

## Sweeping AC100 2022

By Tom, W6ORG & Mary Ann, WB6YSS, O'Hara

This was the most unusual year for the Angeles Crest 100 Mile Trail Race. The AC100 originally went from Wrightwood to the Rose Bowl mostly on single track trails, but more recently ended in Altadena. The Bobcat fire and following rains wiped out much of the latter part of the course causing the race to be cancelled in 2020 and 2021. Thanks to a lot of trail work done by Gary Hilliard, K16OJB, and runner volunteers, the course was cleared enough to do an out to Shortcut Saddle and back to Wrightwood race this year.

There have always been sweeps at AC100, but their main job was to take down the course markings and that could occur any time after the last runner passed to days later. Over the years there have been a few incidents with lost or injured runners such that those of us in the club working the Chantry Flat Aid Station thought our sweep segment from Newcomb Saddle to Chantry should be done directly after the last runner so as to reduce the time to get help. Once there was a runner who got lost at night and decided it was safest for her to hide in an outhouse at the Cascades camping spot and she was not found until the next morning.

Thanks to the ham radio Runner Track system designed by Gerry Walsh, KB6OOC, we know when a runner left an aid station and their estimated time of arrival, based on their pace, to the next aid station. It also gives us a list of those still out on trail which is especially helpful for sweeps shadowing those few runners pushing cutoff and more likely to have a problem. More recently, our two sweeps use radios which helped get timely runner updates as to runner status, lost or injured, etc., while out on trail. The license free FRS radios are OK, but are limited with their low power and cannot use high mountain top repeaters like ham radio can.

Meanwhile, for the last few years, many trail runners in the club got their ham radio licenses both for their own safety since cell phones often don't work in the mountains, and to help out at races. In fact the Foothill Flyers Radio

Club was started by Rick Besocke, K16ZKM, in 2019 as a sub group in the running club and now has about 20 members.

See: [foothillflyers.org/FHFRC.html](http://foothillflyers.org/FHFRC.html)

Along comes this modified AC100 out and back course this year which offered the perfect opportunity to have at least one ham sweep per segment on the return from Shortcut to Wrightwood and thus improve runner safety over this grueling uphill last half of the race.

In February, I emailed Ken Hamada, KC6FEU, the race director, about sweeping the return with ham/runners, and he welcomed the idea. We were able to find enough volunteers for at least 2 people per segment and with at least one a ham with a hand-held radio. Our sweeps would leave at the aid station cutoff time or shadow the last accounted for runner, whichever came first, again so as to minimize the time to get help to a runner in distress. Due to having to go back up hill this year, the finish cutoff was changed from 33 to 36 hours and aid station cutoff times extended accordingly. The cutoff to cutoff pace between aid stations varied from 19 to 27 minutes per mile on the 50.7 mile return - just a fast walking piece of cake, right?

The ham sweeps went out a few times to check the radio coverage and familiarize themselves with their trail segments. There were a few places where it was tough to get a signal out so Mary Ann and I planned to follow along in our car with our mobile ham radio and find spots to relay if necessary or help any runners return if that was the easiest way for them to drop.

Some of the aid station volunteers expressed concern that there would be no sweeps on the very long and tough outbound Vincent Gap to Islip Saddle section. Past races showed a high drop-out rate at Islip with about 6-8 runners not making cutoff at there. This segment has the climb to Mt. Baden-Powell at 9300 ft and in the heat of mid-day.

Two weeks before the race, I was talking to Beth Epstein about this and she volunteered to sweep this segment. But I said I really also

need a ham to go with you. She tells me a day later that she signed up to take the test the next weekend on line and just needed time during the week to study. She passed - call letters KN6VFR. She bought a hand-held ham radio and came over to my place for me to program it and show her how to use it.

Meanwhile, Nicole Lugue was sent my way by a fellow ultrarunner to volunteer to sweep so I put her together with Beth and the concern for runner safety over that segment was covered at the last minute.

Beth and Nicole came across a runner sitting about 1.5 mi up from the Vincent Gap aid station and said he had been there an hour. He was fatigued and had a little nausea, but got up and continued. At about 2.3 miles he stopped again and said he still felt a little nausea, was able to pee clear, had not trained enough and thought he should just go back and drop. He said he was good to go on his own and Beth, an experienced ultra trail runner and past EMT, concurred. Beth radioed to the Vincent Gap aid station captain, Brian Hershberger, that he was coming back and they sent people to meet him.

