

# Adventure World

magazine

**THE  
GUN BARREL**  
**50** WHERE ENDURANCE  
HITS THE BUMPS

## EXPEDITION SIBERIA

**2011 USARA  
NATIONALS**  
CUMBERLAND FALLS, KY  
OCTOBER 6-8

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# APRIL

ADVENTURE  
WORLD

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## Top Ten Nationally Ranked Adventure Race Teams

	Points
1. Mountain Khakis/Rev3 Adventure	137
2. iM.O.A.T.	44
3. Vignette	44
4. Lost but Found	44
5. Cumberland Trail Connection	41
6. 3 Builders and a Shocker	41
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Each month, the top ten teams in the country will receive USARA top ten certificates. The current top 10 rankings will also appear in each issue of Adventure World Magazine. The team ranked number one on October 1, 2011 will receive a free entry to the 2011 USARA Adventure Race National Championship. The final USARA National Rankings will be released immediately following the USARA Adventure Race National Championship, with the # 1 team in the nation being crowned at the awards ceremony of the USARA Adventure Race National Championships. Register your team now at [www.USARA.com](http://www.USARA.com) and start collecting points toward a national ranking!

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ADVENTURE WORLD MAGAZINE



*I don't even know how to put on this climbing harness.*

*What if I get caught in an avalanche?*

*What if I have to rescue someone?*

*Should I really be doing this?*

*Am I in over my head?*

*I don't even know how to put on this rescue beacon.*

***Am I going to die today?***

# Backcountry Heli-Boarding

A photograph of a helicopter flying over a vast, snow-covered mountain range. The helicopter is in the upper left quadrant, flying towards the right. The landscape is filled with snow-covered peaks and valleys, with some clouds visible in the distance. The overall tone is bright and somewhat hazy, suggesting a high-altitude, snowy environment.

by Zach Wilkinson

photos by Sean Janes  
*Alaska Powder Descents*

When I moved to Juneau, Alaska five years ago, I had no idea what I was in for. My story was a common one here in Juneau. I accepted a job transfer to Juneau from the southwest and had no intention of staying longer than one or two years. To me, moving around and experiencing new places was a way to add an element of adventure to my otherwise drab career as a finance manager. By my second winter here, I began to realize that I might be here a while, and if I was going to maintain sanity, I'd better pick up a winter sport, so I learned to snowboard. Three winters, and many bumps and bruises later, I have managed to improve significantly, and now I think I can safely say that I am passionate about snowboarding, and I have begun to explore the incredible back country that Juneau has to offer. Recently, I have discovered that heli-skiing is relatively inexpensive for Juneau residents. I suspect that when people who are unfamiliar with the sport hear the term, their minds conjure up some very James Bondian images. For me, it is slightly more emotional experience.

The instant my eyes popped open on the morning of one of my first days Heli-boarding, I felt the slight pang of anxiety mixed with excitement and anticipation. The evening before, the healthy stress set in as I prepared my gear, got the coffee pot ready to go, and then struggled to fall asleep as thoughts and images of snow, speed, danger, and exhilaration raced in my mind.

The feeling as I step into APD's (Alaska Powder Descents) shop in the morning is electric. Everyone is sharing these anxious feelings and has been since the night before, though for some the anxiety is more obvious. I feel it down in my gut, it is fear, but in a good way. It's the kind I just can't get enough of. As I sign a release form, and begin donning safety equipment, I begin questioning myself.

I don't even know how to put on this climbing harness...should I really be doing this? Am I in over my head? I don't even know how to put on this rescue beacon. What if I get caught in an avalanche? What if I have to rescue someone? Am I going to die today?

I look around at the group and wonder what I am doing there with all these people who look like experts. I catch myself second guessing my ability, wondering how

far outclassed I am, and wondering if any of the others are thinking the same thing (and secretly hoping that they are).

As the safety briefing begins, the reality of where I am going, and what I am about to do sets in. There is going to be extreme cold, and real avalanche danger, and speed, and heights, and wind, and moving parts and jet fuel. Yikes...pay attention, and don't screw this up. Today we will be moderating these risks with technology, experience, and a little bit of luck.

Suddenly, there is a loud, high pitched whine, swiftly followed by the quick thump-thump-thump as the helicopter comes to life. I feel the rush of cool air across my face, coupled with the sting of sand and snow as it blasts my cheeks and nose. The basket is loaded with skis, snowboards and



backpacks, and one by one we carefully climb into the helicopter and get strapped in, following the methodical process just described to us in the safety briefing. Now this is getting real.

I feel my seat wiggle from to side fluidly as the Helicopter pulls slowly away from the sturdy hold of the earth's surface. Then we pitch forward and begin to fly as the heli seems to magically ascend quickly into the sky.

As the familiar sights from town fade into little toy cars and houses, the equally familiar background scenery becomes real. Mountains that normally look like a scenic paintings hanging like a backdrop behind our town become sheer cliffs, glacial ice, jagged rock peaks, and snow faces above the tree line, so close I can almost reach out and touch



them as we whiz by. I can see the pilot and Sean (our guide) in the front seat pointing and talking, but I can't hear what they are saying. As we come close to one of the peaks, I think to myself, "Surely we are not going to land there... no way I can ride this mountain. That looks insane!" The helicopter touches down on that same peak thirty seconds later, and wiggles itself snugly into the snow. The rotors slow but do not stop, and as the door flies open, the crisp peak air bites my face, and another layer of reality is quickly peeled back.

"Holy smokes" I think to myself, "What am I doing? This is real!"

I climb out and carefully crouch down next to the stack of skis, snowboards and backpacks on the ground, and the group of five huddles together over the gear as the helicopter seems to roll right off the top of the mountain the way a soda can rolls off a picnic table in a strong wind. Suddenly, it is quiet and still. All around us we are surrounded by a world of snow and peaks and ice as far as the eye can see. It is beautiful, and scary. It is a sensory overload, and slightly more than my brain can process.

I spend a few seconds attempting to take it all in, without much luck. I can see it, and I know what I am looking at, but I just can't quiet rationalize it all in my mind. This feeling is a combi-

nation of joy, like what you feel when you witness a baby being born, and guilt, because this is clearly not my domain, but somehow I have cheated nature, and appeared in this place almost effortlessly. I did not climb to this peak, and this mountain does not owe me anything. Consequently, I feel I should be paying homage to themountain somehow. Then I rationalize it, the way we humans do, and decide that the best way for me to feel right with the world at this moment is to shred this mountain like I own it!

We break from the huddle in a collective whoop and high fives all around and each of us begins grabbing our gear and getting ready. The sounds of zippers, clips, Velcro scratching and the Styrofoam scrunching of compressing snow underfoot takes over the silence of the peak.

We have a brief talk about our path down the mountain, and off goes the guide. Twenty feet into his run, he disappears. This run is so steep, it rolls over and we cannot see where it leads below us. For a few seconds, we don't know where he has gone, what is happening, or what we are following him into. Then he pops out at the bottom, and makes a few awesome deep powder turns. He stops, turns around and waives us on. There are six of us in the group.





Photo: Suzanne Turrell / Mount Rainier National Park

The new ultralight Obi™ 2P tent (3 lbs) and Zor™ Standard sleeping pad (405 g).

## ADVENTURE ANYWHERE™

NEMO was founded on a commitment to adventure, to the fearless pursuit of uncharted paths, in everything from the equipment we build to the way we run our business. Great adventures are possible for anyone, anywhere. Possible, that is, if you bring the will, the imagination, and the right gear.

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Following the guide, we drop into the slope one at a time to mitigate avalanche danger. We take on the slope with each of our unique combinations of gear, skill and experience. Some are notably more graceful than others.

As I ease up to the edge when it's my turn to drop in, I feel the last pang of fear that I will have this day. I make one last check to make sure my board is buckled properly, my pack is strapped on, and my pockets zipped. Anything forgotten at this point will remain forgotten forever.

I take the plunge and suddenly as I lean into my first turn, I adjust my weight back to surf this deep snow, I feel my speed instantly pick up as the wind and powder hits my face. My eyes see the mountain below me, and my mind picks my line. Any feelings of fear or self doubt melt away into the smooth creamy turns. Heck yeah...this is living. All the stress and anxiety that have led up to this moment is released into my veins in the form of adrenaline. My body simultaneously amps up as my mind becomes calm, clear and focused. The faster I go, the more my world seems to slow. I am in the zone, and this is why I am here. My senses are heightened. I can feel the individual microscopic snowflakes as they pepper my face, and the individual beads of sweat developing on my scalp. I am suddenly more alive than I have ever been, and there is no possible way to get enough of this feeling. The entire world seems focused in one tiny spot that moves with me as the energy and friction and speed is translated from the snow, through my board and into my body. I lean from one turn to the next, slicing cleanly through the deep snow. Each turn lasts only sec-



onds, or less, but in my mind each turn is a journey complete with a beginning, an ending and a world of experiences in between. I can feel every bump wrinkle and roll on the surface of the clean, untracked snow. The turns form one continuous line, beginning at the top of the mountain, un-broken, and leading to where I am now-in the present. Somehow, in the few seconds it takes me to descend, my mind has time to contemplate this metaphor for life, and absorb and process all these thoughts and sensations.

I round out my last turn, and stop near Sean at the bottom in a blast of snow, followed by fist pumping, high fives and a good ol' cowboy wha-hoo. Then suddenly the narrowly focused world opens back up for a moment as I catch my breath, and watch my friends descending the lines behind me. This is living. This is a casual morning of heli-boarding. This is reality in Juneau, Alaska, and this, is why I am still here. This is how my work week has started out, and its only Tuesday. 

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If you would like to experience Heli-sking or -boarding in Alaska, contact Sean Janes with Alaska Powder Descents at [www.alaskapowder.com](http://www.alaskapowder.com) and mention this article.

# get your Adventure Racing

presented by

The United States Adventure Racing Association

The 2011 USARA Adventure Race National Championship will be headquartered out of Cumberland Falls State Resort Park, one of the most popular and beautiful state parks in Kentucky.

Outside the lodge, there is a large observation deck overlooking the Cumberland River, above the 125 foot wide curtain of water that falls 68 feet into the boulder strewn gorge below. Teams should consider staying through the full moon on October 11th, when they may have the opportunity to witness the only moonbow that occurs in the western hemisphere!

Cumberland Falls is the largest of several spectacular waterfalls teams will visit over the course of the race.

The race will also take teams through the Daniel Boone National Forest and Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, which boasts one of the highest concentrations of natural bridges in the eastern U.S. The Big South Fork is one of only five federally protected, free flowing National Rivers, so designated for its historic and scenic value. The challenging course and wide open views afforded by overlooks above the steep-walled gorge are sure to provide lasting memories.

From start to finish the weekend has been designed as a family event. Spectators will receive their own swag bag with course information, maps, and discount coupons for area restaurants and attractions, which include horseback riding, rafting, a zip line, and a train ride on the Big South



Fork Scenic Railway. The event includes interpretive hikes that will help spectators learn more about the history and geography of the area led by rangers from the US Forest Service and National Park Service. Spectators and family members will also enjoy live entertainment, kid's crafts, several interpretive hikes, and other planned recreational events.

With the generous assistance and support of Kentucky State Parks, the Kentucky Office of Adventure Tourism, Tour Southern & Eastern Kentucky and McCreary County the USARA is generating a lot of attention for the 2011 Adventure Race National Championship. The event should be well covered by local, regional and national media, creating positive exposure for teams and their sponsors.



# 2011 REGIONAL USARA QUALIFIERS

MVP Health Care Frigid Infliction	February 26, 2011	Bolton Valley Resort, VT
Eco-Lonestar Adventure Race	March 05, 2011	Reveille Peak Ranch, Burnet, TX
Natchez Trace Adventure Race	March 19, 2011	Wildersville, TN
Ozark Challenge Adventure Race	March 26, 2011	Ozark, AR
Extreme Break Up Adventure Race	April 02, 2011	Manhattan, KS
Lightning Strikes Adventure Race	April 03, 2011	Mount Carroll, IL
Blue Ridge Mountain Adventure Race	April 09, 2011	Blue Ridge, GA
Rev3 Epic Adventure Race	April 16, 2011	Front Royal, VA
Grizzly Man Adventure Race	April 23, 2011	Missoula, MT
TeamSOG Yough Xtreme	April 30, 2011	Ohiopyle, PA
MISSION Adventure Race	May 07, 2011	Nashville, IN
Atomic Adventure Race	May 14, 2011	Dawsonville, GA
Chadron Adventure Race	May 21, 2011	Nebraska
Odyssey Wild Wonderful 24 Hour AR	May 21, 2011	Oak Hill, WV
USARA Collegiate National Championship	May 21, 2011	Burnet, TX
USARA Sprint AR National Championship	May 21, 2011	Burnet, TX
Longest Day and Night Adventure Race	June 04, 2011	New Paltz, NY
One Long Day	June 04, 2011	Farragut State Park, ID
Run, Row, Rock & Roll Adventure Race	June 18, 2011	Fairbury, NE
Odyssey Endorphin Fix	June 24, 2011	Oak Hill, WV
TeamSOG Equinox Traverse	July 15, 2011	Hidden Valley, PA
Krista Griesacker Memorial Race	July 30, 2011	Hamburg, PA
Lake Tahoe 36	July 30, 2011	North Lake Tahoe, CA
Sheltowee Extreme	July 30, 2011	Cave Run Lake, Morehead, KY
Alaska AR Regionals -- Bushwack This!	August 06, 2011	Cooper Landing, AK
MVP Health Care Bitter Pill	August 2011	Bolton, VT
TeamSOG Lionheart 24 Hour AR	August 13, 2011	Ohiopyle, PA
Expedition Idaho	August 14, 2011	Farragut State Park, ID
The Shag	August 27, 2011	New Jersey
The Thunder Rolls Adventure Race	August 27, 2011	Oregon, IL
Tahoe Big Blue	September 17, 2011	North Lake Tahoe, CA
Warrior Challenge	September 17, 2011	Nebraska
Terra Firma Adventure Race	September 24, 2011	Smithville, TX
San Juan Island Quest	September 2011	San Juan Islands, WA

## 2012 Regional Qualifiers

Lewis and Clark Ozark AR	October 21, 2011	Fayetteville, AR
Raid the Rock Adventure Race	October 29, 2011	Little Rock, AR
Red River Gorge The Fig IX	November 5, 2011	Stanton, KY
Huntsville Hammer	November 12, 2011	Lake Livingston, TX



Presented By:



## Two Great Events At One Venue

May 21, 2011 Burnet, Texas

### **USARA Sprint Adventure Race National Championship**

The USARA is proud to present the 2011 Sprint Adventure Race National Championship. Teams from around the country will battle it out for bragging rights in Burnet, Texas. Two member teams will mountain bike, trail run, and paddle their way to victory. Categories will include coed, coed masters, male, male masters, female, female masters, solo male, solo female and clydesdale.

