

# ADVENTURE GETTING INVOLVED IN RACING



BY MILES JAFFE

**W**hile the sport of adventure racing continues to attract participants at astounding rates (the 2001 Eco-Challenge had 1,000 teams apply in the first hour of registration), the sport's top teams have had to face a dilemma that comes with success: choosing their races.

That will probably always be a problem, but some races are now working together in an attempt to create an adventure-racing world championship. The Discovery Channel World Championship Adventure Race will be the culmination of a series of adventure races this year. It's the product of a partnership between The Discovery Channel and the organizers of the Southern Traverse, which is held each year in New Zealand.

This world championship will be held in Europe in September (exact date and location were not available at press time) and offer a \$100,000 prize purse. In order to provide a qualifying system for the world championship, the group has also created the adventure racing World Series. This group of seven races includes the Adrenaline Rush (United Kingdom), Beast of the East (USA), Expedicao Mata Atlantica (Brazil), Hi-Tec Adventure Quest (Africa), NOC Merciless Mountain Melee (USA), Raid the North Extreme (Canada) and the Southern Traverse (New Zealand).

Of course, just calling yourself the world championship doesn't make it so. Other big races, specifically the Raid Gauloises and the Eco-Challenge, will also be vying for the world's top teams this fall. The Raid and the Eco-Challenge will both take place in October, with the Raid traveling to Vietnam, the Eco-Challenge to New Zealand.

For most people interested in adventure racing, all of the politicking makes for an interesting story, but it has little to do with which, if any, adventure races are open to them. The demand for adventure races continues to far outpace the number of team slots available. For those who would like to get involved in the sport, this often means waiting for years until you can get in. (Although, considering the amount of training you should have before attempting some of these weeklong endurance races, that may not be such a bad idea.) But there are many other ways to get some experience in the sport.

## How to get started?

In the east, there are two primary training centers each run by committed enthusiasts. One is Odyssey Adventure Racing (OAR), run by Don Mann, a former Navy SEAL. His program at OAR, located in Virginia and West Virginia, consists of five- and seven-day adventure racing training programs, one-day, two-day and five-day races, including Endorphin Fixes (two days) and the five-day Beast of the East. If those races are not enough, and they are not for Mann, his program offers Xterra races and double- and triple-Ironman-distance triathlons, some on road, some off.

Mann's training programs are serious. He brings experienced racers to lecture. Participation in a clinic guarantees participation in one of his races. For his races, be sure you like mountain biking. His races continue all year and include participation of teams of four to solos. For information, call 757-425-2445, or visit [www.oarevents.com](http://www.oarevents.com).

The adventure racing couple of Tracyn Thayer and Norm Greenberg are equally

## Wild Onion takes root in Chicago

Adventure racing has traditionally flourished in off-the-beaten path environments, like Borneo, Morocco and the wilds of New Zealand. But for those who'd like the adventure race experience with more of an urban feel, the Wild Onion Urban Adventure Race in Chicago takes racers through the concrete jungle.

Actually, organizers offered racers a mix of urban adventure and traditional outdoor sports at last year's inaugural event. Participants climbed (via stairs) the Sears Tower and rappelled off of a ten-story structure on Navy Pier, but they also kayaked in Lake Michigan and the Chicago River. Other sports that challenged the coed teams of three included mountain biking, running, hiking, orienteering, in-line skating and canoeing. Put it all together and you get an adventure race like no other.

This year's Wild Onion takes place September 21-22 in Chicago, and the 50-team field is expected to fill quickly. For more information, call 312-464-9617, [www.urbanadventureracing.com](http://www.urbanadventureracing.com).



committed to the sport. Program directors and instructors at the Nantahala Outdoor Center in North Carolina, Thayer and Greenberg have raced the Eco-Challenge, the Elf, the Southern Traverse and, in four-person team status, have won the Beast. NOC offers a limited adventure-race schedule (a new race may be announced after this writing) but has an impressive training program of multiday clinics for outdoor sports of all types, particularly whitewater kayaking. For more information visit, [www.noc.com](http://www.noc.com).

In the past year, Chris Ballou (a finisher of the Eco-Challenge in 1996) has established a membership organization and clearing house, [www.nyara.org](http://www.nyara.org), centered in New York City. Ballou also organizes training clinics in the Shawangunks with a focus on climbing. NYARA will also put on a May adventure run and plans for a later adventure race. This group represents the beginning of grassroots efforts like those that arose in the triathlon world in the early '80s.

In Canada, another serious, dedicated adventure racer and race producer, Dave Zietsma, offers training and racing. Zietsma placed in the top 10 of races like the Eco-Challenge, and his team, Subaru Outback, has competed on five continents. Throughout the summer, he organizes multiday races across Canada: in Nova Scotia May 26-27, Newfoundland in June and out west and in Ontario for the balance of summer and fall. Zietsma's races are well run, and because he offers many races, gaining entrance is possible. For more information, visit [www.raidthenorth.com](http://www.raidthenorth.com).

## Take Your Time

The best adventure racers are mature, experienced athletes in their middle or late 30s, sometimes in their 40s. They have paid their dues. Their teams have come together over years. Their backpacks have been refined through hundreds of days on the trail, multiple races under their feet. The road into the sport is long, race registration is sometimes difficult, but the rewards can be many. Take your time, get good training, and enjoy the sport. ■