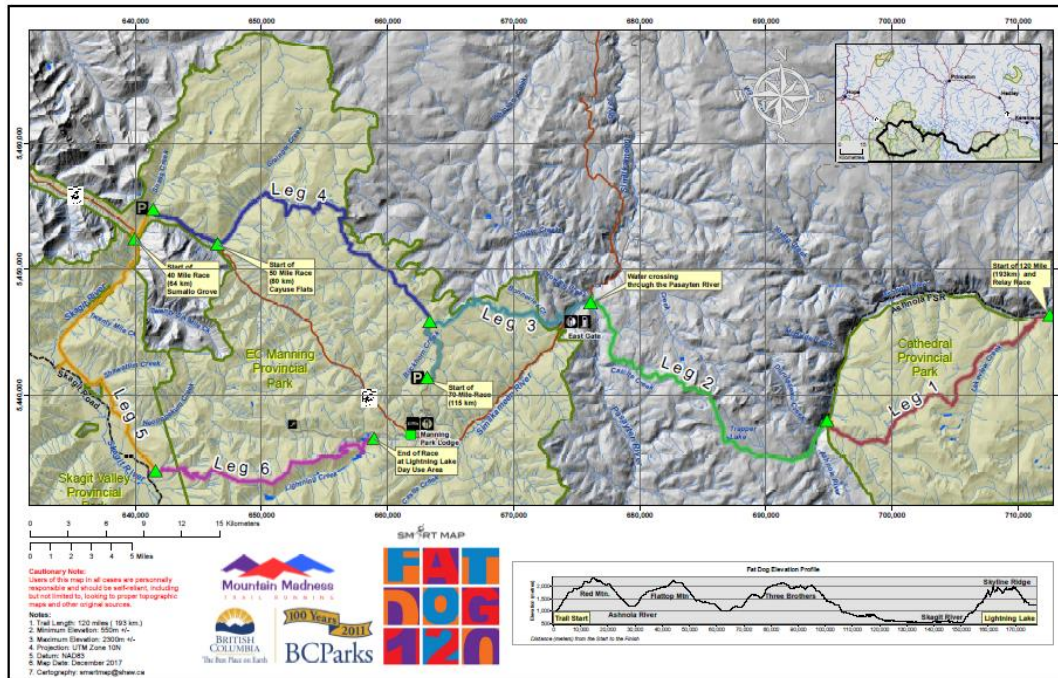


Ashnola Miracle



By Heather Macdonald

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Race Director, Fat Dog 120 Trail Race

www.fatdog120.ca

This story is dedicated to Paul Blomberg, Bill Borrett,
Wendy Hawkes and Jim Furlong.

November 27, 2018

Fat Dog 120 Trail Race and Nature's Intervention

There are good people out there. In 2018, we were lucky enough to find them.

Racers from 12 countries were getting excited to travel to BC to do the international ultramarathon trail race called Fat Dog 120 on August 10-12, 2018. The 120 mile point-to-point race route starts near Keremeos in Cathedral Provincial Park, travels through Trapper Lake Trail, then through Manning Park and Skagit Valley Provincial Parks to arrive back in Manning Park at Lightning Lake. There are 15 aid stations along the way.

It is considered one of the top nine toughest trail races in the world by [Outside Online Magazine](#); this doesn't deter racers, it encourages them.



Racers had done their training for their chosen event: 120 mile, 70 mile, 50 mile, 40 mile or relay. They were looking forward to experiencing the elevation gain (8682 metres for 120 mile racers), and taking in the scenery. We believe this is the most scenic ultra in Canada.



Centennial Trail,
Cathedral
Provincial Park



Lightning Lake, Manning Park



Pasayten River Crossing



Skyline Trail, Manning Park

In May, we were planning our trips to do trail clearing which consisted of removing fallen trees and brushing to cut back overgrown bushes. We wanted to make sure we worked on the Centennial Trail and Trapper Lake Trail because the Diamond Creek fire had burned some of that area in 2017. We expected to spend many hours in June clearing those trails.

To get there, we would take the Ashnola River Road off Highway 3 near Keremeos. From the highway, it takes about an hour to get to the trailhead travelling beside the river.

June 11, 2018, I received an email from ex-BC Parks Ranger Lee Mounsey (who had volunteered at the Trapper Lake aid station in 2015). She and her husband Ian had planned to go into the Trapper area and see what trail work they could do (this is why I love trail people).



But at the 34 km mark along the Ashnola River Road, they had to stop because the road was so washed out they could not continue.



Although the race does not travel on that road, racers do cross it 4 km further along from the washout. This was devastating news for two reasons. The Ashnola and Trapper Lake aid stations use that road to get access to their locations. Relay racers and racer support crews would not be able to get to those aid stations and exchange points.



Ashnola Aid Station at
Wall Creek Bridge (at
the 38 km marker on
Ashnola River Road)



Relay exchange point
at Trapper Lake Aid
Station near
Easygoing Creek

I started problem-solving with the help of Eastgate resident Jim Bolenback who belongs to the Similkameen Valley Riders ATV Club; what about ATVs to get to the aid stations? How would I mobilize people who had ATVs?

Some might come from Eastgate outside Manning Park. Where else? Is this a realistic solution? What would the race captains like to offer for a solution?

