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# ON MY WAY TO BOSTON I STOPPED BY WESTERN STATES

By Vanessa Stroud

Life is a funny thing. I think some things happen because they just do; God allows certain events for a higher purpose. Often you're just a bit player or, at best, a supporting actor in someone else's amazing Broadway debut. If you're smart you'll pay it forward while carefully observing and learning all you can from these stars. At other times, circumstances are carefully orchestrated by Him, unbeknownst to our befuddled human psyches until hindsight clearly illuminates the Master's plan. It seems when we try to force things to fit our preconceived notions, our plans get all discombobulated and never turn out the way we desire or imagined. But when we relax, sit back and get still, essentially letting things take their course, events fall into place and the outcome is always amazingly beyond what we could ever expect.

**Western States**

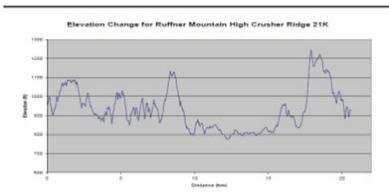
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Such is my Western States experience. I had in mind to qualify for Boston soon. But in November 2012, on a very casual Saturday run just after the Pinhoti 100, Prince Whatley off-handedly stated, "Don't tell me you haven't been out to the Western States site and registered for the lottery." I shrugged. "Hadn't really thought about it. How does it all work?" Long story short, on December 8<sup>th</sup>, I was waiting for Prince and Trey Whitt to come thru the last aid station at the Toshka 50K and a friend texts "CONGRATULATIONS!" "For what?" I reply. I had just dropped down from 50K to the 25 not ready to dial it in for another 15 miles so soon after Pinhoti. Physically I was good, but it had become apparent at mile 12 just how mentally taxing hundreds can be. "You were selected in the lottery for Western States!" he shot back. I stared at the screen for a second that seemed to stretch into eternity. Then I proceeded to suck all the air out of the aid station and surrounding woods. "Are you ok?" the startled volunteers questioned. I managed to blurt out "I just got into Western States" before I let out a big "WHOOHOO!"

My brain tried to wrap itself around the fact that my next 100 would be the Big Dance, the Boston of ultrarunning, *the mecca* of the sport. Me? ME?!?! The career mom of two who gets by on an average of 35 miles a week, who's only run one 100, who hasn't even qualified for Boston yet, who just dropped down in distance mid race – never done that before. The non-elite have less than a 7% chance of being selected in this lottery. Me. OK, this is definitely a God thing. It took all of about two seconds to keep the news to myself when I saw the fellas come through the aid station. It took Trey even less time to sign on as my chief pacer.

As is my character, I immediately set about researching the race in depth to determine if and how my training needed to be tweaked. I created a 'to scale' stacked comparison of elevation charts from my training route at Ruffner Mountain x8, the Pinhoti course, and Western States. Check this out...

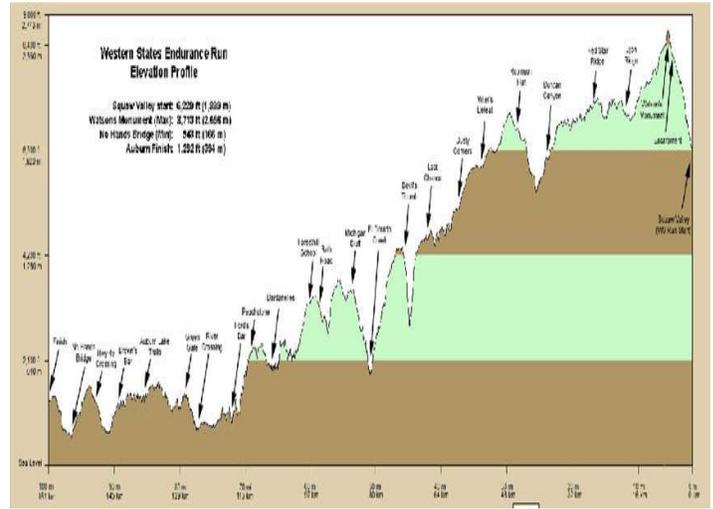
Ruffner Crusher Ridge 13.1 course x8 = 104 miles...38,400' of elevation change between 775' and 1250'.



And then we have... Western States... with 41,060' elevation change between 520' and 8750'. (Below is flipped so the start is at the left like the Pinhoti chart below.)

My first reaction: *Oh God, how am I going to do this?*

If He allowed, or arranged, for my name to be drawn, He would surely provide me the strength and endurance to make it to the finish line. So I pinned it on the cubicle wall to the right of my monitors so it would be in my face all day. Eventually I became

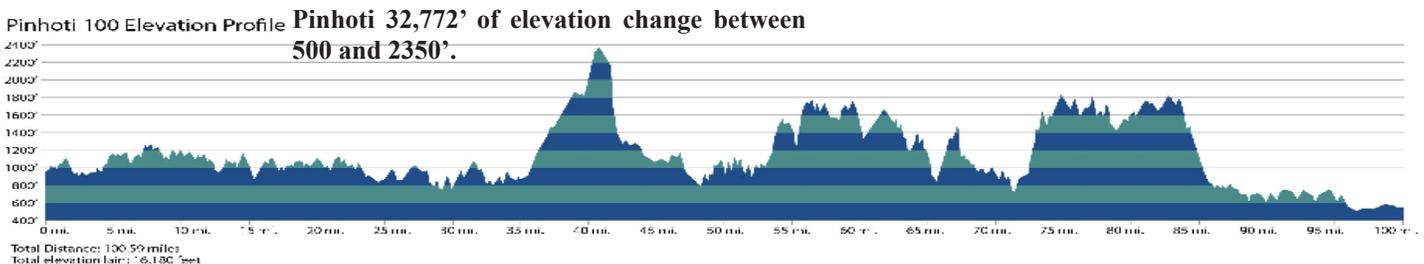


somewhat desensitized, little by little convincing myself that those mountains really weren't that high and the climbs not that steep. Why, look at Mt. Cheaha. It's the same pitch as the Escarpment and Devil's Thumb.

Since finishing Pinhoti, I had decided it's good to sweat the small stuff. Not being a mileage monster, there are several training habits that I'm 100% sold on as the key to being able to complete a 100 on minimal miles. Amidst ongoing questions and comments, I continued to stand at my desk spending at least an hour a day on the balance board. Brushing teeth became two minute wall squat sessions, sometimes alternating legs for even more strengthening. I only managed to get in a few 50K's, pace a marathon, and do a couple of extra-long runs with the last one being on Memorial Day with Prince Whatley. (Thank you, man!) With each one, I felt stronger and stronger; my resolve to finish refining itself to a rock hard state.

On the last really long training run, I tried out a pair of HOKAs since the previous monster run left me with a nice case of metatarsalgia. I wasn't wigged out and refused to worry. I just stoically treated the issue and knew that it would all be fine. Turns out HOKAs were the ticket and are now in my regular trail shoe rotation. The speed laces were ditched in favor of a funky lacing pattern that provided the max width in the toe box. I tried them out on a 54 mile run and even soaked them on a particularly dry Saturday to see how they'd do wet. It's good to get as uncomfortable as possible during training.

Upon studying historical weather records, it appeared the heat cycle would come back around for this year's race. Therefore, eight weeks out, heat training began. Studies show the body requires at least 21 days at 90 minutes per session in hot temps to become acclimated and it begins to regress back within 7 days. I didn't find this '21 day' tidbit of info until I was 10 days out from race day. Oh well, the extra weeks of heat training would



just be a feather in my cap. The unusually cool spring required a diligent effort to artificially create heat; wearing the warmest fleece lined tights and top along with eschewing all electrolytes until each training session was over. This process was taxing to say the least and required an extra measure of mental discipline. And I began to carry a sweater everywhere I went as any amount of air conditioning chilled me to the bone. However, I would find myself thanking God for providing me the wisdom and discipline to look like such an idiot day in and day out. The strange looks I got were humorous for the most part. My heat training finale was scheduled on the Tuesday of race week with a three hour, heat full blast, full winter gear sweat-fest driving extravaganza. When I got out at my exit to fill up, it was 86 degrees outside and felt like a walk in freezer. The last thing I did before boarding the plane was to get a really short haircut. The locks had not been shorn in about 6 months figuring longer, thicker hair would contribute to the heat training. I immediately felt two pounds lighter and 15 degrees cooler. Heat training, check. It was all out of my hands now.

As I did for Pinhoti, in the weeks preceding the race, I revised the 48 page ridiculously detailed crew document to reflect the info for Western States. Again, it was more an exercise for me to ensure I'd thought every detail through, had considered all angles, concocted responses to every scenario, provided resources and answers for every possible question, and in short – kept the type A section of my cranium believing I had some control over this runaway train. And, it provided humorous reading for the crew should they become unbearably bored waiting for me to drag my hiney into the next aid station. There was even a new section on wildlife and how to deal with encounters of every type, especially of the bear, cougar and snake variety. Trey admitted he could never remember which bear we were supposed to play dead with and which to stand up to. Good thing we didn't see any.

When we arrived in Squaw Valley, I took one look at that first mountain, a straight uphill 4 mile climb. Check. I got this thing. Ruffner had prepared me for this and yes, these climbs were three or four times the length of any I trained on, but I wasn't intimidated. My crew power hiked up for the flag raising requiring them to start about two hours ahead of time. Trey and I rode the tram to save our legs for the task ahead. The consensus was that it was tough and they didn't see how the elites could run all the way to the top.

The weather had been a balmy 45 – 70 degrees at the start with the finish line temps in Auburn being about 20 degrees warmer; pretty nice. It was almost chilly at all the outdoor runner/crew briefings held Wednesday through Friday. But Saturday's forecast was looking warm. I admired the sub-24 silver buckles that seemed to be all the latest in fashion. "Let's just get through this race first," my husband/crew chief kept repeating. Ever the optimist, I had purchased a miniature silver buckle pin and had secured it inside the pocket of my shorts. Which, by the way, were purchased off the clearance rack on Thursday. Race Ready with WS100 logo for \$9.00 – who could pass *that* up? So much for not trying anything new on race day.

Saturday morning finally arrived with a cool starting temp of 50. After liberally applying Body Glide *and* Vaseline to every moving part, seam, and potential chaffing point, then shellacking myself with 100 sweat proof sunscreen, I slid on down to the start. There was a gas log fire pit situated almost center of the starting

area so I secured a spot and spent a moment or two asking for divine protection, guidance, and strength for the task ahead. As with Pinhoti, I had been blessed with a spirit of serene calmness and an odd absence of anxiety. There was no concern for the course, the elevation change, potential altitude issues, heat, getting lost, wildlife, competing with other runners, etc. So, when the gun went off, I continued lounging until almost the whole field had crossed the mat and then began to mosey up the mountain. I hiked up in pretty decent time of an hour and 15 minutes with Gordy Ainsleigh (*the* original Western States runner), Cowman a Moo-ha (the second original Western States runner), and some other back of the packers. The sun was up by the time we reached the summit and started down the other side. There were only small scattered patches of snow and none on the trail since winter had been one of the mildest in a decade.

At this point, I took a moment to look up and was pleasantly surprised to see wildflowers as far as the eye could see. It crossed my mind to do my best Julie Andrews *Sound of Music* impression, but I had 96 miles to go and all day to get there. Suffice it to say that it was as gorgeous a scene as I could ever imagine. However, I found that if you don't like the current scenery or terrain, just wait 45 minutes and it would drastically change. Julie's meadow abruptly morphed to desert-like sandy dirt with baseball sized loose rocks and scrub brush – still beautiful in its own way. This gave way to the Red Star fire area where all the trees were about 10-15 feet tall and charred black. Lush green undergrowth was filing in, but with the entire canopy gone, the full sun was heating up. During this first section the experts' advisement kept scrolling thru my mind "Take it easy on the ridge top and save some for the last 40 miles. Your system's working harder than you think in the thinner air." Despite this, I paced to keep my average to 14:30 thinking I would take my time in the canyons and then burn up the last 40 'runnable' miles.

When I pulled into Robinson's Flat at mile 29ish and saw my crew for the first time, I was just 45 minutes over my 50K PR time. I point blank stated "That was the hardest 30 miles I had ever run...and guess what? The next 30 would be even harder. One word for ya - canyons." Unfazed, they soaked me down with ice water, put a baggie of ice in the front of my jog bra and ice in the hat, swapped bottles and spy belts and sent me on my way. Quickly, all the ice melted away and I was dry again. And of course the baggie of ice had gone tepid and slipped out from the bottom band of the bra. I now looked like Archie Bunker with a sloshy beer belly. Not one to be wasteful, I retrieved it, carefully opened a small bit of the zipper, and poured it over my head weaving side to side to keep every precious drop rolling down my face and neck instead of dripping prematurely to the dry, dusty ground.

After about two miles of uphill grade in a dense forest with the biggest pine trees I'd ever seen and pinecones the size of footballs, the trail turned a sharp corner and thrust the runners out onto an exposed ridge. I squinted into the bright sunlight and once my eyes adjusted, a 360 panoramic view expanded before me. Desert-like terrain spread out with switchbacks several miles down to a verdant valley and back up the opposite mountain. Beyond that mountain were six or seven snowcapped mountain chains, as wide as they were tall, seemingly endless even while fading into the curve of the cloudless horizon. It was so breath-taking a lump rose in my throat as I almost wept at the magnificence and display of the infinite creativity of my God. Truth be known, if I had any



sense I should have been mortified, or at the very least intimidated, by the fact that I would be traversing some of those very peaks. But instead, I worshipped right on down those countless switchbacks to that green shaded haven below and on up the other side. One canyon down, three to go.

Now don't get me wrong, I was thanking God that the other canyons were mostly shaded. Dipping my hat in every stream was imperative; the air was so dry that I never felt a trickle of sweat. Really. It evaporated as soon as it rose to the skin's surface. I estimate that I drank about 5 gallons of fluid across the entire course. The temperature rose to 106, the second hottest in the race's 40 year history. With a starting weight of 111.2 and 10 weigh stations, I was very conscious to keep the electrolytes balanced as well. Occasionally, I would check my left hand to see if my wedding band was getting tight, but each time found it to be comfortably loose.

The first 62 miles have crazy long ups and downs which can really work the quads, hamstrings, hips and glutes. The downs were taken with very loose hips and knees carefully balancing the center of gravity directly over the feet. Even with constant attention to form, my quads became tender to the touch by mile 60 or so. At one point I felt the slightest perception of a ripple in my right hamstring so I popped an extra Salt Stick and never felt it again. Continual monitoring of hydration and electrolyte balance was so crucial on this run to keep the muscles going and fatigue to a minimum in the heat. Besides, as a pacer, I've had a front row seat to the long-lingering carnage and semi-permanent damage of improper electrolyte management during a 100. Not pretty.

Eventually the infamous Devil's Thumb climb with 36 evil uphill switchbacks presented itself. I actually found it to be not so hideous since it was shaded and almost rain forest-like in some spots. When I reached the top, I was greeted by the nicest lady of whom I asked, "So where is it?" "What?" "Devil's Thumb, of course!" "Oh, it's way over there, but you probably don't want to spend time or energy to get to it so just step over here and these guys will drape a nice icy cold bath towel over you." "Well alrighty, then. I'm game for that!" Across the race, there

are 24 such oasis, which can suck you in and waste a lot of precious time if you're not careful. I must say the race lives up to its hype on this subject. Most had a sentry stationed about a tenth of a mile out with a two-way radio relaying approaching runner's bib #'s. It was not unusual for a volunteer to greet me with "Welcome to such and such Aid Station, Vanessa! I'm so-n-so and I'll be taking care of you today. What's in your bottles? More ice? Step over to the scales while I fill your bottles, then I'll meet you at the food tables with your drop bag." The spread was always great, even though I didn't eat much solid food during the day to ward off potential nausea that can be caused when the gut tries to digest food while the blood is directed at the skin for cooling and muscles for running. Fruit is what appealed to me, but I still ate sparingly relying mainly on Vitargo S2 and Hammer Gels from my bags to make up the needed 250 calories per hour. Volunteers were generous with the ice, wet sponges, water hoses and even sunscreen.

At Miller's Defeat, the cutest volunteer ever ran up to me and in the sweetest little four-year old squeaky voice asked "What's in your bottles, lady?" with both pudgy little filthy hands outstretched to take them for refilling. I could tell he'd been coached all day as he raced to get the bottles to his dad and then raced back to me holding them up as high as he could reach with an "aren't you proud of me?" ear to ear grin (with snaggle teeth of course). Love this sport where families can bring even their smallest kids out to volunteer and be a part of something really cool; great way to teach work ethic from an early age.

Somewhere along this mileage, a guy slowly passed me on an uphill and casually mumbled something about being 14 minutes behind the 30 hour cut off at the last aid station. My Garmin had stopped at about mile 42 and the backup wouldn't pull a signal. I should have dismissed his deranged rantings since my crew had assured me I was dead on a 27 hour pace at each and every aid station. As Tina said, she could set a clock by my splits. But that was hours ago at mile 30. What if I had fallen off pace? I asked what time it was and began rudimentary calculations. It didn't take but a few minutes to determine his marbles had melted in the heat.

I managed to make it into Michigan Bluff mile 55 by 7:15 PM or so, 27 hour pace intact. After my crew extolled the virtues of a local pizza joint (where's my slice, huh?), they loaded me up with more gels (pizza, anyone, Bueller?). Since it was still daylight and I wasn't allowed to pick up a pacer yet, I donned my lights and headed off to crank out the last 7 miles of solo running thru the last canyon. I had spent at least 12 hours running pretty much by myself and was ready for some company. On my way out, I told Trey to get ready as I had some run left and we were going to make up some time that night!

