

## Part I: Strider's Adventures at: **Subaru Primal Quest** - Telluride, CO

July 4-12, 2002; *by Barb Dutrow*

Striders members Barb Dutrow and Carl Gable, together with Joel Krypel (Santa Fe) and Brad Fawcett (Denver), comprised Team Santa Fe (TSF) to compete in the first Subaru Primal Quest held in the San Juan Mountains of SW Colorado. They were joined by a superb support crew consisting of Jessica Harrison, M.D., of Tucson, AZ, Bill Roth and Jennifer Harrison (no relation) of Santa Fe. To keep our family and friends informed, we arranged for daily updates to be e-mailed by Darrell Henry (LSU). For those interested in the daily play by play, these are posted to the website of Barb's local running club and can be viewed at: <http://www.lawired.com/csr/home.htm>. Pictures of TSF during the race can also be viewed at: [http://www.geol.lsu.edu/dutrow/tsf\\_pics.html](http://www.geol.lsu.edu/dutrow/tsf_pics.html)

The Subaru Primal Quest Adventure Race, was an "expedition" length race of 251 miles and was advertized as having 68,000' of elevation gain! Immense! Four racers comprised coed teams that must stay and finish together to be officially ranked. Teams may continue 'unranked' if a team member drops out. Racers navigate their way, non-stop, via maps through check points (CP's) by mountain biking (151 miles), trekking (68 miles), fixed ropes, and kayaking (32 miles). "Wild single track, dirt road, steep couloirs and ridgelines that stretch across the skyline for days" is how the race director described the course. This "richest adventure" race was also unusual in that it had a HUGE purse - \$250,000; 1st place received \$100,000, 2nd - \$50,000, 3rd - \$25,000 - to 15th place. As a result, the best teams in the world were our competition! Nearly all of the race was above an elevation of 9,000' and many passes were in excess of 13,000', making this one of the highest adventure races to date with some of the most total elevation gain. The altitude was one of the most challenging aspects of the course and brought down some of the best-ranked teams. At the races end, Barb recorded 54,790' of vertical gain on her altimeter, short of the projected gain, but nearly equivalent to climbing two Mt. Everest's from sea level! The total elevation change was over 120,000'! Of the 68 teams that started the race, 39 finished the race as ranked teams.

After spending July 4 loading the support vehicle, Bill's flatbed truck, TSF was off to Mountain Village, on the slopes of Telluride. Gear checkout required we arrive with ALL of the required gear - including bikes, early on July 5. Teams of volunteers thoroughly checked every item and selected gear was tagged to assure it didn't get swapped for lighter gear after checkout! With the prize money at stake, ounces count for speed. For the mountaineering test, the ropes were, of course, anchored to the bumper of a Subaru! Having the whitewater kayak checkout fully geared up in the tiny pool, with gondolas overhead, made for a surreal sight. Due to fire danger, stoves, flares, smoke bombs, etc. were eliminated as were, unfortunately, ice axes and crampons (so much for snow fields). We were finished, our photos taken, our goodie bags gathered, by 2pm. Now we had 2.5 days to fill with reorganizing gear, again and again. Pre-race briefing, July 6, provided us with a course overview, various warnings about high altitude sickness and our maps. Each team was to carry a sealed GPS unit as a tracking device.

Race start: 3 pm, July 7, elevation 9,500'ft; 24 miles of trekking, 4 mountain passes. Sixty-eight teams gathered near the gondola's base for the first fitness test! Weather conditions were generally great, but hot! Racers were off en masse, starting at the low elevation of 9500', straight up the Telluride ski slope! Up was followed by down, across high mountain meadows, ablaze with wild flowers. Despite the drought, colors were spectacular. We crossed 4 13,000' passes in this short segment. After a strategic move contouring at 13,000' to get to CP 2, we descended and then climbed Ajax mountain for the descent to the Imogene Pass Road (CP3) and into Telluride. This was a major mistake!

