

Superior Sawtooth 100 Mile Rocks and Rolls

by Bob Metzger

The legendary 100-mile race on Minnesota's Superior Hiking Trail made a triumphant return on September 8. Renamed the "Superior Sawtooth 100," and now in the capable and caring hands of Larry and Colleen Pederson, the race attracted 33 starters, 20 of whom reached the finish line within the 38-hour time limit. Participants were treated to sunny, cool, and dry daytime conditions, and a full moon and frost at night. The spectacular new point-to-point 100-percent trail course configuration featured abundant roots, rocks, steep climbs and descents, a water crossing, and even 2.6 bonus miles.

Larry and Colleen, assisted by a small group of dedicated helpers, undertook the daunting task of returning the 100-mile race to credibility. Buoyed by confidence from their successful experiences directing the Moose Mountain Marathon and the Superior Trail 50 Mile in recent years, they seized the opportunity to not only fill the void left by the recent disappointments and eventual demise of the previous 100-mile race, but to make it even better than it had been back in its glory days. They succeeded beyond most people's wildest dreams.

Timing the starts of the Superior Sawtooth 100 Mile, Superior Trail 50 mile, and Moose Mountain Marathon over a two-day period so they all shared a final cutoff of 10:00 p.m. on Saturday at the common finish line added to the fun and excitement for all participants and spectators. Runners cheered one another on as they converged along the course, and the growing crowd at the finish line gave each finisher a huge ovation.

In the days immediately following the race, I had the opportunity to interview men's winner Sean Andrish, women's winner Kerry Owens, and women's runner-up Tina Ure. All three hail from outside Minnesota, so their comments carry the weight of those having traveled a long way and incurred no small expense to take part in the event. What follows are their answers to some of my questions.

What, if any, of the other trail 100-milers you have run were most similar to this one?

Sean: The Massanutten Mountain Trail 100 Mile is similar to the Superior Sawtooth, in that both courses are extremely technical; Massanutten has more rocks than roots, Superior has more roots than rocks.

Tina: The HURT was quite similar in terms of terrain (and obviously because of that tough terrain, both the cutoff times for these two races are similar—the HURT cutoff is 36 hours, SS100 38 hours). The big difference might be the weather: Hawaii doesn't challenge you with either extreme heat or cold (although humidity is a factor).

How did this one compare to the others in terms of difficulty?

Sean: The SHT is very technical, and the footing is as difficult as that of any course I've run, but it was not as physically challenging as courses such as Hardrock or Wasatch, because it does not have the extended climbs and descents.

Kerry: For me, this run was more difficult than Massanutten. I am used to training on longer gradual climbs and Superior had a lot of very steep and short ascents and descents. The footing from miles 10 to 69 was very difficult at Superior.

Tina: Anyone who enjoys the HURT type of challenge of rocks, roots, and steep climbs, would also do well at the Superior Sawtooth. In addition, I personally prefer the point-to-point style of SS100 as opposed to HURT, which is a loop of 20 miles. A point-to-point course really gives you more of a feel of accomplishment, covering a very long distance, instead of simply doing laps to get the mileage done.

How did this one compare to the others in terms of organization?

Sean: The Superior Sawtooth 100 was as well-organized as any race I've run.

Tina: I've run 18 marathons and 21 ultras, and the organization of this event was superb! I always hold the Tahoe Rim Trail race as a gold standard for big events, in

terms of web site info, registration, course and trail marking, aid stations, and awards; this was right up there with that event. Even better was the personalized attention, which was possible because it was a smaller event. I got the feeling Larry and all the aid personnel really cared about each runner and his or her experience. It's nice to have a sort of intimacy like that.

What, if anything, surprised you about the course?

Sean: Having talked to runners who had run the race before, I was prepared for the roots and rocks that covered the course. However, I was not expecting so many steep hills to climb. Running in the Midwest, along one of the Great Lakes, I was expecting a relatively flat course.

Kerry: I knew the course was going to be technical, but I was surprised by the extent of the difficulty, as well as the steepness of some of it.

What did you like best about the course/event?

Sean: I love the fact that the race is essentially 100-percent trail.

Kerry: I loved the course, the scenery including the lakes and colorful leaves, the aid stations and volunteers, and the goodies!