Tina, my pacer who would run the last 7 miles, met me on Bath Road to run me into Foresthill mile 62. She had been schlepping a grass skirt, flower covered bikini top, and lei just waiting for the chance to play dress up. She garnered quite a few compliments from the gentlemen we passed by en route to

the school. Once there, it was quite the party atmosphere with an announcer enthusiastically calling out each runner's name and home town. I couldn't resist doing a huge heel click when I ran into the spot light. Have to take full advantage of every second of those 15 minutes of fame, you know. The crowd seemed to love it and the medical staff felt it unnecessary to inquire how I was doing when I stepped onto the scales.

Trey and I set off into the darkness. I had to pause a few times in the first mile or two to get a rock out of my shoe. So much for those new gaiters. And why does a grain of sand feel like a boulder? How can that be? *Now* I was ready to crank out some mileage and make up some time! With the next 14 miles being primarily downhill and having some run left we jogged for a short while...until my stomach declared itself a Benedict Arnold. Darn it! I've rarely had to deal with nausea on a run. I typically can eat pizza, fried egg sandwiches, Chinese, Mexican, whatever and can run miles and miles without so much as a belch. What in the heck is this mess? I hit the ginger chews, which I had been enjoying here and there all day. They weren't so pleasant now. I couldn't bring myself to choke down a gel as even the thought made me gag. Heeeeyyyy. Maybe that's what I need to do – make myself gag and reset the ol' tummy ah la Sunny Blende. I tried to toss one down and sure enough, it came right back up, but alone with nothing else. OK. Well, my stomach is still cranking through calories, so that's good. Better just slow down to a decent power hike pace until it passes and try to keep some calories coming in somehow.

At each aid station I'd grab a handful of saltines, maybe a banana, and/or some broth and kept my mouth just wet enough with plain water to keep it all sliding down the hatch. Every here and there I'd toss in a Salt Stick to ensure the electrolytes were covered. Nothing was working. Every time I power hiked up hill, bluhhh. Jogging downhill jostled my stomach too much. Dang it. In desperation, I began trying Sprite, Coke and finally the arsenic of soft drinks...Mountain Dew. This was the first time a soft drink had crossed my lips since I fractured my femur and changed my nutrition to an alkaline diet. Since I don't drink coffee, the Mountain Dew certainly helped to wake me up for the last 7 miles. When I finally saw my crew again at miles 78 and 93, I let them know what I was battling. My hubby had the nerve to tell me afterwards that he had some Dramamine but "you don't take meds." Seriously? This is a *one – hundred - mile - RACE* – all nutrition/med rules are out and we do what we have to in order to make the goal – which in my case was finish n under 30 hours and get one of those coveted buckles. Note to self...pack a Dramamine in stash and count on downing some caffeine with it.

Finally we made it to the famous American River crossing at the Rucky Chucky aid stations mile 78. I could not wait to step into those bone chilling, muscle reviving waters; after all, we were up in the mountains and this was true snow melt water. I took a deep breath and stepped in. It was a click cooler than tepid bath water. Alrighty then. I was all set for ice cream headache welcoming relief for aching legs. I can only assume the water feeding the river was spillover from the dam up stream and the sun had warmed it quite a bit during the day. Regardless, it was wet and better than nothing. How quickly the pleasantness dried up though. By mile 82 I had silently, firmly made up my mind to get this bronze buckle and I *would not* be back. I was done with Western States. Checked off the bucket list. I kept this to myself

though and tried not to complain. Just take care of business and keep troubleshooting.

I have to credit Trey; he kept a good attitude and a good pace during this very long night of nausea. Unfortunately, across those 30 some odd miles, he didn't get to run much which was highly disappointing for me. It's not how I wanted his pacing segment to go considering the time and expense he had invested helping me live out this crazy dream. We did have some funny moments however. During the night a fellow and his pacer kept leap frogging with us. We could hear him coming *and* going since he was using a cadence metronome. Beep, beep, beep, pause. Beep, beep, beep, pause. I seriously don't know how his pacer didn't stuff that thing under the nearest boulder or toss it into one of the bottomless ravines off the side of the trail. About the time the sun was creeping above the peaks, the birds began to welcome the day. Wouldn't you know there was a bird that sounded exactly like that stupid metronome?!

Trey also kept my mathematical aptitude in check. Sometime during the night, his watch had stopped and his backup wouldn't pick up a satellite either. He was pacing off of feel and estimating the distance/time to the next aid stations. Coming in to Brown's Bar, I had convinced myself it was mile 85 and was beginning to freak out that at Highway 49, I'd have 11 miles to go (versus the actual 7). I couldn't make it compute that at the pace we were going I could finish in less than 30 hours. I shuttered at the thought of my buckle slipping away. All the training, the sacrifice of time with my family, and the financial investment in this experience would all be for naught. I can't fail my family. I can't fail my pacers. I can't fail *myself*. I had never not finished a race. No DNF's nor failing to meet cut offs. I was staring down a very dark, discouraging tunnel. I never felt like this at Pinhoti. Lord, what's going on with this? The type A left side of my brain chalked it up to the nausea. The spiritual right side prayed, "Lord, I know my friends and family are praying for me. I ask that you let me feel those prayers as renewed strength to get through this mileage."

It was only after the race while catching up on Facebook that the goodness of God was yet again revealed. Timestamps on the posts showed that during this toughest stretch, my sweet friends were awake and praying for me. It sent chills up my spine and flooded me with so much awe that God would care about a little 5'2" crazy woman who had her mind set on running a hundred miles over the Sierra Nevadas...and for what? A buckle? A cheap trinket that collect dust and tarnish? No, not a buckle. Something intangible and eternal to be stored in my heart. I watched as He gave me strength to continue putting one foot in front of the other, step by step. As His Spirit was moving through my family and friends, He kept me moving. I understood that this is just one of the reasons He called me to run, so I could experience Him like this. I cannot think of another medium by which I have had so rich and deep and full a drink of His goodness. It's my desire that everyone find the passion He has put inside each of us, whatever that is - be it painting, dancing, singing, teaching, saving lives, inventing cool products to make life easier, whatever – and delve into it to the point that they can't sustain it under their own power, but have to rely fully on Him to see it through. At my lowest and weakest, He is strong. His power is perfected in my flawed humanness...and it's humbling and awe inspiring to experience.

Unaware of the silent spiritual battle that was waging just a few feet behind him, Trey reassured me that Brown's Bar was mile 89, Highway 49 was mile 93 and estimated I'd break 29 hours for a nice PR. I still had trouble believing him until he checked the pace card and confirmed it. To put my ridiculous paranoia into perspective, Trey is a senior partner in a very established, highly successful accounting firm here in town. I, however, couldn't make it through high school trig. Who was I to question his math?

I noted when the sun began to rise and as soon as possible turned off my lights thinking perhaps the pendulum motion/illusion was contributing to the nausea. No such luck. Maybe it was a delayed reaction to the heat, dust (boy was it dusty), altitude, who knows – a combination of those things? We pulled into Highway 49 amidst American flags and cheers. Gulping Mountain Dew I reloaded both hands with saltines. After I ditched one bottle and switched the other for ice water, Tina and I set out. It took about a mile to break Tina in to what had become routine over the last 30 miles. Again, I was disappointed that she wouldn't be running a whole lot. We crossed through a meadow and back onto rolling trails. I asked her to tell me the story of almost being deported to Guatemala last month. Tina is an office manager for a funeral home in Savannah, which one of the largest seaport on the Eastern coastline. This proximity creates all kinds of opportunities for international quags in returning the recently deceased to their country of origin, especially if a person passes away at sea. This job is not just researching ancient burial policies from companies that have been bought out multiple times over the decades. Nope, we're talking about coordinating consulates, embassies, ambassadors, port authorities, the FBI and state and county law enforcement, bridging gaps in language barriers, the whole enchilada. And to think people are just dying to get in there. (I couldn't resist.)

When we came across a couple of ladies who appeared to have lost their way to Walmart (come on, you know the type), we knew No Hands Bridge had to be within a quarter mile. There was no stopping at this aid station and we proceeded across the bridge. I may have imagined it, but I believe I saw a sign that stated a limit of 5 runners or 3 dismounted riders with horses. Guess I should have been more concerned that there were about 20 people crossing in both directions? Perhaps I imagined the other 18 pedestrians as well? The scenery again was spectacular, but the course, again, seemed all uphill and even more nauseating. We passed and were passed with the temps rising high in the 90's, again (are you seeing a pattern here?). I was continuing to pop Salt Stick and monitor that ring finger. I truly didn't want to let the electrolytes slip out of control. Finally at long last we reached Robie Point, which I blew through as well. ('Blew through' being a relative term –

my pace was snail slow at that point - as you can imagine.) My crew met me there to do the last mile, sans Trey who was waiting at the track with camera in hand. For some reason I had in my mind that from Robie Point on it was flat. Well...to the crew it was. To me, it was another mountain on which I had to stop twice, hands on knees, to catch my breath. Jesus, need some more help here, please.

Kudos to this neighborhood. There was a festival atmosphere with everyone congratulating the runners. There was even a big group shouting out our names as they checked bib #'s on their iPads tuned to ultralive.net. Nikki Kimball who had finished 2<sup>nd</sup> female – *the day before* - was cheering us on. That last mile took an eternity. "Where is that infernal track?" I asked for the 10<sup>th</sup> time. Then I turned the corner...and the angels in heaven began to sing...for there before me was the most famous chain link gate in all of ultrarunning. The only portal to the sacred track leading to the most revered finish line in ultrarunning. Just a mere 200 yards...300 steps to glory. Carefully, having being warned about the step up, I set foot on the red rubberized surface. A white hot energy rose through the soles of my Hokas, igniting the smoldering embers of endurance, fanning the flames under my feet until I found myself not only running, but hopping up to click my heels together in sheer joy and ecstasy of being granted the strength and privilege to pull this thing off.

I crossed the line in 214<sup>th</sup> place, 38<sup>th</sup> female, 28:47:45, PR. Yeh, baby! I'm coming back for the silver! (That change of mind took less than 1 second. And the hubby says I have mood swings...really?) The finish line medical team directed me to yet another scale where I weighted exactly 111.0, just 0.2 off from my starting weight. They consulted their iPads for the other 10 weigh-ins, double checked my wrist band, and tilted their heads with raised eyebrows. I had managed to stay within one pound on either side of my starting weight. *Nailed it!* When I took my shoes off and the feet finally dried out, I only had two small, insignificant blisters and all ten toenails were intact, unbruised and complete with racing red nail polish. I had just finished my second hundred

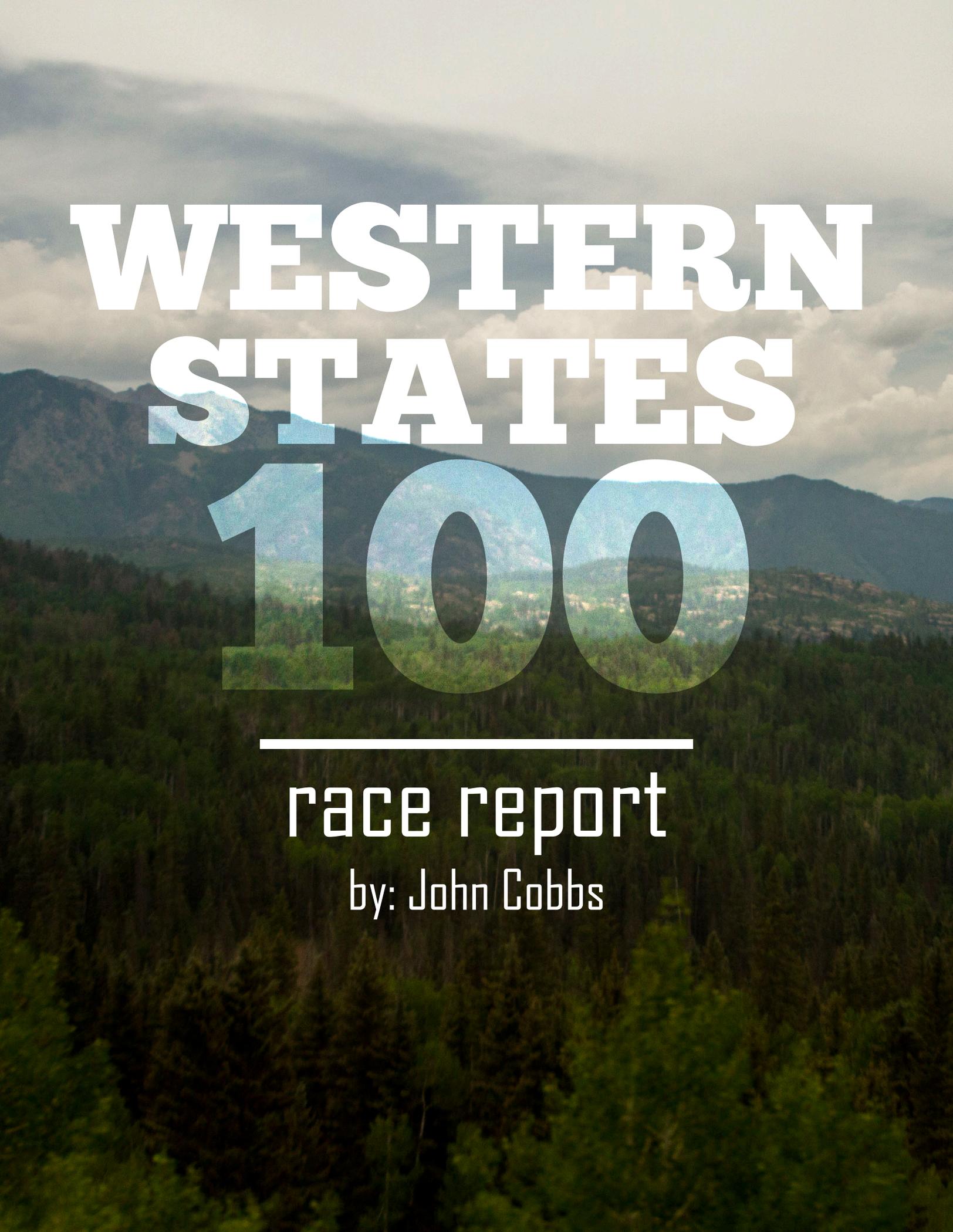


in the hottest temps I'd ever run in bar none, with wet feet the entire time, with 25% more elevation change, PR'd, and could still run, jump, function. *Ba Bam!*

*God is good...all the time. And all the time...God is good.*

Post script: Over 100 starters had dropped in the heat with at least 6 waking up in the hospital. One guy even dropped at mile 96 with a couple of hours left on the clock. (Broken bone? Wrap it in duct tape and keep movin' man!) All five runners from Birmingham finished (Congratulations guys!). The fastest of us, John Cobbs, I had estimated would finish in less than 20 hours ended up with a 23:29 narrowly securing a silver buckle (awesome job!). That put my performance into even clearer perspective for me. If the terrain/ heat/dust/whatever delayed John, my little bitty PR was a miracle!

Moral of the story...I've learned I can do anything I set my mind and heart to do. Never settle for a glass ceiling that you or someone else has built. Find a skylight, a roof access point, at the worst – throw a rock at it...and break on through!



# WESTERN STATES 1000

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race report

by: John Cobbs

In 1974, when Gordy Ainsleigh ran the 100 miles from Lake Tahoe to Auburn, California, finishing in just under 24 hours, a number of ultrarunning firsts were achieved and a handful of traditions were established. He was the only runner that day but he ran and walked alongside the Tevis Cup horse race that had been run on that same route for twenty years. Borrowing from the horse race, the first official human-only version in 1977 also used 100 miles as its distance standard, provided medical aid stations along the route, used 24 hours as the cutoff time and awarded western belt buckles as finisher tokens. Ultrarunning has evolved a good deal since 1974. There are plenty of longer and more difficult races around the world. However, the Western States Endurance Run, the event Gordy initiated and for which he still toes the line each year, has become the most prestigious and competitive 100 miler in the sport.

Once you start cavorting with trail runners, specifically the ultra variety, you invariably get asked THE question: "Gonna ever do Western States?" Saying yes is actually easy as it involves no real commitment. The annual lottery takes less than 10% of applicants so you can apply for years, and never have to actually toe the line. Well my luck turned last year. On my fifth roll of the dice spanning the last seven years, my name came up. The ultra gods were smiling on Alabama that day as six runners from the state got selected, five from the Birmingham area and two (Vanessa Stroud and Kyle Stichtenoth) in back to back drawings.

Fast forward six and a half months and there I was in Squaw Valley, having arrived a week early to get acclimated and do some course recon. I had good company too, having drafted two of the fastest trail runners in Birmingham as my pacers. Ali Edwards is barely legal but has been setting course records in ultras around the South this last year and was just about to start a solo hike of the Appalachian Trail. Owen Bradley has won ultras all over the country and is training for the Leadville 100 in August so Western States fit perfectly in his training schedule. In the days leading up to the race we explored a few miles of the course, attending race briefings, ate a lot of Mexican food and plotted our strategy.

Weather predictions were for 3-digit highs and even though I considered the 80's and 90's we'd been experiencing in Alabama a good warm up, I heard plenty of race veterans saying that the unfiltered mountain sun would slow even the elites this year. Recalling a 90 degree day at the 2012 Boston Marathon where I ended up barely jogging the last 10 miles (after disregarding Coach Kirk Mueller's advice to take it easy early on), I vowed to not let my ego drive my pace. Owen and I had written up a pacing plan that had me finishing in 22:30, allowing enough cushion to break the magic 24 hour mark should something go wrong. But then we heard Andy Jones-Wilkins, an 8-time top 10 finisher, admonish the crowd at the final pre-race briefing: "Tear up any pace charts you've made and just set your goal to finish". So I did. Sort of.

