

## Streaking The Bear



**“There are a bunch of dern fools running a 100-mile race in the mountains.” — Overheard in a convenient store in Preston, Idaho, 2006.**

It is 1:30 a.m., at about mile 73 of the 2007 Bear 100, on the 5<sup>th</sup> climb of the famed Bear “roller coaster,” in the mountains above Preston, Idaho. I’m lying down on the side of the trail, breathing hard, out of gas. My first-time pacer brother, Bob, is leaning over me, “Should I get help?” “No”, is my quick reply. “This is just a bad bonk, part of this crazy sport.” Earlier, Bob was talking about the possibility of trying a 100-miler of his own. Now, looking down at my agony, he’s having lots of second thoughts about that crazy idea. Bob drapes a jacket over me and wonders if I’m going to croak. After five minutes, I feel a little better, and struggle back to my feet. I eat and drink and do the only thing I know how to do at that point – push forward. I throw up several times and I hear Bob exclaim, “Oh boy!” I grin to myself and push forward even harder, feeling a little better. In another mile Bob starts to complement my strong pace. I was back in the race.

The Bear 100 has a special place in my heart because it was the first 100-mile race that I attempted. The original course was run near Preston, Idaho (Gosh, yes, Napoleon Dynamite territory) in the mountains west of Bear Lake. It was the brain child of Leland Barker who wanted to introduce another 100-mile race to the mountain west because the Wasatch Front 100 was getting harder to get into. He first had the vision of an end-to-end course from Logan, Utah to Bear Lake, but because of difficulty with permits, he created a beautiful, challenging loop course.



This low-key race is held each year toward the end of September when the fall colors are usually stunning. I had another connection to the race location; Preston, Idaho was the town where my grandfather grew up. His family would go on family outings in the canyons where The Bear was run. For me, running the Bear was returning home.

1999 was the first running of The Bear. Phil Lowry helped as assistant race director and Errol “Rocket” Jones coordinated the aid stations. I ran the race for the first time in 2004. Those early years were more like adventure runs. Leland, the race director, would get a head start on the field by a couple hours and mark sections of the course as he ran. We became familiar with what we called, “Leland poop” which were small pieces of flagging that he would just throw down on the trail. Runners got lost frequently, but to me that was part of the intriguing challenge.

By 2003, The Bear 100 was part of the “Rocky Mountain Slam,” which consisted of finishing four 100-mile races in the same calendar year, Hardrock plus three of four other mountain races, Bighorn, Leadville, Wasatch, or The Bear. Leland would create incredible hand-carved trophies for the finishers of “the Slam.”



“Streaking the Bear” became an established feature of the race. To earn the coveted “Streaker” jacket you needed to finish The Bear in five consecutive years. To this day there have only been a handful of runners who have accomplished this. It seemed impossible to me to achieve, but after successfully finishing a couple times, I had my eye on that accomplishment.

### [2004 Bear 100](#)

This was my first 100-mile attempt. I didn’t have enough experience and training. I also had an injured knee. I ended up DNFing at mile 87. The details are covered in [chapter 7](#). I left that experience believing it was impossible for me to every finish The Bear. But even with all my suffering that first year, I fell in love with the course, the fall colors, and even the challenging climbs. After recovering a few days, I knew I would return.

### [2005 Bear 100](#)

I finished The Bear for the first time in 2005, but the race was full of stress and worry, leaving me unfulfilled. The details are covered in [chapter 8](#). I finished in 32:23 in 29<sup>th</sup> place.

Watch the long film, “Dancing the Bear,” produced about the 2004 and 2005 Bear 100. I appear in it at least three times.

### [2006 Bear 100](#)

2006 turned out to be an epic year for The Bear. Early season snow blanketed the course, but to the credit of Phil Lowry, an alternate snow course was created to allow aid stations to be located at a lower elevation. Runners still climbed high in the snow at some points. This year’s race became affectionately known as “The Snow Bear” or “The Polar Bear.” I ran this race after finishing Wasatch 100 for the first time, just 12 days earlier. At the start, heavy snow was falling. Only 44 runners showed up to start that year. Many chose to stay home but missed an experience of a lifetime.



I soon understood how challenging this was going to be. Not only was the trail covered in snow, but the bushes and trees were heavy with snow too. Their branches were pushed down across the trail and we had to continually push aside the branches and get a face full of snow in the process. I watched one runner hit a heavy branch with his head causing a big load of snow to fall on his back. Looking for course flag markings was a challenge because we had to concentrate hard on our footing, following the snow tracks of the runners ahead. Many of the flags started to be buried in the snow.



Snowy trail in the morning



The sun finally appeared in the early afternoon and this caused the snow in the trees to start melting very fast, making an amazing roar in the forest sections. The trails became very wet and muddy, but I was having a blast.



