

You folks write fabulous race reports. I have truly enjoyed reading them but I thought it was time to hear about things from the real “back of the pack”. I was in the back of the pack from the very beginning. I mean, I was shocked to read that we sang the national anthem before the race! Really? At the back of the pack I completely missed that part.

First, a little about me so you know where I’m coming from. I am a competitive soul trapped in the body of an extremely slow runner. I know the Lord has a specific purpose for this combination and I am confident that he will share that purpose with me during one of my runs. I was hoping it would be at Holiday Lake, but maybe it’s going to be at Terrapin Mountain.

When I first began running about five years ago, I quickly realized that my shelves were not going to be lined with awards. So, to satisfy my competitive soul I decided to see if maybe I could run farther than those speedsters. As I began researching, reading and talking to others about ultras, one name kept reappearing .... David Horton. I found out that he has high expectations not only for the leaders but also for the back of the pack. He pushes everything ... the mileage, the PRs, the cutoffs. But I wasn’t truly sold until I realized the reward ... a “Horton Hug”. That’s when I knew it, that my new challenge would be to officially finish a Horton race and get a “Horton Hug”!!

So, there I was at the starting area of my first Horton race, the 2010 Holiday Lake 50k++. The snow, I thought, was working to my benefit because of the extra hour it provided. I was very thankful for that hour. The snow, I thought, wouldn’t be that difficult because 260 some folks were going to pack it down for me. I was very thankful for that too.

After prayer and song (so I read) we were off for a grand adventure. The road section went by quickly and I made the turn to the trail. The first few miles were fabulous. Just as I anticipated, everyone ahead of me had cleared the way. Running was pretty easy in this section. I made it to the first aid station within my allotted time and everything was going good. I didn’t need to stop for anything so I said thanks to the volunteers and went on my way.

This was where everything changed. The nice path that had been cleared for me turned into a trench that was about 10 inches wide and 6 inches deep! After reading all the race reports I now realize this must have been the point where everyone was able to spread out well enough to run. Your walking path was perfect for me but your running path was about four inches too narrow. I felt like a drunkard trying to walk the white line! Each step in the trench was awkward and clumsy.

When I thought it couldn’t get any worse I came to what I have dubbed .... the wasteland .... the open area along the power lines. Here there was no trench or path. Everyone had spread out and made their own tracks. Wow, what an energy drain that area was for me. It made me respect everyone’s speed, energy and endurance even more.

At the third aid station I just about lost mind. I know Dr. Horton thought, “Who in the world was that crazy woman!” As I was coming down the small hill at the aid station I looked up and saw a man holding a clip board. I think I actually said, out loud, “Oh, it’s you!” I ran straight into Dr. Horton and wrapped my arms around him and gave him a big hug! Suddenly I came to my senses and realized that my goal was for *him* to hug *me*! I peeled myself off and quickly ran off like an embarrassed school girl. (Sorry about that Dr. Horton!)

The last segment of the loop was even slower than the third because by this time everyone was coming back around on the second loop. As soon as I would see a runner coming toward me I would hop out of the trench or path and clap and cheer for them. You all are so inspiring to me. I love to watch you run.

I did actually get some hugs and cheers during this section from my friends from the Iron Mountain group. They all looked strong and happy! Hootie Hoo!!

I was very happy to finally get to the turnaround area, but unfortunately I didn’t make it in time to continue on to the second loop. Of course I knew several miles out that I wasn’t going to make the cutoff, but I want to

acknowledge the volunteer that made it official. I truly believe he understood how hard I had worked to complete the loop and instead of being sad he was ready to celebrate with me what I had accomplished. It was a grand adventure.

Thank you, Dr. Horton for the challenge. I will keep trying as long as you let me. Thank you to all the volunteers who stay out there and cheer for the back of the pack folks and make us feel like winners. The cowbells were awesome and you all rock!! Thanks to all the runners for sharing the trails and for being such an inspiration.

**Donna Bays**