

THE 1983 WASATCH FRONT 100 MILE ENDURANCE RUN
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1940 - 1998

In 1982, when my brother David (Ferguson) withdrew from the Wasatch Front 100 Mile Endurance Run at sixty-one miles, I felt like shedding tears. It was his first DNF and he was no quitter. He was a two-buckle winner from the 1980 and 1981 Western States 100's. And it looked like thirty hours was well within his reach.

After he withdrew we drove down Millcreek Canyon and up Big Cottonwood Canyon to Guardsman pass Road above Brighton ski area where the runners would be coming through on their way to the Brighton checkpoint. Here we learned that Gary Cross was now also out of the race. Ben Dewell came through at 2 a.m., spent one hour at Brighton, and then continued on to an eventual 30:05 finish. However, Fred Pilon and Peter Gagarin took the decision to withdraw here and, later on, Leland Jonas also called it quits here. Of the other entrants, only James Gills and Bill Athey of Florida made it as far as this and they continued to a 35:25 finish.

This experience made a deep impression on me. I had a buckle from the Western States 100 that year for a 21:51 finish but I had serious doubts as to whether I was up to the challenge of the Wasatch Front 100. But in late August of 1983 with a second successful completion of the Western States 100 behind me, I decided to accept the challenge.

Reading the list of entrants of the 1983 edition of the run was a little intimidating. Jay Aldous, Dennis Coffee, Ben Dewell, James Gills, Robert Haynes, James Honig, David Innes, O.R. Petersen, Dennis Scott, Dale Sutton, Rob Volkenand, and Gary Cross are all veterans of the Western States 100. Gary Cross is a five-buckle winner. Ben Dewell has four buckles and he has finished in sixth place twice and fifth place once. And Rob Landis. We had heard such tales of his training runs! Fred Pilon and Leland Jonas were returning as were James Gills and Bill Athey. And one of the original finishers from the first year of the race, Laurie Staton-Carter, was there. There were other names that were not as familiar – forty-one entrants in all. Surely the 30 hours barrier would be broken. Some had higher hopes than this. Race director Steve Baugh had said to me that Ben Dewell told him to be sure to have a 24-hour award on hand.

The weather had been unsettled for a few days but race day came with clear skies, calm winds, and moderate temperatures. As I and my crew made our preparations by the light of flashlights I reminded myself of my own goal, 30 hours if possible but not in such a way as to jeopardize the possibility of a finish within the 36-hour cutoff time. Having fixed this goal clearly in my mind, I wandered around trying to identify runners. Laurie Staton-Carter was getting attention from TV interviewers. Dewell appeared fit and ready. Where was Gary Cross? (He was four minutes late for the start as it turned out.) Finally, a couple of minutes before 5 a.m. by my watch, Steve Baugh started us on our way.

It is a relief, as much as anything else, to be on the move after days of apprehensive anticipation. The first five miles of the Wasatch Front 100 are very steep and necessitate a slow

pace even at a good effort. Perhaps it is just as well that scarcely more than 4 ½ miles can be in the first hour and a half of darkness because the next 4 ½ miles are better done in daylight. It was at about 4 ½ miles, near the base of a steep bowl up which we had to climb to gain the ridge, that the first untoward incident occurred. Joe Adams of Texas suffered an excruciating injury (pulled muscles?) to his leg which meant the end of the race for him. (I heard later that he had traveled to Utah from Texas on several of the previous weekends to train on and master the trails.) Having witnessed the accident, the lesson was not lost on me. In a race such as this on such a course, haste makes waste. What a disappointment it must be, to be ready for the race, and then to suffer such an injury so early. I determined that this should not happen to me.

Although the ridge route lacks a distinct trail it is fairly easy to stay on course and the cool of the morning, the beautiful view of the Salt Lake Valley on one side and Morgan Valley on the other, the brief intercourse with other runners when passing or being passed, combined to make this part of the journey very enjoyable.

At about 9 ½ miles my brother David, acting as handler and pacer, met me and walked along with me for a half mile while he posted me on progress of the race up front. I was in seventh place overall or sixth place among individual runners. (There was a relay team entered in the race but after this point their presence was seldom mentioned, at least to me.) Rob Landis was already forty minutes ahead. The other runners preceding me were Ben Dewell, Leland Jonas, Stan Elton and Gary Cross. I noted during the course of the race that it was easy to get accurate information on what was happening ahead of me but very difficult to get accurate information about what was happening more than a few minutes behind me.

