

Dr. Horton,

First, good luck in the bike race!

My “race report” is a series of emails. They’re in reverse chronological order here, starting with PromiseLand 2022. But the full picture begins with PromiseLand 2021 and includes my first trip to Silverton and first 100k last August. One thing that isn’t here, is that because you sign all of the pre-race emails “In Christ,” and there was a finisher with the same name as my old coach, I was reached out to my old Wheaton College teammate and roommate who joined my sister and crew for the 100k in Silverton. I

Godspeed!

-sarah

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First message is to my sister who after reading my 2021 email to my fired Katie encouraged me to write about the race this year too.

Katie,

Ok, so I was slower than last year, by 33 minutes...but that’s generally about how much slower the winning times were compared to last year and so maybe it’s just right..... either way, as my crew—whether at the race or virtually—I know you want the full scoop.

I wasn’t sure I wanted to go. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to #behere for the race. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to climb the mountains and run the miles...it was just that all of a sudden work travel was pulling me away from home in the weeks ahead of the race. I felt mad that so suddenly things were shifting back to in person meetings. Seems unnecessary, let’s just zoom. And of course, Sable is a puppy, a good dog in training. My leaving for the race and for the training runs it required felt like I was leaving John to deal with Sable and maybe not doing everything I should do to help her realize her good dog potential.

The days of training with big miles and the big hill climbs were hard for me to make happen. It wasn’t that I was unmotivated, it was that I fell into endless questioning of best logistics and when to go. I also didn’t keep my strength routine up and failed to add speed into my training mix. But I did some good Bickle Knob climbs (2,000 ft up and then back down, 8.5 miles round trip) and I did two Blackwater Canyon Half course doubles.

The week of the race was less than ideal. Missed sleep and missed meals because of the work travel and I just wasn’t sure I was going to race—or as I told you on the phone on Thursday—I pretended I wasn’t going. But I packed at the last minute and went. I was carpooling with my friend Katie and so once it got to Friday morning, I knew I was actually going. But it did take John helping load the gear in the jeep to get me out the door and actually on my way.

We arrived and got one of the last parking spots by the creek. I found some trees that maybe weren’t ideal but seemed to hold the hammock ok. And the view of the creek from the hammock actually was ideal. We chatted with other runners, I ate my GF dinner by the jeep while others ate pizza. We went to the pre race meeting, which helpfully included the locations of the deepest creeks where we could cool off. And then it was time to set the 4:30 alarm and get some rest. Things got quiet fast, but at 4:30,

everything came alive and it was time to get race ready. I had time for one cup of coffee and some baked oatmeal. RD Horton was on the bull horn, telling the guys to go pee in the woods and that we had to be on the starting line in 10, then 5 minutes. I didn't have my shoes on yet! And the people in the tent next to me were spraying bug spray that smelled like deodorant. But I made it. At the jeep and with my shoes on, I decided I'd probably be fine without a headlamp. But then at the starting line I questioned my choice and got the small emergency handheld light out of my pack. I held it, for the first few miles...didn't need it. I kept my pace reasonable on the climb. I talked to some people and I tried to stay behind people I recognized and suspected should finish ahead of me. I knew I'd gone out too fast last year and was pretty determined to run a different race. I had even avoided the same hammock tree on Friday night hoping to be sure it was different this time. I worked hard to keep my pace easy going up and not to fight the downhill. The sunrise was epic. I felt better than last year and felt like I was running a smarter race. My plan was to take food or a gel from my pack every hour and then supplement with whatever aid station food was ok for me. I enjoyed aid station bacon and then potatoes with salt at sunset fields. By then (14 miles in) I was feeling strong but also hot. I had been sipping tailwind, and asked for ice to stuff in my bra at the aid station. I am sure I embarrassed the guys with that request, but I was trying to keep my core as cool as possible. The section after sunset fields was better than last year...I was running the downhills and the flats and I reminded myself that maybe after mile 20 I could pick up the pace. I got passed by some people going down, and then some more on the flat. But I was running and there were trilliums everywhere! Maybe some people are faster downhill than me.

