



**2006 Primal Quest – Moab, Utah**  
*Story Time by Grant Sisler*  
June 26 - July 4, 2006

Before I start story time, I want to thank Mark Manning (arnavsupplies.com) for putting together an awesome training program for me for the 6 months leading up the Primal Quest. Without the program, there is no way I would have felt nearly as good as I did (minus my feet) for the entire race. I also want to thank Ritchey for making our bikes lighter and more durable by adding their great components to our bikes, when you spend 10 hours pushing your bike through the sand, you appreciate that your bike is as light as it can be. Clif Bar once again came up huge and by my count, I personally ate over 60 Clif Shots, 20 bars (Mojo and Clif), 10 packets of Clif Blocks (I would have eaten more but I ran out) and over a thousand ounces of Clif electrolyte drink. I literally would not have finished without all their food and I have no problem eating more of them! Jetboil is the best/most important item to have in a Transition Area (TA). In an unsupported race, there is nothing better for getting your food ready fast and easy, such a great stove to have and if you don't have one and you race, you need one, simple as that. Thanks also to iRULE for their multisport shorts – the Ninjas. I want to thank all of our sponsors because without their support, it would be really hard to do these races.

Getting into a bus at midnight sucks because you know that you are not going to be getting a lot of sleep; but at least you know that you are finally heading to the start of the race. After two days of running around and getting all of our gear and certificates taken care of, it was finally time for the race to start. We had been given the maps around 7pm on June 24<sup>th</sup> and we finally got to see what we were going to be in for. While the team looked at the maps, I went to Subway to get food. It didn't make a lot of sense for me to look at the maps, as even after all this time racing, maps still just look like a bunch of squiggly lines that haven't been drawn in random patterns!

The race was going to be hot, damn hot, with temperatures over 100 for the majority of the race. It was also going to be long, and we were going to have to carry a lot of food and a lot of water for long periods of time. This was not going to be a fast race; it was going to be a race of attrition. We were starting off with a 23 mile horseback riding section, but there was a catch. There was only one horse for four people. The rule was that either one person could ride the horse while wearing their pack, OR, you could put all four packs on the horse and run alongside the horse. We were going to opt for number 2 as none of us really wanted to sit on a horse for 2 miles, forget 23 miles. Funny side story, Team Halti elected to ride the horse for the whole 23 miles and the rider ended up with such a raw ass that at the next TA, they had to duct tape his ass for padding/protection. He now had 380 miles to go w/ an ass that was duct tape closed (minus a small whole for "business").

All 89 teams got onto the busses and prepared for the 4 hour drive out to the start in Lucky Flats. Remember those school busses that you rode on when you were a kid (no Ethan, not the little yellow one you were on, but the full size ones)? Well, they weren't very big when you were a kid and they certainly have not gotten any bigger. Trying to get to sleep was nearly impossible as you were heading down bumpy roads. I think I managed to squeeze in an hour of sleep by the time we arrived. We split up once we got there and two of us waited to get the horse and two of us waited to get the GPS that we'd have to carry for the entire race. While the GPS is really cool for people at home because they can watch us, they suck to carry because of the size and weight.

Cary and I went to get the horse and this is where things got interesting. 89 teams of 4 running all around (nearly 360 people) and 89 horses in a small area at 4:30am could not be good. Some of these horses were not happy to be approached by people wearing headlamps and trying to toss a saddle on them. I think that one team was knocked out before the race even began as a horse landed a solid kick into the body of a racer. I don't like horses for this exact reason, they kick, they're bigger than me and I don't know what they are thinking. Our horse came out and it was HUGE (probably weighs in close to 2,000 lbs!). It was not made for running, but it was a pack horse. This meant it could easily carry our packs, but it was not going to like running much, that's not good when you are in a race. The good news is that the horse's name was Ann and that's the same name as Scott's mom, so we took it as a good omen.

After a few hours of everyone trying to figure out what was going on, at 6:20am with helicopters flying overhead the gun went off. Let's think about this again... 89 teams, 89 horses, helicopter, start of a race and a gun going off, are you kidding me??? The only thing I can think they were thinking about was how good this would



look on TV. Not surprisingly, some of the horses flipped out and before long there were horses running wild w/o any riders attached to them. That's not good if that's your team, b/c the horse is mandatory gear and you have to do the section with a horse. Ann (our horse) seemed relatively unimpressed by what was going on, but she seemed unimpressed by anything the whole time. We could get her to run for about 20 seconds and then she was back to walking. When a horse wants to walk, it seems like there is very little you can do to get it to run. We tried slaps to the ass, but let's be real: Scott is the biggest on our team and he weighs in at 180 lbs. A hand slap to the ass of a 2,000 pound horse is not really going to do anything to the horse, but at least she did not run away from us after tossing one of us in the air.

