

Adventure World magazine

**2008 USARA Sprint and
Collegiate Adventure Race
National Championships**

**Pushing the Envelope
An Interview with Dean Karnazes**

**Dirt Divas
Six for a Stronger Core**

**Adventure Racing 101
You Know You Wanna Try It...**

- Plus**
- Trail Runners
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 - Navigation Challenge

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Cover Photo: 2008 USARA
Sprint National Championships
Photo by Glennon Simmons

This Page: Photo courtesy of
Glennon Simmons

contributors

• Sally Heath lives and trains in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. An avid adventure racer for the past six years, she has completed over 50 sprint and middle distance races in Canada and the United States. In 2007, she and her teammate Stephania (better known as the Funderstorm) racked up several sprint race victories, including wins in the all-female category at the SMAC XL and GRAAR Fall challenge in Michigan. Sally is generously sponsored by Running Free, a multisport retail store in Markham, Ontario (www.runningfree.com). When not racing, Sally enjoys writing about the sport and has had previous publications in Adventure Sports, Breathe Magazine, and Trail Runner.



• Robyn Benincasa is a veteran of over 35 expedition length Adventure Races and is one of only two women in the world who has won both the Eco-Challenge and the Raid Gauloises. She is currently the Captain of Team Merrell/Zanfel Adventure Racing, which recently placed 2nd at the grueling Primal Quest Adventure Race in Big Sky, Montana. You can generally find her and her team on the podium of the biggest expedition races on earth.



SHEER SPEED

Alex and Thomas Huber race up the Nose of El Capitan, California during the world speed climbing record attempt



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“I left my heart in Jalcomulco”

Tales from Frontier Adventure Sports & Training’s Mexican Training Camps

by Sally Heath

What makes a vacation the trip of a lifetime? For me, it’s the opportunity to combine travelling with the sport that I love, adventure racing. Thanks to Geoff Langford, president of Frontier Adventure Sports & Training and the staff from Esprit Rafting (recently rated the #2 Adventure Travel company in the world!), I’ve found a way to experience the trip of a lifetime not once, but twice.

For the past two winters, I’ve spent my vacation time training with some of North America’s top adventure racers in a lush tropical setting far away from the blustery Canadian winter. Since 2006, Frontier Adventure Sports & Training and Esprit Rafting have been hosting week long adventure race training camps in the rural village of Jalcomulco, Veracruz, known for its hilly terrain, exceptional whitewater, and welcoming community.

Having raced with Frontier for several years in Canada, I was familiar with their reputation for putting on top notch events. After a failed trip to Costa Rica in which I demanded to leave the resort on a daily basis, I knew that I was through with beach vacations. I wanted more out of my travel experiences than an umbrella drink and a sunburn.



Photos courtesy of William Young

In March 2007, my teammate and I headed to Jalcomulco for adventure racing camp. We were planning on racing for the first time that year as an all female team, and were hoping that the camp would help us to hone our navigation and teamwork skills. Even though we’d already been racing for several years, we knew that we would have much to learn from the camp’s instructors, Lawrence Foster and Trish Westman.

Our group that year was a varied group in terms of age and experience: some participants had never raced before while others were seasoned competitors looking for some added motivation and technical skills. Neither group of participants went home disappointed. Throughout

the week we trekked, biked, rafted, ascended, and rappelled in the rural areas surrounding Jalcomulco, as well as learned valuable wilderness first aid and swift water rescue skills. While our days were filled with training activities, including optional pre-breakfast bike rides, runs, or yoga classes, our nights were far from quiet.

Frontier and Esprit went well out of their way to ensure that our Mexican experience wasn’t just athletic, but culturally memorable as well. One evening we attended a family-run travelling circus that had made its way to Jalcomulco; another night we gathered in the local pool hall where we learned that Lawrence is equally competitive at foosball as he is at adventure



racing! The after hours highlight of the week, however, would have to have been the temescal ceremony that had been arranged for us.

After being blessed by a shaman, we entered a dark, circular, underground stone hut. Once seated, lava bricks that had been baking for hours were brought into the middle of the hut and the door was sealed. We covered ourselves with clay and for the next hour, we sweated, shared what had brought us to Jalcomulco and what we wished we could take away from it, and listened to the shaman chant and pray for us all. The temescal ceremony was perhaps the most mentally difficult part of the entire week for me, but part of what made my Mexican experience so memorable!

