

# ADVENTURF, ADVENTURF,

Boulder's ultimate athlete
An island escape
1999 Running Shoe Guide
Cherry Creek Sneak Preview

or a few moments, lan Adamson thought he had finally met his match. Near the top of Ecuador's daunting Cotopaxi volcano—just a few hundred steps shy of 20,000 feet above sea level—the 34-year-old Australian adventure athlete extraordinaire was fading. Stumbling along in the wee hours of the morning, his entire body ached and his limbs were so tired he wanted to cut them off.

Meanwhile, his mind was wandering somewhere outside of his incredibly fit body into another plane of existence, probably from his fear of suffocating at the lofty perch above the clouds. Adamson, known for his continual high-energy banter, was reduced to survival mode.

Such is par for the course in the Raid Gauloises, generally considered the most grueling adventure race on the planet. The ninth edition of the Raid last fall sent teams through some of Ecuador's harshest terrain—rafting on raging rivers, kayaking across choppy ocean waters, running, horseback riding and mountain biking, in addition

to the exhausting high-altitude hiking.

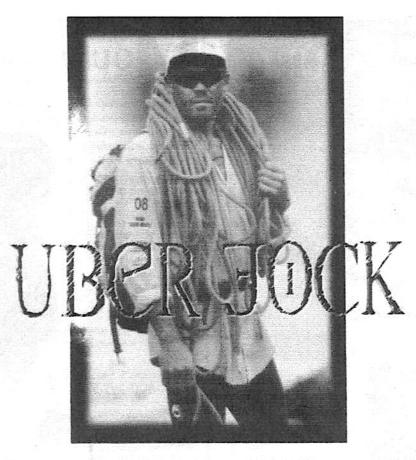
"It was grueling," says Adamson, who has lived in the Denver-Boulder area since 1991. "Probably as much mentally and emotionally as it was physically. Just to finish a race like that can be almost overwhelming."

The race was Adamson's first attempt at the Raid. His team—Salomon-Presidio—was one of the most prestigious adventure racing crews ever assembled, complete with Irishman Robert Nagle, legendary Kiwis John Howard and Steve Gurney, and San Diego's Robyn Benincasa.

As the race unfolded, Nagle and Howard became intensely sick and were prohibited by race officials from making the final 4,000-foot climb to the infamous Checkpoint 19 near the icy summit of Cotopaxi. With Benincasa and Gurney extremely fatigued and French team Spie Batignolles increasing its lead, Adamson had to rally the troops or start racing for second place.

Wearily they trudged with their crampons, knowing that even if they made it to the top, the race would only be half over.

"I've completed Ironman with a 104-degree fever, but I've never been as fried in my life as I was going up the volcano," Benincasa says. "At that altitude and with that little oxygen, you realize you're slowly dying with each step you take higher and higher. If it weren't for Ian's guidance and



Boulder's Ian Adamson is king of the adventure sports jungle

By Brian Metzler Photos By Tony Dizinno

energy, I wouldn't have made it, and we would have been finished."

Salomon-Presidio and Spie Batignolles exchanged the lead nine times over the last three days of the race, before Adamson's crew finally outpaddled their French foes on the final sea kayaking portion of the race to seal the victory.

"It was the toughest thing..." Adamson says, stopping mid-sentence to flash back over the nine nasty days in Ecuador, as well as a lifetime of other grueling events. "It was the toughest thing I've ever done. I've done a lot of difficult races, but what made this so grueling is that it was so long. It was very, very, very long. And on top of that," it was a navigational nightmare."

### An elite club

By captaining Team Salomon-Presidio to a victory in the Raid Gauloises, Adamson became only the second person in the world—the first being Adamson's teammate John Howard—to have won each of the planet's four major adventure races: Raid Gauloises, Eco-Challenge, Southern Traverse and the presently defunct ESPN X-Venture Race.

