

Adventure World

magazine

USARA NATIONALS PHOTO JOURNAL

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IN NORTH
KENYA

THE MONGOL DERBY HORSE RACE

SUBTERRANEAN SCUBA

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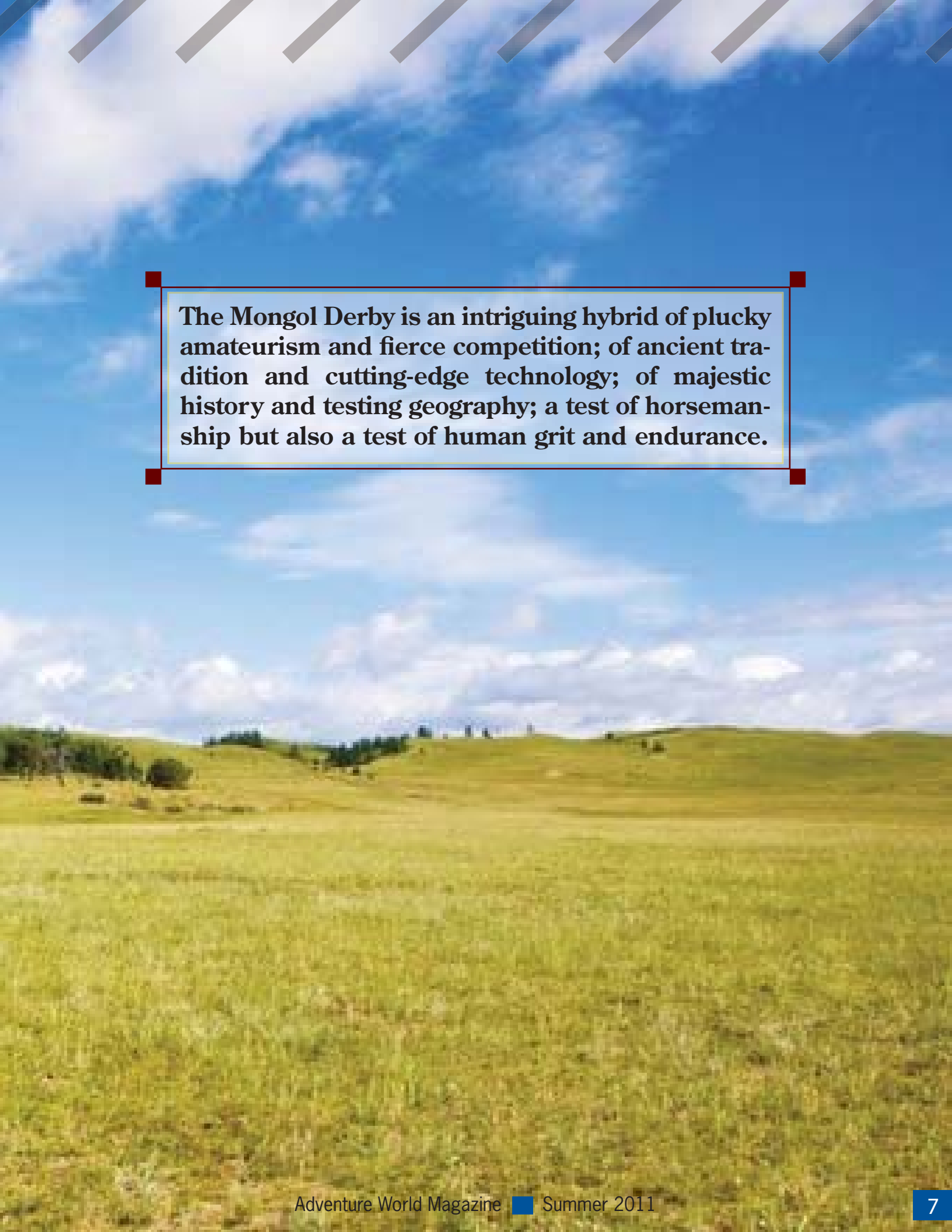
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The Mongol Derby

A circular graphic consisting of a thin blue outer ring and a solid grey inner circle, partially overlapping the text and the background image.

by Katy Willings





The Mongol Derby is an intriguing hybrid of plucky amateurism and fierce competition; of ancient tradition and cutting-edge technology; of majestic history and testing geography; a test of horsemanship but also a test of human grit and endurance.



he Mongol Derby is a 1000 km horse race based on the postal system of Chinggis Khaan, which could relay messages thousands of miles in a matter of days. Like the ancient postal system the Mongol Derby relies on a network of horse stations, or 'Morin Urtuus' in Mongolian. These are stationed at a maximum of 40 kilometre intervals stretching along the course. With the riders changing steed at each horse station, the Derby is not a test of the horses' speed, but of the rider's skill and endurance. This ambitious event, which will employ some 1000 horses and 100 staff during the event, is staged by the UK company the Adventurists, and places are now available for the third edition of the Derby in August 2011.

The Mongol Derby is an intriguing hybrid of plucky amateurism and fierce competition; of ancient tradition and cutting-edge technology; of majestic history and testing geography; a test of horsemanship but also a test of human grit and endurance.

The essence of the Derby is a self-guided 1000kms adventure race, at speed, across the incomparable Mongolian steppe, one of the world's last remaining wildernesses and cradle of the largest land empire ever created under Man of the Millennium, Chinggis Khaan. Participants are mounted on semi-wild Mongolian horses, which hold a sacred place in the enduring Mongolian nomadic culture, and eat and rest with nomadic families along the way, thereby experiencing Mongolia as it would have appeared in the time of the Great Khaans. In the background is an extensive modern back-up system providing medical and veterinary cover for horses and riders, but all being well, riders are alone in the wilderness with their semi-wild steeds. This is a multi-faceted adventure, not just an endurance race, and the sheer number of contingencies which contribute to the 1000km epic keeps riders on their toes (and knees at times!) and gives spectators following the race via the Adventur-

ists' proprietary live tracking system plenty to talk about.

Riders need to look after themselves in extreme conditions, navigate independently using a map and a GPS, and overcome difficulties using their initiative and duct tape. Being a good rider is not enough, and for most Derby contestants, the riding element is the most straightforward aspect of the event. Riders have different reasons for taking part;



some come to win, pure and simple, others to see if they can complete such an epic race, others to indulge their cowboy fantasies and experience a true wilderness on horseback. The Derby is a chance to shed the shackles of a safety-obsessed world and enjoy a raw and old-fashioned adventure. As 2010 rider Richard Dyer, 31, from Guildford, put it, "the opportunity to ride in the vast open spaces of Mongolia was incredible, but extremely challenging. It's the excitement of taking a calculated risk. There are safety measures in place, but at the same time it's just you and the horse, it's up to you to get from A to B. It's a genuine experience, as far as possible, of being alone."

Each rider is fitted with a satellite tracker which allows the Mongol Derby back-up team, directed from the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar in conjunction with Adventurists HQ in Bristol, UK, to

see where all riders are at all times, keep the back up crews in touch with the pack of riders, and respond to any distress signals from the riders by dispatching the appropriate back-up unit, either medical or veterinary. With a testing course over steppe, sand, forest and flood plain and in conditions ranging from scorching heat to torrential rains and hail storms, the international crew of medics and vets who track the riders are briefed to expect plenty of incidents.

Almost everyone can expect to take a tumble along the way, and dehydration and exposure slow a few folks down before they hit their stride and develop their appetite for mutton and fermented mare's milk, the staples on offer along the way. Despite this, the race has claimed fewer scalps than might be expected (though plenty of skin elsewhere). The horses, by comparison, are nonchalant and virtually indestructible, navigating dangerous terrain at high speeds and giving the riders plenty of thrilling gallops in open country, fording rivers, weaving through dense forest, climbing and descending dizzying passes, and coming in with heart rates to suggest they could gallop all the way home again. They are truly formidable partners for the lucky riders, the ultimate

all-terrain vehicle, and an incredible example of natural selection at work. Besides the routine pre- and post-ride checks which every horse undergoes, the vets tend to spend a lot of time playing cricket and treating herders' other animals during the Mongol Derby...

Firstly, an element of self-selection. Getting lost in one of the most sparsely populated and luxury-free countries on earth, pitting yourself against innumerable hazards and riding semi-wild and fairly feisty horses across all sorts of terrain, two days from the nearest hospital, appeals to a certain type of person. That person is probably a pioneering type, at home in the great outdoors, able to handle situations as and when they arise without the need for furious pre-planning. They probably have a sense of humour, too.

Secondly, horsemanship. Riders are selected following a thorough application process and references are taken to ensure that all entrants can ride to a high enough standard, are lightweight enough (85kgs dressed to ride) and also have the requisite knowledge and experience to look after the horses they will be riding, and monitor their wellbeing with



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confidence. Prior entrants have included international eventers, dressage riders, polo players and jockeys, and, most telling, endurance riders.

Thirdly, fitness. It definitely helps to be a good athlete, as well as a good rider. The 2009 race boasted climbers, triathletes, adventure racers, surfers, and plenty of other extreme challenge veterans, including the first woman to skydive over Everest. The 2010 edition boasted an even more stellar international line-up, including a summer and winter Olympian (in skiing and track cycling), diplomats, builders, law students and housewives. Hot favourite was Texan Justin Nelzen. His application back at the end of 2009 rather modestly stated "farrier" as his occupation, and while this is strictly speaking accurate, it is some way down the list of his qualifications for the Mongol Derby. As well as being a very accomplished horseman, Justin cuts a pretty formidable figure as a survivor and general hard-nut. Having survived all the usual pleasure spots like Afghanistan as a US Marine in the 1990s, he dallied with martial arts (two bronze and one gold at the World Champs....not bad) and dabbled with marathons, adventure races and triathlons just to stop the dust settling. Describing his remarkable transition from self-powered athlete to endurance rider, Justin explained, "I didn't know anything other than to train my horses like I trained myself. Someone asked me before my first race what I expected. I told them I expected to win, and I did. I didn't know any better at the time."

With just five years' riding experience under

his belt, Justin is proof that natural talent and the appetite to learn can prepare you for anything. In fact, some well-known adventurers who have never even sat on a horse have the Derby in their sights for two years' time, and have commenced training with UK based distance riding expert Maggie Pattinson, who acts as Pre Race Trainer to the chosen few.

The 2011 edition boasts several track riders, polo and polocrosse players, a vet-come-cowboy, and plenty of

folks for whom riding is just one of many feathers in their cap- doctors, entrepreneurs, geologists, world-class athletes, engineers...and a Cabinet Minister!

Fourthly, bush-craft. Navigation took on plenty of significance during the 2010 race, as riders juggled the lure of the 'direct route' to the next station, taking them over, under or through the intervening terrain, or going 'round the mountain' and covering a greater distance but on an easier track. With no set route, riders are responsible for getting safely from one station to the next, and armchair followers were intrigued by the variation in tracks produced by the 15 brave riders out on the steppe. As well as reading the terrain, riders need to be able to choose a safe place to stop and camp for the night should they find themselves between horse stations at darkfall, find good water and grazing for their horse, and crucially, secure him overnight so they have something to ride come sun-up. A facility with knots, maps, and, in extremis, capturing a loose horse in a field three times the size of France, are all key skills, and hard earned in many cases along the 1000kms.

All of these criteria are tested over three days' pre-race training out on the steppe, which is also the first opportunity for the riders to get up close and personal with the famously feisty Mongolian horses. For one unlucky rider last year it was first blood to the horses, a broken collarbone ending her Derby hopes in one thudding fall.

As mighty as the challenge is, and as indepen-

dent as the competitors need to be, it's not all solo adventuring. The beauty of the Derby is the chance to meet and mix with the nomadic herders whose incredibly robust and enduring lifestyle has seduced and inspired the riders in equal measure. Their hospitality, good humour and pride in showcasing their country and their horses takes the term 'outside assistance' to a whole new level. In a country so sparsely populated, and with a climate so inhospitable for nine months of the year, the herders who live on the steppe year-round are completely at home with a stranger passing through, requiring food and lodgings. It makes sense to camp near a ger (the round felt tents in which the nomads live) as it means there will be water nearby, and in keeping with their hospitable reputation, the family in situ may well invite the lone rider in to their ger rather than have him camp. Last year two riders ended up going to a wedding when they did this, and many others had wonderful experiences staying with local nomadic families who had no connection with the Mongol Derby whatsoever. It's the perfect opportunity to dig out the old Mongolian phrasebook! The urtuu families, who are paid for their work feeding and hosting the riders at the horse stations, have provided equally special memories, with singing, traditional feasts of marmot (an acquired taste) and a genuine taste of family life in Mongolia. The easy bond between visitor and host

is reinforced by a mutual love of horses and open country.

The live tracking system linked in to the riders' satellite trackers creates a virtual Derby, where each rider's track is visible, leaving folks glued to the website following the drama as it thunders across the steppe. In 2010, messages between Facebook supporters of the Derby crowded the airwaves as followers speculated on dog-legs and delays, and live audio uploaded from the finish line where the leading pair were interviewed by the UK team in Bristol, was rapturously received by an international audience who had variously stayed up late or got up early to be on Mongolian time!

Having taken on board just how rabidly the Derby enthusiasts follow the race, The Adventurists will be working even harder to provide innovative and continuous content to the website during the race, allowing followers to be as close as technology will allow to one of the most remote locations on earth. The 2011 edition will boast even more state-of-the-art coverage, with live updates planned from several horse stations along the route, and virtually live coverage of the start and finish, including video and audio.

