

2013 Expedition Everest Challenge: runDisney Event Review

by Ed Falso, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Saturday, May 4th dawned with overcast skies and steady drizzle at Walt Disney World.

But (magically!) the rain was long gone and skies were clear by the time we arrived at the Animal Kingdom parking lot for the 2013 Expedition Everest Challenge that evening. It was a great night for a run!

The Expedition is unique among the RunDisney events in that it combines two features: a 5K "adventure run" plus a form of scavenger hunt that tests your ability to solve various puzzles. Another unique feature is that runners may elect to compete individually or join together and run as a two-person team.

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□ You start with the 5K run. Then, after crossing the 5k finish line, you receive the first clue and start the puzzle-solving challenge. Your finish time is the total of both your 5K and scavenger hunt times. Your split time for the 5K is also recorded.

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□ The 5K is called an "adventure run" because there are obstacles along the way. They are not difficult or intimidating at all, just a bit of added interest.

This year marked the sixth annual Expedition Everest Challenge, and the third time my wife and I participated.

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□ Our weekend began on Friday afternoon when we picked up our race packets at Champions Stadium at Disney's Wide World of Sports. It was quick and efficient that afternoon. Course talks were also offered to familiarize runners with the event.

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□ Unlike last year, there was no race expo in the Jostens Center. There were just a few vendors selling merchandise in the stadium concourse. Somehow, both my wife and I still managed to find new running apparel that we just absolutely seemed to need!

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□ There were kids' races as well as a family-oriented mini-challenge on Saturday morning. The main Expedition is a night-time event, with a 10:00 pm start time. Transportation is provided from designated Disney Host Resorts. The Host Resorts for 2013 were All-Star Sports, All-Star Movies, All-Star Music, Caribbean Beach and the Animal Kingdom Lodge. You'll want to have a car if

you're not staying at one of the Host Resorts, which was our situation this year.

□ We arrived early for the event... just past 8:00 pm. Traffic was light and we were quickly parked. However, by 8:30 there was a steady, long line of traffic entering the Animal Kingdom lot, and parking took considerably longer. If you will be driving, plan accordingly.

□ We participated as a coed team. That was the biggest category, with 987 teams finishing. Other options were individual male or female runner, or male or female team. There was also an option to participate as a military team. There were many creative team names and lots of fanciful attire, often with a yeti theme!

□ Prior to the start, there was a moment of silence in consideration of sad and tragic events at the Boston Marathon. We also noticed an officer with a police dog patrolling, one visible sign of the added security that will likely be applied to running events around the country in the post-Boston era.

□ There were more separate start waves this year than in 2012... now eight altogether. They are designated by letters A through H. Since the route through Animal Kingdom is often dark, and there is a narrow spot in the course along the sidewalk just before the Animal Kingdom entrance plaza, spreading the runners out more is a good idea.

□ We were in Wave C. The first wave started at 10:00 pm with a burst of smoke from the overhead starting arch. Unlike last year, and to our disappointment, there were no fireworks with the start. Succeeding waves started every six minutes. So we were soon off and running, with our own burst of smoke!

□ From the starting line, the course circled a large portion of parking lot, and took us to the first obstacle, jumping over bales of hay, prior to completing the first mile. Then into and through portions the Animal Kingdom park before running down some backstage roadways, including one behind the Everest mountain. The second obstacle challenge, stepping through tires, was past the two-mile mark.

□ A bit later, a sharp left turn brought us quickly to the three-mile mark and on to the edge of the parking lot for the final crawl-under obstacle and the 5K finish. Time to start the scavenger hunt!

□ Event personnel handed us a card with the first clue. We solved it and proceeded to the first checkpoint. If you recite the correct answer, you receive the next clue, and so on. Checkpoints were at various locations

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around the Animal Kingdom.

□ We needed to solve four puzzles, and then a fifth and last clue required us to use the first four answers to come up with the final solution. While we were able to solve the first four clues quickly, we found the last puzzle to be quite challenging. But eventually we had the answer, allowing entry into the chute leading up to the finish line back in the parking lot.

□ We were done! An enjoyable run and we were rewarded with an elaborate finisher medal. Altogether, almost 4,300 runners completed the Expedition this year.

□ The awards ceremony and post-event party took place in the Dinoland area of the Animal Kingdom park. There was a DJ providing music, and photo opportunities with Mickey, Minnie, and other characters. In addition, Expedition Everest, Kali River Rapids, and the entire Dinoland area, including Dinosaur, were all open. We made sure to visit the Yeti by taking a nighttime ride on Everest!

□ If you are looking for a running event that is appealing and appropriate for a wide range of participants, the Expedition Everest Challenge is worth your consideration. While there is a pacing requirement, this is an excellent event for the novice runner, because it offers Disney touches along with the combination of a flat run and an interesting scavenger hunt. Plus, most people can walk and still meet the pace cutoff. Just remember that the scavenger hunt will add another 1 1/2 to 2 miles to the 5K distance you need to cover. And it's no less enjoyable for the experienced runner. The scavenger hunt provides added interest and challenge for the run, and the post race rides and party offer some late night fun. Plus, it's nice to be able to run as a team if you want to directly share the experience. We really enjoyed the 2013 Expedition Everest Challenge. We plan to return next year

About The Author: Ed is a Disney fan and has been participating in RunDisney events for two years now. Next on his schedule is the Dumbo Double Dare in Disneyland, CA, to be held Saturday & Sunday of Labor Day weekend.

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