SANDIA CROSSING HISTORY AND RUN INFORMATION

The history of the Sandia Crossing began in 1978 when Dr. Otto Appenzeller had an idea to do research on long distance runners and the effects of high altitude. Otto was a runner himself who began to run in ultra type mountain races when he found out how challenging they were. He then began doing research on the effects of these kind of events on the human body. The runners would have to volunteer for various testing both before and after the race. Blood was also drawn to study the bodies response to the altitude and physical exertion. The race originally had many aid stations and started in Placitas going to Tijeras. It was held for 11 years, in 1979 thru 88 and again in 93, with a field of 50 runners. The run had also been continued informally by Tom Kirchgessner for several years after that, but no records had been set.

The nearly 29 mile course crosses the Sandia Mountains following the crest trail #130 from Canyon Estates to the Tunnel springs trailhead near Placitas. The trail was initially built in around 1960 and measured by wheel at 28.5 miles. A couple years later they added a slightly longer section at around 4.6 miles up to lesson the grade in the earlier steep section. Then fairly recently like 15 years ago, the forest service added a slightly longer route around the Kiwanas meadow, to keep people out of this "animal grazing zone". These new sections added about .2 more tenths making the course now at least 28.7! I just call it 29 since the trail has eroded over the years with lots of loose and exposed rocks.

Whatever the exact distance, the "Crossing" is a beautiful and challenging trail run with many tough climbs and beautiful flatter meadows. The course climbs from 6550 feet at Canyon Estates to the south spring at 5.9 miles and 8800 feet. Then on to Deer pass at 7 miles and 9340 feet. Then on to right below the South Peak at 7.5 miles and a high of 9540 ft elevation. Then the trail runs slightly downhill for 3 &1/4 miles to the Canyoncito trail intersection at 10&3/4 miles. Next the trail climbs up and over a high point of nearly 9500' going back down to 9250' at the Cienega/Pino trail intersection at about 12&1/4 miles. Then goes 2 more miles to the Tree Spring intersection at 14&1/4 miles and 9450 feet. Now is the 1&3/4 mile 850 foot climb to right below the Tram at 10,340' and 16 miles. This section includes the steepest part of the race (a 350' 1/2 mile climb) in the middle. The course then continues another 1.6 miles to get to the Sandia Crest. This section includes the "Kiwanas Meadow" and onto an upper dirt service road which ends at the lower parking lot of the Crest. The runners then rejoin the North Crest Trail at 17.6 passing the high point of 10,650 feet! Now for the last 11.4 mile descent which ends at Tunnel Springs! The first year the event was held was in 1979 and ran from North to South. I still remember the race as a young 21 year old. I was excited but also a little scared about doing my first
In 1980 Ken Young won with a new record of 3:38. He was really tough and had won the Pikes Peak Marathon the previous two years. Then in 1981 I won with a 3:38 as well. Bob Parks won in 1982 and I won again in 1983 with a time I believe of about 3:36. In 1984 I ran well to the top, but did not have enough mileage behind me in my preparation. I had decided to run for a new record anyway and tried to run a 3:30 pace. In this 1984 race against Chris Dean, Chris beat my previous record doing a 3:31:14! I had paced Chris for the first 17.5 miles to the Crest parking lot in 2:24 which was close to my goal 3:30 pace. Unfortunately I was mentally psyched out when Chris surged past me to the cheers of some spectators. I stopped a half mile later, and walked back to the parking lot. Chris had kept on going at a great pace, sprinting the final downhill in a decent record of 67 minutes! That is sub 6 minute pace, for the last 11.4 miles including the last one which is partly uphill.

I was determined to never quit a race again and to beat the record the next year, so I trained especially hard. I beat Chris that year with my best of 3:32:23 but could not quite get his record. Chris had run the Duke City Marathon the week before and was not at his best that day. I still remember pushing the pace on the steep section before the south spring that day leaving Chris behind. I felt this was the best race of my life because it was a little warm out and I felt confident the effort would have been close to my goal of a 3:30 if the weather was a little cooler. (We ran in late August and the last hour or so was beginning to get warm) I still remember my own split times from this race as if it were yesterday. I hit the south spring in 48:05 minutes, Deer pass in 58 minutes, Canyoncito in 1:24:35, Cienega in 1:35:35, Tree spring in 1:51:25 the Tram in 2:10, the Crest parking lot in 2:24:15 and the final downhill section in just over 68 minutes. I won again with a 3:35 in 1986; a 3:37 in 1987 and then a 3:35 in 1988 but could not break my best time. The year in 1987 I ran a record pace to the top but could not hold it to the finish as dehydration and fatigue took my pace down over the last six or so miles. Kurt Coonrod blazed a super fast 67minute last downhill to come close to catching me with a 3:38:52.

