

Frozen Ed's Report on the 2013 Barkley Marathons
May 19, 2013

Laz has told us that he enjoys reading runners' post-race reports, and several other runners have written great reports, including some relatively long ones about relatively short runs. I'll follow that example. Here is my story of my adventures and "failure" at the 2013 Barkley Marathons. But first I want to compliment Nick and Travis for their awesome runs and for their well-written and at times gripping reports of those runs.

The 2013 running of the Barkley Marathons continued the evolution of several themes that we have all come to recognize: the course keeps getting tougher, and so do a few of the runners; some of us other runners keep getting slower; it rained as usual; and it was the most interesting and fun event of the year for us hard-core Barkley addicts, some of whom came from across the country and overseas, and some of those addicts were there just to observe, not run the race. What is it about this unique event that attracts us from far and wide?

Anticipation was high in the campground over the last few days before the race. Several top runners had spent a few days there scouting the parts of the course that were open. They told the rest of us about the foot of snow up in the mountains. Jared and John, both finishers of last year's Barkley 100, claimed to be better trained than last year. Last year's Fun Run finishers Nick, Travis, Alan, and Bev were all there again, and were taking it very seriously. Brett was there, too, but as an observer, not an entrant. He had injured his back in training for Barkley on fast, steep downhill runs. Cooler temperatures than last year added to the expectation of some of us that we could have another "mass finish" similar to last year's. However, in the days just before this year's race, the weather forecast included a potentially significant amount of rain for the weekend. This reminded me of a comment from laz after last year's Barkley, that good weather had been a factor in the relative successes of recent years, and that more normal "Barkley weather" could return us to "zero finish" conditions.

The Barkley weather started getting us prepared on Friday, the day before the race. It rained much of that afternoon, evening, and night. It was not raining at the 9:04 AM race start, but the ground was wet and slippery. As we lined up at the gate, I positioned myself in front of the gap to the left of the gate and waited for laz to light his cigarette. As soon as he did, I quickly took several strides past the gate and onto the jeep road beyond. I glanced around and saw that no one was in front of me. It was the 27th running of the Greatest Race Among Men and Mountains, and I was in the lead!... for about two seconds. Then the pack of real runners surged past and I was soon in my proper position near the back of the pack.

I had been mentally rehearsing the course for many weeks leading up to this moment, and now I was finally living out the fantasy. The 14 switchbacks up Bird Mountain were enjoyable and easy, as always. I topped out in 0:43 race time (RT), which is typical of my times to that point in recent years (for example, 0:41 in 2012). The Pillars of Death were a little scary because they were wet and slippery, but I got across safely, and soon got to the England Mountain peak at 3018 feet elevation. I was with Drew Hackett through this area. We made good time through Fangorn Forest and went directly to the first book, arriving at 1:01 RT. This was seven minutes slower than my time of 0:54 last year. Near the book we passed some other runners, Leonard and Shannon as I recall. After getting my page, I counted steps from the book along the coal bench to the turn-off that I call Cable Ridge, and went left along the ridge a

short ways before dropping down the steep mountainside toward Phillips Creek, following a memorized compass heading. We (Drew was still with me) found the crevice in the cliffs that I call the Flume of Doom, and went down it, then found the line of blazed trees that we followed down until we were close to the old Park boundary corner cairn at Phillips Creek. We overshot the corner a little, but realized it as soon as we saw Phillips Creek. So we bore to the right and were at the creek crossing within a couple of minutes. The time was 1:24 RT. This was four minutes longer than my time to this point last year.

The old North Boundary Trail (NBT) - now called the North Bird Mountain Trail on the new map of the expanded Frozen Head State Park and Natural Area - was in good condition and easy to follow all the way to SOB Ditch. However, on the downhill side of Jury Ridge, at 2:14 RT, I suffered a severe cramp in my left upper thigh. This was very disconcerting. It was the third consecutive year that I have experienced this problem on the NBT section of the course. I had been drinking and peeing, so I didn't think I was dehydrated. The cramp was extremely painful, and I had to stop for a minute or two for it to release. One of the runners who passed me just then asked if I wanted a calcium pill. I thanked him but declined, saying that I had some with me. I then took both a Succeed electrolyte capsule and a Tums (calcium carbonate). After the cramp subsided, I continued along the NBT. I was carrying some of Kerry Trammell's ashes, and somewhere along this trail, which is in the Emory River watershed, I scattered some of his ashes.

