

BEST TARGETS

BEST Targets Shooting Team After Action Report (AAR)

Event: 2017 Mammoth Sniper Challenge
Date: January 6-8, 2017
Location: Rockcastle Shooting Center, Park City, KY
Websites: www.mammothsniperchallenge.com
www.rockcastleshootingcenter.com

Shooter: Chris Andrews
Rifle: GA Precision GAP-10 chambered in .308
Ammo: Federal Gold Medal Match 175 gr SMK
Gear: Vortex PST 6-24x in an Aadland Engineering 1 piece 20 MOA mount, Kahntrol Solutions muzzle brake, Harris Bipod w/Kahntrol Solutions Pod-Mod Adapters, Hawk Hill Custom Spiked Feet & Wiebad bags.

Vasquez boots, Icebreaker merino wool socks and base layers, military polypro layers, Patagonia PCU Level 5 pants, Propper fleece pullover, Wild Things Gear Lightweight Softshell jacket, Icebreaker merino wool neck gaiter and Mechainx Wear 0.5mm High Dexterity, Original Cold Weather & Windproof gloves.

Shooter: Scott Whitehead
Rifle: Stiller Action/BruX Barrel/KRG X-Ray Chassis Rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor by Cloudis Precision
Ammo: 6.5 Creedmoor Handloads. Berger 140 Hybrids, 43.0gr H4350, Lots R10e
Gear: Vortex Razor AMG 6-24x, Vortex Precision Rings, Harris BiPod w/Kahntrol Pod-Mods & Wiebad bags.

Asolo boots, WrightSock double-layer anti-blisters socks, Patagonia Capilene baselayers, PCU Level 2 Waffle Fleece, Patagonia PCU Level 5 pants, Propper fleece pullover, Wild Things Gear Lightweight Softshell jacket and Mechanix Wear Original Cold Weather gloves.

Facility Notes

The Rockcastle Shooting Center located in Park City, KY continues to be an awesome venue for the Mammoth Sniper Challenge. We shot our first ever precision rifle event here three years ago, the 2014 Mammoth Sniper Challenge, and going back always reminds us of how great the facility is. This year we got to see the many hiking trails on the property that we had never seen before. Although it's not a Facility Note it's key to mention here the weather forecast for the weekend included temperatures no higher than 25° and the chance of snow on every day. It was cold, very cold.

Event Format

This year the Open division that we had shot in for the last three events was eliminated and the 66 two person teams were divided into two divisions: Regular and Tough Man. Each division shot the same ten stages. The Regular teams started and ended each day at the resort, ate in the restaurant and slept in a bed. Tough Man teams left the resort on Friday morning and hiked, shot and camped out until the event ended Sunday afternoon. For the last three years in the old Open division we drove from stage to stage. This year we were required to hike roughly 10 miles a day for three days. Hikes ranged from 1.5 to 3.5 miles each. The Regular teams were required to keep a 22 min/mi pace while the Tough Man teams had to hold a 19 min/mile pace. If a team failed to finish a hike in the allotted time they dropped out of the scoring system at that point. In last year's AAR we wrote "Although the Tough Man divisions sound like an awesome challenge we haven't yet stepped up to it ... and may not ever". This year Joe Harris forced our hand. Thanks Joe.

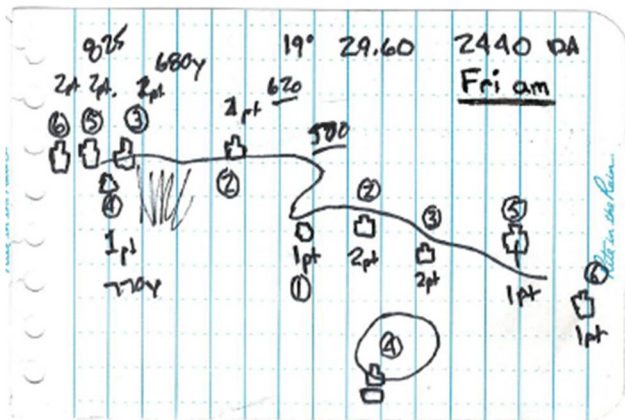
Teams were grouped into Squads of 11 two person teams. We were assigned to Squad 2. Each Squad had a Range Officer that led the group from stage to stage throughout the weekend. At each stage, another Range Officer delivered the stage briefing, answered any questions and kept score for each team. A Stage Spotter was assigned to each stage to call hits on targets. Squads of teams from both divisions rotated around the complex for three days to complete all the stages. Because of the large rotation some squads shoot some stages on different days or at different times than others but this is just a consequence of being such a large match. Scores were only posted at the end of the event Sunday.

