

WELCOME BACK

Body & Soul

Run the gauntlet:
Adventure racing's elite

Leggins



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In the darkness, Ian Adamson was attempting to carve a path with his headlamp. The voids were everywhere. Night had encroached upon him and the rest of Team GoLite like a new, silent obstacle creeping in from nowhere.

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Again, Adamson was confronted with negotiating one of those points of uncertain contention. Every race has one. It's a point where adrenaline seeps through his and his teammates' well-conditioned veins and the smell of fear wafts up from under the arms. This year's Primal Quest was no different.

Like most adventure races, Primal Quest is a fusion of strategy, navigation and the evolution of the multi-sport, specifically through a couple hundred miles of the San Juan Mountains in southern Colorado.. It revolves around physical abilities that border on superhuman, and a combination of intelligence and versatility that allows its participants to improvise and attack an array of unforgiving and ruthless terrain.

"We ascended a really steep degree slope to a saddle. And from the saddle, ascended to a ridge of rock pinnacle," said Adamson of his latest moment of uncertainty. "Our idea was to



ness, the men and women who attack races like the Eco-Challenge and Primal Quest demand a certain respect in their chiseled rough-and-tumble application of strategy, intelligence, physical capability and preparation. It is the ultimate test for the renaissance outdoorsman. For the average man and woman, it's beyond the sphere of practical accomplishment. For Ian Adamson, it's a way of life.

Taking off in New Zealand and Australia in 1981, the adventure race, as we know it, is a result of the evolution of the multi-sport — i.e. triathlons, etc. — but in the most practical sense, the methodology applied and the physical trials that are fused with wilderness navigation are closer to those applied in alpine mountaineering.

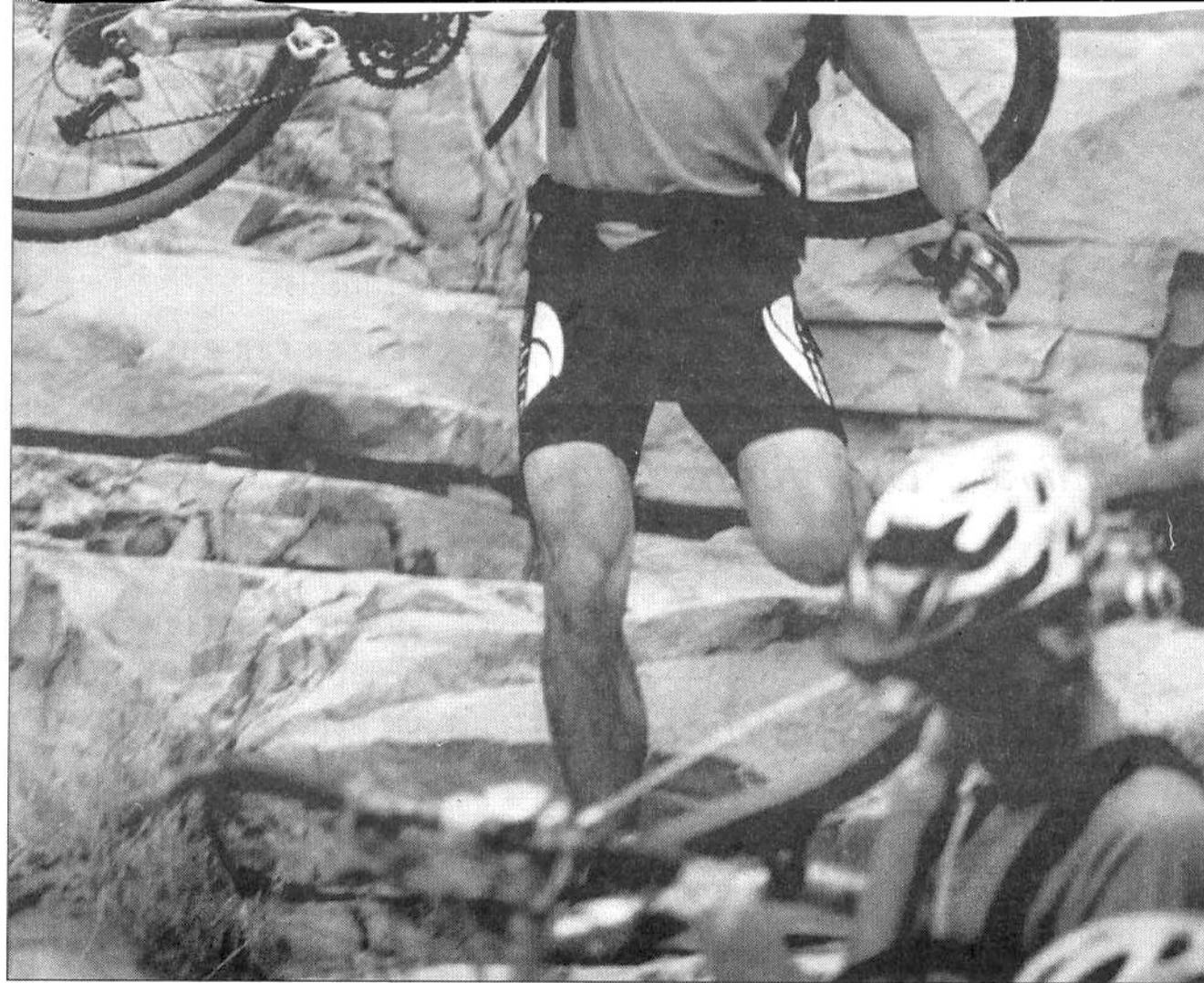
In last year's Eco-Challenge New Zealand, three to five coed team members from 67 teams traversed and navigated through 300 miles of wilderness, ravines, canyons and peaks using non-motorized transport. With raw, unassisted ability and

