

A few reflections from my experience with this year's race in the rearview. This is a lengthy read.

One: I brought too much food. Without going into detail, I had a gallon Ziploc bag full of bars, beef sticks, Fig Newtons, etc. I had the same set aside as a drop at Mel George's and left it there because I still had enough and more. I ate nothing at Gateway in a 15 minute stay, ate like a pig at M G's in 30 minutes (everyone will tell you not to do that, but it depends on your body. I've had an upset stomach maybe twice in 57 years, so it works for me), but would have been fine if I had not eaten at all. Lesson, you (I, at least) can get by and thrive with less food.

Everything else was perfect. With learnings from the first year I whittled clothing and gear to the safe minimum. What I rode in worked perfectly (and there's no point in telling you what it all was, as it may not have been perfect for you), and when I had to quit I had everything I needed. And not only did I have everything I needed, I knew exactly where it all was located. That's important, as I was not able to get it all for myself. I was able to say, "My parka is in my seat bag, my mittens are in the top of my anything bag on the right fork, with my headlamp right under them." Knowing exact locations of all gear is a habit developed as a backpack and canoe guide, and it served me well. It's essential that you know your gear locations well enough that even if you are in extremis you can accurately direct someone who is trying to help you.

In addition to knowing where everything is, don't complain about required gear or try shave ounces there. I've read the postings questioning whether a -20 bag is really necessary. Usually, it's not, but unusual things happen. Assume they can happen to you. Mine is a -40 bag. Overkill, but when you're suffering that overkill helps. With several broken ribs I was not able to get into my bivy bag. A warmer than necessary sleeping bag with a waterproof outer, laid over the top of my bivy and mattress kept me warm as the snow piled up (well, not really a pile, maybe more of a healthy dusting) and I awaited my snowmobile pick up. The down parka I packed kept me warm and had already started to dry my base layer by the time I got into the bag. By the time the snowmobile arrived I was dry and warm so the 30-45 minute ride to a warm car was fine.

So it's really simple stuff. Bring the right things for an emergency and know where they are located on your bike or sled. It could make a difference.