### **USARA Collegiate Adventure Race National Championship**

The USARA Collegiate Adventure Race National Championship will be held in conjunction with Sprint Nationals. Collegiate competitors will compete for the title of Sprint Collegiate National Champions. Teams of two will mountain bike, trail run and paddle. Categories will include coed and male.



AIX Group will offer an amazing \$3000+ sponsorship package to the winning Collegiate coed team. This sponsorship package will include AIX Team Racing Gear, funds for race entry fees, travel expenses, and armfuls of gear!! The sponsorship includes equipment from Merrell, The Right Stuff, High Gear, Numa, Grangers and Zanafel. The team will also receive free entry into the 2011 USARA 24 Hour Adventure Race National Championship, an additional \$900 value.

[usaranationals.com](http://usaranationals.com)

# INSIDE

an adventure rally

"It was unpredictable weather  
as wild as the landscape itself."

---

by lauren johnson

It was hot in the car, but that wasn't why everyone had handkerchiefs tied around their faces. With the frame of the tiny Citroen Saxo 1.1 liter car splitting in half, the body was riddled with cracks and holes and the powdery sand of the Mongolian steppe was pouring through the vents like flour through a sifter.

The roads had long ago ceased to exist and we, along with our two-car convoy, were driving through the steppe with nothing more than a compass and an outdated Russian atlas. We had less than three days to make it to UlaanBataar and we knew for certain that we were way off track.

The Mongol Rally launched in late July, 2010 with over 400 teams departing from the Goodwood race track in Britain, and from similar start points in Italy and Spain. There was no set route, the point of the rally was the adventure and planning your own route was part of the fun. We plotted a route using maps and compasses, foregoing the technology of our era in favor of a bit of old fashioned navigation. Studying sun and star navigation techniques was an interesting lesson in respecting our forefather's sense of adventure.

We set off through Europe, Eastern Europe and into the clutches of the former Soviet Republics, including Moldova, which was at war with separatists when were



traversing the country. Uzbekistan was in the middle of a fuel shortage that left us scrambling for black market imported petrol, and Kazakhstan and Russian were havens for corrupt police who attempted to extort cash from our little convoy at every bend in the crooked road. Finally, and overcoming daring odds, our tiny convoy arrived at the Mongolian border in late August.

Mongolia is a country unlike many in terms of its adherence to a nomadic lifestyle and the vast, unbroken distances between families on the steppe. Arriving in Western Mongolia, we cut a direct south-east path toward Ulaan-Bataar following what we heard were decent dirt roads. The roads were sometimes decent, by which I mean there

were no boulders and a path was cut across the steppe like a scar on otherwise perfect skin. Sometimes the roads disappeared, and the steppe had reclaimed its territory, kicking all signs of human presence off the landscape. Even worse, sometimes a single path would diverge into 5-10 smaller paths that spread out like the tentacles of a delta, with no signs or landmarks indicating which road one should take to reach a particular settlement. The maps became a joke early on, and showing one to a rural Mongolian was like showing a rural American the Rosetta Stone and asking for a translation.





During the day it was hot, dusty and windy while at night temperatures sank to below freezing, and if it rained the moisture turned the roads to small rivers of mud and rocks. It was unpredictable weather, as wild as the landscape itself.

The car was shattered. With a tiny engine, ill-suited tires and a frame designed for soft road use, the Citroen Saxo did not last long. The frame split in half over the back tires, and continued to ride lower and lower until we had to dump all of our supplies in convoy cars to keep the weight down. Everything was covered in a thick layer of red powdery sand. Sealed containers became little swamps of sand, grass and moisture, all of which found a way into every nook and crevice. Our clothing was dirty, sweaty and we could find nowhere warm or dry enough to hang anything so washing was out of the question. In the final weeks of the rally, no one changed his or her clothes. We became like cartoon characters, forever stuck wearing what we were drawn in when we entered Mongolia.

Corruption is a word for officials who abuse their power, but to rural Mongolians, it is a way of life. Only an idiot would charge a foreigner who owns a car the same price for meat as a local. Only an idiot would give foreigners fuel for anything other than all the cash in his

wallet. We were at the mercy of the people of the steppe, who were in turn at the mercy of a harsh climate with an even more barren landscape as company. Renting a ger to sleep in at night once our tent ripped in a storm was an ordeal more difficult than I imagine arranging a wedding would be. Finding clean water to purchase for anything less than what we paid for the car proved to be impossible. We withstood the corruption, and owing to the desolate nature of the area, forgave it instantly.

Mongolians are not an unhappy people. Looking up at the stars one night outside his ger, one Mongolian man lit his pipe and turned to us and said, "From here you can see the stars, and know you are lucky." He told of his degree in engineering from UlaanBataar and his wife, who was an accountant at a bank before retiring to a nomadic lifestyle. They were less than forty years old, and childless but with aspirations for a third member of the family soon. "This is our way" he finished, and suddenly we knew that living under the stars with exactly what you needed to survive and not much else was a lifestyle many sought after, and didn't want to escape from. I was envious of his lifestyle, but then how can someone raised with laptops, ipods and the internet ever be mentally calm enough to stare at the stars for too long. We hopped back into our mud-covered car and continued the journey.

If your car is higher than knee-height you have more fun, but still our tiny Saxo managed to survive a few river crossings that would have left some trucks floundering. Our lightweight and tiny frame worked to our advantage as we hydroplaned across some rivers and floated sideways down others. We were a comical site, with one team member sitting on the roof of the Saxo holding all of our electronics as we crossed the river, just in case the car flooded.

One of the first things people ask is if we won the rally. The Mongol Rally isn't a race, and the point is simply to survive and arrive in UlaanBataar with your car at some point, whether it be weeks or months. After forty-two days our faithful little Saxo finally died, and as we shifted down from 3rd to 2nd and finally to 1st the car came to a halt and did not want to be resuscitated. The filters were full of sand, the battery was sideways in the frame, and the engine had water in it from too many river crossings. The frame had cracked to the point that the bumper was rubbing on the tires and the break line was rubbed raw and spilling fluid. She was done, and she went not with a bang, thankfully, but with a whimper in the night. It was near midnight and the convoy had split up in the dark of night. Our tiny Saxo died alone on the

steppe much like the stray goats and horses whose skulls littered the landscape.

In the morning, we were towed into the closest settlement where we officially signed over our car to one of the many drop-off locations for valiantly defeated rally cars. We piled into the two remaining convoy cars and set off for UlaanBataar. By the time we set off from the settlement that afternoon we had only a few hours to go until the final closing bell of the rally.

We drove through the night and arrived by 1:00am, tired, worn out and extremely dirty. Once in the city we were pulled over multiple times before finding the official finish line. We pulled into the pub marking the finish and sat in our cars. 10,000+ miles and we had finally arrived. In the two remaining cars we had nine people from over five teams, and yet only two cars had finished. No man was left behind and we managed to haul seven in one car alone through the night. Everything that wasn't tied down was tossed to locals along the way who needed supplies. At some point on the steppe the rally became not about adventure but about survival, and our tiny band of ralliers had weathered an amazing array of challenges to arrive, healthy and sane, in UlaanBataar on September 4th, 2010. 



# SHELTOWEE EXTREME III

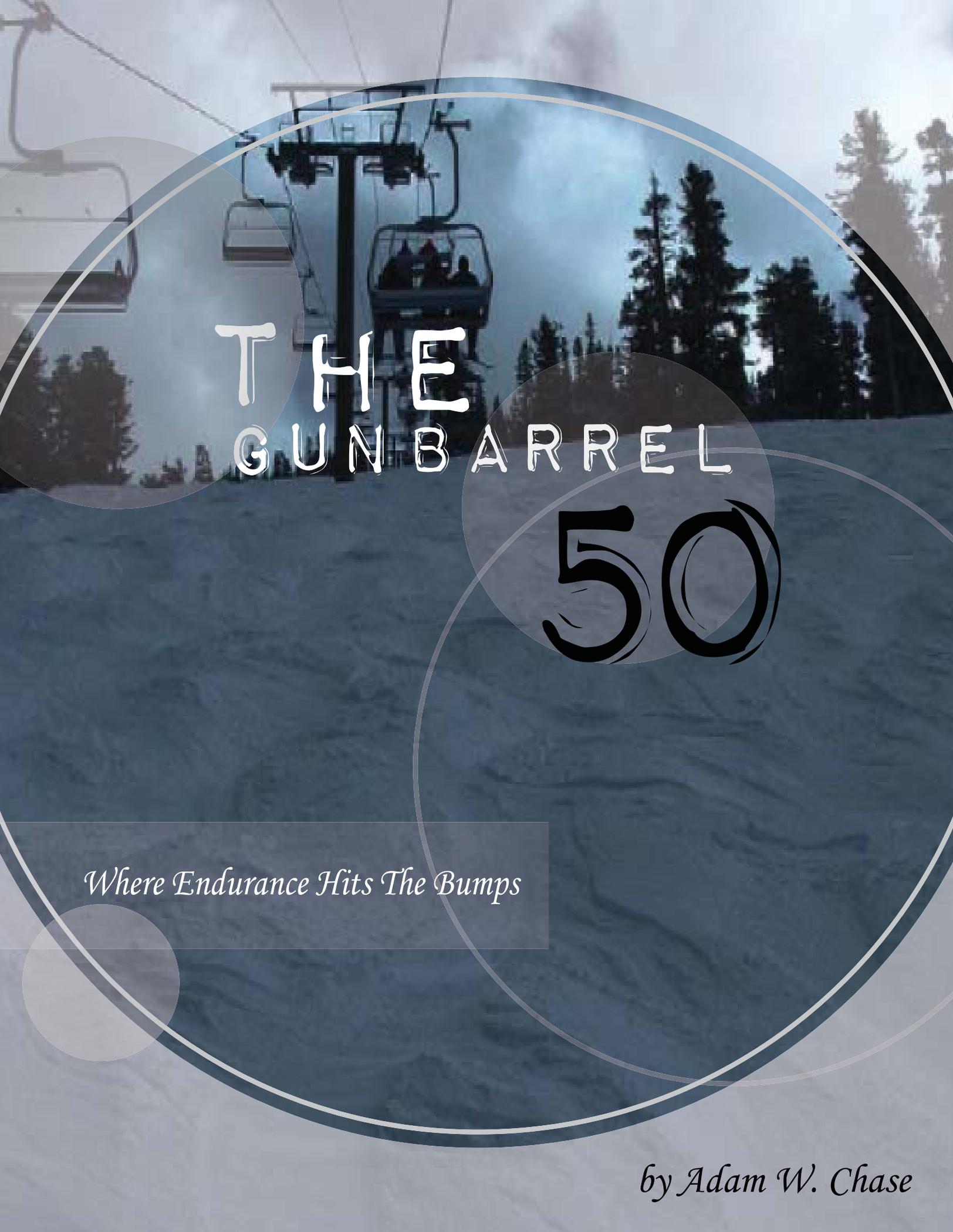
**July 30, 2011**  
**Cave Run Lake Recreation Area**  
**Morehead, Kentucky**

**12-hour adventure race by the director of the 2011 USARA  
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**Open to soloists and teams of 2/3/4. Top teams in 3 and 4-person  
co-ed divisions qualify for Nationals!**

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# THE GUNBARREL

# 50

*Where Endurance Hits The Bumps*

*by Adam W. Chase*

**A**s I struggled, but held my edge on a particularly irksome set of icy ripple moguls, I rooted myself on, "c'mon Chase, only 19 more runs to go; we're getting close. You really are 'Son of Captain Mogul.'"

A lot of odd coincidences had brought me to the Gunbarrel 50 in Heavenly, California on April 1, an appropriate April Fools' event. The catalyst to it all was meeting Glen Plake, the famed Mohawk-adorned personality in many a Warren Miller film, on a flight to Tokyo, where I was heading for a 50k mountain running race a year earlier. Glen and his wife, Kimberly, not only gave me detailed instructions on how to negotiate Japanese bathing rituals, they also insisted I come to Heavenly to ski in their mogul competition.

My path to the Gunbarrel 50 was also set by two seemingly incongruous facts: I was raised skiing bumps in Colorado with my father, "Captain Mogul," yet for the past 15 years, I had been competing as an endurance athlete, running ultras and adventure racing around the globe. That I had skied moguls only a handful of times since being competitive back in high school, 22 years before, might have been cause for concern but for some absurd reason that never seemed a serious deterrent. On the contrary, my lack of bump skiing experience in more than two decades set the groundwork for a fine experiment, the question being: "Is endurance training enough, or do you have to have a sport-specific focus to survive?" Put another way: "Could I, as the endurance Guinea Pig, overcome the control group of sport-specific bump skiers – affectionately known by locals as 'Face Rats' because of their almost permanent fixture status on the mogul-riddled face of Heavenly – after a number of hours?"



The 24+ hour race that amassed \$20000 in gear giveaways and 60 teams in 2010 is returning on May 14th. Sign up for one of the most exciting adventure races in the country. Thoroughly vetted and extensively covered, this race will push you past your limits as you brave the challenging North GA wilderness.

## The Facts

Where: Dawsonville, GA

When: May 14, - May 15, 2011

Registration:  
<http://www.AtomicAR.com>

## The Challenge

Armed with only your map, compass, and sheer will, brave the North GA mountains on this 100+ mile course. Boasting a 33-40% clearing rate and 66% finishing rate, chilly nights, blistering heat, and torrential downpours are only a taste of what Mother Nature may choose to throw your way.

## The Course

In 2010 the course consisted of:

40-60 miles mountain biking, 15-30 miles paddling, 15-30 miles trekking.



## *Fresh Tracks*

At 8:30am, the 24 entrants in the 50-run competition lined up to be the first on the high-speed quad. The 135 competitors doing the Gunbarrel 25 had to wait two hours before they got to start; a disconcerting fact, given that there was more than ten inches of fresh snow that would be skied off by the time they began. Coming from Colorado, this “powder” felt heavy and the fact that it covered icy moguls meant that the first handful of runs were leg-sapping and slow for those without wide powder skis.

To make 50 runs before the lift stopped at 4:45, it would be necessary to maintain 9-minute “laps” of combined run and lift time. The lift took about four and a half minutes, so you basically needed to stay even with the first chair of the day. My first lap took me close to 12 minutes and my spirits were dampened by the slowness and the energy-depleting conditions that left my legs screaming in short shrift. It didn't help matters that I fell a couple of times, losing a ski once when my tips crossed. I tried to weigh the decision of whether it was more efficient to ski in tight control for short, fast blasts, or to slow it down a little and hang on, making my way from top to bottom without stopping. As the fresh snow got sorted out, I was able to ski more comfortably and realized that steady, non-stop runs were the way to go. That was where the stamina of long-distance training and racing came in handy. Nonetheless, by the first hour I had only completed a little more than five laps and one of the fastest Face Rats, a guy skiing on some fat planks (we'll call him Face Rat #1), was only about 30 seconds back from lapping me.

