



3 DECADES OF PROGRAM CONTROL

*SPECTACULAR MESSES, PECULIAR JOURNEYS, AND A
CALL TO ACTION FOR EVERYONE*

Tom Polen, ClearPlan Consulting



There are people in this industry who are new... mid-career... or think that they're tapped out. All still may have many miles to go... and they may need your help.



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Any they may not ask.

EXERCISE

During today's presentation, think about, or write down... One or all three.

- A. Something positive you've taken away from a failed project.
- B. A time that you've framed a decision (A vs B) for a decision-maker.
- C. A time you prevented someone from making a mistake that you have previously made. Or vice versa.

TODAY

Today's presentation is about helping people... and accepting help.



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For many of us, one, the other, or both, can be difficult.



BACKGROUND

I've wanted to deliver this presentation for 5 years. The Time / Place / Topic was never quite right. Something happened recently which brought it back to mind.

Today is a good day!

And I recognize that this is an unusual presentation



Your stories are very helpful to this presentation.

I encourage you to participate in any way that you
feel comfortable.

I need your help today!

WHO. WHAT. WHY.

Tom Polen

Program Control Addiction since 1995.

In April 2021, I convinced myself that my mission had ended.



WHO. WHAT. WHY.

Burnout?

New Endeavors?

“Retired?”



WHO. WHAT. WHY.

Burnout?

New Endeavors?

“Retired?”

It was time to do
something ridiculous.

RIDICULOUS

Cocodona 250

250 mile foot race across the most scenic and treacherous parts of Arizona.

Exactly 5 days to complete the course with intermediate cutoff checkpoints.

The winner will surely appear on the cover of Ultrarunning Magazine.



