

RAID THE NORTH EXTREME

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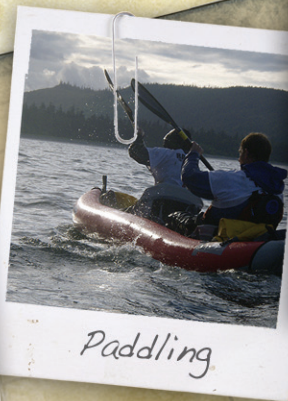
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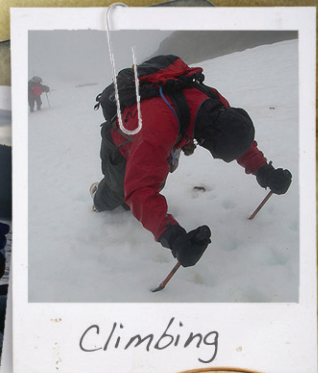
Mountain Biking



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RACE REPORT

How to Build and Operate Your Own Adventure Race in 14 days or Less

Lonnie Wishart Photo



by Bruce Wishart, Tourism Prince Rupert

It is already being called the best Raid the North Extreme event ever. It is said to have set a new standard for expedition-style adventure racing. For Keith Ash of Team Racing With Giants it was “a journey to our personal extremes, and delivered a lifetime of memories.” For Dan Mallory of Team Adrenaline Rush it was “the overall experience—the views, the food, the people.” Prince Rupert and Raid the North Extreme were a perfect fit.

In any adventure race the story begins long before well-rested competitors launch into a six-day event that will test the extremes of their personal maturity, strength, ability and endurance. The story of these six days in June, 2007, began a year-and-a-half earlier. This is the story of a community opening their arms, the story of a setting so wild that it threw even the most extreme adventure race off the tracks, and of a dedicated organizing team who rose to that challenge and delivered a landmark event in less than two weeks.

The Idea

The partnership began at Cowpuccino’s Coffee House in Cow Bay, Prince Rupert, in December 2005. Geoff Langford, a former adventure racer who, as owner of Frontier Adventure Racing had organized over 50 Canadian races, approached Tourism Prince Rupert with the idea of bringing Raid the North Extreme to Prince Rupert. Our Director of Marketing, Jillian Greenwood, was intrigued by the idea. Frankly, I was skeptical. But we decided that we should at least meet with him, and set a meeting at Cowpuccino’s Coffee House, owned by a friend of ours named Judson Rowse. If this race turned out to be something that we wanted to become involved in, we knew that we would need Judd Rowse in on the ground floor. We were right about that. That first day he was bubbling over with enthusiasm at the idea of RTNX coming to

Prince Rupert, and he led Team Coastal Disturbance across the finish line with a top-ten placing in June 2007.

We began planning a race for September 2006. Key funding fell through at a critical moment, however, so the race was postponed until June 2007. Jill Greenwood managed the RTNX file, and a Service Canada staffing contract, through this whole process. She came up with such innovations as the hugely-successful Adopt-a-Team program, and made sure that the cultural elements of the Northwest Coast were integrated into the race. Anthony Everett, CEO of the Northern BC Tourism Association, immediately recognized the regional benefit that RTNX would bring, and was keen to partner with Tourism Prince Rupert.

In February 2007 Lawrence Foster, the notorious Team Holofiber animal who is considered one of North America’s best adventure racers, and whose 30+ designed courses included the 2005 Adventure Racing World Championships in Newfoundland, arrived in Prince Rupert to design the new course.

Lawrence might be best known for inspiring fear in racers, but he inspired a lot of confidence for us organizers. His list of credentials is amazing—captain of the largest volunteer SAR ops in North America, and boasting a resume of several major races around the world including winning Eco Challenge North America Championships in 2004 and 2005. He is a Natural Resources Instructor who drives home the lessons of teamwork, goal setting, and perseverance. He is a highly-skilled mountaineer and mountain biker who once ran a sea kayak and rock / ice climbing guiding company. And he is an absolutely unstoppable force who seems to just loom up wherever he is needed. He took quick jogs up Mount Hays for a spot of exercise, and spent his spare time poring over a clutter of

topographical maps as if they held the answer to the meaning of life.

Lawrence played with a number of course options, with the rest of us coming in on such innovative thoughts as a wet launch from a ferry, and finally settled on a course that looked to be one of the most challenging I've ever heard of. He then retreated to Ontario to wait out the winter, and with the rest of us kept an uneasy eye on the record snow pack (known locally as *wicked powder days*). In communications to registered teams, the gear list was expanded to include additional mountaineering and safety equipment to deal with the snow.

Changing the Course

The snow grew to dangerous levels. On May 28 a massive mudslide brought a mountainside down across Highway 16 west of Terrace, BC, cutting off all travel into the region for four days. But no sooner had the highway reopened around the slide than it was closed June 5 east and west of Terrace by flooding worse than any in decades. Homes were being evacuated ahead of the rising waters. We were faced not only with uncertainty over what the course would look like, but also the danger of creating the perception that we would be running an extreme wilderness event in an area where emergency services were already maxed out.



Crest pole at Quay'lnagaay: The ancient community of Quay'lnagaay, or "Sea Lion Town," is now home to the new Haida Heritage Centre. - Lonnie Wishart Photo



Race Director Geoff Langford and Course Designer Lawrence Foster after an overflight of the Raid the North Extreme course with North Pacific Seaplanes in February 2007.

- Lonnie Wishart Photo

On June 7 Lawrence Foster emailed from the Vancouver Airport as he dashed to Prince Rupert to assess the situation. This time he wasn't inspiring confidence. The road closures would make the "testing, logistics and execution of our race almost impossible." His version of the "good news" was that, "It is out of our control—nobody will hold this against anyone. It is out of our control."

It didn't seem out of our control to me—despite the increasingly haunted look in Geoff's eyes—and this email didn't really sound like Lawrence. I spent the first of many sleepless nights working through the logistics of a new idea.

The next morning Geoff and Lawrence settled into my office to review, and I immediately suggested beginning and ending in Prince Rupert, but including a Haida Gwaii stage that incorporated BC Ferries and the Haida Heritage Centre at Quay'lnagaay. Before I was even finished explaining all of the reasons that I thought this was an absolutely serendipitous solution, Lawrence was demanding any maps I had of Haida Gwaii, and muttering curses because I didn't happen to have detailed topographical maps. By afternoon we had a tentative agreement from the Haida Nation and the Haida Heritage Centre at Quay'lnagaay, and the promise of an answer the following week from BC Ferries. I spent the day with a phone held to my ear, grinning at occasional sightings of Lawrence as he charged around terrorizing staff members in his fanatic quest for maps.

The next day a press release was issued announcing that the course would be moved, and on Sunday, June 10—the day the highway opened through the flood-soaked Skeena Valley, and 13 days before the start of the race—Geoff and Lawrence sailed on the *Queen of Prince Rupert* for Haida Gwaii to scout a course. It was a challenge for them to wait that long. They were first in line Saturday morning at BC Ferries, only to realize that no ferry sailed on Saturday.

