

## 2021 Hellgate 100K++

### Bethany Williams

“So Bethany, are you going to run Hellgate? I really think you could do it, you are training so well.” My friend Kim Weatherford said to me on a training run for MMTR 50K one day. The thought of running Hellgate, a 100K when mentally I was just training for my first ultra postpartum felt overwhelming. I told her I honestly didn’t know. However, that day she planted a seed in my head.

Hellgate is a very special race and I felt I just started to get back into solid running this year after post-partum and having my daughter in late 2019. I had run a few shorter races but the MMTR 50K was going to be my first ultra back postpartum. (Which is why the idea of Hellgate felt crazy to me...to take on something so big....).

Then, in early October I went for a training run with the Thomas’s. Since the idea was floating in my head, I asked Alexis if she thought I could run Hellgate. With no hesitation she answered, “Absolutely, I think you could do it!” If I was going to apply, I had to do so before I ran MMTR 50K. So I took the risk and I did. Looking back, I am grateful for friends like Kim and Alexis who believed in me and were able to see my potential I think before I even could.

#### Race Day:

When I asked about borrowing a waist lamp for the race (I ordered one but it was on backorder) Rebekah Trittipoe offered me hers and to crew me and so after the race briefing she drove Kim Weatherford and I to the start. As Kim said, “I was rearing to go.” I was SO excited. The last time I ran Hellgate was 4 years ago in 2017 and I felt ready and rested.

Dr. Horton said a prayer and we sang the anthem and then off we went. The first 4 miles are actual quite runnable and I found myself running behind Brenton, Tim, Jordan and Michael for the first mile. This told me I was probably running too fast, I stayed with them a little bit longer and then they pulled away. I started in a short-sleeve shirt with arm sleeves and gloves and ended up pulling the arm sleeves off within a mile. It was much warmer than my previous Hellgate. I ended up running with Laura and Shannon for a little bit until we got to the road. Aid station one in 43ish minutes, I knew I was moving well.

The section up Pettit’s I ran when I could and power hiked on the stepper parts. I love seeing all the lights going up the road. When I got to the aid station I was surprised, that section went by faster than I thought. I arrived at Pettit’s at 1:25am. Todd or Steve told me I beat the 1:30 mark. I ran up more of Pettit’s than I ever remember running before but I felt good and strong both physically and mentally. I grabbed some grapes and was out of there.

After you cross the Parkway, the section immediately after Pettit’s is a very technical rocky downhill and I am pretty sure my left ankle got turned on this section. Once we started the ascent on the Glenwood Horse trail, it started to rain. It was so strange, it was warm so I didn’t want to put on a jacket and the rain came and went within like 5 minutes. When I popped out on the Goff Mountain Road, I started to hike and then did an alternating run/walk up towards Camping Gap. I would catch up to someone and talk to them. I ran with a Marine for a while and we talked about the challenges of training with a family and full-time jobs. Talking with him was such a good reminder there were many people in the same

boat as us. There were many people *choosing to run in the middle of the night* this crazy race and had the challenges of training with families and their jobs. Before I realized it, around or just a couple minutes before 3am I was at Camping Gap where it was crazy windy. I thought it was going to be really gusty on the grassy road so I pulled out my jacket as I was making sure I grabbed food for the next 10 mile section. I grabbed some quesadilla and had some broth. I laughed about 5 minutes later when I was taking the jacket off.

The grassy road section was SO foggy. It did not look like there were any runners around me because you literally could only see in front of you. It was the first time I honestly ever worried about falling off the edge of the grassy road. I just told myself one step at a time and follow the trail. I knew the primary path was on the left side so I just kept running one foot in front of the other. When I could, I ran and eventually I ended up running in this pack of people. Towards the end of the grassy road, Alexis caught me. I was surprised to see her and we ran together for a couple miles and talked some. I had to stop on the descent to change my waist lamp battery. (In retrospect, I think I should have just grabbed my headlamp in my pack and changed the waist lamp at the aid station. Noting this here for next time). I really tried to increase my fluid intake on this section as my urine was darker and I did not want to get dehydrated.

I arrived at Floyd's Field (25 miles) at 5:20am. Rebekah said I was doing great! She helped me refill my pack with food and water. I knew I had been eating because I needed more food! I changed my socks here as my foot was rubbing and I knew I still had a long ways to go. (Note: Pack bag better next time). I knew I ran that first section strong for me. I told her I felt good and she told me to keep it up. I took a bag with food to go as leaving Floyd's I had a climb.

I ate my food on the climb and felt good leaving. Then, I don't know what happened-I started to feel drunk on the section to Jennings. I had been eating and drinking well...I was kind of weaving on the trail (I guess I was just tired? Right before dawn is always the worst for me.) A couple people passed me on the downhill. I kept telling myself to pick it up. One of my intermediate goals was to get to Jennings before dark as Rebekah had shared that the times she had broken 16 hours she arrived there before dark. I got there at 6:50am just shortly before sunrise and for probably my first Hellgate ever, I actually ate breakfast. Sam, Todd and Dennis stuffed a bag for me with bacon, potatoes, and a pancake. Scott Covey got me coffee and literally held it for me until I was ready. Rebekah gave me a word of encouragement and told me to stay strong. Helen literally held something for me and walked with me to the road. It really was not until after the race, when I took time to slow down that I saw so many hands helping me towards my goal. I am sure I am missing someone and so I want to share I am grateful to each of these people who saw me and pushed me to do my best and not to settle!

