



2011 | 2012 Press Kit



# The First Descents Story:

In 2001, ten young adults took to the rivers of Colorado in whitewater kayaks. For seven days, they learned the basics of the sport, led by professional kayaker Brad Ludden, eventually conquering Class III rapids before the week's end. They were there to prove a point: that cancer, no matter how aggressive, dormant, advanced, or invasive, would never be stronger than they were.

## Mission Statement:

First Descents offers young adult cancer fighters and survivors (ages 18 to 39) a free week-long outdoor adventure experience designed to enable them to climb, paddle and surf beyond their diagnosis, defy their cancer, reclaim their lives and connect with others doing the same.

## What Happens at First Descents:

During the week-long First Descents experience, young adult (ages 18-39) survivors are empowered through conquering legitimate outdoor challenges to push their limits and face their fears, and by doing so, they are able to regain the confidence and self-efficacy lost to cancer. First Descents places an emphasis on each individual's experience and provides the right support for every participant to achieve their goals for the week. The experience is designed to allow healing to happen naturally and organically – no forced conversations and no structured group sessions or therapy. Each program is limited to 15 campers, ensuring individualized care, medical attention and an intimate experience with fellow survivors. First Descents programs are available to young adults with cancer regardless of their financial means. In 2011, First Descents will host 27 week-long programs in seven states (ID, MT, OR, CO, NC, UT, CA) and Canada.







FIRST DESCENTS FOUNDER BRAD LUDDEN WAS BORN IN WYOMING AND RAISED IN NORTHWEST MONTANA. HE SPENT HIS DAYS IN THE OUTDOORS WITH HIS FAMILY HIKING, CAMPING, FISHING, HUNTING, SKIING AND, OF COURSE, KAYAKING. OF ALL HIS PASSIONS, KAYAKING CAUGHT HIS EYE THE MOST.

His parents gave him his first kayak when he was nine and at age 12 he was traveling and competing internationally. By 18 he had kayaked in over 20 countries and found his true passion within the sport, first descents. A first descent is the first time a person successfully kayaks a river or section of river that has never been done. Through his first descents he found immense challenge, adventure, community and personal growth.

Cancer went from being just some random word to something very personal when he was 12 and his aunt was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 38. After watching

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her endure cancer and seeing how little support there was available to her, Brad started volunteering for a local pediatric oncology program by teaching the participants how to kayak. He fell in love with it and decided it was time to do more so at 18, he started working on an organization that would soon become "First Descents". Its goal: to help young adults like his aunt by giving them the life changing experience of kayaking.

"I wanted to recreate the experience of a 'first descent', that had so greatly impacted my life, for people like my aunt who really needed it," says Brad. "Even though thousands of people have been down the rivers they're kayaking at camp, it's still the first time they've been down it and that's the magic of FD!"

Brad continues to kayak professionally for Teva, Dagger, AT Paddles, Kokatat and Smith Optics and still pursues his own adventures on rivers around the world when he's not passionately working with and for First Descents.





# First Descents Program Levels



The original First Descents experience. A week-long adventure program centered around whitewater kayaking, rock climbing and surfing. Young adult fighters and survivors will be able to push their limits, connect with their peers, and experience the healing properties of the outdoors. FD1 level programs are for all first-time participants.



The next step in the journey as a survivor and an outdoorsman (woman!). A new location, a heightened adventure, and the same FD magic. These week-long adventure programs will be centered around whitewater kayaking, rock climbing, and surfing for 2011. The FD2 experience is designed to allow returning campers to create new goals, and continue reaching – both physically and emotionally.



The ultimate adventure experience, FDX is about pursuing life-long adventure, connecting with fellow cancer survivors and continuing to live the spirit of FD. First Descents alum will have the opportunity to select an FDX trip and fundraise to secure a spot on that expedition. FDX programs are owned by the participants; redefining their own limits and seeking their own adventure.