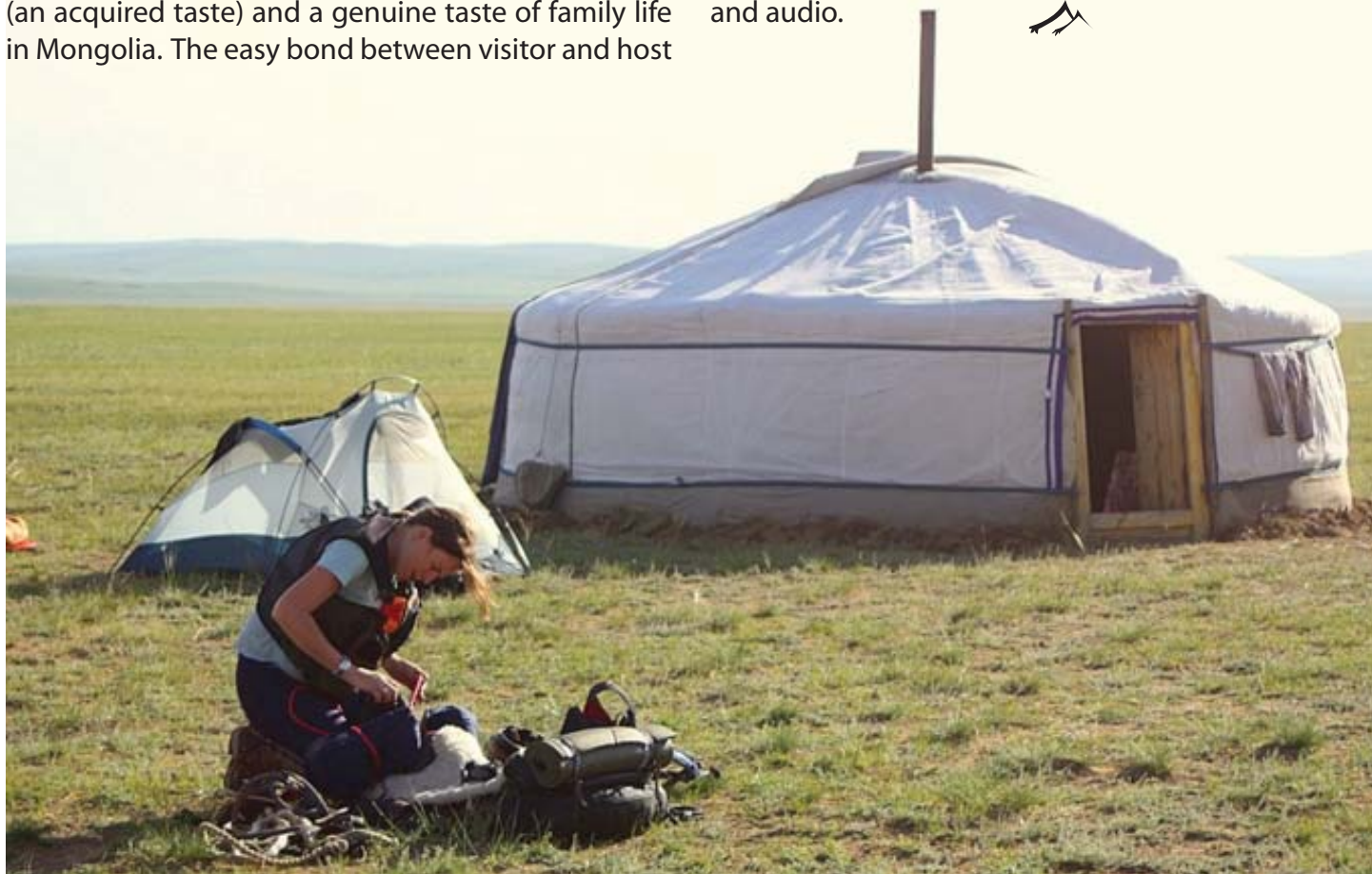




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ABOUT PROJECT ATHENA

Project Athena is a 501c3 non-profit foundation that encourages women who've endured life-altering medical setbacks to unleash the Athlete and Adventurer within and complete the journey of a lifetime--whether that's to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, cross the finish line of an Ironman Triathlon, or fall into the arms of a proud family at the end of a local 5k.

Project Athena provides travel expenses, entry fees, coaching, equipment and, most importantly, the encouragement and inspiration to help strong, amazing women make that life-affirming transition from Survivor to Athlete.

"All of us have had our 'chutes' to deal with in life", explains Project Athena's Founder and World Champion Adventure Racer Robyn Benincasa. "Project Athena is all about showing other Survivors the way to the 'ladders' and helping them inspire and amaze themselves on that climb back up. Probably the most important thing we give our Athenaship Recipients is hope, and a vision of what's possible. Doctors cure the body...Project Athena cures the spirit."

This unique approach to recovery (Survivors helping Survivors) has gained widespread media attention. Robyn and her Project Athena Teammates have been featured in *Runners World* (as 'Running Heroes of 2009'), *The New York Times*, *Triathlete Magazine*, *National Geographic Adventure*, and on NBC's *Jeep World of Adventure*, *E!*, *The Today Show* and *Live with Regis*.



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Sponsorship Opportunities:

Erica Nitti

Erica@projectathena.org

Robyn Benincasa

Founder, Executive Director

robyn@projectathena.org

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Seven Days in North Kenya



by Kyle Henning

“No matter how tough the going was those first few weeks, the looming ‘Moyale Road’ was always in the back of my head.”



W

hen people take the popular 'Cairo to Cape Town' route through Africa, they commonly declare one stretch of road in north Kenya to be the most dangerous of the entire journey. Known for banditry and extreme desert heat, the 400km road connecting the Ethiopian border-town of Moyale to Isiolo, Kenya is the true Wild West. Tourists and locals alike drive trucks in convoys for safety, and often hire armed guards for protection. Yet in early 2011, I found myself looking down this infamous stretch of road alone, on a bicycle.

I wasn't on a journey from Cairo, nor was I headed to Cape Town. My journey started in the tiny country of Djibouti at the lowest point on the African continent: Lake Assal (155 meters below sea level).



My destination was the highest point: Uhuru Peak, Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania (5,895 meters above sea level).

My solo, human-powered expedition through Africa had already faced some challenges. Men with machine guns woke me up in my tent the very first night in Djibouti. The rear wheel of my bicycle had fallen apart twice under the strain of Ethiopian mountain passes. Children threw rocks at me, bouncing off my helmet, body, and fingers. No matter how tough the going was those first few weeks, the looming 'Moyale Road' was always in the back of my head.

As I cycled through southern Ethiopia toward the Kenyan border, I started to reevaluate the situation. From living in Africa for the previous two years, I'd come to expect things to be in the middle of the polarized accounts people gave me. The Moyale Road was no different. The blogs and books I researched all said it was extremely dangerous, but Africans who'd just taken the road said it was completely safe. The reality, as always, was somewhere in between.

The expedition was a fundraiser and I was writing a blog. Knowing that people would be watching put some pressure on me to do the entire length of the trip by 'human power' and not take a truck for this dangerous section. I didn't have a lot of current information when I reached the border, so I asked Kenyans about the situation once I crossed. Most people told

me it was fine and that no attacks had been reported for months. Truck drivers, however, told me it was impossible and I'd need to ride in their truck (for a fee, no doubt). The best compromise I could come up with was to start riding, continuously feel it out, and take a truck if I ever felt unsafe.

On Day 28 of 'Low2High: Africa', I left the asphalt of Moyale behind and started peddling south on the rocky, ill-famed road. The first stretch was relatively easy. I rode 80km to the town of Sololo where I found some of the most hospitable people of the entire expedition. I stayed in a hotel, had a shower, and ate plenty of food. The staff also told me the road had been safe for a few months and that I shouldn't have too many problems from bandits. However, they did tell me that the condition of the road itself was going to get much worse. Whatever the consensus of the locals, I slept very lightly that first night.

My second day on the road found me very paranoid. The terrain became extremely barren and my imagination was getting the better of me. My senses were heightened, looking for any movement. I listened closely for stamping feet or voices amid the rocks. My head was on a swivel as I rode as fast as possible. I had a bad feeling in my gut, and I just wanted to get to the next town and be safe.

That second night I stayed at a hotel in Turbi. Again I was greeted with smiles and enthusiasm. The looming storm clouds added to the ominous look of the Chalbi Desert, but did give hope for rain, which the area hadn't received in nearly a year.

Leaving Turbi on the third morning was slightly postponed as the clouds delayed the morning light. I was only on the road for an hour when the raindrops started to fall.

At first I was relieved. The burning sun was safely behind the clouds. I rode hard and fast, taking advantage of the cool air. The rain even kept the dust down, and I was jubilant at my good fortune. But, the rain didn't stop. The parched land that hadn't seen rain for many months began to saturate and flood. Soon, I was riding through water higher than my wheel axels. Worried about my luggage being soaked, I tried to ride on slightly higher ground. This proved pointless as the high ground consisted of black, jagged boulders.

At several points, I had to push the bike. Even when I could pedal through the murky water, I couldn't



see the rocks beneath and would get knocked off my bicycle. Pushing was the only safe way to continue.

I eventually came across some large barrels and a tarp on the side of the road. What luck! I improvised a simple rain shelter and ate my lunch between the barrels. I started to get very cold. Finally a car came by and asked if I wanted a ride. I reluctantly said 'no'. Darn integrity! The driver told me the road behind him had been washed out by a flash flood. He was the last car through before the water came, making the road impassible. I had apparently just made it, as the flooded section was between Turbi and here.



Pushing on, my brakes started to lock up with mud and gravel. My Trek 820 had cantilever brakes, not disc brakes. I'd acquired the bike in Ethiopia and didn't have any options. Disc would have been better. Lesson learned for next time. All I could do was push the mud out with a stick and carry on.

Later I was able to ride the bike some more, thinking that the next town, Bubisa, couldn't be much further. I'd been riding



Bubisa and dried out all my gear in the now-blinding sun. I took the rest of the day off to rest my aching body.

The fifth day on the Moyale Road was tough. Gone were the puddles and mud, back were the washboard ruts and stalling sand. It was hard riding, and my body was lacking in energy. Finally I made it to Marsabit, the only town of significant size on the entire road.

Another night of rest worked wonders, and on the sixth day I was moving fast. The road was a bit smoother, but I got a little cocky. Once the road got bumpy again, I kept moving too fast and

since dawn. 'It has to be around this turn.' I'd keep telling myself that, but my morale kept taking hits as each turn revealed endless muddy road ahead. I finally accepted my fate that I wouldn't reach Bubisa, and pitched my tent for the night amongst the rocks and mud.

Everything was wet. My sleeping bag felt like it weighed 100 pounds. I was prepared for heat and drought, but there I was shivering as I tried to dry out my clothes and tent. With thoughts of bandits and flash floodwaters still in my mind, I zipped into my drenched sleeping bag and slept lightly, one eye open.

The morning sun was a welcome sight. I packed up my gear and pushed my bike back onto the road. I was hoping to find a dry, firm track, but the water and mud from the day prior still dominated the road surface. I pushed the bike, stopping every 100 feet to free mud from the brake levers. The going was slow, but the road eventually meandered uphill and became firm enough for riding. I rode to

broke my pannier rack. After a quick roadside fix, I had to wear my heavy pack on my shoulders to relieve the burden on the rack. Riding on the rough road was painful on my butt before, but now the added weight of the pack made it excruciating. Every time my body slammed down onto the seat, a shock went from my tailbone to my neck.

I carried on, often riding in the sand along



the road instead of the road itself. I had to peddle harder to ride through soft ground, but I couldn't take the pain of the bumps anymore. I passed several kids in red robes. They were friendly, but they all carried spears and made me uncomfortable. I saw a mostly-nude woman alone under a tree. As soon as she spotted me, she jumped up and started chasing me with her spear raised over her head, pointing it at me, and yelling at the top of her lungs. I panicked and started riding as fast as my legs would turn. I was fumbling through my handlebar bag for a can of pepper spray, trying to keep control of the bike with only one hand. I remember cursing myself – 'What good is pepper spray if you can't get it when you need it?!' I tried swerving from side to side to become a harder target to hit. I never managed to get the spray, but was able to outrun the woman. I kept riding for the next hour straight. I wanted to get as far away from her as I could.


Exhausted from my brush with danger, and in terrible pain from carrying the heavy pack, I was physically unable to reach the next town of Laisamis, so again I slept out. This time I was so jumpy that I didn't even set up my tent. I wanted to be able to run at first sign of danger. I slept under the stars, shoes on. Pepper spray in one hand, a big stick in the other. All my valuables (passport, money, etc.) were in a bag under my head. If I had to run, I'd grab the bag and sprint. No bike, just run.

I awoke before dawn, my seventh day on the Moyale Road. Pushing hard, I made it to Laisamis by mid-morning and had a huge breakfast. My best source told me the asphalt in Kenya starts in Sere Olupi. The people in Laisamis all told me it would start in Merille, a bit closer. I knew it was important to manage my expectations, so I didn't anticipate anything closer than Sere Olupi. I arrived in Merille in the early afternoon. I looked around the town but didn't see any asphalt. I grabbed lunch in a small diner.

The men were laughing at my filthy clothes. They all figured I was coming from the north, and they were right. 'Congratulations!' they all said. 'You made it!' I asked them to clarify, and they said it was ½



km to the asphalt. I still didn't believe them. I got back on my bike, rode over a hill, and the most magnificent sight came into view – a brand new, wide highway! I was ecstatic! I rode to the pavement, got off my bike, and kissed the road. People were smiling at me, knowing the journey that brought me here must have been hard.

The road was an absolute pleasure. I had to ride on the left now that I was properly on a Kenyan highway, a strange concept to this American boy. Even though I still had hundreds of kilometers to reach the base of Mt. Kilimanjaro, I felt like a huge hurdle was behind me. Despite the heat, flash floods, a spear attack, and a crucial part breaking, I had crossed the desert and earned my place on the tarmac. I gleefully removed the bag from my shoulders, strapped it to the rack, and rode south. 

Kyle Henning is an explorer and development worker. After finishing his service with the US Peace Corps in Ethiopia, he embarked on Low2High: Africa - a human-powered, solo expedition from the lowest point in Africa to the highest. After cycling over 2,900 km through four countries, Kyle arrived at the base of Mt. Kilimanjaro and trekked to the summit of Uhuru Peak (5,895m above sea level), summiting on March 26, 2011. The expedition was a fundraiser for the New Day Children's Centre in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia and raised over \$4,900 USD. Read the full story on Kyle's blog at www.low2highafrica.blogspot.com.