My friend Kelley Cook showed me the online site for road conditions for [resource roads](#) in the Okanagan area. I scrolled down to find the Ashnola Road closure and it had no timeline on repairs. This is a problem.

Okanagan Shuswap Natural Resource District Road Safety Information

- [Radio Calling \(PDF, 67KB\)](#)
- [Driving on Forest Roads \(PDF, 19KB\)](#)
- [Protecting our Forests and Range Land \(PDF, 1.59MB\)](#)
- [Radio Channel Maps](#)

Road Closures

Ashton Mara East (Skyline) FSR (5143.05) (as of May 14, 2018)

Road Closed. Landslide is blocking the road at or near 11.4 km. No timeline on repairs.

McGregor-Siwash Rock FSR (7596.05) (as of May 28, 2018)

Road Closed - washout at 0.5 km. No timeline on repairs.

Munro Lake FSR (8696.01) (as of May 14, 2018)

Road Closed. A landslide is blocking the road near 1.4km. No timeline on repairs.

Contact Information

Please report any road safety issues to

Paul.Blomberg@gov.bc.ca

250 558-1779

or the Okanagan Shuswap District Office

Office:

250 558-1700

Mailing:

2501 - 14th Avenue, Vernon, B.C. V1T 8Z1

Email:

Forests.OkanaganShuswapDistrictOffice@gov.bc.ca

There, on this well-designed web page, was the contact information I needed. How brilliant is that. I would contact Paul Blomberg (District Engineering Officer for Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, FLNRO) to check on the likelihood of a repair. We still had almost two months before the race in August.

I called Paul and explained that ultramarathon and relay racers were coming from 12 countries to do this recognized race (in its 8th year). He sounded impressed. He promised to get back to me with some news.

During the same week, he called back. They would request a First Nations archaeological study and if that proved to be okay, they might be able to do a partial repair.

Now managing this project, Bill Borrett (FLNRO) contacted the Lower Similkameen Indian Band (LSIB) Referrals Coordinator to request an archaeological assessment.

They may be able to clear enough space for ATVs to get through. I became slightly optimistic! Talking to the right people gave me hope. And if that smoldering fire in the area didn't get worse, we would be okay to race as usual on August 10-12, 2018.

This is where it gets really impressive.

On July 12, 2018, Bill Borrett texted me to suggest that I contact the LSIB Referrals Coordinator Wendy Hawkes and talk to her about the race. I contacted her right away and explained the race route. I also asked her if she had any local people who could act as traffic controllers if we needed that service at the repaired road. She got the assessment rolling.

On July 23, 2018, Bill texted me on my cell phone. “Just having an onsite meeting today and hope to start work...will keep you posted.” I was amazed; something was happening!

Later that day, Bill sent the phone number for Jim Furlong (J. Furlong Consulting Ltd.) who would be doing the machine work and said if I didn’t hear back by July 24, give Jim a call.

On July 24, I received this next photo from Bill. I was astounded; there was enough room for a truck to get through! They had saved the race access in the Ashnola.

It was a miracle!



We were super excited. The race could go on as usual without route changes. We would be able to do trail clearing on Centennial Trail and Trapper Lake Trail. Our volunteers would be able to set up the two aid stations in that area on race weekend. Thank you so much Paul, Bill, Wendy and Jim.



Nature's Other Intervention

We were all set to go along the Ashnola to do the trail work but we got news that the road was closed due to the wildfire in the area that was now spreading out of control. Firefighters were there with heavy equipment.

In case the road wouldn't reopen in time, I had to create an alternative route. Racers would not be able to do the first two legs of the race: Cathedral and Trapper (which included the Ashnola and Trapper Lake aid stations and two fantastic vistas). I devised a new route that took place on the remaining part of the usual route, plus I added Frosty Mountain, to come up with 103 miles.

The racers accepted the change and were looking forward to climbing Frosty, the highest peak in the area. Volunteers were okay with the new aid stations.

I kept an eye on the wildfire situation. There was one burning in the Skagit but it wasn't looking like it would impact the race. That bubble burst when I got a call from BC Parks two days before the race to say that the Skagit was closed; we would not be able to do our usual route along the Skagit River Trail, Centennial and Skyline.

Sadly, I had to cancel the race for 2018.

The racers did not get to race in 2018 but many got to do some casual, orientation runs on some Manning Park trails that were not impacted by wildfires. We had a barbecue and they hung around to help remove race flagging. I gave them a free deferral to 2019. We will have two alternative routes in 2019 in case they are needed.



Heather Trail in Manning Park

Post Script

Even though the race was cancelled, we still appreciate the amazing help we got in the Ashnola in such a short time frame.

The permanent fix is underway in November 2018.

With our sawyers Bob and Mike, we did get back to the Ashnola on September 30 and cleared 200 trees on Trapper Lake Trail; there's more to be done. People who want to join us can check the website Trail Work page. <https://www.fatdog120.ca/site/trail-work.html>

Here's what our volunteers did in 2018 to assist the parks.

| Area | Volunteers | Hours | # Trees |
|-----------------------|------------|-------|---------|
| Manning and Cathedral | 12 | 97 | 69 |
| Skagit | 26 | 194.5 | 226 |
| Trapper | 17 | 193 | 638 |
| Totals | 55 | 484.5 | 933 |



View from Flat
Top Mountain on
Trapper Lake Trail