

2006 Wasatch Front 100 Mile: "Couldn't Ask For A Nicer Day"

by John Moellmer

During the 27 years that the Wasatch Front 100 Mile Endurance Run has been held, there have been wet years (1991), cold years (1988) and hot years (2004). The course has been threatened with forest fires, flood damage, and potential snowstorms. So what can we call this year of cool temperatures, light overcast skies and great trail conditions? Pure heaven! It was a remarkable year, which the 223 starters took to their advantage. The completion rate was a whopping 68 percent, no doubt due to cooler than normal temperatures and less direct sunlight.

The overall winner was Karl Meltzer in 20:18:58, followed by Jim Huffman in 21:40:55 and Kevin Shilling in 22:31:17. Jim was in first place in the race until the Alexander Ridge aid station (mile 47) where Karl passed him to take over first place for the remainder of the run. In winning this year's race, Karl notched his sixth win and his 10th finish. Jim McGregor and Tom Remkes got their 10th finishes as well.

Betsy Nye won the women's race in 26:20:02, with Suzanna Bon second in 26:48:08 and Kim Gimenez third in 27:04:17. Betsy was chased closely by Suzanna and Kim; just a few minutes separated them at Lamb's. By Brighton, Betsy had extended her lead over Suzanna by 25 minutes and an hour over Kim.

Opting for a quick getaway, Betsy stayed only three minutes at Brighton and maintained her lead all the way to the finish: 28 minutes over second-place Susanna and 44 minutes over Kim.

For the runners finishing the course in less than 24 hours, there is one more trial to be endured, the ceremony of induction into "The Royal Order of the Crimson Cheetah." Most runners (inductees and the general audience) all groan at the requirement to kneel during the ritual. They all know too well what pain this entails. Ten runners who finished this year under 24 hours were inducted into this prestigious order. In the following order they were: Karl Meltzer, Jim Huffman, Kevin Shilling, Andy Jones-Wilkins, Todd Schmidtke, Garrett Graubins, Clark Hirschi, David Hunt, Ryan Cooper, and Paul Sweeney. Congratulations to these Crimson Cheetahs.

Of the 223 starters, 12 were entered into the "Grand Slam of ultrarunning" by having first competed Western States, Vermont, and Leadville 100-mile trail runs this summer. Only Wasatch stood between them and the Grand Slam. Unfortunately, one runner had to drop out, so eleven were successful in achieving this prestigious award. These athletes included Darcy Africa, Tim Englund, Bruce Grant, Dan Brenden, Steve Douglas, Keith Knipling, Andy Knight, Bill Thom, David Gordon,

Gary Knipling, and Mike Samuelson.

Each year, the race committee gives the "Spirit of the Wasatch" award to an individual who exemplifies the ideal of excellence that Wasatch celebrates. The award went this year to Cindy Spence, who went far beyond in providing aid to her husband Tim, while also proactively helping other runners. Cindy was at many aid stations supporting runners and encouraging them to "go on, go on, you'll finish." She maintains an upbeat attitude, personally attends to runners, and keeps a good nature through it all. Typical for Cindy, she was off getting supplies for someone else at a grocery store when it was announced that she was the 2006 award winner.

Race director John Grobbs greeted the runners at the finish line with a handshake or hug. He had stayed up all night directing the run, handling problems, and being there for at the completion of 100 fantastic miles. Not all finish, however. The majority of runners who dropped out this year did so at either at Lamb's aid station (mile 52) or at Mill Creek (mile 60). With the Brighton aid station at mile 75, those 25 miles through the mountains at nearly 10,000 feet can appear awfully tough.

Although there are many reasons a runner might attempt a 100-mile run, the finishers gain far more than a plaque and belt buckle. They earn a life lesson. Most struggle at some time during those long 100 miles, but unless stopped by injury or illness, the runners that finish are the ones who push through the pain, cold, and exhaustion. Greg Moellmer, upon completing his first finish of three tries (in 33 hours) said, "I decided to finish whether I was able to or not. I just decided they would have to drag me off the course." And Davy Crockett (yes, running with a coonskin cap) is reported to have said when finishing the race in 34 hours, "I vowed that I would never run Wasatch again. My friends said, 'yeah right'." Every finisher of the Wasatch 100 Mile knows this spirit and these feelings. Congratulations to all who started this incredible run. Each entrant had to toe that starting line, knowing that he or she might not finish. Yet, start they did, to face a long day and a dark night. Adventure is not dead in our time, nor is courage.



