

**Odyssey Endorphin Fix 3-Day Adventure Race
New River Gorge, West Virginia
April 24-27, 2008**

**Bob and Mike's Race Report
Team #96 - Waterlogged Dogwoods**

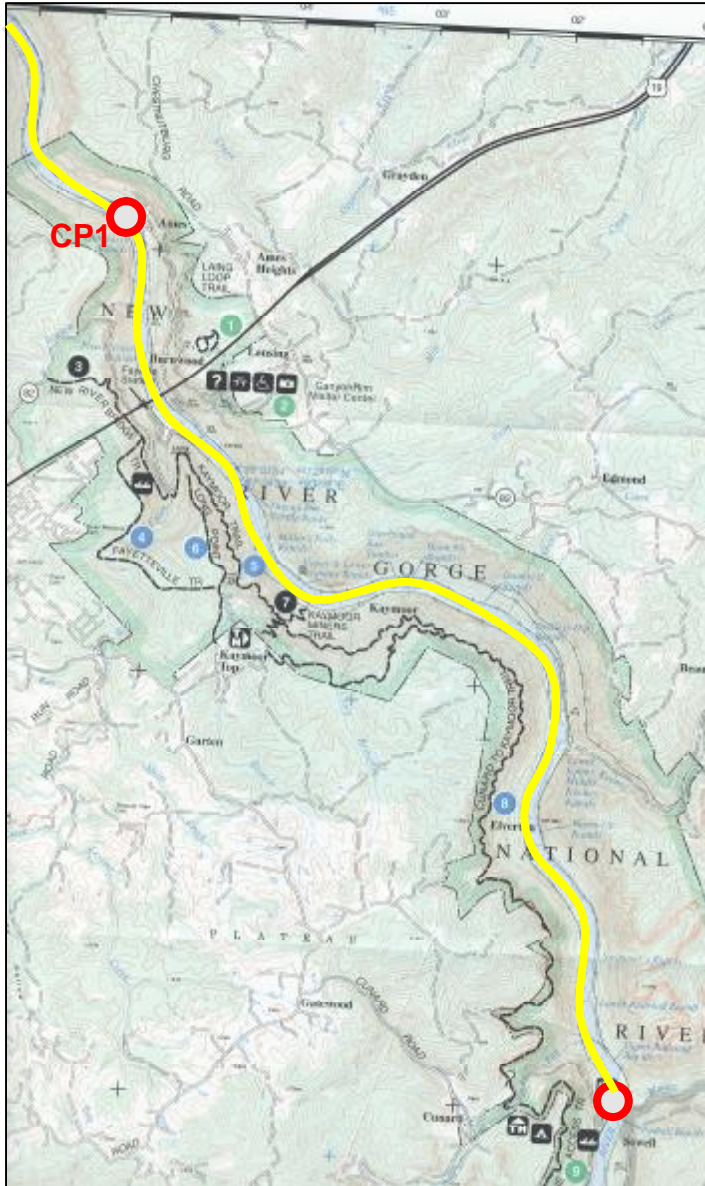
The Waterlogged Dogwoods is a relatively new team from Northern VA that participated in the 2007 Odyssey Sprint Series and most of the 2007 EX2 Adventure Races with some top finishes in the Co-Ed Division. The two members that participating in the 2008 EFIX are Team Captain - Mike Piet, and Team Navigator - Bob May (me). The goal of the team was to not get too lost, race solidly, and cross the finish line as a ranked team. Well, I guess we didn't accomplish any of our primary goals, but we had a great time and definitely got our money's worth. In this week's Grey's Anatomy there was a good saying, "In a Lion fight, you rarely win, but if you come out of it alive, there is reason to roar." – or something like that. Pictures can be found at:
<http://www.checkpointtracker.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=app.gallery&eventID=135>
<http://share.shutterfly.com/action/welcome?sid=8AZNGrl1Ytmga>

The Odyssey EFIX 3-Day was based out of the Pipestem McKeever Lodge on the rim of the Bluestone Canyon. Mike and I showed up Wednesday night and we got some good sleep prior to the race. Race check-in was Thursday, 24 April, and we got a bit of a late start getting all of our gear turned together, getting it checked, bikes inspected, and the rappelling and water safety skills test. We weren't able to get the maps, directions, and passport until fairly late and we were in a bit of a time crunch picking the canoe up from the maintenance facility, packing our racing packs, loading up the gear box, and plotting out the course. I was only able to figure out the first portion of the course – up to checkpoint 6. **Mike's Comment – what Bob doesn't mention is that our hotel room looked like REI had dropped a 500lb gear bomb. The gear list for this race was four pages long – and that was just mandatory gear. We scrambled in the morning to pare down what we had to what we needed – and what could fit into our one assigned gear box. Between the river boards, wet suits, bikes, life jackets, paddles, food, extra clothes, and camp stove, you would have thought we were headed out for two weeks in the wilderness, not a three day adventure race. My favorite piece of equipment though was one Bob carried the length of the race – each team was required to bring a trowel, an entrenching tool for burying waste. Well, Bob has one but on the day he was leaving couldn't find it – his solution was to bring a wooden handled metal garden spade. For some reason this brought me hours of entertainment, especially as we got more and more sleep and food deprived.**

