

2011 Ironman Coeur D'Alene Race Report by Michael Roth

“That’s not sweat you can see, it’s your fat cells crying” unknown spectator sign - 2011 Coeur D’ Alene

This race report comes with a warning, it has been written as a retrospective of my year and may contain more information than you need, want or can bare to read, so be warned. It is also the ramblings of a parent/spouse/working guy/triathlete.

So, it is July 2010 I am in Coeur D’ Alene to watch the race, support some buds and to maybe sign up. I have reservations, I have a chronic injury (a term used by my physio not me), my spouse is up to her eyeballs in work and educational pursuits and my kids are on the cusp of teenagerism (they are great kids but keeping them busy comes at a price). The day before the race a couple of Nanaimo buds and I ride one 90km loop of the bike course. Riding my winter bike I complete the ride and decide that if it does not feel too bad on my winter bike I could only imagine how much fun it would be on my race bike (yeh right). Role forward 48 hours and it is now Monday morning, Visa card in hand I am standing in the line-up to register to race in 2011. I am here based on the premise; if everything becomes too complicated I can always drop out of the race at any time over the next year. I have my friends to thank for this idea; they of course have done their race and were not planning to sign up again for 2011 (that should have been a sign).

Back in Victoria, I break the news to the kids who smile and encourage me to train hard and do well. They know I can do this, my third Ironman, and assure me I will take it all in my stride. I am still dealing with a sore right knee and have not run very much in two months. I am swimming and biking with the HPR crew and looking forward to heading to the Okanagan in August to support friends and HPR Team mates racing Ironman Canada and to get out and ride the 180k course for fun (I know, I know).

By September 2010, I am back to running and decide to try and end the year on a positive note. If I can build my run back up to two loops of Elk Lake (a 20k trail run) I will sign up for the Silverman Half Ironman at Henderson Nevada in November. Chad and Tammy are going to be there racing the full Iron distance at the same time, so I was confident I would finish ahead of at least two people who had to do twice the distance. I enter the race; fly down via Calgary where Homeland Security decides to take an interest in my travel plans. Maybe they had a hard time believing someone would fly into Las Vegas with a bike in tow or maybe it was the fact I was smiling when going through passport control, but after a brief 30 minute interview (they spoke, I listened, yes sir no sir) I was on my way.

Silverman was a well-organized and fun event, after meeting up with a couple of the HPR guys from Ohio (Brewer and Butterworth) also there to race the half, we duelled it out on the course. I was happy to see Brewer pass me about 60k into the ride, if he had not I would never have heard the end of it. I am also glad I elected to race the half. After running my race, which I am sure included more uphill than down especially on the run course, Brewer and I hang around to cheer Chad and Tammy as they each crossed the finish line in one piece. Silverman is the venue for the 2011 ITU long course championships, and the 2011, 70.3 Worlds so good luck to everyone heading down this year.

I came through Silverman feeling great and my run was about as good I could expect. No lasting injuries and everything seemed to be back on track, yeh!! Back at work in Vic and keen to make a fool of myself I join some coworkers at a lunchtime boot camp, part way through my first class and after several star jump intervals, I feel a familiar ping around my right knee, my old friend is back - so are the reduced miles and now I am wearing a knee support when running.

Swim training: Early morning swims were consistent and a new year commitment to bring my swim back to a reasonable pace helped keep me focused. Lots of pool time, little lollygagging, instead a focused effort combined with supportive coaching help me to maintain a reasonable return on my effort. By mid

2011 Ironman Coeur D'Alene Race Report by Michael Roth

May 2011, I was back at Thetis Lake and even though the spring weather had not been kind, the lake seemed no worse than previous years around this time. Five weeks of lake swimming combined with pool swims provided ample time to get a few decent 4k lake swims in before race day.

