

## **Ken Farley's Angeles Crest 100 run in September 2005**

- The race started in a parking lot in Wrightwood. Other than a couple of orange sodium vapor lamps it was pitch dark. About a hundred people just milling around trying to keep warm. Definitely a strange looking assortment of runners - not the usual pack of tough looking people at the start of a road marathon. I was pretty nervous; most of the others had clearly done this before. I kept thinking of the 40% of us that wouldn't make it to Johnson Rock and how much misery it might take to make me give up. Finally it was time to start - 5 AM. No gun, no whistle, no national anthem. Just a very low key "10 seconds", and then, "Go". And off we went. Through the darkened streets of Wrightwood, in dead silence. Not like the cheering at the start of a marathon. A gentle jog on paved streets, and then a turn on to single track trail, flashlights on, and the first ascent, almost 2000 feet up Blue Ridge. Fast-walking. I hooked up with a group of guys and learned that between them they had attempted the race 11 times and succeeded just 4 times. Oh. As we switch-backed up the mountain I was struck by the strange torch-light procession already stretched out for a mile or so down the trail.

-I crested Blue Ridge and came out of the deep forest into a clearing at about 6 AM, and enjoyed the simultaneous setting of the huge blood red full moon in the west and a brilliant orange sunrise in the east. What a perfect moment to be alive! Off with the gloves. Let the running begin! The next few miles were easy - rolling hills on the ridge top through pines and chaparral.

-At mile 13, a steep drop to the Vincent Gap aid station. Scrounging through my orange-painted trash bag for some calories. I'm a bit ahead of my 24 hr pace, but feeling good. No other runners in sight. Then the dreaded 2,800 foot ascent of Mount Baden Powell (9300'). It was a long slow climb but I was moving well. I met up with someone I knew from a previous run, passed him. As it turned out he and I passed each other repeatedly until about mile 65. He finished an hour before me but had vomited for the last 2 hours of his run and was still in the medical tent during the awards ceremony. Near the summit there was a chill wind, which was unpleasant with a sweat-damp shirt. And I started to feel unexpected nausea, I think from the altitude. I had a well-conceived plan to consume a liter of water and 250 calories every hour, but I dropped off the plan because my stomach was bad. The trail stays between 8,000' and 9,000' on the spine of a spectacular narrow ridge, desert on one side, shocking deep canyons on the other. Here I made a not so good decision, and that was to pick up the pace a bit to try to get down to lower elevation quickly - I wanted warmth and more oxygen. That seemed to help the nausea, but exacted a heavy price on my quads.

- At 10:20 I arrived at Islip Saddle (6500', mile 25), to the cheers of my wife Kristen, my two kids, Scott and Ryan, and my running buddy and soon-to-be-pacer, Don. One quarter of the way! That was a big boost but I already knew there would be trouble ahead - my quads were beginning to ache and burn. And at the med check I was already down 4 lbs; the staff would suggest I not continue if I lost more than 5.5 lbs. So much for my hydration plan!

- Over Mt Williamson, from the top of which I could barely make out the antenna-capped summit of Mt Wilson, just beyond which is the finish. Holy cow that is a long way away! Past Eagle's Roost aid station where I somehow got off the course running on the highway instead of the parallel trail and got yelled at, then down through the hot and still Cooper Canyon section, beautiful trees and babbling brook but HOT. At Cooper creek crossing in deep woods I started to eat a cliff bar and realized it had an off taste and texture and I looked at it and discovered it was filled with flour bug larvae. Yuck. Just what I needed. Then there was a long arcing section of dirt road and then a steep climb back up to Cloudburst Summit aid station (mi 37). Still spot-on 24 hour pace. But every step is starting to hurt, especially downhill on my quads. Don and Kristen and the kids urge me to sit at the aid station, and get some calories in. Maybe I don't look so good. So I scrapped the "Beware the Chair" advice. And I ate a cookie and a handful of gummy bears and a few salt tablets. (Seemed like a lot at the time, but not enough). And 4 minutes later I'm off again. But the wheels are starting to come off the train. Unknown to me about 15 minutes before I arrived, the previous runner through the aid station had been in pretty desperate shape, vomiting profusely. Scott asked Kristen if she thought I'd be puking too. "Let's hope not!" The race is starting to fall apart for some people. By this time runners were spread out from each other by many minutes, so I was by myself most of the time.

