**Black Hills 100**

**Course Description**

**Course Markings**

If you pay attention to nothing else in this document, for the love of all that is holy, pay attention to this part. You can run this course knowing absolutely nothing about what turns are where so long as you know what markings you are supposed to (or not supposed to) follow. Every year, we describe and show examples of the course markings at the start of the race, and every year we end up with someone who says, “Well, I followed such and such marking and ended up off course” and it’s because they followed markings that are not ours. PAY. ATTENTION.

We essentially have four types of markings on the course. That may sound like a lot, but it’s really very simple:

**Centennial/Deerfield Trail Signs**

The bulk of the course is on the Centennial trail, with the last few miles into Silver City (and back out) following the Deerfield trail. Both trails have permanent Forest Service or BLM trail signage. The Centennial signs have a #89 with a buffalo skull. The Deerfield signs have a #40 with a deer hoofprint. In general, if you’re seeing these markings, you’re in good shape. Any deviations from these trails will be marked accordingly with other markings, as described below.

**Buffalo Skulls**

In addition to the Centennial and Deerfield signage, we have marked the course with our own buffalo skull markings. These are either white or gray signs (the background color makes absolutely no difference) with a black buffalo skull on them. The skull itself is highly reflective, so these double as nighttime markings. You’ll see these skull markings on both the Centennial and Deerfield trails, and along some other short sections that don’t follow these trails. People always ask, “Are there markings every quarter mile or so?” The answer is no. Quite frankly, there are some sections of the trail where there is literally a zero percent chance you could get off course unless you decided to start bushwhacking for some inexplicable reason. Those sections are not marked as heavily. There are other sections that have sharp turns or that have multiple side trails. Those sections are marked more heavily.

**W Signs**

Along the way you may also see white signs with a big red W on them. That W stands for “Wrong Way”. If you see one of these, it would be in your best interest to go back to the last trail intersection and reconsider your options. Take note that not every single intersection along the course has these. If you come to an intersection and see no markings in one direction, but a buffalo skull or Centennial trail sign in the other, then common sense should lead you in the correct direction. If you come to a logging road crossing and see the trail straight across on the other side, but no Ws going either way on the road, common sense says to keep going straight. If a turn isn’t clearly marked as a turn, don’t turn. The Ws are primarily at intersections where it’s easier to get off course, or where we’ve had issues in the past.

**Pin Flags**

We do not place pin flags along the entire course, or at every intersection, because that would be a shit ton of pin flags and a shit ton of clean up afterward. You will see pin flags in a few sections, primarily in areas where it’s either harder to place the other markings described above because of lack of trees, or in areas where we really wanted to mark the piss out of the course. Pin flags are used fairly heavily in the first 7 miles from Sturgis out past the Alkali Creek aid station to get you out of town along the bike path and then on to the Centennial trail and through the grassland section. You won’t see them again until after the Dalton Lake aid station, where the Centennial becomes a multi-use (aka ATV) trail. The ATV section is heavily used and has a bunch of side trails, so we mark it HEAVILY with pin flags at intersections to make sure you know exactly where you’re supposed to be. You’ll also follow pin flags for a couple mile stretch where the course briefly leaves the Centennial to take you along a short stretch of highway to get you to the Nemo aid station, and then along dirt roads to get you back to the Centennial. And, lastly, after the Pilot Knob aid station, you’ll see some occasional pin flags at road crossings, but they’ll be much less plentiful once you’re off the motorized section.

We’d like to be able to say right here and now that the pin flags will all be orange or pink or whatever, but the reality is that sometimes they’re all a single color, sometimes we use three different colors. All depends on how much of what is in stock when we go to buy them.

**Markings We Do NOT Use**

In a nutshell: **do not follow anything not described above**. Everything we use to mark the trail is described above. Anything else was not put there by us.

If you at some point find yourself following flags/ribbons tied to trees, those aren’t ours. That’s not to say you’ll never see these along the course, it’s just to say they aren’t ours. If you follow the ribbons in a direction away from the markings described above, you’ve made a bad choice. These ribbons are used for a variety of reasons by a variety of entities, just make sure that if you’re following them you’re also following one of the markings described above.

You may come to a trail intersection and see a sign that says “Sturgis Trails”. Don’t follow those. They are very nice trails and something you should definitely check out if you’re in the area outside of race weekend, but they’re not going to take you where you want to go on race day. Come back another time and run those trails.

