

Angeles Crest 100 Mile Endurance Run
July 23-24, 2011
By Ben Gaetos

“Forgive me Father for I have sinned. I swore not to run AC100 again. Yet for the 4th time, I couldn’t resist temptation.” I just hope my penance will be in miles.

Wrightwood (Mile 0) to Islip Saddle (Mile 25.91) went conservative as planned. Thereby, I observed the natural beauty and surroundings of Angeles National Forest more including sunrise. Being calm meant no gasping for air climbing Acorn Trail and fear of Mt. Baden Powell towering 9400’. Weather forecasted scorching temperature. Yet, some runners hammered the downhills early. One must be patient to defeat this beast. AC100 pays no mercy.

Heat intensified after Islip Saddle. I didn’t lose weight at first mandatory medical check. The chicken rice soup that my crew prepared was welcoming present. I focused on Chilao Aid Station M52.80. I kept drinking iced water, coconut water, Saltstick, protein drink and solid bites. The trails at Cooper Canyon exhausted me despite conservative pace. I sat down for the first time at Cloudburst AS M37.54. Two of my veteran ultra friends, Cheryl and Jakob gave me encouraging words. Chief crew, Rebe handed a protein drink. My friend Carmela’s hubby, Gus as always offered a hand. I planned to pad time at the next 5 miles of downhill. To my despair, legs had nothing and were relegated to walk. A few runners passed without challenge. Total despair continued until Chilao. My projected 30 hr. pace diminished to 32-33 hr. cutoff. My goal was 31 hrs. or better.

DNF (Did Not Finish) went through my mind at Chilao. My weight was up by 1.5 lbs. mostly from negative thoughts. I sat down with weary legs and mind. My pacer whom I knew the night before was a no show. While eating and hydrating, I noticed that 2 faster runners were in deeper hole. I asked Rebe for second serving of beef strips. Cheryl, who just completed Badwater Ultramarathon at 120 degree temps, assured me temperature will drop soon. At 8 pm, mercury was still boiling. I touched my bib with my sister’s name written. She is fighting cancer. I told myself, “We will overcome this together”.

Lo and behold, my second wind arrived as I passed several runners going to Shortcut Saddle M59.30. Gus uttered, “Dude, you gained time.” I was pumped up to see more friends. Going down the fire road leading to Newcomb AS, I felt blister on both heels caused by running down on loose rocks. I should have tightened my laces hours ago but kept postponing. Puking zone must have moved early as there were several spots leading to the stream. My level of confidence skyrocketed but wary of letdown. Just don’t be too confident. Headlamp started fading but enough to read the trails.

At Chantry Flats M74.55, I regained my weight. My second pacer, JT was present. I changed socks, shoes, replaced batteries, ate and greeted my friends. I also asked for updates of my running friends. AC100 vets say the race begins at Chantry. No one can save a troubled runner after Chantry. There is no crew access until the finish line. JT did

most of the talking climbing 5.5 miles to Mt. Wilson Toll Road. Soon, he'll step up to the 100's. City of Pasadena below was painted with colors of second sunrise. This fueled energy to my system. Downhill followed and then endless uphill inferno to Sam Merrill while avoiding poison oaks and toxic poodle bushes. The sign at Sam Merrill M89.25 said, "It's all downhill from here". They should have added, "And it's rocky". My blisters grunted running over rocks. I just dealt with it and continued passing runners in the final stretch.

Coming home it was an enormous welcome. 71 out of 123 starters finished. Buckle #4 was most difficult but fastest at 31:41:12. This time, I'll keep my options open for 2012.



Mary Ann O'Hara welcomes Ben Gaetos into the Foothill Flyers Chantry Flat aid station.