

**Odyssey Endorphin Fix 3.5 Day Adventure Race
Pipestem, West Virginia
April 16-19, 2009**

**Bob and Mike's Race Report
Team #57 - Waterlogged Dogwoods**

Mike and I attempted this race last year and were not able to finish due to poor route planning, poor navigation, and running out of food after about 2-days into the race. We decided that the only way to redeem ourselves was to wind up and let it rip one more time. A lesson is not learned until applied, so we had to make sure we didn't repeat the same mistakes.

The Odyssey EFIX 3.5 Day was again based out of the Pipestem McKeever Lodge on the rim of the Bluestone Canyon. This year, the race was slightly different in a couple aspects; half day added, no race support, no rafting or river boarding, morning start instead of afternoon, and the route would take us into Virginia. For race prep, I did a couple things differently, ensuring I had a big straight edge for non-gridded maps, contact paper to waterproof maps and directions, and map tools for all the ratios specified in the competitor letters. We both arrived at Pipestem at about the same time and went to race check-in. Odyssey did away with the gear and certification checks for this race, which was a big A+ in my book. After check-in, we took our 7 maps and started planning the first portion of the course. I realized that this race would head south into the Jefferson National Forest, characterized by a series of SW to NE running ridges, instead of the New River Gorge to the North. The race brief was also conducted faster than normal so we were excited to not feel too rushed making final preparations. By midnight our route was planned, packs ready to go, and gear box set....still could hear many teams in the hall and adjacent rooms getting ready for the next day's fun.

The next morning, Mike and I took our gear box to the drop-off location. Just afterwards, I realized that a 6:00am start would still be in the dark and we hadn't planned to have lights on our bikes (sometimes I miss the trees because of the forest), so we had to dig through the gear box and grab the bike lights. There was a bit of a chill in the air and the scene was pretty cool – bikes with lights, full packs with paddles attached, and folks itching to go....and we're off. The first leg was a 50-mile bike down to the New River and then through Glen Lyn, Narrows, Pearisburg, and then to Pembroke, VA. Mike's big into building up some Race Karma early on and I may have derailed this objective a bit. During the mad rush of the Peloton, I didn't see a dead possum right in my path and ran over his head (probably achieving a Karma deficit). The downhill to the New River was a nice way to start, almost no hard pedaling for the first 10 miles. There were two Park Rangers down at the River that asked us how long we were going to be in the area. We responded that it was going to be a 3 Day, 300 mile race, and we were just passing through this area. They advised that they would be shooting deer and it would be a shame if they got one of us instead.

The first CP was at Shumate Falls allowing us to check out what we had in store for us during the paddle. Just beyond Pearisburg, we had to find a route to cross over the river because Route 460 was off-limits. The National Geographic Trails Illustrated Map showed a bridge just north of the 460 bridge and the only thing that was there were remnants of the base pylons, but no bridge. We had to adjust a bit (and break the rules) by following a trail along the South side of the river that required us to cross-over a railroad trestle. At CP2 / TA1 in Pembroke we transitioned and trekked to the rappel site. There was about an hour and a half wait to get on the rope and it got a bit longer, one of the ropes was pulled due to a falling rock pinching the rope and making it unserviceable. The rappel was about 200' with a bit of a tricky start through a rock opening, and then a free-fall to the tree infested finish. A quick run / walk back to the Pembroke Boat Launch.

I guess Mike and I were taking our sweet time so far, because we were the last team to take a canoe, and boy what a canoe we were left with. The bottom was completely ripped up and

patched numerous times. Not sure how the outfitter would provide a boat like this, or how Odyssey wouldn't check. Upon entering the water, it immediately started leaking and filling up with water, and we didn't bring a bailer. What made the whole situation worse (or just plain funny) was that we disassembled our bikes and had them in the canoe as well, so with the water and the extra weight, the canoe was really unstable. The Class I and II rapids were easy enough leading up to the Narrows Class III, but we had to stop several times to empty the 4-6 inches of water in our canoe. Then we saw Ronny, Odyssey President, waving us down at the start of the Narrows rapids, recommending that we bypass with a small portage. Mike's response was "Portaging is for weenies." Ronny just smiled and gave us some guidance on what line to take and also recommended we should empty the water from the bottom of the boat. Well, Mike and I, ended up just winging it...the first couple rapids went OK, but then we got sideways a bit and water just poured in from one of the bigger swells, turning us completely over. Now we are both clinging onto an upside down canoe, in some pretty cold water, floating down the middle of the river. Another team that just completed the portage threw us a line and assisted us getting to the shore, where a fire was awaiting. Luckily none of our equipment was missing. I guess most teams had the same fate and Ronny got some great shots of the carnage. Both our "dry" bags ended up being not so dry and every piece of clothing we had with us was now completely soaked. The fire was a lifesaver....and the Volunteer manning this point was doing a great job keeping the fire stoked. We spent way too much time memorized by the warmth, but since it was now starting to get dark and cold, we needed to get some of our clothes a bit dry for the rest of the paddle. Having gone about 15 miles, we had about 25 miles left to paddle with one more substantial Class III – Shumate Falls.

