

RACE REPORT – BISHOP HIGH SIERRA ULTRA-MARATHONS, MAY 21, 2011.

Having now seen the complete weather for May weekends, I realize that placing Pastor Chris Costello, a 100k runner, in charge of the weather for May 21 was a wise move on my part. We were blessed with fine, mild, sunny and light breezy conditions for the 18th running of the Bishop High Sierra Ultra-marathons, on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada range in California. Previous and now subsequent weekends have been stormy, cold and windy, with more snow on the higher elevations, plus a small fire broke out on a trail section on the Sunday following the race.

Our runners, an intrepid lot, enjoyed the race immensely. Continually throughout the day and night, I was greeted with overwhelming praise for a well-organized event, superbly marked route, fantastic volunteers, excellent variety of aid station offerings, with a “signature” menu item at all 10 stations, and the feeling that runner safety was foremost in our planning.

The Northern Inyo Hospital Foundation is a beneficiary of the race proceeds. In the last 18 years, the Foundation has received a total of over \$100,000 from the races. The Foundation will help provide extra equipment to Emergency, Outpatient and Surgery departments, and is actively involved with the planning of a Healing Garden near the front entrance of the new Hospital building, due to open sometime in mid 2012. Runners can be proud of their contribution towards this most necessary and wonderful addition to our new Hospital.

Race communications improved an order of magnitude with the addition of 13 out of town radio operators who shared their equipment and expertise with our own small radio club. There was instant communication throughout the race between finish line and each station – not a small thing when runners are scattered over a vast landscape. Our local 4wd club contributed vehicles as well, and our one “MIA” situation was quickly resolved with excellent communication, thorough trail sweeping, and cell phone availability.

The 100k record was resoundingly smashed by Jorge Maravilla, who took 55 minutes off the old time, to set a very high bar of 9:40. This legendary performance will stand for some time! Andi Ramer, our first woman across the line, also dropped 35 minutes off the old time, and her record of 12:27 has set a great challenge for the ladies in future years. Runners who “took the left turn” at mile 48.5, instead of choosing to drop into the 50 mile event, were rewarded with stunning views of the Owens Valley at dusk, or a star-filled night sky, and lightning on the White Mountain range, as they traversed and returned over the Tungsten Hill before heading into the finish. This event now joins the ranks of “tough” 100k events, and is a perfect lead-up to the high altitude 100 mile trail events taking place in the next several months. Almost half of the event is above 6,500’, with dryness and exposure adding to the challenge.

The 50 mile event still belongs to Bishop! Local runner, Ryan Spaulding, won his first 50 mile event in 8:01. His excitement was palpable as he charged across the finish line, leaping with joy, as only a young man is able, at the end of a hard run 50 miles. A number of 100k “wanna-be’s” decided to take the 50 mile option as well, and were happy to have official finishes at the shorter distance. Veteran ladies’ winner, Sada Crawford, led in 9:15, followed closely by Betsy Nye, with 9:34.

The most popular distance this year was the 50k, with the most registered runners, and then some, as the day wore on. Perennial winner, Dan Yarborough from Mammoth Lakes attempted to best his record 4:00:28, but was only able to manage 4:08, a fine time on this actual 51.5k course. Ladies were led by Carolyn Barichievic in 5:28, with our oldest veteran finishers, Pat De Vita and Bill Dickey bringing up the rear of the field.

Billed as a “Fun Run” the 20 miler, whilst not a true ultra, is our entry level event. Enjoyed by many new runners, we have seen some stellar performances over the years. In fact, many of our older runners have chosen this event to enjoy the Bishop weekend and races, while not taking the beating from the higher altitude course. Younger runners, eager to try a longer distance, are welcomed to this event, with accompanying adult participation and race director consent.

My tenure as Race Director is coming to a close in the next couple of years; the races have evolved from a small 50 mile attended by less than 50 runners to 4 distinct races attracting about 300 runners. We have welcomed runners from across the United States and several overseas runners as well. This year we enjoyed the participation of runners from the UK, Canada and Australia, word of our world-class event having travelled far and wide.

Again, I welcome runners to participate in one of the best ultra-marathon events in world. We will be here on the 3rd Saturday in May, 2012, at 6:00 a.m. – headin’ for the hills!