Those 13 days grew into a blur for all involved. I worked

on the new partnerships while Geoff and Lawrence dashed around the Islands, testing treks and making friends. Working with John Murray at Meadfield Marketing and Jason Alsop at the Haida Heritage Centre at Quay'llnagaay, the Centre was made available as a base camp for the Haida Gwaii stage of the race. Through Andrew Merilees at the Haida Gwaii Tourism Association and the administration at Naikoon Provincial Park we secured permission to utilize the North Beach, Tow Hill and Rose Spit portions of the course from the Old Massett Village Council and BC Parks. Chief Willard Wilson of the Skidegate Band Council was very supportive and enthusiastic. We were, in fact, welcomed with open arms everywhere we went on Haida Gwaii, and Geoff and Lawrence grew more and more excited about the course.

By June 16 all of the big pieces finally seemed to be in place—minus a thousand logistical details—and we issued a press release. “When we first considered moving the race to the Queen Charlotte Islands,” Lawrence said, “I was skeptical about how much we’d be able to do there. My attitude changed as soon as I saw the Islands. This is a superb leg of the course. The mountains are a little bit smaller, and not as snow covered, allowing some great treks over mountains and through passes. Racers will really get a true sense of the Queen Charlottes by the time they’re finished. We will be passing through every community on the Queen Charlottes, we will see every kind of nature, and racers will truly understand why this is called the Galapagos of the North. On the Prince Rupert side there will be majestic, seemingly-remote wilderness that’s really right in Prince Rupert’s back yard.”

To give a sense of the tight timing, on the following day, June 17, the first racer arrived in Prince Rupert. As my first opportunity to hear a reaction to the new idea, I was delighted that such an experienced racer as Andrew Love of Team Intrepid Travel was stoked about going to Haida Gwaii.

The final week brought a flurry of activity. Everybody was absolutely scrambling to sort out the details of logistics, finding volunteers for the new Haida Gwaii stage of the race, and generally filling in dozens of blanks. On Friday, June 22, registration was set up at the Highliner Inn, bike checks at Farwest Sport & Cycle, and race organizers were rushing to prepare for the Opening



Farwest Sport & Cycle owner Iain Cullen conducts a bike inspection before the start of the race. - Lonnie Wishart Photo



LEFT: Helly Hansen reps along with Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR filled Helly Hansen shot glass for all of the RTNX staff and volunteers at the first Pub Night at Breakers Pub in Cow Bay. Breakers ran Pub Nights throughout the event, providing local residents with an opportunity to learn about the day’s events on the course. ABOVE: Members of Team Suburban RUSH-Secondwind at the first aid table at RTNX registration at the Highliner Inn. - Lonnie Wishart Photo



Ceremony at the Lester Centre for the Performing Arts that evening. For the planning team June 22 was a chaotic rush as a result of all the last-minute changes. Chris Collard, logistics coordinator for almost 30 races, swept into town, and I after seeing him in action I had a vision of him strapped into his seat on the plane ride up, barking like a mastiff at the stewardesses to get his vocal chords warmed up. On the communications side the only reason that we pulled it together was because chronic volunteers Bill Young, Pat Chan and Erin Coffey were now on the ground. But at 1900 Geoff hit the stage with area and team introductions, and Lawrence described the course for the first time with the assistance of a dramatic (and sometimes accident-prone) graphic flyover.

On Saturday Raid the North Extreme was formally welcomed to the territory of the Tsimshian Nation in a moving ceremony by the Gwisamiikgigol Dancers, and dance group leader Sam Bryant offered advice and stories based on the cultural experiences of the Tsimshian in the coastal wilderness. Then after a sushi reception and tours of the Museum of Northern British Columbia, racers trooped upstairs to one of the Museum's board rooms for Lawrence's formal course briefing.

Some teams would have trouble later for not heeding some of Lawrence's words at the race briefing. He was particularly firm about sticking to the ridgetops on the first



ABOVE: Course Designer Lawrence Foster walks through the RTNX course at the race briefing in the board room at the Museum of Northern BC. LEFT: Member of Gregg's Fat Tire Racing Team ponder the mysteries of the Tomcats during race registration. - Lonnie Wishart Photos

trek between CP1 and CP3. "Stick to the course," he said. "If you think there is a faster way, understand now that there is no faster way... You need to be on the ridgetops. Don't go into the valleys, and don't follow streams." The danger was bluntly reiterated in the written Competitor Directions: "Continuation Northwest along ridges from CP2 is UNSAFE and OUT OF BOUNDS."

There was also lively discussion around the orienteering portion of the Haida Gwaii stage of the course—which would cause some teams trouble later on, when they left with the impression that this was a rogaine event where they only needed to reach as many Check Points as possible before continuing the race.

That night racers and staff descended upon Breakers Pub in Cow Bay, which would be the Pub Night sponsor



ABOVE: Race Director Geoff Langford at the Opening Ceremonies for RTNX 2007 at the Lester Centre for Performing Arts. RIGHT: Team Zissou members Danilo Caron and Scott Covey inspect the treasures of the Museum of Northern BC. - Lonnie Wishart Photo





Raid the North Extreme 2007 was formally launched in Pacific Mariners' Memorial Park in Prince Rupert at 0800 on Sunday, June 24.
 - Lonnie Wishart Photo

for the duration of the race. Breakers Pub had also become local sponsors for Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR, and with Helly Hansen reps on hand events grew somewhat lively—which led to some jokes at their expense later, when they had a slow start on the first leg of the race.

DAY ONE, Sunday, June 24

The pace of this year's course seemed deceptively simple and relaxed. Morning sun and clear blue sky heralded the start of the race at Pacific Mariners' Memorial Park in Prince Rupert. 92 racers forming 23 teams started out on bikes at 0800, and followed the Helly Hansen Pace Car through downtown Prince Rupert and up Park Avenue to BC Ferries Prince Rupert Terminal. Within 15 minutes the first stage was over, and teams boarded the *Queen of Prince Rupert* for the 1100 sailing to Haida Gwaii.

The partnership with BC Ferries has to have been unique in the history of adventure racing. The *Queen of Prince Rupert* became a Transition Point, but one that moved the entire race to a new location and discipline. And it went extraordinarily well, given the logistics of packing gear into trucks upon arrival, and then loading the



ABOVE: Captain Orval Bouchard with members of Team SOLE on the bridge of the *Queen of Prince Rupert*. BC Ferries were local sponsors for both Team SOLE and Team Race The Rockies. RIGHT: Kate Green, Field Producer for ATV Productions, conducts an interview with Team Suburban RUSH-Secondwind on the aft deck of the *Queen of Prince Rupert*.

- Bill Young Photos



RTNX teams were given the rare privilege of pitching their tents and camping at the ancient Haida village of Quay'lnagaay, or "Sea Lion Town."

