

Traverse

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ting the elements over Taylor Pass — a final ascent through the exposed white pillow that reaches 11,930 feet above sea-level. Full confidence was restored when the duo ran into race leaders a few miles later at the Barnard Hut Aid Station.

“We knew it was still a race at that point,” said Jones.

Well past the nine hour mark in the trek, it appeared the real race had just began. Jones and O’Neil hit the groomed corduroy of Aspen Mountain with local adventure racing studs Bryan Wickenhauser and Eric Sullivan in hot pursuit.

When Jones and O’Neill flew across the line, Wickenhauser and Sullivan were just five seconds from the finish. The effort, officially marked at 9:35:30, was good enough for third place among the 125-plus teams brave enough to bare it.

“I’ve finished in the top-three eight times before, but it felt pretty darn good to see Jake that excited. That made it just as rewarding as a win,” said O’Neill.

“In the Grand Traverse, it’s a hostile environment and you need somebody to take care of you and vice-versa,” added Jones. “That’s why I love this race so much. It’s something you can share with someone else and know you truly did it together.”

Kloser prevails, again

Mike Kloser enters the GT year-after-year with one goal in mind: winning.

“For me, it’s all or nothing in this race,” said Kloser, a 49-year-old Vail resident. “Second is losing and I go into this race with one goal in mind.”

The savvy veteran’s game plan has proven to pay off pretty well. On Saturday, he claimed his fifth first place finish, in 9:17:40, granting him bragging rights to the title for the third consecutive year.

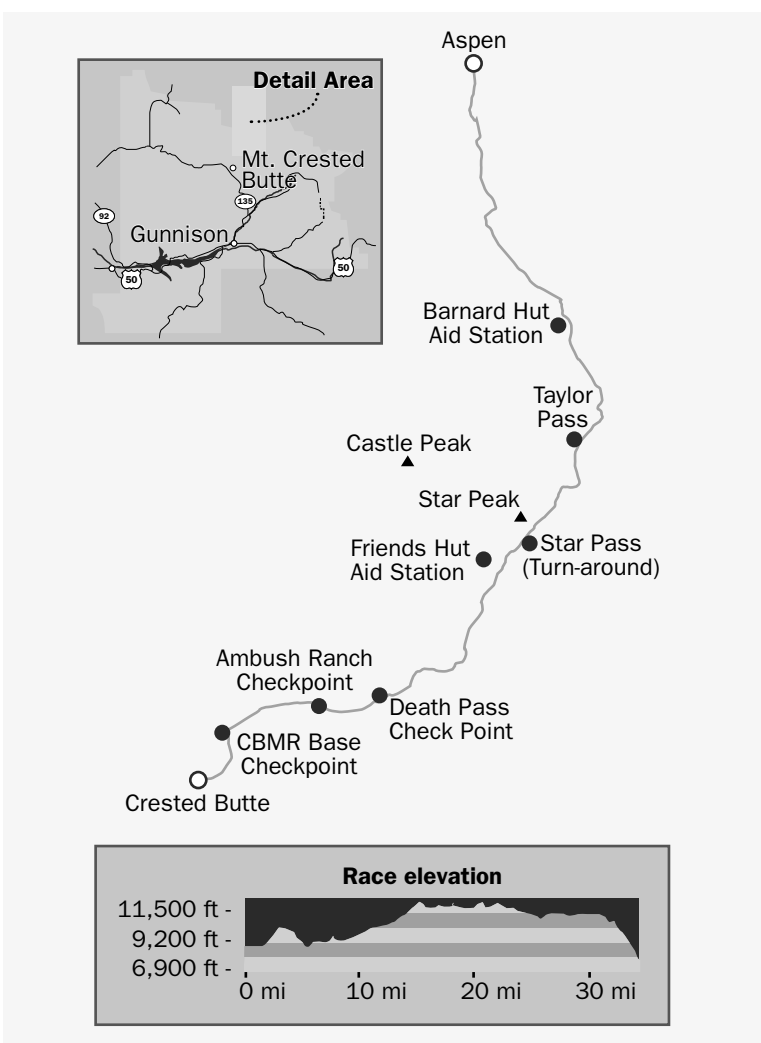
Kloser and his teammate, Jay Henry, made the call to use a traditional backcountry set-up this year at 3 p.m. Friday, eight hours before the traditional midnight start. After suiting up in beefier alpine touring (AT) gear for the 2008 GT — which is a common trend among elite racers — Kloser said the choice was a “gamble on the opposite side of the spectrum.”

That gamble paid dividends through the deep, new snow and on steeper climbs, where most teams had to stop to put on skins before ascending. The seconds added up and, pulling into the Barnard Hut, Kloser



The wind-swept scene from near Taylor Pass.