# 2011 First Descents Schedule

## FD1 PROGRAMS:

April 3-8, Moab, UT: Rock Climbing  
May 8-13, Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing  
May 15-20, Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing  
May 22-27 Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing  
May 29-June 3, Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing  
May 15-21, Bryson City, NC: Rock Climbing  
May 22-28, Bryson City, NC: Rock Climbing  
May 29-June 4, Bryson City, NC: Rock Climbing  
June 5-11, Bryson City, NC: Rock Climbing  
June 23-29, Hood River, OR: Kayaking  
July 10-16, Kalispell, MT: Kayaking  
July 24-30, Vail, CO: Kayaking  
July 31-Aug 6, Vail, CO: Kayaking  
Aug 7-13, Vail, CO: Kayaking  
Aug 14-20, Ottawa, ON, Canada: Kayaking  
Sept 4-9, Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing  
Sept 11-16, Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing  
Sept 18-23, Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing  
Sept 25-30 Estes Park, CO: Rock Climbing

## FD2 PROGRAMS:

April 9-14, Moab, UT: Rock Climbing  
June 15-21, Hood River, OR: Kayaking  
July 3-9, Kalispell, MT: Kayaking  
July 17-23, Kalispell, MT: Kayaking  
July 24-30, Kalispell, MT: Kayaking  
Aug 14-20, Ottawa, ON, Canada: Kayaking  
Sept 11-17, Santa Barbara, CA: Surfing

## FDX PROGRAMS:

June 5-11, Mt Hood, OR: Mountaineering  
July 8-14, Salmon River, ID: Kayaking, Rafting







# FIRST DESCENTS

FIRST DESCENTS IS ALL ABOUT CHALLENGE. THROUGH CHALLENGE OUR PARTICIPANTS LEARN AND GROW. THEY DEFY CANCER, RECLAIM THEIR LIVES AND LIVE IT ON THEIR TERMS. CHALLENGE GIVES US CONFIDENCE AND IDENTITY. IT BUILDS COMMUNITY AND STRENGTHENS BONDS. IN SHORT, CHALLENGE HEALS.

As a way to carry challenge forward in their lives, First Descents encourages its participants to identify something that would be challenging to them. Challenge is different for everyone and can be anything from a 5k walk to an Ironman. FD just encourages each of them to pick an athletic challenge, set a fund-raising goal to go along with it, tell their community what it is and why they're doing it and then face that challenge head on. In doing so they've not only grown individually and raised awareness for young adult cancer, but they've also paid it forward so that another young adult with cancer can have the challenge of a First Descents program.

The cool thing is, Team FD isn't limited to FD participants. It's an opportunity for anyone to challenge themselves and in doing so reap all of the same rewards, including paying it forward.



# Getting Involved

There are many ways for anyone to get involved with First Descents. Here are just a few:

1. Refer a young adult who is fighting and surviving cancer to First Descents to be a program participant.
2. Sponsor a one-week adventure therapy program for one of First Descents' program participants.
3. Become a part of Team FD by picking a challenge and setting a fundraising goal.





**When was First Descents established?**

FD was established in 2001, with ten young adults surviving cancer in kayaks on the rivers of Colorado.

**Who is eligible to attend a First Descents program?**

Any young adult (ages 18-39) who has or is currently fighting cancer is eligible to participate in FD programs. The young adult population is the most underserved demographic in the cancer world. It is First Descents' mission to support these survivors and fighters.

**What does it cost to attend a First Descent program?**

First Descents programs are free to all participants who are accepted. A limited number of travel scholarships are also available. First Descents makes every effort to not let monetary obstacles prevent people from participating in our programs.

**What kind of experience is required for participation?**

Participants need zero experience to attend an FD program. The majority of FD participants are new to the sports.

**What kind of medical support is available?**

There are emergency medical providers onsite at each program. First Descents has a team of volunteer Oncology professionals who review each application, and communicate with each participant's primary care physician, ensuring a safe and successful experience.

**Can I, as a media representative, attend an FD program?**

We encourage media to make an appointment through First Descents. We are happy to take you on the river, rock or surf for the day.