Horses do not belong in adventure racing. We (the racers) train for months/years to get ready for the race and you show up to a race w/ a teammate (the horse) that hasn't trained at all in some cases. We would have liked to run a lot more, but we couldn't b/c the horse would not run. It was only 23 miles out of over 400, but to make sure that everything in the race is fair, horses should not be involved. How pissed off would you be if you paid all this money to race and then you got kicked/tossed off your horse on the first day and were injured? If you've got a horse that wants to run, you could be hours ahead of other teams whose horse did not want to run. After 8 hours of walking a horse around the desert, we arrived at CP 5 to start the desert trek. We were in about 38<sup>th</sup> place, but the horse was now gone, so going forward there were no more excuses that we could make accept that we were slow.

The end of the horseback riding was followed up with a 23 mile desert trek and our first visit to the sand. It was hot, really hot out there. If I end up in hell (which I most likely will, since I don't believe in it anyway) I really don't think it can get much warmer. Think about the hottest you have ever been, now think about the fact that you could not go inside, hop in the pool, or do anything else to cool yourself off. I don't know if anyone else liked to steal food from the kitchen before it was done cooking, but remember when you opened up the oven and that first blast of heat would come out? You had to duck away, wait for the heat to pass, and then you could steal some hot food. Remember when you didn't duck and it singed your hair and burned your lungs? That's how hot it was. OH, you are also carrying around 30 pounds of water, food and gear because if you don't carry it, you can't eat/drink it.

Sand sucks. Walking in the sand is fun when you're at the beach, but when you are wearing a heavy pack and shoes, sand sucks. It gets into your shoes and you have to stop all the time to dump your shoes out. We started to have little contests to see who could get the most sand in their shoes and make the biggest castle out of the sand when you dumped it out. I don't think I'm going to go to a beach in a long time. This is also sadly the point when I first started to get blisters. Yup, the second section of the race and I started to have blister problems. I DON'T GET BLISTERS. If you were betting who on the team would have gotten blisters, I would have been the last pick, but something was definitely wrong. I don't know if it was the sand, the shoes, the heat, the socks, or a combination of all of the above, but the blisters started early and it was not a good sign for things to come. The desert trek was 23 miles so the race started with 46 miles of trekking and that was the theme to come. A total of 15 hours on your feet to start the race and we knew we still had over 100 miles on our feet to come!

After 46 miles of walking around we arrived at the mountain bike transition area. This was the first time that we decided to grab some sleep. In the past our sleep strategy revolved around us getting very little sleep because we were fighting the time cut-offs. This year, thanks to more training, it looked like we would actually be able to bank some sleep early as we were moving fast enough to sleep. We quickly put our bikes together, in the last little bit of light, and laid down to grab a quick hour of sleep before heading out on the bikes. Because of the way the course was laid out, there was a dark zone at the white water swimming section. This meant that if we go there anytime between 6pm and 6am we were not going to be able to enter the water. So, we reasoned that we should grab some sleep now and hopefully time it to arrive right around 6am. I grabbed about 45 minutes of sleep and then snuck off to the med tent to get my feet looked at, the first of many trips to the med tent. The medical personnel and volunteers at this race were awesome. They took care of my feet over and over again and didn't even laugh at me too much, which was nice; although they did once bring other people over to look at my feet because I had something growing out of my heel, which is not a good sign!

Did I mention sand before??? Sand while walking is not a lot of fun, sand while biking is even less fun! You're cruising along and then all the sudden WHAM, you're at a dead stop and trying to pedal. The other frequent option would be that you're pedaling along and then all the sudden your face down in the sand because you've suddenly crashed! When we first looked at the times we couldn't figure out how it could take 6 hours to go 54 miles (estimates for the top team). One of the top team Nike has ex professional mountain bikers on their team, surely



they could average over 9mph while on their bikes. Well, it doesn't matter how fast you are on your bike if you're not riding it, and that's what the sand will do to you. Luckily with the new Ritchey parts, our bikes were as light as they could possibly be so when we were not riding them and had to push them we were cruising (well moving) at 3mph. Stupid sand... 10 hours of biking later and we were off our feet and white-water swimming!