I was alone when I crossed SOB Ditch and clambered up the coal-mining spoils pile to the Coal Ponds. There I encountered Lynn Turner, aka Father Gump. He had slowed down after some problems (his back, as I recall). He stayed with me as we traversed the Coal Ponds and then started up toward the Garden Spot and onto the Cumberland Candyass Trail. We soon saw Paul Lefelhocz who was a little off-trail north of us, and seemed glad to see us. The three of us continued up to the Garden Spot. We were soon joined by Leonard Martin, who had been gaining on me since I passed him near book 1. As I recall, we also saw John Price in this area. My time to the Garden Spot, book 2, was 3:56 RT, compared to 3:42 last year. I attribute this 14-minute (6%) slow-down to my lesser level of training mileage and elevation change this year, which was about 24% below that of last year.

After refilling our bottles at the Cold Gap water-drop, we took the jeep road around to the turn-off to Coffin Springs. Father Gump had told us that he wanted to quit and head back to camp, so Leonard and I pointed out the road for him to take past Coffin Springs to Quitter's Road. But before Father Gump left us, I asked him to help me with a little ceremony for Kerry Trammell. I scattered some of Kerry's ashes at that intersection, into the New River watershed, while saying my own farewell to Kerry. Father Gump then said a short prayer. He then headed down toward camp, while the rest of us continued around the dirt road toward Stallion Mountain.

In past years, I have usually had problems navigating Stallion Mountain, and have gone there a couple of times in recent years for training runs to try to learn it better. I thought that I really knew it well this year. But that wasn't taking into consideration the new part of the course that was waiting for us. We didn't go to the familiar Yellow Indian book location this year. Instead we were supposed to go southward down the west side of Stallion Mountain to Barley Mouth Branch, a southwesterly-flowing creek. As my group struck into the unknown on an old mining road, we soon encountered Dale Holdaway, who had been uncertain of the route and was heading back to a known location to try again to follow the course directions. Dale joined our group. I had another paralyzing leg cramp while descending the side of Stallion Mountain, this time in my right thigh. I took another electrolyte capsule

and stopped for a minute while the cramp subsided. Fortunately, this was the last significant leg cramp I had for the rest of the race. I also recall that in the Stallion Mountain area, I had a premonition - one of several throughout the day - about Travis. I had a sort of feeling that I was following him, and that this was his year to finish the Barkley.

We descended Stallion Mountain in search of the old Leonard's Buttslide, which was part of the course this year for the first time since 2005. I felt fortunate at this point to be with Leonard himself. If anyone could find this new book location, I thought that surely Leonard would be able to do so, at least in theory. However, reality turned out different than that theory. As we were going down the mountain, we apparently got too far to the right, and hit the coal road that we were supposed to take from Barley Mouth Branch to Bobcat Rock, before we crossed Barley Mouth Branch. Not realizing that we were on the correct road but too far north, we continued downhill below the road, angling toward the Barley Mouth Branch valley that we could see in front of us.

When we got to Barley Mouth Branch, we crossed it and kept going down along it, expecting to come to the coal road at any moment. However, it seemed to be taking longer than expected. We eventually began speculating that we were too far down the mountainside, but I didn't believe it until I could see one of the most beautiful sights in Frozen Head: the confluence of Barley Mouth Branch and the New River. There were many rapids and small waterfalls on both streams, as the waters babbled downward to their confluence about a hundred feet vertically below us. Moss-covered rocks and huge hardwood trees filled the deep valley. I saw an animal down near the confluence, darting among the rocks and trees "as if they were standing still." I was pretty sure it was a wild boar. I really enjoyed seeing this beautiful nature scene, but I knew that it was a major mistake to be here. We were several hundred feet vertically below where we should have been.

I must digress to say what a stroke of evil genius it was for laz to ban altimeters from the Barkley a couple years ago. If I had had my altimeter with me this year, I easily would have been able to know when we had been on the correct coal road up above. But alas, now the only thing we could do was admit that we had screwed up, and turn and head up the steep slope in search of Leonard's Buttslide. We finally climbed up to the coal road, and found the top of Leonard's Buttslide not far from where we had gotten to the road. As we headed down the Buttslide, we could look down and see the milk crate and deer stand in the tree below us, so we slid on down and found the tree with book 3, and got our pages. We then turned around and slid back up the Buttslide, back to the coal road. There was Bobcat Rock, and we entered the small cave and saw the slot going up and out the back of the cave. We went up through it, just like I had seen laz do in the video that Kyle Henn had posted on YouTube from the book setting-out <<http://youtu.be/cOtK7xsHLwE>>. I think that tunnel out the top of the cave is now one of the coolest features on the course!

