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## Key Roles within AR Teams

**Article by John Cunningham**

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**This article is written to provide an insight into the many and varied roles that individuals within AR teams must play in order to not only get their team to the finish line of a race but also to get them to the race itself.**

Some roles are both obvious and crucial whilst others are frequently ignored to a team's peril. By learning more about the various roles, team members not only attempt to 'spread the load' within the team on a long term basis (based on personalities and skills) but also make themselves as ready as possible to 'leap into the breach' if and when necessary. Thus, do elite teams function optimally...

### Navigation

Perhaps the most essential skill in an adventure racing team is the ability to read a map. Without any sense of navigational skill your race is likely to be a long and arduous time. Being able to navigate in a race requires a combination of skill, knowledge, confidence and trust from your team. It is wise to learn in a non-threatening situation, i.e. not in an important race, and at a pace that matches your current ability.



Being able to successfully navigate in a race requires you and your team mates to be able to utilise the map's scale, features, altitude delineating contours and symbols both with and without the additional use of a compass.

Whilst one person is generally ultimately responsible for map and compass interpretation, another can be responsible for providing altimeter readings, counting paces or keeping note of elapsed time. Another person can be responsible for route choice in the indicated direction of travel and the final person can act as back-up navigator, ready to either provide support or to take over, as necessary. Everyone should get into the habit of calling out features like buildings, path junctions etc since navigators can otherwise miss such features when their noses are in the maps.

Although navigators in international races generally highlight a route of choice pre race, they often have to be as reactive to terrain on the ground as short distance AR navigators. An absence of marked paths, marshes, rocky outcrops etc can all lead to slower than expected progress underfoot and the necessity to change plans on the hoof.



### Motivation

Every team needs someone to help maintain a good sense of reason and humour but it is almost impossible for someone to fulfil this role throughout the entire length of a race. Hence, everyone needs to be aware of the need for this role and to be willing to motivate the normal motivator / team as and when necessary. Sharing foods, holding hands, singing and story-telling can all raise team spirits.

However motivation also comes in the form of urgency and it can be vital for a team to have one particular person charged with making sure everyone stays focused on race tasks. This is very much so during transitions or at check points when the aim should be to dib, perhaps quickly check the map but then move on asap. However, it is also important when things go wrong and there is a natural tendency to relax the state of urgency.

Girls often play a pivotal motivational role within a team but it cannot be one person's exclusive role.



### Kit checking & readiness

Every race provides new challenges both on the course and in the transition area. Being prepared begins before you have even left home and should cover all the elements of the race you expect to be involved in. You must gather as much information from and for your team as possible pre race so as to individually arrive in as organised a state as possible.

Checking you are well equipped is the first large step. Make sure that you have followed the race kit list exactly and have also brought all the required optional extras to facilitate your progress in the terrain you are likely to encounter. My advice is to finish getting your kit together at least five days before you go to the race, that way you leave yourself quite a bit of time to get last minute things. Don't forget that there is a huge community of friends out there from whom you can borrow specific items if and when necessary.

Bring a good selection of clothing and enough to keep you warm through all weather. It is quite a good move to ask more experienced racers what they might wear for different disciplines, that way you stand a better chance of being able to perform well. It is better to go to your first few races with too much clothing to choose from when packing the race boxes than too little, especially given that hypothermia causes more DNFs than any other reason.

One key pre-race role is that of organiser. The navigator and back-up navigator will be working on map interpretation so someone else must ensure that they have learned the road book's rules inside out and that they know exactly what kit must go into each race box, so as to simplify life for the others as much as possible.



### Transitioning

Having the right kit and clothing in your kit box is half the battle. The other is accessing this equipment as efficiently as possible in transitions. This starts with one person in the team talking through transition requirements prior to TA arrival, one keeping check on time in the TA and another ensuring that all the points and jobs raised prior to arrival have been met and that the team leaves the TA with the mandatory equipment and maps needed for the next section.



### Sponsorship and Accounting

At a certain point in your AR career, you will hit a brick wall. You will be strong and competent enough as an athlete to take part in any race but you are unlikely to have enough money to enable your ideal team to do so. Hence, for better or worse, your ability to proceed will be determined by your ability or that of one of your team mates, to procure and maintain a strong partner association with a sponsor.

However, beware. Many racers are totally unaware of what a time commitment such an association imposes. How you honour your commitment to your partners reflects on the whole sport and not just your name or your team so associations must not be entered into lightly.



Once they are, someone in the team needs to be put in charge of all accounting and this needs to be transparent, both for tax and for partner purposes. Someone else must be responsible for a professional and up to date website detailing all sponsors, including up-to-date race reports and photo galleries and someone else must be in charge of promoting the team and its successes within the media so as to put your partner's name 'out there' as much as possible.

The team will also be responsible for sending back CDs of images to sponsors that they have the right to use and this is rarely simple since it is hard to get great shots mid race by team members. Hence you often have to commission photographers, negotiate access rights for the team and sponsor etc. etc.

As soon as there is a sponsorship association then the team also has the responsibility to display that association at all times, to wear the kit and clothing provided by the sponsor (even if not ideal, within a reasonable extent) and to logo up any additional items of kit or clothing. The team must look professional and like a team so individual kit preferences have to go out of the window.



The kit provided by the sponsor must be tested rigorously and reported back upon in a confidential manner and this in itself is no simple task when it means collating timely thoughts on numerous items of kit from team mates with very different levels of clothing and kit expertise.

Kit maintenance and repair (e.g. of bikes) can be a huge ongoing expense within the team, so if someone within your team can take it upon themselves to regularly service bikes, then that will mean one less pre-race task or one less expense for the individuals.



In other words, the roles you can choose to take upon yourself are many and varied and it is not surprising that the best teams in the world are made up of athletes committed to these roles and to their team full time. The pre-race sponsorship liaison and associated roles alone demand far more than one person's full time attention. Hence, beware of landing too much work on one person – or the team's overall fitness will suffer. Make yourself aware of everything that needs to be done to keep your team on the circuit and racing well. Volunteer to oversee the roles that suit you best but make sure you know at least the rudiments of the other roles so as to be able to step in as and when necessary. In this manner, all roles will be covered and the team will function smoothly and perform well in the races themselves.

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