

146 Miles at "Across The Years" by George Nelsen

I have been running ultras since 1999, when I did the JFK 50-miler. Ever since, I have been on a quest to see how many miles I could run in one race. This past New Years I took the next step by running/walking 146.6 miles in a race called Across the Years near Phoenix, AZ. The race has been held for 25 years and is one of the best ultra races (if not the best) in the US. It actually consists of three races that all end on New Years day at 9:00 am. Runners can do a 24-hour race starting on the 31st, a 48-hour race starting on the 30th, or a 72-hour race starting on the 29th. The 72-hour race is the only race of that length in the world. I did the 72-hour because I had already done a 48-hour race twice. The race is held on a country estate called Nardini Manor about 25 miles west of the Phoenix airport. The owner provides for everything a runner might need. A measured, packed dirt 500 meter track to circle, heated tents and cots for sleeping, porta-potties next to the track, top quality food round the clock, music 24/7, great medical care, hot showers, chip timing with instantaneous updates, a video camera of the runners, and even fireworks for New Years! All runners have to do is keep moving forward.

Across the Years was definitely the best ultrarunning experience I have ever had! The race was like a huge family gathering. The dedicated staff and volunteers operated like a well oiled machine. The location is perfect, the weather was ideal, the food was awesome, and the medical care was fantastic! I'm sure I will be coming back for many years.

I'm very satisfied with the 146.6 miles I did, although I now know that with better "rest management" during the last 12-15 hours, I probably could have ended up with 155-160 miles. But since it is 36 miles more than I've ever run before, I am very happy about it!

My training mainly consisted of running a 24-hour race in late Sep (Hinson Lake, NC), a 48-hour race in mid-Nov (near Dallas, TX), with easy 30-35 mile weeks in between. On race morning I felt as ready as I could be, and very happy to be there since I had torn my Achilles back in February and couldn't run for 3 months in 2008.

I ran 62 miles (alternating running 2 laps and walking one) until taking a 4 hour rest (1:00 - 5:00 am). I then added another 11 miles (all walking) by the 24-hour point at 9:00 am 30 Dec. The first day I used one pair of Ultimax Wigwam socks and Dr. Andy Lovy's foot cream and my feet held up pretty well. The second day I decided to try Drymax socks with more of Andy's cream. By mid-afternoon, with about 81 miles in, my feet started to develop hot spots and a blister. Based on another runner's advice, I went to the race doctor Chris O'Loughlin to get my feet taped. Thank God I did that! I had never had my feet taped before. It was a great learning experience to see the "master" do it the right way. After 20 minutes all my toes and the entire bottom of both feet were covered in a smooth layer of tape. Chris guaranteed I would have no new blisters --- I never did! After surviving the first "crisis," I was able to add more miles the second day (all walking), stopping with 100 miles at 9:00 pm. I then took a nice hot shower (good decision on my part) and rested until 3:00 am. When I got up I felt re-energized and managed to add another 14.5 miles (all walking) for a total of 114.5 miles by the 48-hour point (a new 48-hour PR for me). I continued moving well until I had 131 miles by about 4:30 pm. Then I had my second "crisis." All of a sudden I felt very cold and started shivering,

even as the sun was still up and the temps were around 70. I realized I must be very dehydrated, so I ate three burritos (freshly made), drank a lot of water, and crawled deep into my sleeping bag to warm up. I thought my race was over! But after about 4 hours, I felt reasonably normal and headed back out to add more laps. At this point, although I had no new blisters, my feet were very "tender" and I still felt a little weak. So I became conservative for the next 8-9 hours, alternating walking 2 miles and lying down for an hour. It was during this period that I slipped several places in the standings. However, surprisingly around 7:00 am, as the sun started to rise and seemingly everyone emerged to do laps, I picked up the pace to keep up with everyone else and was able to do a reasonably fast last 5 miles. I now realize I could have added more miles that last night. The finish was awesome with everyone hugging and celebrating. It was a little bit like a "Band of Brothers" when the war was over!

My main lessons learned: 1) Tape your feet before the race. 2) Keep well hydrated at all times, especially in dry climates where you don't realize you sweat. 3) You can add more miles and go faster during the last 12 hours than you realize.

The next step up the ladder of long distance is the 6-day race. They have one in New York City each April. Maybe!