

2017 Adventure Race World Championships

By: David Bogle

Team Vignette out of Texas had a goal to do another expedition length adventure race. (not sure what that is? check out this video <https://youtu.be/occW94DgWT4>). The core team was Marcy Beard, David Bogle and we quickly recruited Leslie Reuter. John Beard was our original fourth but due to some injuries, he quickly decided he could not race. Leslie was able to hook us up with Tom Turley out of Denver, Colorado. With a team set, we picked the race, which was Primal Quest taking place near Vancouver Canada in September 2017. Training began which is a 8-12 month progress to get ready for a race of this length. Several months ago, during a long training run with Dave, Leslie and Marcy, we got a message saying Primal Quest was postponed a year. We were all a bit frustrated, but since training was already well in progress, we decided to try and find a different race. We were fortunate to be able to get into the Cowboy Tough Adventure Race World Championships. We knew all about this race long ago, but this is really a super competitive race, so we originally passed on it, as we are truly an amateur team of “aging” racers (youngest member is 47).



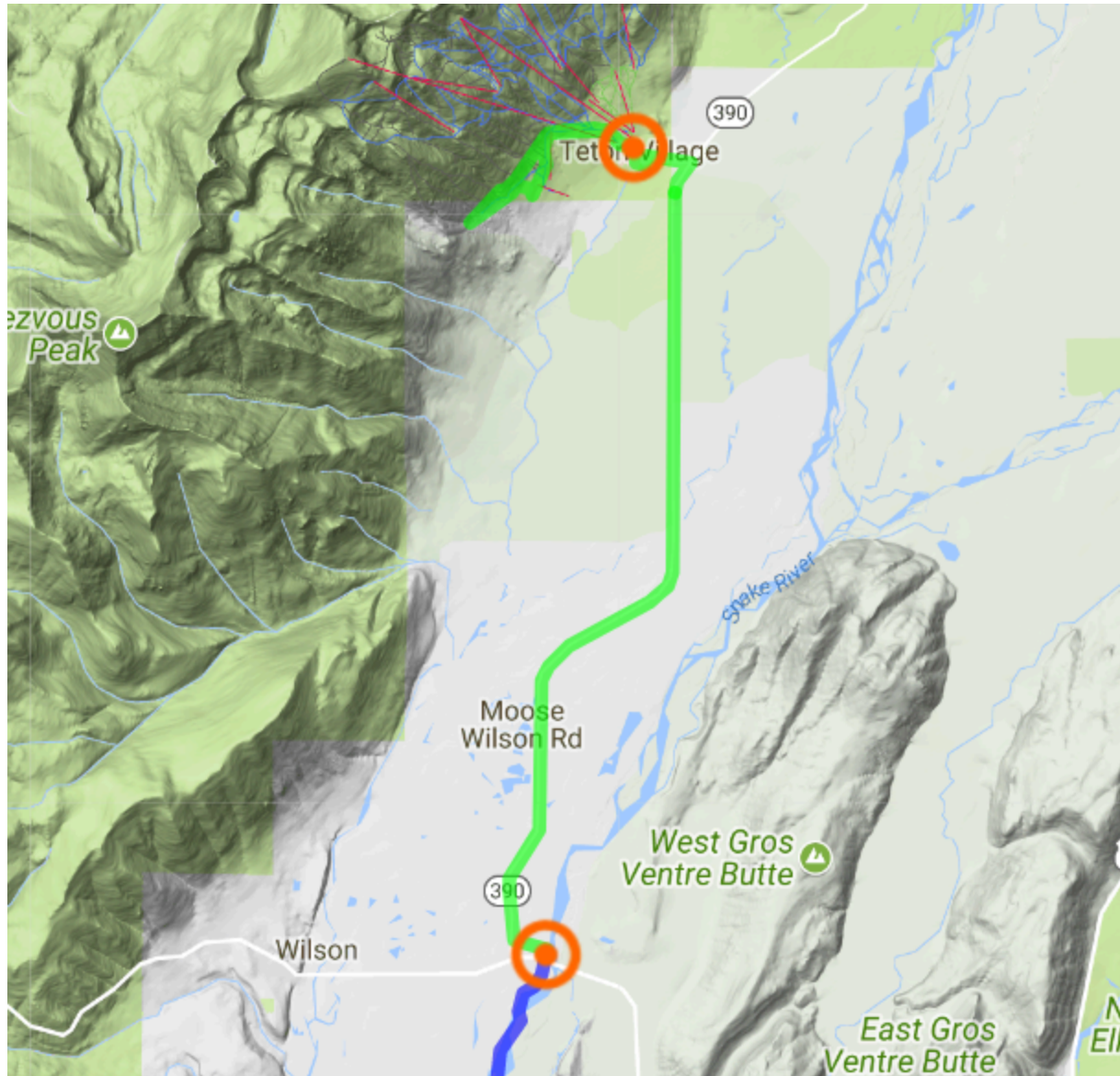
Pre race fun - winning the urban orienteering section! (Dave, Tom, Marcy, Leslie -CW direction)

We all arrived in Casper Wyoming a couple days before the race. We chose to stay at a Hilton just a block away from the official race hotel and across the street from the gear staging area. This was a great decision as the host hotel seemed crazy with racers and gear all over the place. Days before the race, we had lots of hectic moments as we had to turn in all our gear for the race. This consisted of 4 gear boxes, a bag with all our paddle gear, and 4 boxes containing our bikes (all items had max weight limits, which proved a challenge to hit). Our team did a

good bit of logistics on what we wanted when and where, but still a real tricky item as you never know when you will actually see the box based on race speeds, and course length. Once all gear was turned in, we could relax a bit.

On race morning, we had to load buses at 5:30 am. We were given all our race maps and course information as we loaded buses. Both Tom and I had problems sleeping night before and we were both up at midnight... not a good sleep strategy with a 6 day/6 night race ahead of us. On the bus, Marcy and I started pouring over the maps, and a huge pack of maps we had. It was about 25 different maps. All the maps were at a pretty large scale. Most adventure race maps are 1:24,000. These were all 1:50,000 and 1:100,000. We would be covering lots of ground in this race, about 500 miles. It took several hours, but Marcy and I were able to lay out plans for the whole course. With pre-race information, Marcy was able to actually pre-guess the macro level detail of most of the course, which turned out to be very close.

