

Bushwhacker's

Canada \$3.00
U.S.A. \$2.00

Wilderness journal

Summer, 2003
Vol. 9, No. 2

IN THIS ISSUE

- **The Last Trip in our First Canoe**
- **Bugs, Sweat and Blood:
A Day with Team Canadian Viper**
- **McGrae Lake Nightmare**
- **Gourmet Camping**
- **Granite & Dry Blood:
Part Two of a Lenny Everson Thriller**
- **Potatoes in the Lake**
- **Lightweight Camp Stoves**
- **Wild Edibles: Lamb's Quarters**

www.bushwhackeronline.com

Bugs, sweat and blood

by Andy Christie

As I crouched near the shoreline of a small lake vomiting enthusiastically, and perhaps moaning a bit, savagely nauseous, I could not believe that such a promising day of adventure racing had ended this badly.

The only two words within the Chinese language that share the same calligraphic symbol are the words "crisis" and "growth". It is said that the way we react in the face of adversity defines us. If we react weakly, or without rational thought or humility, we will build and set loose a new beast for all to see. If we pause, only briefly, to allow the sum of all our training and commitment to pull us along, we will likely succeed, and we may well facilitate growth even if we finish near the back of the pack.

My teammate Rob Rodger and I have been best friends for 32 years. As we drove northward into the Canadian Shield on a sparkling, slightly hazy, sweet-smelling Saturday morning in early June, we could not have been more relaxed. We were exactly where we wanted to be. Having competed strongly in two of Subaru's all day Enduro races in 2001, including a top ten finish in Haliburton, we pretty much knew the drill.

A key reason why we finished well in 2001 was the strength of our female teammate, Kelly Kamstra-Lloyd. The attribute that makes her an amazing adventure racer is her toughness. A few winters ago, on the day we first met Kelly, we did a one hour trail run in knee deep snow. Kelly ran the entire distance with concrete blocks duct-taped to her feet. Actually, that's not true, but she did smoke everyone. She's a take-no-crap fitness instructor, and she's tough as hell.

The Haliburton Forest is a 50,000 acre privately-owned, outdoor recreation park and nature preserve. It is a rustic realm of seemingly endless forest, rock and water. The registration and pre-race meetings are conducted in what is called the "base camp" for the Haliburton Forest. I call it "the only level piece of ground within a hundred miles". The base camp is an enclave of buildings and utility areas, and on this morning it was a carnival of activity, buzzing with pre-race energy. At the pre-race briefing we joined the other teams in an urgent rush to record the verbal instructions and tips which would guide us through the race.

No matter what happened in today's race, we all knew it would

A day with Team Canadian Viper at the Haliburton Subaru Adventure Race



Team Canadian Viper Trail

Andy Christie, Kelly Kamstra-Lloyd, Robert Rodger

be one heck of a ride. All we had to worry about were a few equipment and logistical details and world domination. Well, perhaps not world domination, because as we drove I told Rob about a book in which I had been immersed; it was about fluidity and energy and success. I described how my transformation from intense, run-em-over and ask questions later, take no prisoners, warrior-guy into unflappable, enjoying-every-second-of-competition, perpetual-motion-man would help me in all aspects of life. The first test for my new persona would be given early in the day. We were transported by bus to the Start area. In addition to providing a key opportunity to discuss the race course and develop strategy, the bus ride is also a stress relief session that includes chatting with other competitors, joking, and taming butterflies. One of the competitors on our bus had attended a rival high school named after Sir Wilfred Laurier. He asked me if I had known a friend of his who had attended my school, but he immediately withdrew his inquiry, stating that his friend was "not an old guy like you." My teeth were grinding together as I laughed, probably somewhat maniacally, and repeated the words old guy? Of course now I had my enemy, but wait! I am eastern guy now. He will be my co-competitor, and he will help facilitate my growth, albeit unknowingly. I made myself calm down, and tried to focus on the impending race start without wasting energy thinking about Laurier-Guy.