- Lonnie Wishart Photo



vehicles and teams onto the ship. For the racers the sailing was all about maps and naps, with topographical charts spread out everywhere, and random corners filled with snoozing racers as their Transition Point crossed Hecate Strait at 16 knots. The communications team worked frantically in an aft lounge to get ready for the media side of things.

BC Ferries had become the local sponsor for both Team SOLE and Team Race the Rockies, and Captain Orval Bouchard invited both teams up for a visit to the bridge. While we were up there I asked Race the Rockies member Wayne Nyman what he thought of the unorthodox start and ferry leg. "It's half way into Day One, and we're still tied for first place," he joked. "But seriously, originally we were up in the mountains, and being that we're from Alberta we're used to mountains. We thought, 'bring it on.'



Teams enthusiastically responded to an invitation to join in with the Hltaaxuulang Guud Ad K'aaju Dance Group during the Haida welcome.

- Erin Coffey Photo

But this will be just awesome. I think that there will be huge surprises on a couple of the treks, and in connecting the dots, and those long rides will be *extreme*, just in a different way. Those are just grueling distances."

Team Race the Rockies was not the only team challenged by the sweeping changes in the course. Megan Rose of Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR wrote, "this race just turned from

a trekking-based race to a paddling-based race, which for us was not a good thing." Prince Rupert's Team Coastal Disturbance now faced a massive biking section, which they did not feel was among their strong points.

The hospitality began to flow as soon as Raid the North Extreme landed at the Haida Heritage Centre at



The Haida Gwaii stage of Raid the North Extreme was launched under morning sun at 0600 on June 25. - Lonnie Wishart Photo

Quay'lnagaay. Raid the North Extreme organizers and racers were welcomed to Haida Gwaii in a powerful ceremony at the Haida Heritage Centre. Guujaaw, President of the Council of the Haida Nation, also speaking on behalf of Chief Skidegate, Dempsey Collinson, and Eddy Russ, speaking on behalf of Chief Councillor Willard Wilson and the Skidegate Band Council, spoke to racers and organizers. Raid the North Extreme was formally welcomed to Haida Gwaii, and also to the ancient community of Qay'lnagaay, or "Sea Lion Town." Racers were given the rare privilege of camping at Qay'lnagaay.

It was a long night for racers as they inflated and tested their kayaks, triple-checked their maps, and organized their gear in preparation for the four-day Haida Gwaii stage.

DAY TWO, Monday, June 25

It was a magical morning. At dawn golden light punched over a band of dark blue cloud that wrapped the horizon, and painted the sky robin's egg blue. The sea was glass, without a breath of wind. The deep red Tomcat Tandem kayaks were lined up along the gravel beach before the Haida Heritage Centre at Qay'lnagaay. It was impossible to not contemplate the old Haida village of Qay'lnagaay, Sea Lion Town, where such activity had played out for hundreds of years. The boats on the beach, the cedar house fronts and crest poles, were a 2007 version of an ancient scene.

Racers charged down the beach at 0600, clattering through the gravel, and launched the first paddle around into Skidegate Inlet and up to Check Point 1 at Jakes Landing on Skidegate Channel (beginning what can only be described as a "hate-affair" with the sturdy but unsteerable Tomcats). Everyone made good time on the glassy surface, with the exception of Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR, who sought a supposedly top-secret tactical advantage by moving their kayaks on wheels over a long portage by logging road. They spent five hours on a leg that had taken most teams just over three hours, and



The first trek, over a 3,500-foot mountain between CP1 and CP3, defeated several teams. - Team Expedition Canada Photo

ended up in last place at Check Point 1 just as the first "Team #10 not accounted for" messages were being radioed back to Base Camp. In fact, a reasonable spread was already growing in the pack, with almost two hours between the first and last teams to reach CP1.

By 1000 almost all teams were on the 11km jog along a logging road running along Trounce Inlet, still under warm and sunny skies. With CP2 unmanned at the top of a 3,500-foot peak, teams were out of communication until they either reached CP3, retreated, or broke out their radios to request assistance. For us back at the Haida Heritage Centre, it was time to ignore the race long enough to scramble together communications. The Heritage Centre was still a month away from their "soft opening," and communications on Haida Gwaii can be challenging at the best of times. Beginning with no cell service and a couple of ADSL jacks (rare on Haida Gwaii), we were able by that afternoon to devise some basic telephone and wireless Internet solutions.

The first news off the course came late that afternoon when



Teams arriving at Check Point 1, at Jakes Landing in Skidegate Channel.

- Lonnie Wishart Photo

race officials went into radio contact with Team Supplierpipeline, a projected frontrunner. They had won the Adventure Racing Sprint National Championships and finished second-ranked in the country after the National Adventure Race Championships last year, but RTNX 2007 would not be one of their podium placings. "We were two minutes behind the second place team at CP1, and on track to reach CP2 well on schedule with our race plans," team member Laval St. Germain told me on Tuesday. "I was in snow, jumping across the melt-water creek on top of the mountain about 30 minutes below CP2, and I slipped on a wet rock and came down on my upper right thigh. We continued on to CP2, but when we started the descent I was using different muscles and realized that something was very wrong. There was also substantial swelling in the leg. We held a full team discussion, and immediately agreed to self-evacuate, but soon realized that we couldn't continue at that pace, so we requested helicopter extraction."

The Medical Team arranged for a Canadian Forces CH-149 Cormorant helicopter from 442 Squadron in Comox to fly in to MEDEVAC St. Germain, passing over the incident site at 1920 and successfully lifting him off the mountain at 1939 while the other three members of Supplierpipeline returned to CP1.

"A high mountain rescue is always difficult and chal-

lenging," said St. Germain, himself a commercial pilot, "and having to call them is something that will always bother me. I'm a strong believer that if you get yourself into a pickle you're supposed to get yourself out, and when we were first talking about it I said no way. It's not a decision that we took lightly."

Geoff and Maddalena Acconci (M.A.), medical team leader, dashed to the hospital in Queen Charlotte to meet Laval, and while they were at the hospital, M.A. talking to Laval, Geoff's radio crackled to life at 2010. Joe Gabor of Team Runningfree.com / Dead Reckoning had been feeling sick all day, was now too ill to continue, and the team advised Geoff that they wanted to MEDEVAC Joe off the mountain. In a radio conversation with Lawrence the team asked to be brought some food with the MEDEVAC flight if allowed. It was a stark reminder, as foul weather blew in and promised to punish racers still on the mountain, that some teams had risked carrying lighter loads at the expense of being prepared for delays.

Meanwhile, both Lawrence and Logistics Coordinator Chris Collard were questioning the weather conditions on the Masset Inlet paddle as the first teams approached CP3. The wind was growing downright nasty. Erin Coffey discussed this with the Coast Guard, and at 2108 it was announced that the paddle intended between CP4 at Justkatla and CP5 at the Yakoun River Inn next to the



Teammates Dave Corner and captain Trisha Westwood support injured Laval St. Germain as they watch the search and rescue Cormorant helicopter touch down near CP12. - Chad Ulansky Photo

Government Wharf in Port Clements would be replaced by a bike ride.