**How many programs are there?**

In 2011, there are 27 week-long programs all over the US and Canada.

**What kinds of programs are available?**

First Descents now offers kayaking, surfing and rock climbing programs.



# PRESS RELEASES



**FIRST**  
**DESCENTS**





**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **First Descents Offers Marathon Training Incentive for Team FD Runners**

*Sports Authority Rock 'n' Roll Denver Marathon runners are invited to prep with free endurance instruction*

**Denver, CO—June 21, 2011**--[First Descents](#), a Colorado-based young adult cancer non-profit is offering a chance to get in top running form with free marathon training for those running the Sports Authority Rock 'n' Roll Denver Marathon and Half Marathon with Team FD, the fundraising force of First Descents. First Descents is proud to be an [official charity partner of the Denver Rock 'n' Roll Marathon](#), held October 9, 2011.

Anyone who signs up to run the Denver Rock 'n' Roll Half or Full Marathon as a fundraiser on Team FD is invited to take part in free weekly training sessions with certified fitness trainer Tyler Haughness beginning in July.

***"Life is full of so many opportunities and I'm excited to be a part of this one," says Tyler Haughness, who is donating his time and expertise to Team FD Denver marathoners. "I'm happy to help Team FD prepare for the marathon no matter what their goal might be."***

***"This is an awesome opportunity for those who are nervous about signing up for their first marathon," says Lisa Goldstein, First Descents Team FD Manager. "Our goal is to get more than 100 runners signed up to run with Team FD."***

Those interested in running the Denver Marathon or Half Marathon can sign up here and take advantage of Tyler's training sessions by contacting Lisa Goldstein at [lisa.goldstein@firstdescents.org](mailto:lisa.goldstein@firstdescents.org).

Team FD is made up of athletes and cancer survivors at all levels of competition, each sharing the goal of supporting First Descents and the young adult cancer population. Team FD is all about challenge. It's about each individual picking an activity which represents a challenge to him or her, training for it, setting a fundraising goal and completing that challenge. The challenge can be something solo in nature, or it could be part of an event like the Kona Ironman or a local 5k. It's all about what defines challenge for each person!

For more information on joining [Team FD click here](#).

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## **Team FD Ups the Ante; Fundraising Goal Raised to \$500,000**

*After hitting its initial goal in only five months, First Descents' fundraising athletes raise the bar*

**Denver, CO—May 23, 2011**--[First Descents](#), a Colorado-based young adult cancer non-profit, is setting a higher fundraising goal for 2011 after meeting its initial goal of \$300,000 only five months into the year. First Descents' athlete-driven fundraising force, Team FD, crossed the fundraising finish line way ahead of schedule!. So, Team FD is now announcing a new fundraising goal of \$500,000 for 2011.

***"Our program experience is all about challenge and Team FD is a natural extension of that," says Lisa Goldstein, First Descents Team FD Manager. "Reaching \$300,000 this soon is a testament to the amazing generosity of our supporters and Team FD athletes. But in the true spirit of FD, we felt we needed to dial up the challenge for the remainder of 2011-- so we're all excited to keep pushing toward our new \$500,000 goal!"***

In 2010, more than 180 fundraisers and athletes joined Team FD, raising a total of \$179,674.95 for First Descents. This year, Team FD has far exceeded last year's fundraising mark, with its major events still to come.

### **2011 Team FD Events**

- Triple Bypass Bike Ride – July 10, 2011
- Denver Rock 'n' Roll Half and Full Marathon – Oct. 9, 2011
- New York City Marathon – Nov. 6, 2011.

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First Descents is a non-profit organization providing free outdoor adventure therapy to young adults fighting, surviving and living with cancer. For more information on joining [Team FD click here](#).

