

Running In The Wulfman's Footsteps

Saturday, June 19th saw some of the best of what the running world has to offer in Montana. Perfect running weather, idyllic course, excellent race administration, fantastic competition, and even better camaraderie. All that and more was to be found at the 3rd Annual Wulfman's CDT 14K Trail Race.

The race takes place on the Continental Divide Trail between Homestake and Pipestone Passes east of Butte, Montana. Named in honor of John "The Wulfman" Wulf, the Godfather of Butte's Piss & Moan Runners, the race is held each year on the Saturday closest to the summer solstice, the anniversary of The Wulfman's final group run.

Run in opposite directions every other year, this year saw the race in the southbound direction between Homestake and Pipestone. Although not considered a technical trail, the course makes up for it with a combination of climbs and altitude. With a starting elevation of 1940 m, the course rises 405 m in several climbs over the first 9 kilometers. That leaves a downhill "sprint" to the finish over the last 5 kilometers to the finish at 1983 m.

There was lots of post race debate about which direction was the most challenging. The general consensus is that, although the bulk of the climb occurs in the first 5K on the northbound (Pipestone to Homestake) direction, the long downhill and net elevation loss makes the odd-numbered year route the "easier" course. But, in the end, a calm, cool morning and mostly dry trail conditions led to a spate of fast times – even on this, the "harder" route.

The runner's were chasing the southbound course records, set in 2008's inaugural running of the race, of 58:50 by Thomas Jodoin on the men's side. And, for the women, the target was on Sarah Keller's 1:10:36. In addition to the \$25 cash bonus for a course record, there was also a \$100 bonus for the race winner if they could break 56:00 (men) or 1:05:00 (women). So, there was plenty of incentive to run hard and fast.

But, before thinking about bonuses, you first had to win the race. And, normal racing strategy went out the window due to the unique starting format of the race. Due to the narrow nature of the trail and no good, open starting area, the race is run in a seeded, time-trail format. Starting with the fastest predicted runners, athletes are sent off in 10-second intervals. As a result, the race is 14 kilometers of hunting or being hunted.

On the women's side – the expected duel between the Helena duo of Michele Bazanella and Marta Fisher materialized quite nicely. Having faced each other on the trails at several other events earlier this year, Marta had been the victor in each of those races. As a result, she hit the trail 10 seconds ahead of Michele. But, using her uphill running prowess, Michele caught and passed Marta after the first few kilometers and forced Marta to try to chase Michele up the hills – exactly the situation that Marta had hoped to avoid.

Marta held close on Michele's heels up the switchbacks from 7 to 9 kilometers on the course's 2nd long, grinding climb. Michele was able to hold a narrow lead up to the aid station at about 10K. At that point there is one last little uphill "bump" before the downhill "sprint" over the last 3.5 kilometers. And, that was all that Michele needed to make her break. She pushed the hill hard, created a gap, then kept the pressure on all the way to the finish. The result – a 77 second win (1:09:16 to 1:10:33) and the course record bonus.

With the first two women under the old record, there was still some serious racing going on. Continuing a fine season of her own, Jackson's Maurie McLaughlin pulled down the 3rd place spot with her 1:12:12. Showing that Montana's masters women can run with the under-40 crowd, Debbie Gibson of Helena had a strong showing of 1:12:41 in 4th. Rounding out the top 5 was Clancy's Beth Shumate in 1:15:34.

Moving on to the men, the question of the day was whether or not Thomas Jodoin of Helena would remain as the race's only champion (having won the first two versions) and get a coveted 3-peat. With Missoula's Kiefer Hahn and Dillon's Lynn Reynolds starting behind him, Jodoin knew that he had a tall order ahead of him. In response to that challenge, Thomas went out hard and tried to "hide" away before hitting the first set of switchbacks at about 2K.

Unfortunately for Thomas, Reynolds also went out hard in that first 2k. At that point Lynn had caught and passed Keifer and had visual contact with Thomas. It took a while; but, by the next set of switchbacks at 7K, Lynn had gotten onto Thomas's heels and was in the hunt. Thomas held steady until the top of the climb at 9K; but, that's when Lynn's quick turnover became the deciding factor. (Lynn just finished up his sophomore season as part of the University of Montana track and cross country programs.)

As the long descent began, Lynn opened it up and the race for 1st was over. All that was left was to see if Lynn could get the course record and premium time marks as well. And the answer was a resounding yes. His 55:38 shattered the old record by 3:12 (and is also faster than the northbound course record of 56:29) and broke the elusive sub-4:00 per K (56:00) premium time barrier as well. (Unfortunately for Lynn, NCAA eligibility regulations prevented him from accepting the combined \$125 cash prize for bettering those marks.)

Racing hard to the finish, Jodoin also found himself under his old course record with his 56:10 for 2nd place. That put him 25 seconds ahead of 3rd placer Keifer Hahn. In what may be the performance of the day, 44-year old Ray Hunt of Deer Lodge ran himself sick to secure 4th place overall in 58:20 (which converts to an age-graded performance time of 53:48). The top 5 was completed by another master's runner with Dillon's Mike Telling and his 1:00:31 performance.

Retiring to the friendly grounds of the Homestake Lodge, the runners were greeted to some great food (including chili prepared by women's winner Michele Bazanella and served by Ray Hunt's parents); the mandatory post-race breakdowns and tall tales; a generous amount of door prizes and awards; and, quick and accurate results.

The race team, comprised of volunteers from the host Piss & Moan Runners, are a passionate group of runners who worked hard to stage an event that was all about meeting the needs of the runners. That passion for excellence has quickly made this a destination event that is becoming one of the key events on the early summer running calendar.

A full complement of race results (cumulative, male, female, age group, age graded, etc.) can be found at <http://www.buttesspissandmoanrunners.com/Butte%20Races/CDT-14K/results.htm>. A good selection of race comments and photos can be found on the Wulfman's CDT 14K Trail Race Facebook page. Check the sites out and get yourself psyched up to conquer the Divide in 2011.



Katie McDonald photos

Helena's trail racing tandem of Marta Fisher and Michele Bazanella speeding downward near 10K.

Fisher held front position here, but Bazanella was the eventual winner with a course record time of 1:09:16.



Lynn Reynolds of Dillon blistering the final kilometers of Wulfman's CDT-14K to become the first runner ever to eclipse the 4 minutes per kilometer barrier on this course with a finish time of 55:38.