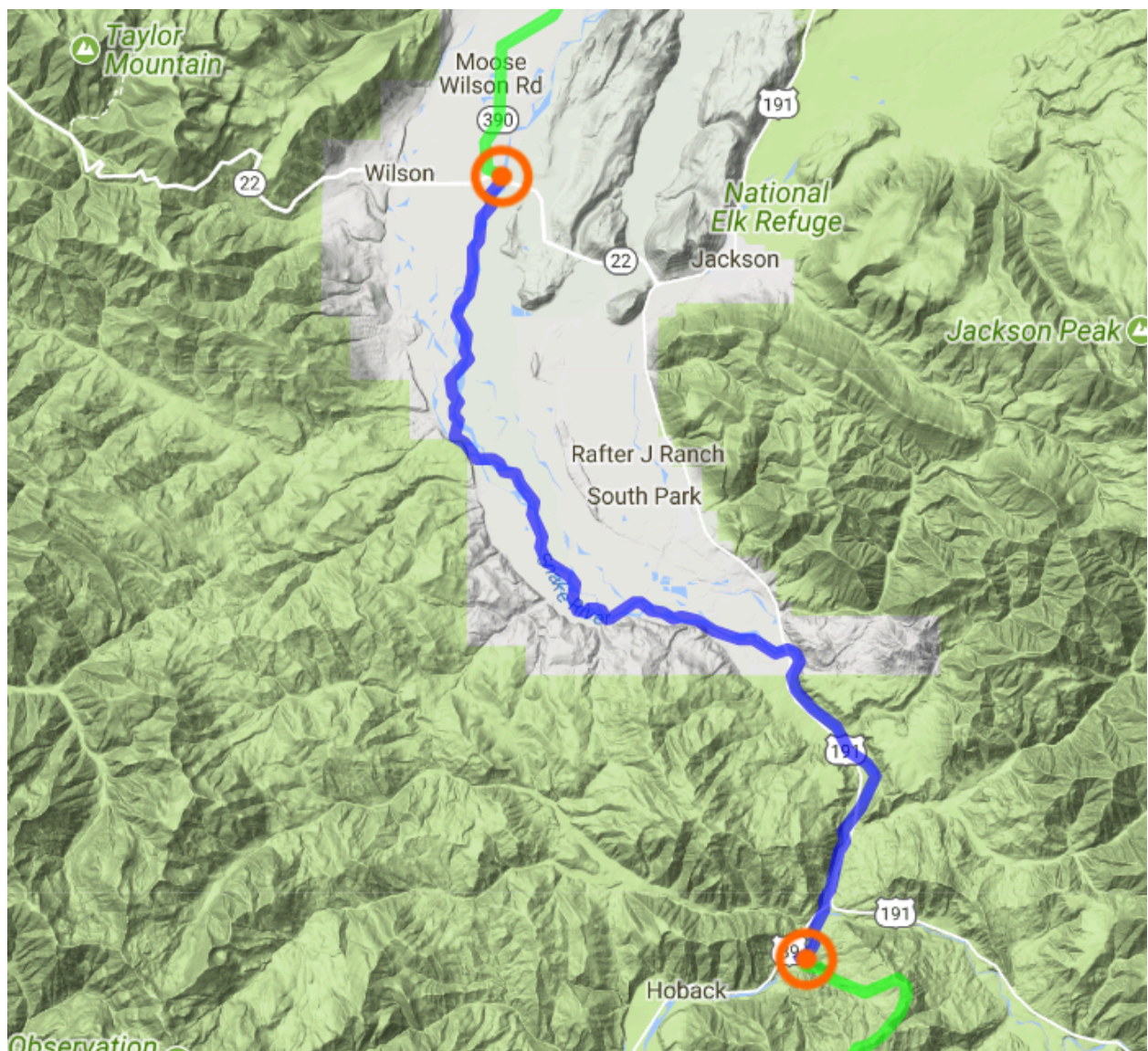
The buses drove for about 5 hours, finally dropping us off at Jackson Hole ski resort on the western side of Wyoming. We would race basically across the state back to the finish line in Casper, Wy. Jackson was quite beautiful with snow capped mountains all around us. The race would start with a run up and around a ski slope to gather a few checkpoints (to help spread out teams). The race was capped at 60 teams maximum. 58 teams made it to the starting line. As we lined up for the start, Leslie was anxious to get to the front, Marcy and I were quite content to start in the back, so we did. A gun shot signalled the start. We agreed to run, through the starting line (and photographer line), but then immediately went to walking as the course was going up a ski slope. Lots of teams out front were really hammering a run up front and quickly out of site. Once we stopped gaining elevation, we too ran the course. We punched all the CP's (Leslie was carrying a digital checkpoint recorder that had to be inserted in a small device to prove we went to the CP). We passed a few teams once running and several teams passed us. This section ended back at the ski resort where we started. Here we picked up all our large backpacks and gear for the real start of the race. I estimate we were near the back of the pack, which was fine. The next section was a rather boring 7 mile bike path run to the put in of the paddle. This would be the last real civilization we might see for a week.



Prologue leg 1 around Jackson hole and run down Moose Wilson Rd to paddle put in

Our team had originally decided to walk this 7 miles, but with all the excitement, we ended up running 95% of it. The weather was nice and cool with low humidity. At the end of this run, we picked up all our paddling gear for a 19 mile downriver paddle. In this race, we used packrafts, not rigid sided boats. Packrafts are small inflatable boats, that can be deflated, and carried along with teams, then inflated and deployed as needed. Most teams used 2 medium sized boats for a team of 4 people. Our transition into the boats was a bit slow. The race did not provide water (or any other items) on the course, so for water, teams had to filter or treat water from rivers. Our plan was to run water through a filter system for the team to drink. This turned out to be VERY slow. Once on the water, the river moved very well and we did a great job of getting down the river in good fashion. We even passed a few boats on the river. 19 miles later, we pulled out of the river at the official takeout. Here, we had to deflate our boats and transition

to the first real challenging leg of the race. This would be a 38 mile Trek through some mountainous terrain. Again, our transition was terribly slow in packing up the rafts and filtering enough water for the team. This would be a long section of the race, with very few chances to get water on our planned route (top of a large ridgeline). We went pretty heavy on water (as I, Dave, am susceptible to dehydration). This meant lots of climbing up a mountain with very heavy packs. We got through this transition and set off on the trek in the daylight which was great. There were a few teams still around us, but clearly we were in the bottom 10 teams of the race. It is good to mention our race goal, which was to FINISH this race on the full course with a full team. That was it. Even in dead last, if we accomplished that goal, we would all be happy. Leslie wanted top 10.... But we all just laughed at her (she is fully capable of that kind of performance, but was racing down with us as we are just nice people!)



Paddle leg down Snake River

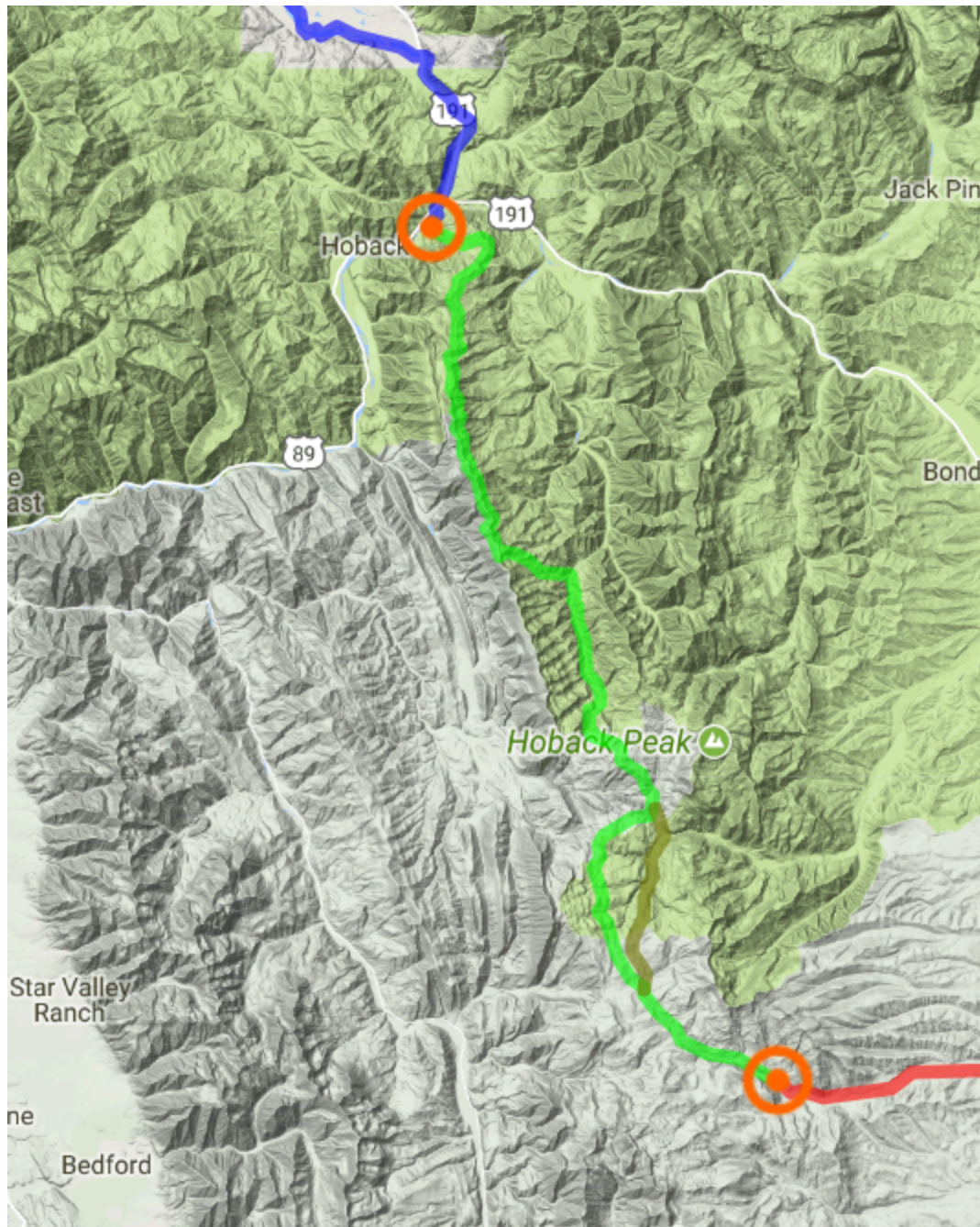
Trek 1 - Leg 4 of the race, +10,200'/-8,000' (meaning we go up a LOT)

