

Angeles Crest 100 Mile Trail Race - Genesis

In the beginning, there was the Foothill Flyers. 3 wise men from this tribe of runners gazed upon the majestic San Gabriel Mountains and said: we must put on a 100 mile trail race so that runners may experience this beauty and wonderment. Now some can argue whether they were enlightened or just sadistic to organize such an event. And so it came to pass at the Bean Town Café in the land of Sierra Madre in early 1985. These three invited the Foothill Flyers tribe and others to this gathering to present their vision of a tough, quality 100 mile trail race in Southern California and thus began the journey that will celebrate it's 30 year anniversary this month.

The 3 founders, all of whom were club members, were Ken Hamada, Dr. Ted Hill and Del Beaudoin. Ken was the over all race director, in charge of logistics, permits and made the shirts and awards. Ted was the treasurer and provided the seed money to get the organization going. Del was the trail master who put in many long hours figuring out the course, doing trail maintenance and even walked the whole route with a wheel counter to measure the distances. This was long before personal GPS devices.

There was much discussion about how organized the race should be. On one side, some thought it should be somewhat informal with runners providing their own aid and crew – keep it simple. Others, who had experienced the Western States 100, the granddad of 100's, wanted a more organized event with fixed aid stations and wanted it to grow in stature among 100 mile events. The USFS somewhat decided it for us by emphasizing their need to evacuate the forest quickly and efficiently in the case of a fire. Organized it would be. Ken had a difficult time negotiating with the USFS and property owners to satisfy all the requirements to obtain the Special Use Permit.

Key to acceptance was showing that the race organization could account for every runner between aid stations and contact them within a reasonable time. I was tasked with recruiting ham radio emergency communications groups to provide people and operators at the start, for 17 aid stations, the finish and for Sierra Madre Search and Rescue. Maintaining communications through the mountains is not an easy technical task, and all the radio paths had to be surveyed and verified.

At the same time, I had to come up with aid station cutoff times. Western States 100 has a straight-line cut off system – multiply the finish cut off time by aid station distance divided by 100. After having crewed at Western States for Barbara Basta, I did not think straight line cutoff times were fair given the changes in terrain. A runner could be just after cutoff coming in from a tough steep section that could have been made it up on a later downhill and still have finished in time. For instance, the climb up the Acorn Trail to the Pacific Crest Trail is steep and you don't want runners pushing too hard right from the start. So I added an 11 minute extension to the first aid station cutoff at Inspiration Point. We found that runners just go slower running at night too. For the 9 mile segment from Chantry to Idlehour I added 55 minutes to the straight line 33 hour time knowing how tough Upper Winter Creek is at this point in the race and at night.

For a number of weekends, somewhat like Robert and Maria Vangilder's Weekend Warrior runs today, club members would join me to run the AC100 course in 2 to 4 aid station distances. We would check the radio communication range and degrees of difficulty between aid stations. It introduced some people to trail running in the club and to the vast number and variety of trails in the mountains. We would caravan and park half the cars at the end aid station, then drive the other half to the beginning aid station. After the run we would compare what we thought our average pace should be to the actual and came up with an adjustment factor. For the first 3 years we fine tweaked the times based on actual runner data from the last few runners who finished under the 33 hour cutoff.

Another difference with WS100 was we wanted the decision to drop or be pulled to be solely the runner's as long as they were under cutoff. We saw wide differences in the condition of runners based solely on their percentage of starting weight. If the doc at the medical aid stations (spaced every 25 miles) thought the runner's weight loss was too much or they looked too bad, they could be pulled at WS100. At AC100 it was decided to weigh runners at the 25 mile spaced aid stations, but suggest to the runners they re-hydrate if more than 3% less than their starting weight before leaving the aid station. If the runner was 5% down from their starting weight we strongly suggested that they remain in the aid station for re-hydration but did not pull them if they did not. If a doctor was not a runner or hadn't experienced working ultras before, they tended to discourage runners from continuing.

So we tried to recruit EMT's or nurses who had running experience for AC100.

I was flying a helicopter at the time and had fun taking Ken around the course to get a birds eye view. Word got out and soon I was picking up runners training for AC100 at Chantry and dropping them off on the course to run back to their cars.



Tom and Ken fly ahead of the lead runners to check out the Islip Saddle aid station.

Booth Hartley came up with a data base program and took all the data passed on by the hams of the runner aid station times and put out the results. He also analyzed the data and included a chart showing how runner's paces varied over the course. Keep in mind this was back when personal computing was in its infancy.



Barbara's Bistro aka the ChantryFlat aid station

Barbara Basta – later Barbara Hartley – volunteered to be the Chantry Flat aid station capitana. She recruited Mary Ann O'Hara to help and it started Mary Ann's career in ultra food service. Barbara, an ultra trail runner herself, wanted to go all out supplying food, drink and TLC

to get runners to the finish line. From her experience running Western States, she knew the variety of food and drink ultra runners wanted and the wide range of condition they would be in when they reached Chantry compared to what some might have experienced at marathons or shorter distance aid stations. To raise the runner's spirits, Barbara's daughter Michelle greeted runners in a Cabaret costume and thus started the theme tradition.

Bill Dickey captained the Newcomb Saddle aid station. "Bills Oasis" was a party central tent city in the middle of nowhere. Bill made up Burma Shave jingle signs and placed them in series along the trail from a half-mile before the aid station to take the runners minds off the pain with a little humor. Art Solderbom had a book that contained all 600 of these jingles that lined the highways from 1927 to 1963. My favorite: Around the corner / lickety split / it's a pretty car / wasn't it. Just after his aid station Bill put a sign proclaiming "Barbara's Bistro, open all night, only 6 miles ahead at Chantry Flat."

At the first race held on Sept. 27th, 1986 there were only 59 starters and 37 finishers. Over the years a 2/3 start to finish ratio has held which is an indication of how tough this race is. AC100 was rated 3rd toughest at the time with its 19,000 ft of gain and 24,000 ft of loss. Among the finishers in 1986 were 4 Foothill Flyers: Jack Slater (2nd over all), John Radich, Bob Moses and Bob King. At the 1989 event, Flyer Jim O'Brien set the record at 17:35, which still holds today. So the club has been very involved in the AC100 since the beginning and I hope the tradition will continue another 30 years. But you don't have to run 100 miles to experience and feel a part of this event, there is a lot of satisfaction knowing you helped runners reach the finish line by working an aid station, crewing or pacing. It starts with volunteering at an aid station, then pacing, then.... never say never, who knows, one day you might give running AC100 a shot.

Tom O'Hara, AC100 RD 1988