There have been dozens of wild experiences along the way—such as the seemingly easy win in the 1996 Eco-Challenge in British Columbia, thanks in large part to Adamson's proficient navigating skills. In another race, he lost the grip of a teammate on a free climb and watched him fall 20 feet off a rock ledge into a shallow stream—and survive.

In the 1997 ESPN X-Venture Race in Baja, Mexico, temperatures soared above 150 degrees, bringing water in black canteens to a near-boiling point. "After it cooled off to the upper 90s a few days later, we were all wearing fleece jackets, but we were quite cold because of what we had been through," Adamson says.

Adamson's ability to handle nearly any situation has been the foundation of his adventure racing achievements.

"The thing about Ian is that he is very, very organized and persistent," Howard says. "We're just about opposites in how we race and how we think. He's very cerebral, always thinking ahead of time what needs to be done. And you need that on a team if you want to be successful."

Most of Adamson's recent success has come under the banner of Team Eco Internet, the world's premier adventure racing corps that he co-founded with Nagle in 1995. The two adrenaline adventure hounds got acquainted in cyberspace after continually seeing each other's

names in newsgroups and chat rooms for triathlon, ultrarunning and other endurance sports.

Eco Internet, of which Team Salomon-Presidio was a derivative, has grown to include 10 of the world's best racers. It's suffered only a few losses and never has the team finished lower than third in any type of race.

"We never go to a race to win," Adamson says. "Our intent is always to have fun and remain friends. And if we can do that, based on what we've all accomplished, it usually means we'll do pretty well in the race. But if you go trying to win, it puts a lot of pressure on you and things get all messed up. If we finish second but feel we had a great race, we can be happy with that. And we always come home friends."

Aside from his organizational skills and seemingly boundless enthusiasm, Adamson is an allaround gifted athlete. He's been a champion at cycling, canoeing and orienteering. He's competed at a high level in ultrarunning, in-line skating, sailing, windsurfing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and triathlon. He's a three-time Ironman Triathlon finisher, an expert skier and he once won a prestigious Australian Blue Award—which could be considered a Purple Heart award for sports—for his collegiate canoe and kayak accomplishments.

"I try to get into sports when they're young-that way I can become good at them

# Adventure Racing Camp Rolodex

Colorado Adventure Training Golden

303-279-1429 www.adventuretraining.com

Four Winds Adventure Racing Academy

Sedona, Ariz. www.4windsadventure.com 714-635-2488

MountainQuest Adventures

Fort Collins www.mountain-quest.com 970-225-2100

Odyssey Adventure Racing Academy Fayetteville, W.Va. 304-574-0394

Presidio Adventure Racing Academy

San Francisco, Calif. www.presidioar.com 415-252-7221

SOL Adventures

Moab, Utah www.moab.com 801-364-9071

before everybody else gets involved," Adamson says, with a chuckle.

### Gotta' keep on moving

Adamson is always on the go. And in the rare moments that he's not training or competing somewhere, he's often thinking up unique ways to challenge himself. Aside from his athletic exploits, he's also a concert flutist, a private pilot and a gourmet cook.

A quick glance at Adamson's personal organizer shows an incredibly crowded calendar for 1999. In between more than a dozen competitions in various sports—including adventure racing, triathlon, orienteering and kayaking—Adamson will keep busy by directing his new Colorado Adventure Training school, helping design race courses for MountainQuest Adventures of Fort Collins and instructing at Odyssey Adventure Racing Academy in West Virginia.

He'll also spend time assisting in the design of footwear at Salomon's Design Center in Boulder and fulfilling a handful of corporate speaking engagements.

In late April, Adamson will be off to the Philippines to take part in a new expeditionary event called the ELF Authentic Adventure (see article, page 10). Other events on Adamson's 1999 agenda include the Texas Water Safari, a series of whitewater paddling events in the Lone Star State; the Western Isles Challenge, a three-day solo adventure race in Ireland; the Mild Seven multisport stage race in China: and the 1999 Discovery Channel Eco-Challenge in Argentina's Patagonia region.

