

GOING TO EXTREMES

Michael Clark's (Almost) Excellent Adventure

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Team Helly Hansen-PrunESCO sea kayaking on the open ocean at Seno Otway into the Wickhand Fjord during the 2009 Wenger Patagonian Expedition Race. D700, AF-S VR Zoom-NIKKOR 70-200mm f/2.8G IF-ED; 1/1600 second at f/3.2, ISO 400, Matrix metering, manual exposure.

Early in the year, adventure photographer Michael Clark called to ask if we'd like to run some photos and a story about his coverage of the upcoming Wenger Patagonian Expedition Race, an endurance event that he called "the longest, hardest and most remote adventure race in the world."

The clincher: "I'll be putting some of your latest cameras into severe conditions (sideways rain, hail, sleet, snow) and will be in terrain that is rarely if ever traveled by human beings...terrain that is unmapped and uncharted down there at the end of the world as I cover racers who will be sea kayaking, mountain biking, trekking and climbing through a 600-plus kilometer course with no trails."

Sounded good to us.

Upon his return, Michael sent an e-mail: "Race was epic...close calls...six racers in

the hospital...everyone okay, but some were in danger of losing limbs, even life. One camera body and one lens took a swim with me in the ocean; they're toast. Hiked for three days through some of the densest forests I have ever seen. Rained every single day during the race... completely soaked was a fact of life...keep moving to stay warm was the motto."

Michael had gone to Patagonia with a D700, a D300 and a variety of NIKKORs: AF DX Fisheye-NIKKOR 10.5mm f/2.8G ED; AF NIKKOR 24mm f/2.8D; AF NIKKOR



Vanessa Guzman of Team Almas Patagonicas, ascending the fixed ropes above Lake Anibal Pinto. D700, AF-S Zoom-NIKKOR 17-35mm f/2.8D IF-ED; 1/800 second at f/6.3, ISO 400, Matrix metering, aperture priority.



Lina Augaitis of Team Buff, mountain biking during the second stage of the race. D700, AF-S Zoom-NIKKOR 17-35mm f/2.8D IF-ED, SB-800; 1/15 second at f/10, ISO 800, Matrix metering, manual exposure.

85mm f/1.4D IF; AF-S Zoom-NIKKOR 17-35mm f/2.8D IF-ED; AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED; AF-S VR Zoom-NIKKOR 70-200mm f/2.8G IF-ED; and AF-S VR NIKKOR 300mm f/2.8G IF-ED. The D700 and 24-70mm went into the sea and returned fit only for insurance claims.

Michael admits he took along "a ridiculous amount of equipment" that included but was not limited to MB-D10 Multi-Power Battery Pack grips for the cameras, an underwater housing bag, SB-800 and -900 Speedlights, a full Elinchrom Ranger battery-powered strobe setup in a Pelican case, a digital wallet, 70 gigs worth of memory cards, a laptop and hard drives. He used it all, shooting 8,000 images in ten days.

Every aspect of the race was a strength and endurance test for the racers; for the photographers and journalists covering the event the toughest going was the trekking. "That's when you're hiking with the racers, a pack on your back, through the rain. I was on a boat for the kayaking and in a Jeep for the mountain biking." For climbing...well, Michael, an experienced climber,



Nicola Macleod, Andrew Wilson and Mark Humphrey of Team Helly Hansen-PrunESCO portaging their sea kayaks across a deep river in a dense forest. D700, AF-S Zoom-NIKKOR 17-35mm f/2.8D IF-ED; 1/320 second at f/2.8, ISO 1600, Matrix metering, aperture priority.

says, "I could run circles around most of those guys." So, overall, even with the difficult trekking, he did just fine. Until...

"After the trekking, [the photographers] got on a fishing boat for a short hiatus until we got picked up to cover the end of the race." A Zodiac was to take them to shore, and as Michael was making his way along its side, his feet slipped off the rubber. "It was midnight and kind of cold; there was no way I could get back, so I swam about 30 feet to shore."

Covering the race meant making choices. "You take your chances, watching likely winners and trying to get shots of high-risk places. I kept my eye on one team in particular and got good shots of them, and they happened to win. You get to choose where to go each day, but shooting for the organizers, I needed balanced coverage. And sometimes it was hard to find people."

Especially if they get lost. "On the trekking section of the race a team got lost. They took shortcuts and got more lost. They ended up doing coast steering—swimming in the ocean around cliffs. They ran out of food and water, could barely

walk. They were two miles away from the finish but the cliffs made it impossible for them to get there. Their satellite phone batteries were dead. They fired flares, but there was no one to see them. The GPS probably didn't work because of high peaks, dense forest cover and few satellites. They finally got to a higher point of land and pushed the 911 button on their GPS locators. That sent an emergency signal that led to their rescue. They were helicoptered out, and several of them went to a hospital."

Michael says he's likely to photograph the event again. "Compared to some of things I shoot, it's pretty tame. Besides, it's not often I have an adventure while covering an adventure."

You'll see a collection of stunning adventure images at Michael's website, www.michaelclarkphoto.com, and this fall look for a new story about Michael's extreme photography at the Learn & Explore section of NikonUSA.com. You can check in right now at www.patagonianexpeditionrace.com to find out more about the Wenger Patagonian Expedition Race.