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U.S. Team Announced for 2009 NACAC Mountain Running Championships

Colorado Springs, CO --- The U.S. will host the sixth North American Central American Caribbean (NACAC) Mountain Running Championship in North Conway, NH, on Sunday, June 28, 2009. This up/down two-lap course at Mount Cranmore includes approximately 2,400 feet of vertical gain over a 10 kilometer route and will act as a tune-up for NACAC teams in preparation for the World Mountain Running Championships to be held in Campdolcino, Italy, on September 6.

The U.S. hosted the NACAC event in 2004 and 2005, Mexico hosted in 2006 and 2008, and Canada hosted in 2007. Team USA won men's and women's gold medals the first two years, but didn't compete in 2006. In 2007 Team USA was again victorious in both the men's and women's divisions. Last year Team Mexico won the men's competition with Team USA finishing second and Team Canada finishing third. The U.S. women were victorious followed by Mexico and Canada.

"We are looking forward to the NACAC competition returning to the U.S. this June. The course at Cranmore will test the speed and strength of the athletes and with Team USA comprised of experienced international competitors, we're sure to be in the hunt for gold medals," said USATF Mountain Ultra Trail Running Council Chairperson and USA Team manager Nancy Hobbs.

"The White Mountain Milers are really excited to have Cranmore host the NACAC Mountain Running Champs this year. The local running community always gets involved with mountain races at Cranmore and Mt. Washington and this year they are looking forward to hosting athletes from Canada and Central America as well," added race director Paul Kirsch.

The men's team includes **Eric Blake, Rickey Gates, Joseph Gray, and Simon Gutierrez**. The women's team includes **Kasie Enman, Brandy Erholtz, Laura Haefeli, and Megan Kimmel**. The team was selected based on their finish at the World Mountain Running Trophy in 2008. If an athlete declined their spot, members of the 2008 US Team at NACAC were offered spots. Bios of the 2009 team follow.

Eric Blake, 29, New Britain, CT, is a four-time Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team member finishing third for the U.S. men last year in Switzerland. He represented the U.S. at the NACAC Mountain Running Championships in 2007 on the gold-medal squad. He won the USA National Mountain Running Championships in 2006 and 2008. On June 24, 2006 Blake set the *treadmill marathon world record* of 2:21:40 in Farmington, CT at Malibu Fitness. (The former world record was 2:23:58.) He was 28th in the 2004 World Mountain Trophy in Sauze D'Oulx, Italy, 23rd in the 2005 World Trophy in Wellington, New Zealand, and 11th at the Trophy in Bursa, Turkey in 2006. He was 33rd in the 2004 U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials. In Lyman Memorial High School in Lebanon, Connecticut, he was the 1996 state open cross-country champion. He is a member of the Boston Athletic Association and is the Assistant Men's Cross-Country and Track and Field Coach at Central Connecticut State University.

Rickey Gates, 28, Boulder, CO, made his third consecutive Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team in 2008 with his third place finish at Mount Washington. He was the first American at the World Mountain Running Trophy in Switzerland leading the men to a bronze-medal finish. Gates raced in Europe for most of the summer and fall garnering several wins and top finishes in Austria, Norway, Italy, and Slovenia. In 2007 he had back-to-back weekend wins at the USA Mountain Running Championships and the USA 10 km Trail Championships and was also named the 2007 USATF Mountain Runner of the Year. He won the Run the Register Stair Climb in Denver, CO, in February 2008 (47 floors, 1,014 steps). His 10km PR is 31:43 recorded at the Bolder Boulder in May 2008. He competed in college one year while at Lewis and Clark in Portland, OR, and is a graduate of the University of Colorado/Boulder where he studied Sociology and Photography. Gates once won America's Uphill (held annually in March) on Aspen Mountain racing in a clown suit. He was born and raised in the Roaring Fork Valley and is a 1999 graduate of Aspen High School. In 1998 Gates finished fourth in the 3A State Cross Country Championships running 16:48.

