

# Outdoors: real-life adventures



## The Coastal Challenge

The ultimate physical and emotional challenge tests your will and spirit as well as your fitness *By Stefani Jackenthal*

**S**even days. 236 km. A race like no other, down the Pacific coastline of Costa Rica, covering jagged mountains, lush jungle, steep gravel roads, and uninhabited beaches. >> And for the 48 international racers—marathoners, adventure racers, and newbies from around the world—participating in the second annual Coastal Challenge was an experience they'll never forget. >> The adventure began at 10 a.m. on January 22, 2006. Under blazing sun, race director Tim

Holmstrom yells, "Go!" sending competitors off over thick, soft sand beside crashing waves. Local racers push the pace at the front, taking the lead, and Claire Johnson, a 29-year-old event coordinator from London, sticks with the pack. She later admits that, while she has "run a few marathons," she's "never done anything like this."

The first stage is 33.5 kilometers on beaches, asphalt, and gravel roads, eventually turning into a shoe-sucking muddy riverbed. "I sank in over my ankle and thought I was going to lose my shoe!" remembers Stacey Moller, 34, a national-level bodybuilder turned ultrarunner from Golden, Colo. "That was nothing compared to the steep, slippery jungle climb that followed."

Day two of the race—a grueling 47-kilometer route—starts at 5:45 a.m. Johnson leads the women to the breathtaking views at the top of the Filacostera mountain range, and she immediately hammers back down a twisty single-track descent to checkpoint one, where she'll refuel with fluids before hitting the dusty road. "I'm not big on energy bars, so I took some fruit and biscuits, and added extra salt to my water," notes Johnson about her hydration strategy. The day ends with a quad-pounding descent into the beach town of Dominicalito. "You don't get hills like that in London," Johnson admits, yet she still held on to the first women's position. "My quads are sorer than I ever recall."

On day three, the locals once again lead, but Johnson trails close behind. "I'm still shocked at where I am," she confesses, her preparation having been severely hindered

by a hamstring pull and a demanding work schedule. She did the majority of her training in the gym, running on the treadmill and taking Spinning classes. "The Spin classes really helped me on the hills," she notes, "but I'm worried they haven't given me enough endurance."

After a much welcome "rest day" on day four, renewed-but-worn racers prepare for day five's 50-kilometer stage—the longest of the race. As daylight breaks at 5:30 a.m., howler monkeys screech overhead as racers journey up long, sweeping hills and cherry-pick their way down twisty, cracked terrain.

Day six's 38 kilometers along the uninhabited beaches of Corcovado National Park are critical to the final outcome, as the last day is a quick 18-kilometer beach run. Johnson has a substantial lead over the next woman. "It's not over until the final whistle," she says before dashing off the start line drawn in the sand. In the end, Johnson arrives at the finish line just a half hour behind the top male finishers.

**Howler monkeys screech overhead as racers journey up sweeping hills and cherry-pick their way down twisty terrain.**

Just 22 runners complete the grueling course. Johnson's reward for the win: a \$5,000 check, plus the satisfaction of facing her challenge and coming out on top. "It wasn't an easy race," she remembers. "The heat was unbearable, and when we hit the monster climb in the jungle, I got the shivers and threw up. But it's like everything in life: You have to believe that if you keep putting one foot in front of the other, you'll eventually arrive."

For more information, check out [thecoastalchallenge.com](http://thecoastalchallenge.com).

## Foot Care

*Keeping feet healthy is a concern for multiday expedition racers and recreational runners alike. We asked footwear expert and author of Fixing Your Feet: Prevention and Treatments for Athletes John Vonhof how to keep your feet blister-free, no matter what kind of hell you're putting them through.*

**1) SHOES** A properly fitting shoe should have plenty of wiggle room in the toe and a snug-fitting heel. Vonhof suggests buying shoes one size larger than your street shoes with a thumb-width of space between the longest toe and the front of the shoe.

**2) SOCKS** Select a moisture-wicking synthetic or merino wool sock. Avoid cotton because it retains moisture that creates blisters. Try a few styles of socks—thick, thin, high- or low-collared—and decide which works best for you.

**3) SKIN & TOE PREPARATION** Buff calluses smooth and moisturize feet at night to keep them crack-free. Trim your toenails straight, short, and smooth around the edges to prevent ingrown nails—and get a pedicure every now and again.

**4) BLISTER PREVENTION** Before runs, apply a silicone lubricant like Bodyglide to toes, heels, and balls of feet to limit blister-causing friction between socks and skin. Remove socks after runs to allow your feet to breathe and dry.

**5) BLISTER TREATMENT** Vonhof recommends draining blisters by making two tiny V cuts with sanitized scissors. Don't remove the skin from the blister—it protects the raw skin underneath. Dress the area with breathable sports tape.

FROM LEFT: TIM HOLMSTROM; SERGIO PUCCI.

SERGIO PUCCI (5); TIM HOLMSTROM; STILLS: AARON CAMERON MUNTZ.

HERS GEAR

### RACING ESSENTIALS

**MONTRAIL CONTINENTAL DIVIDES**  
This sturdy trail shoe is designed for off-road runners keen on adventure and agility. \$105 @ [montrail.com](http://montrail.com)



**CAMELBAK CHARM HYDROBAK**  
This women's hydration pack is ergonomically designed to fit the curves of a woman's body. \$35 @ [camelbak.com](http://camelbak.com)



**SMARTWOOL RUNNING SOCKS**  
Sweat-absorbent yet odor-free, these running socks are made from 100% merino wool. \$11-14 @ [smartwool.com](http://smartwool.com)