RIDICULOUS

Cocodona 250

50,000 feet of elevation gain

92% trails

Mandatory gear to haul

Aid every 10 to 20 miles

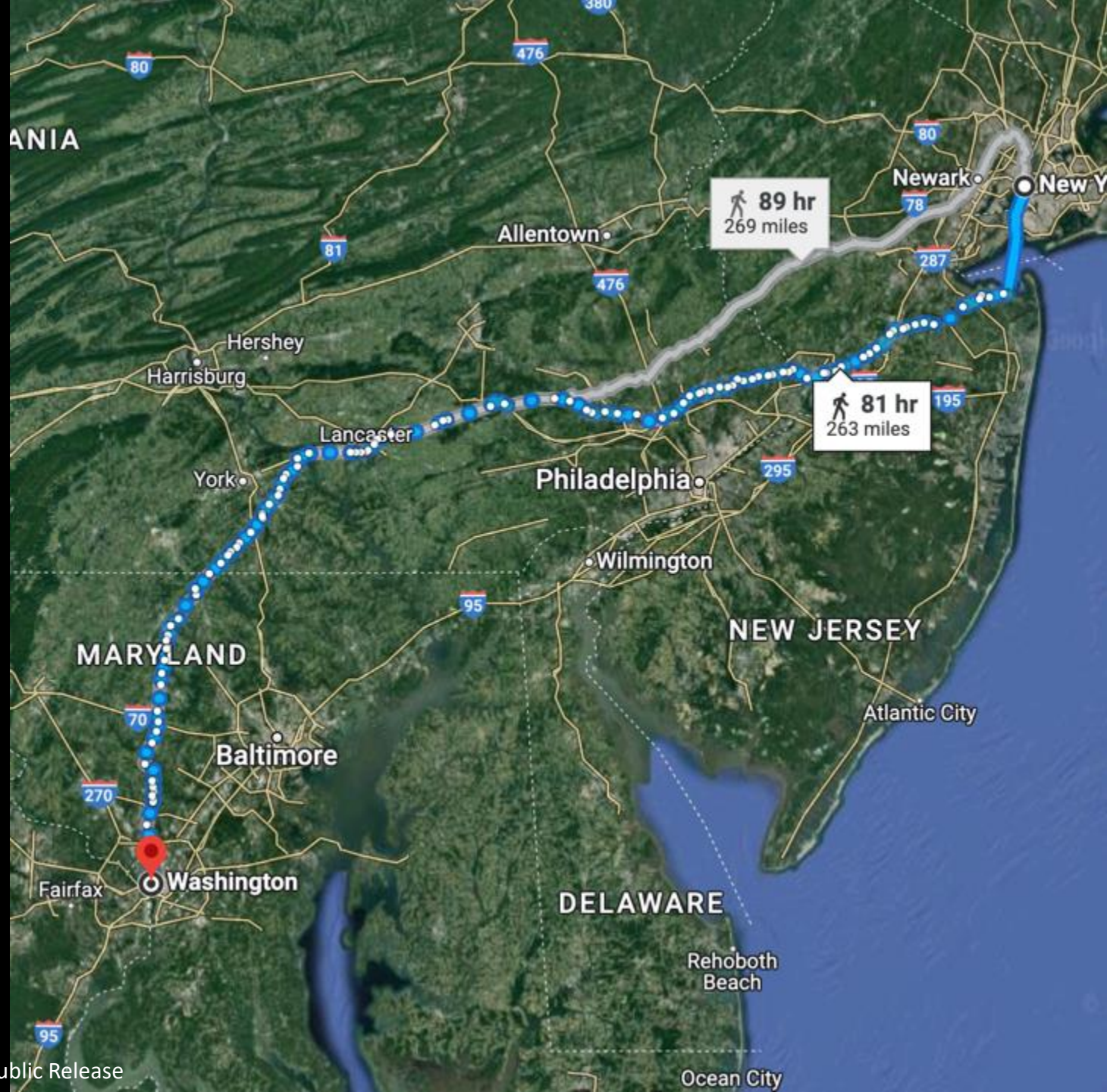
Livestream and detailed GPS tracking



RIDICULOUS

250 miles is

- 9 ½ Olympic Marathons
- 40 x 10k runs
- Running New York to DC



THE PROJECT

Appear on the cover of
Ultrarunning Magazine.



WHY?

Ultrarunning is an obsession to many.

You learn about your limits – physical and emotional.

Failure is a clear and present option at every event.





THE PROJECT

Appear on the cover of Ultrarunning Magazine.

This may be the highest honor in the sport.

THE PROJECT

The Cover.

Ultrarunning
Magazine.

Immortality.

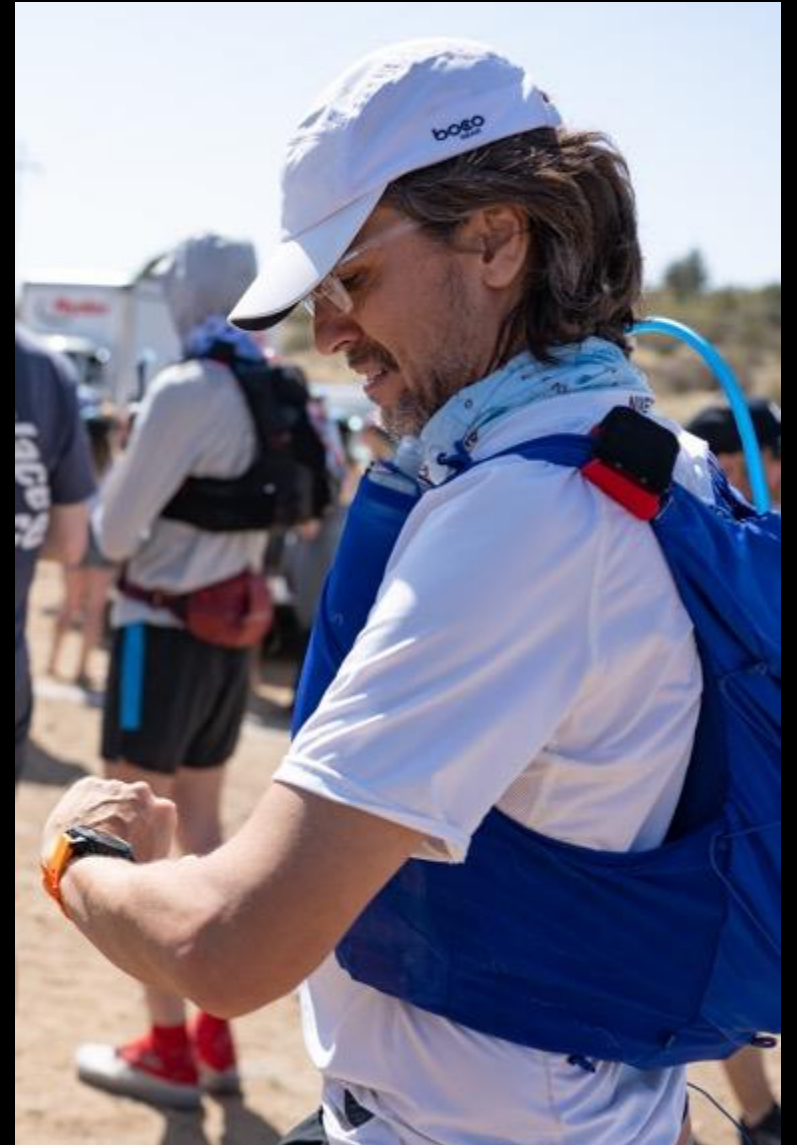


#WINNING

Train Every Day.