This might be a good time to say we ended up being an unsupported team, so Odyssey was responsible for moving all the required equipment from one manned transition point to the next. Most teams had 1-2 folks supporting them. We got everything loaded on the right U-Hauls and got a ride from an Odyssey Volunteer to the Class VI River Runners Outfitters just north of the New River Gorge Bridge.

We got a raft safety briefing, loaded buses, and headed to the Cunard put-in on the New River, ready to raft the Lower New River - <http://www.class-vi.com/rivers.cfm?RiverNameID=2>. A lottery decided what raft the teams were in – there were 3 waves of 4 rafts, and we were in boat #13 of wave 2. The waves started 5 minutes apart at about 5:00pm. Odyssey threw a bit of a curve ball at the beginning of the race. Our raft guy was named Ark – "like the boat", a pretty cool guy with a long ponytail and a German 3rd Reich type helmet – kinda funny. As the waves boarded the rafts and pushed off into the river, a member from each team had to run up some steep stairs, down a trail, jump into the water a ways down stream and swim to the rafts. After the raft recovered all its passengers, the teams in that raft could start down the river. Even though Mike is a lot stronger swimmer than I am, I was wearing a shorty wetsuit and ended up doing the swim because the water was a bit chill. There was one other 4-person Team – Team Moab and two

soloists in the raft with us, so there were 4 total swimmers from our raft. I ended up being the first to our boat, but we took off last in our wave.



The raft portion was the best leg of the race and was awesome fun. We pretty much paddled the entire time and switched positions in the raft occasionally to keep our arms fresh. Ark helped to paddle and tried to take lines to keep us running in the fast part of the river – he also played a key role in letting us know which side of the river to swim to if any of us got dumped out of the boat. Fortunately, no one did any additional swimming. The rapids were mostly class III and IV, with three Class Vs (I think). Since it was West Virginia, every time we heard banjos we paddled just a little bit faster. The raft portion went to CP1 at Trey's landing, a total of 8 miles. This is where we unloaded the rafts and transitioned to the canoe to continue heading north on the river.

We rented a canoe from a local outfitter and it wasn't very speedy with its boxed front. It was mostly a whitewater canoe and we were on fairly flat water. It also didn't help that we had Mike with a two-bladed paddle and I had a one bladed paddle in the front. This part of the Race is called **Dumb Mistake**

Our first fatal flaw occurred during this canoe leg. I had the maps and directions in a water proof case, but it wouldn't close properly. After finding its way to the bottom of the boat it filled with water and all the directions with the CP grids got soaked. Most of the maps were water proof, so no biggy, but the 4 pages of directions and O'Course Map that were folded over on itself were completely bound together and almost ruined.

