

Wilson Creek Frozen 50km

It's 7 AM and the full December moon is finishing its full eclipse. Along with thirty-five or so other runners, I stare at the pool of light that my headlamp illuminates ahead of me. We start to run, or should I say shuffle along the desert trails below Wilson Peak. Today is an "unofficial" training run of just over 20 miles that follows next month's course for the Frozen 50k.

I found myself on this run because I had read about a new running series that was based on long distance trail runs. Trail running has taken the nation by storm, and Idaho is no different. The Idaho Trail Ultra Series is a series of outdoor trail runs around the state that highlights not only different styles and terrains, but also varying locales; desert, arid high country, forest, and foothills that make up Idaho. The brain child of a group of existing race directors and ultra runners; Emily Berriochoa, Davina Jackson, Ben Blessing, and Jenny Stinson; the group felt that Idaho offered a unique opportunity for running long distances. Ben is Race Director for the Wild Idaho Endurance Runs out of McCall, Jenny with her Foothills Frenzy in the Boise area, and now Emily and Davina, through their Pickled Feet Ultra Running have added a mid-winter race, and another in June in the Silver City area. The group has been involved with Ultra races around the west, including big name events like the Badwater 135, and the Bear 100. It all adds up to a series designed for local and recreational runners who now have a chance to stretch their running horizons.

Ultra running or ultra marathons are defined as any distance greater than the traditional 26.2 mile length. Ultra distances are typically 50km, 100km, 50 miles, or even 100 miles! All of these races are run on or over varying terrains and elevations. Distances of this length staggers the mindset of many traditional 10k runners. Many of these extreme races offer shorter distances for the more recreational runners. The Wilson Creek Frozen 50 will also offer distances of 20 miles, and of 10 miles. All of the other races within the series also offer alternate distances.

The large storm system that hit the Boise area over the week played havoc with the Pickled Feet race course. Snow, rain, and the famous Owyhee gumbo mud are in full force as the 7 AM starting gun goes off for the longer 50k and 20 mile racers. My better judgment prevailed as I emailed Emily earlier in the week and changed my race status to the shorter, and much lower in elevation 10.8 mile short loop. The long loop that makes up the heart of the 50k and 20 mile course climbs up to the summit of Wilson Peak via almost 4500 feet of elevation gain. What goes up must come down, and after my training run I knew that the technical and demanding descent would be one incredible challenge. Over 200 crazy and determined ultra runners signed up for the Frozen 50, with about half running the shorter races.

The bang of a shotgun signals the start of my race, and along with about 99 new friends, we all shuffled along the road and off onto a series of single track trails that will lead us in, up, down, and around the Wilson Creek trail system, culminating with the beautiful red canyon walls and Chinese built aqueduct that travels above the raging Reynolds Creek. Within the next 1 ½ to 12 hours, all of the racers will take those final steps through the finish line where an electronic chip attached to a running shoe will declare the elapsed time.

I wandered around after finishing, talking to other racers, discussing times, trails, and memories. The spectacular Reynolds Creek canyon was a common theme. More than once I heard runners telling me that this was their first race of this kind; that they were "first timers". The word "suckered" by friends cropped up often along with smiles and laughter. Bags of swag were provided by local running sponsors, and tents of food prepared by local eateries propped up our depleted energy levels. Unique awards for

top finishers sat waiting to be handed out. As I sipped on a cup of piping hot chicken soup, the winner of the 50k race crossed the line. From Montana, his time was 5 hours and a few minutes. I better keep training.

For more info on the Idaho Trail Ultra Series and the upcoming races visit www.idahotrailultraseries.com.

<http://pickledfeetultras.com/> Pickled Feet Ultra Running

<http://www.runwildidaho.com/> Wild Idaho Endurance Runs

<http://imtuf100.com/> Idaho Mountain Trail Ultra Festival

<http://www.racingpulse.com/demo/> The Pulse Running and Fitness Shop; Foothills Frenzy

..... my time for the 10.8 mile was 2:01:22, and I finished 15th overall and 1st in my 50-59 age group 😊