Photo by Alex Fenlon



The 40-mile slog from Crested Butte to Aspen covered its fare share of ups and downs, totalling near 6,000 feet in vertical gain. Seen here, is a map of the route taken by racers early Saturday morning.

Map by Ben Denece

and Henry maintained a slight lead on locals Travis Scheefer and Ethan Passant.

“They were definitely good at putting the hammer down,” said Scheefer, who completed his third GT. “You could just tell that Kloser was determined to be out in front and he really knew the pace that he could push.”

The teams traded off pushing the lead in the early stages, which gave Kloser a good chance to size up the team that would end up being his closest competition.

“I was just amazed, dumbfounded, at how fast their skins were,” said Kloser. “I don’t know what they had on those



The madness of final check in, a few minutes till midnight.

Photo by Matt Smith



Jake Jones, Ethan Passant and Pat O’Neill relaxing at the finish.

Photo courtesy Sarah Gillis

things, but it was amazing to watch them glide across the snow.”

But the king of traversing was not to be denied on Saturday morning. Kloser and Henry broke open a substantial lead after leaving Barnard and left the rights to second place to Scheefer and Passant, who

finished in 9:28:30.

Kloser is already considering defending his title in 2010, where he would enter the race at the ripe age of 50. Even after all these years, he’s still searching for what drives him to such daring feats.

“I’m not exactly sure what it is, other than it’s a true back-country adventure,” said Kloser. “It’s just one of those races that is unique and holds a special place.”

A family affair

Growing up in the Gunnison Valley, Melody Scheefer eventually came to the realization that finishing a GT is, in many ways, a rite of passage.

On Saturday she earned her stripes by crossing the finish line with teammate Dawn French in 13-hours, 33-minutes. Driving her along the way were updates of how her brother, Travis, and father, Dave, were faring.

“For us it was more about taking in the scenery, making sure it was fun and being around other teams,” said Melody, who traveled from Montana just for the race. “It made it easier to be able to stop and ask about how my brother and dad were doing.”

Melody’s inspiration to race came not only from her family, but numerous people around the community who she grew up alongside. Travis and Dave helped out by supplying her with plenty of gear and even giving a few pointers on when to “skin-up.” But come race day, she was all on her own.

While Travis was busy vying for a podium spot at the front of the pack, Dave was living it up a couple hours behind, and a couple hours ahead of his daughter. Dave teamed up with Tom Pulaski and finished the race 25th overall, in a time of 11:48:05.

“It was something, to be honest, I could never imagine would happen,” Dave, who finished his 11th traverse, said of participating in the event with his two kids. “As a parent, all you can do is live the example and hope your children are paying attention and follow along in your footsteps.”

The GT is a family affair for many people, with siblings, spouses (French, for example, and Passant are married) and other relations either teaming up together or with other partners to tackle the daunting task of skiing from Crested Butte to Aspen with the aid of camaraderie as well as competition.

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Grand Traverse Results

Overall Place, Names, Time, Age/Group Place

1. Mike Kloser and Jay Henry, 9:17:40, 1
2. Ethan Passant and Travis Scheefer, 9:28:30, 1
3. Patrick O’Neill and Jake Jones, 9:35:30, 2
4. Brian Wickenhauser and Eric Sullivan, 9:35:35, 2
5. Jason Stubbe and Dave Wiens, 9:45:55, 3
6. Allen Hadley and Todd Malzhan, 9:45:58, 1
7. Jon Brown and Brian Smith, 9:56:05, 3
8. Charlie Nuttelman, 9:56:30, 4
9. Mark Falender and Max Taam, 10:00:00, 5
10. Teague Holmes and Brad LaRochelle, 10:05:20, 6
11. Elliott Larson and Brian Johnson, 10:23:35, 4
12. Billy Mattison and Andre Boesel, 10:28:30, 2
13. Pierre Wille and Scott Oberbreckling, 10:45:40, 5
14. Jarad Kohlar and Eric Iverson, 10:48:25, 7
15. Matt Huber and William Roush, 10:52:20, 8
16. Andrew Kastning and Grethe Haggensen, 11:02:30, 1
17. Janelle Smiley and Mark Smiley, 11:08:55, 2
18. Maile Wade and Jenny Hamilton, 11:12:10, 1
19. Ted Mahon and Christy Sauer, 11:14:05, 3