try and traverse the ridge around to a check-point on a spur off a ridgeway. The cliffs are large, the drops are significant and the exposure is huge. We were up there at night and we got clipped out while traversing the ridge. So we're walking along with our headlamps, peering into a void. Everything is crumbling — the rock is appallingly bad. We're at the top of this thing, walking around and we've just got voids in every direction."

This is what Adamson is trained for, what he excels at and what he is passionate about. These points of uncertainty — where life and death become a very real part of racing — are what defines his role as captain of Team GoLite, two-time champion of Eco-Challenge 2000 and 2001. But a certain humbleness defines him as an individual, as well as a sense of realism when it comes to what it takes to get, and continue to get, the job done.

"I'm the slow guy," said Adamson of his role in the team dynamic. "I balance out the team by having 18 years of experience. I have the experience to make good decisions."

Slow, of course, is a relative term. Adamson's notion of pushing himself is, to put it mildly, on a different plane, if not different planet, of conception than the average athlete's. He's made it a point to be a world-class expert at sports like climbing, mountaineering and kayaking and, in fact, has won every major international



Ian Adamson fears no physical challenge, as this photo demonstrates. (Photo by TIM HOLSTROM/COURTESY GOLITE)

adventure race on the planet.

Adamson's accolades read like a laundry list trivialized on paper: two World Endurance Kayak Records (203 miles in 24 hours in 1997 and 217 miles

in 1998), wins at Eco-challenge New Zealand in 2001, in Borneo in 2000, and a victory at Raid Gauloises in Tibet in 1996, to name just a few. Adamson and GoLite teammates and

expert athletes John Jacoby, Keith Murray and Andrea Murray continue to set the standard for adventure racing.

Flipping through the channels on a Sunday afternoon, the

average couch potato/armchair adventurer watches in awe at the documentation of Eco-challenges and adventure races. Regardless of your take on physical conditioning and fit-

a time limit, they attacked legs that focused on horseback riding, mountain-biking, river rafting, mountaineering and fixed ropes. As an expert whitewater rafter, sea kayaker, mountain biker, horseback rider, mountaineer and climber, this is Adamson's comfort zone.

Adventure racing, as a rule, is a balance of strategy, sleep and strength and after four days, five hours and thirty-four minutes of balancing these elements out, team Eco-Internet (now Team Go-Lite), following Adamson's lead, sealed the deal for first place.

Of course, this is not the kind of event you walk into blindfolded. It's the kind that takes years of preparation and a fitness mentality that seeps into every day of your life.

"If you go into an event that has sea-kayaking, white-water rafting, mountain-biking, technical climbing, caving, sailing, paragliding," said Adamson of his training methodology, "and you want to try out all of those things, number one, you want to get schooled enough that you're safe, and safe under pressure. Pressure like bad food, bad weather, no sleep for five days at a time."

"It becomes a way of life," said Adamson. "It's challenging. So you have to do it in a way that works into your lifestyle."

For Adamson, this means not cutting any corners.

"When I was working full time, which was about until

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1996, I would commute to work on my bike or by running, which was 20 miles each way," said Adamson. "Then I would do something at lunchtime and do something during the evening. I was actually training more than I do now. You can't spend an hour each way commuting to work. You have to make that a workout. You have to work it into your life."

Next, Ian is off to Malaysia; specifically, to the Island of Sabah. He's working with television and production crews on the Mild 7 Outdoor Quest, an event that's seen worldwide by millions of viewers. Primarily, he's there for the athletes; on a secondary basis, for the television crews. Seven months out of the year he's traveling. Between hosting events on the Outdoor Life Network and racing with Team Go-Lite, he's also the Men's Journal Adventure Team Captain, works as a photojournalist, and works as co-owner/producer for his company, I and I Productions LLC, an expedition television company. For Adamson, it's all a part of his passion for getting out there in a way unparalleled to our everyday experience.

"You get to see all sorts of places that are difficult to get to and would typically take a