On the day before the match, we got to the facility in time to zero and chrono our rifles, meet some friends, do a final gear check and in general shake things down. We knew we were off to a good start as our zeroing went well and while on the zero range we found two pennies next to each other – both heads up. That was a sign. We each took one and carried them in our packs for the rest of the weekend.

DAY 1

We were warned by Joe Harris at the 7:15 am Friday match briefing that this was a tough match and that half of the teams wouldn't make it to the end. Joe instructed everyone to pay attention to the details of the stage briefs and to ask any questions in the 5-minute Q&A time after the briefing. This was important as the stage briefings contained information that many missed. Range Officers were instructed to not help any team with pointers or suggestions during a stage. Although this can be frustrating it was fair and equal for everyone. Unlike some timed shooting events the time is not a factor in the scoring. Only hits matter. After each stage, we had to sign a score sheet to confirm our stage score. After the briefing, we broke up into squads and met at "The Rock" to start our first hike of the day. It was 19° and the sun had just come up.

After counting down to the start, we were off and hiking. Our first hike of the day was 3.2 miles from the resort to the back of Thunder Valley where we would shoot two stages. We were surprised at how many teams took off running since we knew we had been training at a 16-17 min/mi pace and we all knew we were going to have to do this for 3 days. 1.5 miles into this first hike we caught and passed many of the teams that took off running. It was going to be a long weekend.



The first stage we arrived at was Stage 11, PIG SADDLE. Teams waited in a holding area before getting on deck. At the start of the 8-minute clock we had to move 10 yards and climb over a large tree limb roughly 6 feet off the ground. All our gear had to pass over this limb. There was a designated shooting area that was a tight fit for two prone shooters. No ranges were given - we had to range all the targets with our LRF. The primary shooter had to shoot an octagon in the center of the target array at 580 yards and then (5) torsos to the left ranging from 620 to 825 yards. Two torsos must have been engaged off of stage supplied tripod and pig saddle. After the primary shooter engaged all his targets the secondary shooter had to start at the same octagon target and work on (5) torsos to the right ranging from 500 to 700 yards.

Chris – Because we had to wait almost an hour to shoot this stage I got quite cold – cold enough to have shakes and shivers and to wonder what we were doing out here. Once we started strategizing our plan some of this went away. Our plan was for Scott to score on his first four targets and then to throw two shots off the tripod so that I could get to work on my targets. The tripod and hog saddle were left loose and unadjusted for us and we didn't think the points would be worth the waste of time it would take to set it up. Our plan worked well as we scored 10 points here – nearly a stage high score.

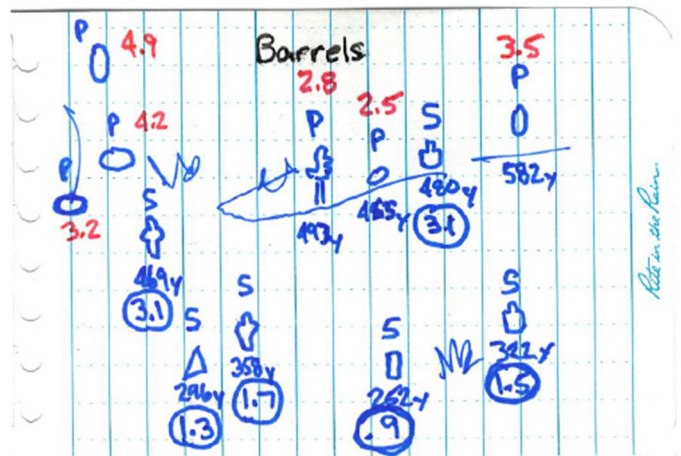
Scott – This was going to be a fairly straight-forward stage but it was the coldest I'd be all weekend while we were waiting to shoot. The fact that we shot last only made that worse. My toes were especially cold but once we got going I never thought about that again. At Mammoth several years ago we learned the importance of setting realistic goals for a stage and this was a good example of that. If you fiddled with that tripod there was no way you were going to get all your shots off. I connected with all four of my targets, threw two shots into the dirt off the tripod, and passed off to Chris. Although it seemed pretty still, I was holding well off right edge on my farther impacts.

