



Snake Creek Gap Time Trial 2010

How did this early season training event grow into a full on race? I remember looking at this crazy winter Time Trail mtb race a few years ago and thinking we should give it a go. At the time we were wrapped up in adventure racing and never got around to doing the race. Anyway, last year Brenda and I started each of the three races (I dnf one race because of a mechanical).

For those of you that have never ridden the Snake Creek course, it is pretty cool! You will have to earn a finish of either the 17 or the 34 miler. The course is mostly single track and the last hour or so is very rocky. I might be understating the difficulty of the course a little, but it is warm in my office and my back feels pretty good right now.

So, here we go. It is time to start the 2010 Snake Creek Gap Time Trial Series...

Uh, not so fast! Brenda tried to bring down a tree with her sternum on Christmas day. We were riding on the truck trail on Lookout Mtn and she attempted to bunny hop a log. Unfortunately she did not get proper amplitude, railed the log and was hucked over the edge of the trail and into a tree without touching the brakes. We FINISHED the ride, and THEN went to the ER. Nothing was broken, but she has been slow to heal. We put her down as a "game day decision." The final decision was that Lee would make the trip to Dalton alone, and Brenda would spend the day walking around Chattanooga in the cold.

I pulled into the finish line parking lot at around 8:15 which should be plenty of time to catch the 9am bus to the start. Somehow I ended up barely getting my act together and making the bus. I have learned that the shuttle is kind of long, but I always have fun talking to the people around me. My bench partner was from Macon and was wearing old school waffle-style leggings under his bike shorts. You know - the kind your grandfather used to wear under his overalls while plowing the fields. He asked about the course and said that he was a triathlete and marathon runner. I hesitated and thought about what I was going to say, but in the end I just said "save a little energy for the last hour." I guessed that the course might have 4k of elevation gain, but really what does it matter we will be dying by the end anyway?

In the registration line there was lots of talk about the first creek crossing. My plan was to just blast through it and unclip my feet if it was not too wide. I had always crossed to the far left, but the girl at registration said the far right was best. I knew I needed to be very cold at the start and during the first few miles because the course climbs after that and I would warm up quickly. I was comfortably cold heading into the creek crossing and lining up for my new entry to the right when I shot over the handlebars superman style. It seems that the line to the far right travels through a sand trap. Fortunately, I landed on the only soft part of the whole course. I promptly hopped up and found my bike leaning against a grassy bank just as if I had placed it there.



I then crossed the creek and went on my way. The day was surprisingly typical for a mtb race. I did wear my clunky Lake winter mtb shoes so my feet were okay and my hands warmed up pretty fast. I have learned to blow the water back out of the hose when using a hydration pack on cold days...thanks Wisconsin! So I had water all day. By some miracle my bike worked well except for a frozen front derailleur that I was able to get working again after a few minutes (I am knocking on wood now).

I was reminded of a few lessons for Winter Bike Riding:

- Keep it simple - Eating, drinking, adding and removing clothing is hard with big winter gloves. I added all of my calories into my hydration pack rather than searching under layers of clothes for food.
- You are only going to be SO comfortable on a day like that, so just keep moving.

I can totally sympathize with people who had to stop to fix flats, etc... Once your hands get cold on a day like that, it is nearly impossible to recover.

Congratulations to all that started the race - getting to the start line is half the battle (just ask Brenda).