

La Luz Trail Run History

The La Luz trail run began in 1965 when nine runners lined up to climb the six mile ascent up the west side of the awesome Sandia Mountains. The course passes through many different life zones as if you were running from the high deserts of New Mexico all the way to the Canadian Forests. There are many spectacular views of the Rio Grande river valley and Albuquerque below.

Raymon Leyba won that first day in an hour and 20:44. The original 6 mile trail had been built to lead to a mine near the top of the mountain. The next year in 1966 the trail was rebuilt on the south facing slope of the canyon to be less steep with about an 8.5% total average grade.

The first 5 miles (including a short 300 yard road section and 4.8 miles of trail) would climb almost 2000 feet from the start at 7000 feet to 8950 feet at the overlook. Then the trail descends for about .2 mile and climbs back up for .2 to what is called "the rockslide at about 9000 feet." The course then winds through a two mile section of trail with many switchbacks that cross a talus slope. This "rockslide" area is very unstable and the rocks slowly creep down the slope every year. The trail climbs over 1100 feet to 10,120 ft in this section. Much of the rockslide has fairly steep portions followed by shorter flatter ones. There is even a slight downhill section around .7 mile up the slide. The trail then steepens over most of the "second" mile till right before the junction with the crest spur trail, when it flattens out a bit for a short rest. Then comes the final tough kilometer, which climbs 508 feet to the finish. Most runners are reduced to an agonizing walk as the trail steepens and then turns into a concrete stairway with some 600 yards to go. As the altitude and steepness take their toll, runners must continue staggering on, while the trail continues with a steep grade over most of the remaining 550 yards. The average grades are therefore about 7.5% on the first 5 miles then 10.5% over the rockslide and a brutal 15% average over the final kilometer section.

The original new course would be 7.8 miles of trail and an extra 300 yards on the road to total approximately 8 miles in all, with a total climb of 3628 feet. New G.P.S. measurements shorten the trail length to 7.26 miles but this does not take into consideration all the uneven rocky ground with undulating ups and downs and twists and turns in the trail. (When a rough mountain trail is measured with a wheel, it can be at least 100 yards a mile longer than GPS measurements (which measures distance in a straight line from point to point.)

The new trail was originally smooth and easily traveled and even had the rock slide filled in with rock chips.

The first great runner was Steve Gatchupin, who won in the years 1966, 67, 68, 69 and 71. He was a Native American from the Jemez Pueblo which lies in a beautiful valley at the foot of the Jemez Mountains in Northern New Mexico. Steve was also known for winning the Pikes Peak marathon six times in the late 60's and early 70's. Steve ran his best La Luz time in 1968 for a 66:23. He also won Pikes Peak and ran in the 1968 Olympic trials marathon placing 15th, all in a month that fall. Steve was later inducted into the Native American Hall of fame along with such runners as Billy Mills and Al Waquie.

In 1970, Steve's friend and former state high school champ Harold Sando from Jemez beat him to break up his winning streak.

Then in the following years other famous runners came to test themselves on the mountain. The most famous of which was probably Tony Sandoval who later became the 1980 Olympic Trials marathon winner. Tony was definitely capable of an Olympic medal and a likely gold as he had beaten the Russian who won, but unfortunately the games were boycotted that year. Tony was raised in the small New Mexico town of Truchas and became a cardiologist. He was so talented and versatile that he could run well at any distance and was an excellent cross country and uphill runner as well. He had the speed and fluid stride to run a fast 1:49.5 800 at Stanford and the strength and endurance to later run several 2:10 marathons (which were close to the world record at the time). Tony held the Olympic Trials marathon record of 2:10:19 from back in 1980 until Ryan Hall recently broke it in 2008.

In 1972 as a young 18 year old Tony ran a 65:23 to break Steve Gatchupin's record by a full minute! The second placer that day was another New Mexico star runner (Rick Rojas) who had pushed Tony to a fast time. Rick was a friend of Tony's and the Mile State Champion from Los Alamos. His N.M. record still stands with a 4:12.6 from back in 1970.

Rick's accomplishments included representing the U.S. in the Pan Am games as well as winning the national cross country championships in 1976. He also set a new 15k world record of 43:12 in 1981. Rick still loves coaching and has a business in Boulder coaching all levels of runners. He was instrumental in coaching and motivating both Lynn Bjorklund and Tony Sandoval and helped them early in their careers to becoming two of the best runners in History!