Throughout most of the rest of the race I was not in contact with other runners. There were exceptions. At about seventeen miles I made contact, briefly, with Gary Cross and Stan Elton. They were momentarily uncertain of their course and were apparently running together. I had already spent some time in conversation with Gary Cross on an earlier portion of the course. I was quite well acquainted with him from several previous meetings at other races. All I knew of Stan Elton was his name. I knew him no better after this encounter for when he and Gary made sure of their course they left behind quickly. At about twenty-five or twenty-six miles, on Hardscrabble Road, I overtook Leland Jonas. This quite surprised me as I knew from the previous years' experience that he was a very tough competitor. There was an explanation. Leland had twisted his ankle badly at five miles and though he had bandaged it, it was now quite swollen. He could walk but he could not run. After a few minutes conversation I left him behind but it turned out that I needed his help a few miles later finding the trail south from the ridge and so we spent a couple of short stretches together. The final direct contact I had with another runner occurred just above Desolation Lake at sixty-seven miles. Elton was in the dark due to having his flashlight batteries run down and he asked if he could share the light of me and my brother at this time was pacing me. Stan trailed behind us for a few miles until, just above Scott's Hill, he unaccountably dropped back. This contact was somewhat peculiar in that there was little communication between. Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that David had taken a bad fall ¼ of a mile beyond Dog Lake and had cracked a couple of ribs. Because of the

discomfort of his situation I don't supposed we were very communicative. At any rate, while Stan was traveling with us everyone was keeping his own counsel.

The second leg of the run, from the Green Maintenance Shed to Affleck Park, was unfamiliar to me except through the description contained in the runner's entry material. I had committed to memory that part of the description that took us to Hardscrabble Road. It was gratifying to see the course unfold exactly as described. There were the beaver ponds and then the balding sagebrush hill; there was the road going to the left and forking; then the big dry gully cutting down to the right. I was met here by an older couple who described the next part of the course to me. Just before Hardscrabble Road there was an unexpected aid station with cold lemonade and several different kinds of cookies, courtesy, I was told, of the Wahsatch Steeplechase. After the aid station the course turned south on a good dirt road for two or three miles before becoming a trail, a very bad trail, up Hardscrabble Creek. This section of trail is the worst on the course, and I was glad to be through it sometime after noon. When I reached the ridge, I spent some time wandering around before Leland Jonas caught up to me and we found the right way. Brief periods of uncertainty about the course occurred several times in the course of the run and were the cause of a certain amount of exasperation but I had determined ahead of time that I was not going to fall victim to frustration and would not spend extra energy rushing back and forth looking for a lost trail. Once on the right track the trail was relatively good and I soon left Jonas behind on the downhill run to Affleck park at thirty-five miles. I arrived a few minutes before 2 p.m., almost two and a half hours behind Rob Landis and forty to forty-five minutes behind Cross, Dewell and Elton. Landis' pace was difficult to believe. I walked straight through Affleck Park and up the three miles of pavement to Big Mountain Pass before stopping to change shoes and sit down for a few minutes. I had been able to eat and drink my fill on the walk along the pavement and I felt restored in that way but I was already starting to feel tired in the legs.

The next section of trail does not have any route-finding problems and there is not much uphill in it but the cobblestone trails in the middle of this section, plus the direct sunlight and heat drained my energy and by the time I reached Alexander Springs at forty-eight miles I had a bad stomach, was depressed and was feeling acutely fatigued. This was the low point of the race for me. At Lamb's Canyon checkpoint, fifty-three miles into the run, at 6:10 p.m., I changed into dry shoes and ate some soup while I got the report from my crew. Rob Landis was three hours head. Dewell was second, Cross third, and Elton fourth and they were stringing out. Within an hour of the time I left Affleck park I had been followed by fourteen others, led by Jonas with Rene Casteran and Rob Volkenand of Oregon not too much further back.

The section of trail from the trailhead on Lamb's Canyon Road to the trailhead on Millcreek Canyon Road is only three and a half miles long but there is no steeper trail on the course. Strangely enough, it was on this section, with the sun setting and the coolness of evening advancing, that I recovered a fairly optimistic outlook. My legs were still sore but my energy was returning.

At the sixty-one mile checkpoint at Lower Big Water Trailhead, I stopped to put on warm clothing and a headlamp. I had been eating and drinking all along the three mile walk up Millcreek Canyon Road. David would accompany me to Guardsman Road and then from Brighton to Mineral Basin. He would carry additional clothing and equipment plus water and goodies. There had been no change in the position of the runners ahead of me, but behind me about twenty minutes were Casteran and Volkenand. I felt pretty good. Things were going very well.

I have already alluded to events on this next section of the course. David's accident, though very unfortunate for him, did not particularly demoralize me. I felt badly for him, of course, but I did not think that his absence during the section from Brighton to American Fork Canyon would hurt my chances for a sub-30 hour finish. I was more than an hour up on the schedule I had set for myself, and, though my legs were quite fatigued, I was quite confident now. It was not so easy to convince David that carrying the pack eight or so miles beyond the point where he had fallen and cracked his ribs was enough of a contribution to the cause. Perhaps it was the pain as much as any of my pleadings, that sufficed to convince him. At Guardsman Road he took a ride in and I jogged the last two miles in solitude except for the last two hundred yards when some young people came out to accompany me. We were now at seventy-five miles.

