

# Barkley 2012: A Record Year

Race Report by Frozen Ed Furtaw

In my opinion, the 2012 Barkley Marathons was one of the most incredible and memorable Barkley races ever, for the following reasons:

- A new 100-mile course record was set on probably the toughest course ever. Congratulations, Brett!
- We had the first two-time 100-mile finisher ever. Congratulations, Brett!
- We had three 100-mile finishers for the first time ever. Congratulations, Brett, Jared, and John!
- We had eight Fun Run Finishers - the fifth-most ever of 26 Barkleys. Congratulations Brett, Jared, John, Alan, Nick, Bev, Travis, and Rob!
- We had the first female Fun Run finisher since 2001. Congratulations, Bev!

All of these great accomplishments occurred on a tough course with a rugged new off-trail section, and on one of the hottest Barkley weekends ever. Talking to several runners in camp before the race, I could tell that many of the top runners were taking the race very seriously this year. So there was reason to expect a year of good results, but I also expected that the heat would be a negative factor. I think the heat was indeed a problem for many if not all runners (including me), but obviously many of the top runners handled it very well. I was surprised that the field did as well as it did in that heat.

It was really great having Tim and Annika and their video crew there recording all this wonderful accomplishment, fun, and failure. If there was ever a good year to make a documentary video of Barkley, this was it. I can't wait to see the video! The unusual level of success of the runners may make it look like the race is getting easier. However, in my opinion, the course is actually getting more difficult. I think that the wonderful story of this year is that the runners are getting better, much better than in the old days. Consider that a generation ago, some of the best ultrarunners in the country could do only three loops before quitting and crying in pain in the shower. I think there is a profound story here, that the evolution of the course has forced today's top Barkley runners to become significantly better than the best runners of ten or more years ago. I think this is a wonderful evolutionary process that we are witnessing and creating.

My personal result in some ways reflects that of the overall field — a relative success. I started the race running with my new friend, Michiel Panhuysen from the Netherlands. Mig, as he likes to be called, was at Frozen Head last year to observe the Barkley and take notes for an article that he subsequently wrote for a Dutch magazine. I guess he liked what he saw, because this year he entered Barkley. He and his wife, Nicole, flew from Holland to San Francisco in March this year, rented a car, and travelled across the U.S. to Frozen Head for the Barkley. They visited Gail and me in Colorado while driving across the country. Mig decided to run with me on the first loop to learn the course.

We had no trouble finding the first book at its new location on the Gambit/Checkmate Hill. We moved fairly quickly going down Checkmate, including a short slide down a narrow slot in the cliffs that I called the Flume of Doom. At this point, we were in a group of five or six runners. I think most of them were staying with me because they thought I knew the course. I thought so too. However, we were soon disillusioned of that belief when we got down to Phillips Creek. The Park Boundary corner and its cairn were nowhere to be seen. I had a sudden humility attack, while someone pulled out their map and we concluded that we were too far downstream on Phillips Creek. We bushwhacked upstream through some gnarly terrain that I had never seen before. After several minutes, we found the cairn with book 2,

just as another group of runners arrived. We took our pages. I checked my watch and wrote the time on my Pocket Guide. It was 1hr:20min race time, exactly the time to get to this book that I had written on my pre-race plan. However, the off-course meander had probably cost us at least five minutes of wasted time as well as extra physical and psychological energy. The 1:20 time was about 11 minutes longer than my average time to the Phillips Creek book over the past several years. So the new book 1 on Checkmate Hill accomplished its goal — it made the loop tougher and slower.