Then in 1973 U.N.M.'s Faustino Salazar won La Luz with a 65:55. In 74 Faustino's teammate Lionel Ortega won with a fast new record of 63:24! Lionel was now an all American as well as had been an earlier high school state champion in cross country. He was later ranked 8th in the U.S. in the marathon and was even better in the half marathon.

The next year in 1975 saw a new record by Faustino as he destroyed the old time with a 60:51. Faustino became a star at U.N.M. and although he did not have the speed to beat all the talented Africans and top Americans in the NCAA cross country races, he had become an incredibly tough runner who could beat most of them uphill. I still remember being in Awe of him after the race that year (which I ran for the first time in 1:20 as a 17 year old) and remember how I wanted to run an hour someday too! On this day Faustino had forged a blistering pace and then added on a wicked kick over the last several minutes. Lionel had clung to him for over 7.5 miles but then said that Faustino hit the stairs like a tiger and was gone! Oh well, second place! Lionel did finish in second, and a great P.R., but was over 30 seconds behind! It seemed as if Faustino was capable of running the course in under an hour if he just held a slightly faster pace! This race is still considered as good as anyone ever ran La Luz, (except for Al Waquie).

In 1976 another famous runner (Rick Trujillo) came to try the mountain. Rick had won Pikes Peak many times and was a legend there among mountain

runners . Rick was a geologist who lived in the mountain town of Ouray Colorado where he had easy access to the steep trails in this region. No one could beat him on his best courses like Pikes Peak or Imogene Pass. There was a good chance Faustino could defeat Rick on his "home course", if he was in top form, but unfortunately he did not compete again after 1975. Faustino became a fireman for the Albuquerque Fire Department.

There did happen to be a small wiry runner signed up by the name of Alloysious Waquie. Waquie had grown up in the Jemez Pueblo of New Mexico. Al had trained on his native mountain trails since High school and became the state cross country champion in 1968. He then went on to become an All American in cross country at Haskell Indian College in Kansas. This day in 1977 the race began with Rick taking the lead and Al following. After several miles the pair had left their competition behind. Later in the race as they came to the final steep two miles, Al refused to pass Rick, respecting him. The pace was fast but not unbearable for Al as he later said he could have gone faster. Rick won that day with a 62:13 with Al right behind!

The next year, Waquie became the first to run the course in under one hour. Actually, Al ran well under an hour but the timers had not arrived when he finished so no one knows his exact time. Since Al did not have on his watch that day, the officials simply gave him a time of one hour flat! But Al was definitely unchallenged, and far ahead of the next runners. He seemed to be unbeatable. In fact, Al Waquie would never be beaten again in his career, on "his mountain".

The next year in 1978 Al did an incredible time of 57:40 which left his competitors in shock and over 30 seconds a mile back! Al's pace was 7:12 per mile and would make unbelievable splits if you saw his times. From my calculation, I figured Al hit the overlook in about 33:20, then the next .4 to the rock slide in somewhere around 2:40 with the last 2.6 steep miles in a lung searing 21:40! This means Al ran the first five miles to the overlook at 6:40 pace! Then he ran the last 3 miles in 24:20 or 8:07 a mile! I am sure that on this mostly steep, high altitude section, Al was probably as good as anyone in the world! To compare this effort with what a normal runner experiences, most people have difficulty just maintaining a slow jog or fast walk over most of this section. Here Al ran at a pace that would be pretty good on the flat for many normal folks or twice the speed of a very fast walk!

This race was well etched into my memory as I had started the race along side Al and still remember all the training and preparation I had done that summer preparing for La Luz and my first college cross country season. I finished eighth in a personal record of 66:22. Coincidentally, this was almost exactly the time of Steve Gatchupin's personal best of 66:23. I was happy when I found I was close to my goal of 66 minutes but a little in shock when I heard of Al's time!! In fact, Al's new record of "**57:40**" was over a minute a mile faster than my own pace!

Anyway, to give you an idea of how fast Al's record really is, try to hold this pace for just one minute. Most average runners can not even run this fast for more than a short sprint. Even good high school runners can only hold this pace for a mile or two and top college runners for maybe three or four miles.

