

## **Hellgate 100K++ Race Report**

### **December 8, 2012**

**WARNING:** This took me almost a week to write, and if you really care to try to read this whole thing, it might take you an hour. Or more. I hope I get a kick out of re-reading this again ten years.

I like to set big goals. I guess that's just what keeps me going—always having something on the horizon that I'm working for that doesn't come easy and I have to really work for. This permeates my professional and personal life. At one point I had a bunch of sticky note goals all over the wall above my desk with various goals and the years I wanted to achieve them; another time I did a mindmapping exercise (no, I'm not kidding), and created a serious web diagram with all my goals broken out into categories and subgoals. That hung on the fridge for several months. In 2011, the big goals were to do a 50 miler (Bull Run Run) and an Ironman (Louisville). I ran six marathons/50Ks in the first three months of the year in my training, and as I was tapering down for BRR, I was starting to transition and ramp up for my IM training plan. Right around that time I started having some serious foot pain which I later found out was plantar fasciitis. Although I had several other big race goals to check off the "before I turn 30" bucket list, coming off of Louisville in August I knew that the most important thing before I started seriously ramping up the running again was to conquer the PF. I stopped running, and tried everything I could think of. Fast forward 8 months and it was only worse. I really missed running, so I gave up on the not running plan and began the very slow process of rebuilding mileage—seriously, slowly. By August of 2012 it had been a year since I last raced and I was ready to let myself return to the drawing board and see what I could work on checking off next on the race goals list. And that's what brings me to Hellgate.

Hellgate appealed to my inner masochism because it posed a serious challenge on multiple levels.

1. Distance. I'd only done one 50 miler at that point. And in August when I made this decision, my long runs were only up to about 8-10 miles. There would need to be some serious building.
2. Cold. I have asthma that is induced by the cold weather, and I've always fared better in the hot and humid versus the cold. Below 70, and I'm usually putting on the pants and long sleeves!
3. Elevation. I hate running hills, suck at running hills, and wasn't really training on the hills.
4. Darkness. Totally afraid of the dark. Even pacing my Dad at MMT earlier that year when I was WITH MY DAD I got freaked out being out there in the woods in the dark. I don't know what it is but I just have a hard time keeping my heart rate in check because I just get freaked out.

Hellgate was also special because my college coach Cat Phillips had run it (and won it) in 2003. She was a big inspiration to me for IM Lou and made this race even more special. So that was it: Hellgate and a 100 miler became the next two targets that I set my heart and mind on. Coming from not really running much in so long (it had been rough easing in over the summer with a lot of 70-90 hour work weeks), and with coaching 20 hours a week in the fall, I really had to manage my schedule to get in the miles. I also had to be smart and not hurt my foot any further (which was much better, and being managed alright at this point). Once I had set my heart on it, it came down to getting in. This might be harder than actually doing this race. Dr. Horton is very selective. With some please from Mike Bailey and Cat Phillips, and my begging, Dr. Horton let me in. This was for real now!

On Friday I took the day off from work, and so did my absolutely amazing one-man crew, Gray Weaver. Gray had put together a lovely folder with all kinds of information and helped me figure out what I needed (it even had a fancy label!). He came by around noon and we walked through all of stuff to make sure I didn't forget anything. Better yet, he'd already packed extras of just about everything I might need. We hit the road around 2 pm with Gray driving and me napping on and off (Photo: Gray packing the cooler up with ice on the drive down). I had slept about 11 hours the night before so I was pretty well rested. We arrived at Camp Bethel just in time for the 6 pm dinner.



I know my stomach can be finicky, so I kept dinner pretty simple. There was some lasagna that looked pretty amazing, but I was avoiding anything too acidic (tomato sauce), dairy, or too much fiber (vegetables). I ate some plain pasta noodled (I know, boring!), bread with a tiny bit of butter, a small serving of salad with no dressing, and then allotted myself about a 1 cubic inch slice of veggie lasagna because it really looked so good. I could have eaten a ton of that, but I'm glad I didn't. I allowed myself one cupcake because they were petty plain, just white cake, chocolate frosting—yum! There was some time between dinner and the pre-race briefing, so we just hung around then at the briefing. Dr. Horton went over the course and all the usual stuff. In addition, we learned that Dr. Horton was having heart surgery (something like 7 bypasses) on Monday. The fact that he scheduled that for after the race really says a lot about how much he loves it. Definitely sending prayers and thoughts his way for an easy surgery and quick recovery.

