

The text 'WAY TOO COOL 50K' is rendered in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. Silhouettes of several people are integrated with the text: some are running behind the letters, while others are climbing over them, particularly on the '50K' and 'COOL' parts. Below the main title, the words 'ENDURANCE RUN' are written in a smaller, white, all-caps sans-serif font.

WAY TOO COOL 50K

ENDURANCE RUN

wtc50k.com



Way Too Cool 50k offers colorful past



From its start in **1990**, event keeps growing in popularity.

Consider the **Way Too Cool 50k** an ultra runner's rite of spring, an annual tradition that starts another season of trails, training and camaraderie.

Pat and Sandy Whyte simply wanted to put on an affordable local race for their friends in the Sierra Express running club. But what they started in 1990 has grown into a major event on the ultra racing calendar.

To fully appreciate what the race has become – an event with **1,000 starters**, a lottery to gain a spot in the field and a largely single-track course with spectacular views – a look back provides perspective.

Ask around about the Way Too Cool 50k's past and the stories that emerge paint a rich, colorful picture.

Auburn's Bill Finkbeiner, one of six runners who has run in every Cool race since it began in 1990, remembers firing up a tractor to widen the trail in the final 50 yards before the first event.

Pat Whyte, who founded the event with his wife Sandy, recalls parks officials asking him before one of the first races to ask runners to keep an eye out for a head because they'd discovered a headless body down near the quarry. No one found anything.

Others talk about the black-bean soup the Whytes would serve after the race in the early years, the storm year of 1995 when **Dave Scott** and **Ann Trason** tied for first place and those challenging climbs over the years up Goat Hill and Ball Bearing.

Pat Whyte said he had no idea the race, then known as the **Cool Canyon Crawl**, would grow into its present form.

"We just wanted to do a race that was affordable," he said. "There weren't too many races back then."

Said Cool ultra runner **Kathy Young**: *"It's just where we went to run. It turned into a formalized thing."*

The first race featured **130 entrants**, with **Dennis Rinde** winning the men's title in 3 hours, 53 minutes and 44 seconds and **Pam Martin** taking home top women's honors with a 4:44:37 performance.



WAY TOO COOL 50K ENDURANCE RUN



"I actually got recruited to create the last 50 yards with the tractor," Finkbeiner said. "We got the state parks to allow us to do it, create that plateau that's wide enough and drains enough."

The event, which begins and ends near the Cool Fire House, quickly grew in popularity. The March date was the perfect time to get re-acquainted with ultra running friends and get serious about training for longer races like the American River 50 and the 100-mile Western States Endurance Run.

*"It was the right time of year, the right course and the right location," said **Greg Soderlund**, who took over as race director from the Whytes for 10 years before passing the torch to current race director **Julie Fingar**.*

"It just had all the ingredients to be successful. I think what makes it really unique is it's the first event of the season after the winter off. Everybody gets a chance to see their friends they haven't seen in four, five months."

Sacramento's Gloria Takagishi, who has run in every Cool race, noted the importance of the event's camaraderie and the uniqueness of the 50k distance back in 1990.

"It was like here's this new race we're going to put on here," she said. "It was low-key and fun ... If you were from around here, you knew about everybody in the race."

"When it first started it was pretty unique because it was a 50k. The 50k distance was kind of in between. You have that confidence, if I can do a marathon, I can do a 50k."

Soderlund recalls registration going from mail-in to on-line, with the event selling out in a matter of minutes before Fingar instituted the lottery.

"It filled in seven or eight minutes," Soderlund said. "It just got faster every year. The registration company one year opened it 30 seconds early. Boy, did I hear about that."

"It got pretty crazy. It was going to be a lottery eventually so everybody didn't feel so rushed. You had to be in front of the computer or have somebody do it for you."

And while the race has attracted the best runners in the sport, including Trason, who won 14 Western States women's titles, seven-time Western States champion Scott Jurek and five-time Western States winner Tim Twietmeyer, it's also a great event for first-timers.

"The middle and back of the pack is non-competitive," Soderlund said. "It's more like a training run than a race."

Said veteran Citrus Heights ultra runner Dana Gard: *"This is a good one to start with, just to see some of the Western States course."* The course has evolved over the years. The original course featured a single-track start and a turnaround near Green Gate. The current route is nearly all single-track after the start and has eliminated two-way traffic.

"It's just beautiful," said Young, the Cool ultra runner. "Those trails are hard to beat."

So is a Cool race that's grown into something special.

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