

Rocky Tracks

Long-distance carrier

Ian Adamson, a master in numerous individual sports, has proved in multiday adventure races to be the ultimate team player.



Ian Adamson, front, and Michael Tobin were part of Team Nike, which won the Primal Quest Adventure Race last year in Moab, Utah.

COLORADO'S TOP 10 ADVENTURE ATHLETES

Fourth in a series of profiles of world-class athletes who define their mountain sports specialties

Wilderness coaxes best

Ian Adamson thrives at pushing himself to edge of endurance

By Brian Metzler
SPECIAL TO THE ROCKY

When it comes to outdoor endurance activities, Ian Adamson is a jack-of-all-sports and seemingly a master of most of them. The Australian-born Boulder resident has the skill set of a Swiss Army knife and the resourcefulness of a Jedi, qualities that have helped him become one of the world's most successful adventure racers.

The races he has excelled in typically entail coed four-person teams covering 300 to 500 miles of terrain through mountain biking, trekking, paddling and rappelling during a span of five to seven days with little sleep. He has been on the winning team at seven world championship adventure races, more than any other athlete. But he's also a world-record paddler and one of the planet's best wilderness navigators.

"Racing with Ian was just amazing," said Dave Wiens, of Gunnison, who teamed with Adamson, Breckenridge's Monique Merrill and New Zealander Richard Ussher to win the 2006 Adventure Racing World Championship in Norway and Sweden. "The navigating he did just blew my mind. The maps we were given ... had very little detail on them. I couldn't believe how he got us over this really long ridge that was nothing but pure rock. And he was just so calm the whole time."

After helping Team Nike win Primal Quest in Utah and the Adventure Racing World Championship last year, Adamson retired from being a professional athlete and began a career as a race producer.

He's hoping to pass the excitement of multi-sport endurance racing to others through his 24 Hours of Triathlon events, the first of which was held in September at Boulder Reservoir.

"It's a unique format that has components of teamwork, strategy and camaraderie, and it's a lot different than many other races and any other triathlon," Adamson said. "It has a fun and supportive festival atmosphere, and it can be done by first-timers or pros or as a relay team. You don't have to have the skills in every sport to enjoy it."

► **Ian Adamson had no time** to attend to a bloody nose while on a quick lunch break during a 2004 competition in Argentina. He helped Team Nike win the 2006 Adventure Racing World Championship in Scandinavia.

PHOTOS BY DAN CAMPBELL/SPECIAL TO THE ROCKY



from passionate racer

In his own words

■ **On starting young:** As a young kid, I guess I showed some aptitude for athletics and adventure in elementary school. In elementary school, we had cross country running and track and field, but canoeing and cycling were also included in high school. And I was also really into climbing at a young age, so for adventure racing, I had all of the requisite sports. And then I was exposed to it in my first year in university with the canoe club, and then it was just a natural progression for me.

■ **On being in Boulder:** For any endurance athlete, the environment in Boulder is just about perfect. The weather is great. There are lots of hills and lots of trails and lots of other athletes and a strong community of outdoor sports. I first moved to Denver (from Australia) in 1991 for a temporary job to help with various aspects of product development, and I was influenced very heavily that Boulder was close.

■ **On his favorite races:** The Adventure Racing World Championship last year in Sweden and Norway was spectacular. It was clean and pristine and beautiful. The course was technical and it required skill and intelligence and tactics and athleticism, and the competition was really fierce. The Eco-Challenge in British Columbia in 1996 was also a good one, with spectacular mountains and glaciers and deep, deep wilderness. And those are the things that really feed my passionate outdoor athletic soul.

■ **On competing in heat:** The heat in the 1997 ESPN X Games adventure race (in Mexico and California) was brutal. It topped out my Suunto wrist computer's thermometer at 160 degrees, or more accurately the LCD screen went black (it recovered about the same time I did when the temperature cooled to 120). The adhesives in our shoes gave out and the air bags in our Nikes exploded, leaving us walking with scorched feet on a single flattened layer of mid sole. Water in our canteens boiled, our feet blistered and our muscles cramped. The medical team gave us strange looks when we asked for hot tea and blankets at the end of stage three — the temperature had dropped to 90 degrees that night and we were shivering from the sudden "cold."

■ **On setting the paddling record:** It takes such tenacity over a long period of time to get a record (paddling 262 miles in 24 hours) like that. You might be just really lucky to get the conditions right. I spent eight years to get the coincidence of fitness, motivation, river conditions, weather conditions and competition to come together. It finally came together in 2004, but I think in perfect conditions 280 miles is possible.