2011 REGIONAL USARA QUALIFIERS



STAPHASEPTIC

PRESENTED BY



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	Ohio, 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	Ohio, 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
Raid the Rock Adventure Race	September 2011	Little Rock, AR
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	October 29, 2011	Little Rock, AR
Red River Gorge The Fig IX	November 5, 2011	Stanton, KY
Huntsville Hammer	November 12, 2011	Huntsville, TX



The winning team members at each regional qualifying event will be presented with a Merrell USARA Regional Champion Jacket.

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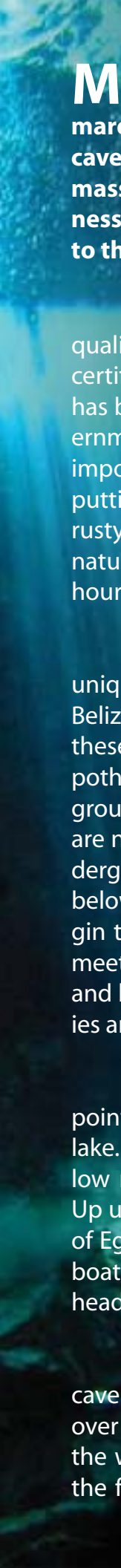
TEC LABS

A full-page background image of an underwater cave. Sunlight beams through the water, creating a dramatic, ethereal atmosphere. A scuba diver is visible in the center-right, swimming towards the left. The cave walls are rocky and covered in some marine life.

subterranean scuba

IN THE BURIAL CAVES OF MEXICO

by LEVISON WOOD



Most people associate cave diving with having a death wish. It features the stuff of nightmares- running out of oxygen or getting lost amongst a labyrinthine network of pitch black caves full of water... But for some people, the allure of inland diving away from the tourism masses in some of the world's most beautiful scenery just about overcomes the apparent madness of it all. Travel writer and photojournalist Levison Wood talks about his recent diving trip to the Yucatan Peninsula.

"You don't actually need any specialist qualifications, other than the PADI open water certificate" says Aaron, the local divemaster who has been exploring the cenotes of Mexico's easternmost region for over fifteen years, "the most important thing is a sense of adventure." That's putting it lightly thinks I, as we climb down a rusty set of ladders some twenty metres down a natural bore hole in the middle of the jungle, an hour's drive from the nearest town.

Cenotes are a natural phenomenon unique to this part of Mexico and neighbouring Belize. The whole of the peninsula is dotted with these holes, ranging from cavernous wells to tiny potholes- many of them are linked by an underground network of tunnels. Because of this, there are no natural rivers here and all water flows underground creating a vast undiscovered world below the blooming jungle of the interior. I begin to realize that there is more to Mexico than meets the eye- the luxuriant grandeur of Cancun and bustling markets of the Spanish Colonial cities are a world away from this remote spot.

As we don our flippers and masks Aaron points to a particularly dark corner of the cave's lake. "We are going that way, make sure you follow me." He needn't have reiterated that point. Up until now I had only ever dived off the coasts of Egypt and Thailand, civilized affairs where the boat stays as a reassuring image above one's head. This was something totally different.

Aaron tells me that in fact the water in this cave is fairly new and has been steadily rising over the centuries. As we begin to descend into the water I am amazed at just how crystal clear the fresh water is, the visibility is incredible, de-

spite the lack of natural light and I soon lose my initial fear. Cenote diving isn't cave diving in the truest sense (for which you need specialist certification and nerves of steel), because when you get below the small entry points they actually open up into immense cathedral-like caverns where it is almost impossible to get lost. Aaron leads the way, following a pre-placed line to the bottom of the cave and as am surprised to see fish and even a turtle swim gracefully by.

I gaze in wonder at my surroundings, drooping stalagmites and stalagmites protrude to create an otherworldly feeling reminiscent of a journey to the centre of the earth. Even the water changes its appearance to give the impression of layers of air, but it's just a different kind of water says my guide through the high tech inbuilt microphone system in my mask. At the bottom of the cave we find what Aaron has been so excited to show me. "He is maybe two thousand years old" he says, pointing at the human skull, sitting incongruously on a rock shelf next to a pile of bones. Nearby is a pair of perfectly preserved ceramic jars about the size of a keg of beer- each containing yet more bones. "They are from animals- probably cows" and on the cave wall is a painting of what looks like a running horse.

The cenotes were seen by the ancient Mayan civilisation, which flourished in Central America until the coming of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, as gateways to the afterlife. Many of the caves were then dry and became used as burial chambers and places where human and animal sacrifices took place. Since the conquistadors effectively ended many of the traditional practices and Catholicism took hold, the cenotes were left to disappear into the jungle



and were forgotten about for several hundred years. It wasn't until the first European explorers and anthropologists became interested in the Maya in the nineteenth century and discovered such architectural riches as Chichen Itza and Uxmal, that cenotes were even heard of. Sketches were made and later photographs taken of these natural wonders but it wasn't really until the 1970s that the first intrepid divers decided to explore the underwater treasures. Even now only a handful of the cenotes have ever been dived and there are still over 3000 left undiscovered. Aaron hopes to enable more visitors to experience what he has seen and is one of only a couple of qualified diving guides that operate in the region.

As we slowly ascend toward the moon-like circle of light above I feel a tremendous sense of tranquility, but also real privilege to have been able to explore this fascinating underground world. It only felt like we were under water for five minutes but Aaron smiles and shows me his watch and I am stunned to realize that we have actually been submerged for over half an hour. "It's the magic of the Maya" he chuckles as we climb out into the emerald lushness of the Mexican Jungle.

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Levison Wood founded the pioneering expeditionary service Secret Compass which specialises in taking clients to the world's most remote and undiscovered destinations. He is leading a one-off dive trip to explore the cenotes of the Yucatan in September. If you would like to find out more or apply to join the expedition see www.secretcompass.com.



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2011 Race Report

by Patti Plagmann

photos courtesy of Bobcat13 Photography, LLC

Race report? I haven't written an adventure race report since, well, hmm, it has been awhile. Adventure Race?... hmmmm That's been awhile too! The iMOAT (formerly MOAT, Mother of All Teams, now in Memory of a Teammate) team members have had a hard time since that September day in 2008 when we lost our fearless leader, beloved teammate and close friend Dave Boyd, but somehow we've managed to pull together race teams to fill the void, to stay competitive and make our lost teammate proud that we are carrying on the tradition of podium finishes.

Me, I've had a hard time returning to the sport of AR that Dave introduced me to just seven years ago in 2004. I kept turning down opportunities to race for my team while others picked up the slack -- all amazing athletes like Kristy Darby, Kathy Hudson, and Kim Chance. That's what teams do, though, and I am very grateful to be a part of this team. This year I felt ready, time to step up to the plate, and say WWDBD? He'd say, "Frickin' just race!"

Then the call finally came. My first opportunity came when Nathan Winkelmann asked me to do

the EcoLonestar 12hr early in the year. It was finally time to put on my big girl shorts, grab a paddle, my bike and in this case, raingear. Talk about just jumping back in! We managed to pull out a win, which was huge for my confidence. I was back!

Then in April, I got the next call. USARA Sprint Nationals, with none other than Daniel Duryea! Was he crazy?! He was just coming off a nice finish in International Off-Road Triathlon Championships in Spain! "I'm old Daniel!" Did I mention, he's half my age and twice my size? He didn't care. He was ready to race and thought I was too. How sweet! Our team name would be AIX/iMOAT.

We managed to get a few text's in the day before the race:

P: "you get seats?"

D: "nah, we don't need 'em"

P: "huh?, I do!"

D: "we'll get some"

P: "k"

We didn't. Well, we found one seat.

Race Day:

D: "you bring a tow rope?"

P: "nah, forgot"

D: "we'll figure something out"

P: "k."

We managed! You'd have thought we were connected at the hip the way we had to run and ride next to each other so he could "push" the extra weight. He was awesome!

The race was held at Camp Longhorn in Burnet, Texas, a beautiful camp on Inks Lake. The weather was warm but a bit overcast at race start, and my nerves were running high for the US-ARA Sprint and Collegiate Nationals.

The task ahead: run, bike, paddle, run, paddle, bike, with scattered special tests.

The cannon fired and we were off for a quick $\frac{3}{4}$ mile run (sprint) to spread out the field before getting on our bikes. Neither of us had warmed up as we spent most of pre-race trying to find seats and a tow rope! We managed to stay in the top 10 as we hit TA to our bikes. Daniel told me to go ahead he'd catch up. I took off out of TA on my bike with Houston Fit AR Werewolves, Ashley Mangin and Gabe Haarsma, not in our category, but a fast team none-the-less. As I looked back, I didn't see Daniel. He apparently lost his shoe from his pack and Gabe was gracious enough to let him know. Great sportsmanship, Gabe -- thanks! We managed to hit the single track just behind HFAR WW. Out on the pavement we hit a long, fast decent. We waited until the bottom to pass and Ashley waved us through. We gladly accepted the offer and pushed ahead to take the lead. I feel better in the front when going into single track. We managed the single track without any blood. Finally on the jeep roads I was able to take a drink. I was breathing so hard I sucked the nozzle off my camelback and it dropped to the ground. Water was spraying everywhere! Not a good sign. I stopped to retrieve. Moments later, we had a tight squeeze through a gate; Daniel heard a kaboom and a screech. That was me. I had hit the deck, my bar end had ripped off. Now racing with one bar end, a loose grip and apparently no brakes on that side either, we trekked on. (Did I mention it had been a while since I had raced?) Feeling my pain and frustration, Daniel tried his best to

lighten up the situation. "Patti, we're having fun remember?"

We made it to the boat just ahead of Team HFARWW. Daniel reported he had forgotten to put water in his water bottle and was "running low." What a pair we make! As we blew up the one lone seat, we changed into running shoes and entered the water at the same time as HFARWW. It appeared there were about five or six other teams ahead. As we watched Ash and Gabe paddle away, Daniel admitted he had chosen "the wrong boat" and without a seat he struggled to find the right position. He was miserable! We did a few 180's (not a good thing in this sport!) Feeling his pain and frustration, I tried my best to lighten up the situation. "Daniel, we're having fun remember?" We survived the first paddle.

We made it to the death run, finally! And death run it was! It was hot! First hot run of the season and it beat us down. The sun was in full swing. As we were trudging around the hot stone, dodging cacti and other creatures, and with Team HFAR





BUILT TO ROCK



ON THE ROAD TO EL DORADO SPRINGS, TIMMY O'NEILL
JAMS OUT IN HIS NATIVE LODOS.

He doesn't know convention. He doesn't follow the rules. And he definitely doesn't take the beaten path. Timmy O'Neill is a modern-day pioneer...and he's got the scars to prove it. Scars earned setting speed records in Yosemite, exploring untouched terrain in Patagonia and getting kicked out of his makeshift cave-home in Joshua Tree. Before he's done, he'll have countless more scars – and if we had to guess, a slew of new stories to tell.

Timmy O'Neill is Built to Rock. What are you built for?

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largely in front of us somewhere, we both thought we were doomed and were making excuses for our poor performance to ourselves and each other. Little did I know that Daniel was planning an attack for the last half of the race. (Daniel doesn't like to lose...to anyone! Including the all male teams)

The plan: pick a better boat. Daniel used the one lone seat. I paddled on my knees. Ride smoothly through the single track. He pushed me back up that long paved hill and then we needed to push hard to the finish. The plan worked. Well, except for the extra credit dive I took off a small rock ledge into some cacti. I guess the loose grip and brake issue came back to haunt me. Daniel retrieved me, picked a few cactus needles out of a few different places and off we went.



We managed to pass a few teams on the bike. Daniel was riding really strong for the both of us. As we headed up the jeep road back to the TA we were waved down by a race volunteer. Special Test! One of us had to do a short run while the other had to bring both bikes up the road where we would meet up and ride back to TA together. Daniel ran, I rode. As I pulled up to the next race volunteer, I saw Gabe waiting for Ashley. I guess we had passed all the rest of the teams and it was just the two of us. We waited and waited. Anxiously, we waited. Who would come up the hill first?? A few other bikes are now arriving

to wait for their teammate.

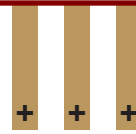
On Daniel's run, he spotted Ashley of HFAR-WW. "Sounds like a stampede coming!" she shouts. Daniel passes and congratulates her. Daniel, being the gentleman that he is, stops a few times to help Ash over some slippery sections as they are both in their bike shoes. Ashley, being the highly competitive racer she is, encourages him to stop helping her and just race!

I finally see Daniel's head pop up and I know there is hope! It's hammer time! We hopped on our bikes and took off. We flew into TA with one more special test: swim, run or do whatever it takes to get through the Lazy River... backwards. Daniel slipped the merit (to prove he did the first special test) into his mouth and I grabbed on. He trudged through the water, next to the edge and I floated on top of the water, pulling myself along the edge of pool. Team HFARWW makes it to the river and a few male teams as well. We pulled ourselves through the entire river, then, out of the pool and with arms raised made it across the finish line. First place, overall! Daniel's plan had worked! We had managed to carry on the iMO-AT tradition of pulling out a first place for the COED Open Division. Team HFAR Werewolves came across just fifty-nine seconds behind to take the COED Masters Division title. Great race, Ash and Gabe! Thanks for pushing us!

Sprint Nationals 2011 will be a race I won't soon forget and hopefully, DB was a proud teammate that day.



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Avid's XX World Cup brakes reign supreme in the XC kingdom. They feature two-piece forged magnesium calipers, carbon fiber lever blades, MatchMaker X compatibility (so you can hook your Sram shifters on with the same clamp as your brakes, reducing weight even more), CleanSweep X rotors and, of course, the stopping power and precise control of TaperBore technology.