The team set out with a strong hiking pace on this leg. The first couple of hours would just be going up. It was a nice trail and pretty easily hikable. We came across a couple of teams during this first part of the trek which is always fun to see. Elevation for this section would be 7,000'+ to over 9,700'. This high elevation really put the hurting on me later in the night when the slopes got very steep. I live at 750' of elevation and did zero acclimating to the high altitude. Both Leslie and Tom were great in helping me with pack weight on the steeper sections a couple of times. Teams stayed pretty spread out as it got dark until we got to an old horse stable area. When we hit this area, there seemed to be teams going all different directions. These areas are not high travel areas at all, so trails sort of come and go. There was clearly a very beaten down path ahead of us from the 200+ racers that had been through here. We too set off in that direction. It was not long until teams were coming back at us. Marcy (who was the lead on all foot based navigation), was already studying the maps as something was off. She quickly decided the trail where most teams were heading, was not right and we needed to climb up a much steeper ridge. I have raced with Marcy many years and had great confidence. I think Tom was quite nervous to not follow where all the other racers in site were heading. Marcy's call was dead on. We went cross country, up a crazy steep slope for a little while and finally rejoined the correct ridge trail. For the rest of the night, we could see teams on ridge lines far away (and teams were on the correct ridge line with us). This first trek had zero checkpoints until the end, so any route (for most of it), was legal. As the sun rose, we were coming off the ridge, feeling great, so we took a selfie.



We then immediately got off track. In this portion, there was a prescribed path to come off the ridge line. There were lots of trails (some from racers, some from animals), so it took a little

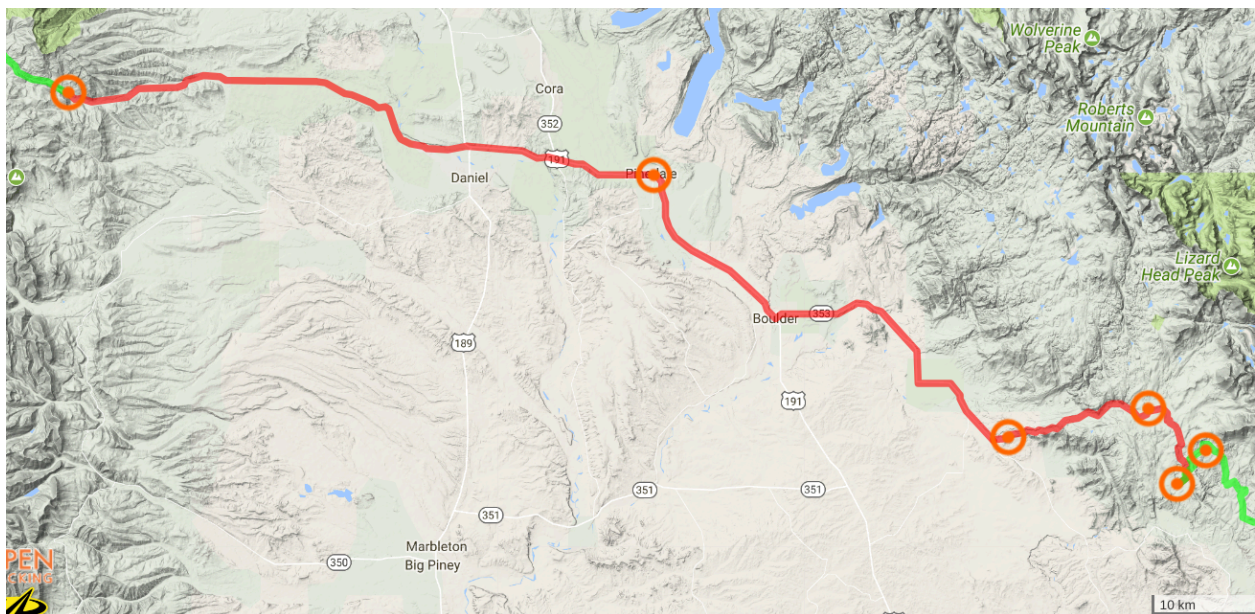
while to get back on track and off the ridge. It was a long march into the transition area on this leg. With my lack of sleep the night before the start, i was actually hallucinating a bit, which is odd for me at less than 24 hours of racing. I recall seeing a house with a nice basketball course, a guy suntanning next to a creek and a few other odd sightings.



Wyoming Range Trek - some true wilderness out here!

Leg 5, 83 mile bike

The end of this trek brought us into a TA area where we would transition from foot to bikes. Our bikes were here all packaged up in boxes. This required us to build up our bikes, refill our packs with what we would need for the next 83 miles (of biking), fill water by filtering from a creek. We had a better transition here with all the team building up their bikes with no real problems. The tricky part is making sure to put the right items back in your gear bin or bike box so they would be available later in the race. On bikes, we would be heading through the town of Pinedale. It was not late in the day on day 2 of the race. Up to this time, we have not stopped at all for sleep. Once on bikes, we made good time. Normally I would do all the bike navigation, but with Marcy preparing heavily and “pre-guessing” a good bit of the course, she had mostly memorized the route into the town of Pinedale, where our next CP was located. Marcy had anticipated Pinedale on the route, so had made some notes about this town (and we were all excited). Our plan (if it worked would be to grab some real food in Pinedale and stop at a hotel. In adventure racing, racers almost never stop at a hotel, as they are out of the way. In this case, we passed just feet away and it was next to a gas station with a subway. Normally, teams just stop and sleep on the ground as needed. Our theory was if we could sleep a few hours in a hotel bed, it would be worth twice as much time as sleeping poorly on the ground. And man, it was worth it. We grabbed food and room. The team all even took a shower (we did not do that as a team, we took turns). While some showered, others ate and prepped gear. The whole team was in bed at the same time with a planned sleep of 4 hours. I recall all of us awake after 3.5 hours of sleep so we jumped back on the bikes and got back to work. I think we were all very refreshed and looking at the tracking, our pace really picked up compared to other teams near us, so the hotel sleep was well worth it. (and we all had a spare subway sandwich to eat later).

