

Cascade Crest Classic 100 miler

Since running a 100 miler isn't really that challenge any more that it used to be (there is no more fear of not being able to finish one) and at my age setting new PR's is becoming increasingly difficult, I came up with a new idea:

To organize a 100 mile-race of my own!. After some course planning I looked into the logistics and figured out that with the amount of support I could come up with there was no way I could organize a 100 mile event. However I figured that a 100k race might be feasible. And it being in Europe 100k is a much more traditional distance anyway. Of course I designed it to be a mountain race on narrow steep foothpaths, inspired by my 100 mile races and the trail races in the Finger Lakes - a kind of race which hardly exists in Europe. So I set out to host that race in Ruhpolding at the sports club whose running section I am a member of. It was a lot of work and a lot of excitement, especially when I was told a week before the race that I needed approval by the government of Bavaria since the run crosses a nature preserve (on well travelled trails). I was a little late for announcing it in time on a broader scale, nevertheless 40 persons (including myself) participated of whom more than half finished the complete distance and everybody was very impressed with the course. Of course the whole event would not have been possible without the help of most of my personal friends and acquaintances, whom I am very grateful for their support! You can find more about the run under <http://www.chiemgauer100.de> .

The run will be held again this summer and I invite everyone to come and participate, help or watch!

Since organizing and running a race at the same time isn't the optimum for a good running performance I had a second project scheduled: The Cascade Crest Classic 100 miler near Seattle, WA end of August. This one was selected since it coincides with our company holidays in August and it is on a fairly challenging mountain course. Also did I combine the race preparation with 14 days of vacation. First checked out the course and ran the parts that I reckoned I would have to travel on during the night and then I cut back on my running mileage (I reckon I might have been faster the year before if I had run less during the 14 days preceding the race).

So I travelled up to Vancouver Island and hiked the West Coast trail (with minimum weight on my pack) It is an interesting trail, with changing views, coastal hikes and temperate rainforest. It hardly rained, but there was also only little sun. Unfortunately there was not much wildlife to be seen in the forrest - except for a tons of slugs and seagulls were more or less the only birds. Just toward the end of the trail one could watch grey whales and sea lions. A good part of the trail I hiked with a very friendly Chinese guy who was working at the University in Vancouver. Then I travelled East, just North of the American border through the Cascades and Rockies to Waterton and Glacier Nat'l Parks. Both parks have a spectacular mountain scenery and abundant wildlife. Bear encounters are quite likely and I was happy that the bear I passed in a thicket on a run was even more afraid of me than I was of him. Here I did a few runs and hikes including one to firetower with an amazing view, a setting of fog and sunshine and a group of bighorn sheep which came up to a distance of just a couple of yards. This was definitely the highlight of the trip.

From glacier park I worked my way back over to Easton, the beginning of the 100 mile race, went to the pre-race party met with some runners I knew from previous races. They told me that my pacer of the previous year at Hardrock nearly drowned on a training run there this summer: He sat down on a log jam to wait for some others when the giant log fell over and buried him in the water. Fortunately he managed to extract himself out of that near-lethal situation and gain the road with serious injuries, but alive.

The Cascades are known for frequent rainfall, however I was lucky: Apart from one night of rain on Vancouver Island and some fog there, I had had perfect weather, while at home severe rainfalls caused some substantial flooding. Race day was also hot, not my preferred weather for ultra achievements. I started out in the group following a group of 4, clearly being in the lead. During the first couple of hours things were well under control, I gained ground on the uphill and was doubled on the downhill which I used to recover. In the early afternoon my stomach stopped processing fluids and my belly felt terrible. I tried to hang in there, a guy which passed me gave some of his "miracle enzymes" to help digestion, but I couldn't feel any improvements. These are the moments where you put yourself the question "why am I doing this", "this is definitely my last 100 miler" ... After an hour or so of slow running and some walking I reached an aid station around mile 40. Fortunately Tom Crull, a seasoned

ultrarunner diagnosed me correctly with a lack of salt (even though I had been drinking mainly energy drink) and ordered me to wait at the aid station until they had cooked a salty soup for me. These 15 minutes did the trick: After first throwing up and then eating a bowl of salty noodle soup I began to recover and would soon settle into a decent running speed which I was more or less able to keep up till the end of the run. After the halfway point some guy closed up on me and we ran together for a while, overtaking to others. On the next uphill he pulled away from me only to fall behind some 30 minutes later. I was alone once again.

Some more uphill and then there was a very long gradual sparsely marked downhill on a dusty dirt road. I was glad I knew where I was going in the middle of the night. Out of nowhere a runner caught up to me at the bottom of the downhill and left Kachess aid station ahead of me. Here is where the "trail from hell" begins: Bushwacking, crawling under and over logs and later a trail with very difficult footing. Due to my better light I quickly was ahead of that Canadian runner, but I didn't manage to pull away from him since he didn't have to bother about route-finding now. Mile 70 we had some good food and started the long gradual uphill on the forestry road to Kachess ridge. I soon saw that there was no way to keep up with him on good terrain. So I let him go, race walked the bottom and ran the more gradual upper part of the climb, still hoping I might catch the Canadian later on the trail past Thorpe mountain. On the out and back to Thorpe mountain summit he was already 20 minutes ahead of me and nobody was within 30 minutes behind me. So the situation was clear: the last 15 miles are against the clock. My goal was beat the course record of 2003: 22hours. Without any major problems I kept a steady pace until the end which earned me a 5th place finish in 21:30, my best 100 mile time ever on probably the second toughest course, 1:30 behind the winner. Over all I was very satisfied with the result.