

DO NOT

BLOCK GATE

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THE 2024 BARKLEY MARATHONS

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Vertebrate Publishing, Sheffield
www.adventurebooks.com

FOREWORD

For nearly forty years, the Barkley Marathons has taken place in a remote corner of East Tennessee. On the surface, it's an arbitrary test designed by an enigmatic race director who goes by the pseudonym of Lazarus Lake. Runners have sixty hours to navigate over 100 miles of dense briar-covered forest while climbing the equivalent of Everest twice.

It appears that it's designed for people to fail. And about ninety-nine per cent of attempts do fall short of the full distance. But through that lies its true purpose: to provide an opportunity for all participants to push beyond their perceived limits and for a small number to achieve the kind of success that only exists when failure is likely.

It took nearly a decade for Mark Williams to become the first finisher of the full 100-plus-miles distance, and in the quarter century that followed fourteen more joined him. I grew up right next to the Barkley course, on farmland where my family has worked for over two centuries. I've now had the good fortune of being involved in the race in some form since 2015. In that time, I've seen both incredible triumphs and agonising defeats.

I've experienced the agony and ecstasy of my own first finish in 2017, pushing my body beyond what I thought was possible while most parts of my mind had abandoned me. I've seen years with no finishers, experiencing defeat myself multiple times. In my second finish I had the joy of leisurely watching a beautiful sunset while I looked down from the mountain that I had looked up at through my childhood bedroom window.

I sat right in front of the heartbreaking scene of Gary Robbins coming up just short. In 2023 that story was reversed, with Karel Sabbe of Belgium finishing with only six minutes to spare. He followed Aurélien Sanchez of France, the two of them becoming the only non-Americans to finish since Mark Williams of the UK in 1995.

But I don't know if there will ever be another year to match 2024. Ihor Vervys was the first finisher for both Canada and Ukraine. I tied with Jared Campbell for the most finishes at three before he came in for his fourth shortly after, the two of us accounting for over a quarter of all Barkley finishes. Greig Hamilton then became the first finisher from New Zealand while also making 2024 the first year with more than three finishers.

But still, no women had ever finished Barkley. Jasmin Paris had all the right ingredients to prove that it could be done, but with time ticking away seemingly everyone had conceded she wouldn't make it on her third attempt. The only person whose opinion mattered, Jasmin herself, had not conceded anything. She pushed alone down the last long descent and over a stretch of painfully runnable terrain before she arrived within sight of camp.

In yet another first, Carl Laniak waited at the gate as the effective race director. But Laz was there as well, delighted to see what he had spent so many years saying couldn't be done. Edwin 'Frozen Ed' Furtaw, the first finisher back in 1988 when the race was 'only' three loops instead of five, stood with his trademark beaming smile. With just one minute and thirty-nine seconds remaining until the sixty-hour cut-off, and absolutely nothing left other than her relentless focus and determination, Jasmin became the first woman to finish the Barkley Marathons.

In that moment, seemingly the most unexpected and pivotal incident in the history of an event known for its unpredictable changes, what became clear is that this is the constant it was meant to be all along. The new was built upon the old, all of us pushing our individual and collective limits, bricks in a tower that now reaches to previously unimaginable heights. The race itself will continue to evolve and become more difficult, forcing us to grow further. Who knows what will be built upon this latest brick – who will be inspired to pursue their passion and take on challenges that they otherwise might not have thought possible.

David Miller was there to capture that moment. His photos aren't just of people, or of a place, but of moments in time that pull those unique ingredients together in just the right way to share the experiences of a few with many. Key to that is that the photos capture the moment without affecting it. Barkley will never be a mass participation or spectator-friendly event. For decades it was barely known, and most people involved in the race, including me, would personally be content or even prefer for it to stay that way. But the stories, the messages and the experiences from the race should be shared. Daughters everywhere should be inspired by Jasmin's achievement, just as mine were watching her finish. Thank you, David, for helping make that possible.

John Kelly

INTRODUCTION

I had a vision for the 2024 Barkley Marathons and that was to create a black and white photojournalism book documenting what is arguably the most mythical and hardest footrace on the planet.

Time moves differently in Frozen Head – it's like you're somewhere else away from the rest of the world. The Barkley is special; it's hard to put into words just how unique the whole experience is. When you arrive, you're welcomed as part of the Barkley family; it doesn't matter if you're a runner, crew or media, you're just part of it.

I first picked up a camera during lockdown in 2020 as a distraction from the global pandemic. The subsequent journey leading up to the publication of this book was unexpected but something I wouldn't ever change. I didn't realise I was a creative until I was 34, but when I have a camera in my hand it just feels like an extension of myself. My photography is there to be interpreted and my style is something I've carefully crafted over a short space of time, mainly by taking influence from the ultra and trail running community.

Armed with a Leica Q2 Monochrom my trip to Tennessee had purpose. I first held this camera in the Leica shop in Mayfair, London, late in 2023 and it was during that moment I knew this camera was going to do the work at the Barkley. I wanted to try something new and showcase the Barkley Marathons through a particular photojournalism style. No hiding, just raw, unfiltered and true documentation. Only one of the photos in this book has been edited (to disguise a map); the rest are unedited. As they're straight off the camera, this adds to the effect and gives the viewer undisturbed imagery of what really went down in Frozen Head.

Little did I know that 2024 would likely prove to be the most iconic year in Barkley Marathons history. Seeing five finishers for the first time and Jasmin Paris becoming the first ever female finisher was nothing short of breathtaking. I won't ever forget that moment – I remember cheering behind the camera witnessing Jasmin touch the iconic gate with one minute and thirty-nine seconds to spare before the sixty-hour cut-off. I couldn't believe what I had just witnessed and, quite honestly, I don't believe I'll ever capture a moment this important ever again. I firmly believe this.

Thanks to those who backed this Kickstarter project because without you this book wouldn't be a thing. I feel so privileged to help immortalise the 2024 Barkley Marathons.

David x

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank everyone who has helped with the production of this book. Thanks to my family and friends who have supported me and encouraged me to pursue my passion and follow my dreams. The ultra and trail running community for continuing to inspire and encourage me to keep this up when I haven't always wanted to. Vertebrate Publishing for sharing this vision. Lazarus Lake for giving me the gift of photographing the Barkley. Photographers Alexis Berg and Howie Stern for showing me the ropes during Barkley 2023. Jacob Zocherman, a friend for life. Jasmin Paris, thanks for finishing and making this book even more special. Allie Bailey for being Allie. The South Coast Sharks. Anna Wiles, thanks for believing in me. Tom Carter for being my best mate. My boys, Louie and Freddie, for allowing me to do this and allowing me to teach them to chase their dreams.



