Weighing in at a lean 270 grams, these brakes pack some serious stopping power without adding bulk to your rig. They have great modulation, but lock up like Fort Knox when you need them to. The fit and finish is impeccable, right down to the last detail. Avid knocked it out of the park in the looks department as well as functionality. I love the classy all black with a touch of red and silver in the logos. Bottom line: if you don't have them, get them. You won't be disappointed.

Race Report:

La Ruta de los Conquistadores//////



by Tom Smith

It was just before dawn and except for a few stray dogs and the occasional crowing of a rooster, the dirt streets of Villa Nuevo were empty and quiet. The motorized gate that guarded the entry to our little hotel slowly rattled open. I took a deep breath and clipped into my pedals, rolled out and headed down the hill. It was 45 minutes before the start of La Ruta de Los Conquistadores, “the toughest mountain bike race in the world.”

“La Ruta” has been described as a grinding suffer fest of heat, humidity, mud, and relentlessly steep hills, staged over four days and culminating with a spine crushing ride on railroad track across the coastal plain and through the banana plantations to the port city of Limon. We would gain massive amounts of elevation every day, bake in the coastal heat, freeze on the flanks of two volcanoes and carry our bikes through miles of jungle. That was just too good to pass up.

Stage 1: Jaco to Santa Ana
Elapsed time 10:25
Distance 69 miles
Elevation gain 12,536'

Sometime during the ride to the start my bike, a Gary Fischer Super Fly 100 Elite, began to have some second thoughts. This all-carbon 29'r was a purebred racing machine. The engine, on the other hand was a Volkswagen Beetle. The 'fly had some serious concerns the power plant lacked the horsepower to get to Limon. Legitimate concern Superfly...

When I arrived out front of the Best Western, Jaco Beach, riders were already circling the streets. I joined them and we circled the main street, alternately sprinting and peeing. Oddly enough this did not alter the smell of the town at all. According to our friend and guide, Sebastian, Jaco consisted largely of prostitutes, their clients, surfers and stray dogs. Now we had mountain bikers. I'm not sure where we fit into the social structure in Jaco but I'm sure it's below prostitutes and above surfers. The dogs were working overtime trying to keep everything marked.

I stayed in the back when we lined up for the start. I didn't want to pull a hole-shot at the line with the pros. I didn't think the one or two minutes I lost at the start was going to be decisive on this stage. (I was nipped at the finish by about... four hours).

Every stage at La Ruta is legendary for something. Today it's the Carara jungle. Along with the standard mud, heat and crazy elevation gain there were approximately six to eight miles of carrying your bike. There was no way to wheel it, you had to carry it. A lot of riders would see their La Ruta dream end in a deep muddy hole somewhere in the Carara.

My biggest fear was mechanical failures.

Throughout the race I saw broken frames, taco'd wheels, shattered derailleurs, crushed suspensions (the Cannondale Lefty seemed prone to front shock explosions). I had great sympathy for these folks. There but for the grace of Gary Fischer go I...

When the gun went off the racers sprinted down Main Street and hooked the first left headed north out of town. Within a few minutes we were on a dirt road beginning a gradual ascent. A few minutes later the grade went vertical, the track turned muddy and I was off the bike and pushing. Very disappointing...long walk to Limon.

I alternated riding and pushing based on a simple rule of thumb from years of adventure racing: if you can walk as fast as you can ride, walk. With four hard days ahead it was crucial to save the quads. According to my computer we climbed about 300 feet in the first four miles. In the next three we climbed 2,000.

Each day the race would have five PC's (pues-to de controle) where you could get water and food (I stayed away from the food). There were published

time limits to get to these points but oddly enough they did not require you to check in. Get there late and you were done.

If I had experienced a moment of despair pushing the bike earlier I really had to cinch up the knickers when I hit the jungle section from

PC One to PC Two. This leg of the race was legendary for the pure misery factor. The trail through the Carara National Forest deteriorated to a slick muddy ditch that was barely ride-able up or down. Applying the rear brake sent the bike into a sideways slide that resulted in the back end rapidly overtaking the front end. Applying the front brake kept the back end in place... until it stuck. I was sent into low earth orbit a couple of times.



A significant amount of the next twelve K involved simply picking up the bike and carrying it. There was no place to push it, just a steep, badly eroded, very slippery ditch. The few times I got on the bike for the down-hills ended in terrifying uncontrolled descents into the next river. Despite some nasty falls I sort of enjoyed this just because it broke up the monotony of slogging through the jungle with a bike on my back. Sliding sideways down a twenty-five percent grade in a greasy ditch is a huge adrenaline rush.

There were numerous river crossings and even a ¼ mile section that was just walking up a river, bike on your back. It was common to see riders attempting to clean their bikes in the streams but that is wishful thinking and a huge time suck. Your bike is going to look exactly the way it did going into the river within 100 yards of coming out; caked in greasy red mud. Mudslides had collapsed onto the trail and trees had fallen and blocked the trail in places. It was a carry, drag, push, scramble, endo...

It was a relief to get out of the jungle just before PC Two and back onto the dirt road. There was nothing worth eating at the PC so I grabbed some water and rode on.

I gained some ground on the paved climb from PC Three to PC Four. This was a relentless 2400 foot ascent, mostly pavement, only nine miles but without any relief. The XO transmission on the Superfly has no granny gear and the 29" wheels cover more ground with each crank turn so as long as you can turn them you tend to gain on a lot of riders. It was on



this hill that I noticed my chain was getting squeaky. Chain lube is on a list of essentials for La Ruta but I had thought it was good enough to let my support crew carry it. That didn't cut it. The chain was stripped bare and bone dry. A Canadian girl I was riding with got tired of the squeak and loaned me some chain-saw oil. I never got caught out again without chain oil.

The rest of the day was a series of steep climbs and descents. The stage finished in Santa Ana, a major suburb of San Jose. When I hit pavement I started to hammer. The city traffic was sketchy but the race organizers had people with flags at the major intersections. After almost ten and half hours in the saddle I will admit to a cavalier attitude towards the cars. I just wanted to be done and felt I had right-of-way everywhere. I came through a jammed traffic roundabout in rush hour traffic at warp speed, hands over the bars in aero tuck. I just assumed everyone in San Jose had been told I was coming and would get out of the way.

I rolled into the Quality Inn, Santa Anna completely toasted. My computer indicated I had covered almost 70 miles and ascended 12,500 feet. I was happy to dismount the Superfly and hand it over to the race techs for cleaning and tuning. I took a quick inventory, besides being covered in mud and banged up from the flying lessons everything looked good. The 'fly had no issues and the best part is once you hand it over to the race techs they will clean it, lube it and guard it. I had 13 hours to get ready to race again.



Stage 2: Santa Ana to Tres Rios

Elapsed time: 7:10

Distance: 46 miles

Elevation gain: 10,246'

Stage Two essentially starts the minute you finish Stage One. I had run a huge calorie deficit that I filled by knocking back a high calorie carbohydrate and protein drink every hour followed by a substantial dinner of chicken, rice, beans and plantains. That still didn't do it. I was up every night between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. eating and drinking, too hungry to sleep.

Wake up is 4:30 a.m. with the start at 6:00 a.m. I got down to the bike corral by 5:30. The Superfly was circling the corral, playfully nipping at the other bikes and looking very frisky. She was shiny, well rested and eager to hit the trails.

When La Ruta veterans talk about Stage 2 it is all about the first hill. A fellow American who I had started with (never got out of the jungle and was DNF) had come here last summer just to ride this hill. Here's how La Ruta champion Ben Sonntag describes it:

"These are the most stupidly steep climbs I've ever done in my life," said Sonntag. "But I knew that from last year. People had told me before I came the first time, but I think you have to see it and ride it before you believe it."

We climbed about 200 feet in the first mile. In the next four miles we climbed 2400'. It took over an hour to get to the top. Most of this was gravel road, muddy and slick in places but not technical. Portions of it were too steep to ride. The rear tire would not hold.

I did my share of hike-a-bike. Because we were so close to town and La Ruta is a big deal in Costa Rica the road was lined with fans cheering on the racers. It was a muddy, third world, Tour De France.

Once over the top I pushed the speed up along a ridge line with a beautiful view into the next valley. Nothing but green hills as far as you could see. I was looking forward to some downhill. I got the downhill alright. A treacherous muddy chute that was as steep going down as it had been coming up. It

was the same red greasy mud that provided no grip for the wheels to bite into. The trail narrowed to a V with no flat part to ride on. The center of the ditch was a narrow eroded canyon ranging from a foot to two feet wide and just as deep. You couldn't ride in it but it was hard to stay out of it. The rear brake was useless and the front brake dangerous. I combined sliding, rolling, squealing and ending down this section. Spicy!

(The race director crashed his motorbike on this section and spent the rest of La Ruta in the hospital).

The remainder of this downhill was more fun, winding down the ridge into a village in the valley on a dirt road. Some of the corners involved hairpin drops that were so steep you needed to be behind your seat and almost sitting on the rear wheel to have any shot at braking and still staying on the bike. The turns were so sharp and so steep that you only had a few feet to get the bike around 180 degrees or go off the edge into the jungle and down the cliff. More Spicy!

I am not sure why the first hill is the one people fear. The second one is a nightmare. Ten miles and



two hours later I was still grinding my way up. The grade was so constant and relentless that it became a mental battle as much as physical. You could actually stay in the saddle but that made it worse. You just wanted to get off and lie down. The temperature hovered around ninety degrees. It went on forever.

The carnage started on this hill. Stage One had eliminated a large group of riders that never should have started (and a small group that just got unlucky). Stage 2 was coming for the rest of us. It was like a war zone. You would be grinding up a monster hill in a group of riders and suddenly one would just veer off to the side and go down with severe cramps (frequently screaming). Very unsettling.

I had stayed on a steady diet of HEED, shot blocks and assorted gels. That kept the cramps at bay and the legs turning. I stayed away from everything they served at the aid stations but the water.

The word was North Americans started getting sick by Stage Three. The theory is that all the cow shit on the dirt roads gets on your water bottles and makes you ill. Riders discuss this theory while eating cut fruit that's been sitting around the aid station for hours and again over dinner at the buffet that serves 250 racers. I am not sure how the cows took the fall for this.

My crack support crew was taking great care of me. They were allowed to help within 200 yards of any PC. They could not reach some of the more remote PC's and many times it was a race to see who would get to the next PC first. They skipped some to be sure they were at the next one. Sebastian would grab the bike, lube it up, knock off some mud and hand it back. Renee would make sure I had fresh bottles and more food. Every ultra distance racer knows the real secret to a good crew is not the support they give you. It's the lift you get when you see them and

the desire to not let them down.

Costa Ricans have a loose sense of the rules and generally took the 200 yard rule to mean "anywhere on the course." That was a little frustrating but cheating is widespread. Some well supported riders from outside of Costa Rica also cheated on the basis that "everybody did it." The Dark Horse does not cheat.

There was a minor slip up though... Renee and Sebastian set up at an intersection where a dozen support crews were waiting for riders. Only after passing through this faux PC and then passing through the actual PC two miles later did I realize they were in the wrong spot. Oops. (Exception: The Dark Horse sometimes cheats inadvertently in races.)



the thrill of riding blind to this dangerous activity. I stopped doing this after I almost crashed a few times. It was worth it. Imagine the thrill these kids experienced when they discovered Tom Smith had signed their notebooks.

Stage Two ended with another hair-raising ride through rush hour traffic into town. We had essentially looped south of San Jose from the western suburbs and we were returning to the eastern suburb of Tres Rios. It had been a lot of steep up and down. The bottoms tended to be very sharp descents into river valleys, usually a small village and a sketchy bridge and then an immediate steep climb out. Due

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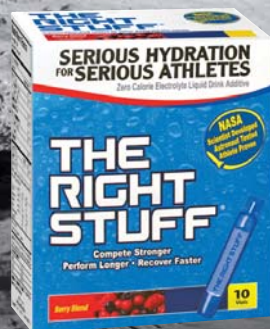
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to the mud, ridiculous grade and the hairpin turns my entry into these villages was frequently an awkward sideways slide. Usually accompanied by weird grunting noises, panicky yelps, desperate cries of “No, No, No!” followed by excited cries of “Yes, Yes, Yes!” as I lined my bike up with the inevitable narrow metal plate bridge. Once you line up with the bridge you let go of the brake... and pray. The wheels were caked in slick mud and the bridge was wet metal plate. You weren’t steering or stopping on the bridge. I have no idea what the villagers thought of my brief but alarming visits.

The day finished at a large suburban mall. I was grateful to be off the bike and out of the bike shoes (which the very tricky Sebastian would immediately stuff into the engine block to dry). I handed the ‘fly over to the bike techs and headed for a small B&B in San Jose that Renee had found.

Stage 3: Tres Rios to Turrialba

Elapsed time: 6:21

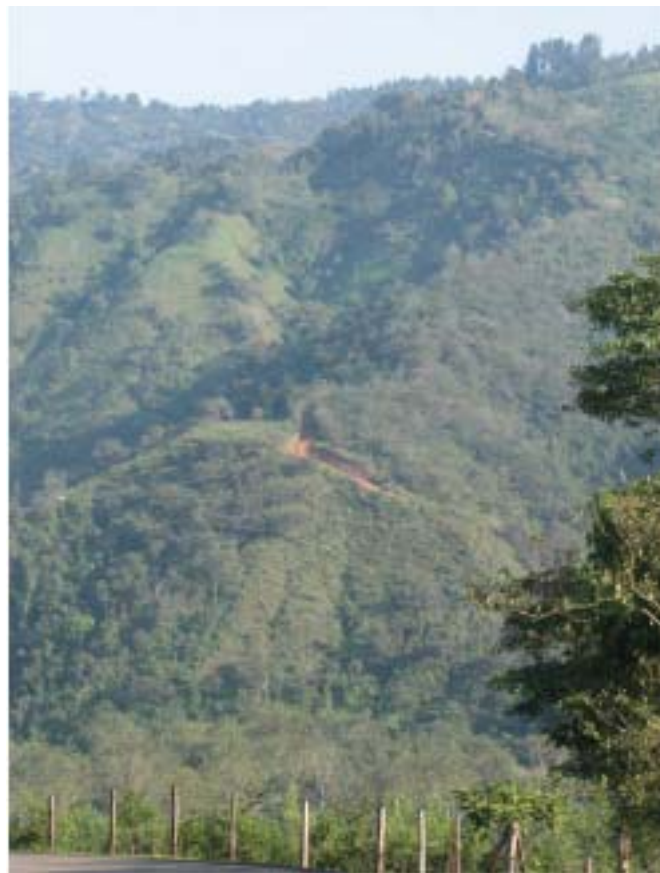
Distance: 51 miles

Elevation gain: 8,860’

Stage Three is not the steepest, or the longest of the stages. It is not really feared for the climb. That seemed crazy. It starts with a twenty-three mile, 6,000’ climb. That seemed like something you should lose sleep over. It’s the descent racers talk about. An 8,000’ drop off the flank of Volcan Turrialba. They talk about it because this is where riders get really badly injured.

