



## ADVENTURE RACING TIPS

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October 2009

One of the greatest things about adventure racing is it is a multi faceted challenge. There is the challenge of the physical and testing nature of the disciplines and race course. There is the challenge of teamwork and conspiring together towards a shared goal and also the challenge of mastering something new – logistics, navigation, support systems and equipment – especially the specialised equipment that has evolved out of adventure racing in the past decade.

Here a few tips that I hope will offer a little more insight into the sport.

I'll start with a few quotes from adventure racing...

"The thing you didn't plan for is coming right your way"

"Something is bound to go wrong, what's important is how you deal with it, accept it - solve it - forget it"

"Adventure racing is a years emotions condensed into one event"

"It's easy to be average, that's why it's so popular"

"When something seems hard it's time to do something harder"

"Don't wish it were easier - wish you were better"

"Never give up"

"In adventure racing, there is no victory for one - the finish line can only be a triumph of many."



This information will be divided into 3-sections.

- » Pre event
- » Event
- » Post event

It's assumed you've already done your training, which depending on your goal, involved biking, kayaking and running, probably 10-20 hours a week for at least 6-weeks before the event you're entered in. Maybe some event specific practice too – ropes, horses, inline skates, caving, rafting etc.



PRE EVENT (10-days before the event)

1/ Gear & Equipment. Print out the event compulsory gear list and make sure you have all the items listed and that they are in working order.

2/ Gear maintenance - specifically mountain bike – some people turn up to events with bicycles that are barely staying together (perished tires, brake pads worn, gears not tuned). Not only is this dangerous, it's unfair to your team if your poor bike preparation consumes time. It is standard to have your bike 'raced tuned' by a Cycle Shop prior to a major event.

3/ Travel, accommodation and meal plans should be thought about and have some level of planning. Plan your event weekend with plenty of time – rushing the day before an event is tiring and that's when things get missed.

4/ Support crew. For a 4-person team, the ideal size support crew is 2-4 people. Any more than 4 and it starts adding unnecessary logistics.

5/ Transition Areas. Some people perceive transitions as a rest area. While you can spend as much time in the TA as you wish, it is advised to move through the TA with speed and efficiency, taking rests on the course when they feel most needed. While it may seem 'too serious' – practicing transitions with your support crew is extremely worthwhile, that way the support crew are confident and know what to expect, it also gives them time to think of ways they can be better also.

6/ TA equipment. To set up a TA begin with an area about the size of a car park. Lay down a ground sheet and place 4-chairs or stools in 4-corners. It's important the team members can see each other and communicate. I suggest you have 2-bins either side of each chair. One contains the things the athlete

may require for the next stage – this bin is often pre packed by the athlete and well named. The empty bin is for all the equipment that is discarded from the previous stage. The last thing you should do before leaving the TA is checking the gear you've just discarded ensuring you have not left any compulsory gear behind.

It's a good opportunity to fuel up in a TA with some drinks and food. Typically something like a can of drink and a muffin.

7/ Try to keep the TA as simple as possible. Going to extravagant lengths to make the TA comfortable only encourages teams to spend more time than they need in the TA. Have some spares handy but try to avoid clutter. A fast TA should take the team 2-3 minutes. A slow TA is reaching 10-minutes. In longer races sleep is best taken in TA's, ideally between 1am-6am period – the witching hours.

8/ Bicycles – the support crew should assemble the bikes ASAP once in the appropriate TA. They should check the tires; the brakes and that all the tools are with the bikes. It's also wise to make sure the team has the correct maps and course notes for the stage to follow.

9/ TA extras. Insect spray, sun block, spare compulsory gear items, extra maps, variety of food and drink options.



10/ You should be able to pack your biking and hiking gear before race briefing. You may have to make a few adjustments once you have the course but it'll save you time after the briefing if you're 90% packed.

11/ Make time for a team meeting, about 1-hour. The objective is to agree on a shared goal. What is your aim? Talk about strategies for the day and how

the team can help each other? Think of some things that could go wrong and consider some solutions. Have some means of re-visiting your team goal during the event – maybe a phrase or buzzword.

3-main common values for adventure racing are – composure (keep cool), optimism (nothing is a problem) and perseverance (never, ever give up – no matter how bleak the situation feels).

12/ Race briefing – the team captain and one support crewmember should attend. Go to the briefing with a pen and paper. Once the briefing is over you will have the course notes and maps of the course.

13/ Race planning – read through the course notes then examine the map to gauge the overall course. Once you are clear with the route you want to take use a highlighter (orange or pink) and draw on your intended route, linking the Check Points and TA's. You can also write small notes and messages on the map (“be careful not to miss the turn off”, “last chance to fill water bottles”). Some people even write compass bearings on the map to save time in the field. Then seal your map with clear cover seal. It pays to cover seal the course notes, as you will need to take them on course also.



