

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch! That's what we all heard Saturday as we made our way through the Holiday Lake 50k ++ snow covered course. This was my first Holiday Lake and I loved it!! This being my second Horton event.

I arrived at the Lodge Friday night to witness more of Horton's pre-race pep talks that are both inspiring and comical. As I enjoyed the pasta meal and listened to idle chatter from some of the most amazing ultra runners anywhere, I was joined by three of the best looking young ladies in the ultra-world; Heather, Toni, & Liane. We introduced ourselves and exchanged running stories for awhile til Horton got on with the meeting.

After the meeting, I went to my bunk and attempted to sleep. I haven't gone to bed this early for years which turns into a vicious cycle of trying to sleep but not tired. While tossing and turning and trying to drown out bodily function noises from 16 other guys, reminded me why I didn't like having brothers or sharing a room!! A couple of Coronas sounded good right about now. Morning came and guys were getting their game faces on. We piled out of the bunkhouse and into the lodge to prepare for a good but cool day of mountain snow running. Runners nervously wandered around and chit-chatted with friends and strangers anxiously awaiting the start. From where I was waiting for the start, I could only hear mumbles of the prayer and the singing of Star Spangled Banner. Heather, Liane, and Toni were far more interesting to talk to than the singing, sorry Dave. Finally, Horton (or someone) yells "GO!" and we're off. Two things that I don't like: cold and mornings; it was cold and it was morning and I wasn't liking life right then. So, as people were getting around me, I wandered how much energy this was going to take me to get pass them later. At this point I didn't care and only wanted to get back to my warm sleeping bag where it was quietly waiting for me. Oh, well. I slugged along with everyone else. A light snow fell as we started and I hoped this was not how the day was going to turn out. A third thing that I don't like; snow! Yes, I live in PA and we've had 4 feet of snow last week but I don't like snow. I'm a hot weather kind of fella. I began to feel more awake as we made our way up the hard road to the trail and I began to formulate a race plan. I wanted to see how hard I can push myself and possibly get a top three age group finish. I really wanted to win my age group but I'd settle for top three. I'm coming off of a miserable Hellgate finish two months ago and healing broken bones in my foot. I've been running rather well since early January but nothing extremely hard. So, I wanted to see where I was fitness wise. Back to the trail, I felt pretty good so I made passes when and where I could. I thought that I would make my own trail when I needed to then duck back into formation with other runners when I needed to recover. This went on for quite a while and I was moving up through the ranks pretty well. I felt that the snow was going to sap my energy faster than I wanted but so was staying out on the course longer than I wanted to, also. This was definitely a historical race year. As we all know Horton doesn't make any changes to his finishing times nor does he cancel races, so for him to announce a one hour extension to the overall finishing time was absolutely unheard of and made this a historical race year.

At one point, I made my own trail to get around a long train of single file runners and I knew this was going to come back and haunt me later. Not to mention I had a follower for nearly 10 miles that I felt that I was pacing. I pushed at times where I may have slowed for recovery, and perhaps even jogged to drink and eat a little more to preserve energy, but as my follower hung on, I felt the obligation of maintaining pace. He never attempted to go around me nor did he ask to go around me. As I was nearing the turnaround, the first three runners converged and I was surprised how far up front I was. I maintained pace and hit the turn around with Horton calling my name out. At this point I was about 15 minutes behind the leaders and I hoped things were going to be just as smooth going back. I kept moving and things were going well til I began converging upon oncoming runners at which time I was expending a lot of energy attempting to be respectful by moving to the side as much as possible. It seemed like there were a thousand oncoming people while on that single track trail around the lake. I didn't know where everyone was coming from. I thought, there weren't this many people at the starting line, but I was half-asleep too. Things were good and pace was steady. I gave "good job" calls to runners that I was converging upon as well as receiving "good job" calls. Ultra running is the only sport that I know of that everyone pats everyone on the back no matter the finishing time, comradery and mutual respect that we all can be proud of. I was especially happy to see Heather who is the cutest little snow bunny, ever! then later Toni who is the cutest little firecracker! then shortly later the classy and very pretty Liane. It was nice to see the three of them and knowing that they were still on the move.

Somewhere I loss my follower, I don't recall when or where. Just all of the sudden I realized he wasn't there any longer. In fact, at one point I was alone for miles. It was ok though, I'm use to training alone and getting lost in my head. I rarely listen to music as I run and use the time to sort out and resolve all of the world's problems. The unfortunate part, is by the time I get back to my starting point, I can't remember what conclusions that I have made so the world will just have to solve their own problems.

As I came through the last aid station, I took a cup of water. Something that I rarely do. I try to be self-sufficient in all of my races because I like to eat and if I see some good grub at the aid stations, I know that I'll start eating like its nobody's business, only to suffer later with an upset belly. I took the water because my camel-bak was empty. Poor pre-race planning of checking to see if it was full. It wasn't so I drank sparingly throughout the course. After leaving the aid station, I knew that I was going to be in trouble the last 4+ miles because of how thirsty I was becoming. I'm experienced enough to know that when I get extremely thirsty, I'm in trouble. It goes to show that no matter how hard and often one trains, hydration and nutrition will stop a person in their tracks. The last 4 miles took me almost 36 minutes to complete and was passed by 4 guys that looked strong and fast. As I got onto the road for the last mile, I was passed by one more guy. A spectator warned me of a fast approaching runner and I had better pick it up if I don't want passed. By the time I got all of that, the runner whizzed past and I didn't really care. If you want to know who it was, read Mulder's story. I was the guy he passed the last 100 yards. At least it was a fellow Pennsylvanian! We congratulated each other at the finish and it was all in good spirit. I finished with even splits and 21st overall. Third in my age group. Not a bad showing and some personal redemption after a miserable Hellgate.

I met up with Heather who performed very well! Later, Toni came in looking just as energetic as she did at the start. Liane came in after I left. I was concerned she may not make it but I looked at the results for her and she did make it and in a very good time!! Congratulations to all!

Thank you to all of the volunteers and the sponsors. None of this could ever happen without your unbelievable support and generosity. Not to mention the standing in one place in the cold for hours. And thank you to David Horton for putting on such a great race. You fellas from the south know how to put on some outstanding ultras and I'm looking forward to Terrapin Mountain. It's not a Horton event, but it's close enough.

If any of you are ever in Chambersburg, PA. (southcentral) drop by The Runner's Sole. www.therunnerssole.com It's a small running store that I own and would love to meet all of you and carry on our running stories....

Rick Meyers