## *Warmed Up and Ready to Go*

It might have been the pressure of having Face Rat #1 breathing down my Gore-Tex, but snow conditions were getting better for my skis and skiing style, which I had come to realize sorely lacked any real definition given the abject absence of Alpine skiing in my adult life, and I picked up the pace. Perhaps I was just getting some sorely-needed ski practice, but whatever it was, by six laps into the event I was able to drop my time as precipitously as Gunbarrel was steep. Later, after the event, Glen Plake asked the competitors to appreciate “How cool is it that people create moguls. They aren't made by a machine or anything like that. It was funny that the course changed with the day so that the least favorite, hardest sections in the morn-

ing became very skiable and the easier sections at the start of the day were the most difficult in the afternoon.” This event also proved the converse as well; that moguls make people.

By ten in the morning the fresh snow had settled and I was ticking laps off every seven minutes, distancing myself from being lapped by Face Rat #1 while passing four or five skiers and boarders who had gracefully made the day's early runs look so easy. In chatting with fellow competitors on the lift, I learned the names of the top Face Rats. Heavenly was a small community and those who for all intents lived on Gunbarrel knew one another well and had strong opinions as to who the hot shots were out there. Rat #1 had an old school style while Rat #2, who moved to South Lake Tahoe from Maine, skied with an East-Coast, bent-knee, edgy style that was smooth and fluid. Those two and a third Rat, who deployed an awkward sit-back, hot-dogger, double-poling to make his way expeditiously down each run, were the local heroes among the Heavenly crowd.



## *Added Obstacles*

The weather cooperated for the most part although it remained cool enough that the moguls never really softened and, after the fresh cover was skied off, the underlying ice unabashedly showed its nasty face with an evil glare. To complicate matters, at 10:30 we were joined by throngs of skiers in the 25-lap competition. The part of the in-bounds run, which was lined with bamboo poles to narrow the run, soon became crowded. Not only were we skiing one of the steepest and longest bump runs in the country, we were struggling to maintain fall lines while slower skiers, parents and children, and at least a handful of participants who had gotten in over their heads, skied in front of us. It felt like we were playing some twisted video game, "Glen Plake's Sick and Sadistic Ski-a-thon," in which you maneuvered ice falls, slow-moving skier tots, boarders dragging their knuckles and crashing in front of you, while fast 25-lap skiers moved quickly past on the sides of the run. If you ran into any of these obstructions the screen would suddenly explode in powder and broken ski equipment. Game over.

With all the new traffic, it became difficult to keep track of who was where, but by about 20 runs into the day I had managed to move into fourth position as some of the fast-out-of-the-gates young types began to lose steam. It was inspiring to see last year's winner of the 25, Janez Desmar, a Slovenian who had lived in South Lake Tahoe for years and won most of the speed skiing events in the area with his gate-skiing background and graceful ability to maintain an edge as he effortlessly piloted run after run. Janez ended up winning the 25 again, this time in just over three hours and ten minutes, a tad slower than his usual due to the snow conditions. Equally as inspiring was Glen's niece, Danica Bunnett, who, at a mere nine years old, went on to win the women's 25 division with her perma-grin and steady, fluid skiing.

I rode up the lift with Glen, whose enthusiasm for the event was contagious. He was chomping down a big piece of meat, a hunk of which he kindly offered to his lift mates. It was thick and floppy, not even in the beef jerky family from what I could tell and, being a tree-hugging vegetarian, I kindly declined, instead swapping him a Clif Block for a piece of licorice. I had a cache of more Clif bars and cans of Go Fast drink in a bag at the bottom of the lift but wasn't willing to take the time to stop and so I rationed what I had in my parka to make it through the strenuous day. I finally caught up to Face Rats #1 and #2 after 29 runs and we rode the lift up together and shared our fatigue. None of us had taken any break, skiing almost every run without stopping for even the slightest rest. We grabbed water and sports drinks as we skied up to the chairlift and there was a sense of camaraderie rather than competition, especially because we were well ahead of pace and it looked very likely that we'd make the 50 lap goal with time to spare.

As is common practice in endurance events, you play psychological games, telling yourself that it will be okay to ease up, but as the three of us skied down our 30th run, practically side by side, I felt the adrenaline surge and knew that this was where the true test of endurance versus sport-specific was going to spit out an answer. It had taken me 60% of the event to catch these Face Rats and, as friendly as they were, if I had the fortitude, it was high time to push, as I knew how; the difference being that this was on skis, not on foot, bike, or some other self-ambulatory mode used in my past.

My 31st lap was probably my fastest of the day as endurance mode kicked in. I maintaining a fast enough pace that I pulled away from the Rats, putting almost a half a lap on them by lap 36. Face Rat #1 was starting to slow down and #2 kept up his smooth form and soon passed #1. Had #2 been better trained for long-distance events, the race would have likely been his. The incredible thing was that Rat #3, even with his uncomfortable-looking style, was maintaining a great pace and was a half a lap ahead by the 40th lap, almost catching the other two. There were no style points in the Gunbarrel 50.

## *Kicking It In*

With only ten runs to go, I was looking for inspiration to keep up the pace and complete the day. I thought about how my father would have loved to have been there that day. Captain Mogul died of cancer when I was 21 and this kind of thing was right up his alley. It was probably his death that had served as a catalyst for my shift from skiing to endurance sports like running marathons and competing in triathlons. I enjoyed the monastic focus of just going and going and a lot of the thrill of pounding moguls had passed with my father. And yet, as I found myself nearing the completion of the event, I was able to finesse some tight turns in what had become deep fall lines, even drawing whoops and hollers from skiers riding the lift above, renewing the adrenaline I used to thrive on back in the early 1980s, when I skied runs like Highline in Vail, throwing copters with the gall and flare of an adolescent craving approval and acknowledgment.

Fatigue had certainly built up not only in my legs and lower back, but my forearms had become quite sore from poling, especially given the double fall line near the top of the run, where snowboarders had left many a ripple mogul from their scraping and traversing of the steeps. I have grown to savor the pain of long events and this was a familiar feeling, the one I relish as I'm on my last couple miles of a double marathon or the final hours of a multi-day adventure race. It was the suffering I had earned and as the volunteers at the base counted laps 49 and 50, I breathed into the areas of my body where the lactic acid was pooling and the knocks of the day had accumulated in promised stiffness, feeling a certain satisfaction and validation. I was as alive as I could be and these painful reminders were a good thing.

I wasn't sure of the count but thought that the number might have been one off so, out of respect for Face Rats #1 and #2, I skied back onto the lift to push the count to 51. Rat #3 kept skiing as well and, in the end, he had finished his 50th in 7:27, about three minutes ahead of my 50th, while #2 was about five minutes back and #1 a minute behind him, although nobody really cared by that point. The four of us and three women, including the ever-steady and grinning Kimberly Plake, were just thrilled to have completed this one-time, 50-run event, skiing 90,000 vertical feet of moguls in a day. We were pleasantly cooked and knew that next year, on the first Saturday of April, we could come back for the Gunbarrel 25. While the others probably will, I kind of doubt it. The experiment was over and it is clear to me that it was endurance, not sport-specific conditioning that was my friend and I needed a lot more than 25 runs before that would help me. 

It'll get better once we've made it inside the forest", I told Johan reassuringly; "The same way it is in all jungles all over the world.

**It Didn't**



by Mikael Strandberg

**EXPEDITION**

**SIBERIA**

“Mike!” Johan whispered anxiously, “Look out!”

As I turned around I saw a big brown bear standing on the beach only 20 metres away, between us and our canoe, intensely sniffing and staring at us. It was one of the most beautiful bears I’ve ever seen. His fur was radiant in the sun, his rams were grey from age and he seemed startled by our presence. At that moment I had no idea whether it was the same bear I had shot at from the canoe ten minutes earlier or if it was another one. The first bear had fallen over, having been hit at least three times in the area below his left shoulder and before I had time to reload, he slowly crawled into the thick taiga. This one, however, took a step forward, stopped again and stood up on his hind legs, sniffing even more eagerly. I took a quick look at my young partner Johan and I suddenly realised that he was unarmed. The Russian authorities had allowed us to bring one rifle only and at that moment I remembered the words of my wife Titti before setting out on the Expedition:

“Don’t ever forget that you have the same responsibility as any parent regarding Johan. It is better you die if things come to that.”

“Maybe you should have a go”, I said calmly to Johan and handed him the rifle as I took a step down from the steep bank and out of the thick forest.

My appearance startled the bear initially, but suddenly the giant charged off up the steep slope, turned around facing us and came at us with determination.

“Whatever you do, don’t miss”, I told Johan quietly as he raised the rifle.

The bear suddenly stopped 10 metres away from us and stood up on his hind legs again. Johan shot the bear in the stomach; the giant fell backward, rolled down the bank and straight into the fast current of the river. Stunned, we watched the bear being swept away. We had killed for nothing and I felt more miserable than ever before. And painfully hungry. Our expedition down the Kolyma River, located in the far north-eastern part of Siberia, was only one month old, it was the end of August and we were already on the verge of starvation.

“We better stay sharp and focused” I advised Johan with an exhausted voice whilst he reloaded. “We still don’t know if there’s another bear around. If there is, it’s badly injured and therefore very dangerous.”

It was useless advice. Johan, only 21 years old and on his first expedition, was full of adrenalin. He trembled from excitement, concentration and nervous tension. I grabbed an axe from the canoe, in the hope of using it as some kind of defence weapon if needed and together we went cautiously into the dense taiga. We spent an hour doing a thorough examination of the area and concluded that it was the same bear and that his odd behaviour had to do with him being badly injured from me shooting him from the

canoe. (A Swedish authority on bears, after having heard measurements of its paws, estimated that it was a male bear weighing around 400-450 kilograms.)

“No meat, no fur and no food”, Johan said downheartedly when we returned to the canoe, ready to continue down the river, “And we don’t seem to catch enough fish. Maybe we’re not good enough trappers?”

“Don’t worry”, I answered reassuringly, “if we keep working hard, sooner or later things will change.”

But, in reality, I knew if we didn’t get some hunting and fishing done within a week, we would never make it to our final goal in Ambarchik Bay, 10 months and 3500 km of travelling further north.

One of the less important aims of the expedition was to investigate whether our ability to hunt and fish would be sufficient enough to survive the wild Siberian taiga and tundra along the Kolyma River. More important, however, was to make a full record of this unknown part of our world. This was a vital task, since in the course of our extensive research work we did realise that not even the Russians or the Siberians themselves had a comprehensive picture of the area along the Kolyma River. The obstacles were the cold, the distance, the size and the isolation. The area was untouched, remote and unknown. The main aim was to build a bridge between our cultures, widen the western world’s knowledge about the Russian and Siberian way. We wanted to find the Russian and Siberian temperament. We believed this could provide a perspective on the way of life in the future. We also wanted to ascertain how the area had been affected by the enormous changes in society that have been the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. And we knew 3.5 million people had lost their lives in Stalin’s concentration camps -- known as gulags -- along the river. Another genocide which had to be documented thoroughly and quickly. The documentation of the native people was another important issue. The Yakuts, the Even, the Chukchi and especially, the Yukahirs, of whom only 400 individuals had survived the Soviet era. All of them living in one of the coldest inhabited places on earth. Therefore, another specific aim was to examine if the native people along the Kolyma were genetically different to us Western Europeans when it came to their ability to cope with this extreme cold. And, during our research work we became conscious about the fact that polar travel throughout its short history, a record full of frostbites and death, had been dominated by people being brought up and living in cities. We believed that people like ourselves, born, bred and still living in the North Scandinavian outback, were much more physically tolerant when it came to handling the cold and hardships of the polar areas. For this reason, we had used the old lumberjack tradition of putting on enormous amounts of extra weight in the shape of fat,

before the arrival of winter, so that day in the beginning of August when we first put the canoe down the river, we had put on 20 extra kilos each. However, it was all gone by the time we had the hunting incident with the bear, after only a month of paddling. All due the fact that we had been pushed to our limits, both physically and mentally, since the first day we put the canoe down into the river at the beginning of August.

“Johan!” I shouted in panic, “I am stuck under the canoe!”

At the same time Johan, with all his strength, managed to pull the canoe away from me, I went under the rapids and was quickly pulled away by the strong current. It tossed me around like a piece of paper and I would have drowned if I hadn't been lucky enough to end up on the sandbank which we had tried to avoid crashing into and which had forced us to jump out of the canoe to try to change direction.

“Are you ok?” Johan asked exhausted.

“Yes,” I answered terrified, “but I am scared stiff every second we spend in the canoe. If the canoe turns, we're dead.”

“We better not turn over, then”, Johan said quietly, which made us laugh and relax for a moment.

We pulled the overloaded canoe up on the bank and took a short break, to give us some time to sharpen our concentration, whilst enormous masses of water passed us on both sides. Rain was pouring down and it was the third day on our expedition and our lives had immediately turned into a constant struggle for survival. A nasty typhoon had hit this unpopulated, untouched and very wild mountainous area and this reality made the water level of the river rise 7 metres in a couple of days. We had expected a fairly calm river, with relatively easy paddling, since it was in the beginning of the autumn, where we could put up camp on the banks of the river and spend the evenings fishing and

hunting. Instead the typhoon had turned it into a torrent of a wide river full of fast moving logs, violent rapids and unpredictable sandbanks which were hard to spot whilst we steered through high waves.

“Time to concentrate fully again” I told Johan as we pushed the canoe out from the sandbank straight into another rapid.

I was terrified every single second as I was sitting in the front of the canoe. Our survival depended a lot on the knowledge of my young comrade and his ability to steer through the rapids, avoiding getting run over by fast moving logs or getting stuck on a log that's come to a halt. We didn't talk at all. That would have meant a dangerous loss of concentration. I just sat in the front and waited for his screaming instructions when we hit a stretch of high waves.

“Paddle harder!”

At that moment I paddled for my life. After a couple of hours of paddling we saw a cloud of water spray and heard a thunderous noise ahead of us and we realized that something even worse awaited us. Amazingly enough we spotted a stretch of calm water to our left and I yelled in a slight panicky voice “We have to get out of the canoe and check that stretch out now!”

Johan yelled back “Look out! I will turn the canoe around and when I scream paddle, we need all your strength to make it!”

To my amazement he managed to turn the canoe in a nasty rapid and we ended up front to front with the current and we crossed the river, paddling like mad for what seemed like ages. Eventually we made it over to the side of the river. We hadn't come across such calm water since we began paddling. For a short moment it felt like we've entered a sanctuary of peace. At least until that second cloud of mosquitoes arrived and wreaked havoc amongst us. We

tied the canoe to a tree and entered the taiga. It was our first contact with the wild Siberian taiga and it was a nasty surprise. We were true forest people, but we were used to the easy cultivated Scandinavian taiga, where one can travel easily and right now we couldn't move forward even one single step.

