

TRENDS AND OBSERVATIONS

Bend but don't break

BY RAUNO PERTTU



Rauno Perttu

Because I spent my undergraduate years at the University of Oregon, I've always been a Ducks fan. I'm also a strong supporter of the Beavers, but I love my Ducks. Everyone knows about their potent offense, but this year's Ducks football team also has a strong defense that is known for its "bend but don't break" attitude. Several years ago, I appreciated the same attributes in two old and cracked poles. I'll explain.

Exploration geology can be a dangerous profession. Over the years, I've had several very close calls that could have ended very badly. Sometimes events were out of my control and, at other times, I was just being stupid. I've had close calls in helicopters and small planes, in vehicles on dangerous roads and on non-roads. I've hung from cliffs, and crawled around inside abandoned mines and third-world mine workings. It was in an abandoned mine in Chile where I met those "bend but don't break" poles.

Twenty years ago, I was more agile and sometimes willing to take foolish chances. I had been asked to check out a gold prospect in Chile's Atacama Desert, which is the driest place on the planet, and is also one of the most mineralized places in the world. I arrived at the abandoned gold mine and met two local prospectors who were there to show me the property. They were very small and wiry with tanned and weathered faces. I guessed neither weighed more than 90 pounds.

The prospectors led me into the old mine working, and a short distance inside, just far enough in that the light was starting to fade, they stopped. None of us had a flashlight. I doubt they owned one, and I hadn't planned on being underground. Our access was blocked by a dark hole that

stretched across the entire width of the adit. This was a shaft that had been sunk to reach lower levels of the mine. I threw a rock into the dark shaft and listened as it ricocheted off the shaft walls. The fading bounces told me the shaft was deep. I was puzzled as to what the miners planned to show me. One of them went back toward the entry, and a few moments later came back with two long poles. The poles were old, only a very few inches thick, dry, with a spiraling wood grain and with deep cracks along the grain.

I wondered where they had acquired these poles out here in the desert where no plants of any kind grew. Next, I wondered what they planned to do with those poles. As I puzzled, they laid the poles side by side across the 12- to 15-foot-wide pit. In turn, each got onto his hands and knees. They grasped the poles firmly with their hands and, as they scooted forward over the abyss, they placed their lower legs at angles across the poles, and proceeded to "walk" across the gaping black hole by alternately sliding a hand and leg forward along the poles. They had clearly done this many times.

They crossed the shaft and beckoned me to join them. This was one of my stupid moments. I got onto my hands and knees and copied their actions. Unfortunately, I was not 90 pounds; I weighed close to 200. I didn't think those poles looked nearly strong enough to support me. As if to

confirm my worries, the poles made loud popping sounds as I inched forward. The popping sounds echoed off the adit walls, and the poles bent ominously as I inched across the black void below. After what seemed an eternity, I reached the other side, with the poles (and me) still intact.

On the other side, we walked a short distance in the rapidly fading light and came to the end of the adit. The rock wall told me that the reason the adit ended and a shaft went down was because the gold

vein ended at the wall, and the old miners had followed the ore shoot the only way they could, which was downward. Our adventure over the pit and potential death had been a waste of time.

Now I faced the prospect of recrossing the pit. I was relatively certain that I had weakened the poles to the point they couldn't possibly support me on the way back. I wanted someone to be able to eventually haul my body out of that black pit and ship it back home, so I insisted that they cross back first. They would be trapped if I went first and broke the poles.

The prospectors crossed the pit with little difficulty, although the poles now made noises from their 90-pound weights. My turn came, and I was almost certain I was living my last moments. As I was about a third of the way across, the poles sagged deeply, and one of the poles made an exceptionally loud pop. I froze and waited a moment. Nothing further happened,

so I cautiously continued. As I reached the other side, I felt I had survived a near-death experience. The miners asked me what I thought and I told them I was not encouraged by what I had seen. They immediately wanted me to go back across with them to look again. This time, I decided I had exhibited enough stupidity for one day and declined.

Afterward, I sometimes wondered if I had weakened the poles enough that they eventually were unable to support even a 90-pound body, or if another, perhaps fatter, geologist was persuaded to attempt the crossing, only to disappear into that black pit.