After a short 1.3 mile hike we shot our SECOND Stage. Since we didn't write down the name we'll call it SECOND. This was an 8-minute stage that was run in two parts. First the team had to move/roll a large drainage pipe into a position about 20 yards away then the secondary shooter had to engage (6) very small targets at 293, 334, 392, 436, 503 & 514 yards from inside this pipe. After hitting all (6) targets OR calling "TIME" the clock stopped and the remaining time was saved for the primary shooter. We then moved to a staging area not far away for the second half of the stage. To finish the stage, and with only the time remaining from the first half, both team members and all their gear had to move into a small SUV and the primary shooter had to engage (6) very small targets at 392, 436, 503, 514, 587 & 658 yards.

Chris – We thought we had a good technique to move the tube but after the fact we realized we could have done better. It was difficult to get a stable position inside the curved surface of the cold, slippery tube but I hit all (6) targets including a 1" W x 12" T wind strip at 392 yards. I left Scott 4:15 to use. This was enough time and we ended up cleaning this stage.

Scott – For the primary half of this stage we needed to climb into the back of a small SUV and shoot out of the open rear glass. The spotter also had to be inside the car making spotting tough and making "stillness" super-important! I rested the rifle on the edge of the rear window frame, hugged my pack for rear support, and connected with every one of our targets. We cleaned this stage, and it felt GREAT!

After hiking 2.8 miles to the Red Barn we shot our final Stage of the day, BARRELS. This was a typical Mammoth Sniper Challenge pain in the ass stage and it killed us. At the start of the 8-minute time each of us had to roll a large cable spool 10-15 yards past a finish line while carrying all of our gear. After getting the spools in position we had to take turns shooting and spotting from on top of four plastic barrels laid on their side. There were (6) targets for the secondary shooter ranging from 252 to 480 yards and (6) different targets for the primary shooter at longer distances. No gear could touch anything except the blue barrels. And it was cold, VERY cold ... and snowing.



Chris – I struggled bad here. My GAP-10 had feeding and cycling issues in the super cold weather and the shooting position I chose was awful. Some of my feeding issues may have been cause by resting my rifle on the magazine and I know late in the day I was cold and tired. Fortunately, Scott scored one hit here which kept us from zeroing the stage.

Scott – This was an outrageously difficult position. Don't get me wrong – I love challenges like this one but this was HARD. I tried to lay down but after placing the rifle on the front barrel there was very little support for my body and it simply was not stable enough to make consistent shots and corrections. Several of the targets I was shooting at were UKD, and had to be "mil'ed" before the stage which just added to the uncertainty. It was nice shooting at our familiar BEST Targets ovals but with only one hit, I had my tail between my legs after this one. Many teams didn't do any better.

To end the first day, we hiked 2.5 miles back to the resort including the long uphill from the golf course up to the parking lot. We did this particular uphill at the end of every day and it never got any easier. We ate huge dinner and exchanged stories with other teams before repacking our gear and passing out early. Step off time Saturday morning was 5:00 am.

DAY 2

Saturday morning, we met at "The Rock" right before 5:00 am. It was dark and 10° when we started our hike of 3.2 miles back to Thunder Valley. We did this hike Friday so we knew what to expect but it was cold and dark this morning. Fewer teams started off running today and before we started we learned that two teams from our squad had dropped out.



The first stage we shot Saturday morning was THE HIDE. This was an 8-minute stage. In addition to being a LRF stage and having to engage the targets from the hide we both first had to walk across a roughly 25' long, 3" wide nylon strap stretched six feet above the ground between two trees. All of our gear and packs went with us while we used a cable above as a hand hold.

Chris – The crossing of the nylon strap wasn't difficult but it did eat a little time. The position in the hide was pretty tight but we have a good system for ranging targets, logging the distances and shooting as a team. There's always a little bipod adjusting and wrangling to do when shooting from a hide but I think we executed this stage well. The primary shooter's targets ranged from 677 to 1055 yards and the secondary shooter's targets were all closer than that.

Scott – We both did pretty well here, but I was frustrated at missing the most distant target – a large BEST Targets oval at about 1000 yards. Holding bottom right corner, I still went high left.