As we headed up Jury Ridge, we were passed by Nick Hollon. He had had problems finding one of the early books, but was now hiking at a much faster pace than the group I was in. Within a few minutes he was out of sight ahead of us. Things went well for Mig and me until we got just past SOB Ditch. Then, while climbing the steep spoils pile up to the Coal Ponds, I started having severe leg cramps. The relative heat (compared to the temperatures I had been training in for the past three months) was already taking a toll on me. I had not been drinking enough in those first two or three hours, and was already getting dehydrated. Over the next few hours and throughout the heat of the day, I had to stop frequently to massage my leg muscles because of the cramps. Mig kept reminding me to "take short steps" to help prevent cramps. I think this was excellent advice. He observed that I tend to take long strides, especially while hiking uphill. The long strides were triggering muscle seizures, and he was correct that I could help prevent the cramps by taking shorter strides. But having to stop and slow down frequently because of those cramps probably cost us about a half-hour of time during the first loop.

We navigated the remainder of loop 1 flawlessly. Mig finally ran ahead of me as we approached the end of the loop. I finished loop 1 in the dark in 12:15. This was the slowest first loop I had ever done, being four minutes slower than my first loop in 2011, when we started at 1:07 AM and much of the first loop was done in the dark. Mig and I methodically prepared for the second loop. I ate, drank, reloaded my pack, and changed my wet outer pair of toe-socks, but not the inner pair of the two pairs that I was wearing. This may have been a mistake, and I will return to this issue later. I also gave myself a leg massage with some sore-muscle balm, which felt really good. I was feeling refreshed and energized when I left on loop 2, but I had spent 49 minutes in camp between loops — about 20 minutes longer than I had hoped.

Mig had started loop 2 ahead of me, but I caught up to him and Julian Jamison at the top of the Bird Mountain Trail. We found book 1 easily, and saw another group of about four runners heading away from the book as we were approaching it. Then I made another navigational gaffe, missing the place to go down Checkmate Hill where we had gone down on loop 1. After spending several minutes finding the correct location, we worked our way slowly down the Flume of Doom and the rest of Checkmate Hill. This time, we went directly to the cairn with book 2, and arrived just as the other group of four runners also arrived there. This took me 1:56 from the start of loop 2 — nearly 30 minutes longer than my average loop-2 times to Phillips Creek in recent years. So again, the new part of the course added significant time to the loop, especially in the dark. Laz and Raw Dog (and Hiram) can again feel good about shortening the course while making it more difficult!

Most or all of the group of four decided to quit there and take the Bird Mountain Trail back to camp. However, Mig, Julian, and I were determined to continue. We slowly made our way along the North Boundary Trail to book 3 at the Garden Spot. We took one rest break on the way, and then spent several more minutes resting and reloading water at the water-drop location just after the Garden Spot. Julian was having stomach problems, but his goal was to go to at least one more book, in order to surpass his

previous Barkley distance, so he continued with Mig and me. However, we had a little misadventure when we had trouble finding the Stallion Mountain/Yellow Indian book 4 in the dark. We finally stumbled onto it after several wasted minutes. Julian then headed back toward Quitters Road to camp, while Mig and I went onward. "Misadventure" then became the operative word for our trek down Stallion Mountain in the dark. After passing the pond on the right below Yellow Indian, we missed the old coal road to the fire-ring junction, and spent maybe ten wasted minutes getting back on course. We then did alright until we got to the stone ruins near the old Patterson Cemetery. But after that, we apparently wandered too far to the right, and missed the correct valley to the New River. After a lot of bushwhacking, we finally got down to the River, but we were in a place I had never been before. The overhead powerline seemed to be on the wrong side of the River. Mig and I had different opinions about which way to go to get back on course. Unfortunately, we went to the right, the way I thought we should go. After a few minutes, we realized that it was wrong, and turned around and went the way Mig had thought was correct, which was in fact correct. After a few more minutes, we were back on course, and crossed the River on the same log that we had used on loop 1. We then worked our way up to Highway 116. In the dark, we could not see the small waterfall across the Highway, but we knew we couldn't be far from it. In a repeat of the previous scenario, I thought we should go right on the Highway to find the waterfall, so we headed that way. But after a couple of minutes, I realized that we were going the wrong way, so we again turned around and soon found the waterfall.