After the pre-race briefing, it was still only around 9 pm. We weren't leaving to drive to the start (its about 30 miles away) until 10:50 pm, so Gray and I climbed into my car (the few bunks at Camp Bethel get snatched up pretty quick by the Veterans so it was either floor or folding chair inside...so we picked the car!), and napped until 10. Then I went inside to change and suit up, settling on my green dress, pink socks, shorts, and a long sleeve shirt underneath the dress. I wore gloves and a hat. Other than changing to thinner gloves and switching to a baseball cap mid day, this ended up being the perfect weather outfit the whole day. However, I'd forgotten to add new batteries to my headlamp and on top of that I didn't have the mini size screwdriver to open it and take out the batteries. Gray had extra batteries but without being able to open the compartment, that was useless. He gave me his headlamp and he took mine to have at the aid stations. Thank goodness for that because I really don't think my batteries I'd been using since September would have lasted.

We grabbed our new friends Jim and Mark who we were giving a ride to the start line, and off we went. In the middle of nowhere by the start of the race, it must have looked interesting for any local looking out their window seeing this caravan of maybe 75 cars cruising by in a line to the start. (Photo: staying warm in the car just before the race!)



**Hellgate Creek, the start:** It felt pretty cold out there standing around at the start, so we all stayed in the car until about 10 minutes before the race. Mark is really into videotaping his ultra experiences so I think he got some video of our pre-race chatting and prep. At 12:01 am, it was off into the night!

**Start-AS 1, FSR 35:**

Horton says: 3.5 miles

Hillary's 310XT says: 4.2 miles

Time: 42 minutes

The descriptions of this section that I read pretty much said this was "all downhill." And "really easy." It started out nice and open on at least so that was good with 140 runners all starting together. The first mile was pretty easy and mostly downhill, with some tiny inclines that we all just ran up easily. Next mile felt more uphill than down, but relative to the rest of the course, I guess I see now why they say easy. It got a bit rocky and leafy after that, and my ankles were not appreciating that. I remember thinking, wow, if this is easy, what the heck did I get myself into?? Aid Station 1 was just a water stop, no crew access. I hit it in about 42 minutes and just blew right on through, still feeling good, strong and excited. There were still quite a few people around kind of grouped together.

**FSR35-AS2, Petites Gap:**

Horton Says: 7.5

Hillary's 310XT says: 8.2 miles

Time: 1:28

This section is easy to describe: You come out at a dirt road to the first aid station. Look to your left and it's a hill. Run up said dirt road hill. It winds, and switches back, some parts are steeper than the others, but the hill does not end or have any breaks until 4 miles later when you hit AS 2. I was feeling good and got into a groove running, and other than a short walk break in the first half mile, I ran this nonstop. Was able to hold down in the 10-1130 pace range, which was nice. Passed a lot of people walking. At the very beginning I passed Kathleen Cusick, who won Vermont last year, and for a short while, I was feeling pretty bad ass. Met a guy named Tim about a mile up, and started chatting to him about how long the hill was and he informed me it lasted until the aid station, maybe another couple miles...we got into a groove chatting; I think he was from Savannah and had done the race a few times in the past. Hit the second AS in about 1:28. Gray was there with all my stuff, but I still hadn't even taken one sip of my water or eaten anything. It was nice to see a smiling face, and I told him I needed to work on hydrating (he agreed!) but I wasn't hungry yet. I was feeling awesome but knew that wouldn't last long. I asked him how long to the next aid, forgetting that the next one was crew inaccessible, and he couldn't remember, so off I went.