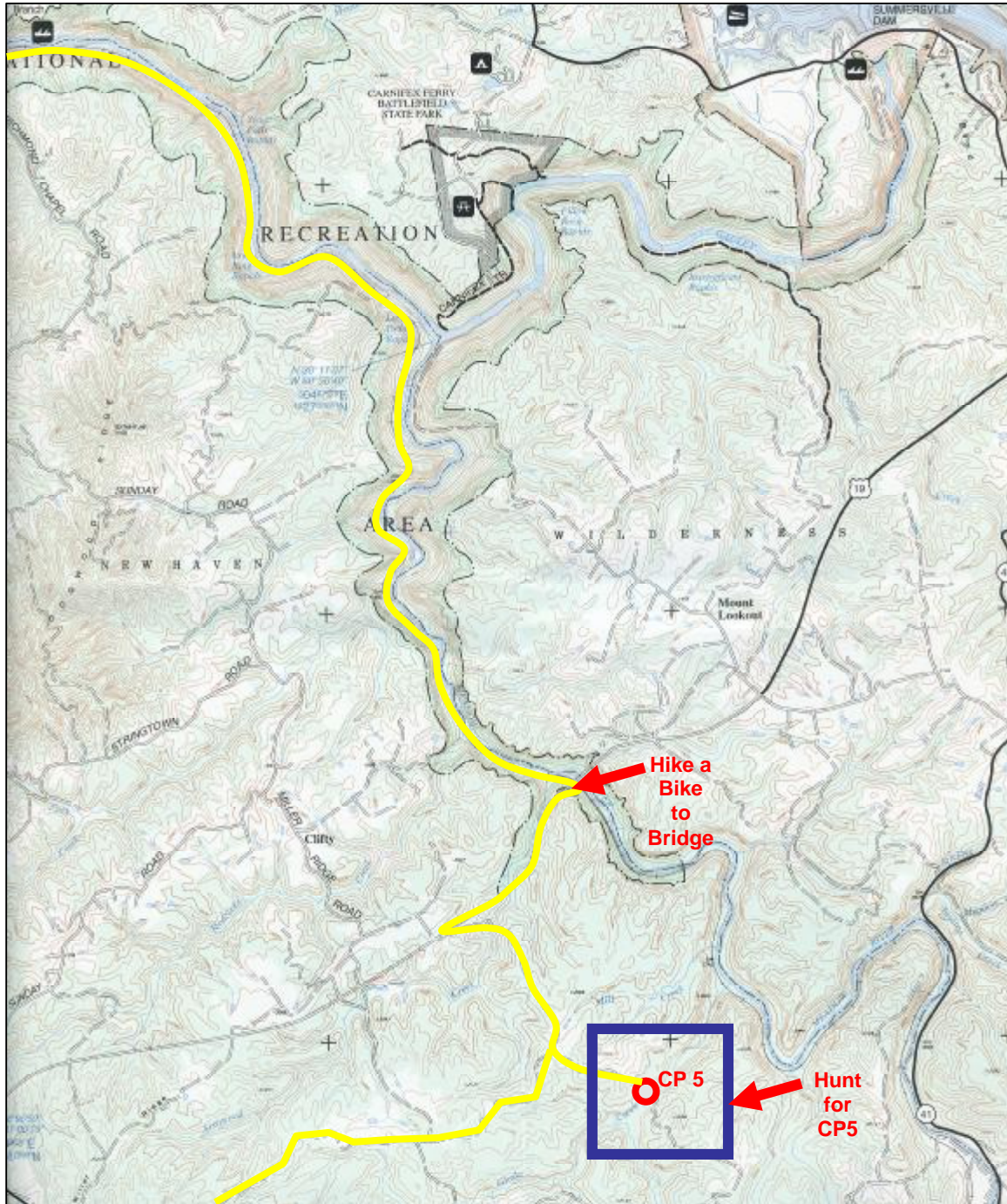
At the end of the canoe leg (~3 mile paddle) we transitioned to a trail at Hawk's Nest State Park at CP2 and started a portage up a fairly steep unimproved road. I guess we took the wrong road, because a little ways up, we saw all the teams ahead of us heading running back down the hill. It was kinda fun watching some of the top teams jostling for position like a NASCAR short track. We turned around too and started up the right trail.

The portage up the hill was a total of 3 miles. Thanks Pat – the portage wheels worked out great and we were very happy to have them. Neither one of us could imagine trying to muscle our canoe all the way up the hill without wheels. We got to the next transition area at CP3 – Ansted Ball Field, and it was already dark. This is where we first noticed the unsupported teams were at a disadvantage. The supported teams had meals cooked, equipment laid out, and folks ready to give them special attention to help get them ready for the next leg. We came up to our two bikes in the grass and a closed gear box. Now, the Odyssey Volunteers were great and we truly appreciate the help and support, but it just wasn't the same. We got some food in us, reloaded hydration packs and water bottles, and got the bikes ready with the light set-ups. Left the TA at about mid pack.



The next leg was a bike leg and we started heading to CP4 at Laurel Creek near the Gauley River. This is where we first started to get an idea of how extreme the MTB leg elevation was

going to be. Up, down, up, down, up, up, up. We ended up walking some of the really steep portions. It took us one wrong turn to find the trail leading down to CP4 at Laurel Creek. This last little bit was a really steep decent that we flew down. I love the downhill portions of the race – no effort, lots of speed, wind in your face....and the possibility of a good wipe out on gravel. This was the first unmanned checkpoint and we were happy to see if reflect off our headlamps.



