

Fort Worth mom ready for toughest test

Kim Dunkin makes her second trip to the world's toughest adventure race.

By **ERIC RANSOM**
Special to the Star-Telegram

Sleepless nights, whitewater rapids and maybe even grizzly bears await Kim Dunkin in Montana. But she's spent the past two years getting ready for her second attempt at Primal Quest, which begins Monday morning.

Dunkin's last attempt at the 10-day adventure race ended not in the canyon trails or the banks of a river, but in the bleakest of places — a Denny's in Moab, Utah.

Two years ago, Dunkin suffered terrible blisters on her feet and was forced by her team to quit on the sixth day.

"We stopped at a Denny's; I was in the restroom, and when I came back out my team told me they didn't want me to go on with my feet like they were," said Dunkin, of Fort Worth. "It was one of my best and worst experiences. It was awesome to be able and do everything, but it was heartbreaking to not finish."

Dunkin, a small business owner and mother of a 6-year-old, is the only woman on her new four-member Team Intrepid. Her teammates include



Fort Worth mom Kim Dunkin said "it was heartbreaking to not finish" Primal Quest two years ago.

SPECIAL TO THE S-T/RICHARD W. RODRIGUEZ

two experts in navigation and one triathlete she describes as "stronger than an ox."

The race's organizers keep the route secret until right before the start. But the teams know to expect a total elevation change of 100,000 feet over the 10 days of racing. The challenges in Primal Quest range from cross-country running to mountain biking to freescale climbing.

While some crews will catnap in the transitions, or not sleep at all, Intrepid plans on using the two hours from 3-5 a.m. for sleeping along the trail. Sleep is a rare commodity, and two years ago, Dunkin

found herself falling asleep in a kayak.

"Last time, there were points when all four of us were asleep while paddling down the river," Dunkin said. "With this team, we've chosen not to stop in the transition tents, because we worry about staying too long. We're going to sleep along the trail and wake up with the sun. Hopefully it will trick our bodies into thinking we slept more."

The weather in Montana also calls for up to 10 feet of snow in the higher elevations. The risk of avalanches caused organizers to change the rules and allow GPS devices.

Training

How Kim Dunkin trains for Primal Quest:

Mountain biking: Practices in Sansom Park.

Running: Usually goes for two hours at a time on a treadmill with boards under it to increase the difficulty.

Stair climbing: Twice a week runs stadium stairs for several hours.

Free climbing: A ropes system in a backyard tree allows her to practice scaling up to 40 feet.

Note: You can track Dunkin's Team Intrepid at <http://www.ecoprimalquest.com/wp-primal/> or read the team blog at <http://team59.ecoprimalquest.com/>

But after some teams cried foul, Primal Quest changed the navigation rules to incur a time penalty every time the GPS is brought out. Intrepid doesn't plan on using GPS, but will lean on map-and-compass navigation.

And while the elements and navigation will be their own challenges, there also might be bears. Grizzly bears.

"We'll have a pepper spray, but I'm hoping we won't need to use it," Dunkin said.

Whatever happens along the trail, Dunkin's team isn't talking about just finishing but being one of the fastest across the line in Montana.

+