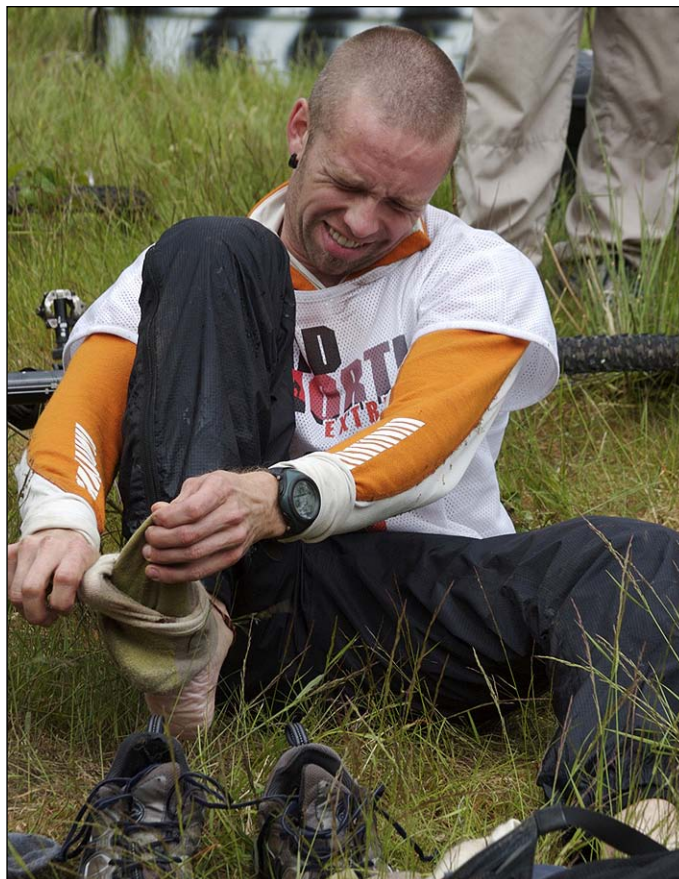
The second MEDEVAC of the night was playing out at the same time. M.A. and Geoff had Laval St. Germain and were driving back to Base Camp at 2121 when Runningfree radioed to say that weather conditions were seriously deteriorating on the mountain, and they were worried about keeping Joe sheltered. Joe was lifted out at 2204.

Two hours earlier, at 2005, Team YukonWILD arrived at CP3, on Clapp Basin in Rennell Sound. They had a clear three-hour lead over Team SOLE and Team DART-nuun, who pulled in together at 2318 and 2319 respectively. Team SSS was another hour behind, arriving at nine minutes past midnight. Then darkness and weather pinned down the teams still on the first trek.

DAY THREE, Tuesday, June 26

Night brought fog and rain, the sort of coastal storm that was felt worst at the 3,500-foot Check Point 2. The wind began to die down in the early morning hours, but it was a miserable night. Race organizers implemented a time cut off for the extended course and diverted all but those four teams already through CP3, directing all further teams back to CP11/21 at the Haida Heritage Centre for a shortened course.

I can't even imagine what it was like for those teams still caught on the first trek. I still don't even know the name of



Jordy Ydse of Team Suburban RUSH-Secondwind inspects the damage to his feet at CP3 after the first trek.

- Lonnie Wishart Photo



ABOVE and RIGHT: Teams reaching CP3 after the time cut off were redirected onto a shortened course, sending them back to CP11 at the Haida Heritage Centre instead of on the extended northern run.

- Lonnie Wishart Photos

that mountain—though the Cormorant pilots were calling it Mount St. Germain—but it was a damned inhospitable place to sit out a coastal storm. It should have made me question the sanity of racers more than ever. Instead, it added a new layer to my understanding of why these athletes sought such extreme challenges in such remote places.

As the sky lightened to gray in the early morning hours of Day Three, the waves still broke white in Rennell Sound. At the Media Communications base in the Haida Heritage Center at Qay'llnagaay we had no information. Our only real knowledge, given the spread that had devel-



oped during the night, was that teams were stretched between Check Point 1 and Tow Hill. To gain information as much as images, I sent photographer Lonnie Wishart up with Inland Air to scout the course, but they were bashed around in the wind without spotting a single team.

The first of the teams destined to take the shortened course arrived at CP3 first thing in the morning—Helly Hansen / MOMAR at 0749, shortly followed by the Playground Bullies at 0759. Race the Rockies, Adrenaline Rush, Zissou, and Coastal Disturbance were in by 1300, but at that time nine teams were still unaccounted for at CP3.

Team Intrepid Travel had retreated off the first trek early that morning, and had been extracted by the Coast Guard from Young Point, near Long Inlet.

Meanwhile, the leading teams charged on. They passed through Check Point 4 at the old logging camp of Juskatla. With the Masset Inlet paddle cancelled, teams biked on to Port Clements. At Check Point 5 at the Yakoun River Inn next to the Government Wharf in Port Clements Team



Team YukonWILD transitions at CP6/9 at Tow Hill. At this stage in the race they had a considerable lead over the other three teams who had passed CP3 before the time cut-off.
- Bill Young Photo

YukonWILD was still maintaining their strong lead, arriving at 0115, followed by Team SOLE at 0354, Team DART-nuun at 0429, and Team SSS at 0830.

YukonWILD's lead continued at CP6/9 at Tow Hill, one of the most famous icons of the Haida Gwaii wilderness. It is a 100-metre outcrop of basalt columns, towering above 100 kilometres of sandy beach. YukonWILD arrived at 0429, still almost three hours ahead closest Team SOLE, and they came back off the Rose Spit trek at 1012, followed by Team SOLE and Team DART-nuun just past 1400, and by Team SSS at 1955.

Back on the first trek, at 1425 Team Dirty Avocados broke out their radio and called HQ, Chris Collard, though from Base Camp it didn't sound as if the call went through. Med #3 was able to make contact with the Dirty Avocados at 1445.

A few minutes later, at 1454, Team Expedition Canada made contact with Med #3 and gave their coordinates. After CP2 they had climbed the wrong mountain, and they were completely socked in with zero visibility. Lawrence



ABOVE: Danilo Caron of Team Zissou double-checks his maps as the team launches into the shortened course at CP3. RIGHT: Captain Judson Rowse and Dean Wagner of Team Coastal Disturbance consult with Logistics Coordinator Chris Collard at CP3 as the team makes the decision whether or not to tackle the advanced paddle leg of the course

- Lonnie Wishart Photos





advised them to move down the north side of the mountain to CP3, using their GPS for direction, and asked them to stay in communication and let staff know if they encountered any other teams.

At 1505 the Dirty Avocados were in contact with Med #3 and Lawrence. Lawrence was able to determine their coordinates, and advised them to follow a deer trail heading north in the tree line. Five minutes later, after further clarification, Team Expedition Canada was clear in their directions, and Med #3 headed for CP1 to collect the remaining members of Team Runningfree.com/Dead Reckoning.

