

## **IRONMAN COEUR D'ALENE 2008**

**By Mary Knott**

I arrived home from CDA last night after a whirlwind week. We landed in Spokane on Wednesday last week. After checking into our hotel, we threw on our running shoes and headed into CDA. We ran a little on the marathon course and then after a bite to eat at the brewery, complete with Huckleberry Ale, we drove the run and bike course. The run course didn't look too bad. There was about 0.4 mile at mile 7 and mile 19 that was a 6% incline, otherwise the course was fairly flat. The bike course, however, was much more intimidating. The bike course was also 2 loops, and each loop had about 20 miles of hills. So we got a good look at what we were going to be up against come Sunday. On Thursday morning we went through registration and went for a swim in the lake followed by an hour ride on the course. The scenery was amazing! I had no idea that Idaho was so beautiful. The lake was surrounded by forested hills. The air was clean and cool. Such a change from the little sandbox in hell that I call home. Friday morning we hopped in the lake for another swim and went for a short run followed by breakfast with the Skirts. It was so much fun hanging out with them! And the huckleberry pancakes weren't bad either! Saturday we checked in our bikes and gear bags and tried to put our feet up and rest for a while. We spent the afternoon watching movies in our hotel room and eating pizza.

Race day! We woke up early on Sunday morning to be down at the venue by 5 am. I pumped my bike tires and dropped off my special needs bag for the bike and run. I did a quick run through of the transition area and then started to get my stuff together for the start. It's amazing how quickly the time goes by! Before long we were beachside watching the professionals start their race. 30 minutes later we were lined up along the shore waiting for the gun to go off. I was lined up front row in the center. No room for error. Immediately there are 2000 bodies in the water, arms flailing, feet kicking. A couple hundred yards in I took in a bunch of water when I turned my head to breathe. I paused for just a second to cough and try to catch my breath. I could feel the panic starting to rise. But I couldn't go anywhere. I was surrounded by fast and furious swimmers on all sides. I had to swim through it. I worked through it and by the time I got to the first turn I had caught my breath and had some more space in the water as things were starting to thin out a bit. I exited the water in 1 hour 4 minutes (and some seconds) and flew through the transition area. The volunteer in the women's change tent helped me get my bike shoes, jersey and helmet on. I sprayed on some sunscreen and took off. I grabbed Trixie and off we went.

The first loop of the bike (first 56 miles) I tried to take it relatively easy because I knew the hills would hurt on the second loop. I kept thinking 'how lucky am I to be able to race here' - it was so beautiful. The volunteers at the aid stations were awesome and there were tons of spectators all over the course. Normally I'm a chicken when it comes to down hills. I can power up hills all day but I hate to descend so I told myself that I wasn't going to brake on the downhills because then I would have to work harder up the next. I literally was talking to myself, out loud, as I approached one descent which was particularly steep, trying to psych myself up. I dropped into my biggest gear, tucked low, and held on tight. At the bottom of the hill I glanced at my speedometer, it read 40 mph. Fastest I've ever clocked. On the second loop of the bike I felt a little stronger even though my time was probably slower. I finished the bike in 6 hours 37 minutes, just 20 minutes slower than my Arizona time from 10 weeks ago, which was awesome considering Coeur d'Alene is a much harder course. Again I flew through transition, swapping my tri shorts for my Race Belt Skirt. I took off on the marathon feeling great.

I hit the first aid station and ate a few cookies and some water. I was starving! That boosted my energy levels and I kept a great pace through the first 13 miles. By the second loop my muscles were feeling the fatigue and pain from the previous 126 miles. I kept running although my pace was significantly slower. I walked through aid stations so I could eat and drink. I saw several of my friends on the course and tried to shout out words of encouragement. I absorbed the energy from the spectators and volunteers. I tried my best to keep a smile on my face, and I think I was successful most of the time. The last 4 miles I kinda zoned out and just focused on getting it done. With a mile to go, I could hear the finish line announcer. I knew I was getting close. Everyone was shouting 'you're almost there!' and I started to get a little choked up. Ironman is a long day. You feel everything out there. Gratitude for being healthy and capable of competing. Fear that something will happen (bike crash, gastrointestinal shutdown, failure to make a cutoff) that will end your race prematurely. Frustration at aches and pains that creep up and slow you down. Pride in your accomplishment. Joy and elation when you are finished and you look back over the long road. When I turned the corner and saw the finish line...there are no words. I couldn't help but smile and laugh. I felt like I was sprinting, though I was probably only running a 10 minute pace at that point. I threw my hands in the air and listened as the voice of Ironman (Mike Reily) announced that I was an Ironman. I had done it. I survived the day. I survived another challenge.

The volunteer at the finish line took my arm, asked my how I was doing and led me through to get my medal, T shirt, hat and water. Dan was waiting for me with a hug and my morning clothes bag so I could put some dry clothes on. We went to the food tent and had some pizza and soda. After eating and resting for a few minutes we collected our bikes and dropped them off at TriBike Transport and took our gear bags to the car. We went to the host hotel to shower and change and then we walked back to the finish line to watch. It is so inspiring to watch the athletes coming through the finish line. Some are dancing and high-fiving spectators, some are completely drained and it's all they can do to just get across the line. We all come to Ironman with the same challenge-to finish an endurance event. We all face a set of challenges on race day and can only work to persevere. We all hope to leave with a finisher's medal, pride, and a sense of accomplishment. As a friend of mine said: Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain. Each time I approach Ironman, I learn a little more about myself and what I am capable of, both physically and mentally. I believe that Ironman prepares me for the other challenges I'll face in life. I know that the going will get tough, but I can hang in there and I can dance through it, and when the race is over, I'm a stronger person.