



Red Tail

ADVENTURE RACE

Story by Steve R. Zenone

Photos by Daphne Hougard • www.daphnehougard.com

When I heard about the Red Tail Adventure Race (6-12 hour race) taking place in Briones Park (the East Bay Regional Park District) and San Pablo Reservoir on July 19th, I didn't hesitate to sign up. Briones Park, which is near Berkeley, offers over 14,000 acres of open land right in the heart of the East San Francisco Bay Area – perfect for a summer's adventure!

I signed up for the two-person category with a proficient and reliable teammate, Michael Kennedy. Our team name was Team Critical Path (team #206), and we were ready for fun. We knew the race consisted of five main disciplines; kayaking, trail running, mountain biking, navigation and orienteering. With that knowledge, we packed the mandatory and necessary gear and looked forward to the race.

Race day finally came. Michael and I took our gear to the designated transition areas (TA) and organized our equipment. At roughly 7:30a.m., maps, rules and race-passports were handed out to all team captains. Shortly thereafter, Todd Jackson, the Race Director, gave a pre-race briefing with the rules along with the do's and don'ts. We were told that the Red Tail Adventure Race consisted of fifteen checkpoints (CP), both manned and unmanned, that had to be located throughout the race. In addition to the main CPs, an orienteering section existed that consisted of twelve additional checkpoints, of which only eight of our own choosing had to be found.



Yellow Star Thistle

There were a couple of unique twists to the checkpoints. There were a couple of sections of the race where you could go to the CPs in any order of your choosing. This would require some good orienteering and navigational decisions. The second twist was that we were given a list of questions that we had to find the answers to at the various CPs of the kayak and mountain biking sections. The answers had to be written in our passport for the appropriate CP. Examples of questions include, "what is written on the sign" at the CP, or "what is being measured" at the CP. Once we located the CPs, the answers to the questions were to be obvious and written down on our race passport

(proof that we've been to each checkpoint). These twists added to the adventure of the race.

With maps, passports, the CP questions and other necessary gear, the teams walked over to the starting line situated in an open meadow. Once we were all there, we awaited the start. We were given a countdown from five—bang! The race officially began at 8:30 a.m., and I was smiling from ear to ear, knowing full well what I had gotten myself into once again.

We ran through the meadow and up a fire road to CP1 and checked in with a race volunteer. From there, we headed back down the same fire road to the bike TA. This was a clever way to thin out the teams before getting on the bike section. We geared up and biked on road for roughly three miles to CP2. At this point, the air was still cool, but with

clear blue skies above I could tell it was going to be a hot day.

At CP2, we were instructed to leave our bikes and trail run to CP3 where the kayak section began. Michael and I were wearing our bike shoes, which made for an uncomfortable two to three mile run. At CP3 we were ready to give our feet a break and prepared our kayak for put-in. We entered the reservoir's waters where we were to find three CPs in any order. As we were kayaking towards CP5, the wind really picked up and made kayaking more of a challenge. Once we found all of the kayak CPs, we steered toward CP7 for take-out.

Once at CP7, we left our kayak and started trail running back (in

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our bike shoes) to our bikes at CP8. While en route we heard sirens from various medical vehicles and the whirling blades from a medical helicopter. This wasn't typical of a sprint adventure race, and I wondered what could have happened. At CP8 we learned that a road cyclist, who was not associated with the race, had a serious road accident and needed to be airlifted out. The CP was temporarily closed until the helicopter left with the injured cyclist. CP8 then re-opened and teams were allowed to get on their bikes in the order of their arrival to the CP. There was a 17 minute wait for each team from the time of their arrival to the CP.

Michael and I biked back to the bike TA (CP9) and had the option of doing the mountain bike section or orienteering section next. We opted for doing the mountain biking section first while we



Top left: Team Entrails enjoying more than one ice cold Red Tail Ale. Bottom left: Team Price Point sorting out the orienteering course. Top right: Team Torque powers the San Pablo Reservoir. Bottom right: Jason Quin of Team Torque poses with an ancient Red Tail Hawk leg bone.

were still feeling strong. We had to find six CPs in any order. As we began biking, the sun was overhead and it was hot!

The mountain biking consisted of going up one hill after another—always fun when you're hot and tired. Fortunately, this is where biking in the Santa Cruz Mountains paid off for both Michael and I. As we were headed to CP10 I made a navigational mistake that cost us a half-hour. You've got to love adventure racing! Luckily, we were able to make some strategic route choices for the remainder of the bike leg that helped prevent adding to the lost time.

After the bike leg we had to do the orienteering section. We picked up our orienteering map and control card. We had to find eight out of twelve orienteering CPs in the order of our choosing. Each orienteering CP had a control flag and attached punch with a unique pattern to mark our control card to show we've been to the CP. We mixed up hiking and running on and off trail to find the

orienteering CPs. When we found our eighth orienteering CP, we immediately went and had our control card reviewed for accuracy and our passport checked off showing that the orienteering section was completed successfully.

We ran to the finish CP where a race volunteer reviewed our passport to verify that we had found all checkpoints throughout the race. We were given the thumbs up, and ran across the finish line and straight to the buckets of water and ice. Michael and I began drinking some of the ice-cold and thoroughly refreshing drinks that were provided and were happy to have participated in the first annual Red Tail Adventure Race!

Now I can't wait to race the third race in the Big Blue Adventure Racing series, the Half Moon Bay Ocean Blue Adventure Race. I hope there is a nice ocean breeze.

ADVENTURE RACING 101

Bring every single piece of summer time adventure gear you have, every ounce of physical and mental fortitude, and all of your scarce navigational abilities to adventure racing camp; but please leave your ego at home. Otherwise, it too will be battered, hungry, sleep deprived and utterly inspired after two and a half painful and challenging, but wonderful days of adventure racing camp. Besides, that ego gets heavy and it can slow down even the best adventure racing team.

Todd Jackson, founder of the popular Big Blue Adventure Racing Series, and Terri Schneider, adventure racer extraordinaire, put on a great camp that served to speed up the A.R. learning curve of a number of newbie racers. Terri and fellow instructors, Michael Tobin of Team Nike ACG and Nick Moore, longtime adventure racer, duathlete and Balance Bar 24hour Adventure Race Series director, gave campers the inside secrets of top adventure athletes, including the all important secrets to navigating any course. Team Montrail, winners of the latest Raid Gauloises, also made an appearance and shared race stories that had campers on the edges of their Capilene™ clad seats.

The camp was held at Northstar, which provided the ideal topography for honing mountain biking, kayaking and orienteering skills. It was also a great opportunity for participants to meet potential future teammates.

If you plan on becoming an adventure racer, be sure to head to their clinic next summer. In the meantime, join an orienteering club, get on your bike, paddle some long blue miles, and check out a shorter adventure race, like the Tahoe Big Blue, to be held on Saturday, September 13th. Here are some links to tide you over until next summer's Big Blue Adventure Racing Camp...

RACES:

BIG BLUE ADVENTURE RACING SERIES

www.bigblueadventure.com

BALANCE BAR 24HR ADVENTURE RACING SERIES

www.balancebaradventure.com

ORIENTEERING:

BAY AREA ORIENTEERING CLUB

www.boac.org/resources.html

TEAMS/ATHLETES:

TEAM MONTRAIL

www.teammontrail.com

TEAM NIKE ACG/ MICHAEL TOBIN

www.mtobin.com

TEAM EPINEPHRINE www.teamepinephrine.com

TERRY SCHNEIDER

www.svchallenge.com