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Raid in France - Stormy Return for Raid in France

Raid in France, one of the oldest established AR World Series events, made a stormy return to the series recently with their 'Volcanoes to Carmargue' edition.

RIF had taken a break after so successfully organising the 2012 World Championships, and rejoined the AR World Series this year as the final qualifier before the 2014 World Champs in Ecuador. The international race line up of 29 teams came from the U.K., South Africa, Australia, Sweden, Belgium, Switzerland and Slovenia, but as the week of adventure unfolded it was the French teams who dominated a race which was weather interrupted.

All the teams gathered for their preparations, competency testing and the prologue at Puy en Velay, where they were joined by the organising and volunteer team which is so much a part of the Raid in France experience. Many of the RIF volunteers have been supporting adventure racing for decades and their close knit community is the bedrock of the race organisation.

The teams were also introduced to the Raid in France ethos of a back-to-nature experience and respect for the environments they were to travel through. This was encapsulated in a 'Memories and Territories' booklet given to all teams, which detailed the historical, human and environmental aspects of the race route. (The book is given to schools along the route as well.)

The short race prologue took place around historic sites of Puy en Velay with teams racing for orienteering checkpoints, after which they rode to an overnight pre-start camp some 35km away. There are not many races where you have 45 minutes of hard running and a 35km ride before you can even start!

The race began with a short kayak on Le Lac Du Bouchet before a technical MTB descent stage. This was followed by more kayaking, a short steep trek and a rafting stage as the early stages of the race were characterised by short, swift stages. In this early part of the race it was the top French teams who moved to the front, and that is where they stayed, with the experienced 400Team Raidlight moving into the lead.

The course then took in the longest ride and trek in the route, and most teams were on the 40km mountain trek when a severe thunderstorm hit, drenching the racers and pelting them with hail stones. It was forewarning of worse to come as the weather broke down and even at this early stage of the race it was clear how tough the course was. Teams said the trek was through rough country and the trails were not well mapped, and many were already falling behind and missing cut-offs which resulted in them being 'shunted' along the course. (This meant they were taken forward and missed some sections, but would no longer be ranked in the results.)

The leaders completed the trek in time to dodge the storm with 400Team Raidlight extending their lead, but there was no missing the huge storm which hit while teams were in the middle part of the course and up in the high mountains on the following days. It was a dangerous situation, with racers cold and tired, paths washed away and rivers in flood, and the organisers took the decision to suspend the race. Their first priority was to make sure all the teams were safe, and once this was done the whole race had to regroup for the final two stages, with race positions from the first half of the course retained.

The teams were glad to be safely out of the storm and to gather to share their stories, and were taken forward to resume the race with the much anticipated horse riding across the wide open marshy plains of the Carmargue at the mouth of the River Rhone. They finished with a trek to Grand-du-Roi, running across the line on the beach by the Mediterranean shore.

In the end only three teams completed all the available route to be fully ranked. Arverne Outdoor were 3rd, Lozere Sport Nature Oxstis second and the winners were 400Team Raidlight comprising Sébastien Raichon, Audrey Ehano, Adrien Lhermet and Thomas Gaudion.

Team captain Sébastien Raichon said, "Congratulation to the organisers for this amazing race ... one with a happy ending for all. Raid in France was truly magical for us and we experienced wonderful times, and some scary times. We never wavered, keeping the same pace from start to finish and I congratulate my team mates."

The team now have a place on the start line of the World Championships in Ecuador in November and will be hoping to improve on their 7th position in the World Rankings.

You can find out more about Raid in France at <http://www.raidinfrance.com/> and follow all the information on the AR World Series at www.arworldseries.com