

Tim and Anna's excellent adventures

In their kind of sport, fitness is in both the mind and body

An adventure is an undertaking usually involving danger and unknown risks. Though married couple Tim Buchholz and Anna Nummelin aren't in too much peril when they sign up for an off-road adventure race, what they do isn't a typical walk in the park, either.

Their sport involves hiking and/or trail running, says Buchholz, but also "mountain biking and some type of paddling, though not always in the same order."

The physicality of adventure racing is a given. But then there's the mental fortitude and strategy, he says. "There are a lot of components that go into it other than the actual physical aspect and that's why we were really drawn to it."

Being fastest doesn't win the race alone. Being smart factors into the competition. Orienteering—using a map and compass for navigation—gets racers from point A to point B in the shortest time. Which route they choose is up to them. Technology like Global Positioning Systems (GPSs) and cellphones (for way-finding) are forbidden. "It's all unmarked, and there's bushwhacking involved," Buchholz says.

"The shortest route doesn't always equal the fastest route," adds Nummelin laughing. "That fast route on paper could be over a mountain and actually take more time."

Buchholz, a professor of music at the UW-Marathon County, and Nummelin, a nurse practitioner in Stevens Point, have been adventure racing for nine years. The pair race with a college friend as part of their team, Rib Mountain Racing, and find training for and doing races a great way to stay healthy while having a great time.

"We've been told we could do the *Amazing Race*," says Nummelin. "You go places you'd never normally go, like 50 miles out in nowhere, seeing stunning places."

They got hooked after watching the TV show *Eco-Challenge* created by Mark Burnett (producer of many reality TV shows including *Survivor*, *The Apprentice* and *Shark Tank*). They started with local events, including a 12-hour race that Nummelin did in southwest Wisconsin. It didn't go so well. "I had an idea of what it was but I overestimated my ability to read a map and I didn't

Adventure racing goes back a few decades, and its origins could be the two-day Kariakor International Mountain Marathon, first held in 1968, according to Wikipedia. This race required two-person teams to traverse mountainous terrain while carrying all the supplies required to support themselves through the double-length marathon run.



Team Rib Mountain Racing Adventure racing most often includes cross-country running/hiking, paddling and biking. "A lot of things are left up to the elements and chance," says Tim Buchholz. That could mean a bike mechanical issue 50 miles out in the woods and running into wildlife.

really appreciate at the time why adventure racing is such a team sport."

She spent her first hour traversing a swamp and through brambles looking around for a route. "But I made it back in," she says. Being alone in the far reaches of the woods might sound scary, but, "that was part of the adventure," she says. "I just made it a lot harder."

Adventure racers use maps provided only the night before or morning of the race—the course is kept secret until then. "It's a big detailed topographic map and on that map are a number of checkpoints, like 50 or 60," Buchholz says. At the checkpoints—simply a flag in the middle of the woods or up a creek—racers stamp their "passport" to show they've reached that destination.

Different checkpoints require a designated mode of transportation. For most races, the directors will provide the canoes. If the race starts on a run, teams might run a large loop, ending up back at the beginning, take off on their bikes from there, paddle around a lake or down a river, and even throw the bikes in the canoes at times.

Races range from three hours to 10 days, depending upon the event. "Nationals is 30 hours," Buchholz says. "With a total of about 120 miles of off-road travel."

"There are times you are half asleep and really fatigued, but overall it's an amazing way to just travel and meet people and be in the outdoors and exercise the brain," says Nummelin.

Racers are required to carry a backpack filled with specified equipment, first aid, food and hydration. "We eat energy bars for as long as we can stomach them," says Nummelin. "It's important to be eating the right things at the right time. When you're putting out that much energy you need to replenish it, that's the most important part of the race."

Nummelin says the most important thing while racing is to fuel correctly. "When you don't eat right, the brain doesn't have the energy to function and make good decisions," she says. "Also, if you don't wear the right clothes, you will chafe if you are out there long enough. We adjust for different temperatures. It's a key factor. Going through the woods, you need to have cover so you're not eaten up."

Team Rib Mountain Racing qualified for nationals this year by winning the 30-hour Atomic Adventure Race, Southeastern Regional championship in Blue Ridge, Ga. They competed in the 30-hour Na-

continues on 12 ▶

HEALTH/WELLNESS ◀ from 11



Anna Nummelin (in front): "You go places you'd never normally go, like 50 miles out in nowhere, seeing stunning places"

tionals in Nashville, Ind., taking 12th place at this competitive event with the best teams from more than 30 states, says Buchholz. Their team also took first place in the Wisconsin First Basis Adventure Racing Series, which consists of three separate events in Wisconsin throughout the year.

They aren't the physically fastest team, Buchholz admits, and usually compete against Olympic-level athletes. "But we have a great strategy, and we are very good at navigation and we have great teamwork," he says. "A lot of things are left up to the elements and chance."

That could mean, for example, a bike mechanical issue. Racers could find themselves on a broken-down bike 50 miles out in the woods, says Buchholz. Or you go running around a mountain and run into a cliff.

Wildlife can also be a factor. "In Florida there are alligators," says Buchholz. "We've been chest deep in swamp water

and seen them in the distance. And actually, they are pretty shy."

Not all animals have steered clear. "We've seen bear and been chased by wild boar," he says.

All somebody needs for adventure racing is a mountain bike, compass and trail running or hiking shoes, he says. "Just go out there and have fun."

Fitness conditioning is needed, of course, but not necessarily on the level of training to run a marathon. "I know six hours can seem daunting to be out racing, but if you break it down to an hour and a half paddling, then a hike and a bike... it's very doable, just take it all at an easy pace. You don't have to run. A lot of people just hike it."

People do need to know how to read and use a map, and many race companies will offer a clinic beforehand. If you can comfortably run or hike 5 miles at your own pace, bike 10-20 miles, and have some experience paddling a canoe, then

Joel and Stephanie from Wausau