

Cheaha Challenge 2004  
‘That’s what friends are for’  
The Fisher Report  
By Greg “Bulldog” Fisher

If anyone ever asks you if Cheaha is the bear they say it is. You look then straight in the eye and no!!!!, it’s worst. Cheaha 2004 was a little different this year. We had all week the possibility and more like a promise of foul weather come Sunday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, 2004. The anticipation of Cheaha runs for months before this monumental ride. Paul Weaver trains for months before the ride, the rest of us don’t.

Some of us send our registration as soon as we get it in the mail and some us wait till the last minute. Some of ride up together and share special moments together and some ride up solo and enjoy some solitude. Larry Pierson and I started going up together last year. We always go up on Saturday morning. We always stay at the Piedmont Hilton, the weight room at the Piedmont Civic center. We always see Benton Morton who also stays at the civic center.

This year he brought his 16 year old grandson James.

Larry always likes to ride the Chief Ladiga Trail just behind us at the civic center. We ride about 40 miles and have a great time. This is a Rails for Trails project and is a super surface for riding.

The following event, I must warn you, don’t try this at home we are professionals. Ben and Larry are riding on the Ladiga trail and are a little behind James and I who are a little ahead. James and I slow up and we all stop for a moment. At least I thought we had. I look ahead and see what I think is James riding ahead. I ask is that James ahead about 100 yards ahead. I don’t get an answer, but a challenge and a wager of two pitchers of beer from Larry, not one! But two! I figured that Larry didn’t have much confidence in my ability as a cyclist, so I bite and bite hard on the wager. I took off like Godzilla was after me. The specialized bike I was on light and fast. It didn’t take me long too catch up with, Huh, James?

When I got behind his bike, I noticed that it wasn’t James, but another fellow dressed like him.

At that moment I knew I had been had and stopped the bike and turned side ways on the trail and waited to the sound of uncontrollable laughter. Larry assured me that there was no way for me to catch James if he was behind me.” Here’s your sign”. After the ride we got back to civic center and set up camp. We got a nice shower and then changed and went to downtown Anniston to register and see some of the races and see some friends who had come up for the ride. It was a nice spring evening, warm but not hot and a gentle breeze.

We saw Stephanie Wilkins who had a booth set up for the “Ride Of love” for camp Smile A mile” We saw Paul Weaver ,Gary and the always lovely Tricia Falls, Phil Hardee, Dave Casebeer, Daniel DeJarnette and Eric White.

We would stand around and talk for a few minutes and then head for the “Top of the River” Seafood restaurant. This is an absolutely wonderful place to get seafood. Larry encouraged me to get the hungry man special. This thing comes on a huge platter that is as large as a trash can lid. There is enough to feed two people or three. I eat what I can, my friends help me out. After we finish that fabulous meal we head back to Piedmont

Hilton to bed down for the night. I am pretty tired so it doesn't take long for me or anyone else to fall asleep. I would sleep much better than I did last year.

However, at about 4:30 A.M. I am awakened by the sound of what I thought was bad wrap music, as if I thought there was any good wrap music. Only to figure out it was thunder, accompanied by lightening and strong winds. The rain was beating against the window pane really hard.

I thought wouldn't you know it, after such a beautiful day Saturday!

Things wouldn't improve by 5:30 A.M. when I got up. It was raining and pouring and the wind was blowing. Everything was water logged. Folks were standing around with this uncertain look on their face. Folks were watching the weather radar on TV. It was finally decided to postpone the start of the ride 30 minutes to see if maybe the rain would move on out. The rain didn't hardly slack up. All the delay did was made the road wetter.

We finally started at 8 A.M. in the driving rain. With rain jackets on, or at least those that had them, we started for the great mountain with "Sweet Home Alabama" playing in the back ground.

We started the 22 mile trek to the base of the great hill in the rain and a 15 mph cross wind. Stephanie, Pixie and I tried to stay together till we started the first good climb. By that time the weather was a little better, except for the fog, which made it hard to see at times. We didn't know where Pixie was but knew she was close by. We rode up and down those large hills. We encountered up to 1 /1/2 mile steep climbs one after the other. These climbs were unrelenting and tested the strength of your resolve. We are the base of one of steepest climbs and see two fellows get off the bikes and walk. I remember Stephanie saying "I am not getting off the bike". I dig in and make the climb to the third rest stop.

The weather is really bad with the fog and the rain and the wind making it rough to be on a bike or standing there serving the bike riders at the rest stop. They did have their cars to get in if things got too nasty, we didn't.

We would continue the roller coaster torture party till we get to the Famous 3 mile climb. By this time Stephanie is waxing me on the climbs. Her gearing was different, she was stronger and lighter and cuter. I was behind a good hundred yards and couldn't see her for the fog. I just dug in and climbed and climbed. At one point I was thinking I can't do this, I can't do this! Then a voice seems to say, go ahead and quit. Isn't that what you wanted to do all along? Go ahead get in the wussy wagon. It is dry and warm and they have food and drink and you don't have to pedal anymore. Come on be a chicken get in the van, it feels so good. At this point I am almost in tears. I finally get to the top and see my friends. Gary and the always lovely Tricia Falls, Stephanie, Daniel and Pixie. I told them I can't make it. Stephanie said you are going to make it for the kids at the camp and for yourself. I said I am hurting, Gary Falls said we are all hurting. With that I refreshed and took three Advil and climbed on the bike and we rode the other eight miles to Adam's gap.

We would rest a few minutes and then back on the saddle for the trek back to the top of the mountain. I knew on the way back, there were looming, my nemeses, and the hill that took me down. The hill is like a mini Horseblock, straight up in your face climb. I start up and dig down deep and win the hill. We ride along up and down, till we come to big climb below the park. This a long, steep Tour de France type climbs. I must admit that I

put it in grandma and just grinned up the hill. I loose Stephanie again in the fog. I am all alone.

I get toward the top and hear music or something, I think I was delirious. I get into the park and see my friends again. We refresh and then it down the treacherous 3 mile descent on the way to the dreaded Horseblock. I am a chicken and hold the brakes till I think my hands will break. It would be more up and down and down and up, till we get to Horseblock. I don't why they call it that. This hill is massive and in your face and looks like a 20 story conveyer. This is the final test, the big Kahuna, let's see what you really got, and take your best shot climb. Make this climb and you are in the home stretch. We all make the climb and reward ourselves at the third rest stop.

We all gather together and do the last 24 miles into a sharp headwind – crosswind into Piedmont and nirvana At one point about 10 miles out and look at Stephanie and say I have nothing left .She gives me a payday candy bar.

Gary Falls looks at me and says you need a GU. I said I need a what? He said GU it is an energy supplement and will settle your tummy. I opened and sucked it in. I said Gary, this tastes like #%^&. What do I do now, he said swallow it. I swallowed it and after a few minutes I had new life.

We would make the final 9 miles in and cross the start finish line this would not be in any record time .No bands or speeches or flowers or a yellow jersey. I get my picture taken, not by the newspaper, but by a good friend. I got handshakes and hugs and congratulations that is better than any fame I could ever desire. There is an old Beatles song that goes “I get by with a little help from my friends, I gonna try with a little help from my friends. Cheaha proves true the words of this song.