

White-Water Canoeing and Stump Jumps

By CARL GOODMAN

Ranked among the nation's most adventurous cities, Chattanooga is home to a growing number of 'adventure racers'

It came as no surprise to most residents when Chattanooga was recently ranked among the top 12 U.S. cities for its adventurous lifestyle by National Geographic Adventure magazine.

A survey conducted by the magazine confirmed what local runners already knew: area lakes, trails and mountains are excellent venues for honing skills and hardening bodies to prepare for endurance races known as adventure racing, the phenomenon that combines multiple disciplines into a single event-like triathlons combine biking, running and swimming.

Mark McKnight, marketing director at Rock/Creek outfitters, says Chattanooga is a natural hub for adventure racing because the city is home to so many people who enjoy an array of outdoor activities. "You have a ton of crossover," he says. "That's why adventure racing is so popular."

Cathy Cannon, a 33-year-old graphic designer who moved to Chattanooga from Atlanta, got into adventure racing in 2001 after finishing her first marathon and deciding she preferred trails over pavement.

"I think one of the coolest things about adventure racing is it's perfect for people who have athletic A-D-D because you get to jump around to many different sports," quips Cannon, now proficient in white-water paddling, rappelling, orienteering and navigating. "There is never a dull moment."

Cannon says the need to keep going non-stop for 30 to 40 hours adds to the excitement. While paddling along North Carolina's

French Broad River, she once began to hallucinate, seeing exotic birds of all shapes and sizes along the riverbank before realizing she was gazing at leaves swaying in the breeze.

"One thing I love about adventure racing is you have these amazing aha moments," she says. "You stop and say, wow, this is why I do what I do."

Dreama Campbell, 36, a personal trainer at the Downtown YMCA, is among many adventure racers in the Chattanooga area. She frequently organizes races and is an active member of Velo Vixens, a women's cycling team. A graduate of UTC, where she did not compete in sports, Campbell runs often with her husband Trey, 34, also a UTC alumni and former weight lifter. When not running or working, the Campbells chase after their two sons, Gage, 10, and Xian, 5.

"Adventure racing is something we can do together," says Dreama, recalling that her husband lost 20 pounds during their first six months of racing together—returning him to his high school weight.

The Campbells along with a few friends in their extreme racing community will participate Oct. 4 in the popular Rock/Creek StumpJump, a 50k run and 11-mile trail race that starts and ends on Signal Mountain. It's not a triathlon, they point out, but it's nevertheless a grueling competition—the kind that appeals to them. With its 5,000 ft. of elevation gain, the Stump Jump has earned the reputation as one of the toughest 50k races in the East.

Adventure racing, according to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, dates from 1968, when the Karrimor International Mountain Marathon was first held in the Scottish lowlands. The now famous Ironman Triathlon, first held in Honolulu a decade later in 1978, brought the phenomenon to the fore. Then, New Zealand hosted the Coast-to-Coast in

Dreama Campbell, Michelle Meek, and Cat Thornton after a bike ride at Booker T. Washington State Park.



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Ned and Dreama Campbell with friend and triathlete Sergio Bianchini stretching before a run.

1980 and the Raid Gauloises in 1989.

A two-time Raid competitor and producer of the popular *American Survivor* television series, Mark Burnett created Eco-Challenge in 1995. Not surprisingly, the British-born Burnett wanted his event to be the world's premier adventure race. It was a made-for-television extravaganza with teams of men and women competing in everything from trekking, white water canoeing and horseback riding to sea kayaking, scuba diving, mountaineering and mountain biking over a 300-mile course in a Utah desert.

Adventure racing made its debut in Chattanooga in 1982 with the Riverbend Triathlon. The race was replaced in 1991 by the Chattanooga Dam Triathlon, which, in turn, was supplanted in 2005 by the Chattanooga Waterfront Triathlon. This July event combines a 1,500-meter swim, a 24.9-mile bike race and a 6.2-mile run. Classified as an Olympic triathlon, the race is sanctioned by the USA Triathlon (USAT), the official authority for more than 2,000 multi-sport events nationally.

Dreama Campbell has participated in two Ironman triathlons: at Tempe, Ariz. in 2008, and in Panama City Beach, Fla., in 2006. Ironman races are famous for grueling lengths, conditions and sports television coverage. Ironman events include a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike race and a full marathon—a 26.2-mile run. At finish lines each racer is hailed as an "Ironman," a coveted moniker among triathletes.

The Campbells and their running mates train throughout the area, especially in Prentice Cooper State For-

est along the scenic Tennessee River Gorge, and on Raccoon Mountain, site of TVA's largest hydro facility and a state-designated Wildlife Observation Area. When you're out there, you run into "lots of things" including coyotes, snakes, deer and, recently, says Campbell, "turkey buzzards. They're disgusting."

On her blog (www.irondreama.blogspot.com), Cambell describes a mountain bike ride in Booker T. Washington State Park and a swim at Chickamauga Dam with Sergio Bianchini, 67, who she occasionally meets on Fridays for what she jokingly calls "secret" training.

Born in Italy, the East Ridge businessman participated in the recent Chattanooga Sports Barn/Quintana Roo Sprint Triathlon, which includes a 25-mile swim, an 8.2-mile bike race and a 2-mile run. The swim is in open water in Lake Chickamauga, the run is moderately challenging and the biking is flat and fast, according to sponsors.

Bianchini placed second in his age group behind a runner from Atlanta who beat him by 15 seconds. "I fell down on the job," he says. **irc**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ADVENTURE RACING, VISIT UNITED STATES ADVENTURE RACING ASSOCIATION (USARA.COM); IRONMAN TRIATHLON (IRONMAN.COM); ADVENTURE SPORTS ONLINE (ADVENTURESPTS.COM); OUTDOOR ADVENTURES NETWORK (MYOAN.NET); TRIATHLETE MAGAZINE (TRIATHLETEMAG.COM) AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE MAGAZINE (ADVENTURE.NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM).

STUMPJUMP STILL AN ADVENTURE

It may not technically qualify as Adventure Racing, but running up and down mountain trails for 50 kilometers must be considered adventurous.

As many as 600 folks are expected to come to Chattanooga Oct. 4 for the 8th annual StumpJump, which is one of nine local races in the Rock/Creek Trail Series. While as many as half of this year's racers will be locals, Rock/Creek marketing director Mark McKnight says the event attracts people from all over, including the western U.S. — where the sport is extremely popular — and at least four foreign countries.

"The energy level for trail racing is pretty high here," says McKnight. "Certainly in the Southeast, Chattanooga is the city with the most trail races. Chattanooga has definitely become a destination for trail racing."

The popularity of the races not only brings people into Chattanooga, it

also helps raise funds for the upkeep of area trails in conjunction with the Wilderness Trail Running Association.

Most of the races fall into the category of ultra running, which includes anything with distances longer than the 26.2-mile marathon, according to McKnight.

He says the high interest

level for the off-road, long distance races follows a similar path for many of the area's outdoor enthusiasts who live here for the variety of adventure recreation from boating and biking to running and hiking.

"Trail racing is kind of like hiking," says McKnight, "but you get to see two to three more times the amount of scenery."

For those who prefer to wait until the weather cools off a bit for their extreme, fast-paced "hiking" experience, the Rock/Creek Trail Series will cap off the year Dec. 20 with the Lookout Mountain 100K, the longest run in Chattanooga history. **irc**



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