

BDS Director in San Francisco Pushes Her Endurance to the Limit

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Imagine starting your day by running a marathon, and from there, rather than kicking up your feet for some rest and relaxation, continuing on to 10 straight days of biking, hiking, swimming, caving and climbing through the rough terrain of South Dakota. Now imagine doing all that with only two hours of sleep a night and while carrying a backpack full of food, water and clothes.

That's exactly what **Melissa Griffiths**, Business Development director in San Francisco, did last month during the Primal Quest Badlands race, a 600-mile wilderness race in South Dakota referred to as the world's most challenging human endurance competition.

"The race was a mixture of different disciplines and started with a 27-mile run," says Griffiths. "It was a cruel way to begin a 10-day race, but it was less than five percent of the course, so it didn't seem so bad in the big

scheme of things."

Preparing for the challenge

Primal Quest is an environmentally friendly, ecologically aware wilderness expedition adventure race in which co-ed teams of four journey across expansive terrain using only a map, a compass and their combined skills of strategy, stamina, mental fortitude, teamwork and determination.

Griffiths' fellow members of Team Tecnu Extreme were spread across the West Coast, so she trained by herself most of the time in advance of the race. She would bike and run for two hours before work every weekday. On weekends she would add kayaking and roping to the mix, training for up to 10 hours each day. But to develop camaraderie and train together, there were a few weekends when her team met up to compete in shorter, 24-hour races, in which they placed well and built anticipation for the big race.

The highs and the lows

According to Griffiths, it's tough to convey even a small portion of what she and her teammates experienced physically, emotionally and mentally during the race. "Adventure racing is highly unpredictable as you not only don't know the course, but there are always dozens of unforeseen challenges to overcome," she says. "It's definitely a lesson in negotiation and team work. There are constant, critical decisions being made that can make or break your race – some personal, and some that must be debated and agreed upon by the team."

At times, getting through the race was simply a process of managing and minimizing suffering. "There were countless annoyances and discomforts – from bruises, cuts, blisters and sunburn, to hunger, thirst, cold and exhaustion – the list goes on and on," Griffiths explains. "But that's all part of the sport. After years of racing, I had a pretty good idea what I was getting into when I signed up."

And it certainly wasn't all bad, with Griffiths saying the lows made the flip side even richer. She and her

team experienced what she refers to as “moments of euphoria” as they encountered many beautiful vistas, wild animals, flowers, woodland creatures and breathtaking sunrises. The four team members also shared many laughs, built strong camaraderie and felt a deep satisfaction after every completed checkpoint.

Achieving goals

Team Tecnu Extreme’s goal was to place in the top 10, and they succeeded, coming in 10th place. “Out of the 32 teams that started, only 10 teams even finished the whole course, so we were very proud to be part of such an elite group,” says Griffiths.

Another positive result from Griffiths’ perspective? She burned an average of 10,000 calories a day, so she was eating anything she could get her hands on following the race. “When people ask why I do this, the answer is always so I can eat my body weight in chocolate cake afterwards!”