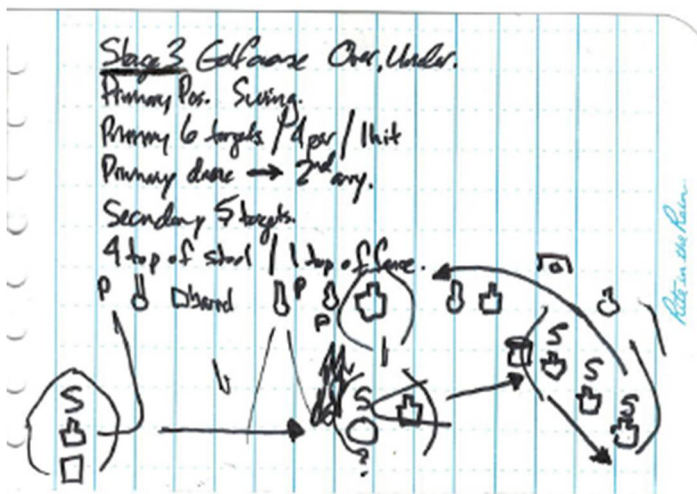
After shooting THE HIDE we set off on what we heard was to be our most difficult hike of the event. We were headed up to the top of the hill where we'd be shooting across what's known as "The Valley". Although this hike was only 2.1 miles the last several hundred years were nearly straight up vertical to the staging area for the next stage THE BLIND STAGE.

The BLIND STAGE was exactly as advertised. This was an 8-minute stage. We were told that there were (2) sets of (4) targets that could be seen from the shooting positions – one for the primary and one for the secondary shooters. The primary shooter's targets were 889 yards out and they were (4) BEST Targets ovals in decreasing size and increasing point values. The secondary shooter's targets were 567 yards out and they were (3) circles and (1) torso in decreasing size and increasing point values. Each shooter was allowed (16) rounds to score as many points as they could. There were two options here for shooting position. Each shooter could choose to shoot prone OR they could shoot from an alternate shooting position "off of the stump near their shooting area". Hits made from the alternate shooting position counted as double the targets value. One by one teams disappeared over the hill to start their run and we heard shots and some hits but no one got to see the targets or the shooting position(s) until their clock had started.

Chris – Turns out this was the annual "Mammoth Sniper Challenge Points Racking Up Stage" ... and we missed it. Scott and I figured we were both good prone shooters and spotters and there was a lot of wind blowing across the valley so we decided to not worry about the alternate shooting position at all. Scott got into his prone position quickly and scored some hits but I struggled with the spotting scope to get on target and help him. I also failed to start our timer here so we lost track of time. After Scott scored us some points I struggled to find my targets until I turned 90 degrees to my right and spotted them. Not knowing how much time I had left I smoked thru my 16 rounds and scored some hits. When we finished, the scorer told us we had 1:00 left. We could have taken more time and scored better for sure. After we were done shooting we inspected the alternate shooting positions and they both included stumps that were cut off close to the ground with V cuts in the top of them. These would have been easy to use and would have scored us many more points. The eventual winners of the competition Joshua Tibbles and Matt Rooks scored 100 points here – 56 points more than the eventual 2nd place finishers. We scored a mere 21 points here and gave up a lot. Damn.

Scott – I never even looked at the tree stump alternate positions and that was a critical mistake. I was being conservative, and missed an opportunity. We both did. Even with that aside, we did not shoot well on this stage. We struggled with the spotting scope here and we were relatively blind. I recall holding bottom right corner of the targets I was hitting. Hmmm.

Our next hike was 1.9 miles to the golf course. Knowing that the most difficult hike of the event was behind us this hike was short and sweet. By this time, we were pacing ourselves on the hikes to not be the last team to arrive at each stage.



The GOLF COURSE stage included much movement, three shooting positions, laser range finding and many targets. The team had to start in a starting box and then move to the first position while going over, under, over, under, over and under (6) 2"x4"s screwed between trees with all of their gear. The first (primary) shooting position was off a rope swing that was VERY unstable and there were (6) primary targets available. After the primary shooter shot as much as he'd like the team had to move to the next (secondary) shooting position which was off of a wooden spool. There were (5) targets to engage here and then the final (also secondary) shooting position required using a wire fence as a support to engage (1) more target.

Chris – I was very happy with first our team performance and then my personal performance on this stage. Right away we both recognized that this was a secondary shooter

stage. The primary position was VERY unstable and the targets were small and difficult to find. We made a plan going in that if Scott couldn't score quickly we'd move on to my position. We traversed the 2"x4"s with a good, efficient, plan and quicker than anyone else we saw. Scott got in position on the swing and after a few hits said "this is no good, we're outta here" and we were on our way. While Scott was shooting at his first target I was able to range his second and third and then range MY first target as well. When I landed I surprisingly found a stable position on the spool and hit my first target with the first round. I proceeded to hit the next (4) targets as Scott called out their ranges. I moved to the wire fence position and was squared up on the sixth target with my finger on the trigger when time expired – Aaaarrgggh.

