



## THE QUEBEC RAID

**One hundred of the world's most insanely fit athletes devote a sleepless week to extreme adventure, vying for the title of 2006 Raid World Champions in Adventure Racing.**

Story and Photos by **Jacqueline Windh**

**RICHARD USSHER IS BURSTING WITH ENERGY.** "I don't know what's wrong with me," he says with a silly grin as he jumps up and down on the sand. Richard, along with teammates Sari Anderson, Michael Tobin and Captain Mike Kloser, has just covered nearly 1,000 kilometres on foot, bike, kayak and canoe in just six days, sleeping a total of only 27 hours en route to winning the Raid World Cup Championships in Adventure Racing. But Richard can't stop jumping.

We're standing on the beach in front of the Grand Hotel Tadoussac, where the Saguenay Fjord opens into the St. Lawrence River. We're in the territory of whales—minke, finback, humpbacks, and the world's southernmost population of belugas. Inland, deer, bear and moose wander through rolling hills covered with forests of maple, birch, spruce and pine. Rushing rivers and countless tiny azure lakes are scattered over the landscape. It's early September, and over the last week we have watched the countryside transform day by day, from every shade of green to a brilliant patchwork of yellow, orange and red.

Adventure Racing (AR) is one of the fastest-growing sports on the continent, yet it still seems to fall short of the mainstream

media's radar, at least in North America. The Raid World Cup is one of the biggest international races of the year, and the competitors here are undoubtedly some of the most fit and conditioned athletes on the planet. They can hold their own against any of the top endurance runners, off-road mountain bikers or rough water paddlers, and at the same time they're experts in many technical disciplines such as navigation and rock-climbing. Even more important, they have the mental strength that's crucial to working together as a team in tough emotional conditions: sleep-deprived, hungry, in physical pain and often just plain scared.

This is the first time that the Raid World Cup has been held in North America. The Raid organizers, based in France, got the sport of AR started by organizing the first international AR event, the Raid Gauloises in New Zealand in 1989. They have selected Quebec's wild Saguenay/Lac St. Jean region for the 2006 challenge. Although the area does not boast the high altitudes of such previous Raid venues as the European Alps or Patagonian Andes, the rolling terrain here would still have racers rising and dropping a total of 15,000

metres over the week.

Richard is still bouncing uncontrollably, and looking out to sea. Little less than a week ago his Nike USA team, along with 25 of the top AR teams in the world, started the race on the margins of Lake Chibouguiche far west of here. They had qualified through a series of 36-hour "sprint" races in Western Australia, Idaho and France. (Yes, to these guys, a 250-kilometre race over two days is just a sprint. In the Idaho qualifier, for instance, a marathon-distance run through forest with a 2,000-metre elevation gain was just one of the events.)

The night before the championship race began, the local Montagnais people had treated us to a supper of roasted moose and beaver, and sung us to sleep with traditional songs. At 5 am, the teams lined up with their bikes at the start line, and they were off.

The course would take them on two long river descents by canoe, three sea-kayaking sections, first on Lake St. Jean by night, and then two separate sections on the spectacular cliff-lined fjord. The teams would also tackle seven different mountain bike routes, including a 130-

# For relief of today's tough muscle



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** French Team Sport 2000-LaFuma eventually placed seventh; Nike's Richard Ussher and Sari Anderson on the Ashuapmushuan River; One third of the competitors, including French team Ertips, were forced to abandon the race; Big support for the local team; Reigning 2005 champs Les Arcs Quechua on the 270m rappel.

kilometre passage through the Parc des Hautes Gorges. Raid organizer Sylvain Thuault described this section, towards the end of the race as “more like a stage from the Tour de France.” The five sections on foot are not hikes—that is far too slow for this gang!—but rather “adventure running,” which means navigating with map and compass while speeding through the forest. The highlight for many teams was a 270-metre rappel down the purply-grey slab of granite that forms the wall of Cape Trinity, on the southern bank of the Saguenay Fjord.

“Richard, what is wrong with you?” I just have to ask. His team finished over two hours ago and the second-place team, Wilsa Sport Helly Hansen from France, is already in. You’d think he would be in bed after such a race—or at least have his feet up and be enjoying a beer. But he is still bouncing.

“He’s waiting for Elina,” explains a teammate as two double kayaks come into view. Richard’s girlfriend Elina Maki Rautila is racing on Kiwi team Golite Timberland, and they’re on the final approach to take third place.

Richard waits for her team to cross the finish line, and then stands back and waits some more while they are greeted by the press. Then he moves in and gives her a big hug.

*Now he can rest.*

## LOCAL TEAM SHINES

Most of the teams competing for the Raid World Cup have been racing together for years, but this year there was one surprise. Hearing that the championship was to be held right in their own backyard, a bunch of local athletes put together a team and headed to Idaho for the qualifier. Although team Saguenay/Lac St. Jean was new, the athletes themselves were experienced, having raced many local adventure races and triathlons. Captain Jean-Arthur Tremblay is a champion mountain biker. The team placed 12th in Idaho—good enough to just qualify for the final.

In Quebec, the team, now racing under the name of Paramédic Saguenay, hoped to finish in the top half of the field. “We feel well prepared, and we know the terrain here,” Jean-Arthur said before the race. “And we’re definitely strong on the bike and on the water.”

They ended up doing better than that, placing 10th in the international field, racing against the world’s best. Well done, bravo! Team members: Captain Jean-Arthur Tremblay, Simon Côté, Audrey Tremblay, and Sébastien Lapointe!



### RAID WORLD CUP 2006 ([www.theraid.org](http://www.theraid.org))

Course length: 986 km  
 Total elevation gain: 15,000 m  
 Total teams entered: 26  
 Total teams finished: 17  
 Required sleep time on course: 27 hours  
 Winning team: Nike USA (5 days 8 hours)  
 Last team in: Revo-Lithuania (7 days 4 hours)  
 Total prize money: US\$180,000  
 First prize: \$50,000

**pain, one  is often enough.**