We started heading generally southeast on an abandoned railroad bed, right along the side of the Gauley River. It was dark so we could only hear the rapids down below. I really wish it was light so I could see the river's fury. This little section was nice and flat, so we kept a pretty good clip, but it seemed like it lasted forever. **Mike's Comment – I like how Bob still thinks this section**

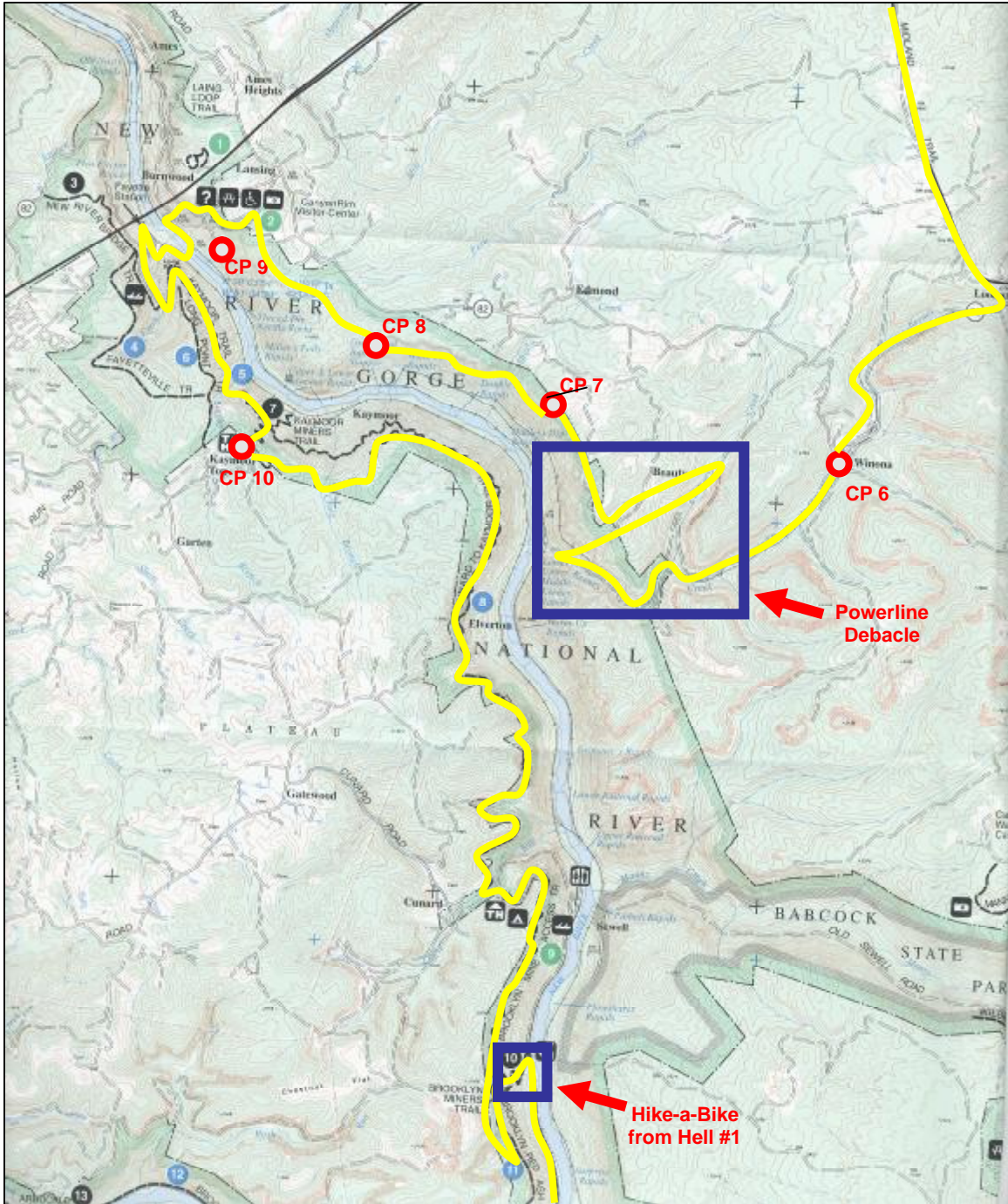
was flat. Part of the reason it seemed to last forever was because it was a gradual uphill the whole time... At some point I realized I should have worn some kind of padded shorts, cause my butt was barking at me. **Mike's Comment again – the bike shorts didn't really help. As Bob commented on Sunday morning after the race was over, his bike seat was actually fashioned out of a porcupine carcass. Mine felt no better.** We took the railroad bed to the Rte 19 Bridge over the Gauley. Upon seeing it, we immediately wondered how we were going to get up there. It was spanning at least 200' up. We found a trail under the bridge and started our first uphill hike-a-bike along an already worn trail from racers in front of us.

