

Like Share Saver  
Click to Start Flash Plug-in

**REMEMBER HOW YOU FELT**

Thursday, 28 July 2011 14:05

# Top 10 Extreme Endurance Races in the U.S.

Featured

Written by [Michelle Leach](#) | font size | [Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

Rate this item (13 votes)

You know the definition of “hardcore” in the endurance racing world has changed when No. 10 on the list is a comparatively “easy” marathon run, completed by some of the slower contenders, in five and a half hours — this following a 112-mile bike ride and 2.4-mile swim in choppy ocean waters. But consider the extreme competition on this list. In one race, you may find yourself hauling 32 pounds of pennies through a cold, rainy Vermont backwoods at 4 a.m. while memorizing Greek text. In another, you’ll run two marathons each day for 50 consecutive days, around the same course, over and over and over again. Given the choice, I’ll gladly pick the Ironman World Championship winding through scenic Kailua-Kona, Hawaii any day.

## 10. Ironman World Championship



*Photo credit: U.S. Navy/Chief Journalist Deborah Carson*

Easily the best-known endurance race on the list, each year more than 50,000 triathletes compete in qualifying races throughout the world to earn one of 1,800 spots — for the pleasure of swimming, biking and running nearly 140 miles in 17 hours in Hawaii. Covering such ground in paradise is little solace, considering that the ocean waves and dark, crowded open water can make two miles feel like 20, and running over lava-covered terrain after already cycling 112 miles in 95-degree heat

Search Listosaur...

### Online Deal

Groupon



After Hours Cupcake Bar

\$30.00



Top ERP Systems Rankings ▾

Nexus 7 from \$229 ▾

### categories

➔ [Bizarre Stuff](#)

➔ [Entertainment](#)

➔ [Food & Fitness](#)

➔ [History](#)

➔ [Miscellaneous](#)

➔ [Politics](#)

➔ [Science & Technology](#)

➔ [Sports](#)

➔ [Travel](#)

Follow @listosaur 66 followers



and 60 mph headwinds isn't quite like sipping umbrella drinks on the beach. Even so, of the nearly 1,850 starters in 2010, more than 1,770 finished. As you shall see, those are still pretty good odds.

## 9. Primal Quest



*Photo credit: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 Mike Bitton*

After a two-year hiatus, Primal Quest is returning in 2012, although as of July 2011, the location was TBA (there was a vague reference on the official site to "western United States.") There's no stopping an event billed as the "World's Toughest Human Endurance Race." True to form, previous races have included more than 400 miles through the rugged Sierras, and more than 600 miles over the desolate Badlands and remote Black Hills. What makes the race so challenging is that, to really be a competitor, you need to be good — or at least decent — at a lot of different, scary-to-the-average-person activities. At some point during the course of five or 10 days (depending on how adept you are), you'll climb mountains, navigate whitewater rapids, bike over mountainous terrain, kayak and trek on little to no sleep, all while foregoing GPS for an old-fashioned map and compass. The good news is you'll have others to share in these fun times; participants compete in coed groups of four.

## 8. The Grand Slam of Ultrarunning



*Photo credit: CC By 2.0 Jon Roig*

For many Americans, when one thinks, "Grand Slam," baseball or the Denny's menu comes to mind. But not for the 70,000

### Find us on Facebook



**Listosaur**



**Listosaur**

A look at 10 maps that reveal quite a bit about American life, from ancestry and religion to bizarre cultural quirks.

**10 Revealing Maps About Life in the U.S.**  
www.listosaur.com

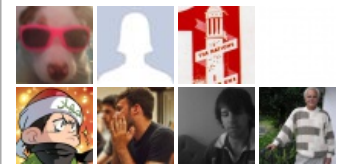
about an hour ago



**Listosaur**

Falling televisions

274 people like Listosaur.



Facebook social plugin

## Home Builder Software

[www.builtrend.com](http://www.builtrend.com)

Web-Based Construction Software for Home Builders.  
View Online Demo!



more sports

### 5 Unheralded African American Sports Pioneers

[Read more...](#)

### 10 Popular TV Commercials Starring Retired Athletes

[Read more...](#)

### 6 Losing NFL Teams That

runners annually who take on ultras — those races longer than the marathon distance of 26.2188 miles. The “Slam” in this ultra-sport boils down to completing, in one year, four of the oldest, stateside 100 mile-trail runs: the Western States 100, Leadville Trail 100, Vermont 100 and Wasatch Front 100. The first of the four listed takes place in California and follows the same trails used by 19th century gold miners. The terrain is so inhospitable — climbing more than 18,000 feet — that it’s usually only accessible by horseback or helicopter. Humans have to navigate it in 30 hours. For Vermont, runners are up against a 30-hour cut-off on back roads climbing and descending some 14,000 feet and July temps well into the 80s. “The Race Across the Sky,” as Leadville is known, takes place in August in the Rockies and also boasts a 30-hour cut-off, while the Wasatch Front in the mountains of Utah gives runners an extra six hours to climb 5,000 feet in nine miles and survive, in one day, snow on passes and temperatures over 100 degrees. Since 1986, 209 eccentrics ... er ... runners, have completed the **Grand Slam of Ultrarunning** — some have done so six times.