“It'll get better once we've made it inside the forest”, I told Johan reassuringly; “The same way it is in all jungles all over the world.”

It didn't. It was almost impenetrable and it took us one hour to advance only 100 metres ahead. And it took the same time to return to the canoe. We never got to see what waited ahead of us.



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“We just have to give it a try and hope for the best”, I said, “And if we keep our concentration, we’ll get through.”

We tried to traverse the river once again, since we figured we had a better choice of routes from that side. But once we made it to the middle, the current and the rapids were too strong. We ended up in the worst possible route through the rapids. Before I had a chance to yell out my feelings of terror, we went into a series of high waves, which were above us one moment and below us the next. The waves just tossed us around, uncontrollably, and the canoe moaned from the damage it was taking. Suddenly, just as I was sure we’d had it, we were through to the other side.

“I have never been as scared as that in my twenty years of extreme exploration” I told Johan in terror and relief.

“I love it!” Johan yelled happily, “I want more of this!”

If I would have had my rifle next to me at that moment, I would have shot him! Luckily, he didn’t say anything more for the next two hours. We just went through one series of rapids after another and after five hours of avoiding turning over, we were too knackered to continue. We stopped at the first high ground we could find; a muddy opening in the taiga with clouds of mosquitoes waiting for us. It took us two hours to carry all our equipment a few hundred metres inland to avoid getting flooded, but once we started pitching the tepee, we realised we wouldn’t get any sleep

the upcoming night either. The level of the river was rising quickly. At 7 p.m. it got dark and we set our alarm clock ringing every fifteen minutes to remind us to check the level of the river. At 11 p.m. we knew that we would get flooded during the night. And we were well aware that paddling in the dark would kill us instantly. We just had to hang on somehow until the break of dawn. In the dark we packed the canoe, attacked by uncountable amounts of mosquitoes, gnats and flies and we stood in the dark next to it until water reached above our knees at 3 a.m. at which point we took our seats, tied it to a sturdy tree and waited. It was a demanding wait, as we were freezing cold from being constantly soaked to the bone. As soon as dawn arrived, we took a deep breath, untied the rope and we set off fully concentrated for another day of uncertainty.

We didn’t get any sleep for ten days and the lack of proper rest made it difficult to stay focused. We had many near-accidents every day. Most difficult of all, however, was the lack of food. Even though we carried 350 kilograms of equipment, only a small percentage was provisions like rice, pasta, cooking oil, wheat flour, lots of salt, sugar, 30 portions of dried frozen food, coffee, teabags, stock cubes and oats. And our original idea was that we would fish and hunt not only to survive in the present, but also to collect enough meat and fish to dry as stores for the upcoming

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winter. The flooding, of course, made this impossible. And when we encountered the brown bear, after 4 weeks of troublesome and demanding paddling, it was pure survival instinct that made us shoot. We had pretty much run out of all supplies, except salt and pasta. Even though, we tragically took a life, lost a big amount of meat and good fur, it sharpened our instincts dramatically. After that, things started to pick up. The flooding stopped and just a couple of days after loosing the bear, we caught fifteen kilograms of trout and local fish in our net, shot two massive hares and a pheasant. During the next two months, September and October, we caught over 150 kilograms of fish in our nets and very few of them were caught with western lures or flies. Every day, a couple of hours before darkness, we took turns being the hunting dog with the sole purpose of forcing giant Siberian hares out of hiding. It was dead easy. After we established the areas where they hid, one of us took the role of a barking dog and went off into the dense taiga. The one with the rifle took position waiting eagerly for the dog to do its work. It was some of the most interesting hunting I've ever done. When the human dog barked once it meant a hare had been spotted, two barks, that he was coming straight for the spot and three barks in row meant that the hare should be in front of the shooter at that moment. During this time we managed to hunt enough game and catch an adequate amount of fish not only to survive, but also to put on additional body weight to face one of the coldest climates on earth – the Kolyma Winter.

“That’s another frostbite” Johan stated through his facemask in despair, “That means I’ve got one on every finger.”

He was having another bout of diarrhoea. It was the third time in an hour he had to squat down and pull off his trousers and his three sets of gloves. On every occasion he had experienced that burning feeling followed by numbness in one of his fingers -- the first stage of frostbite. I could barely make him out in the eternal darkness of mid-Winter as I shivered violently; the same way I had every day since we left the settlement of Zyryanka four weeks earlier, in the middle of November.

“I think we better move on”, I whispered.

I then exhaled, coughed and heard that familiar tinkling sound of my breath turning into a shower of ice crystals, which locally was referred to as “the whispers of the stars”. It was -70°F and it was impossible to form a decent thought or even daydream. Or feel any worries. By pure survival instinct, we knew we had to keep moving. Therefore, we continued with great effort in the darkness, pulling our 330 pounds each behind us. Even though the river was covered with only a couple of inches of snow, it still felt like pulling the sledges over sand. It didn’t help that we were walking,

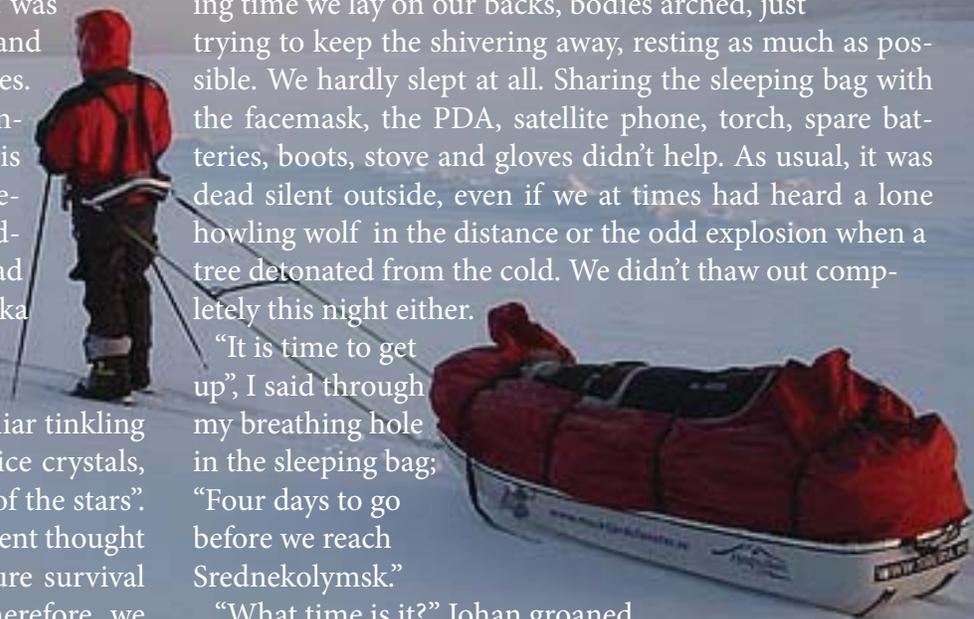
not skiing, since our ski bindings had broken when the temperature dropped below -58°F, as with most metal parts of our equipment. The heavy load made us sweat profusely the whole time, but we just couldn’t stop and have a break. Every time we did, we seemed to pick up more frostbite on fingers or cheeks, and it felt like the liquid in our elbows and knees froze and we shivered uncontrollably. Consequently we kept moving in complete darkness, hour after hour, steadily putting one foot in front of the other. The darkness didn’t matter since our eyebrows were always iced up, impairing our vision. But, as long as we kept moving, at least it made us aware that we were still alive. Until that dreadful moment it was time to get inside the tent.

After sixteen hours of walking it only took us a few minutes to pitch the tent, but it took at least an hour to get the stove going. Some nights it didn’t work at all. Poor quality Russian petrol was the problem. It froze solid. As a result, we carried the petrol bottle under our armpit the last hour of the day to keep it warm. We always knew when it was usable because the bottle would leak. It still took an hour to get the stove going since it was completely frozen and we had to pour petrol in a cup and light it to defrost the stove. We both had to keep busy during these attempts in order to keep the dangerous apathy at bay. The cold still made us tremble, sometimes almost hysterically. When the stove finally worked, we could momentarily form a thought, but unfortunately this relief just made us more aware of how cold it was. Once inside the sleeping bag, we knew we had at least six hours of unrelenting pain to cope with. Not due to the frostbites thawing, but because it took at least three hours to regain control of our bodies. During this terrifying time we lay on our backs, bodies arched, just trying to keep the shivering away, resting as much as possible. We hardly slept at all. Sharing the sleeping bag with the facemask, the PDA, satellite phone, torch, spare batteries, boots, stove and gloves didn’t help. As usual, it was dead silent outside, even if we at times had heard a lone howling wolf in the distance or the odd explosion when a tree detonated from the cold. We didn’t thaw out completely this night either.

“It is time to get up”, I said through my breathing hole in the sleeping bag; “Four days to go before we reach Srednekolymsk.”

“What time is it?” Johan groaned and my answer was a simple one: “I don’t know. Does it matter? It’s dark all the time anyway.”

As quick as I moved cold snow fell into myface just to remind me of the torture I was in.



It was pitch black and it always took some time to find the torch. I'd slept on it most of the night. When I switched it on, still inside the sleeping bag, I noticed as usual that our breath had formed giant stalagmites of snow hanging down the tent roof. And when I heard Johan moving, I realized I had to try to get out of the sleeping bag. It felt almost impossible. The body was still stiff; every muscle ached, my cheeks, nose and hands were burning, I felt no energy at all and I found it hard to concentrate. Johan was first as usual out of the bag and immediately put his down jacket on, followed by his facemask and then started the struggle to get his boots on. He was very weak after days of diarrhoea, but still worked heroically hard and did everything purely by instinct. He handed me the stove by routine. To work it I had to remove a layer of gloves and I had problems getting the lighter to work, even though I'd kept it in my underpants all night. My hands were too stiff. And the stove was frozen solid. Johan gave it a try with no luck.

"I think we have to give breakfast a miss today", I told Johan; "We forgot to take the petrol bottle and stove into the sleeping bag last night."

The only positive aspect with not being able to cook was that we didn't have to suffer condensation, which iced everything up badly. We didn't waste any time getting out of the tent. It took us just a few minutes to get all the equipment out of the tent, disassemble it and pack everything together in the dark. This routine was followed by one of the coldest moments of the day, when it was time to take the down jacket off and start moving. It took at least three hours to feel relatively warm. During this time the face, nostrils and eyes were covered by ice again, making breathing difficult and we coughed pretty much continuously. To save batteries we travelled in darkness all day. Three days later we reached the Yakut settlement of Srednekolymsk.

We spent January thawing up in Srednekolymsk. Temperatures were constantly below  $-60^{\circ}\text{F}$  and amongst some of the nicest and most generous people on earth we put on a lot of weight needed for the remaining 1500 kilometres to reach Ambarchik Bay before the end of April. We sampled their local delicacies like stroganina, frozen raw fish eaten like ice-cream, maxa, frozen raw liver eaten the same way, cooked moose nostrils, stewed moose heart, fried liver from wild caribou, cooked moose muzzle with pasta, raw frozen horse testicles and much more. And the local people gave us a healthy perspective regarding extreme cold. Some of them had amputated fingers, arms and legs. Almost all had scarred cheeks and had lost the tip of their noses. And,



as they told us, it could have been worse. We could have been unfortunate prisoners in one of Stalin's gulags whose remains dotted the Kolyma. Many prisoners froze to death within two weeks.

Even though we encountered temperatures below  $-55^{\circ}\text{F}$  most of February, travelling was a holiday in comparison with the dark Mid-Winter travel. We froze badly throughout the month, but at noon every day the temperatures rose to  $-30^{\circ}\text{F}$  and that was enough to thaw out and we could even stop for a short brake without getting frostbite. We pulled the sledges from early morning until a couple of hours before darkness, having encountered no problems to form thoughts during the day, and then we pitched our tent and spent a couple of hours trying to get the stove working. Eventually it did. Equipment continued to brake in the cold, but we came across trappers almost every three or four days and their log cabins gave us enough warmth to do decent repairs. In March we had plenty of daylight and temperatures rose to  $-40^{\circ}\text{F}$  even in the night and we experienced day temperatures up to  $0^{\circ}\text{F}$ ! We reached the tundra in April and travelled quickly over the sastrugi and made it to our goal in Ambarchik Bay at the end of April 2005.

Much time has passed since we returned back home to Sweden. It hasn't been easy returning. I miss Kolyma every day. Not the hardships, the suffering or the extreme cold, but the people. They are the best people I've come across during 25 years of exploration; generous, funny, intelligent, knowledgeable, open-minded and extremely warm. All the goals we set before the Expedition have been fulfilled and we've discovered a lot of unknown information. I think the most important thing I've brought with me back home, is an understanding of the major difference between humans and other species: communication.

Jag skriver mer sedan... 

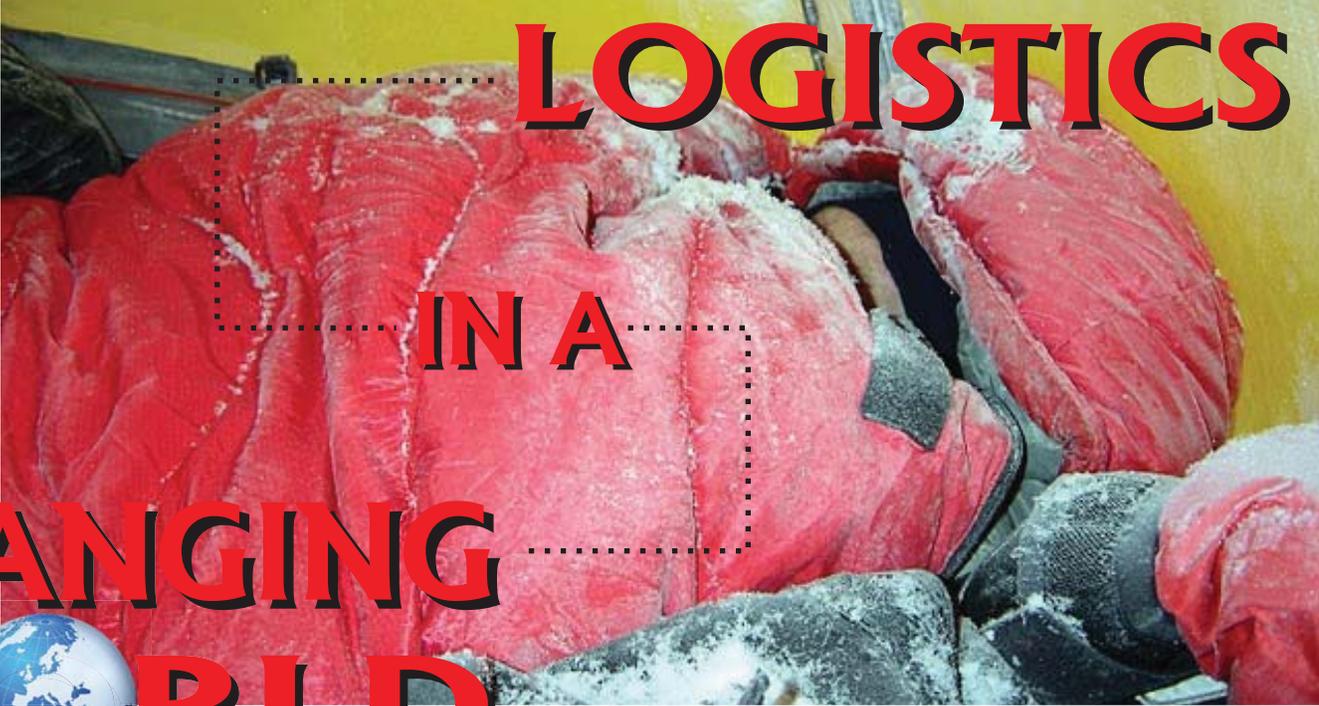
Have you always nurtured a dream of doing an Expedition that will change your life for the better? An Expedition that will create global attention? An Expedition to places which are considered off limits to most human beings?