Scott – Before the stage started we discussed our plan to get through the 2"x4" obstacles – and that paid off big. We would move over TWO obstacles at a time, handing off gear only every other obstacle, and save a lot of time. I was proud of the plan and it worked perfectly. We also discussed how most of the points were in the hands of the secondary shooter. The primary targets were smaller, harder to find and the position was more difficult so we wanted to make sure we got Chris some quality trigger time on this stage. When I got to the swing, I was actually surprised how stable I was

able to get, and I connected with the first target on my first shot. I think I hit three targets before wasting a few critical seconds looking for a fourth one. When I couldn't find it I called for us to move on and not waste any more time but I had already scored more points than I thought I was going to. Chris shot very well on this stage too – he had a good stable position. I just wish we could have gotten him that last shot – it would have been a buzzer beater. He also struggled find his last target, and that cost us both critical time.

After completing the GOLF COURSE stage we backtracked 1.9 miles up the hill to run the LANXANG TACTICAL stage.

The LANXANG TACTICAL stage involved even more movement, a stage gun and two shooting positions. First the team had to carry (4) military gas cans of water down to the first shooting position. Here the primary shooter had to engage targets 715ish yards out first with (8) rounds off the top of a drainage pipe then, after rotating the pipe 90°, with (8) rounds from out of the inside of the pipe. After the primary shooter was done with that task the secondary shooter had to fire (4) rounds from a Lanxang Tactical stage gun at the same targets then the primary shooter had to do the same. At some point the (4) cans of water had to be returned to their starting position. Finally, the secondary shooter had to flip (6) plates of a dueling tree 266 yards out while shooting off of a wobbly wood tripod AND while loading one round at a time. WOW.



Chris – While trying to catch two teams on this uphill hike I rolled my ankle and had to slow down. This hurt but didn't stop me. We had a flexible plan for this stage depending on how things went in the first few minutes of movement and shooting. We carried the water jugs down and Scott engaged his targets. With our spotting and spotting scope issues I was not able to help much as a spotter. I made two trips carrying the water jugs back and I was prone behind the stage gun when he finished. I shot my (4) rounds here and scored (2) hits. While I heard Scott finish with the stage gun I got in position on the wobbly tripod and hit the dueling tree (4) times. The position was very unstable but I thought we did ok. A few teams forgot steps along the way here or didn't move very efficiently and it cost them shooting time.

Scott – Unfortunately, there were lots of mistakes here. Our plan was good and our movement was good to start. I shot well off the top of the tube, but after we moved it and I climbed

into the tube, I was not aimed at the target well and Chris had already gone to start moving the jugs. Shooting at an angle to the centerline of the tube I had one bipod leg riding up the inside wall of the tube on one side while I was climbing my shoulders up the other side. It was a horrible position. I called for Chris to help but he didn't hear me. I pondered getting out and moving the tube myself but I probably made a poor decision – I decided to tough it out. I lost a lot of time here and we lost points as well. After Chris shot the stage gun I got to it and struggled with the 45* safety costing us even more time. Our final mistake was on the plate rack. The RO had explained that one plate of the dueling tree was missing and that the secondary had to shoot one plate twice. Chris did just that, but what the RO "meant" was that after shooting the five plates that were there he could go back and shoot another one again. Chris had shot the same plate twice in a row and that's not what the RO wanted so he did not get scored for those two hits. ARGH!

After shooting the Lanxang Tactical stage we had a 1.2 mile hike back to the resort. This hike included the long uphill grind from the golf course up to the parking lot. This didn't seem as difficult on the second day. We celebrated with our daily reward – a Toblerone bar – or HALF of one. After a huge buffet dinner (actually several dinners) we were both repacked for Sunday am and sound asleep.



DAY 3

We started our first hike of 2.0 miles to the Red Barn Sunday morning at 6:00 in the dark and at 5°. At least one more team didn't show up Sunday. This was the coldest start of any day we had but the weather promised to warm up quickly.

The first stage we shot at the Red Barn was A-FRAME. This was a 4-minute stage that had (2) shooting positions at (3) targets that were small but inside 500 yards. At the start signal teams had to climb up and over the first A-frame and then take a shooting position on the second A-Frame. Both shooters had to engage targets off the A-frame then they could move to a prone position next to the A-frame and score on the targets again – all in 1/2 the time we've been used to.