We arrived at the white water swimming a couple hours later then we would have liked to, but it was cool because all the teams that had gotten stopped at the dark zone were coming out of the water. Basically for them, the race had been restarted and it was a whole new ball game. Teams that had gotten stuck with a slow horse were able to catch up and teams with fast horses were able to get some sleep.

Water... SO NICE!!! To be hot that long and then to finally hop in the water was an excellent switch. I don't like water, I don't move fast in the water, but I was still happy to be in the water, the whole team was even though the water section made me feel like we had entered the Special Olympics. There we were cruising down some slow moving water wearing knee pads, thigh pads, elbow pads and a helmet. You could have tossed a 4 year old into the water and they would have been safe. It was basically a 2+ hour river kick down the water with a couple of fun rapids thrown in along the way. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way down the river, we got caught by another team. We were that slow/special that another team managed to catch us, which was a bit embarrassing. The good news was that the team that caught us ended up having the fastest kick time in the entire race and, rumor has it, they had a small outboard motor attached to their kickboards (OK, I started that rumor, but it makes me feel better).

After the river boarding it was into the kayaks for a 35 mile paddle. This was great timing because we were now in the water at the hottest time of the day. When we got hot, we just simply dumped our hats into the water and were instantly cooled off for 10 seconds. The paddle was long, but beautiful (kind of the theme of the race) and we had a nice tail wind at the end as a storm threatened. The wind was actually strong enough that we stopped paddling and lifted our paddles up in the air to try and catch the wind so we could be extra lazy, very nice. A 6 hour paddle and we were once again looking forward to being on our feet and off of our asses.

Well that feeling did not last long. The 6 hour paddle had successfully softened up the skin on my feet so all the blisters were now primed to peel right off and get filled up with sand. NICE, that's fun, nothing like sand inside your blisters for you to walk around on, fun for all, I'd highly recommend trying it if you've never done it before. The good news in all of this is that the rest of the team was doing well and didn't have any blister, glad to take one for the team. The first canyoneering section began after we made a swim across the river to the other side, so we were starting off wet, but once again, that lasted for all of 10 seconds.

The first canyoneering had our first sleep out at night and had the first rappelling section of the race, both eventful for the team. It was a bit cruel because as you headed out you walked past the final CP of the canyoneering section. They let you know where you would be eventually, but you weren't going to be there for another 24 hours even though the entire section was 27 miles (your third marathon). That's just not nice.

I'm sure that this canyoneering section would have been incredible during the day, but luckily/unluckily for me, we got a large portion of it during the night. I like heights, but I like them when I am on a stable surface. You know when you look out a window of a building, or look off the Golden Gate Bridge and down into the water? That's fun. When you know that if you tripped and fell that you would then tumble painfully over a cliff bouncing off of rocks and boulders before settling in some jumbled heap, that's not fun and this section was like that. Scott loves that stuff and he's got a really bright light on his head so he's looking all over the place and checking out the "incredible" rocks/structures/painful death situations all around us. Me? My light has either a spot light, or a dissipating light. I turned on the spotlight, stared at it and followed it from one cairn to the next quite happily oblivious to everything around me. We then got to the rappel, where I quickly shat my pants and then did the longest rappel EVER. I don't like rappelling and I discovered later that I did not like rappelling because I was doing it wrong. I couldn't stop because I was pushing my hand the wrong way so instead of braking, I kept going faster. My feeling of helplessness and very hot/tired hands was because I was in fact not braking and the only thing slowing me down was how hard I gripped the rope. After figuring this out, the final two rappels were much more fun, but I had to scare the crap out of myself a few more times before figuring this out.

The canyoneering section felt like it would never end. You are in a huge canyon making giant S turns that you think will never end. Around each corner you hope that you are at the end, but no, it just keeps on going. The



canyoneering section also had the first rope-ascending section. The ascent was a short 90 ft. climb and everything went well for the team. It was at this time where we also ran into several other teams. Some of the time you are out there and you forget that you are in a race. You're just cruising along, enjoying things when all of a sudden you remember that you're racing against other teams. I guess that's what happens when you aren't the navigator, you tend to forget things and you just follow the people in front of you.