-On a really smooth and almost level dirt road on which I should be making 9 minute miles the pain in my quads worsens, and then the cramping starts. First my quads, then other muscles that I cannot identify. The jarring caused by running twangs the muscles and makes them cramp. I struggle on with a run-walk-run, maybe 12 minute miles. This is not good for mile 41! Fear sets in. This is what almost stopped my first 50 mile run. I struggled into 3-Points aid station (mi 42). And sat down on the ground, announced to the family I was cramping. The kids of course had no idea what that meant, and they still rooted me on with a smile, but I saw the doubt in Don and Kristen's eyes. Don immediately grabbed a tub of Vaseline and gave me a three minute quad massage, which seemed to help. As I left the aid station I looked at Kristen, and heard myself whisper "no way". And meant it. But off I went anyway.

-I had been dreading the next stretch, a run out into the desert to a nasty place called Sulfur Springs. I ran it last month and it was miserable. Hot and dusty and just plain lonely. Interminable. Not a place to be in bad shape. And 5 minutes out of the aid station I started to feel woozy and decided I had better come up with some new plan or it would be all over before I made Chilao at 52. And I thought about telling people I dropped before mile 50 and I hated the thought. So I started to walk. And I forced myself to drink. First a sip; it doesn't want to go down but I force it. A few minutes later, another sip. And then something happens and I'm thirsty again, and the water is going in fast and then I suck on a hard candy for some calories and pretty soon I'm eating a cliff bar (after bug inspection). Then I notice that my toe is blistering from the strange shuffling stride I've developed to protect my quads and I decide to stop and put some tape on it. So I sit down on a rock, pull the tape from my bag, and try to put it on my toe. But every time I reach for my toe I can't quite make it before my quads cramp! I wriggled this way and that until I was literally squirming in the dirt, but I just couldn't quite reach the toe before

the cramps kicked in. I would back off, and they'd stop, reach forward, and they'd restart. And then in a sudden flash I saw the humor in this situation and just started to laugh. The heck with it. Put the shoe back on. Strangely, even though I was barely moving for nearly an hour not a soul passed me. 15 minutes later I was walking the paved road up Mt Hillyer and was struck by the first waves of that food and water, and it felt absolutely great and I had overcome the first real low point and I literally shouted "I am back!". And now I look back on Sulfur Springs as a wonderful stretch of course, where I was smart and dug deep and found something inside when I thought the end was in sight. Just past the Mt. Hillyer aid station I passed one of the Indians, looking truly horrid, sitting sullenly in the dirt. I asked if he was ok, but he just waved me on.

-As I ran through the towering boulders and descended into Chilao I was passed by another runner for the first time in hours, "Hey Bro, how ya doing?", "Ok", "Hmm, quads hurting?" (my ginger steps on the downhill were a giveaway), "Yup", "Ever done this race before?", "Nope", "Well bro, you have no idea what pain is yet to come, this race will have you in tears before the end.". Hmmm. Thanks a lot, bro. Fortunately 2 minutes later I spotted Don L. at the base of a hill and then I was at Chilao with my cheering squad. The symbolic half way point. By this time it was 5 PM. My weight had climbed 3 lbs! I'm pretty sure that's why the cramps left me at this point. I changed all my clothes (just took off what I was wearing in plain sight; just do what you gotta do). New shoes and socks. And that silly blister on my toe? Wasn't even there! Got organized and ate. I felt bad because I was clearly off pace, but made an easy transition into survival mode: just finish. And then I called "96, out" and set off into the unknown mental terrain beyond 50 miles. Fortunately I was now with my pacer Don C. A huge mental boost – just follow along – don't need to lead anymore. Let someone else drive.

- 12 miles later after a long descent into Upper Tujung Creek, and then a comparably long ascent on which we passed a threesome (last people we would pass) we arrived at Shortcut Saddle aid station – last crossing of the Angeles Crest Highway. Kristen and the kids had gone home by then. It was deep twilight and lonely even with the aid station crowd. My shirt was sodden with sweat and again there was a chill wind blowing. I really wanted to sit and eat a little but I started to get cold and then I started to shiver until it was almost uncontrollable and I wondered if this was the end. To be put out not by pain or weariness but just plain being cold. I felt the end coming fast. Maybe it wasn't smart but I just got up, called "96 out" and started off into the least accessible part of the course, the West Fork crossing and down to Chantry Flats. And I thought this would be a bad place to be shivering cold and Newcombs aid station is a long way away! But didn't I put a long sleeve shirt in my Newcombs drop bag? So down down down we went on a most gawd-awful rutted and steep road. I couldn't really run anymore, to minimize the pain I was reduced to a kind of awkward jog that involved a lot of arm-swinging. Fortunately I warmed up quickly and was even lucid enough to see how beautiful the deep canyon was in the moonlight. Row on row of ridges, all dark except for a few itty-bitty pinpricks of light, runners on the trail ahead or behind. But after that I started into my second mental low. I think Don noticed and he proceeded to tell me the plot lines of several recent novels he had read. Start to finish. All I could do was occasionally say "uh-huh". I longed to lie down and sleep. We were moving pretty slowly and got passed by the