Chris – Knowing that the targets were small, shooting off the A-Frame could be difficult, we only had 4 minutes and that we didn't want to give up any points our plan was for me to engage (1) target off the A-frame then move to the prone position while Scott scored on all (3) targets from the A-frame. I would be prone and ready when he finished and by the time I finished with my targets from the prone position he would be ready to do the same. I think we were both surprised when I scored on my first shot at the farthest of the (3) targets from the A-frame but I stuck to the plan and moved down to the prone position. Scott cleaned all (3) targets from the A-Frame and I quickly cleaned all (3) from the prone. When I was done Scott cleaned them all from the prone and we finished with 30 seconds to spare. I probably could have hit the other (2) from the A-frame and maximized our score but we still did well on this stage.

Scott – Climbing over the first A-frame was not tough, but it was interesting when you are also being aware of your 45# pack moving around. Our plan was definitely to be conservative here and since Chris was not confident in his ability from the top of the A-Frame it was probably smart to avoid spending too much time there. Of course he nailed his first shot but we stayed on plan and moved on. I cleaned the targets from the A-frame and we were both clean from the ground. NICE.



After shooting the A-FRAME we moved a couple hundred yards over to the BARRICADE STAGE. This stage included (4) targets to be shot off a typical PRS style barricade. To get to the barricade we had to walk/run thru a zigzag of ribbons going under one at the beginning and the end with all of our gear.

Chris – This stage was fairly simple. I carried both backpacks so Scott could zoom thru the ribbons and get into position sooner. He cleaned the targets quickly and I did the same. Barricade shooting is not my strength but we did well here.

Scott – Other than the movement in the beginning, this had PRS stage written all over it. We both shot well here.

After shooting The BARRICADE STAGE we hiked 2.8 miles to our final stage of the event – BARBED WIRE. For this 8-minute stage, we had to belly crawl about 15 yards thru a crevice under barbed wire to get to the first shooting position where the secondary shooter had to laser range (3) targets then engage them strong side and then weak side. After the secondary shooter tagged out the primary shooter had to do the same thing at (3) different targets from a different position 25 yards away.

Chris – The barbed wire crawl was pretty easy and my shooting position was pretty solid as well. Kahntrol Solutions Pod-Mod Adapters and short leg extensions were key to my shooting position while pointed downhill towards the targets. The first problem I had here though was that the sun was in my eyes once I got in position. Scott did a good job anticipating this and he used the hat that he had packed. As part of my weight savings I had shed my scopes sun shade and I didn't pack a hat. The second problem that I had here was that I'm an awful weak side shooter. I never practice it. After hitting two of the three targets strong side I couldn't even find them in the scope weak side and I tagged out so that Scott could get started. As I expected him to Scott scored well on this stage so I was glad I bailed out when I did.

Scott – Other than the movement through the barbed wire, this was a pretty straight forward stage. I struggle weak side but I still managed to get good hits and scored on my last target right as time expired. Time management, again, was key.

After we all finished the BARBED WIRE stage we posed for the picture of the awesome Squad 2 below. Since we were done shooting some pitched remaining ammo into the woods while others gave it away. We all shared whatever food and drink we had left to lighten our loads and we headed out for the final hike – 3.2 miles back to the resort.

Chris – The excitement of knowing that we were headed to the finish carried me thru most of the last hike but I confess that the last hike up the hill from the golf course to the resort wasn't easy. These hikes were more mental than physical challenges for me but I put one foot in front of the other to the end.

Scott – The last hike was kinda euphoric for me. We were on the home stretch. Just bring it home. I was tired and my feet hurt but we only needed to tough it out for a little longer. Endurance-wise I felt very well prepared for this match and my energy on the last hike was good.

Things Done Well

The biggest strength we showed as a team at this event was once again communication & planning. Scott and I always strategize the movement and execution of the stages well and we plan around each other's strengths. Our rifles, optics, ammo, dope, backpacks, gloves, packing approach, food plan, boots & clothing all did well for us. Our cold weather practice hikes in December prepared us well.

Chris – I made an effort in preparation for the event to try to keep my pack and gear as light as possible by buying a new, smaller, lighter Eberlestock pack, a carbon fiber tripod and a small Vortex spotting scope and by shedding a bunch of gear that I probably wouldn't need. I knew that I would hike better with a lighter pack and I stayed hard on Scott Whitehead to lighten his load as 1) he weighs quite a bit more than me and 2) he always tends to pack more. (In the end he did a better job hiking than I did even with that extra weight). I worked hard to make the GAP-10 .308 gas gun reliable in below freezing conditions and I had only one cycling issue on the first day. This rifle shoots amazingly well and the Kahntol Solutions brake, Vortex optic and Aadland 1 piece scope mount are all awesome.