The high point of the Wasatch 100 mile, Catherine's Pass, at mile 78.

Photo by Bill Thom

Wasatch Front 100 Mile

Salt Lake City, Utah

September 9

Mountainous trails

1. Karl Meltzer, 38	20:18:58	69. Joan Parker, 38	31:43:41	111. Wynn Shooter, 35	34:04:40
2. Jim Huffman, 38	21:40:55	70. Andrew Henrikson, 34	31:44:46	112. Daren Anderson, 37	34:06:28
3. Kevin Shilling, 38	22:31:17	71. Lyle Nay, 44	31:52:44	113. Brent Rutledge, 50	34:12:25
4. Andy Jones-Wilkins, 38, CA	22:46:51	72. Laura Vaughan, 40, CA	31:58:17	114. Davy Crockett, 48	34:15:06
5. Todd Schmidtke, 42	22:59:14	73. Charles Stevens, 50, CA	31:59:31	115. Don Platt, 52, CO	34:17:58
6. Garett Graubins, 33, CA	23:19:36	74. Terry Foust, 44	31:59:54	116. James Skaggs, 47	34:23:11
7. Clark Hirschi, 42	23:29:05	75. Doug Clark, 54,	32:01:13	117. James McGregor, 63	34:24:08
8. David Hunt, 47	23:34:18	76. Glenn Pace, 42, BC	32:03:05	118. William Long, 49	34:27:06
9. Ryan Cooper, 32, CO	23:40:19	77. James Nelson, 45	32:05:43	119. Bill Thom, 46, IL	34:28:40
10. Paul Sweeney, 40, CA	23:59:43	78. Marc Andrieux, 50	32:06:14	120. Mike Lynch, 42, NJ	34:30:17
11. Tim Spence, 50	25:19:34	79. Alain Rabaud, 48,	32:06:14	121. Jeri Neese Pugh, 54	34:30:34
12. Patrick McMurtry, 47	25:20:35	80. Jerry Bloom, 53, CA	32:09:25	122. Travis Sybrowsky, 38, MI	34:31:15
13. Scott Mills, 55, CA	25:35:44	81. Eric Johnson, 40	32:11:06	123. Jacob Stapp, 23	34:33:26
14. Tom Hayes-McGoff, 55, MT	25:37:03	82. Keith Knipling, 30, IL	32:22:48	124. Marc Sanderson, 35	34:35:43
15. Brandon Sybrowsky, 35, WA	25:58:40	83. Gary Knipling, 62, VA	32:22:48	125. Jessica Sanderson, 35	34:35:43
16. David Terry, 44, OR	25:58:40	84. David Gordon, 60, CA	32:29:13	126. H Leon Deitlaf, 47	34:35:43
17. Phill Kiddoo, 31, CA	26:08:08	85. Max Bliss, 38, NY	32:30:11	127. Fred Abramowitz, 54, CO	34:41:36
18. Rick Hessek, 40, CO	26:18:26	86. Dennis Aslett, 57, ID	32:31:32	128. Mike Samuelson, 41, TN	34:43:50
19. Betsy Nye, 41, CA	26:20:02	87. Ernie Floyd, 52	32:38:13	129. Colleen Ann Ford, 44	34:44:20
20. Carter Williams, 48	26:24:08	88. Ken Ward, 49, OR	32:42:54	130. Honey Albrecht, 47, AZ	34:45:09
21. Suzanna Bon, 42, CA	26:48:08	89. George Ruiz, 49, NV	32:47:07	131. Eve Davies, 39	34:50:33
22. Kim Gimenez, 41, CA	27:04:17	90. David Michael Tanner, 47	32:50:36	132. Robert Tuller, 42, NY	34:56:23
23. Bruce Grant, 40	27:07:52	91. Jeff Lunt, 49	32:55:11	133. Marty Lindemann, 45, VA	34:56:48
24. Tom Remkes, 44	27:24:07	92. Mike Price, 56, GA	32:55:25	134. Rachel Landon, 38, OR	35:03:13
25. Cory Johnson, 41	27:24:07	93. Jim Knight, 53	32:56:16	135. Aaron Shamy, 25	35:04:50