There was a brief commotion at the front of the race just before the start. The race directors had thrown out a top Colombian rider for receiving aid. Bizarrely enough the race officials were holding to a clearly stated policy that the top fifty riders shouldn’t cheat. As a matter of fact they insisted their new policy was that nobody should cheat. That’s a novel idea. They threw out one guy a day. They must have picked these names out of a hat, cheating was rampant.

I did not see any of this from the back of the start chute. Renee told me about it later and it was all over TV that night. The field had shrunk quite a bit and was looking decidedly ragged. I was focusing on the guys chucking their breakfast around me. I did not want to get chunked on. As predicted there were



a lot of sick riders who had been up most of the night spewing. I give these guys credit. I honestly did not expect to see any of them the next morning but most of them were on the line for Stage Four. That’s hard core.

You climb two volcanoes in Stage Three, first Irazu and then over to Turrialba. There’s not much of a descent between them. You basically climb one and transit to the other and then it’s a monster descent into the town of Turrialba. The descent is the scary part. The upper part is all big, loose volcanic rock. It is razor sharp. I have done this section in an adventure race and had to walk it. This time I was going to ride it.

The long ride up the flank of Irazu was a steady, uneventful grind. Much of it was paved. Except for a few short muddy sections riders had to carry, I stayed in the saddle. The scenery was incredible. The cloud layer was below you and the views were stunning. I am not sure how many of the riders got to see that. Stage 3 was the Ride of the La Ruta Zombies. When you are grinding uphill at 4 to 6 mph there is quite a bit of chatter every day. Not today. Heads were down and riders had the thousand-yard stare. I rode by one guy that just kept muttering “my legs, my legs...” I’m not a doctor but I think his legs hurt. If

you think it might be interesting to see a video of me grinding slowly up Irazu check this out: www.vimeo.com/19481280. I did that for four hours.

A number of Costa Rican cyclists think this is a good time to jump in and ride a stage of La Ruta. There's a lot of pavement, only a few hike-a-bike sections and the ride down is more incredible than terrifying. That is if you go down the way you come up. No one in their right mind would go down the way we were going down. The result is you are constantly being attacked by groups of riders who seem ridiculously fresh. It took me a while to realize none of these guys had numbers. That didn't make it less annoying. Want to know what Stage Three feels like? Ride Stages One and Two.

Even with my cranky pants on and despite the relentless grade I felt pretty good. I was a little worried about how I would feel at 10,000 feet. The crossing from Irazu to Turrialba is renowned for being very cold and wet. The Costa Ricans suffer miserably on this section but it should be perfect for me. I arranged to meet my crack crew at PC Four, the high point of the stage and the start of a thirty mile descent. They would give me some additional clothing to survive the freezing downhill. While it took me a little over four hours to go the first twenty miles of this stage I would do the remaining thirty miles in roughly two hours. The final twenty miles I would cover in one very spicy hour.

When I got to the top there was no crack crew. In fact the crew had cracked. The roads are so bad in Costa Rica that it frequently took them almost as long to get to the PC's as I did, mostly on roundabout routes with no road signs or maps. After the first day I realized they were hardly ever eating, they had no time to stop. I urged my crew to make sure they got enough to eat each day. The Dark Horse's first concern is always for his crew... Today was the day they decided it was time for a hearty breakfast. I rode on, teeth chattering and arms going numb in a light rain to PC Five.

The cracked crew eventually did get to PC Four but realized after twenty minutes that I must have already passed through. Thus proceeded what Renee describes as one of the most terrifying, and thrilling rides of her life. My dedicated crew was mor-

tified that their rider was braving the mountains naked to the elements. Knowing they could never get to PC Five ahead of me they proceeded to careen down the mountain to the finish line.

The temperature never dropped below fifty degrees and except for the first ten miles I was fine. I had been worried that the altitude would really affect me and was pleasantly surprised that it didn't. I even made up some jingles about how the altitude didn't bother me. I was so thrilled with the lack of affect from the thin air I chased some chickens with my bike, sang funny songs, wondered why I wasn't cold, practiced my Spanish on the locals, tried to jump a drainage ditch, moo'ed at some cows and squinted really hard to see if I could see the Caribbean. It's good to know I am not affected by low oxygen levels.

My crew also recovered and by the time they got to the finish (ahead of me) had already rationalized leaving me to fend for myself as my own fault. Had I not told them to eat more? Were they not following my directions? Is it their fault I was getting faster each day? Sebastian and Renee had suffered an unpleasant period of self recrimination on the ride off the volcano. I was relieved to see them smiling and happy at the finish line secure in the knowledge that whatever discomfort I had endured had surely been self imposed.

Meanwhile back on the mountain...

It is worth doing La Ruta just to do this descent. After passing through PC Five it's twenty miles and 6,000 feet down to the finish line. The first five or six miles is the most dangerous part of the course. If you see pictures of La Ruta and there is a rider who looks like he's been in a meat grinder you can bet they got that coming off Turrialba. If you are crazy and have little concern for your life you can gain some serious time on the field here. Rebecca Rusch (winner of the Leadville 100) describes it as being "in a pinball machine".

The terrain is fairly open, mostly jeep track but covered in large, loose rock. It is very steep and very rough. Perversely the harder you hit it the better off you are. Lose momentum and the bike stops eating the terrain and the terrain starts eating you, slamming you right out of the saddle. The rocks are



big enough and loose enough to jam the front wheel; you have to fight to stay wheels down. If you superman you are going to lose a lot of flesh and maybe an organ. It wouldn't be so bad if you could go at it straight but it's a series of turns, winding down the mountain. As soon as you try and steer, the wheel jams and you launch. I bounced and hopped around the turns. Many riders chose to walk this section. The Dark Horse wasn't walking.

The Superfly is made for this, with the big wheels and full suspension it tends to roll over terrain that would stop a twenty-six inch bike. I was determined to ride it. The result was the craziest thirty minutes of mountain biking I've ever experienced. It was a pinball machine, washing machine and paint can shaker all rolled into one. There was no way to do it slowly, if you touched the brake you were toast. I hung on for dear life. My fellow racers who had wisely chosen to walk this section were cheering wildly as I went by, mistakenly believing that I was hammering this thing. That is not what happened. Once I committed I quickly realized there was no way to stop, any attempt to use the brakes resulted in rapid loss of control as the front wheel began jamming. I was bouncing down this trail like I was riding a pogo stick. What looked to my compatriots like an aggressive move by an experienced downhiller was actually a terrifying out-of-control descent by a rider who desperately wanted to get off and walk but couldn't. I recovered from each huge hit just in time to take the next one. Two or three big hits in a row would leave

me so far over the bars that most of the bike was in the rear view mirror. I somehow managed to wrestle the bike around each corner a whisker from disaster each time.

I am embarrassed to admit this descent was punctuated by a profanity laced tirade interrupted by screams of pure joy, crying jags, grunts, cowboy yelps, improvised prayers ("oh Lord if you get me out of this I'll never....blah, blah, blah") and a constant stream of encouragement to my Superfly. My bike did not fail me and miraculously I was still sitting on it when the trail

smoothed out and the descent shifted into overdrive. The speed and near death experience combined to provide an adrenaline rush that has me thinking of signing up again just to do this four miles.

The next fifteen miles were the most fun I've ever had on a bike. The road got better and better and eventually turned to pavement. The turns were banked and fast, I regularly exceeded thirty-five mph. There was no way cars could go down these hills at that speed but after three days of grinding uphill and sliding downhill I was not in the mood to use the brakes. I passed cars on the inside, on the outside, on sidewalks and front lawns. At that speed it became very difficult to keep track of course markings but I wasn't slowing down for that either. When I mentioned this to a Canadian rider at the finish he said he had the same worry but figured if this wasn't the course he didn't care, he would take a cab back to the top and do it again.

When I hit town I was totally jazzed up. I came into Turrialba in full time trial mode, arms out over the bars and cranking away in an aero tuck. A motorcycle cop pulled out in front of me and began motor pacing me through the city streets. With the lights flashing and siren sounding I took it up a notch. I looked back over my shoulder expecting to be alone only to find another rider twenty-five yards back and coming hard. Nuts! I had burned a lot of jet fuel impressing the town folk and was about to get caught three

miles from the finish line. The Superfly was having none of it. It edged up alongside the cop and I waved frantically for him to pick it up. The 'fly dropped back in and punched it up to twenty-five mph with me going into cardiac arrest. We held off the attack and cruised to the finish in six hours and twenty minutes with 8900' feet of climbing.

The finish line of Stage Three is a bit of a party. While Stage four still has over 5,000 feet of climbing and seventy-five miles of riding it is practically considered a vacation day. If you've gotten to the finish of Stage Three you have an excellent chance, barring mechanical failure, to get to the finish.



Stage 4: Turrialba to Limon

Elapsed time: 6:08

Distance: 75 miles

Elevation gain: 5,085'

Stage Four is considered a celebration day but it is no walk in the park. There are still some decent climbs, seventy-five miles of riding, and the temperature exceeds ninety degrees along the coast. Stage Four is renowned for its railroad tracks and bridges. The course follows the abandoned tracks along the coast, using the old bridges to cross the rivers. Since these are designed as railroad bridges they consist of railroad ties with about eighteen inches of space between them. It's a long drop to the river between the ties. I have crossed them many times before in adventure races. I had no concerns but they freak a lot of people out and can seriously slow you down if you get behind them.

The peloton rolled out in a pretty good down-

pour at 7:00 a.m. (Stage Four starts an hour later, like I said, vacation day!) We too one more pass through the coastal mountain range and then began grinding out the flats through the banana plantations to the coast. I had read in numerous reports that you did not want to get caught alone once you left the hills. It was fifty miles to the finish, much of it into a headwind. At PC Three I hooked up with Kristen Kopec, a female from Canada that I had spent much of La Ruta riding with and two Costa Ricans. This was a strong group and we maintained a pretty hard pace (you can see my pull in this video: www.vimeo.com/19452680). The course alternated between dirt roads, some pavement and railroad track through the jungle.

Somewhere along the way we picked up an American rider from Denver. We swept him up on the way by. Denver was a strong rider and immediately added some punch to our peloton. On the downside he was the worst group rider I've ever encountered. When he got on the front he would hammer like a madman, dropping Kristen and one of the Costa Ricans. I would have to fall off to pick the group back up, in essence taking another pull. When he was not on the front he would overlap the rider in front of him and screw up the draft. He was killing the weaker members of the group and we needed everyone. I encouraged him to ride in line a few times before finally telling him to stay in the line, stop hammering off the front or I would personally shove his entire bike up his butt. Denver took this surprisingly well and tightened his ride up a bit.

Kristen had voiced some concern about trains but I explained that the tracks were abandoned. As we neared the coast we were hammering down the center of these tracks with Kristen riding fifth and me in fourth when she again expressed some worry about getting hit by a train. No worries, I replied, there are no trains. That's when I heard the train whistle. We were hammering down a track that's a little over four feet wide between two steel rails. The ties stick up from a stone base, making for a bumpy ride and we are riding a foot or two apart. You cannot look up let alone back.

"Kristen, are you asking me about trains again because there's one behind you?"

"Yes, I know you said there aren't any but the

one behind me is gaining fast and the conductor looks pretty annoyed”

The train was indeed catching us, you could tell by the whistle, but there was no way to leave the tracks without stopping. There was a steep embankment that dropped a few feet on both sides into the jungle and jumping the rails was not an option. If we slowed down to stop and dismount the train would run us over. We picked up the pace...

This was unsustainable. The train was now part of our chase group and we were really making the guy angry. Eventually we slowed enough to come to a group decision to get off the track. We hit the brakes, grabbed the bikes and jumped the rails. The tourists on the train were so close they almost hit us in the face when they stuck their video cameras out the window to film us. We stood there with our noses twelve inches from the train, bikes on our backs, like monkeys in the zoo as the tourists snapped pictures of us. It was the first time in the race I had ever really noticed what a complete mess we were.

When you hit PC Five on the coast it is roughly twenty k to the finish. It is a disappointing twenty k. The pace slows significantly in the sandy track behind the beach. The puddles are long and frequently two to three feet deep. I give the group credit for sticking together through this. At least two of us could have ridden away at this point. We had hung together so far and wanted to finish together. I don't think anyone thought this would change the general results category but oddly enough it did change one riders results; mine. Kristen went on to beat me in the overall by less than thirty seconds. How do you like that?

I thought Denver had been annoying before but now he began insisting we should pick it up because although we were in sand and deep puddles we would hit twenty miles of clean pavement at the end. I knew the area pretty well and explained that we had twelve miles left to go and there would be one mile of pavement going into Limon. It was over ninety-five degrees, pick it up now and we would be laying in a puddle with severe cramps in five miles. Luckily the Costa Ricans knew the area as well and didn't really understand what he was saying. When we hit pavement I let the lead rider know it was his to finish out. The finish chute was narrow, required a

hard left turn and went down some concrete steps onto a beach. I did not want our group to attempt a mad sprint to the finish that took one or all of us out.

