

'No Boundaries' gets really real

With genuine challenges and dangers, this is the gutsy show 'Survivor' will never be.

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In the mountains of British Columbia, the contestants swing on a rope on the face of a cliff.

At other times, they're on a wild rafting trip, hiking down a mountain in intense fog, moving large barrels through a mining tunnel or climbing glaciers.

Fifteen contestants are traveling more than 2,000 miles from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, to the Arctic Circle. They're going by car, boat, racing yacht, llama, canoe and other means. They even cross river canyons by hanging under a cable and sliding. (A fall wouldn't be fatal, but it's still fairly high.)

"No Boundaries," the latest "reality" show, stresses adventure over soap opera elements. And it's more about genuine survival than "Survivor" is.

In fact, everything that's right about "No Boundaries" shows what's so wrong about "Survivor." "No Boundaries" is must viewing for anyone who loves facing the forces of nature.

"No Boundaries" premieres at 7 p.m. Sunday on The WB. Troy Hartman, a skysurfer who was the recent host of MTV's "Senseless Acts of Video," is the host. Executive Producers are Brady Connell ("The Amazing Race," "Eco-Challenge") and partner James A. Jusko for Lion's Gate Television and Ford Motor Company.

"No Boundaries" is like a good book you can't put down, and I found the relationships among the contestants to be more genuine than those in "Survivor." I watched a preview tape of part of Thursday's premiere of "Survivor: Marquesas" immediately after seeing "No Boundaries."

"Survivor," which airs at 8 p.m. Thursdays on CBS, paled in comparison. The adventure on "Survivor," at least so far, doesn't seem to go much beyond everyone paddling a couple of miles in a raft to the Polynesian island of Marquesas.

That's a light stroll for the contestants in the much colder British Columbia on "No Boundaries." Two teams of the contestants had to row like crazy in a long canoe race.

"Survivor: Marquesas" wastes no time getting to the contestants' complaints about one another. Fortunately, the camaraderie improves after the two tribes find water and start their first fires.

"No Boundaries" begins on a positive note, as the contestants choose the oldest and most experienced among them to be their leader. In every episode, the leader must choose to expel one contestant.

Afterward, the entire group votes for a new leader in a ranking/point procedure that's more complicated than it needs to be. I won't try to explain it here, but I have to give "Survivor" credit for keeping its cast-off system simpler.

But that's really my only complaint about "No Boundaries." The contestants do talk about one another, pro and con, in interviews, but they seem to be doing so fairly.

"No Boundaries" isn't a mean-spirited series. That's because the contestants in "No Boundaries" are facing difficult tests that could leave them injured.

No one was killed and safety was stressed, but the risk was there in all the rock-climbing and swinging on cliff faces. One contestant had early stages of hypothermia in an early event.