The Haliburton Enduro consisted of three main sections - running/trekking, canoeing and mountain biking. The first section for today's race would be on foot. I had absolutely no sense of how far we needed to go. This was because, during the pre-race meeting, which focuses on the logistics of the race, I was busy making trips to our vehicles tidying up last minute equipment and supply details. We had decided that Rob would be our navigator, which suits his titanic nature. At 6 feet 7 inches tall and strong as an oak tree it was a no-brainer to let him lead. A short time into the race I asked whether we should be looking to start through the bush

toward check point one. The voice that answered was not Rob's, but that of a dear friend and a fine mentor. It was Rick Skilbeck (Skilly), our high school football coach and gym teacher, and a co-competitor every adventure race we have entered. I remembered running with Skilly many times in gym class. We ran in all conditions. I remember kids complaining, and the look Skilly would give them. To run with him now, through the golden morning sunlight in the Haliburton forest was like a gift.

Kelly and I believed in Rob's ability to guide us. No one was more passionate about navigating, or more anal about detail. After an hour or so of intense and challenging bushwhacking, which included scrambling over some very exciting ridges in deep forest, we practically fell onto Check Point 1. SaWeet! We were in the top ten at this point. After checking in with race officials we had a brief meeting regarding our next move. Rob pointed down a road that the team just ahead of us had chosen NOT to take. Bonus! They were obviously quite fatigued or their compass was broken. We were buoyed by the thought that we had just moved up a position without taking a step. One of the other teams with whom we had been running intermittently was right on our heels. They were a very fit and intelligent-looking team, I thought; surely two such sharp and qualified groups could not make a significant directional error at the same time. But as we rumbled enthusiastically toward Check Point 2 the river we were hoping to see did not present itself. We stopped to discuss where we thought we were and what the next step should be. The group behind us, also concerned, joined us for some group head-scratching. By the end of this talk Rob and the navigator from the other team had convinced themselves, and the rest of us, that we were on the right track, and in fact were likely leading the race. Bravo! We jumped back to work, running with, I thought, decisive magnificence, leading the race to Check Point 2. In a few minutes we had left the fit-smart group well behind us. DAMN WE WERE GOOD! Then we came to a road. It was the Nugget road. We checked the map. "This map is no fucking good!!!!" we screamed. The map that included road names showed, quite inarguably, that we were pretty much at the wrong end of the Haliburton Forest. Well, not quite. But we realized we had run a huge distance in the wrong direction. We all looked at each other and cursed with wild abandon for a few moments. AHHHHHHHH!!! As I write this, almost eight weeks later, I can still feel the epic slap-in-the-face feeling of shock that hits you when you go from

thinking you are in the lead to knowing that you are completely out of the race. I remember when we first talked about becoming involved in adventure racing; everyone said navigation was the key to success. We laughed off such panic-driven nonsense. Moving really quickly through the woods, like bunnies, would surely be the key. But carelessness in navigating put us out of this race early. Now it was time to re-group. We would double-super-hustle our way right back into this race.

After running more than an hour in the wrong direction, we started back, but I could feel this extra weight pulling me down like an anchor. I knew my teammates felt it too, but looking up I saw Rob plowing ahead without slowing. He would never quit. Neither would Kelly. They filled me with confidence and resolve.

We tried taking a "shortcut", but ended up walking through the same endless swamp we had carried our mountain bikes through during last year's race. After another hour and something of charming bushwhacking we made it - finally - to the canoe pick up point. We would later learn that the majority of teams had covered the distance between Check Points 1 and 2 in 15 to 30 minutes. It had taken us 3 hours and 3 minutes! We shuffled through the splintery pile of broken Louisvilles and cricket bats that was the remaining selection of canoe paddles. The canoe transition area was eerily quiet. Signs of a recent stampede of migrating beasts were all around us; parts of water bottles, small pieces of energy food wrappers and articles of clothing. I was sure that forensic testing would indicate a significant quantity of blood, sweat and tears upon the trampled earth, as well. The few volunteers that remained in the area gawked as though we had arrived by time machine.

We hoisted our beat-up paddles and embarked upon what is probably our strongest event. Rob and I have logged hundreds of kilometers of meandering river runs and windy, shoulder-burning, open-water paddling in Algonquin Park. After blowing by nine teams on a tight river section during last year's Haliburton Enduro, we were now faced with paddling in solitude. As we paddled across a medium-sized lake, it became immediately apparent that, either our fatigue had robbed us of our skills, or we were in the tippiest canoe ever constructed. After coming very close to tipping the canoe on a number of occasions, a bodily shift of weight, perhaps in conjunction with a big wave, a shift in the wind, or maybe El Nino, caused us to lurch quite violently to the left. I was positive we were going under, but at the peak of our voyageurian rotation we managed to shift