I felt ready to go and my energy was way up. My wife Katherine and 14-year old daughter Parker had arrived to fill out my support team. Elite runners sporting the latest branded gear roamed the ritzy ski village and mingled at the meetings, lending an air of importance and style to all of us mortals. Past winners and legends repeatedly spoke about the great tradition and indescribable experience we were all about to share in, that we would all be sorely tested but that we should not give in or give up. The atmosphere was like an ultrarunning revival--we were gonna

be saved/healed/converted and dance our way to Auburn.

Turns out I was way over amped. The last time I looked at the clock on race eve it was after 1am and I knew my alarm would ring in just over two hours. Oh well, it's the night before the night before the race that really matters where sleep is concerned, right? Anyway, when Owen shook me awake and gave no mind to my wimpy complaints I was reminded why I'd hired him. He's all business when it's race time. I took a super quick jog to get rid of my jitters and my dinner and then had a burrito of peanut butter and Nutella (a breakfast creation I'd learned from my 12-year old daughter, Ella) and then speed walked up to the race check in.



A last family hug, high fives to the crew, camera flashes in the dark and we were off. The race spikes up three and a half miles from the start at the foot of Squaw Valley Ski Resort in Lake Tahoe (6200 ft) to the high point of the race (8950 ft) at Emigrant Pass. It was a beautiful climb as the sun was rising behind us and the steep grade of the ski slope meant most of us were mixing in plenty of walking with their jogging spurts. I crested the pass in 45 minutes but it actually seemed quicker. The view was incredible and plenty of folks had made the trek up to cheer on runners. Cow bells rang out, camera crews were in place and it seemed the whole of Lake Tahoe was visible behind. It was a pretty amazing moment. This was also the first aid station and it made me realize I had not yet taken a sip from either of my handheld bottles. Time to stop sight seeing and focus.

As we began to descend from the pass, the trail got rough and we were in and out of small streams and mud left behind by

the departed snows. I was quickly passed by 20 or so runners whose technical skills and urgency superseded my own. I ignored the urge to keep pace, turned on my ipod and tried to settle in.

The next couple of aid stations seemed to pass quickly. The trail criss-crossed ridges and mostly kept us beneath a covering of massive Ponderosa pines and other evergreens. I began a few conversations with runners I would pass and then get passed by on successive ups and downs, nervous chatter to dispel the enormity of what lay ahead. I felt a bit foggy headed and blamed it on the heights rather than sleep or fueling since I hoped any altitude issues would dissipate as we continued to descend.

As I pulled up to the Duncan Canyon aid station (mile 23), I saw a contingent from Kyle's crew and got my first sighting of familiar faces. They had two cars, enabling them to cover more aid stations than my crew, so this was a friendly surprise. The always cheerful John Gregg told me I looked great and regardless of the truth of that statement I headed back out in great spirits. I snuck a first peek at my supposedly abandoned pace sheet and saw that I was within five minutes of my projected split. I felt even better. And then I headed down the winding forest trail to the bottom of Duncan Canyon, jumped across the creek and saw what lay up ahead.

I had consciously not walked any climbs since cresting Emigrant Pass but the route that lay before me made me reconsider. The tree covering had thinned out and though it was not even 10am, things were beginning to warm up. It took me 1:25 to cover the six miles down to the canyon stream and up to the next aid station at Robinson Flat (mile 29). I was humbled. I mustered a smile coming into Robinson since I knew I would get to see my own crew for the first time. This was also our first mandatory weigh in and after I was off the scales I found Katherine and Owen and they escorted me to their little corner of crew town. This being the first crew stop for many other folks as well, it was a raucous scene with lots of cheering and joking around. It was great to see everyone so excited for me and I gorged on chilled fruit, topped off my bottles, put the previous climb out of mind and headed out of Robinson reinvigorated.

It's an interesting game that gets played at crew stops for 100 milers. As a runner you want to look fresh and appreciative of the effort your crew is putting forth. And as crew members you want to inflate your tired runner's confidence and offer up some of your enthusiasm. Runners try to mask their discomfort and crews try to put behind the boredom and anxiety of waiting without knowing. Manufacturing that cheery demeanor, no matter which role you're playing, is not too hard early in a race. It's toward the end that it gets tough.

From Robinson Flat, the trail headed briefly up and then down for about 10 miles to the main two canyons of the race. I was alarmed to notice that after only 40 miles in with the two steepest downs and ups ahead, my upper quads were already feeling the strain from all the descending. There was a noticeable shock accompanying every downhill stride and only the flats or slight uphill seemed to relieve it. At one of the last aid stations before entering the canyons proper, I once again found some friendly faces (John and Katie Gregg along with Brad Siegal) and begged for Ibuprofen. Dr. Siegal provided. John admitted the next day he knew I was already entering the house of pain but did his best not

to let on at the time. With bottles topped off and two Aleve down, I was off, headed down to my first real crossing of the American River, knowing the race was about to get real.

The precipitous descent down to the river was technical and full of quick switchbacks. I tried to stay with a tall African runner I had seen on and off all day (10-time finisher Simon Mtuy) and keeping chase beat me to a sweaty pulp. By the time we hit bottom I was feeling the heat. We crossed the swinging bridge across the river and came to a spring-fed waterfall that I had heard WS vets bragging on. Underneath was a foot deep pool where two other runners lay sprawled. I emptied one of my bottles and used it as a cup to scoop and pour water down my head and back for several minutes, and then refilled both for the climb back out.

Despite having cooled off, after only a few steps, I knew I'd overdone it on the way down. I was dizzy and could barely muster the fat man stair climb. There were a handful of times I stopped completely--hands on knees and chin on chest. In the mile and a half to the summit probably 15 runners passed me, most walking briskly and some even managing a steady trot. A lanky Brit with a bright blue mohawk who I had passed at the previous aid station stopped to ask me if I needed anything: "Gel, whisky, smoke?" Somewhere deep inside my brain his humor was appreciated but at the time I couldn't even muster a chuckle. Too down to laugh. That is truly low. Luckily we would see each other later when the roles were reversed and I would have a chance to return the favor.

I arrived at Devil's Thumb aid station (mile 47) with two empty bottles and weighed in down eight pounds. It had taken me 80 minutes to cover less than five miles into and out of the canyon, meaning that if I had averaged 8 minute miles going down, I must have taken close to 30 minutes a mile getting back up. The doc gave me a concerned look and asked me some questions to gauge my mental capacity. I did my best to fake some degree of coherence and promised to drink and eat up. My reward for passing his test was permission to undertake the next daunting leg into and out of El Dorado Canyon.

This climb was more winding than steep but by now my quads were hot to the touch and not discriminating between the grade of the descent--anything downhill elicited a grimace each footfall. My main companion down was a Spanish runner who'd recently moved to Austin. We kept up a good, distracting conversation until we reached the aid station at the canyon floor (mile 52). It was a pretty grim scene. One gal who'd obviously fallen somewhere on the descent was having her badly bleeding back and hip treated by the staff [note: I'm pretty sure she passed me back about 30 miles later]. Other runners sat listlessly in chairs or on the ground. The midday heat and steepes were taking their toll. I took time to put down extra food at that fine buffett, especially enjoying the cold watermelon squares and quartered PB & Js.

Climbing out of El Dorado was slow but much less dizzying than Devil's Thumb. I knew my crew was ahead at Michigan's Bluff (mile 55) and the prospect of putting the canyons behind me and seeing my peeps got me up and out before the buffett's benefits had worn off. Once again, this being a major aid station, the crowds were rowdy and energizing. I got a full body car wash from one of the aid workers who scrubbed me down with an icy sponge and then filled my hat with ice while my crew plied

me with more fruit and a mini burrito. My spirits were up again realizing I had only about seven more miles till Foresthill (mile 62) when Ali would join as my first pacer. I headed out of Michigan's and the first person I saw was my buddy "Blue-Hawk" the Brit and we kept each other semi-amused until the trail began to slope again down toward the river and a sign for Volcano Canyon appeared. This completely caught me unaware--I had thought the canyons were history and my energy suddenly evaporated. I gingerly trotted the descent and was honestly happy when the trail turned up again. Just prior to the summit, where the trail intersects a paved road leading out of the canyon, crew members can accompany their runner the mile or so into the small city of Foresthill. Owen appeared and escorted me into Foresthill taking care to ask what I wanted, see how my feet were holding out, and catch me up on the race between the elite competition that happening far ahead.

Foresthill was the biggest of all aid stations and I had a personal aid volunteer assigned to guide me through 50 yards of weigh ins, refueling and another sponge bath. It was five-star concierge treatment. My crew then handed me a headlamp--though it was only around 6pm, we wouldn't see each other for another 4 hours. Best of all, Ali was ready to roll and together we heading down the road, chatty and confident that the hard stuff was behind and now we just had to bring 'er home. Five minutes after we left the aid station though a stranger came running up behind us shouting something we could not quite make out and pointing back toward town. We had missed the turn and had run about a quarter mile oblivious to the shouts of other staff and crew who had seen us. We laughed it off but I should have taken that as a warning that I would need to pay closer attention to the course from now on.

Back on the trail, things began to descend again as we angled down "Cal Street" to follow along the American River for the next 18 miles. This section is considered very runnable by those who are still upright and we started to make good time with Ali turning on her humor and giving grief to every runner we passed. We came upon Scott Mills, a 61-year old on his 19th visit to Western States who is famous for having won his age group most every year since his late 40's. Scott was not having his best race and had bit of a starboard list going on. As we passed I said something awkward and dumb about being awed by his accomplishments. Scott politely shrugged off the compliment but his pacer chimed in that yes, Scott was a legend and was going to hang tough today as well. Ali would have none of it. She said in response that her "old man" (um, me) was going to kick Scott's ass and that if his pacer had anything else to say he'd better speed up so she could hear it. The trail had plenty of rolling sections and we stopped at a couple of creeks to water me down so we continued to see Scott and his pacer for the next couple of legs. Ali's irreverence never subsided and she kept me laughing through the pain of the descents. She had prepared some great stories and I was a captive and willingly attentive audience. I can't thank her enough for keeping me moving consistently and keeping my mind off the signals sent brain-ward by my legs.

Night began to fall as we got closer to the river and began to anticipate our approach to the Rucky Chucky aid station (mile 78)--a river crossing that brings out the crowds and cools the quads in preparation for the last 20 miles. Ali was still chipper but my pace had begun to slow. Food no longer sounded appetizing and my stomach tightened every 30 minutes when my watch rang the

dinner bell. I resorted to "sipping" gels, taking 15 or 20 minutes to get one down despite Ali's insistence to "eat up, Pops". The sight of lights strung out across the river was a big pick me up though as I knew my crew was just up the hill on the other side. Owen met us at the river crossing which was about waist high and it did feel wonderful on my overworked legs. Hats off to the aid workers who stood in the water for hours stabilizing the cable that guided us across. They were a boisterous group and their hardiness was inspiring.

We crossed then hiked to Green Gate (mile 80) where Owen took over pacing duties from Ali, and Katherine and Parker cheered me up with lies about how well I was doing. I knew Owen would be ready to rock these last 20 miles and though he acknowledged that we were still at sub-24 pace, I could tell that he was a bit worried by the slowdown he witnessed as I climbed those 2 miles up from the river.

From Green Gate we had 5 miles to the next aid station and Owen let me lead and he followed in my tracks. The darkness was complete by this point (10 pm) and we followed the lights ahead of us more intently than any trail indications. Soon we were heading down a steep, rutted road and Owen got a quick demonstration of how severely my downhill form had crumbled. Then a light came back up the road in the opposite direction. It was a gal who seemed to be looking for something lost. She said she had reached a dead end ahead and was looking to see if there were any trail markers on the road we'd descended. My spirits sank. Owen raced ahead to check out her story and left me wallowing in self pity: "Now we're lost and the 24 hour goal is blown and I'm too beat to even care. Time to just slow it down and walk it in." Before Owen was completely out of range I yelled, "what do you want me to do?". He said to start walking up the hill and since walking and up were both better than running and down, I did. In a couple of minutes the lady pacer whistled down from high up the road that she had found the trail. By this time there were six or eight other folks who had made the same mistake and we all cheered and headed back up more briskly. I turned onto the trail shortly afterwards, still disconnected from Owen, but trusting he would quickly catch up. Which he did.

Owen was ready to make up time but I was not cooperating. I was glad to be back on the trail but feeling low from not eating and still nursing some of that self-pity I'd indulged in. The next few miles were pitiful. I was feeling hazy, acting cranky and nothing Owen could do could get me motivated. We pulled into the Auburn Lake Trails aid station (mile 85) and I sat down for the first time that day. I had heard the warnings: "Beware the Chair", but was in no mood to go anywhere soon. An aid station worked came over and got in my face: "You are only 10 minutes ahead of sub-24 pace. You need to get up and moving". Owen brought me a coke and spelled it out more directly: "It's your decision. Do you want to hang out here, get comfortable for awhile, and then drag your butt home in 30 hours and be mad at yourself for the next 20 years? Or, do you want to get out of that chair and finish what you started?" Well, honestly, getting comfortable sounded pretty good to me but I knew which option Owen preferred. So I filled up a bottle with half coke and half water and followed Owen as he set about to get us back on track.

The next five miles to the Brown's Bar aid station (mile

90) were a grind as Owen kept up an uncomfortably fast pace (for me) and my stomach started to refuse even the coke + water mix. But when we checked our time against the 24-hour split at the Brown's Bar cook tent, we found we had gained 40 minutes back. I found some warm chicken noodle broth that went down ok and followed as Owen moved us quickly toward our next destination.

The Highway 49 Crossing (mile 94) was the final big checkpoint and the last time I would see my full crew before the finish. I had been losing steam but Owen again pulled us through and did his best to keep me focused despite my complaints about my dimming headlight, my failing quads and my lurching stomach. Seeing Katherine, Parker and Ali all at Highway 49 was truly a big lift. I took on some more broth, Owen got me a fresh light, our 24-hour split was still looking good and only six more miles remained till Auburn.

It all sounded good and then what was probably a minor climb in the big scheme of things was almost my undoing. We were on a rutted trail with a group of four or five other runners & pacer teams and we started up a hill that seemed to go on and on and on. I could see lights way ahead and the prospect of trudging up that pitch was draining my recently inflated resolve. Owen began calling out each trail marker and rock in the road to give my tired brain time to process and that became our mantra. "Marker... rock...rock...big rock...marker...you're doing great...rock...rock... marker..." And so on til we did finally crest the hill, crossed a wide meadow and headed back down for one more river crossing at No Hands Bridge (mile 96) and the final climb up to Robie Point.

The bridge, lit up with Christmas lights was a welcome site. Ali and I had run these last four miles together the previous week so it all seemed familiar and I felt confident that at least there would be no surprises. I knew there was one last steep hill but the payoff this time was going to be a paved mile down to Auburn's Placer High School track. I asked Owen for a time check since my watch had died and he said "Nevermind what time it is, we have a race to finish." He was not going to let me meter out my exertion or slack off even now.

We made it up most of the last climb and I was greeted by a wonderful sight. Parker was there, somehow looking fresh and excited at 4am and said she had run the mile or so back from the finish in the dark (with no light) and wanted to escort us back to the finish again. I was super fired up at this point and we three finished the rest of the climb together, hooked onto the streets of Auburn and finally headed down toward the stadium. You can't imagine how wonderful it feels to see the stadium lights peeking out through the trees as you head down to the finish. Although it's not Bryant-Denny or Jordan-Hare, there was an electric feeling as we headed out onto the track for our last 300 yds. Several runners' teams were on the track ahead of us and Parker said "Let's catch them". I called up a Usain Bolt-like sprint (which video evidence showed to be more of a stiff shuffle) and we hustled around the track, passing two groups and finishing in 23:29, good enough for a silver buckle. Owen and Parker crossed the line with me while Katherine cheered from the stands.

The next 8 hours were a blur. We reached our hotel as the sun was coming up and I took a slow shower and inventory. All in all, I was pretty unscathed. Aside from my burning quads, I had only lost one toenail and amazingly had no real blisters (I have

my Hoka's to thank for that). I tossed and turned, over caffeinated from all the coke I'd drank, but didn't really care that I couldn't sleep. We were back on the track by 11am to see the last official runners cross. It was both amazing and gut wrenching to see folks bravely dragging in having battled the heat a second day. By the time the awards ceremony began, temps were in the hundreds again and still a few, last, unofficial finishers rolled in.

We left as soon as the hardware was in hand and set the GPS to In & Out Burger. As we rolled out of the high school parking lot the last time I was weak and queasy but still cognizant of what a special race I'd been a part of. It was an overwhelmingly good feeling to have such support in achieving a very personal and quite selfish goal that had consumed me for the previous six months. And it was a great feeling too to share it with the rest of the Birmingham crew who all had strong races. All five Birmingham runners finished within the official 30-hour window and considering about 72% of the field as a whole made it all the way to Auburn, I'd say the Bham folk way over-achieved.

On the plane ride back, Parker asked me if I'd like to run Western States again. I answered, yes, in about 10 years, when I can accompany you the last mile.