Ah... the sleep monster. Those of you who have read different story time know that she is a bitch. You're cruising along and all of a sudden your eyes start to get tired. You ignore it and you power on, thinking that you can trick your body and make it think that you don't need sleep. It's been almost 2 days and you've slept for an hour, why would you possibly be sleepy??? You keep on fighting, but it's a losing battle. Your head starts to drop and all of a sudden you are following the feet in front of you as they rhythmically put you to sleep. Then everything turns into a picture book. You see feet in front of you, next you see dirt, but no feet, then you're looking at the side of the trail, but you've stopped moving. Where did the feet go??? Well, they're still walking, but you're facing the wrong direction. You jog ahead, lock in on the feet and continue the flip-book.

4am comes and we decide to sleep. Scott and I have both battled the sleep monster long enough and it's time for the team to go to bed. The plan is to sleep from 4am (when it's dark out) and get up at 6am when the sun is up, hopefully tricking the system into thinking that you've gotten a bunch of sleep. We crawl into a wash to try to get some protection from the wind, stay warm and go to sleep.

4:45am comes along and it's cold. Not super cold, but I'm wearing a pair of light weight Rail-Rider pants, and a light-weight Rail-Riders long sleeved shirt while lying on the ground sleeping. I decide to toss on my beanie and bust out my space blanket for warmth. For all of you out there who race and have had the same space blanket for the past 3 years, pay the additional \$2 and get yourself a new space blanket. I unwrap my space blanket for the first time in years and it delaminates, just completely tears apart in my hands, not good. I'm now sitting there with a useless space blanket; I've basically got a large zip-lock bag which does nothing to keep you warm. I'm not too happy as I take out every bit of clothing that I have in my Salomon backpack and put it on.

It's now that Shrek (Scott) comes flying over with his space blanket in his hands. "Dudes, it's frigging freezing out, can I crash between the two of you for warmth?" As he says his last word, he is asleep and snoring between Shibby and me with his space blanket in his hands. I assume that his space blanket is also broken (I'll discover about 4 days later that Scott's hands are just too big to open his space blanket, but he actually has a perfectly good, and large, space blanket that could have kept all three of us warm) and Scott now becomes the cream in the Oreo between Shibby and me. Cary is soundly sleeping and warm, happily curled up in her functioning space blanket.

An hour later we all wake up to the happy 6am alarm clock. The sun is up so it's slightly warmer, but I'm still covered in all my clothes and cold a feeling that 90% of the time I'm wishing for. Scott has been the cream in the Oreo so he's not too bad, but he's out of it. Shibby's warm and good to go and drill Sergeant Cary is up and wants to get us going. After yelling at us to get going (Cary's great for that, the rest of us want to sleep and Cary gets us moving) we're heading out, but Scott is still clueless as to what is going on. I think I'm a deep sleeper, but Scott takes the cake. This is a guy who has just passed out an hour ago while in the middle of a sentence! Luckily we know where we are going so we start to head off to the next CP. After about 10 minutes of walking along we decide to do a light jog to warm up and get going. Scott tells us he can't, he's getting blisters. Then, like a 5-year old who has done something wrong, he lifts up his pants to reveal to us that he does not have any socks on. He's so tired/out of it that when he got up; he forgot to put his socks on!!! After the three of us stop laughing at Scott he put his socks on and we got going.

The next section was awesome. We were in the slot canyons in Utah (which are made by water over a lot of time, no, more time than that, which I found hard to believe. I hadn't seen water in a long time and was curious if a flash flood was really a bad thing, I thought maybe I could just float along drinking the water and not worry about my feet... probably not) and man, it was hot, but a lot of fun. We'd chimney down the rocks (our backs against the wall and our feet on the other side) trying to figure out the best way to get down and then look around trying to figure out how we were going to get out on the other side. It required team work and thinking. We're good as a team, but a bit lacking on the thinking side, but made it through relatively unscathed.



The canyoneering section finally ended and we were getting into the boats. At this point it had been 179 miles of racing and nearly 60 hours. This time we were heading out for a 45-mile paddling section that was going to take us through the heat of the day into the night. Once again, the timing could not have been better, but we were tired and not paddling as fast as we had in the past. The sleep monster is most active while you are paddling, so we started to play games. Playing G-H-O-S-T while you are sleepy is hard, I can't spell when I'm wide awake, so trying to do it while falling asleep and in a boat is even harder.

G-H-O-S-T ended but the paddling kept going. We had not planned on an 8.5 hour paddle so we did not have the lights that we would have liked so the end of the paddle got interesting. We ran into John Turner from Racing with Giants and the 4 boats paddled along together hoping to not run into anything. As normal, Shibby and I were able to run into everything for the other racers, so they didn't have to hit things. After getting stuck 3-4 times on sand-bars we finally arrived at the TA at 11:30pm. It was scary to think that we were only 2.5 days into the race but we had traveled half of the total distance that could only mean very slow moving for the remainder of the race.

