

2012 Barkley Marathons at Frozen Head State Park, part 1
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 10, 2012)

One of my favorite places to relax is Frozen Head State Park. It is 30 minutes from Oak Ridge and upon arriving there I am immediately transported from the rush of daily life in Oak Ridge to something far more relaxed yet in a strange way even more intense. I often experience a calming force but also a longing to experience all the woods have to offer, all at once.

The mountains bring a fresh perspective to life for me and when I am taking photographs of wildflowers, waterfalls and other features of Frozen Head, I am in world far removed from that of the daily issues and pressures that otherwise seem to be omnipresent. Time spent in the woods somehow does not seem to count against life's allotted days. That time is special and revives the soul and spirit...rather than count against you, it seems to actually add length to one's days.

While many of you can likely identify with my description of the relaxation experience that comes with a visit to Frozen Head, there are many facets to the phenomenon that is Frozen Head. Not all of the available Frozen Head opportunities can be experienced by everyone. An example of a truly unique experience is that of the Barkley Marathons held annually on the last weekend in March.

Each year, a special campsite is established at the Big Cove Campground in Frozen Head State Park to serve as the race headquarters. This campsite and the other 19 available campsites plus the two group campsites holding 20 campers each are taken by a truly unique group...ultrarunners. Additionally, there are several who come to the park for the race to support the runners but stay in local hotels.

These ultrarunners are accustomed to spending time alone on long trail runs challenging their bodies and focusing on finishing tough courses. Yet, this Barkley Marathons is in a class all to itself. It draws experienced runners who are looking for a challenge beyond running normal marathons.

The Barkley Marathons also serves to pull these independent souls together quickly. When the race starts, that is the time when runners look for other more experienced runners to show them the way to the first books. Even with all the help one can get, the first time runners who are running on a course where the trails are not marked, struggle to finish even one loop. It is truly a tough course.

This unique ultrarunning experience, known affectionately as "the race that eats its young," and known officially as the Barkley Marathons. The name is intentionally stated as a plural because it is actually two ultramarathons. First there is a "fun run" of three loops ostensibly 20 miles each, but likely more. And there is the second full course of five loops.

The first two loops are run in the clockwise direction roughly around the perimeter of Frozen Head following trails for only small sections of the route. Eleven books are strategically placed along the unmarked course from which each runner is to tear out the page in each book corresponding to the unique number that has been assigned each runner for that loop.

The Barkley Marathons is known internationally as one of the toughest, if not THE toughest, 100 mile race that exists. It is tied inextricably to two things.

First, the reason it came to be as a result of the escape of James Earl Ray from Brushy Mountain State Prison on June 10, 1977. He was recaptured on June 13, three days later (actually 55 hours), and returned to prison. He had only gotten eight miles from the prison.

Second, the man who created the race is a most colorful character with a deep appreciation for the need to understand and face challenges. And he is an experienced ultra run course designer.

Gary Cantrell, also known by his chosen name of Lazarus Lake or affectionately by the ultrarunning community as simply "Laz," heard of that pitiful escape attempt. His immediate comment was that given a 55 hour escape time, he could have easily covered 100 miles, not just eight. Gary was already an

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ultramarathon runner who easily covered long distances on rough trails. He thought he had seen some of the roughest terrain ultrarunning had to offer.

His close friend, Karl "Raw Dog" Henn, a local coal mine inspector pointed out the terrain surrounding Brushy Mountain Penitentiary and Frozen Head State Park on topographic maps and suggested that Gary just might be mistaken. Thus began a collaboration that has resulted in the creation of a phenomenal ultramarathon that is world renowned. "Laz" has become synonymous with ultrarunning's toughest and most demanding course. He is now, close to 30 years later, a legend as is the Barkley Marathons, his brainchild.

Prior to the 2012 Barkley, only 10 people had ever finished the 100 mile course in the allotted time of 60 hours and well over 800 had started. The first event was held in 1986 and while it was limited to nominally 55 miles, no one finished. The same thing happened the next year, no one finished.

In 1988, Frozen Ed Furtaw became the first person to win the Barkley. The name "Frozen Ed" was given Ed by Gary in December 1987, when he was encouraging Ed to take the Barkley challenge.

Frozen Ed has since started 16 Barkley Marathons. Only one other person has started more Barkley's...Leonard Martin, an Oak Ridge dentist! Leonard has started 17 times. Leonard is one of several Oak Ridgers with a connection to the Barkley Marathons. Others are Hiram Rogers, who entered this year for his ninth time, Kerry Trammell who has entered eight times and my son, Zane Smith, who grew up in Oak Ridge but now lives in Columbia, TN, has started two times.

Frozen Ed has written an excellent book chronicling the history of this most unique ultrarunning experience. The name of his book is, *Tales from "Out There," The Barkley Marathons, The World's Toughest Trail Race*. Ed told me that he is about ready to issue an updated edition of the classic.

The term "Out There" is a commonly used phrase to describe what is happening to runners who are on a loop of the Barkley. At night, that term takes on special meaning when navigating the unmarked trail between the 11 different paperback books which prove a runner has covered the course by tearing out a page corresponding to the number they have been assigned for that loop.

Obviously, Frozen Ed has experienced the feeling of being "out there" and not knowing exactly where he was out there. The term has special meaning to those who have attempted the Barkley.

With the exception of 2002, when the state government closed many of the state parks because of funding problems, The Barkley Marathons has been held annually. It is known throughout the ultramarathon world as being one of, if not THE, toughest ultramarathon in existence.

The winner this year, Brett Maune, who set a new trail record of 52 hours 03 minutes and 08 seconds, wrote about his experience "out there" last year when he also won. Brett said, "I eventually navigated through the mess and got to the river but saw nothing to indicate where I was. I had no idea where I was. The paranoia I was experiencing took a quantum leap at this point." I think that most effectively describes what surely must be the feeling of being "out there."

The 2012 Barkley Marathons was a most unusual one. For the first time ever, three people finished the 100 (I am convinced it is well over 100 miles). Brett Maune (second time winner) from California, Jared Campbell of Utah at 56 hours and 15 seconds and John Fegyverese of Antarctica came in at 59 hours 41 minutes and 21 seconds. Interestingly enough, John also set a record...for the longest official time for a 100 mile ultramarathon.

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Next we will examine the international nature of this most unusual race right in our back yard.



Frozen Ed and Gail Furtaw, prepare for Ed's 16th run of the Barkley...notice he is eating the fabled
grilled chicken

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Hiram Rogers in red and Zane Smith facing camera enjoy the camp chatter before starting the race the next morning

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Kerry Trammell enjoys a laugh at the camp, while he did not run this year, Kerry still enjoyed the event