26. Lex Curtis, 31	27:24:24	94. Greg Moellmer, 26	33:00:11	136. Pat Homelvig, 47, CO	35:06:11
27. Nancy Hendrickson, 44	27:25:06	95. Michael Schlier, 50	33:05:22	137. Robert Hills, 40, MO	35:07:30
28. Glen M. Boline, 54	27:38:18	96. Matthew Mouritsen, 42	33:07:28	138. Guy Hardcastle, 38	35:11:00
29. Peter Lindgren, 36	27:39:47	97. Brian Rush, 48	33:14:38	139. Fred Denys, 62	35:18:33
30. Steven Douglas, 41, CA	28:03:51	98. Julie Dolan, 39	33:14:38	140. Jodi Martin Fessler, 47, WY	35:20:12
31. Ric Hatch, 51, AZ	28:05:21	99. John Diroll, 49	33:18:54	141. Jim Kerse, 57	35:28:59
32. Scott Mason, 44	28:06:10	100. Karen Helfrich, 39	33:18:54	142. Carolyn Luckett, 39	35:32:26
33. David Larsen, 35	28:08:51	101. Jill Bohney, 42	33:18:54	143. Andy White, 59	35:36:48
34. Ted Mahon, 34, CO	28:17:00	102. Rick Gates, 49	33:28:56	144. Xy Weiss, 45, CA	35:36:56
35. Beverley Anderson-Abbs, 42, CA	28:18:00	103. Catra Corbett, 41, CA	33:29:24	145. Shauna Heisler, 55	35:39:59
36. Phillip Lowry, 40	28:22:03	104. Charlie Vincent, 46	33:44:47	146. Janet Vincent, 49, VA	35:41:03
37. Lorie Hutchison, 42	28:22:57	105. Hans-Dieter Weisshaar, 66,	33:48:55	147. Larry Emery, 56	35:44:45
38. David Williams, 52, CA	28:24:53	106. Kerry Collings, 57	33:49:58	148. Jeffrey Holdaway, 47, VA	35:51:28
39. Tim Seminoff, 48	28:25:17	107. John Maack, 45	33:49:58	149. Wendy Holdaway, 51	35:51:28
40. Mark Christopherson, 38	28:30:50	108. Jeff Nielsen, 44	33:55:10	150. Lorraine Sorensen LaVelle, 56, CA	35:52:19
41. Joe Lane, 27, CA	28:33:32	109. George Hitzfeld, 46, TX	33:55:56	151. Carl Hunt, 55, CT	35:55:02
42. Tim Englund, 40, WA	28:33:55	110. Stephen Kissell, 45	33:58:02	223 starters	
43. Darcy Africa, 31, CO	28:35:08				
44. Dan Brenden, 55, AZ	28:36:11				
45. Pam Reed, 45, AZ	28:51:39				
46. David Toone, 48	29:08:54				
47. Tom Jackson, 46, WA	29:09:45				
48. Roch Horton, 48	29:20:41				
49. Shane Martin, 39	29:31:10				
50. David Goldberg, 46, AZ	29:31:10				
51. Deanna McLaughlin, 50	29:39:37				
52. Robert Kronkhyte, 50, CA	29:40:55				
53. Rodger Smith, 35	29:41:40				
54. Keith Blom, 49, CA	29:47:57				
55. Derek Blaylock, 37	29:55:38				
56. Alan Abbs, 36, CA	30:18:02				
57. Rickie Redland, 52, CO	30:19:45				
58. Wendell Doman, 47, LA	30:22:31				
59. Matthew Watts, 49, CO	30:23:38				
60. Howard Cohen, 48, CA	30:46:22				
61. Beat Jegerlehner, 37, CA	30:48:37				
62. Diane Van Deren, 46, CO	30:57:38				
63. Dean Tucker, 45, CO	31:09:30				
64. David Pease, 43	31:17:25				
65. Arnie Kiddoo, 58, CA	31:24:00				
66. Mark Kiner, 32, CA	31:24:00				
67. Jenn Kuhlmann Eyre, 35	31:24:56				
68. Andy Knight, 21	31:33:38				