**AS 2-AS3, Camping Gap:**

Horton Says: 13.1

Hillary's 310XT says: 14.5

Time: 3:01

This part really was treacherous. Although it wasn't my lowest point, it may have been the ugliest part of the whole course. If I had to summarize the entire HG course in one sentence, I'd say: run down mountain, on switchbacks which entail technical rocky leafy trail, then get to a valley, then climb up long 2-4 mile fire road to aid station, and repeat to the next aid station. That's truly how this section went. After climbing up, up, up to AS2, it was a long way down. I'd been warned to be careful on this section because you want to go fast on it with the downhill, but the trail can be tricky. And it was really annoying. It was somewhat steep downhill and was just covered in really slippery rocks with like a foot of really slippery leaves on top. It was dark and the trail was also fairly overgrown so you really had to pay attention. To add to that, as we descended into the valley there was a ton of fog. If you've ever been driving through fog with your high beams on and you just can't see anything, that was what this was like. The headlamp almost made it worse. We got kind of bottlenecked in there with a bunch of people, and we were just descending the mess as a group. At the bottom, as usual, it dumped us out on a dirt fire road, and up, up, up we went. I got passed by SO MANY PEOPLE here. Lots of dudes that were just motoring up the hill, hiking. I would do some little jogs here and there on the less steep parts, but overall I was just moving very slowly up this hill. My calves had tightened up a TON at this point (fail on my part for not training on terrain like this!) and my left calf was really feeling strained. Going up the hill was aggravating it even more, and I was struggling because running

felt better than walking for the calf, but I just couldn't run much up that hill because I'm just not that good or in good enough shape to run up hills like that. I think the uphill to the top was maybe 2.5 miles or so.

At some point a hummer or jeep or something came cruising down the hill, presumably driven by one of the Liberty students (these guys were great, by the way, they staffed all the aid stations and worked registration and the finish!), with Horton in the car—I knew this because I heard “Peabody!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” being yelled out the window, which was obviously Dr. Horton. People from Massachusetts pronounce my last name the way they pronounce the town there, and it sounds more like “Puberty” than “Pea-BODY”—I HATE THAT. That's how he says it. Ugh.

Finally I reached the top and some smiling LU students. This was the first AS I stopped at and made a point to refuel. I took some potatoes, maybe some pretzels or something, and a little bit of soda for caffeine. The volunteers added water to my pack, but all I'd had was maybe .25 liters at that point (BAD, not enough!) so they didn't need to add much. I silently reprimanded myself for not imbibing enough. The AS volunteers told me it was 9 miles (hah, YEAH RIGHT!) to the next aid station, so off I went after about a 5 minute break there.

### **AS3-AS4, Headforemost Mountain:**

Horton Says: 21.9

Hillary's 310XT says: 24.75

Time: 5:36

This stretch was my lowest point in the race. Going into the race, Gray had told me about how hard he thought the latest part of the night was at Grindstone, even though it was really early on still, just because it psychologically screws with you to start at night. I didn't really know what he meant until I hit this part. The thing is, this section was fabulous course! I hear its part of the Promise Land course too, and someone else referred to it as the “section that's like running on a golf course.” Okay, so, any golf-playing, non-ultrarunning person would think that guy was out of his mind, but it was really nice easy trail, like a partly overgrown, soft first fire road that literally just wound around through the mountains. You were up high and could look way down into the valley and see this trail of headlamps all the way back, which was neat. I was by myself for a good 4 miles or so here, though I could every so often see the three guys ahead of me by a few minutes, and the guy who was 2 or 3 minutes behind me. I was running for the most part here, then it started getting a little hillier (nothing crazy though), and I started really falling behind. People were passing me now every so often. Meanwhile, my left calf was getting worse and worse, and it was starting to affect my form. Finally we took a left downhill onto some real trails (off the fire road), and I remember thinking, “yay, we are going down, I bet the aid station is at the bottom” (it wasn't). It wound and wound and wound down, and I was limping along worse and worse. Then we started going up again and it was steady up and down on not super technical trails but definitely trails. It got a little rockier again and I started getting passed again by a bunch more people. My calf was getting worse and I was now walking even on flats and downhills, and really maneuvering carefully around the rocks. On what should have been relatively decent paced running trails, I was logging some 16-18 minute miles in here.

This was the first point that a DNF crossed my mind. I really didn't think I could run another 40 plus miles with my calf like that, and if it didn't get any better, I needed to start resolving in my mind what I was going to do. My targeted first 100 miler, Iron Horse was 2 months and 2 days away. If I ran the whole way and screwed my calf up more, would I be able to do that? What if I DNF'ed Hellgate? I'd probably never be allowed back, so I needed to finish. Okay, so then what if I can't do Iron Horse? Alright, well there goes \$135, but I am signed up for Buffalo Run 100 about 6 weeks after, and I haven't booked travel yet to Iron Horse (in FL), so I could just make Buffalo Run my first hundo. Yes,. That's it. Plan A: fix calf problem. Plan B, if Plan A fails: Force self to finish, get really really injured, but get better by March 26 to be able to run 100 miles. Great!

