

# Striders saga: the ultim

By MIKE NOLAN

'Twas said by many that Mike Ipsen and his Redwood City Striders were crazy. Nutty. Just plain loco.

Well, maybe they were at that, but it turned out to be a most determined form of madness.

The Redwood City area was loaded with skeptics when the gregarious Ipsen and 12 teen-aged Striders trotted off July 1 on history's first cross-country relay on foot.

"We finished for all the people who didn't think we would," said Ipsen, the Striders' 30-year-old unconventional coach who, with vast understatement, may safely be called "colorful."

"Of course, there were a lot of people who thought we would finish, and we appreciated their faith," said Mike.

But maybe not as many as Ipsen thinks. The Striders' feat truly was a marvel of determination and teenage tenacity.

All those kids — plus Ipsen, who claims "you're only as old as you feel" — did was run 235 consecutive two-hour legs from ocean to ocean. For the benefit of the Guinness Book of World Records, 3,421 miles in 19 days, 13 hours, and 52 minutes.

But it developed into much more than "just" history's first cross-

country race for the Striders' lucky 13.

The journey also became an eye-opener for 13 young people who had never been east of the Rocky Mountains — a lesson in the realities of life all over the United States, not just comfortable California.

"It was far more than we ever dreamed it would be," admitted Ipsen. "We developed a feeling that's hard to put into words."

And the Striders did it on a shoestring budget of less than \$75 per person. The only major expense was gas and (too many) repairs for the party's three cars. They ate mostly canned food and slept under the stars.

The Striders got a real cross-section of America, jogging over desert, plain, mountain and rolling hill from Martin's Beach near Half Moon Bay to Ship Bottom, New Jersey.

Significantly but not surprisingly, they were often dismayed by what they saw, not unlike the reaction of many Northern Californians when they first discover what lies beyond the Sierra Nevadas.

Sequoia High junior Jose Garza, 17, summed up the experience for the entire group: "We're all so spoiled by Northern California."

"I never thought those big cities (St.

Louis, Cincinnati, Philadelphia) would be like that," said Shirlee Rose, 16, a San Carlos High junior. "California seems like its own little world to me now."

"I used to think San Francisco was a typical big city, but not now," said Ken White of College of San Mateo. "It's a lot nicer than the others we saw."

"I couldn't believe what I saw going through the bad areas of Cincinnati," observed Leroy Rosing, 17, a June Sequoia graduate.

Ipsen, too, was admittedly "surprised. I'll say this — after what we saw in both big cities and small towns, I can tell you that no youngster in the Sequoia Union High School District really lives in a ghetto."

It was a real lesson, the Striders agreed, in being thankful for what they have instead of comparing themselves with well-to-do Peninsulans, surely among the world's most affluent people in more than just money.

The Striders had mixed feelings about the people they encountered.

"We met both very friendly and very hostile people," said Ipsen, who

## ate cross country race

admitted the hostile ones were a bit "discouraging" at times.

"Kansas was the friendliest state. They were just beautiful in all the small towns. Pennsylvanians were friendly, too.

"But Missouri was the worst. Ugh! Some people would just as soon run you off the road. The Ozarks are no place to run!" said Ipsen.

Many viewed the Striders with amusement. Marathon running is a relatively undeveloped sport; Northern California is its hotbed.

"One guy came out from his farm in Illinois to run with me," offered Doug Peck, 18, a Palo Alto High grad. "His mother saw me running and he couldn't believe it."

"Yeah, that guy was so happy to find someone interested in running," said Ipsen. The fellow ran several miles with Peck in jubilation.

"We couldn't believe all the fat women we saw with skinny husbands," laughed Shirlee, who acted as cook and log-keeper for the crew and even ran a couple of legs.

Desiree Wilson, Shirlee's 17-year-old San Carlos classmate, ran regular legs and logged the fifth most miles, prov-

ing just as durable as any of the boys.

Ipsen did have a few problems, though, keeping the wolves (male variety) away from the attractive blue-eyed blonde.

Usually, two of the Strider cars would drive ahead while one remained a few miles near the runner. "It might seem complicated, but it wasn't," said Ipsen. "Everybody knew what to do."

Parents of the Striders placed great confidence in Ipsen, longtime local track figure who's made many friends and foes alike in a sometimes stormy career, but has never been known to back down from a battle.

I was nervous at first. I didn't know how much of Easy Rider to believe," said Ipsen. "We got a little harassment (from citizens), but the police were generally very helpful."

The youngest Striders were Redwood City's Dave Wilson, 13, who will be a McKinley School eighth grader, and Danny Martinez, 13, of Newark.

The oldest were White, Peck and Bob Cooper, 18, who was most valuable cross country runner as a Canada College freshman last year.

Also running were Redwood City's

David Cortez, 15, who will enter St. Francis High this fall, and brother Frank, 18, a Sequoia graduate, and Richard Martinez, 15, of Newark.

Lightning storms, snakes, mosquitoes and ticks, erratic drivers, strength-sapping midwestern and eastern humidity — all plagued the Striders. Plus some 13-14 hours in a car each day.

"Don't forget Cooper's imagination," someone said.

"Bob saw five donkeys at night and was convinced they were water buffalo," laughed Ipsen. "An old German shepherd became a wolf and a water hose was a big snake!"

Cooper also tumbled into a ditch in Pennsylvania when a car veered too close, but shook it off in true Strider spirit.

The Striders unanimously agreed that Desiree Wilson and Cooper ate the most.

Biggest chuckle came when some culturally deprived fellow told White, "You're from the San Francisco area, eh? Gee, isn't that where they have that bridge of gold? I've always wanted to see that."

Ken didn't have the heart to tell the guy the truth.

"I really learned to respect the pioneers," said White. A point no one disputed.

Would the Striders do it all over? "We wouldn't turn down a challenge," smiled Ipsen.

That's certain. The Striders have met and conquered their toughest challenge already.