

# Fire, Wind, Hail, Snow — Just Another Wasatch 100 Mile

by John Grobben

The Wasatch Front 100 Mile has a history of adding some special challenges to the already demanding Wasatch terrain. In 1982 there were 14" temperatures and six inches of snow on the high passes. In 1984 and 1985 there were floods and washed-out trails to cope with. Before the 1986 run there was an avalanche that left hundreds of pine trees across the trail. And in 1987 the landowners in Hardscrabble Canyon refused to let the run cross their property and over 15 miles of new trail had to be found or created.

This year saw a continuation of the pattern. Just eight days prior to the run a small fire started in Emigration Canyon; when it was finally contained six days later it had consumed 5700 acres, caused the evacuation of hundreds of residents (including ultrarunners Jim Carter and Laurie Staton-Carter), and destroyed three miles of the Wasatch course. When the Forest Service refused to let the run go through the burned-out section, runners were left to speculate as to where the course would go.

Anticipating the need for a course change, Irv Nielsen, the Trail Guru of the Wasatch 100, had been out on the course

with his measuring wheel while the fire was raging just a mile away. He found an alternate route, taking a different ridge directly to Big Mountain Pass, but it posed another problem — it was 3½ miles shorter, and Irv didn't like the sound of a Wasatch 96.5 Mile Endurance Run. So he spent all of Labor Day weekend mapping and measuring an extra loop to add in Millcreek Canyon. Knowing that the Forest Service would be tough to deal with, he actually put on a three-piece suit in an effort to impress them, but to no avail. The proposed route went through a bit of wilderness terrain and it would not be allowed.

Back to work again. Now it was Wednesday, just three days before the race, and Irv found a different loop to add that the runners would eventually remember well (and not necessarily thank him for!). Up a steep ski slope at the Solitude area, past two high mountain lakes, then down a steep, rocky trail to the Brighton store. Nice views in the daytime, but the runners would be there at night.

The net effect of the changes was that six miles of pavement were replaced by rough trail and a few hundred feet of climb were added. And the course was probably close to an hour slower. But still 100 miles.

This year's field was the largest ever, but there was no obvious challenger to Dana Miller, the defending champion. He had had an excellent year of training and felt that he had a realistic shot at Chuck Jones's course record of 20:39:35. A realistic shot, that is, until the fire and the altered course. For the women, in the absence of defending champion Laurie Staton-Carter, the favorite had to be Becky Nielsen, a former winner and the first to break thirty hours. However, she had several strong runners to contend with, including Californian Sue Summerhays-King and local mountain runners Cindy Andrus and Debbie Shore.

In addition, the field included four ultrarunners who had already finished Old Dominion, Western States, and Leadville this year and who were going for the Grand Slam of Ultrarunning — Wendell Robison, Dennis Hagele, Max Hooper, and England's Martin Greaves.

It had been a very hot and dry summer in Utah and the forecast was for hot weather during the race. The day before it was in the 90s and at the start at 5 a.m. it was already 75°. But the weather was changing and by 8 a.m. up on top of the ridge it was 51°, overcast, and blowing hard. Thunderstorms passed through and the wind got even fiercer; that night the temperatures dropped into the teens with occasional bits of hail and snow and wind chill factors well below zero. Concerns about heat and dehydration at the start changed to concerns about cold and hypothermia and keeping your water bottles from freezing. Scott's Pass at 69



Janet Reiffert

Alfred Bogenhuber on the way to a third-place finish (tied with Dennis Herr), just missing 24 hours. Not all of Wasatch is hilly, not all of Wasatch is rocky, despite how you feel when you're running it.

centage up to a respectable figure. My time here was about an hour and a half slower than times I've had at Leadville and Angeles Crest, but this was by far the better run for me. (Is there a harder 100-miler? Not unless you allow a bit of fantasy, such as putting together a course consisting of the first third of Wasatch, the middle third of Leadville, and the last third of Angeles Crest — with the substitution of the last few miles of Western States for an uphill finish — all done in a plastic bubble to simulate the humidity of Old Dominion.)

Actually, I had had serious doubts about the wisdom of my trying Wasatch ever since I decided to do so back in March. It just seemed too hard. A good bit of my concern stemmed from the fact that this would be my second attempt — in 1982, along with my fellow *Ultrarunning* editor Fred Pilon, I had made it 73 miles and then called it quits when ankles and knees just hurt too much from all the hills. So I had the advantage of knowing something about the course, but more often than not this knowledge translated itself into pessimism about my prospects rather than optimism.

But there is some value to experience, whether that experience was gained at Wasatch or at other ultras over the years. One thing I have learned is that you have to train for the course you are planning to run, and in this case that meant HILLS. Virtually every run I took in the couple of months prior to the race was seriously up and down. Walk up, run down, with the downhill training just as important as the up. My mileage

was never great — except for one week of 80, most weeks were 40–60 — but all was on hilly trails. The other thing I did right was going to Utah a week before the run and using the time to hike and learn the nighttime sections of the course and to get somewhat used to the altitude. I hadn't done this six years earlier and it showed.

