

Promise Land has always held a special place in my heart. It was my first ultra and was the catalyst to my ultrarunning journey two years ago. This year, I set out to train harder than I ever had before with the intention of putting myself in the best position to beat my previous time of 5:34. Little did I know what would end up unfolding on race day.

As I walked up to the start line of Promise Land, I felt at ease and confident in my training and preparation. I did not have any expectations on my performance and instead just set out to enjoy the race and run as well as I could. As soon as Horton gave us the go ahead, I went out with the front men up the first climb. Climbing has always been an area where I excel, so I was soon towards the front of the pack. I began to wonder if I was starting out too fast but trusted that my body could sustain the pace I was running.

Once I hit the grassy road section, I let my legs fly down the easy terrain. I knew that this was an area where I could make up time for the climbs that were ahead. I felt amazing and after glancing at my watch discovered that my overall time was faster than I expected. I continued to push my pace, but soon realized the bottom section of my shirt and shorts were soaked from my pack leaking. While this was frustrating, I had enough water for the moment and decided to focus on the things that I could control. When I made it to the aid station at Sunset Fields, I quickly enlisted my parents to help me refill my pack before making the descent down the falls.

At this point, I kept reminding myself to stay focused on my footing while still going as fast as possible. I was around some of the front men, which provided some nice conversation as we continued to the bottom of the hill. We soon made it to the Cornelius Creek aid station when I saw a white truck pulling up. Dr. Horton was just getting out of the truck, so I said hi as I kept running past him. He was so surprised to see me he dropped his clipboard and responded, “What are you doing girl?” He encouraged me to keep up my pace and that told me I was on target to get the course record. I had realized this earlier but hearing him say it set a new fire ablaze in me. I ran the new few miles on the road at a quick 6:30 pace and continued to feel fantastic. My watch buzzed that I had hit the 20-mile mark with a little over two hours until I needed to be at the finish to get the CR, which gave me confidence.

I was soon on the rolling hills back towards the falls. During this section I picked off a few men on the smaller climbs and kept pushing my pace. I reminded myself to stay focused on the terrain and made mental blocks in my mind of the rest of the race. I knew that the hardest part would be the climb back up the falls and that I needed to put myself in the best possible position for the CR by taking advantage of the easier miles. I still had enough time to do the remaining miles at a little slower than 10 minutes each, which made me feel confident. I cruised on the downhill sections before finally making it to the last aid before the dreaded climb up the falls. I grabbed a cup of water quickly and turned right back around. As I ran away from the aid, I heard voices I didn't know cheering me on, which made me even more excited that the end was in sight. I started climbing up the falls, but quickly slowed down. My legs felt very tired and I was out of water at this point. I allowed myself to walk up some steep sections and picked off another man who was ahead of me. The miles seemed to drag on and I began to become a little worried that I was losing too much time if I wanted to beat the CR. At mile 28 up the falls, my watch buzzed that I had an hour to get to the start line, which worried me since I still had a little over 6 miles to go. I knew I only had about a mile of climbing left, but my body felt utterly exhausted. To make things worse, this is when the terrible hail and lightning started. I began to

become very discouraged that I couldn't get to the finish in time and began to desperately pray that God would help me make it to the top of this climb. I kept going as fast as I could through the rain and eventually made it to the top of the falls. I was so relieved that I didn't even care that I might get struck by the lightning that was right above me. I knew I had five miles to go and that if I wanted to beat the record would have to give it everything I had.

The rain kept coming, but I kept pushing through while trying not to slip in the stream that used to be the trail. On the final little climb before the last road section, I caught up to Michael Owen who gave me some encouragement to keep pushing. When we hit the road with 2.6 miles to go, the top three men pulled away in their all-out sprint for the finish. I checked my watch and realized I had 22 minutes to make it to the finish for the CR. I began sprinting as fast as I could, while still running smart so that I didn't fall. I felt great and was cruising at a 6:20 pace, when all of the sudden with a little over a mile to go, I had the worst calf cramp of my life. It was so bad that I had to stop for a second to massage it even though I only had 10 minutes to get to the finish. Thankfully, dry swallowing a salt tablet and the massage did the trick, and I was good to go.

I sprinted on for the last mile and soon enough saw the camp. A feeling unlike anything I have experienced overcame me as I kept getting closer. Knowing that all my hard work for the last few months had paid off and that my friends and family were waiting for me at the finish made me overcome with joy. I hit the grass finish and soon heard Dr. Horton yelling my name, along with everyone else cheering for me. I cruised past the finish at 4:58, straight into Dr. Horton's embrace. I was in disbelief that I had beaten the course record and finished right behind the top three men. Following the race, I savored every moment. It truly was such a special time with my friends, family, and other ultrarunners. I will forever remember that day and it will always be one of my most favorite memories.