

*Our featured runner this month is Centerville's Jim Davidson. Jim has been a WCC runner for many years while also entering an occasional "ultra-marathon." In 2008, Jim entered the Western States 100 mile race only to have the event cancelled due to wild fires. He renewed his efforts for the 2009 event with the goal of finishing under the 30 hour time limit. Jim not only completed the event, but did so well under his goal time. The event starts at Squaw Valley and finishes 100 miles later in Auburn, CA. Jim graciously took time out of his schedule to share his story of this memorable run.*

To have a chance at entering the Western States 100 requires a bit of luck. I sent my qualifying run time along with my entry fee only to wait until the day of the draw (the participants are chosen thru a lottery system). I didn't expect to be chosen from a large pool of other hopeful runners. To my amazement, I logged onto the W.S. 100 website and found my name listed among the participants for the 2008 race.

I felt this event demanded special attention via a strict training regiment. I decided to slowly build mileage over 5 days per week while taking a rest day prior to my long run on Sunday. I then took a rest day after the long run day. Tuesday thru Friday saw me running 15 miles in the morning while adding 20-30 minutes of stair running. I would follow this workout with an easy 5 miles each evening. The off days are required to keep me from injury due to the rigorous training. The Sunday runs are an easy pace, but may last as long as 6-7.5 hours. Running 47+ miles on a given Sunday morning tends to wear on one's mind as well as the body. I owe a special thanks to Anne Wissell & Dale Bolser for running laps with me that first year (2008). Having someone to talk with really makes the time fly by. I'm sure when Dale & I ran the trails at Whitewater State Park that many people were amazed at how we could run and carry on conversation at the same time. Running with Anne was more of a training experience as she was preparing for her first marathon. She did really well on these runs and completed her goal by finishing the Flying Pig Marathon.

As race day 2008 approached, it was time to taper. The trip (plane ride/flight) to California was filled with anticipation. However, this was short lived as I learned upon arrival that the event had been cancelled due to the wildfires.

The flight home was filled with disbelief. Everyone that had entered the 2008 run was given entry into the 2009 event.

Wow! It hits me that now the ritual must be repeated if I'm going to reach my goal.

Another winter of long running lay ahead in preparation for the race on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2009.

For the 2009 event, I still had Dale to join me on many Sunday morning runs. We have logged plenty of miles together over the past 2 years in preparation for the race. His wife would be out on occasion running as well and would laugh at our ongoing conversations. I'm sure she heard us coming as we're both such chatterboxes.

Another training partner is Matt Cox from Liberty. Matt hopes to run a 50 miler someday and would join in to get a "feel" for the training. I assure you that one day, he & I will finish one together.

For the 4 months leading up to the 2009 run, my Sunday runs averaged 40 miles. I sacrificed all of the local races in 2008 and allowed myself to break some of my training rules for 2009 by entering some local events. I would also run a few miles on my "off" day prior to the long run on Sunday. This allowed me to join in with the Running Wayne County group on Saturday mornings which I really enjoyed.

As I ran (what should have been) my last long run, I had Dale & Matt to keep me company. My mind and body were screaming to let up early. I knew I could push thru this and put together one more long run. But, I knew it was time to listen to my body. It was great to finish up with the guys rather than hear them drive away as I ran more miles. As race day approached, I tapered the mileage in anticipation of the big day. Suddenly, Lisa & I are on the plane to California. We arrived on Wednesday before the race on Saturday. I contacted Janeen (a gal that I met via e-mail who agreed to help pace me). She was training to pace her brother for another 100 mile event. She had agreed to meet up with me at the 62 mile mark and help me make it to the finish line. She was a huge help as she took us around enabling us to see the last few miles as well as the finish line area. It's always helpful to have that visual of the finish in your mind as you strive towards that goal.

Lisa & I sat thru numerous pre-race briefings (each were very helpful).

Finally, the big day had arrived. That was the good news.....the bad news was that the temperatures were near record highs. Race day arrives and thoughts are racing thru my mind. Did I put everything needed in the "drop bags?" (You're required to pack your own drop bags for each aid station). The bags will be awaiting you as you reach each checkpoint. Did Lisa have all that she needed to get from aid station to aid station? (travel wise. She too was up the entire time to meet up with me and see that I had what I needed along the way. What a gal!!!). I told myself to stay calm as I'm well prepared. I know that Lisa is very resourceful and assure myself that she'll be fine.