When our peloton took the hard left around a building and into the finish chute we were stunned to find an enormous, pink tourist with a cane, right in the middle of the stairs under the finish banner. He had come up from the beach and completely ignoring the finish line, race chute and hundreds of cheering fans, walked right up the chute. By the time the race organizers saw him we had rounded the corner and were coming down the chute at twenty miles an hour. We swerved right around the guy while he angrily waved his cane at us shouting. If you hit pause at the five second mark of this video (www.vimeo.com/19491590) you can see the guy at the top of the stairs with someone trying to get him off the course. I honestly thought we were going to clobber the guy. I hugged my chase group handed my bike to Sebastian, picked up my finisher's medal and went for a swim in the ocean.

My goal from the start was to race stronger every day and I accomplished that. I had finished ninety-ninth in the field on Stage One, ninety-second on Stage Two, and eighty-seventh on Stage Three. I had a great day on Stage Four and finished eightieth. I owe the steady improvement to a race plan that treated the race as one long event instead of four separate stages and a crew that took great care of me. They took care of everything; all I had to do was pedal. That being said I know I can do this faster next time...





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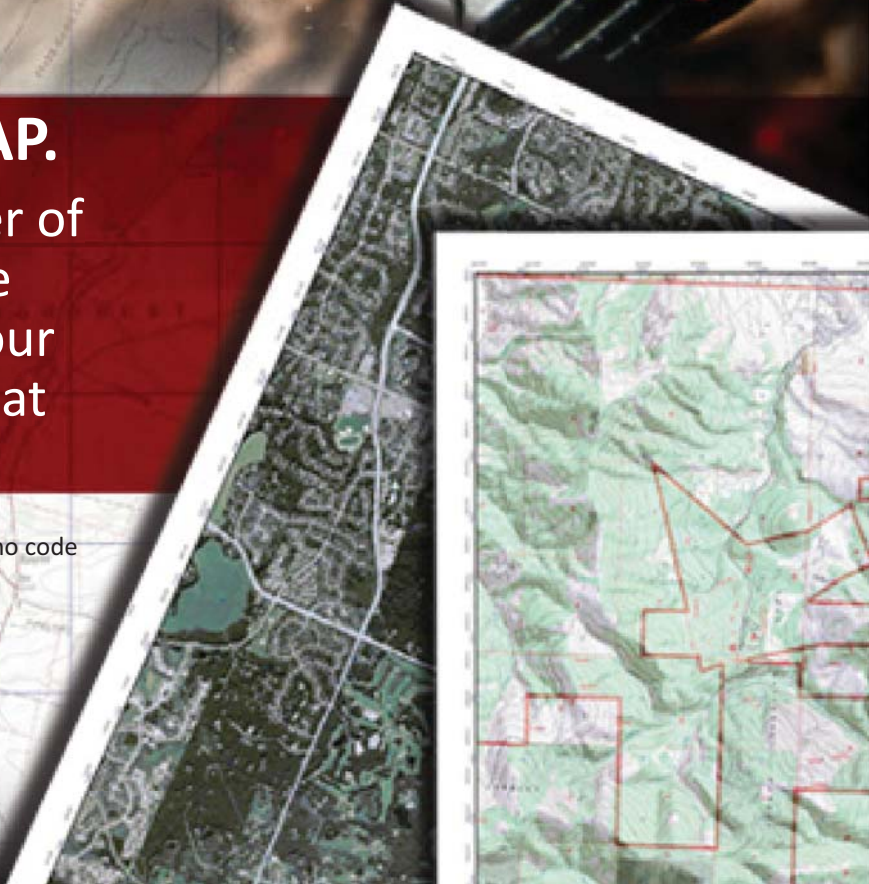
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NBC'S WEEKEND TODAY GOES

Wild



Southern Utah Desert
July 2011

Weekend TODAY co-hosts Jenna Wolfe, Lester Holt and Amy Robach recently braved a night

in the Utah wilderness with little more than the clothes on their backs, learning primitive survival skills and techniques along the way from BOSS, the Boulder Outdoor Survival School. Leave behind your food, tents, sleeping bags, backpacks, phones, and just about everything else you rely on in your daily life and head out into the wild. But pay attention to where you're going because you will have to find your way back out!

The three co-host were gracious enough to answer all of our questions about their experience in the wild. Our interview picks up where the cameras left off...

Lester, with the reporting you do from hotspots and war zones around the world, did you have any prior primitive survival training or experience?

Lester Holt: I have undergone hostile environment training to prepare for working in war and conflict zones, which includes everything from how to treat a sucking chest wound, to how to know if the AK-47 pointed at you has the “safety” on or not. In addition I have had nuclear, bio and chemical hazard training. I have lived in tents while covering famine in Africa, as well as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, however, all of my previous “survival” experiences and training involved the availability of modern tools such as flashlights, sat phones, and MREs.

Were you more exposed to the elements and dependant on the earth than you typically are when on location in such areas as Afghanistan or Lebanon?

LH: Our Utah experience brought us much closer to nature than the imbed I was on in Afghanistan. At least at Camp Leatherneck in Helmund Province I was housed in a plywood hut and had a sleeping bag (although it was probably as dusty as the ground I slept on in Utah!) At the front lines in Lebanon I actually had a hotel room. It’s the one and only hotel stay I can recall sleeping with a ballistic vest and helmet. I have also slept in a fair number of cars while covering hurricanes and other natural disasters. In none of those places did I have to find water or eat off the land as we did in Utah.

Do you feel this experience will help you in the future while filming from remote locations?

LH: I learned a lot from the folks at BOSS that I hope never to have to use. The reality, however of covering stories in hostile places is that you can get cut off from your colleagues, or have to escape and evade. I found myself cut-off from our bureau in Cairo for several hours during the height of the violent clashes between pro and anti-government protesters there this spring and thankfully had all the kit I needed for “urban” survival. (communications, passport, cash, contacts, Arabic phrase book, etc), but if that were to occur in a remote location I now have a few new tricks in my arsenal. You can bet parachute cord and water purification tablets are now going in my grab bag as a direct result of my Utah experience.

Amy Robach: Definitely. Once you sleep without a tent, sleeping bag or food, you can handle just about anything!

Jenna Wolfe: I feel like this experience helped in that it allowed me the rare opportunity to focus on the story itself without any distractions such as a blackberry, cell phone, wifi access, etc. I guess I never realized how many times over the course of a day and night I check my email. Perhaps (and this is a big perhaps) I’ll leave the blackberry behind on my next shoot. Maybe. Possibly. It’s just a thought. A remote thought. Far, distant, remote thought.

What was the hardest thing for you to be without?

LH: Flashlight and headlamp. Stumbling around the desert at night looking for a place to relieve yourself is no picnic.

AR: My blackberry. It’s amazing how empty my hand feels without it.

JW: For me, it was food. As an athlete, I eat constantly throughout the day. I need my little meals to recharge

and re-energize. The fact that we went the whole day with nothing more than the air we breathed and the water we lugged with us was the hardest thing I've done in a while. Add to that the fact that the only food we eventually *did* eat was a boiled potato and carrot with some quinoa and I was starting to see two of Lester and Amy by night's end.

Has this experience inspired you to make any lifestyle changes?

LH: I'll be a little more respectful of nature. I had no idea how fragile plant life can be and how delicate the desert really is.

AR: Yes - I love the message of the school: focus on the here and now. When all of life's distractions have been taken away, and your objective is food, shelter and water, you learn to focus your mind on the present. I've tried to take that back with me.

JW: Now instead of using my bathroom, I go outside on Columbus Ave in Manhattan just like I did in the Utah wilderness.

What was the greatest challenge for you to overcome or the hardest skill to learn?

LH: The idea of making fire with a bow and stick seemed impossible. With a patient teacher I overcame, and seeing that first glowing ember -- the fruit of my efforts -- was a tremendous thrill I won't soon forget.

JW: My greatest challenge was minimizing my gear. I brought a ton of stuff to Utah. I was allowed to bring just 0.000008% of that on our hike. I left behind a toothbrush, toilet paper, sleeping bag, moisturizing cream, a comb, a Rubik's cube, sunglasses and *food*. As for the hardest skill, hands down, making fire was the most challenging thing to learn. There was rubbing and grinding and blowing and ashing and waiting. I never quite got it, so we all cheated off of Lester's measly little fire.

What equipment or gear did you bring and what was provided?

LH: We were provided with a wool blanket, rain poncho, and parachute cord, with which we were taught to fashion a makeshift backpack. In addition we were provided a knife, cup and water bottle.

AR: We had a hand crafted spatula to eat with.

JW: All we were allowed to bring was a few items of warm clothing for the night and they provided a boatload of enthusiasm.

How did you prepare for a night in the wild with virtually no modern conveniences?

LH: The truth is, I didn't prepare. I wanted to experience the school without preconceived notions. Besides, had I known how primitive the experience was going to be, I might have backed out! I thought about bringing the 800 number for Hyatt just in case.

AR: I felt safe because we had guides and each other, and frankly, without others to help I would not have been prepared!

JW: We didn't. For all the athletic endeavors I've partaken in, all the thrill-seeking stunts I've been a part of, all the crazy, heart-pumping events I've put myself through, the one thing I've never really done is survival camp. I was fully prepared for the athletic challenge, but not the "survival" challenge. I wasn't ready to go without food,

hand sanitizers, a toothbrush, an extra pair of underwear, a matchbook, a five-course meal... well, maybe not that last one. I understood that electronics would be confiscated, but *my GPS watch???*

Did you encounter any wildlife?

LH: Just bugs and small critters including a snake. Did I mention I am deathly afraid of snakes? I'd frankly rather deal with the aforementioned AK-47 than a snake. At least with a gun I don't have to figure out if it's dangerous or not.

AR: Insane amounts of ants, but thankfully no mountain lions or bears, which was a real possibility.

JW: If you consider 7,000 big black beetles, a little snake and an endless caterpillar wildlife, then yes, we definitely encountered that.

What was the high point and low point of the trip?

AR: The high point for me was finding our way two miles out of the desert with a map and no help from guides. That felt good! The low point was being exhausted, hungry, and completely unable to make a fire (without a match of course). I gave up. Thankfully Lester didn't and by One A.M. we had boiling water and some grains.

JW: There was a moment, shortly after "dinner," when we all wrapped ourselves up in blankets, when the fire went out and we were all alone in this vast wilderness. I looked at my two colleagues and smiled, fully appreciating the stillness of the wild Utah night. That was the high point for me. When you can take three incredibly busy and bustling journalists and stop them in their tracks for one evening it's a beautiful thing. As for the low point, I raced Lester up a steep hill with all of our gear on in ninety degree weather and celebrated the win with a jump over a cactus plant. Nothing about that was any fun.

Do you have any tips or revelations to share with our readers?

AR: My advice would be this: survival school is not for everyone and it's not for the faint of heart. I'm actually a fairly experienced camper and I had a tough time. I only went through one night. My hat is off to those who complete a twenty-eight day course. I'm a big fan of modern conveniences, but it was fun to see how we did for twenty-four hours without any!

JW: Do one thing everyday that scares you and you will come out on top. Navigating through snakes and beetles in the middle of the night to find my way back to my "bed" was my one thing that night. Fate loves the fearless...





RUDY PROJECT STERLING HELMET

The Rudy Project Sterling is a must have. It comes with a padded mesh liner to keep the bugs and debris out of your hair, but you can easily switch that out for the more typical helmet pads that come with it. Either way, this helmet is supremely comfortable. I don't find the mesh traps in any extra heat (even in Texas in July) because the Sterling has some serious air flow through its eighteen vents. The retention dial, called the RSR7, allows you to precisely and evenly tighten the helmet down for a perfect fit and it holds strong all day. Rudy Project included a couple things I've never seen before – an eyewear dock built into the frame and a padded chin strap. The buckles on the chin straps are super easy to adjust and the included visor and storage bag are a nice touch. The Sterling helmet is pure quality at every turn. Check out the many color options, as well as their full line of helmets, sunglasses, goggles, and other gear at www.e-rudy.com.

HIGHGEAR ALTERRA IPT

The Alterra IPT from HighGear is one of the most useful pieces of gear around. It displays and records accumulated ascent and descent values, changes in barometric pressure and vertical speed, all in real time. It shows altitude, temperature, and has a built in compass with adjustable declination. It is sturdy enough to take anywhere, but compact and low profile so you don't feel like you're wearing a car battery on your wrist. And what's the best feature of all? You get all this for only \$175, which absolutely blows the competition away. View the entire product line at highgear.com.





BENCHMADE 915 TRIAGE

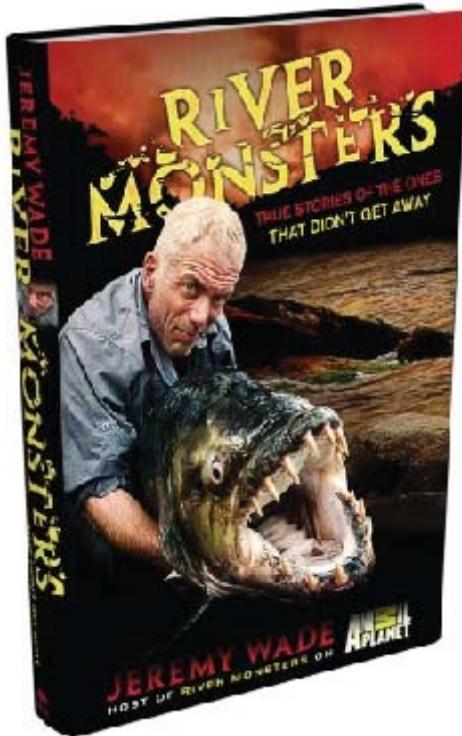
What a great knife! The Benchmade 915 Triage came razor sharp right out of the box. It has a 3.5 inch blade made out of highly corrosion resistant N680 steel, a safety hook and a carbide glass breaker. The deeply textured and comfortably contoured G10 handles offer incredible grip and, like the rest of the knife, are extremely durable. Add to all that Benchmade's Axis lock, which is completely ambidextrous and will not let the blade close until you tell it to, and you have one of the finest tools on the market. Visit www.benchmade.com to learn more.