**Course Description**

Okay, now that you have a rock-solid knowledge of what markings to follow and, more importantly, not to follow, let’s get down to the nitty gritty. I’m not gonna bother with exact mileage in this description, because that will inevitably lead to me saying something like “turn right at mile 10.2”and someone will get to the intended intersection and their watch will only say 9.9 miles and they’ll be like “well, I guess I don’t turn yet” and then they’ll get lost and I’ll catch hell about it. I prefer to keep my catching hell to the bare minimum. This is a general description, not a tenth of mile by tenth of a mile documentation of the entire course. Any turns on our course are at easily describable, major intersections. The exact mileage of these locations matters much less than knowing what trails you should be on and when you should be on them.

**Sturgis to Alkali Creek (Miles 0 -7)**

Your self-propelled foot tour of the Black Hills will start at the Sturgis City Park, right next to Woodle Field. From the start, you’ll head out of town on the bike path, following the occasional pin flags as you go. After about a mile, the bike path will dip down and you’ll take a right to run through a tunnel that takes you under Highway 34. If you manage to miss this turn and end up at the high school, you’ve gone too far. The tunnel will spit you out at the entrance to the Black Hills VA hospital. Follow the pin flags across the driveway, and then across a footbridge, and then across a grassy area until you pass by the Ft Meade trailhead. No aid here; you’re only a bit over a mile in, after all. The pin flags will lead you directly onto the Centennial trail. From this point, you’ll start seeing the Centennial trail signs and buffalo skulls described above, along with some pin flags here and there at trail intersections. The Centennial will take you around the Ft Meade cemetery, up and over some small hills, and across a grassy ridge before you climb up the first real hill of the day. Watch out for cows, and especially cow pies, through here. After cresting the first big hill you’ll drop right back down to the first aid station at Alkali Creek.

**Alkali Creek to Bulldog (Miles 7 – 11.5)**

From Alkali, you’ll continue along the Centennial, paralleling Interstate 90 for a half mile or so until the trail drops down and passes through another tunnel to get you underneath and past the interstate. This tunnel also gets Alkali Creek across the interstate and, depending on our moisture levels, there may be some water in it, although it’s hardly ever enough to submerge your feet. There are actually two tunnels side by side and it makes absolutely no difference which one you choose…they both lead to the exact same place. After crossing the interstate, you’ll run across an open grassy area for less than a mile until you cross over a fence (there’s a rollover bike gate you can walk across) and onto Forest Service land. Right after that fence, you’ll see a trail branching off to the right. Remember those Sturgis trails signs I told you about above? Well, this is one of those trails and will have one of those signs. Continue going straight to stay on the Centennial, which will take you up into the trees and start climbing. The next hill will last a few miles as it switchbacks up the ridge. At the top, you’ll cross another Sturgis trail. Again, don’t turn onto ANYTHING that says Sturgis trails on it. Continue straight on the Centennial again and you’ll drop down the opposite side. After about a half mile, you’ll reach a road at the bottom and the Bulldog aid station will be there to greet you.

**Bulldog to Elk Creek (Miles 11.5 – 17.5)**

From Bulldog, continue along the Centennial. DO NOT try to run down the road. It’s not gonna take you anywhere you want to go. The trail will meander along the bottom of the gulch for a while and cross the creek a few times. 90% of the time the creek is low enough that you can easily get across without getting your feet wet. If we get a ton of snowmelt or rain, you might have to do some wading. After the creek crossings, the trail will start to climb again, getting steeper as you go. When you get to the top, you’ll be in a fairly open area known as both The Sisters and Beaver Park. The trail will level off some and you run past some old logging piles before the trail starts to drop down again and heads back into the trees. On this descent, you’ll pass yet another Sturgis trail intersection. Yet again, keep going straight on the Centennial. All in all, this downhill lasts for a few miles. Eventually you’ll cross another old logging road and see a sign on the other side that says “Trailhead 1 Mile”. It’s more than a mile, but that doesn’t really matter because the Elk Creek aid station is about 2/3 of a mile before the actual trailhead. Just keep chugging along the trail and you’ll reach another logging road crossing where you’ll find the Elk Creek aid station. If your crew is meeting you at Elk Creek, they will not be permitted to drive up to the aid station, so they will either need to hike in, or they can meet you at the trailhead itself. This is the one location where we allow crews to meet their runner outside of an aid station. The Elk Creek aid station is where you’ll have access to your first drop bags.

