

“Planks in the Clouds” Highlight Rugged Superior 50 Km

by Phillip Gary Smith

The parched woods of the Superior National Forest in northern Minnesota officially saw the end of its drought arrive at 1:17 a.m. on Saturday morning, May 19. For weeks, a 125-square mile fire (tagged the Ham Lake Fire) had raged further north before spilling into Canada and finally being tamed by the brave efforts of courageous firefighters. It happens that May 19 corresponded exactly with the Superior Trail 50 Km.

When the “ding ding ding” of the hard rain striking the metal gutters outside my room served as a too-early alarm clock, with thunder and lightning joining the chorus, I got up to close the windows. The nice mountain breeze had turned to a big blow at the event’s host hotel, the Caribou Highlands Resort, Lutsen, Minnesota.

At the runner’s meeting Friday night, standing outside in the mountains with an 83 degree F temperature, someone asked chief of course, Donnie Clark, about the forecast of rain. His reply was how one can take any weather forecast in this region: “Well, you know, it’s Superior.” Meaning, with Superior National Forest mountains adjoining the largest inland fresh water ocean in the world, Lake Superior, the only constant is change. By the end of the race, at 3:00 p.m., temperatures were 38 degrees F. Minnesota had warmer afternoons in January.

Newlyweds-to-be Gretchen Haas and Mike Perbix are the new race directors after training with now-retired race directors (but ever busy business people) Linda and Rick

Lindquist, who still worked at their “old” event. Managing an event such as this must be a good test for marriage, something like the lessons of wallpapering a room together: if you can do that as a couple and not drive each other batty, you’re destined to a long and happy union.

Rain continued, but with diminished intensity, for about an hour into the run, time for the leaders to reach the first aid station at Oberg Mountain. Aid station volunteers this year were supplemented by a group of 20 high school members of the cross country ski team (and some parents) from Two Harbors, Minnesota, the home of the Superior Hiking Trail Association (S.H.T.A.), which builds and maintains these trails. These young women livened up the aid station with a big radio and popular music, along with plenty of enthusiasm. The check-in official called the runners, sloshing past her tent, “Hon,” enduring herself forever to the muddy, wet-haired group. Another six miles through Leveaux Mountain, Angela’s Mountain and Britton Peak to the Sawtooth aid station and a swarming group of workers, made one feel as if they were checking into the Ritz. Finally, two more miles up the rocky, boulder-strewn single-track to Carlton Peak, and after making the turnaround, and exchanging a high-five with the young man officiating the site, we were ready to do it all again in reverse.

Of the 31 miles this course covers in the out-and-back format, perhaps one mile consists of roads to and from the trail. It seems 10 percent of the course is covered in single-track wooden planks covering wet marsh and creeks, “like a bridge over troubled waters,” as Simon and Garfunkel sang, and roaring rivers, with names like “Onion” and “Poplar.” With the rain, racers had to be careful with their steps, since these things get slick. There were a few bumps and bruises from falls, but nothing serious.

The rain started again in earnest about four hours into the race, giving elite finishers a free shower as they crossed the finish line. The remainder of us managed to find more mud. Donnie Clark had said “The trail shouldn’t be too muddy if you’re one of the first 50 through it.” Problem was, there was a 25-km companion race starting two hours after the ultrarunners have left. That group, numbering 135 or so, on the same out-and-back course but turning around at the Oberg aid station, managed to turn Moose Mountain and

Las Vegas Red Rock Tradition Continues

by Ian Torrence

In the 12th running of the Red Rock Fat Ass 50 Km (RRFA), Jim Rapp took charge as a first-time director. This was a fitting role for Jim, as it was he who first proposed the idea of the RRFA back in 1995. Jim did a great job. He continued the post-holiday ultra tradition of the Fat Ass format: no fee, no awards, and no whining. Despite this low-key format, Jim had arranged for several volunteers to set up two aid stations, double the normal number. The runners had the luxury of passing these aid stations a total of seven times, so aid visits were only a few miles apart. Thanks are due to Jim and all the volunteers who made this fun run possible.