Tina: The scenery and the trail itself were very appealing and interesting. I like rapidly changing features, because it keeps you engaged in the moment. I liked that Larry took an active interest in the runners. I thought it was cool that he was at the first two aid stations to see how everyone was doing.

The Superior Sawtooth 100 Mile provides one of the few point-to-point 100-mile trail runs in the country, and the course is 100 percent (indeed, rounded up from 99.7 percent) on scenic, challenging, mostly single-track trails. For the cautious, timid, or dare I say, more sensible runner, the Moose Mountain Marathon and Superior Trail 50 Mile events provide an opportunity to get acquainted with the event and the trail without making the commitment to an event with a perhaps daunting but deserved 38-hour cutoff.

Superior Sawtooth: From a Hospital Bed to the Winner's Circle

by Sean Andrish

My Superior Sawtooth 100 Mile actually began two weeks before the race, as I lay in the recovery room after surgery. I had just undergone an experimental neurosurgical procedure to treat my epilepsy. The procedure involved implanting a pacemaker-type device under my scalp and placing several electrodes in the region of my brain where my seizures originate. The electrodes record electrical impulses and transmit the data to the pacemaker device, which can be programmed to recognize the electrical impulses associated with my seizures and, upon identifying seizure activity, can send out an electrical impulse to short-circuit the seizure.

As I lay there, my head throbbing with pain, I wondered how I could ever be ready to run 100 miles in two weeks. If I couldn't even get out of bed, what hope could I have of covering 100 miles so soon after my operation? These thoughts would haunt me for the next couple weeks, but at least I had the support of my neurologist and neurosurgeon. If they thought that it was medically safe for me to run this race, then I had to be doing fairly well. While I had been cleared to run, I didn't feel like anyone (myself included) gave me much of a chance of finishing. That provided the motivation I needed: I had to prove to myself that I could complete a challenging 100-miler within two weeks of brain surgery. I had also skipped the Wasatch 100 Mile this year so that I could run this race. I knew I would want to go back to run Wasatch next year because it is one of my favorite races, so this was my year to run Superior. With those thoughts in mind, I began running three days after surgery slowly, but consistently, every day until I left for Minnesota.

Kerry Owens and I flew out to Minneapolis the day before the race, had lunch with her friends, and then drove the three hours up to the site of the pre-race activities and the start in Two Harbors. At the pre-race dinner and briefing I was more relaxed than usual. There was no pressure on me to run well; nobody knew me in this part of the country, my doctors had predicted a sub-par performance because of the effects of the surgery, and the staples that had been used to close the wounds in my head were a constant reminder that I was still recovering. It was interesting talking to the race director and some of the volunteers because they were all commenting on how difficult the course was because of all the roots and

rocks. This was just what I wanted to hear! If anything could keep me motivated to complete an ultra, it was the thought of running 100 miles on nasty trails; that's my kind of running.

We finished dinner and headed back to the hotel to make final preparations for the run. My father arrived at the hotel later that evening, and the first thing I asked him to do was remove the staples from my head. I had been expecting this to be a painful process, but it proved to be a simple, painless procedure. I felt better immediately. Maybe there was hope for a good race!

At 8:00 a.m. on Friday, 33 runners set out to enjoy 100 miles of the Superior Hiking Trail. I had decided to take it easy, especially early in the race because I was not sure what to expect from my body. "Taking it easy" to me means running just hard enough to maintain a lead. The first 10 miles of the course were enjoyable. We ran on single-track trails through birch and cedar forests, climbed short, steep hills that were not as technically challenging as some of the terrain we would cover later in the day, passed several waterfalls, and had spectacular views of Lake Superior and the surrounding hills. If I pushed the pace during that part of the race, it was simply because I was eager to see what was around the next bend in the trail!

As usual, my dad just missed me at the first aid station. While I had been looking forward to seeing him at that point, I was not that disappointed because it was still early in the race and I really didn't need any aid at that point. Missing my father was actually reassuring, because it meant that I must have been running well.

The next couple sections were uneventful; I reached the aid station at mile 24 feeling surprisingly fresh. Then I hit a bad patch. Almost immediately after leaving the aid station at mile 24, my legs became heavy and I struggled on the steep hills. I was expecting this; I always have a low point somewhere between mile 20 and 50 and knew that if I kept moving, it would eventually get better. While I struggled during this stretch, I was still able to enjoy the scenery. At one point we were running on a rocky outcrop a couple hundred feet above a small lake. I thought, "Wouldn't it be nice to sit down here and just enjoy the scenery?" I pushed through the discomfort however, and somewhere around the aid station at mile 42 I started to feel better.