Photos by Steve Baugh

The 2006 Grand Slam of Ultrarunning finishers. Listed left to right as follows: Darcy Africa, Dan Brenden, Bill Thom, Steve Douglas, Andy Knight, David Gordon, Keith Knipling, Gary Knipling, Mike Samuelson, Bruce Grant and Tim Englund.

Remembering a Humble and Gentle Champion

by Kevin Cassidy

Purely by accident, I stumbled upon a web link to a Utah's *Deseret Morning News* report that stunned me with news of the sad death of Heikki Ingstrom. The news brought me back more than a decade, when I traveled to Salt Lake City for the Wasatch 100 Mile, in 1994. As a foreigner on the opposite side of the world, I spent two weeks as a lonely figure in the small town of Brighton preparing for the event. Walking to a store one morning, I was greeted by a tall, thin figure of a man who was obviously in town for the Wasatch race.

Meeting Heikki was a highlight of my time at Wasatch. Sharing lunch at the Brighton Store, I learned he had run Wasatch before. He was very willing to share his wealth of knowledge with me. He gave me great advice on sections of the course and what parts I should train on. He was also very willing to share his thoughts on the strategy he felt was required to finish Wasatch. He gave no inkling of his incredible ultra achievements, but I did make my own assumption that he was probably a much more accomplished runner than I. Above all, he came across as being one of nature's genuine nice guys.

I was soon to learn just how accomplished an athlete he was. Tackling the final hours of the Wasatch event, the sun was rising on the second day when I received word at one of the later aid stations (mile 90, I think, but my memory is a bit hazy) that Heikki had indeed won the race.

Imagine my surprise, as I made my way along those final two miles of paved road into Midway, when a car pulled up beside me. It was Heikki offering encouragement to his fellow runners. I immediately congratulated him on his fine win but he brushed it off, preferring instead to praise all those (including me) around him for doing so well.

At the awards presentation, Heikki appeared embarrassed to be

receiving the accolades. He asked that all finishers stand up. "We are the winners here at Wasatch," he insisted. It was a statement I will never forget, a statement that said so much about the man.

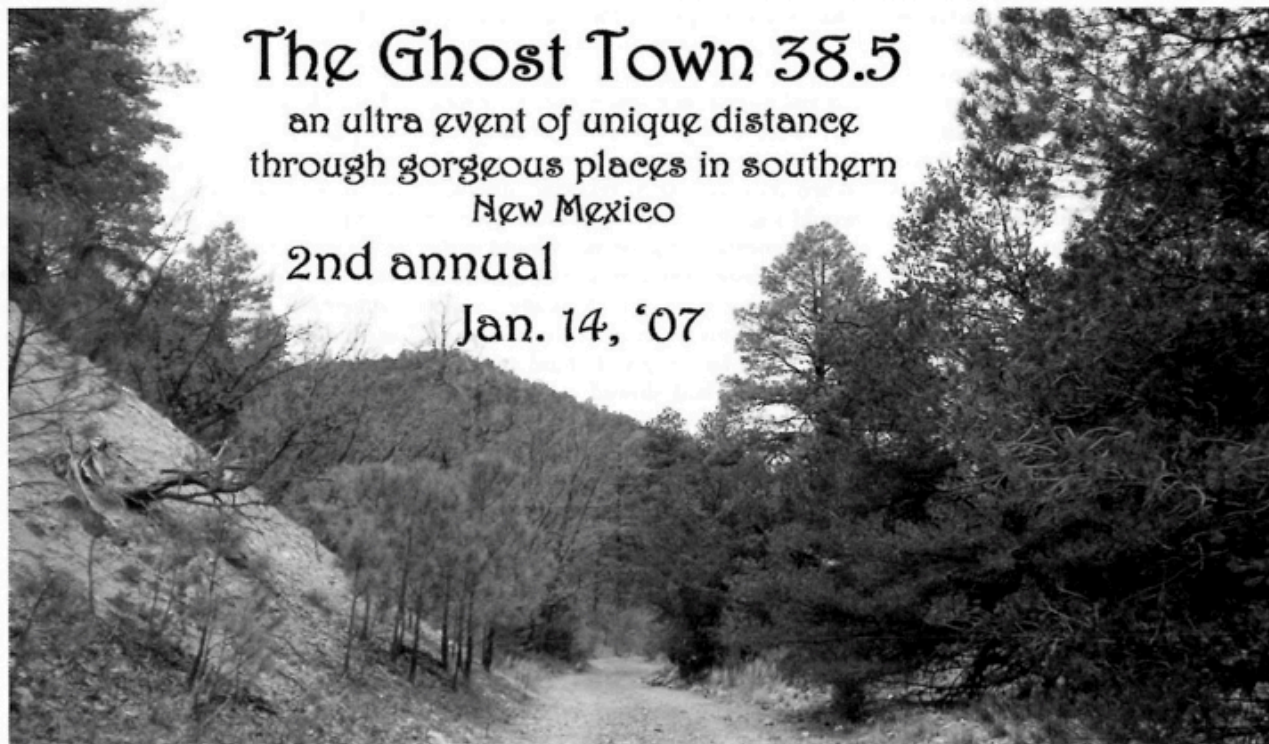
I returned home to Australia with many treasured memories and continued to follow Heikki's career via the various results in *UltraRunning*. I crossed paths with Heikki only briefly in my life, but the impression he made upon me was both immense and everlasting. What a wonderful world it would be if it were full of Heikki Ingstroms. Reading the *Deseret News* articles filled me with sadness. The final paragraphs had me close to tears. Life is many things, but it certainly isn't fair.