Part of my race plan towards a PR was to alternate running and hiking on the section to Little Cove and I executed that as much as possible. It was beautiful (and so different) for me to see the sunrise on this section! Once I got to the road, Martha Nelson and I pounded that downhill together which was fun. She told me her stomach was upset and my shin and ankle were hurting but we were moving strong. After the nice runnable section on the next big uphill, I met another runner, Ron on this section and we stayed together for a good bit which really helped the time go by faster. I believe I arrived at Little Cove shortly after 8:30am. Little Cove is where I first saw Emma who finished directly behind me at MMTR. I love the section when you first leave Little Cove as it is a gentle downhill and pretty runnable section. I tried to run this whole section until I got to the turn for the trail. On the trail, I could see the 2 runners

in front of me and I tried to run the same flattish sections they did. In long races, every bit helps. On the section leading to the Devil's Trail is where Emma initially passed me, looking strong. I tried to just focus on my race but having her in front of me now motivated me more to keep moving. I still hate the devil's trail. I tend to fall but had made it this far without falling and I wanted to keep that up.

Finally, after many rocks and leaves in the devil trail I made it to Bearwallow at 10:33am! Rebekah had put 2 signs my husband made with encouraging notes from my family right at the entrance. I anticipated 5 hours to get to the finish from here so I was right on schedule! At this point, coming into Bearwallow, I was stoked as I knew I was going to PR, the question was just by how much? I was so excited and motivated. At Bearwallow, Rebekah encouraged me to change my sports bra and shirt. Having a clean shirt on was so refreshing. She stuffed my pack with food, got tailwind and I picked up my pacer, Steve Higgins here. Rebekah handed me a Capri Sun and I drank that on the climb. Capri Sun never tasted so good!

*Steve pushed me.* Once we go to the ridge he basically said, "Okay run!" and we did. Looking back on this section, I used the climb to eat and then we ran A LOT of the ridge. Pretty sure I ran and enjoyed this section more than I ever had before. We passed Emma on this section but I knew she was not far behind. We made it to Boblett's before 12pm and Rebekah said I was doing great and reminded me to make sure I was drinking enough fluids as it was warm. Stuffed my food in a to go bag because Steve already told me we were running the whole 3 miles downhill until the forever section. Leaving Boblett's there were many BRTR volunteers and others I knew. They were all cheering, "Go Bethany!" That seriously put a smile on my face to know there were people cheering for me.

Leaving Boblett's, Steve and I definitely picked up the pace. Eventually, we started to see other runners. I paced a female, Jordan Cooter and could see Alexis's up ahead. Martha Nelson and I ran together for a bit again and she was holding a very steady pace and she eventually dropped me. Climbing in the Forever section is where I made myself eat and drink. I tried to eat real foods on my training runs and I think that greatly helped me for race day. I was honestly surprised at how well my stomach had been holding up. (This is not always the case). Steve made me run the flat sections and eventually we caught up to Alexis. We both lamented we were hurting but knew we were going to finish. She and Todd pulled away when I had to stop to pee. Later on, I passed Alexis in this section closer to the aid station and I told her, "Great job" and meant it. Alexis is tough.

We arrived at Day Creek around 1:55pm. Steve and I had calculated we needed to be there by 2:00pm to finish by 15:30 so I was stoked we were ahead of schedule. He made sure I grabbed my coke and water and literally pulled me up the last hill. I was really hurting at this point and just so ready to be done. He told me he knew I was hurting but basically, I just had to suck it up and keep running as thinking about the pain wouldn't help. (He is a wise person!). He told me we had to make it to the top of Blackhorse Gap in 45 minutes. We made it in 43. He reminded me it was all downhill from here. I think my spirits were disappointed a little when I could not see the 2 people who were just in front of us as we crested and started the downhill. He reminded me just to run my race and that I was having a great day. Nothing like a good pacer to get you in your right mind! ☺ I literally took a breath and told him I would pick up the pace, and I did. On the downhill, Emma passed us. I could see her and I decided I would run as hard as I could to try to catch her. Literally at least the last 2 miles I was chasing her. (Thank you Emma for helping me have such a strong finish!). When we saw the 1 mile to go sign, I was elated! I wasn't just going to PR, I was going to break 15:30! Steve told me I was doing a great job and

working hard and I knew he meant it. We ran and ran and ran, then we saw the camp! I heard someone yell, "Runners!" then I knew we were really close! Finally, we turned and I could see the chute, I could hear people cheering and yelling. I threw my fist in the air, pumped that I had such a great day after all the challenges of training. When I crossed the finish line with a smile on my face at 15:11, I felt I was going to fall over.

Before I knew it, my sister Amy was giving me a huge hug and telling me she was proud of me. There was so much emotion, I started to cry. I finished my 4<sup>th</sup> Hellgate in 15:11 which was over a one hour PR for me!!! I wanted to run Hellgate this year to avenge by 2017 time and I did! I would have not been able to run this well without my husband, Clifton's support. He is my number one fan. I also want to give a shout out to my sister Jenny who watched Ava so I could go run long in the mountains when Clifton was working. 😊

Having Ava has given me a different perspective on racing. I wanted to run Hellgate to show and model to Ava you can do hard things when you put your mind and effort into it and I believe I did. I am grateful for the opportunity to run such a special and HARD race. Now, the only question is, will I run a 5<sup>th</sup> Hellgate and if so, when?