#### A pacer helps

We've had a lot written in this magazine recently about pacing. While my own feelings are strongly in favor of allowing pacers, at least for all of us who don't care about winning, I had never realized how much of a difference pacers can make. Psychologically, not physically.

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started to chat, and without much thought or much struggle we jogged into the finish with only a couple of short walks on uphills. An anticipated thirty minutes of suffering turned into a relaxing twenty.

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#### The Crimson Cheetah

Most ultras have their own particular style, mostly a result of the nature of the course and the character of the race director. Wasatch's race director for the past few years has been Steve Baugh. This year Steve claimed not to have the time, so John Grobbs took over, but Steve's impact is still there. One example is a ceremony held at the awards ceremony where new members of the Royal Order of the Crimson Cheetah are inducted. You can qualify in two ways: run the course in under 24 hours, or play a major role in organizing the event. Steve starts by apologizing in advance for the fact that he is about to make a fool of himself, then he seems to set out to do just that, what with a corny "speech" and elaborately foolish ceremony, but in fact everyone, Steve included, is loving it and the whole thing comes off wonderfully. This year there was only one new member who qualified on speed (Scott Demaree), while four qualified on service. Somehow the fact that more workers than runners end up getting recognized seems just right.

Peter Gagarin



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Time to add another runner to the Royal Order of the Crimson Cheetah: new inductee Scott Demaree (left), Dana Miller, who was already a three-time member, race director John Grobbs (with tom-tom drum for sound effects), assistant race director Nancy Barraclough, and Steve Baugh reading from the "official" certificate.

miles was especially difficult and many runners, including Helen Klein, were forced to drop out because of the wind and cold.

Miller lead all the way, but another Utah runner, Bill Sayre, stayed within 30 minutes of him until Sayre dropped out at 75 miles at Brighton. Fatigue and problems with his contact lenses did him in. At that point the only question was whether Miller could break the course record. He ran his best times ever for all of the old parts of the course, but the new section at Solitude was significantly slower and a record was out of reach. Miller has run Wasatch four times, winning three of them, and all of his times have been within 13 minutes of each other!

Debbie Shore won the women's race, which turned out to be a question of survival as only three of the thirteen starters could finish. But Shore's time of 29:46:55 would have been hard to beat regardless.

With all of the naturally-caused trials to contend with in this year's run, the biggest problem turned out to be a man-made one. The new trail around the burned-out area went past a shepherd's camp, and evidently that bothered him because he moved many of the ribbons at a critical intersection and at least 25 runners became confused and got lost. Most of them lost a lot of time and eventually dropped out, including Max Hooper. Robison, Greaves, and Hagele finished to become the fourth, fifth, and sixth Grand Slammers (joining Tom Green, John Bandur, and Herb Tanimoto). Rob "Ole Goat" Volkenand and Fred Riemer both finished to join Laurie Staton-Carter with five finishes and Scott Demaree became only the eighth runner in history to complete the course in under 24 hours.

## Wasatch Front 100 Mile Endurance Run

E. Layton to Midway, Utah Sept. 10, 1988  
23,200' climb; 22,500' descent

1. Dana Miller,37	21:41:07
2. Scott Demaree,37,CO	23:36:35
3. Dennis Herr,41,VA	24:21:38
Alfred Bogenhuber,48,CA	24:21:38
5. Jim McIntosh,35,VA	25:35:21
6. Dick Brainard,42,MA	25:53:12
7. Charles Allen,38	26:21:01
8. Wendell Robison,36,WY	26:28:38
9. Thomas Green,37,MD	26:37:58
Martyn Greaves,29,ENG	26:37:58
11. Peter Gagarin,43,MA	26:53:39
12. Odin Christiansen,40,NV	27:32:17
13. Mark Watson,32	28:05:03
Richard Gates,31	28:05:03
15. Frank Hanson,30,ID	28:10:51
16. Rick May,40	28:17:41
17. Edward Creer,39	28:21:29
18. Stanley Crane,49	28:31:30
Andy Anderson,40,NM	28:31:30
20. O. R. Petersen,51,CO	28:33:33
21. Pat Whyte,40,CA	28:38:25
Roland Martin,39,NV	28:38:25
23. Ferdinand de Souza,35	28:40:03
24. René Casteran,40,OR	28:53:44
Rob Volkenand,57,OR	28:53:44
26. Dennis Olfert,36,OR	28:58:53



Gail Gagarin



Dennis Olfert (top) on the open ridges at about 30 miles; much of Wasatch is above treeline, but like most trail races there are some road sections as well — Tom Green (below, left), first to do the Grand Slam in 1986, is joined by Martyn Greaves, on his way to finishing the Slam this year.