Then when the trail gets really steep you might as well forget trying to beat Al. When I was running at my best in my 20's I can still remember running intervals at Waquie's pace on the last steep section of the course. It was tough! I know I couldn't have done more than a mile at this pace in an all out race! And I was the "7 time" Sandia Crossing marathon champion.

Rick Rojas (who was one of the best cross country runners in the country at the time), said the closest he got to Al was at the start and Dave Segura said he could only hold off Al for a mile and a half when Al politely just took over and took off! Dave was an incredibly tough runner and so talented that he did a 2:13:59 marathon that year as a 20 year old! This was an American age group record!

Anyway, Rojas had a personal record of 61:39, Dave a P.R. of 62:04 and Lionel a solid 63:20, but all far from Al's time. There were 17 runners under one hour and 11 minutes that day making a very competitive race.

In the year 1979, the race was lengthened exactly two miles to begin right beyond the second cattle guard on the road. Now the course would climb nearly 4,600 feet! Al easily won again with a quick 1:14:18. He again beat the best runners badly, with Lionel second at 1:18:30. Lionel called this his best race ever as he easily defeated several of his Olympic hopeful teammates. John Lodwick was third in (1:20:12) with Benito Arellano fourth. Tony Sandoval had also been expected to compete along with the other Athletics West Marathoners and was the only runner thought to be capable of giving Waquie a race, Tony was 5'7" 112 pounds and 2% body fat with a smooth and graceful uphill stride. Unfortunately he did not start that day because he was probably concentrating on the Olympic trials coming up soon. Tony was super fit and would have probably been able to push Al. My younger brother Dave also set a 15 year old junior record that day of 1:33:16, which has never been broken.

The following year in 1980 Al ran his "dream" race as he scorched to a new record of 1:12:40. This is 7:16 per mile over the original long course's 10 mile distance! No one could stay close to Al as he had achieved his goal of running an hour and twelve minutes. Al told me personally that he had dreamt twice of running the race in an hour and twelve minutes and sure enough his dreams became reality. He dedicated this special race to his grandfather who had recently passed away. Al had trained especially hard and when the gun sounded, he took off with calculated and fearless confidence and never looked back! This was the best race ever run on La Luz and it is doubtful if anyone could have beaten Al on this day. Al's time was equivalent to running about a 58:40 on the shorter course with the extra two miles of pavement in a fast 14:00. These first two miles on the road have hurt many runners badly, if they go out too fast) The second mile is the steepest and has a constant unrelenting 11.5% grade climbing over 600 feet! Although there are many steeper sections on the rockslide and on several short sections on the lower parts of the trail, they are not as relentless. Only the final last .6 mile has an average steeper grade. Anyway, many runners have gone into oxygen debt if they were not experienced or had made the mistake of trying to stay with Al Waquie's torrid pace on this section of road!

I figured that Al's 1:12:40 effort this year would equate to a little faster than his amazing 57:40 short course record, by adding a slow down of about 7 or 8

seconds per mile, for adding the extra tough two miles. Al's record race this year would have been even faster if the weather had been as cool as his short course record of 1978. Al's time also equates to around a 1:10:25 on the present course which starts 650 yards farther up the road than the original long course. Al would have covered this section in around two minutes and 15 seconds at about 6:00 pace, since the lower section of road is less steep. I always thought that if the 1980 Olympics had a mountain race as an event, Al would have won the gold medal that day!

Anyway, the second placer (Tim Tays), told reporters they should name the La Luz after Al, after finishing almost 8 minutes behind at 1:20:16! Tim was another friend of mine who had run with me at Eldorado High school. He had gone on to run at Kansas University and held school records for the indoor two mile with an 8:51 and three mile with 13:36. Third place that day went to my close friend Ron McCurley with a good 1:22:46.

The next year in 81 the race was cancelled because of road construction, so Al had to be satisfied with winning the Pikes Peak marathon instead of La Luz. He set a new course record of 3:26:17 (with a 2:05 ascent) beating Rick Trujillo's record by 8 minutes! No one broke this time for over ten years, and even now only a couple of world class runners have run faster.

