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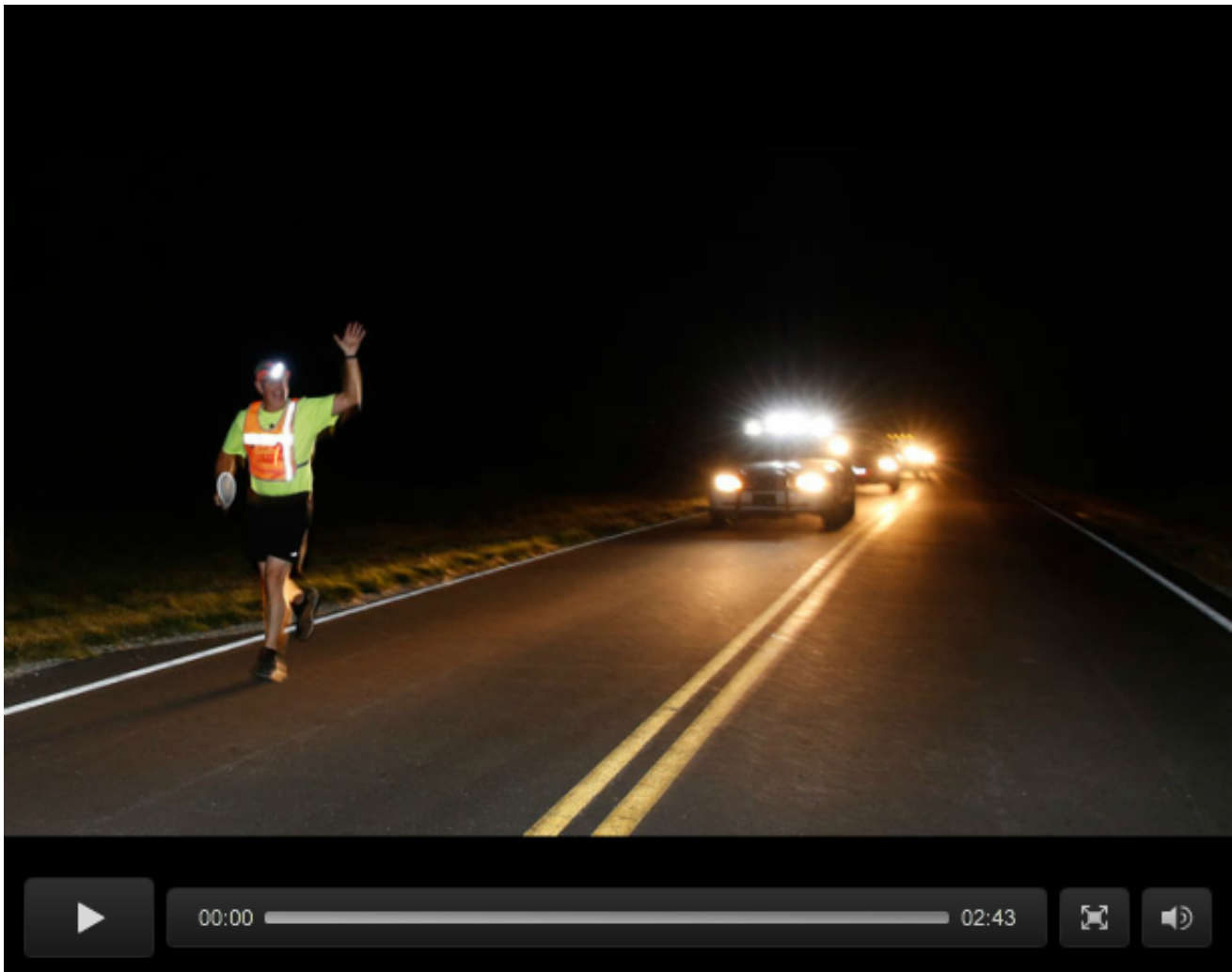
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Metro

# A long night's journey with One Run for Boston

Moved by the Marathon tragedy, a few young Brits dreamed up a cross-country relay to raise money and spirits. In the Ozarks, Dan Bohannon held down leg 173.