Irv Nielson adds:

I was shocked and saddened to hear about Heikki. Kevin's thoughts are a nice comment on what a nice fellow he was to us. As for me, he was always happy to see me on the trails above the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah, and we would often chat for a while before continuing our different directions. He was a very talented runner and yet he cared about everyone who ran, fast or slow, and let them know how much he appreciated their efforts. It is a real tragedy to have him leave this life in such a mysterious manner.

Sadly, the sport of ultrarunning lost one of its great runners in Heikki Ingstrom. Originally from Finland, Heikki lived in Utah for many years, where he excelled in marathon and ultra-distance running, highlighted by a win at the Wasatch 100 Mile in 1994 and a 2:28 second-place finish at the St. George Marathon.

As reported by Lucinda Kinkead of Utah's Deseret News, Ingstrom suffered a fatal head injury at his home in Ash Fork Arizona last December, although the circumstances behind the nature of the injury are still not completely clear. To read the complete report, go to <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,640192355,00.html>.



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One Tough Cat: Chasing the Cheetah

by Garrett Graubins

It may sound clichéd, but the Wasatch Front 100 Mile is the cat's meow of 100-milers. I last ran the race in 2000. It took me that long to forget exactly how difficult it is, and to try it again. That year I finished in 28 hours and something. It hurt. The course sank its claws into me and never let go.

In the buildup for this year's race, many of my friends talked about "chasing the cheetah" and "having cat fever." They challenged me to try to crack 24 hours at this lion of a race—more than 26,000 feet of climbing at high altitude, in extreme hot and cold temperatures. I wondered if I could do it, if I could crack the sacred 24-hour barrier at the Wasatch and join an exclusive group known as The Loyal Order of the Crimson Cheetah.

I had my doubts, and they were major. Every year, some great runners chase the Cheetah and fall short. I figured that everything would need to go exactly right—and I'd need to find a lucky horseshoe or three—to do it. In July, while on a training run, I did see a bobcat. It was no cheetah, but I wondered if it could be a sign of Wasatch success to come.

At the starting line for this year's race—an oddly mellow locale at a trailhead at the end of a rural road—I positioned myself near the front. The people around me would be the frontrunners in this year's 27th running of the race. There was Karl Meltzer. Wearing a sleeveless shirt and weathered, fingerless gloves, he looked like an alley cat, but everyone knows he is the king of the jungle. Nearby there was local boy Jim Huffman, who finished second last year and was ready to pounce on this year's race like a cat would a mouse. Also on hand was Andy Jones-Wilkins, an elite runner who it seems has finished second at every major ultra west of Utah, and Kevin Shilling, who is always near the front of the Wasatch pack.

Early in the race, everyone jockeyed for position, running on fresh legs through dusty, sandy filth that resembled kitty litter. The trail soon climbed and the sky began to glow pink as the sun cast its first rays on the rocks marking the apex of the first climb, called Chinscraper. I had run and hiked much of the way with Jones-Wilkins and felt fine as I scratched and clawed my way to the top. Once on

the other side of Chinscraper, we rolled and meandered along a ridgeline, making our way to the first aid station, called Grobben's Corner. As the rising sun warmed my face, I stopped more than once to stretch my quadriceps, mentally purring at the beauty of the course.

By the Francis Peak Maintenance Sheds aid station I felt relatively fresh and had managed to arrive on pace for a sub-24-hour finish. It was still very early in the race, so a saucer of milk was out of the question. Instead, I gulped an Ensure and learned that the leader of the race, Huffman, had bounded through 14 minutes ahead of his closest pursuer, Meltzer.

