



One of the most exciting things to Brenda and me about getting the chance to move back to Chattanooga was the endless trail running and mountain biking opportunities. We quickly and greedily decided that we wanted to do the Rock Creek Trail running series and four of the NUE 100 mile mountain bike series races in 2009. We knew our performances in both series would be a little compromised by the other, but figured "what the hell it sounds like fun". So, each weekend we were faced with the question of whether to do a long run or bike or both.

Early in the spring Lee developed a nagging running injury, so we quickly put the running series on hold and spent more time on the bikes. We also added a 5th NUE race so that we would have some breathing room in case one of us had a bad race, mechanical or DNF. The best four finishes count in the series, so if you do more than that, you get to drop your lowest showings from the overall.

Anyway, I thought I would give a few descriptions of each race for anyone interested in a race or the series. The series consists of 8 races and you must complete 4 to compete in the series overall rankings. The races are all mass start. Every race is incredibly difficult with lots of climbing, and a combination of single track, double track, gravel roads; a couple races even have a small amount of paved roads. It is hard to adequately explain how difficult the courses are, but in my opinion they are much closer to an Ironman than any road century I have ever done.

The races are very competitive, but still have the feel of Grass Roots Mountain biking with many of the races offering group camping at the start/finish area the night before the race.

Cohutta 100: A giant gravel road loop sandwiched between really nice single-track at the Tanasi area. Those that live for single track might find the big gravel road loop a bit of a pain (understatement). The good news is that if conditions are right, Cohutta can be a good, fast introduction to 100 mile mtb races. Again, everything is relative...notice I did not use the word "easy". Actually I had a hard time typing it; my fear is that I will pay next year. It's local to Chattanooga, so lots of upsides with that.

Mohican 100: The travel to Ohio was made easy by the fact that we traveled in an RV with Brad, Amy and Justin. The race starts and finishes at a really nice campground with great lodging options.

The course was around 50% single-track, which is a lot for a 100 miler. This course has tons of climbing - as do all of the NUE races - but none of the climbs were over 300 ft or so. Do not think Ohio will be flat and easy. The single track was fantastic!

Wilderness 101: Pennsylvania has lots of rocks, and rocks are slick in the rain. I actually had dreams the night after this race about trying to make it through yet another rock garden. So here is the course: climb a gravel road; descend on the nastiest, slickest, and rockiest single track you can image; lather, rinse and repeat.

I would guess the course was around 30% single-track, and you had to fight through every bit of it.



Fools Gold 100: In many ways this is my favorite course. But again, they are all great. The course is a great mix of gravel road, double track and single track. Just when you might think you're getting tired of one, you switch to another. It definitely keeps things interesting. I think this course has the most climbing - around 14, 000 ft - but again, if you do not like climbing you will be miserable at any of these races.

The race starts with a big gravel road climb, so there is no rush to get to the single track. Southern-style heat and humidity can be big issues as the race is held in August, but what the hell...you knew it was going to be hard.

The field is typically the smallest at this race, which is baffling because the course and organization is great.

Shenandoah 100: This race is a classic! It has the largest and most competitive field of all the NUE races. The start felt like the start of a 2 hour race due to the incredibly large field and fast pace. It is a totally epic course with screaming single-track downhills. I kept asking myself why I was going so fast on this rocky downhill, but what can you do? Really there was no reason to slow down.

We have not done the races in Michigan, Breckenridge or Lake Tahoe, but hope to next year.

I hope to see more of you out there in the future. With some preparation, some skill and lots of determination the races are doable. It also helps to have a screw or two loose!