Coming into Cornelius Creek the first time, there was a huge black snake across the trail. I told a lady that it was a black snake and not a rattlesnake and she was going to get a picture. I took time to ask for popsicles at the aid stations and to refill my bottles. I drank tailwind all the time. I felt hot and nauseous but I didn't want to give into it. I just kept going as fast as I could. And it wasn't fast. I had a side stitch that wouldn't go away and later turned into cramps across my abs (I haven't been carrying that much weight when I run lately, maybe that was it?). Some runner said he wasn't looking forward to the apple orchard climb and I said it was my favorite part. I tried to find the exact spot where last year those ladies had told me there were 10 more miles when I'd thought we were almost done. Coming off the road section I passed a lady who had her phone in her pocket with the music playing out loud. I ran as hard as I could to stay ahead of her because I hate that. The birds were trying to sing and I was there to hear them, not her playlist!

Finally I was there, the apple orchard climb. And it took at least an hour. I passed some people early but then as I approached the wooden steps, I caught an older couple who seemed like tourists. I couldn't pass them but just fell in and kept moving. I later met them at the finish and realized they were racing too and not tourists at all. This year, I knew the climb went on and on after the falls, and that helped.

But I was still a mess when I got back up to sunset fields. They gave me Mountain Dew which I was assured would make me feel better in 9 minutes and told me that I was more than an hour ahead of the cutoff and could walk as much as I needed to...but I didn't. I was just slowly running. I love that section of trail and imagined what it would be like without 29 miles already on my legs. I got caught by a young guy who was flying and a few other who were moving only slightly faster than me. My right foot felt like it was a block of wood and it was hard to figure out where to put it. It felt like I had a big rock in my heel and something was wrong with my second toe, but it wasn't bad enough to stop to take a look. When I got out onto the road, I finally threw up and that made me feel better. And I just kept running as fast as my legs would move. I heard Katie's friend Robin say my name as I was coming into the finish. I ran it in as fast as I could, still hot but happy to have somehow survived that course a second time.

The rock in my heel was actually three grains of sand. I'm still a little sore all over but also happy all over. The finishers shorts are the perfect green.

The 6 week transition from ski season and the Birkie to this race feels fast, but I think I will be back. I just don't think I've run my fastest PromiseLand yet. I think the heat this year was a lot like a Birkie where wax is difficult to figure out and maybe klister is required. Some years are just tougher than others. Next time for PromiseLand I might use poles, climb the steps at Blackwater falls for hill repeats a few times in training, keep doing the long and Bickle Knob runs but also try somehow to be faster on everyday runs.....

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Message to Sarah at running store about Silverton ultra Dirty 100k, sent in early August....

First, your Silverton pictures were popping up as I was in the midst of final long runs and gear testing and it inspired me to prepare well! It was insanely beautiful, super tough and I want to go back tomorrow and do it again. We started and ended at the visitor's center in Silverton. Ran up the canyon with the railroad tracks, up to Molas pass, by the little lakes, clockwise around Engineer Mountain and down to the engineer trailhead, up Cascade Creek, up to the Bandera mine, down and up to Putnam and finished the same way the Hardrock 100 does which was absolutely completely insane by headlamp—and so very very steep. Next time I'd love a pacer, and I'll go to help anyone who needs one. But even though it was dark and super technical, I was weirdly able to just keep going all alone...I stayed positive and was just thankful for all of it.... I will send a photo of the course in a separate message. The RD Megan has a goal of 100 percent finishers. It didn't happen this year but it was inspiring for me to simply know that my goal was to make it to that finish.

The altitude slowed me down. The medic told us the night before to just take the time and respect the mountains. We also had Dr.Todd talk to each of us at 31 miles and he encouraged me to use my poles more. I was able to go out a week before race day and spent a few days acclimating and working remotely in Leadville before heading to Silverton. That helped. And I was ok under Treeline but with the wildfire smoke hanging in the air I had trouble when we were up at 13,000....but once it happened the first time, I was able to just expect it and told myself the only way down was through forward progress!

I've never spent time at aid stations before but for this adventure, I needed to wait for my Gluten Free food and at night It got cold and I needed to add layers too. I think it was 90 degrees here when I packed my drop bag and added a wool shirt. But I sure needed it!

In the dark my light and mind played some tricks on me...I saw a greenhouse, a glowing mushroom, and an animal skull inside a wooden frame at the side of the trail. I was pretty convinced that was the part of the course overlapping with the Hardrock course and that maybe they put things out there to entertain or scare the runners. There was even a person who was dressed like a bug at one point. I later learned that was really another runner who was struggling with back pain and so maybe the rest of it was fake too. My first 100k and my first mid-race hallucinations!

Oh and I raced in the superiors I got on clearance and they were fantastic.

