Endless Mountains 2025

(Times/Distances Approximate)

I vaguely remember seeing ads on TV in the late 90s promoting the ‘World’s Toughest Race thinking, WHY would anyone WANT to do THAT?!? Turns out timing is everything. Adventure Racing was a good way to fill my time in a COVID-World. Fast forward 4 years and an introduction to a team looking for a fourth for their first multi-day race. They were signed up for World’s but didn’t want to go into it cold… Enter Endless Mountains and me! SIDE NOTE: Watching a never-ending course flyover, it occurred to me that Endless Mountains would cover slightly more distance in fewer days than ARWC2025… This was our prep race?!

Day 1: 44 hours (Based on sleep, not a 24h clock)

WALKING THROUGH THE FIRE OF MY LIFE BEING TRANSFORMED BY ITS FLAMES AS I EXPAND THE CAPACITY OF MY NERVOUS SYSTEM TO HOLD THE FULL CATASTROPHE OF THIS HUMAN EXPERIENCE (not my words but fitting summary)

Prologue & Stage A 67km trek, Stage A(A) 6km packraft, TA1, Stage B 80km bike and sleep

Post 5km Prologue trek, we set off within an hour of receiving the course maps. I joked my claim to fame would be that we were ahead of Bones Canada - for all of 10 minutes. I was living the dream, minus the GoPro I dropped between CP5, CP6 & A1. Still, so long I could answer ‘living the dream’ in some capacity all was well. Overnight my feet and mind began to deteriorate in the rain. Now I was living less of a dream. I suffered silently, unsure of what I needed from my teammates, second guessing my decisions, my place, my fitness. In the light of day, I saw John’s familiar face volunteering and he gave us not only a donut but a glimmer of hope that my mental state might improve though I was sceptical about the state of my feet.

At TA1 I desperately needed a reset - which translated to a 90-minute nap while the team reviewed maps and prepped bikes. After draining blisters and squishing swollen feet into bike shoes I hobbled over to Brian Gatens. With the first stage and our interview behind us, we genuinely enjoyed riding through Pine Hill Park. Avoiding the Shrewsbury trek helped preserve our sanity. We passed Killington and pushed on to Pittsfield’s Green Mountain Trails. By then, I was back to living the dream and believing I could do hard things – something I made sure to tell Paul Miller when we crossed paths. Biking was easier than walking, but my feet still screamed despite Brent’s optimism back in TA1. At 37 hours in, the team called for a proper recovery – that being

a glorious 7 hours of sleep! As I lay down, I marvelled at the milky way above and thought back to the fireflies we had seen earlier, an unexpected highlight in an otherwise rough race so far.

Day 2: 24h45 MAGIC AMID EXTREMES

Stage B cont. 35km biking, TA2, Stage C 42km packraft, TA3, Stage D 26km biking and 4h sleep

We rose with the sun and headed onto the trails, collecting all the CPs. Wet feet aside, the Tweed River crossing was another personal highlight - even without photos - as Nic Wynia caught us after the fact. Exiting the trails we saw kids training at Camp Spartan where we topped up water at Riverside Farm and continued to TA2 for the paddle.

We transitioned quickly. In the packraft I kept my feet propped up and mostly dry. Choosing lines that brought us the most joy in the class I & II rapids we periodically pulled over to empty the “splashy” water we collected. Along the way, we chatted with other teams and locals tubing down river. The day buzzed with summer energy – people swinging from ropes, jumping off the abandoned dam at CP26, and wading in the White River with coolers of beverages. We happily accepted a Pepsi to share. We even had our own Arthur the King moment when a dog chased us down, desperate to hop in and join the ride.

Sand had worked its way into every blister, so I cleaned and re-bandaged my feet at TA3. Then we were back on the bikes headed for an elusive CP28 located in an abandoned cemetery. We navigated a network of trails (many not on our map) alongside other teams all seemingly in the right area but coming up empty in the dark. We nailed it our second attack, then rode out of the buggy woods and camped outside of West Norwich Church for the night – if four hours can be called a night.

Day 3: 27h30 LETTING GO THROUGH PIVOTS AND PAUSES

Stage D cont. 40km biking, Stage D(A) 7km trek, Stage D(B) 3km SUP turned 4km trek, Stage D cont. 53km biking, TA4 and 4h sleep

Up and at ‘em. We pressed on over the “Class IV” roads, and just as we were about to climb another hill someone shouted that water was available! ARDotWatch’s Doug Silk met a local calling for his cat, who kindly offered water to passing racers – a small, much appreciated gesture seen often.

Although it took us longer than it should have, Elizabeth Mine’s gorge made for a stunning CP30. D1 at the covered bridge turned into a racer party, with another water refill as the temperature kept climbing. We spotted the Vermontasaurus (CP31) before

arriving at Camp Lanakila. Despite our picnic at Wings Market in Fairlee, the treats at the bike drop were impossible to resist. Mid-conversation with Abby I burst into tears prompting one of her famous hugs. “I’m fine!” I insisted, pulling myself together – only to nearly unravel when Chris Laughren gave me another hug. Even if I didn’t look it, I was living the dream!