Throughout the first 50 miles of the

Superior Trail 100 Mile and 50 Mile

Lutsen, Minnesota

September 9

Tough trails

100 Miles

1. Sean Andrish, 36	21:42:11
2. Craig Bunk, 36	25:37:33
3. Scott Meyers, 38	28:27:00
4. <u>Kerry Owens</u> , 43	29:37:26
5. Dallas Sigurdur, 35	29:42:49
6. Dan Kasper, 48	30:09:56
7. Jerry Frost, 51	31:07:49
8. <u>Tina Ure</u> , 46	31:32:42
9. John Finn, 36	31:33:19
10. Doug Hansel, 46	33:55:20
11. Bill Gengler, 52	33:55:30
12. Allan Holtz, 56	34:49:40
13. <u>Kathy Weix</u> , 57	35:30:25
14. Gary Sheets, 54	35:32:05
15. <u>Deborah McKinzie</u> , 36	35:42:50
16. Joe Lovett, 39	36:40:40
17. Stuart Johnson, 47	37:17:40
18. Joel Fors, 49	37:25:18
19. Daryl Saari, 43	37:47:50

33 starters

50 Miles

1. Dan Harihan, 34	8:34:45
2. Eric Kaitala, 34	8:58:32
3. <u>Rochelle Writh</u> , 44	9:05:39
4. <u>Deb Bennett</u> , 47	9:51:51
5. <u>Lisa Trainor</u> , 47	9:53:25
6. John Kiser, 45	9:55:16
7. Geoff Hanson, 31	9:56:30
8. Shawn Bostad, 28	10:31:11
9. Jim Brown, 48	10:38:43
10. Heber Rosario, 34	11:00:45
11. Michael Scamdrett, 52	11:03:07
12. Dan Bradford, 50	11:03:24
13. Todd Grauvogel, 42	11:22:24
Patrick Susnik, 41	11:22:24
15. Seth Carlson, 27	11:22:35
16. Jim Klussman, 32	11:30:38
17. <u>Valeria Shuster</u> , 30	11:37:00
18. Kris Webeck, 37	11:54:25
19. James Pospisil, 36	11:56:56
20. Bohdan Stepchuk, 36	12:00:58
21. Brad Birkholz, 38	12:15:41
Jeff Mallach, 46	12:15:41
23. Clint Cherepa, 28	12:32:21
24. Raymond Skowrya, 23	12:41:01
25. Steve Krampe, 56	12:49:45
26. Dale Humphrey, 47	12:59:21
27. <u>Deb Vomhof</u> , 44	13:26:27
28. Londell Pease, 43	13:30:00
29. John Montwill, 45	13:30:07
30. <u>Pam Pettengill</u> , 40	13:35:18
31. <u>Sara Lovett</u> , 37	13:35:19
32. Jeffrey Swainhart, 51	13:40:32
33. Les Martisko, 62	13:41:40
34. Todd Ekstrom, 44	13:50:01
35. Steve Fleace, 41	13:52:25
36. Joseph Wright, 45	13:53:01
37. Keith Whited, 54	14:11:40
38. <u>Cathy Dexler</u> , 45	14:16:02
39. James Jahoda, 44	15:03:45
40. <u>Van Huynh-Leap</u> , 38	15:17:38
41. <u>Carol Izadi</u> , 47	15:28:10
42. Phillip Smith, 58	16:06:00

race I had tried not to think about my competition and where they were. I knew I was running well and that I just had to

keep a steady pace and enjoy the early miles of the run—the race would begin at 50 miles. At the halfway point we did an out-and-back on a side trail to an aid station. As I was leaving the aid station I saw the second-place runner coming down the trail; I only had about a five-minute lead. I knew I had been moving slowly from mile 24 to mile 42, but I hadn't seen or heard anyone all day, so I thought I had built a good lead. That was my wake-up call. Luckily we were starting a relatively runnable section of trail, and I picked up the pace to try to open a gap. I maintained a strong pace through the river crossing around mile 65. By then I had built a sizeable lead and it was getting dark, so it would be more difficult for other runners to make up ground. I settled into a steady pace. My goal was simply to average 15-minute miles through the second half. Since I had run the first 50 miles in 9:20, 15-minute miles would ensure that I broke 24 hours.

