

**20 Years of Masochism
1983-2002
October 19, 2002
by David Horton**

Each year, a few days after the Mountain Masochist Trail Run, I organize a group to help clean up the race course (from start to finish), pulling down streamers and picking up trash. It was a gorgeous day! I think the colors in the mountains were even more beautiful than on race weekend.

If you had asked me a few days ago if I wanted to continue directing the MMTR next year ... I probably wouldn't have answered in the affirmative. But, isn't that just the norm for any runner after they've finished a tough ultra? Immediately afterwards, you may say, "Never again ... this is stupid." In my opinion, directing a large ultra is much tougher than actually running one! There are a lot of logistics that have to happen months before the event, and even a week after. Lots of work goes into the planning and implementing of such a race, especially a "point-to-point" race. It is becoming a logistical nightmare! And, the stress on myself as well as my wife ... takes its toll! But, time changes our perspective.

As I began the task of writing (for the 20th time) an account of the race, I feel different. This year marked a very special milestone! In 1983, we started 21 runners, with "yours truly" being fortunate enough to win ... but only by 13 seconds! I wanted the race to succeed and I wanted the MMTR to be the biggest ultra in the U.S. But, after this year ... I've changed my mind!

I had limited the number of runners for the 2002 MMTR to 300, and we almost reached that goal. We had 295 runners registered and started 278. Next year the race will also be limited to 300 registered runners, with the resulting field being around 280. This year proved to me that we couldn't continue producing a first-class (in my opinion) race with more than that number. I am proud of the race and its solid reputation. I'm excited to see runners come back year after year. I'm excited that first-time ultra runners find the MMTR a good "first" experience. I'm thankful for all the dependable and capable crews that help maintain the race year after year! I don't want to lose that personal touch! So please, don't wait too late to register!

Lou Bastin, a former MMTR finisher, and for years has been in charge of aid station 4 (Dancing Creek) and aid station 11 (Buck Mountain), wanted to do something special for the 20th anniversary race. Lou, with the help of Steve Bozeman, worked on developing a medallion to present to the finishers. I was very proud to place these beautiful bronze medallions around the neck of those who crossed the finish line!

All registered runners received a water bottle from Patagonia. All sub-12 hours finishers received the special medallion and a Patagonia long-sleeve silk weight shirt.

Five runners were going for their 10th finish in order to receive their embroidered jacket. One of those, Salli O'Donnell (Chesapeake, VA) was in line to become the first female to be a 10-time finisher! Tom Green (Columbia, MD) would be attempting his 20th finish to receive the coveted Patagonia Gore-Tex jacket. Tom called me a few weeks before the race and said he had a calf problem and had not been running and didn't know if he would be able to finish ... much less run the MMTR. I really felt bad, because I knew it meant as much to him as it did to me!

There were 16 manned aid stations supplied with all kinds of goodies. Conquest supplied the replacement drink and Cliff Bar provided Cliff Bars and Shots for the runners at several designated aid stations.

Very soon after the start of the 20th MMTR, Randall Ussery (Harrisonburg, VA) jumped to a slight early lead. Ussery had previously run the MMTR in 1997 in a very fast time. Sean Andrish (Leesburg, VA) joined Courtney Campbell and Hans Put in a close pack. Andrish is a training partner of Campbell and his assistant cross-country coach in a northern Virginia high school.

By aid station 6 (17.5 miles) Ussery had increased his lead to 6 minutes over Campbell and Andrish, and 7 minutes over Put. However, Ussery's lead slowly shrank to a 1-minute lead over Andrish, 2 minutes over Campbell and 5 minutes over Put by 29.5 miles. In the next 2.5 miles, both Andrish and Campbell passed a fading Ussery. By the start of the infamous 5-mile loop (33.6 to 38.6 miles), Andrish had increased his lead to 3 minutes on Campbell and 5 minutes on Ussery. From there on out, Andrish continued to run very fast finishing in 1st place in a time of 7:02:06, the fourth fastest time ever in the 20 year history of the MMTR. Campbell took 2nd place with a time of 7:15:00, Put in 3rd (7:22:55), Dink Taylor finishing 4th running a PR in 7:23:53, Ussery finishing in 5th (7:27:44) and Zealand running a solid 6th place to finish in 7:46:11.

Francesca Conte crossed the finish line in an outstanding time of 8:28:37. This was only 1:36 behind Janice Anderson's course record time of 8:27:01. Only 26 seconds later, Hunter finished in 8:29:03, the third fastest female time in the history of the race. This was also the closest finish in the history of the women's race. Ragan Petrie (Decatur, GA) finished in 3rd place with a time of 8:48:34, which would have won all but 5 of the previous MMTR races!!! Kathy Youngren (Huntsville, AL) placed 4th in her best ever finish at the MMTR in a time of 8:54:43, and Moehl taking 5th place in 8:55:26, just over one minute slower than her winning time in 2001. This was definitely the best women's field we have ever had. We have never had five women run under 9 hours in one year!

A large part of the increase in runners at the MMTR these last two years, has been attributed to the Lynchburg Ultra Series (LUS). There were 65 runners entered in the 2002 LUS. LUS finishers received a beautiful embroidered Patagonia Flash Pullover on Saturday night. Danny McDonnell (Fallston, MD) volunteered to buy a photo and frame for all LUS finishers this year. Roy Maahs (World of Color) took photos in all three LUS events: the Holiday Lake 50K, the Promise Land 50K and the MMTR 50 Miler. The LUS winners were Clark Zealand and Bethany Hunter. The masters LUS winners were Dave Drach and Deb Pero. These four winners also received a free pair of Montrail shoes and a Patagonia shirt.

Other noted winners in the race were master's division, Derrick Carr (Fredericksburg, VA) completing the race in a PR of 7:49:40. Nancy Drach (Leasburg, NC) took the women's masters title in 9:13:35. The Grand Masters titles went to Scott Mills (Alexandria, VA) and Anne Huntzicker (Beaverton, OR). Anne also won the "Best Blood" award, falling in the last mile and breaking two ribs, her humerus, and partially collapsing one lung.

The Brian McNeil "More Guts Than Brains" award went to Charles Miles (Barbourville, KY) with a time of 11:58:57, the last finisher under the 12-hour cut-off. The super masters award went to John DeWalt (Sarver, PA). The Mountain Man and Mountain Woman (top local finishers) went to Zealand and Hunter.

Of course the highlight for me on Saturday night was to present the 10-year finisher jackets. Jeffrey Welsh (Greenville, NC), Donald Smith (Blairs, VA), Ben Clark (Barnesville, MD), Bill Gentry (Waynesboro, VA), and last but not least ... the first woman to receive the coveted 10-year jacket ... Salli O'Donnell.

Tom Green cruised through with no apparent problems, finishing in 10:54:00 for his 20th straight MMTR finish. Tom Green ...you are my hero!

Twenty Years of Masochism! Unbelievable! Twenty more? Although it's tempting to give it up ... and my wife makes some good points to that end ... I don't see it happening anytime in the near future. I can't imagine not directing the "Best Trail Run in the East." But then again, I can't imagine directing it for 20 more years either!!!!