Guardian Snow Angel

I had fallen back a few miles from Phil Lowry but evidence of that he passed that way was seen by a snow angel, complete with a fanny pack. The race progressed well for me but the night temperature fell to 12 degrees F. During the night, I would pass several runners taking snoozes in the snow by the side of the trail which seemed dangerous to me. At one aid station the grapes were frozen solid. My buddy Brad crewed me during the night and he recalled, “One runner was sitting there with a clear case of hypothermia. He was shivering and very cold. The volunteers set up one big propane heater and another electric heater behind him with the fire in front of him. They used rags dipped in hot water to warm and clean his feet. I was impressed with their level of concern and care.”

Morning arrived and I pushed the pace with Brad at my side as I ran the final miles. I reached the finish in 30:35, in 19<sup>th</sup> place, my most memorable Bear 100 finish.

### 2007 Bear 100

My goal in 2007 was to finally break 30 hours and get the Grizzly Bear buckle. I had now finished 12 previous 100s, believing that I finally had enough experience to run well. I recruited my brother Bob to



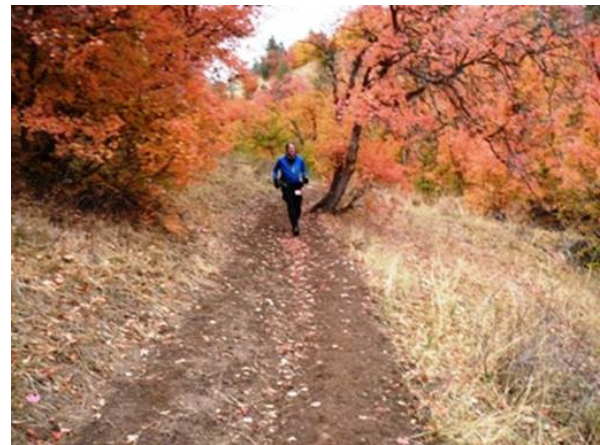
pace me for about 37 miles. He had recently also become interested in ultrarunning. This would be his first experience at a 100-miler.

I arrived at Paris Canyon, mile 53, in 26<sup>th</sup> place where I was greeted by Bob, eager to get running with me. I left that location running with my friend, Tom Jackson. Bob was full of energy and quickly disappeared up the trail. He obviously understood that he needed to scout the trail ahead for us. The sun went down and near the top we turned our lights on. Bob was having fun catching other runners and then waiting for us. Tom mentioned, “You have a racer pacer!” Bob witnessed both my high points and low points, truly giving him a true taste of how grueling running 100 miles can be.



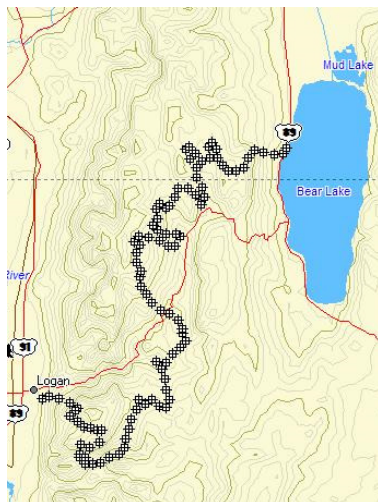
Arriving at Paris Canyon. Bob ready to pace.

The last half of the race went surprisingly well for me. Near the final miles, I pushed my way through a masochist section that Leland invented referred to as “Leland’s Ledge” or “Devil’s Den.” Sections seemed more like a bushwhack than a trail, but it was a great challenge to try to move quickly through. With just a mile to go the skies opened up and it started to rain, giving me further motivation to finish strong. I came across the finish line in 28:13 in 23<sup>rd</sup> place out of 62 starters. I was thrilled. I had now finished The Bear three years in a row, and also earned the sub-30 Grizzly buckle.



Beautiful colors with one mile to go

### 2008 Bear 100



The Bear grew up. Leland Barker’s dream of a point-to-point course from Logan, Utah to Bear Lake in Idaho became a reality. A brand new course was introduced with only about five miles in common. I had now finished 19 100-milers and was starting to feel like a 100-mile veteran.

The new course was tougher, with longer, rougher climbs. But it also was much more crew friendly and no longer required long hours of driving on dirt roads. I ran this race after finishing the tough Plain 100 only 13 days



76 starters

earlier. This year, along with my trusty crew Brad and Geri, my crazy roommate from college, Steve joined in on the crewing fun. My brother Bob, also came back to pace me again.



The new course was spectacular. I especially enjoyed the single-track sections. When I hit one section I started to fly! I caught up with many who passed me earlier. Some would say, “Its Davy!” I even started letting out whoops of joy. It was very fun running fast in the forest.



On the longest, toughest climb of the afternoon up to Tony Grove (mile 52), Bob ran with me. I was feeling great and decided to really push the pace hard. At times I experimented to see if I could even push it into a higher gear as we were running hard up the steep trail. After rising up more than 3,000 feet, Bob finally said something like, “Holy Smokes, you have amazing leg muscles.” I grinned, knowing that I was working him very hard.