Seriously, these are the crazy mind games that happen in races like this, when it's 4:30 am and you've already run almost a marathon. I came out of the woods again at the bottom of a mountain, and again it was a long fire road uphill. I was looking at my watch and thinking I've GOT to be getting close, but it ended up still being like 2 or 3 more miles from here. As I said before, this was my lowest point in the race. I was starting to get hungry, but wouldn't let myself eat because my Honey Stinger waffles were in my pack and I would have to reach behind my back to get them, and I kept thinking, well the AS will be right around the corner. I'll just eat when I get there. Other than the few potatoes and pretzels at AS3, I was more than 20 miles into the race, around 5 hours, and I hadn't really eaten anything. Also still wasn't hydrating well. And I hadn't had any endurolytes. At least the weather was beautiful and it was perfect temperature (although there were some places on this stretch where it was a bit windy up at the top). A guy named Jack (I think that was his name?) had caught up to me and we were just hiking up the hill and pondering how far we might be from the AS. I was telling him about my calf and talking through how I was going to fix it. I decided that I would have Gray use my Stick to roll it out and I could take a Hand Warmer (thank goodness I thought to pack those—you know, the things you open up the pkg, shake it, and it gets hot?) and put it on my calf. Jack was telling me how he was going to change shoes and socks at this AS; this was the first aid station that had drop bags at it for those who didn't have a crew.

Finally, the aid station came, more than 10 miles after the last AS, and it had been almost 17 miles since I'd seen Gray. It really seemed like FOREVER. Seriously, this was my Forever section (more on that later). I spent a good almost 15 minutes at this aid station. This was the first cut point (as in, if you don't get there by 6:30 am, your race is over), and I was hitting it almost an hour ahead of time, so that was good. I told Gray about my calf and that we really needed to seriously fix it. I drank some broth while he rolled it with the Stick. That hurt like hell, by the way, and I was seriously cringing like a baby. I had some more soda, too, and maybe some pretzels or something. Gray checked my Nathan Hydration pack to find out that I was still doing really bad on the hydration. He added some water and reprimanded me again. I took 3 endurolytes here as well, and stocked up on some gels in a place where I could reach them. I decided that just for ease, I would try to eat some gels in between the aid stations. My sweet potatoes were in the car, so I asked Gray to have those at the next AS, which would finally be in the daylight. I was really feeling down, and I was looking forward to seeing the sun. I hoped that I would bounce back because dear lord it was still really early in the race to be feeling that bad. Instead of the heat, I elected to put some biofreeze on my calf. After the long break to eat, stretch, and fix up the calf, I was off again.

#### **AS4-5, Jennings Creek (the “Breakfast aid station”):**

Horton Says: 27.6

Hillary's 310XT says: 31

Time: 7:10

I was so happy that I had taken so long at the last aid station, because leaving here I really did feel refreshed. I was able to start running again, and caught up to some people who had gotten ahead because they didn't take forever like I had at the aid station. About a mile out of the AS, I realized that my headlamp was really getting dim. Like, hard to see kind of dim. And we were getting into some rocky and leafy areas again. I really hate that stuff, by the way. Then we hit some muddy areas. A few times I didn't see it at all until I was in the middle of it, then it was just a slip and slide exercise to get out. A few of us were pacing together at this point so we tried to call out to warn the others depending on who saw it first. I snuck ahead and got to another woman who had done the race before and was telling me what the rest was like into the aid station. We got to chatting and at this point it was getting a little rocky again, and we both slowed down. She offered to let me pass, and I told her I was just trying to keep up with her! Turns out, we BOTH hate/suck at the really technical trails. So we were both moving at a snail pace trying not to break our ankles on the rocks. She introduced herself as Chelsie, then was telling me she was from Lynchburg, and I realized she was Chelsie Viar—we have a good friend in common, Liane Axe. Once I said, “oh, you're friends with Liane,” she immediately knew who I was too. It's a small world in ultra-land. We chatted about Liane for a few minutes which was kind of cool. In fact, we got so into talking that we ran right off the trail, until someone yelled to

