

Action County: Sharon Crawford

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Frisco's Sharon Crawford possesses a world-class ability to navigate her way through the wilderness.

Among international masters, few can beat the 10th-year local in the dynamic sport of orienteering.

Crawford, who is also a proficient Nordic skier, first gravitated toward a map and compass while living in New England during the early 70s. The mentally challenging sport began to play an increasingly larger role in her life and she eventually became a member of the U.S. team.

The Montana transplant seems to be drawn to the multi-faceted nature of the sport.

"You're running as hard as you can, but you're also thinking," Crawford said. "It's called the thinking sport. Someone may be faster than you, but you can beat them if you have better orienteering skills."

Crawford has become a mainstay on the international circuit. Last summer she traveled to Austria for the World Masters Orienteering Championships and Australia for the World Rogaining Championships. Rogaining is the sport of long-distance, cross-country navigation.

The 62-year-old was among the top 10 in her age class in Austria before heading to the team event Down Under, where she and former Denver resident Robin Spriggs picked up their second consecutive victory in the super veteran women category (55 and over).

The 24-hour rogaining competition featured a large map area containing 60 different flags with various point values. Because it was impossible for Crawford and her partner to reach every checkpoint in the allotted time, they created an efficient strategy to reach as many as they could. Returning to base camp to sleep or regroup was optional.

Most competitions Crawford enters are 60- to 90-minute races that have predetermined courses and two-minute interval starts. Racers move between checkpoints along the course they deem most fit.

"You have to decide the best route for you," Crawford explained. "Often, you take the safer route because you say, 'It's not the faster route, but I'll still get there. If I take the faster route, it might be risky because I might muck it up.'"

Crawford, who is a member of the Rocky Mountain Orienteering group, seems to relish such competitions because each one is unique.

Sharon
Crawford with
her orienteering
maps.

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"It's a sport I do for traveling and seeing new places," she said. "In tennis, the courts are all the same."

Since becoming a masters-level competitor as a 35-year-old, Crawford has won her age category three times at the World Masters and has been a perennial podium presence.

Before Crawford began orienteering, she developed a passion for Nordic skiing, which she learned as a child at Montana's Red Lodge Mountain.

After moving to the East Coast, she obtained her own cross country equipment for the first time.

"I remember buying my first pair of wooden skis at an EMS sale," she said. "In those days, you had to impregnate the base of your skis with pine tar for the wax to stick to them. Otherwise the wood would get wet and it wouldn't hold the wax."

Crawford said she's looking forward to combining her two passions at a ski orienteering competition, Jan. 20 at the Frisco Nordic Center.

What brought you to Summit County?

"The high-tech company I was working with had a lot of ups and downs and finally they laid people off. I said, 'Fine, that's it, I've had enough, I'm outta here.' Time is too short and I always wanted to come back to the West. I had some friends that had moved here and my sister and mother were in Denver. I said, 'Great, let's go.'"

Did you ever get into alpine skiing?

"I had done it in Montana, but back East it was harder to do in those days - they didn't groom as well and they didn't have the snowmaking. So you would drive up to New Hampshire for three hours, stand in line, pay big bucks and ski on ice."