The forest was very dark at night, making navigation through the rocks and roots even more difficult. However, there was a full moon, and occasionally when running among the birch trees the moonlight would break through and light up the trail. At times the moonlight was so bright that I thought it was the flashlight of a runner who was catching me!

Other than missing me at the first aid station, my dad did a great job of keeping up with me and having everything ready when I rolled into aid stations. We had a good system worked out in which my dad would give me an Ensure, some Succeed, a couple cups of Mountain Dew, and new water bottles. I would sit down and drink my Ensure and then he would send me on my way. I don't think I spent more than two or three minutes at any of the aid stations, which saved me a lot of time over the course of the race.

The night progressed uneventfully. I was running my 15-minute miles and knew that I would break 24 hours. However, it wasn't until I reached the final aid station at mile 95 that I knew I had a chance to break 22 hours and finish before the 50-mile race started. At that point I knew I had the race won, so breaking 22 hours became my motivation for the last seven miles (yes, it's a 102-mile race!) as hard as I could. I walked the two significant climbs on this section, but ran everything else faster than I had since the start. With about a mile to go, the course turned onto a gravel road. Knowing I was almost home, I took off. The final mile of the race was my fastest of the race. My dad directed me around the buildings

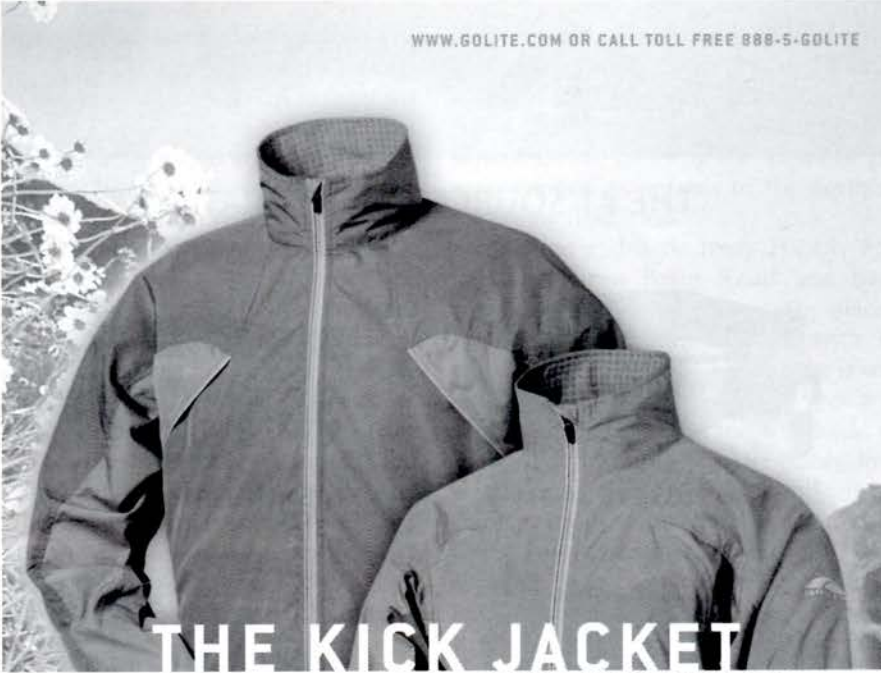
near the Lutsen ski area, and I crossed the finish line alone, since no one expected me to break 22 hours and the race officials were still inside the lodge with the 50-mile runners.

After taking a shower and then soaking in a hot tub for a few minutes, the race directors allowed me to take a nap in their condo. I felt slightly guilty about this, since my dad was heading back out on the course to try to meet Kerry at some of the aid stations. I thought I should go support her, but I was too tired. After resting for a few hours, I limped back outside to watch the runners finish. I was glad I made it back to the finish line in time to see Kerry

win the women's race and finish fourth overall. I am amazed at how consistently well she runs 100-mile races. The finish line is always such a fun place, talking to other runners, comparing stories from the trail, and cheering for the finishers.

The Superior Sawtooth 100 Mile marked the end of a busy travel season for me, which saw me run races in several different states, crew at the Leadville 100 Mile, and take a camping trip in New York with my family. Enjoying a 100-mile run through the rolling hills of Minnesota as the leaves were starting to change color was the perfect way to end a great summer.

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