us to get back on track. Chelsie assured me that the trail was going to open up to a grassy part soon, then it would be straight downhill into the breakfast aid station. At this point the sun was coming up, so I turned my useless headlamp off. It was right at that point where the sky wasn't dark anymore, but the woods was still not particularly bright. I pulled away and fortunately it was out in the grassy downhill part shortly after. As we got lower into the valley (I think this was one of only three aid stations that was not at the top of a mountain), it was actually a bit colder. But I could smell/see the campfire so I knew I was close. I started jetting downhill pretty fast, and took my first (and fortunately only) nose dive down onto the trail. Of all the rocky terrible parts, I managed to fall on a nice grassy soft area because I got my foot caught on a stupid overgrown piece of grass. Fortunately I was by myself and no one saw it. Had a tiny bit of grass burn on my knee but hopped right up. Thank goodness for gloves to protect the hands!

Photo: Coming into the Aid Station (Credit: Gray Weaver) At the aid station, since it was pretty chilly, I decided to keep my warm winter hat a bit longer. Even though it was a bit sweaty...at least it was warm sweat :) I actually sat down in a chair here and spent a good 11 minutes at the AS. I told Gray that rolling the calf really had worked somehow, so we did that again and stuck a hand warmer in my sock. It took a long time to get warm, but I just ran with it for a while in the sock and that was actually pretty ingenious. Ate some sweet potato, 3 more endurolytes, took my morning allergy drugs (by the way, it had been warm enough that I hadn't used my rescue inhaler at all even though I carried it with me all day). Had a little more soda, and although I was offered breakfast, I decided to stick with what was safe because I for the first time ever wasn't having any stomach issues in an ultra, although I knew I was underreating and I still hadn't eaten anything between aid stations, and this plan would not be enough to get me through.



### **AS 5-6, Little Cove Mountain:**

Horton Says: 34.5

Hillary's 310XT says: 38.6

Time: 9:04

Again the long break at the aid station refreshed me and made my calf feel okay. This section starts with a 2.5 mile climb up a fire road out of a valley, then twists through some trails down the backside, down a road, back into the woods (but still really runnable), then eventually spits you out on another fire road and you climb that for about a mile up to the aid station. I actually motored up the hill at a pretty decent pace because I was able to run a little. Started with running for one minute, then taking a 2 minute walk break, and alternating that about half way up the hill. Then it got a lot steeper, so I would do 30 second runs every 2 minutes. On the backside I actually got moving at a good pace, doing a 9:38 and then a 10:40 mile before the trail got a little windy again. Then it was back up, and I slowed to the 13-15s but was still running uphill a little bit here and there on the road. I was leapfrogging and chatting a little bit with two guys that were mostly just walking, but maintaining a pretty solid hike pace. I was feeling pretty good. Saw Tab on my way up the road, and she said Ryan, who she was crewing, was doing really well. Was nice to see a friendly face.

At the top of the road/mountain, as usual, I came into the aid station. I spent 10 minutes here eating my sweet potato, 3 more endurolytes, some pretzels or chips (can't remember), and drank a few sips of soda. We had gotten into a pretty good routine with the calf and it was holding up really well. Rolled it out again.

## AS 6-7, Bearwallow Gap:

Horton Says: 42.5

Hillary's 310XT says 46.8

Time: 11:28

Second most low point of the race right here. I'd heard that the race gets a lot more technical starting just after a nice little downhill/flat/rolling/not too hard road part coming out of the AS. Although I can see why they say that, I definitely thought that the earlier parts had some more rocky technical stuff than this, but there were certainly some annoying rocks in here. The difference was that the loose rocks were more on the uphill, where I didn't mind them so much because I was walking anyway, or the ones on the downhill at least weren't as steep. Whatever the case, I really hit a low point in here. Mark, the video camera guy that we had given a ride to the start, caught up to me just after the aid station, and we got to chatting. He was not having a very good day. I realized he still had his headlamp on (we'd been in the daylight now for over 4 hours!) and I was thinking how that must have really sucked to have no crew and there were only two places you get your drop bag—and the first one is conveniently just BEFORE the daylight and then you have to get all the way to Bearwallow to see your bag again. Thank you, Gray, for crewing me! Anyway, Mark was dragging, but I was really starting to fade fast as well. We leapfrogged a little, and I turned to walking....ALOT. I was annoyed with myself because I was walking some pretty runnable parts, and I was walking at a 20 minute pace. But I just didn't want to run. I hated running in those minutes, and I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Eventually, after a mile and a half of lazy walking,