The second canyoneering section had an interesting start. After arriving at the kayaking TA and transitioning out for the canyoneering section, we decided to grab some sleep. We headed out on the trail and then cut up into a wash to sleep. We thought that was a good idea, but the freak storm that came through had other ideas. This one had rain, but it also had BRUTAL winds. Poor Cary nearly lost her contact and Scott had to hold her hand and lead her out after she got sand in her eyes. With a storm barreling down we still hadn't gotten the sleep that we wanted, so we opted for plan B: sleep next to the toilets. Yup, we were sleepy enough that it made sense to get out of the storm by getting protection from the concrete-toilet structures. The smell was bad, but we were dry and that was all that mattered. After getting some sleep in the toilet section (there was another team there so we weren't that crazy) we moved back to the sands to finish off our nap before heading out.

The Nano music player could be better than a cup of coffee. As we headed out for the canyoneering section we were not exactly awake and raring to go. Luckily Shawna had loaded up her Nano and had loaned it to us for the race. As I am arrived, Metallica's *Enter Sandman* filled my head and the lyrics filled my lungs. I'm not sure which woke up my teammates more, my HORRIBLE singing of *Enter Sandman* or their turns with the Nano. One person got the Nano and found a song of their liking, but they then had to sing the song. Soon, we were all laughing as it was quite clear that none of us would be on American Idol anytime soon.

This canyoneering section is one that I will not forget. It featured the dumbest mistake I have ever had the pleasure to be a part of, and I have been a part of a lot of dumb mistakes. Nomad is a strong team on our feet, all of us have done ultra-marathons and generally we like being on the ground and not in a boat. Some of the time this is an advantage, some of the time it's a disadvantage, this time, it was a major disadvantage. We left CP 21 feeling good and looking to catch up with some of the teams ahead of us, so we were jogging the flats and the downhill and walking the uphill. We had caught a couple of teams and as we came to the end of a long straight road and came upon some toilets and a campground, we caught another team that had decided to stop and rest its feet. Feeling good about catching another team, we took off still jogging on the trail to the NW.

**SUCH A BIG MISTAKE.** The entire section had been marked and we'd been following red tape for almost the entire canyoneering section. In Utah there is this ground call crypto biotic soil and it's really important not to walk on it or Utah becomes a desert. As a result, they had marked a lot of this section to make sure we were walking in the right place. The map clearly showed that at the Way Point (markers that we had to come within 100 meters of) we were to take a trail to the NW and after around 3km arrive at the rappel section. We were so pumped about how we were feeling and passing another team that we assumed that since the trail was so large and well marked that they must have stopped marking the course. Also, since we had just gone by a campground/bathroom/rest area we assumed that had to be where the way point was. What's that saying about assuming??? Wait, it gets worse.

As we keep jogging down our trail I look back and see a member of Aberdeen Asset Management running down behind us, but it's only one member. We never see them again, but for some reason no bells go off in my head. (Still, it gets worse). We keep on jogging (our trail was rolling hills) and suddenly a car pulls up next to us and a guy pops his head out the window (map in hand).

Random Spectator looking for his team: "Excuse me, are you guys on course?"



Nomad, misunderstanding the question and thinking he's asking if we're on the full course or the short course: "Yeah, we're still on the full course!!!"

RS: "No, I mean are you guys going the right way???"

Nomad: "Yeah, we're heading to the rappel section right now!"

RS: "You sure? You guys see any footprints???"

Nomad looking down: "No... but the ground here is pretty hard..."

So bad... Long story short, we get lost, really lost and to top it all off, it's noon and the hottest time of the day. By the time we realize what we've done (which we should have done much earlier since it was only 3km to the rappel) we have kicked our water and are walking as slowly as we can to try and conserve energy and not sweat because now we've gone from trying to crack into the top 15 for a shot at the top 10, to making sure we finish this section and can keep on racing. Not a fun turn of events for Nomad. If you want to see exactly what happened you can check out the PQ web-site [www.ecoprimalquest.com](http://www.ecoprimalquest.com) and use their GPS tracking. Click on Nomad and Aberdeen Asset Management and watch us wander off a bit too early to reach CP22 and watch Aberdeen Asset Management calmly stroll to the CP. Oops.