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## **Outdoor Adventure Programs for Young Adults with Cancer Triple in Three Years**

*First Descents announces a new multi-level program model, with a total of 27 surf, kayak and climbing camps in 2011*

**Denver, CO—May 16, 2011**--[First Descents](#), a Colorado-based young adult cancer non-profit, kicked off its 2011 season with news that it has developed a multi-level program model, consisting of FD1, FD2 and FDX, in order to enhance the program experience for first timers and returning participants alike.

FD1 is the original First Descents experience. It's a free, week-long whitewater kayaking or rock climbing adventure. It's open to young adult cancer fighters and survivors (ages 18 - 39) who have never attended a First Descents program before.

FD2 is a week-long whitewater kayaking, rock climbing or surfing program for 2nd and 3rd time returning First Descents participants. FD2 is designed to allow returning campers to build on their past camp experience and set new goals. FD2 program participants are encouraged to give back to the cancer community by registering for a Team FD challenge, with the goal of sponsoring a new first-time participant.

FDX—FDX is centered on pursuing life-long adventure, connecting with fellow cancer survivors, and continuing to live the spirit of FD. First Descents works with partnering outfitters to reserve spaces on outdoor expeditions. FD alum, donors, and supporters are then given the opportunity to fundraise to secure their spots on these adventure trips. FDX is also open to the caregivers, partners and spouses of FD alum – an incredible opportunity for FD participants to share the powerful experiences they've had at First Descents with their own support teams.

*According to Founder and CEO, Brad Ludden, **"What was missing previously was a means by which participants could grow through their FD experience year after year. We used to give the same experience to returning participants as we did to new ones. We realized that we needed to offer a more challenging level of programming for those who are ready to take the next step in their survivorship with FD2 and beyond that, FDX is designed to grow with them for the rest of their lives."***

First Descents has tripled its programs in the past three years. In 2009, First Descents held nine programs. Last year it held 15. This year there are 27 First Descents programs scheduled in six states and Canada.

2011 marks a number of firsts for First Descents, including its first-ever surf camp, first program in Canada, and first invitation for donors, volunteers, family, friends and supporters to experience an adventure camp.

***"This is an exciting time, because we're able to reach even more young adults with cancer than ever before,"*** says First Descents Program Director Whitney Lange. ***"And while our reach has expanded, each program still offers the attentive, unforgettable adventure experience FD has always provided."***

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## **First Descents' First Blind Camper Brings Inspirational Story to the Big Apple**

*Neil "Tailz" Taylor is set to ride NYC's Five Boro Bike Tour this weekend*

**Denver, CO—April 25, 2011--**[First Descents](#), a Colorado-based nonprofit providing outdoor adventure therapy to young adults with cancer, is proud to announce that blind camper Neil "Tailz" Taylor will ride in the TD Bank Five Boro Bike Tour May 1 in New York City.

Taylor will join more than 30,000 cyclists experience New York City on two wheels. The TD Bank Five Boro Bike tour follows 42 miles of car-free streets through all five city boroughs. Taylor will ride tandem with First Descents Founder and CEO, Brad Ludden.

31-year-old Taylor from Brattleboro, Vermont, is fighting the brain cancer that caused his blindness. He attended a First Descents kayak camp in the summer of 2010 in Vail, Colorado. At the 5th Annual First Descents Ball this spring, he was presented the First Descents Spirit Award for inspiring campers, volunteers and staffers. This year, Taylor has signed on as a volunteer massage therapist with First Descents. He'll travel to a number of camps across the country offering massage therapy to climbers and kayakers involved in the program.

*Of his experience at First Descents camp, Taylor says, "**People on the river and rafts didn't know that I was blind. And that's really empowering for me because when I'm walking down the street, it's obvious that I'm blind. First Descents has surpassed anything I could ever imagine it would be.**"*

Neil Taylor and Brad Ludden will be in New York City for the TD Bank Five Boro Bike Tour this coming Friday, April 29th through Monday, May 2nd and will be available for interviews. If you'd like to talk to them, please contact [Hilary@outsidemedia.com](mailto:Hilary@outsidemedia.com).

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## MULTIMEDIA LINKS