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Joseph Gray, 24, Lakewood, WA, started his 2008 mountain running season in Vail, CO, on June 7 with a third-place sprint-to-the finish at the LaraBar 10km, Rickey Gates was the first-place finisher at the event. Gray placed fourth at the USA Mountain Running Championships earning a spot on his first Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team. He was the second U.S. finisher at the World Mountain Trophy – 16th place – in Sierre Crans Montana, Switzerland, and a scoring member of the U.S. bronze medal team. He was the top U.S. finisher at Challenge Stellina in Susa, Italy, Kitzbuhelerhorn in Kitzbuehel, Austria, and Skaala Uphill Challenge in Loen, Norway. He also was the first finisher in the Canadian Mountain Running National Championship at Mt Seymour, Canada, and won the Northwest Mountain Running Championship, in Mt Hood, OR.

Simon Gutierrez, 42, Alamosa, CO, was the 2008 USA Mountain Running National Master Champion setting a masters' course record at Mount Washington and finishing in fifth place just behind Gray. Gutierrez won the La Sportiva Berry Picker in July 2008, the second and final Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team selection race where he made his seventh consecutive team. He won the World Masters Mountain Running Championships in the Czech Republic (his third consecutive win) and was the fourth U.S. finisher at the World Mountain Trophy finishing in 25th place. He is a three-time USATF masters' mountain runner of the year and a two-time winner of the USATF open mountain runner of the year award. He is a three-time USA world cross country team member and a 1983 High School cross country All American. At age 17 Gutierrez set the still standing road 10km record of 29.45. He works at the San Luis Valley Regional Medical Center as an outpatient manual/orthopedic physical therapist and works closely with the Adams State men's and women's cross country and track teams.

Kasie Enman, 29, Huntington, VT, was the top U.S. women's finisher at the NACAC Mountain Championships in 2008. She is a member of the Boston Athletic Association (BAA) and was the USATF New England Runner of the month for April 2008. At the 2008 Mount Washington Road Race, she was runner-up and was also a member of the open championship team. Enman ran a PR of 2:37:14 to finish 11th at the 2008 Olympic Marathon Trials. She won the 2007 Loon Mountain and Ascutney Mountain races in New England, setting a course record of 35:07 at Ascutney. In 2006, she was the U.S. Snowshoe National Champion. She twice represented the U.S. at Ras Nah Eireann International X-Country race in Ireland, placing third in 2005. She was a NCAA Division III All-American in cross country and is presently an elementary school teacher and High School x-country and track coach.

Brandy Erholtz, 31, Bailey, CO, is the 2008 USATF Mountain Runner of the Year in only her second year as a "mountain runner." She finished third at the LaraBar 10km and was the USA National Mountain Running Champion where she made her first Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team. She finished third at both the USA 8km Trail Running Championships and the La Sportiva Berry Picker. Erholtz was the Pikes Peak Ascent champion and also posted wins at the final La Sportiva Mountain Cup Race in Vail and the Black Canyon Ascent setting a course record. She was the top U.S. finisher at the World Mountain Running Trophy finishing in 11th place. Erholtz is employed as a schoolteacher.

Laura Haefeli, 40, Del Norte, CO, was the 2004 and 2005 USATF Mountain Runner of the Year and was the 2008 USATF Masters Mountain Runner of the Year. She won the LaraBar 10km and the USA 8km Trail Championships. She was the USA National Mountain Running Masters champion setting a masters course record and finishing in third place. She earned a spot on the Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team with her second-place finish at the La Sportiva Berry Picker. She finished in 44th place at the World Mountain Running Trophy which was her fourth U.S. team appearance at a Trophy event ('04, '05, '07, and '08). Laura and her husband Tom are beekeepers and sell honey and wax. She is the mother of three young children and is also a high school cross country coach.

Megan Kimmel, 28, Silverton, CO, is a newcomer on the national mountain running circuit. She finished second at the USA 8 km Trail Champs in Steamboat Springs and won the Berry Picker to earn a spot on her first Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team. She was the second U.S. women's finisher in 33rd place at the World Mountain Trophy. Kimmel ran cross country at Cherry Creek High School for four years. She is a past winner of the Kendall Mountain Race and top finisher in the Imogene Pass Run. She participates in Nordic ski racing in the winter. Kimmel lives and trains at elevations above 8,000 feet and is a massage therapist practicing her trade in Silverton and Ouray, CO.

For additional information on the USA Mountain Running Program visit www.usmrt.com, www.trailrunner.com, and www.usatf.org.

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