Back on that side of the trek more teams had retreated from Mt. St. Germain. Team BanffLodgingCo.com and Team SMAC / HART / AlpineAire-Inferno came into Long Inlet "on top of Intrepid's tracks," and were collected by the Coast Guard. At 2010 Gregg's Fat Tire Race Team were back at CP1, to be picked up by Med #4. Team Energetic also returned to CP1.

Other teams made it to CP3. Team Suburban RUSH-Secondwind arrived at 1437. The last teams to appear at CP3 that night were Team Racing with Giants / Towanda at 1858, and Team Dancing Pandas at 1911.

Around 2000 the Dirty Avocados reported that they were traversing a mountain ridge, and Lawrence decided to take action. He recruited his former teammates, wife Trisha Westman and Chad Ulansky, to help him locate and re-supply the teams still on the trek, and Med #2 brought Trish and Chad out to CP3.

At the front end of the race, Team YukonWILD were the clear leaders at the end of the Graham Island stage of the race, arriving back at the Haida Heritage Centre 1735, followed by Team SOLE and Team DART-nuun at 2041, and Team SSS at 0510 on Wednesday morning. All four teams transitioned quickly, although all but SOLE grabbed a few hours' sleep, paddling into a brisk chop in fading light on



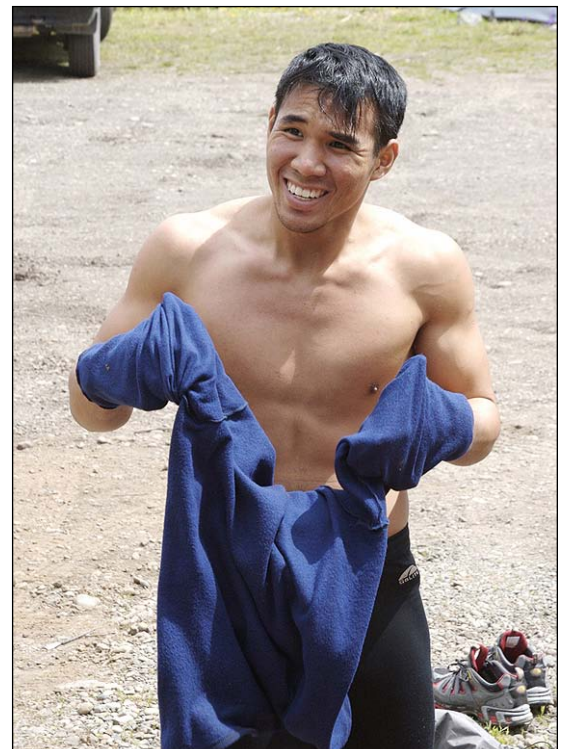
TOP: Photographer Sho Fujimaki trades a thumbs-up with his friends in SuburbanRUSH-Secondwind during the ride out of Rennell Sound (Lonnie Wishart Photo). MIDDLE: Joe Gabor (at left) with race staff and volunteers early in his 32-hour stint at CP12. ABOVE: Jonathon Ebb of Mount Moresby Adventures made CP14 a real destination (Bill Young Photos). RIGHT: Team YukonWILD arrives back at CP11 after completing the entire Graham Island course. (Lonnie Wishart Photo).

Tuesday evening.

As teams passed through the Heritage Centre, they were surprised by an unexpected treat. Chief Willard Wilson had stopped by earlier in the day, and announced that the Skidegate Band Council were sponsoring a feast for the racers and staff. The volunteers who pulled this off must have worked hard, because late in the afternoon they arrived with mounds of welcome food. Teams came in for heaping plates-full, as did volunteers as they worked to move the race infrastructure across to Moresby Island with the assistance of the BC Ferries vessel *Kwuna*.

At race headquarters it was seeming less and less likely that anyone could overtake YukonWILD—though in adventure racing anything can happen, usually as a result of a small mistake.

Team members who were out of the race were quick to jump in to help with the shortage of volunteers. “I went from racer one day to volunteer the next,” Joe Gabor told me, “and I can tell you that as hard as it is to race, once you work among the volunteers you realize that they’re working just as hard as the racers on just as little sleep. Not only that, but we rely upon them when an emergency happens, when it’s three in the morning and we need to find a boat. This is not a military operation—as often as not it’s volunteers calling in favours, and getting friends out of bed. Everyone who races should work a race as staff to really gain an understanding of it. I spent 32 hours at Check Point 12 with nothing but a couple of bars and a rain coat, and built a shelter out of the boats. I can



TOP and MIDDLE: Teams transitioned from the biking legs to kayaking at CP11 right through the night. ABOVE: Tourism Prince Rupert Director of Marketing Jillian Greenwood talks to HQ, Chris Collard, at CP3 during Day Three. RIGHT: Wilson Low of Team SART transitions at CP11 at the Haida Heritage Centre.
- Lonnie Wishart Photos



From gruelling paddles and bike legs, to the torture of trekking above the snow line, the Haida Gwaii stage of the race subjected racers to everything the Northwest Coast could throw at them. - Team Expedition Canada Photo

say that when you have a complaint, the last person you should complain to is the CP staff. It's important to recognize that it is the volunteers who make a race happen. If they had to hire people to do all of those jobs it would cost us five times more to race, and even then the race wouldn't happen, because you couldn't pay anyone enough to do that."

As darkness returned Tuesday night, three teams who had chosen scenic routes through the fist trek were still



unaccounted for between CP1 and CP3.

DAY FOUR, Wednesday, June 27

Calm seas, light winds, and sun breaking through broken cloud were a welcome sight to racers who had struggled with weather on Day Two.

Lawrence's relief team was working to locate the teams still caught on the first trek. At 0647 they encountered Team SART, an estimated 4-6 hours out of CP3. Lawrence offered to re-supply them. "At first they said that they were fine, that they had planned well and were prepared," Lawrence told me. "Then Grace Chan, who is known as the team nutritionist, took a look at my food and decided it was better than what they had, so she took as much as she could get!"

Sporadic contact was made with the Dirty Avocados. The team called into to CP3 at 0719, and Lawrence felt that he was in a good position to intercept them. Further contact was made at 0747. At 0858 the team was again in

contact with Lawrence, on a ridge line ascending a snow field at about 2200 feet. They had strayed onto a course that Lawrence had tested and found unsafe, in the area clearly determined out of bounds. At 1042 Lawrence and CP3 were both trying to reach the Dirty Avocados by radio. Lawrence's relief team finally linked up with them, fed the team, and began to lead them back to CP3.

Team SART came into CP3 at 1230, and went on to Base Camp with Med #2 by car to continue the race as an assisted team, but by 1450 Team Expedition Canada had still not arrived, and Lawrence was hoping to catch up with them. They came in at 1520, and Team Dirty Avocados arrived at 1800—14 hours after Lawrence and his Supplierpipeline team had left CP3. As long as teams departed CP11 by midnight they could still continue on the Moresby Island leg of the course, and all three teams chose to carry on unranked.



Team SOLE arrives at CP14B at Gray Bay on Moresby Island, having taken a clear lead in the race.