The women's race was already taking shape. Beverly Anderson-Abbs got to Francis Peak at the same time as I did and barely shook a whisker before she hit the trail once again. She held a 12-minute lead over the next closest woman. Anderson-Abbs had held a nice lead in the summer's Grand Slam standings after finishing second at Western States and first at Vermont, but she dropped at Leadville. She seemed to be on a mission to win this race, and perhaps join the Cat Club, too.

I kept a steady pace and stayed on track for my target time, while playing cat and mouse with other runners around me. While I ate or slowed to take in the magnificent views, they would pass me. When they slowed to hike the uphill, I would jog past them. Still, always about a quarter-mile ahead of me, I could make out Anderson-Abb's powerful gait and her bobbing pony tail. I finally caught up to her shortly before Big Mountain (mile 39), a lavish spread of aid and crew support. She had slowed a bit, but still held on to the women's lead. I had also slowed, but my watch indicated that I was still on target for a sub 24-hour.

A few miles ahead, the men's frontrunners were within sight of each other. Huffman had stormed the first 39 miles of the course in record-breaking time, literally running away from Meltzer, who was also on record pace. Meltzer, who has left his claw marks in many 100-mile mountain races, stayed steady and didn't panic. Says Meltzer, "I figured if he held that kind of effort all the way, more power to him, but I knew that it would

not last. The rabbit rarely wins." In other words, Meltzer was no scaredy cat. He figured there's more than one way to skin a feline.

Huffman, as it turned out, had experienced some digestive problems early on, and addressed them with Imodium AD. "I didn't realize that it basically shuts down your entire digestive tract," he says. Huffman continued to eat, but his body had stopped processing fuel. Says Huffman, "Just a couple of minutes out of Big Mountain, I felt like somebody had stuffed an air hose in my stomach." He began to vomit uncontrollably and had to walk, weak as a kitten.

Huffman still beat Meltzer to the next aid station, Alexander Ridge (mile 47), but he was still there when a surging Meltzer arrived a few minutes later. Meltzer, a hardened competitor, was on the situation like a pack of dogs on a three-legged cat. He said, "He was standing in the tent drinking water. I just said 'hang tough, the heat will be over with in a few hours.'" As he checked out, Meltzer was back in a familiar role: leading at the Wasatch Front.

Huffman, like most cats when they fall, landed on his feet, and left Alexander Ridge after spending a total of 34 minutes there. He was back the prowl, even though his pace lagged. In fact, this running writer managed to catch him just a few miles short of the following aid station, Lamb's Canyon (mile 52). In a surreal moment, I looked at him as I jogged by during the last descent. Huffman mumbled something, but I was so flabbergasted to see him that I couldn't muster an eloquent reply. It seems the cat had my tongue.

At Lamb's, my crew showered me with excited updates on my time—I was now on a pace to crack 23 hours—and my placing. I had somehow worked my up to sixth or seventh place. I began to wonder if this was one of those days that all ultrarunners dream of, when they far surpass even their craziest expectations. I also wondered if I could push a little harder and perhaps crack 22 hours—a time that would place me in an extraordinarily elite cat-egory. I know: it was foolish to even consider it. After all, curiosity killed the cat.

I learned later that Anderson-Abbs still

held her lead, not far behind me. Up front, Meltzer lapped up the miles and had built a half-hour lead over the field. As I left Lamb's, I heard Huffman arrive to cheers from his family and crew. A few minutes later, he blurred past me. His race didn't seem to be such a cat-astrophe after all. I wasn't too shocked. Many ultrarunners come back from the dead, and cats do indeed have nine lives. He smiled like the cat that ate the canary—and was finally able to hold it down. He would tell me later, "I never considered dropping." He moved with such ease up the paved road leaving Lamb's, I wondered if it was feasible for him to chase down Meltzer.

As I marveled at my good graces more than halfway into the race, I pushed the pace over the next section of the course, a major climb over Bear Bottom Pass. Here, with a grilled cheese, Ensure, and a banana in my belly, I was able to power the ups and then find legs for the downs. I made it to the next aid station, Upper Big Water (mile 62), in good condition, but I wondered if this part of the race was my proverbial black cat. Was my luck about to run out? Indeed, my troubles were to begin over the next section.

