

romise Land 2012

Runnin' with the Devil--and the thunder, lightning, and freezing rain

As I approached AS5-Colon Hollow, the ice cream station, stereo speakers blared the Van Halen classic "Runnin with the Devil". "Great song" I remarked to the guys writing down our race numbers, "but isn't that more appropriate for Hellgate?" While showing an agreeing smile one of them remarked--"but you never know." Less than 5 minutes later when I was finishing my ice cream sandwich, I saw the skies darken and heard in the distance a rumbling of thunder---the Devil was soon to have some fun with us.

I was back in Virginia with my fellow SW Ohio buddies Dave Krekeler(better known as Hellgate Best Blood Ever), Bob Jasinski, and Todd Bumgardner for the third installment of the 2012 Beast Series. Our group has learned to love our treks to this trail running haven, catching up with new friends we have made in this area and looking forward to the usual charm of a Horton event. The setting of the Promise Land Youth Camp ranked right with Hellgate, Holiday Lake and Terrapin Mt for quality race headquarters. After an evening of food, conversation and the always entertaining Horton race meeting and gear giveaway, we prepared for sleep--Bob and Todd did the camping thing while wimpy Dave and I headed to our Days Inn in Bedford. Back at the camp in the morning we checked in, sang a very weak rendition of the National Anthem, and following Dr Horton's prayer, we were off on the first of many climbs.

There are many good race reports that tell details of section by section, and in particular the PHD of race reports--Keith Knipling--has one for Promise Land that is excellent for course insight, so I'll skip that minutiae. I will say I was pleasantly surprised that there were more runnable sections than expected, that the climbs were tough but I like to power hike, and the mountain and stream views were amazing. I was proceeding very comfortably section by section, staying within 5-10 minutes of target times I had planned. When I came to AS5 at just under 5 hours, I was starting to think I could be much better than my 7:45 "goal time".

That of course is when we started Runnin' with the Devil. Initially it seemed like it was going to be a light rain that actually may feel good, but soon the winds picked up, rain came sideways, thunder and lightning were way too close for comfort, and worse of all the temps dropped like a rock. I mostly felt numb in my hands, but lots of people around me were clearly struggling from the conditions. The Dark Side climb to the falls would be tough in perfect weather, but today it clearly became a death march. I had to pull out all my tricks. I always carry a picture of my 23 year old special needs daughter Alicia, and this time I held it my hand for all 3 miles. I used my mantras--relentless forward motion, shoulders back and down, embrace the journey. I kept hearing the voice of my yoga instructor Karen saying "breathe"--"soft face" and "relax".

With great relief I finally saw the tent for Sunset Fields. As I saw many runners crowded in the tent trying to get warm, I ironically thought of the runners I saw collapsing from excessive heat at the Boston Marathon less than 2 weeks ago.

I fortunately was feeling well enough to attack the remaining mostly downhill to the finish. The trails with 6 inches of standing water made staying upright a challenge while pushing the pace. When I hit the gravel road at Overstreet Falls I knew I could let gravity be my friend and reached the finish at 7:55. Given the changing conditions and making through the day with no falls, I felt very happy with my finishing time.

Congratulations to everyone who finished--or tried for that matter. Other than the Eric Grossman of the front pack, most had some dealings with the storm. For those that spend two hours or longer than me getting to the finish I have extreme respect.

As typical with a Horton race, the volunteers are a terrific blend of long time Horton friends mixed with the bubbling enthusiasm of the Liberty University students that make every aid station a fun visit. I always enjoy conversations with the spirited and well spoken LU students--very special young people. I saw the experience of the older volunteers as they assisted a poor fellow who badly injured his shoulder in a fall. Finally the group that prepared our tasty post race food, including Dr Horton's wife, started our recovery process. THANKS TO ALL THE GREAT VOLUNTEERS!!!!

Dr Horton, I was glad to beat my race " seeding"--thanks for the motivation. But thank you most for being the leader of another fabulous VA trail event.

I look forward (I think) to a return in October for Grindstone.

Al Eder