27. Raymond Bell,41,FL	29:19:01
28. Tony Alexander,28	29:19:34
29. Robert Henderson,22	29:26:49
30. Jeff Hagen,41,SD	29:28:08
31. Jim Knight,35	29:41:38
32. Ken Doss,55,WV	29:46:16
33. Debbie Shore,32	29:46:55
34. Nick Bassett,CA	29:51:03
35. Phil Penna,40,CA	29:58:55
36. Don Spradling,38	31:57:20
37. Dennis Hagele,44,IL	32:05:57
38. Phil Krumm,52,OR	32:34:34
39. Ray Atleson,44,OR	32:46:46
40. Don Froese,40	32:47:47
41. Fred Riemer,40	33:08:13
42. Frank Servery,34	33:20:53
43. Nancy March,41,CA	33:42:14
44. Stephen Kissell,27	33:44:46
45. Edward Lujan,49,CA	33:46:45
46. Bob Cox,46,NV	34:25:03
47. Dan Bowers,42,CO	34:53:33
Nick Klaich,43,NV	34:53:33
49. Thomas Milligan,30	34:55:19
50. Herb Tanimoto,40,CA	35:17:39
51. Cedric Blacker,32,HOL	35:38:25
Frank Searfus,OR	35:38:25
53. Margaret Smith,32,MT	35:38:43
54. Charlie Wilson,45,FL	35:43:24
55. Peter Coffin,43	35:58:13
108 starters	

## The “Crimson Cheetah” and Other Memories of Wasatch

Friends of mine, runners and otherwise, occasionally wonder how I manage to put up with what they imagine to be the endless hours of an ultra. After finding out how long I took to finish, they shake their heads in amazement and I know they’re thinking that my brain must be missing a few key links. Maybe it will help my case — usually my part of the conversation is trying to persuade them that my ultra, run at my relaxed ultra pace, has been a hell of a lot more fun than their marathon raced at their marathon pace — if I recount how I passed a bit of time during the race (more likely, they will be convinced I’m a fool).

It was about 1:15 a.m. and I had just left the Brighton General Store, which was serving as an aid station at about 75 miles. I wasn’t really looking forward to the next three miles, a steady three-mile climb past

Catherine’s Pass to Point Lookout, the highest point on the course at 10,480 feet. I had some hot vegetable soup at the store and refilled my water bottles and now was heading up at a pace that probably approximated Red Fisher’s pace in 1986 (about which he wrote — “I hammered up the trail, passing rocks and trees as if they were standing still.”). But weak as my legs felt, they were matched by a sudden weakness in my bowels and an increasingly strong demand from them for some relief. Dropping my pants in the middle of the trail had the most appeal from the point of view of pure efficiency, but I didn’t think that would leave a favorable impression on either the runners to follow or on hikers the next day. So I began casting my light to the side of the trail, looking for a convenient place to squat in the bushes.

But after 20 hours on the move, nothing is quite so simple as it seems. While my bowels continued to complain, I debated the chances that I might squat down and cramp up, or squat down and not be able to get up again, or squat down and fall over and roll down the steep hillside. I considered the environmental aspect and knew there was no way I was going to manage to dig a small hole first and then cover everything up afterwards. I thought of Odin Christensen, maybe five minutes behind me and getting steadily closer, and what would he think on spotting me crouched by the trail. I thought I’d do it just around this corner, and then it didn’t look right so wait until just around the next corner, and then the next corner. I wondered if it was an especially fast-acting kind of vegetable soup back at the store (it had been the strangest tasting soup I had ever had!). And Odin’s light kept getting closer and closer and I thought about how I’d never get done before he came by, so I’d better try and hold it until he passed me. And as I slowly got closer to the pass, what were all those weird noises and weird lights coming from up there. And Odin caught up to me and we climbed the last hundred yards together up to the party that was taking place at the pass, and the wind was howling, and we sat down for something hot to drink . . . somehow my bowels just decided to stop complaining.

Another hour and a quarter had passed. Uncomfortable, yes; boring, no way.

### Hills and more hills

Wasatch is a course that demands as much from an ultrarunner as any course I can imagine doing (that excludes things like six-day runs, which I can’t imagine doing). The combination of hills, relatively high altitude, and rough trails probably makes the course three to four hours slower than any of the other trail 100-milers. Only the generous 36-hour time limit keeps the finishing per-



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Dennis Herr on the descent into Big Mountain Pass at 35 miles. His third-place finish here matched his third at Leadville (in 19:54!) three weeks earlier.

centage up to a respectable figure. My time here was about an hour and a half slower than times I've had at Leadville and Angeles Crest, but this was by far the better run for me. (Is there a harder 100-miler? Not unless you allow a bit of fantasy, such as putting together a course consisting of the first third of Wasatch, the middle third of Leadville, and the last third of Angeles Crest — with the substitution of the last few miles of Western States for an uphill finish — all done in a plastic bubble to simulate the humidity of Old Dominion.)

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