

The Coyote Journey
2002 Furnace Creek 508



The Coyote Journey

by Ray Barnes

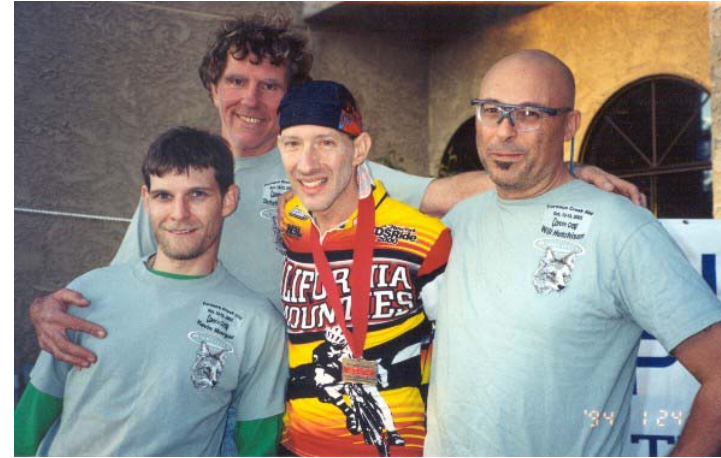


*A Rookie's Success Story
in the 2002 Furnace Creek 508 Bicycle Race*

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*Anticipation at the Starting Line
L-R: Christian, Kevin, Coyote, Will*



*Celebrating the Finish Line
L-R: Kevin, Christian, Coyote, Will*



The trusty crew with the trusty van



Victory!

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by Ray Barnes

October 2002

This booklet was written to forever remember the experience of the 2002 Furnace Creek 508 Bicycle Race from the rider "Coyote" point of view. It is intended to spark memory as well as provide the reader with some feeling of the experience of being there. For that reason, please excuse some portions of the story which may seem unusual, extreme, or unsafe. This is simply the reality of the intensity of this type of event.

The Coyote dedicates this booklet to the wonderful people who sent their sponsorship and support before, during and after this race. The tremendous positive energy certainly helped propel the Coyote Team, especially during those final hours.

As a result of the ride, a total of over \$3000 was raised for L.A. Shanti.

Thank you!



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Pre-Race Training and Motivation

There I was, hanging suspended in mid-air, or so it seemed. Even though it was dark outside, everything was crystal clear. I knew that I was upside-down, in the air. I could see my bicycle still stuck standing in the 2-foot high pile of sand in the middle of the road. Time had slowed down. I knew I was no longer connected to my bike. I knew I had flown over my handlebars. I knew I was traveling at about 20 mph. I knew I would hit the ground. I also remember saying to myself: “my life is about to change – again.”

Just 20 minutes earlier, at dusk, I had set off on a 60-mile evening training ride, and I was about 5 miles into it. I was in training for the Furnace Creek 508, a personal challenge ultra bike race, to be held Oct. 12-13, 2002. I ride a lot, even at dark, and I have special lighting and all the gear. I knew what I was doing, but I had let my mind wander for a moment to look at a house for sale and so I wasn't focused on the road in front of me the way I should have been. I assumed that the road ahead was clear, but it wasn't.

What did I lack at that critical point that would have prevented this accident? Clarity and focus. For that brief time, I was not focused on the important task of seeing what was ahead. As a result, I was not aware of my surroundings. Yes, no one is perfect, but perhaps if I had a little help at the time, I would have avoided that sand pile, and would not have been recovering from a bruised head, cracked helmet, road rash on my face and shoulders, intensely cut and sore lips, and bruised knees. It was a lesson learned the hard way. Sometimes we have to learn that way. Other times, it would be nice to have

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some help in an environment where we are safe and we can practice techniques to avoid “the big falls” or to learn how to go on in life after we have our own life-changing event.

There is one organization uniquely involved in this kind of help, and at the point when I was in the air suspended, I realized that I wanted to train and ride the Furnace Creek 508 with even more of a purpose than just personal fulfillment. This ride is a tremendous personal challenge, which would push my personal limits and challenge me in ways I would not know until I actually did the ride. The thought of having support through the love and caring of my friends helping to support LA Shanti, and seeing the LA Shanti symbol on my crew van, was going to be a very important addition to this challenging ride. L.A. Shanti is a volunteer-driven not for profit organization, dedicated to providing support for individuals of diverse communities affected by HIV disease and committed to supporting others with life threatening illnesses. I have recently joined with LA Shanti as a volunteer group facilitator, and their training program exposed me to an in-depth soul search as well as the diversity and genuineness of their small staff and a portion of their huge group of volunteers.

This was why I rode the Furnace Creek 508 and here is my story.

I am the Coyote.

Day 1, Sat Morning: The Fun Begins

There was a lot of excitement 7:00 am at the start of the race; everything seemed great. I had slept well the night before. Usually, I can't sleep before a big event, but this time, I told myself I just had to sleep if I was going to be up for nearly 2 days. The night before, I wrapped my toes in gauze tape as usual; I also covered my foot calluses in Moleskin Plus, as usual.

I was looking forward to a photo op with my crew in the Coyote T-Shirts I had supplied for them, but in the sleepiness of the morning, they had forgotten to wear them. They ran back to the van and put them on. What a great crew already!

One of my crew members, Kevin, got really caught up in the excitement and proclaimed that he wanted to do this next year and tried to get another crew member, Christian, to do it with him. Christian said “no way” and I said to Kevin that maybe he should wait until the end of the race to make a decision like this. Kevin has yet to do his first double century, but that will soon change. Before I say anything more, I must once again thank my crew. They were all rookies too and it took a while for them to develop a strategy, but once they did, they were awesome. There were three of them, and the plan was for one of them to sleep while the other two were driver, navigator, and/or nutritionist. I never got involved in who was doing what; I decided whatever went on in the van was not my business. I know that none of them really ever slept, and so they had problems caused by sleep deprivation just like I did.

