

February 2021

The Midwest's Aerobic Recreation Magazine

silent

SPORTS

Return
of the
BIRKIE
Issue!



www.silentsportsmagazine.com



CRUSH PROOF 2020

[TOP] A beautiful morning to crush comfort zones. Crushers have to stop at checkpoints, scenic like this one, and take a selfie - required! **[BOTTOM]** Yes this is the trail, courtesy of Todd Poquette. Participants learned the difference between being interested in versus committed to crushing it early on.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TODD POQUETTE.

Shane Stuard Versus Todd Poquette's Great, Finger-Salutin' UP Gravel

By Chris Schotz

Something going wrong is to be expected on a trip to Marquette for one of the events Todd Poquette hosts with the 906 Adventure Team. He's made that town the calamity capital of the Midwest. But no one whines about it; riders by the hundreds sign up for the adversity. Poquette makes no secret that he's out to make their lives miserable, greeting them with a "Blame Todd" sign on a heinous Marji Gesick rock formation or "You paid . . . for this?" sign while at the Polar Roll. The Pied Piper of abuse lures us out of town beyond comfort zone city limits to events at our mental and physical edge. The humble tin cups and wooden chips awarded at the finish symbolize that you're totally alive and may never look at the follies of life the same way again.

Shane Stuard has seen Poquette's tricks before, starting with event registrations that turn into a cruel game. He knows Marji tokens could be anywhere, early or late in the course, sometimes out of order. Soaking wet at Marji mile 99 last year, Stuard found his GPX track sending him straight up the world's largest gemstone to a sign stating to the effect of: "No tokens here. Now go back down and finish the race." Stuard finished that Marji as dawn approached, despite sharing the beam of his light with another racer as they mostly walked through downpours on the treacherous final miles through Suicide Bowl. That winter, he finished the Polar Roll despite starting two minutes late, thankful the 30 miles of snow held up. The year before had turned into the infamous Polar Stroll, where the vast majority of racers walked the vast majority of miles; Stuard probably would have made it. He's a humble racer and he does not quit.

Finishing the Marji in September and the Polar Roll in February earned Stuard two thorns in Poquette's Triple Crown, which reserves a permanent seat in the "Hall of Pain." In 2020, he faced the



Stuard taking the required selfie at one of the Todd Poquette checkpoints, granting stunning vistas in exchange for pain.

toughest challenge in the toughest year. When the Crusher was launched the year before, it was a 225-mile event, stretching to 235 miles from Copper Harbor to Marquette over the collection of surfaces including rocky truck roads and sandy ATV trails, which Poquette merely dubbed: "Enhanced Gravel." That event was held on a single day with a shuttlebus and stops in a few towns to resupply. With plenty of company out there, we felt supported in our unsupported adventure. It still took me until 3 AM to finish in 2019.

2020 would be another story for Stuard. We may look back one day and wonder if the whole year was virtual, as if we'd dreamed the whole twelve months. COVID mitigation would not allow racers to sit shoulder-to-shoulder on a two-hour school bus ride. The 225-mile race would follow a 250-mile loop through the most remote crannies of the UP, with a single dose of light pollution at L'Anse. No single race day. No organized support. No trailer of food parked at the Yellow Dog River ford. Riders would have to filter or treat their own

water from the river because there was nothing out there.

Stuard drove four hours to Marquette for an early start at the Crusher on what would have been race day. As the July sun rose, he knew he wasn't going to be alone. Many had heard rumors that 2020 would require climbing a rocky prominence called the Hogsback a few miles in. All were in hurry to beat the forecasted massive storms, so a long line of riders formed to hoist their bikes up the numerous ledges to the bare summit with dramatic views of Lake Superior

EXPLORE HAYWARD!

With miles of trails for cross-country skiing, hiking, and road or off-road bicycling, this area is buzzing with activity!

Hayward Area
CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE

Plan your next adventure at
haywardareachamber.com

The Washburn Inn

ON THE LAKE IN WASHBURN, WI SURROUNDED BY BIKING, HIKING AND SKIING
www.washburninn.com 715-373-5671



Crossing the mouth of the Huron 112-miles into the Crusher.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TODD POQUETTE.

and the approaching lightning.

Rain doesn't usually bother Stuard. I'd seen him when a storm front rolled into the Jack Lake WEMS race years ago. When the rain started, I was running behind Jon Lester, who had just finished second in the 4,300-mile Trans-Am race the year before. I'd had enough, but Lester wondered aloud whether one more lap would be enough to seal his win. That's when Stuard came splashing out of the woods. I pointed at him and told

Lester, "That guy is not going to quit no matter what." Lester and I loaded our bikes while Stuard kept going through sustained downpours until the organizers had to shut down the race.

That rainstorm was no problem, but standing atop the Hogsback just as the Crusher storm hit full voltage was spine-tingling to say the least. "Butt-puckering," as Stuard put it.

