

Hi-Tec Badwater Race

UltraRunning Magazine

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Hi-Tec Badwater Race

Badwater, Calif.

July 16, 1998

Roads, 135 miles

1. Gabriel Flores,CA	28:09!
2. Carlos Banderas,CA	28:27
3. Marshall Ulrich,CO	30:06
4. Lisa Smith,NJ	37:33
5. Cliff Treyens,OH	38:45
6. Duke Bartoo,CA	41:38
7. Bob Ankeney,CA	42:58
8. Mike Zeigle,WI	43:47
9. Arthur Webb,CA	44:44
10. Fred Vance,CA	46:34
11. Julie Teiger,UT	47:04
12. Bernard Schoeneck,GER	47:45
13. Jim Hamilton,CA	51:51
14. Ephraim Romesberg,CA	53:31
15. Scott Weber,CO	54:13
16. Bob Lapanja,CA	54:39
17. Adam Bookspan,FL	55:30
18. Jack Denness,UK	57:39
19. Lloyd Scott,UK	57:54
20. Helmut Linzbichler,AUT	58:57
29 starters	

The race was no easier this year than any in the past. El Niño kept things cooler several months longer, but then seemed to make up for it in the few days before the start of the race. The pre-race clinics were disappointingly too "cool" over Memorial Day weekend when it barely got to over 100 degrees. It warmed up to 113 degrees on July 4 weekend, however. I used a Kestrel 2000 wind/temperature gauge for many readings. It was 92 degrees at the start at Badwater, 282 feet below sea level, at 6:00 a.m. on Thursday July 16. By mid-afternoon the same day, it was 127 degrees (official). The next day, Friday, there was an all-time record of 129 degrees (official) for that same day as far back as records go for Death Valley National Park (formerly Death Valley National Monument). By Saturday the temperature rose to 131 degrees, according to the ABC network, while the race was still in progress.

The National Park Service west boundary is at about the 87-mile mark. So there was hell at the beginning and it continued and existed at the end. Air temperatures at Whitney Portals at 8,300 feet elevation were unusually warm, and on a test hike to Trail Camp at 12,000 feet on Sunday July 12, it was 75 degrees despite the overwhelming amount of snow coverage above 11,300 feet.

This was the eleventh running of Hi-Tec's race. It used to start at 6:00 p.m., but for the last two years the start has been at 6:00 a.m. The extreme runners and adventurers wanted to test themselves in more rigorous conditions, thereby exposing themselves to more heat in Death Valley. This is patterned after Richard Benyo and Tom Crawford of the "Death Valley 300" fame. They went from "fire to ice and back to fire" doing the double-crossing. These adventure seekers had originally wanted to

create a run (not a race) from Badwater to Whitney and got 150 runners interested. They backed off because of liability when the athletes began wondering where the day-care centers, ATM booths and hitching posts were.

At about that time Hi-Tec and Adrian Crane got together to test the course using a shoe entitled the "Badwater 146," representing the mileage from Badwater to the top of Mt. Whitney at 14,496 feet elevation. In those days Adrian Crane and Tom Posser had some great duels. More runners were invited in later years. Denise Jones, who is also a cosmetologist, gave several foot care clinics before the race and personally treated most of those with significant blisters. Her efforts contributed significantly to the success of many that have buckled and finished.

The average age of the 29 runners this year was 47.2. There was no appreciable wind this year and there were neither clouds nor precipitation from Death Valley to the Sierra during the event. My motto is, "The course is always ready," and, "Get out of the valley." Eric Clifton did some wind sprints back and forth at the start line. The others shuffled around getting their pictures taken and some formed a prayer circle. In less than a minute from taking the obligatory group picture at the Badwater sign, the 29 starters lined up on the highway and a ten-second countdown was performed by Matt Frederick, Hi-Tec Sports Race Director.