I willed myself to start jogging a little. I eventually caught Mark again and passed him, and made up some time on the rocky downhill, then lost some time climbing back up it. This section was also the first time I ate something not at an aid station. Usually in these long races I hate gels but since I wasn't eating anything sweet at the aid stations, I didn't mind it at all. I had a Honey Stinger gel (either honey or vanilla flavor), my first one of those ever. It was pretty good, although I will say that it *really* tastes like honey. Really. Like eating a whole ¼ cup of honey. Anyway, it was 120 calories, and I needed it because I was definitely underfueling. There was one or two sections that I ended up eating two gels along the way. Eventually we wound down the mountain, crossed a stream (totally was dry for 46 miles, then stepped on one slippery rock and both feet were submerged in an instant here), crossed the parkway, then did a really annoying little squiggly section in which I kept passing crew people who were telling me I was just 200 meters away...that last half mile or so really seemed to last a long time. When the aid station was finally in sight, even then you kind of zig past it and around before you come out of the woods to the parking lot. Even though that was only an extra 50 meters or so, it sure was annoying at this stage in the race! (Photo: coming into Bearwallow, Credit: Gray Weaver)

I spent 14 minutes at this aid station. Mark came in a couple of minutes after me and I tried to get him to come with when I was leaving, but he was still in his chair. I was glad I was able to get up out of my chair, because boy was it comfortable. I was at the AS about an hour ahead of the cut off (when arrived, not so much when I left...) and this was the last cut off AS. Aid station was the same here: 3 electrolytes, roll out the calf, sweet potato, broth (boy I had really missed that, there wasn't any at the last AS! Broth is my favorite), a bunch of stale tasting (but awesome!) saltines. Rolled out the calf

again. Here we were right in the sun and it was pretty warm. Gray said a lot of people were losing layers at this AS. I had thought I might want to switch to my bottle around this time and lose the weight on my back, but I didn't feel like aggravating my already tired bicep. Switching off the long sleeves would have meant potentially making myself aware of any really bad chafing that had already occurred which I couldn't yet feel, and I wasn't too hot, so I stuck with it. I changed into my baseball cap hat instead of my warm winter hat though. I had already switched from warm fleece gloves to thin running gloves a couple aid stations earlier, but elected not to risk falling and chipping my nails by losing the gloves. I think that another crew person got a real kick out of that comment, but seriously, I had just gotten a rather expensive manicure done and was trying to make it back in time for my fancy company holiday party that night.

### **AS7-8, Bobblets Gap:**

Horton Says: 49.5

Hillary's 310XT says: 53.5

Time: 1:28

At the Bearwallow AS, I'd asked Gray to lie to me about the distance to the next aid station. I couldn't remember what was on Horton's sheet that I'd printed out earlier in the week, but I knew that every other time it was wrong, and even though I knew it would be wrong, I was counting down the miles and every time it was psychologically screwing with my head when it ended up being that there was another 1 or 2 miles to go after my countdown.

So he told me it was "8 or 9 miles" to the next aid. I settled on 9 and started my countdown. It went up, up, up, really steep climbing a bit out of the aid, and then you are pretty much on a ridge line for a bit, then up and down little bits in the side of the top of the mountains. I had some slow miles in here. Other people were even slower. Passed a couple guys who had pacers (Bearwallow was where you could first get a pacer) which for whatever reason made me feel cool. Then I caught sight of a woman (with her male pacer); she'd come into the last aid behind me, but left way ahead of me and had gotten a good lead. I was around 50 miles, which was my "no mans victory step land" (the place where I've never been before because its longer than I've ever run, but every step is a victory step, because its one step further than I've ever been before!) and for whatever reason I felt energized at the thought of passing a girl. I got within about 20 feet of them and they took off. It would end up taking me around ten miles to catch her again, but I eventually did. This section seemed to take a while, and it was a lot of up and down—no hills that were nearly as long as earlier in the race, but they were persistent, and my slow pace persisted, in the 16-18 minute range for a lot of it. I think I had half of a Honey Stinger Waffle in here- I love those things, and had planned to eat mostly waffles the whole race actually, but got lazy and didn't really do it. There was a Clif Shot gel or two in there as well. I was getting better about fueling and drinking more water, and was starting to feel stronger again. There was a pretty solid maybe mile long hill as usual at the end, and then I came out near the parkway to the AS.