Bike training: After Silverman I was feeling confident with my biking but very aware the riding was likely contributing to the fatigue my knee was being placed under. It was about this time the winter blues hit, no sun, and a feeling of 'now what'. Onwards and upwards, I rode through the winter and recall numerous days were my heart rate barely made it into zone 3 and my hands and toes barely warmed up in time for the next grey day ride. Seeing ice hanging off the rocks during solo rides on the Malahat in February was not a good sign, nor was the fact I went through three tires and had more flats in three months (Feb-Apr) than all the past five years combined. Ah, the winter and spring of 2011, a memorable time. Solo rides were also the general pattern as family and work came first followed by tri training. Thanks to the training buds that did make it out for a ride with me and to the HPR crew for welcoming me on my rare appearances for team rides. The spring was made tolerable by a great week of HPR training in Tucson, where even my running felt better, hmmm sunshine, what an amazing cure-all. It should be noted that while in Tucson one of the highlights of the week is the 42k ride up Mt Lemmon with a gain of 6000ft. The ride was preceded by a dinner which I could have done without, about midway the lookout point known as Windy Point earned its name in more ways than one.....all I can say was thank goodness for the outhouse. By the time May 2011 rolled around, I felt like I had plenty of slow twitch muscle but not much in the way of fast twitch. I had also worked hard on training with my power meter and was finally starting to figure out how to ride hills without blowing my reserves and using my gears more wisely.

Run training: So, a knackered right knee brought on (so it appears) by an injured glute caused by a weak hip flexor, still reading this? was not going to go away. I guess when an RMT says "if you rest your leg and consider not doing this ironman thing the injury may get better" does not seem to make sense to you perhaps it's time to find the couch and seek professional help. But no, not us tri folks, "I'll show you" and that was that. By the new year, my left knee was also acting up, sympathy pain or compensation I am not sure but I decided to wear knee supports on both legs, ice them lots and get more physio. Whatever happened to, if things do not work out I can always drop out of the event?????? When my kids gave me a new year gift of the Island Race Series to help keep me on track I knew I was in trouble. With a road race every second week starting in January I knew I would not have an excuse to take it easy, I could run but it was not going to be pretty, I was also resigned to wearing the neoprene knee supports and watching for any signs of increased discomfort. Often the knee pain would dissipate shortly after the run, sometimes it would last several hours but the underlying discomfort was always lingering. I also found that to get the miles in I needed I was often running before and after each race. Again thanks to my buds for their patience when trying to car pool and looking to get away after the races, (I think they were even contemplating sending out the search party after the Mill Bay 10k race). March arrived and there I was towing the start line at the Comox half marathon, having done a hard long ride in the rain the day before (mid Island in spring so what could you expect), I think I spent the first 6 km whining about wanting to run on fresh legs just once. Still I managed a sub 2-hour race and was happy to finish. However, this was also the event that foreshadowed what was to eventually become the way of the future. While running in a small group at the Comox event I passed an older spectator who was heard to say, "look that one looks like he's walking". Now, I was doing about a 6-minute kilometer and in a pack of about eight other runners but being the self-conscious 6'4" runner that I am, I was pretty sure she was referring to me. I guess I make it look to easy. This was verified about a month later when out for a solo three hour run on the Goose, again trying to maintain a 6-minute k, I ran towards two older gentlemen who observed to one another "I have not seen speed walking in years". By May and several physio visits later I was down to one knee support and a slight improvement in the post run inflammation around my right knee.

2011 Ironman Coeur D'Alene Race Report by Michael Roth

Pre race events: By January, it was confirmed that my eldest's Grade 10 provincial exams were going to take place on the Thursday and Friday before Coeur D'Alene and the Monday and Tuesday right after. So with some disappointment it was decided my spouse and daughter would not be coming to watch me race. If there was some way of bringing my son I would make it work, he, as any 12 year old would agree felt it was perfectly okay for me leave him alone in the hotel for 13 plus hours on race day. I on the other hand figured that even if he had flown a Cessna over Victoria and a glider around Nanaimo he was not quite ready to hang out by himself in Idaho. Unbeknown to the kids I asked my elder bro to come out from the UK to watch me race and keep Benjamin company, he could also combine a family visit with us afterwards for a week (I doubt he will do that again).

The great thing about racing Coeur d'Alene (CdA) is the weather there is pretty much like the weather in Victoria, so heading out on the Thursday before the race was not a big deal, even with the 2.5-hour wait at the border. Foot note, don't believe those signs the border guys use to let you know the approx crossing times. Twenty minutes to the border is not the same as twenty minutes on a clock.

We arrived in CdA dinner time Thursday and checked into the AmeriTel hotel, a clean and newer hotel located only a five minute drive from the race start. The place included a pool and gym open 24/7 and breakfast in the AM. On race day, the management even opened the kitchen 3 hours early at 4:30AM (a Sunday) to ease the pain. This kind gesture more than made up for the slightly higher than usual premium they charged for our five-day stay.