20. Ryan Jennings and Craig Olivieri, 11:29:10, 9
21. Kirk Haskel and John Barney, 11:30:45, 6
22. Mark Beardsley and Brian Edmiston, 11:33:10, 7
23. Tucker Roberts and Jari Kirkland, 11:39:05, 4
24. Eric Kowal and Chris Bruggeman, 11:44:50, 10
25. Dave Scheefer and Tom Pulaski, 11:48:05, 3
26. Rebecca Sears and Jarral Ryter, 12:04:25, 5
27. Dan Loftus and Ben Preston, 12:08:35, 11
28. Mike Nolan and Jake Beren, 12:11:30, 12
29. Wouter van Tiel and Sam Faivre, 12:12:20, 8
30. Rich Smith and John Biggers, 12:16:40, 4
31. Josh Egedy and Mark Selt, 12:22:00, 13
32. Christine Matyk and Joan Swift, 12:32:30, 1
33. Joshua Hmielowski and Brian Kurzel, 12:32:23, 14
34. Miles Venzara and Scott Simmons, 12:33:55, 5
35. Jose Garcia and Ben Blaugrund, 12:38:10, 9
36. Henry Yu and Dave Kerr, 12:39:10, 15
37. Colleen Ihnken and Anda Smalls, 12:47:40, 3
38. Cameron Millard and Rich Silkey, 12:50:40, 16
39. Sarah Gillis and Robyn Zimmerman, 12:53:45, 6
40. Chris Read and Matt Kuehlhorn, 12:57:25, 17
41. Stevie Kremer and Marshall Thomson, 13:00:20, 7
42. Emma Lohr and Emma Catmur, 13:05:20, 2
43. Adam Cooper and Rich Rodgers, 13:14:00, 18
44. Jeff Perambo and Krista Powers, 13:23:15, 8

45. Peter Marbarger and Chase Edgerton, 13:29:50, 19
46. Dave Gray and Tyler Newton, 13:30:30, 20
47. Melody Scheefer and Dawn French, 13:33:00, 1
48. Collette Newell and Mary Lewis, 13:33:20, 2
49. Elizabeth Smith and Rob Fessenden, 13:43:00, 9
50. Steve Lawlor and Travis Underwood, 13:48:50, 10
51. Josh Harrod and Whit Johnson, 13:50:30, 5
52. Ethan Mueller and Nick Herrin, 13:52:00, 22
53. Matthew Moerdyk and Gary Schultz, 13:54:00, 6
54. David Bower and Dan Brewster, 13:56:40, 11
55. Daniel McElroy and Leititia McElroy, 14:01:30, 12
56. Jaime Falcon and Karen Lapides, 14:03:00, 12
57. Roger Reif and Kevin Dunkelberg, 14:04:00, 3
58. Jesse Crandall and Summer Ruckman, 14:09:10, 13
59. Jeffrey Paffendorf and Dave Brodhead, 14:14:20, 30
60. Tim Poppe and Shawn Wolfenbarger, 14:26:40, 14
61. Brad Johnson and Jeff Giddings, 14:50:20, 15
62. Mike Preston and Alex Lafoe, 14:51:00, 16
63. Mark Fischer and Levi Borst, 14:51:00, 17
64. Joshua Blum and Kevin Shilling, 14:56:57, 10
65. Brynn O’Connell and Casey Wilson, 15:01:20, 3
66. Bill Wright and John Prater, 15:08:15, 18
67. Todd McGrath and Jim Philpott, 15:16:40, 23
68. Stephen Halvorson and Megan Lawson, 15:17:30, 14
69. Brad Byers and Clinton Coerd, 15:23:40, 24

70. Tim Krantz and Ian Elliott, 15:32:00, 25
71. Eric Beavers and Bart Hero, 15:41:40, 26
72. Kimberly Levin and Robyn Woodridge, 15:52:10, 4
73. Franklin McSwain Jr. and Jill Goudie, 16:11:10, 11
74. Lionel Bony and Tripp Hyde, 16:18:00, 17
75. Drew Larson and Noelle Larson, 16:19:00, 22
76. Steve Lipsher and Danny Gnojek, 16:20:50, 19
77. Dave Ludders and Jeremy Bisher, 16:26:50, 28
78. Jeremy Barbin and Eben Clark, 16:32:10, 20
79. Nathan Ament and Ben Raevsky, 16:44:00, 29
80. Nicole Blaser and Maria Daniela Runge, 16:50:00, 5
81. David Gross and Michael Pruett, 16:52:00, 30
82. Timothy Kugler and Ian Hatchet, 16:57:00, 7
83. Evan Menzel and Dave Songayllo, 17:04:00, 31
84. Andrea Sinclair and Nate Stireman, 17:06:40, 15
85. Paul Breitenwischer and Marie Christine Carel-Breitenwischer, 17:10:30, 21
86. Erin Kiernan and Cameron Elmendorf, 17:23:00, 6
87. Michael Smith and Tim Ryan, 17:35:00, 8
88. Jeffrey Dixon and Jesse Gaylord, 17:39:00, 1
89. Amber Guzzardo and Rachel Kelley, 17:43:00, 9
90. Larry Ross and Becky Church, 17:44:00, 16
91. Mark Alling and Karl Plambeck, 17:49:00, 21
92. Kay Doan and Meg McKenna, 17:52:00, 8
93. Steve Orr and Dan Arkin, 18:02:00, 22