By [Eric Moskowitz](#) | GLOBE STAFF JUNE 30, 2013



CONWAY, Mo. — Thirteen and a half days and 1,910 miles had passed since the first group of runners set out amid the bodybuilders and piercing parlors of Venice Beach, Calif., and now the baton was just around the bend, down a section of Route 66 snaking amid the prairie grass and rolling hills of southwestern Missouri.

Dan Bohannon, 57 and a grandfather of four, tied a bandanna around his head, took a puff from his inhaler, and tried to ignore the butterflies in his stomach. Never in his life, he thought, had he been part of something so epic.

It was nearing 9:40 p.m. on June 20. Bohannon was limbering up for the 173d leg of the One Run for Boston, a crowd-sourced 3,300-mile relay to raise money for victims of the Boston Marathon bombings, billed as the first nonstop, coast-to-coast baton pass ever to unfurl across America.

That baton — shaped like a streamlined lily, outfitted with a GPS transponder to track its progress — is poised to reach Boston tonight, 24 days after the start, with nearly \$100,000 raised for the One Fund. Some 650 runners have registered for the 319th and final leg from Newton, planning to surge down Boylston Street together.

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By the time the baton, nicknamed Miles, reached the Ozarks, late that Thursday night, it had bobbed through Beverly Hills and skirted Joshua Tree National Park, crossed the sunburnt deserts of the Southwest, and passed solemnly through the rubble of an Oklahoma town flattened by a tornado.

Bohannon, wearing a necklace stamped “Boston Strong” and “173,” waited at the corner of a cornfield to carry it over a 9½-mile leg — a link in the continuous chain passing, incredible to him, through his hometown of Conway, population 788, nine churches, no stoplight. He would run by his parents’ cattle farm along a narrow stretch of Route 66 that

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his grandfather helped pave, long before the interstates.

A full moon and the lights of an idling escort from the Conway Volunteer Fire Department illuminated the road. His wife rubbed the small of his back. Cicadas hissed and bullfrogs rasped in the distance.

“Is this real?” Bohannon asked.

He had followed every picture, post, and tweet about the One Run since it first popped up in his Facebook feed a month earlier, had tracked the baton across the continent, and drank up the stories — the Navajo runners like Thomas Hatathli who made up lost time across tribal lands, the Mainer, Gary Allen, who had run Boston 21 times and powered 33½ miles through hail and lightning in the Texas Panhandle.

And he knew all about the two 30-something Brits who set everything in motion — Kate Treleaven, a former journalist who once organized a charity relay all around the UK, and Danny Bent, a teacher and triathlete who once bicycled to India — and were now following Miles like stormchasers, while strangers tucked \$20 bills under the wipers of their donated, decorated rental SUV at rest stops.

Bohannon could not believe they let him be part of all this. Downsized in December by Kraft Foods, he is a self-deprecating Missourian who does not run very fast and who had never been to Boston, never carried a baton, never run this late at night.

But he shared something with everyone involved, from Santa Monica to Southwest England: Running is such a part of his identity that he kept thinking about the Boston Marathon — the lives upended, the goodwill of race day shattered — long after it disappeared from his local news.

In high school he had been the scrawny, asthmatic manager of the Conway Bears basketball team. When he took up running at 30, everyone thought he was nuts or needed a ride; it just wasn't something a grown man did, not then in the Ozarks.



GREG KENDALL-BALL FOR THE GLOBE

**Missourian Dan Bohannon, who had never been to Boston or run this late at night, trudged along with his escort.**

But he loved it, the way it cleared his head between work and gospel practice, the way it allowed him to eat what he wanted and still see his belt buckle, the way the miles accumulated in his log books. He kept on running well into middle age, 20,000 deliberate miles, half a dozen marathons, scores of small road races.

