

# RACE REPORT – WARNING

It was a long race, it's a long report :-)

COLLEEN EMICK WILCOX-SATURDAY, MARCH 26, 2016

Last weekend it took me 33 hours and 2 minutes of sleepless forward movement at Lake Louisa State Park in Clermont to complete the 281.2 mile course so I could call myself “Finisher” at the 2016 Florida Double Anvil.

This year there were 24 registered individual competitors and 5 relay teams scheduled to start the event, but when we toed the line at 8am on Friday, March 18 the field consisted of just 19 solo (5 women, 14 men) and 5 relay teams.

**The Swim** – 4.8 Miles, 12 Loops in the Lake, Time Limit - 5 Hours (1pm Friday): Danielle and I had gone to the beach to check out the swim when we first arrived in Florida. We were told that the water was clean but there was something in the leaves of the trees that surround the lake that cause the water to be brown. It wasn't until we dove in to start the swim (a few minutes late at 8:22am) that we realized that the water was the color of root beer – all of the water! It was as dark as night... I thought for a moment I had gone blind! I could not see my hand right in front of my face let alone seeing the feet of a swimmer in front of me! It was a quick adjustment that simply required much more sighting above water.

Since it was going to be such a long event it was vital to drink and fuel during the swim in order to avoid starting the bike dehydrated and at a calorie deficit. They anchored 2 beer pong pool floats by the near turn buoy about 25 yards off shore. Athletes were able to stage bottles and food on the floats to grab each lap as they rounded the buoy and called out to the lap timers on shore to mark their progress. We were fortunate enough to have Danielle's boyfriend David (a

multiple time UltraTri Double and Triple finisher) waded out to the floats and be there to hand us our bottles each lap!

The swim went well and I was out of the water in 2:39:00. There was a bath house at the water's edge and since it was going to be a long day I had budgeted time in my race plan to take advantage of that luxury. [Side Note: I had been fortunate enough to have been enjoying the Ladera Ranch pool (thank you Nancy) during training and the showers there are amazing – you push the button, water flows for about 30 seconds and it is wonderfully warm. That was NOT the case at Lake Louisa! Danielle described them perfectly when she said they were like the shower scene in the movie *Silkwood*! You had to hold on to the button to make water come out, and when you did it was like being blasted with a frigid water cannon! That certainly kept me from lingering in the shower – ha, ha.] I dried off, lubed up, put on bike shorts and my mesh vest then threw on my flip flops to head up to the Village where the shelters, my bike and my crew (John Wilcox, Carrie and Marco Mack) were waiting for me.

Total transition time 0:18:20.

**The Bike** – 224.0 Miles, 37 Loops on Park Roads, Time Limit – 26 Hours from Race Start (10am Saturday):

As I ride over the timing mat out of the Village to start the bike the Race Clock shows 2:57:20. The bike route has some small rolling undulations – you can't really call them hills, but we had an average of 150 feet of gain on each of the 37 bike loops so that 5,500 of total gain was not insignificant. It was actually nice to have some variety that actually required you to manage your gearing and pay some attention (unlike the steady climb/grind up Bee Line at IMAZ). Those who know me are familiar with the adage about “how to eat an elephant – one bite at a time”. I knew that I couldn't think too much about all of the miles ahead of me, I needed to stay in the present to keep from overwhelming myself. My mantra was “it's not about this loop, don't think about this mile, focus on this moment”.

With so few of us racing there was a lot of time when you were completely by yourself, so it was nice to reach the turnaround point where there was another timing mat staffed with a happy volunteer who would see my name and picture pop up as I made the turn and would tell me I looked great, or encourage me to keep going or tell me how proud of me they were (that one made me cry later in the race ). Then I would head back to the Village where all of the amazing, enthusiastic, supportive crews were waiting.

I was pretty consistent with 22 or 23 minute laps so my crew knew when to be expecting me. Each time through the Village I would update them on my fluid and fuel status, letting them know what I would need the next time I came through. It was like placing your order at a very bizarre drive through restaurant! During the daylight hours I would return to find them standing there holding out a bottle or food product for me to grab as I rode through. When it got dark we changed our process a little and I would stop to do the exchange – they transformed in to an eerie combination of Nascar pit crew and Nurse Ratched; swapping my bottles, filling my snack bin, emptying a Styrofoam shot glass of caffeine pills or Aleve into my hand and giving me the bottle of water to wash them down with!

I wasn't sure how it would be riding at night, but it was beautiful. We had lights on our bikes (some more fancy than others – right Joey Lichter) but there was enough moonlight so you could see the road far in front of you and many of nature's creatures that were out there with you.

Each time we crossed the timing mat it made a swooshing noise ... until your last lap when it rang a bell! That was a glorious sound. I crossed the mat at the village and got my bell, knowing that this was the last time I would be riding out to the turn around. Then when I crossed the far mat and that timing volunteer heard

the bell they offered congratulations as I rode away, heading in to the village for the last time.