## EVENT

1/ Ideally it's good to have breakfast 2-hours before the event start. It's also advised to have at least 30-minutes of free time prior to the race start. Aim to be 100% ready to start 30-minutes before. This makes the morning relaxing, even if it means 30-minutes less sleep.

2/ Pace yourself sensibly. Don't go at a pace you have not trained at. Efficiency in adventure racing pays more returns than speed.

3/ Navigate independently; don't assume the team in front knows where they are going. They are probably thinking that because there is a team behind them they are on the right route. At all times during the event the navigator should know where the team is on the map – within 500-metres. If they can't do this, practice some composure then optimism.

4/ Blisters can ruin your day. If someone in the team feels a hot spot or a blister starting, you need to attend to it immediately. The best treatment is to clean and dry the area and apply strong tape to cover the area. Try and remove any rubbing points footwear may be contributing. Blisters can largely be avoided by training, proven socks and footwear and applying an antichafe lubricant to your feet. There is a company called Ready-Set-Go that makes a product called 'antichafe', having a layer of this on your feet is recommended.

5/ As your team progresses through the course, continually think about how the team can travel as smoothly as possible. If someone is feeling weak or tired, they just need to say to a team mate "hey, you look strong and fresh, can you help me for a while so I can be strong again". You can help each other carrying someone's else backpack, pushing someone lightly from behind, using a length of bungy cord to tow someone and many teams use a retractable dog leash shortened down to tow others while biking. Sometimes simple communication and encouragement can make all the difference.

6/ It is an event rule to stay together as a team for safety reasons but it's also a huge benefit in making sure the team moves well. Teams that get spread out always waste time and lose any team spirit they may have had.

7/ During the event keep your team goal in the forefront of your minds and even mention it from time to time. What can be disappointing is crossing the finish line and not have achieved your team goal for the day, especially when it was in grasp. Someone might just pose a question "How are we going with our team goal right now?"

8/ Take time to enjoy the surroundings. At any given time during the event the scenery will be very special and at times incredible – regardless of the weather. Be sure to enjoy the journey and the adventure.

9/ Adjust things as the event unfolds. Due to weather you may take extra clothing or drop items out. Some foods may be going down well and others not. Be flexible and adaptable.



## POST EVENT

1/ Your support crew have had an adventure too – don't forget to ask them how their day was.

2/ Make time as a team and crew to discuss the event. Focus on the basic things like what worked really well, the good ideas, what didn't work and needs to be changed, and a general chat about how people found the day.



## A FEW MORE TIPS FOR THE EXPEDITION RACES

- I. Sleep management is critical. The best formula I have used is based on a calculation of 2-hours sleep in every 24-hour period. This can either be taken as 2-full hours, or 1-hour every 12-hour period or 20-minutes every 4-hours over a 24-hour day. If you can grab some more as a result of a dark zone, or because someone needs more, or because you can, then bravo. Never go without sleep for more than 30-hours ... ever!
- II. Sleep deprivation aids – stimulating debate, caffeine energy drinks, cold or another crazy one is a swim.
- III. Food – going hungry is something you want to avoid at all costs, take extra and if it starts to look like you've packed too much, eat it. Try and carry a selections if possible – bread, biscuits, grain bars, salted chips & nuts, energy gels and hydration drink powder, salami / light meats, candy, chocolate bars.
- IV. Water – in hot countries especially, taken plenty of water and also an extra litre each as emergency water – only to be used in dire situations.
- V. Sun protection – in hot countries cover up from the sun, long periods of exposure to the sun will drain a huge amount of energy. Long sleeve shirts, long shorts and big brimmed hats are good, sunscreen where needed and always have lip and eye protection available.
- VI. Foot problems are the single biggest thing that ruins team's races. These can be largely avoided by (in order of importance – conditioning – time on feet, anti chafe (Ready Set Go) liberally rubbed into feet, proven footwear & socks, avoid having your feet over heating.
- VII. In the late 90's and early in the last decade weight became a major fad in the sport, resulting in people finding all sorts of creative ways to save weight, but it went to far and people were carrying equipment around

that really had no practical use. I suggest you pack wisely, and as light as possible, but without comprising safety and sensibility.

- VIII. Inefficiency is the enemy in an adventure race. Stopping is something you do at the end. Be extremely creative and plan well to avoid stopping at all costs, once a team loses momentum it is very hard to get it back.
- IX. Train in all weather so you know exactly what clothing you'll require during an event when the weather turns.
- X. Adventure races are bloody hard. There is a glamorous side that will hook you but there is an ugly side that will test you to your limit- during the times of extreme hardship will be the true test of your character – what will get you through is a positive attitude the ability to laugh at the situation you've chosen to be in. It's meant to be fun.