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## President

Jennifer Andress  
president@birminghamtrackclub.com



## Vice-President

Alex Morrow  
coachalex@resoluterunning.com



## Past-President

Brad Clay  
bradclay@aol.com



## Treasurer

Randy Lyle  
randy.lyle@icloud.com



## Secretary

Mitzi Duer-Savelis  
jmduer@gmail.com

## BTC Committees

<b>General Council/Parliamentarian</b>	Michael D. Tucker		
<b>BTC Race Series Coordinators</b>	Kemper Sarrett		
	David Barry	dmbarry1@gmail.com	
<b>Long Run Coordinator</b>	Natalie Ferguson	nataliez1@hotmail.com	
<b>Moderate Distance Run Coordinator</b>	Burt Chandler	burt.chandler@iberiabank.com	
<b>Medical Director Emeritus</b>	Jack Hasson	btcmembership@gmail.com	(205) 870-1864
<b>Medical Director</b>			
<b>Marketing Chair</b>	Beth Feller	coachalex@resoluterunning.com	
<b>Marketing/Social Media</b>	Alex Morrow	dguenster@me.com	
<b>Membership</b>	Dirk Guenster	allisonlowell@gmail.com	
<b>Membership Benefits</b>	Allison Williams	president@birminghamtrackclub.com	
<b>Merchandise</b>	Jennifer Andress	burt.chandler@iberiabank.com	
<b>Social Chair</b>	Burt Chandler	zeronuckols@gmail.com	(205) 746 5450
<b>"The Vulcan Runner" Editor</b>	Andrew Nuckols	davidchristy@hotmail.com	
<b>Club Photographer</b>	David Christy	btcpress09@gmail.com	
<b>Japan Exchange Program</b>	Johnaca Kelley	1200@birminghamtrackclub.com	
<b>1200 Mile Club</b>	Michele Parr	rrc@birminghamtrackclub.com	(205) 835-0030
<b>Road Race Emeritus</b>	Rick Melanson	mleeburris13@yahoo.com	
<b>Volunteer Coordinator</b>	Mark Burris	trish@championship-racing.com	
<b>Historian</b>	Trish Portuese	btc262coach@gmail.com	
<b>Marathon Coach</b>	Al Dimicco		
<b>Finish Line Crew</b>	Michael Gann		
<b>BTC Race Directors</b>			
<b>Adam's Heart Run</b>	Burt Chandler	burt.chandler@iberiabank.com	
<b>Statue 2 Statue</b>	Judy Loo	judy.loo@healthsouth.com	
<b>Peavine Falls</b>	Alex Morrow	coachalex@resoluterunning.com	
	Mark Burris	mleeburris13@yahoo.com	
<b>The Vulcan Run</b>	Danny Haralson	newrunners@birminghamtrackclub.com	

## BTC Mission Statement

The primary purpose of the Birmingham Track Club (BTC) shall be the education and training of individuals in and around the community of Birmingham, AL, as to the benefits of jogging, running, and walking for fitness, health, and recreation.

## Contact BTC at:

Birmingham Track Club  
P.O. Box 530363  
Birmingham, AL 35253  
info@BirminghamTrackClub.com

## Race Results

Find the latest and most complete local race results at the following:  
**birminghamtrackclub.com**  
**trakshak.com**      **run42k.com**

# President's Message

—Jennifer Andress



## Greetings BTC!

I hope this finds you well! You will not believe how much information is in this August issue of The Vulcan Runner. At the beginning of each month I start looking for stories from our amazing running community. Many of you run interesting races, and have unique perspectives, and I love highlighting them to our members. It is no secret that we have a lot of talent in this community, both running and writing talent. Odds are, if we are Facebook friends I have more than likely pestered you about sending me a picture to feature or a blog to print. Thank you for your contributions and keep 'em coming!

July was a fantastic month for the BTC. The Rick Melanson Peavine Falls Run on July 4th was a huge success in spite of a rainy forecast! In fact, the rain cooled everyone down and added to a fun morning. We had more than 600 runners register and 498 finishers. Both of those numbers set event records! Our new Finish Line Crew, led by Michael Gann, debuted and worked with our event timers, the Southern Sports Group, to create a great-looking finish area. Your Race Directors Alex Morrow and Mark Burris kept everything moving along smoothly, and their many volunteers, including Food Chair Allison Stone, made sure everyone had a great time!



*Rick Melanson*

Speaking of great times, the BTC Evening Social at the Birmingham Barons game was a huge hit! Thanks to Social Chair Burt Chandler for coordinating such a fun event. Burt secured 75 tickets and we offered them for \$5 each to BTC members and our friends and families. Those sold out quickly so we purchased another 25 and they were gone just as fast. We met at Good People Brewery to pick up our tickets and then headed over to Regions Field to sit in a section reserved for just the BTC. In addition, the Barons won their game making it a special night all the way around.

August is shaping up to be a huge month for the BTC as well. We have BIG news for our members regarding the Vulcan Run on November 2nd. It is no secret we want each of you there on race day. In preparation for our premiere race, we have been selling the tremendously popular "In Training" shirts featuring Vulcan himself. But we are not stopping there. Now the BTC is going to offer a FIRST for BTC Members, training for FREE! Whether you are a beginning runner looking to complete your first 10k, an experienced runner looking to improve your finish time, or you are looking to compete for a coveted "Top 200" shirt, we will have a free training program designed specifically for you! Our coaching staff will consist of Danny Haralson, Alex Morrow and Kile Putman and we are thrilled to offer you their services just for being a BTC member. If you know of someone who could use this training, whether they are a complete beginner or an advanced runner, make sure they join the club. By doing so they too can take advantage of this amazing offer.

Mark your calendars for Wednesday, August 14 and Saturday morning, August 17. We will be rolling out our training plans at the Trak Shak Wednesday evening run, and at our next Saturday Run Social. Stay tuned for more details, but this is going to be HUGE!

I also have a couple of updates from the communities that we run in. Chair of the Mt. Brook Parks and Recreation Board Carey Hollingsworth, commenting on the plaza surrounding the new water fountain that we funded on the Jemison Trail and a marker recognizing the BTC membership, said, "The

family has approved a design and we are getting it priced before releasing it". I will continue to update you on this.

Representative Paul DeMarco also gave us an update on the proposed pedestrian bridge over Highway 280 on Hollywood Boulevard in Homewood. The BTC supports the construction of this bridge in an effort to make the overpass safer for walkers and runners.

Representative DeMarco said, "It is my understanding the Homewood City Council, in conjunction with working with

the Mayor, will have a work session to hear proposals about cost estimates for the bridge in August. Representatives from the city of Mountain Brook, which is going to partner with Homewood, should also be in attendance. Shortly thereafter, the final documentation for the application for the funding for the pedestrian bridge should be submitted to the Alabama Department of Transportation. At that point, we will wait to hear back from the Alabama Department of Transportation on final approval.”

I plan on attending the August meeting to represent the BTC. I will keep you posted on developments.

So get ready BTC! We have a lot going on and a busy few months ahead and we are thrilled you will be a part of all the fun.

# Vulcan Run 10k



**November 2, 2013**

Register by visiting:  
[www.birminghamtrackclub.com](http://www.birminghamtrackclub.com)

# PLAYLIST

## Take It Easy

—By Kile Putman

Song: "Take It Easy"

Artist: The Eagles

Composers: Jackson Browne and Glen Frey

Label: Asylum Records

Format: Vinyl 7" single

Released: May 1, 1972

Genre: Country Rock

**"Well, I'm a runnin' down  
the road tryin' to  
loosen my load  
Got a world of trouble  
on my mind...  
Take it easy, take it easy..."**

The evolution of portable electronic gadgets and gizmos over the past several decades has made the simple act of running complex for a lot of runners. First there was the appearance of digital wristwatch in the 1980's. Now a run could actually be timed. No longer was it necessary to wait for the second hand on the kitchen clock to get to the top before heading out the door only to end the run by running into the house to have another look at the clock. Heart Rate monitors followed soon after that; a device that could tell us how we were supposed to be feeling.

Watches now feature GPS devices which presumably track not only the time but also the distance traveled. Some runners even swear by the accuracy of these devices. Current technology features 'apps' that can control personal music choices to match songs with particular beat count to the pace you are maintaining. With just a link up and a few keystrokes, workout data can be downloaded into online training logs. Sorting and graphing and analyzing these flow charts makes today's runners look like robots with a running program.

Learn when to unleash yourself of these devices and enjoy the freedom of running. Listen to the sounds of the hectic city streets you roam. Smell the air when you take the route along the salty ocean coastline. Monitor the seasonal changing colors of the leaves as you run through a mountain trail. Enjoy the simple act of running. Briefly stop along the way if you desire- pet a friendly dog, view a sun rise or absorb the rain. Remember back to when you were becoming a runner and find an opportunity to slow down and jog with a new friend just getting into the sport.

In addition to the freedom of running there are times when it may not be practical to electronically evaluate the training session. Many times a sluggish run or a struggle during training may bring an unwarranted comparison of times thus causing a worry regarding the perceived lack of pace. This worry may lead to a detrimental increase in the effort of the session and thus not allow proper recovery or even lead to injury.

When an individual is slowed due to an injury and during the rehabilitation that may be required, fitness level may decline. It is not reassuring to compare a well you with an injured version. You do not need a device to let you know you will be slower when dealing with a medical setback. Focus on getting well, not running fast.

Environmental concerns including extreme heat or cold and rolling terrain add a natural resistance to the running pace. Some days it is just not practical to battle these factors and push the body to a quicker or deeper level of fatigue. Slow down, leave the devices at home, and take it easy.

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***Kile Putman warns that runners should stay safe and be aware of their surroundings by keeping a reduced volume level when running with music. A USATF certified Track and Field coach, he can be contacted at [kputman@bellsouth.net](mailto:kputman@bellsouth.net) for personalized instruction.***





# RUNNING IN HELL

— Tanya Sylvan

It's hot in Alabama in the summer. That's an understatement. It's not a "let's sit outside and get tan" heat, it's more of an "um, my skin is melting off!" heat. Dashing to your car from an air-conditioned haven can easily become an Olympic sport. If you're a runner, from May-October are just plain miserable. And if you're a Jersey transplant who can happily run in shorts in the snow, it's plain hell.

Now that I've lived in Alabama for close to seven years, one might argue that I should be accustomed to the heat and humidity. Wrong. But, I have come up with a few coping mechanisms that make running in summer slightly easier:

**Hydrate**—Channel your inner camel and drink, then drink some more. Then go home and rehydrate with some delicious craft beer to numb the pain.

**Run through sprinklers**—Remember when you were little and would spend the summers running through sprinklers with your friends? Do it during a run. It's the same thing, only trespassing. Technically.

**Start at ungodly hours**—If the time on your alarm starts with a 3, there's a slight chance that you will finish your run before your shoes melt to the pavement. However, this tactic does not protect you from the humidity.

**Minimize clothing**—I'm a firm believer in doing whatever you have to do to be comfortable. Even if that means running shirtless. Even if you don't have rippling muscles. Bonus points if you do.

**Keep a cool head**—Sure, hats are meant to protect you from the sun and frizzy hair, but they're way more effective as ice buckets. Yes, your head will look lumpy for a few minutes. No, you won't care.

**Embrace the suck**—When instinct tells you to sit inside your freezer, go outside and run. Go out in 100 degrees, 100% humidity, at high noon, and eventually your body will acclimate. Or so they tell me.



# SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL



*Ryan James post recovery  
from Granfather Mountain  
Marathon*



*Lisa Booher in Los Angeles*



**Above: Madison Kirkwood  
and Mary Harrison at the  
2013 Retro Run!**



**Water Stop at Retro Run!**



**Left: Caitlin and Dewayne  
Minor, Rifle Falls, CO**



**Zach Sylvan, Vann Thursby,  
Jason Whitcomb, Joey Longoria,  
and Michael Gann. The brand  
new BTC Finish Line Crew**

# SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL



*BTC travels to Helena to train with the HERG!*



**Amy and John Gash,  
Chicago Rock n Roll Half  
Marathon**



**Kile Putman, Will Address, Paul  
DeMarco at the Fresh Start 5km**



**Charlie Brown**



**Olivia Affuso**

# SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL

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We want to see where you have been running, representing the BTC! Email photos to:

[president@birminghamtrackclub.com](mailto:president@birminghamtrackclub.com)

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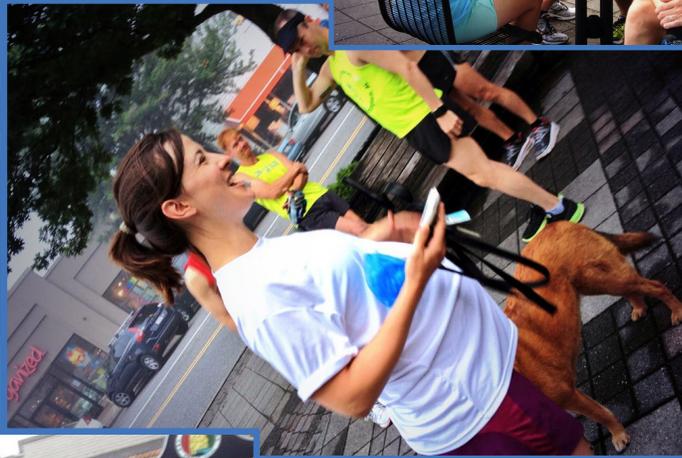
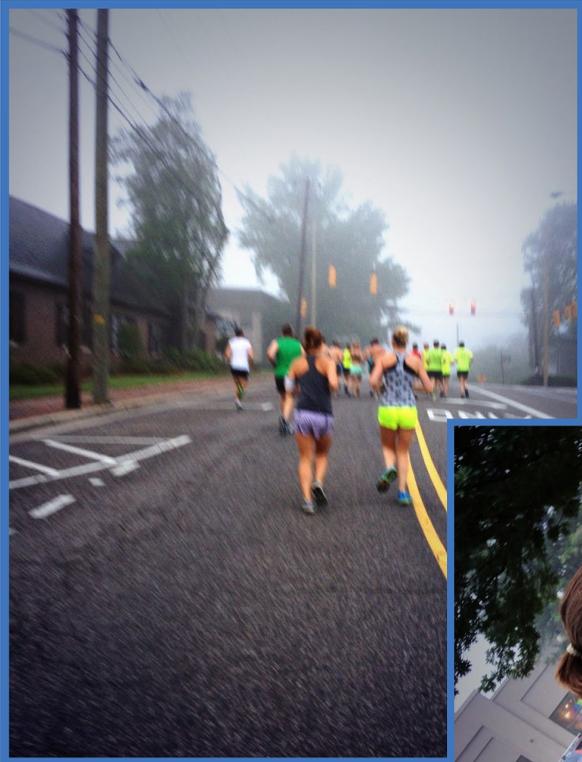


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**Left to Right: Danny Haralson, Jennifer Andress,  
Alex Morrow, Julie Wright, Rebecca Tait, Randy Lyle**

# SAN FRANCISCO HALF MARATHON

—Dean Thornton

Our family had been planning a trip to Yosemite National Park for over six months. I had meticulously planned out all the details. We would fly to San Francisco where we would spend two days sightseeing before picking up our RV to roam through Yosemite, Kings Canyon, and Sequoia National Parks for a week. I had all the usual activities planned for our time in San Francisco: Fisherman's Wharf, Chinatown, North Beach, and a cruise under the Golden Gate Bridge and around Alcatraz. As our trip approached, my wife, Tracy, commented that it would be Father's Day while we were in San Francisco. She wondered what she could get me for a present. A few days before we left, I had an answer for her.

One of the other members of my running team announced he could not run the marathon he had long planned. He was looking for an alternative closer to home on that same weekend. Out of curiosity, I checked the MarathonGuide.com website. I didn't find anything in the Southeast, but I made an interesting discovery: the Wipro San Francisco Marathon and Half Marathon would be run while we were in town...on Father's Day.

I had planned to squeeze in a few runs during our vacation. I love running in new places and new cities. Naturally, I was excited by the possibility of racing in such a picturesque locale as San Francisco. I knew I didn't want to tackle a marathon (too much time and not enough training). But a half marathon would be perfect. As it turns out, there were two different half marathons offered for this race! Runners could sign up for either the First Half Marathon or the Second Half Marathon. Each race had its appeal. But the First Half drew my immediate attention. Not only would we get to race through the Embarcadero and Fisherman's Wharf, but we would also get to run over the Golden Gate Bridge...twice! I was sold. Fortunately, I was able to sell my wife on it, too (as her Father's Day gift to me). Five days before the race and two days before the deadline, I completed my online application.

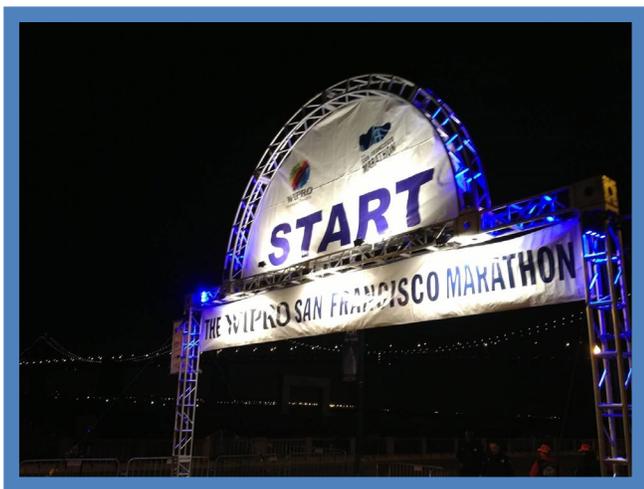
Early on the day after we arrived in San Francisco, I rose early to get in a shakeout run before a day of sightseeing. I ran from our quaint, anime-themed hotel in Japantown up a long gradual incline to Nob Hill. At the top of the hill I was able to see the sun rise over the bay. Through the skyscraper canyons of the Financial District I saw the Bay Bridge wrapped in a warm glow as the early sunlight bounced off the waters of the bay. Next I circled Grace Cathedral which sits majestically yet humbly upon Nob Hill. From there I coasted like a trolley car back down the hill to our hotel invigorated for a day of discovery with my family.

Later that afternoon, I dragged my family to the Race Expo. There we fought the crowds (20,000+ runners were registered) so I could pick up my bib number and my shirt. After receiving yet another too-small Medium technical shirt, I have finally decided to always order the Large knowing that it will often be too large (but at least I can still wear it). After the Expo, we walked down to AT&T Park to see the Giants' stadium. Our one regret of the trip was that Giants were not in town. AT&T Park is one of the best parks to watch a ballgame. From there we made our way to Union Square. Somewhere along the way I recalled that you weren't supposed to spend the day before a race walking miles around the city. But this race was for fun, and I wasn't about to miss the sights with my family. Back in Japantown that evening, I discovered a new carbo-loading source: Japanese Ramen noodle bowl. These were not your penniless college student Ramen noodles; these were delicious, filling noodles with actual flavor!