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Without the crew's concern, support, and judicious prodding, Coyote would never have made it to the finish line in time. Christian Moser, Will Hutchison, and Kevin Morgan, you are my heroes. To any rookie reading this, remember that, of course, your training is important, but without the right crew, it simply isn't possible. Get the best crew you can! Make sure they know what they are doing and that they get along with each other, and that they are as devoted as you are to finishing. My crew was, and it made the difference for me.

The first day progressed normally with the usual diet of water, 1 bottle of Sustained Energy about every 2 hours, and 2 Solid Protein bars about every 4 hours, with supplements every hour: 2-4 Endurolytes, 2 Anti-Fatigue Caps, 1 Race cap, 2 Enduro Caps, my meds when I need them every 12 hrs, vitamins every 12 hrs and 800 mg Naproxyn for anti-inflammatory and 800 mg Motrin for pain. (I loaded on the Naproxyn and Motrin for 3 days before the event). This was working well. It had been hot but not unusually so, temp in the mid 80's and mostly overcast. There were headwinds in the hills but by mile 100, I thought I was ahead of schedule, but actually I was right about exactly on schedule. I was riding at my training speed, which if I kept on schedule would put me at the finish line at approx. 42-43 hrs. That was my plan.

There are 10 major climbs in the Furnace Creek 508. A climb is usually at least 10 miles long and several thousand feet in elevation. These 10 climbs comprise about half of the 35,000 ft total elevation of this course. So far, Climb #1, San Francisquito Canyon and Climb #2, the Mojave climb, were fun. I rode at my own pace, and really enjoyed the fact that as I passed other crew vans waiting for their riders, they waved and

clapped. Coyote was beginning to think that this was going to be a great race! The crew took pictures of me with windmills in the background. The only problem I was having so far, which I expressed to the crew, was a feeling of loneliness because I thought they were getting too far ahead of me on the leapfrogs. Our walkie-talkies were supposed to have a 5-mile range, but it seemed more like 2 or 3. I kept trying to contact them between stops and I could not get them on the radio until I was practically on top of the van. Then, it was too late to give them preparation information. Our major stops were every 4 hours. At that time, I would sit in a chair, take off my cycling shoes, and eat while they swapped out my Camelback bladder (water), Sustained Energy bottle, and supplements. The plan was that they would set a timer for 12 minutes at the stop, and when it rang, I would have 3 minutes to get my shoes back on and back onto the bike.

We had never practiced our pit-stop routine during our training sessions, which later turned out to be too bad. Not as bad as rider "Coatimundi", whose only crew was his patient wife. I had been casually riding with him this summer on the Tour of Two Forests double-century ride, told him that I was entered into the FC508, and he said that he'd like to do it too. I was happy to see him on the route. He is a stronger rider than I, but I got a bit concerned when I saw him lag behind me at the top of the Johannesburg climb (#3) due to leg cramps. He later dropped out. He was hoping to find another crewmember to help out his wife, but I could not spare one. He was good to me and offered his Sport Slick though. I never used it but I did start a regimen of wiping my rear with antibacterial wipes at each 4 hours to stop bacterial buildup (and hopefully large bruises). Five weeks prior, I had ridden 400 miles and had the

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largest bruises I had ever seen. I was then told this was caused by bacteria buildup, but I didn't know what to do about it. Now I know. The wipes seemed to have worked – by the end of the race (and a few days later), my bruises were minimal. So I will get some Sport Slick for the future. I also used ButtR every 4 hours.

In my training, I had ridden or driven the first 380 miles of the route, to Baker, so the terrain looked familiar. The Jo'Berg climb at mile 110 seemed a lot longer and harder than it did in my training. This was probably because, at this point, I was not consuming enough food. My crew politely reminded me that I had told them before to track my consumption and let me know if I slack off. They told me, and I assured them that I would start eating more. Actually, I was starting to feel nauseous.



Day 1, Sat Evening: The Wild Ride

After the sun goes down and after the Panamint Valley climb (mile 160, climb #4), I hit a lot of headwinds and I take a long time just to get to the start of the Townes Pass run. Coyote is very slow at this point. My crew points out again that I told them to remind me if I am not consuming enough and they look at my Sustained energy bottle still half full and my 1.5 energy bars remaining out of the 2 that I had and tell me that I am not eating enough. I tell them OK I will start eating more now. But my favorite energy bar, Solid Protein, is no longer tasting good. My favorite flavor is disgusting to me and when I bite into any bar I chew and chew but I cannot swallow because I feel that I will barf if I do. I eat a few slices of orange and a half a banana and continue. I am trying to drink more Sustained Energy because at least that does not make me sick. But I keep forgetting about it as I am riding. There is a headwind and I am going much slower than I should be. I tell the crew I am in my mid-day slump period. I've been riding for "only" about 15 hours now. This is still within my usual double century riding time.

On this stretch and the one before it is where most of the relay teams caught up with us. It was fun to see the energy as they passed us, with the van/truck full of people and the excitement of it all. Every team member that passed me said "You're doing great, I'm on a team" so that I didn't feel so bad as I slumbered along. It was a nice feeling. The relay teams category consists of teams of 2 or 4 riders, who start 3-5 hours later than the solo riders like myself. Each team rider just rides a short time then trades off with the next rider. This way, they really burn up the course. They go strictly for speed and the

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competition is fierce in some cases. We had one situation where two teams passed us at the same time and with the riders and all the vehicles it was a bit tense. There was obviously a lot of competition between those teams.

I finally get to Townes Pass and I had been looking forward to this so I am at least ready for it. Townes Pass is the steepest hill of the race. It is 10 miles long and has a 12-15% grade. I attacked Townes Pass (climb #5) pretty much like I expected to because I had already trained on it before. We had switched bikes to the triple-ring earlier so I was ready to go. It took about 2 hours to go the 10 miles to the top, which was OK with me because that's what I had in my budget anyway. I didn't want to burn out on this hill. It was at mile 200 and there was still plenty of the course remaining. The crew told me to eat, but I said when I am pushing like this on the hill, I can't, but that I would eat at the top of Towne's Pass. I am also not drinking much water anymore. My only mission is to keep going. I could not consume anything.

