

GRAND TO GRAND A GRAND JOURNEY

by Colin Geddes, RD

As the first-ever self-supported stage foot race in North America, let me start by telling you what stage racing is all about. Competitors in the Grand to Grand Ultra (fondly known as the G2G) are required to complete 167 miles over six stages in seven days. They are also required to carry all that they will need for the week with the exception of water and a roof over their head. This means they have to carry all of their food (a minimum of 2,000 calories per day as stipulated in the rules), as well as a sleeping bag and other mandatory items such as a compass, whistle, signal mirror, small knife, headlamp, windproof jacket. Runners' packs can therefore weigh up to 20 pounds at the start.

The event was conceived by Colin and Tess Geddes, together with a third partner Terry Madl, back in early 2010. Tess had completed several self-supported multi-day stage race ultras around the world including the Eastern Sahara in Egypt, the Marathon Des Sables in the Western Sahara, the Atacama Crossing in Chile and the Desafío al Desierto in Argentina and it dawned on us that America was missing out.

Almost two and half years later, the inaugural Grand to Grand Ultra took place in Southern Utah and Northern Arizona, starting from a desolate part of the north rim of the Grand Canyon and finishing on the summit of the Pink Cliffs, overlooking the Grand Staircase.

Many thousands of hours were invested into researching the ideal location, planning, seeking permits and then execution. While the iconic nature of the Grand Canyon and Grand Staircase drew them to Southern Utah and Northern Arizona, it was the welcome they received from the local community of Kanab that finally decided on the location. The locals were looking for something new and the G2G team inspired them to embrace trail running and hiking. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Grand to Grand Ultra 2012 started with 60 competitors, representing 15 countries, and it wasn't long before the field separated into three broad groups.

In the first group were the elite runners – athletes who would run almost the whole course, and some of whom were winners and veterans

of other self-supported multi-day stage races. Salvador Calvo Redondo, from Spain, fell into this category as did Stefano Gregoretti of Italy, and Sharon Gayter and Caroline Richards, both of the UK.

In the second group were veterans of other multi-day stage races who adopted a mix of running and hiking and whose objective was to successfully complete all of the stages within the allotted cutoff times.

The third group comprised the “newbies” – a mixed group of runners and hikers who had never before done a multi-day stage race, some of whom had never completed a single ultramarathon. For this latter group, being able to complete the course was going to be challenge enough.

The organizers provided water at checkpoints approximately four to six miles apart. The evening campsites were roving and would magically appear at the end of each stage at a new location usually some 25 miles from the previous campsite. Competitors were provided with quite luxurious 10-man tents and medics were available at each checkpoint and at the medical



Mesas form an impressive backdrop



The race even featured a tunnel traverse

tent every evening. The first campsite was located near the north rim of the Grand Canyon and provided many of the competitors with their first-ever awe-inspiring view of one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World.

The final stage was a nine-mile “celebratory” run which brought the runners up to the finish line on the summit of the Pink Cliffs at 9,300 feet

elevation, with views overlooking Bryce Canyon and the whole course that had been run.

Salvador completed the event in a cumulative time of 34 hours and 10 minutes, 52 minutes ahead of second-place Stefano Gregoretti. The women's race proved to be very tight throughout the seven days. Caroline was leading after the first two stages but Sharon moved ahead af-

ter stage three and despite Caroline eating into her lead all the way to the end, Sharon managed to hold on to win in a cumulative time of 42 hours and 32 minutes.

The final competitor completed the course in 79 hours and 15 minutes.

The oldest finisher was 69 years old and the youngest was 26 years old. ■



Red rock rambling



A giant rock duck points the way

GRAND TO GRAND | KANAB, UTAH | SEPTEMBER 22 | ▲ 4,4

| 167 MILES IN 6 STAGES | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Salvador Calvo Redondo, ESP 34:10:06 | 13. Christina Dotson, 31, CA 46:08:27 | 26. Lynne Hewett, AUS 58:09:17 | 39. Vincent Antunez, 51, AZ 71:31:40 | | |
| 2. Stefano Gregoretti, ITA 35:02:06 | 14. Angela Pierotti, 34, AB 46:51:03 | 27. Sergio Radovic, SRB 58:10:30 | 40. Pavee McMahon, 71:53:35 | | |
| 3. Davide Ugolini, ITA 36:57:21 | 15. Stephanie Case, 29, NY 46:51:24 | 28. Peter Clarke, GBR 59:47:13 | 41. Gyeong Su Kim, KOR 71:54:06 | | |
| 4. Jo Petersen, NZL 41:59:33 | 16. Stuart Blieschke, AUS 46:51:24 | 29. Karen Wei, HKG 59:48:34 | 42. Kim Rich 72:41:20 | | |
| 5. Sharon Gayter, GBR 42:32:00 | 17. Laurie Colon, 34, OH 49:27:10 | 30. St. John Flaherty, HKG 59:48:34 | 43. Andrew Bydlon 73:40:35 | | |
| 6. Caroline Richards, GBR 42:52:02 | 18. Dan Owings, 41, IL 50:56:44 | 31. Bob Becker, 66, FL 60:18:25 | 44. Russel Lowe, ZAF 74:14:36 | | |
| 7. Sarah Lavender Smith, 43, CA43:05:01 | 19. Miranda Jamieson, 32, FL 51:28:35 | 32. Catherine Berry, GBR 61:56:44 | 45. Hun Ghi Woo, KOR 74:16:43 | | |
| 8. John Zahab, 43, ON 43:24:19 | 20. Matt Nelson, 47, FL 51:53:32 | 33. Marilena Wilkinson, VEN 61:56:44 | 46. Kisuk Song, KOR 77:26:02 | | |
| 9. Brian Henderson, 39, ON 43:42:08 | 21. Jerry Busbee, 40, FL 52:15:12 | 34. Patty Noonoy, 55, NV 64:45:34 | 47. Kyung Tae Song, KOR 77:26:02 | | |
| 10. Heather Mastroianni, 41, CA 43:44:35 | 22. Patrick Singh, 53, ON 54:23:03 | 35. Mihwa Kim, KOR 64:53:39 | 48. Jungkeun Park, KOR 79:15:40 | | |
| 11. Jared Knapp, 42, FL 44:21:35 | 23. Mandu Miller, 50, FL 54:32:31 | 36. Melanie Papagestas, 39, FL 66:00:28 | | | |
| 12. Jay Hairsine, GBR 45:53:19 | 24. Mary Betts, IRL 56:20:22 | 37. Astrid Valks, NLD 70:05:22 | | | |
| | 25. Dave Didonna 57:22:39 | 38. Moo Woong Lee, KOR 70:51:06 | | | |



Breakfast time in camp



Circling the wagons on a cool blue night

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