Took Rte 19 about a mile and half and found the unimproved road leading to the general area of the ominous CP 5 at Glade Creek. This part of the Race is called **Hunt for CP 5**. This area had some new roads not on the map and some connections not shown. At first I thought we were right on track, heading down a steep trail to the intersection with Glade Creek, but after getting where I thought it should be, we found nothing. Crossed the creek several times and hunted about in the thick rhododendron. We hiked our bikes back up the hill to the main intersection and tried several other trails. We even met some other teams and searched around together....still nothing. We wasted a good 2 hours searching for this control and finally called it quits. Started our way to the next TA. It's always disappointing to not find a point, after searching so long and thinking you are in the right spot.

We headed east toward Rte 60 along a windy hilly unimproved road. Right before we got to Rte 60, we stopped in front of a house to check the map. It was still dark at around 4:45am and a guy came outside to see what all the lights were for – Mike has a pair of pretty bright car headlights on his bike that can wake the dead. The guy asked us, "Are you OK.....are you on bikes?!?". We assured him we were ok, well as ok as you can be when you are smoked, your butts and legs hurt, it's early in the morning and you just biked the entire night. **Mike's Comment – we both wished, that after determining we were 1) okay, and 2) only marginally crazy, that the gentleman had invited us in for some breakfast. No such luck.**

We got to Rte 60 and headed to the TA at CP6 – Winona. It was just starting to get light when we arrived at our awaiting closed gear box. Total bike was 36 miles, but I think we added another 4-5 miles of biking / trekking to look for CP 5. The TAs were a sight to see - a random grouping of vehicles in the strangest places, with tents, tarps, fires, tables, bikes, boxes, canoes, gear all over the place. At this TA we got out the backpacking stove and heated up some water for Mike's Ramon Noodles and my dehydrated Eggs and Bacon. Loaded up on gels, beans, bars, water, and with a quick change of clothes we started our trek to CP7 – the Rappel at Ram's Head. This part of the race is known as the **Powerline Debacle**.

Remember all of our race directions with the grids got wet and I only plotted up to CP 6....well, from this point on, Mike and I were kinda flying blind. Shortly after leaving Winona, we stopped to re-assess our location deciding the only way to get to the rappel site was straight up the side of a hill – no trails, just a scramble. Before that, Mike took his first nap – a five minute sleep in the middle of a road – fortunately unused, at least at that time. From that point on, we were in almost a worst case scenario for a navigator. Everything I know not to do, I did. The directions have us following a trail down to the New River Boundary and then following Powerlines to the Rappel Site at Ram's Head. We ended up following the trail too far down toward the River, finding a set of powerlines, and then scampering up a really steep incline to a relay station with intersecting powerlines, and then following the wrong set east of Beauty (when the directions clearly stated west, it would help if I remembered that when looking at a map upside down, the cardinal directions are reversed). We finally got oriented and back on track, but wasted a lot of time going up and down needlessly, expending lots of energy. The rappel at CP 6 was probably the second favorite part of the course with the rafting being the best. It was about a 12' descent down the face of a cliff to an overhang and then a 170' straight descent....lots of fun with a great view of the gorge. The Odyssey Photographer was there to snap some good shots of us.



We then followed the Climber's Trail along the base of the cliff to the mountain ladder at CP 8, up the ladder to the Endless Wall Trailhead and started toward Rte 82 near the Rte 19 Bridge (where they do base jumping from on Bridge Day in OCT). Shortly before hitting the mountain ladder, we ran out of water and had to press on for a good hour before finally finding a stream where we could stop and refill, purifying the water with iodine tablets. Running out of water was a major problem since it was in the middle of a hot day, and it foreshadowed what would happen about 24 hours later. The directions stated that CP 9 was at the trailhead with Rte 82, but there ended up being multiple trailheads, so we skipped it after a brief search. Rte 82 led to the bridge at the bottom of the gorge on some steep switchbacks. To save more time we just bushwacked straight down. Crossed the bridge and started our way back uphill again to the Kaymoor Trail. At this

