



NEWS RELEASE

Public Lands Guide Defies the Odds and the Elements to Finish 100 Mile Ultra-Marathon

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Laurie "Lulu" Searles after finishing the Rabid Raccoon 100.

While most people spent St. Patrick's Day weekend watching parades or drinking green beer, Laurie "Lulu" Searles spent it trekking 100 miles through freezing temperatures and snow squalls.

Lulu, a guide at one of our Public Lands stores, recently finished the Rabid Raccoon 100 ultra-marathon at Raccoon Creek State Park in Hookstown, Pennsylvania.

Lulu's love for sports and the outdoors began when she was just two-years-old, but she only started running ten years ago when her best friend, Sarah Sherman, asked her to train for a race with her. Since then, Lulu has done half and full marathons, 24-hour obstacle races, Obstacle Course World Championships and several 50-mile trail races, but her inspiration to run 100 miles did not come until years later.

On March 27, 2019, Lulu had brain surgery to remove a benign tumor sitting on her cochlear and vestibular nerves, which are responsible for hearing and balance respectively. Doctors removed the tumor but severed the nerves, leaving her completely deaf in her left ear and without balance on her left side. When she woke up from surgery, the room was spinning.

"I got super scared that I wouldn't be able to do what I love, which is just being outside and doing crazy events," Lulu said.

While in vestibular therapy, Lulu gave her therapist a list of all the things she wanted to continue to do, from biking and swimming to paddleboarding and running. Running proved to be the most difficult.

"I asked my therapist why are other things easier? And she said because your head's not bobbing up and down."

Instead of hanging up her running shoes, Lulu decided to lace them up tighter.

"I started looking for bigger things just to see what I could push myself to do," Lulu said. That's when she set her sights on a 100-mile race.

Lulu training with her service dog, Molly.

Lulu signed up for the Oil Creek 100 in Titusville, Pennsylvania. She trained with her service dog, Molly. Something Lulu and her team didn't plan for, though, was running in the dark at the beginning of the race.

"Running in the dark is like another barrier," Lulu said. "I didn't really think about it being dark at the start until the start line."

The race started before sunrise. Less than three miles in, Lulu fell.

"My vision became blurry in my left eye," she said. "As the race kept going, my vision kept getting worse and worse and worse."

Lulu kept going despite the blurry vision and was on pace to complete the race, but she missed the cut off at mile 75. After the race, Lulu learned the fall caused a hole behind her retina, which healed itself in time.

Determined to complete 100 miles, Lulu signed up for the Rabid Raccoon 100. This time she got permission to have pacers run with her in the dark, one of whom was her Public Lands Assistant Store Manager Sarah Brown.

"When Lulu called me two weeks before her race and asked me to be a pacer, I had zero hesitation to run six miles with her," said Sarah. "Then the night before she texted me saying that it would be 11 miles. Again, without hesitation, I said yes! Let's get you this 100!"

While Lulu was prepared to run in the dark, she was not expecting to run in brutal winter weather in mid-March.

"As I was watching the temperatures leading up to the race, I was like you've got to be kidding me," Lulu said. "The course started turning into ice 24 hours into the race."

The dangerous, slick conditions caused Lulu to fall more frequently, so she had to slow her pace on the trail. She also lost more time than expected at aid stations throughout the course. Instead of quick two-minute stops, Lulu said some lasted more than 15 minutes for her to eat and change into dry, warm clothes and shoes.

“But you get back up and you keep going,” Lulu said. “You have to keep moving forward.”

Around mile 83, Lulu realized once again she would miss a cut off, but this time, she wasn't stopping.

“I said to my pacer if I get cut off, they can take my bib, but I'm going to keep going,” Lulu said. “We're doing 100 miles today.”

Lulu crossing the Rabid Raccoon 100 finish line.

Lulu's Full Psych Adventure teammates talked to race organizers. They encouraged her to finish all 100 miles.

"We were just really impressed to see the determination and toughness of her to finish the whole distance," said Andrew Mascio of Wolf Creek Race Management.

After 37 hours and 49 minutes, Lulu crossed that finish line with her crew cheering her on.

"It gave me chills to watch her cross her finish line," said Sarah.

Despite not finishing in the 36-hour time limit, Lulu was marked as an official finisher.

"She was marked as an official finisher because she did finish. She ran all 100," Andrew said.

Lulu and her team at the Rabid Raccoon 100.

So, what comes after a 100-mile ultra-marathon? Lulu said she has no idea.

“We try not to just jump into the next thing,” she said. “It needs to really mean something.”

In the meantime, Lulu plans to keep running. She is signed up for the DICK’S Sporting Goods Pittsburgh Half-Marathon on May 7, and she’s hoping for no snow squalls.