

Some cuts and bruises, but big smiles, too

Edmontonians capture trail marathon crowns

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BRAGG CREEK

Alex Kotyk was 14 kilometres into the trail marathon when rugged Powderface Ridge stole her eyes from the rock-strewn downhill trail.

"Just as I was thinking, 'Wow, I'm really enjoying this', I looked up for a second to see the view and wham," said Kotyk, 37.

The veteran trail runner from Edmonton tripped headlong, skinning her right knee and shoulder.

That's the biggest difference between the Powderface42 Trail Marathon and a road marathon. A moment's lapse in concentration could end your race.

Kotyk has run 30 off-road races around the world, some of which were 125-K, yet she fell twice more and stumbled several times as she picked her way through singletrack trails exposing a chaotic jumble of roots, rocks, pine needles, dirt and mud Saturday.

"It was warm but lovely, and the flowers were beautiful," said Kotyk, who led the women's marathon from start to finish.

On the breezy 28 C day, Kotyk beat Sandy Mikula, a 27-year-old from Crossfield, by almost four minutes with her time of five hours, 32 minutes and 54 seconds.

Like the 100 other marathoners and half-marathoners racing on a figure-8 course of hiking trails through the mountains of Kananaskis west of Bragg Creek, starting and finishing at the Station Flats parking lot, Kotyk was often tricked by a mix of sun and shade that hid jutting roots and rocks.

Many runners finished with a few cuts and scrapes to go with their finish line smiles, but almost all of the hardy bunch jumped up and kept running, usually down the backside of a steep hill they had just climbed.

Craig McBride was the fastest marathoner, beating last year's winner, Calgary's Scott Wakefield, 38, by 1:11 with a time of 5:05:00.

McBride, a 49-year-old from Edmonton, spent most of the race 10 minutes behind the leaders, conserving energy while running with two friends from Edmonton.

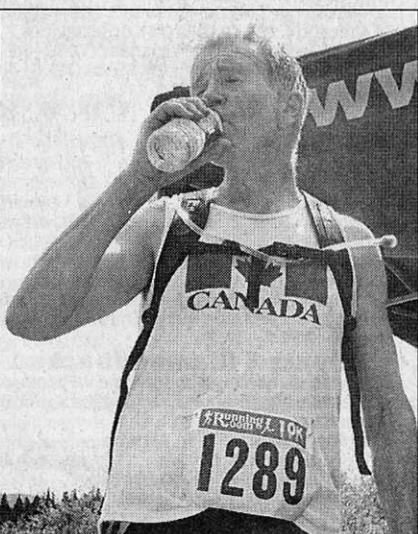
"You really have to hold yourself back in a race like this," said McBride. "It's very difficult, with a lot of ups and downs."

With just eight kilometres to go, McBride picked up his pace dramatically, nearly sprinting the long downhill on the final stretch. McBride passed a handful of marathoners in the final 5-K.