At the Brighton store at 12:40 a.m. I was treated royally. Good hot soup and coffee! I changed socks and put on another sweater. A small blister on my left heel was an annoyance but not a problem. Ben Dewell was in second place and picking up the pace, or at least maintaining it, while Landis was slowing. Gary Cross in third place was also reported to be slowing and was about forty minutes ahead of me. I, of course, was in fourth place by virtue of overtaking Elton. I made ready to go. A young woman who worked at the little store that served as the checkpoint volunteered to guide me to Catherine Pass. Her husband had done the same for Cross. Though I had no doubts about the way, I accepted for the sake of having company. She secured a flashlight and gloves and we set off. In my haste I forgot my water bottle.

The first three miles out of Brighton are a steep uphill. My legs were now quite fatigued, and it seemed as if we were going very slowly. I was very glad for the company of this young woman. I don't believe that during this run or any of the Western States 100 Milers that I participated in it ever occurred to me to wonder why I was doing what I was doing. But in the hike to Catherine Pass I admit to being overcome by a sense of how very, very strange it was to be at this place, at this time, having this rather ordinary conversation with this young woman. This mood passed quickly. We had drifted slightly to the right of the course we wanted to follow and had to hike down a bit to traverse the pass. When we came to the campfire of some volunteer helpers we discovered, to my wonder, that Cross had passed through only ten minutes earlier. It seems that he and his guide had wandered well to the left of the right course and had lost thirty-five to forty minutes. At this campfire I drank sparingly of their water as it seemed to be a small supply. I then found out that my guide would accompany me until we encountered her husband and so we set off together and a few hundred yards later were pointed down into Dry Fork Canyon by another group of volunteers. My guide was very good at keeping to the trail which faded in and out frequently in this steep rather unpleasant part of the

course. Unfortunately for me, about a half mile into the canyon we met her husband and another fellow coming back up. I was informed that Cross was twelve or thirteen minutes ahead of me. After receiving a brief description of the trail immediately ahead of me I set off alone in pursuit. In about fifty yards I lost the trail. In the ten to fifteen minutes that it took me to find the trail again I began to notice my thirst and to regret my forgotten water bottle. When I reached the jeep trail where I could begin to run, or at least jog, I began to stumble badly and even fell for the first time during the race. By the time I got to the American Fork Canyon checkpoint at eighty-two miles I was dehydrated and very tired. I was now about twenty-five minutes behind Cross. David informed me that though Landis was very fatigued he would win and had probably already finished. Dewell was also sure to go under twenty-four hours. I received this news at about 3:40 a.m.

Thankfully, from this point on my crew had constant access to me and I took advantage of it to rehydrate and to eat and to try to regain my spirits a little. I succeeded in this in part but from the top of Pole Line Pass at eighty-six miles to Snake Creek Canyon at about ninety-five miles I became quite obsessed with the notion that Casteran and Volkenand were going to catch me from behind.

At the Snake Creek Canyon checkpoint, I was still about twenty-five minutes behind Cross and, though I ran most of the way to the finish from this point, I finished more than twenty minutes behind him.

The sun rose a couple of minutes before I finished. At the finish line were Steve Baugh, Nancy Barraclough, Gary Cross and my wife, my brother and sister-in-law. It was glorious!

Rene Casteran and Stan Elton finished fifth and sixth respectively and were the last finishers under thirty hours. Rob Volkenand took a wrong run at eighty-seven miles and turned a sure sub-30 hours finish into a DNF several hours later. Between thirty hours and thirty-six hours the number of finishers tripled to make this by far the most successful Wasatch Front 100 Miler ever.

How does the Wasatch Front 100 Miler compare with the Western States 100 Miler? The Western States is bigger. It has more entrants, more volunteers, and more organization. This bigness generates excitement. My experience at the Western States runs are something that have stayed on my mind and I wouldn't give them up for a great deal. But the Wasatch Front has its own organization and the volunteers, though fewer, give of themselves as much as those at the Western States. I have nothing but good feelings for them all.

And the Wasatch Front is tougher. Gary Cross, who has more experience with both races than anyone else, endorses this view and told me so at the finish of the race. I personally believe that a sub-30 hour finish at the Wasatch Front is comparable to, if not tougher than, a sub-24 hour finish at the Western States. There are three sub-30 hour finishers at the Wasatch Front that have a record at the Western States:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Wasatch Front '83'</u>	<u>Best Western States</u>
Ben Dewell	22:50	18:12
Gary Cross	26:06	21:31
Charles Ferguson	26:27	21:16

This is not to say that tougher is better. But the Wasatch Front 100 Mile Endurance Run has been on my mind lately and I wouldn't trade my experience there for a great deal either.