

Father and twin sons spend Father's Day eve relaying Moraine on water and on foot



By Jeff Doner

The Oak Ridges Trail Association (ORTA) had a fantastic showing for its eighth annual Moraine Adventure Relay Race, with 35 teams and hundreds of participants in this year's competition last weekend.

The event itself is no small feat, as participants gave it their all across 160km of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail from Rice Lake [Cobourg], down to King City by canoe, on foot and by bicycle.

Mike Bender of Aurora was the very first participant to cross the finish line at Seneca College's King Campus on Dufferin Street.

Bender was with the team from the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, which included his 18-year-old twin sons, Eric and Neil.

The team finished first with a time of nine hours and 24 minutes, with Bender starting out the first leg in the canoe, running 10.5 km in between and finishing the last leg from Sheppard's Bush in Aurora to Seneca King Campus on foot.

"The team just inspired me so much. They heard that the canoe got swamped and they did their personal best on each leg. I was following them along, so they inspired me," Bender said.

Their team was initially behind the pack after Bender and his teammate, John Liversage of Stouffville, swamped their canoe early on.

"When we first arrived up there with our canoe, we looked out and saw that it was very wavy out on the water. We knew it was going to be rough," Bender recalled. "There were whitecaps out on the lake and right from the start everyone was battling. With the whitecaps, we were just rolling up and down and when we came down, the next wave would just fill us in with water. We got probably a third of the way into it when we realized we had just taken on too much water."

They tried to get to shore in order to empty their canoe, but it was too little too late, as it went under, leaving them to swim for about 20 minutes until help came.

That holdup left the team feeling like they wouldn't be able to catch up to get back ahead.

?No, I thought we were going to have a great race, but I didn't think we would be able to win it,? Bender said. ?We had one cyclist who was the ultimate team member who caught us up and got us into the lead.?

It was the sixth time Bender's team from the Toronto Region Conservation Authority has participated in the relay and he said they look forward to it every year.

?We partner with the Oak Ridges Trail Association to foster the trail and steward the trail and we worked with them to kind of establish the trail in the first place, so it was kind of an honour for us to be participating with such a great organization,? he said with his sons by his side.

This year the relay had teams representing communities from Peel, York, Durham and Northumberland.

The relay is the main fundraiser for the ORTA each year, but the group also has plenty of other hiking and nature events throughout the year.

For more information, visit www.moraineadventure.com