

## Rob Rose Column - 8/23/07

The marathon is sometimes described as the limit of human endeavor. The proverbial 'wall' at twenty miles is where it all comes apart. It's the point where the body shuts down and the spirit takes over. Well, that's what they say. But there are those out there that regard the marathon as only a gateway to the true outer realm of mortal endurance.

Last month, a neophyte to the world of triple digit ultra racing ventured to the Northern Kingdom and became the latest member of that select subculture. On July 21 and 22, Ron Farkash completed the Vermont 100 Mile Endurance Race in 22 hours, 53 minutes and 7 seconds, placing 46th out of 141 finishers. "I love running and being out in the woods," the Plainville resident said in an understatement of his mammoth accomplishment. "This was a perfect way of combining the two."

One hundred miles should be worth a myriad of harrowing stories about overcoming the adversities of this grueling event. Considering that the race was contested on a figure eight course, consisting of dirt roads, trails and hills in the desolate woods of Vermont, Farkash should have had at least one encounter with a wild animal. Or an amusing tale of hallucinations brought on by sleep deprivation. Or a 'wrong turn/lost his way' moment. Or the de rigeur injury that hampered his every step from mile fifty to the finish. Unfortunately for you, eager readers, Farkash had none of those to relate about his ultra experience. Oh, wait! There was this 'crisis' that occurred late in the race. "Had a blister pop around mile seventy," he said matter of factly. "Felt like someone was sticking a knife in my toe every step. After about five minutes the toe went numb and it didn't bother me the rest of the race."

For someone who had never gone past fifty miles, Farkash probably had as fine a first time experience at triple digits as anyone could expect and the results confirmed it. There was never a point where, he needed to reevaluate his commitment to continue. "I felt my training had gone well and that I was physically prepared," he said. "Never once during the race did I consider dropping out. I can honestly say that I enjoyed the whole experience. My nutrition and hydration were spot on and I had a solid stomach, good energy and clear head throughout the day. There were some tough stretches late in the race when the legs were trashed but as long as the terrain was relatively flat, I could still run pretty well."

The ultra urge only came recently to Farkash, who moved to Plainville with his family from Cincinnati in 2005. Watching the Lake Placid Ironman seven years ago piqued his interest in endurance events and that got him back to running after a hiatus. "Got the ultra bug in 2005 after starting to really

enjoy the longer distances and realizing that while I wasn't fast, I could run at a moderate pace for a long time." He has run several shorter distance ultras including the Stone Cat 50 Miler in Connecticut.

To prepare for the race, Farkash had to employ some unusual tactics to replicate the terrain, duration and time of day of the event. "Training was pretty consistent at around 70 miles a week," the 38 year old said. "Twice a month I did long runs of six to eight hours over hilly trails. Had a few night runs to get used to running at night and a few back to backs (of twenty to twenty five miles) to simulate tired legs. I had the benefit of training with many previous Vermont finishers so I had a gauge of my fitness relative to them."

Although he was confident, Farkash was still treading into the unknown. "I felt ready but I had no idea what awaited me," he said. "I had a few nervous nights trying to make the mental leap from seven to eight hour training runs to 22 to 24 hours in Vermont."

On race day, Farkash "let the terrain dictate the pace. I wanted to keep a nice even effort level throughout the day and to start out easy enough to still feel fresh at the halfway point. Due to the hilly terrain, this typically meant power walking the hills and cruising the flats and downhills." Outside of the blisters, black toenails and pulverized quads, he thrived rather than merely survived.

His support crew consisted of his wife Lauren and father-in-law. Kudos also have to be extended to Lauren, who ran twenty three of the last thirty miles with her husband.

At the finish, his mood was one of subdued exuberance. "I was really too tired to get emotional," he said. "Looking back on it, it met or exceeded my expectations in every way. The feeling is one of deep achievement and confidence."

Farkash now joins a very select group of local runners, Attleboro's Kim Forget, Foxboro's John Horvath and Mansfield's Kham Haleudeth, who have completed the Vermont 100. Within two weeks, he had completely recovered from the ordeal and is gearing up for more. "I'm already planning my race schedule for next year and it will include at least two 100 milers," he said. "I'm totally hooked on the experience and plan on doing many more in the future." Looks like this guy's passed through the gateway and is not coming back.

Footnotes - The Mystic Marathon is dead; the late October race has now been replaced by the Niantic Bay Half Marathon on Sept. 30, in East Lyme ... the BAA Half Marathon has closed registration for the Oct. 7 race, hitting its 4,500 runner limit

after only three weeks of open registration.....