The 21 starters and 17 finishers were close to historical averages for this “non-event.” As usual, we had perfect running weather; temperatures were in the 30s and 40s, with virtually no wind, and clear blue sunny skies. We also returned this year to the familiar result, as Ian Torrence was the first finisher. Ian has now won eleven of the twelve RRFA’s, missing only last year when he was the co-director instead of a runner.

We believe that this is one of the slower, tougher 50-km ultra courses around, due to 5,400 feet each of elevation gain and drop, and rocky footing. This year the trail seemed rockier than ever due to erosion from heavy rains of the previous couple of years. We also ran through some areas that had burned in wildfires each of the past two summers. These areas had an eerie moonscape-like appearance, but it was encouraging to see new tufts of grasses and

other vegetation already beginning to re-grow in the burned areas.

As I traversed the rockiest sections, I could recall from past years how treacherous the footing is in some of these areas. But somehow, the current rockiness seemed worse than the memories from prior years. This reinforced one of my beliefs about ultrarunners: we are generally optimists in that we remember the good and enjoyable aspects of ultras, much more strongly than we remember the negative and painful aspects. Otherwise, we would not keep running them! After the run, several of the participants engaged in another RRFA tradition by congregating at a local restaurant and pub to interrupt our recovery from the holidays.

Las Vegas Red Rock 50 Km

Las Vegas, Nevada

January 6, 2007

Mountainous, rocky, single-track trails

1.	Ian Torrence, 34, AZ	4:53
2.	Dave James, 28, NY	5:15
3.	Josh McIntyre, 25	5:38
4.	Joe Baumgarte, 36,	5:39
5.	Casey Harney, 49	5:46
6.	Jeff Heasley, 39, CO	5:52
7.	Ric Hatch, 51, AZ	6:28
8.	Mike Milligan, 33	6:40
9.	Larry Miller, 53	6:43
10.	Dan Moore, 28	6:54
11.	Ed Furtaw, 58, CO	6:55
12.	Jim Rapp, 49	7:35
13.	Dennis Jensen, 58	7:50
14.	Brenda Bland, 47, WI	8:08
	Mike Robinson, 25	8:08
16.	Liz Kindel, 55	8:15
	Paul Piplani, 59, AZ	8:15
	21 Starters	

Mystery Mountain even mushier. Moose Mountain on the inbound is a nasty ascent anyway, starting just as one crosses Rollins Creek. It continues to slope upward and steeper until the runner is taking the built-in steps to finish the "Stairway to Heaven" climb that is also part of the autumn 100-mile race. Larry Pederson remarked to me at the finish line, "Imagine climbing Moose and Mystery after 95 miles."

Each of the mountains was covered in clouds this year, so one often had the unique, surreal sensation of running on wet wood in the forest while being in a misty state. For a while, at least, one tended to forget about the challenges at hand and just glided along the planks in the clouds. Crossing the roaring Poplar River, enjoying its power and sound, leaving the trail and beginning the last half-mile of gravel and paved road to the finish line, curving behind the resort and around the pool, one could reflect on the achievement of the day—completing this rugged trail on a rainy, weather-driven day. As Alicia Gordon remarked afterward, "Because we're trail runners, that's what we do." One runner was overheard to say, "That was the hardest course I've ever run." Gretchen and Mike noted even with the rain, the trail was fast and many set personal records. It was a cold day for volunteers, but the 45 degree F weather was "perfect for the runners."

A course record for female runners was set by the ever-fast Eve Rembleski, who holds that honor for the Afton Trail 50 Km, the Trail Mix 50 Km, and now the Superior Trail 50 Km. Eve finished the

run in 4:32:05, knocking 28 minutes off the previous record, and led second-place finisher Cheryl Goldberg by a comfortable margin. Shari Olson, in third place, trailed Cheryl by just four seconds at the finish.