**Elk Creek to Crooked Tree (Miles 17.5 – 24)**

From the aid station, continue down the trail (again, NOT down the road), and you’ll continue downhill for about 2/3 of a mile before reaching yet another road. This is Runkle Road, a bigger road than the last few you’ve crossed, and on the opposite side of it will be the Elk Creek trailhead where, as described above, you can meet your crew if you so choose. Cross the road and continue through the trailhead to pick up the trail on the opposite side. From the trailhead, the trail will continue slightly downhill for another 2/3 of a mile or so until you reach the first of the Elk Creek crossings. Elk Creek is a fickle beast. Some years, the creek is bone dry. Other years, it’s flowing knee deep. And it can go from one to the other with one good rain event. Regardless, there are five crossings of Elk Creek in all, and they’re all within a mile of each other. Whether the creek is dry or not, we’ll have ropes strung across every crossing to guide you across. After the last crossing, the trail will continue along the drainage bottom briefly before it starts climbing again. Along this climb, you may or may not notice the infamous crooked tree along the trail. Either way, before long you’ll be up above the Elk Creek drainage, looking a good ways back down to the creek you crossed not long ago. The trail keeps climbing until it hits another logging road, and this is where you’ll find the Crooked Tree aid station (take note that the aid station is about 2.5 miles beyond the actual crooked tree….don’t be expecting any snacks at the tree itself.)

**Crooked Tree to Dalton Lake (Miles 24 – 31)**

One thing to know about Crooked Tree: **it is an absolutely terrible place to drop**. Now, hopefully that won’t even be a thought on your outbound journey, but on the way back it might seem like it could be a good idea. It’s not. Crooked Tree is on a rough, unmaintained road and is tough for even our intrepid aid station volunteers to get to. If you drop there, there is an excellent chance you’ll be waiting a good while before you can catch a ride out.

After leaving the aid station (because you wisely chose not to drop), the trail continues up what can be a fairly tough climb by this point in the day. You’ve got a solid couple of miles yet to go up and it’s a bit steeper than the previous section. The payoff is that once you do get to the top, the trail runs along a ridgeline with some pretty awesome views of the terrain below. You will cross another old logging road/ATV trail near the top of this climb. Again, continue straight across to stay on the Centennial. After running along the ridge for a bit, the trail will make another short climb before starting to drop down. The descent into Dalton Lake is a few miles long and along the way the trail will merge with a logging road for a bit. The turn onto this road is very natural on your way out, as the trail curves you straight into it, but the turn back onto the trail on your way back is one you’ll want to watch out for, as it’s very easy to just continue down the road, which you don’t want to do. In any case, this is one of those spots that will be very heavily marked with buffalo skulls and W signs, and there are also regular Centennial trail signs at the intersection. The road/trail heads up for less than half a mile before the trail takes a fairly sharply left and dives off the road and down the hill. Again, this turn will be heavily marked. From that point on, you’ll be on single track trail the rest of the way down the hill to Dalton Lake. As you near the lake, you’ll start to see it through the trees below and to your left. Keep following the trail as it heads across the slope most of the way past the lake and then turns back and takes you the rest of the way down the hill, past the lake again and eventually across the creek below the dam. By the time you cross the footbridge over the creek, you’ll be able to see the Dalton Lake aid station at the trailhead directly ahead.

**Dalton Lake to Nemo/Boxelder Creek (Miles 31 – 39)**

The next couple sections are where we’ve probably had our largest percentage of lost souls over the years. The number has gone down as our markings have increased, but the reality is that the 13 mile stretch from Dalton Lake through Nemo to Pilot Knob is almost all ATV trail, with a bunch of other ATV trails branching off. We place literally hundreds of pin flags along this stretch, along with the Centennial signage, buffalo skulls, and W signs, to keep you on course, but in the dark especially, it’s a good idea to take some time and be sure about the decisions you are making.

From Dalton Lake, you’ll exit the trailhead, cross the road and follow the signs back onto the Centennial trail. The first half mile or so of trail heading up the hill is single track, non-motorized, but before long you’ll hit the motorized section. When you do, you’ll have a choice to go either left or right. Go right. As usual, it’ll be marked. The ATV trail continues up the hill, albeit more gradually than the single track you just climbed. As mentioned above, as you work your way up the ridge and down the other side, you’ll come across multiple trail intersections. Be aware that some of the Centennial trail signs along here will say 8089 instead of just 89. The “80” signifies that it’s a motorized trail. Follow the pin flags and buffalo skulls at every intersection and you’ll be fine. The trail will drop down and briefly parallel a gravel road before turning away and then back down until you’re running along a paved road, which is the Vanocker Canyon highway. Stay on the trail and it will run along the highway ditch until you reach the intersection with Nemo Road. Now, pay attention to this next part because it’s important. The trail is along the left side of the road at this point and will continue left along Nemo Rd. from the intersection. Just after the left turn along Nemo Rd., the Centennial trail actually crosses Nemo Rd. and heads up the hill on the opposite side. This is one of the very few times where you DO NOT FOLLOW THE CENTENNIAL. If you do, you’ll end up skirting around the town of Nemo, which will add an unnecessary mile or so onto your journey. Instead, continue along the highway shoulder, following pin flags the entire way, until you reach the town of Nemo, which is only about a quarter mile from the highway intersection. Be aware that you’ll be running along the shoulder of a highway for this stretch, so stay on the left side and watch out for traffic. **NEW FOR 2023**: In past years, the aid station was in the town of Nemo. To alleviate parking congestion in town, we have moved the aid station out of Nemo and down the road to the Boxelder Creek Trailhead. The course has not changed, just the location of the aid station. When you reach Nemo, you will turn right off the highway onto Boxelder Forks Road. Follow this road through town (won’t take long, Nemo ain’t very big). At the edge of town, the road forks. Make sure to stay to the right to stay on Boxelder Forks Rd. There will be pin flags to guide you through town and down Boxelder Forks Rd to the Boxelder Creek Trailhead, which is where you will find the aid station. This new aid station location is approximately 0.7 miles further along the course than the old Nemo location.

