

# Smoke Gets In Your Eyes

by John Farrow

**Bang! Ping!**

**Bang! Ping!**

**Bang! Ping!**

**Bang! Ping!**

**Bang! . . . .**

*Damn! Another 50 meters!*

And so it goes in my first biathlon – not a duathlon, which is a run and bike, but a run and shoot. It was like old times -- real old times -- back in Texas as a boy hunting rabbits, although at least here we didn't have to carry the rifle while running through the woods. The last thing anyone wanted was to have a bunch of wild-eyed, semi-trained idiots wearing what might appear at first glance to be their underwear running around in the Montana wilderness armed with rifles. All the local Freeman would think they were under attack by a horde of perverts and that the Judgment Day they are awaiting had finally arrived.

On the other hand, there are bears out there and we didn't have any bear bells. As if a tiny little .22-caliber rifle is going to be any protection against a bear, but it might at least be a comforting, albeit last, thought. Bears eat those things for breakfast or give them to the cubs to play with.

In fact, when a group of hot shots on the front lines of the forest fires in the southwestern part of the state found a newly-orphaned Smokey the Bear cub, he wanted to go back for his favorite .22.

I was actually hoping that I wouldn't have to employ my esoteric knowledge of bear poop for identification purposes out on the trail. An old Alaska hand explained it to me prior to a run outside of Fairbanks one time.

He said that the difference between black bear poop and grizzly bear poop was that black bear poop would have a lot of berries in it. Grizzly bear poop, on the other hand, would have both berries and bear bells in it. Not a comforting thought.

The biathlon is an interesting concept for a race, however. Run a mile on trails outside of

Missoula and then enter a shooting range where you are handed a rifle with five shells in the clip. The first time around, you shoot at five targets from a prone position. Each target missed results in a 50-meter penalty lap around a separate track. Then it's out onto the regular trail for another mile jaunt through the woods.

After the second mile, you re-enter the shooting range for five more shots at five targets from a standing position. And let me tell you, boys and girls, shooting from the standing position is hard enough considering the fact that you have to remain absolutely still while trying to aim a heavy rifle through a powerful scope at a tiny target 50 meters away. Then add to that the fact that you've just run two miles (or more), you're breathing heavily and your every heartbeat creates enough movement in the eyepiece of the scope to mess up your aim, and frankly, a lot of other things that you could be doing just then quickly come to mind. Like lounging around the pool at the motel sipping a beer.

Anyway, after shooting from the standing position and running your penalty laps (i.e. 250 meters), there is a final mile lap to run plus 100-something meters to complete the 5k. Oh, the things we do in the name of sport and fitness. And this with the air hazy from the smoke of the worst forest fires in 50 years.

Speaking of fitness, the surgeon general has issued a warning that heavy exercise in the smokey skies of western Montana can result in headache, lightheadedness and nausea as well as eye irritation. Which is the main reason this race was canceled in the first place. I just thought it would be interesting to imagine what it might have been like had I actually been able to do it.□

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