

Hellgate 2024 was a “redemption race” for me and it did not disappoint! After thinking about this race since I started running ultras in 2020, the injury, travel, and work calendars aligned, and the Race Committee accepted my application! I thought 2023 would be my first Hellgate, but a successful Superior 100 was followed by a nagging lower leg issue that kept me from running until past the mail-in deadline. This year, fortunes reversed: I suffered my first DNF at Superior 100 (mile 78) with the same lower leg/ankle issue, but I was running again by October when the application was posted. It was the motivation that I needed! I drafted an application, asked my neighbor/fellow SLUG (St Louis Ultrarunning Group), Chris Roberts, for any tips, and dropped things in the mail.

I also let my generous 82-year-old father and crew chief extraordinaire know that I might be out to visit his Shenandoah Valley home. *Say, Dad, after traveling all the way out to Superior (past Duluth near Canada!) and back for a week in September, would you be interested in staying up all night to drive through the cold mountains?*

For the full meaning of my Hellgate, I'll rewind a bit. Dad and I began endurance events together when I was 11 years old, cycling while growing up in Minnesota. (Little running back then.) My folks moved to Virginia when I was in college, and our cycling days became wound down around Dad's retirement. By 2017, I was back on the bike, doing ultra gravel cycling in the Midwest. Dad cheerfully crewed me twice for the 340-mile Trans Iowa bike race. A great event, much like Hellgate: small, old school, and directed by a proud contrarian named “Guitar Ted.”

When I began ultra trail running in 2020 (shout out to Ozark Trail 100!), my parents' home in Virginia enabled some incredible training runs and races around visits. I ran Martha Moats Baker 60k and two Grindstone 100s out of Camp Shenandoah. Meanwhile, my mother was working through an ultra that would make my events feel trivial. She passed away between the two Grindstones. Today, trail running and ultras remain a way for me to feel connected to her. I'm filled with gratitude and fond memories when I think about how she supported and encouraged me in running and life adventures. Every time I'm on the trail, I think about Mom. I hear her presence in the birds and in the soft sound of the leaves. I feel her when I see deer and each new sunrise. It is the best kind of healing for me.

So, Hellgate 2024. It was a chance to visit Dad, to redeem my recent DNF, and to experience the magic (and pain) that Roberts and others talked about. I had a nice short 6-week training block so was nervous but excited. I tried to embrace the unknown. Arriving at Camp Bethel, Dr. Horton's handshake, warm greeting, and conversation immediately made me feel part of the Hellgate Family. We had dinner with Jared from CT and Alden from WV. After dinner, Dad drove Chris, Karolina, and me—the fellow Missouri SLUGS—to the start.

I love running at night, so the 12:01 start was perfect. The stars, Jupiter, Mars, full moon, and sunrise were gorgeous. The mountains were scenic as always. I got to see Dad at every crew AS but Day Creek! I had nutrition challenges (rare for me), bonked at Bobblets Gap and was delirious, but rallied with Coke, Tailwind, and great AS food & volunteers. The post-race chili and cookies were fantastic! My legs were shot halfway through after pushing too hard on flatlander under-training. The race felt as hard as my 100s. I was challenged, humbled, and awestruck. I loved the experience and will certainly be back, with better training, and with my crew chief extraordinaire Dad who also seemed to have a good time. I'm part of the Hellgate Family now, and Hellgate also means time with my family.