I picked up my pacer, Devin, for the next stretch to the isolated ski lodge of Brighton. We hiked and ate on the initial climb to Dog Lake (mile 65), and I couldn't help but note the irony that I was chasing a cat while passing a lake named for canines. The trail continued upward and it was there that I began to feel the first hints of problems. My breathing—my cat's breath—was labored, my pulse raced, and my stomach turned south. What's more, the temperature began to sink like a bag full of kittens thrown into a river.

We had been fortunate with the weather all day, with relatively cool temperatures and generous cloud cover. It rained only for a short time and the Wasatch field never experienced the cats-and-dogs storms that normally appear at some point every year. Now, it seemed that Mother Nature would atone for her generosity; the night began to grow very cold. At Desolation Lake (mile 67), I had two hot chocolates and a banana. It was a strange diet, I know, but I had to focus on staying warm until I could put on some new clothes when I saw my crew, still miles away over Red Lover's Ridge.

Now hours ahead, Karl Meltzer had arrived at the Brighton Ski Lodge, his fat-cat lead still intact. Huffman had put on

a charge, but still trailed by 56 minutes. Meltzer, who knows that section of the course very well ("I own that part of the course," he says.), would go on to win his seventh Wasatch Front 100 Mile. Huffman, in a valiant come-back-from-the-dead effort reminiscent of Stephen King's *Pet Cemetery*, cat-apulted into second place, where he finished for the second consecutive year. "I'll definitely be back," Huffman said a week later.

Me? I saw my wife at the last major aid station, Brighton Ski Lodge (mile 75), and she made sure that I left wearing dry, warm clothes, had fresh batteries, and a handful of greasy, salty hash browns. My pacer and I trudged up Catherine's Pass. My pace had faded, but I still had a very realistic shot of cracking 24 hours. The Cheetah was lurking within my reach. With the sun down and the temperatures dipping toward the freezing mark, I focused on slow, steady forward motion over the last quarter of the race. It was all I could do to keep my body temperature up. Whenever I would slow down or stop, I could feel the cold creeping in.

While I negotiated an infamous climb called "the grunt," the women's race was doing a flip-flop. Betsy Nye, a hardy mountain runner from Truckee, California, had run down Anderson-Abbs and passed her in the most bizarre of places: the ladies' rest room at the Brighton Ski Lodge. The two intense competitors were anything but catty. Says Nye, "I gave her a pat on the back and said, 'You can do it.'" Back outside, Nye attacked the course and lengthened her lead during the final 25 miles. Although she did admit to "looking over my shoulder," no other women were able to stalk her. Nye kept the lead and went on to notch the Wasatch Front 100 Mile win.

At the last aid station, Pot Bottom (mile 93), I stood in a nearly cat-atonic state. I could sniff the finish line, but it still seemed so far away. Over the previous 15 miles, I had intentionally avoided looking at my watch, fearful that my Cheetah dreams had fizzled on one of the countless climbs or horrible descents through ankle-deep dirt. As I tackled the race's last climb, my time-tracking pacer let the cat out of the bag. "I think you've got it," he said, "You're joining the Cheetah Club." At that point, I would need to have a major meltdown—maybe even take a cat nap—in order to avoid cracking 24 hours.

The news was a boost, and I found legs to proudly shuffle the final four miles. I

called it my stray-cat strut. As I rounded a turn into The Homestead, where the race concludes, I let myself celebrate. "Here comes a cheetah!" I roared, while running across a spongy grass field leading to the finish line banner. Race director John Grobbs congratulated me on my time and asked me for my thoughts on the course. I moaned about the terrible footing around mile 90, but later thought to myself, "That is quite possibly the purr-fect race." Sure, I felt and looked like something the cat dragged in, but it was the happiest exhaustion I've ever experienced.

Later, at the awards ceremony, I was honored to join nine other runners during a cat-tongue-in-cheek, sacred ceremony recognizing all runners who cracked 24 hours. Together, we were the Loyal Order of the Crimson Cheetah, class of 2006. While Betsy Nye officiated, Karl Meltzer, King Crimson himself, handed us our cardboard crowns, looking up at each of us with a congratulatory Cheshire Cat smile.

Garrett Graubins is former Senior Editor of Trail Runner Magazine (www.trailrunnermag.com). His ipod playlist includes several songs from Cat Stevens.



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