

## PROMISE LAND 2018 RACE REPORT – Steve Combs

The new bumper sticker swag this year touts the slogan “Promise Land, not your average 50k.” Indeed! Promise Land is a unique experience, from the Friday night camp/pizza dinner with Dr. Horton’s pre-race briefing, to the quad and glute busting climb up Apple Orchard falls after we’ve already run a marathon, capped off by the 3 mile quad searing descent to the finish line. I felt well-trained and healthier this year than last, so when my Garmin alarm went off at 3:45 AM Saturday, I felt ready. The initial climb up Overstreet falls is a great warmup and helps to “spread the field” before we exit onto that gooey single track that leads us deeper into the Promise Land and I felt great when we hit the muddy trail. When I hit the wide, rolling grassy fire road I fell into a train of 5-6 runners, I decided to let gravity do the work on the downs and found myself clipping off 8:30 or so miles. I thought I should slow down, but decided to keep a fast pace on the downs and run easy on the slight ups. I’ve learned to plan my aid station routine before I get there, so rolling into AS2 I grabbed a PBJ quarter, some pringles and a banana. The quick in and out had me headed up the next climb in good time. The stretch from AS2 to Sunset was a little long and lonely, but coming into the festive and lively Sunset to see all the familiar faces- Bob Clouston, Mike Fox to name a couple, was a great boost. Photo cred to Bob for catching me while I had a smile on! Heading out of Sunset after a quick refuel, I was SO looking forward to running the technical downhill that plagued me last year with a bum ankle. I didn’t want to be reckless, but I wanted to bomb it if possible. Bomb it, I did, with only one point where she (the Trail) tried to pull the rug out from under my feet. “Nice recovery” I heard from the runner just behind me, who was bombing it right there with me. Rolling down into Cornelius Creek and the awesome, rocking AS manned by Steve Higgins and all of the BRTR family, marked the beginning of the “endless 5k” on that beautiful stretch of road along the stream. I fell in with Rick and we ran together until jumping back on the Trail out to Colon Hollow. Again, a quick refuel had me back out and headed along the “dark side” back over to Cornelius Creek, take 2. I fell in lock- step with Al, a third year LU student in this stretch. As we talked, I learned that Al is a HR and Marketing major, and we discussed the finer points of life, present and future. As it turns out, we were able to help each other pass those Dark Side miles pleasantly and before we knew it we made the turn down to the now infamous “Great White rapids” crossing headed into Cornelius AS take 2. Again, BRTR was rockin it out down there and had us fueled up, ice-popped, quesadilla’d and headed up Apple Orchard Falls. Last year my quads cramped on the climb and had it not been for Martha Wright pushing and dragging me up, I might still be on the trail there. This year, I managed my salt and electrolytes much better and had a great climb up those falls with a train of 2 other runners all the way to the top. The awesome thing about UltraRunning is that everybody is out there with the same goal- get to the top of the next climb and on towards the finish line while having as much fun as possible. We all revel as much in our fellow runners’ success as we do in our own- no cliques, no pretense, nothing but raw determination amongst our family. In and out of Sunset AS quickly and thanks to the encouragement of Mike Fox and the Ace crew manning the tables, we I was on my way down to that last descent- onward towards the Squirrel!! I was pretty much by myself most of that last stretch, with only one or two runners around me the whole way- just close enough to see, but not close enough to talk. Once the trail dumped us out onto the gravel road at the top of Overstreet, I felt really good for that last quad- burning downhill into camp. As I did last year, I saluted and tipped my hat to The Squirrel waiting for us at the half-mile mark. You’re never so glad to see anything as you are to see Squirrel for the second time this day. I cruised (cruise is relative at this point) into camp and the PL greeting party, which includes Dr Horton and just about everyone who’s finished their race, in a new PR time for me of 7:02 - 36 minutes faster than last year. David Horton, as expected, advised that I looked “too good to have just finished this course- You must not’ve run hard enough.” Just what I expected after a great day playing in the woods! Thanks Dr Horton for your continued encouragement and advice, and all volunteers/ crew for an always epic experience! And a huge congrats to every other runner out there on this day, in this “not your average 50k!” Looking forward to a summer of Training now to get ready for the next adventure!