

120 degrees, and radiant temperature as hot as 180 degrees on the road surface attempting to cook your shoes and feet and legs, the heat in that part of the Mojave Desert is just the beginning.

The "Badwater 135" Ultramarathon has been called the toughest footrace in the world by National Geographic magazine. Each year in mid-July in Death Valley, CA, 90 runners begin an epic journey from the lowest point in the Western Hemisphere—282 feet below sea level at a spot on the map called "Badwater"—to the end of the road on Mount Whitney, at 8,360 feet above sea level. Between them are two additional summits of more than 5,000 feet. Reaching the first of these, Towne Pass, from the settlement of Stovepipe Wells located at 5 feet above sea level, runners are slowed by a very strong, very **hot headwind that is always present as the runner** moves up that mountain road for 16 miles to the summit. Hold a blow-dryer to your face for a few hours and you'll get the idea! Mike Morton called the climb to Towne Pass the toughest part of the entire race.

I competed at Badwater in 2008. It was certainly a highlight of my running career. As I have done four other times, this year I volunteered as a crew member and pacer for competitor, Paul Grimm. This was Paul's second Badwater. In 2010, he finished the race but not in a fast enough time to receive a coveted Badwater belt buckle. This time, Paul was determined to finish within the new cut-off time of 48 hours and head home with that hardware in hand. That was his goal, and so it was the focus for the other four crew members and me.

Being around this supporting cast of characters was half the fun! Dale Perry ran the Badwater route solo a year ago. He was also a member of my support crew in 2008 and has crewed for others the past few years. Dale is also a consummate comedian. Between Dale and Ken Grimm, our runner's brother, there was never a lack of one liners and off-color humor, generally in particularly bad taste. Ed Green crewed for me in 2008 as he has at Badwater in other years. Phil Rosenstein has run this race twice and across the entire United States solo, pushing a baby jogger with all his gear. There was never a lack of good adventure stories among this group. But, when it came to supporting our runner, it was all serious business. The crew had to be certain that the runner was hydrating properly, taking enough calories each hour and maintaining electrolyte balance. He needed to keep ice in his neck bandana and under his hat, and be sprayed or wiped-down with cool water on a regular basis. His i-Pods had to be kept charged. Clothing and shoes needed to be occasionally changed. Even monitoring his weight and bathroom breaks was part of our job. We kept him company on the road, running and walking, with encouragement, advice and conversation. In short, we were alert and working full-time, for 6-8 hour shifts. With two of our crew injured and unable to run, the rest of us stepped-up to do the pacing. I accompanied Paul without a break from 1:30am until 8:00am Sunday morning and was glad to be able to do it. All-in, I ran and walked with him over 50 miles. Crewing at Badwater is a very gratifying and satisfying experience, and one I would recommend to any serious runner. It will give you the experience of being part of this great event without directly competing in it. And it will very likely whet your appetite to step-up your game and apply for admission to this race another.

So, the conditions are extreme and the race is long. Sleep deprivation is real. The elevation gain and loss along the way is not a mirage, although you may witness a few of those in the glare of the desert sun. The satisfaction for athletes like Paul Grimm in completing this event and holding that buckle in hand? How about "huge"? And the sense of accomplishment at supporting Paul as crew? Very complete. Be sure to say, "Yes!" if you are ever given the opportunity to participate as a Badwater runner, crew or race volunteer. And don't forget, you'll be adding yet another chapter to the Keys/Florida-Badwater connection.

Bob Becker
Race Director, KEYS100
Ultra Sports, LLC

KWSR's weekly group training run schedule is as follows:

Mondays: 5 am / Green Parrot Bar / 3 miles easy pace (9:30-10:30/miles)
Tuesdays: 5 am / White Street Pier / 5 mile tempo run (mile slow, mile faster, mile slow, etc.)
Wednesdays: 5 am, 6 pm / KW High School Track / Speed workout
Thursdays: 5 am / New Publix Store parking lot / 5 mile run with bridge repeats over the Garrison Bight bridge
Fridays: 5 am / Waffle House parking lot / 3 miles easy pace (9:30-10:30/miles)
Saturdays: 7 am / White Street Pier / 4 mile social run up the beach and back / breakfast afterwards (non-race Saturdays)
Sundays: 7:30 am / White Street Pier / 10+ miles long slow distance run

If you have any questions about the group runs, please e-mail Dedra at: dr.dedraling@gmail.com. The schedule is also always posted on the KWSR website as well. All runners are always welcome to join us any morning.

Check out Pictures and applications online from the www.southernmostrunners.com web site, all applications are in Adobe Acrobat PDF format. Race results from all our events are posted promptly.

Remember all memberships are now good for 1 year from the date you joined, Check on the website to see when you last paid or call me at 305-745-3027

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