



MGAR 2010 - Team GoBushwhack.com Race Report

Jan 30, 2010 - GoBushwhack.com was represented at the Mandatory Gear Adventure Race near Conway, SC by Patrick Downie, Jeff Eichman, Nicole Lewis and myself - Don Childrey. This was Nicole's first real AR! It was Patrick's first time running the MGAR, Jeff's second, and my third (the first run was as a practice race in 2008).

The first activity after the briefing was a prologue. At 9pm on Friday, one team member would go out and run a predetermined route and retrieve an item from a CP along the nearby railroad tracks. Another team member would ride a route to find several CP's and pick up an item from each. A third team member would be given the UTM coordinates and the map and an hour to plot and mark the map. In our case, the fourth team member would also do the run. At 10pm, the maps and UTM sheets would have to be turned back in. They would be given back at 5am. The ride and run times of the teams would be used to determine the start order in the morning. With 20 teams, start times would theoretically range from 5:30am to 6am on Sat.

We figured the best we could do was come in mid-pack on the ride and run, so we were probably looking at a 15 minute start advantage at best. At worst, we would start 30 minutes after the first team. The run and ride were each supposed to be about one hour long. Patrick was convinced from the time he heard about this prologue that it wasn't worth the effort just to gain 15 to 30 minutes advantage. He worked on persuading the rest of the team, and after the briefing, he posed his idea to the Race Director to see how bad he would penalize us for choosing to take the last starting position. Dale thought about it, and decided that our "penalty" would be that we wouldn't get our maps until 5am. That would only leave us one hour in the morning to plot our points and work out a race strategy. It would also mean we could stay clean and dry and warm that evening and spend the time arranging our gear for the race.

The prologue itself had interval starts every 1.5 minutes. Our team was slotted in to start tenth. It was a big decision to go against the flow like this, so we agonized (some of us) over the decision until about 7 minutes before we were to actually take off on the prologue. I went outside in the brisk, dark night and stood by Dale as he started another team. Then I told him we had decided to skip the prologue and do our mapping in the morning. Would this strategy pay off?

After the prologue was over, we learned that most teams had completed the rides and runs in less than 30 minutes, most were around 23 minutes. There were so many teams with nearly the same finish times that Dale decided to start several of the teams in groups. This compressed the overall start time spread to just 16 minutes. We would only be starting 16 minutes after the first team! With no effort expended, we figured that was a win. We'd have the opportunity to waste that much time or more out on the course anyway.

I was up at 4:28am and checked the radar. Lots of green and yellow just west of us, and it extended off the radar map. All of that was coming our way. We got ready as quickly as we could and were ready to plot our points right at 5am. Working together, we were able to plot and plan our route and get suited up to start within the 46 minutes we had to work with! I knew it was going to be raining when I packed at home, so I had grabbed four large Saran bowl covers that looked like shower caps. I gave them to me team. The others got to wear pink ones. Mine was green with snowflakes on it. Not fashionable, but the team could appreciate the functionality! The rain began falling just as the first team started at 5:30am. It was 37 degrees outside.

As we rolled off from the start, the raindrops were substantial. Stuffing that 3'x4' map into an 9"x11" case and trying to read it while riding in the dark and rain was a great challenge to start the race with! We quickly made our way through several streets to the first TA. We found the target dirt road just fine, but didn't see the unmanned TA flag as we rode down it. We met teams heading back out already, scratching their heads, and knew this section was going to be tricky. The topo map didn't have any details for this area (read that as "monotonous green shading only"), so Dale had given us a copy of a photomap with some lines penciled in and white bits of paper marking the flags. Using a headlamp to read a color map of a forested area, with black lines drawn on it, while standing out in the rain at 5:50am, proved troublesome. We explored a side road on the right and found unrideable muck. Another team was further down that road and we saw them come back to pick up their bikes and then proceed farther down the mucky road. We choose to go back and continue down the main road.

Exploring the second road to the right we found a group of teams at a CP flag. Yay! Ohhh. It was not numbered so we had no way to confirm which flag it was. I made the call that it was #3, Jeff punched it and we continued back to the main road. Continuing down it we came to another intersection that started to make sense with the hand drawn lines on the photomap. Based on that info, we proceeded further looking for #1. The road led towards a "field" of different vegetation, which we reached without finding #1, and we followed the road around it. This matched the photomap and led us to #2, which was one of the two mandatory points.

We punched it and turned back and briefly looked for #1 again, but were unsuccessful. Before we could chose a course of action, another team came by and Jeff and Patrick were able to learn from them that they had found a CP flag with a coffee can under it. We confirmed for them that the TA flag had the can, but they hadn't retrieved an object from it, so they had to go back. We followed them and found several teams at the flag, which was less than 100 yards in from the paved road but was hanging to the side about 20' into the brush. Had we been looking up and to the right when we rode in through the dark and rain, we could have seen it. Shame on us. We punched it and retrieved a coffee-flavored candy from the can. There were three CP's left in this area, and one of them was mandatory.

