

Dan Rossi Memorial Ultra Runs
Nov. 3rd and 4th, 2001
Carroll County, Ohio

Did you ever fantasize about directing a race but never think that you would get serious enough and really do it? Well, it takes just the right motivation...

Volunteers traveled across the state to the Dan Rossi Memorial Ultra Runs, bringing with them trays of brownies, bags of homemade cookies, soup, beer, camping supplies. Leo Lightner captained the second aid station, piled his car with supplies, stayed up during the night, and then thanked us for inviting him! Our neighbors became intrigued with the strange event happening in their backyards, and allowed us to use their driveways, tables, and firewood. In response to our request that local people leave their lights on for the short segment leading from the bike lane to aid station #1, one neighbor put up his Christmas lights early. This was an event that was clearly meant to happen...

Dan Rossi must still be chuckling about this whole idea that started over a few beers and became a reality. It is his spirit that found delight and beauty in times of pain and struggle that guided this event. After the events of 9/11/01 Lisa Gilbert and I were wondering what we could do to add something healing and hopeful to our world. The idea for the 100 miler was born after talking to our dear friend Monica Scholz, learning that she was prevented from traveling to the Rio del Lago 100 as a result of the tragedy. Wanting to provide Monica a chance to get the number of 100s she had hoped for became our first motivation. Naming the race after Dan Rossi, the ultrarunner from Erie, PA who first teased and cajoled me into this sport, provided the rest of the impetus. The result was a magical experience, similar to those rare races when everything just clicks. It takes a lot of work to get ready for them, but they stay in your memory forever.

The start and finish line of the Dan Rossi Memorial Ultras was the largest crack in the driveway, spraypainted silver (my silver car has quite a bit of rust). The driveway was also one of the two aid stations. Race headquarters was the living room, and the pasta dinner was served on our dining room table and several borrowed card tables. The course was a beautiful 9.139 mile loop in the bike lanes of the state route that winds by Atwood Lake in eastern central Ohio.

A thick fog in the morning enveloped everyone and made the start mysterious. A raffle was held before the race, and Montrail t-shirts and a shoe certificate were handed out to happy runners. A hydration pack, donated by Ultrafit, was won by Fredrick Davis, III, in what appeared to be divine intervention as years ago Fred saved my hide by lending me a brand new water bottle pack before a race.

Two runners said that they felt compelled to come to this race, and their decisions to act on their intuition were richly rewarded. Rod Hasker finished his first 100 mile race, winning the men's division. Debbie Richmeier flew the course, her energy even increasing as it got dark and the stars came out. Turns out she likes the cold and dark, and there is plenty of that in November in Ohio. Louise Mason traveled by bus and train to attend, and delighted everyone with her rich assortment of reflectors and lights. Yen Nguyen and Peter Bennett flew in from Houston and were happy to find a banquet at the aid stations as they made their 100 mile journey. It takes guts for runners from Texas to leave the warmth of the fire behind when there is frost forming on the windshield of the car! In his first attempt at 100 miles, Chip Schwartz was thrilled to complete 91 miles and witness his first sunrise of the next day in an event.

Then there was Monica's run. We knew she was interested in the first place award, as each was handbuilt by a ceramic artist. The inside of each bowl sparkled with gold leaf. Not known as a runner who enjoys roads, Monica took off from the very start, running the rolling hills and enjoying the course. Never have I seen her so consistently focused, from the very beginning, and she raced through the early morning fog, the warmth of the sunny day, and into the brisk and starlit night. In an amazing performance, she won the 100 mile race in 18:46.08, a PR and less than 20 minutes off of the Canadian women's record. In a race where most might presume she would just put out enough energy to finish, she found it within herself to race hard from the very first step. It was an amazing run to witness.