(ABOVE: Erin Coffey Photo; LEFT: Lonnie Wishart Photo).

“We thought there was a magic trail,” said SART team member Wilson Low when I caught up with him while the team was transitioning at the Haida Heritage Centre, “but we learned pretty soon there was no magic trail. We found out later that everybody was really challenged, so we were glad to find that we were not alone in that sense. We spent two nights above the snow line, getting tired at the wrong times and not able to move in the dark, but we’re here now and it’s all good.”

The amount of time the team spent above the snow line was made more impressive by the fact that it was the first time any of them had ever seen snow. “The novelty of it wears off pretty fast,” Low told me.

Meanwhile, for the leaders, the race had taken a surprising turn mid-morning. The leading teams made the long paddle into CP12 on the beach near South Bay on Moresby Island in good time. Team YukonWILD arrived at 2120 Tuesday night, Team SOLE at 2225, and DART-nuun at 0045 Wednesday morning. Team SOLE had clearly cut YukonWILD’s lead to one hour, and by the time they had summited the 3,700-foot Mount Moresby and reached CP14A at Moresby Camp, the teams were neck-and-neck with DART-nuun just a couple of hours behind. All three teams had elected to do the advanced paddle, and by the end of it Team SOLE had taken the lead, arriving at CP14B in Gray Bay at 1957 on Wednesday, followed by YukonWILD at 2145 and Team DART-nuun at 2228. Team SSS did not feel that they had time to complete this stage of the race if they tackled the advanced paddle, and carried on knowing that they had locked down fourth place.



TOP: Members of Team BanffLodgingCo.com replaced Joe Gabor at CP12, and turned it into a welcoming camp for passing racers. BOTTOM: Gear strewn at CP20 after racers departed Moresby Island to complete the Haida Gwaii stage of Raid the North Extreme. - Bill Young Photos

On the shortened course, Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR were the clear leaders, arriving back at the Haida Heritage Centre at 1121 Wednesday, followed by Team Playground Bullies at 1218 and Race the Rockies at 1510. Teams continued to straggle in, and several elected to spend the damp, cold night hunkered down at the Heritage Centre.

The story of the volunteers became more and more incredible as the race progressed. Jason and Meggen Oliver, who had manned CP3 were tireless. Charles Tree, Reyann MacDonell, and Pat Chan worked like dogs through long days and nights, tackling whatever needed to be done. Joe Gabor earned the nickname “Shoeless Joe” during his 32-hour stint at CP12 when Team SART passed through on their way to their challenge of Mount Moresby at

1800. One member of the team had been rushing too much at the transition at the Heritage Centre, and had forgotten his shoes for trekking. Joe forced him to take the shoes off his own feet, and was rumoured to have spent part of his time there wandering around the Check Point with his feet wrapped in tee shirts. Team BanffLodgingCo.com relieved Joe at CP12, after 32 hours on his own without radio communication and from Joe’s lonely and shoeless existence they created a party atmosphere on the beach.

DAY FIVE, Thursday, June 28

The last day of the Haida Gwaii stage of Raid the North Extreme 2007 saw Team SOLE stretch their lead on DART-nuun and YukonWILD. At CP20 in the community of Sandspit they arrived five hours ahead of Team DART-nuun, and nine hours ahead of Team YukonWILD, who



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Members of Team Coastal Disturbance improvised a rickshaw with kayak wheels and paddles to assist team member Colleen Myers after a slight knee injury (Sho Fujimaki Photo); Transitioning from kayaks to bikes at CP14B (Bill Young Photo); Racers and staff slept when they could no longer continue (Erin Coffey Photo); Team Dancing Pandas crossing the finish line at the Haida Heritage Centre at the end of the Haida Gwaii stage of Raid the North Extreme (Lonnie Wishart Photo).





had clearly been tangled up in the orienteering section of the Moresby Island course. SOLE finished the Haida Gwaii stage at 0705 Thursday morning, followed by DART-nuun at 1158, and YukonWILD at 1620. Team SSS, without the advanced paddle, finished at 1138.

On the shortened course, there was a battle for fifth place and beyond. Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR, who were an hour in the lead coming into the Haida Heritage Centre on Wednesday, made CP14A at 1004 Wednesday intent on doing the advanced paddle. Luck was against them. As they were launching at 1300, one of their boats was torn on a piece of metal protruding from the rocks on the beach. They were responsible for their gear, so they asked for clarification of rules. If they got assistance with the boat, would they be out of the race? Geoff radioed that they would remain ranked if they continued with the boat in some way—by carrying it or patching it. Patching the boat caused a five-hour delay at Moresby Camp. Their race ended at 2156, when the team radioed for assistance because team member Todd Nowack began to suffer from hypothermia, and they were extracted by boat back to Moresby Camp.

The standing of teams grew complicated as the Moresby Island stage of the race was completed. Some of the teams were by now racing unofficially, just to complete the course, and more were knocked out as they failed to



reach Check Points. Team Race the Rockies reached CP14B, completing the advanced course, but missed all of the bike orienteering Check Points, shifting the team to unofficial status. Team Coastal Disturbance opted for some rest at CP14B after the advanced paddle, and chose to get only one of the orienteering Check Points, also ending their official status. Team Suburban Rush and Team Zissou both collected four of five orienteering Check Points, one short of remaining official. Both Team Adrenaline Rush and Team Racing With Giants made CP19 but carried on back to the Haida Heritage Centre by ferry. Meanwhile, in this carnage-laden section, Team Playground Bullies, collected all five Check Points and were still ranked, but received a one-hour penalty for their team being too far apart.

There were some memorable moments on this leg of the race. There had been considerable scheming on the part of race organizers and TV crews to arrange for medical team member Cameron Eby to be working at a Check Point when his girlfriend Colleen Myer's team, Coastal Disturbance, passed through on their way to the advanced paddle section. While Cam tended to her blisters, she accepted his wedding proposal, made mid-race in front of a camera crew.

We were all impressed with Coastal Disturbance. Not



ABOVE: Dirty but happy, Colleen Myers of Team Coastal Disturbance enjoys a feast laid out by the Village of Queen Charlotte on Day Five. TOP LEFT: Chief Willard Wilson of the Skidegate Band Council presents Geoff with a halibut hook pendant. LEFT: Racers, staff and volunteers signed a large Raid the North Extreme banner to present to the Haida People.

- Lonnie Wishart Photos

only did they soldier through to complete the course with a top ten standing—an unprecedented feat for any RTNX local team—they displayed the right attitude for adventure racing. They faced their own case of mild hypothermia during the first trek, but were experienced enough to deal with it themselves. When team member Colleen Myers was injured, they improvised a rickshaw from paddles and kayak wheels and carried on. And every time they achieved any sort of milestone, Judd Rowse made his appearance wearing a Hawaiian lei.

Team SART were also crowd favourites for their enthusiastic attitude, and there was a collective cheer when they reached CP13 on the summit of Mount Moresby at 1018.