We met up with another couple and Lisa has teamed up with Rachel to help her navigate from station to station.

We awake at 2:00 a.m. on race day to make the 45 minute trip to the starting area. Upon arrival, we found only a few folks there at that hour. My mind is on the race and the importance of consuming fluids. I have a bottle of Ensure which I carry in one hand. This will be my primary source of energy. I also have two water bottles around my waist. I also carry numerous power-gels, mints, M&M's, gum, and my cell phone. The cell phone was a long shot on reception. I left it shut off and turned it on when we were in clearings at the top of a mountain.

My race day breakfast consisted of 2 Ensures and 3 bottles of water. Nerves required me to take many bathroom breaks as start time drew near. Finally, 3 minutes to go and we head to the start line. I tell myself to stay calm and navigate this first climb as it's a sample of things to come.

We're off at 5:00 a.m. and the leaders make the first mistake of the day by going the wrong way only 5 minutes into the run. At least I can say that I was ahead of the best in the world for a little while. This small mistake by these guys made me more aware of how critical it would be to stay aware of the trail markers. When running this far, you don't need to add any extra mileage.

The first climb is 4+ miles and I concentrate on fluids all the way to the top. Restroom breaks assure me that my fluid intake is adequate.....I keep drinking. I try to drink more Ensure than water to replenish my vital nutrients for the body. At one point, we're like a bunch of pack mules in single file clawing our way to the top of the mountain. It's quite a relief to see the view from the top and start our descent to Lyon Ridge. I really wanted to soak up the views, but the trails require too much attention to allow much sight seeing.

There's no doubt that many runners would be injured with the severity of this terrain. After what was a nice run-able downhill, we're on our way up what turns out to be a single file trail smack in the middle of a snowmelt run off. Miles of slogging thru water will certainly soften up one's feet.

As I entered Lyon's Ridge, I made quick work of refilling the bottles, drank a couple glasses of Coke and ate the best Oreo cookie that I've ever had. When something tastes that good, get more. I continued on the trail with a handful of Oreos and a huge smile. The next stop is Red Star Ridge where I have a drop bag. This is the first of many drops and I'm looking forward to it.

I reach the aid station at Red Star Ridge and receive the first of my drop bags. A handler records my bib number and retrieves my drop bag. She refills my bottle with Ensure while I drink more Coke and eat more Oreo cookies. I'm now supplied with more Ensure and power gels as planned. With the water bottles in place, it's time to keep rolling. I pick up a hat to shield me from the sun and make my way down the trail. Duncan Canyon.....here I come.

I found things to amuse myself as I made my way along the course. There are some participants that agree to be "lab rats" for the event. They take the time to leave urine specimens at pre-determined locations. This was done simply by using Ziploc bags with the runner's bib number attached. It was amusing to see how often these samples were placed. I'm sure some valuable info was gathered to determine the effects of such an adventure on one's body.

Duncan Canyon is one of those steep descents that just heats you up. I'm anxious to get there as the next stop will enable me to see Lisa for the first time since the start of the race. The negative side is the climb out of the canyon. Going down is almost like a controlled fall. It almost seems as though you can't stop.....you just try to contain yourself. Once at the bottom, I top off my water bottles, soak my hat (to help keep cool) and begin the 6 mile climb to Robinson Flat. It's here that I'll meet up with Lisa for the first time. Before starting the climb, I use a power gel to provide some extra energy. I'll repeat this process at each climb throughout the race (often using more than one on several occasions).

As I make my way up the climb, I am amazed to see several runners along the side vomiting. It's early in the run and their day will only get worse. The climb is more than a little rough.....a complete body check. With the temps on the rise and very little air movement, sweat just pours from my body like a blown radiator. As I near the top, I feel a cool breeze. This only lasts a minute, but anything to help keep cool is welcomed.

