



ADVENTURE RACING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 2010 – SPAIN

By Nathan Fa'avae / Team Blackwater

One of the best things about adventure racing is opening a packet of chocolate biscuits and eating the whole lot, a few times each day.

I recently returned from the 2010 Adventure Racing World Championships in Spain, held between October 3rd and 9th. I only decided to race a few months ago when I got an invitation from US athlete Mike Kloser. I have raced against Mike for many years and the idea of racing with him had appeal, he also holds the record for the most starts and podium finishes in the sport, so a highly decorated AR athlete. Also in the team was his regular female teammate, Monique Merrell and Kiwi orienteerer Chris Forne, who won the AR Worlds in 2007. Between us we had about 10-world titles making us a pre-race favourite and also the team most likely to contest Buff, the top Spanish team.

Another reason I was keen to race was Spain had interest and the Race Director was one of the sports recognised athletes, popular Spanish racer Antonio de la Rosa, a good friend and respected competitor.

Much praise was heaped on Antonio de la Rosa for making the most of the local area, using the historic heritage sites of Avila and Salamanca, the high peaks of the Guadarrama and Gredos mountains, the huge network of farms tracks and gravel roads on which to trek and bike, and the long-but-satisfying kayak down the Rio Tormes to the finish.

Going into the race, we perceived the top teams to be:

- Orion Adventure (Brent Edwards, Fleur Pawsey, Nathan Peterson, Stuart Lynch).
- Buff (Emma Roca, Fran Lopez, Arnau Julia, Benjamin Midena)
- Silva / Gerber (Bjon Ryguan, Aaron Prince, Robert Lindberg, Josefina Vimberg)
- Team Outdry / Chiru (Jacky Boisset, Myrian Guilliot, Jacob Roberts, Ian Edmond)

Plenty of Kiwis spread around to make sure the racing was tight.

The race from Team Blackwater's perspective.

Stage 1 Orienteering 7km

A mass start in Avila Castle and into an urban rogaine. The pace was not too crazy and the top teams all completed this section within sight of each other.

Stage 2 MTB 75km

Soon into the first ride a bunch formed with about 10-teams, all the major contenders present. An undulating ride on a mixture of roads and trails. About 50km into the ride some teams started to drop off and by the end we entered the TA with Buff and Outdry / Chiru.

Stage 3 Orienteering 18km

In a forested area we set off on a 20-control rogaine. Because Chris was regarded the top navigator in the field, we had a frustrating time as Buff and Outdry / Chiru just followed us around the stage despite Chris trying to lose them a few times. With 3-teams reaching the control at the same time and everybody needing to punch, there was a 12-person queue each time that slowed us down dramatically with the end result that all 3-teams lost time to chasing teams. Thankfully at the end of the rogaine we had to split into pairs and reach another 6-controls. This gave us an opportunity to get away on our own even though the following teams still tried to latch on.

Stage 4 MTB 76km

We started the stage in 3rd place behind Silva and the Danish team. Little did we know that a huge storm was brewing and we were about to have a long and cold night. 12-hours into the race the wind and rain began and the air temperature plummeted to minus 4. Totally under prepared for such conditions, we froze in misery as we clicked off the k's in the mountain bike stage that was another ride of diverse terrain. With exceptional navigation from Chris, we finished the stage in first place in early hours of the morning.

Stage 5 Kayak / Trek 18km / 28km

The team had to split on this stage, Mike and Chris started in kayaks and Monique and I on foot. We had to navigate our way to a point on the lake where we would change over. Frustratingly for me, I made a navigation error that cost us valuable time. Despite that we held first place at the end of the stage and were thankful the rain had stopped and daybreak was not far away.

Stage 6 MTB 63km

The ride started bad for us when it took us a lot of time to locate the first CP of the stage. We acknowledged lack of sleep was contributing to our speed so we pulled into a barn for a 15-minute nap. Buff, Silva and Outdry / Chiru passed us while we slept. Once back on the bikes I got a puncture losing our new momentum early on in the ride. We were pleased to be warming up and the ride had some massive climbs to generate some heat. Outdry / Chiru made some navigational mistakes going off course and we finished the stage just behind Buff and Silva.

