

The Empire Runner

Notes From Another SOB

Well, a week after our Kenwood footrace my wife and I did our new annual trek to Mt Ashland, home of the SOB Trail races (15k and 50k). It has become my favorite race of the year, with apologies to the Ilseño and Loop races. It was hot all week and temps were in the 90's in Ashland, not boding well for enjoyment, also at the higher points of both courses, they were faced with 6 feet of snow still on the ground the previous week, and were debating having to alter the 50k route. We arrived in Weed Friday night and met my niece, Sarah, from Placerville who was the only one I could convince to run the race this year. Weed is an interesting little town to stop over in, with many historic spots, a walkable downtown and rivers and mountains all around. Check it out.

We drove up the 30 miles to the start early Saturday, no race day reg since it is limited to 225 in each event, picked up our numbers and enjoyed a mostly windless, chilly mountain morning. Did I mention the races start (and end) at 6500 feet and meander along the mostly single track Pacific Crest Trail with views of Mt McLaughlin, Shasta, and the Cascade and Siskiyou ranges. Sarah and I and my wife Jeanne, who does not race, wished each other luck and started off with the others. Both courses head off downhill, which means they finish uphill, a sobering thought, and peel off of the dirt road onto single track and awesome views, if you are daring enough to glimpse up from the side-hill trail and sneak a peek or two. The trails are mostly soft meadow trails, with a few wet spots but pretty narrow, which limits passing, but most are content to keep a sane pace at the earlier stages, hopefully leaving something in the tank for the rising temps at the end.

The first half is pretty much rolling to flat with one section of steep, but short, switchbacks leading to the not quite halfway turnaround. At that point you head up a long, hot, uphill on a dirt road, passing a few 4ft snow banks. This is a tough section that seems to climb forever, especially since you can see the road stretching off into the distance (and I couldn't remember from last year if we stayed on the road the whole climb or not. We did stay on it for over a mile up and then a tough downhill for another mile or so (there are no mile markers on the course-which is a good thing cause you wouldn't want to know your splits anyway). Anyway we finally hit the first and last aid station again and got back on the single track till we hit the final uphill grind to the finish. This stretch was baking by the time I got there, but I struggled through and was glad to have a level finish to muster up a little speed, and dignity, for the crowd. All in all this is a beautiful course, very well run, lots of camaraderie (typical with these mountain trail runs). It is tough and long and at altitude but a great challenge. I recommend it to all.

I ran 7 minutes slower than last year and had a little bout of altitude issues after finishing. Sarah finished a few minutes behind me, surprising all of us with a good first race here. My wife and I traveled on to Bend, Oregon for a mini vacation, which is a great outdoor area for running, biking, climbing and kayaking. I'll be back to the SOB (Siskiyou Outback) next year. Sarah said next time *she* is choosing the race (and it won't be at 6500 feet).

Bill Browne