

ONTARIO ROADRUNNER

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Spring 2005

ORA Stories

Wild Willie Takes Tampa

Your Favourite Races 2004

Are Running Clubs in Trouble?



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George Biondic finishing the 2004 Kiehl's Badwater Ultramarathon

Website Calendar password: groucho
Effective: March 20, 2005

Cover photo: Monica Scholz, 37, of Jerseyville, in the Ancaster area, in the 135 mile **2004 Kiehl's Badwater Ultramarathon** photo by John Rennison (see story page 7)

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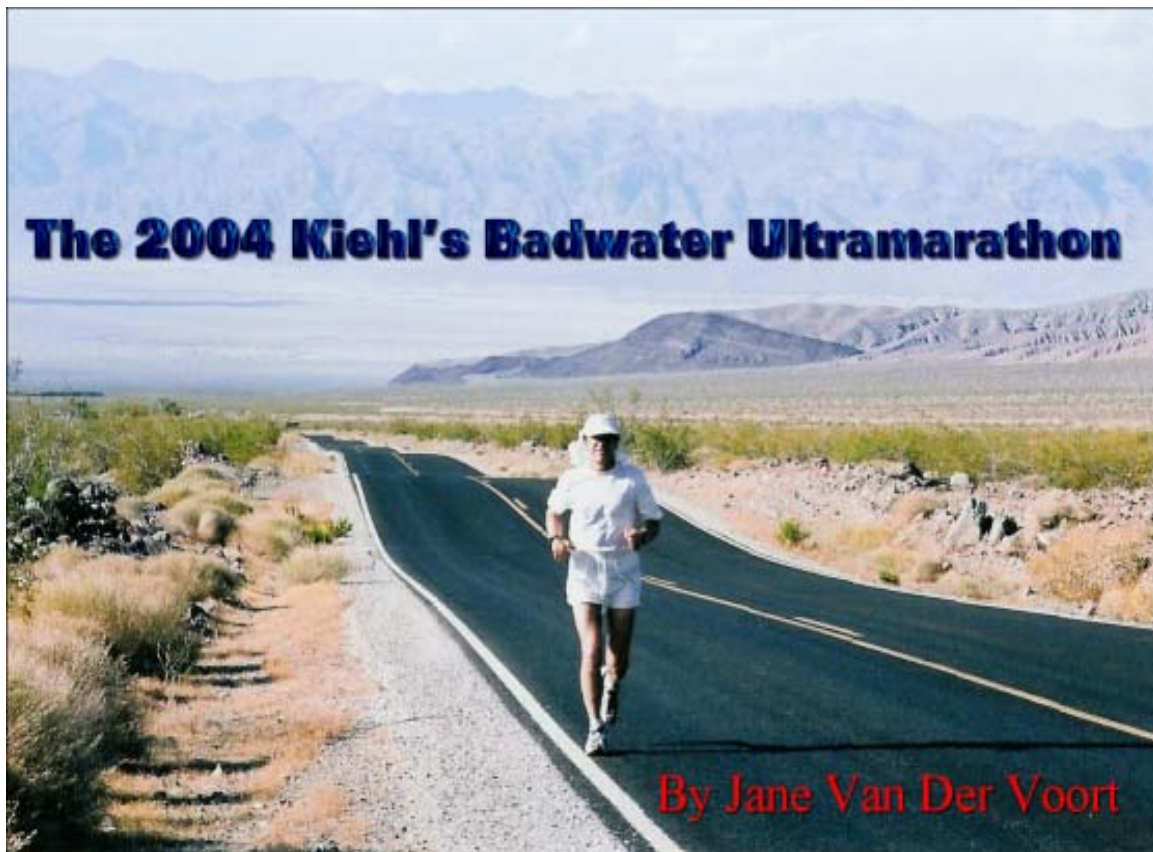
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Mail to:

Ontario Roadrunner, Suite 158, 2255-B Queen St. E, Toronto, Ontario. M4E 1G3.

Fax: 416-691-9556/1-800-733-6184

E-Mail: info@ontarioroadrunners.com



13th place finisher George Biondic

Survival can be the sweetest revenge.

Especially if you survive the toughest foot race on Earth, 135 non-stop miles that start in Hell — Death Valley.

Four Canadians were among the 72 competitors invited to that race, the 2004 Kiehl's Badwater Ultramarathon. The route pits life against death at nearly every step, from Death Valley at temperatures up to 130F, to the Mt. Whitney Portals at nearly 8,300 feet above sea level.

The Canadians did exceptionally well, with second and third spots. B.C.'s Ferg Hawke, 46, a rookie entrant, lost by only 7-1/2 minutes to first-place finisher Dean Karnazes, 41, of California who clocked the time of 27:22:48. Monica Scholz, 37, of Jerseyville, in the Ancaster area, came third at 29:22:29.

The race itself is renowned yet eccentric — a good fit for title sponsor Kiehl's since 1851, which has grown its line of skin and hair products from a small, New York-based family business to having a new, second location in Toronto.

And then, when Badwater is over, most competitors say they'll do it again.

Are they nuts?

Ferg Hawke, who came second in the race last July 12-14, had known about it for years. "I thought it was from another planet!" he said with his good-humoured laugh.

