

Holiday Lake 50k++ 2019 - Jordan Cooter

The Holiday Lake 50k became a thought in May of 2018. I had “picked up” running early spring in an attempt to lose weight and get back in shape, but as I talked through my goals with a friend, he said “You need to run an ultra race. You need to run Holiday Lake.” He ensured me it was an easy ultra and a great first race for those wanting to run an ultra marathon. (shout out to Brenton and Jamie Swyers! Jamie built my training plan and Brenton dealt with all of my thousand questions and even ran with me throughout much of my training. Made a huge impact.)

Fast forward to February 15th, 2019. The eve of the big race- this is what all the training had led up to. I encourage everyone to join in on the pre-race meal on Friday night as it was informative, full of good conversation and many laughs, and friendships were developed - part of what I have already grown to love about this sport. We checked in, enjoyed our carb heavy meal, heard from Dr. Horton on the do's and don'ts of your first ultra, and eventually spent some time preparing/organizing ourselves for the next morning. Lights out was 10:00 but most of us found ourselves asleep by 9:30.

Alarms began going off around 5:15. There was an obvious air of excitement blended with nervousness for many of us first timers as we filled our containers with water and pinned our racing numbers to our shorts. There was a light continental breakfast as we checked in for the second time and finally we assembled outside for prayer and the national anthem. Weather is always unpredictable- leading up to the race everything was showing it would be just above freezing temp and raining on and off throughout the race... as we waited for the clock to strike 6:30, it began to rain gently.

6:30 hit and we were off! As soon as Dr. Horton yelled “Go!” there was a symphony of subtle clicks and dings from everyone setting their watches. We headed up the road in a large pack. At this point it was still dark, and many chose not to carry headlamps or flashlights. I was not one of those people and so I found myself surrounded with a few people needing to see where they were going. We soon took the first turn off of the road and onto some single track. I took the first few miles easy as Dr. Horton's speech the night before was rolling through my head - “Don't take the first loop too fast!”. I came into aid station one as the sun was coming up and was feeling good. After a quick refill of Tailwind, I was off. I coasted the next few miles at a strong pace and came through the wonderful creek crossing. I embraced every bit of it and moved swiftly through the ice-cold water, reaching up just above my knees. The next mile and a half was a gentle incline to aid station 2. Again, a quick refill on fluid and a couple cookies and I was off. After moving swiftly a few miles, I met pace with a gentlemen from Buena Vista. This was a nice mental break and we held good conversation about our running adventures (the few I had to offer) and by mile 13 I picked up my pace and once again was running on my own. From that point to the turn around I was encouraged by seeing many of the front runners coming back my way. Cheering them on provided an unexpected energy and I found myself

moving swiftly along the trail beside the lake, down and across the damn, and into camp, refueling and grabbing some gels from my drop bag.

Turn around into the second lap was quick. Two things were resonating in my head “don’t hang around the aid stations too long” and “your first step past the turn around means your halfway there”. Coming into camp I had caught up to a runner that had set a good pace for me to follow, so leaving camp I held with her for a few miles, however she slowly faded out of site as I slowed my pace a bit. I passed through the first aid station of the second loop feeling good and of course, refilling my Tailwind. I was getting ready to head up the hill leaving the aid station and noticed a runner looking uncomfortable. I waved her on and told her it was time to go. We walked the hill and she said her hand had been hurting so bad from the cold. I muttered what I thought were encouraging words and can’t even remember at this point what they were. We reached the top of the hill and she took off. The next four miles were a combination of managing my pace, forcing myself to run the few hills, and as I reached the powerlines (about a 1.5 mile stretch), I tried to pick up my pace, passing a few runners. Soon I was out of the power line stretch, passed another runner or two through the woods, and headed up a gravel road to the next aid station. I came into the aid station, 8 miles remaining, in 47th place. A friend, Brenton, asked me how I felt. I let him know mentally I was good but my legs were screaming. He said I was doing great. I ate a pickle and, you guessed it, refueled on Tailwind! I ran the next 1.5 miles hard as it was somewhat of a decline. I crossed the creek for the second time and headed on the uphill climb, again forcing myself to run the length of it.

Before I knew it I was coming into the last aid station of the race. Roughly four miles to go. I came in a little fuzzy and someone asked what I needed. I honestly didn’t need to stop or refill, but at this point it was habit- I refilled on Tailwind. I saw someone run through the aid station and yell for a quesadilla- her husband grabbed one and ran after her with it and as I left he said to me, “You gonna let a girl beat you?” That honestly did not motivate me in the slightest, but I appreciated the effort. I headed out of the aid station at a good pace and it was very apparent to me that my legs did not want me to go any further. I thought back to some tips that had been emailed out before the race “one foot in front of the other” and “it can never keep getting worse”. Soon I was headed down hill - at this point I haven’t mentioned it, but it has dropped in temperature, it’s not raining anymore, but is a mix of snow and sleet, and the entire course is slick mud. Going down this hill was a challenge, but I couldn’t let it slow me down. Before I knew it, the lake was in sight, meaning there was only a couple miles of single track trail left. I came to the top of one hill, misstepped, and instantly had a screaming pain inside my right thigh. I straightened up and pressed on it hard with my thumb. I knew I was too close to walk so I picked my pace back up and hoped the cramp wouldn’t come back.

With not much more than a mile left, I pass the runner that had asked for the quesadilla. I had ran behind her for a bit but she let me pass and I accepted the invitation. Soon I was walking down the few steps that led out of the woods and onto the main road that led back into camp. I was running what ended up being one of my fastest miles in the race. The thought of crossing that finish line was more motivation than I could have imagined. I came into camp with

everything I had as Dr. Horton said into the loud speaker “Is that Cooter??” I sprinted across the finish line, so satisfied. My wife greeted me, congratulating me for my finish. Dr. Horton walked over and shook my hand. I bent over and felt more accomplished than I had in a long time. I had set a goal of just finishing the race, however over the course of my training I set a goal of finishing under 6 hours. I finished the 2019 Holiday Lake 50K++ at 5:51.

It’s an awesome event that I highly recommend! A great location with a great group of people. I have since signed up for two more 50k races :)