

Chippewa Triathlon

I love the Chippewa Triathlon. It's been one of my favorite events for the entire season, and one I train specifically for. This year, I knew it would be hard - solo, a year older, less time to ride, but I had a good frame of mind and was looking forward to the event.

What makes the Chippy special? Lots of things - the course is unique, beautiful, and challenging. The organizers and community do a nice job. The vast majority of competitors are the nicest people you'd ever want to meet. Some folks I see every year at this race, and it's always fun to chat. Camping the night before a 7:00AM start. And the fact that an aging boomer with mediocre running skills can do well in an event that lasts 6 hours or so. Pre race decisions...

I drove up Friday morning - worked until about 10, came home, packed, stopped by the library, and headed north. Stopped off at Elk River for a little loaf of cherry walnut bread (good stuff) and again at Pequot Lakes for coffee. Got up around 4, checked out a couple of the portages, met Mike&Pam at the spaghetti feed/registration, and hit the campground for the evening. I took both my ICF K1, which is very fast, but very tippy, and the new Current Designs Freedom proto. The CD boat is a bit heavier, but I figured if the wind was really bad it would be the better boat. I actually didn't decide what to paddle until Saturday morning. The wind was up, but still OK, and coming from the west (best possible direction) so I decided the K1. I knew I could turn it better in the snake pit - the CD boat is a little harder to turn and nine pounds heavier (remember the lyrics to the oldtime country song??). I still have to get the cockpit padded up so I can 'hip turn' it. Paddling

We lined up, and I stayed in the back row, where I could keep moving, then to the outside of the fray after the gun went off. I probably cost myself 5 minutes getting clear, but certainly saved a possible swim. The entire first leg is on a big, shallow bay, and over the course of ~30 minutes I passed probably 25-30 boats, mostly MNIIIs and the rental proboats. Toward the first portage, I caught up with the Sullivans and had Keith&IO in sight. The portages were hard, but I was able to maintain a decent pace across them. I only gave up 2 boats on portages all day - Phil and Kelly Rogers, and Aaron Alto& his young partner - all of whom can actually run! Well, Aaron walked, but he walks faster than I can run!

Mike Brumbaugh and his new Mohican opened a few eyes about the potential of fast tippy boats, keeping pace with Al Rudquist, and I think leading him on most of the lakes. Al runs quite well, and I think Mike felt the whoosh as Al went past on the long portage. The Mohican just doesn't pay attention to suck water.

After the final portage (~1mi) I was tired but still OK, and was "looking forward" to the snake pit. It seemed narrower this year... Anyway, I managed to get thru most of it without too much trouble. I found that if I slapped the rudder over, hipped the boat on edge, and then used the grass on the inside of the turn as an anchor for the paddle, I could turn a 180 corner pretty easily. I also found that in the 2 culverts my balance sucked (what balance). I swam both of them - in 2' of water, it's just a walk out, quick dump and back in. This year, there was a floating mass of reeds at the end of the snakepit, and I managed to hook a paddle and swim there. Bad spot - too thick to swim, too soft to stand. I did get the boat empty, and was standing in the mess trying to figure out where to go so I could climb back in. Two guys in a MNII stopped and held the boat while I popped back in - along with about 3" of black water and a bunch of weeds, reeds, and I don't want to know... I made it to the takeout lake, which was whitecapping and rolling, and just couldn't control the boat, so in sight of the transition, over for the last time. I just walked it in - probably cost me a minute or so, but hey - I was done, the boat got clean, and so did I:-) The long and winding road...

The bike leg was hard, long, with some course adjustments to take care of property issues this year. I was rolling along pretty well, and picking up a few bikes along the way. [How many people made the left turn down to the lake and had to backtrack. Come on - let me see those hands!] Doing fine, except that at about 16mi in, I was coming up on a guy that I knew I should be able to pass easily, and I was just able to stay with him. My feeble brain finally suggested that maybe I needed food, so at the food station, I stopped, filled my bottle, ate some oranges, a bar, and started off again in 'survival mode'. I did manage to start picking up the pace, and by the last few miles on pavement was actually able to rock along the flats at 20-22. However any little rise and my legs were *shot*. I didn't know what to expect on the run. I wasn't feeling bad, but I'd had enough little indicators on the bike to know that I was going to be cramp prone.

One side note. In the 8 or 10 years I've been doing these multis, I cannot remember a single negative encounter with anyone. People (including me) will bark about room, watch your paddle, etc at/near the start, but in general, this is a pretty genteel, look out for each other, enjoy the day sport - even at the very front end when competing for podiums. As I came up to the cross under the bridge, I swung wide to set up for the corner and had two young Type A reputed members of cycling teams blast thru on my outside without even a 'rider up' 'on your left' or 'passing'. Common courtesy. I mentioned it, and caught a ration of testosterone and bombast from these two clowns. They finished the bike leg just in front of me, but disappeared to lock up their expensive cyclocross bikes outside of the transition zone. As I said - first time in 10 years, and outside of cycling, first time in 20 years I've had that kind of negative encounter in sports. I was unimpressed, and kinda glad I was too tired to remember what teams they were on so I could write their sponsors a love

note. Sponsored athletes, riding in colors have certain obligations to their sponsors. Otherwise, their sponsors will be someone else's, or leave the sport. Too many jerks, not enough dollars. Running ragged...

Back was OK, and I grabbed some more food, a gel, and some water and headed off. After about a mile, I was running OK - as long as I didn't lift my feet more than about an inch off the ground. Anything more and I could feel the cramps coming on. Drat, drat. But I found to get over logs if I sorta crabbed up and swung my leg over sideways I was OK. I had a hard time not laughing at this mental image. I walked when they started to cramp, ran the rest of the time, enjoyed the trail (really pretty pine forest trail) and all the wildflowers... And there was this guy, who I think finished just a bit in front of me, who ran most of the leg barefoot. His shoes were rubbing blisters. Razzle, dazzle, drizzle, drone. Time for this one to go home...

And pretty soon I was across the finish line. Even with sore legs, I felt OK. I mean - it's a 6 hour event and I was shot, but I felt pretty good. Watched people finish, celebrated victories, commiserated on agonies, and collected my 2nd feather. I packed up, took a shower, checked for crawly things, and headed for home very happy with 3rd place this year..