



Team Checkpoint Zero Endures 100 Year Storm in Moab

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Just two days after a shortened Adventure Xstream ended in Moab, blue skies in southeastern Utah made it hard to believe teams had just finished racing through what locals were calling a "100 Year Storm."

Team Checkpoint Zero with Ernie Chilcott (Durham, N.C.), Beth Reyburn (Austin, Texas), Charlie Roberts (Asheville, N.C.), and yours truly from Atlanta had traveled to the mountain bike capital of the world looking forward to spending three days and 300+ miles racing through the rocky, sandstone cliffs of Moab. Instead, high winds, rain and floods forced the race directors to call the race roughly 30 hours after it began.

The race started at 7 p.m. Oct. 5 at Red Cliffs Adventure Lodge on the banks of the Colorado River. Rain began to fall much earlier, but that didn't dampen the spirits of the teams that bolted up into the La Sal Mountains on bikes toward the Rogaine orienteering section when the green flag dropped.

After about 4,000 feet of climbing (and trying to stick with Beth) on bikes, the team left on foot to get as many as eight orienteering checkpoints in any order. A missed CP would be a two hour penalty, but it became clear fairly quickly that the rain and wind -- a team reported gusts of up to 80 mph -- as well as the elevation would make it difficult to reach each within that two hours. We'd have to decide whether it was quicker -- and easier on our bodies -- to skip any CPs, then make it back to our bikes and down the mountains to the paddling section. The team knocked off the first few CPs fairly quickly, and after some precarious rock hopping after a few missed turns, nabbed a few more CPs.

Then it was up the tall mountains to more than 11,000 feet to get a pair of CPs. At the tops of the mountains, the howling wind, whipping rain and steep grade made it slow going. I thought I was hallucinating when I saw one member of a two-male team -- no kidding -- gripping an umbrella in his hand. Apparently, the umbrella was doing its job because he seemed quite proud that he was carrying it and was in great spirits. I greeted him with a Mary Poppins comment, and then the team contoured around the mountain (great move, Charlie) to the next high-elevation checkpoint. Two checkpoints remained -- numbers 8 and 3. Number 8 was at more than 12,000 feet. And number 3 wasn't connected by any obvious trails on the map. So, the team did some quick math and decided it was smarter and probably quicker to skip the two checkpoints, run down to the bikes, then ride down the mountain to the paddle put-in with a few hours to spare before the cutoff at 11 a.m.

After a transition to paddling clothes back at the lodge, the team jumped into their two-person inflatable kayaks. Ernie and Charlie teamed up in one, while Beth and I paddled the other. The first two hours of the roughly four-hour paddle were great on the rain-swollen Colorado River. There were a series of big wave trains, and Beth got more than one mouthful of the silt-filled water. The view was tremendous. The heavy rains formed waterfalls that spilled over seemingly every high-cliff rock formation the team passed along the paddle. It definitely took some concentration to keep looking forward and focused on the race. We passed a few teams during the paddle and pulled into the transition to the rappel a bit cold and very hungry. Fortunately, our support person, Lisa, had made friends with the crew for Blueline, a team of police from Canada, and they came to the rescue with a sack full of cheeseburgers.

The team devoured the burgers while huddled together in a warm, but very stinky, pit toilet next to the river, then grabbed our gear and took off on a trek for the rappel site. We were blown away when we saw the drop area -- a free rappel from a 250-foot high arch, under which a waterfall spilled down to the rocks below. It was truly spectacular. The rain had stopped for a few moments, so Charlie snapped a few pictures. We then waited behind another team to climb up to the rappel site, then descended one-by-one and headed back on foot to the transition to the next bike section.

The team had been refreshed by the rappel experience, but was debating whether to catch a quick sleep before heading off on the next leg. We figured there wasn't much chance any team got all the Rogaine checkpoints and we wanted to bank a little sleep early in the race so we'd be fresh down the road on Day 3. Just as we were pulling on our last bits of clothes, lubing up the appropriate body parts and debating whether to take a short nap or head off on our bikes in the next minute or so, Lisa delivered word that no more teams could leave the transition area. At that time, race director Will Newcomer was heading out to check the rest of the course to determine how much damage the rain had caused. It would be a 30-minute wait, we were told. The decision had been made for us? we were going to get some sleep. After the 30 minutes ended, we then were informed we'd have to wait several more hours for the race directors to decide how the race would proceed.

At a 7 p.m. meeting, teams were told the bike leg planned after the rappel had been cancelled due to flooding, falling rocks and generally impassable and dangerous conditions. Instead, racers were now divided into two divisions? the long and the short course -- and teams were to follow the race passport from CP 24 onward. We had missed the long course by mere minutes and knew that some of the six teams on the long course? those that had gotten out of the transition area before Will started holding teams back -- had punched fewer Rogaine checkpoints than us. We were extremely disappointed, but all we could do was get on our bikes and pedal hard through Moab and up the road past the Slickrock Trail entrance and on to CP 25. The rain had stopped and the wind had died down, but unfortunately Mother Nature wasn't done with Moab just yet.

Hard pace-line riding along the Colorado River corridor took us back to Moab quickly. It was extremely bizarre to ride through town and see the shops and restaurants packed with folks - clean, warm, and quite oblivious to our suffering. We took a left turn out of town and started climbing. Beth first noticed the rain-heavy clouds blowing toward us. Ernie and I ignored her warnings to throw on our rain gear. We should have listened. Moments later we were tearing through our packs for our warmest and driest clothing, while getting pelted by rain and more chilling winds. Our one-hour reprieve from bad weather had ended.

The bike to CP 25 was pretty long - about 70 kilometers. The roads were rutted out. The sound of rushing water was everywhere. Sand was thick and slowed our travel. The night sky was repeatedly brightened by lightning and the thunder that followed shook our bikes as we crossed wide open areas of rock and pedaled past steep ledges. We saw a few more teams on the road with us, and all were as determined as we were to beat the cold wind and rain and keep moving forward. Finally, we reached the point on the map where CP 25 was supposed to be. After about 30 minutes of searching with several teams, we found a race volunteer bundled in the bed of his pickup and bearing some expected news - the race had been called off and all teams were to bike straight to the finish line at the lodge. We'd been racing only about 30 hours, but the rain essentially flooded out the race course.

Following the disappointing news, the fast bike down the mountain toward the premature finish line was extremely anticlimactic - though the gust that nearly knocked Ernie off the road and the three-bike pileup in a foot-deep mud bog provided some excitement.

Will and Lisa greeted us at the lodge with some cheers and a bottle of Champagne. We saved the bottle for later, and instead climbed into our sleeping bags



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and took some shelter from the rain and wind that was howling again.

At this point, I believe complete standings are still being tallied. Team BagelWorks took 1st place in the 4 person Co-ed category, followed by Team Go Lite/Timberland Sprint and Team NW Nike ACG. I'm not sure how we'll be ranked in the end, but only two of the six teams on the "long" course got more checkpoints on the Rogaine than we did and nobody got them all. The other four teams on the long course missed three or more CPs. We missed two.

However Will decides to position teams in the final results for the shortened event, I definitely can say it was a crazy race, a crazy storm, and thank the Good Lord for my GoLite Xirtam jacket :-)

The team would like to thank our sponsors Checkpoint Zero, GoLite, nuun, Headsweats, Axis Gear, Highgear and MPGear.com along with Hammerhead Bikes and Hammer Nutrition for making it possible for us to participate in this race.

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