As I've gotten older and remembered geologists who were killed in various ways while doing exploration, and thought about my close calls, I've gotten more cautious. Still, those stupid adventures of yesterday make exciting memories, but I also remind myself you have to be around to have those memories.

Some of my close calls have taught me important lessons. When I reflect on this one, the only lesson that comes to mind is "Don't be so stupid!"

As I write this, the Ducks haven't yet had their key game at University of Southern California. I hope that their "bend but don't break" defense helps them win that important game, just as my "bend but don't break" poles allowed me to be around to enjoy that game.

Rauno Perttu
541-899-8036
jrperttu@charter.net

Twenty years ago I was more agile and sometimes willing to take foolish chances.

ENCHANTED

FROM PAGE 1

Hatter Timothy Olson, former two-time winner of Pine to Palms 100-mile run from Williams to Ashland, led the charge for ten youngsters on a quarter-mile run in the Wooldridge Creek vineyard.

While the 117 runners in the 5K finished their vineyard run and enjoyed tasting Wooldridge Creek wines, and the ten children enjoyed playing with the Mad Hatter and Queen of Hearts, 143 half-marathoners were sweating it out on the trails up the hill. After the finish, many seasoned runners admitted it was "one tough half," including Jim Clover, owner and creator of the Clover Creek property trails. Jim said he felt more beat after that 13.1 miles than he did after a 50-mile run in South Dakota the previous month. The half-marathoners were rewarded for their

efforts with a lunch by Fulcrum Dining after the race.

In the 5K, Eric Boehmer, 39, of Grants Pass won overall with a time of 20:34, with the first woman, Quinnan Picton, 32, Medford, placing fifth overall at 23:43. Other notable finishers in the 5K included the impressive juniors: Ally Waldron, 15, of Medford; Xavier Bodager, 10, Grants Pass; Hayden Ellis, 9, Ashland; Amanda Forrester, 14, Glendale; Joe Stranberg, 10, Ashland; and Jazmin Fox, 8, Medford.

The 5K senior group included Peter Stevens, 64, of Newburgh, Indiana, in 15th place overall. Others in the over-60 age division were Linda Smith, 63, Grants Pass; and Beverly de la Fuente, 60, Montague, California.

In the half-marathon (13.1 miles) Scott Breeden, 22, of Bloomington, Indiana, won overall with a time of 1:39:23. The first woman finisher, in fifth place overall, was 31-year old Becka Kern of Salem with a time of 1:53:33. One intrepid junior ran the half: TJ Hooks, 15, from Ashland, placed an impressive 16th overall.

The 60-plus half-marathoners included Suzanne Ray, 60, Jacksonville; Douglas Naverson, 63, Jacksonville; David White, 68, Ashland; Tom Bedell, 63, Bandon; Tom Ahle, 63, Ashland; Jim Clover, 70, Applegate; Hank Smith, 64, Grants Pass; and Ted Warrick, 72, Applegate.

Ted and Mary Warrick are the proprietors of Wooldridge Creek Winery



Photos, left to right: Runners at the start of the Enchanted Forest Wine Run, and the Mad Hatter and Queen of Hearts. (Photos by Michael Lebowitz, LongRun Pictures. www.longrunpictures.com.)



Fairy runners, left to right, Sydnee Fox and Jazmin Fox. (Photo by LongRun Pictures.)

with partners Greg Paneitz and Kara Olmo. Ted and Greg ran the half-marathon while Mary and Kara helped out at the finish line and the Wooldridge aid station.

It takes a village to host an event like this, and without the many volunteers and sponsors it

would not have been possible. Many thanks to Wooldridge Creek Winery, Noble Coffee, Fulcrum Dining, Pearl Izumi, Smith Optics, Ultraspire, Good People Run, High Gear, Rogue Valley Runners, Siskiyou Outback Race, First Endurance, Clover Creek Vineyards, Applegate Trails Association, and Southern Oregon Runners for all the help and great stuff!

Big thanks also to all the runners who turned out to make this such a delightful success. We hope to see everyone back again next year for even more excitement and fun.

Annette Parsons • 541-846-6656
aparsons@apbb.net