

# Stuck!

The end of the year is often a time of reflection, of making lists and checking them twice. For me, the list that I have been working on for some time now is to run a race in every state plus the District of Columbia. Not a marathon – that is for the incorrigibly hardcore. Any organized race will do just fine, thank you.

And as I look over my list, how am I doing, you may ask? I'm stuck.

Even as a boy I was intrigued with traveling to each of the states, and a few years ago I realized that I had also run races in quite a few. There is nothing quite as exhilarating as lining up for a race while on vacation, heading out on an unfamiliar route with a group of total strangers and then rehashing everything post-race with new-found friends.

I actually came to road racing quite late with the 1985 Duke City 5K being my very first road race. Then, I was simply running a few miles here and there to relieve stress and keep the weight off. And I have to admit I was actually a bit intimidated by running 3.1 miles. I honestly did not know if I could do it because I had only occasionally run as many as three miles consecutively at any one time.

That quickly changed as I began to actively seek out races whenever I had a trip coming up, with the burgeoning internet vastly simplifying the task. Some highlights:

**Texas:** Gruene 10K, with post-race longnecks and barbecue in the oldest dance hall in Texas. Bob Wills, Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker have been regular performers over the years, and not too long ago the house band featured a young unknown singer by the name of George Strait.

**California:** Bay to Breakers 12K, where clothing optional runners competed with tea-sipping, chiffon-clad, combat-booted bikers among the spectators for my attention.

**Colorado:** No Oxygen 10K, an aptly-named race that began in downtown Leadville and went up from there. Inhalers have generally kept my asthma in check at lower elevations, but it was breathless up in the mountains. I have never been as proud of a 50-minute 10K as here, though.

**Washington:** Bloomsday 12K in the rain on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. As we passed a couple in lawn chairs, I noticed they were both sitting in the rain holding umbrellas over their dry and very happy golden retriever, who wanted nothing less than to be out running with us.

**Rhode Island:** Pilgrim 5K. I didn't think the state was big enough for any other distance. Back in my native Texas, ranches are actually measured in "Rhode Islands."

**New York:** New York City Marathon, simply a 26.2 mile long party with guests from all over the world, where one year I saw a woman walking her pet turtle up Fifth Avenue on a leash.

**Kentucky:** Hatfield-McCoy Half-Marathon. “I don’t want no feudin,’ hear? Jus’ runnin’!” Up and over and around them thar hills as train whistles echoed through the valleys. Moonshine post-race.

**Minnesota:** Run for the Border 12K, which went into Canada and finished over in North Dakota, with its painful memory of comfortably running the early miles until a slow burn developed behind my right ankle and forced me to stop and walk, signaling the onset of years of Achilles tendonitis. It didn’t help to learn that someone I had been running with eventually won my age group.

**Massachusetts:** Boston Marathon, a long way from that first intimidating 5K, to be sure. The entire weekend felt as if I were floating along on the euphoria of the event, capped off by a baseball game at Fenway Park.

Now my list is at 45 (44 states plus the District of Columbia) and that number has not budged in three years. What states do I lack? Surprisingly, they are all in the west with Wyoming being the closest and one of only two states in which I have never even set foot. Any number of times I have said that I would just head up I-25 and catch a race in Laramie some weekend but something always seems to come up. Inertia, usually.

Then there is Montana, where I was to have competed in a biathlon (a run and shoot) only to have it cancelled the day before due to a forest fire. Also Idaho, whose panhandle I’ve driven across several times and run trails along Lake Coeur d’Alene, but no race. And Oregon, the other state I have never visited.

Plus Alaska, where my only visit coincided with a Fourth of July race up Mt. Marathon that closed early, and Hawaii. I have visited the islands, but all my running then was on the beach, admiring the stunning beauty of Hanalei Bay – several girls running in some of the tiniest bikinis I have ever seen, in or out of the water. The scenery is also nice, as I recall.

But now I am stuck. However, I resolve to at least get up I-25 for a race in Wyoming this year. Unless, of course, I get stuck in the state of inertia.