

The Runner's Bucket List: 200 Races to Run Before You Die by Denise Malan

Chapter 23: Get Some Friends Together - Golden Gate Relay, "California's Longest Party."

If you want to win the Golden Gate Relay ("GGR"), you have to be organized.

The Google1 team, made up of workers from the famous technology company who all happen to be former collegiate runners, won the race four consecutive times, from 2007 to 2010. Besides their obvious running chops, they had another advantage: their technical expertise.

"We've run simulations before," team member Eddie Higgins said. "We feed everything into the computer and ask it to formulate every possible runner and leg and see the best possible outcome."

Most teams won't be that advanced, but everyone needs to know their expected finish times. Those must be turned in before the race so the start can be staggered to facilitate the race's most unique feature: all teams pass over the Golden Gate Bridge (the halfway point) around midnight.

Known as "California's longest party," the Relay covers about 200 miles from Calistoga to Santa Cruz, though it has varied from 193 miles to 200 miles depending on small course changes through the years. Its 36 legs vary in difficulty and in distance, from three to eight miles each.

Higgins advises that teams put their best runners on Legs 10 and 11, and then fill in other runners from there. Because each team needs two vans to carry six runners each, the most dependable runners need to be Nos. 1 and 7 so they can be at the van exchanges at the right times. Trusty drivers also help.

"A big part of the logistics is just recruiting people," Higgins said. "You need yourself and 11 other people who are crazy enough to do this."

Bring plenty of sugary food for the team members to nosh on while they're riding in the vans.

"You will eat some pretty disgusting stuff over this race," Higgins said. "You will look back and think, 'Oh my gosh, I didn't think six bananas and some Pop-Tarts and some PowerBars would get me through 24 hours.' Whatever your body is asking for, it's best to just give it to it."

Even with the staggered start that helps everyone finish the first half around the same time, the teams usually get pretty spread out in the second half, with the winners typically coming in between 20 and 21 hours, and the last finishers taking 36 hours or more. So it helps that the relay has a 10-hour after-party with plenty of wine, beer, food, and desserts.

Location: Calistoga to Santa Cruz, California

Date: first weekend in May

Distance: varies from 190 to 200 miles (36 legs of 3 to 8 miles each)

Field Size: 200 teams (12 runners)

Website: www.TheRelay.com

Race Highlights: run the Golden Gate Bridge in the middle of the night; start in wine country and end in gorgeous Santa Cruz