

History of the Cheetah Herders Athletic Club

"There is a spontaneous and light-hearted quality in a sport which vanishes as the sport matures." -- Sir Arnold Lunn

Once upon a time there were six restless young dudes. Lynn Carey, Pat Caffrey, John DeLarios, Dave Kesheimer, Doug Mood and Don Larson found the winter of 1977 intolerable. They played pickup volleyball games with other energetic Seeley Lake folk. Sometimes play was so heated and vigorous that the dudes got fatigued and thirsty. They had yet to hear of carbo-loading, so afterwards they would leave with Don for his bar and get simply-loaded.

The dudes were staggering into a new world where they found a breathtaking and profound interaction between amateur sport and manly frivolity previously known only by pool sharks, rugby players and chemical dependency unit rejects. On October 14, 1978, Doug and Pat completed a 10 mile footrace, the first joint athletic participation by the future members of the Club. A couple of months later they were all doing winter training runs. On weekend mornings they met at Don's bar to run the 13-mile loop around the lake. Whoever got back first was El Presidente for the week. As each dude finished "running for office," he downed a can of Fosters. Logically, extra Fosters was brought forth if there was a football game on, or if there was going to be a game on later, or if the TV had not been repossessed, or if there was still Fosters in the cooler. This was back in the days when Fosters was actually brewed in Australia, mate, not Canada, aye, so it was all Very Special. The proceedings were not concluded until someone actually went Down Under. Don proved a quick study and enabled the proceedings by never running out of Fosters.

The dudes having reached the pinnacle of human existence, Pat wanted a club name to wear during the Western States 100. It had to be a name reflecting play and shameless opportunism in the finest English prep school tradition, yet also suggest an illusion of speed, competence and social order. On February 26, 1979 he was out in the woods during a total solar eclipse. Evidently, both he and the sun blacked out. Whilst deep in mental oblivion, he received cosmic insight, and came to with the knowledge of a proper and fitting club name.

By April of 1979 the dudes were representing the Club at footraces, triathlons and combination-event relays. At relays it was no longer just about the beer. There was money to be made. A member's finest performance often was to recruit a world-class replacement rather than participate himself. Injured members were expected to sustain their sense of accomplishment by maintaining their "post-race conditioning," meaning self-medication with beer and pizza. Lynn became particularly adept at engineering division and age-group switches (Carey-picking) to ensure the necessary margin of victory. Pat could not run fast enough to be competitive, so he compensated by seeking longer events. "I can beat any of you if the race is long enough," he blubbered.



Don Larson finishing a lap around the lake.

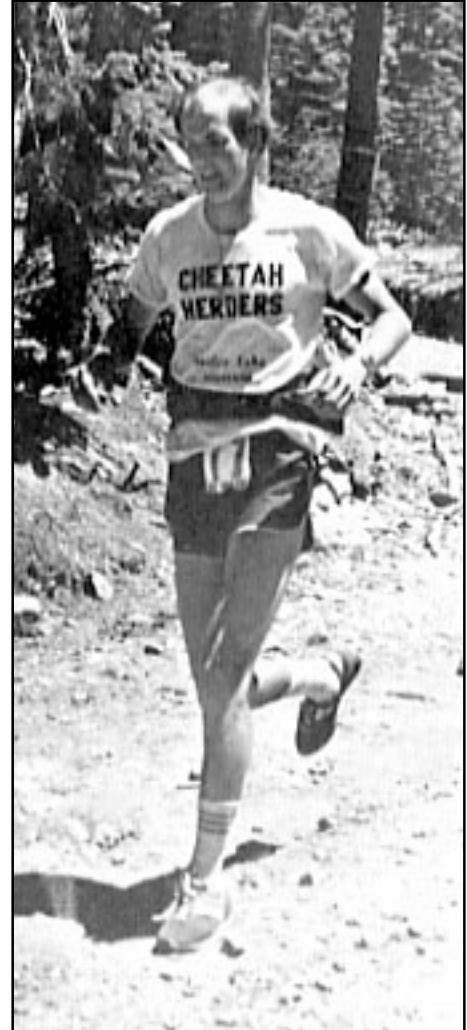


Pat, John, Lynn, Doug, and Danny Jasso at a running relay.

