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SPORTS

STAFF PHOTO/ERIN RILEY

Fraser Pegg (from left), Brad Sterling, Mark Severn and Connie Pegg are a four-person adventure racing squad.

Adventure racing tests mind, body

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

Cliff Redford used to run marathons and described himself as a canoeing enthusiast.

More recently, though, the 28-year-old Markham resident had become bored with long-distance running and believed there were no canoeing competitions to test his skill.

All this changed when he was channel surfing one day and found a TV program on adventure racing. It included all his favourite outdoor activities and Mr. Redford became a fanatic.

Described by Mr. Redford as a "cross between orienteering and a wilderness triathlon", an adventure race can be as short as four hours or as long as 14 days. It is staged primarily in remote wilderness settings with co-ed teams of up to four people who must navigate their way — non-stop and in unison — from several checkpoints using various means of transportation.

Disciplines may include trekking (running and hiking), mountain biking, mountaineering (rappelling, ascending, fixed ropes), kayaking, canoeing, white-water rafting and navigation.

Originating in Europe and New Zealand during the early 1980s, adventure racing eventually found its way into North America in 1995. The first race in Canada was in 1996. Since then, it has become one of North America's fastest growing sports.

Annual growth rates for adventure racing average 275 per cent; there were 65 races worldwide in 1999, 340 races in 2000 and more than 500 in 2001, Mr. Redford said.

"My wife joked with me and said, 'Why not get into an eco-challenge (the adventure racing series that he watched on TV)?'" recalled Mr. Redford of the events leading up to his introduction to the sport.

After watching his first adventure race, Mr. Redford went in search of websites. He eventually found one called Raid the North, which stages a series of adventure races and accommodates newcomers by placing them on a local team doing events at which they're adept.

Making his adventure racing debut last year in Ottawa in a race called Outlast, Mr. Redford said the 24-hour event was unforgettable.

"There were only 13 teams. It was a small race. Physically, we had the strongest team and we had mental toughness.

"But we made one rookie mistake that cost us. We were lost for six hours in the middle of the night. We said, 'Forget the race, we're in trouble'," he recalled.

Although he was in an embarassing situation before eventually crossing the finish line, Mr. Redford said the experience was a rush and he now captains a Markham-based foursome called Frontrunners.

Mr. Redford isn't the only York Region resident who has found fulfillment in the sport.

Fraser Pegg, 31, and his wife, Connie, 25, were intrigued by adventure racing and jumped in to the sport by first volunteering as race marshalls in the Adventure

See TEAM, page 25.

Take a hike, region says

MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

From now on, you have no excuse.

Because no matter where you live in York Region, there is a trail nearby, complete with natural setting, where you can walk a kilometre or two.

Or maybe 10.

The free *Take A Hike* guide, released by the region today as part of its "greening strategy", will show you exactly where it is.

The handy booklet, a first-time collection of 32 recreational trails and 18 paths through the region's forest tracts, also tells you how long a trail is, its surface, activities you might try on it and where to park.

'Walking is growing in popularity, as well as interest in the natural environment.'

Take A Hike comes at a great time, according to Harold Sellers. He's the president of the Oak Ridges Trail Association and a representative of Hike Ontario, which contributed to the guide along with the region's nine municipalities, its two conservation authorities and Rouge Park.

"Walking is growing in popularity, as well as interest in the natural environment," said Mr. Sellers, who wrote the booklet's introduction and the trail user's code, common-sense tips for comfort while hiking.

"As regular hikers, we recognize it's a healthy activity."

He noted *Take A Hike* offers plenty for everyone, including children and seniors.

Except for the more strenuous parts of the Oak Ridges Trail, most of which the guide does not show in detail, there are few pathways in the region too hard or too long for most

See GUIDE, page 25.

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