Are you an experienced explorer who needs help with the logistics, like permits? Or a film maker who need help finding a local crew or permits to film?

# EXPEDITION LOGISTICS

IN A

# CHANGING WORLD



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There's no doubt about it. I love being with people, motivating them to enjoy life, inspiring them to live to its fullest, showing them some of the most unique spots on earth and giving them a perspective of life that very few other people get. A sense of exclusivity that only a few can have. And, from now on, I will be able to do that after becoming part of the Explorer In Residence Series at Kensington Tours.



## The Long Walk Articles

The interest regarding The Long Walk forced me to update my homepage completely. I have an extraordinary amount of readers from all over the world, but primarily from the US, UK and Scandinavia in that order.



## The Voices of Exploration Interviews

An ever-expanding database of exclusive monthly interviews with the world's leading explorers conducted by my friend Basha O'Reilly, explorer and founder of the Long Riders Guild. Interviews Include:

1. Basha O'Reilly
2. John Blashford-Snell
3. Robin Hanbury-Tenison

Visit me at

[www.mikaelstrandberg.com](http://www.mikaelstrandberg.com)

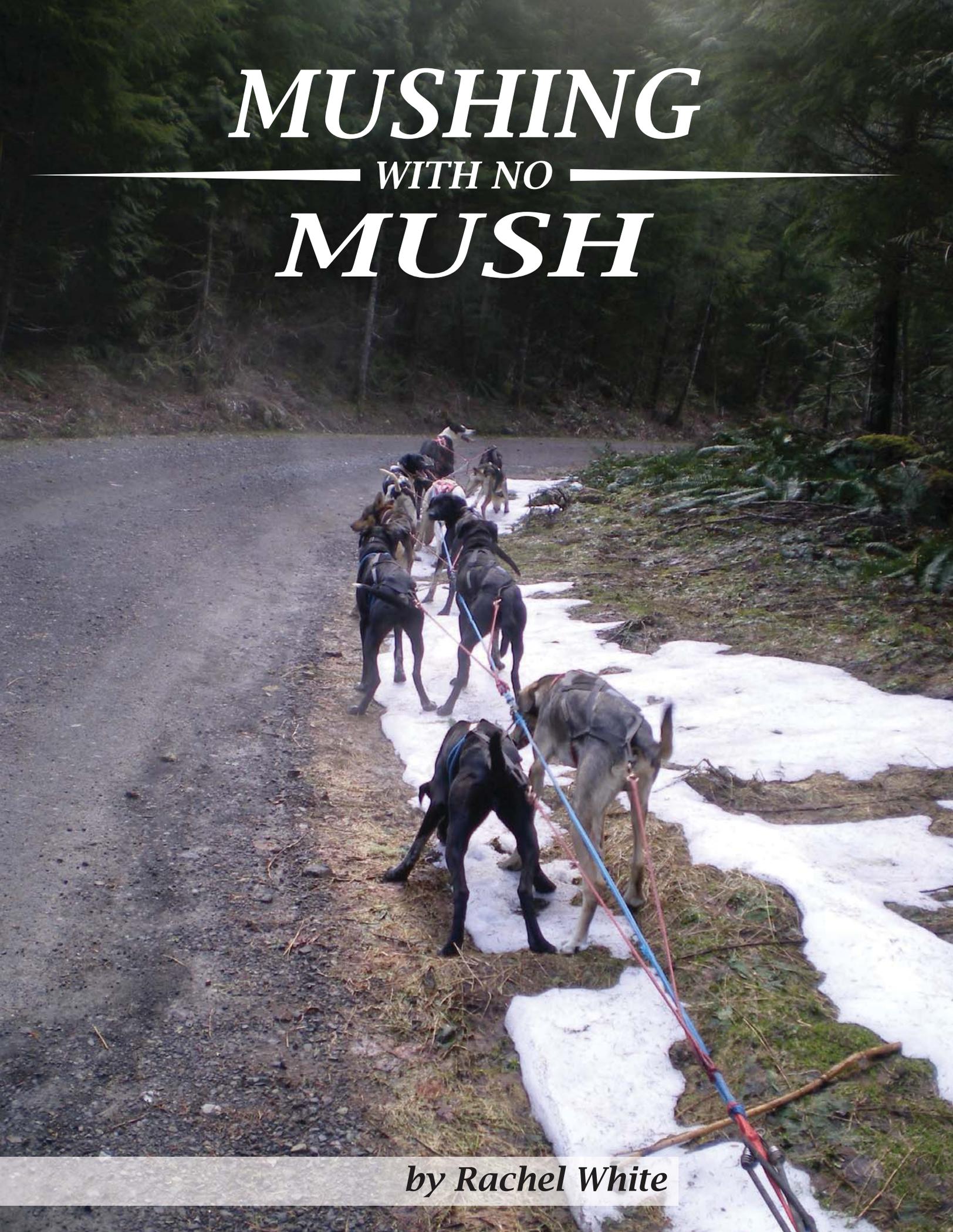
# *MUSHING*

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*WITH NO*

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# *MUSH*



*by Rachel White*

**T**he red Honda ATV I'm sitting on is parked, anchored by rope to the pickup truck behind me, and the handbrake is held tightly down with multiple loops of twine, and still I'm being bucked around like a cowgirl. Twelve dogs, ranging in size from 45 to 78 pounds, are attached by a 30-foot long rope to the ATV, and are catapulting themselves into the air in a frenzied desire to run and pull. They drown out all other sound with an ear-piercing cacophony of yips and quivering howls as their owner, Tim Curley, makes a final check of their lines to make sure there are no tangles. Their frantic energy adds a building sense of urgency, yet there's nothing I can do to help but sit tight and be ready. The engine is running, but the ATV will stay in neutral, acting simply as a weight and a place for us to sit. Throwing his gloves in the crate on the back, Tim jumps onto the seat in front of me, yells to a bystander to unhook the anchor rope, and in a surge of adrenaline, we're off, being pulled down the dirt track by pure dog power.

The dogs pulling this 400-pound ATV (plus the weight of two passengers) are a mixed breed called Alaskan huskies, moderate-sized dogs that generally look nothing like the fluffy purebred Siberian huskies most people associate with sledding. The Siberian husky breed does undoubtedly contribute to the ancestry of Alaskan huskies, but so do other breeds known for speed, work ethic, and endurance, such as German shorthaired pointer, greyhound, and the traditional Alaskan village dog. Alaskan huskies are bred specifically for this sport, and they love to pull. As anyone who has been on the leash end of an en-

thusiastic dog knows, they can exert a disproportionately powerful tug for a relatively small creature. Imagine that times 12, with dogs genetically wired for stamina, and it's no surprise they can haul an ATV around for miles.

For over ten years, Tim and his wife, Maria, have raced teams of these dogs in the winter using a sled. "It all started when we went to the pound and brought home a

**Keeping a sled dog team fit during the summer takes ingenuity.**

***It also turns heads.***

Siberian husky," recalled Tim. "We just wanted a pet. But someone told us sled racing would be good exercise for her, so we started letting her run on someone else's team. She learned fast and she loved it." Compact and trim, with short ginger hair and a neat beard showing hints of silver, Tim gave a wry smile at the thought of how far things have progressed since that day at the pound. "We got hooked on sled racing ourselves and we eventually learned about the superspeed and strength of Alaskan huskies," he explained. He and Maria moved from Portland to the smaller town of Sandy, Oregon several years ago so they would have room to care for their growing team of speed freaks, now numbering seventeen.

Tim, like most sled dog owners, understands that these dogs are athletes and need to keep up their training. In the winter, they race and train with the sled. But the whole landscape of opportunities for running and pulling changes as the planet tilts from winter to summer. For one thing, the warm temperatures raise the chances of the dogs overheating. But mainly, when the snow melts, your sled won't go. Sled dog owners have to come up with other alternatives, such as using an ATV, which they refer to as "quad training." Quad training keep the dogs



conditioned for pulling, but also gives them a good cardio workout and acts as weight-training to build muscle, since the ATV weighs more than twice what a sled weighs. And, for the passenger, it's pretty thrilling.

7 a.m. in the Thriftway parking lot in Welches, Oregon. Tim's red pick-up is easy to recognize: built into the truck's bed is a double-decker "dog box" with multiple ventilated compartments—a mobile home for his team. Just visible behind the metal grating on the doors to the compartments are dog noses, six on each side of the truck. Like a clown car, it's surprising so many dogs can fit in such compact arrangement, but the compartments are small by design. In the winter, when they travel to races in very cold weather, the snug boxes allow each dog's body heat to keep them warm.

Heading past Welches on Highway 26, we turn on Still Creek Road, an out-of-the-way dirt road that doesn't get a lot of traffic. "We also like this road because it has wide spots," explains Tim. "The trickiest part of quad training is turning around, because you have to try to keep all the dogs lined out and not let them get tangled."

Once he has found a suitable starting point, Tim begins the preparations, which take about half an hour. He unloads the ATV from the trailer, and stretches out the long rope, called the "gangline," that attaches to each dog's individual towrope. The dogs are starting to whine, but Tim gets as much prep work done as he can before "dropping" the dogs, or letting them out, because as soon as he does, the chaos will erupt. They know what's coming and they have only one thought: eat up the trail. They tremble and squirm with anticipation as Tim lets them out and temporarily ties them to a chain that circles the truck so that he can fit each of them with their harness. They are beautiful animals, with short, sleek coats that contour closely over lean, defined muscle. Seven of them are 15-month old puppies. Hope and Hudson are the parents. Ozzy has an all-white coat that's slightly longer, approaching shaggy. Patches, with black and white blotches, is the lead dog. As the lead, he has a harder job. Some dogs don't like the extra responsibility of navigating the trail, negotiating around other teams or obstacles, and being alone out front. But just like people, some dogs have leader personalities. "I used to have a lead dog named Spirit," says Tim. "And she really did have spirit. She would play chicken with approaching teams. If I had to correct her on something I would punish her by taking her off the lead and putting her back in with the team. She didn't like that at all."



With the prep over, the brake off, the anchor let go, and the shout "Hup! Hup!" to the crazed dogs, we start moving forward. In the winter, Tim does distance races rather than sprints, so he doesn't let the dogs go all out. We maintain a pretty steady pace of 8 or 9 miles per hour for the whole trip. A fit trail runner would have to really huff and puff to keep up with us. The dogs, having discovered all over again what they were born to do, glide along, silent now and completely absorbed in the task at hand. Although the weather forecast says the afternoon will see temperatures in the 70s, the morning air is still in the upper 30s, chilly enough to turn bare skin to ice, especially now that we're moving briskly along. "Can you hand me those gloves?" Tim asks me. The dogs love it. In fact, the cold temperatures are a requirement for training them in harness because they are exerting so much energy. To help keep them cool, Tim lets them stop at a snow patch every so often and lets them munch on snow.



# Race

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The four mile out-and-back trip comes to an end all too soon and we're back at the truck. The dogs, panting and quiet, send clouds of steam into the air as they cool down. While they are still harnessed to the gangline, Tim gives each dog water and bites of uncooked hot dog, talking individually to each of them. "People ask me how I can love so many dogs," he says. "Well, I want to say to them, 'How many friends do you have? How many people are in your family?' You love them all. Maybe you love them each in a different way because they each have a unique personality, but each one is special." I've only spent a few minutes with these dogs, but their individuality is evident. Tyee scorns the hot dog bite, spitting it out onto the ground each time Tim tries to entice him. Helen and Janet, meanwhile, took a few minutes when Tim's back was turned and chewed through their towlines. Hudson, despondent that the fun has ended, always has to be carried to the truck when it's time to leave.

Dry-land mushing adds a new dimension to the partnership built up between sled dogs and their owners. Without snow, you don't need to stick to groomed trails, so you have more options for training locations. It also provides all kinds of opportunity for obtaining more sporting gear and equipment to cram into your basement or garage. For people with fewer dogs, or who prefer not to use an ATV, other options for off-season pull training include using a special scooter, a customized cart, or hooking a dog

or two to their mountain bike. But bikes can be tricky, because not only do you have to be able to control your dog, you also have to manage the handling characteristics of the bike itself. In contrast, scooters are simpler, have fewer mechanical parts that can go wrong, and have a lower center of gravity so you can jump off faster.

Members of the Cascade Sled Dog Club, based in Portland, have used all these methods to train their sled dogs. Ellen Donoghue, a club board member, spoke about the transition from winter to summer activities. "Usually, Still Creek Road loses snow the soonest of the places we train around the mountain, and I know several of us who have been keeping a close eye on that in anticipation of switching from sleds or skis to wheels," she said. In winter, Ellen doesn't use a sled, but races her two dogs on skis, in a sport known as "skijoring." Her dogs wear the same type of harnesses as Tim's dogs, and tow her on a 10-foot line while she skies behind. In the warm months of the year, she uses a scooter. But not when it's too warm. "Basically, we'll be training our dogs every weekend until the coolest morning temperatures start getting up around 50 degrees. Above that, and it gets too warm for them to work in harness," she explained.

"Dog safety and dog health are our number one priorities. That's why we do everything so early in the morning, given that we always seek out the coolest temperatures for the dogs."

Thad McKracken, club vice president, reiterated how important this lesson is. "The most common mistake made by newbies is overheating their dogs," he said. Hydration is important too, and the owners have to take full responsibility for making sure the dogs drink enough. As Thad pointed out, "If you were going to run a marathon, you would drink extra water in the days leading up to the race to get yourself ready. But dogs have no idea you're going to race or train them the next morning." So the night before a training run or a race, you "bait" their water to entice them to drink. Some people stir in a little wet food, some people use fish. During a training run, owners also make sure and let the dogs stop for water breaks every so often.