threesome and I wondered whether Don would suggest I bail out at Chantry Flats. I wasn't miserable at all. It hurt, but I still wanted to keep going. And amazingly I can't say I was "tired". Ever. But here I was sleepy.

-We finally got to Newcombs aid station. On the top of a ridge it took us an hour to ascend, totally isolated on a dirt road in the wilderness and it was all lit up and just about the most gorgeous thing I ever saw. As I sat down in the light I was hit with the first wave of euphoria. When the aid station volunteer set a portable heater up next to me I was struck with an overwhelming gratitude. And then he brought me a cup of chicken soup and some pudding (I have NEVER wanted those in a race before but damn they were good) and the world suddenly seemed entirely perfect and I had an almost uncontrollable urge to tell him I loved him! This was the turning point of my race. AND there was a dry shirt in my drop bag. It just doesn't get any better than this!

-On this next stretch I decided I had better start moving or I might have to face the inevitable question of whether to drop out at Chantry. Maybe it was irrational but I was afraid that Don was thinking I was going too slow to finish. But somehow the world started to come back into focus, and I knew I would make it. I might go slow, but I would make it to Johnson's Rock, damn it. I never doubted finishing again.

-The next 20 miles are just a collage of images. Meeting Kristen on a very dark stretch of trail near the river below Chantry, wondering in a totally addle-brained sort of way what she was doing way down there, then struggling to keep up with her and Don climbing the paved road up to the aid station. Wait up! Where the hell is that aid station??? Then more chicken soup at Chantry just after midnight, asking for pudding without success and trying to slap Vaseline on some private spots in the glare of portable lamps. Then onward and upward, following a path of eerie green glowsticks through the dense forest up Mt Wilson. Up and up through forests I have never seen in daylight. Don ahead of me, sometimes far ahead as I stopped for a quick rest. Never nagging me. Put my head down and follow. Just have to follow, no thinking required or desired. I have no recollection of how long that climb took. And then we hit the Mt Wilson Toll road!!! Home turf at last. Utter relief. Autopilot from here. Sharp left turn and start of the descent to Idlehour. Switch gears from walking climb to stumbling downhill run. Quads hurt – fire radiating outward from my legs with every footstrike. But then the sudden panorama of the lights of the entire LA Basin at about mile 80, what a sight! The warm glow of Idlehour aid station seen from several switchbacks above it. The endless and totally surreal climb out of Idlehour Canyon in darkness, and finally: Sam Merrill saddle, at mile 90.

-Just coming on to dawn. Sitting in the Sam Merrill aid station, then something clicking in my head and I'm saying, let's finish this thing, now. NOW. Don taken by surprise that we were leaving so soon. Down past the ruins on Echo Mtn in dawn twilight, and down Sunset Ridge to Millard. Got passed a couple more times – wanted to go faster but I had only one speed. Not fast enough to keep up with the other runners, but I was running! Not far now! Absolutely no doubt anymore – gonna make it. We rolled straight through the Millard Aid station and up the Brown Mtn fire road in warm sunshine. Past the big cactus and down onto the El Prieto dirt track. Two mountain bikers coming up playing a game

of chicken with me, but I wasn't about to yield the trail, not today, not at mile 98! Screw you, out of my way!

-At mile 99 I hit the Arroyo bottom, and there were Scott and Kristen, and together the four of us ran in past the JPL parking lots and for the last half mile I bet I was doing seven minute miles and all I could think was that I was going to make it and that as soon as I crossed the line I could lay down and I warned Kristen that I was likely to start crying at the finish. And finally there was that big ugly rock and the finish banner! Down onto the grassy field, raising my hands to touch the banner as I went beneath it. 27:20 and 20th place. And at the finish were Ry and some friends from the Flyers and from work and they were all slapping me on the back. I forced myself not to cry. I made it. I ran 100 miles! ***100 miles.***