As I entered this aid station, the handlers strip me of my gear and I step on the scales to be weighed. I spoke with the doctor that weighed me and he asks my weight at the start. This info (along with vital signs) is listed on my wristband. He says, "150 lbs. You've only lost one pound and look really good. Keep drinking.....we'll see you later." The handlers return my gear with the water bottles refilled. I speak with Lisa for about a minute as she refills my Ensure. She too, thinks I look pretty good and tells me to keep moving. I tell her, "Goodbye....I'll plan to see you at Michigan Bluff."

Michigan Bluff is the 55 mile point of the race. I'll cover almost 25 miles before I see Lisa again. This section will have a lot of downhill running. One must be careful to not run too fast or you'll burn yourself up. These downhill runs are also murder on your feet & quads. I make it thru the next couple of aid stations with the usual routine of many

Oreos, some chips (for salt), and a little more Coke. I'm really pumped to get to Devils Thumb as I know there'll be another aid station. Once I pass that station, it will be another 5 miles of "freefall" into Deadwood Canyon. All goes well on the downhill (but it is bone-jarring to say the least).

Anytime you go downhill on this course, you need to expect to go uphill once you reach the bottom. The next climb is almost 2 miles (a real good butt-kicking). I tell myself to keep drinking as there'll be another medical check at the top. I must maintain my weight in order for the next doctor to allow me to continue. I've already seen runners given "time outs" where the runners are pulled out to take in fluids so that they can regain a % of their weight before moving on. Time is critical as there is virtually none to waste. Each aid station has a time "cut-off." If you don't make the time cut, you are pulled from the race. My goal is to bring home the belt buckle.....so I keep moving.

When you enter any aid station, the object is to not waste time. Get what you need and leave.

As I reached Devil's Thumb, I give my gear to a handler. They refill my water bottles & ensure as I get weighed while speaking with the doctor. Wow!!! I'm amazed that everything is going so well as I'm still only one pound lighter than at the start of the event. With my fluids back, this next downhill will be a killer. I free fall into El Dorado Creek like a 149 pound rock falling from the sky. When I reach the bottom, I find a couple of runners soaking in the creek to get cool. Myself, I soak my hat for a few seconds, eat a power-gel and move on to the 3 mile uphill gut check. I'm motivated by the thought of Lisa waiting at the top of the climb. I plan to have her wash my feet and change my socks as I feel some blisters starting. There are more scenes of runners vomiting, sitting, & lying on the ground. These guys are having a tough day. I really feel for them, but can't waste time. As I passed each one, I offered some encouragement and kept climbing. Deep down, I know the day is almost over for many of these folks. But, I keep going.

I'm at the top and elated to be there. A medical check reveals that I'm now one pound heavier than at the start (must be the Oreos, I'm thinking). There's Lisa.....she has a chair for me and I sit down for the first time. I take a short sit down break while she cleans my feet and admires my blisters. She also reminds me that Janeen will be waiting at mile 62 (another 6 miles) to pace me the rest of the way. Otherwise, Lisa thinks I'm doing great! I'm really pumped as I leave the aid station running with a huge smile on my face and (you guessed it) Oreos in my hand. I met another runner on the trail and spoke with her for a while. She must have slowed down as I kept moving and had to cut our visit short. My thoughts switch to meeting Janeen at mile 62.

Forest Hill is now in sight and I'm looking forward to meeting up with Lisa & Janeen. A handler takes my gear (for refilling). I tip the scales at 150 lbs. (same as the start) and I'm good to go.

I ask where my "crew" is and learn that they (Lisa & Janeen) are in a roped area. I found them visiting and asked "Ladies, are you having fun yet?" Both girls get a funny look on their face as they weren't expecting me just yet. Lisa tells me, "You're not supposed to be here for another 20 minutes." I reply, "Sorry about that, but Janeen & I have business to tend to." Lisa hands me another pack of Oreos and we're on our way once again. I tell Janeen that I'm glad she's joined me. It will be nice to have someone to talk with that I know will stick with me for a while. I also apologized for the odor I'm producing and

suggest that a good bath is in order once this is over. Janeen informs me that the temperature will stay high thru the night. But, to get some relief from the blaring sun will be a nice break. The temps today reached 104 degrees.....plenty warm.

I told Janeen that I felt pretty good and would like to try to make some time before sundown. With the challenge of the terrain, it's tough to make time after dark as you just can't see as well. I know others will lose time later and I hope to pick off some other runners.