At a certain point in the summer, the temperatures will prohibit any training that involves pulling. Ellen, like many people, will continue to take her dogs for long runs and hikes, but they won't wear their harnesses again until the chilly mornings of fall. Other training can be accomplished in the summer, however. Tim plans to use the summer break to train his dogs on general discipline issues. "I'm also going to set up a 'gangline to nowhere,' where the dogs have to get all hooked up to the gangline and just stay in place," he explained. "Then I teach them stuff like not to chew through their towlines."



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I've only spent a few minutes with these dogs, but their individuality is evident. Tyee scorns the hot dog bite, spitting it out onto the ground each time Tim tries to entice him. Helen and Janet, meanwhile, took a few minutes when Tim's back was turned and chewed through their towlines. Hudson, despondent that the fun has ended, always has to be carried to the truck when it's time to leave.

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Ellen, Thad, and Tim are passionate about this sport, and all of them do very well during the racing season. They also devote copious amounts of love, care, and training to their dogs. "When members of the club are together, all we do is talk about dogs," laughed Ellen. "You'd think there was nothing else going on in the world – no wars, no politics, no big social or cultural events. In fact, some of our spouses and partners have learned to stay away from club events. In general, people in the mushing crowd are fairly unique. We tend to be highly strong-willed, independent individuals."

But not completely independent. This is a sport made possible through a special partnership: a unique team made of human and dog. For the people I met, the

connection with their dogs is clear, and the hours they have spent working together evident. Their dogs seem almost to work as extensions of their own bodies. For them, half the fun of sled racing or skijoring is developing the relationship of trust between themselves and their dogs.

And it's what the dogs live for. These dogs are truly happiest when they have a job to do. You can tell when they are running their big hearts out that they have found what they were meant to do in life. They want to pull, and they want to please you, and that remains true no matter how old they get. "They never want it to end," said Tim. "If I went home right now to my 14-year old dog and got his harness out, he'd want to run. Even on his last day of life, if you harnessed him, he'd be ready." 





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## Terra Nova Laser 20L

Weighing in at only 12 ounces, this ultra-light day pack has the appropriate amount of padding (enough to be comfortable, but not excessive) on the back, shoulder straps, and waist straps. I love the vertical zipper for the main compartment because nothing gets lost down at the bottom of the bag. With a water bottle pocket and a zippered pocket on each waist strap, an internal sleeve for a hydration bladder, and two large mesh pockets on the outside, you can easily stow and access all your gear. It is light, but tough with reinforced stress points and solid material, it'll hold everything you need for an overnight race or hike. This is a very well thought out, high quality pack that won't add to your load. View their full line of tents, packs, sleeping bags, and more at [www.terra-nova.co.uk](http://www.terra-nova.co.uk).



## Terra Nova Laser Competition 1

This completely waterproof, three season tent packs down so small and light you'll forget you have it with you. The maximum weight is 930 grams (two pounds) with a FastPack weight of 580g (just barely over a pound!) and it sleeps one person spaciouly with room for two. It is very stable with a single DAC Featherweight pole across the middle (which provides ample headroom) and 4 guylines to hold it in place. It has a porch at the entrance to keep your gear out of the weather which is a very nice touch. Included are 12 titanium pegs weighing two grams each. This is another quality product from the people at Terra Nova, who obviously love the outdoor lifestyle and know the importance of high quality, lightweight gear. View their full line of tents, packs, sleeping bags, and more at [www.terra-nova.co.uk](http://www.terra-nova.co.uk).



# Adventure World Product Reviews



## Howler Brothers Magic Mesh Polo

My favorite mesh polo! The 100% polyester shirt wicks and dries quickly in hot weather. This polo is stylish enough to wear in a semi-formal setting and relaxed enough to wear to the beach. Great style, great feel and a Howler Monkey emblem to boot. This shirt has it all. Pick one up and I guarantee it will work its way into your regular shirt rotation. They also make the world's coolest belt buckle. View their entire line at [www.howlerbros.com](http://www.howlerbros.com).



## ECHO I Ultralight Shelter System

The Echo 1 Shelter System is about as versatile and light weight as it gets. When the box arrived at the office, I thought they may have just sent a pamphlet instead of the actual product. It comes in three pieces: overhead tarp, mesh tent insert to guard against bugs and ground water, and a detachable rear vestibule for when the weather gets a little out of hand. You can pitch the tarp, with or without mesh insert, or just the mesh on its own, with trekking poles, sticks, or tie the guy lines to some trees. The whole system weighs less than 1.5 pounds and, depending on the weather, it doesn't even have to weigh that much. It is made out of very sturdy Cuben fiber and it sets up as fast or faster than a regular tent. Check out their full line at [www.hyperlitemountaingear.com](http://www.hyperlitemountaingear.com).



## Lunatec Scrubr and Trekr

These washcloths and dishcloths are awesome. That's something I never thought I'd get excited about, but they rarely, if ever, need to be washed and you won't even know they're in your pack. The nylon and polyester they are made of do not absorb water or debris and dry very quickly, which makes it tough for odor-causing bacteria to grow. They hold a surprising amount of water in the open-weave design and when they dry (in about ten minutes!) they weigh next to nothing and pack down very small. The blue Trekr washcloth is a 27cm square and the yellow Scrubr dishcloth is a 20cm square. The president of the company has had his for over a year without having to wash it. They better hope everyone keeps losing them because I'm not sure you'll ever wear one out. And they come in a two pack! Visit [www.lunatecgear.com](http://www.lunatecgear.com) to get yours.



## GEIGERRIG Hydration Engine

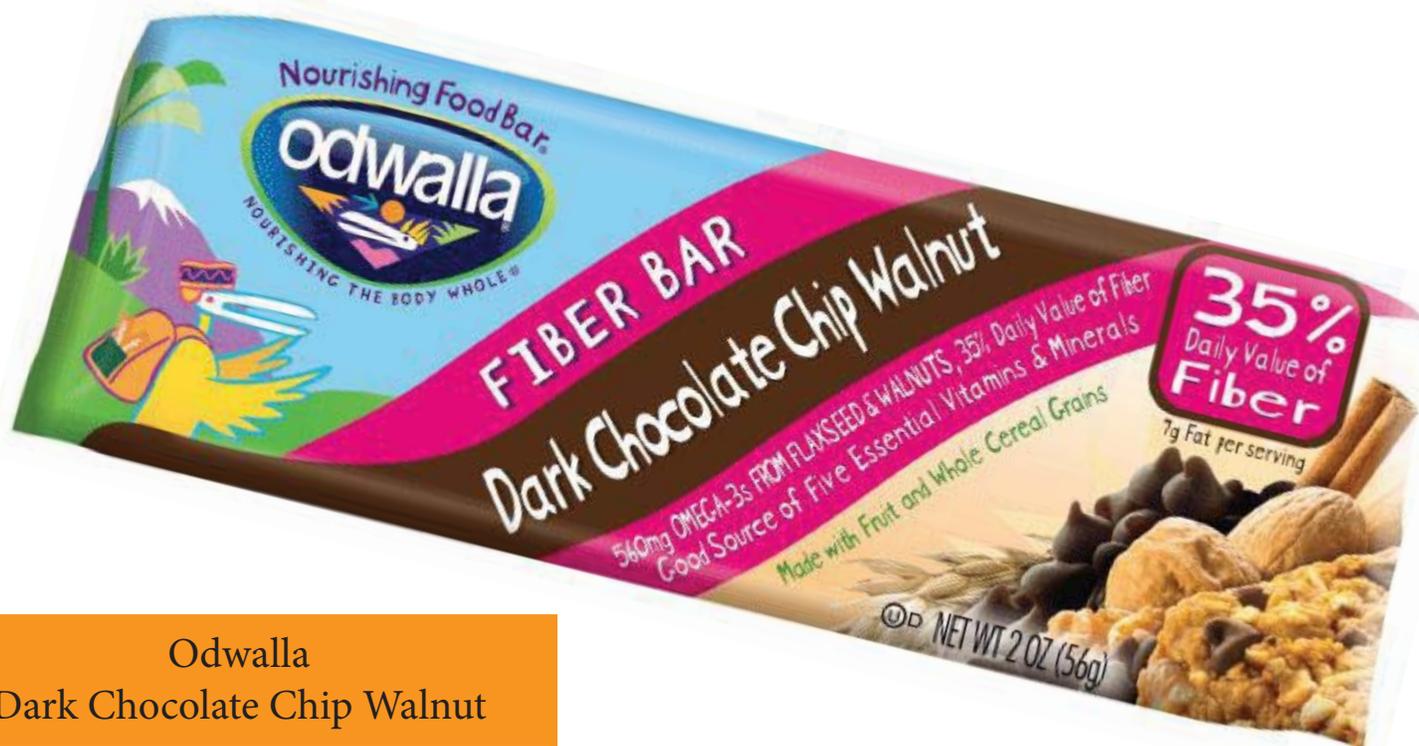


These are the best hydration bladders on the market. They have plenty of well-deserved awards to prove it. The bladders are actually called engines because, while they look similar to a regular bladder, they actually spray water. Just pinch the valve with your teeth or fingers and the water sprays right out so you can keep the oxygen flowing into your lungs while you drink. You pump up a separate chamber in the engine to pressurize it with a ball similar to that of a blood pressure cuff which is stowed in a pouch on the shoulder strap of your pack. The hoses snap on and off easily with a quick release and the top of the engine opens completely, letting everything dry out quickly with no hiding spots for the water. The bite valve never leaks, which blows me away. Every other valve I've had leaks constantly and they aren't even pressurized! Adding the feather-light water filter extends your water supply to fifty gallons.

Their packs come in several different sizes, but they are all incredibly tough and well padded with plenty of well thought-out pockets and straps to organize and stow equipment. I wasn't afraid to load these things down with the heaviest gear I could find and nothing is going to stab through the ballistic nylon.

Check out [www.geigerrig.com](http://www.geigerrig.com) for the full product line and details.

# Adventure World Product Reviews



## Odwalla Dark Chocolate Chip Walnut

So Good! This bar proves that food can be healthy and tasty. I love bars for their convenience and Odwalla makes the best. They taste great and don't wear your jaws out chewing through them. Perfectly moist and flavorful.



## CGear Sand Free Mat

These mats are perfect for camping, beach outings or sports transition areas. The mats were originally designed to eliminate sand, dirt and dust from helicopter landings, so they can definitely handle camping and beach outings. Sand and dirt fall straight through the mat and do not come back up. Gone are the days of sand filled towels and tarps just minutes after being spread out at the beach. The mats come in a variety of sizes (6' x 6'), (8' x 8') or (10' x 10'). [www.cgear-sandfree.com](http://www.cgear-sandfree.com)

# Adventure World Product Reviews



## Chaco Z/1 Vibram Unaweep

Made from sturdy nylon webbing and paired with tough Vibram soles, these sandals will last forever. The tread ensures a solid grip and fully adjustable straps will keep them on your feet no matter where you take them.



## Chaco Local Ecotread

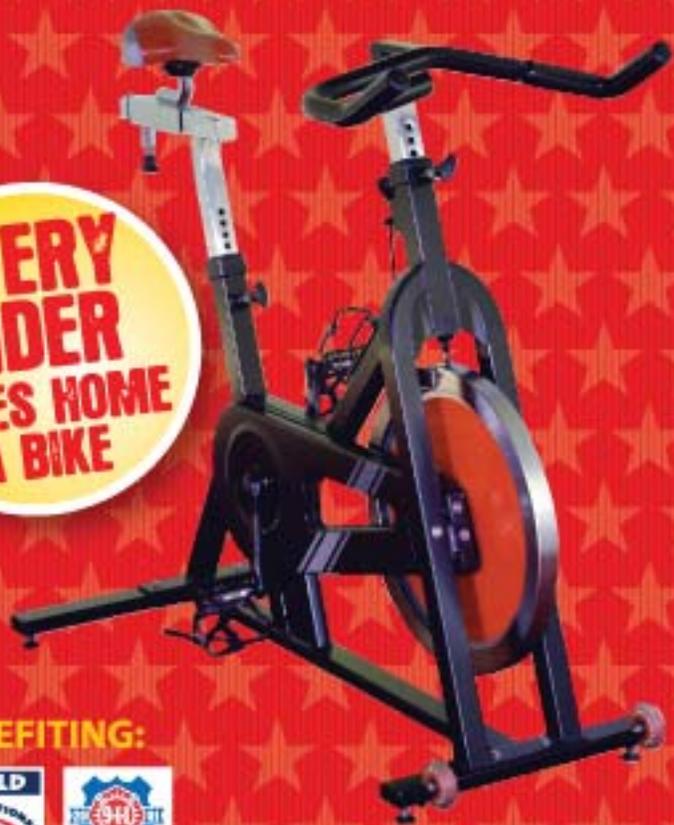
Sandal season started a few months ago here in Texas, so I was delighted to get a pair of Chaco Local Ecotreads in Chocolate Brown. Chaco definitely wants you to get the perfect fit out of your sandals; they provide a few adjustments in the straps to allow for your most comfortable fit. Once I got my straps adjusted, it was time to hit the town! The sandals are extremely comfortable and I absolutely love the arch support - I forgot that I was wearing a brand new pair. The leather is soft and supple, plus the flower and dot design in the leather gives the sandals a truly feminine feel. The Local Ecotreads are quite versatile - I have worn them with shorts and jeans, as well as slacks. I do appreciate Chaco's concern for the environment as the outsole consists of 25% recycled content. I am looking forward to wearing the sandals throughout the year. I expect the Local Ecotreads to handle the Texas heat and humidity, lasting for years of use while maintaining a great fashionable style.



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# Where Imagination Is Your Only Limit

A Look at Pain, Suffering and Success at One of the World's Most Gruelling Races.

By Steve Hay

When I first signed up for the 2009 UltimateXC, a 56km trail run in the rolling hills of Mont Tremblant, Québec, I thought to myself "Great...another long happy trail run." Nothing could have been further from the truth. The race ended up being an utter, and complete slog from beginning to end and challenged me to reconsider how I view racing.

Taking part in adventure racing for the past ten years, I believed I was an athlete who had become accustomed to the pain and suffering that comes along with the sport. If I could get myself through a sleep-deprived, 1000km expedition race such as Primal Quest, then surely I would be able to handle a mere 56km "trail run." With the race start and finish at the base of the Mont Tremblant ski village, the setting is serene, beautiful, and it lulls racers into a false sense of security. Being able to run a comfortable marathon in 3 hours, the UltimateXC should have taken me no longer than 5 hours to complete.

But, after crossing the finish line in over 9.5 hours I was humiliated, and defeated. After a couple of days of pouting, I vowed to return the following year to recover my pride. In order to do so, I would have to learn to love pain and make it my best friend.

When 2010 rolled around, the UltimateXC itself had changed. Not only was there a 56km trail section, but it began with a 67km down-river paddle, and ended with an arduous 110km mountain bike ride. Now this was more like it. Long distance, hard conditions, and challenging terrain. Again, I believed that my race experience had prepared me for this type of race. After all, expedition adventure races were my thing. Wrong again.

