

Now that my legs are starting to forgive me, I figured I would write down a bit about my experience this Saturday. It's a bit long winded, so the short version is run run run, walk lots, shuffle shuffle, cold feet, finish, be sore.

I've been interested in ultras ever since I heard they existed. At first I thought ultra runners were insane. Then I ran my first marathon, and I thought that going any farther than that was just masochistic. Then I ran another marathon and wondered if I could go further. Fast forward a bit over a year since my second marathon and I was signed up for the Holiday Lake 50k.

Both my roommates and many of my friends have run marathons, so when I signed up, I asked them all if they wanted to run it. Responses ranged from "You're an idiot." to saying it sounded fun and then avoiding me whenever I tried to get them to sign up.

I hate being cold when I run with a passion. This made training kind of hard, but I managed to make myself go run at least a few miles most days, and on the days I didn't run I rode the stationary bike. Unfortunately, due to my busy schedule I only managed to get in a 16 mile run and a 26 mile hike with a bit of running mixed in for my long runs.

As race day approached there was snow everywhere here in Annapolis, and I was getting nervous about the race. I felt (with good reason) that I hadn't trained well enough and was getting in over my head. But I had paid the entry fee, so I was at least going to try it. A few days before the race I got the email with the seedings and the challenge to run faster than your assigned number. Luckily I was given 269, which was very near the bottom.

Friday rolled around and after class that day I dug out my car and drove down. I had intended to get to the camp in time for the pre-race dinner and an early bedtime, but due to traffic I got in around 10:30. After checking in I went to bed and slept wonderfully.

Saturday morning before the race I met a guy named Tom. He was awesome and gave me lots of advice which can best be summed up as "Don't stop moving." This was rather helpful later in the race.

When the race started, I took off and started running at what seemed like a relaxed pace to me. I figured I should run slower than normal for as long as possible so that I could save energy for later. I had expected to have trouble with the snow, but I noticed that as long as I stayed in the path of the rest of the runners it was packed fairly well and didn't give me any problems. I got to aid station one and felt fine so I ate a gel and refilled my water and kept going. Shortly after this we got to the creek crossings. The first one was fairly narrow, so I managed to jump and only get one foot wet. I felt pretty good about it until I saw the second creek. Then I gave up and just ran across getting both my feet completely soaked and cold.

Throughout the entire first loop I ran pretty much everything. There were a few hills that I walked up, but I felt great, so I just kept plugging along, probably running more than I should have. Shortly after the last aid station before the halfway point I started seeing the front runners. I was amazed at how fresh they looked and how fast they managed to run with all the snow. I reached the halfway point at 3:12, which was a bit faster than I had expected. I took a longer break, stretched a bit and then grabbed some food and ate it as I walked out.

The second half I began to have some trouble. I started walking everything that might be called an uphill, but was still running everything else. I kept that up until the first aid station of the loop. Somewhere in this area I started talking to a guy named Barry and we ran and walked and talked for a few miles. This was great, because it kept my mind occupied. After a few miles my new friend stopped to eat, so I continued on.

Somewhere around mile 22 or so I started feeling horrible. My legs hurt, I was tired, my feet were cold and I really wanted to just sit down and go to sleep. Fortunately I'm kind of stubborn, so I just kept going, but very very slowly. This lasted a few miles. I would walk for a while, get fed up and start running, only to stop again pretty soon. Somewhere during the bad part I remembered a Bible verse I memorized a while back. It said "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew

their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Remembering that encouraged me a lot, and even though it didn't make me any less tired or weary, it got me to start running again, so I was very thankful.

At the next to last aid station I met a guy named James. We started talking and it immediately helped me out. For the rest of the race we stuck together running, walking talking, encouraging each other, and looking forward to finishing. We made decent time until the last aid station, where there was hot tomato soup. Both of us knew that we should keep going, but the soup looked delicious and we were both cold, so we ended up staying a while and eating soup. Barry caught up with us and passed us as we were eating our soup.

After the soup we very slowly made our way the last few miles to the finish line. I walked most of this part, with a bit of running mixed in. A couple miles from the end Tom passed me and told me to keep it up because I was almost there. It was encouraging to think I was almost done, but it still seemed a long way off.

James and I talked about how it would be nice to sprint the ending, but we didn't think we could manage it. We talked about how at this point sprint was a relative term so maybe if we just ran a bit faster it would count.

Eventually we got to the road, and we both sped up a little bit. We managed to run the rest of the way in, and even sped up (slightly) for the run across the finish. My time was 7:24 and I believe I beat Horton's seeding by a bit.

Two days later my legs are still sore, but not as bad as after road marathons. My parents and friends think I'm crazy, but I've already committed to running another ultra March 13th at the LBL Trail Runs in western Kentucky. I'm still undecided on if I should do the 50 miler or the 60k. I'd like to do the 50, but I'm not sure if my legs can take that much abuse yet.

I would like to say a huge thanks to David Horton and the amazing volunteers that put on the race. Everyone I met was encouraging a friendly, which is a much different atmosphere than I have experienced at road races. I'll definitely be back.

Cory McArtor, First-time ultrarunner