On Friday, I headed down to the lake for a race time simulated swim (7AM). The water was cool but no worse than Thetis had been a few weeks earlier. There was a slight chop and swimming out from the beach felt like one was being hit by someone holding a pillow, not a big deal but enough to know the water was there. A slightly shorter stroke heading out and a longer glide heading back in. Race registration was easy and well organized, I was in and out in about 20 minutes, so off to the expo. There is something to be said for a huge line up of folks waiting to part with their hard-earned cash for an Mdot item. With so many people in the line up it was easy to avoid shopping. After an early dinner we went on a short drive along part of the bike course, it had been a year since I had ridden the route and I wanted to see some of the middle bike leg which included most of the hilly section. We covered about 20k and I was reminded how long some of the climbs were, nothing too steep just long. After the drive I dropped in on the pre race briefing and made sure I had heard correctly that the run course had been changed. Instead of coming out of T2 and running west for about 800 meters and then going back (east) 800m towards T2 before leaving town, the new route required one to exit T2 and just head east, the 1.6k was tacked onto the far end of the run and now included all of the big hill (both sides) at the far end of the loop.

Saturday was an early morning 20 minute ride and 20 minute run, pack my gear bags, drink extra electrolytes, a lunch time snooze and then off to check in my bike by 2PM. Dinner was at a small family owned local Italian restaurant. Penticton had prepared me well, so I knew to reserve a table at the beginning of the week and thank goodness. Other than local senior citizens, most of the restaurants seemed busy serving athletes and their entourages around 5:30PM.

Race day: Up at 4:30 AM, breakfast in the room (oatmeal, banana, a cup of tea and my 7Systems vitamins) the boys headed down to the breakfast and I had time to make sure everything was where it needed to be. Fluids, special needs and wetsuit. We were off and parked across from the race sight by 5:30. Body marking took five minutes and while my bro dropped off my special needs bags I checked the bike, filled the fluids and put the cliff blocks on the bike. I decided I would bring a cycling top, vest, tri top and arm warmers down to the race site and decide what to wear under the wetsuit once I was on site. The days leading up to the race had been in the high 60's and windy so I was glad to see a fairly calm lake and sunshine, the weather forecast was calling for a high of 75. So it was the tri top and arm

2011 Ironman Coeur D'Alene Race Report by Michael Roth

warmers (don't worry and bike shorts). I had also been loaned an aero helmet (thank you Mr. Ash). I tried it out the day before and figured I could make it work, yes I know what they say about new gear but hey, it was not new to Mr. Ash and I am a sucker for a shiny toy.

I said my goodbyes to the family and headed down to the beach. Having watched the swim start last year I was aware how tightly packed in the swim start was, maybe a third smaller beach area than Canada and with a two-loop course it was going to be packed. In 2010 the folks swimming in my expected time range (1:03 to 1:10) had exited the first loop in a tight pack. I had also observed the area to the left of the marker buoys was way less packed last year and I had planned to swim along the left side only passing to the right if the kayakers forced swimmers inside the turn buoys. While on the beach I found myself standing next to Sam a former Victoria triathlete now living and studying in the states, and her bud Mark. We chatted and passed the usual pre race banter. Soon it was time to face the music. At 7 AM we were off.

Swim: So much for the plan, a few punches to the face, kicks to the chest and I even had someone grab my left hamstring for several strokes (I found rolling over helped relieve the individual of my leg and their death grip) and I ended up staying to the right of the buoys. It was hard to sight and I did not want to rely on the folks ahead of me. I remembered seeing quite a few folks head way off course in 2010, they say there is a slight current in the lake. I also had to stop a few times to let folks move ahead in the swirl of moving bodies. I managed to find the occasional piece of open water interspersed with times where I had swimmers either side of me. I did not try and track whether they were passing me or I them. I tried to focus on even strokes and regular breathing (when I could). It was pretty clear the buoys were not lined up and that one of the turn buoys was way out (and not for the better), I reminded myself that everyone else had to follow the same route so remained focused on keeping myself on target. I exited the water for the first lap in 31:37. Back in the water and around one more time for a second lap of 33:27 for a total swim time of 1:05:05.

Into T1 and the change tent. I knew the water was a tad cold, at the race briefing the night before socks were made an optional item. I had chosen not use mine but decided I would make sure my feet were dry and warm before heading off on the bike. I also figured it was cold when the guy getting changed next to me was in need in assistance getting his gear on as he had no feeling in his arms, there is something to be said for carrying my own thermal layer around with me. I am not one for having a strange guy dress me at the best of times. Out of the tent, on with the sunscreen and off to my bike. T1 was a slightly sleepy nine minutes but I had to hit the porta-potty and was glad to be discharging some of the lake water so soon.