The night was full of highs and lows. I didn't dress warm enough and paid for it by getting very sleepy at times. I had terrible foot pain for the final 40 miles. The cause, which I didn't figure out until I finished were two sets of insoles in the shoes I changed into. I just couldn't understand why my toes were being crushed so badly. That year runners got lost for a while during the night on sections of the course that weren't marked well, but I managed to figure things out.



Feeling good at mile 62



Bear Lake comes into view

The final miles were rough. My feet were in terrible shape and the pain was killing me, but I pushed on ahead and finally Bear Lake came into view. Some volunteers had described the final descent as “a trail that needed a fireman's net to catch the runners.” Sure enough, the descent was incredibly steep. It was very tough on the feet but I was glad to get the descent over with as quickly as possible. We came out of the forest and were now exposed by hot sunlight for the rest of the course.

During my slow descent a couple fast moving runners passed me. They were doing great. I wished that I could keep up. I pushed hard for the final miles and finished in 30:51, my 4<sup>th</sup> Bear 100 finish. I couldn't help but think that if I had only finished that first time in 2004, I would be a Bear Streaker. That would have to wait for the following year.

### 2009 Bear 100



Finishing

I came back determined to run the new course fast this year and to earn that “Bear Streaker” award. I now was a true veteran ultrarunner with 26 100-mile finishes on my record. Two weeks earlier I had a good run at the Wasatch 100 and my recovery had gone well. I was ready to attack the course again. I pushed the pace hard early on but after about 12 miles took a very nasty fall that took the wind out of my sails. This was a great disappointment but I did my best to keep the pace up despite a painful leg.

The pain calmed down and by the time I reached mile 45 I was more than an hour ahead of my last year's pace, in 23<sup>rd</sup> place. At Tony Grove (mile 51.8) I picked up my pacer, a very experienced elite runner, Jon Allen, who was starting into ultrarunner. In the past I had some poor experiences using pacers other than my backpacking buddies.

For me, pacers distract me, more than help me. I worry about them. I slow down for them. But when I use my close buddies, they know me well, and know the mind tricks to play with me to get me to go faster. I didn't know Jon well, but he was a very experienced runner and could do anything I threw his way. When we topped over a ridge, I suggested that Jon take the lead and run fast. I would then draft behind him step, for step, and see how long we could keep that going. Jon wrote, “Davy decided to really push himself on the decent into White Pine. He had me run ahead and we absolutely blasted down the trail. We were cruising and blew by several people, including the first place woman. He had fallen earlier and banged his quad, and it really pained him on descents, but he did awesome at ignoring it.” Jon observed quickly that I would slow down on dirt roads but loved running fast on single-track trails, so he encouraged me. Our oft-repeated mantra was “Don't be lazy.” Jon's pacing shift was over after 25 miles and I hated to see him go. I learned a ton about the value of having an experienced runner as pacer.



The rest of the night was a struggle because of all my pains but I pushed in on. Before the huge final descent, a fast runner passed me like I was standing still. He would go on to break 28 hours. As I went along, I adjusted my finishing goal. I realized even breaking 28 hours would be too painful, so I decided that I would just try to beat my Wasatch 100 time from two weeks ago 28:33. I pushed hard and crossed the finish line in 28:21:15, in 24th place.



Receiving my jacket



Another Bear finish

At the awards ceremony, Larry Hall and I were awarded our jackets for “Streaking the Bear” – finishing five consecutive Bear 100s. When I thought about it, I was amazed, because when I DNFed my first Bear in 2004, I sat near the finish line in total dejection, telling my wife that this race was far beyond my abilities. I was convinced that I needed to give up the hope of ever finishing this race. But I faced the challenge and proved that I could indeed finish this race over and over again. I officially became a “Bear Streaker.”

### 2010 Bear 100

I didn’t stop at finishing five straight, I went on to finish six straight Bear 100s. Things came together much better that year and I crushed my personal best, [finishing in 26:30:45](#), in 27<sup>th</sup> place out of a big field of 170 runners.

### **2012 Bear 100**

The streak ended. In 2011 after running The Bear 100 for seven straight years, I decided to go do something else and ran Virgil Crest 100 in New York, near the place I lived for nine years. But I again returned to run The Bear in 2012. It had been a year of recovery from a massive injury, so I took it easy and just had as much fun as I could. My brother Bob and son Kevin paced me. Stomach problems during the night really slowed me down but I pulled it together enough for a slow finish of 31:46:05 in 102<sup>nd</sup> place. But with all my challenges that year, I was just delighted to be back running again.

### **2014 Bear 100**

I again returned to The Bear in 2014, but it didn’t go well. I had a very good race going, but by about mile 75 a terrible storm came in that lasted for hours. I wore the wrong shoes for the mud and after slipping and sliding for an hour decided it was wise to quit. Many tougher runners continued and finished, but I wasn’t willing to risk injury on a race that I’ve finished so many times before.

When people ask me what my favorite 100-mile race is, I usually include The Bear 100 in my top two or three. I love it for the fall colors, the cool temperatures, the challenging climbs, having many local friends in the race, and because it was my first 100 attempted. The memories always come back, both the good and bad. The Bear 100 is now an important part of my life.

