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Ultra fit



ANTHONY S.C. HAMPTON for Frontenac This Week

Derrick Spafford and Sara Montgomery recently competed in the Rock and Ice Ultra, a multi-day marathon based out of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Montgomery came first in the 3-day women's K-Rock event. For story, please see Page 69.

SPORTS

Yarker woman wins snowshoe marathon; Couple compete in Rock & Ice Ultra

ANTHONY S.C. HAMPTON
For Frontenac This Week

(YARKER) For many people, it can require serious motivation to get out for a jog, even on a warm, sunny summer's day. For Sara Montgomery and Derrick Spafford, that's a walk in the park.

That's because the couple recently returned from the 2009 Rock and Ice Ultra, a multi-day marathon that takes place annually near Yellowknife.

Montgomery, for whom this was the first trip to the event, placed first in the three-day, 135-kilometre K Rock Ultra.

"I feel like I was as well prepared as I could have been without having done it before. A lot of it depends on the conditions you have. You can only prepare so much and then it's up to mother nature," said Montgomery.

“I feel like I was as well prepared as I could have been without having done it before.”

Sara Montgomery

"I tried pretty hard and I expected I would finish. How it turned out in the stages, I was pretty lucky, but I think I got stronger as the race went on."

Luckily, this year she had favourable conditions, except for the very start of the race.

"That was almost like white out conditions. After that the weather was much better. We even had the wind at our backs."

For Spafford, who placed second in last year's K Rock Ultra, this year was a bit of a disappointment. Due to illness, he was forced to quit only a third through the six-day, 225-kilometre Diamond Ultra.

"I had to drop out on the second day. It was frustrating, but I got to see Sara race. But I feel I learned a lot."

For both Spafford and Montgomery, the race is, above all, a learning experience. The two said they learned about managing the

cold and about how their bodies reacted to the adverse conditions.

"For me, it was a lot of little things you need to figure out," said Montgomery. "It's so cold, everything freezes. You have to worry about your contact lenses freezing. Obviously, you have to drink a lot, but your water bottle freezes too."

Although the tundra through which the race is run is technically desert, both last year and this year there has been an unusually large amount of snow. According to Spafford, the snow last year, which was of a "sugary" consistency, was extremely hard to run on. Runners have the option of doing the race in

skis or a combination of snowshoes and running shoes -- the route Montgomery and Spafford chose to go.

"I was worried about the snow being as big a problem as last year.

We did have a few sections of that sugar snow, so I got to try it out. I only wore my shoes for about 45 minutes at the start of the race and 45 minutes at the end, the rest of the time I had to run in snowshoes."

Although the pair are always training, a race of the magnitude in which Spafford and Montgomery just took part requires a special effort.

"I really started training specifically for the race last fall. I bumped up my mileage in November. I did a lot of running to work on my stamina, and I trained with weighted backpacks and snowshoes on a lot."

In addition to the physical training, participants must assemble gear including food, emergency gear, clothes and extra water. More gear, including yet more food, cold weather camping gear and stoves are transported for the runners to the stage camps along the race route.

"Assembling the gear is a whole 'nother



Anthony S.C. Hampton for Frontenac This Week

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endurance event," Montgomery joked.

"Just getting enough calories into your body can be a challenge. I made a trip over to the cheese factory in Wilton for cheese curds so that we could have them as another source of calories during the race," said Spafford.

With a win behind her for Montgomery and the challenge of returning to the unfinished for Spafford, both are considering heading north again for the 2010 race.

"I would definitely like to go back. It's an expensive race to get to though," said Spafford, referring to both the steep price of airfare

to Yellowknife and the \$1,000 plus registration fee.

"Hopefully we can get some sponsorship too, that would make it easier to get up," said Spafford.

"It is hard to think of missing out on it," added Montgomery. "That's a pretty strong pull, but I'm not 100 per cent sure yet."

To learn more about the Rock and Ice Ultra, visit the race's website at www.rockandiceultra.com. To read Spafford and Montgomery's race blogs, visit www.healthandadventure.com.