Heading out of T1 I could hear the unmistakable UK voice of my bro and gave him and my son a big wave and smile as I mounted my bike. Rather than have my family wait around for me all day I had given them approx best, normal and worst case scenarios when I hoped to be back in around T1, T2 and the finish and advised them to enjoy the day, if I saw them great but no expectations. I was very glad to see them on the bike twice and again heading out of T2.

The bike: In my prerace meeting with Coach Mike we discussed what my approach was going to be, with the run being unpredictable it was agreed I would go forward as if everything was going to fall into place and that meant not going crazy on the bike, in fact I decided to hold back just a little in the hopes it would not increase the stress on my right quad and knee. I had also decided I was going to do everything I could to enjoy the day. I recalled my last Ironman in 2009 where I had ended the run in a pretty negative place, I also watched racers at CdA in 2010 who had let themselves lose sight of what they were doing out there. I was going to smile my way around the course and thank everyone I could.

2011 Ironman Coeur D'Alene Race Report by Michael Roth

The bike heads out and back along lake Coeur D'Alene and includes one hill climb (same hill as the run), back through town then its north out of town towards Hayden and the rural roads. The ride can best be summed up as 30k of moderate to flat roads followed by 30 k of hills and then back into town for 30 k of flat roads. My first loop was going well, my pace was comfortable and I tried not to get too carried away, I followed my nutrition plan and kept up with the hydration. I am used to stopping once on the bike to pee and was surprised that I had to dismount on four occasions, in retrospect I think it was my body's way of dealing with the increase in core body temp, partly from the warm weather but also the limited ventilation of the aero helmet (to keep the sweat out of my eyes I was also wearing a summer weight toque). When I clued in to the warmer than usual noggin I tried to pour water into the vents but with limited success. I had packed salt tabs and began taking them around the 60k mark. I had a little GI discomfort and kept an eye on my HR. As long as I was below the top of my Zone 3, I would try to drink my fluids (Infinite at 300 calories per bottle per hour). I grabbed bananas at the aid stations and fresh water as needed

I completed my first loop in 2:56:22 and headed back out along the lake to the turn around and special needs bags. I had left a green tea in my special needs bag and was looking forward to something a little different and the associated caffeine. Back out into the netherworld of Hayden. It was around 120k that I felt my right quad start to knot, just a little, but enough to send me warning signals. I kept working hard, tried to maintain the nutrition and fluids. I saw the occasional familiar face out on the bike course (Mr. Boos & Mr. Etcheverry) and watched the km's go by. I even stopped to help a rider in need of an alan key due to a loose saddle (I did not have one but she had a nice smile). My right leg was not getting any better and coming in to T2 for a second lap of 3:20:48 was the best I could do. I doubt I could have gone any harder even if I had wanted to for a total bike time of 6:18:08.

T2 was a sub 7 minute affair with a change from bike to run shorts, fresh socks, right knee support and shoes. I also decided to wear my running belt with one bottle, I did not want to get caught between aid stations without fluids or a gel, salt tabs (and the kitchen sink). I had also left a spare knee support in my special needs just in case the left knee started acting up. As I left T2 I am pretty sure I heard my bro say "run fat boy run" or something to that effect. But I won't hold that against him until he is standing next to me at some European tri race and then we will see.

Run: I planned to run 10 and 1's even if that meant also walking outside of the aid stations. I would try and take a gel every other aid station and water in between. I had trained on my long runs by eating powerbars and knew I needed to fuel the engine. I was going to wait until the second loop of the run before taking in any coke. At Canada in 2009 I bonked pretty early on the run and think that then taking in coke during the first half of that run may have contributed to my downfall. I did not want to make the same mistake this time. So off I went, within the two km my left hamstring seized, followed shortly after by my right hamstring. Each time I stopped momentarily, not that I had an option, stretched and tried walking until the muscles relaxed enough for me to start running again. After the first few km, I am glad to say this did not happen again. At about the third aid station I grabbed a power bar, took one small bite and knew that I would not be doing that again. Oh well, so much for eating during my training runs, when the body and mind make a decision that's that.

