

## 2018 Angeles Crest 100 – The Solo Runner

By Richard Carney

The AC100 is a hard race by any standard and running it 'solo' introduces a whole new level of difficulty. Solo runners are not allowed support of any kind during the race other than that which is available at aid stations and only from aid station volunteers. Solo runners are not allowed to have friends or family as spectators nor accept any assistance from other crews or pacers. These conditions serve two purposes; they help to minimize the amount of traffic along the course and at aid stations, and they also give a modest and respectful nod to the self-supported traditions of long distance running.

The AC100 is also an increasingly popular race. A spectacular point to point in the San Gabriel mountains, it attracts over 400 applicants each year for only 250 places. A lottery system is now used to select the starting lineup and electing to participate as a solo runner provides better odds of being selected. In the 2018 starting lineup, 54% of runners had registered as solo runners.

Running the AC100 as a solo runner requires complete determination to finish. The AC course will test you for anything less, and anything less will most likely lead to a DNF. However, determination alone is no guarantee of success and a solo run also needs good planning and a strategy. The race allows runners (solo or assisted) to place drop bags at nine of the fourteen aid stations along the course. Therefore, a solo runner's strategy, with some variations, can generally follow two approaches;

- The simple approach of running with most of what you need in a pack whilst using the minimum number of drop bags to occasionally replenish your onboard stock of fluids, foods, headlamps and power packs. The obvious disadvantage is the carry-weight, particularly in the hot afternoon temperatures and the long night-time climbs. The advantage is that it's simple, and simple is good when the heat inevitably starts to scramble your brains from 30-mile and onward.

Or

- To run light-weight and carry less (using a pack, waist belt or hand-held bottles) and use multiple/more drop bags to grab small stocks as you pass each aid station. This approach requires some experience of the course and knowing what you will need and where (not when!) you will need it. Careful planning and ability to remember your careful planning is essential. Some dexterous handling of bottles, powders and gels also helps to cut down the dwell time at aid stations.

This year was my third AC100 solo run. For my two previous runs I had chosen the simple strategy of using a pack and 3 or 4 drop bags. My 2017 race report for Foothills Flyers newsletter also suggested that 2 drop bags would be plenty for my 2018 solo run. *"..... less is more and 3 (25mile, 50mile and 75mile) is still too many. 2 drop bags next year; 50 mile and 75mile"*. However, at some point in my training (I think watching Karl Meltzer on the Appalachian Trail may have triggered it) I decided that running light and minimal would be the way to go. And with my experience, what could possibly go wrong!

I chose to use a waist belt - Ultimate Direction Signature – with two collapsible 18oz water bottles and small pouch for gels and electrolyte tablets. This is an excellent piece of kit; lightweight, comfortable and well designed. I also chose five drop bags at strategic locations and for specific reasons;

#1 at Vincent Gap Mile 13 – drop-off the morning headlamp, pick up an extra 20oz hand-held for Baden Powell segment (the longest and most difficult section of the course), replenish carbs and gels

#2 at Islip saddle Mile 25 – drop-off the hand held, replenish carbs and gels

#3 at Chilao Mile 44 – pick up a small headlamp (just-in-case), pick up a power pack for the GPS watch, replenish carbs and gels

#4 at Red Box Mile 60 – drop off power pack (having re-charged the GPS watch), pick up a large headlamp for the long night-time run, replenish carb and gels

#5 at Chantry Mile 75 – a just-in-case change of clothes

Most things went well. Many runners complained about the afternoon heat and although I had some heat related stomach issues, the waist belt definitely helped to keep my core temperature down throughout the day. I also managed to remember my planning and the pickups (bottle, power pack and headlamp) were all in the correct place and available at the right time. As much as anything, this was down to accurately predicting my pace and understanding the course.

Some things did not go so well. I quickly abandoned the idea of picking up and using my own carbohydrate mix (Carbopro). Even the most able aid station staff had problems emptying my carefully prepared 200 calorie (and near impossible to open) packets into my bottles. Later in the race a fellow runner, Ricardo Ramirez (and a Carbopro sponsored athlete) explained how he uses a pre-mix concentrate with added flavorings in a 1000 calorie pouch to avoid this – such a good idea! As my stomach issue worsened – from mile 35 and onward – I abandoned solid food and gels. Then running on fumes and starting to bonk, I had many moments of serious self-doubt. Sitting on the trail with my head in my hands on the climb to Short Cut Saddle (Mile 50) was the worst and Upper Winter Creek (Mile 78) was a close second. On both occasions, being 100% determined to get my third AC finish got me back to my feet and moving forward.

The large number of DNFs (85 from 185 starters, including the 2017 winner) is testament to the heat and difficult conditions during this year's race. Huge credit is deserved for the aid station staff who, on several occasions were able to convert my beaten-up mind and body back into a runner and send me out feeling good. Encouraging words, good advice and giving me what I needed - ginger ale, ice and of course a really nice cup of tea at Chantry. Next year will be a waist pack and definitely less drop-bags. A really big thanks to everyone who helps to make this race possible.

Richard Carney, Bib #26, 2018, Bib #18, 2019.



*Photo 1 -The unused leftovers from my 5 drop-bag strategy*



*Photo 2 - 2018 Finishing in 30h 36m*