That June, Pat posted his first and only DNF to this day. Here's why he never let it happen again: The local "Backwoods Press" newspaper announced that Doug and Lynn were going to attempt a marathon, and added, "Watch for a Post Race Medical Bulletin!" The post-event coverage was somewhat different: "Running at a sustained pace that even veteran racers have difficulty regulatin, Lynn Carey and Doug Mood ran 26.2 miles at the Governor's Cup Marathon. The two Cheetah Herders completed the run in fine style without any major problems or injuries. In fact, at 17 miles they were still fresh and sassy enough to offer long strings of criticism to a certain local runner who for once was being outclassed. The two finished a little stiff, but otherwise looking fresh and fit. However, they soon faded under the strain of the brand of post-race celebrating for which the Cheetah Herders are notorious."

Then there were the endorsements. Sadly, Bombardier Ale (The Official Beer of the Cheetah Herders Athletic Club) was not on the market long, but Samuel Adams easily replaced it with its label proclaiming Samuel to be both a Brewer and a Patriot (two honorable titles the dudes instinctively knew meant the same thing). Bag Balm was the "Official Lubricant", and John Madden was the "Official Sportscaster". The "Official Anthem" was "Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap." Copenhagen, the "Official Drug", was often sampled after a good workout to removing any lingering sensation of health and mental clarity. A duct-taped 12-gauge shotgun became the "Official Starting Device", etc, you get the picture.

The Club's quintessential relay performance was delivered at the Great Race Relay. On two days notice they assembled a five-man team to bike 15 miles, run a 3/4-mile pass run and a 3 1/2 mile run, canoe 7 miles, then chug a large pitcher of beer over the sawdust floor of



The first Cheetah Herder T-shirt in action. Pat at the 1979 Western States.



John, Lynn, friend, Gary, & another friend in front of the "Official Pace Car."

Moose's Saloon in Kalispell. The Club, being proponents of the LSD (long slow drinking) training regimen, did not have a qualified chugger, but they knew they had to field the best. The Seeley Lake bars turned out to be a bounteous chugger recruiting ground. They found Gary Castonguay, the Marine Corps Chugging Champion while stationed in Korea, already engaged in a hard workout, but was he a team player? Not to worry. After the event the Backwoods Press reported Gary, "the 'anchor' man handled this chore with agility and finesse." He took the hand-off with 18 seconds to make up on the 3rd Place team. His empty pitcher struck the bar a split second before their pathetic chugger choked down the suds for a fourth place finish and 26 bucks. The Cheetah team took third place and \$80. In an awesome demonstration of flawless follow-through, the Club expended its winnings on the premises.

Even with such stellar performances, prospective recruits were slow to appreciate the benefits of membership. Perhaps those lacking the necessary post-race credentials discouraged themselves. Recruitment ads in the Backwoods Press such as this one didn't help: "If you can't run, no problem. The club is having problems finding someone to clean the sandboxes in the corrals."

Relay Action



Dave "The Animal" hands off to Pat.



Gary in an encore performance at the Great Race the following year. The anchor leg was held outside because puking chuggers the previous year had trouble hitting the buckets provided for the purpose.



Lynn & John paddle their hot canoe.



Dave, Lynn, Pat, John & Ulla DeLarios at the "Official Waiting For The Awards Event."



John swallows hard as Lynn holds the spoils of victory in both hands.

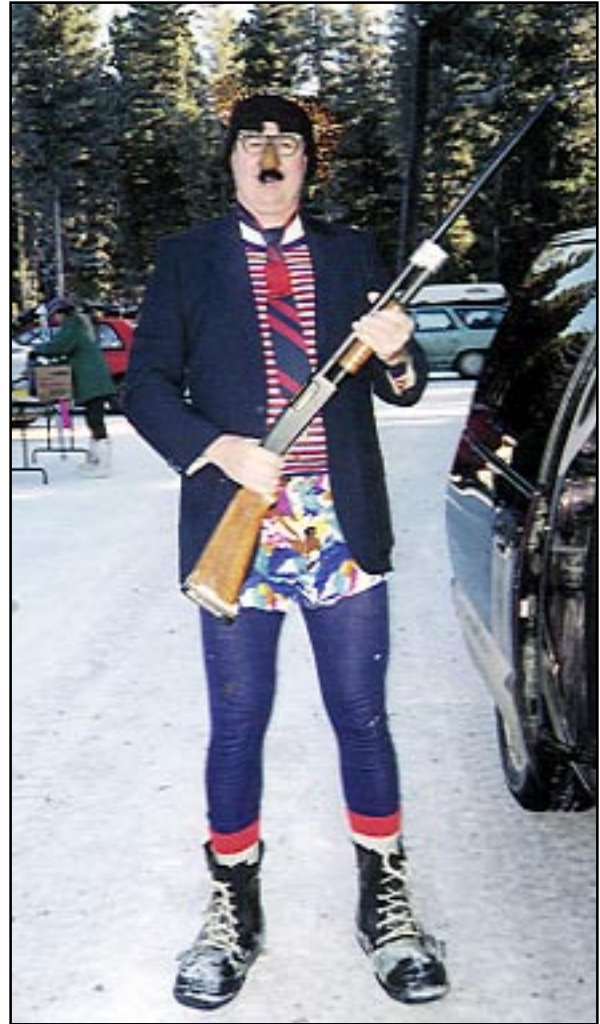
Throughout time, all of history's turning points had their spark in guys sitting around drinking beer and playing double-dare with novel and blatantly ridiculous ideas. Nazism, the Ironman Triathlon, you name it. All Cheetah Herder endeavors are required to originate in this manner. After one particularly invigorating lap around the lake with the dudes, someone halfway through his third Fosters slobbered, "Hey, let's get runners to drive to Seeley Lake in the dead of winter, run our half-marathon loop around the lake on icy roads, then help us drink Don's beer." It made perfect sense. Don was certainly all for it. On February 23, 1980, 33 runners actually took it seriously and showed up. The first Snow Joke was run, and was won by Mike Layman while in training for the Olympic Marathon Trials. The "Official Post-Race Event of the Cheetah Herders Athletic Club" went well into the next day.