decisively to the right, and, at least temporarily, we quelled the threat of submersion. During the instant of directional change, however, I had suffered an injury both painful and personal. At the aforementioned pinnacle of rotation the left cheek was still traveling west, while the right cheek moved aggressively eastward. The result was a not-insignificant tensioning of the area upon which the sun never shines. Let's call it the tip-stopping butt-ripper! As I curled toward the bow in the canoe version of the fetal position, grimacing in excruciating pain, my teammates inquired as to my discomfort. I grunted something like: "I ripped my ass." Their empathy was readily apparent. Rob said: "You are sphincter boy. No, you are the sphincter boy!! Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha!!!" Kelly joined in, "Hey, SPHINCTER BOY!! OOOH HAA!!" They laughed long and hard while I squeezed my butt cheeks together. Through their expressions of mirth they were trying to cheer me up, I am quite certain. We then paddled strongly across the rough and windy lake, starting to get into a groove.

We entered what would be a long, winding river section, immersed again in a world of trees. It was a silent, Conradian realm. Further evidence of the passage of a large group was observable at every turn, including broken branches, scraped logs and flattened grass at pullover locations. As if we had not had ample opportunity to hone our bushwhacking skills, the river was narrow, and was blocked repeatedly by logs too stalwart or too high to be run without disembarking from the canoe. We were forced to portage and pull over repeatedly, often balancing precariously upon half-submerged logs while dragging the canoe over them. About halfway through the canoe section each team was required to carry out a traverse over the river, by walking across a suspended, single-rope bridge, while holding onto another, higher rope for balance. I was again happy to suffer personal discomfort for the betterment of team morale. Following my head-first plunge into swampy river water the team seemed refreshed, and paddled with noteworthy vigor for the balance of the canoe section.

It was apparent, as we dumped our canoe at the end of the river section, that we were back in the race. This was a place of action. Volunteers and wounded competitors moved about with some urgency in the warm, late afternoon sun. Check Point 3 was supposed to be a key re-watering point for the teams. I approached a middle-aged, confident-looking race official. "How ya doin'?" I greeted him. He responded with a blank stare.

"Can you tell us where we can stock up

on water?" I asked.

He replied quite casually. "There is no water left."

Rob and I looked at each other, weighing the situation. I gave the volunteer the Cole's Notes version of our extra time on foot. He smirked and said, "Forgive me if I'm laughing inside." I could feel my teeth gnashing together again as the Jack Nicholson-grin returned. Sensing my intensity, he shifted into helpful-guy mode. He instructed us to obtain a water container with a wide top. His plan to provide us with drinking water involved dumping water from the bottom of a large picnic cooler into the wide-topped water bottle, from which it could be poured into our backpack water bladders. We looked skeptically into the source cooler. It contained partially melted blocks of ice, a number of plastic bottles filled with -I'm guessing - energy drinks, and/or urine samples, and a watery solution that had been nutritionally augmented by dirt and other unidentifiable particulates. Rob and I looked at each other grimly, examining our options. Best friends for more than three decades, we often communicate telepathically, and now examined our options without speaking aloud. Option A: Perform the first ever human castration by canoe paddle. In spite of the intense satisfaction and medical advancement this option would surely provide, the public reaction would likely prevent us from finishing the race. Plus, we did not want to see the guy naked. Option B: Make him drink some of the water. Then wait a few hours, if necessary, to see if he puked, or died. This was not a practical option as we had lost enough time already. Option C: Accept his kind offer with grace, and hope for an opportunity to beat him up later. Oops! Rob reminded me that I was drifting perilously close to an uncorrected, western urge to maim and dominate. We went with Option C anyway, knowing that we would only drink the swill if we absolutely had to. We set out on the short hike to get our mountain bikes.

Most adventure racers tend to handle their pain and discomfort with dignity, humour and grace. The racers coming toward us had already mounted their bikes. They would stay to the right side, ever careful not to impede the motion of oncoming racers. All except Laurier-Guy. He looked like a wildebeest from a Maurice Sendak children's book. Pointy teeth flashing, bulky muscles bulging, he bullied down the middle of the double track, swerving like a drunken battle tank. Those on the opposite track were forced off the trail, or moved prudently well to the right to avoid a messy collision. The temptation to throw a forearm was powerful indeed; while I restrained

this violent urge, catching this guy and passing him was a goal I would focus on for the rest of the race.