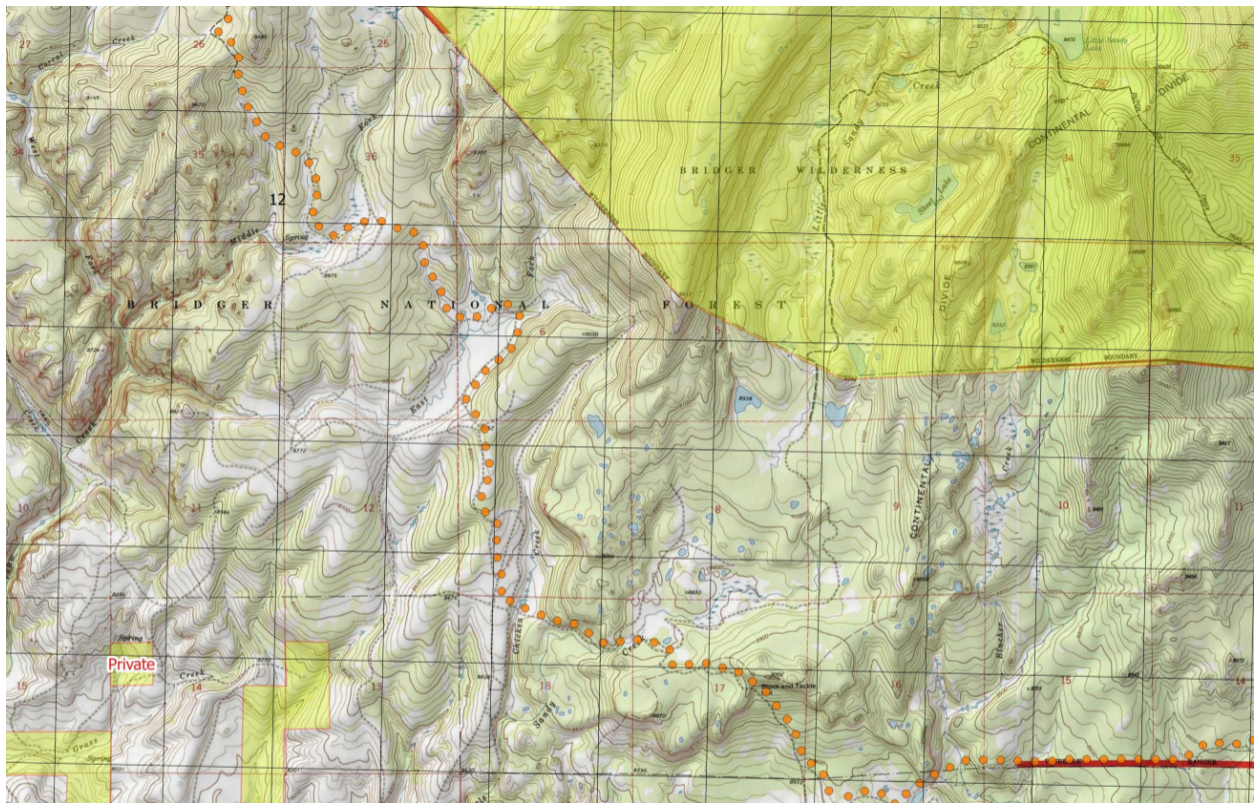


We punched the CP in downtown Rockdale in middle of the night and got a few more miles of fast pavement riding before our turn off back to some sandy (slow riding) roads. Tom and Leslie

were strong on the bike. They spent some time towing Marcy and pulling a strong pace line. I was still suffering some altitude issues, so was happy to just sit in the draft. Back on trails, we ran across quite a few teams sleeping on the ground. We were smiling a bit as it was very wet with dew outside and a bit cold of a night. Near CP6, the area was a bit confusing as we needed to leave the main trail (and there were lots of trails going all over the place). We nailed CP6 perfectly (and later heard lots of teams had some issues). I recall hitting this one right about sunrise. Sunrises (and sunsets) were quite nice here. Sunrises also re-energize everyone and helps to wake us all up. The end of this bike ride was CP7/TA. I recall team NYARA providing a bacon cheeseburger to each team member. This was quite unexpected, but they had gotten permission from the race organization to give teams this treat. One real treat here was at the checkin table there was a note wishing us well from Robyn Cantor. She was out backpacking in the area apparently.

Leg 6 - 40 mile trek

We would now transition from bikes back to foot. In this case, we would not be putting our bikes back in boxes. Instead the race organization would move our bikes out of the boxes. But, it was up to us to make sure all our bike related stuff was well secured to the bikes. Leg 6 would be a 40 mile trek and for me the real pinnacle leg of the race. Trekking is my weak leg so if i could make it past this leg, i felt i could finish the race. This next section had some notes that the intention of the race was for us to follow the Continental Divide Trail, but in some sections the CDT may be faint or non-existent. Teams were allowed to follow any route they chose, but by maps, the CDT appeared to be a solid route. The CDT was loosely drawn on the maps with little dots, but clearly, it was just a guide. This trek started out well, following trails. We saw a couple of teams around us and tried to be quiet and not give any teams any hints (a little silly in a 6 day long race, but it gave us something to do). As we needed water, we would stop at streams. About this time, we gave up on filtering water with my Sawyers system and went to water treatment tablets. Taste is not as great, but it is far faster. (we did try to just filter as we drank, but the filters were clogging up with debris from the rivers). On this trek, it was not long before the trail simply went away. We ran into a few teams that went varying directions. We tried several options to pick the trail back up as trail travel is FAR faster than pure off trail cross country travel. After an hour or two of slow progress and not finding the trail, Marcy and i made the decision to just "navigate the shit out of this" and go pure cross country for a long way. There were other potential trail/road options but they would add a ton of distance (and no promise those trails actually existed).



The dots on this map, represent the “spirit” of the CDT in this area. I assure you, no trail currently exists.

Progress was slow, but the team worked very well together to keep correct bearings and move through tough terrain. This area was hit hard with pine beetles which killed most trees causing just tons of downfall. In this area, there is a property boundary marked on the map. In reality, this means nothing, but miraculously we found it. It was a clear cutting of the trees. We were thrilled to find this as it meant we could follow this and not have to work as hard on precise navigation.



