



MONTANA CUP

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2015 Montana Cup Hall of Fame

Scott Creel



Seemingly defying age during the 2011 Montana Cup at the Anaconda Hills Golf Course in Great Falls, Scott Creel (49) is pictured leading 'young guns' Michael Fisher (white jersey), Jimmy Grant (cap), and Adam Peterman (red shorts). On the day when Peterman was born, Creel was 33 years old and about to start his second running career.

Scott Creel spent his first post-collegiate decade mostly in Tanzania's Serengeti "baking my brains out inside a Land Rover" while studying wild dogs and other predators in association with his doctoral work. He did this work during the period of life when most lifelong runners are hitting their athletic prime. Creel's wife Nancy was there at his side in Africa and together they had two daughters. It was Scott and Nancy's desire to raise their girls in a wholesome and outdoorsy community that brought them looking for a new home in a place like Bozeman. In 1997, Creel attained an ecology professorship at MSU, and Bozeman's athletic culture soon had him wanting to revitalize his running career.

While growing up, Creel lived in Iowa, Indiana, Ontario and finally Ohio where he spent his high school years. He remembered that "I weighed less than 100 pounds when I started high school. And yes, I had big Coke bottle glasses (held together with tape, seriously). Running was a huge breakout for me in high school. It was (other than school itself) the first thing that made me realize the joy of doing a thing well." His athletic highlights there were setting his school's records in XC (12:15 for 2.5 miles) and in track for 2 miles in 9:30.1. "Ohio was so tough at the time that I did not even make it to State in track."

Creel matriculated at Ohio's Bowling Green State University, where he competed as a scholarship athlete in track and cross country. The established Bowling Green training system at that time was famed for producing Dave Wottle, the 1972 Olympic 800 m champion, and steeplechase American Record holder Sid Sink. Bowling Green's intense training regime produced improvement for Creel, but it also left him feeling over trained. Though Creel never reached the stellar levels of Wottle or Sink, he did manage highly respectable PRs of 14:38 at 5,000 m and a 9:04 steeple chase that was good for 7th place in the Mid-American Conference Championship. After graduation, Creel initially ran a few miles a day in Serengeti (always at noon to reduce the odds of animal problems) but he

soon found running to be incompatible with his research program.

Once in Bozeman, Creel started to work back toward good physical conditioning by riding his bike from and to his house every workday at MSU. Bozeman's first race that captured Creel's attention was the grueling 19.65-mile Bridger Ridge Run, and in preparation for that he started adventuring into the mountains for running. He first entered the Ridge Run in 1998, and he won in 3:23:50 - a winning time that would be his slowest.

1998 was also the first year when Creel competed in the Montana Cup, placing seventh on the hilly course at Montana Tech. By the next year, Creel was nearly fit enough to win the Montana Cup. Only the explosive come-from-behind kick of Helena's Rowdy Sargeson kept Creel from the individual victory, still Creel's two team points that day lead Bozeman to history's first defeat of the vaunted Montana Cup team from Missoula. That day's team scoring count was 1) Bozeman 34; 2) Helena 36; 3) Missoula 53.

In 1999, Creel's thirst for competition caused him to widen his athletic gaze to include cross country skiing, and both summer and winter biathlon. He quickly excelled at all three events, though he explained that his not-quite-perfect skill at xc skiing down extra treacherous hills sometimes "left me as a long bloody streak in the snow with a pair of skies at the end." However, in summer biathlon (mountain running combined with rifle marksmanship) no skies were required and so Creel, who also became a good marksman, was hard to beat. He made the USA nation summer biathlon team twice, the benefits of which included traveling to Europe as part of the US entourage



After this summer biathlon race, Creel crumpled to the ground, chest heaving and stomach retching from exhaustion.

The pictured scene is of Team USA's four-man relay at the 2000 world championships in Khanty-Monsiysk,

that competed in the Summer Biathlon World Championships. Creel remembered his best individual finish in those championships as "Top 10 but not on the podium. I can't remember for certain what spot. 8th?"

Creel eventually changed his habit of biking to work and back each day, reasoning that "as good as biking back and forth was, *running* had to be that much better," and he rationalized that his students got used to him showing up for lectures steaming with sweat.

Creel is known to harshly pace his races by pushing the outer reaches of his ability, often leaving himself spent and vomiting during or afterward, as was the case in 2002, when Creel made his third Montana Cup appearance as a freshly anointed "master" in the forty-plus age division, and in that race he left no

possibility of again being outkicked at the finish. He won that year's pancake-flat 8K at Bozeman's East Gallatin Park by 37 seconds over the second place runner, with a winning time of 27:24. Creel's victory again led Bozeman's men to a Cup team championship, their second ever, by a score of 32 to 51 over Missoula. Creel's individual victory that day made him the first (and still only) master's runner to win the Montana Cup's open division. Immediately after that race, Creel lost the two slices of toast and the doughnut that he reported eating for breakfast.

In 2003, Creel turned his attention to ultra-distance trail racing, most notably winning that year's 50K USA Championship on the hilly trails near San Francisco. Subsequently, he was twice selected to represent the USA in the World 100K Championships, which he recounted as two of his most painful experiences. "In Winschoten, Holland, I ran with the lead pack for 70 km and was feeling pretty good. I had not figured out electrolytes for races that long, and starting cramping in my hamstrings and my right butt cheek. The spasms went out of control and I DNFed, which is rare for me. I still have a big knot in my butt muscle from the damage.

