

The Back Of The Pack

Six Races in Six States in Six Days

By Gary Pulver



The races were all 5K's, the states were Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Colorado, and the days were September 14-19. When searching for races in these and other states I discovered the group called Mainly Marathons. Anyone interested in running a race, a marathon or a half marathon in all 50 states needs to try running with this wonderful organization. They sponsor eight racing series that occur in from one to seven states. The series that I participated in is called the Center of the Nation Series. I will chronicle these six days of fun in this month's column. Here is the website for Mainly Marathons so that you can investigate them yourselves. [Mainly Marathons](#)

The evening before the first race of a series, a free pasta dinner is held at the site of that first race. This is when many participants pick up their bibs and mingle with other runners. Then, the evening before the other races, a restaurant is chosen for runners to meet, mingle, and enjoy another meal together if they so choose. The pasta dinner and the evening get togethers were certainly a lot of fun for me and my wife to attend. The prices for the events are as follows - \$30 for the 5K, \$80 for the half marathons, and \$95 for the full marathons. Discounts are available to members of groups of most of the 50 states clubs and one free race is offered to runners if they sign up early enough. You will

learn more about them in my personal description of each day.



Baker, Montana - held at Triangle Park, as most of the races, it was an out and back loop of under two miles that marathoners had to traverse 16 times and half marathoners had to traverse 8 times. For the 5K, I had to do one of the loops and then about half of a second one. After each loop, a runner picks up a rubber band and once enough have been collected he or she has finished and the time is recorded. The surface of this race was mostly concrete and asphalt. I quickly learned that although I am a slow runner, this is one series of races that one gets to see all of the runners over and over. I could not count how many times another runner would say "way to go Gary" or "good job" or "almost done", etc. Not really knowing how I would hold up, I

started out slowly but found a good rhythm and finished this first race in 43:35, good enough for 3rd place out of ten runners. There were 41 half marathoners and 57 full marathoners that completed the course. I quickly bonded with several of the 5K runners who also were signed up for all six days of racing. "Bill" was clearly the fastest of the bunch and came in first all six days with times that ranged from 23-25 minutes.

Bowman, North Dakota - Bowman-Haley Lake - My wife and I wanted to see as much of the country around where the races were held so we ventured to Theodore National Park after the Montana race and then settled into our hotel in Bowman. The race site was about 25 miles south of town so we all had to get up 30 minutes earlier for this race. I met a lot of runners at the dinner the night before at Hibachi House and all of them greeted me every time we passed. I brought 4 pair of running shoes with me hoping to taylor my choice to the surface. I had chosen the HOKAs for the cement for day one and with this race being mostly asphalt, I chose the Adidas Ultraboosts. I felt a bit faster and actually stronger but my garmin had this race measure one tenth of a mile longer than the day before and I finished in 43:58, 5th place out of 12. To give you an idea of how the marathoners did for this race, the winner finished in 3:44:50 and the final finisher had a time of 8:40:01. Mainly Marathons advertises that all of their races have no time limit.

Belle Fourche, South Dakota - Center of the Nation Visitors Center - This is the race site for which this series of races was named. Belle Fourche prides itself on being located at the geographic center of the nation. Weather was an ideal chilly for this race. By now I was getting to know the participants who were doing all or most of the 5K's. Cynthia was a 43 year old who was new to running but had joined the series thanks to her friend. She was doing the half marathon the first and last day and 5K's the middle four days. My pace was pretty much the same as the previous days and I finished in 44:05. We wanted to visit Devil's Tower on the way to our next site in Wyoming so I left the race site quickly.

Sundance, Wyoming - Crook County Fairgrounds - I found us a wonderful cabin on the mountainside to stay in for this race. After inspecting the course I decided that I definitely needed to wear some old shoes and really take it easy. It was mostly gravel with large stones throughout. Once the race started I also decided that this would be a great day to just walk the entire race. I found another person who was walking that I knew and we walked it together, until I finished my 5K and he went on to finish his half marathon. Everyone I talked to said that this surface was the least stable of the series and I noticed a lot of people walking that had run previously. Many runners recorded their slowest time of the series in Wyoming. My final time was 49:35. We stayed in our cabin as long as we could before heading to Nebraska.



Chadron, Nebraska - Chadron State Park - We stopped at three National Monuments on the way to Chadron. We viewed the film in each of the visitor's centers. I fell asleep in all three!!! By now, I was not really feeling the effects of racing, just the effects of the very early wake ups and the drives to the next site. Weather conditions were the harshest in Chadron. It rained hard for all of my 5K and for about two hours of the marathon and half marathon races. The course was about half asphalt and half grass trail. I decided it was best to walk on the grass and run on the asphalt. I finished in a respectable 46:40. I was lucky enough to witness two young girls on their first half marathon. Their father was the fastest runner of the series, he finished his half in about 1:32.

The 12 year old finished in 2:36 and the 11 year old in 2:47. Since I have yet to break 3 hours in a half marathon, they definitely would have smoked me!!!! The father was very proud of them. By now, I had made it a habit to observe the runners under the food tent once I had finished my 5K. The blueberry pancakes were delicious!!!! All of the workers shouted encouragement to the runners over and over again.

Sterling, Colorado - Pioneer Park - Sterling is a small town but was a bustle of activity for the weekend we were there. There was a bike race, a big reunion, a beet festival and our running race all occurring on the Saturday. I was looking very forward to this race as although it appeared to be all concrete, it looked very flat. I wore my Adidas Ultraboosts planning on going at a pretty fast pace. Alas, the race route set before us was about 90% dirt trail. The lovely concrete running paths I had seen were not used. The trails were still not too bad, no rocks and

only a few small parts where the dirt was a bit loose. The out and back route was pretty much uphill one way and downhill for the return. I was quite amazed at how happy the runners were as they were doing their sixth straight marathon. None of them looked very tired or hobbled at all. I managed a 43:51 time. I earned a medal for each race as did every other runner each day. I also received a special medal given to those who completed a race in all six races of the series.

Some runners also received special medals/awards for such things as running in their first marathon or half marathon, completing 25 races with the group, 100th marathon, etc. And, one of the unique things about Mainly Marathons is that they award a special medal, their famous Caboose, to every last place finisher in the half or full marathon. Now, just who were these people and how did they manage to come to these and others of the series of races? Some were retired, some took vacation, some took a few days off for just a few races that they needed to complete a state or states, and some are just hooked on marathon running and actually do each and every marathon offered by Mainly Marathons. Some travel with their spouses, some with friends, and some alone. I was completely sold on Mainly Marathons. I have already signed up to do races in Georgia and Alabama with them the middle of October. And, I am thrilled to notice just today that they are adding a new series, called "Southwest", which will have the states of Nevada, California, Utah, and Arizona. Plus, one of the workers told me that a new club for people trying to do a 5k (or more) in each state similar to Marathon Maniacs and the 50 State Marathon Club is in the works planning to begin this Fall. A total of 208 runners participated in The Center of the Nation Series. Over 600 runners competed in the New England Series, a number they are quite proud of. I'll finish with a photo of me with five other runners, most of us showing off our Hoka Running Shoes in Belle Fourche and one of me holding up my medal for completing the series.