Win Race.

Magazine Cover.



PROJECT PLAN

Train Every Day. (1 yr LOE)

Win Race. (3d)

Magazine Cover.
(Finish Milestone)



EXECUTION

Day 1

Plan: 80 miles



EXECUTION

Day 1

Plan: 80 miles

Earned: 58 miles

Help me, Scott Berg!

EVM will get us to the finish!!!



EXECUTION

Day 1

Plan: 80 miles

Earned: 58 miles

Spent...

EXECUTION

Day 1

Plan: 80 miles

Earned: 58 miles

Spent... All Energy



HOWEVER

Let's talk about comebacks...

PROJECT RESULT

D.N.F.

WHY

Did not study course BCR

Had the right gear, but was disorganized, as my plan was all LOE.

Confusion among me and crew.

Did not test new gear.

Small problems got big. Contingency plans were ad-hoc, rushed, lengthy, and inefficient.

Did not adequately address risk.



HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU SAID THIS?

“We should have known...”

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU SAID THIS?

“We should have known...”

This is the likely outcome when Risk is not adequately addressed.

WHAT WENT RIGHT

Met up with new
and old friends

Enjoyed beautiful
scenery

Lessons Learned
can be positive,
even on a failed
project.



WHAT WENT RIGHT

Met up with new
and old friends

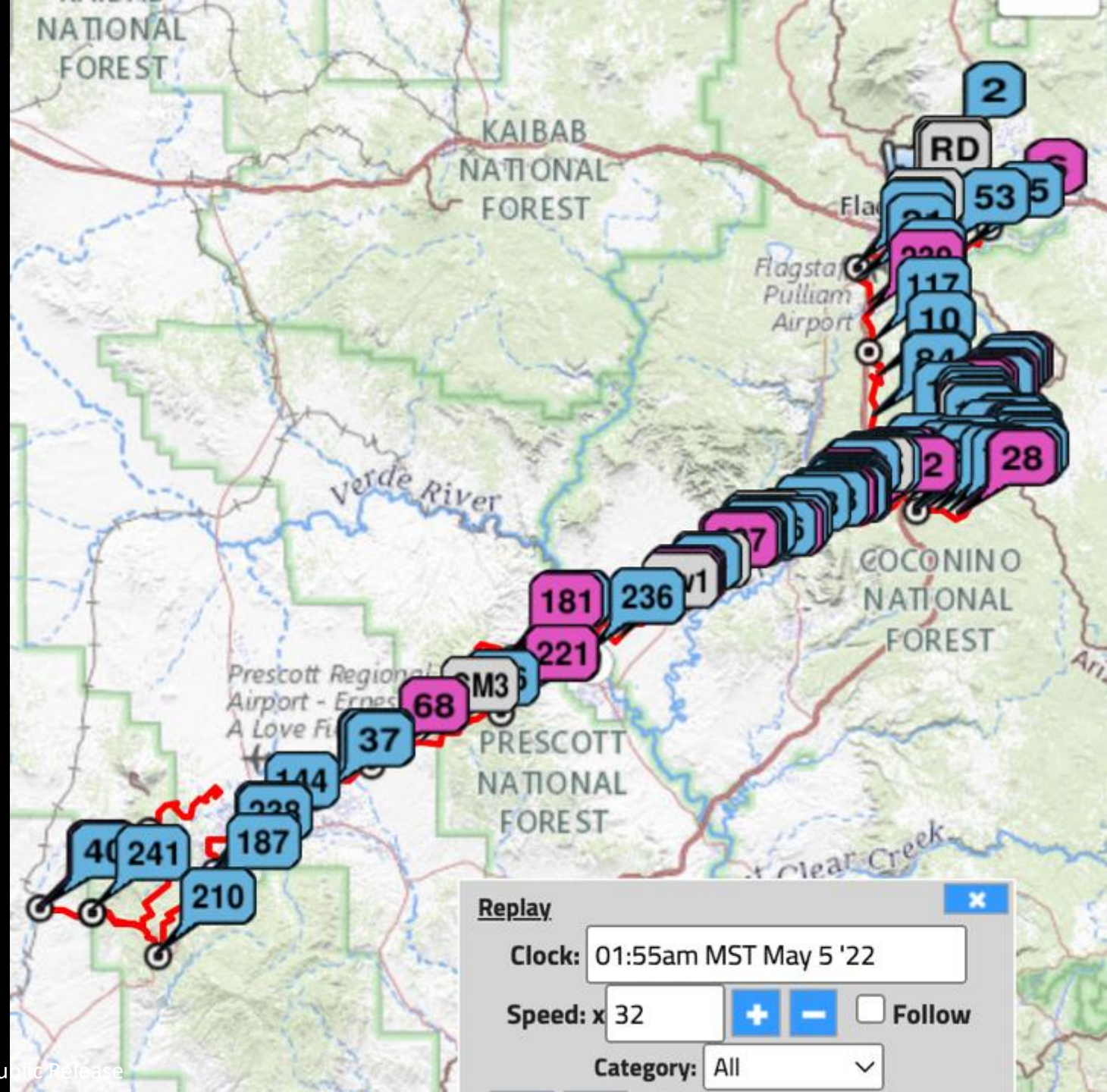
Enjoyed beautiful
scenery

No Magazine
Cover!!!



PROJECT CLOSEOUT

I hid in bed.
I tracked new
friends still in the
race.



SOMETHING WAS BOTHERING ME

Another participant helped me on that first night.

Stephen #212 was upbeat, positive, and persistent. Those are great traits! We worked together through the first night.

But, there was a moment where I knew I was holding him back...



THEN WHAT?

Days later, Stephen was struggling to keep up with the time limits. This is called “Chasing Cutoffs” and it’s a stressful situation for the competitor.

On the eve of the 5th day, 102 hours into the race, I texted race control.

This was extremely difficult for me. I felt like a failure and I had anxiety about re-engaging with the race.

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RESPECT BOUNDARIES AVOID “SPECTACULAR MESSSES”

There was a time that I “helped” with
someone’s career in Program Control...

Help me, Andy Dorsey!

WHEN THERE'S TROUBLE / LESSONS LEARNED

Always be positive.

You are an expert who can and should help,
when appropriate.

Success can be reshaped.

You can't change the past.

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THE STEPHEN PROJECT

Stephen was a project in trouble.
Low on resources.
Unsupported.