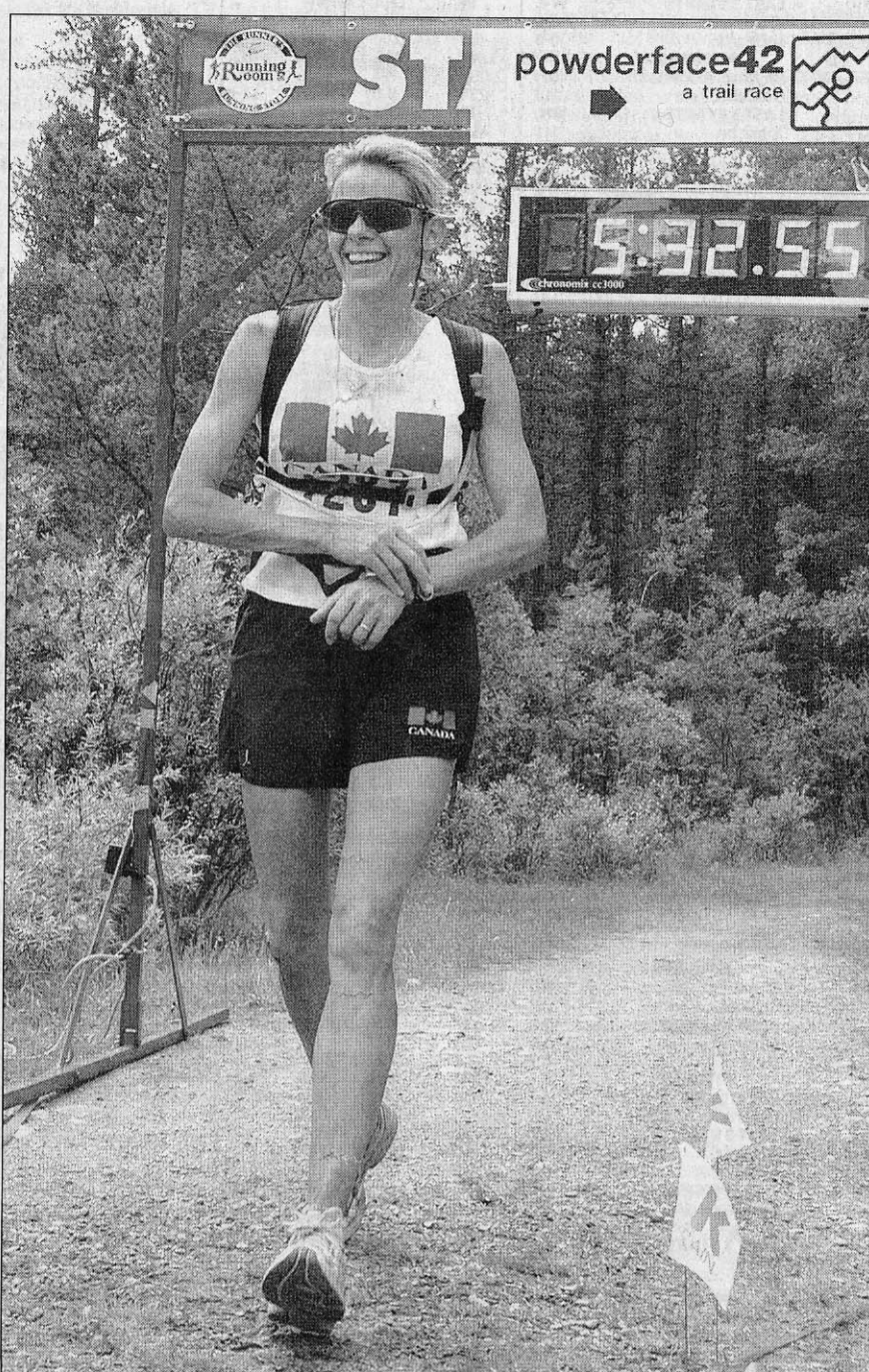
"Fortunately, I only stubbed my toes twice. But I'll be feeling them — along with the rest of my body — tonight," said McBride at the finish.

John MacBeath also left his competition behind in the final 5-K to win the half-marathon.

"My inspiration for this race was closing down Cowboys Wednesday," said MacBeath, a 40-year-old from