When I got to the top of Townes Pass though, I wanted to listen for echoes and take my time up there. I don't know how much time we spent but it was too much. However, I was excited to attack the 19-mile downhill, which I'd been looking forward to. We put on the good lights and I took off. The idea was that they would follow me in the van and honk when 3 miles was traveled. This would signify the end of the tight curvy part, so that I could take off down the hill. Well, I never heard the honk and eventually I caught up with another rider who was braking down the hill; I passed his chase vehicle and him and then another car came from the other direction so my chase van could not pass right away. I took off down that hill at full

speed. Then I realized that I felt a little shaky. I don't know if it was the bike, or me, but suddenly the front end started vibrating. I knew I was going fast, so I tried to slow a bit by easing the brakes. When I did this, the vibrating got even worse. I suddenly thought that it was going to just go out of control and throw me, so I started to think about the right way to roll. Just then, I decided that I did not want to roll since I was probably going close to 50 mph, so I decided that I was going to hold on tight and somehow recover. Which is what happened. I gingerly touched the brakes over and over again until the bike stopped oscillating. I am not sure if it was the braking or just perhaps a less steep part of the hill, but anyway it stopped and I continued on down the hill. Just then, I saw the van lights behind me. I wondered: Did they see what just happened? Apparently not, as I found out later. They were concentrating on taking those curves and staying behind me without running over me. Even though I had gone through this, I was still determined to go down this 19-mile hill as fast as possible, so I held on and pulled in for aerodynamics and continued. Usually, on these types of stretches, I put both feet at equal heights on the pedals and tuck my legs in. I tried to do this, but then my feet started jumping up and down, similar to the way the handlebars had vibrated side-to-side. I began to wonder if it was me or the bike that had caused the problem. So, I had to ride with one leg straight down at all times because my muscles could not control themselves enough at an intermediate position. I couldn't decide whether my legs were shaking from the aftermath of the steep climb, or the aftermath of the near crash. I'll never know that answer. I checked my bike computer later and my peak speed was 47 mph. Not bad for a night ride! I consider that the most exciting ride I'd ever been on. Magic Mountain could never beat this!

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After this was about 80 miles over relatively flat and rolling landscape, and there was a possibility of headwinds. This was through Death Valley's Stovepipe Wells, Furnace Creek, and eventually Badwater. There was not too much headwind, but I was still not eating much, so my forward progress was really getting slow. My crew kept telling me to eat but aside from that, I don't remember much about this stretch. Finally at about 3 am, I had a Red Bull and it woke me up until morning. I think the entire night, Coyote pedaled just enough to keep the bike going and that was about it.



Day 2, Sun. Morning: Badwater and Bad Food

When the sun started to come up, I felt a whole lot better. I'd been riding for 24 hours at this point. I decided that maybe I needed to stop and do a BM so the Badwater rest area was a good choice for this. I knew where it was from having driven it, but it seemed to take forever to get around the lakebed and to the park. When we did, it was 6:45 am. It was daylight and I was worried about whether I still had to keep my headlight on because the rules said 6PM to 7AM. It didn't matter because we did not leave that pit stop until about 7:30. I decided to get all the salt and sunscreen off my face and body, change socks, jerseys, eat, and change bikes. Kevin kept reminding us that we had to get out of there. It was good that he did, since we all were feeling a bit slow, I think.

When we left the Badwater stop, I had fresh sunscreen on, and was clean and refreshed. That was a good thing. I was also starting to eat again. I decided that since I usually have oatmeal in the morning at home that an Oatmeal Raisin Energy bar and a Quaker Oats Fruit bar would be a familiar "breakfast" for me. Actually, it was. I usually don't like these bars but the Quaker bars were easy going down and I got "credit" for eating a whole bar, which made me feel good. But I knew I was cheating and I did get caught when Christian said, "Just how many calories are in these things anyway", and they are about half of the calories of the energy bars. But I also remember mumblings, I think from Kevin, to just get me to eat anything and at least I was eating. I don't know. I was only half there mentally. Suddenly my mission became to avoid the crew for a while because they kept bugging me to eat. I just wanted to jump on my bike and keep riding so that I could make

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progress. I felt like nothing was going to stay down that I ate anyway, and I could see that hot sun coming up and ready to pound on me as soon as it cleared the neighboring hills. There was still a long flat section to go and I was in the shade temporarily. This area is totally desolate with only rocks and sand around; there are no trees, no bushes, and nothing but rocks. I knew those rocks were going to get hot soon!

I was riding and secretly trying to plot how I could throw food away so that the crew would think that I really did eat it. I knew that wasn't really going to help me but I just wanted them to leave me alone! (I had told them in our pre-ride meetings that this might happen and that they should be aware of it and make me eat anyway). They were very nice about it at first. They said, "Ray, sorry to mention this, but you reminded us before to tell you if you were not consuming enough, and well, you're not". My reply would be "OK, thanks for telling me, I will start eating more real soon". I wish I had been able to think about something besides food at that point, because I would have realized how far behind I was. We were at mile 270. Per my plan, I expected to be just starting up Jubilee Pass by daybreak, but I was about 30 miles behind my plan at this point.

Eventually, I got to Jubilee/Salsberry Passes (Climb #6) and slumbered up them slowly. It was hot. As the day went on, my crew followed directly behind me with music, I started liking Sustained Energy with Orange Hammer Gel in it, and I liked Power Bars now. It was 95 degrees out and I was also focused on drinking a lot of water and taking 4 Endurolytes an hour. I remember seeing feet sticking out of the side of the van and wondering how they could stand the heat. Guess they wanted

some fresh air. I remember passing a crew van (Mastodon), whom I had been leap-frogging throughout the race, and my van's music was playing something about being "Crazy". As I passed them feeling good, I shouted "I must be crazy – why else would I be here!" They laughed and waved. At the top of the Pass, I was enjoying that nice downhill and they passed me in their van and with the megaphone said, "Hey, it's the crazy guy – have a great day!" Something like that. They actually followed me for a bit saying things, but I was going downhill in the 30 mph range and I could not look away from the road at that point. I was too hot and weak. But it was a nice change. Then they sped away. I later saw that Mastodon dropped out due to a sore knee. I wondered what happened. Coyote had been on this journey for about 30 hours now.