"In Japan, I was in 6th at 85 km, running in front of the defending world champion (from Italy). I died the death of a thousand screams. Even the people working at the aid stations were laughing, I was so destroyed. I 'ran' the last 10km in about an hour and fell down a few times, but I finished.



"Basketball shorts are for basketball. Real runners know this." - Scott Creel, pictured running Cup '07 in Missoula.

"So basically I am pretty good at ~80k but suck at 100k. I attribute this to liking things like intervals and tempo runs, but not really enjoying much longer than 1.5-2 hours in training."

In 2007, *Outside Bozeman* Magazine asked Creel what attracted him to ultras and trail running, and Creel replied "Trails—I like being out in the mountains, and trail running is engrossing because everything is always changing: climbs, descents, mud, rocks, the occasional moose, etc. It's amazing how beautiful the places are that a person can get to in an hour or two of running. Ultras—I'm not sure anything really does attract me to ultras, other than being fairly good at it."

Creel demonstrated his wide ability range by winning the first three additions of the prestigious Montana Masters Men's Mile (aka the "M⁴") race on MSU's indoor track, including an event record time of 4:33 in 2006. That record stood for six years. His victorious strategy in those events was the same as in most other races: storm into the lead at a brutal tempo that shocked and awed his competitors all the way to the finish line.

The 2007 Montana Cup in Missoula was Creel's first during the era of the meet's Masters' Cup division, and Creel placed as first master (3rd overall) to lead Bozeman to its first team title in the masters' division. Creel repeated as top individual masters runner at the 2011 and 2012 Cups, the latter as the first runner to win the over-forty division as a 50 year old. Creel also again led Bozeman's masters to team titles in 2012 and 2014.

Today, after ten victories in his first ten tries at the Bridger Ridge Run from 1998 to 2011, Creel is commonly referred to as "King of The Ridge," and his ten victory times, the fastest of which was 3:06:30 in 2007, all still rank among the top times ever recorded on that course. Those punishing victories came with consequences, though. For example, there was a crash on the Ridge's jagged rocks, and there was the hot year that left Creel stumbling woozily down the climactic descent. In one of his earlier Ridge races, Creel chipped a bone in his foot, and that chip is still floating around inside there. When asked to consider his greatest lifetime running achievement, Creel replied "Lifetime - hard to

Siberia. Creel started his penultimate leg of that relay in about tenth place. He ran every step aggressively, and he shot his rifle accurately, enabling him to make up a huge amount of time and to pass runners from several other nations. His amazing performance made it possible for the USA to finish the race in fourth place, just one spot shy of the medals. It was clear to all in attendance that they had witnessed a special performance by Creel.

Even the highly nationalistic Russian spectators cheered in appreciation of Creel's effort and skill. A Russian soldier, a large bull of a man with a handlebar mustache, stood tall on the nearby bleacher seats, and he caught the attention of the small American contingent in the crowd by dramatically sweeping his outstretched arm toward Creel. Then the soldier thumped the heart-region of his chest, and pronounced loudly, in his broken English, "Ahhh! World Championships!! Yes!?!"

say, but the most satisfying was probably finishing the Ridge Run with [my daughters] Bridget and Andie all together [in 2015]." Creel's 11th Ridge Run, in 2014, was done running with Andie who had just turned 18, and his 12th Ridge Run was in 2015 running with Bridget who had, likewise, just turned 18, but during that 2015 run the two of them also joined up with Andie along the route.

In his own words:

"The Montana Cup is exceptional. For one thing, it is cross country, which (along with the steeplechase) is my absolute favorite. So many of us fell in love with XC in high school, but chances to do it as an adult are few and far between. For another, there is no other race in the state that consistently attracts great runners from all over the state, from milers to ultra-runners and everything in between. There used to be a set of races around the state like that, but it seems to me that the Montana Cup is the only one that has retained (or even gained) statewide attraction. It's exciting to step to the line knowing that you're going to be pushed as hard as you can go, and the Montana Cup is ALWAYS that way."



"That's an elephant bone, and an astute observer might note the elephant poop in the road. We bumped into the elephants themselves a couple of times, but we kept our distance and everyone went about their business."

- Scott Creel pictured running with his daughters, Andie (with bone) & Bridget, in Kafue, Zambia in 2015. Photo courtesy of Nancy Creel.

Scott Creel's Montana Cup History						
Year	Location	Ind. Place Overall	Team Place (pts)	Ind. Place Masters	Masters' Team Place (pts)	Notes
2016	Bozeman	39	1 (18)	3	2 (33)	
2015	Helena	DNC				
2014	Missoula	19	4 (91)	2	1 (37)	
2013	Butte	11	6 (135)	2	4 (68)	
2012	Kalispell	9	4 (81)	1	1 (36)	Won the individual masters division as a 50 year old.
2011	Great Falls	8	6 (132)	1	2 (49)	
2010	Billings	DNC				
2009	Bozeman	DNC				
2008	Helena	DNC				
2007	Missoula	3	3 (93)	1	1 (35)	
2006	Butte	DNC				
2005	Kalispell	DNC				
2004	Great Falls	DNC				
2003	Billings	DNC				
2002	Bozeman	1	1 (32)	1	NA	The first and only masters runner to win the open division
2001	Helena	DNC				
2000	Helena	DNC				
1999	Butte	2	1 (34)	NA	NA	Member of first team to defeat Missoula
1998	Butte	7	3 (61)	NA	NA	