At the AS, we ran through the usual routine. There was no broth here, so I stuck to some pretzels, sweet potato, soda, endurolytes. Rolled the calf again—hey, this whole stick thing every AS was really working!! Awesome. Gray starting talking about how I should definitely be able to make the cut off, but I needed to not lose pace here, and gave me a head's up that this was the "Forever Section" (as its notoriously known); I'd read about that, and didn't want to have it get me down. Gray told me it was 9 miles I think. Somewhere along the line up to that AS, I'd been doing some finish time math, and perhaps since this was also at the same time that I thought every tree stump was a bear cub that was about to pounce on me, I had done some very inaccurate math (I think it went like this: since 3 mph= a 15 minute pace, and if I run this 3 mph 15 minute pace...), and I told Gray that I was still confident I could nab a sub 16 hour time. He was sweet and didn't tell me that I was way off base.

## **AS8-AS9, Day Creek**

Horton Says: 56.1

Hillary's 310XT says: 61.5

Time: 3:28

I took off down the hill feeling reenergized and ready to get this sub 16. It started out as a really washed out road then turned into a paved road for a bit. Whatever the case, it was downhill and it was fast. I belted out a 10:38, then a 9:10 mile. Then it was into the woods for the up and down...slowed down a bit in here because I was hiking a lot, but still was able to pull out some running and most importantly I felt strong. I felt really strong, in fact. Possibly the best I'd felt, at least in the last 10 hours. This is how I know that my distance training was paying off, because I was feeling better after more miles. The Forever Section was just windy through the woods with a lot of little ups and downs. Until the last mile or mile and a half, it actually seemed to go by really fast. I eventually figured out that I was way off on my time calculation, but I was okay with it, and just happy I was feeling good. I'd heard that the last section was pretty reliably 6 miles, and if this course was 66.6 miles, then that put that aid station at 61.6ish, so as I was getting close it did seem to really take a bit. I passed a guy and his pacer as I was picking up speed again in the last mile, and then I got that girl—finally. I was really moving after that because I didn't want her to get me. I was determined. I also thought maybe I could catch David Snipes, who had passed me way back at Little Cove Mountain 20 plus miles earlier, but who Gray was telling me was only 20-30 mins ahead of me each aid after that. I used this as my motivation. Ate a gel or two in here, and kept chugging.

Then the hallucinations got really fun. In just that last mile or so, I really was seeing things. First it was Doug Sullivan and some woman. Doug had been crewing a bunch of people and for whatever reason seemed to be the first person I was seeing coming into almost every aid station. I think in my head he was just an illusion that meant "aid station ahead;" so anyway, I looked up, and just up ahead, on the ridge, there was Doug, walking on the road, with some woman. I rejoiced realizing that I was really close. Then I looked down, then back up, and they were gone—so was the road and the ridge. Hm. Keep running. About a minute and a corner or two later, I again saw the ridge up ahead. It was a dirt road, and it was lined with cars. Cars! Cars=aid station! That must be the cars of all the crew and volunteers. Look down, look up. JUST KIDDING. Where the heck did that road go? I knew I had imagined Doug at this point, but I seriously looked for that road for a second because I really thought I saw it. Finally, I rounded a corner and saw some real people (wait-are they really real? Yes, they actually were). I didn't need a water refill here because I still had plenty and it was only a little bit further to the finish and I wasn't really hungry. Rolled the calf real quick and I was on my way in about 2 minutes. Felt really strong, and I had in my head it was 3 miles up, 3 miles down.