HONEY STINGER ORGANIC CHEWS AND WAFFLES

Honey Stinger, makers of great tasting organic energy snacks, has just come out with new Pink Lemonade and Lime-Ade flavors in their energy chews. They are a great, all natural fruit snack for adults and kids alike. Honey Stinger also makes organic waffles which are absolutely fantastic as well. The waffles are inspired by Lance Armstrong who suggested they produce their own version of similar waffles which are sold throughout Europe and eaten by professional cyclists. The waffles and the chews are both just the right size to give you some energy and take the hunger away without making you feel like you've eaten too much. See their full line of bars, gels, chews and waffles at www.honeystinger.com.



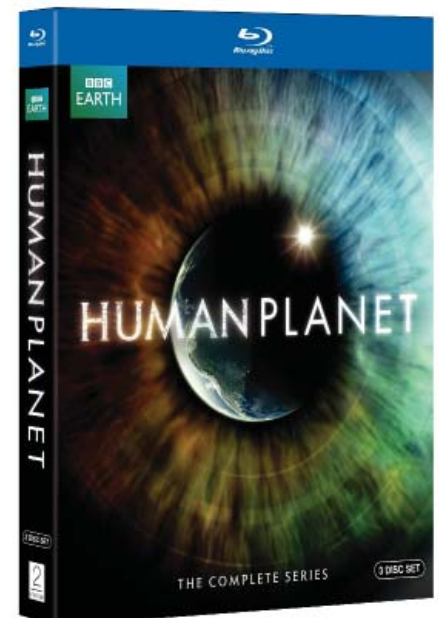
RIVER MONSTERS

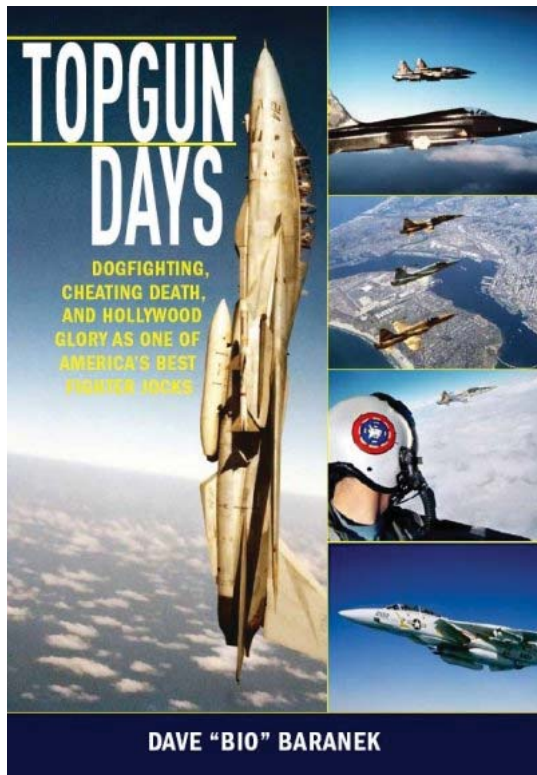


I'll admit it: I'm not much of a fisherman. But Jeremy Wade knows how to fish! He's the host of the show River Monsters on Animal Planet and he has just released a book by the same name. It was fascinating reading about all the tactics that only a lifetime devotion to a single-minded goal of catching fish can bring. This is hardly an instruction manual, though, as we are taken around the world in trolling boats with the latest high tech gadgets, shaky canoes, and free diving with nothing but the breath in our lungs to come face to face with some of the biggest, meanest, and most elusive fresh water fish God ever made. This very well written book sheds some light on the little known world within our world and the monster fish that live there. Apparently there are catfish over nine feet long with shark-like teeth swimming around. Over the course of reading this book I flipped a kayak over in the river and had a momentary freak out wondering who's neighborhood I just splashed into. To find out more about River Monsters, visit animal.discovery.com/tv/river-monsters.

HUMAN PLANET

Discovery Channel and the BBC have done it again. Human Planet focuses on people throughout the world adapting to survive in their environment with only their God-given ingenuity and work ethic. The latest release from the folks who brought you Planet Earth, Life and Blue Planet lives up to the high quality you have come to expect. The stunning landscapes and inspiring stories are only enhanced by the crystal-clear picture quality of Blu-ray. Pick up the Human Planet series and experience life from the jungles of South America, the deserts of Africa, the frozen Arctic Circle, and everywhere in between. Visit the official site at www.humanplanetblog.com





TOPGUN DAYS

I'm sorry to break the news to you, but neither Tom Cruise, nor Val Kilmer are actually certified on an F-14 Tomcat. But Dave "Bio" Baranek is and he was one of the men actually performing the stunt flights for the movie Top Gun. In his book TopGun Days, Bio takes us on an edge of our seats ride through the high risk, fast paced world of a fighter pilot. Truly one of the best in the world, Bio has done it all: carrier take offs and landings, brushes with Soviet planes, near death cockpit ejections, and taught as an instructor at the premier fighter pilot training program, known as TopGun. Between the thrilling stories, talented writing, and over fifty stunning pictures, this is a book you will not want to put down.

RECHARGE NATURAL SPORTS DRINK MIX

The new addition to the R.W. Knudsen Family of all natural juices, Recharge sports drink mix replenishes the fluids and electrolytes your body needs after working out. It really tastes great (especially the lemon!) and because they don't add any sugar to the mix you won't undo all your hard work. The thin little tubes are easy to carry around and the powder dissolves quickly when you shake it up in your water bottle. This is a fantastic product I'm sure will remain a regular part of my inventory.
www.rwknudsenfamily.com





HALO BY PROBAR

ProBars new Halo Bars are the perfect alternative to a candy bar. They taste better and are better for you. Currently in four flavors, they are a healthy, delicious snack option made from all natural certified organic ingredients. I found myself wanting to keep eating them one right after the other (especially the Rocky Road). Visit www.theprobar.com to learn more.

BODYGLIDE

BodyGlide is a sport lubricant that is designed to prevent blisters or chafing during exercise. You can use it on feet, thighs, under arms or anywhere else that tends to chaff during activity. The easy to apply BodyGlide stick goes on like a solid deodorant and is petroleum free so it does not clog pores or leave behind a sticky, greasy mess. It will also stay on for hours but easily washes off with soap and water at the end of the day. BodyGlide's motto is "stops trouble before it starts." And they have hit the nail square on the head. BodyGlide is easy to use, does not make a mess and it works which has made it one of my mandatory pieces of gear. So add a stick to your gear bag and focus on training instead of dealing with blisters and rashes.



Adventure World Product Reviews

BRIGGS & RILEY EXPEDITION DUFFLE BAG

At Briggs & Riley Travelware it all starts with the designer's question. Is there a smarter way to design this, one that will make life easier for our users? Well they have answered that question in spades with the Briggs & Riley Expedition Rolling Duffle bag. To use their terminology this bag has a "ginormous" main compartment for the bulkiest of gear. But plenty of bags have large compartments; what features set this bag apart from the crowd? The side storage panels fold down allowing the bag to collapse for efficient storage when not being used. The Outsider handle system allows for a flat interior surface and provides more interior space inside the bag. This is accomplished by placing the handle on the outside of the luggage. These bags are built to last using high performance 420d ripstop and packcloth nylon. And finally a lifetime warranty like none I have ever seen. If your Briggs & Riley bag is ever broken or damaged, even if it was caused by an airline, they will repair it free of charge. Simple as that! The functionality, quality and warranty make the Briggs & Riley Expedition Rolling Duffle the dream bag for that dream trip.



DR. DRIP COFFEE

The Doctor is in, except I'm booking him for house calls every morning. Dr. Drip is the fun new way to brew a classically delicious cup of coffee. Get the best of both worlds -- the convenience of instant coffee and the taste of freshly roasted and drip-brewed Arabica beans. At home, at the campsite, and anywhere else you want to go, Dr Drip is rich in portability and convenience. Visit them online at drdripcoffee.com.



a look back through the years at the USARA Adventure Race National Championship

As we enter the 12th year of the USARA Adventure Race National Championship we thought it would be exciting to take a visual journey back through the years. Many of the original pioneers of US adventure racing took part in these early championships. Through the years the competitors endured many challenges including floods and snow storms in their quest to be crowned as USARA Adventure Race National Champions.



2000
Kernville, California

Photos from Nationals 2000
by California Sports Marketing



2001
Leesville, Louisiana



2002
Sapphire Valley, North Carolina





2003
Lake Shore, California





2004
French Lick, Indiana



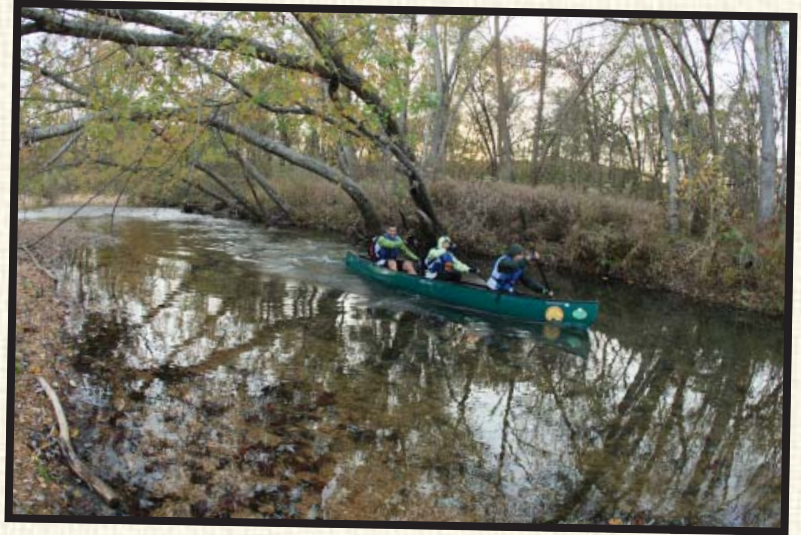
2005
Tampa, Florida





2006
Santa Barbara, California

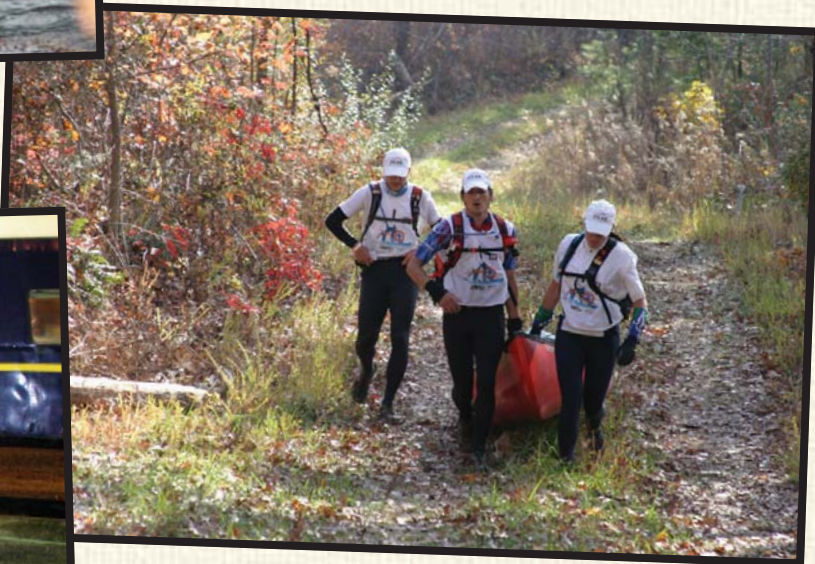




2007
Potosi, Missouri



2008
Blue Ridge, Georgia





2009
Pilot Point, Texas





2010
Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania



2011 USARA

Adventure Race National Championship



Thursday, October 6

1-5:30 PM **Race Check-In**

// Dupont Lodge, Cumberland Falls SRP

4-8:00 PM **Festival by the Falls**

// Live Music by Mountain Trio, Kathy Joy Bell, Mike White, and Lost In Liberty

// Regional Food Booths from Cattlemen's Association and Park

// Handcrafted Items from Mountain Craft Center and Local Metalworking School

// Inflatable BounceHouse and Craft Project for Kids

// Team Photo by the Falls (all teams will receive free 4 x 6)

7-8:00 PM **Pre-Race Briefing**

// Conference Center, Cumberland Falls SRP

Friday, October 7

6:00 AM **Final Pre-Race Briefing**

// Dupont Lodge, Cumberland Falls SRP

// Breakfast Stand Open in Lodge Lobby

7:00 AM **Race Start**

// Dupont Lodge, Cumberland Falls SRP

9:30 AM **Interpretive Program at Blue Heron Camp**

// Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area

3-5 PM **Ranger-Led Fire Tower Hike at Cumberland Falls SRP**

7-8 PM **Square Dance at Cumberland Falls SRP**

8:30 PM **Star Party at Cumberland Falls SRP**

Saturday, October 8

8:00 AM **Ranger-Led Hike at Natural Arch, Daniel Boone National Forest**

10 AM - 1 PM **Finish Line Party with Cornhole and Hillbilly Golf Games, Inflatable**

// Bounce House And Duck Prize Pond For Kids, And More!

// Dupont Lodge, Cumberland Falls SRP

1:00 PM **Race Finish**

// Dupont Lodge, Cumberland Falls SRP

7:00 PM **Awards Banquet**

// Conference Center, Cumberland Falls SRP



Start to Finish!

We've been in adventure races
around the world
since 1996

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BEST SKIN BARRIER AGAINST



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**SADDLE
SORES**

BLISTERS

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Kentucky UNBRIDLED ADVENTURE



Kentucky is overflowing with opportunities for unbridled adventure. With a landscape as diverse as any in the nation, there are new experiences to be had around every bend of the river and over every ridge in the Bluegrass State. History is not lost on Kentuckians. The culture and heritage of Kentucky is showcased throughout the commonwealth at a number of historical locations where people delight in sharing with visitors just what makes them proud to be from Kentucky. Most of Kentucky's finest adventures are found off the beaten path, up and down the back roads that cross all over the state. No matter what mode of transportation you choose to explore Kentucky, what you're sure to find is a gratifying experience that will leave you wanting more.