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Why I went into Silverton ...in my post-2021 PromiseLand glow I accidentally on purpose sent this email one day in response to an ATRA ad about a free race entry opportunity.

On Wed, Apr 28, 2021 at 2:56 PM Sarah Forbes <halfiron02@gmail.com> wrote:

I understand you're giving away an entry for the Silverton 100k or 100 mile in early August. Here's why I'd like to run and what I'd hope to accomplish.

I want to run for recovery and adventure. And I hope to finish my first 100k.

So I had COVID in December 2020. I did all the things and was especially vigilant with multiple masks and all the sanitizers. But I ran errands locally in rural West Virginia one day and simply fell ill as a result of community spread. Nobody wants to hear my story because everyone needs to believe that somehow if they do all the things they won't get sick. And maybe with the vaccine others won't have to go through what it feels like to live with COVID.

When people find out that you had COVID they instinctively take several steps back and don't want to hear about it. So over time I've stopped talking about it. But it's still there, I can feel it in my body. And I think people need to start talking about what happens when you recover from COVID. What happens when we all recover from the pandemic.

My COVID recovery is why I want to come out and run your race. I want to erase my own lingering doubt that I've recovered. I want to breathe the mountain air and embrace the adventure. I want my sister who is based on the west coast to join me and be my crew, just like she did last March in the midst of the pandemic breaking. And I want to talk about COVID recovery.

Right now I'm recovering from my first post-COVID ultra, PromiseLand 50k. It was tough and I can feel that I'm still building back. I'm working on it. Thankful for a finish and for the Forest.

I hope you select me. It'd be my first 100k, my first ultra in Colorado. My goal will be simply to finish strong. And to recover well.

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Message to my friend Katie who volunteered at the 2021 PromiseLand.....

My biggest reaction to everything PromiseLand is that I cannot wait to go back and try it again. Loved it all. It was so nice to see u out there!

Next time, more up and downhill runs w fast and big elevation changes), priority on body weight strength and at least some speed work (preferably downhill). And a plan for fuel.

At first the beginning seemed a lot like the last minute training run I did up Bickel Knob...but then it got a little steeper and I switched to walking. I'm sure I ran more of it than is advisable and was up far enough in my wave, or my silver hair was sparkling enough that I got a "wow, good job" from the guy at the top.

But then that wasn't the top because it just kept going up and ate some maple syrup and sometime later I was welcomed to the top of the mountain.

That left me leading a train on a very very long smooth downhill trail. I don't think I've ever run that far down On a single track that smooth...it was magical.

At some point I fell and it was like a spring and I popped back up.

And then the downhill kept going. I did start to wonder about when and where the aid station and realized I needed to eat my homemade granola bar. Finished it coming into the aid station and took bacon that I kept in my pocket the rest of the day. I just ate all the potatoes and had a gel and not enough maple syrup after that.

On a climb at about mile twelve I got caught by two ladies I recognized. I tried to fall in but just didn't have the speed.

And the miles went on. Sunset fields was fun because you were there and saved my stomach with the tums. I was so uncoordinated dropping the potatoes and very embarrassed about that.

I eased up on the pace just a little and enjoyed the technical downhill. The wildflowers were amazing. And then I just ran and ran...and at some point on a flat part, I started to get passed. And my legs just would not go any faster. I could move but it was slow. And then on the uphill, I'd pass them back. I leapfrogged one guy a few times who was in tons of pain. I don't think I was, but my legs just didn't want to go downhill. There was a flat road section and I was able to do a mile or two that felt faster, but then I was back on the trail and two ladies were talking about ten more miles and how the waterfall was the worst part. I kept wanting to get there to see what all the chatter was about. And when I started on some stone steps, I was happy because the end felt close. But then I was getting passed even more. And there was some lady on a chair in the middle of nowhere. At that point I wanted to cry, but she said I could do it. And then it weirdly got steeper and easier for me. That makes no sense but it's what happened. And the falls were amazing. But then it kept going up, which I didn't expect. Everyone described the falls as the top.

When I saw you again at sunset fields, I felt like I'd pulled through a sketchy stretch. You said I was pale and I knew it but also knew I had a finish in me. At that point I understood that anything flat or downhill was just not going to be fun. And so the downhill road at the end wasn't the fast finish It had promised to be in my headlamp that morning. But I was so happy as so thankful that I was still running. Super slow but not giving up either.

I surprised myself the next week registering for trilogy and then somehow ending up w a 100k too.... I am ready to train harder and be out there.