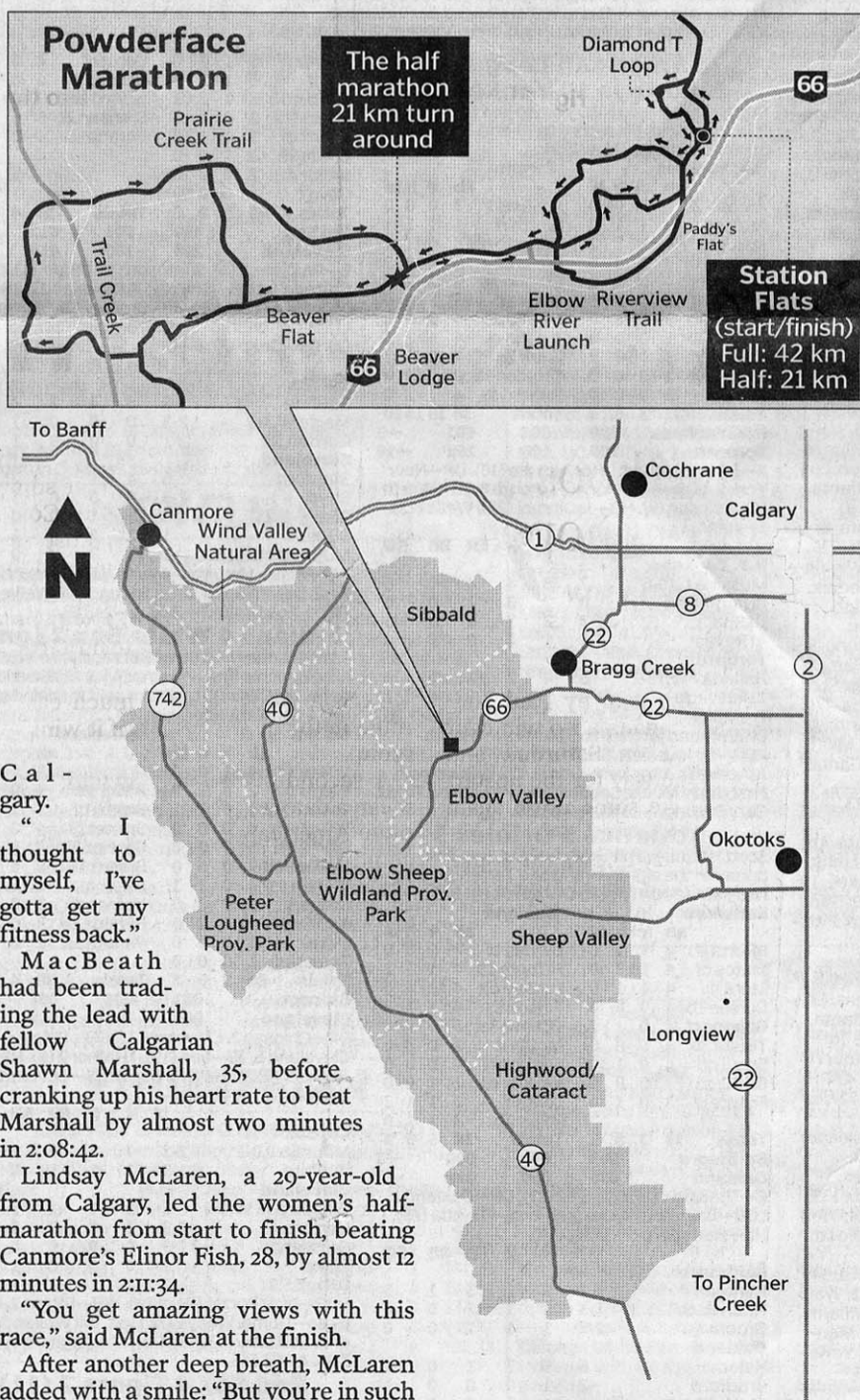


Craig McBride: Fastest marathoner.



Photos, Gillian Waechter, Calgary Herald

Alex Kotyk skinned a knee and shoulder in a fall, but triumphed Saturday.



Calgary.

"I thought to myself, I've gotta get my fitness back."

MacBeath had been trading the lead with fellow Calgarian Shawn Marshall, 35, before cranking up his heart rate to beat Marshall by almost two minutes in 2:08:42.

Lindsay McLaren, a 29-year-old from Calgary, led the women's half-marathon from start to finish, beating Canmore's Elinor Fish, 28, by almost 12 minutes in 2:11:34.

"You get amazing views with this race," said McLaren at the finish.

After another deep breath, McLaren added with a smile: "But you're in such pain when you go up the hills, it's hard to enjoy the views."

Runners from as far as Norway and Mexico cut their teeth, er, knees on

their first trail half-marathons.