

# CASCADE CREST AWESOME TRAIL CLASSIC

by Charlie Crissman, RD

The field that toed the starting line at the Cascade Crest 100-mile Endurance Race on August 29 was the largest and most diverse bunch yet. There was a Belgian who pedaled up from the Seattle airport. New Zealand, Australia and Germany were represented and the state of North Carolina sent an enthusiastic delegation of endorphin-hungry Tar Heels. Dozens of first-time 100-milers eyed the surrounding mountains warily while local favorite Jamie Gifford was out to earn a very unique 1,000-mile buckle. Race founder Randy Gehrke returned as a runner for the first time, dedicating his run to a soldier captured in Afghanistan.

Seattleite Sam Thompson set a fast pace to take the early lead, but was passed by 23-year-old race veteran Phil Shaw shortly before reaching Goat Peak.

"I heard footsteps and turned to see Phil. He usually runs a really smart, conservative race so I was surprised to see him pushing the pace. He had that look that made me think none of us would see him again until Easton," said Sam.

*Phil, who ran the whole course solo, maintained the lead while rousing volunteers from their sleeping bags with early appearances at the overnight aid stations.*

Sam's prediction held through the day and night. Despite some strong pressure through the first 75 miles, Phil, who ran the whole course solo, maintained the lead while rousing volunteers from their sleeping bags with early appearances at the overnight aid stations. He bombed up and down the Cardiac Needles and ran strong back into the town of Easton just as the horizon began to brighten, crossing the finish line in a new record time of 19 hours and 47 minutes.

On the women's side, the race stayed close and competitive for 75 miles with local Shawn



Jennifer Benna still fresh and smiling

McTaggart staying on the heels of first-time 100-mile runner Samantha Sigle from Boulder, Colorado. Behind them in third and fourth place, Rhonda Sundermeier and Jenn Benna pushed each other along throughout the first day and night. Samantha held the lead wire to wire, winning in a time of 23:18. She clearly enjoyed her first go at 100 miles, even the aptly named "Trail from Hell" which she described as "awesome", an opinion not widely shared among the rest of the field.

The cool and overcast conditions on Saturday helped to propel a record of 96 starters through the full arc back to the fire station in Easton where runners began their trek. Race founder Randy Gehrke was back for the first time since retiring as race director after the first seven editions and was said to be heard muttering, "who designed this thing?" on the climb to Goat Peak. Jamie Gifford became the first ten-time finisher and is likely to remain the only runner to have finished dead last (once) as well as first overall (twice).

Personal battles against 22,000 feet of elevation raged throughout the runner field. Christian Griffith and his pacer, Victor Zamudio, squabbled "like an old married couple" through the last 30 miles to the amusement or distraction of those in their vicinity. Vancouver's Karl Jensen kicked off his 60s by turning in another textbook performance and taking some time off of Kent Holder's 60-plus age group record which had stood



Richard Bae of Portland, Oregon completes in 25:54



Climbing Goat Peak to earn a great view

BLACK JEWELL

since 2000. James Varner kept his substantial finish-line fan club on the edge of their seats as he navigated the exits and on-ramps of No Name Ridge, eventually opting to stay and enjoy the fare at the unique "drive-through" aid station.

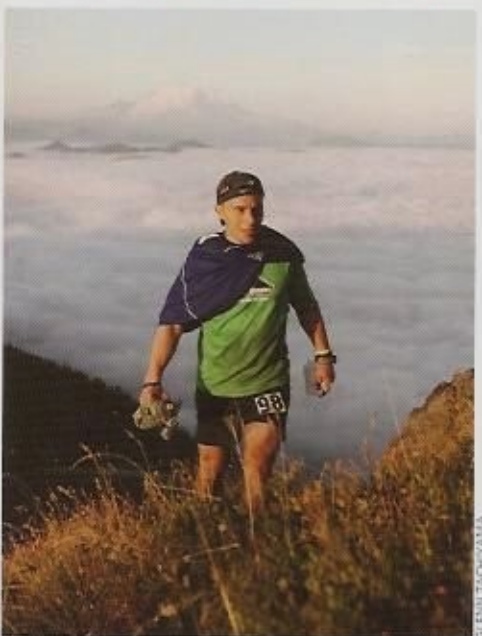
Wouter Hamelinck impressed everyone he met with his adventurous spirit and cheerful, helpful nature. He flew from Belgium to Seattle with his bike and pedaled to the start on Thursday. Friday he volunteered a full day on

his feet helping race staff sort and pack gear for the aid stations. After scorching through the Cascades to a fourth place finish and grabbing a nap and shower, he loaded up his panniers and took off bicycling to the East, heading for Minnesota and the Superior 100 two weeks away. Keep that in mind the next time you plan what Wouter described as "a quick vacation from work".