All these minor navigational screw-ups probably cost us close to an hour on loop 2. I was disappointed with myself, because I had thought that I knew the course better than that. But as always, navigating Stallion Mountain in the dark proved difficult for me. By the time Mig and I were crawling slowly up Testicle Spectacle, daylight was dawning. It was beautiful to see the mountains all around us from the top of Testicle. There was a fog-cloud hanging in the valley over the New River. Now that it was daylight, we had no more navigational problems. We made our way up Rat Jaw to the top of Frozen Head. On the way up, we saw Brett and Jared on their third loop, a few seconds apart, moving fast down Rat Jaw — an impressive and inspirational sight.

At the top, Mig decided to quit and take a short-cut back to camp. He still seemed to be physically and mentally strong enough to continue, but he had had enough. I think maybe he was sandbagging a little, so that if he runs Barkley again, he won't have such a tough goal to surpass his virgin attempt! I was determined to finish two loops, even though I knew that I was going to be over the two-loop time limit, so Mig and I parted company. I spent several minutes talking to some people who were camping at the top of Frozen Head. They were very interested in the race and, of course, I was more than willing to take a break and tell them all about it. I also climbed the lookout tower to enjoy the view, and then headed down Rat Jaw. As I slowly completed loop two, it was really neat to see all the runners on loop 3, going in the opposite direction relative to me. I was impressed by all of them. My time after leaving the lookout tower to the finish on loop 2 was about 5:10, compared to about 4:45 on loop 1. So even though I felt slow on loop 2, I did that last section within 10% of my loop-1 time. This seemed like a relatively good sign. Even though I was slowing down, it was not a radical crash. My energy level was good all the way to the finish. I had consumed about 6,000 Calories of food and drink during the run.

I finished two loops in 29:11. This was well over the 26:40 time limit to be allowed to continue, but it was the furthest I have gone since 1992, so I was very happy. When offered the "EASY" button, I declined, saying: "That was fun, but it was not easy." It was my best Barkley run in my past 12 attempts. It was the first time in 16 starts that laz made me quit because of a time limit. In all my

previous runs, I took the easy way out and quit voluntarily before the time limit. I attribute my ability to go further this year to better training, stronger determination, and better prevention of foot blisters and muscle fatigue — the problems that have made me quit in prior years. This year, I did eventually develop a blister on the sole of one of my feet, but it was not as bad as in past years. By the end of loop 2, I had also developed the puckered, "macerated" skin on the soles of my feet that many runners had. This was due to my feet being wet for so long. In retrospect, I think I should have completely dried my feet and changed both pairs of wet socks after loop 1.

Now I have to figure out how to do those first two loops about three hours faster so that next time I can be allowed to go even further, and have even more fun. I think I can do it. I lost about an hour due to poor navigation. I spent at least half an hour more than necessary stopped to rest, either interloopal or on the course during loop 2. I probably lost half an hour because of the cramps. If I can prevent those time losses, I need to get only a few percent faster at running the first two loops, and I will be able to make the time limit to start the third loop. I will train even better. If the weather were a few degrees cooler, that could also help make the difference. My "lifetime goal" is still to finish three loops, becoming the oldest runner to ever do so. So next year, I will again beg to be allowed to run the Barkley, in hopes that I will continue to do better. As Annelise sang: "I am not done with this race that eats its young."

I thank laz, Raw Dog, and all the other people and runners who worked to make this event, in my opinion and in the words of Andrew Thompson, the greatest race among men and mountains.

On a final note, since this is the year of the Barkley Haiku, I wrote a couple that summarize my Barkley 2012 experience.

Strive to do your best  
the course keeps getting tougher  
runners tougher still

Train three months in cold  
Race in heat on brier'd hills  
Taps played in your face

Frozen Ed



This is me, just after finishing loop 2. Literally a few seconds after I finished, it started raining. Gail handed me the umbrella and took this picture.