



2010 Swamp Stomp Race Report for GoBushwhack.com

Feb. 14, 2010 Chassahowitzka, FL - Don and Patrick teamed up with Rob and Marcilynn to race in the 2010 Swamp Stomp 30 Hour Adventure Race on Feb 13-14, 2010. Patrick and I won the coin toss, so whatever Checkpoint Tracker Series points the squad earned would go to Team GoBushwhack.com. We raced this long event under the long name of GoBushwhack.com/Yourmamaween, although on the course were known simply as team #12.

The race was held about an hour north of Tampa, FL. We started in Homosassa, FL and wound around the general area until we finished in Chassahowitzka, FL (which we affectionately mis-pronounced quite often as "Cheddar-howitzer").

The course was basically a string of rogaine sections, similar to Bushwhack Adventure's long races. There were four mandatory TA's (transition areas) which had to be visited in order. There were 17 mandatory "CP's" (checkpoints). Teams who got all of the TA's and CP's would be ranked above teams who missed some of those points. There were also about 40 points available in the form of optional "BP's" (bonus checkpoints). The highest accumulation of points would determine the final results.



We had to make a choice between two "prologue" options. Option 1 was a 16km paddle from a remote location to TA1. There were no checkpoints to find along the way, but teams would earn 9 points just for getting to TA1. Option 2 was an out and back paddle from TA1 to find 5 points. The fastest team to do this would earn 3 points, second would earn 2 points, and third would earn 1 point. We decided the longer paddle and 9 points would be the best way to go. Even if it took us longer than 3 hours to do this prologue, the points per hour ratio was high enough to make it worthwhile.

The RD's pre-plotted many of the points on the maps for us, but left us a few to plot. Once we had them all plotted, we started adding up distances and quickly realized that at our paces this would be a great 48 hour course. Our only choice was to focus on getting the mandatory CP's and only go for BP's if we discovered we were running faster than expected. Just getting the mandatory CP's would be a challenge for us.



5am on Saturday arrived too soon after getting to bed just before 1am. Rob and I dropped bikes and gear at TA1 and rode the shuttle bus back to the remote start. We all got on the water for a floating 7am start. It turned out to be more of a 7:14am start, which would come into play later. We put Marcilynn and Rob in one canoe and Patrick and myself in the other. Once the main field of teams got out of sight ahead of us (not our choice), we hooked up a towline on M&R's boat and towed them behind us. Most of our team hadn't done much paddling in several months. The towing seemed to work ok.

We got ahead of 4-5 teams at one point by quickly catching a turn among the marsh islands that the other teams missed, but they soon passed us when we stopped for a potty and snack break. We covered 75% of the route in just under 3 hours, but the last 25% was a bummer. We had front quartering winds of 15-20 knots, plus we were trying to paddle up the Chassahowitzka River on an outgoing tide. That last 25% took us 2 hours to complete.

The second section was a bike over to TA2 at Hebron Church. There were two BP's in this section, but we chose to skip them and head straight to TA2. The third section was a trek with four CP's and seven BP's. We eliminated three of the BP's right away because they were so far out. We set a course to pick up the CP's first and would reassess our position and likelihood of getting the remaining BP's.

At TA2, they gave us a UTM for an extra BP, which turned out to be just 300meters off our planned route and very close to the TA, so we headed out for that first. We forgot that there was a CP about 500m behind the TA, so we had to leave time to pick that up when we returned. This trek section had the only time cutoff on the course. We had to be out by 6:30pm. It was about 1:15pm when we started trekking.

The first BP was in a quarry and required a 300m bushwhack off a paved road. We caught sight of the quarry spoil piles off to our right just in time. The pacing was a little different from what we scaled from the map, but not too far off. The second BP was down in a sinkhole/cave, right beside a race photographer that we recognized. Fortunately there was a tunnel to the side that we could scramble down to reach the flag. When I say "we", I mean Marcilynn.



From there we followed a trail to our first CP. Almost 7 hours into the race and we're just getting our first mandatory point - woohoo! Marcilynn distracted a passing 2-male team with a potty break flash and then we bushwhacked straight to the point. As we were leaving the area, we saw the distracted team still searching for the CP. The next CP was several km's away on the north side of a "pond" (think "wet field of reeds"). We found it with no problem and decided we had time to go for some of the BP's.