The next year in 1982, the La Luz course was changed to its present length, beginning 1.8 miles below the trail climbing 4500 feet. Al won again after loosing at least 30 seconds when he was left behind walking up to the starting line. Al had to weave through all the runners to take the lead! I still remember him passing me after about 3/4 mile going very fast with an incredible foot tempo. Al then caught up to the leader Ron McCurley right before the trail. I figured Al probably ran a record time of around 12:30 on the road since he caught Ron in less than 1.8 miles. This makes sense because Ron probably ran around 13:00 in order to do a 1:14 time. Al then ran with Ron to "recover" till the last five or so miles when he began pulling away. This was my friend Ron's best race ever and he told me that he had felt so good that he had dropped the second place local star Matt Segura at the mile mark. Ron had run other great races such as his Pikes Peak 35-40 record time of 2:15 but never as well as he did this day. Ron's time of 1:14:29 beat everyone badly, except for the little Jemez runner who spoiled it.

The next years were again won by Al all in the 1:12 to 1:15 range. He was unbeatable and had also won Pikes Peak twice on the round trip and once on the ascent, and set records there too, with his best of 3:26 for the marathon. Unfortunately Al began having knee problems possibly because of the pounding of the downhill at Pikes Peak. He did not compete again at La Luz after 1985.

I personally feel Al was the best all time uphill runner in the country, along with Matt Carpenter, who ran his best a decade after Waquie. Matt was famous for winning Pikes Peak and other mountain runs mostly in Colorado and around the world. The only other uphill runner who I consider equal or better than Al at his peak, is Jonathon Wyatt from New Zealand, who consistently won the world mountain running championships many times and also has an incredible record of 56:41 on the famous Mt Washington run! This time is off the charts and I

believe equivalent to running 12.5 miles in 56:41 or a half marathon in the 59:30 range. Wyatts record race is very comparable to Waquies best races according to my mountain climbing calculation. I'm guessing however, that Jonathon could beat Waquie at lower altitudes but Waquie would do the same to him up at extremely high elevations. Al had said he actually felt better when he got up to 9 or 10,000 feet!

My calculation is based on adding a mile for every 1,100 feet of climbing and also adding in altitude and trail condition factors. The original La Luz course in newly built conditions would therefore equal about 12.7 sea level miles for most world class runners. I calculated this by adding the old course distance of 8 miles to the vertical gain of 3628 feet divided by 1100 or (3.3 miles) which would add up to make 11.3 miles. Then you would add the trail slowdown which was probably about 24 seconds per mile slower than a good smooth paved surface. With the rocky and gravel surface this seems reasonable. This would make 3 minutes 12 seconds over the approximately eight mile distance adding about .7 tenths of a mile equivalent at a world class 4:35 pace. This would total up to 12 miles. Now you add in the altitude effect of 8800 average feet (or at least 16 seconds a mile at 4:35 pace times the mile equivalent) and you get another 3 minutes 12 seconds. This would total up to another .7 miles, making a GRAND TOTAL of 12.7!

So Waquies time of 57:40 would be aerobically equal to a 4:32.5 pace for 12.7 miles at sea level! If you then add on .4 of a mile at say a 4:50 minute pace (which is the approximate slow down adding the extra distance) (or 1:56) you would get up to the 13.1 mile half marathon with a time of about 59:36! This is only a little over a minute off the present half marathon record of 58:23 by Zersenay Tadese and a couple seconds faster than the present American record by Ryan Hall! Then on the original longer course of 79 and 80, the extra two paved miles equate to about 3 more sea level miles since the road climbs 950 feet and the altitude adds another 30 seconds. This makes Waquie's awesome 1:12:40 from 1980 about like a 4:37 pace for 15.7 miles! Extend that out to the marathon and you get about a 2:06 marathon! The present 9.6 mile course would dial in at about a 15.2 mile equivalent, and be like adding at least 2.5 more sea level miles to the original course. The course is worth even more now since there is so much erosion making many sandy, rutted and extremely (nearly unrunnable) rocky areas such as in the rockslide part of the course.

You could safely say Waquie's two best La Luz course records in 1978 and 1980 were better (aerobically) than any distance running world record back in those days and about as good as the present American record in the half marathon.