The morning of the race was slightly unusual. The race officials had to get thousands of runners over the Golden Gate Bridge with minimal disruption to traffic and tourists. Consequently, the race start time was 5:30 am. This may seem early to many, but I had two things in my favor. I am used to running at 5:00 am, and 5:30 am Pacific Time is 7:30 am Central Time. I set my alarm for 3:45 telling myself it was really 5:45 am. After dressing



quietly in the bathroom of our hotel room, I snuck down to the lobby at 4:15 where I planned to call a cab. Before I could pull out my phone, a couple in the lobby wearing race bibs asked me if I wanted to share a cab. I gladly accepted. As we rode toward the Embarcadero, I discovered that they were from Australia. She was in the country for a work conference, which they were turning into an extended two-week vacation with the kids. This would be the first half marathon for each of them. Being used to kilometers, he was not even sure how far the half marathon was. I did warn them about the hills having studied the elevation chart in the days before the race. They both planned to have fun and take it slowly.



We stepped out of our cab at the Embarcadero at 4:40 am into the still pitch-black, cool early morning. We said our goodbyes and wished each other well. I found a little corner that was shielded from the wind off the bay. I put on my bib and sipped my Gatorade. I was ready to run. But my wave would not start for almost an hour at 5:42 am.

As the crowds of volunteers and runners and race officials and policeman gathered and swelled, my thoughts went to Boston. This would be my first big race since the tragedy of April 15. I took inventory of my feelings. I was not fearful; I was not paranoid or hyper-vigilant; in fact, I was almost defiant. I refused to be afraid. And as I looked around me, I saw the same thing: no one was fearful; no one was paranoid; no one was afraid. There was only anticipation and excitement.



The first light began to peek over the eastern side of the bay. Runners (me included) began migrating to the water's edge to snap pictures of an amazing sunrise that almost none of us would get to see otherwise. Soon, the



runners began to gather in their corrals. I made my way to the Wave 3 corral wondering if I should use the bathroom again (the answer to that question is always "yes").

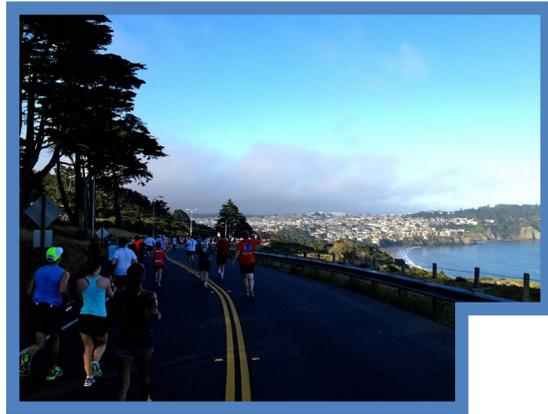
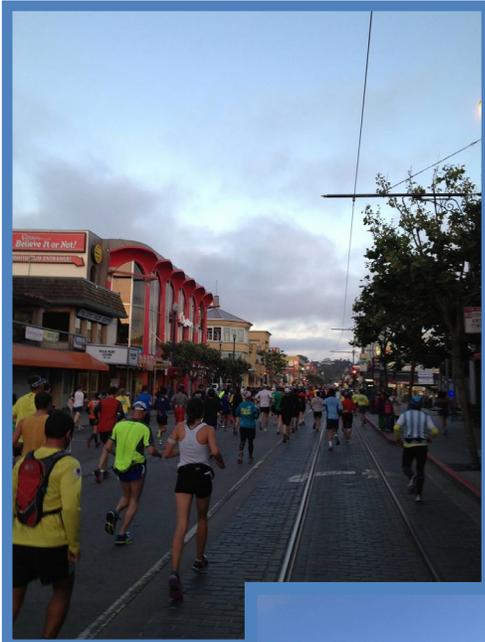
As I stood in the corral, I listened to the conversations around me. I tried to deduce where the other runners were from. Like my new Australian friends, there were many foreign runners (Germany had perhaps the largest contingent). I even made small talk with a few people. As the gun went off at 5:30 for the elites in Wave 1, we inched our way forward in anticipation. Amongst the throngs of runners waiting to begin the race, I ended up standing next to a guy wearing a Mercedes Marathon hat! He was from Kentucky running San Francisco in order to cross off California from his list of 50 marathons in 50 states. We exchanged a few stories about Mercedes before the gun went off for Wave 2.



By now it was almost full daylight. And by now I realized my bladder would not make it 13.1 miles. Silently I cursed my pre-race Gatorade. The starter thanked us for running San Francisco. He thanked us for our patience in the wake of extra security in light of Boston. At the mention of Boston the runners spontaneously cheered. The gun for Wave 3 went off right on time at 5:42 am.

The first few miles were flat as we made our way along the Embarcadero toward Fisherman's Wharf. A place usually teeming with tourists was eerily deserted and still. A few brave souls were out to cheer the runners. But for the most part, the runners and seagulls had the area to themselves. I fell into a comfortable pace about 20 seconds per mile slower than my recent PR. I wanted to save for the bridge and the hills at the end. As we ran past the Wharf, the Golden Gate Bridge came into view. Runners (including me) began stopping for brief pics with their cameras and smartphones. By now I was full of anticipation: somewhat for the run over the bridge but mostly for the nearest port-a-let. Finally, just before the Marina I was able to relieve most of my anticipation. I had lost some time, but was now ready to run in earnest.

After the Marina we encountered our first hill around Mile 5 as we made our way from the edge of the bay to the near end of the bridge. I maintained an even pace up the hill passing a few runners who had gone out too fast the first few miles. As we wound our way up the hill we passed the first elite runners making their way back over the bridge. They ran strong but showed a hint of strain. The bridge itself is a



district. From there it was a gradual 2 mile climb into Golden Gate Park to the finish. As I passed the 12 mile marker I knew I would be able to break 2 hours even while thoroughly enjoying the race and stopping to take pictures. The spectators were now out cheering and holding signs and ringing cowbells. As we entered Golden Gate Park, I could hear the party going. The marathoners split off to the right as we ran left. We wished them well in the second half of their race. Some looked eager to continue; some looked envious of our near-finish. In the home stretch, throngs of people lined the finish shouting for their friends and family members. I always pretend they are cheering for me (it gives me a little boost). I crossed the line happy to be done but sad that it was over.

manageable, gradual incline to the middle. From there, the views were spectacular: the sunbeams bouncing off the waters of the bay; the light filtering through the city still half-asleep. More and more fast runners were running back over the bridge. Runners around me continued to snap pictures of themselves and their companions.

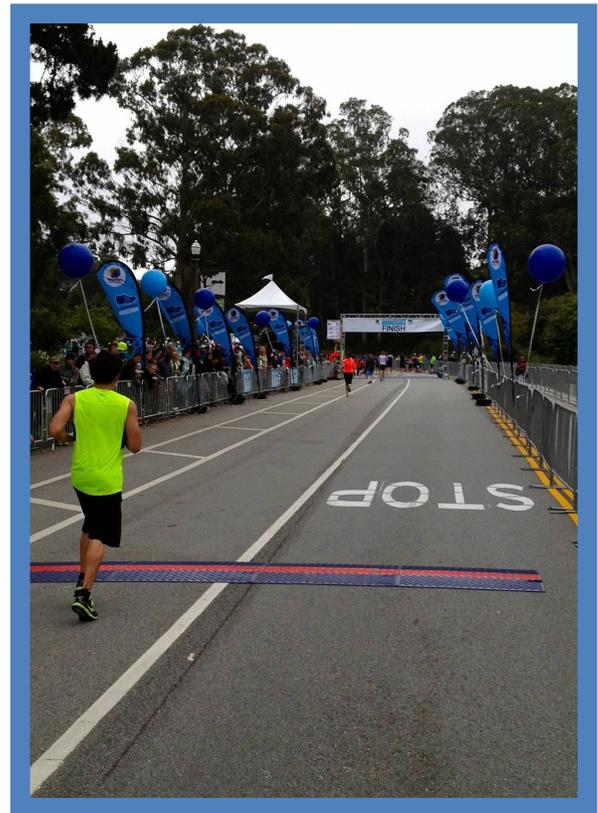


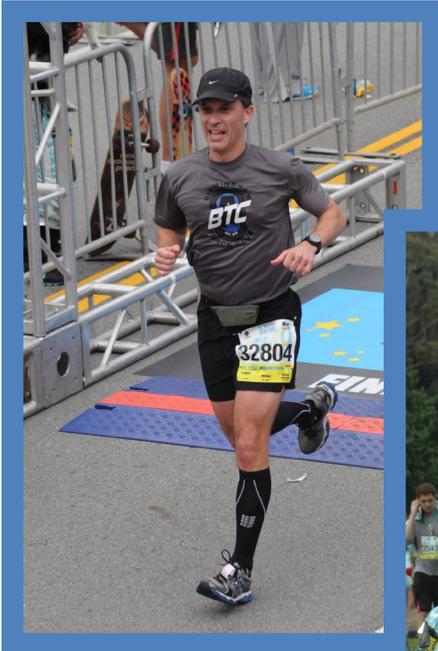
At the far end of the bridge, we ran through an aid station in a parking lot. I stopped to take some water and some photos. I couldn't decide which I liked better: being in the city and looking out over the bay or being on the other side of the bay looking back toward the city. As we made our way back over the bridge, even more and more runners were headed towards us making their first pass over the bridge. Half of the people were watching the road; the other half were watching the scenery.

Once back over the bridge, we headed up another hill into the Presidio. At the top of the hill we hit Mile 10. The reward for our climb was a spectacular view of the bay spilling out into the Pacific. The next mile was a steep downhill descent. I was able to pick up the pace passing many people who were still winded from the previous climb.



At the bottom of the hill we ran into the Richmond



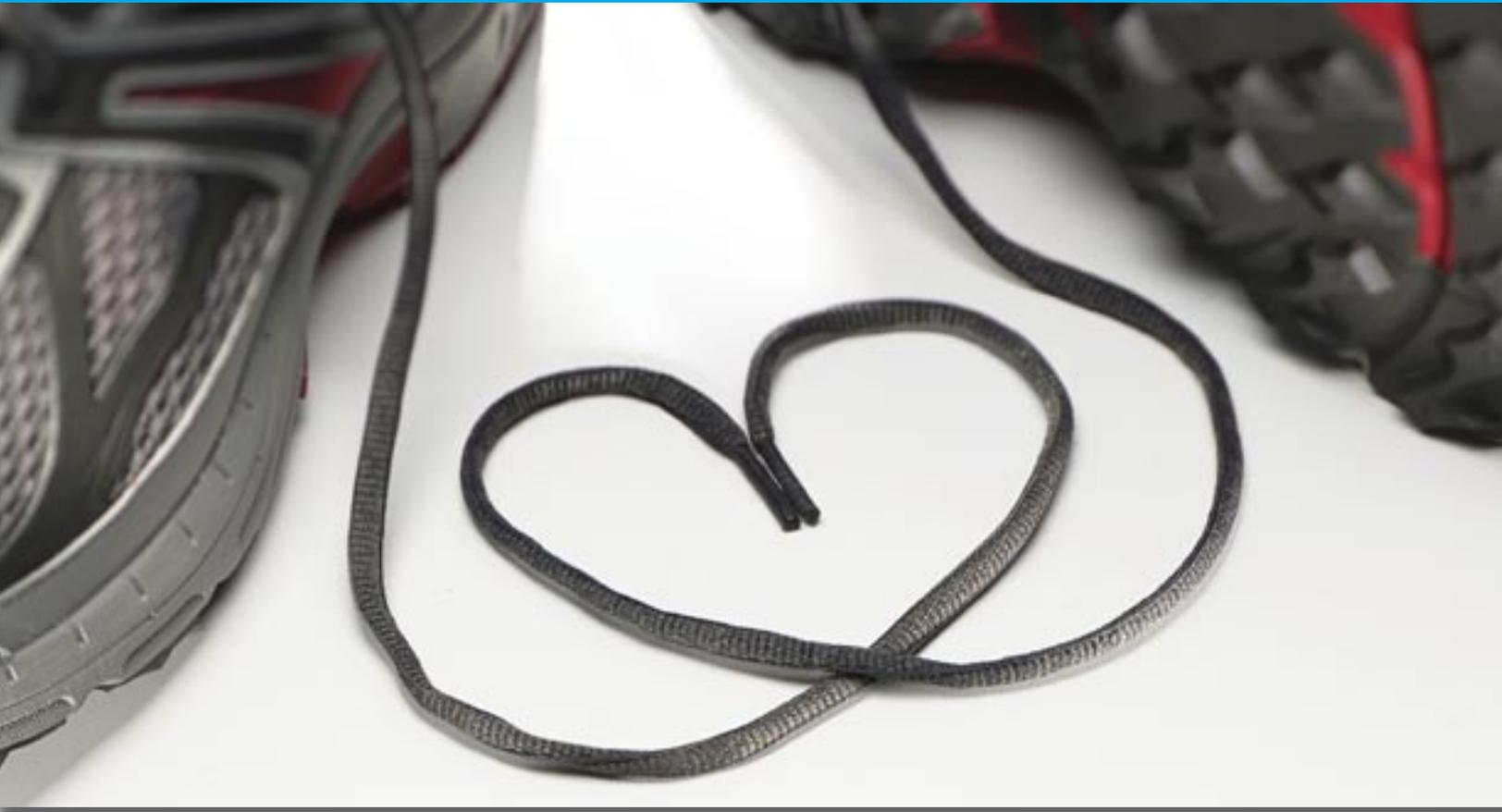


I received my medal and grabbed a bottle of water. I stopped for a couple of quick “official” post-race photos. Then I meandered over to the food. I eagerly picked up a delicious blueberry scone. I also grabbed a pack of Hawaiian rolls for later. Rather than post-race beer, they were offering Irish coffee to the finishers. Since it was little chilly, I gladly accepted a hot cup of coffee (minus the Irish). It was just a short walk out of the park to hail a cab on the street back to the hotel. I was pleasantly tired but refreshingly invigorated. I was ready for a hot shower and a day of sightseeing with my family. (We would end up walking about 5 more miles from Japantown to Union Square to Chinatown to North Beach to Fisherman’s Wharf. But I felt great!)

The race really was a fantastic way to see the city from a perspective I would not otherwise have. I cannot imagine a more scenic urban marathon. The early start gave us cool weather and a beautiful sunrise over the bay. The route gave us an interesting, ever-changing view of the city. This is certainly not the race to run if you want to set a PR. But if you really want to enjoy a race, I highly recommend this one. Next time, I’ll have to run the 2nd Half Marathon to see the rest of San Francisco. Or maybe the Full...

BIRMINGHAM AIDS OUTREACH

*A Show of Heart*



22nd ANNUAL

# Magic City AIDS Walk & 5K Run

Sunday . September 22, 2013

Avondale Park • 4:00-7:00PM

**Grand Marshals ~ Marco & Elan Morosini of Silvertron Cafe**

5k Fun Run sponsored by:

Octane Coffee Company • Omega Wellness & Sports Performance Center



**5K Fun Run Start Time: 6:15 PM | Run starts and ends at Avondale Park**  
*Suggested Minimum Donation \$10*

**Visit [baoevents.org](http://baoevents.org) for registration and more information.**

Contact [jamie@birminghamaidsoutreach.org](mailto:jamie@birminghamaidsoutreach.org) or by phone at 205.322.4197 ext.20

Birmingham **AIDS** Outreach.org



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual *Rock 'n' Run* 5K/Fun Walk

### Benefiting IMPACT Family Counseling

Saturday, August 24, 2013 at 8 A.M.

Homewood Central Park

1632 Oxmoor Road Homewood, AL 35209

**Race Information:** The *Rock 'n' Run* course has been designed to include scenic portions of the downtown Homewood area. This race will be timed and top male and female runners will receive medals. Race Central will be located just past the main bridge at Homewood Central Park.

**Registration and Packet Pick-up Information:** Early Registration accepted through Thursday, August 1, 2013. Please mail or return lower portion of this form to IMPACT or register online at [www.active.com](http://www.active.com) keywords: Rock Birmingham

Race Day registration begins at 7am at Race Central at Homewood Central Park. Early-registrants will receive a t-shirt at packet pick-up. T-shirts for those registered after August 1, 2013 will be available, while supplies last. Packet-Pick Up will be from 10am – 5pm on Friday, August 23, 2013 outside of The Trak Shak in Homewood & from 7-730am at Race Central on the day of race.

**Early Registration through August 1, 2013**

Ages 16 and Older: \$25

Youth (10-15) \$15

9 and under: Free

\*Virtual Runner: \$25

**August 2, 2013 - Day of Race Registration**

Ages 16 and Older: \$30

Youth (10-15) \$20

9 and under: \$5

\*Virtual Runner: \$25

\*Virtual Runners still have an opportunity to make an IMPACT and receive a t-shirt!

All runners/walkers should check-in at Race Central located past the main bridge at Homewood Central Park

**For more information** on the *Rock 'n' Run* for IMPACT Family Counseling, please call IMPACT 205.916.0123 or visit [www.impactmentor.org](http://www.impactmentor.org)

**Return entry form & make checks payable to:**

IMPACT Family Counseling 1000 24<sup>th</sup> Street South Birmingham, AL 35205

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ AGE: \_\_\_\_\_ SEX: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Shirt Size: (circle one) S M L XL 2XL

WAIVER: IN CONSIDERATION OF MY ACCEPTANCE AS A PARTICIPANT IN THE ROCK N RUN 5K AND/OR FUN RUN, I HEREBY FOR MYSELF, MY HEIRS, EXECUTORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND ASSIGNS RELEASE AND HOLD HARMLESS ALL SPONSORS AND THEIR AGENTS, SERVANTS, AND EMPLOYEES, AS WELL AS JEFFERSON COUNTY, CITY OF HOMEWOOD, IMPACT FAMILY COUNSELING/MENTORING, AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES, EMPLOYEES, OFFICIALS, AND ALL RACE VOLUNTEERS, FROM ANY AND ALL ACTIONS, LOSSES, AND DAMAGES INCURRED BY ME OR ARISING OUT OF OR IN CONNECTION WITH MY PARTICIPATION IN THE AFOREMENTIONED ROCK N RUN 5K AND/OR FUN RUN EVENTS. I WARRANT THAT I KNOW THAT RUNNING A ROAD RACE IS POTENTIALLY A HAZARDOUS ACTIVITY AND THAT I AM PHYSICALLY FIT AND HAVE TRAINED SUFFICIENTLY FOR THIS EVENT.