We had a little trouble finding a trail marked on the map, and after backtracking a few hundred meters, we struck off on a bushwhack (see team name) and ended up picking up a trail that appeared to be going in the right direction. We followed it, looking to cross a well-defined road on the map. By the time we reached a property corner and figured out where we were, we had overshot the (nonexistent) road by a few hundred meters. We had been told that this BP was in an area where the map contours were useless due to recent grading work. An area of disturbance was on the map, but was apparently larger than indicated. We had also been told that the flag was on the "highest point around". We checked out one hill, with no luck, then decided to check another which we first thought was too far away. The flag was there! It was at the top of a 40-50 foot "cliff" which was surprising to see in FL. From there we followed a road SE for a few km's until we got back onto sections of map that matched what was on the ground. We skipped a BP along this section because it didn't seem worthwhile to make a 0.75 km trek out and back again.

We had a little trouble with next BP due to the hint of "stock pond". We imagined a pond in a field, like back home in NC. It was actually a wet forested swamp - should have known that based on the name of this race. We made it back to the TA and headed off to the remaining CP behind it. It was in a sinkhole about 50 feet across. The lowest wall of the sinkhole was about 12 feet down. There were two ropes hanging down the higher side, offering a semi-rappel of about 40 feet. Marcilynn said she was scared of heights, so we sent her down the rope. She used a body belay and got down without a problem. The exit was a quick scramble up the short side wall. We left TA2 right at 6:30pm, as the light was fading for the day.

The next bike section took us back part of the route we had come in on. We had initially planned to follow some subdivision roads southward to CP 5, but opted to try a straight powerline road which was well-

graveled as far as we could see. Once we got over the first hilltop, the road turned to a grassy sandy double track. We stuck with the new plan and were soon leapfrogging another 4-coed team - Florida Extreme. We learned to plow with the front tire as we rode through sugar sand sections, and to avoid falling on the cacti beside the trail. Somehow we got through that section with no flats and ahead of the other team. We had a bit of route trouble on our way to the next CP when the trail dumped us out onto some unmapped subdivision roads. We eventually made it through the unmapped section and located where we were on the mapped roads. Then we were back on track.

The next CP we arrived at was manned by Michael, a first-time AR volunteer. He was a nice guy, a trauma nurse, and big time hiker. The best part was that he had a fire going and was offering shots of Jack Daniels. We were all feeling the loss of the sun's heat by then, Marcilynn especially, so she took the opportunity to add more layers before we continued. Several other teams passed us here, but I don't think any of them opted for the shots, like we did.

From here we entered a long section of swampland roads. Despite the road lines added to the maps by the RD's, we had trouble getting through the next 2-3 km's. Several other teams were wandering around here as well. After riding an extra km or two in backtracks and rebacktracks, we found the correct exit turn - hidden behind a huge palmetto frond. This was after going down a road guarded by an orange metal chair with a handwritten note that said "no trespassin - we will shoot you". Nice touch. That sparked a few moments of paranoia from the team as we rode by it just at about midnight.

As we got deeper into the swamp, the road became more of a muddy double track with plenty of cross roots and knees. The "knees" were cypress roots that stick up vertically out of the ground, like a bent knee. These were deceptive because they were only about 6 inches high. Being as solid as a tree when you hit them, they came as a big shock compared to the mucky stuff we were squishing and sliding through as we traveled along the road. These swamp roads all gave me the impression of being "uphill" as I rode through them at night. I'm sure they were level as could be, but the sensation I had was of several hours of riding uphill through mud. We picked up the two CP's in this section but left several BP's alone. We saw team Checkpoint Zero at the second CP, which makes the second race in a row that we've seen them out on the course! There were several other teams there as well.

Patrick had hatched a plan to have us ride back out and around instead of trying to follow the "faint" trail through the swamp. By the time we reached the location where we had to make that call, we realized how much riding going back would involve and we reluctantly agreed to push on and do the swamp. The other teams we had seen at the CP were all out of sight by the time we reached the water. The temp's were close to freezing at this point. Patrick and Rob pulled off their outer pants to keep them drier, then Rob went in first. The water was usually between ankle and knee deep. We pushed and pulled our bikes along with us and used them as a crutch pretty often.

The route was marked by little reflective dots on trees and there was more of an open area between trees where the "trail" was. There were deeper holes and lots of submerged logs and/or gators to trip on. We tried to stay towards the sides where there were less holes. Our progress was agonizingly slow for the half km or so length of this "trail". One other 2-male team passed by us on this section, but we didn't see anyone else. Eventually we came out on another muddy road and worked our way back to better roads and the TA3 at Smoke Hill Camp.



We all changed into dry socks at the TA and put on our hiking shoes. This trek section had three CP's we had to get. We chose to go clockwise to give ourselves a better backstop on the 500m bushwhack we needed to do in order to make this trek a loop of 10 km. If we skipped the bushwhack, we'd have to do a 21 km trek consisting of two out and backs. When we got to the road that led to the bushwhack, we found it full of standing water. So much for a dry hike. This added about 800m of sloshing to the 500m we had expected. Oh well - wet again.