We got to Shoshone uneventfully, and I was feeling a little bit better. My crew stopped for gas at the Time Station and I used the nice clean restroom there behind the Post Office. It seemed like some of my crew wanted to hang around and talk to people. I didn't care; I just took off on my bike. But it was hot and I didn't realize that I was getting back in to my mid-day slump again. On the way up the Ibex Pass (climb #7), I was able to get some good speed. There was a slight tailwind and it pepped me up. But I also felt really hot. I asked the crew to mix me a "super cold" Sustained Energy. This consisted of a full water bottle of ice, half serving of SE, and half bottle of water. That way, the SE stayed cold until I could finish it. I hate warm SE. I downed the first one pretty fast, and then asked for another, but they said they needed to get more ice and had to go back to Shoshone. I got furious over this because I wondered what they did all the time they were there earlier. Anyway, by the time they caught up to me, I was at the top of

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the Pass. They were concerned that I was getting heat exhaustion, by my attitude, and I said I was OK, but I knew I was close. I asked them to get the chemical cold packs and put one in my jersey just at my shoulders, under my Camelback, and one in the rear of my shorts. Wow, did that feel good! I took off! This lasted about 30 minutes. I decided it was too expensive to waste these chemical cold packs, so asked just for double bagged ice to do the same thing. They did that and it was glorious too. All the way into Baker they gave me super-cold Sustained Energy's and new ice bags as soon as they had melted, which was about every 30 minutes.



Day 2, Sun. Evening: The Creatures in the Dark

The ice bags and cold SE worked well for the long stretch into Baker. The whole race this far, I was really looking forward to a grilled cheese sandwich from the Mad Greek in Baker, at mile 380, but it was about 5:00 pm and it looked after we passed Shoshone that we would not get to Baker by 6:00. This would mean that I'd have to wait with the van and I didn't want to do that (after 6:00 PM the van must follow the cyclist). So I really started pushing. This road had a slight tailwind so I was in the 18-25 mph range but there was almost no shoulder, big semi trucks and campers on this road going 80 mph. Also when two vehicles came in opposite directions, the vehicle on my side would just snub me over. Since I'd been used to riding on desolate roads for about 33 hours now, all this traffic really irritated me. And I didn't realize that I was starting to get heat exhaustion. At this point, my crew leapfrogged me, which made me mad because I wanted them to follow me. I did not feel safe on this road because I was hot and tired, I was trying to really push, and I felt that I couldn't push if I was always looking for traffic in my helmet mirror while pedaling and drinking Sustained Energy. I thought I was really coming back.

There was a point of contention here between the Coyote and the crew when I yelled at them to stop opening the rear of the van to get stuff out and just put stuff up front where it was available and follow me. They instead got the stuff, passed me and stopped to hand it to me, which made me really mad. I said, "Just get in that van and follow me now". Which they did. I think they were all mad at me, especially because they had been repacking the van over and over and every time I would ask for something new that seemed to be at the bottom of the

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pile. One suggestion they later made for the future would be to have all boxes the same size, so that they were easier to reconfigure. They really liked the fact that all boxes were labeled on all sides so they were easy to find. Anyway, about the van following me on that road, later I realized that they probably hated that because these cars were flying by at 80 mph and they probably did not feel safe crawling behind me either. But I sure felt safe with them there, and able to concentrate only on riding. I checked my heart monitor and even though I was really pushing, my heartbeats were around 105. I think it was the ice. All I was thinking at that point was how the van had been following directly behind me all day, and now they weren't, and on this busy stretch of road I really felt like I needed that security.

When I arrived at the time station in Baker I remember telling the race official that I wanted to strangle my crew (oops). He said that this was between my crew and myself. They later made the difference in the race for me. Glad I didn't tell them how I felt at that time. In fact, I apologized for yelling and tried to explain that I felt unsafe out there and that I really wanted them with me. They also said that they realized I was probably hot and tired and they told me later that they had actually gotten mad, but then they started to think about what it'd be like for them if they were in my shoes so they decided that maybe they should try to be nice to me.

We got to Baker/Mad Greek at 5:30, which made me happy, so I could continue on and they could get my grilled cheese and their food at Mad Greek and then meet me up the road. I told them that I would ride until 6 PM and then if they hadn't caught up with me I would stop where I was and wait. It was

illegal in the race to ride even an inch between the hours of 6 pm and 7 am without the support vehicle behind you. As it turned out, I stopped a little early because I was tired and hot. This was Climb #8, the 20-mile long "Kelso" hill out of Baker, which has only a 2.4% avg grade, and I hadn't worried about it in my planning. However, when I got on the road, there were good headwinds and the road was in bad shape. This frustrated me. When the van got to me, all I could eat was one quarter of the grilled cheese and even that made me want to barf. So I slowly climbed up this hill, drinking Sustained Energy and hoping that the wind would end.

Here I was passed by PoleCat, which surprised me, as he seemed to effortlessly glide by. He told me "Don't give up" as he passed. I hadn't planned on it, but I did need to hear some nice words though and it made me think about what I must have looked like, struggling and mindless out there.

It seemed to take 4 hours for me to reach the top; I am not sure. All I know is that I thought that this would be the "easier" part of the ride, and it wasn't. The road was really rough, the headwind was bad, and I was crabby and tired. When I finally reached the top, I thought I'd have a gloriously long downhill but it seemed way too short and also had some rollers that annoyed me.

The next hill (Climb #9 – Granite Mtn) was about 12 miles long, and by this time the road surface was looking like something from the Martian landscape. The road was unevenly paved, in layers, and with the van lights shining on it from behind me, looked even worse than it was. I thought that there

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were huge potholes and ruts, some sort of weird filler material to fix holes that looked like carpet pieces glued to the street sometimes, and other times looked like pieces of cactus pressed into the tar. I couldn't imagine even cars using these roads, but a lot of them did pass us very fast during the night.

