

ADVENTURE DULUTH 2003

This is an account of participation in the six-event Adventure Race in Duluth, MN September 20, 2003 by Jeff Vaughan (age 48), Bob Newman (age 44), and myself, Will Gosnold (age 62).

We learned a lot from the experience and we expect to return next year. There were 72 teams in the event and there seemed to be more 6-person teams than 3-person and 2-person teams. We will know when the results are posted on <http://www.adventureduluth.com>.

In two events we did much better than anticipated, in one we did about as expected, and three need much improvement.

A big round of applause is due to Jeff Vaughan for placing second overall in the swim (18:39?) in 49 F water. The water temperature was 60 F at about 6:30 PM Friday, but the prevailing wind blew it away and let the cold deep water move in Saturday morning. The course was shortened to 3/4 miles in deference to the water temperature and the start was held up for 30 minutes to let an ore freighter pass through the canal. Actually, that was to keep the kayakers out of the way of the tanker.

The sea kayak was a lot more adventure than I bargained for. I had not laid eyes on a sea kayak until the Friday evening before the race and that was not a good thing. We rented a nice kayak from the local marina and I was given brief instructions on how to get out in case it turned over. Much to my dismay, there was a great deal more to learn about kayaking than getting in and out of the boat.

When Jeff came out of the water in second place, visions of a high finish place were flashing in my mind and I charged out into Lake Superior on a real adrenaline rush. That didn't last long because the kayak kept turning to the left even though I paddled hard on the left side. We were all diverted away from the canal under the high-lift bridge due to the pending approach of another freighter and that brought into play about 400 meters of portage over a wall and some rocks. Back in the water, I fought the left-pulling kayak for another three miles until another ore-freighter caused everyone to halt progress. Fortunately, one of the rescue boats was nearby and I asked about my steering problem. One of the crew took a look and said, "Your rudder is jammed hard left." I said, "What rudder?" No, I did not know there was a rudder nor did I know that the hard pegs I was pushing on with my feet were used to control the rudder. It actually was jammed and when the boat crewman released it I had directional control at last. Yet, there was still a major problem. The steering pegs were set up so far forward that I had to almost lie flat to reach them. In case you haven't tried paddling a kayak while lying on your back, take my advice and don't. The last six miles were slow and uneventful. Preliminary results showed that I had the 69th place time (2:10 :?). That is mighty embarrassing :-)

Bob Newman's trek on the bicycle was generally good, but the trail was a real challenge even for young athletes who are not so concerned with safety and the prospect of instant death. Since we managed the "Golden" category with lots of years to spare, caution kept the pace within reason. I don't recall the exact placing, but it was in the 60's with a time around 2 hours. In Bob's support, he was suffering from a nasty cold virus and that was definitely a factor.

The in-line skate event was something I was specifically prepared for since my cross-country ski training includes skating. The Munger trail follows an old railroad grade from the lake up to the UMD Outpost in Thompson. It was 12 miles and all uphill but the last mile or so. I managed the 15th fastest time (0:53:56) and missed 14th by one second.

Jeff and I had a real struggle with the canoe since it was the only real whitewater canoe in the event. Actually, I struggled and Jeff showed lots of patience. The course included about 3 miles of flat water racing, about 2 minutes of white water, and about a lifetime of portage. (Please no comments about mixing units.) I don't know how much the canoe weighs, but it is at least three times as much as the flat water kevlar canoes that many teams have. Our placing was in the low 60's with a time just over an hour.

The trail run was another tough event due to the rocky, hilly nature of the course. Again, consideration of safety was a major factor. Just to make the point, Bob ran 8 miles in one hour the weekend before, but it took him just under 2 hours to cover the 10.7 mile trail. His placing was about 44th. However, consider that Bob had put in two hours on the mountain bike and had only two hours to recover. Also, 31 runners were on six-person teams and had only one event for the day. Of course that played a role in placing in all six events.

There was one final indignity for us. Our team name was Three Slow Profs, and when Bob came in on the run the loudspeaker boomed out, "We know we are getting near the end when the Three Slow Profs finish." Since Jeff and I were running alongside Bob for encouragement at the time, we became known to all.

We know we can make significant improvements for next year. We can account for about 30 minutes of lost time due to my inexperience in a sea kayak. There was also the difference between the stable, heavy rental boat I used and the light racing boats that cruised like rockets. Perhaps another 20 minutes were lost in the canoe due to the weight and wind profile of the beast as well as to lack of planning for the portage. Bob's cold was a major factor in both the bike and the trail run.