While Saturday's weather kept Rainier and other more proximate peaks veiled in mist, the clouds cleared overnight and revealed magnificent mountain views on Sunday for those traversing the challenging final sections of the course along No Name Ridge and Thorpe Mountain. Runners in the middle and back of the pack climbed up through a low layer of morning fog to a stunning sunrise on the jagged Stuart Range that marks the northern edge of the course and the southern border of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. As the clock turned on Sunday, the temperatures rose into the mid-80s and tired, dusty finishers made their way into Easton and along the railroad tracks back to their starting point at the fire station.

Cascade Crest remains a low-key all-volunteer affair. Each year a few changes take place to enhance the event. Local runner Daniel Probst applied his wood and metalworking skills to construct a grand and conveniently portable Start and Finish arch that he delivered and assembled on Friday afternoon. It was a fine improvement from the borrowed step ladders or lines of extra pancake batter that have marked the finish of this run in past. Leah Jurek again contributed a beautiful hand-cut block print for race finishers.

It's been gratifying to watch the race grow - the field filled in just two days back in February. But as remains the case for most ultras, the volunteers defined the event and this year they delivered beyond expectations. The logistics of a remote full-loop 100 miler can be daunting. Over 200 people volunteered part or all of their weekend to make sure the runners were cared and accounted for throughout their journey, from the staff at the Easton Fire Department and the Kittitas County Ham Radio operators to the many local friends who pitched in to make the event a success. Cascade Crest offers a level of support, camaraderie and genuine enthusiasm for the runners that exemplifies the positive qualities of ultrarunning. As participant Gail Snyder remarked after the event, "[ultra] running is about far more than how far we ran



David Ploskonka with a fog and snow backdrop

GLENN TACHYAMA



Welcome downhill near Thorpe Lake

SHERA TACHYAMA

and how fast". The runners, friends and family who turn out at Cascade Crest to help participants are a great reminder of the lasting value of friendships made on the trail.

There has been a surge of interest in ultrarunning over the past several years and Cascade Crest is no exception. Having Randy Gehrke back, along with Tim Stroh and Ron Behrmann, who helped Randy with the race in its early years, provided a fitting connection to the roots of the Cascade Crest Classic. ■



Pacer Michele Jensen barely visible on the Trail From Hell

BLACK JEWELL

Date	Event	Location	Distance	Terrain	Surface	Contact
Nov 15	Bangalore Ultra	Bangalore, India	100 km	3	2	bangaloreultra.com
Nov 15	Bangalore Ultra	Bangalore, India	75 km	3	2	bangaloreultra.com
Nov 15	Bangalore Ultra	Bangalore, India	50 km	3	2	bangaloreultra.com
Nov 19	La Transtica	San Jose, Costa Rica	*200 km	4	3	latranstica.org/en
Dec 7	Great Indian Desert Run	Rajasthan, India	*250 km	4	3	greatindiandesertrun.com
Dec 12	Ultramaraton Fuego y Agua	Merida, Nicaragua	100 km	4	4	fuegoyagua.org
Dec 12	Ultramaraton Fuego y Agua	Merida, Nicaragua	50 km	4	4	fuegoyagua.org
Dec 19	Patagonia Running Adventure	Patagonia, Chile	*166 miles	4	3	andesadventures.com
Dec 24	Rajasthan Thar Desert Stage Race	Jodhpur, Rajasthan	*200 km	3	3	globeracers.com
Jan 24	St Croix Scenic 50	St Croix, USVI	50 miles	4	1	stcroix50.com
Feb 21	Namibia Desert Challenge	Sossuvlei, Namibia	*200 km	3	4	kineticevents.net/ndc
Mar 6	Bataan Death March	Bataan, Philippines	102 km	2	1	bataan102.com
Mar 27	Annapurna 100	Pokhara, Nepal	100 km	5	4	annapurna100.com
Apr 10	Taby Extreme Challenge	Stockholm, Sweden	100 miles	1	2	colibri.se/tec

\* stage race

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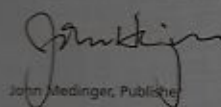
- Charlie Crissman, Cascade Crest

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