Interestingly enough though, whenever we were stopped for a break, if a car/truck came by, every single one stopped and asked us if we needed help. It was surprising, considering we were all from LA and no one would do this there. We also wondered just where these people were going anyway, there was nothing anywhere. Nothing. Just sand. Weird plants. Dead plants that looked like animal carcasses. Piles of rocks along the road that looked to me like arranged gardens of skulls. OK, so I was starting to hallucinate. I told my crew what I was seeing and they just said OK and that they did not see what I was talking about. Then I got worried about the sounds I was hearing. Some sort of animal noise nearby. Will said it was a Burrowing Owl. I didn't believe him. I was having a very hard time focusing. Besides the bad road with these weird patches, there were lots of rocks on it too. It all looked very surreal in the car lights. I just kept thinking that I was going to get a flat and then we'd all be out there and get attacked by these desert animals. Funny though, whenever we did actually stop, I did not feel unsafe. I would stop, pee, they would try to get me to eat, and I would take my supplements and a tiny bit of food and continue. I remember having a really hard time just lifting my foot to click in the pedal and then kickoff to get going. But Coyote was not going to stop. By the way, I later drove these roads in the daylight, and I must admit, it was hard to find the objects that I had seen that night. This is a testament to how

creative the mind can get after many hours of riding and a second night of sleep deprivation!

After a lot of swerving and maneuvering on Granite Mtn, my crew was convinced I was out of it. They were also sleep deprived so they were having trouble deciding whether I was really in bad shape or just swerving a lot to avoid obstacles. Occasionally, I would go way over the yellow line to the left because I thought the road was better over there. As soon as I did, I'd look at the right side of the road and it would look good too. So I'd go back over. No matter what I did, the road always looked bad where I was but good somewhere else, and I was traveling very slowly. I remember one of the crewmembers telling me in the walkie-talkie earbud that I should be more aware of the line I am holding. I could sense a bit of anxiety in their voices when they told me there was a car back and to hold to the right. Later, they told me that whenever they said this, I would start moving towards the left. I don't remember it, but I do remember being told there were cars coming and that I didn't really care. I couldn't understand how cars could go over 20mph on these roads, but they would fly by at seemingly incredible speeds. We also met a Forest Ranger who asked what we were doing, but then when my crew said we were in a bike race, he said, "oh, that's right", and sped off. I'm glad he didn't try to talk to me. I was ready to tell him what I thought of his roads.

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Day 3, Early Mon. Morning: Caffeine Injection

Coyote had now been traveling for 39 hours straight. It was 10 PM on Sunday night. Around this time, I remember stopping and we were discussing that we had 90 miles and 9 hours to go. I thought that should be “no problem”, but then also remembered that earlier, we had 100 miles and 11 hours to go. What was happening here? I had no brains left. Luckily, my crew did. They told me that I was going to have to start listening to them. They said they did not want any discussions, just that I should eat whatever they tell me to eat and so be it. They were expecting arguments from me since I am pretty defiant sometimes, but at this point, I just said “OK”, which surprised them. They started to give me bananas, noodles and other stuff. I really couldn't focus on it too well, and I still only ate about half of each thing they gave me, but I seemed to be getting a little better. I continued my crawling, winding, and weaving up Granite Mtn. I finally reached the top of Granite Mtn, and my crew had been calculating the time now. They were looking worried. They told me that I really had to push for speed down this hill. I said OK, and tried to see my pedal so that I could clip into it. I didn't want them to know that I was seeing double at this point, and my right eye vision was blurred too. I figured that the wind of the downhill would wake me up. It was a bit chilly out but not cold, per se.

I took off down Granite Mtn, but held my brakes the whole way so that I wouldn't go faster than 20 mph. There were still these Martian landscape road conditions. I thought I found a sweet spot right on the yellow centerline, but then it turned into a big rut. I was all over the road. To add to this, my eyes were crossing. I saw two white lines to the right and two yellow

lines to the left. On each side, the lines went in several directions. I thought maybe I could just stay between all the lines I was seeing, but I could only do that going slowly because when I went faster I crossed some of them. I didn't know which ones were the real lines. Then, just when it seemed to be working out OK, they started to jump, like someone taking a sheet on a bed and flapping it. It seemed like a game of jump rope to me. The white line was teasing me to ride under it when it flew up in the air. I almost tried it, and then remembered where I was. I wondered how I had survived thus far. I tried closing one eye, and everything came back into focus. Whew. Now I felt OK. But then the closed eye got tired and I couldn't keep it closed, so it opened and the mayhem returned. So I switched eyes. This worked a few times, and then finally when I closed one eye the other one closed too (much more comfortable that way!). Somehow I realized this before riding off the road and I stopped. My crew didn't need me to say anything. I asked for more caffeine. We decided that a Starbuck's Double Espresso drink was in order. It tasted good, so I had 2 of them. I continued downhill and my problems continued for 5-10 minutes, then all of a sudden, everything snapped into place. Thanks to my pre-race caffeine deprivation. Why hadn't we thought of this sooner? I took off down that hill now at full speed and in a completely straight line. My crew apparently sat with their mouths gaping open because they kept telling me they couldn't believe their eyes! I thought that when I got to the bottom, the Sheep's Hole climb, the last major climb of the race, would come in a few miles. I was shocked when they said I had to hustle for about 15 miles or so just to get there. We stopped and they told me that timing was really critical now. They gave me Peppermint Patties, and Dark Chocolate, which tasted terrible together. I also had

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another Red Bull and some Hammer Gel. They told me I had to get a pace of something like 16 mph on this whole stretch. I remember thinking “how?” Whoever was on the mike here kept encouraging me the whole way (I was having trouble now identifying my crew member voices). All I knew was that I now had about 50 miles and only 4 hrs to go, and that did not sound good to me. I was tired, I had already ridden for 44 hours, and I had one more big climb coming up. I was now in shock that I was this close to the deadline and I wondered if it was possible to finish in time.



Day 3, The Finish Line Sprint. a.k.a.: The Crew Saves Me.

