

Well, my first ultramarathon is DONE, and out of the way! After my great performance at the Route 66 Marathon, (before Thanksgiving), I took 2 weeks off for some "easy paced" runs, to stuff my face full of turkey (and anything else of nutritional and non-nutritional value) before I started training for my first ultramarathon, the [Holiday Lake 50K++](#). From the beginning, I approached this ultra as a "chill" type of race...no pressure, just get your miles in, don't bonk and most of all...cross the finish line standing up. Sound easy for 32 miles? Sure! :-)) I got the training in, but the "meat" of my training was in the final 6 weeks, consisting of running the Holiday Lake course, running the Rivanna Trail in C'ville, and Wednesday O-Hill sessions with the CAT group.

Pre race dinner: Lots of carbo-rich foods and my favorite...cheesecake (I wish I got a second piece of cheesecake, instead of the second piece of lasagna). So many Patagonia jackets in this crowd of ultra-folks...i think it's more than I've even seen inside Blue Ridge Mountain Sports! After the pre-race briefing (where the theme was "If you don't see yellow tape on the course...you're LOST! And you're stupid." The race director, David Horton, was quite a hoot. After the briefing, he had a quick Q&A session for any ultramarathon newbies (a lot of us in the room), ranging from topics as what to eat at the aid station, how to keep motivated (Horton's recom: Walk with a purpose...ie. don't stop), and how to use the bathroom while running (I'm not making that up).

Race morning, pre-race: The start line was LITERALLY outside my cabin. 2 bananas, a cliff bar, and some weak coffee (sorry, I'm a coffee snob). Hit the bathroom one more time...exit said bathroom with 2 minutes before gun time (after the national anthem and a quick prayer by Horton), and we're off! Race temps: low 20s, no wind. Attire: My lucky red hat, my favorite NYC marathon gloves, mittens, 2 long sleeves, armsocks, and shorts. I'm thankful the predicted 15 mph wind wasn't present!

Usually, the next lines of my race reports include mile splits, but not this time. Race morning, I decided to PUT away the ol' Garmin GPS and just go with the trusty Timex Ironman Triathlon. I knew the aid stations were about 4 miles apart...so it made for easy math to calculate my average splits. I wanted to just ENJOY this one.

My fellow training buddy TJ and I were literally the LAST two up the first hill. Horton suggested the night before that newbies WALK that hill, from the start line until we got into the woods. We took that advice to heart. It was wall to wall people until 30 minutes in (from being in the back of the pack).

Miles 1 to 4: Just trying to get the motor going. TJ and I spilt about 30 minutes in...he stopped for bathroom break...he told me to go on. Admiring the sunrise as we made our way along the course.

Miles 4 to 8: The course thins out...meeting people along the way...most of the people I encountered had done an ultra or Holiday Lake before. I realized I'm OVERhydrated. So, taking a nature break every 4 miles became routine from here on.

Miles 9 to 12 - my fastest 4 mile section. Can't explain that...many downhills (which later would become uphill). Doing my best to not FLY down these hills, and risk breaking something. I decided against taking salt tablets or eating potato chips at the aid stations...rather; I brought pistachios to eat/get my salt intake. And when I wasn't taking a GU, taking an electrolyte capsule. The lead runners are coming my way...they're making it look easy.

Miles 13 to 16: I started hearing cheers from across the lake, so I knew the end of the first loop was soon! The course gets narrow coming in...so I stopped for faster traffic to pass by (and made sure I didn't fall down the side of the trail into the lake). I went off course very briefly...when I saw the trail I was on went STRAIGHT into the lake! Thankfully, it was only a few yards of the course. End of

loop 1: 3:06 minutes (cut off for the first loop was 3:45). In and out, after donning a dry shirt and refilling my Camelbak.

Miles 17-32 are just the loop, in reverse. With every significant hill on this course, I reduce my speed to a fast walk...and take in some fluids or eat some nuts. Glen (my traveling buddy, a couple months out from the completion of his 50 marathons/50 states under 4 hours tour), runs this loop with me. He's keep me entertained along the way...laughing....and keeping me from thinking about what madness I'm putting my body through. I tell him the tricks I've been doing to keep myself motivated on the first loop...and making him aware of a some stream crossings. We encounter lots of mud on the second loop, which is easily cleaned up by stream crossings. Sidenote: I POWERED through a stream crossing...literal gallop through it. The runner behind me exclaimed "Dude! That was hard core!!!!" Well...wearing smart wool socks helped!

On the final mile, I catch Kathryn, a fellow C'villian. I told Glen (and I think she overheard) that once we get to the pavement, I'm putting the hammer DOWN and getting to the finish. There was an orange marker, stating it was a mile until the finish. I looked at my watch and saw that a 6 hour finish time was out of the picture (I didn't have a time goal in mind....though a 6 hr finish would have been great).

After passing 55 runners during that second loop (thanks Glen for counting...I'm still amazed!), I crossed the finish line in 6 hours 3 minutes (and some seconds). I wasn't beat up when I got to the finish line...I was surprised! I finished the second loop in 2 hours 57 minutes...9 minutes FASTER than my first loop. I was shocked.

Things I learned:

- Running without the GPS was a blessing. Not worried about the pace. I wasn't chained to technology. I ran by how I was breathing and how my body felt.
- Speed really does kill! As does pavement. The softer surface and slower pace were also a blessing over 32 miles.
- Race week fueling and race day fueling plan: it passes! Salmon and veggies early in the week and a low carb diet until 2-3 days before the race got the old carbs out of the system, enabling to build up a great supply for race day.

Things that motivated me:

- Friends and family that thought I was crazy for attempting my first marathon 12 years ago...and even crazier (18 marathons later, ha ha) for going for my first ultramarathon. It was a challenge to break through to the next level. I know many were cheering for me; despite this crazy goal!
- This hymn, which I learned from my days in a Mennonite High School. So appropriate: It's called [Guide My Feet](#).
- Thoughts of my Tita Kelly, my aunt and my godmother. She died last month at the young age of 77. A massive heart attack. For 32 miles, I carried a picture with her in my Camelbak. When I felt tired,I thought of her and her family...and for my extended family, as we continue to grieve.

Will there be another ultramarathon for Andrew, you ask? Mmmmmmm....there is a possibility. I just won't say the % of that possibility. :-)

Andrew Zapanta