Disorganized gear.
No sleep for 3 days.
Absolutely Zero Float.
Needs 50 miles in < 18 hours



HOW COULD I HELP?

Make a list! This can help everyone

HOW COULD I HELP?

Fully trained for the distance
and altitude remaining.

HOW COULD I HELP?

Fully trained for the distance
and altitude remaining.

Deep knowledge of Northern
Arizona trails and terrain.

HOW COULD I HELP?

Fully trained for the distance and altitude remaining.

Deep knowledge of Northern Arizona trails and terrain.

Experienced being SOL with a long way to go.

HOW COULD I HELP?

Fully trained for the distance and altitude remaining.

Deep knowledge of Northern Arizona trails and terrain.

Experienced being SOL with a long way to go.

Despite my own race failure, I am an experienced Planner.

THE NEW GOAL

Help get Stephen to the finish line as his pacer and crew before the 122 hour high noon deadline in downtown Flagstaff, AZ on Saturday, May 6, 2022

There are only two runners that everyone will remember from this and most ultra-distance races.



EXECUTION

Stephen embraced the support.

Nearly everything except R.F.P. was out of scope.

We needed a good team behind us in order to help him.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

“15 minute trail naps” were actually about 4 minutes. We had to crash the schedule.

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Does “Crashing the Schedule” ever actually work?

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

"To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time."

- Leonard Bernstein

OVERNIGHT

Gathered additional support resources.
Optimize. Know when to shed resources.
Appropriate level of detail. We managed
schedule down to the minute.

2 HOURS TO GO

Helping is contagious

Too much help can be inefficient



1 HOUR TO GO

Helping is Contagious

For one morning, May 6, 2022, in Northern Arizona, Stephen's journey became a movement.



FINAL HOURS

Execute aggressively when necessary and able.

Be direct and transparent, with a smile.

FINAL HOURS

Transparency and framing decisions...

“I know that you need foot care right now. We can do that, but then you cannot finish on time. You have to decide which outcome you want. Foot care or finish the race?”

DOWNTOWN FLAGSTAFF

4 minutes to go.





Approved for Public Release





Approved for Public Release



Approved for Public Release



Approved for Public Release



One of the most amazing things in life is the camaraderie of working as a team toward a shared mission.