Now over 24-hours into the race, we felt it was important to invest time into rest / sleep. Buff and Silva continued on but we felt that was not a wise decision and one that would likely have consequences later. We stopped for a 90-minute sleep. Chris hadn't had a strong start to the race and felt a good sleep would get him back to full power and performance level he is used to. Upon waking Chris reported to the race HQ tent to get some updated course changes, because of high wind and risk of snow, 2-check points were cancelled. Somewhere in the this stage Orion had a team member crash off their mountain bike and get airlifted to hospital, unranking the team.

Stage 7 Inline Skate 5km

First up was a short skate, mainly uphill to the start of the trek. We were in 6th place at this point.

Stage 8 Trek / Ropes 43km

Fresh from a rest we set our sights on a powerful trek with the aim of regaining the lead. We started off exceptionally well and soon moved into 4th and caught 3rd place by the ropes section only 9km into the trek.

With a change in the ropes section because of severe wind, we only had a single rope to ascend then a single abseil. A bit lame in truth, and also a bottleneck. However, the organisers were aware of this and decided to credit teams the queue time they had to wait. We clocked nearly an hour at the stop. Once back racing again the night fell but we kept our strong pace. Hours later high on the ridges, we were surprised we hadn't caught any teams, as we were confident our pace was worthy of reeling the lead teams in. As the ridge started to become extreme Chris suddenly remembered the CP we were about to reach had been cancelled. We had gone hours off course to CP31 & 32 that we didn't need to go to. We changed our direction, dropped off the ridge and returned to the course. Still in 4th place and somewhat disappointed with our mistake. Our big push had returned zero.

For me personally, the race was also taking a bad turn. The first night storm and extreme cold hit me hard and I had a chest, throat and now an eye infection starting to take hold. My eyes started weeping mucus, which made it difficult to see clearly at night and also keep them open.

We ended the trek strongly moving up on Outdry / Chiru and Silva but did not claim any significant time on Buff.

Stage 9 MTB 22km

A short ride in cool conditions took us into a village for the 4-hour compulsory stop. We had some food and retired for a 2.5-hour sleep.

Stage 10 MTB 34km

We started poorly with some inefficient navigation but after the first 15km we got going and caught Outdry / Chiru by the end of the ride. It was fun ride with descent single track towards the end.

Stage 11 Kayak / Orienteering 20km / 8km

This stage consisted of paddling 9km down a lake, stopping for a 4km orienteering section, then a 2km paddle across the lake for another 4km orienteering section then a 9km paddle to return to the bikes.

We paddled with Outdry / Chiru to the orienteering and then it was obvious once again their strategy was to tag onto us for the navigation. We tried to get away and even verbally suggested they be independent but they clung onto us and we finished the stage together.



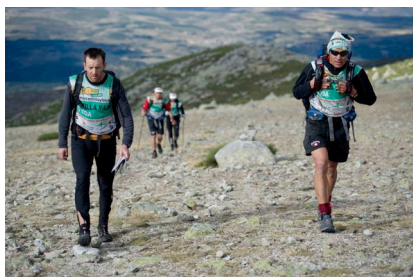
Stage 12 MTB 38km

Starting the next ride it seemed unavoidable that they would simply follow us again. Soon into the ride we had a bike mechanical problem and Outdry / Chiru seemed like they may wait with us but then decided to continue on, immediately taking a route choice that we had not intended to take. We quickly set off and moved into 3rd never to see them again in the race. By the end of the ride we had caught Silva for 2nd equal.

Stage 13 Hike / Skate 14km

We had a 6km run uphill to collect our skates then 8km of steep climbing on skates. Not being a passionate skater, I'm okay with flat skating but honestly, uphill skating, what the F?

Silva were in need of sleep at this stage of the race and they set up their tent for some shuteye.



