



Wulfman's CDT 14k Trail Race

by **Kirk D. Keller, MS** (pictured at left. Photo courtesy of Katie McDonald)

It's in the numbers. The Wulfman's Continental Divide 14k Trail Race near Butte has become one of the most popular early season trail races in the Northern Rockies. And the answer why is in the numbers. Consider this – in four short years of the race's existence – the last three have met the runner limit of 240 runners, (2011 sold out 2 months in advance), over \$4500 dollars have been donated to the local USDA Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest for trail development, overall and age group records fall like spring showers. Cash bonuses, unique age group awards (watermelons, cantaloupe, loafs of bread, boxes of energy bars) and the best post race lunch ever served on the planet doesn't hurt when drawing trail running enthusiasts.

The race is dedicated to the memory and influence of the late John Wulf. Affectionately regarded as the “godfather” of the local running club; Butte's Piss and Moan Runners - his impact on area trail activities continues to bring smiles to peoples' faces. His infamous one liners include; “start easy and taper off”, “there is only one hill”, “it's only a little over 8k”, and “it's all downhill except for the uphill”.

Set to run annually on a date closest to summer solstice – this date marks the last recorded group trail run that John organized and ran in 2007. The race directors; Ray and Nicole Hunt (2010 USATF Mountain Women's Masters of the year) of Deer Lodge are quick to give credit to the tremendous support from the P&M Runners, sponsors and the trail itself as why the race has become so popular. The race is a 14k point to point run directly along the spine of the Continental Divide. Alternate years find the race beginning and ending opposite of the previous year. Runners start single file – every 10 seconds based on predicted finish times to avoid any traffic jams on the dirt and crushed granite single track. You run as both the hunter and the hunted.

I recently caught up Ray and Nicole and asked them about their perspective of the fastest growing trail race in the region.

KK -When did WCDT first begin to evolve?

Ray / Nicole: “I think any runner who ever set foot on this section of the Continental Divide Trail knew that it would make a superb running route. Nicole & I walked there many times shortly after the turn of the century, and we dreamed about hosting a race there. As it turned out, we weren't the only ones with that idea. At the time of Wulfman's death, the section of CDT between Homestake and Pipestone Pass was still 357 days away from completion. Wulfman and the rest of us had been anxiously anticipating the opening of the trail for years. It was like waiting for mail-order running shoes that go on back-order ... day after day of checking the mailbox only to suffer disappointment. The week after Wulfman passed, Nicole and I proposed the idea for Wulfman's CDT-14K to Bruce Robinson. If Wulfman was Godfather to the Piss & Moan Runners then Bruce was (and still is) the club's granddaddy. Bruce loved the idea and he gathered together a few more of Wulfman's running friends to help out. Several of them had already been thinking about a race in the same place. The race became a release for our whole group. I think we all needed to grieve in a way that Wulfman would have approved. He certainly would not have approved of a bunch of crying around.”

KK -Who else helps with this race?

Ray: “I am proud to say that a P&M Runners workgroup comprises the most efficient team I have ever been a part of. And of course we have a ton of other volunteers and sponsors who have joined the fun. I get way more credit for the race than I deserve because I have become (what some on the race committee have called) “the voice of the Wulfman.” My work coordinating registration and communicating race details to the runners via the club's website have made me the visible one. All the others contribute as much or more than me. Proof of that is the fact that the inaugural Wulfman's CDT-14K went off without a hitch while Nicole and I were gone to Missoula where Nicole delivered our boy Eon into the world 30 minutes before the race went off.”

KK - Regarding the growth of the race - are you surprised?

Ray/Nicole : “It is not surprising to us that people would come from far and wide to race on that trail. The trail is challenging but not so technical that one has to cut a lot of steps. You can really get cranking out there in a few places. Compared to the typical trail race, this one is kind. It's not too steep. The footing is good, and the view contains zero civilization. Our group was a little surprised when we reached our 240-runner registration cap in the race's second year, because there certainly are not 240 runners in Butte. We were surprised when the huge trail running crowd from the Bozeman area adopted us as their own.

The trail is at the root of the race's success. The amazing enthusiasm of P& M Runners makes it all happen. The fact that we cater to all ability levels also helps the race in the eyes of the participants. Wulfman's race is a participation-based event with an elite component that many races in this era have shied away from. Although the Wulfman didn't have an elite running bone in his body, he still pulled the elites into his circle just as he did the walkers and joggers.”

KK - Anticipated 2012 date for entries to fill?

Ray/Nicole: If we do a good job of executing our plans for this year's race, I would guess that we will sell out about the end of March, 2012.

Wulfman 14k CDT 2011 race results were equally impressive. Partly cloudy skies, breezy with race time temperatures in the low 40s complimented a very fast field. Men's overall winner, 22 year old Lynn Reynolds of Dillon, a standout runner at the University of Montana, set a new course record by 1:59 running 54:30. Michele Bazzanella, last years' overall winner and a top three finisher in all previous races finished second to Sarah Graves, Ballantine by 23 seconds. Masters runners first across the line were Scott Creel (48) 5th overall in 57:32 and Nicole Hunt (41) 9th overall in 1:17:51 – remarkable considering she is in her second trimester. Creel's time shattered the previous age graded course record by nearly 5 minutes. Debbie Magilke, 62, Billings, Montana established a new women's age graded record by over 2 minutes.

Dewey Peacock, placed 12th overall - summed up his Wulfman CDT 14k race as “I returned to the CDT because I knew that I would be a part of an extremely unique and well run race on a beautiful course. This trail race has the excitement of the alpine skiing like start, the unknowing of where you stand in the race and has quickly become one of the most challenging and competitive trail races in all of Montana. I think the entire organization has every part of a race nailed perfectly, from the great prizes, the homemade food, and the ability to get the entire state of Montana's runners together as a real close knit community. Wulfman CDT embodies what a running race should be. I would encourage other races to follow their lead.”

The passion for a great race is echoed by **Amber Wood-Jensen,** a Piss & Moaner serving on the Wulfman's race committee. She says “2011 was another great year. The past four years have been a complete pleasure due to the quality volunteers we've been blessed with. There is the core group that does the majority of the planning and organizing during the year, but there are also loads of other people who volunteer as trail sweepers, timers, cooks, first aid, etc. that really pull this event together.

“The energy is fed by everyone's passion for this section of trail, the Continental Divide Trail system, running the mountains of Montana, and the concept of living the life you love championed by the late John Wulf.

“The trail is one of my favorites. Running along the backbone of this continent and in the middle of the Boulder Batholith this trail provides exceptional scenery and challenging terrain. It also has special meaning to many of us who knew John because he was so excited about its completion.

“I am humbled that so many runners come to our race. The skill level of some of these runners is phenomenal, and 2011 certainly brought its share of talent.”

The Wulfman's CDT 14k trail race epitomizes the recent growth in trail running and racing. What sets this race apart from its peers is the fact they take care of their customers. No comprise. Numbers don't lie.

Kirk lives near Three Forks and has been running and racing for 30+ years. He enjoys coaching runners having fun with their training and racing. USATF Level II Certified - contact him at kkeller145k@gmail.com