

## A short history of MMTR race director succession

My first exposure to the Mountain Masochist Trail Run was in the fall of 1992. Dr. David Horton was already celebrating MMTR's 10<sup>th</sup> year and I, an intrepid high school grad from Canada, was considering attending Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. My visit to LU included meeting this Dr. Horton, who had just set an Appalachian Trail record the previous summer (something I had never heard of), and hear him talk passionately about trail running and ultrarunning (something else I had never heard of). Obligations to a cross country scholarship kept me from any (real) trail running or ultrarunning but Dr. Horton would constantly badger (I know, surprising) the men's cross country team about joining him on a "little trail run", that is, if we were real men.

Finally, in the fall of 1994, after cross country season, my roommate and I decided to join Dr. Horton on one of these little trail runs in the mountains. We started at Long Mountain Wayside (MMTR mile point 26.9) and, if you've run the Masochist you know how difficult the climb is from there up Buck Mountain. We ran the Masochist course to the loop (MMTR miles 33.6 to 38.6) and back on the AT where I remember thinking, "I may be hurtin' but this old guy's not going to drop me!" Somehow I held on and we made it back to our vehicles for a total of 18 Horton miles (something else I had never heard of). I was captivated. There was something about running these miles that was profoundly different than all the other miles I had ran in my life. Feeling the rocks and roots underfoot, hearing and smelling my enveloping surrounds and seeing the rugged beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains all contributed to an ecological experience I will never forget.

Needless to say, I wanted more; to experience more! The next fall I was working MMTR aid stations 3 (Peavine Mtn) and 16 (Porters Ridge). I really enjoyed seeing runners come through relatively fresh at 8.4 miles and then at 47.1 miles seeing them thankful to be only a few miles from the finish. It was incredibly rewarding to be part of the event as a volunteer and helping people finish a 50 mile race. Selfishly, I simply enjoyed spending the day in the mountains and being around others who enjoy trails as much as I did! However, after four years of volunteering it was time for me to run the MMTR. I successfully finished the Masochist in 2000, 2001, and 2002 and thoroughly enjoyed each year as uniquely different. For me, running the MMTR was confirmation of several things in my life. Most relevant, these experiences confirmed that I wanted to be involved in trail-ultras for a long time, as both a runner and volunteer.

Starting in 2003 it would be four years of missing the Masochist while back in Canada working on my Ph.D. Nevertheless, this time away from the Blue Ridge was an academic extension of my trail experiences. Hence, my dissertation research was centered on the ecological experiences of Appalachian Trail thru-hikers and their concepts of wilderness. One day while writing one of my dissertation chapters, Dr. David Horton called me assertively questioning, "You're still moving back here, right?!" I immediately replied, "Of course!" Then David, explaining his decision, approached me about assuming the duties of MMTR race director for 2008. I was at once surprised and honored but immediately replied in the affirmative, "Yeah, I'll do it...we've got to keep it going!"

Without thinking of the work involved, I accepted his offer based only on the great tradition of the Masochist and a desire to see it continue. I had never before imagined the MMTR coming to an end and I hope that it will continue for many years. As a result, and in expectation of my future directing duties, I shadowed David during this year's 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the MMTR. To be sure, I witnessed the immense amount of work involved and the number of volunteers it takes for the Masochist to be such a success.

My vision as race director for future Mountain Masochist Trail Runs flows from that same eco-experience I had during my first "little trail run". I want more and more individuals to encounter and engage the environment of the Blue Ridge Mountains through running the 50+ mile race course while continuing the tradition that precedes me. I want volunteers to take pride and enjoyment in their involvement with an event that is exceptionally special to those who 'toe' the start line and those who spectate. Overall, I want the MMTR to continue to make a profound impact on people's lives that can/will ultimately better themselves, others and their environment.

With this in mind, David and I are combining forces to offer ultrarunners an exceptional eco-experience in trail running each year. In addition to David's other three trail races (Holiday Lake 50k++, Promise Land 50k, Hellgate 100k) and future MMTR's we are adding the Terrapin Mtn ½ Marathon (maybe a full marathon) and Grindstone 100. Combined, these six events comprise what we are affectionately calling "The Beast Series". David is directing Holiday Lake, Promise Land and Hellgate; I'm directing Terrapin, the Masochist and Grindstone. The Beast Series is intended to complement the already popular Lynchburg Ultra Series which enjoyed 50 men and 16 women finishers this year and, as such, the entry fee is included with the 2008 LUS fees. In sum, The Beast Series' entrants will garner over 60,000 feet of gain and 60,000 feet of loss – Can you imagine? In particular, I'm really excited about Grindstone, an autumn 100 mile trail race in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains just west of Staunton and Harrisonburg, Virginia. The loop course features some beautiful ridge running which is both remote and rugged along with several big climbs and descents. In total, Grindstone has 26,004 feet of elevation gain and the same loss with a high point of 4447 feet. For more information on The Beast Series as well as individual events please visit [www.eco-xsports.com](http://www.eco-xsports.com)

So many people who are involved in organizing, directing, volunteering or competing in ultrarunning events are passionate about what they do. "Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly" Col. 3:23 – That is my purpose and promise.

Running His Race,

Clark T.W. Zealand, Ph.D.

