

Adventures with Mud and Beyond

Ask a runner what's their next "high"? Although you most likely are referencing the word "high" as the next bigger challenge like a marathon, ultra marathon or Ironman. Their answer may not at all be about a high, but a low, grueling mud pit crawl in an adventure race. Yes, adventure racing, which always includes a mud crawl, is the new mecca of fitness. So why the big buzz about adventure races? Adventure races, also called endurance challenges, used to mean the combination of two or more endurance disciplines, mainly running, cycling orienteering or kayaking. However, now it is more about completing wild and zany obstacles on a short run course. They are fun and can be done by people who may not necessarily consider themselves athletic. Common obstacles include a wall climb, tire hopping, net climbing and of course the mudpit.

Why the popularity? My opinion is we are in a very fast paced society, trying to cram in work, family, relationships, fitness and a social life. Adventure racing combines a fun, social component, as most often you enter as a team, while you can still get a good fitness burn or workout. The atmosphere is most definitely relaxed and friendly, meaning you can enjoy these events as pure entertainment or seriously as an extreme athletic challenge. I think there is also a practical reason for the growth in obstacle races. With running, you just run, run and run and with such an overuse can cause injuries.

Our muscles have memory and the best way to challenge and not get stuck in rut is to "mix it up." Amber Storm, from Appleton, flew to Phoenix, Arizona, recently to meet up with girlfriends and do their first adventure race, the Phoenix Oyster Urban Adventure. "It was just ridiculously fun, yet hard core at the same time" laughed Amber. She explained "It's just different than the traditional runs where everyone knows who is going to win in their age division. They had many unique divisions like the 'skin to win' award, where fellow racers voted on the person who suffered the most, either mentally or physically, during the race." She went on to say that although there was a lot of competition between the teams, the races helped build camaraderie within the teams, since no team could complete a challenge until all of the members had finished the task.

Perhaps a reflection of my age and 30 years of race directing, my muscle memory needed a challenge too. So bring on a race director challenge and now we have three Northeast Wisconsin, "Edge the Ledge" on June 28 and the Caveman Adventure Run on September 26. Most importantly in laying the groundwork for a race like this was finding the right venue, which we did. Edge the Ledge is at Fondy Park, Fond du Lac and the Caveman Adventure Run is a Maribel County Park by Manitowoc.

Think about the fun of running through a culvert (just like you did as a kid), hopping over bales of hay, hurdling a maze, tire lateral jumping just to name a few of events along the 3 mile route. Like most adventure races, there will traditional competition competing as an individual. We will also have some off-the-wall divisions, like pairing up a two man team called, "Macho Men", team of two females called "Super Chicks" or the "Six Pack" division which is a team of six or more. And don't forget to wear your wedding dress (or let's just use your imagination) to compete in the best costume award.