He was listening to the Boston Marathon online all day April 15 and heard the explosions and horrifying reports in real time. He longed to do more than send money or run a roadrace in a homemade “4/15/13” bib, both of which he did. Still, when he discovered the One Run — and saw in disbelief that it would bisect Conway — he hesitated.

“This is kind of a big deal,” he thought. “I’m not a big deal runner.”

So he walked away. But the idea of a stranger running through Conway gnawed at him, and he logged on again. Other segments had filled in, but No. 173 remained available. He grabbed it.

He was lucky he did. After mapping a route on Google, soliciting corporate sponsors, and e-mailing running clubs across America, Treleven and Bent had flown to LA with a relay map pocked with openings, resigned to running unfilled stretches themselves to keep the baton moving. But their idea caught fire with the running world, and before the One Run got out of California, every leg had been filled.

So they broadened it to welcome groups all along the way, not just for the shorter, communal legs originally planned around landmarks like the St. Louis Arch, New York’s One World Trade Center, and the Boylston Street finish.

By the time they reached Oklahoma, half way, they had enlisted 1,500 runners and raised \$50,000, with a vibrant community embracing the One Run online and along the way — participants trading inspirational links about Marathon victims, photos of Miles, tips for media outreach, and their own running jokes (mostly involving Danny Bent’s minuscule pair of red shorts, which blew away while being air dried out the window on



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**Bohannon got a hug from Kate Treleven, one of the organizers of the One Run for Boston relay.**

a desert highway but now have their own Twitter handle).

Bohannon relished it, posting words of encouragement and connecting with other runners along the way. On the morning of his own leg, he rose early and drove to Springfield to volunteer with a charity that aids the poor in Nicaragua. He planned to watch the 169-170 handoff in Springfield that afternoon, but the relay was running 80 minutes behind — not bad for two weeks out, in 90-degree heat — so he went home to make cobbler with berries from his yard, a hobby he developed in unemployment.

He returned to Springfield to watch the handoff at the flagship store of Bass Pro Shops, an outdoor-sports emporium big enough to swallow seven football fields under its gabled roof. A Bass Pro emcee amped up the crowd (“Stay tuned! History is about to be made!”) as the baton neared, an oversized thousand-dollar check waiting in the wings.

Time on his hands, Bohannon leapfrogged to Strafford to watch the next exchange, too, 16 runners mostly affiliated with Bass Pro passing the baton off to a 49-year-old hospital lab manager, Richard White, a competitive marathoner with the BAA unicorn tattooed on his shoulder; Aaron Tucker, his 21-year-old protege, and some of Tucker’s college cross-country teammates.

“These young kids,” Bohannon said, watching them depart in a blur. “They’re able to do things. They don’t even know what they can do.”

They blitzed through 12½ miles in 90 minutes, finishing with Miller High Life and cereal bars at a strip mall parking lot, near a tent selling fireworks. When they passed the baton — and a flag they added to the mix — to a group of six led by Iraq war veteran Darren Maute, Bohannon was gone, resting at his mother-in-law’s and nibbling Oreos for energy.

He set out for his own designated crossroads at sunset, knocking on the door across the way to explain why a small crowd would be loitering near a cornfield. “Just wanted to let you know we’re not making trouble,” he said.

“Thank you so much for letting us know,” a woman said, two dogs circling at her feet. “Out here in the country you never know.”

Just before 9:40, Maute's group rounded the bend in a dust cloud, dripping with sweat. They posed for photos, handing over Miles and the flag.

"Be safe out there," Maute said.

"I will," Bohannon said, baton in hand, the flag lashed to the fire department pickup truck that would be his pacesetter. "I'll be paying attention."

"Everyone's real friendly," Maute said. "That flag helps."

And then he was off, smiling as he ran. Behind the flashing lights of the truck, he tentatively tacked to the middle of the road, after years running in the shoulder.

"Go, runner!" someone called from a darkened driveway. It was pitch black beyond the convoy's lights, but Bohannon knew the route from memory, rounding the first curve past a rusted metal barn. He had learned to ride a bike, to drive, to run on this stretch of Route 66. And though he now lived down the road in Sparta, he came home often to see his parents and three brothers.