Signature (Parent's Signature If under 18)

Date

# THANK YOU FOR MAKING AN IMPACT!!!

# DIRTY RUNNING

—David Tosh

You have been thinking you might want to try one of those ultras but you really know nothing about running anything longer than a marathon and you don't know if you really want to try an ultra. For all you know it may turn out to be an awful experience, but there is no way to learn about an ultra except to go out and run one, right? Wrong. There is a great way to learn about ultras, have a lot of fun in the process and provide a great service to runners. What is that you say. Volunteer!

Yes, volunteering for an ultra does three things. First, you get to participate in a really exciting and fun event, second you get to see the race from the inside and third, you provide a great service to the race, the runners, and you will notice a lot of the runners are your friends.

Check out [Ultrasignup.com](http://Ultrasignup.com) and [Ultrarunning.com](http://Ultrarunning.com) for trail races in our area. Several races to consider are the Tranquility Lake 50K and the Pinhoti 100 in November, the Oak Mountain 50K early in March, and Lake Martin 100 late in March. The 100s are a particularly unique experience. A lot of people, and possibly you, wonder how someone can actually run all day and all night. You will find out. How does someone eat while running “for 22, 24, 26 hours, or more?” You will be trying to keep the food on the table and the soup hot. You wonder just how difficult is it really is to run 100 miles? It's really tough, but you will be right there encouraging runners when they are suffering, and cheering them up when they are feeling low. You will share in the excitement and enthusiasm when they are feeling good and you will help keep their spirits up. You will know you had just a little bit, or in some cases, a lot to do with every runner being able to finish the race. You may even find volunteering to be as addictive as trail running is to a lot of us.

If you are already a trail runner you will develop a new appreciation for the hard work all those volunteers put in

to help you get through your races. Some runners take the volunteers for granted. I don't think many trail runners do, but after volunteering you will never go through an aid station without a few kind words for the volunteers and you will always thank them as you head out. You will realize what they gave up and how hard they worked for YOU.

I am leaving in a couple of days to head out to the Hardrock 100 to serve as Aid Station Captain for the Cunningham AS. In emails with my crew of 9 volunteers I found out that most have been volunteering at Hardrock for years. Some as many as 10 or 12 times and most are not even trail



*The climb down to Cunningham Aid Station. When runners leave the aid station they climb right back up the mountain on the other side of the valley, a climb of almost 3,000 feet.*

runners. The head of our communication at Cunningham has worked with Hardrock since the second year of the race and was director of communications for the entire race for 12 years. He doesn't run and never did. Very few of the volunteers even live in Silverton Colorado or in the immediate area of the race, (Silverton, Lake City, Ouray, Telluride, Ophir and back to Silverton.) Some travel as far as 1,200 miles to help, like me. Several of my crew live

near Denver and Boulder, a distance of over 350 miles. That is a long drive in the Colorado Rockies.

Why do these people make such an effort to be part of Hardrock? Why do I? To be totally honest, in my case, I get an extra lottery ticket for a chance to get in Hardrock next year and I guess that is why I am willing to spend what it costs to go help. I have been trying to get in for 5 years and this is the first time I have even been on the wait list. But I am as excited about going out to help as I would be if I were running. (Just a lot less nervous.) It is just so much fun and such a great experience to be associated with a race like that.

I have also helped Todd Henderson with the Pinhoti 100 the last two years. After delivering supplies all the way along the race course from AS 4 at mile 22 to Bulls Gap at mile 85, I return to Adams Gap aid station at mile 55 and wait for the aid station to close. I ran Pinhoti in 2008 and when I reached Adams Gap, I knew I would finish. I was over half way and the worst was behind me.

It was so much fun just to hang out at Adams Gap until the aid station closed about 10:30. Even though I was just supposed to wait there until everyone including the sweep was into Adams Gap you just get caught up in the excitement. I ended up helping out wherever I was needed until the aid station finally closed. It was cold and very windy up on Adams Gap. Everyone would stand at the trail

head waiting for headlamps to appear of in the distance. We would start yelling and cheering as the runners approached the aid station. We would meet them as they came out of the woods and see what they needed, direct them to chairs and retrieve their dropbags. If they were cold we took them to the fire or found a blanket for them. We would get soup or hot chocolate or water, even coffee for them.

Often they would look totally wasted when they came into the AS. As they warmed up and had some hot soup or other food they began to perk up. Before you knew it, they were up and ready to go.

Part of the reason Marye Jo, my wife, and I put on the Southeastern Trail Series and the Lake Martin 100 is that it is just so much fun to be associated with the runners. It is so great to share the experiences and excitement of the runners and so fulfilling to know you did just a little to help them succeed or achieve their goals. No small part is that trail runners are, as a group, some of the most positive, upbeat people I have ever met. It is just fun to be around them. Come out give it a try. I can guarantee you will have a lot of fun and meet a lot of super people. And if that is not enough, you get a cool tech shirt and can join everyone for food and drink at the end.

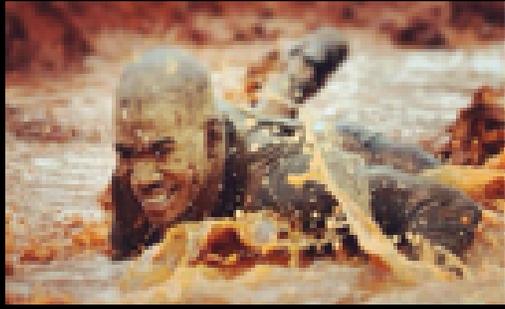


*This is not Adams Gap but it is an aid station after dark. Taking care of the runners is all that matters.*

***Crossing Cunningham Creek into, you guessed it, Cunningham Aid Station.***

# SURVIVE THIS MUD RACE

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Designed by a Special Forces Marine, this course will challenge even the strongest of runners.

If you Survive, you'll be greeted with a beer, t-shirt and medal, and you'll have dragged yourself up to the craziest party you've ever been underdressed to.

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**Come suffer through the mud with  
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friends.**



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# WHEN TO TAKE A RUNNING BREAK

—yomommaruns.com

**R**emember how that last 50K broke me. Afterwards (aka during -- like with each step), I decided that it was time for me to take a break. Not only were all of my toenails throbbing and pleading for no more torture, but my mind just needed a rest from worrying about anything that had to do with running. I wanted to take the running slate and wipe it clean and blow away the dust.

There was nothing broken or seriously injured (minus those toenails), so how did I know I needed to take a break? Well the obvious part is that I've been running like a crazy person for months and months. Although compared to some people, like all of my buddies running Western States, what I run in a month is like a wimpy weekly mileage total for them. But with me and my newness to the 50K and running three of them since February, my body was telling me that it was time to take a deep breath and just recover.

In case you're trying to decide for yourself if it's time to take your own little running vacation, here are some of the key factors for me in deciding when to take a running break:

**Natural downtime in your racing schedule.** Because I don't have another race until the end of July (and it's just for fun, or so I tell myself), this was a great time for me to take a break and let my muscles and bones focus more on recovery for a couple of weeks.

**Your legs are fatigued.** This was actually the determining factor for taking a break after this last 50K. From the first step, my legs felt sooooo heavy. I knew then that they just needed a break from the intensity. After a couple weeks of breaking, they already feel much fresher than they did at the adrenaline-pumped start line of that race.

**Before starting a new training plan.** Starting a new training plan with fresh legs can help you build confidence from the start. In July, I'll start marathon training for Savannah. Even

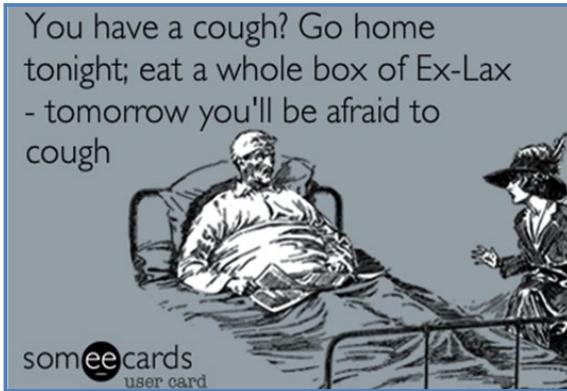
though I'm not racing that one (I'm pacing my buddy in her first marathon!), I'd still like to go into the training plan with fresh legs.

**When you're just not excited about running.** I definitely had the feeling during this last race that running just wasn't fun that day. Did I feel that way for an extended period? Not really, but I wanted to take a break before I got to that point. It's sometimes easier for us to listen to the signals our bodies give us -- like, oh, my Achilles hurts so darn bad that I can't walk straight, so I should probably take a rest. Whereas, it's harder to listen to the mental voice that says that running is losing the magic for you. If you spot it happening, take a mental, meaning an actual, break from training. Hide your training plans and find other positive activities, like hanging with the family and friends, to fill your time.



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

**If you're sick.** Your body has a lot of clever ways to let you know that you are worn down. One of those ways is being more susceptible to illness. Here's a short and informative article on illness related to running activity. Either way, if you are sick, don't be afraid to take a break until you recover.



**Decline in performance.** If you've been out there grindin' and haven't seen any improvement in your results lately, you could be suffering from a performance decline linked to overuse. Check out this article for symptoms of overtraining.

**You're on vacation.** Vacations are the perfect time to take it easy on yourself and your training. Because vacation time is usually focused on family and friends, it's easy to put running into perspective. Running is definitely worthwhile and therapeutic, but it is not as important as your family, which is easy to understand when you're busy swapping stories with them about who wins the award for most tortuous older sibling. My older brothers used to pin me to the ground and spit in my mouth along with telling me that if I tattled on them I would get sent to be made into glue at the Elmer's factory, named after Elmer who told on his big brother -- of course. So they win.

**You have an injury.** I actually forgot this one in my original post, and I had to come back and add it in. Unfortunately, this is the cause of so many of my running breaks. In my opinion, I could have avoided these forced running breaks due to running-related injury if I had taken more of the optional running breaks listed above. That's not a guarantee, but man, I just feel it in my stress-fractured bones.

This article recommends taking at least one three- to four-week break per year. Sounds easy until you get into the thick of running things and realize that taking a break now would interfere with the almighty race schedule. So plan your breaks in advance and with as much care as you put into planning your races. Don't just rationalize that you will eventually get to that.

And even if you haven't preplanned a rest, listen if your body is signaling for a one. That training plan will still be there in

a few weeks, and you will probably be a lot happier to see it.

By the way, I am the worst at this! There are so many for-fun races on my schedule that I forget that even when I'm just doing a race for fun, it still saps lots of energy from my legs.

For this particular rest period, I took two weeks off. Did I run at all? A few times, but I made sure to keep it very fun and easy. Very, very easy. I ended up with about four easy runs total during the two weeks. This article gives some recommendations for how to stay in shape during a break period. Or if you're feeling like it, just pause everything and don't worry about losing or maintaining fitness. I didn't run distance for over 30 years, and my body caught on fairly quickly. Three weeks of resting will not kill you, but it just might make you stronger.

# THE 1200 MILE CLUB

## June 1200 Milers

Last	First	Total	June	May
Adams	Audrey	308.4		
Adams	Clell	758	164	113
Adams	Tammy	247		
Affuso	Olivia	584	97	74
Allen	Darnell	294.8		
Anabtawi	Sam	88		
Andress	Jennifer	737.5	146.5	127
Armstrong	Tommy	245.1	62	20
Arrington	Donna	592.6	98.2	94.3
Atkins	Brian	1010.3	235	202
Ballard	Bill	675	57.6	101
Barry	David	420.5		77
Barry	Heather	405		57
Belcher	Michelle	485.45	62	63
Benner	Kimberley	542	101	98
Benson	Wayne	300		
Bertram	JR	452	116	76
Blankenship	Barry	711.97	146.59	144
Bonatz	Ekkhard	1194		225
Booher	Lisa	793.73	105.3	135.36
Bradley	John	709.2	93.2	106
Bradshaw-Whittemore	Al	630.6	97.8	80.5
Brakefield	Cheryl	435.8		45
Broussard	Julie	293.45		
Brown	Charlie	679.05	125	107.8
Brown	Sean	219		
Browne	Shannon	290.9		
Burke	Chad	1045	173	181
Burnette	Jack	381.4		
Burris	Mark	836	102	121
Burson	Steven	399.45		
Caldwell	Greg	399.9	44.1	16
Chandler	Teresa	614	100	107
Choat	Julie	523		62
Clay	Brad	1357	255	252
Coffee	Mitch	722.06	84.14	79.92
Corrin	LaRonda	208.95		
Corrin	Roger	458.25	40.2	100.55
Crawford	Jennifer	376		
Creed	Brad	638	116	106.4
Crumpton	Dan	724.07	144.1	127.57
Darden	Amber	177		
Davis	Wayne	856	102	91
Dean	John	187		
Dease	Katherine	506.64		68.23
Denton	Matt	748.25	147.5	144.75
DiMicco	Al	717	136	117
Dodson	Brooke	693	145	115
Dortch	Cherie	405.07	50.25	37.77
Dunham	Kelly	733.2	172	140
Dunn	Wade	660.7		
Engels	John	545.9	66.7	99.8
Ensminger	Stephanie	596.04	38.68	68.7
Estes	Jeff	425	41	80
Evans	Debbie	632.3		155.6
Evenden	Sally	691	106	135
Farrell	Meredith	107		
Fasking	Greg	651.2	141.3	107
Fell	Amy	895.5	179	205
Feller	Beth	783.2	131	96.5
Fite	Rebecca	776.95	123.68	104.15
Fondren	Matt	1467	265	315
Ford	Joe	542		116
Foster	Michelle	606	109	100
Franklin	Shane	648.69	126.43	95.91

Last	First	Total	June	May
Frederick	Winston	933	162	173
Ganus	Jack	619	104	107
Gann	Michael	694	114	40
Gash	John	544	143	90
Geisen	Jonathan	600	93	112
Gillis	Sam	536.5	47	13
Givan	Marcus	429	135	122
Glaub	Chris	524	105	55
Goode	Johnny	860	139	175
Gray	Todd	594.1	113.6	96.2
Greene	Michael	343.49		
Gremmels	Jennifer	553.42	118	99
Grossmann	Christopher	632.66	101	74.23
Guenster	Dirk	381.55		
Gullapalli	Satya	559.4	112.7	121.6
Hallmark	Daryl	583.3	101	102
Haralson	Danny	719	103	145
Haralson	Micki	872.5	135	203
Hargrave	Alan	600	119	103
Harrelson	Kitty	393.2		103.1
Harris	Robert	244.25		
Harris	Vickie	591	109	87
Harrison	Lisa	744.6	143.5	128
Hartfield	C. Meade	487		96.1
Hathorne	Chad	326.74		
Haugh	Spencer	535.1	3	78
Heaton	Bryan	696	91	107
Hedrick	Nicole	623.2	121	89
Hickerson	Patrick	588	119	109
Higgins	Shane	608.2	99.6	122.8
Hiller	Russ	523.83	125.89	100.1
Hinton	Gretchen	463	95	87
Hollington	Kasey	709	96	119
Holman	Reannon	213.13		68
Home	Greg	94.1		
Honea	Todd	659	116	106
Hoover	Alison	748.28	140.65	131.9
House	Beth	615.55	104.65	103.85
House	Mike	75.7		
Ingram	Joseph	349		79
Jackson	Terri	483.1	81	54
James	Ryan	859	205	131
Johnson	Mark	635	121.5	80
Jones	David	88.5		
Kahn	David	437.5		68.87
Keith	Michael	629.87	102.3	88.4
Kirkwood	Teresa	619	120	100
Kuhn	Jimmy	779	109	140
Langston	Richard	616		121.7
Lee	Shilonqua	299.65		
Leek	Joshua	557		111
Lester	Treva	122		
Longoria	Joseph	541.98		82
Losole	Liz	507		108
Lucas	Jane	545.5	100	105
Lupinacci	Tim	587	108.5	101
Lyle	Randy	1200.8	195	209.3
McCalley	Charles	117.7		
McCarthy	Nicole	598.11		104.46
McConnell	Kim	481.15	99.5	91.5
McMahon	Mary Lee	382.6		
McShan	Kenny	786.91	146	118
McTune	Mark	1375.39	207.55	243.5
Meadows	Bryan	567.83	85	97
Merry	Vicki	1108.7	251.9	204.8



# **BIRMINGHAM TRACK CLUB**

# **REWARDS**

# **PROGRAM**

Great volunteers make a great race possible! The BTC is dedicated to rewarding our hardworking volunteers and we are excited to offer the following rewards program.

## **VOLUNTEER AT 2 RACES/EVENTS IN A CALENDAR YEAR:**

- Receive a free race t-shirt.
- Receive a free BTC volunteer shirt.
- Your name will be entered into a drawing for a gift card.

## **VOLUNTEER AT 3 RACES/EVENTS IN 12 MONTHS:**

- All of the above.
- Plus, 1 free pre-registered entry at a BTC sponsored race.

## **VOLUNTEER AT 4 RACES/EVENTS IN 12 MONTHS:**

- All the above.
- Plus, free individual BTC Membership!