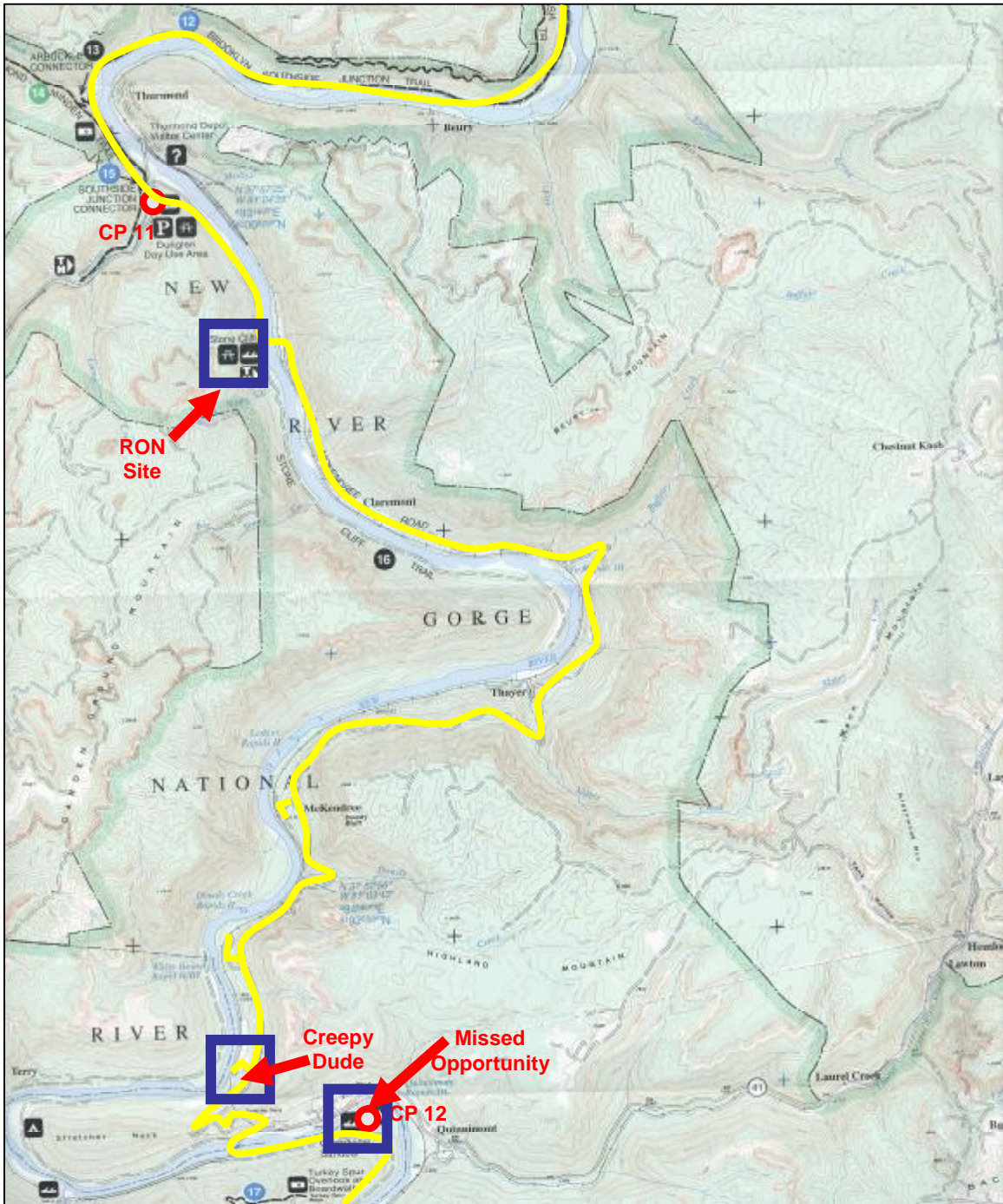
point we were fairly tired and ready to get a break. One last ascent up the Kaymoor Miners Trail brought us to the TA at CP 10....YEAH!!!! There is a great pic of Mike as we entered the parking lot. Total trek of 21 miles with another additional 3-4 miles of really steep terrain during the Powerline Debacle. Mike and I took a bit of time at this TA. My first priority of work was to heat up some water for some Chili Mac while Mike scanned the back of his eyelids for 30 minutes. Our feet were done and it was good to get our shoes off, dig out the jam, dry them off, take care of hotspots, put some foot powder on them, and get some new socks. It was about 24 hours into the race now and we had covered a total of 80 miles of a 72 mile course. I got about a 10 minute cat nap, but we really wanted to get some biking in prior to it getting dark. Another thing to mention was at about this time, we realized we would definitely miss the cut-off for the River Swim at CPs 13-14. I was really excited about the swim and it was definitely a Debbie Downer knowing we would miss out. The motivator of the day was learning that they had all the race shout-outs printed out at CP 12, the next TA, so off we went on our bikes....re-energized a bit.