Stage 14 Trek 27km

Now in 2nd we made another committed attempt to pull back some time on Buff, but soon into the walk, the cold temperature sucked the life out of me and I struggled to function for a few hours. Finally after a very slow ascent uphill I came right and we started to charge. Chris nailed the navigation and we sped through the stage. It was somewhat demoralising to have such a great stage only to find we did the same time as Buff. They were on fire and we were running out of course.

Stage 15 MTB 59km

Starting the ride in daybreak of day 4 Monique was struggling with lack of sleep and our speed was reduced for a few hours. About 20km into the ride she recovered and was back at her strong riding ability and we started to make good progress again. We knew that Buff would be having similar issues and we started to realise that unless they made a mistake like we had, it was going to be hard for us to chip into their 4-hour lead. We did know though that we had an hour time credit so while they were 4-hours ahead, we believed the real time lead was only 3-hours, not much in a race of this scale.

Stage 16 Trek 23km

Arriving at the TA at the start of the trek we discovered bad news, only our biking trunk was at the TA. Given that we had a hike, it was strange our Trekking trunk had no been positioned here but looking back in the race booklet it showed only the biking trunk would be there. During the mandatory stop we had needed to put hiking shoes in our bike trunk, or carried them with us on the previous 59km cycle.

Thankfully, the Columbian team was watching the race and they had shoes for the team to borrow, but nothing my size. I had my mountain bike shoes so I decided to run up the mountain socks and use my bikes shoes for the descent. It was a nuisance and slowed us a bit but we made the best of the situation.

Stage 17 Inline skate 11km

With the darkness setting in for what will be our final night out, we slid into our skates for an 11km uphill skate ... yeah ... say no more.

Stage 18 MTB 71km

The last ride started with the Race Doctor cleaning my eyes out that to such relief, for a while. Then we rode into the village in search of food, we didn't have enough for the ride and a hotel managed to sell us things to eat. Starting with a descent we soon plunged into the very cold temperatures and once again I was hit like a tropical plant being dropped off at Antarctica. I started going nowhere quickly, sleep monster engulfing me. I got so useless and beyond logical conversation the team decided to have a 15-minute sleep. When I woke up I felt as though I'd be dropped from Mars into the race, it was very confusing and the result was I was worse off than before. Soon afterwards we stopped for another 30-minutes. Still struggling even after that we carried on but it was now minus 2 and I was barely functioning. I came the closest to a major injury when I fell asleep on a high-speed descent and started veering towards the cliff edge. Thankfully Mike saw what was going on and yelled at me just in time to stay on the road. Monique started to suffer from the cold and sleep also and the ride became a slog. Finally we made it to the start of the kayak, a 78km paddle over a lake and down a river. In the morning darkness we transitioned slowly and at first light set off, a little over 3-hours behind the leading team Buff. By now, we were securely in second with third place hours behind.

Stage 19 Kayak 78km

It took a while to warm up and the river had many portages around dams but we started to get going and slowly eat into the lead. We didn't though have the energy or focus for a fully committed chase and when we did start to get moving fast, we lost another 30-minutes when Chris paddled into a strainer, capsized, swam and lost his paddle, we rescued it later but lost time. We were also curious to know when our 1-hour time credit would be issued as we had been unable to find out from the race organisation details of that, we started to sense that those time credits were going to be conveniently forgotten about. With the river closing at 8:30pm we were thrilled to reach the end by 7:30pm, a night on the riverbank having little appeal. We exited the kayaks a little over an hour behind Buff.



Stage 20 Orienteering 4km

The final stage was a run around Salamanca, an incredible town of ancient buildings and churches. We reached the finish line with a huge sense of relief that we could finally stop. The exact time gap between our team and Buff seems to be classified information and I still have not seen the official results and times. All we know it was about an hour. We never got our time credit. Silva spent the night on the river and finished the following morning.

CLOSING

Because I was sick it was unpleasant most of the time, but the team was awesome and the racecourse was a worthy challenge. It had some great stages and while it lacked a real journey feel, it was no doubt an adventure. We tried to win the race but in the end the hometown advantage Buff had over us was simply too strong to penetrate their lead. They raced well and deserved the victory. We did our best, we went and raced, we got second, that's racing, that's adventure ... 2011.