To minimize the bushwhack section length, we went further up the road before jumping into the brush. In hindsight, we may have been better off turning earlier, since Micheal Moule (RD) had said it was thicker farther up. He also said it had been a couple years since he was in there, so we didn't pay too much attention to him. Oops. We found thick brush over standing water. We leapfrogged ahead of each other to maintain our compass bearing and finally popped out into the field we were aiming for. That sentence read made it sound so much easier than the actual experience of crawling and twisting through that swamp. Somewhere in there I got scratched on the nose by a black briar and Marcilynn lost her glasses.

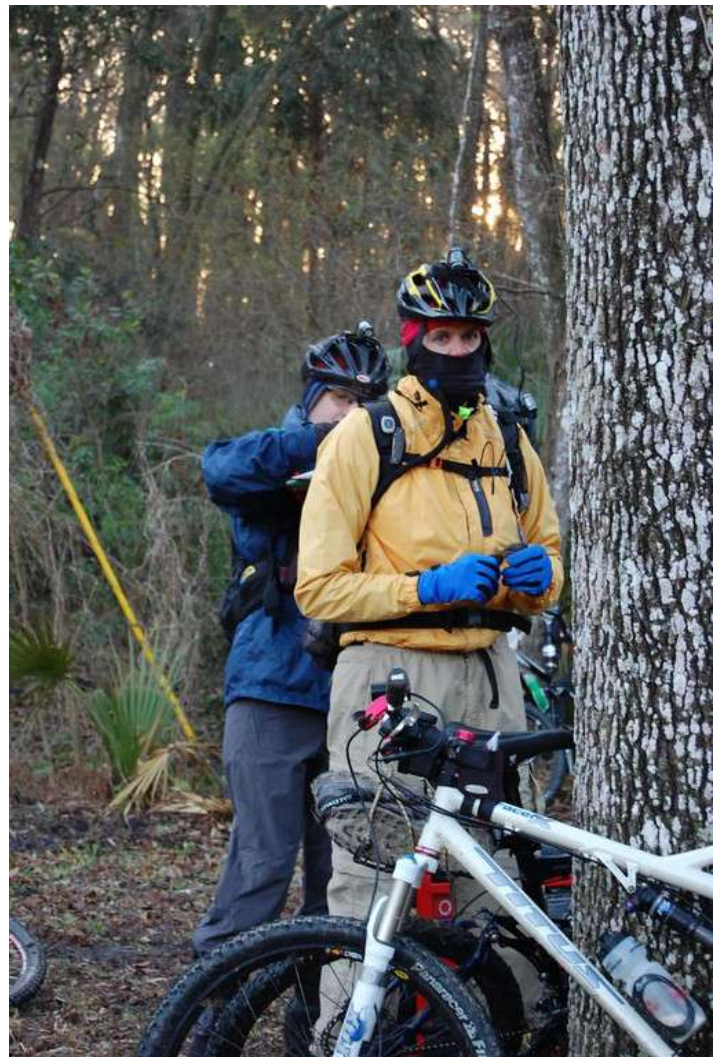
The field of high weeds was coated in a heavy frost when we arrived. We found the road bed in it and worked our way to the intersection that should lead us to the CP. We had to explore a wrong turn before figuring out where we were and then finding the CP. By then we were noticing that we had ice on our shoestrings. Nice. With all three CP's collected in this section, we trekked back to the TA.

We changed socks again and put on more clothes, if we had them. We knew the next bike leg would be frigid with the temp's now below freezing. Patrick and Rob seemed to be doing pretty good, but I was starting to drag and feel the cold creeping in. Eating had become more of a chore for me over the last few hours. Marcilynn was showing signs of early hypothermia too. We set out on the ride at a gentle pace designed to keep our eyeballs from flash freezing.

At one point the windchill starting getting to Marcilynn and we stopped to add another layer of jacket on her. Her speech was quite slow at that point, so we knew she was dangerously close to having real problems. Everyone else had numb fingers and cold toes. My bike was frozen into one gear. The jacket helped Marcilynn and we worked our way steadily up to the last CP on this bike section.

The map seemed to indicate that we'd have to make a long detour to get from this CP to the roads leading to TA4, but the RD's gave us a gift by placing the CP where we could go through someone's yard and save some distance. We just had to cross a 5 foot wide canal to get there. We managed to do that without getting wet again and rolled easily on paved roads to the TA. Team Tecnu Extreme passed by us on this stretch.