We agreed to trek at whatever pace we could bear. It was manageable on trails… Until a storm rolled in with simultaneous lightning flashes and thunder. Foot pain hit fast with wet feet, but CP39 at Glen Falls quickly became my favourite spot on the course. Kirsten Oliver captured my ecstatic heel click, largely because, for a second, I wasn’t on my feet.

From there, the thought of being off my feet, on tow working with Cam, kept me moving toward the SUP. Ready to leave the dock, we were called back due to another storm. It felt like a sucker punch. That disappointment was tough to process as we trudged an eternal 4km around Lake Morey. Back at the bikes I elevated my feet, ate a grilled PB&J sandwich, and patched up my body and spirit to press on. We found Miss Shannon’s School for Girls from Beetlejuice and reluctantly decided we had to omit the Millstone Trails for imminent stages. We reached TA4 at Spruce Mountain Trailhead before sunrise, grabbing another 4-hour rest.

Day 4: 24h30 THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH

Stage E 30km trekking, TA5 plus another 4h or so sleep

At TA, staff informed us of some key course changes – most notably, Jay Peak was now optional and the Stage G(A) packraft on the Missisquoi River was cut. With this news, Millstone Trails could have been an option, but we made the best call with what we knew at the time. Time on our side, we focused on mandatory points again. The heat was intense, and by the time we left Seyon Lodge State Park, Ryan was hitting a wall. What started as GI issues near the beaver dam at CP48 soon presented more like heat exhaustion. We took a break to cool down before hiking Silver Ledge Trail, and later – in the dark once more, circled the top of Owls Head, resetting nav a few times before finding the CP. Inch by inch, we made it to TA5, tired, but relieved.

Day 5:17 hours SUPPORT, DETERMINATION & RESILIENCE

Stage F 64km biking and 7h recovery

A couple of us had ice cream for breakfast (thanks Chris), but Ryan was unwell - 3 out of 10. Prioritizing his condition, we mapped the easiest route to the new TA6, missing all CPs except CP51. We rallied to Hardwick, bought saltines and ginger ale at Buffalo Mountain Market to sustain Ryan, and then took the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail evading

major elevation. Though this route took us off our maps, we would reconnect in Swanton before the canoe transition. We held 14kph as best we could while Ryan battled, but by 7:30pm we called it. We pulled off at Old Mill Park in Johnson. Ryan immediately crashed while Natalie, Cam & I devoured possibly the best gas station pizza ever from Maplefields - and were out cold by 8:30pm.

Day 6: 28 hours ENDINGS ARE JUST BEGINNINGS IN DISGUISE

Stage F cont. 63km biking, TA6, Stage G 40km paddle, TA7, Stage H(A) 60km biking, Stage H(B) 12km trekking

We were slow to get moving, but by 2:30am we were back on the rail trail. Ryan found a second wind as we pedalled into TA - maybe it was the 7 hours of sleep, the beautiful sunrise over the Missisquoi River, and/or knowing this was our final day of racing. By the time we hit the water, he was feeling a solid 7 out of 10.

I wish I could say it was smooth sailing from there... and it might've been, if we'd actually been sailing. It was a grind getting to optional CP G3 with the wind picking up fast, but we were powered by Disney soundtracks to keep morale afloat. Near CP66 and TA7, a safety boat intercepted us to say there were large swells ahead, teams had capsized, and they were pulling everyone off the water. We were transported to TA7.

The finish was palpable. We formed a paceline against gale-force winds and more rain – taking turns pulling. The rain stopped, but the wind did not. At "The Cut" we waited for Wick, the Red Cap Marine commissioned to ferry us across the 200-foot gap in the causeway overnight. The silhouette of a boat and its light bounced around on the water. The dock itself was being tossed so wildly it was shocking no one ended up in the lake. Wick, unfazed, assured us the boat was built for this… as we clung to a rail, doused by spray in the few minutes it took to cross. Back on bikes our mission resumed, careful not to get blown into the water. It was midnight when we reached the bike drop. With 10 hours to cover just 12km, trekking seemed the obvious choice over biking to the finish. But after being on the move since 2:30am, sleep deprivation hit hard. I entered a zombie-like trance, and the idea that this embedded trek might take 10 hours began to feel absurd. We let go of any hard-to-reach points. Finally, we saw the finish arch across St. Michael's campus, debated running (didn't) … and ended with a heel-click... A finish defined not by speed, but by spirit.

The flicker of fireflies, the thrill of downhills, the joy of hard-won CPs, shared pizza and Pepsi, and stories spun from two truths and a lie became the sparks that fuelled us. The race pushed us and pulled us closer shaping us into who we needed to be for one another through physical agony, mental doubts and our darkest hours - with epic

moments in between. Ryan’s drive, Natalie’s intuition and Cam’s selflessness never faltered when the race wrote its toughest chapters - all part of living the dream.