This is the point in the race when a combination of three things happened: my crew really came through, my sheer determination peaked, and a miracle occurred. I hammered on that road all the way to the start of Sheep’s Hole. I wondered if I would have any energy left at all when I got to the climb, but my crew just kept saying not to let up and that this portion was critical. I believed them. They were reporting my speed each time it changed. This is where they pulled a trick on me that I will forever love them for. They decided, knowing me, that I’d be calculating my time to finish, so they decided to subtract 2 mph from my actual speed to get me to speed up. It worked. My mind was toast anyway, so I could not calculate, and I could not judge speed anyway, but it was a good plan. I pushed and pushed to get to the Sheep’s Hole turn, against headwinds, and soreness in every part of my body. When we hit the bottom of the hill, I stopped and said, “Give me something to get up this.” I really wanted another Starbuck’s, but they were out. They had another energy drink called something like X4. I took that. I also took a big swig of Hammer Gel, and 2 pain pills. I decided that nothing was going to stop me going up that hill. I remember thinking “I will pay the price later – so be it.”

Climb #10: Sheep’s Hole. I made a commitment to myself that this hill would make or break the race for me (I didn’t know how right I was), and that I would not stop until the top. I had earlier switched to my 3-ring bike, which was really fortunate. I hit that hill and my legs have never moved so fast. My crew posted my speed, which hardly varied, even though the hill was getting steeper. This hill was steeper than the last two hills, which I had practically crawled up at 5-7 mph. Now I was

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going 8-12 mph. This hill was 10 miles long. My legs were on fire, my heart was pounding, and I was breathing like an asthmatic. I continued this way all the way up the hill, while my crew gave me my speed, distance to the top, and encouragement. At one point, Kevin says, "You are almost there, from this point, only 25 miles to the finish line." I said back "Don't tell me this, I ONLY want to know how far it is up this hill." Which was true. It was all I could focus on. The finish line did not have relevance to me on that hill. It was the make-or-break hill. I was screaming like an animal the entire way up that hill to get energy from my body. I kept wondering where the strength was coming from and if it would end, but if it felt like it was wading, I would pause, scream and push harder. It worked. I got to the time station and was amazed that there seemed to be a lot of people there this late at night. I yelled "Coyote" and I heard them say something like "Go Coyote", but I couldn't hear it. I then had that last 1.5 miles up that hill to what I thought would be the "easy part" into 29 Palms. We cheered at the top of the hill and I ate a little then looked forward to the remainder. I figured as much as I had just hammered, that I could ride my normal speed now and get in with about an hour to spare. So I flew down that hill, and then hit the flats where I had a decent speed for a while, at which point I hit this really strong headwind. It totally deflated me. Coyote slowed way down. My crew said, "Ray, you gotta pull through this". I said, "why, I can make it easily now, right?" They said, no, it is really close. You gotta keep at least a 15 mph avg speed. At that point, I really started to panic. I felt that I had already used up every ounce of "surge" energy that I had on that last hill.

Emotions were flowing through me like crazy. Would it be the dramatic, exciting finish, or the let down of coming in late and having everyone saying "You tried." I thought about all the training I'd done. All the time we'd just spent on the road. How my crew would feel having spent this entire weekend to LOSE. All the money and time I'd spent training. All the fund raising I had done for L.A. Shanti as part of this ride. How could I write to my donors and tell them that I didn't do it? I decided that I would finish no matter what. Even if I passed the deadline, at least I could say that I did the complete route. So I continued pushing.

I didn't know that the entire road into 29 Palms was a slight uphill until I looked at the elevation map later. All I knew at the time was that I had to push and when would this hill end and occasionally it was nice to go into a little valley and have relief from the wind. I pushed and pushed like I never have before. I remember passing a parked car and breathing very loudly, and someone saying "Go, man." I couldn't look up; all I could do was pedal.

It seemed like the road leading to the 6-mile turnoff would never come. I just kept hoping that once I hit it, I could get out of this headwind and really fly. Every part of me was tingling again. It was like I was back on the Sheep's Hole climb. I wondered just how many times I could do this to my body. I decided I would push as hard as I could until I either made it or passed out. Later I found out my crew was also thinking this and trying to decide what to do if I did pass out. They were checking the map for hospitals in the area. I pushed and pushed and then the turn finally came.

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After turning the corner, I did not find the nirvana I expected. In fact, there was still a head wind. I was screaming at the wind. I kept pushing and pushing and my crew kept me constantly informed of my speed. They were very calm, and just kept saying that I was doing “very good.” The tension in the van must have been incredible. When I’d slow down, they’d report my speed and say it would be “better” if I went faster. But they did it in a good way. Instead of just saying, “go faster”, Will said “You’re going 9-10 mph, it’d be better if you were going 11-12 mph.” Later, the crew told me that each time I changed my speed, they recalculated my estimated finish time. They never told me the estimates, and I never asked the time because I was afraid of the answer. It was already starting to become daylight out. I guessed that the 7:00 am deadline had passed but I was going to continue until I got to the finish.

When we got to within about 2-3 miles from the end, there was this very steep but short hill. This is the one someone had talked about earlier and said that, “it was no shame to walk up”. Well, I never walk up hills, but I sure felt like it. I decided to stand on my pedals and power up the hill, but my Bento box was hanging funny and kept hitting my knee. I fought with it to remove it and throw it away, but that Velcro is tenacious. So I sat down, grabbed the Hammer Gel in it, emptied it into my mouth, threw the dispenser (which felt good!) and hammered up that hill on my seat. Again, I wondered where the energy came from, but I did it.

Finally, we got near the finish hotel, and Will said, “It is in sight – you won’t have to climb that hill”. I saw the hill, but no hotel before it. I didn’t know what he was talking about. Turns out I did have to go half way up the hill. I figured they were

lying to me so I started hammering up the hill. Suddenly Will says – get in the left lane – now get in the turn lane. We were in the city of 29 Palms now, on a 4-lane road with a double-yellow-line center lane. I charged over and then I saw the hotel to my left. Yay! I also saw cars coming in the opposite lanes, but I thought in my delirium that I could beat them if I turned right away. I started to go, but luckily I didn’t because I would have hit a car in the oncoming traffic, which I didn’t see. My crew said they all cringed when they saw me start to go for it. They said I was inches from the car and that I had edged onto the left-most yellow line. Funny thing was, the reason I stopped was not because of the car, but because I thought to myself that if I go for it, the van would not be able to make it, and since the rules require the van to follow me until 7 am, I’d better wait.