If he has time, perhaps he'll try to break his

own world record in endurance paddling again. Two years ago he kayaked the Colorado River from Kremmling, Colo., to Moab in a 24-hour span. But that wasn't good enough, so last summer he splashed his way through 217 miles in Canada's Yukon Territory.

"I think I can get 250, maybe 260 miles," he says. "When I first looked at the record, I figured that would be easy to break. Well, not easy, but I knew I could paddle that far in 24 hours."

### What hasn't he done?

The son of an Olympic boxer, Adamson was given up for adoption at birth and raised by par-

ents who doubled as
Antarctica research scientists. He thrived as a
youngster in cycling,
paddling, and track and
field, but never had the
time or the desire to specialize in one sport.
Consequently, he developed him into one of the
world's most accomplished multisport athletes.

Obviously, Adamson is a physical specimen, but what seals his out-of-this-world status as the prototypical 21st century Uber Jock is that he's as much

brain as he is brawn—and he's infinitely humble. He holds degrees in both mechanical engineering and sports medicine, and for six years he operated Reflex Medical Products Inc., a Denver-based company that makes CPR training equipment.

Unless he's prodded, though, he rarely speaks of his considerable accomplishments. Instead, his inquisitive nature and per-

sonable demeanor are continually drawing him to new activities and introducing him to new training partners.

"For an athlete as talented and exceptional as he is, he is remarkably humble and down-toearth," says San Francisco triathlete Lisa Jhung, who prior to competing in her first Eco-Challenge last fall, got instruction and advice from Adamson. "I think lan's predominant quality is that he is beaming with positive energy. For being a worldclass athlete, he is unique in that he doesn't intimidate; instead, he encourages."

### Coming of age

Adventure racing might become one of the most popular sports of the next millennium, yet it's as much of an 18th century-style quest for discovery as it is a modern-day, lung-burning endurance test.

It's a physical undertaking that works your lungs, legs and ligaments to their mortal limits. But like triathlon, it's as much and probably more of a mental, emotional and even spiritual battle. What makes it the absolute perfect sport for Adamson is that it combines his multitalented physique with his intellectual assets.

"The beauty of adventure racing is that you never have to master anything," says Isaac Wilson, a premier racer who runs SOL Adventures in Moab and a teammate of Adamson's in the ELF event. "Instead it's 'who's the best generalist?' There is a high level of intensity because you're challenged on so many different levels. And because it's so diverse, you need to use your mind as much as your body."

Considering that the Colorado-based Team Vail won the Eco-Challenge last October, this month's Discovery Channel telecast of its exploits—combined with a proliferation of new races and adventure racing

camps in the United States—should give adventure racing an enormous boost domestically.

"I would bank on adventure racing growing much like triathlon did in the 1980s," Adamson says. "But there

might be more potential for adventure racing because it reaches such a greater audience. You don't have to be a full-on endurance athlete to compete in some of the shorter, one-day adventure races. But just like triathlon, it will grow as more races become accessible to people."

## Swifter, higher, crazier

So what's next for Adamson? The sky's the limit. Or maybe it's not. He's been toying with the idea of doing an around-the-world individual triathlon—which might entail cycling, paddling and flying an ultralight around the world.

Also there are marks in the Guinness Book of World Records that Adamson thinks he can break, and he has his sights set on climbing Mount McKinley and making an Olympic yachting team.

In the meantime, he's considering going after an unprecedented Leadville 100 trifecta this summer by doing the 100-mile mountain bike and trail running races on successive weekends—then throwing in a 100-mile kayak workout on the third weekend for good measure.

In other words, life hasn't become boring just yet.

"Once you finish a multiday adventure race, you get the feeling there isn't anything you can't do," Adamson says. "It's been said that adventure racing is a metaphor for life because you go through so many different emotional, physical and probably even spiritual battles. But it's more than that. Although it's compressed into a very short time, a race like that is life.