At the 1982 Snow Joke Official Post-Race Event, Dusty Moller (from Columbia Falls, 100 miles away) was drinking his share, and probably several other people's share. No one knows what he actually said, but since every can of Fosters comes with an enunciation decoder, Dusty's gibberish was promptly understood as, "Hey, let's get runners to come up where I live, drive to the edge of the Wilderness, then run back along Hungry Horse Reservoir in a forest full of grizzly bears. We'll call it Le Grizz. It's 50 miles, but we'll have beer at the finish line." Pat slurred back, "OK, if you'll get all the volunteers and set up the course I'll advertise it and handle the applications." Five months later, with applications coming in, Pat learned that Dusty had moved to West Virginia. Big deal. Pat found the crews, Lynn registered to run it, and his wife Rose handled an aid station. Montana had its first ultramarathon.

For three years starting in 1985, the Club co-sponsored the "Prairie to Peaks" Relay, even fielding second-string teams such as "Larson's Loonies" and the "Turtle Herders". Club members also branched out into representing the Club worldwide at sporting events and associated International Beer Comparison Surveys. The Club was represented at numerous marathons, relays and canoe competitions nationwide, and had a runner on Great Fall's "Team Bag Balm" at the Jasper-Banff 177-mile relay. The Club fielded a six-runner team in the 1989 eight-day Lewis & Clark Relay, 507 miles across Washington State, placing 19th amongst 61 10-runner teams. Cheetah Herder flags (Club name lettered on fabric fur) were left of the summits of the highest mountains in South America and Antarctica. The first Montanan to complete the Midnight Sun Ultramarathon on Baffin Island, and the Western States and Wasatch 100 mile runs did so wearing a Cheetah Herder T-Shirt. Surplus Cheetah Herder T-shirts were thrown to spectators during the 1993 Comrades 56-mile ultramarathon in South Africa. Club Officers are currently affiliated with the annual OSCR cross-country ski races.

The Cheetah Herders original mantra of "Run Before You Drink" embodied a practical solution to the eternal struggle between conditioning and dissipation. This "Official Reasoning" has since moderated to "Seek Levity Without Obliteration." The old-time drinking bouts have long since fallen off, but Club members retain their shameless opportunism. Proof: Don and Doug both got into politics. Disclaimer: Since Doug is a current incumbent, before you attribute any indiscretions implied above to him, let's have it understood that Doug came within a cheetah's whisker of being designated the "Official Chaperone".

Appreciation of athletics remains a prerequisite for being a Cheetah Herder, regardless of one's current conditioning. Club direction is to continue to provide the experience its founders once shared. Life is just a little too long to be endured without fitness and health. The Cheetah Herders may not always do battle, but still provides battlegrounds, because people must set goals and fight to achieve them. If you can't deal with the challenges you choose, how in the hell are you going to deal with the ones you don't choose (which will eventually come your way, especially if you get blasted after every workout.) The Club does not advocate sensitive new age thought or political correctness. It is neither for nor against apathy. Nor is it trying to pass on some lasting example to future generations. After all, what have future generations ever done for the Club? The Club does advocate a disciplined life dedicated to fitness and health. You should mind your training schedule! And, provided you don't go out too fast, you should obey your thirst.



The years have been kind. Pat with the Official Starting Device at OSCR, 1999.