



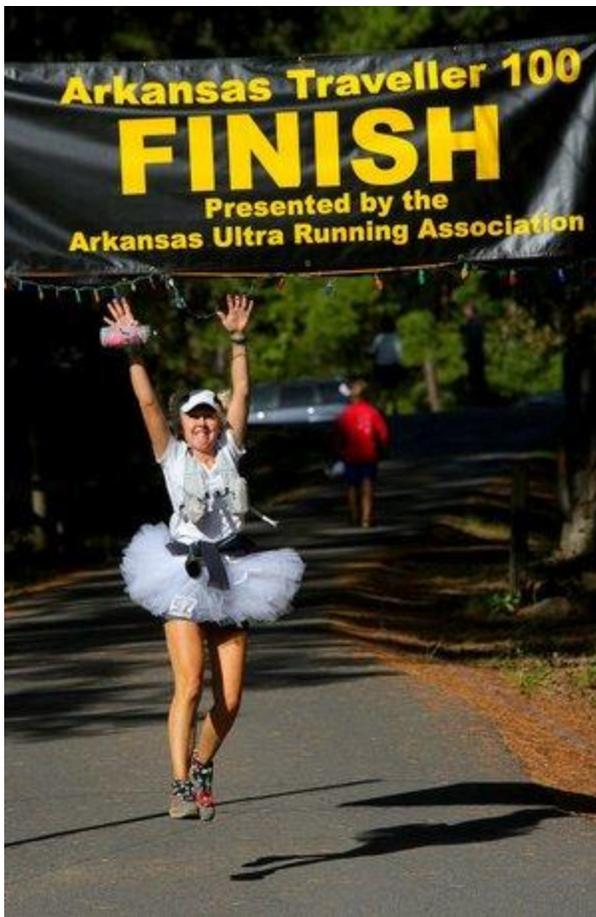
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Welcome **MARK HUNT** ([logout](#))



Paving the trail

‘Perfect’ weather conditions make ultramarathoners happy as they can be



Photographs by [Stephen B. Thornton](#)

10/5/14 Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/STEPHEN B. THORNTON
Wearing a battery lighted Tutu for nighttime running, Laura Range, of St. Louis, Mo. leaps to slap the finish line Sunday morning during annual Arkansas Traveler 100 near Lake Sylvia in the Ouachita National Forest.

Story by [Pete Perkins](#)

Monday, October 6, 2014

WILLIAMS JUNCTION -- The Arkansas Traveller 100 is a struggle for all who attempt to complete, as 100-mile foot races tend to be.

But this weekend's 21st Traveller 100, completed by 106 of 151 entrants, was a snap by comparison.

"It was perfect," said Wes Hunt, of Little Rock, the overall winner in 15 hours, 59 minutes, and 12 seconds. Robert "PoDog" Vogler finished second in 17:44, and Thomas Chapin third in 18:42.

Hunt's time was the third fastest since the Traveller's first running in 1991, and makes Hunt one of three men to break 16 hours. James Kerby set the course record of 15:37:26 in 2004. Joe Kulak won in 15:52:35 in 2002.

Shelley Egli, 41, of Jenks, Okla., won the women's division for the second consecutive year, in 21:51. Carol O'Hear finished second in 23:31, and Tammy Walther third in 23:54.

Temperatures ranged from the 67 degrees on Saturday afternoon to 40 degrees Sunday morning, with conditions so dry there was a burn ban across the Ouachitas and the course, which extends west from Arkansas 9 to Arkansas 7.

"You really couldn't ask for better conditions than this," said Chas Kabanuk, a U.S. Air Force pilot from North Dakota, as he ran out of the Powerline aid station Saturday afternoon with 32.1 miles left to run.

Hunt finished second in last year's Traveller to Brock Hime. The 68-second margin was the closest finish between a Traveller winner and runner-up since the race began; Hime won in 18:05:34. Hunt was next in 18:06:42.

