

## **Lost Dutchman in Arizona by David Holmen**

### **February 2013**

On February, 17, 2013, I ran the Lost Dutchman Marathon in Apache Junction, AZ. This race falls on Presidents' Day weekend, and I can't pass up a chance to do a race on a three day weekend, because it gives me a chance to travel without having to use any vacation time. Although there were several races this weekend, there were only two that I seriously considered. One was the A1A Marathon in Fort Lauderdale, and the other was Lost Dutchman. I've done both races before, and would have loved to do either one again, but ultimately, I had to return to Lost Dutchman because I had unfinished business there.

In 2012, I injured my left hamstring about five miles into this race, and limped through 21 painful miles to finish in 5:20:20, my second slowest marathon ever. The injury marred what would otherwise have been a fun race. I needed to return this year for two reasons. I wanted to be able to run the whole race, unencumbered by injury. I also wanted to be able to enjoy the race. This is a race with charm, but it's hard to enjoy the experience when you're in pain and having difficulty just making forward progress.

My primary goal for this race was to finish without injury and enjoy the experience. Ideally, I would have set a time goal of 3:20:20, which would be a two hour improvement over 2012. Unfortunately, I was hesitant to push too hard for fear of another injury.

The parallels between this race and last year's race were unnerving. In 2012, I injured my left hamstring a week before the Surf City Marathon. After a few rest days, I ran Surf City without incident, but I wasn't fully recovered. I aggravated the injury when I slipped on ice during a training run. I took a few more rest days and went into Lost Dutchman knowing I wasn't 100%, but hoping I had healed enough to be able to race. After limping to the finish at Lost Dutchman, I had to do my next two races at a slow pace, wearing a compression wrap. As a result, I lost opportunities to try for Boston qualifiers in Louisiana and Georgia.

In 2013, I again had a minor hamstring injury in the weeks leading up to this race. This time it was my right leg. Again, my last race before Lost Dutchman was Surf City. I wasn't fully recovered, but finished that race without incident. Again, I aggravated the injury a week before Lost Dutchman. This time I was clearing snow and ice from the driveway after a winter storm. Just like 2012, I had already scheduled my next two races in states where I still need Boston qualifiers. One was even the same race as last year. To say I was nervous about this race was an understatement.

I stayed at the Best Western in Apache Junction. I found this to be a convenient location last year, so I stayed there again. The building blends into the surrounding architecture so well that you can easily drive by without realizing there's a hotel there. (I did that more than once last year.) I was very happy when I got to my room and the AC was already on.

The morning of the race I got up early to stretch before driving to the rodeo grounds to catch a bus to the start. My leg felt OK that morning, but I still wasn't sure if I should try to run normally or play it safe by running with a compression wrap. I put the compression wrap in my gear bag, so I could keep my options open.

The bus dropped us off about an hour before the race. We sat on blankets around small campfires to stay warm in the early morning air. There were enough bathrooms that I was able to make a final bathroom stop, without having to wait in a line. You rarely see that at a race.

When it was time to take off my warm-ups and turn in my gear bag, I decided to run without the compression wrap. I was a little nervous, but after skipping or shortening so many of my recent workouts, I really needed this race to help get in shape for the next one. My goal was to break 3:30.

About 15 minutes before the start, some of us assembled for a Marathon Maniacs group photo. When we arrived, it was dark, but the sun had just risen to reveal the Superstition Mountains just behind us.

The first few miles are mostly downhill, and I took them cautiously. When we got past the place where I got injured last year, I breathed a sigh of relief. The farther I ran, the more confident I was that if I maintained a steady pace, my leg would be OK.

I enjoyed the course more this year. I think I was in too much pain to notice last year, but we had good views of the mountains for much of the race. I also had more fun at the aid stations. At 13 miles they have donut holes. I discovered it's possible to grab a donut hole, stuff it in my mouth, grab a cup of water, and wash it down – all without slowing down. That earned applause from the volunteers. At another aid station, I ate half a banana without slowing down. I didn't really need the extra food; I was just having fun.

With about eight miles to go, fatigue set in, and the fun started wearing off. When I'm in peak shape, breaking 3:30 is something I take for granted. In this race, my recent lack of training started to show. If I wanted to break 3:30, I was going to have to work for it.

After falling off the pace for one mile, I worked hard to speed up again. I used every mental game I know to coax myself to run faster. With 4.2 miles to go, I only needed to average 8:45. Then I ran an 8:50. For the rest of the race, I ran with a sense of urgency, finishing in 3:29:03.

After retrieving my gear bag, I put on my compression wrap as a precaution. It's too soon to say for sure, but I'm cautiously optimistic that I made it through this race unscathed. My next two races are both opportunities to qualify for Boston in new states, so I can't afford another setback. Now I also have to worry about getting back in shape.