"I feel good," he said, feet pounding like a metronome. "Like Steve Rogers, Captain America. I could do this all day. Or night. *Maybe.*"

Ranches and trailers scattered among fields, the freight rail tracks to St. Louis weaving in and out of view. As a teenager, he had picked up hay bales at night for a nickel each along this stretch.

His shoulder and knuckles ached. The baton was no heavier than a water bottle but more awkward to hold, and he shifted it to his other hand. Sweat beaded on his forehead. He ran in silence, narrating occasionally, pointing out signs painted by his father as a side job to farming and driving a rural postal route, the home of a man who taught him to string up steer and cut meat, the cell towers and propane tanks on land rented by farmers squeezed by the dairy crisis.

At 3.1 miles, he crossed the line separating Webster and Laclede counties. Treleven, waiting, handed him a water bottle. "Looking absolutely lovely, Dan!" she cheered.

At 3.9, he passed a familiar sign — Conway, Population 788 — and one he had not noticed before, declaring the city "2010 National High School Robotics Champions."

Approaching 4.5, he neared the heart of Conway, a four-way stop by the Summer Fresh grocery, the post office, and the bank. Twenty people gathered by the road, hollering and clapping, framed by Conway's fire engine and its first-ever ladder truck, displaying up high an American flag. "Wooo!" they cried.

He grinned and raised the baton. "Thank you, Conway!" he called.

A young woman and a middle-aged man jumped out, and then another man, all of them running alongside.

"We're going to join you for a little bit," said Heather Officer, extending a hand.

"My cousin, of course!" Bohannon said. Like many in town, they were loosely related, though he had not seen her since she was a girl.

"We go to church with your parents and they were telling us about this," she said.

Bohannon smiled. His parents might think running was crazy, but they were proud of him. And here was proof that at least three other adults in town had started running, too. As the miles dissolved underfoot, they took turns with the baton.

Nearing six miles, two gray-haired women came into view by a mailbox on the left — "my mom and my aunt!" — opposite a lean, upright man of 80, hands in his pockets.

"My dad!" Bohannon said, eyes wide, slowing for an exchange — "You guys OK?!" "You OK?!" "Yeah!" "All right." — but never stopping.

A mile and a half later, the One Run SUV pulled up alongside Bohannon's pack. Treleaven leaned out, with Bent at the wheel. "We can be your jukebox if you like!"

The group laughed. The organizers drove off toward the finish, the pack marveling at their accents. "Like being in 'Downton Abbey,'" Bohannon said.

A small dog materialized in the shoulder, followed for a few paces, and hooked right down a driveway. "A Boston terrier!" they called, marveling at the coincidence.

At last, after 9.2 miles, they rounded the final bend, and the pack pulled back. Bohannon strode toward the flashing lights of Conway's fire engine and ladder truck,

an American flag billowing 60 feet overhead, a crowd of two dozen clapping and shouting above the hum of the idling engines. “Woo! Woo-hoo!”

It was 11:16 p.m., 9½ miles, 94 minutes. Bohannon ran straight ahead without so much as a wave and pulled up in front of the runner for leg 174, Chris Thomas, a 36-year-old postal carrier and Marine Corps vet.

They shook hands and exchanged the baton. Bohannon exhaled, hugged his wife, Regina, hugged Treleaven and Bent, accepted back pats and head nods all around. His berry cobbler waited on a fire-engine running board.

The ladder truck lowered the bucket, and the captain invited Bohannon to climb in. He thought about something he’d read attributed to Mother Teresa, when asked about all the attention she got over her charity — “Do you think when Jesus rode into Jerusalem the donkey thought it was all about him?” — and considered demurring. But who says no to a bucket truck?

He climbed in. It was almost midnight. High above his hometown, he took a bite of blackberry cobbler, 57 years old and part of something epic. Somewhere in the deep-black distance, the baton bobbed toward Boston.

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