

My name is Mark Henry and I think I this ultra thing is growing on me.

About Me: I first started running when I was young just to get out of the house; however I never had any ambitions of running more than 10 miles. Then I met Frank Gonzalez... (before he started ultras)... At that point Frank was addicted to Disc Golfing and mountain biking, but it wasn't long before he was running with my best friend and me. It started with the Turkey Trot 5k loop that we ran after school, and steadily progressed to encompass a 12 mile loop that we ran before school (and I thought it as a dumb idea to start running at 6am then). You see, Frank has this odd way of coaxing people to do crazy stuff. (Later that year he convinced my friend and me to fly 1 way to California and drive back in 1 weekend- we did it in 36hrs including 1 stop to play Disc Golf in Amarillo, TX) Apparently, after have Frank as a teacher I was slightly brain damaged at this point. For it wasn't 1 year later I joined the Army to go see the world, and the world I did see. I ended up in Kosovo as a Combat Medic with nothing to do. There was a group there from Boston who decided to put on a mirror Boston marathon. So of course, being the brain damaged child I was, I set out to run the marathon with barely 50 miles logged within the past 2 months! The race was slightly reminiscent of an ultra course with the primary terrain compiled mostly of dirt and gravel roads. Let's say the race wasn't stellar. But I did learn something important, you have to eat and drink or you will pass out!

Fast forward 4 years and now Frank has a bright idea to run 50 miles in the mountains. Convinced that he was completely deranged, I politely declined and tried to avoid eye contact. Then, as only Frank can do, he convinced me to run the second half of Promise Land with no training. It was somewhere between falling on my face and crying all the way up Orchard Falls that it happened- I got hooked! I tried to ignore Frank's taunting and suppress the urge I had to run again, but it wasn't but a month later and I was signed up for Masochist 2009! I then crewed and paced Frank through Hellgate. I was about to sign up for LUS 2010, but then I remembered 2 small details, 1. I was graduating that semester and 2. I was getting married the weekend after graduation. So I postponed my LUS goals until this year and now I am officially hooked on ultras!

Holliday Lake was my first 50k. I decided to stay in Lynchburg overnight and drive the short trip to Appomattox in the morning. I got to the race a little jittery, but very excited. I kept rehearsing my time splits in my head and greeted all the other excited runners. I saw Frank who was excited as always and Horton's big smiling face who asked me "Are you ready for this?" What kind of a question is that 20 minutes before the race? Of course I'm ready! Let's get going! I ate some food and drank some coffee and tried not to think about the race anymore. Then sometime before we left for the starting line Horthy looked at me and said "Mark Henry, run smart!" He said this the night before and two days earlier..."Run smart, run your race".

We lined up at the starting line and sang the national anthem together then it was off to the races. I had ran a couple long runs with Frank and Kevin Smith and I knew that if I stuck with Kevin I would break 5 hours, so I attempted to avoid the bottle neck at the stairs and stay with Kevin. However, I think Kevin had a different time on his mind and was running a little too fast for me so I backed off and came across the 1 mile maker at 8 minutes. I had planned on this mile being quicker, and I was happy that I backed off earlier. However, I suddenly felt real queasy. The only thing I could think was Horton spit in the cream cheese! I know he did! I breezed through the 1staid station and stopped for 10 seconds at AS 2 for some ginger ale. I couldn't eat, even though I tried eating at the aid station, and it took everything I had to keep water and Gatorade down. I kept on pushing, but got more and more discouraged as more and more people passed me. I began to feel as though I was wading trough water and knew I had to keep eating and keep moving. I managed to force down a pack of Clif Shots throughout the first loop and some potato chips and pieces of fruit at the last 2 aid stations. I stopped looking at my watch after AS 3 and just kept on plodding.

To my surprise I came into the turn around point at 2:19, but I felt terrible. Kristy Gonzalez was there waiting for me with a resupply and some encouragement. She refilled my bottles, I took the whole PBJ she gave me, and a hand full of chips and kept on walking. I knew I couldn't stay long. I walked for about a ¼ mile until I finally finished the food. I still was feeling terrible, but saw some green socks run past me and knew I had to get moving. I don't know who "Mr. Green Socks" was, but I let him pace me to the next AS. I really felt my worst when I got to the beginning of Carter Trail. This is for two reasons: 1. I really did feel terrible and 2. I saw Jamie Darling prance right one by me and at that moment I really just wanted to untie my shoes and throw them in the lake. But I remember what Horton had already told me three times "Run smart, run your race." So I began running 3 minutes walking 30 seconds and secretly hoped Jamie would bonk for my prides sake.

By the time I reached AS3 I had wasted all the extra time I had made up in the first lap. I spent some extra time at AS3 and took some ibuprofen. On my way to AS2 Mike Pelieger passed me in the same manner he passed me in Masochist 2009. I was fed up of feeling terrible and I was tired of being passed so I decided to follow Mike's pace until I fell over. Then for some odd reason I started feeling better, my mental state improved and I started running fairly well. We ran the majority of the way to AS2. I spent as little time as I could and kept on trucking. I left AS2 about 20 minutes over my pre-planned time. I ran the entire length from AS2 to AS1 and lost Mike halfway through the section. I started catching people who I hadn't seen since the first lap. I ate some chips and refilled at AS1 and knew that I had enough kick to run the majority of the next section. I briefly glanced at my watch and saw that I had 26 minutes to make it under 5hrs. I passed a few more people and really started running hard once I hit the lake. I was moving really well until suddenly I found myself on the ground and

my water bottle rolling down the trail in front of me. I was lucky it was a soft landing, and there wasn't any damage done, but at that point it didn't matter I was on a mission. Lake Trail came and went quickly and I passed the 1 mile marker at 5hrs. I was a little upset, but that made me run harder. I saw 3 people in front of me and passed 2. As I strode down the hill I saw the finish line and heard everyone cheering and felt one last big kick. I glided past one more girl, which helped my pride some, and ran into a grinning Horton who congratulated me on a good run. 5:08. I can live with that.