Steve Gatchupin also ran the crossing in it's first year, but was not as competitive as he had been in his prime where he won Pikes Peak six times in the late 60's and early 70's. Steve was from Jemez Pueblo like Al Waquie who as many mountain runners know was the best uphill runner in the country when he was running his best. Al still holds the La Luz trail records of 1 hour 12:40 in 1980 from 650 yards further down the road than the present start (when the race was first extended exactly two miles!) Big Al, had also run the present course in 1:12:14 and the older shorter course in 57.40!
The Sandia Crossing never had a world class mountain runner like Al Waqie to see how fast a runner could go, but I believe that the course used to be about 5-10 minutes faster than Pikes Peak. (The trail is getting worse over the years without yearly maintenance.) It is therefore probable Al could have run at least a 3:20 since he had run a 3:26 record on Pikes. Since Pikes Peak's course is a little shorter, but steeper and at higher altitude, it is hard to know for sure.

For several years the crossing was not held but then in 1993, it was revived. Martin Ackerman, blasted a 3:29 running through two miles of snow and even carried his own water since there were no longer aid stations like in the first years. I still remember trying to stay with him and John Ortega and breathing pretty hard. Martin seemed to be very comfortable as we ran together. Up ahead, John Ortega led by a minute or so. Unfortunately after about four miles, I had to let Ackerman go. In the middle part of the race John built a good lead of several minutes, and he reached the top in a new uphill record of around 2:18 something, two plus minutes up on Martin. John was an outstanding uphill runner and cyclist and had won the Grants Mount Taylor Quadrathlon. Unfortunately John was not as good as Martin on the descents and began to tire on the final downhill. Ackerman began closing the gap with his superb downhill running, and quickly passed John after just several more miles, breaking the record by two minutes. Then later, at about the time when Martin finished, I caught John with a mile and a half to go. I went on to finish second in a 3:39. I was really happy with my time especially since we had carried our own water and ran through several inches of snow for two miles north of the Crest.

The past women champions of the Crossing were Laura Kirchgessner in 1980 with a 5:01. In the years following, Janeen Hill won several times with a best time of 4:39. Janine was a national class 10k and marathon runner originally from Canada. The next record holder was an outstandingly talented runner by the name of CiCi McCormick. CiCi was the winner several times in the late 80's running her best time "I believe" of 4:27 in 1989. CiCi was challenged that year by local triathlete and mountain runner Debbie Werenko who pushed her for over 13 miles. Debbie finished five minutes behind CiCi with a 4:32. Other local ultra runners to complete the run in fast times around 5 hours were Cecilia Niemczyk with a 4:57 in 85 and Jackie MacFarlane with a 5:04 in 85. Both these women were very dedicated to the Crossing and both ran the race many times.

This year we will run on Saturday, October 15th when the aspen leaves are turning yellow on the Sandias. What a great time of year to finish the mountain running season! We hope to have one or possibly two waves of runners starting at 8:00 am.

You can also download a map of the Crest trail on Dave Koblenz's site @ www.mountain-trail-series.blogspot.com and even get "google" directions on this site by going to maps then click on directions to runs. The run is sponsored by Dr. Wayne Kuang and the Southwest Fertility Center for men. We plan to have recognition T shirts and refreshments at the finish for all finishing runners. This is Wilderness and a very rocky and challenging trail so you are on your own! If you know the Sandia Mountain area the run will begin at the Canyon Estates trailhead, which is found by exiting the I40 freeway as when going to Cedar Crest. Now you go right towards the south 14 road then immediately turn left under the freeway. You drive north a half mile up through the Canyon Estates subdivision to get to the trail head. The run then ends at the Tunnel Springs trailhead close to Placitas, which is to be found by driving 5 miles east of I25 towards Placitas to the Tunnel Spring road then going south and up 1.5 miles till you get to the finish. It is a rough road so go slow! Make sure you know the course beforehand as it will not be marked perfectly but most trail intersections do have signs. You must also provide transportation back from the finish. You can give me an E mail to get more info or detailed directions to the start and finish. Tom4skis@aol.com or 505-967-5968. Hope to see you all there.

By Tom Kirchgessner