

Mountain marathon will test runners Saturday

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FRUIT HEIGHTS - The most abominable sin that runners can commit in a race is to walk. Walking in a race means feeling guilty and falling behind the rest of the field.

Such behavior is usually interpreted to mean that a runner is either out of shape, lacking in proper willpower or is just plain quitting. And "quit" is the dirtiest four-letter word in sports.

Now to all trained and serious runners, it might be slightly permissible to walk a little in a 26-mile marathon, but in races of 10 miles and less? No way!

However, the seventh annual Bair-Gutsman Mountain Marathon Races are scheduled for 7:30 a.m. Saturday starting at the Rock Loft and no runner can possibly complete without walking considerably.

The reason runners must walk part of these races is because of their bizarre steepness. Both races climb 960 vertical feet per mile for the first five miles and rank as the steepest footraces in America. Even the famed Pikes Peak Marathon in Colorado is not nearly as steep.

The Bair-Gutsman races are Utah's oldest and most prestigious mountain footraces. There are two races, a 10-mile which originated in 1974 and a 30.3 mile which was first run in 1978.

Both Gutsman races are the creations of Kaysville's Jan Cheney. Each race starts at the same time and follows the same route for the first 10 miles, but the 30.3 mile continues to Bountiful.

The races begin at 4,700 feet above sea level and follow a paved road for one-half mile up to the mouth of Bair Canyon. The course then follows a narrow and sometimes obliterated trail up the canyon.

Surprisingly, the trail up Bair Canyon passes through a multitude of different types of terrain and flora ranging from sagebrush, swamps, ferns, rocks, grass and a small stream to timber.

At times the trail divides or fades and only a quick discerning or lucky decision prevents a runner from getting lost for several minutes or having to run a longer distance.

Many runners are forced to start walking in the Gutsman after only one mile, but eventually the steepness takes its toll on all competitors. The trail becomes so steep sometimes that a runner can actually save energy and travel faster walking than running.

A few runners use ski poles to aid in propelling their body up the mountain, while most use their arms to pump their knees up and down.

The final 1,000 yards up the canyon transverses what is known as "Death Row," an aerobic torture test that borders on being straight up. Here a slow walk is the fastest pace possible.

At the top of Death Row, the trail connects onto a dirt road that travels south and passes just 50 feet below and behind the twin radar towers on Francis Peak at an elevation of 9,450 feet.

Runners are treated to spectacular bird's-eye views near Francis Peak of most of Davis and Morgan counties and the Great Salt Lake.

The dirt road travels five miles and 2,200 feet down to the top of Farmington Canyon where the 10-mile race finishes.

Finishers of the 10-mile race are treated to a hearty breakfast at a nearby campground, while 30.3 mile racers continue four miles and 1,792 vertical feet up to Bountiful Peak (elevation 9,230 feet).

The longer Gutsman race finishes with 15 more miles

along Skyline dirt road and ends after a downhill drop of 3,970 feet in front of the HB" on the mountain in northern Bountiful.

Total altitude climb in the 10-mile race is 4,800 feet, while it is 6,592 in the longer race. The 10-mile Gutsman course record is one hour, 37

minutes and 22 seconds held by Colorado's Rick Trujillo in 1976. His ascent time up the Bair Canyon stretch of 1:06.15 is also the fastest ever. Trujillo is currently the Pikes Peak Marathon record-holder also.

There are no recorded times for the longer Gutsman race since Cheney feels it is the distance of such longer races that is the key element, not the speed or time. However, no one has come close to finishing the 30.3 mile race in less than 4.5 hours.

As if Cheney's two Gutsman races weren't challenging and long enough, he now has tentative plans for an even longer and tougher mountain event.

He plans to stage "The Flight of the Eagle Event" in September of this year. It will be a fun-run - not a race - from Weber Canyon up along the Skyline of the mountains, past Francis Peak and will follow the remainder of the regular 30.3 mile Gutsman race down into Bountiful.

Best estimates are that this route would be 40 to 45 miles long. Sections of the route would not even include any improvised trail or road.

Prospective entrants of the Gutsman can register for either Gutsman race at 6:30 a.m. Saturday at a cost of \$10. A T-shirt picture and the breakfast are included in the entry fee. More than 100 runners are expected to enter this year's 100-mile race.