By about 16k I could feel my right leg was still not very happy, I knew I was close to pushing it to the edge and was ready to air on the side of caution. Now for some that would have meant not racing at all, for others it may have meant not starting the run, for me I needed to see the finish line. A friend once told me you only quit when you are too injured to finish (at least as an age grouper) and I was not at that point. I also know I want to be able to run, bike and swim for many years to come (I hope). So, this is where I drew the line and by 18 km the walking began. As I neared the turnaround for the second loop I ran and walked through town, the excellent crowd support helped and the street party atmosphere (and actual house parties I passed along the way looked very inviting) helped keep my occupied. As my run turned

2011 Ironman Coeur D'Alene Race Report by Michael Roth

into a permanent walk/forced march I interacted with the folks around more and more but I did not stop. I also decided I would try to find another like-minded sole out on the course who might help to keep me going.

Somewhere around 23 km I caught up with Jeff in the 40-44 age group. We started to talk and I invited him to walk with me, he took me up on my offer and increased his pace. It turned out Jeff was on his first loop. He is a cop from the Seattle area, this was not his first Ironman but several months earlier he had pulled over a drunk driver, as he stepped up to the car the driver sped off and knocked Jeff down, he suffered several broken bones and was severely shaken. Jeff pointed out the driver spent six months in jail and was released before Jeff had even had his last surgery. So, here as a guy who had a reason to walk and was not even sure he was going to make the first run cut off (because the swim, bike and run are two loops there are a number of cut-offs the racers have to make). I told Jeff not worry and told him he had plenty of time, we walked as fast we could and kept moving forward. I kept a close eye on the time and reassured Jeff he was doing fine. He kept me focused and it helped me to keep up the pace knowing I was helping him. I can also say I knew I would rather be running and I hope not to have to walk that far in a race ever again. As we passed through the aid stations we grabbed soup, water, salty chips and anything else we could but never stopped. There is even a rumour that as Jeff and I passed Gerry Etcheverry, celebrating his finish in one of the race side beer gardens with some Victoria friends and waiting to cheer me on, I may have snagged his beer and taken a small medicinal quota. But I would recommend you don't listen to rumours. As we closed in on town and the sun started to drop lower in the sky I knew I had made it (before dark to boot). I said goodbye to Jeff as he headed towards the turnaround for the beginning of his second loop and advised him we had covered his first loop in 3:20 and he was going to be fine, of course I could not be sure but figured if I said it often enough he would believe it.

I turned the final corner and headed down main street, I could see the finish chute approximately eight hundred meters ahead and for the first time in over three hours I tried to run; I don't know if I was running I guess it depends on who you ask. I crossed the finish line in 13:40:49. Definitely my slowest Ironman to date but still a finish.

An interesting post race observation; while I was on the course longer than my previous two races I consumed on average 4000 fewer calories (10,000 vs 14,000). This would correlate well to my typical caloric use for a 21k run.

After exiting the finish area my family and I headed back to the hotel, we stopped on the way for a cheeseburger, something I started to dream about late in the afternoon. Once back at the hotel I enjoyed the burger and washed it down with a cold Guinness, what a great way to end a good day.

Jeff did finish; in fact, he was the last athlete to cross the finish line before the 17 hour cut off in 16:55:40. We have stayed in contact and he hopes to visit Victoria for a belated honeymoon sometime in the future.

So, I am not sure when my next Ironman will be, maybe it is going to have to wait until I get this leg issue sorted, maybe it's going to have to wait until the kids can drive themselves to their after school activities, or maybe I will just surprise them in the near future. I hear they serve great post race beer in Germany, France and Switzerland.

I have also found this year to very challenging mentally, whether it's the nagging injury, numerous things taking priority over training or just life I do not think this has been a very productive time. Trying to evaluate what has worked and what has not may take some time, it will require a serious look at how I

2011 Ironman Coeur D'Alene Race Report by Michael Roth

apply myself to the training program (or how it applies to me). Maybe it is time to cruise and stop to smell the roses.

Check out a neat video of the 2011 Coeur D'Alene swim start:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K58dnyESr34&feature=player_embedded

If you are a stats nut and like to see the numbers check out this page. Pick your Ironman race, download the excel file and find your athlete's name by their finish time. Be sure to follow the steps to copy and paste the data into sheet two tab: <http://www.slowtwitch.com/enhancedresults/>

Thank you to my coach(s), family and friends for helping me to get to the finish line.

ta ta

Michael Roth