Equating the La Luz to a mile race is also an interesting comparison. Since no one had ever run under an hour before and many national class runners had tried, I feel that running the short course in an hour is at least as good as a four minute mile and probably even better! Anyway, if an hour does equal a 4 minute mile then Als 57:40 would equate to a 3:50.6! Of course, running the la Luz is very different than running a mile and relies on pure aerobic to weight power and tremendous strength and endurance. Maybe the other runners were

just not light enough to sustain the pace necessary to do it! Only Faustino Salazar's 60:51, Pablo Vigils 1:14:20, Ron McCurley's 1:14:29, Dan Maas's 1:14:49, and Simon Gutierrez's 1:15:09 are even close to this magic hour barrier. **(I figured a 1:13:15 on the present course would equal an hour on the original course.)** From this, I calculated that Faustino's and Pablo's best races are about the same equivalent or equal to a 4:03 mile. Ron McCurley's best would be equal to a 4:04 mile. Dan Maas' best time would equal 4:05 and Simon Gutierrez's a 4:06.

I realize my 1100 foot climbing calculation and mile comparison are only attempts to try to compare flat and uphill mountain running. They do however, make Waquie's efforts very intriguing. My climbing calculation is also not accurate for every individual and slower and heavier (normal) runners are definitely affected more by the climbing and altitude than world class runners.

As for Waquie, he was obviously able to climb much better than my equation for elite runners. According to Al's best track and road race times, he was able to climb around **1400 feet** in the time it took him to run a flat mile! This unique ability would make the original La Luz course = to only 11.9 miles for Al or equal to a 4:51 pace. Then if you compare the normal speed up from a 12 miler down to a 10K you would get times fairly close to Al's best PR's. I figured that for Al, his best La Luz was equal to about a 28:45 sea level 10K. Sure enough, his best 10K in Albuquerque was about 30 minutes so would be around a 29 minute time at sea level on a fast track.

Since Al could climb so well, this would give him a three-four minute advantage over racing "normal" elite runners. In fact, Al's best races of 1978 and 1980 were both around 30 seconds a mile faster than the next best times ever run by Salazar, Vigil, McCurley, Maas, Gutierrez, Rojas, Ortega, Wesley Smith, Eddy Hellebuyck, Dave Segura and Rick Trujillo.

Incidentally, these are all the guys (in order) of their times, who had run between 1:14 and 1:15 something or the equivalent on the shorter course. Granted, many of them might not have specifically trained as much for uphill running or focused on La Luz like Al and were more famous for their track or cross country running. But whatever the reasons for Al's success I am sure his incredible times were not only because of his genetic gift but also because of his hard and consistent training he would do for months specifically for "La Luz"

Since Al was so amazing on steep hills, this predicts an oxygen uptake of world record proportions. Unfortunately he was never tested. But one thing for sure, with Al being a mere 112 pounds and with the lungs and heart of a mountain goat, he was nearly unbeatable in his specialty of climbing mountains! As Waquie said, "Too bad their weren't more hill races." One thing for sure, no one will ever break Al's records until the trail is rebuilt (especially on the rock slide) and another runner with Al's potential and dedication has a perfect race!

Although Al could not run world class track times he was very competitive with the best local runners in road races and especially cross country. I remember Al and Lionel Ortega had many close battles with each other. I also remember one time when Tony Sandoval ran an incredible 20 kilometer race in

Los Alamos in 64+ minutes on a very hilly and high altitude course and Al was second place just several minutes behind. Tony was definitely one of the best in the country at the time. Both Al and Tony were far ahead of the next runners that day!

While talented hill runners might not be able to run a world record on the flat it is also obvious that most world class track and marathon runners can not run like Wyatt, Carpenter or Waquie either. Uphill mountain running demands a high max VO₂, a lightweight frame, and strong quads, while world class flat running demands a fluid, efficient, long stride as well as super cardiovascular output. Waquie's short quick stride and great aerobic power to weight ratio for instance, would be more suited for uphill speed than it would for running a fast mile. (Waquie had run a 4:24 mile in college which is a good time but not close to world class) Obviously he got much stronger later in his 20's while running for the New Mexico track club and especially as he trained so seriously for the La Luz.