We finally arrived at the rappel section (yeah, another rappel) and drank as much Gatorade as humanly possible (and dunked our head in the ice holding the Gatorade) before doing the rappel and finishing up the canyoneering section. The problem with getting lost is not only did we spend 5 hours wandering around, but our bodies needed several hours to rehydrate and catch up after the damage we had done to ourselves. Finally after way too much time on our feet (nearly 30 hours) we finished the canyoneering section and once again we were on our bikes.

Moab is known for some of the best mountain biking in the world and I had made the silly assumption that we would get to ride it and spend time on our bikes! So far, not the case, but I'm optimistic that things will turn out better. The first 54-mile section had been estimated to take the top teams 6 hours (that's how long it took Nike) and this section was 66 miles and the estimate was that the top team would take 14 hours. So, the average speed here was going to be 4.7mph, or slower than most people run. That meant A LOT of time was about to be spent next to our bikes and not on our bikes. Who does that??? It's like going to a fair, but you don't get to go on any of the rides, you have to buy the ticket (trust me, it's expensive) just have to watch them go round and round. It turned out that it took Nike 16 hours to complete this section for an average speed of just over 4 mph. You're basically talking about a trekking section where you had to bring your bike. Granted, they could have slept, but because of the heat and the terrain, this bike was one of the hardest sections of a race I have ever done.

**HOT! SO HOT!!!** After a fast ride out to Gemini Bridges and another rappel (this one caught on camera so there is a chance you can actually see me as the sweat starts to pour down my face while I'm trying to rappel) we headed off onto Gold Bar Trail and Poison Spider trail, two famous trails in Moab and really the first time that you could do some riding on some cool Moab trails. Yes, the trails were super technical and there was a lot of walking, but at least they were real bike trails. The biggest problem out here was the heat. We were out in 100+ degree weather but we were just cooking on the rocks. At one point I looked down and the watch on my wrist said that it was 108 degrees, that's warm.

This was not a good point in the race for me. There are two theories to what happened:

1. I was so concerned from the rappel and sweating so badly that I did not drink enough to recover from the rappel.
2. I was sweating so much, that I had turned my very breathable Rail Rider Shirt into an easy cook oven, basically baking myself from the inside. All the salt that came off my body stayed on my shirt and it no longer was breathing so all the heat was staying on my skin. I was basically turning myself into a Thanksgiving Turkey. Whichever theory you subscribe to, I got way too hot for my body, stopped sweating and was not feeling good and not in a good mood.

With over an hour left to go on the ride, I was out of water, getting hotter than hell and pretty pissed off that I had rolled my ankle on the rappel. CP 22 and our adventure there was a cakewalk for me compared to what I was



going through now. I was miserably hot, I had brutal blisters on my feet that made riding painful and I had no water, and no way to cool down. I'd spend some time in the shade, but even in the shade it was near 100 so there really was no way to cool down. "Luckily" Scott found a bottle of water that someone had dropped out of their bike on the trail. This water was probably close to 100 as well since it was sitting in a plastic water bottle on the hot rocks. I was miserably hot and my teammates were getting worried that I had stopped sweating so I was the first one to get the water. I took a large sip and nearly spit it all back out and got pissed at my teammates. What the hell were they trying to do to me??? Get me even hotter??? I was not thinking reasonably and I was not too happy that they were making me drink hot water. To top it all off, Scott then had me pour 100 degree water (it felt that hot) on the back of my neck to try and cool me off. I was not very polite in telling my teammates what I thought about their attempts to cool me off, but I was none to happy. Looking back on it, probably one of the best things they could have done for me at the time, but I was still not happy.

We finally make it down to CP28 and I drank more water than a camel does in a year. I drink and I drink and I drink and I'm not stopping until I've knocked back 120 ounces of water. Scott once again has taken over the job of cooling me and has poured cold water down my back, and inserted ice cubes into my hat, down my back and told me to drop some in my pants (he didn't want to do that for me, weird eh?). I was just happy to have liquid in my system, but I suddenly went from super hot to shaking uncontrollably because I was so damn cold. My body had no clue what was going on, I had confused it, but I've done that before and I'd do it again. It was at this CP that we were informed that Pritchett Canyon was closed until 7pm due to extreme heat in the canyon. That was over an hour away so we headed into Moab to find ourselves a Gas Station and eat as many ice-cream bars as we could. In Sweden, it was Swedish Meatballs that had a special place in our hearts, in Moab; it was old fashioned ice-cream sandwiches. So yummy ☺

After a good rest on the grass next to the Gas Station and a bunch of ice-cream sandwiches, we headed into Pritchett Canyon and a section that I have no idea why it was in the race. There is a large sign when you enter Pritchett Canyon that says,

"The Pritchett Canyon road goes about five miles within Pritchett Canyon – but these are five exceedingly hard miles indeed. The road is exceeding difficult for four-wheeled vehicles."