We continued up the ridgeline past Hiram's Pool, which was a much larger lake than I had expected, and the "sofa." We soon got to the rock with book 4 in the borehole. After that, we traversed around the side of the mountain and within a minute we were back to familiar terrain on the south slope of Fyke's Peak.

From there, I remembered the way down Fyke's, and we made good time to the New River, where we crossed on the same log across the river that I have used in recent years. My time to the New River was 6:32 RT, 90 minutes longer than last year's 5:02. So the new part of the course, from Garden Spot to the

New River, had taken me an extra 1:16 compared to last year. I had estimated in advance that the new books would add about half an hour, but the difficulty in finding the Leonard's Buttslide book cost me about 46 minutes longer than that. I did some mental math and realized that I would probably not be able to finish the loop within the time limit. However, I was not ready to quit.

The group I was with on Stallion Mountain had sort of disintegrated as we went down to the New River, and by the time I got to the top of Testicle Spectacle, I was alone. Amazingly, the powerline clearing had been partially bulldozed, and the climb up Testicle was slightly less horrible than in past years. Down Meth Lab Hill and around the hill, I went in a beeline directly to book 6 near Raw Dog Falls. I saw John Price one last time as I was going downhill away from the book while he was going up toward it. I refilled my filter-bottle from the stream as I was crossing Sawmill Hollow, then slipped on a wet rock and submerged one leg into the cold water. Wanting nothing to do with Danger Dave's Climbing Wall, I took the Pussy Ridge Long-cut and worked my way up to the top of Dave's Wall and then down the valley to the rusty drum. I then scrambled up the steep incline through the old tires and trash to Highway 116, then went down along 116 to Pig Head Creek. I continued along the course, up Rat Jaw to the top of Frozen Head. There I saw Brett and a few other spectators, but in my tired state I called Brett John (thinking it was John Fegyveresi) and asked what he was doing there - he should be running! He told me that he was Brett. I was embarrassed, and realized that my mind was getting weak. I collected my page from the book at the tower, and refilled my drink bottles. My time was 8:44 RT, compared to 7:24 last year, so I had done the section from the New River to the Lookout Tower 10 minutes faster than last year. I was determined to complete the loop, even though I still estimated that I would be over the time limit. As I was going back down Rat Jaw, I saw Leonard going up. He too stated his intention to finish the loop regardless of the time.

I went down to the Prison and entered the stream and headed up the tunnel. As I recall, I counted that it was about 300 steps in length - about 250 yards. I then climbed up the embankment at the other end and passed behind James Earl Ray's escape wall, and went around and up to the guard tower where the book was. This was a great place to put the book, and I hope laz continues to use it as a book location. I took a moment to count the number of missing pages in the book, and estimated that I was in about 26th place in the race. I then went out and headed up toward Razor Ridge, which I sometimes think of as Ray's Ridge, because it is thought to be the approximate direction that James Earl Ray went from the prison in his escape.

I nailed the navigation from there to Indian Knob, passing Steve Durbin and his friend (whose name I forget) on the way up. Steve told me that he had been unable to find book 3, at Leonard's Buttslide, so he was out of the race, but wanted to see more of the course. I did pretty well going down Zipline, and then I stopped for a moment along Beech Fork Creek to scatter the last of Kerry's ashes that I was still carrying. So Kerry's remains are in at least three watersheds in Frozen Head: the Emory River, New River, and Beech Fork.

While I was still going down along Beech Fork, I was surprised to see Eva coming uphill along the trail. She told me that she had finished loop 1 with other runners in about 9 hours, but had apparently forgotten to take her page from the book at Indian Knob. So she was on the way back to get her page. She was smiling and seemed to be taking it in stride, calling it "good training." I was impressed with her positive attitude in the face of such a disappointment.

I got my page from the Beech Fork beech tree book, and made my way up Big Hell. Part way up, it got dark, and started raining. I put on the blue rain jacket that I had been carrying. I got to the Chimney Top final book at 12:07 RT, compared to 10:53 last year. My time to there from the Lookout Tower was about 6 minutes less than last year, so I was continuing to make pretty good time in the latter half of the loop. I was also beginning to worry that I might finish the loop within the time limit and be required to continue. But that problem was soon to be resolved.

