

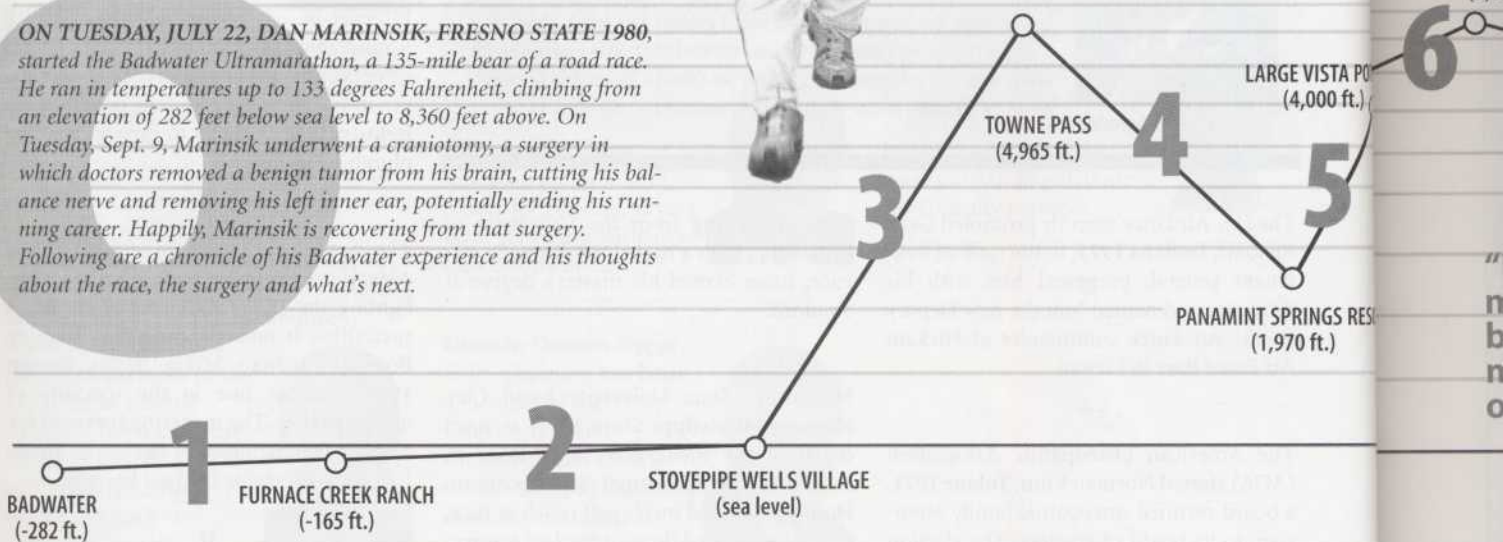
One 135-mile race and one craniotomy down, and this ultra-marathoner is still on the move.

# the long road

by Dan Marinsik, Fresno State 1980



ON TUESDAY, JULY 22, DAN MARINSIK, FRESNO STATE 1980, started the Badwater Ultramarathon, a 135-mile bear of a road race. He ran in temperatures up to 133 degrees Fahrenheit, climbing from an elevation of 282 feet below sea level to 8,360 feet above. On Tuesday, Sept. 9, Marinsik underwent a craniotomy, a surgery in which doctors removed a benign tumor from his brain, cutting his balance nerve and removing his left inner ear, potentially ending his running career. Happily, Marinsik is recovering from that surgery. Following are a chronicle of his Badwater experience and his thoughts about the race, the surgery and what's next.



## STAGE 1—17.4 miles TOTAL—17.4

I pushed for several hours at a 5 mph pace—a pace that in any other race would put me at the back of the pack, but in desert conditions is too fast to maintain. I arrived at Furnace Creek approximately three and a half hours later and only one minute behind my scheduled time. The temperature had already surpassed **110 degrees Fahrenheit**.

