The 27th Angeles Crest 100 Mile Endurance run is now in the books.

The 2014 race started with a heavy heart. Early in June, Garry Curry passed in his sleep at the age of 60. Garry Curry was a legendary runner at AC100 having ran and finished every single AC100 race; 26 finishes. AC100 had only two legacy runners, Garry Curry and Jussi Hamalainen. Not only was Garry a great runner, he was always there Friday before the race to help check in runners. He will forever be missed.

Friday, August 1st. Runners trickled into the Wrightwood Community center starting at 9 AM to get their runner bibs and medical wrist bands. At 2 PM, they again all gathered together for the race briefing. It started with some words from Dennis Merkel (USFS District Recreation Officer with the Angeles National Forest) thanking the runners for all the volunteers trail work hours. Nick Nudell (Medical Director and head of the Ultra Medical Team) then gave the runners some great information, namely: stay on top of hydration because it is going to be hot, watch for snakes, and oh, there is something called purple poodledog bush – don’t touch it. Lambert Timmermans briefly talked about the electronic chip attached to the back of each bib, as the finish line would be electronically chip timed this year. Hal Winton wrapped it up with details about the course. Get some rest everyone, race starts at 5 AM.

Saturday, August 2nd. There was an excited buzz in the Community Center as runners entered, checked in with Andy Morehead, and milled about waiting for the 5 AM start. At 4:45 AM, Hal Winton gave his annual invocation. With runners assembled under the huge iconic START banner, Andy started the countdown … 3 … 2 … 1.. GO! And off went the 140 starters into the early morning darkness as they began their 2014 AC100 journey across the Angeles National Forest.
Inspiration Point is the first aid station and is 9.3 miles into the race. There were several contenders for the win in the men’s race. Will it be Dominic Grossman, Chris Price or Jorge Pacheco, all prior winners? Or one of the newbies, French Guillaume Calmettes or Italian Michele Graglia? And how about 50 year old Ruperto Romero who had 7 AC finishes prior to this year and has come in 2nd in several of those prior years? For the women, the favorites were Pam Smith, a Western States women’s course record holder and Keira Henninger, prior women’s winner of AC100. We all eagerly waited to see who would come barreling down that single track into the aid station to take an early lead. As we waited, we noticed that even though it was 6 AM, everyone was in short sleeve shirts and shorts. All indications were that we were in for a VERY HOT race. In previous years, everyone has been bundled up in jackets this early in the morning. Just before 6:30 AM, we see the first runner; Guillaume and closely behind were Chris and Dominic, then Jorge, then Ruperto and Michele, followed by Randy Vander Tuig (prior AC finisher), Chris Sigel, Andy Pearson and David Villalobos (all first timers). Hanging with the boys was Pam Smith.

Vincent Gap, 13.8 miles into the race, Guillaume maintained his lead with Chris and Dominic right behind him.

Islip Saddle, mile 25.9. There was some cloud cover so it was not as blazing hot, but the air was thick and heavy with humidity. We could see the runners as they made their way down 1/3 mile of long switchbacks. It was now Chris in the lead, then Jorge, Guillaume, Michele, and Dominic. David Villalobos and Ruperto Romero were shortly behind them. The weather and humidity started to affect the runners. Several had lost weight at the weigh in, which is usually a sign of dehydration. Maybe with the cloud cover it felt deceptively “cool” to the runners, but the thermometer in the shade of the medical tent read just under 90 degrees.

Cloudburst (mile 37.5) is always intense because it is right after brutal Cooper Canyon which many runners dread, whether it is because it is during the heat of the day or the odd angle of the climb out of it. As runners came through, we heard a helicopter that seemed to be hovering right around where we were. About 100 yards down Highway 2 from the aid station, a motorcyclist (someone not associated with AC100) had gone over the edge. Several of the front runners came upon the person shortly after the accident. David Villalobos actually ran back (adding distance to his run) to the aid station to inform them of the accident. As the bulk of the runners were now headed to Cloudburst, there were reports that as Eagles Roost (mile 29.9) was shutting down, they experienced rain, thunder and lightning. It looked like weather was moving its way down Highway 2. Eventually, it did rain on the runners in the evening, but most welcomed the change as it was refreshing and wasn’t too cold for the most part. Although it was “cooler,” something about the weather (probably the humidity) affected many runners and resulted in their having a slower than usual finish time on the course.

Through Shortcut (mile 59.3), the men’s race was looking like Dominic, Guillaume, Michele and Ruperto. As they entered Newcomb Saddle (67.9), it was now 50 year old Ruperto Romero that took the lead and held it to finish for the win with a time of 19:29:01, winning the Bronze Ram Award. He asked what his 2013 time was; he had finished 2013 in 19:28:53.

The women’s leader throughout was Pam Smith. Her splits were consistently about 30 minutes ahead of the prior women’s course record holder splits set just one year before by Angela Shartel. Pam Smith was winner of the women race setting yet another women’s course record. She placed 6th overall. She won the Bronze Ram Award and the Solid Sterling Silver/18k Gold buckle for setting the new course record of 21:04:18.

Michele Graglia came in second with a time of 20:25:19 and won the Bronze Cougar Award for the first 30+ runner. Randy Vander Tuig came in fourth with a time of 20:49:02 and won the Bronze Rhino Award for the first 40+ runner. Keira Henninger had a time of 25:04:46 and won the Bronze Cougar Award for the first 30+ runner. Amelia Valinsky-Fillipow had a time of 25:54:23 and won the Bronze Rhino Award for the first 40+ runner. Tom Nielson had a time of 22:56:48 in 10th place for his 10th finish and earned the Bronze Elk Award.

Sixty eight year old Jussi Hamalainen came in for his 27th AC100 finish in a time of 30:38:59. He has run every single year of the race. Now THAT is a legacy streak, truly a living legend. Unbeknownst to most of us, Jussi had run with some of Garry Curry’s ashes and bib. As he crossed the finish line, he held out the ashes such that Garry would finish before him. Jussi then knelt on the ground and poured out the ashes in a line right under the finish line and said some words. It was probably the most moving tribute most of us have ever had the privilege to witness. There was not a dry eye at the finish line.

Running 100’s can also be a family affair. Denise Matthias finished her first AC100 with her father, Don Matthias crewing her. Back in 1991, it was Denise that crewed for her father Don for his first AC100 finish. It remains to be seen whether she will return to beat her father’s time or leave it to the next generation.
Summer Wesson was the last official finisher. She had tried in a previous year but had suffered an injury which caused her to pull out. This was redemption, and the HUGE smile on her face as she finished and at every aid station said it all; success is great, but redemption is sweeter.

As finishers trickled into Alta Loma Park finish line area, headed by Bill Kee, they were treated to made-to-order burgers and/or omelets. Hot showers were available within the park’s facilities.

The 27th AC100 concluded with 93 finishers. At the awards ceremony, happy but tired official finishers each received a buckle and a personalized engraved plaque with their name and finish time; one was a legacy runner, some were “regulars” with several prior finishes, others, first timers and for some, it was also their first 100 mile race finish. The awards ceremony included a special presentation of a custom made Solid Sterling Silver/18K Gold AC100 ring in Garry Curry’s honor and presented to his sister.

Registration for 2015 opened at noon on the Monday following the race. It sold out in 10 minutes.

For 2016 AC100, for those runners that want to run the race solo (no crews, no pacers, no cars) they will be able to enter the race one hour before the rest of the runners.