

Relay of Epic Proportions



Inagural Alaska State Troopers Adventure Relay Provides More Than 500 Miles of Challenges to Raise Money for Wish Upon the North Star Charity

For some, it was the steaming piles of bear scat on the trail and a small stretch of white water kayaking that put the “adventure” into the Alaska State Troopers Adventure Relay. For others it was overcoming adversaries like the vertical bike over Hatcher Pass at night or dealing with bicycle mechanical problems in the middle of a leg. However, it’s knowing all the efforts, aches and pains would raise money to help the children and their families facing life-threatening illnesses that made the inaugural relay truly unforgettable.

The approximately 525-mile relay challenged troopers, military, city and federal law enforcement and

corrections officers, retirees, employees and their families to continuously traverse Alaska by running, hiking, mountain biking, water rafting, kayaking and even incorporating a railroad handcar to get from Fairbanks to Seward in four days. Bonds were forged between the participants with every mile and every dollar collected for the Wish Upon The North Star charity. The route was divided into 27 legs, each with its own unique challenge along Alaska’s trails, roadways, railroads, lakes and rivers. According to organizers’ research, ASTAR was the longest non-motorized, continuous endurance relay in the world.

The relay captured the spirit of determination, demonstrated the will to face challenges and symbolized the far greater challenges for those the event benefits. The relay raised more than \$26,000 for WUNS, a charity benefiting Alaskan children with life-threatening illnesses. WUNS board members said the money will allow them to grant five or six wishes for seriously ill children, giving the children and their families a much needed distraction from the constant battles they face daily while dealing with the adversities life has handed them. At the end of the relay, as everyone got together to retell stories of the trials along the trail, WUNS recipient, Andrew Kurka, told the crowd how the organization helped him get back on his feet after an ATV-crash crippled him years ago. Andrew’s story was an inspiration to all who were there.

The relay started with a 10-mile run through Fairbanks at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 4 and traveled



Fairbanks Police Sgt. Eric Jewkes leads a group of bikers along the Parks Highway near the Wasilla-Fishhook Road on Leg No. 13. Following him is soldier Chris Klein, Fairbanks Sgt. Matt Soden, Fairbanks Sgt. Robert Thompson, Palmer Officer Jack Campbell and couple Kurtis and Ginger Schaff of the 6th Engineer Battalion.



Alaska State Trooper Recruit Justin McGinnis waits with the Alaska State Troopers Adventure Relay flag for runners to finish the first leg at the Ester Volunteer Fire Department.



Pictured right, Alaska State Trooper Elondre Johnson, Sgt. Eugene Fowler and Trooper Recruit Justin McGinnis wait for runners to arrive at the first checkpoint in Ester.

down along the Parks Hwy via bike, headed off road at Clear Air Force Station, back to the Parks Highway before diving into the woods for a 10-mile hike up the Coal Creek Trail. Day two started with a 19-mile paddle down the Susitna River to Talkeetna before runners and bikers took over the journey along the roads leading to Hatcher Pass. That night, bikers went over Hatcher Pass and runners went down into Palmer. After a short ride

on a railroad handcar at the Palmer Fairground early Friday morning, bikers cruised down the Glenn Highway among morning commuters. Runners were greeted by a happy crowd after they made the soggy, cross-city run into Alaska State Trooper headquarters on Tudor Road at noon on Friday. From there, hikers hit the 22 miles of trail through Chugach State Park, climbing over Powerline Pass and finishing into Indian. After a bike to



Alaska State Trooper Steve Lantz gives Army Specialist Thomas Wachter a hand as the soldier runs the first leg of the Alaska State Trooper Adventure Relay in Fairbanks on Wednesday.



Fairbanks police officers Jeromey Lindhag, Scott McCumby, Nathan Werner (in back) and Dustin Stonecipher rest their weary feet after an overnight hike over Johnson Pass Trail.



Kathi Young, a crime scene technician in Fairbanks, runs the bike path along the Glenn Highway in Anchorage during the third day of the relay.

Alyeska Resort and up Turnagain Pass, hikers ended the third day of the relay with an overnight jaunt through bear-infested woods on the Johnson Pass Trail. While no one reported seeing a bear, many heard hair-raising roars and saw left over salmon dinners along the trail. The final day of the relay started with a 13-mile kayak trip from Trail Lakes to Kenai Lake. Two runs legs ended the relay when the final participant, Barry Wilson, jogged into Seward at 3:15 p.m. Sgt. Michelyn Manrique of AST's Alaska Bureau of Investigations and First Lt. Aaron



Aaron Anderson and Christopher Rogers of the 6th Engineer Battalion at Fort Richardson run the last leg into Seward.