**Nemo/Boxelder Creek to Pilot Knob (Miles 39 – 45)**

After you’ve fueled up at the Boxelder Creek Trailhead, you’ll head left to re-join the Centennial trail. Remember, this stretch of the Centennial is still motorized, so you’ll be seeing multiple side trails along the way, all of which are marked with pin flags, W signs, buffalo skulls, and the standard Centennial signage. From Boxelder, the trail climbs for a few miles before you drop back down again, occasionally over some pretty rugged, rocky trail. Eventually you’ll drop down into the Pilot Knob trailhead, which marks the end of the motorized trail. It’s (almost) all single track from here!

**Pilot Knob to Silver City (Miles 45 – 52.5)**

From the aid station, you’ll cross the road (could be heavy crew vehicle traffic, so watch out) and get on the single track trail on the opposite side. The trail will take you across the creek (over a footbridge) and then run along a forested slope for less than a mile before you come to a grassy area with a fence crossing (again, with a rollover gate you can walk across). From here, the trail turns left and goes up the hill. There are actually two routes up the hill: one follows an old road and the other follows a powerline. They both go to the same place, but the actual trail follows the old road, and it will be marked to get you on the right path. The hill is short and, before you know it, you’ll drop back down and cross another dirt road with pin flags to guide you. Within a half a mile after crossing the road, you’ll reach a highway, which is Highway 385. You’ll want to pay attention here for a couple reasons. First, this highway is fairly heavily traveled in the summer, so watch out for vehicles before you cross. Second, the crossing isn’t really straight across, it’s more of a diagonal. Look for the pin flags on the opposite side and down the road a bit to the left and you’ll see where you need to go. Once on the other side, you’ll cross a cattle guard and then follow the pin flags back onto clearly discernable single track trail. Once you’re back on single track, you’ll wind around for a bit on fairly gently rolling trail. This section is actually quite enjoyable if you’re not running it with nearly 50 miles on your legs already. Eventually you will reach an intersection with a trail heading off to the left. This is your first encounter with the Deerfield trail, but if you take that left it’ll just dump you down the hill to a trailhead that you don’t want to be at. So, continue forward. You may see markings for both the Centennial and Deerfield trails as you continue, since they are one and the same for this short stretch. The trail will cross another paved road, which is the Silver City Road. Head straight across and pick up the trail on the other side.

Less than a half mile after the road crossing, you’ll reach a very important intersection. We can’t stress this enough, because we’ve had several runners miss this turn, continue straight, and add significant mileage to their day: DO NOT MISS THIS TURN!!! Admittedly, it’s a tough one, because you’ll be cruising along on the Centennial, and then the Deerfield trail takes off on a sharp, almost hairpin turn to the right. You want to take that right turn! It will be very heavily marked on race day, but even with markings we’ve had people go straight through. Besides pin flags funneling you to the right, you will see W signs if you miss the turn and continue straight on the Centennial. Once you manage the turn, you will be on the Deerfield trail and will see the trail 40 signs instead of the trail 89 signs you’ve been seeing all day. The reflective buffalo skulls will still be seen along this stretch. Right off the bat, the Deerfield takes you up a hill. Once you get to the top, you’ve got about three miles, mostly downhill, to the turnaround at Silver City. As you near the turnaround, you’ll drop down off the hill and cross a dirt road (Jenny Gulch Rd, but there’s no sign there so you’ll just have to trust us). The next stretch is through a grassy area and the trail tends to get overgrown, but we’ll be out to weed whack it before race day. Follow Deerfield and buffalo skull signs through this area, up a short climb, and then back down through another grassy area. By this time, you may be skirting along the edge of Pactola Reservoir, depending on how high the water level is, and you’ll be able to see the Silver City Community Hall, and a bunch of crew vehicles, up ahead. Continue forward, cross the Silver City Rd again, and you’ll be at the turnaround. Now all you gotta do is get your ass out of the comfy aid station and do everything I just described in reverse. Easy!