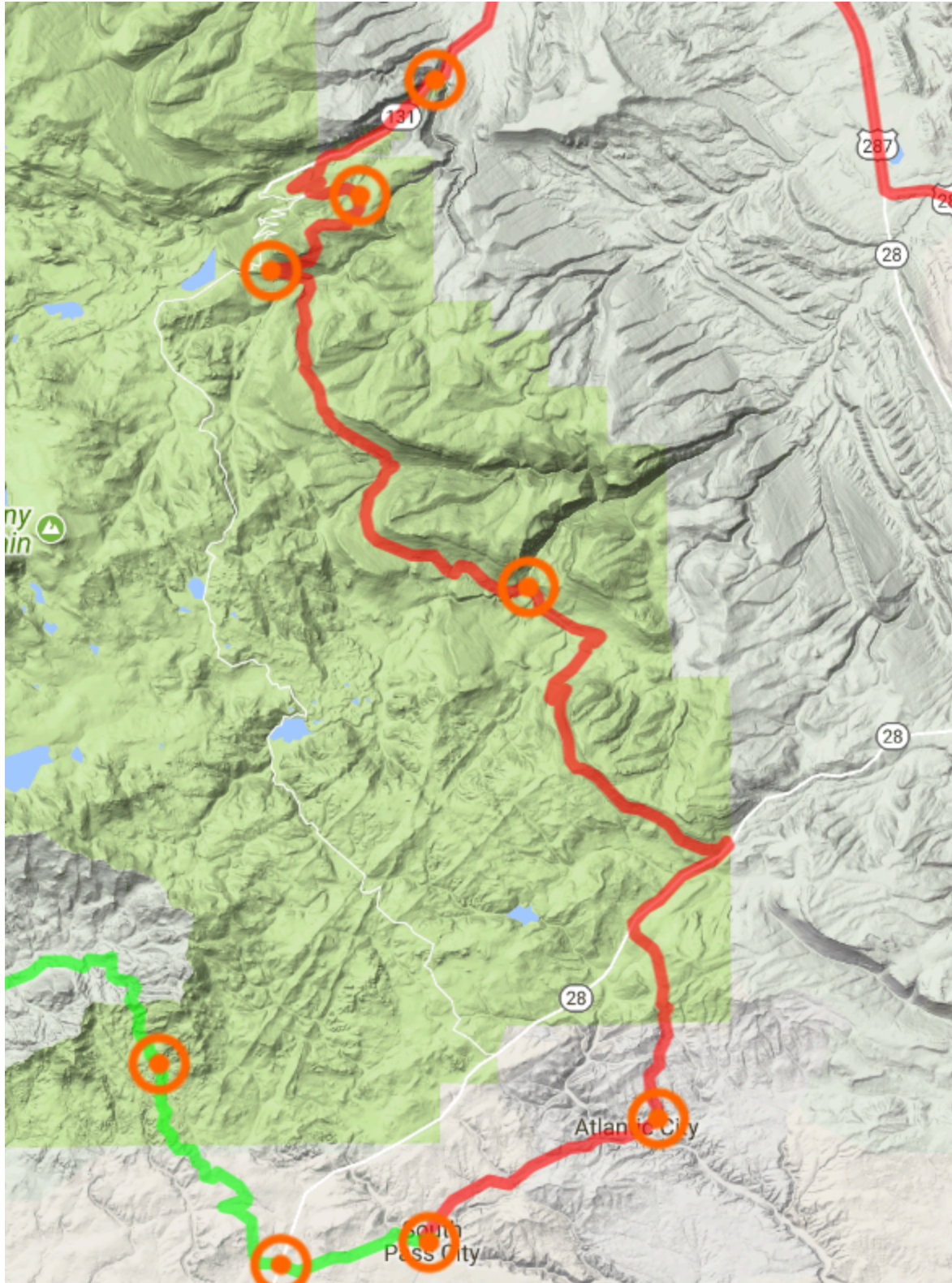
Property boundary

Unfortunately, this clearcut area, did not last long so back to navigating. Occasionally we would find it again (which is a great confidence builder in navigation). After lots of hours of slow cross country work, we popped out right where we wanted to be just north of CP9. we actually ran into a couple teams in this area that had started this trek 12+ hours before we did and had not yet found CP9. We relayed where we thought we were but they felt otherwise and continued on. A few minutes later we punched CP9. This too turned out to be a very difficult point for many teams to find. It took us a while, but in retrospect, we hit it far faster than many other teams. Carrying on, we eventually got back to some very well marked and clear sections of the CDT. At the end of this trek, my feet started hurting a bit. Clearly i had been ignoring some hot spots, but was focused on getting this trek done (not a good decision). A few CP's and lots of miles later, we arrive at CP12/TA. This was an old abandoned? Sort of town. There were lots of teams here. But most were wearing orange jerseys. This meant, these teams had been short course and no longer on the full course (green jerseys). We later learned that many teams who went the wrong way on that first long trek got so far behind, that the race staff offered them a short course option, which skipped the whole long second trek. Here we stopped to try and rest a little while in an old barn. This was a poor decision in hindsight as it was noisy, cold and nobody really got any good sleep. After an hour or two, we got up and got out of this TA. Before leaving, we were offered a shot of Wyoming Whiskey or Pepsi. Showing our true team toughness, Marcy and Leslie drank Whiskey, Tom and I had Pepsi.



Leg 7 - 36 mile bike to Sinks Canyon

Back on bikes, well sort of. In this section, it was very steep and very hard to ride terrain, so lots of hours of pushing bikes up very steep trails. Marcy had been dreading this section. We spent a bit of time with team AR Georgia in this area. It was fun talking to them off and on. I recall stopping at one creek crossing for a 15 minute nap. The darn Wyoming people are so friendly that every person that passed by had to ask if we are OK. (nice but not good for sleep). Near the end of this section we finally had some very nice singletrack mountain bike trails. It was only spoiled by very dark skies and heavy lightning in the distance. The lightning stayed away, but the rain sure hit. Up high, it gets pretty cold quickly. We all donned rain gear and kept going. By the time we got down into Sinks Canyon, rain had stopped. Sinks canyon was the site of our next small transition area. Sinks Canyon is quite interesting in that the Popo Agie river (Dave's pronunciation is Poopoo on Aggies) disappears underground for a mile or two. The river winds through underground caves and emerges many hours later.

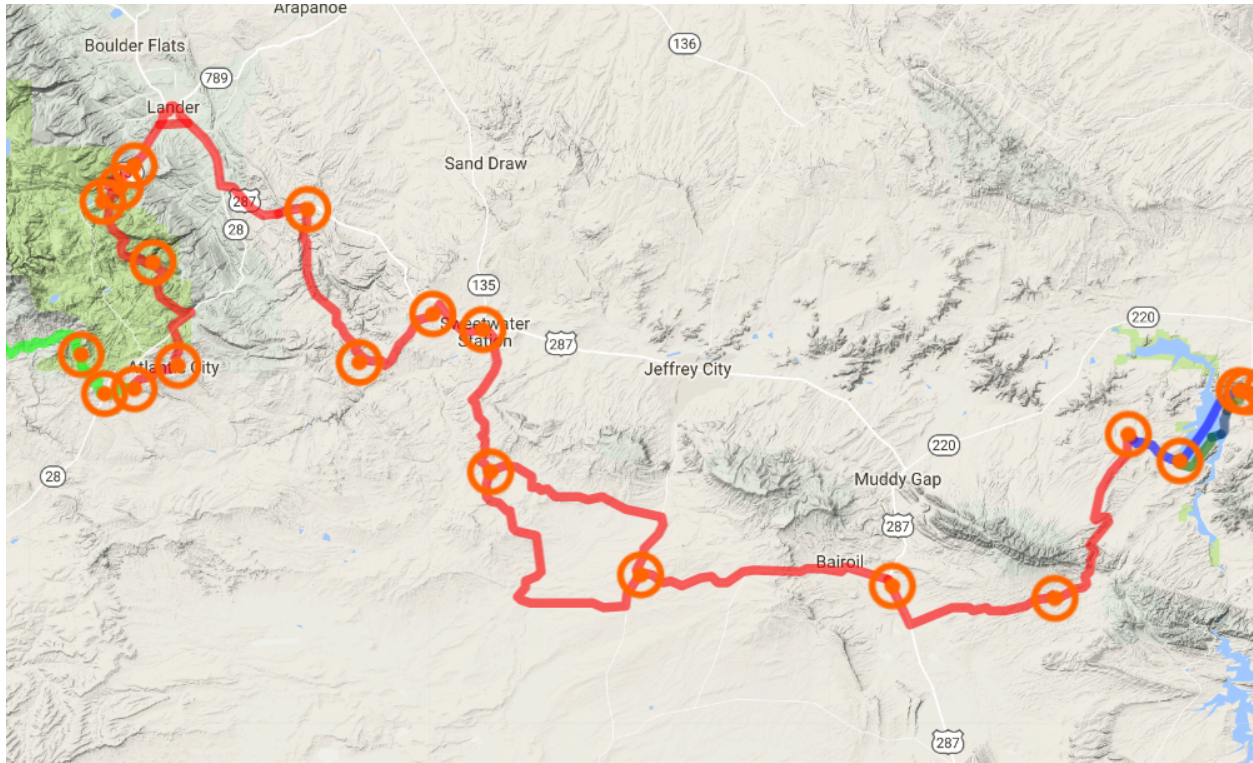


Leg 8 - Ropes

Upon arriving at the TA, i sought medical help for my feet. They were blistered and heavily bruised. The med staff helped my feet with KT tape to hopefully minimize further damage, but not much to relieve the current issues. One funny thing is the medical guy was big into gardening, so we had a fun discussion on gardening and crops. He even pulled out his cellphone to show me all his gardens. (i had a cellphone, but its use is prohibited so could not show off my garden.) We chose to do a rappel first (going down a 200+' drop via rope). There were a couple teams up on the ropes ahead of us, but since they were orange jerseys' the race staff moved them aside to let us go. No problems on the ropes, now to a caving section. We descended into a very narrow opening of a cave which, once inside opened up to a nice room. It did not take too long to find the CP in the back of the cave. In the cave, we could hear the Popo Agie river running underground below us.

