

OUT OF BOUNDS words by Richard Bangs for Mountain Travel Sobek

In 1926, Ernest Hemmingway published his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, which featured Pamplona's San Fermin Festival and the Running with the Bulls. At the time, it was a small event wherein young men would run along six fighting bulls from the Santo Domingo stables, through the city's narrow cobblestone streets and into the bullring. At least 500 years old, the festival had evolved into a manhood ritual so that in order to win a bride one had to survive a run with the bulls.

With the book's acclaim, the festival began to draw an international audience- and more casualties. Fifteen lives have been lost to the bulls in the last 100 years [*possibly more since the printing of this article in July 2004*]. The latest, a 63-year-old hometown participant, had been running with the bulls since he was 14 years old. And with every casualty it seems more people show up to run. I am one of those people. The run takes place every morning throughout the 9-day festival (which is celebrated July 6- July 14 every year) and I arrive on Day Four to the news that four people have been gored, and several others either trampled or injured. I team up with a 23-year-old *Divino*, or Divine One, a local who has mastered the art of BR (bull-running) survival. His family has run for four generations, and he has been running since he was 15. He tells me he stills gets scared, and that his strategy is to run down the middle of the road as there are fewer people to trip over. He is disappointed there are so many foreigners—he guesses 2000-- and blames them for most of the injuries. "Don't touch the bulls", he advises, as though that might be high on my list.

As we near the starting point, we pass a Red Cross station; some 200 volunteers are set up along the route to assist the fallen. Through a blizzard of bodies, I make it to the end of the run—into the bullring—white pants and shirt stained with sweat and dirt, but no blood. About 10 percent of the runners actually get there before the gates are shut behind the last bull. I feel pretty *machismo* until I see two teenage girls in hiking boots who have beaten me in. Still, I am lucky. Thirty-seven others are injured during my run, bringing the week's total to 127. It's a bit like Spanish roulette, only the odds go up each passing year, with more and more people pressed into narrow streets as the bulls run.

In *The Sun Also Rises* Hemmingway depicts a generation lost as it wanders through the fiesta of Pamplona looking for some sort of center or heart. Only one person in the novel knows the way unwaveringly: Romero, a Spaniard who faces the bulls without fear. I can't help but wonder but wonder if Romero could exist today. But with more tourists in Pamplona spinning down streets; with animal rights groups picketing the bullfights; with matadors booed as politically incorrect; and teenage girls proving as macho, or *macha*, as the rest, it seems doubtful. It seems, in the end, the sun also sets.

Richard Bangs is the author, editor, producer and cofounder of Mountain Travel Sobek (www.mtnsobek.com) and now runs www.greatscapes.msnbc.com