Scott – I spent a lot of time preparing for this match. My biggest victory is that I hiked almost 35 miles without any sign of a blister. I'm very prone to them normally and the combination of good boots, good socks, some foot prep and BodyGlide worked well. I also have a badly damaged toe from 11 years on the football field (and a little too much MMA) and my Podiatrist did an amazing job of making up some orthotics to protect it from the rigors of the hikes. Clothing-wise I learned a lot over the past 12 months about how to stay warm – but also how to stay light, flexible and still be able to dry off from the sweat of the marches. I did pretty well in this regard.

Shooting wise, my gun ran well. I had good dope on it from a season of PRS shooting. The combination of Stiller action, Hawk Hill barrel and Kahntrol Muzzle break was magic for me. Although I noticed all weekend I was having to aim low right, I brushed it off as coincidence, until a post-match zero check showed that my zero turret screws were loose and my gun was shooting .3 high and .15 left – just like I was having to hold!

Results & Lessons Learned

Out of 66 two person teams we're told we tied for 3rd and were then scored 4th in Regular Division using Stage 2 (The BLIND STAGE) as the tiebreaker. Our shooting score placed us 8th overall across both divisions. We scored division high scores in 4 of the 11 stages. We didn't zero any stages ☺. The three teams that finished ahead of us were a pair of accomplished PRS shooters, a pair a military sniper instructors and the team from the Michigan National Guard that won the 2016 International Sniper Competition at Ft. Benning. 12 Regular and 20 Tough Man teams dropped out and did not finish the event. This was our fourth Mammoth Sniper Challenge in four years and we've come a long, LONG way from where we started. With the addition of the hikes we didn't know what to expect but we were both happy with our finish and disappointed we didn't do better. By all accounts due to the weather and the stages this was the most difficult Mammoth Sniper Challenge to date. We're looking forward to next year already.

At every competition, we learn something new about competition events, our gear, our abilities and our weaknesses.

Chris' takeaways/to do's:

- I need to work more on cardio training for next year. My weight lifting, hot yoga, circuit training and hiking all helped me to get ready but my poor breathing and poor cardio slowed me down. We were never at risk of missing a time cut but I was definitely the slower hiker on the team. I don't want to be that guy.

- Someone needs to invent a good, compact, lightweight spotting scope for this application. Although we shoot Vortex Optics on all of our rifles we borrowed a small Bushnell spotting scope for the event solely on it's weight and size. This zoom adjustment of this spotting scope failed in the cold weather and cost us points.
- We need to be more aggressive with scoring points. For several years now we've taken a more conservative approach when there are opportunities to score more points available and each time it's cost us. Go big.
- Although this has been a strength of ours in the past we struggled with time management. We have always kept our stage timer on the side of our large spotting scope but since we didn't use that spotter this year we failed to get it mounted well to the new, smaller one. It fell off once on Saturday. Because there were so many stages that didn't allow one team member to spot while the other shot we ran many stages without the spotting scope ... and the timer fastened to it. We finished several stages early for fear of running out of time. We need a more flexible plan for how to mount the timer and we need to use it religiously.
- I need to work on my seated position shooting off a pack. This would have been the money maker off the barrels where instead we both tried to shoot prone ...and failed miserably.
- Think and keep thinking. Although I never felt stressed, worried or out of mind the additional stressors of the cold weather hikes and the physical challenges surely contributed to our poor decisions and mental errors. Remaining focused on the task at hand and nothing else is not easy but it's required.