## 7. Furnace Creek 508



*Photo credit: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 Moth Attack*

Don’t let the “508” confuse you; for nearly 15 years, the race was 508 miles but in 2007 it was rerouted and picked up another mile and some change. Both solo and two- or four-person relay teams must cover the route in 48 hours — starting in Santa Clarita, California, and rolling through the Mojave Desert and Death Valley before ending at Twentynine Palms, California. Not just anyone can handle the sheer length of the race within such time constraints, never mind the conditions that include 35,000 feet in elevation gains. Would-be competitors must apply, demonstrating relevant ultra-cycling and ultra-sports experience. And due less to the difficulty of the race, and more to the capabilities of the competitors, as much as the “508” name has stuck, maybe the race’s other moniker —the “Toughest 48 Hours in Sports” — should be retired, given that many team competitors are finishing in 36 hours and the solo record is 27 hours, 15 minutes.

## 6. Race Across America

### **Made the Super Bowl a Year Later**

[Read more...](#)

### **10 Oldest Stadiums and Ballparks in the U.S.**

[Read more...](#)

### **10 Classic Quotes on Money and Sports**

[Read more...](#)

### **5 Ways Bowling Can Be Trendy**

[Read more...](#)

### **5 Strange Finishes in NFL Playoff History**

[Read more...](#)

### **Top 10 Most Watched Sporting Events on U.S. Television**

[Read more...](#)

### **10 Ageless Wonders in NFL History**

[Read more...](#)

### **Top 10 NASCAR Drivers of All Time**

[Read more...](#)





*Photo credit: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 Kevin Saunders*

You've heard of the Tour de France. But this coast-to-coast ride, at 3,000 miles, runs circles around its famous French counterpart, making it a mere 2,200-mile warm-up ride through the European countryside by comparison. You probably notice a theme here, but the Race Across America is billed as the "World's Toughest Bicycle Race." That's because, from Oceanside Pier in California to Annapolis, Maryland, competitors are on the go with no rest days — covering 30 percent more ground than Tour de France cyclists in half the time. In fact, competitors generally finish the race in nine to 12 days, which breaks down to 250 to 350 miles each day. The fastest in the field have been known to cover the dozen states on the race route in eight days. And though the race may be across America, the field is very international — with 40 percent of riders hailing from outside the U.S. Finishers have ranged in age from 13 to 75.

## 5. Silverton 1,000-Mile Challenge



*Silverton, Colorado Credit: Richard Semik/Shutterstock.com*

You read that right: 1,000 miles. By foot. No bikes. No kayaks. Not even any teammates. When you run out of space for your marathon medals, and the 100-mile ultras get boring, you turn to this — racking up hundreds of miles by, actually, not going much of anywhere. Those ready for this incredible challenge in fitness, endurance and determination take to a Colorado ski lodge at the base of a 9,310-foot mountain and run, over the course of 18 days in late August/early September, a 1-mile loop at least one time each hour. One mile in an hour, how bad can that be? Well, to get to 1,000 miles in the allotted timeframe, runners have to cover at least 55.5 miles daily — running on literally minutes of sleep at a time for days on end, through heat, rain, snow and darkness. To avoid overuse injuries, every six hours runners change directions. When runners do get some

brief shut-eye it's in a shared, heated tent. With so many runners continuously getting up throughout the night, you better not be picky about your sleep habits. Then again, you're an ultra-athlete. Sleep's for the weak.

#### 4. Great Divide Race



*Photo credit: CC BY 2.0 David Blaine*

Doesn't summiting Mt. Everest from sea level seven times in two to four weeks sound like fun? The cyclists who take to the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route along the Continental Divide do just that each June — scaling nearly 200,000 vertical feet over the course of the 2,500-mile journey from Montana through Idaho, Wyoming and Colorado to New Mexico. Adding to the challenge, there are no teams — all cyclists must participate as solo competitors. In addition, the race is as much, if not more so, about self-reliance as it is about athletic prowess; bikers must navigate a trail where signs of civilization may not exist for 100 miles. If your bike breaks down, you fix it yourself or hoof it to the next town. You better prepare to replenish the thousands of calories you're expending cycling in excess of 16 hours a day, and there will be no outside help from family and friends, even if they live in towns along or near the route. Some cyclists also endure the Canadian portion of the route, which tacks on another 254 miles. Participants have been known to lose 20 pounds over the course of the journey, but you could lose much more if you're ill-prepared, considering temperatures on the route have ranged from zero to 120 degrees, not to mention there exists the very real possibility of encountering a grizzly bear or mountain lion.