Leg 9 - Bike 163 miles (yes, its long...)

With the ropes done, we got right back on the bikes for a very long bike section. We were now heading into night 4 of the race. Our only real sleep so far was the 3.5 hours on night 2 in the hotel. We knew we would need to sleep soon. Up ahead, we could take a couple mile detour through another city (Lander) where Marcy knew there to be a couple hotels. It was an easy team decision to head to town. In town, we were able to secure a hotel room. Leslie and i hit the drive through at McDonalds (on our bikes). The guy at the drive up was unfazed and said he had seen quite a few other racers already. Again, the team took showers and hit the beds. This time we all slept the full budgeted 4 hours. Leslie was the annoying voice to always wake us up. She is a racer and always ready to race.



Back on bikes, we had a few more miles of pavement. I recall on this leg finally being adjusted to the altitude and able to do some work at the front of the paceline, finally. This was going to be a very long bike ride, but I had been doing some long rides, so less concerned. Most of it (on the map), looked rideable, so my sore feet should have less impact. There were lots of route choices based on the maps. Many of the roads shown, did not seem to exist and many roads were out there that did not seem to be on the maps. Much of this ride was across open desert. I suffer badly from high heat (overheating). We were quite fortunate that we had pretty good cloud coverage. I was using a device called a swamp cooler which is a big towel of sorts. With the low humidity air in Wyoming, if you can get it wet, it actually stays quite cool. At one point, biking in a very boring desert section, we saw what looked to be a lone cyclist riding towards us. We were all VERY baffled why anyone in their right mind would be out here. Well, it turned out, it was a medical volunteer from our next checkpoint. He was just out riding his bike to get some exercise. A few miles later we arrived at this CP. the race had staged a medical crew here as this was middle of the desert. They also rationed each team member 2 liters of water as there were not water sources while crossing the desert. I think this was the first time we came across the team we called "the Brits". We would spend time on the bike near them for the next day or two. We biked most of the night and all the next day. Night 5 brought us close to the end of this very long bike section and some very confusing areas. Fortunately, we hit this just before dark so made it easier to adjust routes. Lots of deep sand (bike pushing). Near the end of this leg, we ran across team Uruguay for the first time. They spoke very little English, but we became a valuable asset to them quickly as it turns out Tom speaks fluent Spanish. Their navigator consulted with me. He told me he had never navigated with big terrain (mountains), like we had here. This had to be a huge problem as all those squiggly contour lines on a map are the best

thing to navigate with. I was doing the bulk of the bike navigation on these stages, so let them know where they were at. They took off but would wait for our team at the next intersection. In hindsight, looking at race tracks, this team did WAY more miles than any teams by getting way lost then found again. They were nice folks so we were happy to travel with them. The end of this leg did seem to take forever, but we finally rolled into the transition area some time during night 5. There were a couple teams around, but not many bike boxes left. This was a pretty sparse TA, but it was great seeing John Beard had found this TA. He was not allowed to help in any way, but nice to see a familiar face. We had to pack our bikes back up in boxes at the end of this leg. This was something we had to get right (and not lose parts) as we would need our bikes again for the last leg.

Leg 10 packraft 14 miles

Before leaving this TA, we decided we should try and get an hour of sleep. We normally don't like sleeping in transitions as it is usually too noisy and uncomfortable, but in this gear bin, we had a couple extra bivy sacks so we hoped they would help us sleep. Again, sleep here was terrible. I woke up maybe 20-30 minutes later shivering uncontrollably. It was raining and we had no real protection from the elements (we did later see teams sleeping in the race U-haul, but we did not think that was allowed, wish we had asked). We have a rule, if one team member is freezing and can not sleep, then the team should get moving. I woke everyone up and we got moving. This started out with a very long, boring walk to get to the water. 5-10 miles maybe. My feet were in some pain. I was able to walk, but speed was slower than i would have liked. As we got close to the water, it was very strange, there were teams in every direction imaginable. Marcy and i were both having sleep issues (meaning, we could not really think straight, which makes seemingly simple navigation difficult). The map did show a nice trail to a water put in. There were people tracks all over the place through the tall grass, but we really could not find the darn water. This was a huge lake, in hindsight, seems crazy we had trouble finding it. I think Leslie finally took charge and made decision. We saw Uruguay a few times and tried to tell them to follow us, but not sure what they ever did. We slowly got to water, which was more like a flooded field. We found some high ground to inflate our rafts. With that done, i was back on map duty to cross this large lake reservoir. The good news was on the north end, we could see some lights which were the exact direction we needed, so navigation should be easy, head for the lights. It was middle of the night as we started paddling. We had a slight headwind, which is no fun in packrafts as they are very slow boats on flat water.



After 30 minutes of paddling, i was having trouble staying awake, then things changed. The winds had now turned in our favor to a tailwind. This was great in that the winds would help push us across the reservoir. Then the rains hit and very high winds. Marcy was a bit nervous. I guess i was just too sleepy to be scared. We actually had some pretty big waves, enough to where we were surfing some of these waves. We stayed close to Tom and Leslie on this leg in case anyone got in trouble. We had a couple hours of very miserable heavy rain and wind. With daybreak, the rain stopped and we could see our destination. We pulled our rafts out just below the dam and we all quickly realized we were VERY cold. Sitting in a boat always makes you cold, but we were sitting in boats full of water. We drug all our wet gear up into a small park and found a small bathroom. The whole team piled into the bathroom to get out of the wind. Yes, it is kind of gross, but other teams slept in there. We all did our best to put on any dry clothes we had left, but at this stage, the best thing was to get moving. We had to portage our boats across a damn and put in on the other side. Marcy had suggested we just walk farther and put the boats in later, but with my sore feet, i voted to get in water sooner. Marcy was happy to comply, but the water was very shallow and her option would have been better for sure.

Leg 11 - more packrafting 29 miles + whitewater sections

Soon enough we were in Freemont canyon where we would have class III rapids. Marcy is not a fan of whitewater. Leslie and i were both pumped up for this section so we switched boating

partners. Leslie and i jumped in the boat and led the way. A river safety guy appeared and i heard his words, but did not really understand what all he was saying. He spouted off tons of options and hazards. I think it was the lack of sleep, as both Leslie and i looked dazed. We soldiered on and at the first big rapid, Leslie and i were quickly upside down and in the water. The river safety guide was immediately there and shoved us into a small cave eddy area. He said, stay put, i will get your gear that floated away. Sure enough, he came right back with our missing paddles. Marcy and Tom had smartly portaged around this obstacle, but that turned out very hard. They decided they would try and paddle more of it vs portaging. Leslie and i got hung up on a few rocks. At one of them, Leslie jumped out of the boat. I slid forward, and the plan was for Leslie to jump in the back of the boat as we pushed off the rock. The plan started well, but when Leslie landed in the boat (a big inflatable raft), she bounced up and off, back into the water. I tried catching her by the arm, but only got a small section of skin. She ended up with one heck of a bruise on that arm (sorry).