## STAGE 2—24.5 miles TOTAL—41.9

At about mile 32 I took a calculated risk and asked for a Slim-Fast, which usually results in fast energy with little or no stomach ramifications. As a runner passed me and asked how I was doing, I told him that I was having stomach problems and then immediately **projectile vomited**. Luckily, with the abundance of water I had consumed, it was relatively pain free and my stomach immediately settled. I switched to my second pair of running shoes that were two sizes larger than those I normally wear because my feet were rapidly starting to swell from the **200-plus degree** ground temperatures. When I removed my first pair of shoes I found that the insole of **my left shoe had melted** to my sock.

## STAGE 3—16.8 miles TOTAL—58.7

The 18-mile, 4,900-foot climb up Towne Pass was a **blur**. Making things worse was the large amount of sunscreen in my right eye that no matter how many times I tried to wash out, continued to burn. For several hours **I ran like Popeye**, keeping my right eye closed. This finally became difficult and I decided to run with both eyes closed. At times **I could even doze off** while continuing along the never-ending climb. Some first-aid folks spoke with me a couple of times, expressing concern because they knew I was running with a brain tumor and because I was swerving all over the road. I told them that I was sleeping as I was running and they seemed content that I wasn't going to collapse.

## STAGE 4—13.6 miles TOTAL—72.3

## STAGE 5—7.9 miles TOTAL—80.2

The start of the second day brought me the newfound energy I needed for the second major climb of the race. I speed-walked most of the section. By early afternoon I passed the third marathon point. **The miles seemed to be crawling by.**



During the Badwater Ultramarathon, Marinsik experienced mental exhaustion, physical pain and even hallucinations. He wants to do it again next year.



PART WAY UP  
MT. WHITNEY  
(8,360 ft.)

DARWIN TURNOFF  
(5,050 ft.)

DOW VILLA HOTEL  
(3,610 ft.)

"Physical demands were grueling, with moments of vomiting, hours of puncturing blisters and taping feet, an episode of peeling my melted insole off of my sock and periods of bleeding from severe chaffing."

#### STAGE 6—9.9 miles TOTAL—90.1

#### STAGE 7—32.2 miles TOTAL—122.3

As I feebly attempted to calculate the required speed to safely finish the race, I found that my lack of sleep during the last day and a half left me with an **inability to calculate the most basic math problem**. A fellow runner's crew chief assisted with the calculation—I needed to run 21-minute miles for the next 31 miles, which allowed me two hours of down time and eight hours to complete the final 13 miles up Mt. Whitney. The exhaustion rate was severe and **my mind started visualizing minor hallucinations**, shadows were turning into palm trees and factory buildings, and ultimately I saw a purple light that lifted the crew car up into the air. By about 2 a.m., I was ready for another 30-minute nap. At about 6 a.m. we passed the Dow Villa Hotel, leaving me with 12 hours to climb the final 13 miles.

#### STAGE 8—12.7 miles TOTAL—135

The first three miles passed within the first hour, this left 10 miles to go in 11 hours. I was dead-tired and for the first time in the race I allowed my body's fuel supply to get to zero. I requested oatmeal and a Power Bar; this gave me enough energy for a final boost. Several times within the last two miles I had to stay silent as the **combination of total exhaustion and elation nearly brought me to tears**. I maintained a 1.8 mph pace up the final big mountain and finished climbing the 8,360-foot monster at approximately 11:30 a.m., six and a half hours before the cutoff.

## AUGUST 20, 2003

FOUR WEEKS AFTER THE RACE  
THREE WEEKS UNTIL SURGERY

THE BADWATER 135 WAS TRULY an incredible life experience. When the race started the temperature was only slightly more than 100 degrees; by mid-afternoon, it was turning out to be the hottest running of this race in its 25-year history. The temperature climbed to 133 degrees from Furnace Creek to Stovepipe Wells. By race's end, the grueling conditions consumed 27 of the 74 participants.