The incredible talent of the Worlds best distance runners (such as Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia), who holds most of the world records now and has incidentally run 10 kilometers in 26:17, does not guarantee he could beat Waquie up a mountain. No one is equally talented at both disciplines. If they were, Bekeke could run a 1:05 present course La Luz! This would assume he could climb like Waquie. Unfortunately, each kind of running is very different, and runners are usually better in one or the other, depending on their body type, max VO₂, and stride.

I would now like to include a short paragraph about Pikes Peak because it is also such a famous mountain race and many of its winning runners also ran La Luz. On "Pikes", my calculation would make the ascent equal to about 25 miles. But a runner must be acclimated to the altitude as well as have a super high maximum oxygen uptake (good genetics) in order to run this well. It has been shown that average runners finish quite a bit slower on the Pikes Peak ascent than on a sea level marathon. Their times are closer to running 27-30 miles. They usually do even worse if they are not at least somewhat acclimated to the altitude and had trained on steep hills. Only a few people like Carpenter and Waquie do better. This is because they are acclimated to the "thin air" as well as are small and light with tremendous lung power to weight. (max VO₂'s) Matt had a record oxygen uptake of over 90, (which was recorded at 6000 feet so his "real" value at sea level would be several points higher). Al Waquie probably had a similar maximum as Matt because Al and Matt had both run very similar times up Pikes peak of 2:05! Only several other athletes have ever tested at a value of 90 before, including Lance Armstrong and several world class cross country skiers.

Matt's incredible record in 1993 of a 2:01:06 ascent, (I believe) equates to around a 2:07 marathon. Since he returned that day with a blistering round trip time of 3:16:39 he could have definitely run even faster if just going up! This race is definitely on par with Waquie's best races!

Unfortunately, people can only speculate about comparing the two types of running and no one will ever know for sure. It is also hard to know exactly how

the changing barometric pressure effects times at the higher altitudes. Matt told me that the pressure can change at extreme altitudes, so that on occasional (high pressure days) the altitude effects of 14,000 feet might be more like 12,000 feet. This could help explain his awesome record, but even so, Carpenter's time is really incredible. I did notice that in this year many other runners ran at least 5 minutes faster than their previous best for the ascent.

Matt has also done many other incredible races, including winning the Leadville 100 mile race in a new record (beating the old one by over 90 minutes). He has won Imogene Pass many times as well, and set records on the Vail Hillclimb and Mount Washington. Matt even set a new Mt. Evans record in 2008 that no one had broken for 30 years! This is a road race up Colorado's Mount Evans, which climbs about 3600 feet in about 14.4 miles to an altitude of 14,264 feet! Matt's time of 1:37:01 equates to pretty much what might be a world record for a 40 year old runner (Matt was 43 at the time) This is aerobically equivalent to at least 20 miles at sea level at a 4:51 pace! Of course Matt is a freak of max VO2 and incredibly hard worker like Al Waquie. In his prime, Matt was also able to climb around 1400 feet in the time it took him to run each flat mile, so he would be relatively better uphill (and at altitude) than most other world class runners. Since Matt holds the world record for a marathon over 14,000 feet with a 2:52:57, this proves his ability. Unfortunately Matt never ran La Luz but was probably one of only a handful of runners who might have been able to approach Waquie's records! Anyway, back to La Luz History!

The following year's 1986 La Luz was won by Colorado's Pablo Vigil in a great (non Waquie) record of 1:14:20 to break Ron McCurley's previous time. Then Charles England won the 87 and 88 races with good times of 1:18:40 and 1:16:54. Then in 89 Bill Reifsnider won with a fast 1:16:30. Bill was so good he could run a half marathon in 61 minutes but he could not approach Waquie's times.

The next year saw the young Olympic 1500 meter hopeful (Dan Maas) win the race in a quick 1:14:49! Dan was obviously just as tough in mountain races as on the track! Dan also won in the years 91,92, and 95.

In 1993 John Bednarski (who was a past top American runner in his prime and had run for U.T.E.P. in the late 60's and early 70's against Steve Prefontaine) won with a 1:21:01. John was definitely one of the best runners in Albuquerque even in his 40's. Then in 1994 Eddy Hellebuck won with a super fast 1:15:35. Eddy was a world class 2:11 marathoner and also held several world records for 40 year old runners. He was small and light, like Waquie, well suited to uphill running.