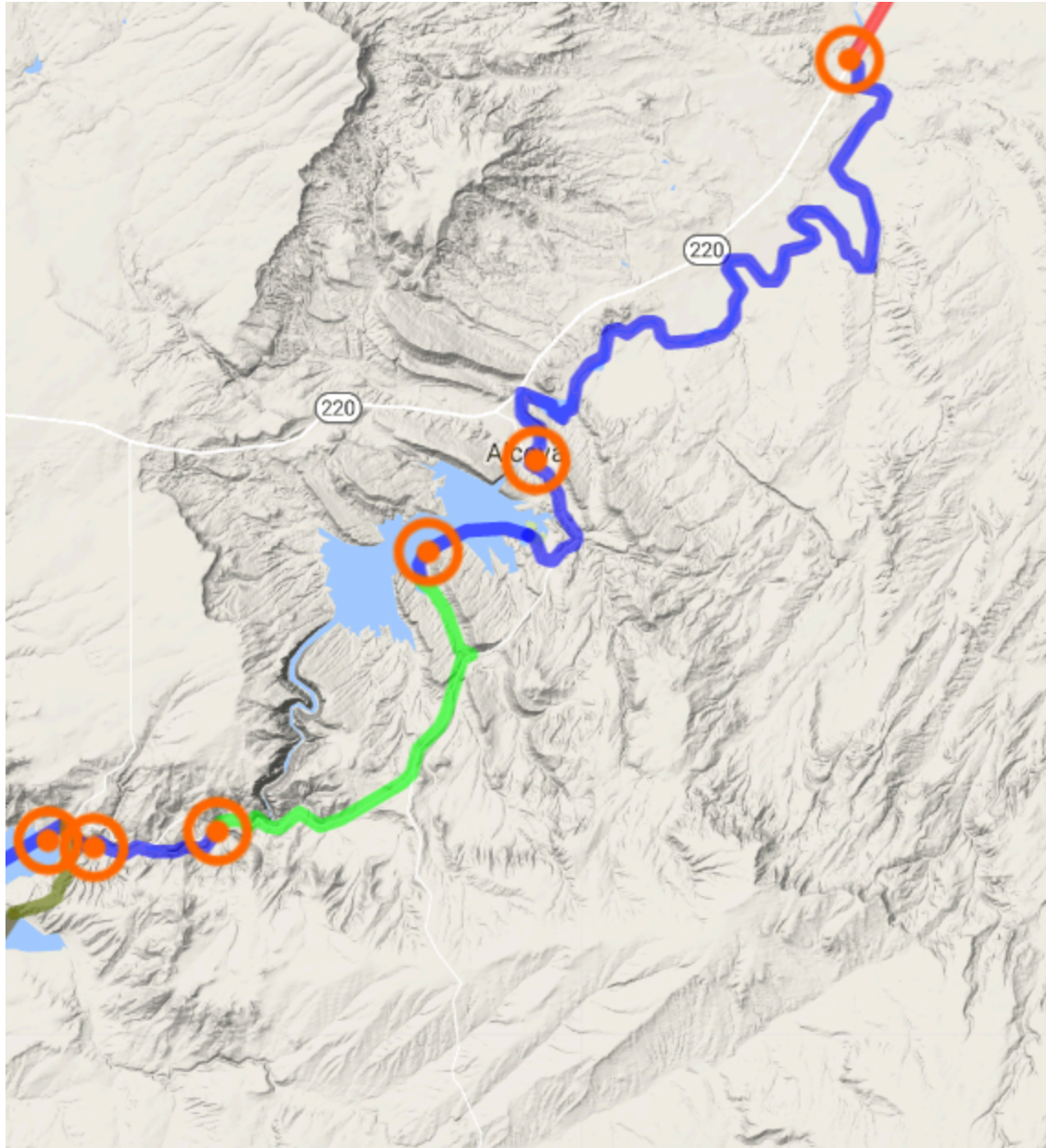


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Dave and Leslie hitting a rapid



Marcy and Tom jumping out at a rapid



The sun was out, and day had warmed up, so i was not longer cold and really enjoying this section. At the end of the whitewater, we had to trudge up a steep hill to the park road. We now had a long 10+ mile hilly paved road to the next reservoir. It was hot day and the sun was out. I got pretty hot about half way into this leg. There was very little cover from the heat. We did finally find a tree to hide under for a quick 20 minute nap.



Dave feeling a little tired during packraft, rest of team, bunch of jokers.



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Important to take your paddles for a walk now and then.



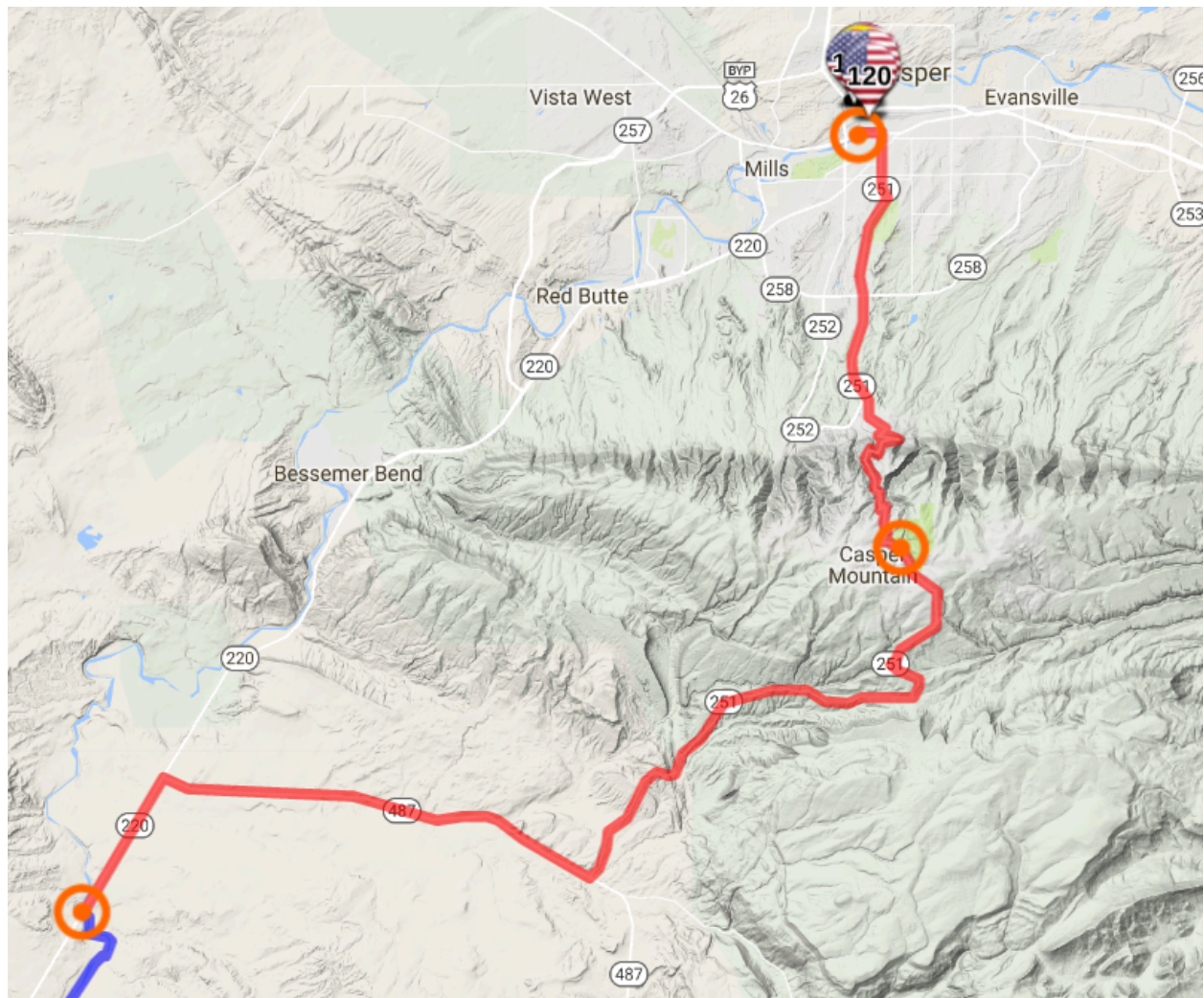
Typical sleep spot for adventure racers - tucked under a tree for some shade.

