



BOB PADECKY

Bradley's one cool, crazy competitor

You may want to wrap yourself in a blanket before you read the next paragraph.

The wind was 50 miles an hour. The air temperature was 20 degrees. The wind chill was three degrees below zero. The wind was blowing heavy snow horizontally, right into his face. It was pitch black. For five hours last Saturday night Bill Bradley dragged a 40-pound sled in those conditions that Alaskans term "a ground blizzard."

"I never saw anything like that in my life," said Santa Rosa's Bradley, "except in those survival movies where people eat each other." Bradley paused for a second, thought about Roger, one of the other competitors on the trail with him that night, and spat out, "I looked at Roger and I said, 'Oh, I could eat him all right.'" Yeah, Bradley laughs now.



Bill Bradley
Santa Rosa resident competed in the Susitna 100 in Alaska last weekend.

Weren't a lot of giggles last weekend at the Susitna 100, the Alaskan torture-fest in which 79 people who didn't want to stay warm and watch movies on the sofa volunteered to ski, bike or run 100 miles in the dead of winter in weather fit for a Popsicle.

Bradley, 47, is the ultra-mega-mondo-extreme endurance athlete who trained inside the meat locker at Wil-
lowside Meats for this little jaunt.

Of the 79 who registered, 32 finished and of those, only 10 did it on foot. Bradley remembered being out for only an hour on the trail and seeing a man in full beard and icicles, looking like the Abdominal Alaskan, headed back on foot to quit the race, the weather conditions and common sense overtaking his sense of adventure and bravado. The man was not alone.

Twenty-five competitors quit by the first checkpoint, 22 miles into the race.

Ordered by brother Jim and sisters Leslie and Karen to carry a GPS tracking device, Bradley freaked out his family for the first 10 hours of the trek when they weren't receiving a signal.

"I put it inside my duffel bag," he

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said. "I didn't know it had to go outside."

Bradley — this you should know — would compete in pushing a wheelbarrow full of mud up Mt. Everest if they gave a name to the event. Such is his nature, to push that wheelbarrow or himself to where the wheels of either are about to fall off. He has biked 508 miles through Death Valley, done six marathons, seven Ironmans and the Hawaii Ultraman.

"I am crazy but I am not suicidal," Bradley said. "I will push it right to the intensive care unit."

That is Bradley's shorthand description of how, at Mile 68, it pained him to surrender Sunday night. He had been on the Susitna 100 for 34 hours, slept 90 of those minutes and realized he could not make the next checkpoint, the fourth, in the allotted time. Susitna 100 organizers set time limits for all competitors at every checkpoint, to insure their survival.

"I needed to average 25 minutes a mile to make the next checkpoint," Bradley said, "and I had dropped to 31 minutes."

Bradley had to pay \$200 for an airplane evacuation and while quitting the race depressed him and sent him into a funk, it was the best option of the ones he was facing.

"Full blown hypothermia had set in," he said.

As one of his rescuers was joking, possibly to alleviate the stress and seriousness of the moment, Bradley could have experienced "paradoxical disrobing" if he had continued in his hypothermic state. Hypothermia, in its advanced stage, can create the illusion of warmth in its victim, to where the person will rip off their clothes, feeling too hot. Coma and death soon follow.

"I just couldn't stop shaking," Bradley said. "I was absolutely cooked. I couldn't even lift my leg off the snowmobile. My hands were blue and swollen. I said to one of these guys (regarding the hands), are they going to chip off? That's when I heard how a lot of people die from hypothermia. Their hands shake so badly they can't open a sleeping bag or a bivvy sack or extra clothes."

Bradley can take great pride in that he went the farthest of any person who didn't finish the race. He also felt pretty good that on Thursday his hands finally had stopped throbbing. He also has a memory that will stay with him forever, those five hours on Flathorn Lake in which wind-blown snow was etching pain in his eyes.

"You couldn't wear goggles because they would fog up," he said, "and then you wouldn't be able to see anything at night. A lot of people quit just because their eyes hurt."

One would think, having experienced swallowing an Alaskan blizzard for 34 hours, that Bradley would retire to the backgammon table. Nope, not our man Bill.

"Absolutely I am coming back next year," Bradley said. "I got some unfinished business on the frozen tundra."

In the meantime, just to stay in shape, he's got a 200-mile bike race in April, a relay bike race with another dude across America in June, the Badwater in July, the toughest of all foot races that starts in Death Valley and ends at Mt. Whitney.

"I'm psyched," Bradley said.

I was, too. I told him I wouldn't be ordering an iced tea for a long, long time.

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