



## **Swank 65**

### The Rocks are Hard

I had heard about this race for a few years, but had been too busy with Adventure Racing, Triathlons, etc to give it a go...or maybe I was scared?

“The Swank 65 Mountain Bike Journey is mountain bike racing at its most primeval, far removed from civilization and polluted air. The race begins at 2500 feet, and consists of a triad of cloverleaf shaped loops winding around Gloucester Gap in Pisgah National Forest. Rolling over rugged mining roads, fun single track, tough climbs and hell-raising descents, the exhilarating course will test your skills and desire as you explore the devilish terrain of the Pisgah National Forest. 42 miles (65K) in length.”

So to finish off the year Brenda and I signed up for the 2009 Swank.

I will get Brenda out of the picture fast; she had a mechanical at about half way and limped back to the car. She took it okay, mostly because it is late in the year and she was about raced out anyway.

The race started with 150 people in a 400 yard Lemans start and then a 3 or 4 mile single track climb. The start was surprisingly orderly, and we settled into single track, gravel road, single track, gravel road, repeat.

For sure, the one thing that sticks out on this course is the Farlow Gap downhill. I am not really sure what to think about this part of the course. I am alive and healthy, but that was not a given during this decent. If I was out on a training ride and started down this hill I would have to have a pretty good reason to not turn around. I am sure some people live for this type of downhill, but I am not sure I qualify as one.

I was in about 22<sup>nd</sup> place going into the downhill and that was just enough reason to ride it out; that and the fact that groups of people along the downhill were yelling things like “momentum is your friend”. I was a little embarrassed at that comment because I know that translates to “let off of the brakes, Fred!”

If I have learned anything over the years it is that when I come across a group of spectators miles out onto the course it is time to jump off of the bike and walk/run or risk death. I even heard a nice young lady dressed in a cheerleader’s suit say “don’t worry, that’s okay” in a very sympathetic voice as I jumped off of my bike and scrambled



down a tricky part. I really felt bad to let the spectators down, but rocks are hard and I am not.

Farlow Gap downhill is very steep, with loose bowling ball-sized rocks, and covered with leaves...perfect! I survived Farlow, and only got passed by one guy and managed to pass another guy (poor sucker). The remaining miles were typically great Pisgah riding. I finished in 4:24 and had a blast.

If you can ride a couple of laps around Raccoon and love to ride the Tanasi you can manage this course. Farlow Gap will be the biggest hurdle, but it is up to the individual how much you ride and how much you walk. There is no shame in walking a little, at least I hope not.