SWEET! We've got bicycles and this is a section that most 4-wheel drive vehicles can't go on??? We soon found out why. The trail was full of sand, rocks and the next 18 miles were a trek with your bike. Totally pointless, but I'm not bitter, I mean who doesn't want to walk for 18 miles on blistered feet with their bike while in Moab. I mean it's got to be hard to find a place to bike in Moab, it's not like people travel from all over the world to come and bike there! There probably weren't any good trails for us to go on. It took us 8 hours (with a 2 hour nap) to cover around 18 miles. That's just not a lot of fun on a bike.

TA9 was nice to finally reach. The final insult of the bike section was a twisting and not very well marked trail to the TA when you could have easily taken the road to the TA. Serious salt in the wounds. Once you reach a TA though you forget all about it; you regroup and get ready for the next section. There was a cold river next to the TA and we all spent some time in the river after the long trek, I mean bike section. This was also where we served our penalty because someone left their jersey at a TA. OK, this is going to surprise a lot of you, but it was me. Yeah, go figure, I forgot something. The good news is that I remembered everything before the race, but I forgot it during the race. We had to spend 1 hour in a heat tent before we headed out into the mountains.

Finally in the La Sal Mountains we expected some relief from the heat, but it was still hot when we were leaving the TA. The mountain trek was 38 miles and the estimates were between 17 and 34 hours. We were starting at 6300 feet and this trek featured two 12,000 ft peaks. That's high, planes fly at that level. Once again though we were on our feet so we were hoping to make up time and see if we could get into the top 15. It was beautiful in the mountains and nice to be out of the desert and in the trees and climbing up a mountain; basically it was nice to out of an S-shaped canyon and walking in the sand. We climbed up, up and up and there were beautiful views from the top. Unfortunately, it was at 12,000 ft. and we then had to walk back down the loose rocks and scree which was not a pleasing sensation on my feet. I was moving brutally slow and I was not happy with my feet. I kept on telling my feet that the faster they moved the sooner it would all be over, but they were not listening and were severely limiting the speed that I could move. Moving downhill was not fun. Uphill, not bad, but downhill my feet would slide in my shoes which would then cause the blister to slide. I had sort of a nice gimping motion down



in my left foot to avoid stepping on the ball of my foot and could walk with all the weight on my heel. The right foot was a bit trickier as I had a large blister on the ball of my foot, but I also had some sort of a growth on my heel (later removed and getting a crowd to look at the thing coming out of my heel), thwarting my master plan of heel walking. Stumped by the double blister on my right foot, I decided to cut the foot off. Unfortunately, we were only required to carry a knife with a 2.5 inch blade and it was going to take too long to do that so I just had to keep on walking.

I don't know what is up with our team moving along fast on our feet (or this time as fast as I could move), passing teams and then getting lost, but we decided to do it again. At least this time there wasn't a clearly marked trail that we were supposed to be following, but getting lost in the La Sal's was bad. We were cruising along, leaving CP35 at 5pm and thinking that we were going to be hitting the next TA by 10pm grabbing some sleep and powering through to the end of the race. So exciting for us, but we made a wee bit of a mistake and instead of our 10pm arrival we stumbled into the TA at 4am significantly more tired than we wanted to be.

The sleep monster is a bitch and when it smacks your navigator suddenly across the head, that's not good. We were supposed to be looking for a pack trail and as we came down off of our last peak and we missed the trail. After running around in what seemed to be a well organized land slide (don't ask, you had to be there) we decided to settle down for some sleep and figure out what was going on. Shibby had taken over the navigation at this point as we were trying to let Scott get some sleep. It was at this point where we realized that Shrek (Scott) had the world's largest space blanket that his mitts could not open. So, back in the earlier trekking section while I was freezing my ass off and Scott was snuggled between Shibby and me, all we had to do was look at his "broken" space blanket and realize that it was just his hands that weren't working.