Our transition from biking to the last paddle section took a fair amount of time, since we were pretty frozen. As we got on the water, the fog rising from the warmer water obscured most of what was on the water, so we navigated by the treetops visible above the fog. Fortunately the winds were calm and we didn't have any real issues paddling down the river and up a tidal creek to the farthest CP. I waded the last 50 feet to get to it and then we paddled back.



The next two CP's were also up creeks - slow travel up, fast travel down, but each one put us closer to the finish. With one last CP to get, we found ourselves in the middle of the Chassahowitzka River with about 3 inches of water. The tide was nearly at the low point. We did a bit of canoe hiking before we reached paddleable water again and then we cranked our way up river.



The last CP was about 200m past the finish line. We arrived at the mouth of the small canal and immediately got grounded on a submerged rock bar.

From my perspective, this is where the team slipped into a comical panic mode. We knew we had about 18 minutes to go before the cutoff. This last CP was the underwater one that Rob would dive for. Then we had the 200m paddle back to the finish. Another team exiting the canal pointed out the channel to bypass the rocks, but Patrick insisted we drag the boats over the rocks anyway. Rob took off on foot to scramble/splash/wade the 100 feet to the CP. Marcilynn managed to paddle their boat up to the CP. Patrick fell on the rocks, nearly submerging himself. I got our canoe over the rocks and got back in with the intention of paddling up to see the CP and watch Rob dive in the hole. Patrick refused to get in and insisted we had to bail the water out of our canoe instead. Rob discovered he was now out of breath from running to the hole and couldn't hold his breath long enough to get down to the bottom - about 15' he said. He tried taking off more shirts and his pants to lose buoyancy. Our canoe was positioned in the middle of the open channel and with more teams coming up from behind, I told Patrick we should move aside and let them pass. I was completely surprised by his response "the heck with them, we've got to bail this water out!" The other teams sent racers off doing the same scramble/splash/wade that Rob had done. Rob finally got to the bottom and retrieved the poker chip we needed.

The last 200m of paddling back to the finish was pretty uneventful. We were greeted with a few cheers and awarded our "finishers" dogtags at the water's edge, and then told to move the canoes out of the way.

Our race was over. We finished at 1pm, with 14 minutes to spare, 29 hours and 46 minutes after we had started. Due to the delayed start, the finish time had been extended by 14 minutes, so we actually finished right at the original cutoff time. Even with the 14 minute extension, we would have been late if we had tried to get any of the other BP's that we considered but skipped during the race. We couldn't have timed our finish any closer.

Our adventure was not over. There was gear to sort and repack, egg salad sandwiches and ham sandwiches and baked potato soup to eat courtesy of the RD's, and a brief interest seeing in the results. Patrick and I won swag items in the prize drawing, a dry sack and a blister treatment kit. Our team was not announced in the top 5 in our category, so we didn't find out exactly where we finished. The best prizes of all were temperatures near 60 degrees and bright sunshine. Marcilynn found that the free showers only had cold water. By 4pm we had our dirty wet gear all loaded up, some cleaner clothes on, and were ready to hit road heading for home.

It didn't take long to realize that making it home would be a challenge too. We were nodding off in mid-sentence just talking to each other in the car. We decided to reward ourselves with a steak dinner, but after fooling around with the GPS for half an hour and finally pulling into a Long Horn Steakhouse, we realized it was Valentine's Day and every steak restaurant in the US would have a waiting line. We went to Arby's instead. After that we started a rotation of drivers, lots of caffeine, forced conversation with the driver, and taking turns nodding off in the back seat.

At 3:30am we arrived in one piece at my house to find snow on the ground, again. It's the second race in a row that has happened. After a quick shower I crawled in bed just before 4am. After 4 hours of sleep on Friday night, none on Saturday night, and some fitful backseat dozing on Sunday night, it didn't take me long to fall into a sound sleep.

When the final results were posted, it turns out we took 7th place in the 4 person Coed category. We took 9th place overall out of 30 teams. Almost 2/3 of the teams DNF'd, or DFO'd (done fell out), or lost a member, or didn't get all of the mandatory points. I have to credit to my teammates for our team's success. We all brought something to the race and helped each other out when we had trouble. We did pretty good considering the challenges put before us. According to the numbers, we covered about 75km on bike, 50km on the water, and 35km on foot. That's about 99 miles. We also discovered, due to a quirk of numbers, that team GoBushwhack.com is currently ranked 5th in the Coed Elite category in the national Checkpoint Tracker Adventure Race Series!





Pictures by Don Childrey and race photographer Meg Roberts.