



KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE

The Mount Taylor Winter Quadrathlon

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RICHARD GRAHAM

Sara Ballantyne approached the summit with a big lead, one that she never relinquished.



*"Keep your shoulder to the wheel and your eyes to the stars."
Race director Abe Pena,
in letter sent to event participants.*

Old Route 66 cuts through the heart of Grants, New Mexico, past boarded-up houses, stores and motels that attest to the town's current tough economic times. With a population of just 8,700, it's still a population of just 10,000 until seven or eight years ago. Grants was a booming uranium mining town.

Paddy Martinez, an Indian laborer and part-time prospector, discovered uranium near Grants in 1950. The ensuing mining rush almost doubled Grants' population, to 15,000 residents. Many of the miners had to sleep in pick-up truck camper shells set on blocks at the side of the highway when the influx of workers caught the town short of motel and hotel rooms. But by 1982, it became cheaper to import uranium from foreign countries, and the town came upon hard times.

Grants needed a way to get back on its feet economically. In 1984, Klaus Weber, ski team coach for the University of New Mexico, came up with the idea for a "quadathlon," a winter event featuring four events—cycling, running, skiing and snowshoeing. Weber dreamed up the race to promote nearby Mount Taylor as a winter ski area. Snowcapped and occasionally cloud-shrouded, the mountain is an extinct volcano just northeast of Grants, an hour's





Rick Crawford, wearing his "magic suit," was one of the race favorites.

shoes for cross-country skis, then peeled off layers of clothing as the sun's warm rays began to penetrate the shadows.

By the time the leaders had reached the third transition and their snowshoes, sweat was beading on their foreheads. As they struggled up the final two kilometers of constant incline in the first half of the race, the warm sun and exertion kept cold from being a problem. Lynn Lee made it to the top of Mount Taylor a good five minutes ahead of Rick Crawford. A white flag bearing the event's logo marked the turnaround at the summit, and as Lee circled the flag and headed back down, it seemed that he had the race well in hand. Pounding down the mountain, Lee took the transitions in stride, trading snowshoes for skis, then skis for running shoes, as he added to his lead.

At the final transition, volunteers stood waiting with his bike. After Lee headed back toward Grants to what looked like his second straight Quadrathlon win, five men reached their bikes before Rick Crawford. Once on the bike, however, Crawford began picking off the men ahead of him one by one. Crouched down low over his handlebars, his suit cutting the wind like a sharp blue knife, he began carving up Lee's lead. Moving from seventh to second within the first two and a half miles of the 13-mile bike leg, Crawford passed Lee with just.

"He passed me like I was standing still," Lee said later. "He was going like a madman." Crawford's time of 3:50:26 set a new course record, while Lee, who had won the 1988 event in 4:16:30, finished second in 3:52:29. Albuquerque's Peter Dinger took third.

Sara Ballantyne, in front for the women from the start, was never really pushed. With her closest challenger over 10 minutes back for most of the race, Ballantyne won easily in 4:20:13, smashing Lisa Muhich's 1988 record of 5:08:52. Kari Miller finished second in 4:33:48, with Brook Blackwelder crossing the line in third, 14 minutes later.

Local Grants athletes used the "perfect racing conditions" to show a lot of improvement. Julie Fjord, 36, cut her 1987 race time



(Above) Conditions were perfect for the start of the sixth annual Mount Taylor Winter Quadrathlon. (Bottom right) At 11,301 feet, Mount Taylor is the tallest mountain in Western New Mexico.

by 35 minutes, while 58-year-old Jody Olson (the oldest female soloist), cut over an hour off her '87 time, finishing in 7:10:39. Foreign students studying at the Armand Hammer World College in Las Vegas, New Mexico, also competed, giving the event an international flavor.

At the lively, laughter-filled awards ceremony, held the night of the race at the Cibola Convention Center in downtown Grants, Abe Pena, the 62-year-old race director (and former director of the Peace Corps in Central America), announced the awards. When the awards occasionally stalled, as such ceremonies often do, Pena amused the audience with stories and jokes.

For their first-place finishes, Rick Crawford and Sara Ballantyne each won \$1,000 and a beautiful silver platter. As top soloist, Crawford also received the Bill Reinos Memorial Cup, named for the winner of the first two quadrathlons who was hit by a truck and killed while roller skiing on an Albuquerque street in 1985.

"The whole town embraced this race," Crawford said as he picked up his prizes, "It's fantastic!" Telling the gathering that the quadrathlon would be a natural for national television coverage, Crawford added, "but it's great the way it is." As they accepted their prizes, many of the award winners took the opportunity to

praise the race's top-notch organization.

Sky City lies about 20-miles southeast of Grants. The oldest continuously inhabited settlement in the U.S., the Acoma Indian pueblo has been occupied since 600 A.D. and has survived wanderlust, Spanish conquistadors, and the encroachment of the modern world. Sitting on a 400-foot mesa, an ideal site for defense against the strength and will of a community of people.

Some of Sky City's resourcefulness and strength must have rubbed off on Grants, a town that truly keeps its shoulders to the wheel and its eyes to the stars. Ellen MacAndrew-Caplan, chief fundraiser for the quadrathlon, calls her race "gutsy, gritty, All-

Mt. Taylor Winter Quadrathlon

*Grants, New Mexico
February 18, 1989*

80k bike, 16k run, 8k xc ski, 4k snowshoe

Top Ten Men		Time
1	Rick Crawford	3:50:26
2	Lynn Lee	3:57:09
3	Peter Drager	3:54:41
4	Tom Kirschensteiner	3:58:24
5	Shane Cleveland	3:51:20
6	Chris Dent	4:02:50
7	Kent Bostick	4:04:22
8	Bryan Miller	4:02:21
9	Hal Walter	4:08:01
10	Tom Spiegel	4:08:43
Top Ten Women		Time
1	Sara Ballantyne	4:20:13
2	Kari Miller	4:37:48
3	Brook Blackwelder	4:48:22
4	Claudia Treadwell	4:59:10
5	Julie Fjord Deife	5:17:47
6	Kandra Lely	5:19:55
7	Carol Davis	5:27:28
8	Linda Smith	5:28:25
9	Petra Villinger	6:07:45
10	Jody Olson	7:10:39
Men (40+)		Time
1	James Schneider	4:24:29
2	Gordon Eatman	4:34:29
3	Harry Little	4:43:38
4	Lance Ruddlegh	4:59:08
5	William Wabrer	6:10:02
Women (40+)		Time
1	Carol Davis	5:27:28
2	Jody Olson	7:10:39

American," and her words could just as easily describe Grants. As the premier event in a town that refuses to die, the Mount Taylor Quadrathlon helps keep Grants' dream of economic survival alive. *Next year's event will take place on February 17, 1990. Those interested in competing can contact: Mount Taylor Winter Quadrathlon, P.O. Box 85, Grants, New Mexico, 87020, (505) 285-6969.* ▲