After getting some rest we were able to figure out where we were (OK, I didn't do a thing, I just followed everyone and pointed to bright lights that I saw in the distance and asked, is that a TA??? It was, go me!) and got out of there by hiking up the world's steepest canyon. This could not have been safe, but it was dark out so we couldn't see what we were doing, that was good. We got to the top of the canyon and then had a 2,000 ft. decent down to the river and over to the trail that we were originally looking for. My feet were not in the mood for this. I have NEVER been in more pain than I was coming down this hill. All I could do was laugh at myself as I stumbled/walked down the hill. Cary kept me company, but I think that was just because she knew I was in more pain than her so it made her feel better. My feet got mad at me just thinking about it. We were about 10 minutes from the TA (finally) when I just had to stop and pop my blisters. I took off my shoes and Scott (now awake and helpful) commented that it looked like one of my toes had its own helmet. 4 blisters later, popped and drained, I was walking again in slightly less pain, but looking forward to the TA.

FINALLY. This is what mountain biking is all about!!! The final 42 miles of mountain biking were what should be in every race; we were riding, on our bikes! Go figure, why would we do that in a race? This was just an awesome section. Part of the fun was that we started at 9,341 feet and the bike section ended at 4,238 feet. 5,000 feet of descending in 41 miles = NICE! Bombing down the mountain going across rivers, it was just a really great section. The only bad part was the location of my blisters on my feet. The bumps from the trail would vibrate through my clips and directly into my feet. I kept clipping out of my shoes trying to ride with only one foot in and some of the time no feet in, not safe, but the feet didn't hurt as much. (Side note: 800mg of Motrin + 2 extra strength Tylenols could be one of the best over the counter pain killers ever) We finished up the ride and all we had left was a final 16 mile trek with the most incredible ropes section ever, or so we thought.

During the trek we noticed that the helicopter that earlier in the race had been following the top teams (always let us know we were close to where we wanted to be b/c it was up in the air) seemed to have parked at a really weird angle on the side of the hill. It turned out that the helicopter had crashed during the race!!!

Once we arrived at the base of the tower we were told that we were going to be stuck there for the night. Uh... excuse me? I had left all of my extra gear (non-mandatory) at the last TA because we only had 8 more hours to the finish line. How bad could it be I thought, it's the middle of the day, hot again, but we'll be back before it's dark and asleep in a nice bed that night. Oops. Luckily we were not the only team that was stuck there and begging from other teams began. There were a lot of teams that were short-coursed, and they were going to be allowed to leave early as they were not allowed to do the ropes section. Knowing that, we started to beg other teams for bivvy sacks, warm clothes and food. The teams there were more than happy to drop off some extra weight as they were headed home and didn't need to carry any more gear.



The morning came and we were heading up to the ropes course. It was an unreal experience. It started off with a 400 foot ascent up Castleton Tower. I don't like rappelling, but I do like ascending (I don't have to worry about braking/dying) and I was able to take my time and enjoy the ascent. (After spending the evening at the base, we knew that we had quite a lead over any other teams). They had also gotten the helicopter back up and running and while Shibby and I were about 200 feet up in the air we heard the loud WHOOMP WHOOMP WHOOMP as the helicopter came around the tower. I felt like I was in a movie. Shibby turns to me and with a Cary-sized smile says, "DUDE, I just waved to a helicopter that was at the same height as I was!!!" It was awesome.

After finishing the ascent we had to come down, walk across, and then back up again. This time though we didn't just go straight back down, we got to go across. There you are, 450 feet (around that) up in the air on a Tyrolean traverse, but the valley floor is 2,500 feet below you, nutty. For those of you who don't know what a Tyrolean traverse is, it's a zip line, or imagine a scene from a movie where someone has to escape from the enemy and they use a sock around a telephone wire and flying down they go (think MacGyver). That's what I got to do from the Rectory to the Priest (use your religious thoughts here) and it was incredible. Except for sky diving, it's the closest feeling I've ever had to flying. I'd do it again in a second and it made the race go from good to great. All we had was a 3-hour walk down to the river, and we were in the boats and done!

It's nice when no one is chasing you to the finish line. We chatted for a while at the final CP and got into our boats for a leisurely paddle to the finish. So nice, floating down the Colorado River, not worried about how fast we were going, occasionally paddling as the fancy hit us.

At 1:44pm on July 3<sup>rd</sup> after starting at 6:30am on June 25<sup>th</sup>, we were done. For the math majors in the group, that's 8 days and 7 hours. That's long (almost as long as Story Time) but we were done, and so is story time... ☺