Hawke, 47, an airline baggage handler from White Rock, B.C., began running in 1989 and started ultramarathons in 1995. He finished eighth in the week-long 2002

Marathon des Sables, through the Sahara Desert.

"Then I thought 'I have to get Badwater scratched off my list of hard, stupid things to do'," he says, laughing again but not really joking.

He trained with weeks of 100-plus miles, including running the Rocky Mountain foothills near his home. His crew, including son Carter, 15, were good friends who'd done Ironman and ultramarathon races. He cut the toes from shoes and broke in running sandals. He stayed fuelled and hydrated with liquid Carbo-Pro, and electrolyte tablets.

To acclimatize to Death Valley, Hawke built a heat chamber — a solarium equipped with electric heaters. He got the temperature to 135F and ran in it on a treadmill.

His Badwater time, 27:30:22, was remarkable — "I'm six-feet and 180 pounds. Nobody gives me much attention at races because I look too big to be much of a threat." — and his finish "was a real surprise ... I was really happy, and then we had to wait two hours to see if I'd won," he said.

"My crew was really stressed to see if Dean was going to beat me. I was just kind of indifferent because from the way I was feeling, I knew I'd given it everything I had."

Now he plans a return to Badwater. "I'm going to give it another try. I mean, seven minutes!"

Monica Scholz, 37, ran her third Badwater Ultramarathon last year, taking third place at 29:22:29 — about four hours better than her time in 2003. "Once you do one ultramarathon, it's addictive," says the Hamilton lawyer who began running nine years ago with her dog, Natasha, a malamute/shepherd cross.

She plans to run Badwater again next year as part of the cycling (Furnace Creek, 508 miles) and running combo, the Death Valley Cup. She currently owns the Cup, with her record time of 73:51:44. Kiehl's spokesman, Ironman Chris Bergland, plans to cycle Furnace Creek with her.

More seems to be better for Scholz, who set records in 2000 and 2001 for most ultramarathons. "I think I have pretty good biomechanics," she modestly admitted. "I have been called a machine. I don't really think about it."

Running almost exclusively on trails, she covers up to 10 km a day with a long run of between four and seven hours each weekend.

To deal with the heat of Badwater, "I play this game — if I run on the white line, I can run through the heat," she says. Her race menu is extensive: Sandwiches, apple sauce, chocolate pudding, beef jerky and cheese strings for the salt, mashed potatoes and chicken soup. "I wanted a burger and a beer, and my crew gave me a burger," she said with an enthusiastic laugh.

Toe socks and open-toed shoes save her feet. The only glitch, she said, was that her crew became "barfy" from the heat. "Yeah, I had to keep them together," she said, with another big laugh. Scholz's attitude belies her ability. "I do have an 'I love me' wall in the office — but my brother maintains it," she admits.

George Biondic, 52, of Aurora, began running at age nine, when he and his family escaped Croatia (then Yugoslavia) through Europe to North America. He ran to grade school to save bus fare for a bicycle.

He did the first of many marathons in Toronto when he was 26. Then he learned about Badwater. "The thought took my breath away. Nobody could do 135 miles!"



Second-place finisher, Ferg Hawke gets a spray from his son Carter, 15

He trained for over a year, slept under piles of blankets, ran on-the-spot in the sauna, and wore layers of clothes while running in the humid Ontario summer. "You can't underestimate the severity of this race.

"Biondic ran a double-crossing of the Grand Canyon weeks before the race, and then trained in Death Valley to be ready for the July 12 start.

"That first day ... you feel like a cheetah running in Africa, fast and sleek," he said. Death Valley temperatures are the "death zone," said Biondic. "Every mile I was sprayed, had ice on my head and neck, and was given a drink as cold as possible."

Halfway through, Biondic thought his race was over. "I could barely walk and I had about 80 miles to go. I was waddling like a duck." Cutting the toe boxes from his shoes relieved his crushed baby toes. Then he hallucinated.

But Biondic persisted, finishing Badwater in 13th place, at 37:30:00. "When you come from nothing and then have the opportunity to have what you want, and all you have to do is work, it's a no-brainer," he says.

Albert Martens finished Badwater with the people of Benin, Africa, in mind. His employer, the Christian missionary-based Athletes In Action, covered his race costs and Martens ran the race as a fundraiser.

Martens, 56, a grandfather in Steinback, Man., has done 32 marathons, seven ultramarathons, run the Marathon des Sables in Morocco, and completed 1,024 km across Germany for a fundraiser.

But Badwater's non-stop distance, heat and altitude gave him pause. "I came home in the summer, dressed up in winter clothes and turned the heat on in the car. I sat in the sauna at 60C for 30 minutes," he said.

His feet, especially, rebelled at Badwater with blisters so severe they oozed blood.

"I thought about my mother, my wife, the poor people of Africa. My son Patrick, who was on my crew, came out and just said 'Dad, how are you doing?' I broke down, but I kept going — I got new strength," he said.

Martens' goal this year is a fundraiser run across the country Benin. He doesn't think he'll do Badwater again: "It was good for an experience," he said, adding about a second attempt: "I don't think my wife will let me!" ♦



Albert Martens