

Jorge Pacheco and Keira Henninger win the 23rd Annual Angeles Crest 100

By: Hal Winton and Ken Hamada

The 23rd Annual Angeles Crest 100 rose out of the ashes of the Station Fire. Last September's Station Fire burned 40% of the Angeles National Forest in one of the largest forest fires in Los Angeles County's history. It was followed by record winter rains creating large run off in the burn areas where most of vegetation that would have held the runoff was gone. After the soil dried out and stabilized, the Forest Service began plowing the fire roads and access roads so the volunteers could drive through the burn area to begin clearing the trails.

Gradually, we repaired the most damaged trails: El Prieto, Silver Moccasin, PCT from Three Points and the Idlehour Trail where we had a large washed out ravine, which we rebuilt using steel posts, fence and wire netting. Without the hard work done by 122 AC100 Trail Maintenance Volunteers the race would not have happened.

District Ranger Mike McIntyre agreed to give us our Special Use Permit for this year's race through 15 miles of the Station Fire burn area (still closed to the public) because of the hard work performed by 122 AC100 trail maintenance volunteers. If the AC100 volunteers did not clear the 15 miles of trails through the burn area, the Forest Service would not have given us our Special Use Permit to put on this year's race.

Those not close to the race had a hard time believing that we could pull off this year's race. There were rumors that the race would be cancelled. However patience and hard work paid off in the end. In the closing days before race weekend, the USFS became more optimistic (because AC100 volunteers cleared the 15 mile section) and signed our Special Use Permit two days before race weekend. The temperature dropped dramatically two days prior to race weekend. In fact, we had thundershowers two days before the race dropping the temperature further.

Canceling the race (two times in 2002 and 2009) causes problems for both the runners (who were rolled over from 2009 to this year's race) and the race organization. However, many of the local runners and others intent on doing our run, stayed the course, showing up for the trail work days and race weekend.

Local legend Jorge Pacheco, 2008 Ultrarunner of the Year, continued to put in long training runs in our mountains preparing for this year's race. Jorge ran Badwater 135 in July and placed 6th. We wondered if he would have enough reserves left to run this year's race. He appeared to be in great shape finishing in 19:20:50 winning the Ram Award, 2 hours ahead of 39 year old Brian Polley who won the 30+ Cougar Award. Forty six year old Roperto Romero was 2 minutes behind Brian in 3rd place winning the 35+ Horse Award. Guillermo Medina (who won the race in 2005) and won the San Diego 100 this year came in 4th place, just over 22 hours and received the Eagle Award for completing 10 straight AC100s, all under 23 hours. Forty one year old David LaDuc from Oakland came in next and won the 40+ Rhino Award. Five more men followed David to the Finish Line all under 24 hours to earn the Sterling Silver Buckle.

Keira Henninger, the new Race Director for the Leona Divide 50 Mile Run, ran a very good 24:15:17 in 11th place overall, even after going off the course at Dawson Saddle trail junction.

On target for a fast time she was upset but determined to regain the lead which she did eventually and nearly pulled off a sub 24 hour performance while doing so. Fifty one year old Ken Hughes from Santa Barbara ran a sub 25:47 to earn the Second Sunrise Buckle and win the 45+ 8 Point Buck Award. Forty eight year old Vanessa Jones from Wrightwood earned the Second Sunrise Buckle and won the 30+ Cougar Award.

Forty two year old Donna Utikas from Amherst, Massachusetts won the Bronze Rhino Award. Sixty four year old Jussi Hamalainen (who won the race in 1990 and 1991 and has finished every AC100) won the 50+ Buffalo Award.

Sixty three year old Eric Kajiwara, from Ridgecrest, with a lot of applause from the crowd, crossed the Finish Line, just over 8 minutes ahead of the 33 hour cutoff and won the Elk Award for 10 finishes. Sixty five runners finished the race, very close to the average finish rate of 65%.

The USFS plans to give us our 5 year Special Use Permit again, indicating that they believe that we can handle difficult problems, as we did this year. Hopefully, next year we will not have forest fires or flooding to contend with, allowing us to get back to "routine trail maintenance".

The Checkpoint Leaders, volunteers, Medical Team, HAM Radio volunteers, Finish Line Coordinator and Finish Line Food Service performed very well again this year. Our "Live Updates" of the race, to follow the status of your runner on our web site, set up by Gerry Walsh, was available worldwide and was referred to as excellent.

The ongoing stories of the runners in this year's race are endless. Garry Curry and Jussi Hamalainen both have now finished all 23 races. Meanwhile Garry had just finished Leadville 100, one week earlier.

In our pre-race prayer, we asked the assembled runners in Wrightwood, to pray for one of our past Champions Vicki DeVita, who is struggling with a very aggressive form of cancer.