The next years were dominated by another native New Mexican who had been a state cross country champion for Del Norte and college runner at Arizona. His name? Simon Gutierrez! Simon was a very fast and gifted runner who had represented the U.S. internationally in cross country. He has also won many mountain races notably the Mount Washington hill climb where he has placed first in the years 2002, 2003, and 2005. In 2008 he got first in the masters division of this hill climb with a time of 61:34 and finished only a mere 55 seconds from first place overall, breaking Matt Carpenters 40 year old age record! The Mt.

Washington course is 7.6 miles and very steep with a 11.5% grade. The higher altitude and sandy and rocky footing at La Luz however, probably makes up for it's less steep grade making the trail section of the La Luz course, about the same in time. Now of course running an hour on the trail is even harder because of the worsening erosion. In fact it is probably humanly impossible!

Simon also has the Pikes Peak 35-40 and second best over 40 ascent records (after the immortal Matt Carpenter) as well, with 2:13:29 and 2:18:06. He also won the overall ascent race in 2008 in cold, snowy conditions in 2:18:09!

Simon has placed very high in the new World Mountain Running championships. He was 10th in both 2005 and 2006! In the master's world championships in 2006 and 2007 Simon won first place both years, which made him the best in the world for an over 40 hill runner! In the 2008 world championship master's race held in the Czech Republic Simon again got 1st place in the 40-45 division! He also ran to a 25th place in the open championships held in Switzerland the following week, helping the U.S. team place third for a bronze medal!

In the La Luz, Simon has won more titles than even Waquie, with ten. He won most years from 1997 to 2008 except when he was in Switzerland studying physical therapy. In these years of 2000 and 2001 Jeremy Wright and Richard Shelly won with respective times of 1:20:08 and 1:18:49. Both Jeremy and Richard were competitive members of the U.S. mountain running team.

Simon's best race time was in 1999 when he ran a 1:15:09. Some people think this kind of time was getting close to Waquie's best efforts since the trail was several minutes slower with the erosion on the rock slide. Where once runners could run this entire section, now they must jog and jump over many loose rocks. The course is undoubtedly even worse now and could be 4 or more minutes slower than in the early days. Simon is not seeming to slow down much at all as he is now in his 40's, and he is racing and training nearly as fast as ever! His Mount Washington, Pikes Peak and World Championship races are proof of this! Although his recent winning times on the La Luz are slower than his best in 99 he still competes against world class hill runners and beats them in other races. Simon is definitely becoming a legend in his own right.

In the 2009 race a new mens champ (Paul Howarth) ran a 1:28:32. He was followed by a young runner (Ryan Fenton) who did an outstanding 1:30:57 at 18 years of age! This guy can only get better! Two other incredible performances were turned in by masters runners. Kevin Tuck did a 1:33:58 at 53 years old for 4th and Bob Evers did a 1:40:01 at 58 for 11th place!! These guys are pretty much national class for their age, don't you think? In 2010 all three of these guys won their divisions again with great performances. And the overall winner was Kristopher Houghton with a fast 1:24:22!! Kris won again in 2011 with another good time of 1:25:16 See the results pages!

Another interesting story is that Al Waquie had been training for the race again in 2001 but had to go to a fire call that day. Al told me about this recently and that he had gone to the trail later after the race to run a time trial to see if he could beat the winners time. He was close, only about 30 seconds slower! Al

was about 50 years old at the time! He is still in great shape and hikes many hours in his native Jemez mountains doing work for the forest service.

Women Of The Trail

The La Luz run has seen many outstanding women runners over the years compete for the title of "La Luz Champ." Lilly Rendt won the first womens trophy in 1967. Then came Lynn Bjorklund who was a threat to most men and also recorded times fast enough to be world ranked in the 3000 meters. She also holds a national high school 3000 meter record of 9:08 set in 1975 that has lasted longer than 33 years! Lynn also won the national cross country title in 74 and 75 and the A.A.U. 2 mile those same years. On the La Luz, Lynn competed against top men and beat many of them over the years she raced. Lynn won the 1974 race and finished 12th overall. David Segura told me he had looked down the trail and saw Lynn only one switchback below him and was worried she would catch him. Dave was a high school champion himself at the time. In 75 Lynn won again with a record of 69:15 which was 10th overall! In 76 she won again with a 1:13:51. I still remember trying to catch Lynn and sprinting past her in the last 50 yards as an eighteen year old. I was really proud of myself, but I knew Lynn had not run her best race that year.

