

[Christine](#) and I tackled our third [2022 Castlewood 8-Hr Adventure Race](#) as the "Happy Campers". This year proved to be the toughest one yet that we've done. I can proudly say that we did the best we could and finished 2nd in the 2-person Coed division, 5th place overall!!! This year was going to be extra tough to claim the top finishing spot as team Alpine Shop was made up of Mari Chandler (USARA National Champion) and Michael Garrison (USARA Executive Director). Talk about a killer team!

We picked up our maps & clue sheet on Friday evening and set about doing research with the best route to take for the bike & paddle checkpoints. We came away with a good plan & finished the rest of our gear packing & clothing choices.

The weather for Saturday was cold. The start was just below freezing and high winds were predicted for much of the day. Clothing choices were tough, since the start of the race had us running up a long & steep hill to the second checkpoint before we got onto our mountain bikes. Plenty of time to warm up, but then we'd be hopping on our bikes and potentially cooling down riding in the wind. Luckily, we both made good choices on just the right amount of clothing to wear.

By checkpoint 3 & 4 we were with the front of the field, with only a few teams ahead of us. Our strategy for getting to checkpoint 5 had us backtracking on the trail and then crossing the Park Loop road to descend another trail. On paper this was the best route however we didn't anticipate how many riders we would be facing head-on. After dodging riders, we made it to 5 but then had a slower descent to 6 since we were now behind some less skilled riders. The climb out of the valley had us going up the steep Park Loop road back towards the visitor center. I'm glad we picked this route rather than the trail since it allowed me to tow Christine and we made up some ground.

The rest of checkpoints 7, 8 & 9 in Greensfelder Park were fairly easy to get, as they were located just off of Allenton Rd. and didn't require much thinking or navigation, only pure strength to ride the hills. After CP9 we had a fun descent down the road towards Interstate 44, crossing the railroad tracks and heading east towards Eureka. We had to ride a long flat stretch of road to get to the next checkpoint and we did our best to keep up and draft the top 2 teams ahead of us. In our research of the route on Friday night we noticed that we could take a shortcut across the railroad tracks into Legion Park, cutting off 1/3 of a mile of road. We were the only team in the group that did this and suddenly we found ourselves in the lead!

After getting the 2 checkpoints in Legion Park we were a bit slower riding through town and the top teams caught back up to us. As we got close to Eureka Mountain Bike Park we had a brief "hello" with team Alpine Shop and Mari quickly dropped us like a sack of potatoes up the climb to the Hub. After punching CP13 I made a blunder and decided at the last second to follow the team ahead of us through a shortcut of the trail ended up getting caught in vines & thorns. I came to an abrupt stop and endo'd over my bike's handlebars. Luckily I wasn't hurt. The remaining checkpoints leading to the canoe put-in at the Meramec River were easy and obvious to get. On Friday evening we had discussed our strategy (if you can call it that) and we wanted to make sure we were near the front leading into the paddle section. This can be a bottleneck and slow to get into the river, but this year there were only a few teams ahead of us and at the time we were the only team getting our canoe into the water.

The Adventure Race had 6 checkpoints located along the east side of the Meramec River, with 3 being located along the riverbank and the rest in Vernon Beck Park. Checkpoints 18, & 19 were only able to be reached paddling by canoe upstream. 17 could be reached either by canoe/foot and the remaining 3 by foot. As we were paddling up-river we decided to punch checkpoints 17 thru 19. Originally, we were going to paddle all the way to 19 and then get 18 and 17 on the

way back, but decided to get them as we went, in order to avoid any log-jams on the way back with teams that were behind us. This proved to be the right choice.

While paddling up river we had a nice tailwind which made it a bit easier. For the first 10 minutes Christine was struggling a bit with keeping the canoe straight, but she eventually got her J-stroke working and we glided over the water straight as an arrow. I was in the front of the canoe and could solely focus on putting in quick and powerful strokes.

For getting the checkpoints in the old Vernon Beck Park we thought of 2 options. First, drop the canoe at CP17 and make a loop through the old park road; or Second, continue downstream nearly across from the put-in and get CP20-22 by trekking out & back. We chose our second option since this would avoid running part of the road, trading it for the remaining paddling we already had to do. As we finished this Trek we noticed that we weren't too far behind team Alpine Shop. In talking with them after the race they chose to make a loop, so our route proved to be the correct one and gained us some time back on them.

The way back to the Wyman Center was fairly straight forward. Only a few checkpoints and not much navigating to do. The route had us going through Rte66 State Park and a completing a 2.3 mile time trial / bike relay. An interesting addition to an adventure race. It was kind of nice, since it gave each of us a short break as we took turns riding the course, allowing us time to eat some much needed energy food & drink.

Once back to the Wyman Center we turned in our first passport and received the second passport, clue sheet, and new orienteering map. WOW 13 more checkpoints to get on foot!!! The race quickly got even tougher. We looked over the map and came up with a route and off we went up the first hill to Checkpoint 1. We decided to grab the checkpoints in a counterclockwise route. Almost all of the checkpoints were located on ridge tops or valleys, with no easy route between them. Lots of trekking through the woods, blazing our own path. On our way to checkpoint 3 I made a slight mistake and wasn't watching my compass. I was aiming us north towards a saddle but mistook it for the ridge line to the west. We got off track a bit and lost a few minutes of time but nothing too drastic. By this point the 4-person co-ed Team Kuat had caught up to us and we echoed their trekking route until point 5. After 6 we headed west to catch the overlook trail and run down it to the Greenrock trail in the valley but they went north out of sight. We ended up making the right route choice, since by the time we were running down from checkpoint 7 we were ahead of them as they were going up. Our legs started to get tired by the time we were heading up a large hill to checkpoint 8. Instead of going straight up the ridge we angled our route to make it easier to climb but we were feeling the cumulative effects of the day's effort.

In getting to checkpoint 11 I made another small mistake, aiming us up the wrong reentrant. It didn't cost us too much time since we were able to hike around and stay at the same elevation to get to it's actual location. The remaining checkpoints were straightforward to obtain, hiking/running to the south of the park along the ridge trails and then descending along a ridge to CP13 and on back to the Wyman center for the finish line.

We finally finished the race with a time of 6 hours 18 minutes. Second place in the 2 person co-ed division, fifth place overall. We finished 37 minutes behind team Alpine shop who took first place in 2 person co-ed and second place overall. I think we had a great finish and given how accomplished the team members are for Alpine Shop, I consider it a win coming in behind them.

Great job to the Sona's ([Jeff](#) & [Carrie](#)) for putting on the event!