Beth and Nicole were able to catch up to the last runner out of Vincent Gap at the Baden Powell / PCT junction. He was on Brian's watch list. This runner also presented with nausea and fatigue which is typical for those pushing cutoffs. Brian said, if he was available, he could drive out to the Dawson Saddle trail head on Hwy 2 to pick up a runner. They thought it better for a runner to make the decision at the Dawson junction with PCT to exit and come down the 1.8 mile trail to Hwy 2 than continue 6.6 more miles to Islip. Beth advised Brian via the ham radio the runner they had discussed would exit at Dawson Saddle and requested pick up. Nicole escorted the runner down to Brian for transport and Beth continued on to Islip.

Beth talked to a runner named Norm at Windy Gap that said some hikers were taking down the yellow race ribbons not realizing they were for a race in progress. He asked them to put

them back. Beth carried some fill in ribbon just in case.

Dawson Saddle is almost half way on this segment and a good cut out point vs. going 6.6 more miles to Islip. I made note to have 3 or more sweeps for Vincent to Islip in case a runner needs escort back to Vincent or down to the Dawson cut out and still have sweeps available to help other runners to Islip.

Meanwhile, we are getting ready for the return sweep. No plan survives first contact as they say. Mary Ann and I arrive at the Shortcut aid station around 8pm Saturday night which is 1 hour before their cutoff. Jimmy Downs, KJ6KVI, and Hal Chiasson check in ready to sweep their 6.3 mile segment to Chilao. But at cutoff we still have a few runners out and one reported moving slowly or sitting on a rock by other runners. What to do? Jimmy and Hal can't really take down the trail as the runners still out could take a wrong turn in the night with no marks. The aid station captain asks for a couple of volunteers that know the trail and will guide the stragglers in. They depart with the sweeps 15 minutes late. Maybe we could have just had the sweeps tell the stragglers to follow the smell of the bacon they had cooking at Shortcut.

As it was, it was slow going for Jimmy and Hal and they never saw another runner. This segment was so heavily marked they think it took them at least 3/4 of an hour longer than they anticipated to take down the ribbons. Runners often got off course in the past in the Charlton Flat/Silver Moccasin trail area so I think that was the reason for the extra heavy marking. In general, marking this year was very good and we only heard of one runner straying off course for a short distance.

Contact with Jimmy on the radio was spotty and the gate to Charlton Flat campground was locked so we could not drive in there for better radio reception or to check on runners. The ham communications used repeaters on Mt. Disappointment, Santiago Peak and Blue Ridge. We found that a repeater on Mt. Wilson actually worked better for sweeps between

Shortcut and 3 Points, but we still had intermittent communications in this section.

We then drove to the Chilao aid station and met with Rick Besocke, KI6ZKM, and Randy Wong who were going to sweep to Cloudburst - 11.8 miles all at night. Soon after they departed, Rick called us on the radio to come out on trail to talk to a woman who was not sure she wanted to continue. But as we approached, she moved on and had decided to go for it. However, we saw the headlamp of another runner that was coming back so we escorted him to Chilao as Rick and Randy continued on sweeping toward Mt. Hillyer. We radioed to the 3 Points aid station asking them to find this runner's crew to have them come back and pick him up. Jimmy and Hal came in to Chilao a little while later with bags overflowing with ribbons and then Mary Ann and I were off to the 3 Points aid station to wait for Rick and Randy.

After 3 Points we went up to Cloudburst arriving about 3am. Rick reported on the radio that runner #124 was at the PCT trail crossing and Hwy 2 and was going to get a ride and drop. Rick advised the runner to stop at the Cloudburst aid station to get his wristband cut off to make it an official drop, but the guy was not seen and is still a mystery. He may not get to do AC again as it is one of the rules that a runner must officially drop by having their wristband cut off by an aid station captain. If Rick had not talked to the runner and witnessed his being picked up, the next step would have been to report them to search and rescue as missing.

The 7 mile section from Cloudburst to Islip Saddle is all next to Hwy 2 with the exception of a short .77 mile single track on the PCT from Eagles Roost to Kratka Ridge. This used to be a very tough section over Mt. Williamson and through Cooper Canyon but was closed off in favor of preserving the yellow legged frog. This segment was perfect for the group of Forestry volunteers and mountain bikers - Mike and Robin McGuire and Steve Messer, KE6CNX - that for the last 9 years have swept from Chantry to the finish. However, no mountain bikes are allowed on the PCT. So

they swept from Cloudburst to Eagles Roost, and then Kratka Ridge to Islip.