Eric Clifton responded the most vigorously and built a two and a half-mile lead at one point over Marshall Ulrich, veteran of seven previous Badwaters. Marshall has the "p.m." start course record of 26:18. Dehydration took its toll on Eric however, and the gap decreased until Marshall finally overtook Eric in Panamint Valley, about 70

miles and 12 hours later. A German journalist who was following Helmut Linzbichler from Austria witnessed a friendly exchange of leads. Eric called it quits at 72 miles at Panamint Springs Resort. He made it 93 miles last year. Both years he had run at Western States a few weeks earlier, however, the previous year he was also getting over a motorcycle accident and leg injuries.

Behind them were Gabriel Flores and Carlos Banderas, who are more familiar with the trail ultras in Southern California. Neither one had ever been even close to Death Valley and Gabriel had never even been in temperatures hotter than 105 degrees. Actually, they showed up "cold," as far as knowledge of the course and environment was concerned. My wife Denise, the "First Lady of Badwater," spent at least an hour with them the day before the race briefing them on race technique and strategy. Their coach had them drink Pedialyte and Ensure and eat bananas and peanut butter sandwiches during the race. In the race, they exchanged the lead several times after they passed Marshall at about 85 to 95 miles. Marshall wondered "who are these guys," and finally told his crew to "cut them loose." Neither Flores nor Banderas knew that the last 13 miles up the Whitney Portal Road involved a 4,600-foot climb. Gabriel informed the media and bystanders "I am not ever coming back to this place! I call Badwater terrible water!" He collapsed shortly after crossing the finish line in a daytime start record time of 28:09.

A mile from the finish, Carlos Banderas's crew's vehicle caught on fire and burned to the ground. The trailer behind it fused to the hitch and almost went out of control when it was released. Dramatically, Carlos had to pass this burning wreckage in order to finish in 28:27, which

Jay Farbman Photography

also broke the previous course record. The fire was presumably related to the unusual heat wave and represented hell at the finish. There were many heat-related incidents with vehicles. Millers Towing made a lot of calls. Marshall arrived at the finish line in 30:06.

Lisa Smith was here for the third time and has won the women's division twice. Last year she set a course record for the a.m. start of 37:01. Lisa Smith's sister Julie Gross is a massage therapist who worked Marshall over both before and after the race. Each year there are more and more physical therapists and fitness trainers present.

Lisa has a terrific portfolio of races, which include the Ironman Triathlon, Marathon des Sables (last April), and all of the Eco Challenges, the Extreme Games and last year's Raid Gauloises in Africa. Within the last month she did the 300-mile Four Winds ultra in Montana. She is getting ready to go to Equador for this year's Raid Gauloises, which includes a climb of the volcano Cotapaxi (over 21,000 feet elevation).

There was an overwhelming amount of media interest in the race this year. The day before this year's Badwater/Whitney Race, the *New York Times* had a large color picture of her on the front page and a story and more pictures on inside pages. There was a film crew from Real TV and Brazilian TV, and various journalists and photographers covering certain runners.

ABC and NBC hurriedly arrived on the scene with their crews and large satellite up-link trucks urgently seeking heat-related coverage. Apparently things had cooled down with Bill and Monica and the heat of the Valley was a prime subject.

Getting back to Lisa, she and her crew had to get past a NPS Ranger who almost had to use pepper spray to control the traffic and congestion. Lisa was paced by her boyfriend, Eric Speck; Whit Rambach (a previous Badwater finisher); and Cameron Widoff, who is expected to challenge for the win at the Hawaiian Ironman this year. She was wearing an unbroken-in pair of Adidas shoes and developed some horrible blisters. Her time was 32 minutes slower than last year and she finished in 37:33.

The other female finisher, Julie Teiger, is the mother of four children and owns and operates a gift basket company. She has crewed Lisa Smith twice before and got the bug. She fulfilled her wish of experiencing the depth of her soul and the spectacle of the night sky. I was able to assist her in the last marathon of the race with encouragement and support along with her amazing crew of Tim Key, four-time Ironman finisher and power-lifter/video-man David Matti Ace.

There were many more stories at Badwater. Each individual had a unique set of credentials and interesting reasons for running. Maybe you can be one of them next year.

Ben Jones

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(L. to R.) Lisa Smith, the women's winner, and her crew, Eric Speck and Whit Rambach, join with Cliff Treyens, the fifth place finisher, to while away the endless miles of Badwater.