

Running



Special

Millen's Joyce Hodges-Hite nears the end of completing a 50-mile run in North Carolina.

Hodges-Hite reaches her goal

68-year-old woman completes 50-mile run

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Failure and disappointment can be as powerful a drive toward accomplishment as confidence and success. Joyce Hodges-Hite knows first hand.

Hodges-Hite, at the age of 68, attempted to complete the JFK 50-mile run along the Appalachian Trail in December and failed to finish. She was removed from the course by race volunteers called sweepers, whose job is to politely tell runners "you're not running fast enough, get off the course."

"All I could think of was the failure," said Hodges-Hite. "I knew why but it was one of those things I couldn't forget. "I had done some running on the Appalachian Trail in Georgia, but these trails were granite rocks of all sizes and covered with leaves. "There was never any place to run on that was dirt. I'm very leery of running when I'm not sure of my balance. I was running so

slow that walking people could have passed me."

Few would fault a woman of Hodges' age, or of any age, for not running 50 miles. Most would find the endeavor quixotic.

As soon as Hodges-Hite arrived back home to Millen after the JFK 50 miler, she scoured the United States for the next 50-miler. She found one near Winston N.C. in January. The race was low key. Organizers do not charge registration fees. Informality is the norm.

Cut to the chase: Hodges-Hite finished her 50-miler. It took 13 hours and 49 minutes. She ran the last few hours in a miner's hat with a light, with a reflecting vest and reflectors on her running shoes. It was a day where she had to dodge a rottweiler, a day where a passerby thought her husband was a threat and called police. A day where rain fell much of the time and 18-

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wheelers whizzed by her as she ran in the road.

It was also a day of immense gratification.

"It was an experience I wouldn't trade," said Hodges-Hite. "It was four days before I could walk normally. The word running wasn't in my vocabulary for a week.

Hodges-Hite took off from the starting line at 7:30 a.m. Nearly the entire race was on concrete roads, the entire 50 miles without a running lane. Hodges-Hite's husband, Jim, trailed her in a car. It was a good day to run with temperatures in

the 50s but rain soon started, causing chaffing and her wet soggy clothing weighed her down.

Hodges-Hite ran nearly all the race on two-lane roads, past homes and over bridges in the North Carolina countryside. She brought pepper spray to ward off possible dog attacks and it paid off.

"A rottweiler had bitten someone last year," Hodges-Hite said. "He made a run at me but Jim (Hodges-Hite's husband) got out of the car and got between us."

Her husband's slow trailing

of her led a passerby to believe something was afool.

"A fellow in a truck stopped and asked if Jim was having car trouble," said Hodges Hite. "I said no that he was helping me but they must have misunderstood because about 15 minutes later a police car came and asked if he was bothering me."

Hodges-Hite said she struggled the last few miles, covering one mile in 28 minutes, alternating between walking and running. She was surprised with her time.

"Someone told me I finished under 14 hours and I

didn't believe them. I thought they were telling me a lie," she said.

A week after completing the 50-mile run, Hodges-Hite ran a half marathon in Savannah. In April, she'll turn 69. She's not finished yet with this long-distance running obsession. She wants to run further. She discovered a 100k race (61 miles) in the south of France when she visited some friends in 2002. The race and distance captivated and has motivated her. Her goal is to run the race in 2008. She'll be 71 when the race starts.