If you are interested in volunteering for the BTC at one of our events or races, please send an email to Mark Burris at [VOLUNTEERS@BIRMINGHAMTRACKCLUB.COM](mailto:VOLUNTEERS@BIRMINGHAMTRACKCLUB.COM)

# THE HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF THE MARATHON TRAINING GROUP

— by Al Dimicco

*“Before I speak, I have something important to say”- Groucho Marx*



Way back in the late 70's, there was a rather select group of runners in the Birmingham area that had actually done several marathons - Adam Robertson, Ray Giles, Rick Melanson, and a few more. They were the icons of local running who could complete what was then the almost unreachable finish line of a marathon. At the time, in the infancy of of the masses running, most local races were 10k's with an accompanying 2 mile Fun Run. Hoover, the town where I now live, was the site of my very first race and later in '79 had what I believe was the only Half Marathon around. In February of 1979, the three year-old Birmingham Track Club hosted the 1st Magic City Marathon that was run through the streets of Birmingham and several miles to the East into the slowly decaying neighborhood of Woodlawn. Running was starting to BOOM in Birmingham. Still, the information on how to train and run these marathons was more myth than fact.

I had just begun running less than a year before that 1st Magic City Marathon, but actually had little desire to attempt such a unfathomable distance. C'mon, 26 miles? Run? 3+ hours? I knew how I felt after the 10k's I had done and really didn't care to extend my lungs and heart four times the distance. However, due to my other interest at the time, photography, I followed a couple of friends around the Magic City course as they tackled the marathon, photographing their gradual physical demise as they ticked off the miles. When they finished and I saw their complete exhaustion, the total muscular fatigue, the spent energy depletion, the blisters, the hobbled gait from the finish line, their Finisher's keychain, there was only one thing for me to say..."I gotta get me some of that. Where do I sign up?"

Following that race, the aforementioned local icon marathoners held a retrospective class on how to run a marathon. It was a one-night, 3-4 hour open forum type talk that covered all aspects of this mysterious side of running. It was like hearing Jonas Salk teaching you in one night how to cure polio - you had no idea what it was, but you wanted to do it. Nine months later, I ran in the 1st Vulcan Marathon here in Birmingham, and as they say, the rest is history. I was hooked for life. Thirty-four years later, I have run 135 marathons or ultras, and although the times have become agonizingly slow, I still toe the line a few times a year. One of

the great joys I have had, in addition to being able to keep my body relatively healthy enough to do these crazy distances, is that I have had the opportunity through the years to teach what I have learned to those other runners that wanted to dip their feet into the marathon waters.

In 1983, I was asked to assist Murray Binderman to hold a series of meetings where we would talk about the different aspects of marathon training in preparation for Vulcan. It was pretty well attended for the 4-5 meetings we held, but fairly informal. The next year, Murray decided not to do the classes, so I took over. I was able to obtain a room at UAB every other week for 5 months, and the Marathon Clinic was supported by the Birmingham Track Club. We had refreshments and handouts and sometimes we needed extra chairs. Sometimes, we had a guest speaker, but most of the time, I would hold court. After going through one of my classes, Charles Thompson jumped in and helped do some of the teaching and mechanics of the clinic. He continues to help today. There was, and never has been, any cost to take part, and no accountability - you showed up if you wanted and didn't if you didn't want to. Our group would have these bi-weekly classes and meet every Sunday somewhere on the marathon course to follow a cookie-cutter training schedule I put together that could accommodate several levels of runners (no run/walk back then). In those days, when computers were in their infancy, I had to draw the training maps with a pen and a ruler. It's funny, but one of the primary routes many local runners still use during their training these days is running up a quarter-mile hill up Overbrook Road. The reason we run up it is because it was easier for me to draw one long straight line than to draw a bunch of short lines meandering through the neighborhood. My legacy is set long after I'm gone!! Al's Hill!!

Now, I held this Marathon Clinic for 11 years, but now let's fast-forward to 1995 when I was asked to become the Run Coach for the Leukemia Society's Team-in-Training (later the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society). The training for the Society went year-round training groups to go here, there, and everywhere, so when training for The Vulcan Marathon and later the Mercedes Marathon (founded in 2002) came around, I merely merged the two groups together for the runs, but gradually, the classes became too unwieldy for

the different groups and so I changed my dissemination of information from mostly classes to a weekly email called RUNNING WITH AL. If that title sounds familiar, after writing emails for 11-12 years, I switched to a weekly blog format (<http://runningwithal.blogspot.com>). Since '95, we began meeting for runs at the Brownell Building (now the NBC Bank Building) and to this day, it is one of the major meeting places for groups of runners in the general Birmingham area to meet on the weekends. After training a group for the 1997 Midnight Sun Marathon in Alaska, Ken Harkless, who had run that marathon for the Society, asked if he could co-coach the Leukemia runners. He only had to ask once and has been by my side to this day. Together, we have coached probably several thousands of runners, but who's counting. In 2010, after 15 years of being the Leukemia Run Coach, I turned the reins over to Prince Whatley, who has very ably taken over those runners, while I continued to train the Mercedes Marathon guys (the Vulcan Marathon folded in 2000). Ken continues to coach the run/walkers for the Leukemia Runners in addition continuing to be by my side training our local group of marathon and halfmarathon runners, training for our Birmingham Mercedes Marathon, as well as marathons all over. Ken and I would put out coolers and say "go", but most of the coaching over the last 2+ years has since been done through my RUNNING WITH AL blog, or RWA's little brother blog, TRAINING WITH AL (<http://trainingwithal.blogspot.com>).

In the past couple of years, the Birmingham running scene has exploded both on the roads and on the trails. Led mostly by The Trak Shak Running Shops, there have been social events, almost weekly races of several distances, and the very successful Mercedes Marathon. In addition, local training groups have sprung up all over town and are doing great with promotions, cohesiveness, and direction. One of the most popular is the Birmingham Track Club's Long Distance Training Group (begun in 2006) that meets every Saturday from The Trak Shak's front door in Homewood. Coordinated by Natalie Ferguson, every week it seems that they gather 30-40-50 or more runners for their runs of 8-22 miles. They have volunteers to man water coolers and I believe they may even have Pace Leaders for some of their runs. So, it only seems right that the Sunday Marathon Training Group should move and merge (?) with the Saturday group.

And so, my friends, after 28 years, I am about to turn the direction, planning, and coordination of training you marathoners over to Natalie and her crew. I will help any way I can and will continue to write TRAINING WITH AL once the formal training begins. More information about the group's runs will be coming soon, but the best way to keep up is to sign up on their Facebook page. Also, Ken and I will continue to show up on Sundays to say "go" at NBC, but it's getting harder and harder for me to keep up with you

guys on the runs, but I'll be there riding shotgun. As usual, ask me anything at any time about any subject concerning marathoning. If I don't know the answer, I'll make something up that will sound very believable. And as always, as I have done for more than the past three decades...

*I'll see you on the roads - AL*

# PEAVINE FALLS RECAP

—by Tanya Sylvan

On the 4th of July the hubs and I volunteered and ran the Peavine Falls Run at Oak Mountain. I'd been waiting for this race all year because it's cheap, has a large field, and always has great shirts.

Zack and I signed up to volunteer with setting up and breaking down the finish line. Or rather, I signed us up. 4 a.m. wakeup on a day off. What a guy! I love when you can volunteer and run a race—best of both worlds!

There was a record turnout despite the rain, and everything went off without a hitch. The rain really wasn't as bad as we had expected. There was no thunder or lightning—it was more like running through a continuous sprinkler. Which you should do on the 4th of July anyway. And it sure as hell beat the 100 degree temps they had last year.

The Peavine course is notorious for its hills, particularly the wonderful downhills in the second half of the race. The catch is, to go down, you must go up first. Four miles of up. While the 1,100 ft. of elevation change isn't shocking for someone who runs trails at Oak Mountain regularly, it's pretty significant for someone who prefers flatter courses. Steep or not, I'd much rather run up a crazy short hill and be done with it than trudge slowly uphill for many miles. Unless I'm running up Mt. Cheaha.

The race started with a bit of a reprieve from the downpour, and the trees sheltered us from the rain the rest of the race. There were a number of beautiful photo ops of the surrounding ridges and runners in the fog, but I chickened out and left my phone in the car where it'd be dry. So you'll have to believe me when I say it was gorgeous!

I didn't put much thought into the race—my only plan was to run the entire way up to the falls. At about mile 1.8 my calves started cramping, which never happens, so I stopped to walk and stretch them out. Was it the hill? Low



sodium? Laziness that I could have pushed through? Either way, it hurt and I ended up speed walking a lot more than I had planned. After the race almost everyone I talked to had ended up walking at least once, so I didn't feel as guilty.

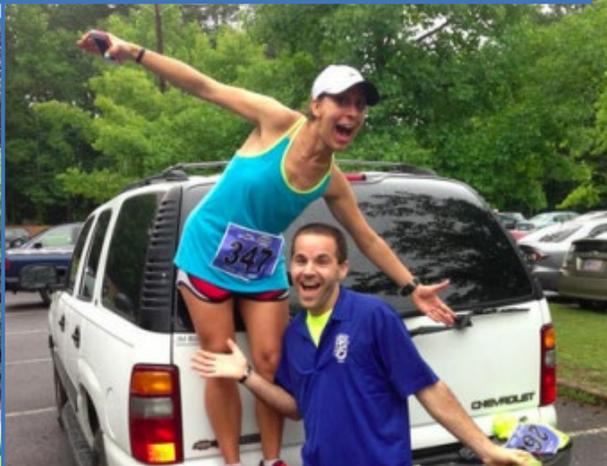
Once I reached the top of Peavine and had some Gatorade, my calves felt better and I was able to take off downhill at a decent clip. It had been frustrating watching people that I had passed pass me while I was walking, but I smoked them on the downhills. Ah, the sweet taste of revenge!

The last 1.2 miles of the race were on singletrack, which I had been looking forward to the entire time. Once we turned onto the trail I was able to get at least eight "kills"—looks like my trail running skillz are paying off!

Overall it was a great start to the holiday weekend! Running, volunteering, hanging out with friends, getting soaked, eating ice pops—that's what freedom is all about, right? Happy birthday America!

**More Pics on the  
next page!**





# THE COOLEST 50K IN JULY

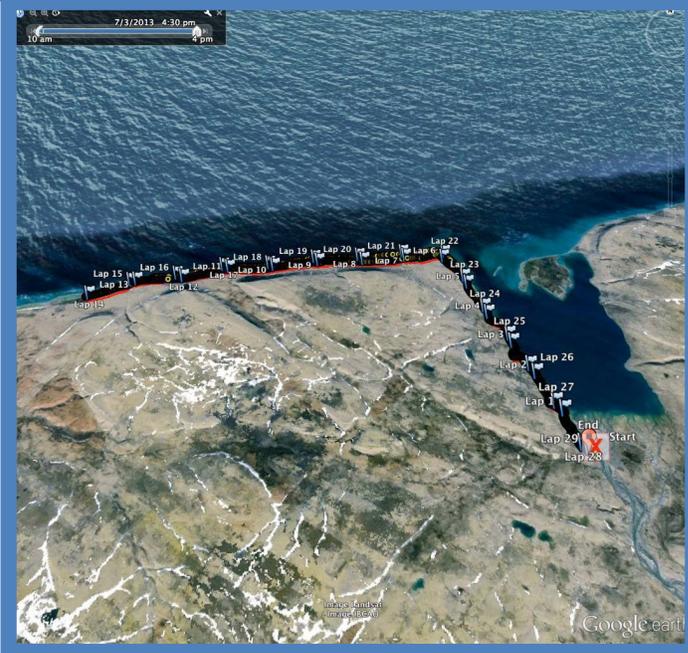
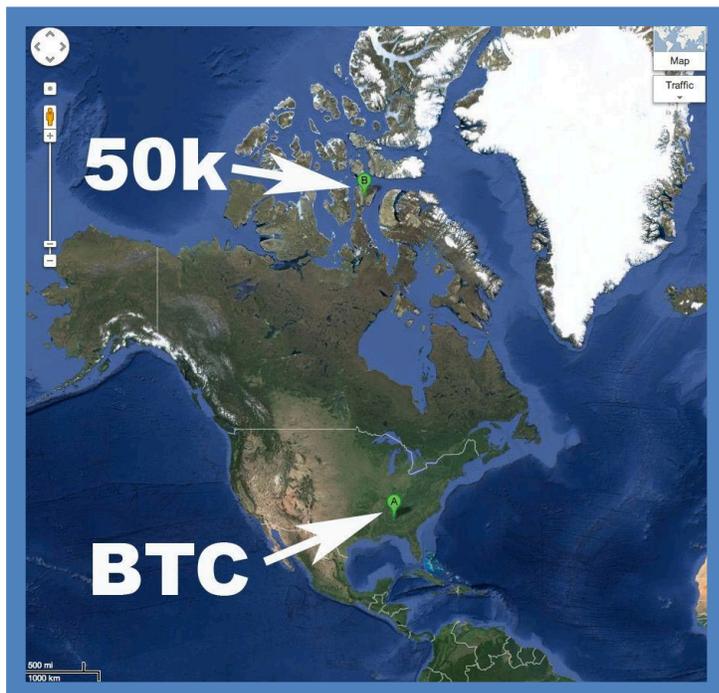
— by Dr. Ekkehard Bonatz

A year ago I decided to purge mind and body and go beyond the numerous marathons whose medals were gracing the wall of my study. I was looking for a flat summer race in cool weather. The Arctic Watch Lodge on Somerset Island, Nunavut, Canada, usually catering to mining companies and to ecotourists, offered a certified 50k. I was sold.

Yellowknife in Northwest Territory was the staging area for ten runners and a handful of engineers who set out to explore the most northern part of habitable Canada, just South of the geographic North Pole. Two days before the race we gathered in the small smoke-filled charter airline lounge where our luggage was weighed and trimmed down to just 44lbs per person. After two hours of uncertainty we were told that the weather was bad, and there was no flight that day. It was Canada Day (equivalent to 4th of July), there was a parade in town and otherwise a great opportunity to rest. The next morning a small plane took us north, stopped for fuel and took to the air again. We crossed the tree line and entered the true Arctic. We all turned silent as we saw the lakes and tundra turn into unexpected snow-covered landscapes. We landed in the middle of nowhere. A bone-chilling northern wind grabbed us as we stepped off onto the landing strip. The camp staff greeted us and advised us to put on our Muck boots. The lodge required a mile's walk, it was overcast and felt like 22 degrees – running an ultra marathon seemed completely unrealistic all of a sudden. We were cold, exhausted, and overwhelmed by the stark hostile world that was to be our home for the next five days. The staff, some of whom spoke with a charming Canadian French accent, ushered us into the main hall of the lounge. There it was warm; coffee, hot chocolate, and delightful snacks were waiting. We could not have asked for a more amazing welcome!

Dinner consisted of the best organic ingredients, roast beef, vegetables, salad, with our choice of wine. I met Valerie, a pathology professor from Chapel Hill, NC, who was going to run her 83rd marathon; Megan, who was attempting her first marathon, Tom and Carol, who had run in the Antarctic together; Erika, who had been injured and was content to go half the distance; John, a seasoned ultra marathoner, who had finished his most recent marathon in 3:20...

There were just ten of us running. We were told we could wait a day if we wanted but we decided that conditions looked favorable and to bring it on! Due to the unexpected winter conditions the course for the next day had to be



rerouted. We retired to our comfortable tents, clutching hot water bottles and crawling under the multiple layers of sheets which kept us warm. The clock reminded me that it was 10PM, time to go to sleep. The sun was high up on the horizon in the North.

Gathering for a delightful breakfast, we debated the start time and agreed on 10AM. The kitchen staff helped us



prepare individual food supplies; I chose a banana, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, some cookies. Our support person would have those ready for us on the course.

The starting gun was a rifle with which any polar bears were to be chased away in case they wanted a piece of us. And so we were off... John in his bright red t-shirt ahead on the well marked trail, as was Erika. The terrain was much more difficult than anticipated, there were numerous creek crossings and snowfields, and the permafrost had made some parts muddy and soft. Very loosely packed gravel gave little traction, and other areas looked like a Martian surface with endless small rocks sticking out of the ground. Deliciously cool, crystal clean and clear water was available in the creeks. I saw Erika climb on board of a supply vehicle after her 13.1 miles. Rather than turning inland, the return leg of the course was now routed outwards over the arctic ice along the coastline. It was well marked by ATV tracks and orange flags. The sun was bright and warm in the cloudless, deep blue sky – and thus began the most amazing part of my first ultra marathon! For the next 3 hours I ran on the vast ice

shell which was slightly crusted over with snow, the wind at my back. I was comfortable shedding my gear down to a singlet and shorts. My support person (the race director himself) checked with me every 30-40 minutes to see if I needed water, food, or clothes. The next two runners were small dots on the horizon. No one was behind me. A gaggle of beautiful black-and-white snow geese flew silently overhead. I was on my own in this vast landscape. The stark and expansive beauty of the scenery was unbelievably humbling and majestic. --

At mile 26.2 I celebrated my personal transition into unknown stratospheric running distance, then paused for a quick food and water break at mile 27, the point at which my coach had warned me about hitting the wall.

I crossed the finish line after 6 hours and 20 minutes, exhausted and happy. Wonderful snacks greeted me once again in the heated common room of the lodge where we were reunited and told our stories. John had finished in 5 ½ hours, Valerie in 5 hours, Tom and Carol in 5:45 hours, Megan had nailed her first (trail) marathon in 4:07, and Erika completed her half in 2 ½ hours. Instead of a medal we received an Arctic Watch bath robe.



Recovery consisted of several hiking trips into the surrounding mountains where we saw wild life (muskoxen), enjoyed a snow slide, and went fossil hunting. We learned that the mining engineers were looking for (and found in abundance) copper and diamonds.



