

First 50k.

I drove down from Charlottesville Friday night to check in and have dinner, which was pasta and salad and cake, all really good. I stayed in the bunk house with a number of VMI cadets and other runners. Picked up some tips about the run, clothes, food, etc. Slept on top bunk, felt like camp. Lots of snoring, each its own style. Got up at 5:30. Wore shorts, t shirt, and thin wool long sleeve base layer. Opted not to wear rain jacket, thinking I'd get too hot, and moisture would be trapped causing me to get wet either way. Applied duct tape to sensitive regions. Been down that road before, and it stings. The morning was cool and dark, about 40 degrees. There was a lot of energy at the start, a rousing star bangled banner, headlights bobbing, and the some hooting. At 630 we took off and the first few miles were nice and easy. Exciting, kinda like "I'm actually doing it, this is happening now". I'd been somewhat half-heartedly training for a 50k for a few years. This year, my longest training run was 16 miles, which I did the weekend previous to race. I did a trail half marathon in October, which felt kinda hard, but also somewhat routine, so wanted to go longer.

The rain started light for awhile, and then it increased and rained fairly heavily and consistently. Temps seemed to drop off a bit. There was intermittent wintry mix, heavy wet globs of snowflakes falling and accumulating in only tiny amounts. As can be expected, the trails became extremely muddy, and there was a lot of slipping and sliding around. My clothes were soaked, but I had enough body heat from running to stay warm. I had the option to put my rain jacket on at the turn around but I decline, because I wasn't cold. I stopped wearing my gloves about halfway through, as they were soaked through and making my hands colder than if I pulled my sleeves around my fists when needed. The single track down by the lake was really pretty, and there was a lot of mountain laurel, moss, and ferns in the coves.

The section before, and after the turnaround was a total mud fest. At around mile 20 or 22 I began to realize that this would be tough. My legs were getting heavy and slow, and I still had a half marathon to go. I felt like I had conserved a lot of energy and was going at a very leisurely pace for the first lap, but that wasn't enough I guess. I couldn't muster more than a slow shuffley jog interspersed with hiking. Tried energy gel with caffeine, and brief stretching out, but each time I'd attempt a more brisk jog, it just wouldn't go. Previously, at the aid stations, I had been eating quesadillas and grilled cheese and oatmeal cream pies, and nothing really bothered my stomach. Aid station volunteers were amazing.

The last several miles were really tough, but I felt great knowing that I was on pace to finish, and that I'd finish this darn thing! Furthest I've ever run. Around mile 33, according to my watch, I was in the middle of the forest with no one in sight, and I thought that I should be done by now and I must've gone off course. The thought entered my mind that I was going to have to back track and run additional miles which truly struck fear in me. I got a shot of adrenaline from that thought, which actually gave me a boost to the top of the hill where I was planning on stopping to assess. I ran into someone coming the opposite direction, who told me that I was on course, and that I had a mile to go. Huge wave of relief. The course was well marked, and easy to follow, I really had no reason to think I'd gone off, other than thinking that I would be done at 32 miles. I shuffled in, completing my first 50k. Incredible experience. Singletrack along the lake towards the finish was very memorable.