There are places all throughout the nation that have been deemed worthy of national recognition and protection. Kentucky has more than its fair share of national parks, forests and recreational areas. In far western Kentucky, between the two largest lakes in the state, lies Land Between the Lakes

National Recreation Area. Land Between the Lakes covers over 170,000 acres of land and 3,000 miles of undeveloped shoreline. There are over 200 miles of trails for hiking and biking, 100 miles of trails for horseback riding and 100 miles of trails for ATVs and off-road enthusiasts. The other end of the state is home to the Cumberland Gap National Historic Park. This historic gap in the Appalachian Mountains sits on the Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee border. This is the site where Daniel Boone first crossed into Kentucky via the Wilderness Road. The original Great Gateway to the West, Cumberland Gap attracts thousands each year with its scenic views and outdoor adventures. More to the heart of the state is the largest cave system in the world. Mammoth Cave National Park provides an underground world just waiting to be explored. Guided tours are available, including a wild cave tour for the truly adventurous spelunker. There is plenty of adventure above ground as well. Canoeing, hiking, horseback riding and even zip lines mark paths above the great cave system. The Daniel Boone National Forest is compiled of tracts that total over 700,000 acres of

public land. The Sheltoewe Trace runs for 269 miles up through the heart of the National Forest. The Sheltoewe Trace, or Kentucky's Long Trail, attracts both thru-hikers and day users to its abundance of natural marvels.

Kentucky's State Parks are also found at significant sites that highlight the cultural, historical and recreational opportunities for visitors. Kentucky has seventeen State Resort Parks; more than any other state. These parks showcase the years that have gone by in this state. They highlight some of the best locations for exploration and adventure. Some are remote, while some are only minutes away from the largest urban areas in Kentucky. They are truly, the finest in the nation.

Over 8,000 miles of trails and 34,000 miles of waterways make Kentucky a top destination for outdoor adventure. Not only is mileage important, but the diversity of trail types and users also helps make Kentucky such a great spot to discover natural settings. Hikers, equestrians, off-roaders and mountain bikers can all be in Kentucky enjoying their favorite trails. Kentucky has established itself as the horse capital of the world. Not only because of the fast paced racing enjoyed by millions, but also because of the horse trails that connect riders with grand locations and memories of a simpler time. World class horse camps and stables can be found in every corner of Kentucky for experienced trail bosses and first time riders alike. Riders that seek a different kind of horsepower are quickly realizing the potential of Kentucky's trail systems. ATVs and off-road vehicles are a tool enjoyed by many to get outside and have some fun. The mountains of eastern Kentucky are a draw for hundreds of thousands of riders every year. ATV parks offer riders with days worth of riding and exploration. Its not only South Eastern Kentucky that enjoys good riding, there are also an increasing number of riding locations being enjoyed in western and northern Kentucky. One popular off-roading TV celebrity has described Kentucky as having "the best ATV riding in North America". Kentucky's bluewater trails bring great paddling and floating to users of all experiences. Want to experience the thrill of Class V+ rapids? Or, enjoy a lazy afternoon float over flat water? There is a place in Kentucky that can accommodate. The commonwealth has more miles of navigable water than any state

in the Continental United States. With this wealth of water, water based recreation is a true highlight of Kentucky. There's another type of outdoor activity that's sweeping across the commonwealth, and the nation. It's not found on land or on the water, but rather in the sky. Ziplines and canopy tours are a great way to have fun in some of Kentucky's most scenic areas. Zip lines are opening in the Red River Gorge area, Mammoth Cave, and even a zipline that is located completely underground beneath Kentucky's largest city.

Sportsmen in Kentucky enjoy a wide range of game to pursue, and a great variety of fish to catch. Stripers at Cumberland, crappie in Kentucky Lake, muskies at Cave Run Lake, and small mouth at Dale Hollow are all world renowned trophy fisheries. Thousands upon thousands of anglers every year travel to Kentucky to experience fast paced action on the end of their lines in Kentucky's lakes and streams.





Race

to where what's on your back isn't your boss.

There's nothing like a Kentucky adventure to rejuvenate your mind, body, and Unbridled Spirit! To learn more about all the exciting things there are to do in Kentucky, visit GetOutKY.com.

GETOUTKY.COM • ADVENTUREBLOG.KENTUCKYTOURISM.COM



my Kids are
weighing me

down...

and it's great!



When I was single, training was a priority so it was easy to make time in my schedule for working out. Once I was married I had to make a few changes to my training schedule to accommodate my wife, but nothing significant, especially since she liked to train with me when possible. Then came those little blessings from heaven. Surly they would only require another minor adjustment, right? Boy was I wrong. I mean, who knew these little guys would have eating, napping, diaper changing schedules and who knew how demanding they would be? I will let you in on a secret: they get really grumpy when these schedules are not kept. So now comes the million dollar question, how can I continue to train while still being a good father? I will let you in on another secret: the correct answer is not to just leave all of the child care to mommy. It did not take long to figure out that I was going to need some extra equipment – but hey, we are all gear junkies so that was no big deal. We did some research and figured out that the Chariot Carrier was exactly what we needed. It provides one carrier that allows you to run with the kids, bike with the kids, even cross country ski or snowshoe if you live in the frozen north, which thankfully I do not. It is easy to change the carrier from one mode to another, which literally takes less than a minute. Best of all, they have an infant sling which allows you to take along small babies and protects them from excessive jarring. So we ordered a Chariot and my new training regime began, with my new partner, a six week old little girl named Izabella. We would get up every morning around seven A.M. and head out

for a thirty to forty minute run. I prefer running on trails but the required change to roads was a minor setback. I even found a steep hill close by so I could do hill repeats, which my daughter seemed to enjoy. After our run we would eat breakfast and switch the Chariot Carrier over to a bike trailer. We would then head to daycare which was a forty-five minute round trip. Even on those cold or rainy days the Chariot seals up tight and we would layer Izzy with blankets to keep her nice and warm. Often in the afternoon I would make the bike trip back to the daycare for another ride together. These training rides were fun and also helped train my little Izzy to be an outside girl. Once, when we were coming home on a summer day it started raining. It was warm so I decided to leave the rain cover open and see how my daughter would react. I looked back and she had this quizzical look on her face, clearly asking, “Poppa, what are we going to do about this?” So I started shouting, “RAIN, WHOO HOO, RAIN, WHOO HOO!” Immediately my daughter followed suit with her own shouts of “RAIN, WHOO HOO, RAIN, WHOO HOO!” When it stopped raining there was silence for about thirty seconds and all of a sudden my daughter started shouting, “MORE RAIN, MORE RAIN.” Boy, was I a proud poppa at that moment. I was smiling ear to ear and chanting, “MORE RAIN, MORE RAIN,” with my daughter. That year of running and biking with my daughter certainly made me stronger and was by far the most fun I have ever had training. Two years later we were blessed with Luke, my son. I sold the Chariot single to a friend who just had a baby and ordered a double



carrier. Yes, they have ones for two kids! With the double carrier, now all three of us can go on running and biking adventures. So once you start expanding your tribe, be sure to grab yourself a Chariot Carrier and take them along on your training outings. You will still get in a great workout, your kids will love being in the outdoors and you get to spend more time with the little guys. We even used our Chariot as a float in a local parade this Fourth of July.



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-Alistair Matthews,
owner, GravityBolivia.com



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It's Our Nature!

SCENIC McCREARY COUNTY

K E N T U C K Y

Imagine driving along a four lane highway. Businesses lining the road, cars passing. Movement. Man's handprint screaming for attention. You turn onto Hwy 700 bound for Alum Ford. The road narrows to a two lane road lined with houses. You continue your drive and slowly life begins to quite. The houses begin to be stretched further and further apart. The road begins to wind. Then as if crossing a magical entry you have entered a place untouched by man. Boulders jet from the earth from nowhere in particular. Rocks are covered with moss of such vibrant green no artist can duplicate. The drive is now canopied by trees of all varieties acting as a tunnel leading into greatness. Then the greatness appears. A river appears as if it fell from the sky and spit the rock mountains and woods in its landing. Here there is peace – there is beauty – there is inspiration and there is challenge. The drive from man's fingerprint to God's handiwork took five minutes. This is McCreary County, Kentucky.

The Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and the Daniel Boone National Forest are

both found in McCreary County, which is located in Southeast Kentucky on the Tennessee- Kentucky border. How you experience this country of the blessed is up to you. There are mom-and-pop lodging facilities that will cater to you as if you are one of the family and primitive campgrounds that will allow you to be friendly with the creatures of the wild. Bring a boat, a fishing pole, an empty stomach, curiosity for history and culture and a desire to meet folks that are happy to share. Jump a train, ride the river, shoot some skeet, or hike a trail.

While visiting McCreary County looking for your pleasure and a souvenir for the scrap book, take a ride on the Big South Fork Scenic Railway. For those of you who have had the privilege of riding a train as a child, you will fall in love with the memories it invokes as well as creating new memories as you learn of the rugged terrain we call home. Once you have reached your destination at Blue Heron Mining Camp you will have time to walk the "ghost structures" that stand representing a time not so long ago. Each structure represents a home, a church, or a school. They are col-

lectively known as "Mine 18." While touring the ghost structures, press the button to hear from the voices who actually lived and worked at Mine 18 during its heyday. A world of time gone by is begging to be remembered. After becoming acquainted with our history, enjoy a few of the family-friendly trails to take in the beauty that abounds. As you peer over the



bridge rising above the river you may witness a kayak or two challenging the swift waters below. One may quickly notice McCreary County offers something for the family looking for a light outdoor adventure as well as those looking to test the limits of man's skill versus the unpredictability of the wild. Visit www.bsfsry.com for departure times and pricing.

In addition to the Big South Fork Scenic Railway, another must see is Barthell Coal Mining Camp. The camp was originally built in 1902 and was reconstructed in the 1990's with love and honor for those who lived and worked in the mining camp along with the families that loved and supported them. While taking the guided tour you may feel the word

"camp" doesn't seem to fit. This was a town; a community built along the banks of the river. The number of artifacts that have been collected and are on display at Barthell will leave you thinking about times past and how far we have come with the advancements in technology. Last on the tour you will be led 300 feet into a coal mine. Once inside you feel the temperature drop, you see the coal so clearly along the wall, you feel the cramped dark conditions the miners worked in on a daily basis. While in the mine you realize miners are men who labored so hard to provide for their families in a place that was both exciting and dangerous at the same time. Barthell Coal Mining Camp is a wonderful step back in time. Visit www.barthellcoalcamp.com for tour times and pricing.

Natural Arch is a true wonder located in the Daniel Boone National Forest. Towering above a forest woodland, Natural Arch stands as an impressive monument to the forces of nature in action. The fifty by ninety foot arch was formed by the erosion of wind, water, and ice that cut away the soft sandstone and left a hard rock cap that arches dramatically across the sky. As you hike the trails, notice the variety of wildlife that make their home here: wild turkey, grouse, deer, squirrels, and raccoons. In the spring, wildflowers such as lady slippers, trillium, and jack-in-the-pulpits delight the eye. Autumn will have its own show for you with a beautiful display of brilliant color. The trail begins on the north end of the picnic area and runs along a paved pathway to the base of Natural Arch, passing two scenic overlooks along the way. At the arch, you may climb the steps to the arch itself or continue along a dirt pathway that loops around



the northwest end of the arch. The trail is one mile in length and is a family friendly hike. Visit www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/boone for more details.

Yahoo Falls located in the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area is Kentucky's highest waterfall, dropping 113 feet from the lip to the pool below. A short one mile loop will take you down to, behind and back to the top of the falls. The Yahoo Falls area also has picnic facilities and scenic overlooks into the Big South Fork river gorge. Visit www.wnps.gov/biso/ for more details.

After experiencing our beauty and history why not try your hand at the sport of shooting clays? Backwoods Shooters Club offers an exciting day of learning the art of shooting sporting clays. The clays set sail as you take aim and shoot. Watching that clay shatter is quite a fun experience. Rental guns are available along with ammo and ear protection. If you are into the sport and own a shotgun, then please stop by and take advantage of the several different regulation courses available. Ervin and Kitty, along with son Wayne love a little competition! Visit www.backwoodsshootersclub.com for hours and pricing.

Main Street in Downtown Whitley offers a range of dining options. The Dairy Bar is a McCreary County staple and has been featured in Southern Living Magazine. The locals would highly recommend the Dixie Whopper and a milkshake. Café Macchiato boasts the best coffee in town while offering a lighter dining plate with homemade soups and salads. Santa Fe Mexican Restaurant offers authentic Mexican cuisine. After dinner walk over to Uptown Opry for some live music played by Hap Strunk and the Southern Smoke. They play every Friday at 7:00 P.M. in a smoke free environment.

Many of our shops offer locally hand-crafted items. From kitchen utensils to furniture, you will find something that has been crafted from love. Sweet Kreations is one of the largest gift stores in Southeast Kentucky. Located in Historic Downtown Stearns, Barb and Kathy will tempt you with their homemade fudge. Big South Fork Market Place offers primitive crafts such as beautifully hand painted gourds and

handmade quilts.

Our lodging facilities are mom-and-pop establishments that offer an authentic small town experience for our visitors. The rooms are clean and affordable for any price range. We offer hotel and motel lodging as well as cabin rentals. For more detailed information about lodging please check out the McCreary County Tourism website at www.kyvacations.com.

No matter how you want to experience the great outdoors, McCreary County has something to offer. The best we offer is our beauty, our history, and our charm. We're not as difficult to find as one might think. We are fifteen minutes from I-75 off Exit 11 on the Tennessee- Kentucky border. We hope you plan a trip to McCreary County soon!