Lynn has also won the Pikes Peak marathon and has the present record for women at 4:15! She did the ascent that day in 1981 in 2:33 which is also the fastest ever run. She has even come back at the age of 51 in 2008 to do a new age group ascent record of 3:20:39! Go Lynn! Lynn has to be the most amazing mountain runner from the late 70's to today!

The next year in 1977, Moo Thorpe won with a 1:23:47, followed by Odette Bonnet. Odette won the next years of 79 thru 80 on the longer course and ran a great time of 1:36:55 in 1980. Odette had been severely pushed by Janine Hill that year who finished only a short distance behind. In the following years Janine did even better and recorded a 1:37:26 and then a 1:33:17 in 85 for a then course record. Janine had the experience and talent from running internationally, and was hard to beat. She had began as a 10k and marathon runner in Canada.

The next winner was a new and tough runner named Kate Washburn. Kate ran an outstanding new record of 1:28:29 in 86. She also won again with a 1:31:10 the next year.

The next winners were Lynn Brown, from Durango, Colorado in 88 with a 1:34:03, Judy Amer in 89 with a 1:39:12 and Maggi Ezzard with a 1:38:47 in 90. Elise Rainbowstar won in 91 with a 1:39:46 and Ann Bockman won in 92 with a fast 1:34:31. In 1993 Elise Rainbowstar won for her second time with a 1:41:21.

In the next three years Marie Boyd won consecutively, doing fast times of 1:33:49; 1:33:41; and then a 1:34:41. Marie was a national class marathoner. Next years winner was Cathy Pierce from Socorro who ran a 1:36:31.

The next year saw a new record by a runner who has beaten the best hill runners in the world! Her name was Magdalena Thorsell. The time she recorded was a completely unbelievable 1 hour twenty two minutes and 38

seconds! I believe she placed second or third overall! This kind of time is even better than Lynn Bjorklunds 69:15 on the old course. She basically ran a sub 69 minute old course and kept this effort for nearly 14 more minutes on the tough road section. Magdalena also won the Mount Washington road race in 1998 with a course record of 1:10:08 never beaten till 2010, beating world class runners from around the world.

The last winners were Janice Posey in 1999 with a 1:38:52 then Cathy Pierce with a 1:34:47. Kathy won again in 2001 with a 1:42:32.

The only woman to have won more years than Lynn Bjorklund is Rachel Cuellar. Rachel has done seven race winning performances between 2002 and 2008 and again in 2011! Rachel is a member of the U.S. women's mountain running team that won gold in the 2006 event. She even placed a great 38th in the (2008) world championships in Switzerland. The only woman to break her string was Erica Larson, who did an awesome 1:30:23 in 2003. Erica's time was the third fastest ever on the longer course! Anita Ortiz also beat Rachel that day doing a fast 1:35:27. Anita was a 5 time U.S. women's team member, four time U.S. champion and the world master's champion in 2004.

In 2009 a past winner was again crowned the champ. Her name was now Erica Bowen "Larson". Erica defeated a new runner (Magdalena Donahue) by about a minute and a half with a good 1:36:13. Defending champ Rachel Cuellar was third about six more minutes behind at 1:43:47. In 2010 Erica won again with 1:39:45 in a close dual with Rachel Early who was just seconds back! Erica also competes at Pikes Peak and her results over the last several years are very impressive. She has won the marathon many times with a personal best and close to Lynn Bjorklunds legendary course record 4:15 with a time of 4:22. You can go to the Pikes Peak website (pikespeakmarathon.org) to see all the results over the years back to the earliest races!

In 2011 Rachel Queller ran a new P.R. with a fast 1:34:31 placing 5th overall and was way ahead of the next women! She is obviously in great shape!

I hope these results inspire runners everywhere to keep up their running dreams and to remember that no matter how fast or how slow that everyone that challenges the mountain is a true champion! Happy Running!

By Tom

Kirchgessner