I had completed the bike in 14:47:13. My crew handed me my transition bag which included my Undress so I stood there in our shelter chatting with them while I changed in to running shorts, with another generous layer of lube, a clean shirt and sat down to put on my shoes. I put on my hat, my head lamp, my race belt and my flashing red light on my back, grabbed my handheld bottle and extra light then headed out into the darkness to start the run.

Transition time was 00:14:35.

**The Run** – 52.4 Miles, 26 Loops on Park Road and Wilderness Trail, Time Limit – 36 Hours from Race Start (8pm Saturday):

Race Clock at Run Start 17:59:08, just after 2am on Saturday. This leaves me with 18 hours to complete the double marathon. This is part that I was most concerned about. [Side Note: In January I had attempted my first 24 hour run – the cold and the pain in my feet had me stopping at 54.5 miles after 17 hours, and that was without having just come off a 224 mile bike ride!] As I start to run out of the Village I know that I can do the distance, but I am not sure that I can do it within the time remaining. I continue my “Not this lap, not even this mile, just this moment” focus and set my Garmin to current lap data.

The run is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile on the pavement and then you turn on to a wilderness path. The path is covered in sand and lined with trees covered in Spanish moss. Unbeknownst to the race directors or participants they are doing a controlled burn so there is smoke in the dark night air. There seem to be more of nature’s creatures on this path than were on the bike route, they are loud and don’t sound happy to have us tromping through their homes. Borrowing a phrase from the movie Princess Bride I dub this section “the fire swamp”.

I don't typically consume caffeine so I'm sure that was a contributing factor in some GI issues I started having pretty early on the run; but the caffeine worked and there wasn't a single moment overnight when I wanted to just put my head down and sleep. Due to the GI trouble there were a few hours where I was not really eating or drinking. Just as the sun was coming up my stomach was settling down. As I come through the Village one lap there is a lot of commotion going on and we hear that there is a large storm expected within the hour – the forecast is pouring rain for about 3 hours. After what had happened at IM Whistler and IM Arizona last year I had packed for every possible weather condition so John confirmed that he was grabbing the rain gear that we had staged in the rental car just in case.

They were right – it poured! And it was fantastic. The humidity and bugs had been pretty intense, but the rain fixed both of those problems. However, now we were running 1 of every 2 miles on each loop in wet sand – just another bonus. I had started the run executing a run walk strategy, but at some point it became painful to walk and start running again, so I switched to continuous/mindless running. I have proven to myself in past races that I can't do math during a triathlon, so I no longer try. David is amazing with numbers so at one point I explain to him – I don't know what time it is so I don't know how much time is left and I don't know how far I've run so I don't know if I'm going to make it... he tells me that I could do the rest of the race at a 30 minute per mile pace and still make the cutoff !! That is amazing news and gives me a little confidence. I don't really have a clear recollection of time frames or sequence of events but as I crossed the Village timing mat at one point John says "awesome job, you are down to single digit laps, it must feel great to know you will finish!" Now, I had been in great spirits the entire race and I think I had been upbeat and appreciative as well, but at that moment I looked at John and said "That's still 20 f'ing miles!". I have since apologized to him, several times, but seriously – what

delusional state did we all find ourselves in that 20 miles to go we are thinking this is a done deal (that is a warped reality).

As I continue running my loops I occasionally encounter a runner coming towards me in the opposite direction – this is an awesome feature of this race. Each runner completes their final lap clockwise, thus letting all of us on the course know that they are finishing and gives us an opportunity to offer congratulations and share in their celebration. Then we quietly (did I mention that music devices are not permitted) go back to our own private thoughts and mantras that keep us moving forward.

Finally I cross the Village timing mat and hear the beautiful sound signifying my final laps... the bell on the run means you are starting your final counter-clockwise lap; the next time you return to the Village you make a U-turn and head out for your clockwise victory lap. I must have hung out with the wrong crowd in college ... because this was the first time I had ever hallucinated! It was nice that the onset of the hallucinations started so late in the race – the cones signifying turns out on the course came to life, the leaf covered section of the wilderness path rose up to envelope me and parked cars were moving! But that was ok because I was almost done!

We all know that triathlon is all about the run and Danielle caught up with me at this point. We were able to enjoy a leisurely clockwise final celebratory lap together. We had seen each other only seconds at a time during the race so now we got to talk about all of the things we had seen, done, felt over the course of the race. We laughed and we cried; we agreed that it was an incredible experience and an awesome journey that was only possible because we had done it together; and agreed that we would do it again – certainly not in 2017, but definitely again in a few years! Then as we approach the Village the awesome young volunteers bring an American flag out to each of us; we take the flags and run through the

Village as they play our National Anthem and we cross the timing mat together!  
Total Race Time 33:02:12 (just after 5pm Saturday).

[Side Note: The awards ceremony was Sunday and we got to reconnect and celebrate with all of the amazing, inspirational, supportive, encouraging, crazy racers, staff, volunteers and crew. Then, after the awards ceremony we went to Disney World and while in line for one of the rides we affirmed that we will be back... but changed our minds about when – see you again in 2017!!]