Continued south along the rim trail to Cunard and then to the Brooklyn Mine Access Trail. There was a Brooklyn Mine Access switchback trail that led to the Southside Junction Trail, seemingly the only way to get there. The problem was that I guess this trail had not existed since the 50s or something. The Course Designer, Joy, said there was another trail not listed that provided easy access down. For folks who had carnal knowledge of this area it was probably well known, but for us, we decided to follow tracks down **Hike-a-Bike from Hell #1**....and it was getting dark, so lots of fun. Most of the scratches and bruises that marked our participation in the EFIX came in this ¼ mile section that dropped about 800' through dense vegetation, lots of rocks, and some little cliffs. I think Mike and I both felt like launching our bikes down the hill and then catching up with them later. Nobody in their right mind would try to do something like this other than an Adventure Racer. Finally down, we continued along the Southside Trail to the CP 11 - Dungen Day Use Area. Again, we were traveling along a river at night and it would be cool to be able to see it – just could hear the rapids to our left. It was getting late and we were both tired. Our asses were on fire from the bike seats having their way, and we both decided to take an extended break at the Stone Cliff Campground -- right in the gravel parking lot. Built a fire to keep warm and started drying out our directions. They were still plastered together and every time we tried to get them apart, the top layer would disintegrate. With a careful surgical procedure, we finally separated them enough to dry the pages individually from the fire. The only problem was that the grids to the next two TAs were indistinguishable because it was right on a seam. We just had directions to follow McKendree Road to CP 12 – the next TA, but that was something to worry about after racking out for a couple hours.

Our Rest Over Night (RON) site must have been the safest place in all of WV, because we got visits from the Park Ranger and a local Sheriff. I guess they knew the scoop on the race, because they just shined a really bright light into our eyes and asked if we were OK – not even worried that we had a fire going on the edge of a parking lot. **Mike's Comment – on the other hand, it was West Virginia, so maybe they were used to seeing two dudes curled up near a fire.** We groggily replied, "YUP...doing great!!" Mike and I took turns trying to keep the fire stoked by hunting for more wood and it amazingly was still roaring in the morning at first light. Saturday morning – the Day of Race Reckoning.

We put the fire out with multiple trips to the river to get little cups of water and got ready to continue on with the bike. Our food stores were already low and getting to the next TA was vital. The only problem was that I didn't know the exact location, just a generic description of where it might be (along McKendree Road). The other snag was that at the CP 12 TA, we would be given the rest of the directions for the second half of the course. The goal of the day was to find CP 12. We started out revived and were making good time. The route took us generally south along the New River, veering off occasionally to go up a draw and back down. Every time there was an unimproved road or trail veering off toward the river, we checked for CP 12...no avail each and every time. The only thing we did find was an old, seemingly unoccupied broken down 1-room shack, with a Tyvek outer shell. Completely inaccessible from any motorized vehicle other than maybe a motorcycle. The windows were broken out, the door was open, and there was some

nice furniture and other random items in the grown over yard. I stopped to look in and saw the whites of some early looking eyes, like seeing deer at night. This creepy dude steps out of the shack and is the poster boy for every WV stereotype you could think of. I haven't been in a cultural clash like this since meeting with Afghan Village Mullahs halfway around the world. I couldn't think of what to do, so I asked him, "Have you seen people on bikes that look like us?" He said some folks were down here yesterday afternoon. I said great and thought, I hope they are still alive. On our way in a hurry. **Mike's Comment – I came up on this surreal scene just as Bob was finishing up the conversation. I wasn't sure if he was making friends with the locals or plans for after the race, but it was strange, to say the least.**



my mind often, especially during the part that Bob is about to describe, but it was never Bob. Bob was awesome to race with throughout, and one of the things I really appreciated about this event was that he and I were having a good time, despite the way the race was going. This part of the Race is fondly referred to as **Hike-a-Bike From Hell #2**. We saw the Kate Falls Trail and almost were looking straight up a steep ravine, and the best part was that we had our bikes with us and our nutrition has been completely depleted for awhile now. No way to just throw your bike down the mountain on this one. Some things just get nugged out by pure determination and will power. Some folks call it intestinal fortitude, some folks call it ponying up, but we just reached deep down inside and started up this hill with bikes in tow. It took every ounce left in us to get to the top and our turkey's were done. Ahhh, finally a cell phone signal. We called Race HQ and cheerful Susanna answered. Mike told her the situation, of how we missed a transition area, missed our support box, and were out of food, but thought we were close to the next TA at CP 22 (not even close really, nor had any idea of where it really was). So we drove on toward the Kate's Plateau Trail and the Bragg O'Course, which was in the right direction. This part of the race is called **Last Fatal Decision**. For whatever reason, which I can still not figure out, after going a ways down the Plateau Trail and not finding anything, I somehow convinced myself and Mike that the next TA was going to be at the Glades Creek Trail at the south trailhead, just south of the Interstate 64 Massive Bridge going over the Glade Creek Canyon. Well, we turned around and headed downhill to the lowest point of our race. Sure enough, we get to the parking lot only to find Trout Fisherman. **Bill's Rescue Mission**. Out of food, demoralized, and just the vaguest idea of where to go...we made the call of shame to Susanna and opted out of the race. This last bike (trek with bike leg) leg was about 30 – 35 miles. Almost 48 hours into it, around 125 miles, about halfway there, we called it quits. Maybe if we had more bars and gels we would have trudged back up the hill and kept fumbling around the woods, but it just wasn't our day or our race. Bill, an Odyssey Staple, was our rescuer with his 4x4. He did a great job figuring out how to get to where we were. As he was going over the massive 64 Bridge, he called us and said he knew we were down there somewhere, and offered to just throw a rope :o) I don't think we would have been able to climb 5' up that rope.

