

Rockland

Cyclists enter 12-hour adventure racing competition

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More than 150 racers did not need to be convinced it was the summer solstice, as they competed yesterday in a "Longest Day" race.

The 12-hour event sponsored by the New York Adventure Racing Association involved hiking, mountain biking, swimming and canoeing from Bear Mountain to Lake Sebago and back.

Fifty-two teams of three racers each vied for the grand prize, a chance to compete in the Expedition Ohio race this fall. Second prize was a slot in the New York Balance Bar 24-Hour Adventure.

The rest of the pack collected orienteering points and prizes, as they found their way from checkpoint to checkpoint without the aid of electronic devices, but with map, compass and plenty of spunk.

"It's challenging but fun," said a mud-splattered Tricia Pandolfo of Connecticut, as she and her team paused on their mountain bikes at the Lake Tiorati traffic circle.

"It's an extremely difficult accomplishment, but the fact that it's hard is what's fun," said Pandolfo's teammate, Larry Curran of Newton, N.J., who has been adventure racing for three years. "You get to know your team members better than by just hanging out."

By mid-afternoon, Kevin Jersey of Nyack and his team paused on their mountain bikes to regroup on a trail near Lake Sebago, still looking for the canoe launch.

Mountain bikers Norm Cognetto, Wendy Sanders and Jim Angle, all from Utica, also paused on the shores of Lake Sebago, before they pedaled off on a trail, looking for the same canoe launch.

Sanders said she liked adventure racing because it required "working together as a team," in this case, "to find the shortest way back to Bear Mountain."

Boat crossings covered all seven lakes in Harriman State Park. Racers were rewarded by verdant scenery filled with lakeshore mountain laurel and families of Canada geese. Others portaged their canoes along Seven Lakes Drive, passing picnickers and motorcyclists.

Patrick Miller, a software project manager from Rochester and a checkpoint volunteer at Lake Tiorati, recalled how he first became interested in adventure racing.

"I watched a Discovery Channel special on the 300-mile Eco-Challenge, where contestants trek across a different country each year," Miller said. "It's an interesting way to get involved."

The 2-year-old New York Adventure Racing Association, headquartered on Staten Island, has 300 members and sponsors four races and 11 clinics per year in the metropolitan area. The clinics teach a variety of practical skills, from navigation to how to fix a mountain bike in the middle of a race. The association also offers a two-day women's adventure racing academy.

Organizers said the fast-growing North American sport calls for teamwork and endurance and offers plenty of variety, with disciplines that may include kayaking, trail running, mountain biking, orienteering, horseback riding and rappelling.

The nonprofit organization benefits metropolitan area charities, including the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association's Widows and Children's Fund, and raises environmental awareness through the Greenbelt Conservancy and the New York City Parks System.

For more information, call 718-442-6048, visit the Web site www.nyara.org or write the New York Adventure Racing Association, 219 Wardwell Ave., Staten Island, NY 10314.

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