We start out at a nice pace and just clip along which feels really good. My thoughts go back to the "lab rats" and their urine specimens. I share that info with Janeen as we come upon more samples. Each one is continually darker with less volume. It's amazing at how much this effort affects the performance of one's normal bodily functions.

When you have company, it's easy to not pay attention to the trail. With it being dark, we missed a turn and burnt up a 10 minute chunk of time as a result while adding distance as well. So much for trying to "make up some time." This again, woke me up as to the importance of paying attention to the trails (especially at night). Several more aid stations come & go while my weight stays within a one pound variance.

Upon entering Rucky Chucky, I tell Janeen, "Let's go and get across the Big River crossing because there's an aid station on the other side. We can re-fuel there. So, there's no need to stop before the crossing." Into the water we go holding onto a rope for support. I plunge in up to my chest. I must have let out a moan as one of the helpers suggested that I apparently have some chafing issues (let me just say that there were some important areas that lost some skin). I really didn't feel much of this as there were other areas that hurt much worse until I hit the water.

Janeen informs me that her knees are killing her and she's going to pull out at Green Gate. I'm concerned for her, but also saddened as I'm going to lose my company. Pulling into Green Gate at 79.8 miles, we say our goodbyes and go our separate ways. She assures me that she'll be at the finish to see me. I can say that having someone to talk with really took my mind off of the pain in my feet. There was also the overall fatigue that I had been mentally blocking for some time.

I keep moving by telling myself to continue to "shorten the distance." The finish line is the goal and I plan to be there. I meet another runner with his pacer and she tells me that I "look great." Her runner is having problems, but still moving well. I told her that "my feet are toast," She replied, "You can't tell, just keep going. There's a big uphill coming with big downhill to follow." I think hard on this as my mind is having great difficulty at blocking the pain by this point. Every stride feels like I'm sticking my feet in a bed of hot coals. I finally tell myself, "You're strong on the up-hills, make some time where you can, as you may slow some going downhill. The downhill pain will be tremendous."

At the base of the next climb, I repeat my process of power gel consumption and head on with a goal of "eating this hill alive." Once I reached the top, I run on a small flat section. Every foot fall is killing me with pain. I try to figure out how to overcome the pain and finally realize that I'll just have to accept it. With each stride, I tell myself that, "I *can* accept this pain as it's too far from my heart to kill me." Each stride becomes somewhat easier. I tell myself to "run & keep running. The downhill will be hell, but look back at where you've been and look at where you're going (the finish)."

Going down this steep, rocky descent, I feel my small toe on the left foot starting to swell. With every stride, it presses harder against the inside of my shoe. For the next 10

minutes, it just feels wedged inside the shoe. Finally, it pops and the pressure is gone. My thoughts are, "I guess I showed that blister who's boss."

As I reach the bottom, I'm elated. Still have 3 more miles to go, but I can smell the barn. I get my bottles refilled and off I go. There are still more climbs to come, but the finish line is pulling me like a magnet. I reach the town of Auburn with thoughts of the last 400 meters around the track stuck in my mind. I know that I may look like crap, but (mentally) I feel like a million bucks.

I try to entertain a group of ladies by asking them, "if they'd waited all this time just to run in with me." One of them replied. "You look so good, I doubt that we could keep up."

As I entered the track and saw the finish on the other side, my thoughts went from where I'd been to where I am now. Heaven and Hell. I'd gone thru Hell to get to Heaven.

28 hours and 39 minutes later, I was there.....**MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.**

Two days later, Lisa & I were walking on the beach. An older lady with a cane passed me like I was sitting still. I told Lisa...."You know you're hurting pretty bad when that happens."

*Editors note:*

*One thing that Jim did not share.....he set the world's record for the highest single bound leap during the event. It seems that he happened upon a Western Diamondback rattlesnake at about 65 miles or so. He heard the rattle before he saw the snake (which he saw just for an instant). His instinct led him to jump well over 5 feet straight up to clear the area unscathed.*

*Jim is to be commended for bringing such notoriety to the Wayne County running community. His wife, Lisa, is to be commended as well. Both Lisa & Jim were up well over 36 hours to complete the event and reach the awards presentations.*

*Congratulations to Jim, Lisa, and their family for a "team effort" well done!!!*