



This year Oct. 3-5, 2008 marks the eighth year international triathletes will gather at Lake Anna State Park southwest of Fredericksburg, Va., for the Virginia Double and Triple IRON Triathlons. The two collectively are among the world's top and most grueling ultra-triathlons. The "Double IRON" consists of swimming 4.8 miles or paddling for 16 miles, a 224-mile bicycle ride, and topping them with a 52.4-mile run – a double marathon! It begins Saturday morning, Oct. 4, and must be completed within 36 hours!

If the Double IRON distances make you wince, here's what those competing in the Triple IRON have in store for their weekend: Each will awake at 5:30 or 6, eat a light breakfast of cereal, fruit, and juice. At 7 a.m. Friday, Oct. 3, the men and women competing in the Triple IRON will plunge into 74-degree waters of Lake Anna for a 7.2-mile swim. Three to five hours later each will get out of the water, quickly dry off, and mount a bicycle for a 336-mile ride lasting a day or longer, close to maybe 30 hours. After that the triathletes will park their bikes and begin their 78.6-mile run.

The past few years has seen a steady increase in the number of participants, especially with those competing in the Triple IRON. Since 1999 when retired Navy Senior Chief Petty



Tom Clime hydrating during the swim!

Officer Steve Kirby first became involved with the Triple IRON (since 2005 he has been in charge of organizing and running the event), “It has grown from three or four racers to a high of nine in two-thousand-six,” he explains. “We had nineteen in two-thousand-seven (more than who competed in the Double IRON) and have that many signed up so far,” he adds. He further explains, “We have put a limit of twenty per event for a max of forty racers over the weekend. We needed to do this due to the services we provide the racers, the space

we have where everyone is set up would be overcrowded, and it would be unsafe for the racers on the course in the state park.”

For most participants, this taxing event is done without sleep – a “daily routine” for those 35 men and women who competed in last year’s USA Triple IRON Triathlon and the concurrently-run Double IRON Triathlon. Several records were set during last year’s events, setting the stage for some even more grueling competition in 2008.

For the 2007 Double IRON, Tom Clime of Maryland set a new bike record with 12:01, beating the previous record holder by four minutes.



Mark McKeon “Thumbing” during the run!

For the even more challenging Triple IRON, there also were several 2007 records: Mark



Beat Knechtle during the run!

McKeon of Iowa took the 3rd fastest swim time with 3:20; Switzerland's Beat Knechtle took the 2nd fastest bike time at 20:43; Sergio Cordeiro of Brazil had the fastest triple marathon run time with 14:15 - two hours faster than the next best time, and Swiss competitor Knechtle took 3rd place in the run with a time of 17:03.

In cumulative time for completing all three events, Knechtle set a new overall men's completion record of 41:44, while Brazil's Cordeiro came in a mere 10 minutes later with 41:54.

Gina Vandiver of Texas set three new record times for women with a bike ride of 20:18 (three hours faster than the next closest time), 20:00 in the run and 44:55 overall, which is the 4th fastest among the men and women. Meanwhile, Kathy Roche-Wallace biked 24:09 for the 3rd fastest women's bike time and ran 21:24 for 3rd fastest, with her overall time of 50:36 being the 2nd fastest among the women. Gina Vandiver at 27 years old also is the youngest woman in the world to complete a Triple IRON.



Sergio Cordeiro barefoot during the run!

The rugged athletes competing in this exhausting, challenging competition aren't typically from the 20-something group. Their ages ranged from 20-year-old college student, Greyson Daugherty, who was the youngest American to attempt the Triple IRON to 69-year-old Brit Arthur Puckrin, who finished the Virginia Triple IRON for the

4th year in a row, then headed to Monterrey, Mexico a month later to compete in a Deca IRON. Also at the Triple IRON starting line was 60-year-old Vietnam veteran Daniel Jensen who lost a



Gina VanDiver on the bike!

leg in the war – that hardly stopped him. Though Dan did not complete the full Triple IRON course, he is credited with finishing the Double IRON since he completed the Triple swim and bike course, but he could only manage two marathons before his right leg gave out - he gave it one hell of a try but when in as much pain as he was and every step became excruciating it was time to accept losing the battle and returning another time to win the war. This year Dan Jensen plans on doing just that.

Why would one “suffer” a tortuous training regimen and subsequent grueling competition when the prize isn’t money, but “only” a medal and trophy? Athletes taking part in this and similar challenges almost universally agree that it is the challenge lures them.

Thirty-six-year-old Michelle Santilhano sums it up with, “Opportunity and challenge – that’s what I tell everybody. . . . it’s knowing yourself better.” A South African who now resides in Menlo Park, Calif., and is a nurse at the Stanford Children’s Hospital, Michelle is no stranger to physical challenges, having swam the



Kathy Roche-Wallace on the left and Michelle Santilhano on the right during the run!

English Channel in September, 2006. More recently (in September 2007) she swam the Catalina Channel in California. Ironman and triathlon competition were new to her, as she recounts. “I

came to America because I knew it was bigger and better and had more to offer, and I would



The ever smiling
Dan Jensen on the bike!

never have heard of something like this [Ultra Triathlon challenges] in South Africa.”

Forty-six-year-old Kathy Roche-Wallace, the mother of six, also sought the challenges of the Triple IRON event. “I like the cross-training aspect of a triathlon – I like the swimming, biking, and running, and I think with the busy life and schedule, cross-training is just an easier fit,” she said. She’s no novice when it comes to these physically challenging events, as she explained.

“I started doing Ironman distance track when I probably was in my later twenties . . . I have six children and in my first marriage I

had five children very close in age. I was really young, so once my youngest of the five was a little bit bigger, I started doing the . . . longer, the Ironman distance triathlons.”

This is just a sampling of the diverse group of athletes that compete each year in the Double and Triple IRON Triathlons. Last year’s competitors represented Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Hungary, England, Wales, South Africa, Brazil, Canada and 14 U.S. states. There also were two teams competing in the Double IRON, one of three buddies from England and the other a father-and-daughter duo from Canada.



Arthur Puckrin about to cross the Finish Line while his National Anthem is being played!

Please visit www.USAUltraTri.com to view pictures of the competitors and their ultra resumés, complete event results, and past stories some of the athletes have written about their experiences. If you are interested in competing, download the application and sign up or send an e-mail if you can attend as a volunteer: Volunteering is a great way to check out the race to see how the racers compete if you have never done so. You can support an individual racer or volunteer to help the organization putting the event on. You'll also observe first-hand to learn about what the athletes do right and about some of the things that can go wrong.