Back in the canoe and on our way again, the water just kept trickling through the crack under Mike's seat. Now it was starting to get really cold, and our feet were sitting in a pool of water. The miles were going so slow, but we made it to Shumate Falls, where we were directed to line haul the canoe on the side of the rapids. It was now completely dark and the moon had not risen yet. While line hauling the canoe, I kept slipping on rocks...it was like I was trying to stomp fish or frogs every time I lost my balance. On one rock, I completely fell backwards into the water and got soaked again. Another fire was waiting for us at the bottom of the falls. We took advantage of this one, as well, to warm up and get a bit dry. I had thoughts of just spending the rest of the night there instead of getting back in the frigid water, but we pushed on. There was about another 15 miles more to the TA at Dickinson Branch Campground and I think we were both agenzized about having to keep paddling. This was absolutely the worst part of the race. Mike and I were both freezing, our feet were sitting in water, and we couldn't see a thing in front of us. We were both on edge, just waiting for us to hit a big rock in the middle of a rapid that would end up flipping again. Curve, after curve, there was no end in sight. At every light on the side of the river, we were hopeful it would be the end, but no luck. I couldn't feel my hands or feet and was now shivering uncontrollably...probably close to hypothermia, but we pressed.

Finally we made it to TA3 at the campground and another fire was waiting, but this one was smoldering. We were practically begging Joy Marr, the Odyssey Rep manning the TA, to add logs to the fire, while shaking uncontrollably. She urged us to get into our gear boxes and put on dry clothes, but we were again mesmerized by the warmth of the fire. Eventually I got out of my cold wet clothes and put on some dry clothes to include the fleece jacket....ahhhhhh, much better. Also had some Chef Boyardee, Cheeze Whiz, and Wheat Thins which tasted so good. To take stock in our race so far, we were pretty far behind right now, and in no condition to start the bike leg. We decided to take a couple hours to get some food, warm up, and get a couple hours of sleep. I got an hour of shut-eye, but Mike couldn't get to sleep, because the ground was too cold. After getting a break, we started to contemplate getting ready for the bike again. Unfortunately, our bikes were not cooperating. My brake lever was stuck in Mike's crank shaft and it took awhile to free it up. Then I discovered that the brake pads on the rear hydraulic brakes were stuck together. I had to undo the bolt and let some of the fluid drip out to separate the pads, allowing me to at least get the wheel back on the frame, but allowing air to enter the line. My back brakes were down to about 25% and that was after pumping them a couple times. The steep down hills of the Covered Bridge Bike Tour was going to be fun. We were about 24 hours into the race and

eager to continue on. This next leg was 80 miles with about 13,000' of elevation gain and crossed over several substantial ridge lines in WV and VA – Mike and I had some catching up to do.