Men's winner Shawn Callahan is a triathlete who has caught ultra trail running fever and took this event in only his second ultra, in 4:01:01. Shawn passed mid-race leader and second -place finisher Dan Horihan to win the battle of these mid-30-year-old runners. In the latter stages of the race, Steve Schuder passed and then hung on to nip Duke Rembleski for third place, by just six seconds. Fitting in with the newlywed theme, Shawn's fiancé helped out at the finish line. Maybe that's why there are so few spectators at the finish of many ultra events—everyone who shows up is put to work.

Phillip Gary Smith authored the first book on the Superior Races titled Ultra Superior. Royalties support the Superior Hiking Trail

Superior 50 Km

Lutsen, Minnesota

May 19

Trails

1.	Shawn Callahan, 35	4:01:01
2.	Dan Horihan, 34	4:09:09
3.	Steve Schuder, 43	4:22:57
4.	Duke Rembleski, 31	4:23:03
5.	Joe Ziegenfuss, 32	4:23:53
6.	Eve Rembleski, 39	4:32:05!
7.	Joshua Wopata, 26	4:50:23
8.	James Morrison, 22	4:56:13
9.	Paul Jaeger, 41	5:04:43
10.	Jeff Allen, 41	5:30:00
11.	Bob Triplett, 43	5:32:04
12.	Brent Bjerkness, 39	5:32:38

13.	Joel Fors, 49	5:33:12
14.	Michael Scandrett, 53	5:41:03
15.	Scott Wagner, 41	5:41:26
16.	Ed Stark, 60	5:45:33
17.	Danial Tracy, 29	5:46:03
18.	Richard Bjork, 44	5:47:58
19.	Brock Foreman, 32	5:49:38
20.	Cheryl Goldberg, 48	5:56:28
21.	Shari Olson, 42	5:56:32
22.	Brian Morrison, 24	6:02:33
23.	Leigh Wright, 42	6:03:50
24.	Dawn Long, 51	6:04:14
25.	Craig Olsen, 44	6:04:16
26.	Michael Cloutier, 48	6:04:47
27.	Keith Rudolph, 55	6:04:53
28.	Andrew Scobbie, 43	6:09:30
29.	Andy Hunsinger, 38	6:12:58
30.	Mark Seaburg, 47	6:13:57
31.	Eric Lacher, 38	6:14:59
32.	Lynette Thompson, 49	6:19:51
	Pete Peter, 49	6:19:51
34.	Joel Button, 39	6:27:29
35.	Carl Gammon, 52	6:32:01
36.	Steve Hagedorn, 48	6:35:05
37.	Jason Husveth, 35	6:39:41
38.	Denise Kinderman, 50	6:47:23
39.	Warren Taylor, 60	6:52:34
40.	Joe Lutz, 59	6:53:29
41.	Karen Gall, 47	6:54:53
42.	JoAnn Fallis, 55	6:57:28
43.	Wendy Neupauer, 35	6:58:25
	Jan O'Brien, 46	6:58:25
45.	Rick Bothwell, 45	6:58:26
46.	Connie Chaney, 47	7:07:07
47.	Brian Poeppel, 52	7:08:52
48.	Kurt King, 54	7:16:51
49.	Paulette Odenthal, 50	7:34:51
50.	Tony Evans, 36	7:44:09
51.	Tom Kaisersatt, 67	7:44:47
52.	Doug Allen, 43	7:52:34
53.	Kevin Phillippe, 46	7:55:25
54.	Amy Berger, 45	8:02:11
55.	Phillip Gary Smith, 59	8:05:51
56.	Anna Laura Scandrett, 21	8:07:22
57.	Carole Morrison, 55	8:13:40
58.	Ken Morrison, 57	8:13:48

Headlands Hundred 50 & 100 Mile Endurance Runs

August 11-12, 2007

"This is a Race in a Beautiful Place!"

events@PCTrailRuns.com



www.PCTrailRuns.com