## **AS9-Finish, Camp Bethel:**

Horton Says: 62.4 (everyone else says 66.6)

Hillary's 310XT says: 67.16

Time: 4:45

Turned out to only be a little more than 2 miles up. There would be no running here, but I said if I can just do under a 20 minute pace to the top, then let gravity eek out a 10 minute pace down the back, I would be very happy. Took a mocha Clif Shot on my way out of the aid station and pushed up the hill. Passed one guy, and got passed by another guy, who was a seriously fast hiker. Made it to the top, about 2.5 miles, in 42 minutes. Walked across the parkway and was greeted by a really sweet older couple staked out in beach chairs in front of their car checking people off. They said, "welcome to the top!" and offered me some water. Boy, it sure felt good to be at "the top." It was around 63.8 miles on my watch, so I was counting down, 3 miles to the bottom and the finish. I was DETERMINED to get it in 30 minutes. It was 4:12 pm. By golly, I was going to hit that 66.6 before 4:42 pm. It was a dirt road, and it was downhill. A bit of little loose rocks so I was being careful, but just letting gravity carry me. It hurt the knees, but I just coached myself through it and counted down. I watched my pace drop, drop, drop, just like I dropped elevation. 10:05 mile, 9:26 mile, 8:27...hmf. As I was just coming up

on 66.1, and I'm thinking, woo hoo! Half a mile! I can keep this sub 9 pace for a half mile, I crossed a line drawn on the road that said "1 Mile to go"

WHAT? ONE MILE????! It's only supposed to be half. Thanks for that, Dr. Horton. I looked at my watch and it was like 1:37 or something. I crossed 66.6 in 1:39 and change, happy that I made that goal, but annoyed that I was not at the finish. It was a fight, and I was in sight of a few other folks who were also laying down 8-9s into the finish. It also flattened out so gravity was no longer helping the last real half mile. Hey, I was almost there, but it sure seemed far the last .5, .4, .3, .2...and I was able to pull out a decent little finish line sprint of about 100meters.

At the finish line I got a nice little Horton hand shake, a hug from my crew man, and some kids showed me their newts (I really wish I took a picture of this, because it was seriously impressive—there were like 3 or 4 small children with a 5 gallon pale filled with newts—like 100s of them, and they proclaimed, "come see the newts after you cross the finish line, we caught them with our own bare hands!" And no, I'm not making this up. Non-hallucinating people who were there can attest to the existence of the newts. Not sure if finishing that or catching all those newts was a more impressive feat for the day). Photo: Final time and distance. I can't believe my Garmin lasted that long!



Note: If you really like data, feel free to check out the complete Garmin data at <http://connect.garmin.com/activity/250336011>

Showered up, got my Patagonia (Pata-Gucci) pullover, and headed north for the 3.5 hour drive. And I did make it back in time for the company holiday party, albeit a few hours late, but I got there, and stayed til after midnight. Not bad!

It took me several days to write this report (as it probably took you several days to read it) and now that I'm at the finish of it, its Friday, and I've been feeling well recovered now for a few days. I didn't run again til Wednesday because I was working late Monday and Tuesday, but I was able to lay down a 7:30-7:45 lactate threshold pace again for 7 miles at the track on Wednesday, and do Spin class yesterday. I see how its easy to get sucked into these crazy things again, because when you bounce back so quickly, its amazing how quickly you forget how much it hurt during the race.

This was definitely a humbling experience for me; I've learned a lot about myself and the limits of the human body. I definitely just trained, pushed, and put my faith in God to do the rest; although I've learned that if I ever run a race with terrain like that again, I'm going to do some hill training! ...and I think I will be back, perhaps not in 2013, but maybe 2014, Dr. Horton!

Special thanks to:

- Mike Bailey and Cat Phillips for making pleas to Dr. Horton to let me in
- Dr. Horton for letting me in
- Gray for supporting me for an entire weekend and in the days prior
- Robert Gillanders, my absolutely amazing physical therapist at [Sports and Spinal Physical Therapy](#) for dealing with me the last few years, and for helping me manage my plantar fasciitis and chondromalacia by sticking me with needles and torturing me with painful active release massage, and reprimanding me to do my exercises. A few months back I really didn't know if I'd be running anything substantial in my near future.



- [High Cloud Foundation](#) family and Dream Team, and all of our sponsors, especially [Honey Stinger](#), because those waffles helped me through a lot of long training runs and races!
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- My coworkers, friends, and family for your love and support

Photo: Finish line...Dr. Horton: "It's not 67 miles!" (Sure, Dr. Horton...) Credit: Gray Weaver