The 50 mile run, with 6 entrants, proved to be competitive, as Fredrick Davis, III, chased, but could not catch, local runner Larry Rutledge. Larry, running in only his second 50 mile event ever, found an ultra in his backyard irresistible, and ran a gutsy race to win in 9:14.36. Arthur Moore and Don Baum, respected and experienced Ohio ultrarunners, finished strongly. Don and Robin Fry, a 50 mile entrant who dropped due to injury, stayed and volunteered for the rest of the race.

Initially our intention was to make this race a one-time event. Yet, after cleaning up and getting much-needed sleep, with the encouragement of the runners, the volunteers, and our neighbors, we are strongly considering making this an annual event. Keep this in mind if you are interested in a friendly country road race in Ohio.

Ruta Mazelis, R.D.

Debbie Richmeier adds:

It started at 7:00 Nov. 3rd, a perfect Indian summer day in Ohio. Dan Rossi's daughter, Eileen, and her husband drove down from PA to start the race. There were 6 runners in the 50 mile and 7 in the 100, representing 5 states.

The 100 mile race consisted of 11 loops of rolling hills run on the pavement bike path through the Atwood Lake area. The weather couldn't have been nicer, especially for a race in Nov. The sky was clear enough at night for the moon to provide enough light to run by. The aid station out on the course had a big welcome bonfire going most of the night. The start/stop area was located right at the lake. It allowed runners access to gear, real bathrooms, warmth and a full buffet of food. We were always well fed and treated like long lost friends of Ruta and Lisa's and the volunteers. Since we were a small group, the volunteers were ready and happy to help us refuel and grab supplies. One of the toughest things about the two aid stations was deciding what to eat. Aside from the usual maintenance food, i.e. boiled potatoes, cut up fruit, hard candy, candy bars, chips, sandwiches, there were also homemade desserts and a chafing dish with as many as three different hot entrees. There was lasagna, pizza, beef stew, and the best chicken noodle soup I've ever had. They also cooked up BBQ chicken, burgers, and hot dogs. I'm surprised anybody made it back out on the course after their "dinner laps."

Having access to a warm spot to hang out and an overabundance of food and hospitality at the finish area gave most runners reason to stick around and cheer on the finishers. At one point all the 100 mile runners as well as some remaining 50 mile runners, some of whom stayed to become volunteers for the 100 milers, were all hanging out in various stages of wakefulness. Most had whet their appetite on the hot breakfasts made to order and had moved on to the leftover beef stew and a homebrew. This truly was the Bed and Breakfast of 100 mile races.

The awards and t-shirts were also custom made and unique. The tie-dye shirt will definitely stand out at other races. Dan Rossi's race hat was tie-dye. The finisher's award for the 100 mile run was an 8 x 10 framed portrait of sunrise over the lake from the viewpoint of the race site. The artwork was Lisa's and she framed and signed them. The 50 mile finishers got a 5 x 7 of the sunset. The first place awards were handmade pottery bowls with gold inlay. There were prizes donated by Montrail and Ultrafit, which were raffled off, and water bottles from Montrail for everyone.

We were pampered and well fed from the prerace gathering on Friday throughout late afternoon on Sunday. It's nice to be part of a small race. It gives you a chance to reconnect with the positive reasons we run ultras in the first place.

Thanks to the volunteers who gave their time and friendliness. Thanks again to Ruta and Lisa for providing us with a memorable weekend.

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50 Miles

1. Larry Rutledge, OH, 47, 9:14.36!
2. Frederick Davis, III, OH, 53, 9:21.05
3. Art Moore, OH, 64, 10:09.52
4. Don Baum, OH,51, 11:32.00

6 starters

100 miles

1. Monica Scholz, ONT, 34, 18:46.08!
2. Debbie Richmeier, CO, 41, 21:08.44
3. Rod Hasker, PA, 56, 24:10.10!
4. Louise Mason, IL, 48, 25:52.10
5. TIE: Yen Nguyen, TX, 39, and Peter Bennett, TX, 26, 26:14.46

7 starters