By late afternoon all teams were back to the Haida Heritage Centre to prepare for the return to Prince Rupert, and to once again benefit from the overflowing hospitality. Long tables of food had been set up in the morning, and



TOP RIGHT: Bikes waiting for transport back to Prince Rupert. ABOVE TOP: Medic Karenn Bailey treats Dave Hitchon of Team SSS, one of only two racers to ever complete all Raid the North Extreme events. RIGHT: Dr. John Vonhof treats Kenny Farrow, Captain of Team SMAC / HART / AlpineAire-Inferno. ABOVE: Team DART-nuun with local sponsor Debbie Mierau, who also volunteered throughout the race as graphic designer on the communications team. - Lonnie Wishart Photos



Andrew Love of Team Intrepid Travel arrives back in Prince Rupert aboard the Queen of Prince Rupert.

- Lonnie Wishart Photo

in the afternoon the Village of Queen Charlotte prepared a salmon barbeque (which I unfortunately missed, as Lawrence, Jill and I had returned by seaplane to Prince Rupert that afternoon). Chief Wilson had opened the Canoe House, and offered the amazing opportunity for teams to paddle Bill Reid's famous war canoe Loo Taas, or "Wave Eater." I later heard more than one expression of deep regret that there had been no time to take advantage of this opportunity.

Amidst the rush of packing to leave, teams and volunteers signed a tall Raid the North Extreme banner that had been destined for the Frontier Adventure Racing offices, which Geoff presented to Chief Wilson before leaving. It was with sincere longing that the race bode farewell to the Islands, and sailed that night at 2300 aboard the *Queen of Prince Rupert*. Still, the ferry offered a welcome opportunity for rest, and by all accounts the decks were cluttered with passed-out racers and volunteers for most of the crossing.

Just before the RTNX machine closed Base Camp at the Haida Heritage Centre at Quay'lnnagaay, M.A. pressed "transmit" one last time as Medic #1 on the public repeater we had been monopolising since Monday:

"To the people of Haida Gwaii / Queen Charlotte Islands who use these repeaters, Raid the North Extreme would like to thank you for your patience

and tolerance over the last four days.

"Your repeater system is the only way we could have accomplished the task of taking our 140 athletes and volunteers on a 400-kilometre course around your beautiful Graham and Moresby Islands.

"We would also like to thank all the kind people who have sponsored us with food and drink and support.

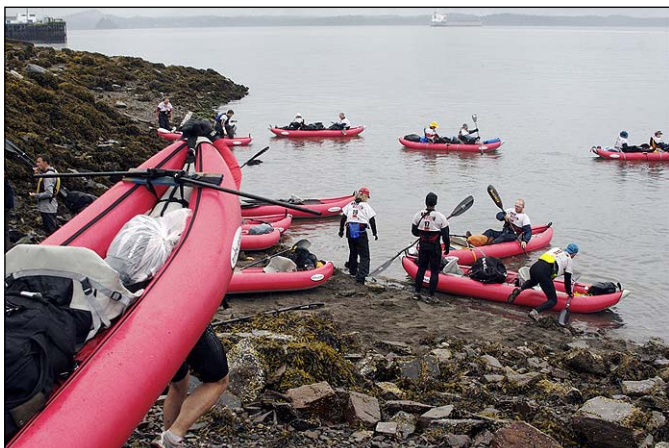
"To the Haida Nation, your hospitality is something we have never experienced. We are overwhelmed.

"Thank you once again. Raid the North Extreme, Frontier Adventure Racing, Over and OUT."

DAY SIX, Friday, June 29

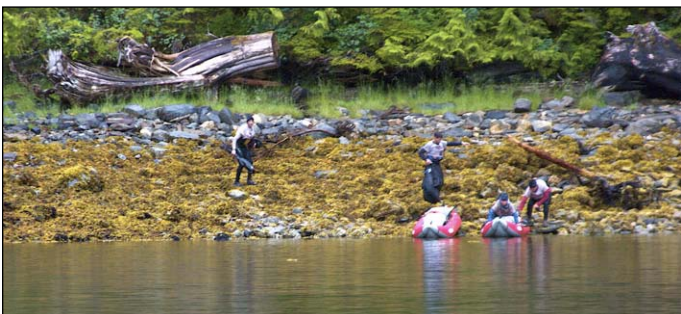
Teams started out from the Prince Rupert Terminal of BC Ferries a few minutes before 0900, jogging through Moresby Park in Prince Rupert and arriving on the waterfront to launch kayaks near Kwinitza Railway Museum. Then began a long paddle up Tuck Inlet, and a portage over the Kitimat Range of the Coast Mountains on the Tsimsean Peninsula to Work Channel. This trek would again prove to be the nemesis of many teams.

Pete Dobos of Team Adrenaline Rush came up to ask



TOP: Teams SOLE and Dancing Pandas confer at the Prince Rupert start line. ABOVE: Teams troop through Moresby Park in Prince Rupert, and LEFT, launch kayaks near Kwinitza Station.

- Lonnie Wishart Photos



Geoff a question when we were standing at the BC Ferries Terminal, and he looked as if he'd been punched in both eyes. With his team already running unofficial, Pete withdrew from the race on medical team advice during the kayak leg up Tuck Inlet. Like so many others, he threw himself into helping with the back-end of the race, and later in the day could be found shuttling around Tourism Prince Rupert Marketing Assistant Rebecca Carignan as she prepared the finish line in Pacific Mariners' Memorial Park.

Some of the first teams through were unofficial, racing for fun or to prove that they were up to the challenge. "We knew that this second stage of the race was probably going to come down to a race amongst the unranked, more rested, slightly frustrated teams that faced issues on Haida Gwaii," wrote Gary Robbins of Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR. "GAME ON!"

The remaining three members of Team Supplierpipeline reached Check Point 24 at the head of Work Channel at 1810, Team Intrepid Travel at 2022, and Helly Hansen / MOMAR at 2025. But in line with these times came leader Team SOLE at 2020, now unstoppable, with DART-nuun following at 2057 and YukonWILD at 2116. Guaranteed fourth-place Team SSS arrived at CP24 at 2022.

"We're holding up okay, because we're nearly home," Team SOLE member Marcel Homgren told me as he worked over his kayak at Check Point 25 at Kloyia Bay around 2300 on Friday. "I can't wait for a hotel room. You don't really feel the pain until the next day. Nobody has time to feel what's going on."

With only two other ranked teams still on the course, the Playground Bullies and Dancing Pandas (who had opted out of the advanced paddle on Moresby Island), the results of the race were now clear. All other teams would be ranked according to the last Check Point they had reached on the Haida Gwaii stage.

DAY SEVEN, Saturday, June 30

The morning began with plenty of excitement for race staff. The first teams over the finish line were unofficial teams Supplierpipeline at 0214 and Helly Hansen / MOMAR at 0435.