Around 10pm we summited to find the couloir leading down was a 1000' slope of unstable rubble. We waited an hour for the preceding team to clear the death zone before continuing. It was obvious from the nearby teams that many did not know how to safely travel on unstable slopes. Teams should stay close together so if a rock is kicked loose, it does not have a chance to gain momentum and cause injury. We set off, keeping another team close by for safety, down the dangerous slope. Glow sticks were supposed to mark the 'best' route, but they had been pummeled by rock fall, only 3 remained (Bad sign!). When we were about halfway down the slope, the team above us moved. Suddenly a tire-sized boulder emerged in our headlamps and careened our way out of the darkness; it was frightening. TSF frantically scrambled to avoid the hazard. Thankfully we were missed, but only by inches. This was life-threatening, and could have been race-ending, had we been only a few feet over. Joel had a nasty cut on this thumb, but it remained functional and attached, although bleeding profusely! After the adrenaline rush, we finished the descent and were off to Telluride to the transition area (TA)- it was 2:45am, July 8. The first leg had taken nearly 12 hrs. At the TA, we meet our support crew, who had hot food and drinks prepared, our gear ready for the next race segment, tended to our sores, gave us beta on the next leg and a boot when we'd sat too long. Did Joel survive? Were there other casualties? Find out next month!!



Figure 1: (Lf) Race start uphill in Telluride (Rt) Carl and Joel ascending another pass.

Transition to the next event was preceded by plotting the remaining 23 CP's on our maps. With this came the sudden realization that the next leg, biking, was over 100 miles with huge vertical. This leg was a mixture of single track, roads, and the all too common, hike-a-bike, up hills, over rivers, etc. Single track, forest and darkness started out the biking. Daylight soon came as did friendlier roads and breathtaking views; completely circum-navigating the Lizard Head wilderness made for spectacular scenery (CP's 5-9). After about 32 hrs of racing, we finally slept for a couple of hours. During the middle of this long bike leg, we were allowed to meet our support crew. Unfortunately for them, we arrived at 2:30am - July 9. Fortunately for us, they had prepared a feast of steaming pasta. In addition, boiled potatoes, hard boiled eggs and peanut butter and jelly's were ready for the road. Our transitions were too long (hours), because they fed us too well! Biking then took us over the Last Dollar road and brought us by the Ralph Lauren ranch. In the heat of the day, was what seemed to be the longest, slight uphill - totally parching with 90+ temperatures. We were low on water (the cow pasture ponds did not look inviting). Finally, we reached CP10 with a stream nearby. Most of us submerged in the clear cold water. By the end of this bike leg (3pm, July 9 at CP 11) after 34 hrs of biking and 17,000' of ascent on this bike leg, our seats were so sore everyone rode the downhills with their quad on the bike seat!

Everyone was looking forward to the mountaineering leg and being on our feet again! Much of this segment was traveling cross country with no trails, over many steep couloirs that were scree slopes instead of the nice snow chutes they would have been in a wetter year. Midway through, a ropes segment was setup to ascend a fixed rope (2 people per rope - very awkward), and then (single file) move through a window in the rock, rappel down the other side and zip across another long scree slope. As Carl, Joel and Brad sat below watching Barb descend, a loud crash signaled that a rockfall (with 3 sofa size rocks) had spontaneously broken off just to the right above Barb and funneled directly down into her descent line. Fortunately the angels were there; if Barb had been a minute further downslope, she would have been flattened by rockfall! We all felt very lucky! Up and over a few more passes, we descended into Ironton to CP17 at 8pm on July 10 (3.5 race days).

Only a short bike ride away was kayaking. Unfortunately as we headed up Corkscrew Pass about 2:30am, we realized that this was going to be another hiking section! Even the lead teams hiked this steep and rocky 4WD road. At the top, just as Barb started down while she was changing gears she hit a rock, and fell over to her right - her arm and hip coming down hard on rocks. After a scream and some tears, the guys made sure she was functional, checked the bike and all was well. The rocky downhill made it painful to grasp the handle bars, but that soon ended in a fabulous long smooth fast downhill. This would have been spectacular scenery during the daylight hours. We rode into Silverton and the boating transition (CP 19) about 6:30 am on July 11 - with time to be on, and off, the water by the mandatory 9pm cutoff. However, when Barb changed into her wetsuit, shock hit as a knob the size of a grapefruit extruded from her lower arm. Even with a compress, trying to squeeze into a wetsuit with a non-functional right arm was difficult, but Jennifer kindly helped!

Did Joel's thumb recover? Did Barb break her arm? Were there other casualties? Find out next month!!