

EXOTIC NEW IRONMAN VENUES

Da Race'a Da Bums

Ed. note: The world of Ironman expanded dramatically in 1998. Lew Friedland, then the president of World Triathlon Corporation, began an ambitious expansion that saw Ironman races begin in Austria, Lake Placid, Florida, Malaysia and beyond. By 2003 there were seven full-distance events in North America alone—as opposed to the two that existed until 1999.

I know all this because, when I was hired as the managing editor of Ironman.com in 2003, I was responsible for 17 races. Now, in addition to having to try and keep Lee Gruenfeld in check, I am supposed to organize coverage for almost 120 events. (I am not sure which is more difficult).

In 2012, Ironman finally hosted an event in New York City, taking Lee's convincing advice. There were so many challenges in putting on that New York event that, as this book went to print, it wasn't clear that there would be another event in the Big Apple. Lee will no doubt be blamed for that, too.

It's nice to know that the Iron powers that be are always on the lookout for exciting new locations for races, and they've sure come up with some creatively off-the-beaten-path sites.

Of course, one man's exotic is another's ho-hum. Florida? Please. Their state bird is the Early Bird. And as for the championship of the world's #1 toughest endurance event, whose idea was it to put it in the world's #1 tourist destination? That's like having "Survivor" in Disney World. When you step off the plane on your way to an Ironman, you should be dodging rhinos or poison darts, not local women draping flowers around your neck.

Seems to me that if you're out to find new places to hold a notoriously tough sporting event, you should choose notoriously tough places. So as part of our ongoing commitment to see to it that Ironman doesn't get watered down into the athletic equivalent of an Oldsmobile, we'll be bringing you a series of carefully considered suggestions for truly exciting race locations.

Up first? Brooklyn, New York!

First, a little history. Once, dinosaurs roamed Brooklyn's gentle hills. Sixty million years later I was born there. That's pretty much everything of interest worth noting, so on to the race.

The swim would take place in the Gowanus Canal, a storied waterway off Upper New York Bay. This is what an Ironman swim was meant to look like, not some idyllic float along the warmest, bluest waters in the world. The theory when the Gowanus was built in 1869 was that tidal action would keep it flushed despite the lack of an outlet at one end. It didn't work. Instead, every single atom of over 200 industrial pollutants that poured into it in the last 140 years remains exactly where it was first deposited. Only three organic entities have ever emerged from the Gowanus intact enough to be identified. Two of them are under study at Area 51 in Nevada. The third was a guy named Guido, the canal being to mob squealers what the La Brea Tar Pits were to saber-toothed tigers. By the way, the Gowanus has the special distinction of being one of only two waterways in the U.S. that have ever caught fire. Regardless of water temperature on race day, wetsuits will not only be allowed but required. And not just some thin neoprene job, either, but a full industrial dive suit certified to underwater demolition standards including hard shoes and a metal helmet with an air hose to the surface. Volunteers assisting swimmers out of the water will not be working with rubber gloves but will be using remotely operated robotic arms like the ones used in processing fuel for atomic weapons.

In the early 1900s, the borough of Brooklyn was overlaid with so many trolley cars that it was almost impossible to cross a street without having to dodge a few, which is why the local baseball team was called the Dodgers. This tells you a little about what the bike leg of IM-Brooklyn might be like.

In addition to the standard equipment normally associated with a bicycle race, a Kryptonite chrome steel lock is highly recommended. This will be used to secure your bike to the rack while you're off doing the swim and, after T1, may be used as a defensive weapon by those participants who do not wish to add the weight of more formidable small-bore armaments tucked into a spare water bottle cage. Incidentally, the use of quick release wheel skewers will be discouraged. Those are mother's milk to many of the enthusiastic fans who will be lining the streets and who will be recognizable by their portable Mita diamond saws, which are capable of sawing through any kind of locking mechanism short of a chrome steel Kryptonite. Trust me when I tell you that any violation of the "no outside assistance" rule will have consequences never contemplated by USAT. (Old local joke: Q: What did the kid from Brooklyn get for Christmas? A: My bike.)

The borough being surprisingly small, three loops will be required to complete the full 112 miles, affording racers multiple glimpses of unique sights. One of these is Floyd Bennett Field, the airport from which Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan departed for California in 1938 but ended up in Ireland instead. Cyclists are advised not to dwell overly long on this as they will soon discover that all the bike course directional markers have been 'jacked and the volunteer traffic directors thrown into the Gowanus Canal. The good news is that it's likely to be the fastest bike leg in Ironman history. As an old African motto puts it: The slowest antelope has the shortest life. 'Nuff said.

The run portion should be historic. The last time this many people were seen running through Brooklyn was when the security guards at the Canarsie Wal-Mart went on strike. Local law enforcement authorities will

Stumbling Towards the Finish Line

be given special briefings to acquaint them with the low probability that people wearing Speedos, Spandex and wristbands are carrying concealed weapons.

And how's this for a benefit: You'll finally learn where the term "Carbo Party" comes from. Among the unique sights to be savored by runners weaving in and out of inner city neighborhoods are the boyhood homes of former Murder, Inc. members Abe "Kid Twist" Reles and Allie "Tick Tock" Tannenbaum. You'll also get a glimpse of the Half Moon Hotel in Coney Island where Reles performed the incredible feat of heaving himself through a window while his hands were tied, his subsequent death ruled a suicide and therefore rendering him unable to testify against mobster Frankie Carbo. When Carbo was released for lack of evidence, his pals threw a...you guessed it!

And speaking of Coney Island, if you make it through all 26 miles without getting shot, mugged or run down by a psychopathic bicycle messenger, you'll have the distinct pleasure of finishing the World's Most Dangerous Endurance Event at Nathan's, site of the annual International Hot Dog Eating Contest. This is another renowned endurance event except, unlike in Ironman, you get disqualified for throwing up.

A splendid time is guaranteed for all!

NEXT TIME: Ironman Antarctica.