

# PRIMAL QUEST

The Primal Quest course was unveiled with assurances that this would be the hardest race ever. Team Aberdeen report back on...

## ...the good, the bad and the ugly



A coach ride through the night brought us into the desert. Tom hadn't been well so we hung out near the improvised toilet whilst other teams met their equine team mate. Nick and I ambled over to the one remaining horse – the one chewing a carrot and wearing a straw hat!

With the horse riding section out of the way, we embarked on the first desert trek. It was hot, thirsty work. Whilst we'd been intelligent on the fluid front, foot problems were surfacing, Ruth's trainers kept sand out but caused overheating and moisture build up.

We shuffled towards the bikes at the end of the first day with mixed hearts. Tom's sickness had returned and he collapsed minutes from transition. It had been a hard day compounded by disappointment that we'd lost touch with the lead teams. In transition, we leapfrogged several teams and were back to our positive selves.

The next transition revealed the full horror of Ruth's feet. Her heels were the most disgusting thing I've ever seen! After an extended lay up, we embarked on a truly beautiful part of the course. The sunset provided stunning red sandstone images to mitigate the pain of another 24hrs on foot with temperatures touching 47 degrees.

45 miles later we docked for another 3hrs of feet patching. Ruth, clearly in severe pain, hadn't uttered a single word of complaint. We had to carry our entire paddle and swim gear 2 miles up to the top of the canyon. Nick set off like a Viagra-smoking Sherpa, laden with 3 huge bags and 4 paddles. Halfway up we were passed by Kiwi team, Port Nelson, with two wearing nothing whatsoever on their bottom halves due to major chaffing issues. I offered them a sliver of Germoline. They accepted with thanks – a special moment between 2 teams ravaged by conditions.

Transition at the top of the canyon was our longest and last. Ruth was advised to spend 6hrs allowing her feet to recover. Infection was setting in, with a real danger of total skin loss on her toes. We improvised the bike boxes into 4 comfortable beds and took a long snooze.

Morning broke, feet were patched and we left the transition after 9hrs. The biking was a real pleasure and the abseil through Gemini Bridge spectacular. We passed several teams and were in the top 20 but the feelgood factor was short-lived. Halfway through the bike stage, Ruth had a horrific crash that still makes me shudder. She casually remarked "I'm pretty certain my arm is broken... I can't ride but I can push my bike one handed".

In the shade of a bush we inspected the arm. We bustled open the radio and Ruth was whisked off to hospital via helicopter. She later left the USA to have her arm pinned in the UK. As we rode on to Moab minus our talisgirl, we met a Canadian and an American who'd lost 2 team mates. We discussed our options: Nick was desperate to carry on – as a new father, it would be his last major outing this season. Tom and I had the world champs in Sweden to consider. In hindsight, we were right to pull out, but the emptiness was unpleasant as we cheered other teams through the finish. Nick joined the Canadian and American to enjoy a course that got better and better.

Would I recommend PQ to other UK racers? Yes, unquestionably. The course was vast, beautiful, brilliantly organised, competitive yet a realistic challenge to anyone prepared to dedicate time to it. The rope sections were better than anything I'd previously experienced. On the downside, very little navigational skill was needed until the last section.

I'd like to pay tribute to Ruth who acquired legendary status and Nick, who was the consummate team man through our 4 1/2 days on the course. Finally I'd like to thank our four major sponsors: Aberdeen Asset Management for the funding, Paramo for clothing that excelled in the harshest of environments; Marin for bikes that made riding a pleasure; and EAS for shipping drinks and food. We look forward to what the next race throws at us.

**Warren Bates, Team Aberdeen Asset Management**