We were finally making some good time, but decided to stop at a Gas Station in Greenville (nice town) to get a soda and some snacks. Then we pushed to the first Covered Bridge at Laurel Creek and continued toward the Covered Bridge on Indian Creek. I decided to go up and over a small ridge instead of following the low ground all the way around a portion of the course – at the top of the ridge we found ourselves in Private Property and had to use some IV lines to make our way around a house, staying out of the line-of-site of the guys hanging outside. When the sun was just starting to warm things up, we decided to stop and let our wet clothes in our packs dry out a bit. Mike didn't get many zzzzz's the night before, so he took a power nap, while I did some map work to verify our route for the rest of the bike leg. We stopped at an intersection in Lilydale and after a couple minutes, it looked like we were having a yard sale with all our clothes and equipment all spread out. Then we were off to CP9. The next portion of the route was a series of directions to take some State, County, and Fire Roads to get to Kire – wish we had gotten a Gazetteer Map, because it was hard to follow the directions on the TOPO or Trails Illustrated Map. We followed 219/10 up over a ridge to 29/1. Mike had a flat, so he stopped to fix the tire, while I tried to get some food in me and stay hydrated, I noticed I had stopped sweating and had started to get a head-ache. Sometimes while navigating I am so busy looking at the map at small rests that I forget to eat and drink. Mike went through two tubes and about three CO2 cartridges trying to fix the flat, ending up having to use the little hand pump to inflate the tire – it just wasn't working out for him. At the next intersection, a guy in a truck, who proclaimed to be an expert surveyor, was super eager to help us get to where we were going. We told him we were following almost turn-by-turn directions to get over the big ridge at the VA-WV border to Kire, and showed him the route we were taking. He told us we were taking the wrong way and directed us to take a route through Zenith Gap, near Hanging Rock that was way, way out of our way. We said thank-you, but we are going to continue on our path. He then got frustrated that we weren't going to follow his instructions...thanks for the help buddy, and have a nice day. Plus his dog was trying to jump out the driver side window.

We then followed 29/2, starting at about 2000' and heading toward the gap in the big ridge at about 3800'. We met up with another very kind and sincere gentlemen that made a point to let us know, with a sly grin, that there were teams almost a day in front of us – this really brightened our Team Spirit. It took us awhile to find the right Fire Road that switch-backed up the Mountain. While snooping through the woods for it, we came across a small Mountain Cabin in the middle of now-where with seemingly no roads or trails leading to it. This is a good time to mention a movie I watched about two weeks before the race, called **Wrong Turn**. I was so thrilled with the movie, I had to call Mike up and immediately tell him all about it. Below is a pretty good synopsis:

“Chris Finn (Desmond Harrington) is on his way to a job interview and is driving through the mountains of West Virginia. There is then a chemical spill on the road, so being short on time, he decides to take a different route, an abandoned dirt road in the middle of nowhere. He then meets a group of friends on a hiking trip who include Jessie (Eliza Dushku) whom were stranded on the road. Two people stay at the car, and another group goes for help, only to find a sinister cabin nestled in the West Virginia woods, that is home to a trio of cannibalistic mountain men grossly disfigured from years of in-breeding. They then make a mad dash for their lives through the woods, only hoping to make it out alive.”

While Mike was playing around with the neat little water system from a near-by spring, I was exploring the area, taking pictures - just in case they might be needed for evidence later. Just to make sure this was not the cabin in the movie; I checked the inside of the cabin for any stranded college students or deranged inbred Hillbillies. Only finding some really old furniture, a stockpile of food, and some animal pelts – but there was the smell of death.....time to leave.

We got back on track and found the switchback fire road. Right prior to cresting the mountain, and just before it started to get dark, we took another little meal and snooze break. It was decided that trying to get any sleep during the night was just not going to happen, because it was just too cold to lie on the ground, and even harder to start going again afterwards. Two soloists and a 4-person co-ed team, who were all kind of traveling at the same pace as us, crossed our path again – Team Halfway There #2, Frank, and Shad. On the back-side of the ridge, we started our way down the mountain, in the dark, on a rocky - slippery fire road toward Kire. Up over one more small ridge and we had made it to Route 635, now in VA again. Turned east and cruised onward to Waiteville, crossing back into WV. At CP10 we had to ID the color of a house at the intersection (it was blue), then headed south. We linked up with a Soloist – Brian, and went up and over Route 636, another fun little climb. At this point we were pretty much walking up all the super climbs – Lance Armstrong was undoubtedly frowning on our pathetic efforts. Another nice cold, fast downhill (hoping my lack of back brakes would not help me find the side of the road) and we were back in VA. Brian pulled over to the side of the road for a little cat nap, while Mike and I rode on. A nice flat jaunt on Route 632 and then up and over one of the more challenging climbs at Rocky Gap, which was along a steep gravel road, again pushing our bikes up most of the mountain. The next CPs 11 and 12 (two more cool little covered bridges) were in the valley fairly close to each other. I was doing a good job taking pictures of the bridges, but missed taking any of these two bridges. The last portion of the 80 mile Covered Bridge Bike Tour was a hellieriffic climb up to the Mountain Lake Resort near Bald Knob – this was the absolute worst climb, because we were just so tired and the road kept going up, up, up, and would just not end. I guess this lodge was the place where the movie **Dirty Dancing** was primarily shot. Most people like the “Nobody puts Baby in a corner” quote, but my personal favorite is “I carried a watermelon.” The lake was really low, more like a pond in the middle of a huge depression, and I was disappointed that the Odyssey Staff had not spray painted green leaves on all the trees. Mike and I made our way to the Rec Bldg, shaped like a barn (not sure if there were any DD scenes filmed in it) and checked in, only to learn that we had missed the cut-off time for the Bald Knob Trek. I was only planning on trekking to 2 of the points anyways but was not looking forward to getting back on the bikes so soon.....My arse was so super pissed at this point. There were several teams at the lodge that were losing team-mates to injuries and dehydration, so we decided on another snooze fest after raiding the all ready harvenged vending machine. They also had our shout-outs from the Check-Point Tracker <http://www.checkpointtracker.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=app.showTeamProfile&eventID=157&teamID=3852> Yea to all the peeps who checked in on us and cheered us on. These comments kept us motivated and determined to drive on. One of my faves was the “Leroy Jenkins” comment – “Let’s Do This” was my go to saying for the start of each leg.