We returned for a third time to the intersection near #1. I measured off the map distance to the point I plotted and Patrick started to pace count. It was then that I realized I had penciled in, too lightly to be easily seen in the dark and rain, that Dale had moved the location of the CP to the north. Looking at the photomap again, I picked out his black pencil line turning left and looping around to come back southward to the CP's new location. Duh! I missed that - sorry team! We took off down the road to the left, squished through some relatively unriden mud and circled around to the #1 flag. Looking at the photomap, I guessed we were only 100 yards from the main road, so we bushwhacked (see name of team) and saved ourselves several minutes of mud-churning retracing of our route on the bikes.

From here it should have been a fairly straight shot down another road to two CP's and out. We churned our way down the road, which deteriorated into more of a four-wheeler path, and came upon the dropped bikes of several teams. There were lights scattered off in the woods all around. Just past the bikes we could see the flag hanging beside the road. #4 - punched! The last CP, the mandatory one, was supposedly just down the trail, halfway to a Tee intersection (according to the hand drawn lines). We encountered several teams coming back along this trail and eventually joined in the wanderfest. The Waterlogged Dogwoods was among them. We went to the Tee intersection, worked our way back, and finally stopped for our first food break.

There were teams everywhere. We checked off in the woods on both sides of the trail and worked our way back to the previous intersection. Jeff spoke with another team who had discovered there was a parallel trail just to the west, and that's where the flag was. We punched it and were off. Instead of working our way back through the muddy trails the

way we came in, we continued southwest and hit the hand drawn line that supposedly would lead us back to the paved road. It did, and we passed several more teams along the way who were still looking. Team No Intel was among them.

The road ride to the next TA was pretty straight forward. By now it was light enough to see easily without lights. We reached it without incident and transitioned to hiking shoes. We worked our way towards CP #6 by following a "road" on the map and guessing there would be a "road" on the ground to the left that led to the CP. We found the road to the left, and met team GLR and another team wandering there. They were just ahead of us and we all spotted the flag about the same time.

From here the map info got a little vague. We only had some sparse contour lines, an unimproved road, and some vegetation change lines to work with. We tried to pick out the top of a ridge from the contours and shoot our bearing to CP #7 from the west. We ended up popping out on the next road to the east before seeing anything besides than other teams wandering. We had gone too far. We went back into the area and followed another roadbed around and back out to the eastern road. Since CP #7 wasn't mandatory and CP #10 was, we decided to go for #10 next. It was on the far side of this road, somewhere. We found a road heading into that area, and followed it in, trying to match up the veg change lines, which were all this section of map had to offer. We soon found more roads than there were veg lines on the map, and I realized we had been lost here in last year's race too. Great. We went a little farther, without finding anything that matched the map. So we decided to go back to the road and try a different attack angle.

On the road, we headed for what should have been a ridge crossing the road. Before we got there, Dale came along in his car and shared some insider info with us. Apparently when he set the point, he discovered a drainage ditch that wasn't indicated on the map (big surprise there!). He said another team had just confirmed that it led right to the CP. Thanks Dale! He drove on down the road and stopped at another group of teams up ahead. As we approached, we recognized team Checkpoint Zero in the group. We've never seen these guys on a course, other than at the start!

Shortly after those teams got the word, we were all headed off down the drainage ditch. We punched the control. The other teams were discussing the CP we had skipped, and team Trakker described where it was. We all listened and then headed back there. Most of us remembered passing the two big oaks in a pine forest, and that's apparently where we needed to shoot a bearing and dive into the brush. When we arrived, Dale was there providing some guidance. CP0 was asking about the right bearing. I sighted down the RD's arm as he pointed and used that guidance! About 150 feet into the thick brush we came upon the elusive CP. You had to be within 20' of it to see it. On the map, the UTM coordinate plotted about 600' from the corner of the "field" where the bearing was pulled, so it's no wonder our attack angle from the other side didn't work. (No offense intended Dale, just trying to figure out why what I tried didn't work.) CP0 rolled out of the TA while we were putting our bike shoes back on.

The next few CP's were bike points along roads on the way to TA3. We grabbed #11 easy enough. It was in the far corner of a field that held a CP last year. The sand roads in this section were horribly soft and what I consider to be the low country's horizontal version of steep hills. CP #12 was in the brush along a field. CP #13 was behind some tobacco kilns. CP #14 proved troublesome to some teams. I spoke with GLR after the race. They tried attacking it from the east, which would have them cross a blue-marked stream (always risky in this flat country). For some reason I had highlighted an approach that took us on roads around to the north and then due south along a ridge to the CP. Looking at the map later, I realized that the "road" to the CP was actually two gridlines that were very close together. It wasn't a road on the map. But we did find a dirt road there on the ground and it led straight to the CP!

By this point in the race, we were all soaked and getting chilled. I was concerned about Nicole because she only had running shoes on. The rest of had bike shoes with neoprene toe covers. My toes were still cold, so I knew hers had to be

also. I was the only one with rain pants on, and I knew their legs had to be chilled too. Nicole had some extra dry socks in her pack, so I changed them for her while she shivered and tried to warm her hands up some. I put her dry socked feet into plastic bags before putting her shoes back on. She added a layer of jacket and put on dry gloves. Several teams came in and punched the CP while we were stopped.