When the traffic was clear, I pulled across the street and to the hotel. There was a tiny hill in the driveway, leading up to the entrance. I was unsure what gear I should have my bike in. They had a finish tape to go through and there was a lot of cheering. It was great! I kept saying – “Did I really make it?” I could not believe that there was any time left on the clock.

Coyote arrived at 47:43:50, just 16 minutes and 10 seconds before the 48-hour deadline! It was 6:44 am on Monday morning. I was the last finisher, but 22 out of the 56 solo starters had already dropped out or been disqualified. There is no shame in finishing last in this race.

I spotted a rock garden, where I headed to, jumped off my bike and launched into. I did not move for 15 minutes. I was so glad to be there and I could not believe that I had made the deadline. Thanks to my crew! People were congratulating me and

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shaking my hand. I can only thank them now because at the time I was not able to process it then. I remember saying, “Coyote may be slow, but he perseveres.”
Wow!



Rest and Recovery Stage

After recovering enough to walk, get my medal presented from Race Director Chris Costman, take pictures, and smile, I headed for my hotel room. My crew had already put my bikes away and taken my bag and first aid kit to my room for me. Upon the advice of a veteran, I was not allowed to shower alone, so Will waited in the room for me while I took a cool shower. It felt good. I realized then that I had some cuts on my rear and groin area, but they weren't that bad. My feet were in perfect shape and everything else seemed normal, except for the fact that I was really tired.

I went to bed. Although I was tired, it was hard to sleep because my heart was racing. I felt like I was still on that hill, and why not – I had so much caffeine remaining in my system. After about 2 hours of tossing and half sleeping, I had a dream about vomiting. I amused myself thinking that I hadn't had a dream like that since way back when I used to drink alcohol and get sick from it. Then I realized – oops, better get to the bathroom quickly. Which I did, and you know I was on my knees in there for a while. Lots of black goo. I was thinking, “What was this stuff, and look, the crew said I wasn't eating enough.” Then I had a similar experience with diarrhea. My crew woke me up at noon because they wanted to drive back home. My vision was blurry in both eyes. I tried to put on some Band-Aids from the medical kit, but I could not focus well enough to see them. I had to wait until my crew came in and they handed them to me. I felt like a 90 year old man. They had to pack up my things and take them out. I was unable to walk more than teeny tiny steps. Stairs were a one step – both legs at a time ordeal. We went to lunch and I ordered several light

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things like cottage cheese, some fries, a vanilla shake, and a coke. The only thing I could down was the vanilla shake. One bite of cottage cheese, one or two French fries, and a sip of coke made me feel nauseous again. The two-hour drive home seemed endless to me. I told the crew that I'd just spent 48 hrs on my bike, but now this 2-hour car trip was making me carsick. I babbled all the way home (the caffeine). The crew told me some of the stories from their perspectives. They also gave me some "next time" pointers.

I asked Kevin, if, after all this, he still wants to do this next year, and he said he does. I said I'd be glad to be on his crew. I cried a bit in the van home as it all started to kick in just what we had all done and how proud of the crew I was.

I was still unable to eat the entire remainder of the day, and I barfed 3 or 4 more times whenever I tried to. The next day, I woke up and per previous arrangement, got some blood drawn. It was part of a UCLA study; they took blood before and after the event, then they took it one week later, to see the impact of this activity on my immune system. Why not combine a little research in with all this insanity?

I really didn't feel too badly the next morning, so I went to work. It got a little touchy as the day went on though. My fingers and ankles kept cramping up unexpectedly. I had problems typing and even using a mouse caused my fingers to cramp. The vision in my right eye became clouded for several hours at a time. Other than that, I was basically Ok, except that I was very tired. I left work a little early though to get some rest. That night, I woke up in the middle of the night screaming in pain because my body finally decided it was time to look

into the areas where my body met the bicycle saddle and report injuries. It didn't look that bad, but boy did it hurt. I took some pain meds and a nurse looked at it; it's not even as bad as my pre-race training crash was. It was described as "common abrasions." What a wimp I was now! Oh, and I weighed myself and I had lost 8 pounds. Not the easiest diet!

The next day, the two outside fingers of both hands were numb and the little toes on both of my feet were numb. My abrasions ached still, but were tolerable without pain pills. The good news was that the cramping ended and my clear vision returned. The days following that, I consider just the "normal" post-ride recovery like I usually experience during heavy training. It is amazing how fast the body can recover! Or, as one friend pointed out, just how fast we can break it down too. It will take a good 2-3 weeks to really recover from these 2 days of riding. But it was worth it! Although I had a couple of problem areas in recovering, they all seemed to clear up in a few days, and amazingly, my muscles never felt sore – like that usual lactic acid buildup feeling. This was either due to my pre-race training conditioning, or my body's confusion over sleep deprivation combined with recovery that just was too many issues to deal with at once.

The first person I called after I finished the race was my Mom. I explained a little bit of this recovery process to her and she comments, "You're never doing this again, right?" To that, I could not answer yes. Coyote WILL ride the 508 again, but NEXT time, I will be faster. I intend to train to a level where I predict I can ride this in under 40 hours. This will not happen by next year, but I intend to do it some time again!

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Post-Ride Analysis

The Furnace Creek 508 was a tremendously challenging, spiritual experience. If not for my crew, I could not have accomplished a successful finish. Thanks again to Christian Moser, Will Hutchison, and Kevin Morgan. Christian and Kevin are members of the cycling club Different Spokes, of which I belong to as well. The Club members were very supportive throughout my training regimen, as I joined the club rides as a portion of my weekend training rides throughout the year. Sometimes, they would only see me at the start, but it was nice to have that cheerfulness and camaraderie as we all took off on a morning ride together. Christian, Kevin, and Will also spent time with me in training rides incorporating long days/nights of trailing me in their vehicles. I will never forget Will's incredibly hard Century training ride out of Bakersfield, starting on Breckenridge road's 29-mile climb in 95 degree heat.