On our bikes again, we had about a 30 mile ride to the Mill Creek Trail System, passing through Pembroke again to get to the south side of the New River. The only real noteworthy item during this leg was that I rallied up some more negative Race Karma by accidentally running over a live snake on the side of the road to Mike’s displeasure – I was so completely zoning out. The valley we were heading up on Sugar Run Road was pretty cool, some neat farms, babbling creeks, and goats hanging out in the middle of the gravel road. We had yet another climb up the Sugar Run Mountain Pass and then turned the corner east toward the next TA at CP19. This was the south end of the Mill Creek Trail System that paralleled the Appalachian Trail. We transitioned to a trek and decided to go for 2 of the 3 points to save some time and attempt to position ourselves to finish with an official time. The terrain was great to nav by, but the trail system was a bit poor and confusing. We took the wrong grassy trail and then had to follow a ridge passed a series of hilltops to eventually find CP21 at Sentinel Point overlooking Narrows and the New River – awesome view that made a great picture. We then took the wrong shortcut and ended up bushwacking through some dense rhododendron and mountain laurel to CP22 near the falls on the Catwalk trail. After a small game of hide-and-seek, I found the CP down a very steep embankment. Mike made a comment that of all the Adventure Races he has run, the Lead Navigator had always sent him searching in a direction that was the least likely area where the CP would be found.....oops, I just did the same thing. Noticing that the light was starting to fade and that we would have to bike through this trail system to get to Narrows, we lit a fire under our

arses and hightailed it back to the TA. After transitioning to the bike, I was really pushing Mike on this MTB leg to get out of the trails before it got completely dark. The trails were very rocky and steep and I didn't want to get stuck trying to navigate them in limited visibility. This was the one portion of the entire race that had some cool, fun single track riding. We exited the Mill Creek Trail System just north of Narrows, VA and decided that we would stop for a sit down meal at a restaurant. We found Anna's Restaurant on Main Street and they had a pretty awesome buffet. It was nice to stop for awhile and enjoy a good hot meal surrounded by some small town ambience. Several other teams had the same idea, and even though the restaurant was closing the wait staff allowed the other teams to trickle in. We did get some strange looks from everybody there – I guess they don't get smelly biking vagrants passing through very often.

We continued biking north along the New River to Glen Lyn, crossed over, to Rich Creek, and then to Peterstown. For some reason, we were stopping a whole bunch during this 35 mile bike leg back to the Dickinson Branch Campground, where our junk canoe was waiting for us. At Peterstown, there was a group of young girls at a gas station that were cat-calling us for some reason....felt so belittled and humiliated :o(Passing into WV for the final time, our spirits were high. A few more miles of biking (through a town called Bozoo and past numerous houses with free range dogs) and we made it to the campground. The mountain bikes were now going to be just added weight to the canoes – we would not have to endure the seat gnashing our sore buttocks anymore – YEAH!!!!!!!