Riders formed a bucket-brigade, lowering bikes down the cascading

ledges. Did this explain why Poquette put snorkels on the required gear list? Stuard's glasses fogged to a point where he had to follow the blinking light ahead of him while sliding down the rock. Rains finally stopped in time for the heat to go blast-furnace, so Stuard felt blessed by the cool waters of the artesian spigot at the 40-mile selfie checkpoint. Thirty miles later, he was taunted by the numerous false summits of Mount Arvon, Michigan's highest point, crowned by the baby-blue mailbox that Stuard would still be cursing weeks later. He rewarded himself with the Boulder Grill burrito he had packed and proceeded down the mountain toward the Huron River ford on the shores of Lake Superior. Another major storm was rolling in and ready to strike hard at night. With no turning back, he kept pedaling towards L'Anse, hoping to reach shelter before it was too late. He might have made it, but instead took advantage of the kindness of strangers who happened to be driving to Marquette. Early the next morning, he drove back into the wild and found roads blocked by toppled giant trees. Some riders had continued, but Stuard didn't regret his early exit at mile 115.

I wasn't too surprised when he made the drive back to Marquette three weeks later. Stuard is often the one doing an extra lap at the end of a group ride. We thought we'd lost him once on a bike-pack through the Nicolet in June until he rolled up with a 6-pack of IPA he'd fetched from Laona 20 miles out of the way. Strategy for the Crusher do-over was to start in the late afternoon so he would repeat familiar ground in the dark. That plan threw off his sleep schedule and put him on the road at the hottest time of day. He pulled the plug at 3 AM, back at the Mount Arvon mailbox.

If mounting defeats discouraged Stuard, he wouldn't be a fan of the Miami Dolphins. Six weeks after his first attempt, he was back to crush the Crusher with a group he'd met from the Facebook community. Feeling strong, he pedaled his Trek Stache's 29 by 3 tires as though they floated over the sand. The required gear list included a spare derailleur hanger, zip ties, and a roll of tape, but not the tiny dropout

nut that cracked on the first rough truck road. Stuard's wheel wobbled against the frame and his shifting fell apart. He made it to that accursed mailbox once more. His three attempts had totaled 250 miles of riding, not to mention the 24 hours of driving. He hates quitting, and quitting three times is hard to bounce back from.

We all thought he was done, but it only took Stuard three more weeks to get in the mood to, as he decried, "Accomplish one damn thing in 2020." He found a couple of fun companions on Facebook and his loyal friend, Paul Kiehne, drove the sag wagon. There would be no overheating on this ride. Stuard started with a mild cough that would not give up as temperatures dropped to 30 degrees. This time he had every spare part he could think of until potential disaster struck at 4 AM.

While releasing an evening fart, he had the terrifying sensation that he had sharted himself. Further examination thankfully revealed a preponderance of Chamois Butt'r was all that filled his shorts.

He dodged the numerous obstacles on the goat path called Mosquito Gulch in daylight, and set off for the elusive final checkpoint which is a small brown sign bearing the race logo at Chunky Summit. Poquette was asking for a middle finger when he hid that camouflaged selfie spot on the back of a tree. Stuard presented said finger and found the finish. He'd taken so many trips to Marquette that Strava had named him Local Legend on a few segments. It had taken a case of bilateral pneumonia to



The welcoming sign at the Crusher's Final checkpoint: Chunky Summit. Poquette is just asking for the single-finger review. Stuard obliged (cropped out per industry standards) and found the finish. SELFIE BY SHANE STUARD.

earn that last thorn in the triple crown, likely with the longest elapsed time, he suspects.

I'm sure Stuard will soon forget how bad that hurt and get back to doing dumb things again. The North Country has a lifetime of challenges for him,

pretty places you won't find on the map. In October, Poquette completed a 1000-mile circumnavigation of the UP by the roughest route he could find. He plans to publish the route for all to, in the most Poquette-able way: "Enjoy."

WHETHER YOU RIDE, RACE, COACH OR PROMOTE, We've got you COVERED! SILENTSPORTSINSURANCE.COM

bike clubs • bike shops • bike rentals • road bike races • bike tours
mtn bike races • camps & clinics • coaches • bike trials • 5K, 10K runs
adventure races • triathlons • duathlons • obstacle races • event timing
canoe • kayak • insurance for your bicycleand much, much MORE!

MCKAY
INSURANCE PO BOX 151
AGENCY, INC. Knoxville, IA 50138

CALL OR GO ONLINE

800.942.0283



Adanac

Belts,
harnesses,
sleds &
much more

As featured in
Dec. '20 Issue

ORDER ONLINE AT adanacsleds.com
OR CALL 406-881-2909

**Skijoring,
Dryland
and Dog
Mushing**





**It helps to be
a little bit nuts!**

Black Squirrel Scurry Paddling Triathlon
Starts at Prairie Trails Park, Merrill, WI
Saturday, July 24, 2021 at 8:30 AM
\$65 solo, \$120 tandem or 2-3 person relay
Reduced prices for 19U solo and relays.
Registration increase 7/1

Online registration through Friday, July 23 6:00 PM
Register at www.blackssquirrelscurry.com/registration/
2 mile paddle (kayak, canoe), 17.5 mi. road bike, 5k trail run
More info: www.blackssquirrelscurry.com
Like and follow on FB: Black Squirrel Scurry