Weather conditions last year were miserable almost throughout the race. High humidity and temperatures in the low-80s held throughout the first day, until heavy rain followed sunset and turned many of the trails either sticky or slick with mud. The temperature plunged into the low-50s through the night and following morning, and runners, soaked by the rainfall, became uncomfortably or painfully hypothermic.

Co-race director Stan Ferguson had the forecast in hand by mid-last week. Thursday night he said, "This should rock."

Hunt rolled from the start. He planned early to run at an average of approximately nine minutes a mile to start, and to perhaps back off by about a minute a mile in the latter stages. His overall average for race the was 9 minutes, 35.5 seconds a mile, a pace aided by his general unwillingness to pause for more than a handful of seconds at any of the 23 aid stops along the route.

Most 100-mile runners revel at aid stations. Finishers visit 13 different stations, 10 of which they pass through twice on the mostly out-and-back course.

Runners pass through Powerline on a gravel road 5 miles deep into the woods off Arkansas 9, approximately 10 miles northeast of Jessierville, at 48 miles and again at 67.9. It is one of the Travellers' most significant milestones, close to both the midpoint and two-thirds of the way through.

Hunt's lead after his first pass of Powerline was 48 minutes over Vogler. He paused briefly to fill his water bottle with Gatorade, and take a peanut butter and honey sandwich from his father, Mark Hunt, and brother, Luke Hunt. To eat the sandwich was a plan put into place Friday. In the 2013 Traveller,

Hunt's only other race longer than a marathon, he ate nothing but energy gels, chewable electrolyte supplements, and one banana. Hunt said he ate three sandwiches Saturday.

He explained his choice as he ran out of Powerline, sandwich in hand. "Last year I was really fatigued through the finish," Hunt said. "You know, really, all this Gu [a brand of energy gel] and Gatorade is really nothing but sugar. I thought maybe if I ate something a little more substantial, it might keep me from bonking."

Vogler was in and out in two minutes, after taking some Mountain Dew and ice and small serving of ramen noodles in chicken broth. "That might help with the cramps."

Others spent much more time at Powerline; some there as long as 20 minutes.

Chad Bailey, 1 hour, 54 minutes behind the leader, stopped to change shoes. "My feet are through with these," he said as tossed aside a pair of Pearl Izumi trail shoes, which he replaced with much thicker Hokas. "I'm feeling OK. I went through a spot there with a little nauseousness, but I'm over that now."

Ronnie Daniel, of Little Rock, stopped at Powerline on his way out in 11 hours, 30 minutes, and at first said he was bothered by little more than a loss of appetite, and a blistered left small toe that forced him to cut a slice from his shoe, the pair of which cost \$140. "I wasn't too happy about that," he said.

But as he walked and jogged out of the aid station, he had a long list of minor complaints. It seemed as if everything connected to his left leg was in some way uncomfortable. Still, he remained confident in his first attempt at a race beyond 50 miles. "I'm right on schedule for a 28-hour finish," he said. "I feel good."

Daniel competed the race Sunday morning in 27:25.

Hunt again dashed through the Powerline on his inbound passing, 32.1 miles from the finish. Vogler came 1:01 later, and asked if anyone knew about his competition. Someone said Hunt was about an hour ahead. "No, I'm talking about the guys behind me," Vogler said. "I'm not worried about Wes anymore."

By that point, Hunt had already literally sprinted across the finish line near Lake Sylvia, about 35 miles west of Little Rock. He said he raced the final 6.3 miles of the race, after he left Pumpkin Patch, the next to last aid station, intent on breaking 16 hours, and that he knew all along he would be close, but didn't know for certain he would reach his objective until he saw the large clock at the finish line from three hundred yards away on Arkansas 324.

Hunt's original schedule called for a finish in 16:50, but he said he felt so strong early that he decided to pick up the pace. His brother Luke, who paced him the final 16.1 miles, from the Lake Winona aid station, said he wasn't surprised.

"No matter how much Wes talks about following his plan, he runs with emotion," Luke Hunt said. "If he feels good, he's just going to go out and run hard. He said he wasn't going to do that, and of course he did."

Sports on 10/06/2014

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