Another small snooze by the fire, a food refit, and some more Cheese Whiz got us ready for the Canoe / Orienteering Leg. At first light we headed out on the water – the bottom of our boat was instantaneously full of water. This go round, Mike had a handy dandy bailer that he found, but it didn't do much good. We were moving really slow and I was playing a game, trying to get into a position so my feet would not be submerged in the standing water. Of the 2 Orienteering Points we tried to find, we found 1 on the Pipestem Creek near the Route 20 Bridge. We turned west into the Bluestone Lake / River and found the next TA. Mike's family and G-friend were waiting for us here – it was nice to have folks cheering us on and see Alexis holding up a fluorescent "Go Waterlogged Dogwoods" sign that she made.

This being the final transition for the trek along the Bluestone Canyon River and up to the Pipestem Lodge, we hurriedly got our canoe out of the water, our bikes out, and our packs on. Mike and I were so ready for the last 13 mile trek to the finish. Odyssey had extended the finish to 4:00pm because the elevation gain had proven to be a challenge for racers. Mike pushed me forward on this leg, because we still didn't have much time left. At one point I remember asking Mike for some Electrolyte Tablets (of which I usually take 3 at a time) and at another point I remember asking for some 800mg Motrin (of which I usually take 1 at a time). Both times, I think he told me he would get it out at the next rest stop. Well, when we stopped, he handed me a bag of pills, which I thought were Electrolyte Tablets, and I took three of them. A while later I started feeling really numb and funny and asked Mike what he had handed me – turns out they were 800mg Motrin. That would explain the funny things happening in my head. I asked Mike to really watch me close to make sure I didn't crash or something and I hoped I would be OK for the final push. We passed the tram at the Bluestone Canyon Resort and then waded across the waist deep river at the rope bridge. Now it was a final assault on the Bluestone Canyon Wall up to the Pipestem - McKeever Lodge. Mike really had to push me on this part, because I was hurting. My blisters had popped and my legs were en fuego. The last 3.5 days was boiling down to having to get to the lodge in under an hour, and there was going to be no way that we were not going to finish on time. With a couple hundred meters to go, we saw Mike's family and Alexis waiting to cheer us the last little ways. One final kick and we were at the lodge – An official finish. What a feeling of accomplishment!!!!!!!

Odyssey Staff took a picture of us finishing and then we entered the Conference Room to the cheers of the teams that finished before us. There was a nice spread of food and I heaped some on my plate and sat down to enjoy a post-race meal.....and then I turn around and see Nathan, my 2yr old son, running up to me. Erin had decided to surprise me by making the journey from

Cary, NC to watch The Waterlogged Dogwoods finish. I was so excited to see them. Even more exciting was that I now wouldn't have to drive home that night because we decided to stay at the lodge one more day. Mike's parents decided to hold their room one more day to let Mike shower and for me to rest a bit, and they very generously allowed Erin and I to use it for the night – Thanks guys, that was awesome. Mike and I did the gear exchange drill and he headed back to VA, undoubtedly reposed in the back seat of the car. Erin, Nathan, and I went to the Pipestem Restaurant to get some food, but Nate was getting a bit crazy so we went back to the hotel to eat. I knew I was completely exhausted when, while eating spaghetti, I woke up with it covering my lap. That night, I raked the frack out in the hotel room like I hadn't slept in a week. Overall, I was feeling a lot better than I thought I should be.

So, we accomplished our goal of finishing with an official time and redeeming ourselves from our performance in EFIX 2008. Even if we hadn't finished this year, I still would have enjoyed the adventure, but walking across the finish line after 3.5 days was just a great moment in time. Mike and I raced great together again and we were able to keep each motivated during the cold and long paddle portions. We so appreciate the support from family, cheering on from friends, and the shout-outs to keep us moving. Once again, the Odyssey Staff and Volunteers have put on an extremely exceptional and challenging race.

Mike's Comments - *Bob did a great job putting together our race report for this year – and I applaud him recognizing his Karma deficits. In the end, it didn't seem to affect us too badly. I would also like to thank Bob for taking this race on again – last year's outcome had really bothered me and I was glad to be able to finish this year. Bob kept us going on the right track with his usual amazing navigation, and kept me going in the canoe of death when all I wanted to do was stop and make a fire. Of course, I would also like to say a big thanks to all of the folks who posted shout outs for us – you have no idea how much that kept us going. Finally, a very special thank you to my Mom and Dad and Alexis for coming out and cheering us on – having you guys there meant everything.*

See you on the Trails,
Bob and Mike – Team 57, Waterlogged Dogwoods