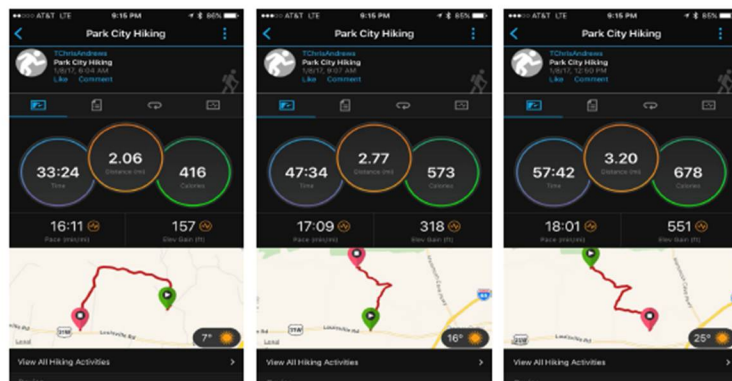
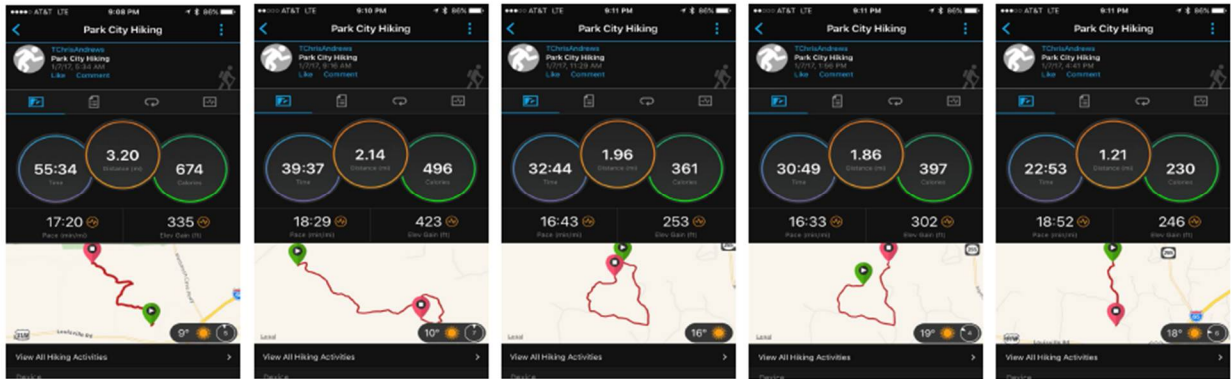
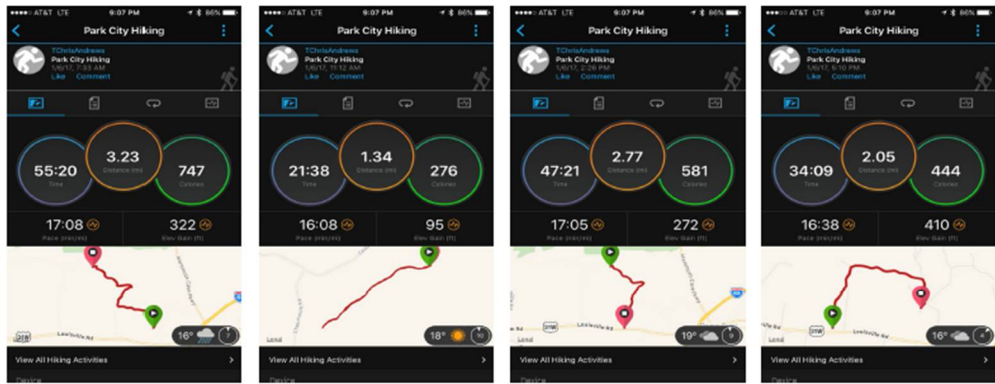
Scott's takeaways/to do's:

- In the severe cold, like single digits – everything starts acting up. Even with Lithium batteries in everything (which are inherently more cold tolerant) we still had every piece of electronics we carried act up at one point or another. Carrying electronics close to your body before you need them is a good trick here. It turns out this also applies to CLIF bars – one can drive nails with a frozen Cliff bar.
- Our practice hikes were invaluable. Understanding just how many layers you need for a hike, compared to standing around in sub-freezing weather, is something many teams did not have a grip on. Our experience with our loaded packs and our comfort level with our trekking poles all helped us tremendously.
- Although there were big successes with my feet (no blisters, and only minor issues with my bad toe), I need to work on how to keep them WARM in these conditions. Standing around they got very cold.
- Expired hand warmers will not work when you expect them to. Buy fresh ones just before the match.
- Pack more Toblerone bars! Seriously, having something to look forward to at the end of each night is key!
- Your hands and lips will crack in this weather. Use moisturizer even when you don't think you need it.
- Gel packs are magic for snacks during the hikes.

Summary

Once again, the Mammoth Sniper Challenge proved to be a great challenge. The addition of the hiking added some elements that we were prepared for and some that we didn't expect – this made it MUCH more challenging. All of the stages this year included some physical challenge which was a new addition. There was much less prone shooting & partner spotting than in years past. We put a lot of time into researching gear and then trimming down our packs. We trained and hiked for months in but we could have done more. We're proud of our finish but know we could have done better. It's fun to look back to a few years ago see the progress we've made. Joe Harris, Marcus Harrison and all the ROs and Scorers did a great job moving squads around efficiently. We know we made a few strategy and shooting errors so we know that we could have scored better. Our gear selections proved to be solid but now that we've done it once we know we could have planned better ... and this is exactly what will have us coming back again next year for more.





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