The week of training was capped off with a sprint race in which we had the opportunity to practice the skills we'd been training, including self-guiding our own rafts down Class II and III whitewater. We also got to practice some unconventional adventure racing skills, such as burro riding through the

streets, much to the delight of the villagers! Our all-female team, Male Mujeres, proved that women can be more than mandatory gear on the adventure racing course by besting all the other co-ed teams in the field by several hours (and celebrating, of course, with shopping and ice cream).

That evening was bittersweet, as we knew that it would be our last in Jalcomulco. Not surprisingly, the Frontier and Esprit crew helped us to finish things off with a bang with an incredible dinner and disco that lasted till the wee hours of the morn! I desperately hated leaving Jalcomulco and vowed to return the following year...

Listening to the feedback of several competitors who wanted to return to Mexico for an "advanced camp," or what I liked to call "Camp, Part II," in 2008, Frontier and Esprit added a second camp to their roster, the "Pico 2 Playa Expedition Training Week."

Unlike the previous year, where we were based out of Jalcomulco, Pico 2 Playa would allow participants to see more of the beautiful Mexican countryside by travelling several hundred kilometres as they trained through two different states. I convinced my teammate that it would be worth a second trip down to Mexico and the planning begun!

As with the previous camp, the expedition week brought in competitors from around the world with varying levels of experience. Each

day we split into smaller groups according to our goals and abilities, so that we could work on what is perhaps the most valuable adventure racing skill: teamwork.

Team Peak Adventure captain, Bob Miller, as well as whitewater expert, Erin Coffey from Esprit, led our camp. We began our week by trekking to the base camp of Pico de Orizaba, Mexico's highest mountain. For some of us, this was our first experience with elevation, which is a reality in many expedition length adventure races. After climbing to 4200 m, we then gritted our teeth on a fast downhill bike ride where we spent our first night camped out in the rural village of Neuva Jacal. We were a little taken aback when swarms of children descended from the hills surrounding the village upon our arrival, but much more grateful when we



realized how helpful they were and that all they really wanted was to have their pictures taken and perhaps some "dulces"!

On Day 2, we made up for the downhill biking that we'd enjoyed the previous day with seven hours of the most difficult uphill biking I'd ever done. Throughout the day, we travelled through many little towns and villages, always amazed

at the hospitality and warmth with which we were greeted. Since many of us had come from wintry climates, we also developed a fast appreciation for Mexican snack food, especially the potato chips that could replenish the electrolytes we were losing in the heat!

The focus of Day 3 was trekking and navigation, as we learned to use burro trails between villages to save time and energy. We spent the night camping at a coffee plantation with a magnificent view of the Barranca Grande canyon. The next day, we traded our trekking poles for inflatable kayaks, which we self-guided (with safety boats, of course) for 25kms of exciting whitewater action. At the end of the day we were astonished once again at our accommodation: a magnificent longhouse built for the rafting trips that regularly run down the Antigua River.

On Day 5 we did it all: trekked, biked, canyoneered, rappelled and ascended as we found our way to Jalcomulco. I insisted on visiting



Photos courtesy of William Young

all my favourite village haunts, including the bridge where I indulged in one of my favourite pastimes: puenting! That night, another temescal ceremony was arranged for us after we ate dinner at Esprit's newly built bar and restaurant in town.

The next and final day we biked from Jalcomulco out to the Gulf of Mexico, stopping en route to visit some Totenac ruins in the town of Cempoala. At the ocean, we were met by our fabulous support crew who transported us back to Veracruz for a night in a luxury hotel and a four course meal. It was a truly amazing way to cap off another unforgettable week in Mexico!

In 2009, Frontier and Esprit will once again be running two adventure race training camps that will appeal as much to the newcomer to the sport as they will to the seasoned racer. The Jalcomulco-based training camp will run from March 7-14, 2009, costs \$1795 CDN and will cater to those starting out in the sport or who want a more relaxing and flexible travel experience.

The Pico 2 Playa expedition week will take place from March 15-

21, 2009, costs \$1995 CDN and will offer participants a more intense week of training. Instructors Lawrence Foster, Trish Westman, and Bob Miller will all be returning to join the staff of Frontier and Esprit.

A third camp, targeted more towards the adventure photographer, will be debuting in 2009 with dates to be confirmed. Once you arrive in Mexico, all meals, accommodations and instruction by professionally trained guides is included.

If you are looking for a way to fuel your passion for adventure racing with a winter getaway, you won't find a better location or way to experience both than with Frontier and Esprit in Jalcomulco!

For more information, please visit www.far.on.ca/ART/CampFrontier/Mexico.php or email Geoff Langford at geoff@far.on.ca. There is also a facebook group (www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2252064929), where you can see additional photos and talk to others who have taken part in Frontier's training camps in previous years.