We socialized more, read books, and listened to our own music. Someone had brought his guitar. There was no Internet, no cell phone service. The generators were turned off between 10PM and 6:30AM. We had 8 ½ hours of sleep every night – the physical and mental health benefits were immeasurable.

I arrived in Birmingham two days late. And it has all been worth it. I have met different kinds of runners and explorers whose friendship will last a long time. We all came in search of the extraordinary. I believe each one of us found it.

I could not have experienced the incredible value of this adventure without the support of my wife Jill, who stayed on the phone with United Airlines for 5 hours to rearrange my return flights (no kidding!), my son Joseph, who kept my Facebook page updated, and coach Alex Morrow, who had the experience and the wisdom to get me to the starting line.

# TURKEY CREEK 8K

## NEWBIE FRIENDLY WITH A SPLASHY FINALE

—yomommaruns.com

It finally happened. After months and months of trying to talk my gym running buddies into hitting the trails with me, one of them finally took me up on the offer. Maybe she was excited to get outside and back to her wilderness roots, or, more likely, she was ready to silence my jibber jabber. Either way, we skipped over the step of a leisurely, peaceful trail run and opted for the inaugural Turkey Creek “Float Your Boat” Festival 8K Trail Race. Could someone come up with a longer name for that race, please?

Why a race for my friend’s first trail run? The nice thing about trail racing is that even though trail runners are competitive they’re also super friendly, so you don’t have to worry about getting knocked down and hurdled if you get in some speedster’s way at the start. Not that that’s ever happened to me at a road race either, but there is usually a hippy, peace-and-rainbows vibe at trail races that makes it a great place to feel comfortable as a newbie.



Because we had an 11-mile long run on the books, we woke up early to fit in the first six miles before the race, and then made a bathroom and shoe swapping pit stop before hopping in the car to head out to Turkey Creek. For those of you, like us, who’ve never been there before, Turkey Creek Nature Preserve is located in Pinson, northeast of Birmingham. The preserve was established through a partnership of the Freshwater Land Trust and Alabama’s Forever Wild Program and is co-managed by the Southern Environmental Center (the other, less-worshiped-in-Alabama SEC), and

you have the option of exploring the creek and trails on your own or taking advantage of their hands-on programming at the environmental education center at the preserve’s entrance.

I had heard through the trail-running grapevine that the trails at Turkey Creek were pretty mild, but the trails for the 8K were brand new to the public. While they weren’t too crazy technical, there were definitely some challenging hills that took a bite out of our speed. The piece of trail we used for the race was around around 2 miles long. We ran a double loop, and the race directors added a piece of road that follows along the creek at the start to round us up to 8K.

My gym buddy and I stuck together throughout the race, hiking the hills when we needed to and flying down the other side when we could. Even though the trails weren’t the most technical, my first-timer friend still had sore ankles the next day from navigating the course. I sometimes forget what it’s like to be running trails for the first time, but there are a lot of little muscles that you find out you have after a trail race because they scream at you when you try to move the next day.



The best, best, best (should I add a fourth?) part of this race was that the finish line shoots you out right beside the falls. The creek water was refreshingly cool for the steamy

summer day, and it doubled as an ice bath for our tired race legs. Pretty much this was the best finish for a trail race that I've ever had. Combine this with the Chipotle burritos they brought in after Run for Kids Challenge 50K, and I would be in post-race heaven.

My first thought when I saw the creek was, I absolutely have to bring my four kids back here. The falls are big enough to stir up some white water and look exciting, but small enough to safely slide down on your own or with an inner tube. Also, the water is shallow enough in most parts that you can let the littlest ones explore without too much worry.

Another fun part of this race series is the frying pan rewards for the winners. Not frying pan trophies or medals, actual frying pans. That's my kind of prize. Run your race and then head home to fry up some eggs and bacon.



For those who might be interested in checking out this race or more trails, Turkey Creek 8K is part of the Sizzlin' Summer Trail series, and the final race of the series is the upcoming Ruffner Mountain Adios Summer 5K/10K/15K Trail Race on August 10. Ruffner will definitely provide a challenge for every level of trail runner with its technical and hilly terrain. And guess who'll be there with me to check them out -- my gym buddy. Turns out that a set of sore ankles and a few tree hurdles didn't scare her off.

# BTC RUNNING GROUPS

## Black Girls Run

Black Girls Run is a National Organization with a local Chapter. They have approx 500 members with all paces and levels from beginner walker to 8 minute milers. There is no fee to join and they are always taking new female members.

Contact Olivia, [oaffuso@gmail.com](mailto:oaffuso@gmail.com), Alexis, [petitlagnippe@hotmail.com](mailto:petitlagnippe@hotmail.com), or Jeralyn, [jeralynpowell@hotmail.com](mailto:jeralynpowell@hotmail.com), or visit [www.blackgirlsrun.com](http://www.blackgirlsrun.com), or find the local chapter Black Girls RUN! Birmingham on facebook <http://www.facebook.com/groups/249831688374975/>

## Norm's Gnomes

Norm's Gnomes are a local group of about 70 members who run a 6:30-8:30 pace and train for long distances; half marathons to 100-mile Ultra's. This is not a beginners group. There is no fee to join and you can become a member by showing up at one of the many weekly runs in the Homewood and Mountain Brook Areas and running with the group.

E-mail Jennifer [andressk@bellsouth.net](mailto:andressk@bellsouth.net) or Tim, [timr71@att.net](mailto:timr71@att.net).

## The Village Runners

The Village Runners are a local group of about 90 runners who enjoy training and running together. They are "serious recreational" runners with paces ranging from 8:30 to 10:30. They meet almost every day at the Western Supermarket in Mountain Brook. Weekday runs are 4-6 miles and weekends are longer. They promise not to leave a runner behind. They welcome all runners – the more the merrier!

Find them online at [www.facebook.com/groups/thevillagerunners](http://www.facebook.com/groups/thevillagerunners) or email Dave [vp@birminghamtrackclub.com](mailto:vp@birminghamtrackclub.com) or Randy [treasurer@birminghamtrackclub.com](mailto:treasurer@birminghamtrackclub.com)

## The Evening Runners

The Evening runners have about 15 regulars and 90 members. After completing Run University's program for the Ruben Studdard Half Marathon in the fall, they decided that the rest of the runners in Birmingham started way too early, so they run at night. Paces range from 9 minute miles to 15 minute miles. They are an open group.

Request to join their facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/groups/257924670910573/> or search for Evening Runners Group. You can also contact

## BTC Saturday Morning Long Run (Natalie's Marathoners)

This group began as Meredith's Marathoners in 2006. Each year they pick a goal Marathon in the fall and train together. Saturday morning routes and water stops are coordinated by Natalie Ferguson and the BTC with members dropping water along the route. Paces range from 9:00 to 11:00. Distances for Saturday morning runs range from 10 to 22 miles. This is not a group for beginners.

See [www.birminghamtrackclub.com](http://www.birminghamtrackclub.com) for information.

## Run University's Couch to 5K (10K)

Run University is a program led by coach Danny Haralson. There are several programs throughout the year that last 7 weeks (5K) or 10 weeks (10K). The programs begin with short walks mixed in with short runs building up to a 5K, 10K or half marathon. This group is appropriate for beginners and open to all fitness levels. The program usually begins in the parking lot below the Mountain Brook YMCA and they go on to meet in various locations throughout Homewood and Mountain Brook as the distance increases.

The program costs \$49 for the 5K/10K and the Half Marathon cost depends on the event chosen for the group. Contact [rununiversity@gmail.com](mailto:rununiversity@gmail.com) or visit [www.rununiversity.com](http://www.rununiversity.com) or find them on facebook <http://www.facebook.com/rununiversity> or twitter <http://twitter.com/rununiversity>

## Fleet Feet's Beginner 5K Group

Fleet Feet in Cahaba Village offers a beginners running program coached by Will Rodgers. If you have never run before or if you are just getting started and need a group for motivation and advice, this is the group for you. The group meets at various locations throughout the city and surrounding suburbs. Each session lasts 10-12 weeks. Currently, Fleet Feet offers two programs per year targeting a spring and a fall race in Birmingham. A small fee beginning at \$80 covers coaching and water stops.

Contact [Will@fleetfeetbirmingham.com](mailto:Will@fleetfeetbirmingham.com)

## Helena Endurance Running Group

HERG is a running group out of Helena, a city about 20 miles south of the city of Birmingham. Their mainstay running days are Wednesday evening and Saturday morning from La Reunion Coffee Shop in Helena. Paces range from 8:30 to 13:30 for long runs. They also meet on Tuesday and Thursday, but that is inconsistent as of Spring 2012. This is an open group with no cost.

More information and contacts can be found on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/groups/hergs/>

## Shijenben Running Group

This is a veteran long run group, training for half and full marathons and moonlighting as triathletes in the off season. They have been running together for over 2 years and paces range from 8:30 to 12:00 minute miles. The regular group has about 65-70 runners with 160 on the group e-mail list. They also meet for Sunday morning bike rides.

You can e-mail [shijenben@gmail.com](mailto:shijenben@gmail.com) to be put on the weekly long run group list, or find them on Facebook. They are an open group.

## Regular Runners

The Regular Runners are a group that trains for various distances with their long runs beginning at 13 miles on Saturday Morning. During the week, they have shorter runs in the Hoover Area. Paces range from 9:00 to 12 minute miles with some members using the Gallaway run-walk method and others just running. Saturday Morning Long Run attendance averages 30 members with about 60 on the e-mail distribution list.

To join this group and receive the weekly e-mails, send a message to David, Harry, or Jay.

## Downtown Running Club

Not only do they not want to drive over the mountain for a run, but they don't want to do it at 6 a.m.! This group meets at Paramount Cafe (200 20th street N) on Saturday mornings for a run around the city. They are open to all paces.

For more information, e-mail Brian at or find them on Facebook.

## Black People Run Bike and Swim

BPRBS It is so important to move! Black People Run Bike And Swim is not an "exclusion" it is an "awareness" of the reality in which education, exposure, and disparities affect us in ways that are at times not recognized or understood. Our group meets weekly to battle obesity in the form of activity.

Like us on Facebook, Follow us on Twitter, or Email us Jerri, Shirley, or Patrick for more information or schedule of events.

# RUNNING TIDBITS

— Compiled by Randy Lyle



## Quotes

“Believe that you can run farther or faster. Believe that you’re young enough, old enough, strong enough, and so on to accomplish everything you want to do. Don’t let worn-out beliefs stop you from moving beyond yourself.”

~ **John Bingham, American marathon runner and author**

“You have a choice. You can throw in the towel, or you can use it to wipe the sweat off of your face.”

~ **Gatorade ad**

“The answer to the big questions in running is the same as the answer to the big questions in life: do the best with what you’ve got.”

~ **Anonymous**

“No one ever drowned in sweat.”

~ **Author unknown**

“We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort.”

~ **Jesse Owens, American track and field athlete who won 4 Gold Medals in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin**

“Play not only keeps us young but also maintains our perspective about the relative seriousness of things. Running is play, for even if we try hard to do well at it, it is a relief from everyday cares.”

~ **Jim Fixx, author of the 1977 best-selling book, The Complete Book of Running**

## Tidbits

### The Best Way to Hydrate

**Source:** <http://beta.active.com/articles/why-sodiumpotassium-balance-is-critical-for-better-hydration>

If you have not noticed yet, it is summertime in Alabama. You know what that means – it is hot and humid pretty much every day. One thing about living in the Deep South is you will sweat a lot in the summer. For runners, that makes it that much more important to stay properly hydrated. Sometimes I do not figure out until I am on my run if I took in enough fluids. It made me wonder if there was a way for me to determine whether I am taking in adequate amounts of fluids. After looking around, I came across the following bits of information and thought I would share it.

The two primary electrolytes in your body are sodium and potassium. They work together to maintain fluid balance in cells, blood plasma and extracellular fluid. Potassium is found primarily inside cells and sodium is the main electrolyte in extracellular fluid. Fortunately, we do not need an in-depth understanding of the complexities the sodium-potassium balance that is critical for proper hydration. I hope the following information is useful in simplifying this concept.

# ***Tidbits cont.***

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## ***Potassium Facts***

Although the recommended daily intake of potassium is 4.7 grams (or 4,700 milligrams), most people get much less than this from their diet. Potassium is the key regulator of blood pressure. A high-potassium diet is full of plant foods and our kidneys are well adapted to excrete excess intake of this mineral. In fact, most potassium is lost in urine while very little is lost in sweat.

## ***Sodium Facts***

It is thought that humans conserve sodium because primitive diets were very low in sodium. The absolute daily minimum intake needed to support health, assuming no losses in sweat, is only 180 milligrams per day but excess sodium can increase blood pressure. The recommended daily limit on sodium intake is now 1,500 milligrams, which is only about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a teaspoon of salt. Sodium loss in urine and sweat adapts to intake. In other words, the more salt you eat, the more sodium there is in your sweat.

## ***Potassium Intake for Athletes***

Regardless of your activity level, you should focus on high potassium foods for general good health. Muscle function, bone strength and nerve signaling all depend on adequate potassium. Potassium from plant foods is the best form. You should try to pick several high potassium foods every day, such as the following:

- Bananas
- Potatoes
- Tomatoes and tomato juice
- Oranges and orange juice
- Dates
- Raisins
- Soy beans, tofu and edamame
- Legumes and refried beans
- Sweet potatoes
- Greens, such as spinach, kale and beet greens
- Broccoli
- Whole grain foods
- Other fruits and vegetables

## ***Sodium Intake for Athletes***

With training and acclimatization, your body will adjust to your typical sodium intake. If your typical intake is modest, sodium losses in sweat will adjust down, with no adverse effects.

However, what happens when circumstances are unusual or extreme? You might travel to an event where the temperature soars, which causes you to sweat much more than normal. If race day temperatures will be hot, with high humidity, and you typically sweat heavily, you should hydrate with sports drinks that contain electrolytes during the event. Altitude and very dry humidity can also cause

## ***Tidbits cont.***

fluid loss, even if you do not perceive much sweat on your skin. Again, go for sports drinks to hydrate and replenish electrolytes, or use salty snacks or special sports foods that contain sodium.

If you normally avoid salty processed foods and snacks, you could add some salt temporarily heading into race day. You do not need large amounts of sodium. Salt foods a bit and add some salty snacks like pretzels or bouillon. Some athletes even drink pickle juice for the sodium content. If that does not appeal to you, stick with pretzels. A mere ½-ounce of salted pretzels has roughly the same amount of sodium as an 8-ounce electrolyte beverage.

If you drink water during the race but do not replace the lost sodium, you could experience hyponatremia (or low blood sodium).

### ***Hyponatremia***

Most research shows that hyponatremia is typically not due to low salt intake. It is actually caused by excessive sodium loss, possibly aggravated by excessive consumption of plain water. Therefore, competing in an extreme athletic event, such as a marathon in high heat and humidity, can put you at risk because you are losing much more sodium than normal in sweat. People who work in extreme heat conditions, such as wild land fire fighters, also need to pay attention to salt intake. These are just some of the unusual situations that can put you at risk.

Hyponatremia can come on quickly and the symptoms include:

- Abdominal bloating
- Swollen fingers and toes
- Swollen ankles and wrists
- Extreme – brain swelling, fatigue, throbbing headache, confusion, loss of coordination

### ***Rules of Thumb for Electrolytes***

- Eat plenty of high potassium foods every day, regardless of your training level.
- Eat modest amounts of sodium.
- Maintain adequate hydration.
- Replace each pound lost as sweat with about 2 cups of fluid.
- When training or competing in high temperatures and/or extreme conditions, boost sodium intake with electrolyte replacement beverages or extra salt on your food.

The important thing is to pay attention to what your body tells you. During these hot summer months, do not wait until you feel thirsty to consume fluids. Also, take in plenty of fluids during the week. Do not wait until the weekend to hydrate for your long run. When possible, hydrate with electrolyte beverages rather than just water. We want everyone to run through the heat of the Alabama summer safely. After all, the fall race season will be here before we know it!

Are you a new runner just graduating from a Couch program wanting to continue your training? Are you an experienced runner wanting more manageable distances? Want a group to run with on Sat. morning? Then join us for a new program the BTC is starting in January. The Saturday Mod Run (Moderate Distance) will offer weekly 3 – 7 mile routes and a group to enjoy your continued training. Distances and routes will vary based on upcoming races. Look for more information on the BTC website.



## BTC Membership application

New member:  Renewal  #

Single membership:  Family

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender:    M    F (Circle)

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Family member	e-mail:	★	Phone:	DOB:	Gender:
2. _____ / _____	_____	_____	_____	_____ / _____	_____ / M F
3. _____ / _____	_____	_____	_____	_____ / _____	_____ / M F
4. _____ / _____	_____	_____	_____	_____ / _____	_____ / M F

**Waiver:** I know that running and volunteering to work in club races are potentially hazardous activities. I should not enter and run in club activities unless I am medically able and properly trained. I agree to abide by any decision of a race official relative to my ability to safely complete the run. I assume all risks associated with running and volunteering to work in club races including, but not limited to, falls, contact with other participants, the effects of the weather, including high heat and/or humidity; knowing these facts, and in consideration of your acceptance of my application for membership, I, for myself and anyone entitled to act on my behalf, waive and release the Road Runners Club of America, The Birmingham Track Club and all sponsors, their representatives and successors from all claims or liabilities of any kind arising out of my participation in these club events even through that liability may arise out of negligence or carelessness on the part of the persons named in this waiver.

Initial:

Pricing			Single	Family
August 1	through	Oct. 31	\$30	\$45
Nov. 1	through	Jan. 31	\$24	\$36
Feb. 1	through	April 30	\$18	\$27
May 1	through	July 31	\$12	\$18

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Yes! I'd love to volunteer! My area of interest is \_\_\_\_\_.