



DOWN AND DIRTY



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TOP: Nicole Bransford climbs through the mud on Saturday in the the Cowboy Crawl Mud Run at Lake Panasoffkee. ABOVE: Joey Myers races through the mud pond.

Thousands attend first Cowboy Crawl Mud Run

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It would have been the same distance as a 5K run. But with as much climbing, jumping, dipping and zigzagging as running forward, it felt much longer than 5 kilometers or 3.1 miles.

More than 1,000 people from Florida and other states competed Saturday in the Cowboy Crawl Mud Run in Lake Panasoffkee. Contestants had to make a grueling run through about two-dozen obstacles on the course off State Road 44.

Dressed in a tight-fitting black workout suit, Miami resident Frances Lopez said she often competes in such events.

"It's a great way to stay fit," she said, after climbing over a number of wooden walls in the "Hog Waller Saloon."

Obstacles included the "Slip 'n Slide" that had contestants scaling a 16-foot-wall with knotted ropes, before making a 45-degree plunge into water that went well over most heads.

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"You went down so fast, it was hard to hold your nose," said Danielle Brannen, who works in the Sumter County courthouse.

They then had to swim through more water and slosh over mud hills.

"Haystack Hill" was comprised of dozens of hay bales stacked on top of each other; and in the "Rope Maze," runners had to avoid getting lassoed.

Some contestants competed as individuals; others with friends or with teams. A dance group, the Tampa

Bay Outlaws, seemed in the perfect mindset to wallow through the mud. Members had pork-related names on the back of their T-shirts, such as "Ham Hock Hamlet," "Sausage Link" and "Baked Ham."

"This is a little bit different," said team member Kami "Bacon" Boles as she prepared to go through the starting gate. She would soon be covered in mud.

DZ Block Inc., of Oxford, had a team called Dirt Divas, who were dressed in colorful tutus. Some members also had Nike tennis shoes, before losing them in the mud.

The starting gate read, "Climb your way to heaven" and "Dig your way through hell." Near the exit was a water hose where contestants could wash off the dirt, mud, sweat and slime.

There also was an obstacle called "Manure Mountain." The name was a perfect fit.

The event was held on Providence Ranch, land filled with livestock, ponds and giant oak trees as well as plenty of mud that received help from early morning rain.

The Sumter Chamber of Commerce helped coordinate the event and about 20

area subcontractors helped build the obstacles, said Terry Yoder, owner of T & D Concrete in Wildwood.

His company helped construct several obstacles with working beginning last November. "It was a way to help out a lot of area subcontractors," Yoder said.

He said he's not sure if organizers will make the Cowboy Crawl Mud Run an annual event.

All the contestants received awards with top competitors garnering the most. The youngest contestant was 13 years old, the age requirement to participate.