

## Tennessee May 2023 – Three Rivers Way....Broken Vista

Day before the event. Arrived at the Fireside Outpost around 5pm. Kim Jordan Murrell got me checked in to the Chilhowee Mountain Cabin. Then met up with some of the usual suspects...Michael Rasch II, Graham Skardon, Joe Wharton, Chad Ponvelle, Kim Ranallo, John Pickron, Irmantas Stiega and Matt Mustin.

Day one. Arrived at the start line in time to take the requisite pre-ride photos. Set bike by the Hiawasse / Ocoee River State Park sign, click. Stand behind the bike and smile, click. Hold phone high in the air, take selfie with group in background, click. Two minutes until 6:30am start (This was the last time I saw Joe Wharton on the course). Shoot. Forgot my headphones. Ride back to Fireside. Get headphones. Ride back to start. Riders have left. Oops. Time to start pedaling. Nowhere to go but up. Literally. The route starts climbing as soon as you get out of the parking lot. A fairly rugged climb up a little used trail. Eventually gaining about 2,000 feet over 9 miles. Michael Rasch II, Matt Mustin, and Eric Henderson, joined the participants for the first five miles up to the scenic overlook. Then bid us farewell. Rasch went back down to knock himself out in the Fireside bathroom for kicks. Matt went back down to plan more of his upcoming Huckleberry 250: Tour of the Towers. Eric went back down because he is smarter than the rest of us.

About three hours in I spotted a bear. It was big. On its hind legs it was easily 10 feet tall. It was carved out of wood in someone's front yard. I easily outdistanced it:)

At 11:30am I hit the Conasauga Creek crossing. Switched to sandals and walked across the creek. Put shoes back on forgetting that the river crisscrosses the trail two or three more times with a half mile stretch (Next time I will remember!).

Hit Tellico plains and ate lunch at the Iron Works Grill. Real food is good. Rolled on and eventually ran into Irmantas Stiega. We rode together for several miles and restocked water at the pipe spring just past Jake Best Campground. Endured the long climb up Cold Spring Road. Encountered rain at some point.

At various times throughout the day, I spotted Kim Ranallo. We would leapfrog back and forth. Eventually separating and not seeing her again until the end of Day 2.

Made it to Indian Boundary around dusk. Set up camp for the night, ate, took a hot shower, brushed teeth, and went to sleep.

Day Two. Awoke at dawn. Well rested, the journey up the Cherohala Skyway began. A long slow 9-mile climb. It was windy but beautiful. The inevitable descent off the Cherohala Skyway down the North River Road was the highlight of Day Two. The gravel was perfect. Steep drop-offs along the side amplified the experience.

Caught sight of Tim, Chase, and Carl as they were leaving Green Cove. We bounced back and forth with each other for the next 20 miles. Then I popped off course to the Williams Mountain Deli for lunch. Rejoined the course and pedaled on to Buck Bald. A fantastic panoramic view greeted me at the top. Found Tim, Chase, and Carl on the bald and ended up riding with them for the rest of Day 2. We restocked at Vic's and later had dinner in McCaysville. Left McCaysville as the sun was setting. We pushed through the Brush Creek single track in the dark. Crossed the Ocoee River bridge by the Whitewater Center around 11:15pm. Then pressed on to Thunder Rock Campground to stop for the night. We saw Kim, tent free, sleeping atop a picnic table. She sat up, said hello and promptly fell back asleep.

I set up camp, ate, took a hot shower, brushed my teeth, and went to sleep. Woke up 2 hours later, and almost every hour thereafter, sick, sick, sick. All contents on my insides decided they wanted to be outside:( Not good. A very un-fun way to spend the night. By dawn I was not any better and made the decision to stop. I was broken. Contacted Kim Jordan Murrell and Chad was able to collect me. I thought maybe I could rest at Fireside for a day then come back out and at least have an unofficial finish. No such luck. Recovery took a full week.

The two days of riding themselves were fantastic. The challenge, the fun, the camaraderie, the solitude, the adventure. Glad to have spent time with old friends and new. Outside. Living. Time to plan an ITT.