#### 3. Spartan Death Race



The website URL, YouMayDie.com, is scary enough but what's really scary is just how baffling this test of sanity and muscle really is. When the race organizer, Peak Races, tells/warns those foolhardy enough to consider this event that it's built to "break those weak of body and mind," they're not kidding. To begin with, the dozens of starters who converge in middle-of-nowhere Vermont get little to no real instructions, aside from a pre-race email that, once translated from Greek into English, still sounds like gibberish. Just read the accounts from previous "survivors" on the race website. By the way, if you're after a PR here, think again. If you can't tell already, this is unlike any "race" you've ever known. Times aren't posted. The goal is to finish — that is, if you can even start. Previous survivor accounts reference trudging 32 pounds of pennies, along with huge wooden bridges, five miles back and forth in the middle of the woods starting at 5 p.m., followed by gathering more than 100 pounds of gear and, inexplicably, buckets of gravel from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. Then the event officially starts. Past exploits have included diving into a muddy, cold pond for a bag of pennies, which can later be traded for supplies, food or even to get out of bizarre challenges — like digging up massive tree stumps with roots and all, carrying 10 pounds of onions and logs five miles up a mountain, and memorizing and duplicating a Lego structure under great duress and no sleep. For the 19 people who survive out of 100, the "race" allegedly takes more than 48 hours ... but it's been said that it takes a good three weeks to get somewhat back to pre-Spartan Death Race "normal."

## 2. Badwater Ultramarathon



*Photo credit: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 Chynna*

With a name like Badwater, you don't expect a stroll through the park. The 135-mile race, in the equally discouraging-



sounding Death Valley, California, during July (of all times), gets its name from the springs at the bottom of the desert which carry water to the surface that, of course, can't be consumed because of the high salt content — hence, "bad water." Like Ironman, the Badwater Ultramarathon is the stuff of legends. Runners take to the blacktop highway in temperatures that can remain over 120 degrees at midnight. You've probably heard stories about runners' shoes melting. That's Badwater, and the stories are true. The broiling blacktop causes the glue on the shoes to liquefy. You'll see runners sticking to the white painted line on the road for this reason. As you can see, it takes a special person to tackle Badwater, let alone earn the coveted belt buckle. In fact, you have to be invited to the race which means, at minimum, you'll have officially finished either a prior Badwater, at least three races at or in excess of 100 miles (one in the last 12 months) or a combination of the Brazil 135 ultra and two other races of at least 100 miles. To get the buckle, be ready to cover all this ground, in all these conditions, in 48 hours or less. Some have even crossed the finish at Mt. Whitney in 24 hours.

1. Self-Transcendence 3,100-Mile Race



If you live near Thomas A. Edison High School in Queens, New York, and pass by the school at 6 a.m. on your way to work, you'll see a group of 10 runners. When you get home, you'll see that same group of runners, still pounding the sidewalks surrounding the school and a nearby park. If you were to pass by the school at midnight, there they'd be — the same group — still running! These are obviously special runners, given that over the course of 52 days, they circle this same .5488-mile course in the heat of summer 5,649 times, logging on average 60 miles daily. Some runners go through a dozen pairs of shoes. Even those who find the Badwater Ultramarathon a breeze might have a hard time swallowing the sheer monotony of rounding a half-mile city block day in and day out for close to two months. But for these runners, many of whom are followers of Indian spiritual leader and race founder, the late Sri Chinmoy, running provides an opportunity to overcome their preconceived limitations — what Chinmoy called "self-transcendence." Like a lot of the races on this list, this, the world's longest footrace, is less about physical strength and more about pushing the limits of what is possible.

Read 10186 times

Published in [Sports](#)

Tagged under [adventure racing](#) [ultramarathons](#) [endurance racing](#) [race across america](#) [sri chinmoy](#) [ironman world championship](#) [badwater ultramarathon](#) [primal quest](#) [spartan death race](#) [furnace creek 508](#) [great divide race](#)

Social sharing

Michelle Leach

Michelle Leach's love of writing has taken her to Sydney, Australia, London, U.K. and other exotic locations like Grand

Island, Neb., and Clio, Mich. She has developed pieces for TV and radio stations, PR departments, newspapers and magazines. A graduate of Northwestern University and Lake Forest College (also in Illinois) she enjoys running marathons and likes to say when not writing, she's running—but she tries not to mix the two activities.

Latest from Michelle Leach

- ➔ [5 Most Liberal States in America](#)
- ➔ [5 Bizarre Wars in United States Territory](#)
- ➔ [5 Controversial Questions About Marijuana](#)
- ➔ [5 Reasons Why Running too Much May be Bad For You](#)
- ➔ [10 Most Despised Professions in America](#)

More in this category: [« Top 12 Sports Movies of All Time](#) [Top 10 Athletes Who Retired in their Prime »](#)

[back to top](#)

♥ Like + Share Javer

Click to Start Flash Plug-in

# FEELING STUCK IN YOUR JOB?

[Site Map](#)

All content ©2013 by Listosaur, LLC unless otherwise noted. All rights reserved. | Web Development by ZooFuze.