

Badger Mountain Challenge 100 Mile (3/30/13) Race Report

Why, the uninitiated might wonder, is it the Badger Mountain *Challenge* 100 rather than just the Badger Mountain 100? Three years of veterans can now answer that question. Miles of volcanic lava rock strewn trails, the impossibly steep straight up the mountain four wheel drive jeep road climbs, the bushwhacking along ragged fields, the climbing of three mountains in the final ten miles to round out a total of 19K in elevation gain, and other delights constitute something race director Brandon Lott might reasonably consider a *challenge*.

I give him that and he's not a man who doesn't recognize a challenge. Just weeks before directing the Badger Mountain races (which included a 50K and a 15K that drew 500 participants) , he dragged a fifty pound sled 350 miles through the Alaskan winter to finish the Iditarod Trail Invitational in a stellar six day effort.

The race showcases the environs around the tri-city area of Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland located in southeastern Washington at the confluence of the Snake, Yakima and Columbia rivers. And what environs! Mountain peaks and ridgelines rise up out of desert scrub flatlands. The Columbia River winds through the towns on the valley floor. Beyond the towns, farmlands stretch out to the horizons, farming being the key industry in the Columbia Valley area, including dozens of vineyards that take advantage of the volcanic soil, hot summers and cooling evening breezes.

The landscape is naturally barren of trees so views in all directions are unobstructed. From the 1500 foot summit of Badger Mountain, you look out at Red Mountain, Candy Mountain, McBee Ridge and Chandler Butte, all places you'll be going soon enough. Long-leaf phlox and prairie stars dot the hillsides. Red-winged blackbirds flitted around Lost Lake. My running buddy, Ray Gruenewald spotted a Western meadowlark on the side of Badger Mountain and a mourning cloak butterfly, named for its somber coloring, on Chandler Butte.

Even if you're not scoping out nature, the run keeps you busy with constantly shifting venues, almost continuous elevation change, and the surfaces underfoot dramatically varying mile by mile. One minute you're high on a ridge stumbling along a road of embedded rocks with just enough loose rock to prevent a relaxed stride. Next minute you're skirting housing on a dippy singletrack, and then you're running through a neighborhood, then tip-toeing along an embankment, going through an underpass tunnel, or pounding down a stretch of blacktop before returning to the stunning vistas of the high ground.

Lonely outpost aid stations at the top of Chandler Butte, on Dallas Road, and in an area called the Orchard add to the adventure at night. The volunteers had fires going, soup at the ready, and loads of sustaining quesadillas. A nice overcast kept the day mostly cool and comfortable, but the night sky was clear and full of stars. Brutal cold winds had ruled the night the previous year so the 2013 edition of the race proved a little more benign in that respect.

Two unique aspects of the race stand out in my mind. One was the turnaround aid station that was provided by a family that opened their garage and bathroom up to the runners, a totally wonderful break from the rigors of the course. The other was a motorcycle club that spent all day and night ranging over the course, marking turns, sitting at the roadside offering water and energy gels, keeping everyone's spirits up and keeping everyone on track. The motorcycle club, the volunteers and Brandon's easy going style really made the runners feel welcome and as

comfortable as you're going to feel while getting beaten up by a tough course.

Participation seems to be growing for this worthy and unique event. Many ultras out West have a lost in the forest feel about them. The Badger Mountain Challenge 100 gives you a different look and feel that will expand your horizons, literally.