Tom and Leslie had an interesting system to dry all their clothes. They simply hung clothing items from paddles and backpacks to dry. Tom looked like a human laundry line going down the road. We finally finished this hot trekking section with heavy loads and were back on the water on Alcova reservoir. This would be a short paddle leg to the next damn pull out. There was a rather long portage around this damn, but Marcy really wanted to try a cross country route. We did not deflate boats which made it a little tricky, but it worked out great and soon enough we were putting our boats in on the North Platte river for the final 15-20 miles of paddling in this race. The good news is that the water was moving well in this river if you could stay in the current. Tom was suffering heavily from sleep deprivation. Leslie and him were back in the boat together so Leslie really suffered in trying to keep Tom awake and paddling. It rained on us again for most of this section, so it was not possible to stop and rest as we would have really frozen. One team had to drop out of the race in this section from severe hypothermia. Marcy and I ended up quite a bit ahead of Tom and Leslie as we were doing much better staying in the fast current. This caused a bit of tension but it was not intentional. I had apparently fallen asleep while paddling/navigating at some point, and lost my place on the map. This caused me to tell Tom/Leslie we were close to finishing, but in reality we were only half way. Once I figured it out, I did not tell them in hopes it would help Tom stay awake... it backfired a bit. We did finally finish this section again, cold and very wet. In this transition area, NYARA was allowed to give each team member a bottle of hot water. This was really nice to put in your shirt to warm up with. Again, we found a bathroom and all piled into it. We heard another team in the other bathroom. It was slightly warmer in this bathroom and it helped to get the team back to the living.

Leg 12 final bike to the finish 33 miles (in theory....)

With one leg left, the team was motivated to get this one done. We had heard some other racer tales in the last leg or two of some very bad conditions trying to get over Casper mountain. In general, we should not have heard anything as that can give team unfair advantages. Tom and I were still having some sleep monster issues, but with one big climb and then to the finish, we were motivated to get it done. This started as a paved ride to the dirt road to climb the mountain. The odd thing was we passed several teams going the opposite direction of us. This was odd, but it was middle of the night, near the end of the race, so nobody was talking. This doubled my efforts to make sure we found the right turn off to climb the mountain. On paper, it did not seem hard. Sure enough, we found the road turn right where it should be. This should not have been a problem for earlier teams from what I saw. A mile or two into the start of the climb, it all became clear, clear as mud. With all the heavy rains Wyoming had gotten in the last couple of days, the road up Casper mountain was a muddy sticky mess. Our bikes quickly locked up. This dirt was sticky clay that completely froze every moving part on the bikes. This is clearly why teams were turning around. We had a long way to go to get to the top. We knew from the top of the mountain, down into Casper it was paved, but all the way to the top, it was dirt road, and likely this sticky mud. We decided to push our bikes in the ditch/grass next to the road for a little ways up the road to see if it cleared. It did not, it never got any better. Again, my

feet were problematic when walking. I was walking, but it was a slow plod. We evaluated maps and saw what other teams were doing. They would simply bike all paved roads around Casper mountain and come up the mountain from the other side. AT this stage, it was a real gamble, do we keep pushing and hope the road gets better (it was unlikely the grassy ditch next to road would continue as we started up the steep switchbacks up the mountain), or bike around. After a couple minutes, we decided to bike around as we were all biking well. It was clearly farther, but all pavement. So, down this dirt road we went back to pavement. We were making fair time, but now Tom could not keep up. It was downhill, but it was not because he was not strong on the bike, he was simply falling asleep. I tried staying with him to motivate him, but a sleeping guy on the bike i shard to keep moving. We finally did decide to stop and rest of 15 minutes. It was windy and cold. We found a ditch next to the road and set up a quick camp of space blankets to keep us off the wet ground. In 5 minutes we were cold so we huddled up together and that helped... until cars stopped to see if we were OK (these darn friendly Wyoming people). Think even a team or two came by also. After 15-20 minutes, we were refreshed enough to be back on bikes.



At some point in this section the muscles in my neck finally fatigued. I spent lots of hours bent over on the bike looking at the map (looking down). I was simply unable to hold up my head effectively. I devised a plan to use Duct tape to basically create a sling to hold my head up. Leslie was a bit surprised when I told her to Duct tape my head to my back, but she jumped in and did it. This worked great. The tape held my head so I could safely bike. Reading the map was harder, but not much of that left. It was a steady climb over the lower sections of Casper mountain. Before long, a local Sheriff deputy pulled us over. He was quite concerned about us and our health. Someone had made several calls of teams sleeping in ditches and one team trying to gain entry to a house. That team was reported to not speak English, so we assumed it was Uruguay. We assured the Sheriff that we were fine and we pedalled on. He did tell us there was a small store open about 8 miles ahead. It was a long 8 miles, but we made it to a little all night gas station. We bought some food and coffee then crashed on the warm floor for a good 20 minutes. Leslie kept watch over us 3 and the store clerk was OK with it as we were tucked in a corner. With a water bottle full of coffee, we were ready for the final push up the mountain. It was a slow slog up some steep switchbacks, but we got to see the sunrise on day 6 of the race. 2 or 3 teams passed us coming down as we were going up. One of them yelled to us that we made a much smarter decision vs pushing bikes all the way up the mud road. At the top, we punched the CP at the top and took a quick picture. Now it was time for a long steep descent down into Casper. It was a blast flying down this long hill seeing the finish line far in the distance. We punched one final CP right before the finish line the biked to the finish. The race staff took our bikes and gave us the USA flag to walk across the finish line with. After racing for 139 hours we crossed the finish line in 30th place as a full course ranked finisher. Lots of tears to be seen at this point. We not only met our goal but finished far higher than I figured we would.

A few post race thoughts. I could not be happier with the team that came together for this race. There were a couple of tense moments, but we all pulled together when needed. Lots of people tell me they would like to attempt an expedition length race. My #1 advice is you must have the right team. You all must have 100% the same goals in mind before you ever get to the starting line.



Team Vignette finish line!!

It was a great experience. Definitely my best expedition race i have ever done. The AR World Series and the local race promoter (Adventure Enablers), did a phenomenal job and put on a super good race. The better news, we crossed the lines as better friends than when we started.



Tom and Dave a bit teary eyed and DAve sporting his duct tape head dress.



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Marcy and Tom



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It was a cold high speed descent to the finish line. Notice the socks on leslie's hands to keep warm.



Rear view of Dave's neck sling.



This is what happens when you put Gorilla tape directly on your hair, then have the medical staff rip it off at the finish line.



Does racing 6 days/nights take a toll, yeah this is the evening after we finished at the awards banquet. We look a little rough