In the early morning hours we heard from Team Expedition Canada that team member Warren Bailey had succumbed to symptoms of hypothermia at the most awkward, halfway point of the portage trek. M.A. moved back to Base Camp in the Highliner Inn to oversee rescue operations, while Lawrence Foster and medical team member Cameron Eby moved into position on the Work Channel side of the trek.

There were some tense moments of radio communication. Lawrence and Cam had stripped down to swim ashore to position themselves, swimming in frigid night

FROM TOP: Geoff, Lawrence, and Medical Team members comfort Warren Bailey during MEDEVAC (Team Expedition Canada Photo); Kayaks in Work Channel; CP24 at the head of Work Channel; Team Coastal Disturbance members portage kayaks toward CP26 (Lonnie Wishart Photos).

waters, and had moved as far inland as they could without losing radio contact with M.A. and the rest of us.

Base Camp scrambled to determine SAR availability, with communications from Lawrence becoming more and more abrupt. He was clearly torn between wanting to move in, and waiting for confirmation of a plan while he still had radio contact.

It was at last determined that the fastest relief would be sending in our own medical teams. Lawrence and Cam began bushwhacking in from the Work Channel side. Westcoast Launch provided a boat to move Geoff and Dr. Trevor Shoosmith in from the Tuck Inlet side at 0210 (and it will take me some time to live down waking up owners Doug and Debbie Davis in the middle of the night!). It proved to be a race to Warren, with Lawrence and Cam arriving at about 0500, about 15 minutes before Geoff's team, and starting a fire. Alpen Helicopters was called in to extract Warren, and Geoff and Lawrence scouted a small clearing suitable for a helicopter landing. Warren was taken out without incident, and was snuggled in Prince Rupert Hospital by 0720.

Team SOLE crossed the finish line at 0607, having completed the full course in 94 hours and 19 minutes. Team DART-nuun followed at 0923, after 102 hours and 28 minutes, and Team YukonWILD crossed at 0849, after 106 hours and 16 minutes. These were the only teams to have completed the entire course, including the advanced paddle leg.

A touching conclusion to the involvement of BC Ferries in Raid the North Extreme came when Captain Orval Bouchard brought the *Queen of Prince Rupert* on a sail-past of the finish line on the vessel's return from Haida Gwaii that morning.

The finish line in Mariner's Park had an incredible atmosphere with music playing, free pizza and drinks from Zorb's Taverna, and with the Adopt-a-Team business representatives out to greet their teams. And of course when local team Coastal Disturbance crossed over at 1316, the crowd levels surged.

Teams trickled in to the finish line throughout the morning, until there were just two teams still unaccounted for. CP24 was in a pocket of mountains that made radio communication impossible, and I drove out for more information and learned that Team SART had made a wrong turn. Later in the day I heard my comment on the radio repeated back to me several times: "M.A., Erin Coffey has intercepted Team SART, has informed them that they need to finish the race before visiting Alaska, and has gotten them turned around."

With Team SART and Gregg's Fat Tire Race Team extracted from the course due to a time cut-off at CP24,



FROM TOP: Team Supplierpipeline, running unranked, were hours ahead of other teams at the finish line; Team SOLE crosses the Finish Line in Mariners' Park in First Place (Bill Young Photos); Team YukonWILD crosses the Finish Line in third place; Megan Rose of the Dirty Avocados enjoys some well-deserved pizza donated by Zorb's Taverna (Lonnie Wishart Photos).

we wrapped the race.

Raid the North Extreme 2007

The reception that night at North Pacific Cannery National Historic Site was an extravaganza of food—all top notch, and plenty of it—with Opa Sushi providing the appetizers, catering by Rain Dining Lounge, desserts by Cow Bay Café and Cowpuccino's Coffee House, and then late night pizzas from Zorbas Taverna. The feast was well appreciated. I was amused by Joe Gabor's comment that he felt guilty, "sucking down lamb legs like they were chicken wings."

Geoff and Lawrence, with Chris Collard and Bill Young, were crunching standings right up until the last moment, causing some delay in the speechifying side of things. The top six ranked teams left no room for doubt, but the

remainder were a puzzle. The many variables in this year's course led to a situation where, in effect, more than one race was being run simultaneously, locking teams into categories based on early cut-offs and performance.

"We had quite a challenge producing the final results for this race," Geoff said. "Our philosophy is to keep competitors on the race course as long as possible, and to provide every team with a ranking, which results in a crazy number of variables to reach fair and final results as teams are



ABOVE: Captain Orval Bouchard brought the Queen of Prince Rupert past the finish line as the ferry arrived on its regular morning sailing from Haida Gwaii (Rebecca Carignan Photo).

ABOVE LEFT:
Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR crossed the finish line in the early morning hours.
- Team Helly Hansen / MOMAR Photo).



RIGHT:
Team Race the Rockies members rest after crossing the Finish Line.
- Lonnie Wishart Photo



Wrap-up party at North Pacific Cannery National Historic Site. FROM TOP: Geoff and Lawrence explain rankings in the complicated course at a team captain's meeting; Port Edward Mayor Dave McDonald looks on as Prince Rupert Mayor Herb Pond congratulates Scott Covey of Team Zissou; Team SOLE with drums from the Museum of Northern BC; Race volunteers receive a standing ovation from racers and staff.

- Lonnie Wishart Photos

short-coursed, or moved ahead, or receive other assistance on the course.

“The top teams came very close to completing the various stages of the course in line with the best possible times suggested by Lawrence Foster, but it was great to hear even the best teams suggest after the race that they were challenged by the course. To hear that, and to see that some of the less advanced teams still crossed the finish line with respectable standings, makes Raid the North Extreme a true success in my eyes.”

On July 1 Keith Ash of Racing With Giants called it “the race of a lifetime,” saying that “set a new standard for premier courses.” Keith compared RTNX 2007 to Eco-Challenge, saying that “these races set a high standard for the sport by developing epic courses, having a world class staff, showing exceptional support for the racers, and involving the community. RTNX has just set the new standard. For being put together in a matter of weeks, we can say that this was one of the most challenging courses we have raced on.”

For me the whole experience was a food- and sleep-deprived blur, with the mad 13-day planning window blending into the actual race. Our biggest challenge, oper-

ationally, was in the shortage of volunteers caused by the change in the course. Our volunteer pool in communities like Smithers and Terrace largely evaporated, but they were replaced by a small number who did the work of many, and by racers who showed outstanding sportsmanship by jumping in where they saw gaps almost as soon as they dragged their abused bodies off the course.

The racers made this event for me. In a press release on July 1, I commented that the racers were, without exception, a “group of focused athletes who were universally warm, funny, and intensely engaging.” As many times as I heard racers praising the welcome of the communities of the Northwest Coast, I have heard residents expressing how the racers won their hearts. That is probably the single biggest thing that I will remember from this crazy, fulfilling experience.

As an old newspaper editor signing “30” on RTNX 2007, I’m left with just one question:

Why does it normally take Frontier Adventure Racing so long to plan Raid the North Extreme?

Honestly, Geoff, based on my experience, with the right people on the ground you can pull it all together in just a couple of weeks.



-Erin Coffey Photo