Approved for Public Release

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE EXERCISE

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AFTERMATH

Take care of the project and the team.

Capture the story. What worked and what did not work?

That story can prevent others from making mistakes.

Understand that “Winning” may be redefined during execution.

CALL TO ACTION

There are people in this industry who are new... mid-career... or think that they're tapped out. All still may have many miles to go... and they may need your help.

Any they may not ask.



CALL TO ACTION

You all are the best in the industry.



CALL TO ACTION

You all are the best in the industry.

You have stories to tell.



CALL TO ACTION

You all are the best in the industry.

You have stories to tell.

You make those around you better.



CALL TO ACTION

You all are the best in the industry.

You have stories to tell.

You make those around you better.

They all have finish lines to reach.



CALL TO ACTION

And when you do...



CALL TO ACTION

And when you do...
You may help someone
achieve...



CALL TO ACTION

And when you do...

You may help someone
achieve...

Something they never thought
possible...

WHAT HAPPENED WITH STEPHEN?

His story went viral...



WHAT HAPPENED WITH STEPHEN?

His story went viral...

Within the Ultrarunning
community 😊



WHAT HAPPENED WITH STEPHEN?

His story went viral...

Within the Ultrarunning
community 😊

He appeared in industry
media and podcasts



WHAT HAPPENED WITH STEPHEN?

He did not win the race.

He finished last. DFL.

There's no prize for 151st place!

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------|-------------|----------------------|----|----|---|
| 124 | Cassidy | Hood | Meridian | ID | 45 | M |
| 125 | Ken | Tulloch | Cos Cob | CT | 56 | M |
| 126 | Lee | Conner | Cleveland | OH | 49 | F |
| 127 | Karmell | Ohlrogge | Cleveland | OH | 36 | F |
| 128 | Mark | Mcconnell | Rockville | MD | 39 | M |
| 129 | Bart | Mangino | Prescott Valley | AZ | 69 | M |
| 130 | Erin | Linehan | Denver | CO | 41 | F |
| 131 | Rebecca | Williams | Ojai | CA | 40 | F |
| 132 | Courtney | Boyle | Lakewood | CO | 41 | F |
| 133 | Patrick | Grengs | Sierra Vista | AZ | 56 | M |
| 134 | Helgi | Olafson | Dania Beach | FL | 39 | M |
| 135 | Brendan | Wiley | Santee | CA | 46 | M |
| 136 | Danelle | Soto | Chandler | AZ | 37 | F |
| 137 | Nathaniel | Lee | Monument | CO | 43 | M |
| 138 | Jason | Baum | Prescott Valley | AZ | 35 | M |
| 139 | Nicholas | Norwood | Little Rock | AR | 27 | M |
| 140 | David | Doran | Flagstaff | AZ | 47 | M |
| 141 | Danny | Westergaard | Palos Verdes Estates | CA | 62 | M |
| 142 | Eduardo | Sanchez | Chula Vista | CA | 31 | M |
| 143 | David | Adams | San Diego | CA | 36 | M |
| 144 | Ramil | Balagat | Paranaque | | 54 | M |
| 145 | Koren | Brown | Flagstaff | AZ | 40 | F |
| 146 | Joshua | Garza | Bakersfield | CA | 55 | M |
| 147 | Karel | Baloun | Lafayette | CA | 50 | M |
| 148 | Tom | Attard | Missoula | MT | 43 | M |
| 149 | Saul | Vidrio | Vista | CA | 52 | M |
| 150 | Colleen | Vidrio | Vista | CA | 50 | F |
| 151 | Stephen | Park | Calgary | AB | 49 | M |

WHAT HAPPENED WITH STEPHEN?

There was no greater feeling...

Than helping him reach the goal that I failed to achieve.

If I could change what happened and meet my own goal, I would not.



HE DID IT

Stephen Park
Cocodona 250 mile foot race

- Cover Athlete
- Ultrarunning Magazine
- July 2022
- D.F.L.





CALL TO ACTION

I believe our greatest duty is to be givers and a helpers.



CALL TO ACTION

I believe our greatest duty is to be givers and a helpers.

This room is full of helpers.



CALL TO ACTION

I believe our greatest duty is to be givers and a helpers.

This room is full of helpers.

Fully engage.



CALL TO ACTION

Your stories can and
will help everyone.



CALL TO ACTION

Respect Boundaries



CALL TO ACTION

But don't wait for an invitation.