

The butterflies increased as I kept reading the prerace emails. By the time I completed the 5 hour drive to Promise Land Camp I had psyched myself out pretty good. This was my first Ultra, and I didn't really know what to expect. The vibe of the evening festivities was light, but I had trouble enjoying it due to the jitters. I was determined to get myself to bed early and get a good night sleep.....the best laid plans of mice and men.....

I unloaded my tent and after stretching out the groundcover and tent I found I had forgot my poles. Oh well, I inflated my air mattress and settled into the bed of the truck. Nerves, dogs barking, nerves, babies crying, nerves, and neighbors kept me from getting much sleep.

I was up before the bullhorn to check and recheck my vest, adjust my shoes, eat and hydrate. I checked in to register and pinned my number. I decided against taking my phone and earbuds due to the weight. No inspirational podcasts for me. We gathered at the start, sang the anthem and I prayed along with Horton that I could glorify God through my running that day.

And we're off! I decided to go with the flow and see how I felt. As my watch buzzed the first mile alert I started to power hike the first hill. I eavesdropped on conversations as I climbed. It felt good to top off the water bottle and use some new muscles when we hit the top. I ditched the headlamp and headed into the mist a short time later. The next few miles were a blur. The grassy road was a nice run to get a rhythm going and eat up some miles. My biggest worry was keeping off the mile long poison ivy patch on my left. I rolled into the next aid station. Quesadillas! Pound a few of those and I'm good to go for awhile!

The next memorable moment was the start of the "gentle shower" mentioned at the pre-race meeting. The rumble of distant thunder hinted of things to come. As the air crackled, the wind blew, and the rain pelted I realized the relativity of the term "gentle" to some people. The storm may have aided me though, since I was on a ridgetop at the time and wanted to get off ASAP! Note to self: try contacts or Lasix surgery before the next race, the fogged glasses had me running almost blind for too many miles. Sometime in here I had Pierogis, grilled cheese sandwiches, popsicles, pickles and anything else I could get my hands on.

The last climb came. Many thanks to the lady (or climbing machine) I followed the whole time. I wish I could have stopped to appreciate the waterfall, but she wouldn't stop. I drafted her to the last aid station and filled up for the last time. Feeling good, I took off and ran the last 5 miles or so. I crossed the finish line a few minutes before my goal of 7 hours with a smile on my face. I was greeted with a hug and smile from my son and some friends. I stayed to clap for people I had met and ran with for a few miles here and there. Then a much needed Ice cold shower at the camp. (the shower was much needed, I could've done without the ice cold part)

The whole experience was unexpectedly good. I enjoyed almost the whole thing. The soreness was gone after a few days, but the chigger bites are a gift that keeps on giving. I started planning my next race before the weekend was over it was such a good time. Thanks to David Horton and all involved to make my first, the first of many.