

BERGE BIKES WAY TO TOP

By Melyssa Springmeyer
Times-Delta

Not many people would ride in a 500-mile bike race.

Not many people would find the time to work on a doctorate degree, take swim classes or peddle up to Lodge Pole.

Not many people would. But Visalian Catharina Berge is not like many people.

"You don't take time, you make time" Berge said.

The 35-year-old breezes over conversations about winning the women's division of an endurance bicycle race like she talks about commuting around town on one of her five bicycles.

Berge placed second overall in the AdventureCORPS Furnace Creek 508, held Oct. 13-15. The race went from Valencia to Death Valley to Twenty-nine Palms and featured a trip through Death Valley and 35,000 feet of cumulative elevation gain.

"A friend asked me if I wanted to compete and I said, 'Sure why not?'" Berge said.

Not one to back away from a challenge, Berge began training for the 508.

"I had been in a 200, but never anything like this," Berge said, "I'm not sure if I really knew what I was getting myself into."

"I didn't understand how tough the race would be when I first accepted," Berge said. "Being in the race wasn't planned. It was, I guess, just my own ignorance or maybe my own arrogance."

Ignorance and arrogance are not words one would use to describe Berge. In fact, she seems unaware of her accomplishments. But, even her everyday accomplishments could be considered milestones to others.

Last weekend, Berge cycled up to Lodge Pole. She called it relaxing.

Lodge Pole is 6,250 feet above sea level. She started in Visalia, 500 feet above sea level. During her ride, her thoughts were about the scenery.

"There was snow on the

Furnace Creek 508

Top ten results from 27th annual AdventureCORPS Furnace Creek 508, held Oct. 13-15

1. Othmar Altmann, 41, Villach, Austria 31 hours, 10 minutes, 30 seconds
2. Catharina Berge, 35, Visalia 31:58:56
3. Eric Ostendorff, 40, Torrance 32:24:29
4. Mark Patten, 41, San Jose 33:01:35
5. Richard Ashbranner, 32, Livermore 34:26:52
6. Paul Biron, 39, Sherman Oaks 35:04:00
7. Kenneth Holloway, 49, San Jose 35:11:45
8. Roel Caragao, 38, Bakersfield 36:18:08
9. Mike Hollenbaugh, 40, San Jose 36:38:04
10. Doug Sloan, 41, Fresno 36:47:58

For more information about the race, check the Web site at www.the508.com

ground. It was so beautiful. I warmed myself in the satin-like feeling of the sunlight" Berge said.

The muscular blonde admits that she would never have started competitive racing had it not been for her fiancée, Ken Metzger, a cyclist himself. A few years ago while out for a ride, she saw him riding and decided to try to keep up. Expecting a fairly easy ride, she was surprised at how difficult and fast the ride seemed to be.

"I figured I could keep up, but I had no idea I was following the fastest guy in Visalia," Berge said laughing.

Working on her doctorate in comparative pathology, Berge somehow makes time to swim in a masters swim class three times a week. She also rides mountain bikes, cross country skies and commutes by bicycle.

"I'm always riding on Mooney. I commute everywhere by bike, I don't have a car," Berge said.



Teresa Hurtado/Times-Delta

Catharina Berge rides her bicycle at Plaza Park on Tuesday. Berge was the first women and second overall at the AdventureCORPS Furnace Creek 508 bicycle race, which was held Oct. 13-15. The race was the first endurance bicycle race for Berge.