Needless to say, in a scorching race of this duration both mind and body go through virtually every emotional and physical feeling one could imagine, from nervous pre-race jitters to feelings of complete control. At times, my mood dipped to utter despair, while at race's end I had feelings of complete elation. Physical demands were grueling, with moments of vomiting, hours of puncturing blisters and taping feet, an episode of peeling my melted insole off of my sock and periods of bleeding from severe chaffing. The utterly spectacular landscape displayed beautiful rock outcrops and magnificent mountain ranges. I completed the race with a respectable 33rd place finish, fully content with the total experience.

I signed up for this race at the beginning of the year because I have always performed well in heat. After my diagnosis in April, I centered my reason for running much more around teaching two lessons to my children, Danielle and Stephen: To follow their passions in life and to put others before themselves. Ultrarunning will always be my passion in some form or another. Whether I'm out there running or helping at an aid station, it will always be part of my life. I decided to run the Badwater 135 for the Challenged Athletes Foundation, making a commitment to raise \$5,000 to purchase two artificial limbs for two young adults who know life's true challenges on a daily basis. If I learned nothing else from this journey, I learned the importance of helping those less fortunate.

The route took more out of my soul than any course I have ever attempted, requiring me to dig deep into my inner

*continued on page 36*

continued from page 35

spirit. Not knowing what will come of my running after the craniotomy, I can only say that if this is indeed my last, it was an experience of a lifetime. If there is a way, I'll be out there pushing toward another finish line.

## SEPTEMBER 29, 2003

THREE WEEKS AFTER SURGERY  
11 DAYS BEFORE THE LAKE TAHOE  
TRIPLE MARATHON

**THERE ARE FOUR DIFFERENT SURGERY TECHNIQUES** for the removal of acoustic neuromas. I elected to have my physician take the most conservative approach, which means the physicians would have direct access to the tumor without having to disturb the brain. It had the least possibility of resulting in facial paralysis and the greatest possibility of complete excision of the tumor. The downside is that the surgeons were required to remove the left inner ear, resulting in total loss of hearing on that side. The tumor had already compromised 70 percent of that ear's hearing, so I didn't see this as a major concern. Plus, I'll be fitted for a cross hearing aid—it has a transmitter in the deaf ear and a receiver in the good ear, so if someone talks to me on the bad side, I'll still be able to hear them. The surgical method also required the physicians to cut the balance nerve on which the tumor was growing—the balance nerve on the other side of the brain will fully take over.

I felt comfortable going into the surgery knowing I had done my homework and that I had the most renowned surgical team in the world for this particular malady—my neurologist had performed more than 3,000 surgeries for this type of tumor.

Immediately after the operation, I awoke to see my wife's concerned face. She asked me to smile and was happy to see that I had full facial function. By day two I was able to get out of bed and walk around. With the balance nerve cut, it felt like my head was about two feet above my body. This didn't concern me as I am comfortable with the human body's ability to adapt. Additionally, I knew my own stubborn nature was only limited by the doctor's restrictions. I was supposed to be in the hospital seven days and flying home by day 14; I was out by day three and flying home by day 10.

It's been approximately two weeks since the surgery. My strength increases each day. I am speed walking between three and five miles a day. I am also negotiating with the doctor to run the Lake Tahoe Triple Marathon—one marathon a day for three days—Oct. 10, 11 and 12. My big plans for next year are to sign up for the Western States 100 and to take on the Badwater 135 a second time. I am already coordinating with my race captain, and my goal is to place in the top 20. ♥

*Marinsik is the worldwide vice president of quality assurance and regulatory affairs for the medical division of Sanmina-SCI.*

*This story first appeared on SIGMACHI.ORG. Stay tuned to the Web site for updates, including a recap of Marinsik's Lake Tahoe Triple Marathon experience.*



**ABOVE:** Marinsik and the crew that helped him tackle Badwater: Crew Chief George Gluck; his wife, Lily; and Dave Evans.

**RIGHT:** Marinsik runs through Badwater's grueling conditions on his way to a 33rd place finish.

**"Not knowing what will come of my running after the craniotomy, I can only say that if this is indeed my last [race], it was an experience of a lifetime."**