To the best of my recollection, this was the first time that I had ever been on Chimney Top in the dark. Even last year, when I finished two loops in 29:15, I hit Chimney Top in daylight on both loops. No problem, I thought now, I had memorized the route through the capstones: go right around the first capstone, then cross over the saddle, and go left around the second set of capstones/cliffs to the Chimney Top Trail (CTT). I thought I did this, but it seemed to be taking longer than expected to find the CTT. As I went to the left past what I thought was the second capstone, I followed a faint trail, presumably from the runners ahead of me. I kept going and kept not seeing the CTT with its bright green blazes. Finally, I started seeing the blazes and found myself on the CTT. I continued ahead in the rain and darkness. I could smell smoke as if from a campfire, but had not seen any campers. I recalled that there was a campsite along the CTT at the Chimney Top capstones, and wondered if I had somehow missed it. After a few minutes, I checked my compass heading. I was going northeasterly. Hmm... this didn't seem right.

Unfortunately, I couldn't check my map for the correct direction, because I had forgotten to bring my map. It was still in the pocket of the grey rain jacket that I had worn in camp the evening before when I marked the new part of the course on my old map, but that was not the blue rain jacket I was wearing now. Without a map, I struggled mentally to visualize the layout of the course loop, and concluded that I should be going westerly, not easterly. About this time, I came to another set of capstones, which convinced me that I was going the wrong way on the CTT. I knew that if I were going the right way, there were no more capstones. Frustrated with myself, I turned around and headed southwesterly. Within a few minutes, I could see lights and a campfire ahead. I soon came to the Chimney Top campsite, where three guys were camped. They told me that they were aware of the race and had seen several other runners. They also confirmed that I was now heading back toward Park Headquarters. I went onward, but almost immediately made a wrong turn between some rocks and lost the trail. This time it took me only a few seconds to get back on the trail. Somewhere in there I checked my watch; it was 12:44 RT, so the Chimney Top capstones had cost me about another half hour of wasted time wandering off-course. This is the third time in my many years at Barkley that I have managed to get lost there, and I know that several other runners have also gone the wrong way on the CTT here in prior years. There is something mysterious about this place. Stu has said that his compass spins in this area, but at least my compass seemed to be working properly. It was my mind that wasn't working right.

The lost time at Chimney Top resolved the question of whether I could finish the loop within the time limit. By the time I got to the Yellow Gate, it was 14:02 RT, 42 minutes over the time limit. Dave Henn blew a creditable rendition of Taps for me. He had already gotten a lot of practice that day. Fortunately for me, I didn't have to go back out there in the rain and fog.

Over the next few hours, many runners came back to camp from Quitter's Road. They had been unable to follow the course in the rain and dense fog that covered the mountains. Even Hiram had trouble finding book 1. This is ironic because that book location was first scouted and proposed by Hiram

himself a couple of years ago. In retrospect, I would have enjoyed the opportunity to see if I could navigate the course in the fog, or if I would have gotten totally lost like most runners who attempted loop two. The fact that seven runners were able to complete loop two (and more, for five of those runners) seems like a miracle.

My time was 1:47 longer than last year's 12:15 first loop. I estimate that my total time penalty from being lost on Stallion and Chimney Top was about 1:16, so if I had been able to navigate better, I could have finished the loop in about 12:46. Since this year's course was longer than last year's, this is not too bad a slow-down, given my lower training level. This gives me hope that I still have it in me to finish loop one in time to continue, and do two or possibly even three loops next year. When the time comes, I will again beg laz to let me try again. Stu has informed me that I have an obligation to keep running Barkley, so I guess I am doomed to keep doing it until laz makes me stop. Actually, I see it more as a precious gift, for which I am extremely grateful, to have the privilege of being allowed to keep running the Barkley. Which brings me back to the dangling question.

In the second paragraph of this report, I ended with the question: what is it that draws us from around the country and world to the Barkley? I think it is a combination of the beauty of course, the difficulty of the challenge, the history of both the failures and successes of the runners at facing that challenge, and the nature of the people who frequent the event.

These factors add up to a deep and intense experience for those of us who seek it out there. In his post-race essay, Michiel Panhuysen said it as well as I have ever heard it said, about why we are drawn to Barkley: "... a little bit more than before the race I realized what it meant to be." I think he is saying, in existentialist terms, nearly the same thing that laz wrote shortly after the 2010 Barkley: "... we are never so alive as when we put it all on the line. and at barkley the only guarantee is that you will be pushed beyond your limits. everything is on the line." I also think this is similar to what Andrew Thompson referred to recently when he wrote about "going deep--deep into ourselves to achieve more than we thought possible." The psychologist Abraham Maslow used the phrase *peak experience* to refer to those intense moments of transcendence and awe that feel like they change our lives and give us higher meaning.

All of these statements - realizing more deeply what it means *to be*, being more alive, going deep into ourselves, peak experience - point to the profound meaning that some of us find in the Barkley. The quest for that meaning is why we will keep going back for as long as we can.