Anderson of the 6th Engineer Battalion at Fort Richardson ran the last two legs to do 18 consecutive miles by the time they crossed the finishing line.

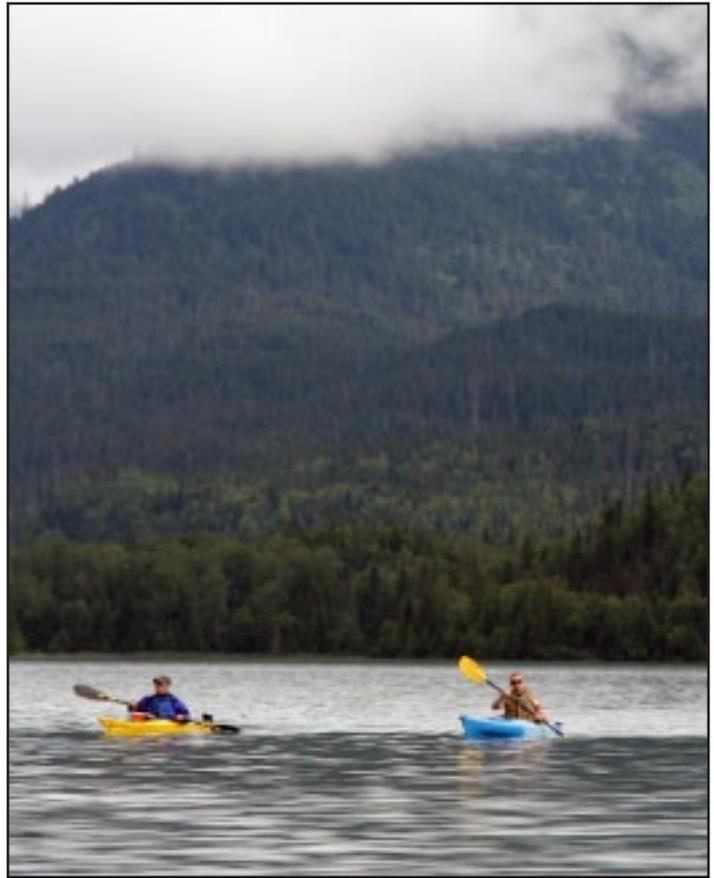
Many bonds were forged during the race as some participants competed against each other, and helped each other to overcome the arduous terrain along the way. The Fairbanks Police Department formed a team that will be used as a model for other teams in the future. Not only did they raise more than \$9,000, they participated in every leg. To do this, many of them pushed themselves to

Ken Acton steers the raft toward the boat landing in Talkeetna at the end of a 38-mile paddle down the Susitna River to Talkeetna. Also in the boat are Dianna Darnell, her son, Michael and Abby Lutt and Jason Fierst from PSG Films who were filming the leg for National Geographic.





Fairbanks Police Sgt. Robert Thompson holds the relay flag while he waits for the signal to start the second leg on Wednesday, Aug. 4.



Pictured at right, Army Lt. Col. Marc Hoffmeister, left, and Fairbanks Police Officer Zachary Sherman kayak Trail Lakes on the Kenai Peninsula on Saturday, Aug. 7.

their physical limits by doing multiple legs. Fairbanks Police Officer Kurt Lockwood tied with Lt. Col. Marc Hoffmeister of the 6th Engineer Battalion for participating in the most legs with seven. Hoffmeister led a team of brave soldiers who compiled a total of 1,460.7 miles between 66 people entered. Anderson ran 55 of the 74 miles of running legs in the relay. However, as he pointed out after compiling his battalion's involvement, the group's participation of running 238.9 miles, biking 684 miles, hiking 302 miles, rafting 190 miles, kayaking 39 miles and pumping a handcart seven miles is "far more impressive than any one person's

achievements."

While the some 140 participants trekked across Alaska, numerous community volunteers cheered them along the way and welcomed the cold and tired participants at the various checkpoints at all hours of the day and night. The relay was a collaborated endeavor of epic proportions in fundraising, logistics and volunteer efforts. Even as participants were starting to rest weary muscles and sleep-deprived organizers were eating burgers at the end celebration in Seward, they were already talking about fundraising and new route challenges for next year's relay.



The Fairbanks Police Department put together a team that had at least one participant in each of the 27-legs of the Alaska State Troopers Adventure Relay from Aug. 4-7. Some participated in numerous legs. Pictured left is a photo of the team before the start in Fairbanks and on the right is the team in Seward after all members finished the relay.