■ **On lessons learned:** The first time I set the 24-hour paddling record, I put in at Pump House (near Kremmling) and took out at Big Bend in Moab, Utah. That one was just too wild, but I was young and stupid at the time. I would never do that again. I would do bits of it during the day, but forget the rest of it. It was dangerous.



■ **Adamson suffered** severe blisters in helping Team Nike to a first-place finish at Primal Quest near Moab, Utah.

■ **Adamson and Team Nike** teammates engage in rigorous training on a Colorado lake.

It's a big, technical whitewater river. I had safety boaters with me, but they couldn't keep up with me. So that was dumb. In retrospect, it was a pretty stupid thing to do.

■ **On his favorite sport:** Ocean kayaking. I like being out in the ocean. I competed on surf skis and surf paddling. Here it would be known as sea kayaking, but technically, it's known as surf ski racing. I would like to do the Ocean Kayaking World Championships in Molokai (Hawaii), but the racing part is not a big deal for me now.

■ **On the mountains:** I love mountains and have always been drawn back to the mountains. I'm drawn to the ocean, too. I miss the ocean, but going there makes it special. And if I lived on the ocean, it would be the same going to the mountains for skiing every year. But athletically, it's better to live and train here.

■ **On being a gourmet cook:** I like food and I like cooking. I like to take my time and chop things and make things. I started cooking as soon as I could eat. I was always fiddling in the kitchen. In

some ways, it's some kind of a creative bent. My favorite thing to cook is whatever I want to eat at that moment.

■ **On the last good book he read:** *The Pursuit of Happiness*, by Chris Gardner.

■ **On his favorite indulgence:** After racing, I almost inevitably want a big piece of red meat, a big juicy hamburger. And after a big day of skiing, it's the same thing. There's a bit of everything in there; it's a complete meal. And for a comfort food, it's Ben & Jerry's chocolate ice cream.

■ **On what he might be doing if not for athletics:** If I wasn't an athlete, I would have been in engineering and probably manufacturing with my own company making something. I was on a track for a while for the entrepreneurial path and had started a company manufacturing CPR training mannequins, of all things. It was my innate desire to do something different and on my own. I've always been a gear freak and like diddling with things, making stuff.

Tips from a pro

Boulder resident Ian Adamson has taught skills clinics, conducted instructional camps and used his adventure experiences to lead corporate training workshops on communication, conflict resolution, teamwork and leadership development. A few tips about getting more involved in adventure sports:

1 Start small. Get all of the skills to stay safe. And have fun. Because if you get the skills, you're going to have a lot more fun and you're going to be a lot more safe. And if you want to build a team and don't have anyone to race with, start doing some of the races solo and see who you're racing alongside.

2 Take lessons and practice. With any kind of paddling, go to REI, get a lesson and in a half-day you've got the basics that you can build on. Even on the Platte River, if your boat wrapped on a piece of rock, that's pretty much instant death. It looks so benign and so easy and people think they can just float down the river. Even shallow, slow-moving water can be incredibly powerful. So getting the basic skills from a lesson can increase your enjoyment with the features on a river.

3 Practice and join a club. Get out in the wilderness with a topo map and compass and match your surroundings to the features on the map. Much of the skill of wilderness navigation is the ability to recognize terrain features and see how they are represented by a topographical map. From there, you can learn how to plot points and maneuver around those features to specific points. Consider joining a local orienteering club and competing in an orienteering event where you need to go to a certain number of points with a map and compass. Clubs give practical tips and encouragement to newcomers. (For information about the Rocky Mountain Orienteering Club, visit RMOC.org.)

Our top 10 so far

■ Chris Davenport, alpine skiing.
■ Mike Kloser, multisport.
■ Gretchen Bleiler, snowboarding.
■ Ian Adamson, adventure racing/paddling/orienteering.
To read about our previous featured athletes, visit RockyMountainNews.com/adventure.

You can do it

The second 24 Hours of Triathlon will be Sept. 1-2 at Cherry Creek State Park in Aurora (site pending). Solo athletes and relay teams will alternate between a half-mile swim, 11-mile bike ride and 3.1-mile run for 24 hours, setting their strategy and order of events. (Swimming is prohibited at night.) Entry fees range from \$175 to \$250 a person, based on category. The student rate is \$100. Details: 24HoursofTriathlon.com.

Mark your calendar

Three short adventure races are planned on the Front Range this year. Subaru Urban Assault events will take place July 22 in Boulder and July 29 in Denver. The Denver Oyster Urban Adventure Race is scheduled for Aug. 18. Adam Chase of Team Teva will talk about urban adventure racing, team tactics and adventure gear from 7-8:30 p.m. July 19 at the REI flagship store in Denver. Information: UrbanAssaultRace.com and TPPEvents.com.