I met them at Eagles Roost and had a great time sweeping that short picturesque segment just before dawn by myself. I used a pair of scissors to cut the ribbons as I went rather than try to untie them. I know what you are thinking, "Didn't your mother tell you to never run with scissors?"

As I was coming down to the PCT/Hwy 2 trail crossing I saw Mary Ann waving to me from the Hwy 2 turn out. Well so did 2 guys racing in fancy Porches who thought she was waving at them and they came to a screeching stop to see if she needed any help. Sorry guys, no help was needed.

We got to Islip after helping another runner who wanted to drop connect with his crew by calling the aid station on the radio. Just as we pulled in we saw Chris Goddard, KM6CKT, Todor Trenkov and Matt Bliss disappear on the trail above us on their way for the tough 11.8 mile sweep segment that included the climb up to Mt. Baden Powell at 9300 ft. We figured they would be a while so we tried to get some sleep in our car around 8am, but the sun shining through our windshield woke us back up an hour later. Good thing we took a nap before starting out Saturday evening.

We hung out a few hours at Islip talking to the hams and monitoring the radio in case any runners decided to come back and drop. The hams and at least one aid station volunteer must remain until all runners reach the next aid station for this reason.

At Vincent Gap we meet up with Maria Case, KK6RNK, and Dave Hokanson, KM6WBG, who would be sweeping the next 4.5 miles to Inspiration Point. Dave did double duty and worked the outbound Cloudburst aid station with the club the day before. Chris, Todor and Matt come in not far behind a runner that they had been advised on the radio to watch for that was not feeling well. The aid station captains appreciate getting a heads up from the sweeps and hams from the other aid stations.

My son, Rick O'Hara, N6UEM, and Dan Stein, KE6OOF, were at the Inspiration Point aid station ready to do the final 9.3 mile segment as we wait for Maria and Dave to arrive. The last runners look like it has been tough for them, but are determined not to hang out past cutoff. Simon Cooper is there in his Speedo costume to welcome or scare runners.

Rick and Dan shadowed the last 4 runners leaving just a few minutes before cutoff. They were able to keep the runners in sight by one of them removing the ribbon and the other holding the bag. Seems that worked faster than each leap frogging ribbon to ribbon.

When they reached the top of the Acorn trail with 3.8 miles to go to the finish, they came across the last runner out of Inspiration one minute before cutoff, Rony Sanchez #22. He was sitting down and was one of those that we noted had been barely making cutoffs for quite a few aid stations. Rick called on the radio to advise us they might be a while. The rule is that sweeps cannot pass the last runner, even if it is past cutoff. But that sit-down break seemed to work for this runner as he was able to really pick it up down this steep technical part of the trail and finish with 20 minutes to spare. His average pace for this 9.3 mile segment was 22:06 per mile vs. 23:39 cutoff to cutoff. You never know.

Another woman, #203 Ellen Oppenheimer, was not so lucky. She became the last runner and was observed by the sweeps half way down Acorn to be getting into that ultra runner leaning and staggering gait. They noticed that she had not been drinking and was probably dehydrated, low on electrolytes and was with a pacer. All this information was passed on to the med people at the finish line by the hams monitoring the sweep frequency.

Mary Ann and I went out to meet her at Acorn and Apple Ave. and a local person came out with his golf cart to offer a ride since she was now past cutoff. I asked Ellen what she wanted to do and she said finish on her own and then she threw up. But she continued on and finished with a smile 10 minutes past the Sunday 5pm cutoff. Real guts and

determination. It has always been the rule at AC100, that the runner decides to continue on or not.

It was a long, busy Saturday and Sunday, but a great adventure. Rick and Dan joined Mary Ann and I for a relaxing celebratory beer on the Wrightwood Brewery patio as the sun shadows from the pine trees lengthened.

Sweeping is one way to enjoy doing ultra trail events and at the same time helping your fellow runners achieve their goals, promote runner safety and give back to the ultra running community. Let us know if you are interested in helping out next year. We would like to have 2-3 runners per segment to sweep, you don't have to be a ham radio operator, but it is a plus and we can help you get your license.

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[foothillflyers.org/ham.html](http://foothillflyers.org/ham.html)  
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