

# 15<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CARL TOUCHSTONE MEMORIAL

## MISSISSIPPI TRAIL 50

MARCH 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2011

### “EVERYONE GOT THEIR MUDDIES WORTH”

Weather reports beginning race week were ominous. At one point the forecast called for a 100 percent chance of rain. With a looming stormy prediction for race day, at the prerace meal the RD commented that “there is nothing we can do to get about 300 runners off 17 miles of trail if the weather turns severe”.

The weather was dry and cool for the annual volunteer run which is held two weeks before the race to allow any volunteers to complete their distance of choice. Time limits and cutoffs are enforced but volunteers usually treat the run as a social event, running as a group and discussing the upcoming race. Completing the volunteer run were Randy Saxon, Michael Yarbrough, Joey Smith, David Dill, Lori Ladd, Dennis Bisnette, Renee Bisnette, Eric Roberts, Serena Williamson and Iva Lightsey who finished her 100<sup>th</sup> Marathon or beyond that day.

Although it rained lightly for some time prior to race day, no real effect was had on the trails. In fact a rain deficit of some 4 inches had occurred since the beginning of the year so a light rain was a welcome sight to all. The light rain falling kept the temperatures low and cooled runners off during the early stages of the race. Mike Brown, winner of the 20K was over a minute faster in the rain that he was the year prior on a dry trail. 99 runners eventually finished the 20K fun run. By noon, 6 hours into the longer races only 1” of rain had fallen. Conditions were still great but began deteriorating soon after. The trail was rapidly reaching a saturation point and creeks were on the rise. Over the next three hours conditions were getting grim. The 6 water crossings on the yellow loop were at least waist deep and getting deeper by the minute. The shorter blue loop with 3 creek crossings started out with a nice waist deep soak followed by two creeks with long stretches of mud. Interestingly the RD kept commenting that there appeared to be no mud on the runners. Later, it became clear that deep creeks and torrential rain kept the runners free of mud. Some runners commented that swimming was faster than wading the creeks.

Everyone running by an aid stations and the start/finish had wide smiles on their faces. All seemed as happy as a three year old playing in the mud. Many runners were heard to comment that running in the rain, mud and water was the most fun they ever had.

Still conditions deteriorated even further. Eventually over 4 more inches of rain fell in a few short hours making even the roads appear as rivers. At that point more wading was going on than running. One concern was that runners were unable to see anything underfoot as water covered roots, holes, and creek beds. The trail was well flagged but almost impossible to discern due to the water. There remained no way for a runner to be sure they weren't stepping in a hole or on some object. Soon after tornados hit in nearby Louisiana, tornado warnings were issued for the race site. One report specifically mentioned a bad storm cell at a location within a few miles from the race.

Eventually conditions got so bad that the decision was made to pull the remaining runners from the course. However, with only two access points on the blue loop collecting runners from the course was at best a long process. Most if not all of the 50K runners were able to complete the course but not all 50 milers finished their distances.

Troy Multon of Louisiana, probably with the advantage of training at or below sea level, won the 50K in a time of 4:21:46. Not a record for the course but a great time considering the horrendous conditions. On the female side Kristel Liddle, now living in Colorado, but recently of Louisiana, finished in a time of 5:37:26. Swamp runners?

Finally winning the 50 mile on his 9<sup>th</sup> attempt was 54 year old Greg Gearhart of Mississippi leading the field of those able to complete the long run in a time of 7:53:58. Karen Ray of Indiana made the trip south to run in the rain and was the winning female with a time of 8:36:41. Only 14 other runners were able to complete the 50 mile run before the race became untenable. 36 participants in the 50 mile event were awarded 50K finishes for the longest distance completed before being rescued from the conditions. No one including the RD and volunteers was happy that any runners' race was cut short. One female participant was heard to object about being pulled from the course until a ground strike of lighting a few yards away quickly convinced her to get in the vehicle.

Naturally a number of less hardy souls and those having better sense declined to start the race. At the end of the day, as one competitor put it "everyone got their muddies worth"