After the 508 was over, I checked my bicycle trip computer, which I had been switching between bikes as I road. According to the computer, my riding time was almost exactly 40 hours. That means that the other 7 hrs and 44 minutes were spent on breaks! We talked about this on the way home, because we had only budgeted about 3 hrs worth of breaks into the planning schedule. But obviously we stopped more than that. We agree that had I not taken the breaks, I probably wouldn't have finished, but on the other hand, the breaks did take out a big chunk of our time. I rode an average of 12.75 mph, which was my goal speed. I did a lot of training for this event, and we practiced some crew activities, but we never practiced pit stops. This is sound advice for the "next" time.

There are three life lessons which I learned during this journey, which we all should apply to our lives when the need arises in the future:

1. **Don't Give Up.** I never considered quitting an option. I told my crew at the start of the race that I had one rule: Never ask me if I want to quit, because I may be weak and say yes. I told them that if I wanted to quit, that I would say so. I never did.
2. **Our Limits Are Flexible.** I greatly exceeded what I thought my limits were; a lesson learned that the limits we set for ourselves may stop us from growing. Continue to push those limits.
3. **Help Is Available and Necessary.** This feat would have been impossible without the direct support of my crew, and the caring support of friends and donors; all of which contributed to the will and determination to continue. I had to ask for help before, during, and after the race. It's good to remember that we are not out there alone; help is always available and necessary.

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The Coyote's Final Thoughts

There was a tremendous amount of stimulus pressed into my system for those 47 hours and 44 minutes along the Furnace Creek 508 (and I am not talking about the caffeine injections at the end!). It is an experience that I will never forget, nor fully remember. There were two inspirational quotes that I had pasted onto the sides of my crew van, in addition to the Coyote pictures and L.A. Shanti signs, to help me through this race, and I think they did help. Here they are:

“It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end” --Ursula LeGuin

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

In conclusion, I took on the Furnace Creek 508 as a personal challenge and a fundraiser for L.A. Shanti. All of my expectations of this ride were exceeded in every area. I planned carefully and thoroughly, but there were still a lot of surprises and challenges to my crew and myself throughout our journey. I highly recommend this race and it has expanded my limits.

Coyote will now rest.

Thanks AdventureCorps!

For more information:

Furnace Creek 508: www.the508.com.

L.A. Shanti: www.lashanti.org.

Different Spokes: www.differentspokes.com

The Coyote (Ray Barnes): raymondlbarnes@netscape.net

Notes from the Crew

I could not have done this ride without my great crew. Since I was on my bike most of the time, I really didn't know what was going on in the van while I was riding. Here are a few impressions:

From Will:

I must say that this was probably the most intense experience of my life (at least since the first two days of Army basic training!). You can take enormous pride in being able to find resources and strengths.

This was the most stunning example of Beth Brown's phrase of encouragement: "You have no idea how strong you are".

Will Hutchison

From Christian:

Reflections on Coyote 508 Support Team Experience

There was never a time that we doubted Coyote would finish this race. It was just a matter of "when?"

As it turned out, Coyote crossed the finish line only minutes before the 48 hours time limit. For sheer DRAMA, what could he have done that was more exciting and climatic than that??

Starting about a hundred miles before the end of this 508 mile course, we in the support van were able to start calculating every remaining mile, every climb, every descent, and from this were able to figure out almost exactly what speed Coyote had to maintain under every given condition in order to finish on time, and it was very tight: it would require exceptional

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performance by Coyote right through to the end, and there was no margin for any wasted time. And we KNEW for at least TEN hours before the finish time that even at best we were down to only MINUTES leeway to finish on time. A 10 hour photo finish! How exciting! 10 hours, that - just by itself - is about 3 times longer than the entire length of most sporting events! Everyone has experienced the fervor and excitement of the final minutes of closely matched sporting events. Imagine sustaining that for 10 hours in a 48 hours event! That's kind of like what it would be like watching Game Seven of a World Series from the time perspective of a hummingbird! Who would ever think that driving a minivan behind a bicycle for 48 hours could be exciting, but it really was, particularly those last 10 hours - every second counted, and during those last 10 hours all eyes of the crew were glued to the Coyote on his bicycle, and to the clock on the dashboard, and to the speedometer - calculating, calculating, and recalculating, every minute, every mile!

And finally we could see the finish – realizing, at last, Coyote had done it, he was going to make it, on time, and watching him cross the finish line just minutes before time was up. This was an outburst of emotion I will never forget! Even as I write this now more than 2 weeks after the event, I still get tears of joy welling in my eyes just as they had gushed uncontrollably when I watched Coyote cross that finish line and then dive to the ground, in sheer exhaustion, surrounded by a throng of fellow riders, and crew, and staff and volunteers who had been anxiously waiting at the finish line to see if he was going to make it, now cheering and congratulating him, and Coyote, lying on the ground, slowly coming to the realization - he had DONE IT – he rode 508 miles! And even finished on time!

That's a feat so hard to do that, no matter how much strength, how much determination, how much training, planning and all the other things that go into it, it's impossible for one to ever really know for sure that they can do it - until after they have actually done it.

Watching Coyote do this race, persevering every mile, was an inspiration and awesome experience for all of us, every inch of the way. But clearly, to me, the most moving image of this event, and one I'll never forget, was the look in the face of the Coyote, tired and battered as he was, lying there on the ground, but bursting with joy and energy on his dawning of awareness that he had really done it, it was over, he had succeeded!

We on the crew, and every other person who was involved in the training, planning, encouraging, moral support and every other aspect of Coyote's participation in this event, and all his contributors, are privileged and graced to have been connected to this extraordinary undertaking and success.

Thank you, Ray, the "Coyote," for this extraordinary opportunity and experience!

Christian Moser

From Kevin:

I can't wait to ride the Furnace Creek 508 next year!

Kevin Morgan

(note from Coyote: I'll be honored to be on your crew!)

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A few glimpses into the Coyote Journey



Riding at Sunset on Day #2



The Long Lonely Road



*Getting a bite to eat at Badwater
(that's sunscreen on my face)*



The crew van all dressed up



Climbing Jubilee Pass – Awesome View!



Coyote recovering at the finish line