Back on the paved road, I had a brain freeze moment and almost had us turn left instead of right. The fact that several other teams were heading right made me check the map again and I caught my foopah just in time! From here, we just a few miles of road riding to reach CP #15 near a pond, and then it was more road riding to get to TA #3. These roads were much better than the soft sand roads we had to ride earlier. When we were within 2km of the TA, we passed a convenience store and stopped to go in and warm up. Unlike the Waterlogged Dogwood's store experience, Nicole was greeted with "Any mess you drip on the floor you're gonna clean up!" and an evil granny stare. She hobbled back out into the cold rain on numb feet and we stood outside the window for a quick refueling snack before riding on.

At TA #3 we found a park picnic shelter and two volunteers with a pot of hot chocolate warming on a stove. The winds were really whipping across the open fields as we rode the last 2km to this park, so we were pretty chilled. We snacked some more and continued discussing our next move. We knew we were all pretty cold and although the hike might warm us up a little, we didn't want anyone to get too hypothermic since we would be miles from help. We learned from the volunteer that there were 11 teams out on the hike. None had returned yet, and some had been out for well over an hour already. We decided the safe thing to do was to ride back to the finish and check out with just the 3 TA's and 15 CP's we had found so far. At least we would be getting ourselves off the course. We knew that some teams had already dropped a teammate, or dropped out altogether. We hoped that by getting off the course as an intact team, we'd still get an official finish.

Team No Intel then crawled out of the volunteers' big van, so we sent Nicole in to at least get out of the wind. It wasn't long before Patrick and Jeff went in also to "help". I stayed outside and ate and shivered and talked to the volunteers about motorcycling and my ride to Utah last July. Team Checkpoint Zero came back from the hike and was the first to finish it, spending 1:15 on it. The remaining members of team TBD and Palmetto Tarheels came back in shortly afterward.

Eventually we had to move, so I pried them out of the van and we grabbed our bikes. When I picked mine up, I realized the front tire was completely flat. \$#*^! I sent Nicole back into the van and Patrick Jeff and I worked on changing my flat with our partially numb fingers. I had a tube and a CO2 cartridge. It took some effort to get the tire off and to separate the tube from the tire. When Jeff went to inflate the new tube, the change in pressure of the CO2, which in the summertime produces a neat frost effect, froze his wet glove solidly to the tool and the valve stem. It took more effort to separate all that. Then we noticed that the tire wasn't seated all the way around the rim and we had to deflate the tube again to seat it properly. I had another cartridge, but it didn't seem to give us enough pressure. We tried Patrick's hand pump, but it only succeeded in warming up one hand and did little for the pressure in the tire. We finally searched the other bikes laying around and found a better frame pump and were able to get enough air in the tire to ride back. Thanks to whoever owned that pump!!! We put it back like we found it.

The windy ride back across those fields was frigid and I got a nice ice-cream headache from it. The cold even froze my rear derailleur and it wouldn't shift for a while. Fortunately, after we turned at the "friendly" country store, we had a tail wind pushing us all the way back to the church at the finish. That helped push a little and saved us from some windchill. The ride back was just a long grind. Despite guesstimates of it being 10 to 15 miles from the TA, my cyclocomputer measured it to be just 14 km (8.7mi). The bank thermometer we passed said it was now 34 degrees. We were really happy to reach the church and get off our bikes, despite having only been out for 8.5 hours. Dale had extended the race

cutoff to 6:30pm, but we were ok with signing out at 2:15pm. We hobbled on numb feet into the church and didn't see anyone at first. The post-race food wasn't there yet, but we did find a pot of coffee and some zebra stripe Little Debbie's. We made that work as a celebration snack! We celebrated that we were still alive and not out in the cold rain anymore!

Before long other teams or teammates appeared and we commiserated about the weather conditions and rejoiced in the warming up process. The post race food was brought in early and I refueled with chicken bog and vegetable soup, followed by cheesecake. I missed out on the chocolate cake, but that's ok. We packed up our gear and were on the road by 4:30pm. We took Marcey, from the Waterlogged Dogwoods, back to Raleigh with us while her teammates Bob and Drew stayed out for more frigid fun. We found the first ice on the road near Fayetteville and slow traffic from there to Raleigh. The non-highway roads were pretty well covered, but we all made it home without any sliding, and the trip back was only an hour longer than the trip down.

I learned several things from this race. We had a great set of teammates - can't wait to race with them again! I shouldn't forget my compass when I go to the next race. I need different gloves for these kinds of conditions. I need different foot covers for these kinds of conditions. I need to drink more and eat more during a race, especially when it's cold. I need to focus on understanding all of the info given out by the RD before rushing off to the course. I need to practice picking my attack points better. If the temp's are in the 30's, I could probably add another layer to both top and bottom and be a little warmer.

We owe Dale a big thank you for all the effort he put into making this race happen. And for the excellent home cookin' served at the finish. The swag was great, including the nice frame pump that I needed during the race (but didn't have yet). Sorry we didn't stay to hang out for the final awards and camaraderie, but we still had adventure to face on the roads and families at home who were concerned about us.