Although I largely dominated the kayak section, I managed only 31km of the trail run before bowing out of the race after falling several times on my recently recovered fractured wrist. The pain in my hand was too much to handle the next days mountain bike ride. I would have to deal with those dreaded feelings that come from seeing DNF (did not finish) beside my name. It had no longer become a question of wanting to win, but merely finishing. Again, I was going to have to find a way to deal with pain. If I was going to defeat this race, I needed to focus all my energy on pain management. The race director, Dan des Rosiers, put it in other terms for me "don't be such a sissy."

Dan is one of those special race directors. He doesn't put the success of his race on the number of people entering but rather the number that finish. And, don't intend on registering and participating



“Dan doesn’t just want to make you suffer, he wants you to earn your pain.”

as a tourist. He simply won't allow you to enter and he requires a documented race CV just to get into the race. I had to squeeze every last bit of my race experience just to complete the 56km the first time, and rightfully so. In the 2011 race, it will become even more difficult as Dan intends on placing multiple time cut-offs for every stage of the race. You have to reach a certain point in the race by a certain time or you are out. This is a race director who understands the mechanics of pain, and how to get it out of his racers. He doesn't just want you to suffer, he wants you to earn your pain.

In preparation for the 2011 race, I have begun to prepare myself by understanding pain, and how to push through it. I studied it, examined it, prodded it and refused to let it get the best of me. It is human nature to treat pain as something to avoid. The pain that comes in a race is perceived with dread and fear by most racers. This is not really difficult to understand. Pain is unpleasant. Pain in long distance racing revolves around the supply of oxygen for energy production. The faster you go, the more energy you need. It takes oxygen to produce this energy. When your body cannot keep up with your demand for oxygen - aerobic energy production, it switches to anaerobic energy production which produces the byproduct lactic acid. When this happens, you better be close to the finish, because it won't be long before you have to slow down. The pain in a race starts mild, goes to

moderate, to severe and eventually reaches unendurable. The more you hold your pace while feeling severe and unendurable pain, the better you become at tolerating it for future races.

I knew that the 2011 UltimateXC would bring those predictable feelings. I was going to have to do more than just manage my suffering. I would have to change the way I thought about racing with pain. A great friend once told me 90% of racing is mental, and the other 10% is also mental. At first I thought his math was terrible. After careful consideration I realized that it is 100% mental. I concluded that I was too focused on pain and its inevitability rather than focusing on the reasons I was racing in the first place. I wanted to race. Period.

I started to visualize the race in its entirety. The first day greets all racers with a 67km down-river paddle. Okay, so that is not so bad in my head. How would I train? What was my strategy? The issue with the paddle is not so much the length, but the effect it will have on your body on the third day. For me, I have to go all out on the kayak. Holding back is simply not an option. I consider myself a strong paddler, but a weak runner. I would need to paddle fast and efficiently to gain time on the runners who will take it back the following day.

Dan just laughs at me and reminds me over and over again that the race is always won on the mountain bike. Before I even get to the mountain bike I will need to get through the 56km "trail run."

There is nothing easy about the run section of the race. If you are not running through water, then you are climbing, or pushing through what hardly could be called a trail. I can see the coy little smile on Dan's face as he explains to racers that the race really begins at the 34km mark. In 2009, when I reached this mark I realized that most of the elevation gain and loss was still to come. As if the first 34km didn't have enough.

However, once you plod onward, and upward reaching the summit for the 4th time in the course, you realize it is all downhill and you finish running through the village of Mont Tremblant with spectators cheering on your weary soul. You have done it. Congrats. But wait, there is still the 110km mountain bike section to go on the third day. Okay Dan. It might be won on the mountain bike. However, it takes the right mental attitude at the end of the run just to get yourself to the start of the mountain bike section.

One thing is certain, you cannot accomplish the goals you set for yourself, you cannot turn your dreams into action until you learn to accept the pain in racing... and that is a mental thing.



I had a chance to ride part of the mountain bike section of the race in early May 2010, a full two months before the race. Beginning at the lovely farmhouse of Patrick Lussier, we proceeded quickly into the mud-laden, uphill start to the course. Ouch. It took about one hour to get through the first 5km. All of this pre-race training was done without the paddle or run on the previous days. Although I never got to ride the complete course in 2010, I saw the pure angst of racers who crossed the finish line

and realized that it took everything they had to keep moving on the bike. The paddle and run had caught up to them on this third and final day. The winner, Bob Miller, a long time successful adventure racer, was heard to comment several months after the race that it took about eight weeks to recover mentally and physically from the UltimateXC.

The number one way to deal with what is going to eventually happen is to totally revamp your attitude and thinking concerning racing pain. At UltimateXC, you

will experience it. Get over it. If you want to race, the pain won't matter. For me, I will sweat in practice so I don't bleed in battle.

When I return to UltimateXC in 2011, it will be my mind that determines how I will accept the pain of this beast. And in the words of the race director who so completely understands the pain that all the racers will be going through...*"it's all good."*

For those cranked up for this race consult [www.ultimatexc.com](http://www.ultimatexc.com) for race details and registration. Good luck. 

The number one way to deal with what is going to eventually happen is to totally revamp your attitude and thinking concerning racing pain. You have to think there is no pain. You have to imagine there is no limit to your abilities.

**ULTIMATEXC**

# OUTCH!

## MONT TREMBLANT

JUNE 17, 18 & 19<sup>th</sup> 2011

21  
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**ULTIMATEXC.COM**



## Heart of the Amazon Voyage

Amazon Nature Tours takes you by river boat into some of the most remote and untouched rainforest in the Amazon. You'll venture far up the Rio Negro, the least-inhabited river in the Amazon Basin, and explore areas rarely visited by outsiders. Led by accomplished naturalist guides you'll see creatures almost never seen by other visitors—in fact, the experience is something like being in a time machine, as you are able to explore places that are relatively unchanged. Your Amazon cruise vessel Tucano (Toucan in Portuguese) has comfortable cabins with large beds and private baths and is air conditioned throughout. Small groups, trained naturalist guides and a thoughtful itinerary allow for a genuine, thrilling experience of the Amazon rainforest. It's truly the trip of a lifetime.

- Day 1

Your trip begins in Manaus, Brazil. Board the Motor Yacht Tucano and depart upstream on the Rio Negro. Through the morning we will cruise through the world's largest river island system, the Anavilhanas Archipelago. From the observation deck we scan the magnificent tangle of vegetation at the water's edge. By mid-afternoon the vessel has gone beyond the frontier of settlement and entered a wilderness area. Both shores are covered by dense rainforest. Though we never know what we will see, we have a good chance of observing pink river dolphins and a large collection of exotic birds. Most certainly we will be treated to magnificent forest vistas and the spectacular trees themselves. In the late afternoon we embark in the launches to search for wildlife and go for a swim in some of the world's cleanest and most refreshing water.

- Day 2

Early this morning we explore the rainforest along the water's edge in our launches. We should hear and perhaps see howler monkeys along with a morning serenade of toucans. After breakfast we go for a walk in the forest where we will get a good start on understanding Amazon ecology. Around midday we return for lunch and the vessel will get underway, stopping at a place to swim. In the late afternoon we will explore the forest in our launches and listen to the sunset chorus of birds and frogs.

- Day 3

This morning there will be an early exploration of the waking forest. We will keep our eyes open for monkeys which can be seen often. We return for breakfast followed by either a walk in

the forest or an excursion in the launches. The Tucano will travel during the middle of the day and we stop in the afternoon for an excursion. Tonight the vessel may travel a bit more as we marvel at the night sky crowded with stars.

- Day 4

After our two morning excursions, the M/Y Tucano will navigate along the heavily forested shore, scouting for wildlife. We may stop for a visit at a settler's home carved out of the forest. In the early afternoon we will be near an extraordinary river called the Rio Jauaperi. We will scout along the shoreline for some of the extraordinary creatures found only in this unique environment. We will do a night excursion to observe nocturnal creatures.

- Day 5

Today we depart the Rio Jauaperi and for the next two days proceed downstream on the Rio Negro exploring a new collection of rainforest habitats. In the daytime we will continue to scout in our launches, walk in the forest, and at night hunt for nocturnal wildlife.

- Day 6

After a walk in the forest we cross to the West bank of the Rio Negro, exploring as we go. We will stop at the substantial boat building village of Novo Airão. As we walk through the streets we'll marvel at how the 19th Century thrives in this remote corner of the globe. Tonight the Tucano goes downstream to arrive at daybreak near the confluence with the Amazon River. As we glide through the starry darkness this is a good night to sip the national drink of Brazil, the "Caipirinha".

- Day 7

This morning we explore the Lago Januari Ecological Park where seasonally the thick brown water of the Amazon flows swiftly through the forest. This area is usually a very good place to observe wildlife. Around midday the vessel will travel to the "Encontra das Aguas" a stark several mile long line where the world's two largest rivers, the Amazon and the Negro, join in a turbulent maelstrom. Here the dark water of the Negro runs beside the opaque brown water of the Amazon. In the afternoon we scout one of the hidden streams in the area to see more of the Amazon's beautiful and bizarre creatures





## Everest Base Camp Trek

Mount Everest towers above the Khumbu at over 29,000 feet and is perhaps the most iconic symbol of challenge and adventure on Earth. On our classic Everest Base Camp Trek, follow in the footsteps of legends as we ascend from verdant Lukla to the vast glaciers and razor-sharp ridgelines of the Everest Himalayas; home of the world's highest peaks. At Base Camp, stand face-to-face with the fabled Khumbu Ice Fall and its towering seracs. Hike to the summit of Kala Patar at over 18,100 feet for an unobstructed view of Everest's windblown summit, trailing a seemingly perpetual banner of cloud and snow. For well over two decades our expert local staff have been traveling the footpaths of the Everest region with REI members, providing insider perspectives, preparing fresh meals and handling every detail of our camping and trekking needs. This epic journey begins and ends in Kathmandu where opportunities abound to explore UNESCO World Heritage sites and discover colorful Buddhist and Hindu traditions.

- **Day 1**

Your trip begins in Kathmandu, Nepal. After clearing immigration and customs, you are met by our friendly staff and transferred to the hotel in colorful Thamel, filled with restaurants, unique shops and outdoor outfitters to help you acquire any last-minute trekking gear. The afternoon is left open to rest and explore this unique area. Perhaps take a walking tour with your guide to become more familiar with the city.

- **Day 2**

We enjoy a guided tour of the ancient cities of Kathmandu and Patan that will last most of the day. Nepal is a country rich in religious diversity and our visits today to Hindu and Buddhist sacred sites including Swayambhunath (the Monkey Temple), Boudhanath and Patan's magnificent Durbar Square will open many windows into these fascinating and ancient worlds. We can also take a side-trip to the Tibetan Refugee Carpet center in Jawalakhel. The rest of the day you will be on your own to explore.

- **Day 3**

In the very early morning (prior to 6 a.m.) we transfer to the airport to catch our scenic flight to Lukla (9,200'), the entrance into the Solu Khumbu. When we arrive, our supplies and gear are loaded onto yaks, then our trek begins with a four hour hike

down through terraced hillsides and along stone fences to the Dudh Kosi River (8,600'), across a hanging bridge, to our first camp near Phakding. Arriving in camp in Phakding, your tent will be set-up for you and all of your gear delivered by our support staff. You can look forward to receiving a hot bowl of water at your tent each day after we arrive in camp – great for washing up or for doing a bit of light laundry. Then there is time for hot tea or hot drinks and well-deserved rest. This is our arrival routine in camp most afternoons/evenings, and you'll appreciate these little extras along with the rest of the exceptional care and attention you can expect to receive from our trekking staff.

- **Day 4**

The dawn's air is crisp as the sun won't reach the bottom of the Dudh Kosi Valley until mid-morning, but your morning wake-up call each day on our trek is delivered complete with a hot cup of tea and warm bowl of washing water delivered right to your tent. After a hearty breakfast, we set out on the trail as it wanders through rolling terrain, past traditional homes, plowed fields and pine and cedar forests. Ascending slowly to the entrance of Sagarmatha National Park, the snowy peak of Thamserku (21,856') gives us a taste of the unmatched mountain scenery to come. Lunch provides fuel for the steep 1,800' hike to the village of Namche Bazaar (11,300'). Namche is the largest Sherpa village and has long been the primary staging area for major Himalayan expeditions. It is a major establishment because of the abundant source of fresh water and its lively bazaar on Saturdays. REI has a long history here and has cultivated many friendships. We know you'll enjoy this very special place and we'll spend two nights here on our way up the mountain.

- **Day 5**

Temple horns and yak bells awaken us to a sunrise surrounded by snowy white mountains over 20,000' high! Today is an acclimatization day, meaning we plan to sleep at the same altitude as the previous night, but we plan to trek higher then descend. A slow and steady ascent with adequate time for acclimatization is key to an enjoyable trek. Peaks we'll view as we set out include Kwangde (20,930'), Thamserku (21,856'), and Kangtega (22,240'). And what's more, as we ascend to around 12,000' we earn truly stunning views of Nuptse (25,790'),

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Lhotse (27,940'), Ama Dablam (22,943') and even Mount Everest (29,035'). Tonight we overnight again in Namche Bazaar.

• Day 6

From Namche Bazaar our trek leaves the standard Base Camp trail for the next two days. Crossing the valley, we ascend through a rhododendron forest traversing the beautiful southern slope of Khumbila, the sacred mountain of the Sherpas which cannot be climbed. We trek over Mung La pass (12,992') stopping for lunch with the spectacular peak of Thamserku looming in the near background. Then we descend to Phortse Tenga alongside the Dudh Koshi River and fed by the glaciers of the sixth highest peak in the world, Cho Oyo. Finally, we ascend another 45 minutes or so through picturesque birch and rhododendron forest to Phortse where we'll camp for the night. Watch for iridescent impeyan pheasants, tahr mountain goats, and possibly musk deer when walking through the forests and among the high farms today.

• Day 7

Today we enjoy a leisurely half-day ascent to Pangboche (13,030') during the morning hours. This hike leads us another 400 feet up the route where we establish camp among small traditional homes and fields. After lunch and a good bit of rest, this afternoon we'll enjoy a unique opportunity to visit Pangboche Monastery, the oldest monastery in the Everest region. The ancient and very special nature of this place is easily felt by visitors. Returning to camp for dinner, enjoy sitting among the 400 year old juniper trees as you gaze across the valley at the magnificent mountain scenery here.

• Day 8

Today's hike is an extended half-day, with a late lunch in camp after a challenging and scenic climb to Dingboche (14,400'). After ascending fairly gradually along the river Imja Khola for the better part of the morning, our trail swings off the main track to the east and climbs slowly up to the windswept potato fields of Dingboche village, the highest permanent Sherpa settlement in the region. Ama Dablam's razor edges are particularly dramatic here. We'll expect to have arrived and be enjoying our lunch by around 1:00 pm, so consider packing an energy bar or snack in your daypack as we set out in the morning. After lunch, the remainder of the afternoon is yours to rest, journal, read, enjoy the views and soak in your surroundings.