This part of the race is called **Recovery, Rest, and Reflection**. Bill drove us back to the Pipestem Lodge where we started to track down our gear box and canoe. Susanna told us it could be at CP 12 and the Canoe was at TA5, so we got in our car and started driving all over the course to find it. The gear box was not found, but we did eventually find out where CP 12 was. The canoe and other water gear were at TA 5, so we hauled that back to the Lodge. It was about 10:00pm on Saturday at this point, so we got a room at the lodge and racked the frack out. Next morning the gear box was in Ronny's Truck, so we divided everything up to its rightful owner, told a few stories, watched some of the Teams finishing, said our well wishes and drove our separate ways. Mike to Northern VA and me back to the Raleigh area of NC.

Well, the Waterlogged Dogwoods didn't accomplish the main goal of finishing, but Mike and I both feel we pushed it to our limit, and we definitely had a ton of fun with the whole experience.

Mike's Comment – this is my second DNF in a long, expedition-style race, and while it came with a great deal of disappointment, I learned a lot and can honestly say that we gave it everything we had for the 45+ hours we were on the course. It will take a while to not feel like I let myself, my teammate, and all the people that were following us down for not finishing, but Bob is right, we did have a ton of fun – much of it coming in looking back on the race more so than during actual portions of the race. As Bob also says, we did learn a great deal and if we ever chose to do another E-Fix or a similar race, we will be much better prepared and I have no doubt we would do well. I thought we raced very well together and stayed positive even with so many SNAFUS. We learned a lot as well.

My personal lessons learned are:

1. When there is an option for race support, bribe as many friends as possible. Even with the great Odyssey Volunteers (one even cooked us a hot brat), it wasn't the same as having familiar faces to help out, provide motivation, and cheer us on.
2. Navigation. I consider this part of Adventure Racing my strong suit, but I have been humbled by Joy Marr's Course. I also need to get better acquainted with plotting on the 1:53,000 Trails Illustrated Map which has no grids. I didn't have the right plotting tools and it took me a long time to plot one point. If anybody has any techniques they would wish to share, I am all ears.
3. Keeping directions dry. I will definitely be bringing some laminating contact paper to the next race. I think this was our #1 downfall. After a ¼ way through the course, we were riding on a wing and a prayer.
4. ***Mike's Comment – I share Bob's lessons learned from this race, with an emphasis on a support crew being absolutely vital. I know it would have made a huge difference to be able to come in to a TA to an already warm meal, equipment laid out for the next leg, and dry clothes. That said, there was something pure about doing it unsupported which I can also appreciate.***

So, that's about it. Thanks Mike, for teaming up – It was a blast. I so appreciate all the folks who were following us from home and even though we never saw them on the course (CP 12), the "Shout-Outs" would have truly propelled us much farther. Thanks to all the Odyssey Staff for putting on such an exceptional race. Special thanks to all the volunteers. Congrats to all the teams who competed, you are the ones who entered the arena. To the ones who made it back to the Lodge on your own two feet - you are all an inspiration to a fairly new Adventure Racer. And Erin and Nathan, thanks for being patient and understanding about a big kid's desire to go play and get dirty occasionally. ***Mike's Comment – like Bob, I did have a great time. The race brought ups and downs, both physical and psychological, but I appreciate Bob as a teammate and as a person for his even-keeled demeanor and level-headedness, even when things were not going well – I would team up with you again any day, and I can already see E-Fix 2009 in our future. I would also like to thank the Odyssey staff and volunteers for an interesting race and pass along my congratulations to all the teams that were out there. Win, lose, or DNF, we know the truth of what was out there. Finally, I would like to thank everyone who cheered us on – from the emails to the Shout Outs, you guys are the best and you inspire us to keep racing. Thanks for taking the time to send a message, wish us luck, or ask how we did – most of all, thank you for indulging us in this somewhat odd pursuit.***

See you on the Trails,
Bob and Mike – Team 96, Waterlogged Dogwoods