



The 2023 Lost Elephant | Written by Nick Edwards

A 520km single stage fully unsupported bikepacking race out of Cranbrook, BC known for its brutality, long hike-a-bike sections, high mountain passes as well as some hilariously bad bike carries across scree slopes.

July 22nd 6am.

My excitement and nerves are almost unbearable, this moment has been the only thing on my mind for a week now or maybe a month but really the adventure started back in winter when I was riding inside on the stationary bike.

60 or so kindred spirits gather at the start line. There are a lot of laughs and I meet up with my mate Andy Ward, my bike-packing mentor and an expert at these type of adventures. We ride up the front for the first 30 km catching up and getting to know the other riders I will be sharing this journey with.

Although the pace is a little fast I find it almost effortless as we hit the first bike carry after 38 km's. We throw our bikes on our backs, there is lots of hooting and hollering as we march across the scree slopes. I'm now in first place.



A few minutes later I follow Andy into a steep descent with some harsh drainage ditches. Andy almost gets bucked off his bike going through the first one, I follow and do the same which makes me choke on my cliff bar bringing me to a crawl. I get to the bottom of the decent and there is Andy, his jumper ripped up and front wheel snapped in half. This is shattering, after everything he has done to help me prepare for this race his day has been cut short. I feel helpless as he urges me to continue on my own journey. Andy escaped with a broken finger and twisted back.

Now alone I have to reassess. I race at the front for a couple more hours. The air is so thick with smoke from nearby wildfires and the temperature in the high 30's so after about 90km into the ride I decide to slow the pace to try and regenerate some energy. I need to "ride my own race".

130 km's in I roll into the town of Fairmont, it is the only town on the route, therefore the



only chance to stock up on food for the following 390 km's through the mountains. As I get to the supermarket the leaders are leaving. I buy \$80 worth of snacks and shove it into my frame bag before heading to subway to further nourish myself. When the man in front of me decides to order 14 chicken teriyaki subs, instead of racing out the door I take this as a sign from the universe to slow down.

When I leave subway for the hills I'm in 4th place with a very heavy bike.

Now in the hottest part of the day my brain really begins to sizzle. My breath is short, it's time to start the biggest climb of the race up to the Taggart Pass. Like a zombie, I drag my bike up and up. I thought this would be where I would excel

the most but instead I can hardly breath and in my delirium I spend an hour bush bashing with my bike in search of the final stretch of hiking trail leading to the pass. By this point I am so short of breath I am convinced I have Covid and decide that I will quit and call Rach when I get to the Kootenay River at the bottom of the descent. When I finally find the trailhead I collapse into a pile of moss feeling defeated.

It's 8pm when I reach the top. Finally the heat is dissipating, the further the sun falls the more my energy grows. By the time I reach the river I am a new person, my breathing has returned to normal and the thought of quitting feels like a thing of the past.

I stop when I come across fellow racers setting up their tents for the night, it is here that I change into night mode. I chuck the lights on the bike and layer up. After a chat and another 6 inch sandwich I ride into the dark a little nervous as we're in grizzly country, but mainly just stoked on my revived state of mind. I ride hard for 4 hours completing the most overgrown mountain pass of the race under the light of my headlamp. At 2am I grab out my emergency bivvy and sleep for 90 minutes. During this time I am awoken by a rider passing by me yelling "HEY BEAR!". I am now in 5th place.

4am and I'm back on the bike riding singletrack alongside a very deep and beautiful canyon. As the sun rises I feel another release of energy. At 6am I pass a rider asleep on the roadside. I ride a little further encountering my first bear sighting of the race. The day brings serious heat and with it serious hallucinations, mainly "things are not what they are" type hallucinations where tree stumps look like riders and bushes like bears. When buses started appearing and then disappearing with a blink of an eye I knew it was time to take a nap. I crawl under the next bridge and set an alarm for 20 minutes. I black out immediately.

Like a zombie I rise, there is no place to hide as I ride along this moonscape terrain created from wildfires years past with the sun beaming relentlessly. "Just keep moving forward" becomes my new mantra, I walk most of the hills and try to remember why I'm out here.

In one of the river crossings I come across another rider, Alexandra, she is also struggling badly with the heat, not being able to eat and enduring the same very dark place that I am in. We ride together for hours, the conversation is such a delightful break from the voices in my head. We rise out of the darkness together. I don't know this at the time but the 2nd place rider has snapped his handlebars going down a vicious descent taking him out of the race after 360 km's. Alex and I are now in 3rd and 4th place.

At km 400 the sun starts to recede behind the mountains and I experience the same energy as the night before. I slowly pull away from Alex and decide to give absolutely everything. I want to leave nothing out on the course. Afraid of the hallucinations I might experience during the night, I race the sun.

470 km into a 520 km race darkness falls for the second time. The remainder of the ride is singletrack through the forest, my headlamp battery is low and the light is dim. I see people hanging from branches, monsters from Where the Wild Things Are and elephants running at me through the trees. I just keep pedalling but eventually I break, having skipped water refills with the intent of finishing as fast as possible I hit a wall.

5 minutes later I fall asleep on the bike. The last 10 km's was one of the hardest challenges of my life. I arrive at the finish line, an almost empty parking lot, at 1:20am with only Rach there to cheer me in.

“That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever done”.

I finish in 3rd place.

520 km, 9000m elevation in 43 hours and 20 minutes.

It took a while to process this one.

My cup is full.

A huge thanks to Gearhub Sports for hooking me up with my bombproof ride! If you're looking for a bikepacking rig that can handle anything you throw at it and more you can't go past the 2023 Kona Sutra LTD.