• Day 9

We've scheduled another important acclimatization day today. To this point in the trek, we've ascended over 6,200', and before we attempt to sleep any higher, we'll hike high today then de-

scend to sleep at the same altitude for one more night. There are many options available to us, and the most likely is one of our Sherpa guides' favorite hikes. Few visitors to the Everest region will ascend the base of Nangkar Tshang peak, and this 5-hour round trip leads past cliff-side sacred sites to a stunning view of Makalu, the world's 5th highest peak at 27,762'. We'll hike as high as it makes sense to, reaching our high point somewhere between 15,700' and 16,400', then return to camp at 14,400'. This should help the body acclimatize more effectively. We do not move camp tonight.

• Day 10

Our ascent today begins with a gentle climb along the upper trail headed into the Pheriche valley. Well above Pheriche and the valley floor, we contour along the Northwest side of the valley through alpine scrub and yak pastures, enjoying panoramic views of Tawoche (21,463'), Cholutse. Directly behind us, Ama Dablam appears to rise directly from the valley floor to its fullest snowy height. After about two hours of gradual ascent along this path, we reach Thokla Pass and begin a challenging but relatively short ascent of about 690'. At the pass, long strands of prayer flags connect monuments and memorials dedicated to Himalayan climbers. The scenery becomes even more exceptional as we crest the pass to panoramic views of Nuptse, Lhotse, Lhotse Shar and a host of "lesser" peaks. We continue hiking beyond Thokla Pass to reach Lobuche, a sparse trekkers' outpost at 16,100' where we'll camp for one night. The next two days will be challenging, so it is imperative to eat well and drink lots of water tonight. You are likely to be tired by the end of this beautiful and challenging day.

• Day 11

The next two days host some of our trek's most exceptional highlights. On day 11, we pick our way through boulders and rock while trekking up about 3 hours and 1,000 feet to reach Gorak Shep (17,100'). This tiny outpost resides in the immediate shadow of Kala Patar (18,190'). We arrive in time for lunch, and then evaluate conditions before moving on. If the weather suggests clear views we'll set out for the summit of Kala Patar to enjoy the exceptional view of Mt. Everest (29,035') from its summit. If the views seem less likely to open up for us, we will instead head up on the 3-4 hour hike to Everest Base Camp, saving Kala Patar for the following morning. In either case, we may descend in the dark to our dinner at camp so bring warm clothes, a headlamp and check your batteries before setting out. Both hikes are optional but exceptional. You'll be glad if you save some energy for these hikes.

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- Day 12

Today, we'll pick-up where we left off the previous day completing whichever of the two hikes we were not already able to attempt. Meanwhile, our team moves camp back down to Lobuche, Thokla or Phulung Kharka depending on the group's physical ability and time. If we set out for Kala Patar this morning, we must start very early so that the light affords us the best quality of Everest views. We will set out before sunrise with headlamps and return to breakfast in camp before descending if we climb Kala Patar today. After breakfast, we'll have time to descend as far as Thokla or Phulung Kharka. If we instead hike to Base Camp, we'll set out in the early twilight and will likely descend to Lobuche this afternoon. You may opt out of the hike this morning if you prefer to head back down the trail. While we can celebrate some very significant accomplishments tonight, there are still plenty of highlights remaining on our descent, which will feature some different trails and very special sights along the way.

- Day 13

Today we cover a lot of ground and descend thousands of feet into far more oxygen-rich air as we hike. We'll enjoy a stop at the Himalayan Rescue Association clinic in Pheriche, which is an important medical facility for trekkers, climbers and local people. Staffed by volunteer physicians, it is a very interesting waypoint on this remote trail that is new to us. After lunch we emerge from the valley and climb a short distance to Pheriche Pass, before descending to cross the river Imja Khola. Climbing on through the park-like rhododendron forests bursting with flowers on spring departures, we eventually reach Deboche or Tengboche to camp. Both are situated in picturesque settings. Not really a village, Tengboche is primarily a gompa and everyone living there is in some way associated with the operations of the monastery. If we reach Tengboche tonight, we will visit for a glimpse into monastic life. If we camp in Deboche, we will visit Tengboche on our descent tomorrow.

- Day 14

Today is another full day of descent and the air continues to become more oxygen-rich. If we've departed from Deboche this morning, we'll soon reach the spacious plateau upon which Tengboche Monastery is built at 12,761'. After a visit there, we continue descending to the Dudh Koshi river then climb for 1.5 hours to Kyangjuma for lunch. We finish our hike today with a

mostly flat walk from Kyangjuma to Namche Bazaar where we'll enjoy once again the unforgettable panoramic views of Lhotse, Nuptse, Everest and Ama Dablam that inspired us near the outset of our trek. Tonight we'll spend the night in Namche Bazaar where you can find services like hot showers and internet access for a small fee, along with local bars and souvenir shops. There will likely be time for you to explore Namche Bazaar on your own after we arrive and before dinner is served.

- Day 15

Leaving Namche Bazaar, we have a big descent today to Phakding. If the weather is clear, take plenty of photos of your final views of the great peaks we've enjoyed so much along the way, including Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam. We'll not see them again after reaching camp tonight. In Phakding we'll camp by the Dudh Koshi River and enjoy another spectacular Himalayan sunset before turning in.

- Day 16

Today is a challenging final day of trekking from Phakding to Lukla as we begin with a short descent, then climb 600' to end in Lukla as we leave the long trail behind. After the climb, enjoy a night in a small lodge where you can shower and then look forward to a truly memorable farewell party with all of the wonderful support staff that have contributed so much to the success of our great adventure. Overnight in Lukla.

- Day 17

We must prepare for our return flight to Kathmandu very early this morning. Taking off from the Lukla airstrip is an exhilarating experience and our last look at the snowy Himalayas is bittersweet. After the flight we are met by our ground staff and transferred to our hotel for hot showers, clean clothes and a relaxed day. Our staff will have double-checked your flights out, and will update you on any important changes. Then the balance of the day is free time.

- Day 18

Enjoy a free day and sightseeing today. This day is on your own, but we provide lots of hints about what to see and do. One big hint: don't miss the fascinating medieval city of Bhaktapur and consider visiting the medieval villages of Bungamati and Kokhana.



# 2011 CRUCE de los ANDES

About half way up the first mountain participants understood why this was an adventure race and not a trail race. There were no trails! Some parts required climbing, not just hiking. But this wasn't yet what the organizer meant by brutal!



by CHARLES PUTZ

**M**y wife, Verena Schultze, and I, Charles Putz, are from Brazil and participated this past February in the Cruce de los Andes (The Cross of the Andes), a three stage 100 km single modality (trekking/running) adventure race that crosses the south Andes from Argentina to Chile in Patagonia, where the mountains aren't very high. The race is in the summer, so if the sun shines it can be hot during the day, but since it isn't far from the South Pole it gets cold at night. It was the tenth year the race was organized, and we had heard a lot about how beautiful it was. Each year a new, special path is chosen. The organizer promised "this year is going to be the most difficult so far. In return you will have spectacular scenery in a priceless natural environment."

We trained on our own without support from any trainer; with all the time constraints inherent in our lives, having to dedicate most of our time to work and family, besides practicing other unrelated sports. We probably trained less than most participants, but we believe we trained properly. Whenever we could, we went on long, technical, but beautiful trails. Apart from short weekday training, any asphalt or indoor running was an exception. It was definitely a good decision to go two weeks before the race to Itatiaia National Park in Brazil. The highest mountains near where we live are in that park, which in addition to steep, long, difficult trails, gave us an acclimatization opportunity at 2500 meters.

We left home at six am, flew from Sao Paulo to Buenos Aires, then Bariloche, and got onto a 5 hour bus ride to San Martin de los Andes, arriving late at night at the official host city of the race. The next day we got our race kit with official shirt, chip, and many nice things supplied by the sponsors. After everything was ready we went for a jog on the lakeside with a scenic view. Our greatest concern at this time was the weather. We heard that last year the weather was terrible, to the extent that a bridge fell and the trucks couldn't arrive with the racers' containers of gear, causing more teams to drop out than any other year. The weather channel forecasted zero chance of rain, but we felt a strong wind coming in, the sky got dark and water starting to pour down. At night we had the first race briefing. The organizer explained how the race was going to be: camp each night next to a lake, where the following morning would be the start, going uphill, trekking through the mountain's ridge,

and then down to another lake. In the third day we would cross the border to arrive in Chile. However, he added (only in Spanish) that there was a change in plans for the first night. Very strong winds were expected for late afternoon at our camp site, which could make it impossible to set up our tents. So we were going to camp at a somewhat sheltered place, three and a half kilometers from the race start. Friday morning, before the race, we would have to walk to the start, which was going to be delayed by half an hour.

On Thursday after an early lunch we got into the organization's busses and traveled four hours to our first camp site, close to Lake Rucachoroi. We carried our container from the truck to a flat free space we located, where we set up our tent. At night it got very cold, and in the morning we had to wipe the frost from our tent before packing it into the container and carrying it back to the trucks. The Argentine army prepared a real military operation to cook for more than 1000 people. The next days we would repeat the ritual of carrying our containers, finding a nice spot for our tent, facing long lines to go to the bathroom, and more of the same food for lunch and dinner. That wouldn't leave us much free time.

The first day was the easiest, and great for marathon racers who had some experience in trails and hills. There were dirt roads or trails in the entire path from Lake Rucachoroi to Lake Ñorquinco, with no extreme slopes, in a total of 31.2km and "only" about 500 meters of elevation gain plus 600 meters descent. For us, it was disappointing. The view was very nice, but we have seen better, and the trails were "too easy". We thought a typical day would take us at least five hours, but we arrived in three hours and thirty-four minutes, in position 154 out of 500 teams. The fastest team took only two hours and eight minutes, while the average team took a little over four hours, and the slowest over eight hours.



At night, during the briefing of the next day, the organizer announced: "Today was difficult, but tomorrow is going to be brutal! Enjoy every minute and don't miss any of the spectacular landscape!" More than a thousand people started chatting concerned about what he meant. We thought: this is going to be our day.

On day two, to avoid jamming, we started out in groups of 100 teams based on the time of the first day. After an initial seven kilometers of fairly flat trails, overcrowding became inevitable when we turned left and started climbing through a single track where it was very difficult to pass other teams. The trail was steeper and less defined than the day before. There were many logs, roots and loose stones on the way. About half way up the first mountain participants understood why this was an adventure race and not a trail race. There were no trails! Some parts required climbing, not just hiking. But this wasn't yet what the organizer meant by brutal. After more than 600 meters

of difficult ascent, we went through a short downhill and then faced another 300 meters of even steeper uphill, on even more difficult terrain. What most imagined to be a semi-flat mountain ridge were they could run turned out to be a series of steep ups and downs, without trails, on such difficult terrain that it was nearly impossible to keep a good pace. In some cases we had to jump from stone to stone. The total altitude gain adding everything was close to 2000 meters, which also meant about 1900 meters of downhill, in a total of 31.2 km. On the other hand, the view was truly rewarding. We looked to our right and saw several Andean lakes, and to our left the stunning Chilean snow capped volcanoes. The day was so clear and everything was gorgeous. We had the impression that looking to the east we could see the Atlantic and on the other side the Pacific.

Since we aren't fast on the easier trails, in addition to the 100 teams which left in front of us, some teams passed us in the first 7 km. Where things got really

difficult, we more than recovered, passing many teams. We knew that some would pass us back in the last kilometers which were well defined downhill trails, but what we didn't count was on Verena's knees giving up. Not only could she not run, but she even had trouble walking. The trekking poles, which had already proven very useful in the steep hills, saved us. We lost about half an hour and enjoyed a wonderful trail in a beautiful araucaria (type of South American pine) forest, while several teams passed us back. We arrived at Lake Moquehue after six hours, six minutes in 132nd position. The first team arrived three hours, thirty-two minutes, and it took twelve hours, nine minutes for the last team. There was supposed to be a nine hour limit, but so many teams exceeded this time that the organization allowed all who wanted to continue move on to the next day.

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More than one thousand racers make their way up the mountain in the 2011 Cruce de los Andes.





In the briefing the night before the third and final day, it was announced that this would be as difficult and gorgeous as the second day. Instructions were passed about crossing the border, again only in Spanish, and an alternate route was offered for teams who wanted to go through a 30 km dirt road, reaching the same destination. Our strategy was to save energy in the first and second days to increase the chances of achieving our main goal: finishing the race. But we weren't sure how well Verena's knees would hold on the last day. She took an anti-inflammatory before going to bed, and joked that she had to go up the mountain again the next day to search for her knees which she had forgotten on the mountain.

For some reason the organization decided that all 1000 runners would start together. Our planning experience played an important role. We examined the maps and realized that in spite of what was announced, we were actually going to have a lot less altitude gain than the day before, about 1200 meters versus almost 2000, and the total distance was going to be one kilometer shorter. We also observed that after 5 km we were going to start going uphill in a single track where it would be difficult to pass. It was the last day and we didn't have to save any energy for the following day. We decided we would run faster than our normal pace to try to get ahead of as many teams possible before hitting the single track. That proved to be a very good strategy. In addition to the difficulties of passing other teams, there were three places where inevitable lines formed. First was a large fallen tree in a steep single track, and then a real charm which was added to the race: a rock we had to climb, and later a short rappel on the way down. We had a combined waiting time

in the three lines of less than half an hour, while the last teams had to wait a total of almost two hours. We were feeling so good, so full of energy and enthusiasm, enjoying the marvelous view, that we kept a much faster pace than the first days, passing many teams. On the way down, into a lovely forest, we ran by a man sitting under a tree who announced: "welcome to Chile, when you finish the race please present your documents."

After four hours, thirty-six minutes we crossed the finish line in Lake Icalma, Chile, and were greeted by race officials hanging a medal on our necks as they called out our names. This was a really special moment. We congratulated the organization for this initiative, done for all 992 competitors who finished the race. We had not only achieved our main objective of finishing the race, and our second objective of staying among the first half, but we arrived in 60th the last day, and 99th in the combined three stages of the race. We arrived 22nd out of 128 mixed couples, and among the first mixed couples of a combined age of more than 80, possibly first of a combined age of more than 90 (only male and female teams were officially age ranked). We did much better than expected.

Many people describe how, after surviving a serious health problem or a traumatic experience such as kidnapping, it seems like the problems of the world get smaller. Many things that once bothered them don't seem to matter anymore. Although in a much less intense manner, after finishing this race, we have the same feeling. Overcoming challenges like this makes us feel lighter and believe that a lot more can be achieved than most people imagine to be possible.



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