As I pulled on dry socks and mountain bike shoes at the bike transition point I felt and watched a platoon of blackflies feast upon my flesh. Surely we had reached the very core within the realm of the blackfly. Many racers wore bug nets over their heads. With ample motivation to depart, I raced after Kelly and Rob.

The early part of the ride was comprised of muddy double-track. Short sections of logs had been installed for great distances to provide purchase. Unfortunately, when you tried to pedal across the logs, the greasy tire skidded sideways, depositing the rider upon the ground, often inflicting lacerations and bruises as one's legs and ankles smashed against the edges of the logs. After what seemed like a great distance of this bloody, muddy carnival, I arrived at a cottage road that would take us, along with a number of other roads, all the way to base camp and the finish line.

Not long after reaching the first section of road I began passing other riders and, shortly thereafter, found Rob, pedaling with some vigor. Feeling strong, thanks in large part to obeying the water every half hour, solid food every hour rule, I pedaled past Rob to seek out Kelly the Unstoppable.

After a few minutes of hard riding, and passing more riders, I spotted Kelly, and rode even harder to try to reach her. When she saw me she laughed, and then she pedaled as though possessed. During the next ten or so kilometers, until the end of the race we passed each other a number of times, but mostly we rode together, spinning unflinching. We were powerful and graceful; I could feel it like liquid horse power. We rode on the wings of angels, up and down the rolling hills, passing group after group of exhausted competitors. Some racers smiled at us because they knew. They knew we were pulling it together, and they cheered us on. And that just made us stronger, or at least it made me feel stronger. I felt unstoppable. I recalled the essence at least, of what Roger Bannister had said about his state of mind, during his history-making, four-minute mile. Here's the exact quote: "The earth seemed to move with me. A fresh rhythm entered my body. No longer conscious of my movement I discovered a new unity with nature - a new source of power and beauty, a source I never knew existed." As we now rode in a soundless, timeless, magical flow, I was moved by a similar feeling of perfect enlightenment. We were in the centre of the moment, living in the highest possible

place.

As we continued to pass groups of other riders I began to look for "Laurier Guy". I wanted very badly to pass him. I would have my revenge. But I knew that when I passed the scaly one, the guy who called me "old", I would have a positive greeting for him and my tornado of motion would blow a swirl of golden zen dust upon him. But that test would not be given. "Laurier Guy" finished somewhere ahead of us. Kelly and I, after our mystical ride together, waited only a couple of moments near the finish line for Rob. The three of us finished together to a clamour of clapping and cheering. The first to greet us was Steve Menzies of Adventure Racing Canada, then Skilly and his team. We related our tale of logistical woe, and it meant so much that they understood.

We had a cold beer together at the van, but I was too exhausted to enjoy it, which is a sad statement indeed. Instead of eating at the Haliburton Forest pavilion, we decided, God knows why, to drive to a nearby Italian restaurant to sample a fine pasta dinner. But my body was shutting down. As I listened, glassy-eyed, from another galaxy, the nice Italian server lady made us pronounce the names of all the dishes correctly (Bowl-aug-nay-zee) a wave of nausea swept over me. I spent the next 90 minutes or so throwing up beside the van, in a nice lakeside environment, while Rob and Kelly enjoyed a sumptuous dinner. Rob, a true friend, brought my pasta to-go, and I ate it, like a Doberman munching kibble, while we laughed about the day and listened to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones on the southbound highway.

It is said that, after interminable times at sea, sailors fall upon terra firma, kissing the ground, thankful for their safe passage above the water. After the 2002 Haliburton Subaru Enduro, I unlocked my front door and strode directly to the couch. I kissed the cushions upon which my tortured butt would bear; I hugged the frilly pillows tightly about my battered, mud-stained body. Well, actually I made that part up. My wife screamed as she shoved me toward the shower. As I pondered the luxuriant wonder of indoor plumbing and harnessed electricity I longed for my next day on the trail, free from the soul-softening devices of modern technology. Give me mud, and cuts, and bugs - lots of bugs. Give me nausea, exhaustion and ass-ripping pain, or give me death. Challenge me, change me, make me grow, for all else is folly.

Team Canadian Viper Trail member Andy Christie lives in Beeton, Ontario.