

# Grand to Grand Ultra: Luck shined through bad weather

By Susana Young

As G2G competitors slept in their tents on the edge of the Grand Canyon on Saturday, September 20, Mother Nature was threatening a major storm. The lightning show eventually broke the clouds apart, and rain fell in the middle of the night. The camp crew adeptly ensured tents were secured and runners were safe. One competitor said, "I've done races everywhere. The support for this race was the best. Top of the ladder."

This was a prelude to a week of thankfulness for a remarkable support crew. Some runners got a little wet as clouds burst early along the first stage route. The remaining days were a little warm, cloudless, calm and dry...until Friday night at camp 6.

Friday's route was through Peek-A-Boo, a trail that would flash-flood the following day. Colin and Tess Geddes watched the weather for

the final stage on Saturday, and decided the route would need to change. The safety of the runners was paramount. So Friday evening they sent Davide Ugolini (a renowned ultra runner from Italy who competed in G2G 2012) to create a new, safer route and pull the flags marking the original route.

At about 4:30 a.m., the race directors made a life-saving decision, according to Shawn Turner, local G2G camp crewmember. "There seemed to be a wall of death around the camp - torrential rain, lightning - but the campsite miraculously stayed relatively dry. The difficult decision was made to cancel stage 7. So they sent Ugolini out again to pull the flags and mark the road for a celebratory two-mile run to begin at 8 a.m. He said the visibility was almost zero out on the original trail due to low cloud cover, and the path very slick and dangerous. At daybreak, when the decision to cancel was announced, there were a few moans and a lot of cheers.

The skies were threatening, but only a slight mist came down as the runners organized themselves into groups to go the final two miles of their G2G experience and cross the finish line together. It was an incred-

ibly emotional event, even though cut short. Not long after the celebration was over and the runners were safely on buses to Kanab, the pounding of hail and heavy rain hit the campsite as the crew was beginning to take down tents. Hail the size of golf balls with jagged edges pelted them as they took cover inside the tents. One camp crewmember described it as apocalyptic.

As the G2G buses arrived in Kanab, the runners picked up their luggage at the old middle school just as a downpour hit Kanab. What was to have been a picnic at the city park became a celebration in the bays at the SAR building, where BLM employees and volunteers had prepared a cookout lunch served inside, with the sounds of the band Mesozoic wafting through the space, in competition with the driving rainstorm.

After a delicious lunch, the caravan proceeded to Las Vegas for the G2G finale at Green Valley Ranch. They arrived anxious for their first real shower in a week and a chance to rest in a real bed for a few moments before meeting on the veranda for drinks and the beginning of a night of celebration.



Thunderstorms looming the night before the final stage was scheduled. Photo by Jeff Frey.

Hail from the thunderstorm on Saturday. Photo by Jeremy Spircoff.



The American contingent at the start of the race. Photo by Jeff Frey.



Tess Geddes (G2G co-founder), Michele Graglia (overall men's winner from Italy), Chantel van der Geest (overall women's winner from the Netherlands), Colin Geddes (G2G co-founder) at the awards dinner in Las Vegas. Photo by Matt Brown.



From top to bottom on left: Volunteers greet a runner completing the race. Photo by Jeff Frey.

Gregory Castle with his belt buckle for completing the race with co-founders Colin and Tess Geddes. Photo by Matt Brown.

Kanab local Mike McTeer posing for his wife at the end of the race. Photo by Matt Brown.

Kanab resident Todd Seliga at the finish. Photo by Matt Brown.

## G2G

Continued from Page 1

through," Seliga said.

Seliga was among the first in line to greet people as they finished each day. His infectious smile seemed to beam even brighter with each day. He loved his tentmates and socializing with the runners and support team. He placed 15<sup>th</sup> overall! Seliga was happy to not be carrying his usual 35-pound pack of gear. Two days after finishing the race, he would once again be on foot, doing his job patrolling in the Grand Canyon.

Mike McTeer, who said he'd be elated if he crossed the finish line last, placed 18<sup>th</sup>! He had trained very hard. He had come a very long way in five years. When asked at the final celebration in Las Vegas how he would describe his experience, McTeer said it was indescribable. "Even if I sat in front of my computer for a day and tried to write about it, the words would not be there." His "beyond words" experience was mirrored by many of the competitors.

Michele Graglia, the overall winner said, "The word magical sums it up. It was an experience of a lifetime!" Graglia averaged

5-¼ miles per hour during the race. That is lightning fast. Most of us "normal" people couldn't do even one mile at that pace. When asked if it was difficult, he seemed so relaxed and pain-free, he replied, "I suffer a lot to go fast. I could have slowed down and perhaps suffered less intensely over a longer period of time, but I run to push myself. Just because I smile doesn't mean I don't suffer."

He loved the challenging terrain, including figuring out that he could navigate the Sand Dunes best by putting his shoes on his hands and digging his bare feet into the sand as he clamored up the endless dunes. While sitting and listening to the local duo Ron Jones and Genevieve Hannon sing western songs, framed by a gorgeous sunset, Graglia couldn't keep the tears from his eyes.

The Chamberlains were delighted with Graglia's graciousness. "He got up from his sleeping bag where he was resting and spent about 20 minutes visiting with us. Although he was the top competitor, you wouldn't have known that from visiting with him. He was not boastful in the least."

At the Las Vegas closing ceremony, everyone was smiling and happy - a joyous celebration of food,

awards and dancing. Marjorie Casse (Belgium), who was tormented by blisters and in such pain that tears streamed down her face much of the time, cried as she was met at the finish line in each camp, still determined to finish. She devised some comfortable "moccasins" from her stack of e-mail and some tape, to give her swollen feet a rest in the evenings. But at the closing ceremony, she danced the night away, a light-footed muse in bandaged but otherwise bare feet.

Colin and Tess Geddes gave out awards (Kanab Wanderstone carvings) to the top male and female, the top winners in each age category, and to several others for a variety of special accomplishments. This year's top female, Chantal van der Geest (Netherlands) came in third overall, the highest female ranking in the three editions of G2G.

If you would like to see more photos and details of how the runners did, you can go to: <http://www.g2gultra.com>. You'll also find information about next year's event.

Volunteering is a tough and joyful experience. Some runners want to return to volunteer. Some volunteers want to run G2G next year. Some volunteers want to do it again next year.



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