

Promise Land Ultra Marathon
Saturday, April 21, 2024
Marty Winn Race Report

Promise Land is my Ultra race. It was my first official Ultra. I first entered it in 2022 but was unable to complete it due to overheating. I entered an easier Ultra in NC called Iron Mountain that Fall and got my first official completion. I entered Promise Land again in 2023 and was very pleased to finish that. Now, for the third time, to break the tie, I registered for Promise Land in 2024.

TRAINING:

I have concentrated on being efficient with my time and getting elevation in the last year. That means hiking up Fort Lewis Mountain out my back door and running down it as often as possible. This is a bit more than 1500' elevation in a bit under 5 miles. This happens about 4 days a week. Sometimes longer runs are done. There are a bunch of trails and more recently I have added distance often. Often I hike with my wife Ruth. In September I ran the Barkley Fall Challenge (part of), In November I ran the Miserous Ultra, and In February the TWOT Ultra. In March my Fort Lewis Winter Challenge, On April 4 and 9 I went out to the Promise Land course and did half marathon distance training runs. I lost 30 pounds since the start of the year to get in better shape. I need to be lighter still.

DAY BEFORE:

On my way home from work on Friday I made a couple of shopping stops. One thing I wanted was Cool Aid. I normally mix in calorie-free Crystal Light in my hydration pack but I thought about it and said why am I trying to save calories during a race? I always struggle to eat and take in calories. I also got some oranges (end of season). I gas up the Tahoe I plan to drive to the race (don't want to take my stick shift truck which is really rough if you have post-race cramps (like I typically do). I had already picked up jelly beans and chocolate chip cookie dough to take with me on the race.

CAR TROUBLE:

We had just driven 1500 miles round trip to Florida the previous weekend in the Tahoe and now about 3 miles from home, the car is overheating. Lights are coming on, steam coming from the hood, crippled to reduce speed. Fortunately, I am a mile from my exit. I barely make it to a hotel parking lot. I feared there was car trouble coming. Antifreeze had been leaking. I had a gallon of water in the car. I let it cool off for 45 minutes. Then fill the reservoir. I was able to make it the last 2 miles home. But this meant I would have to drive the stick shift to and from the race and Saturday afternoon was now for watching water pump replacement YouTube videos and buying auto parts. Sunday afternoon was for replacing the part.

NIGHT BEFORE:

Finally home late and with a 2:30 AM alarm coming I unpacked the groceries and got some dinner (fried eggs and bacon). I started laying out all my race clothes, after-race clothes, provisional clothes, equipment, cooler, and as much food prep as I could do. I made a to-do list for the morning. Fortunately, I had already loaded my phone with directions to the race (it would be easy to get lost between Bedford and Promise Land in the dark). Unfortunately, the truck did not have enough gas for the round trip but I could make it there. I also loaded up the course profiles and the cut-off times and the mile-by-mile, section-by-section elevation gain/lost, my goal paces, and how fast I have run these in the past so I can judge my progress.

HOW I SEE THE COURSE:

The easy way to look at the Promise Land course is to see there are 8 aid stations and thus 9 segments between them and evaluate each one. This is pretty natural because RD David Horton puts out suggested times for each of these segments but also hard (maybe?) cut-off times for Aid Station 3 (3:45 race time) at Sunset Fields before heading downhill into the Dark Side and for Aid Station 6 (7:15 race time) at the Apple Orchard Falls Lower Parking Lot before heading up the big climb of AOF and to the BRP. Then the finish has a 10:00 cut-off.

RACING PHILOSOPHY:

But I looked at the course profile and decided that's not what I need. This course is 4 uphill and 4 downhills. This is how I needed to look at the race. When I failed to complete the 2022 race I looked at the data and was surprised at how slow I am running up hills. I mean I put a lot of effort into it and got exhausted running up the hills. I thought about all of those late run-able miles where I had no energy left. I needed to save my energy for the flats and run-able downhills. When I started finishing races thinking I had so much energy left, why did I save all that energy? I could have used it on the uphills. At that point, I'll start running up hills in races. But as it is relatively speaking I am a very good, fast hiker and it takes much less energy to hike up a hill than run it and it is not really that much slower. Over and over in races during uphills people will run past me and then a few minutes later I will hike past them because they are now walking too, and slower than me. A constant hike is better than some running and some exhausted hiking. For me anyway.

Last year I swallowed my pride and did not run at the start of the race. 300 some people passed me or got ahead of me. I could turn around and count no more than a dozen headlights behind me after about a half mile. The route gets steeper and steeper the first 4 miles. I counted as I passed back the runners, now walkers. I moved from only 12 people behind me to 80 some last year and 70 some this year after about 4+ miles when the course finally turned downhill. I compared 2023 to 2022 and found that I was only 98 seconds behind my previous year's time after 4 miles and I had not run at all. And I was full of conserved energy which I would desperately need on mile 29.

All this to say my racing philosophy for ultras is that I don't run uphill. I hike uphill. I run flats and downhills (and certainly not all of those). I only have so many miles I can run in a race and I am very choosy about where I spend that. Where I can run and make up the most ground as compared to walking.

Another way to look at this race is that to make the cut-off you have to do 17-minute miles. I can walk a 17-minute mile in good conditions. I can't do it exhausted on steep mountains. So if I am going to be doing a 20-minute mile I need a 14-minute mile or three 16-minute miles to trade it off with. If I do a 30-minute mile on a really steep part (mile 29) then I need to have banked 13 minutes earlier in the race.

I say I call it 8 sections, but I represent it as 9 segments here so that I can show Aid #3 which is between 2 downhills that you can add together:

Segment-Description	miles	up'	down'	time	HI'	LOW'
A-----First Up	4.38	2214	0	1:11:02	3548	1296
B-----First Down	3.73	27	837	0:42:07	2639	3548
C-----2nd Up	4.3	1337	55	1:09:58	3983	2639
D-----Down to Aid Station	1.51	0	488	0:20:42	3983	3463
E-----Down Cornls Creek	6.29	119	2347	1:43:27	3463	1155
F-----Up Side Trail	4.06	984	230	1:15:04	1977	1157
G-----Down Side Trail	2.27	44	492	0:40:47	1977	1497
H-----Up AOF to high pt	4.13	2082	48	1:29:46	3542	1469
I-----Down to Finish	4.38	0	2214	1:11:02	3548	1296
Total	35.05	6807	6711			

So it is easy for me to know what to do. For the first 4.38 miles I'm hiking. The next 3.73 miles I'm mostly running. Then 4.3 more miles of hiking. Then 1.5 miles running down to Aid Station 3 and the cut-off time. The next 3 segments have some up and down but mostly they are one or the other. But this really sets my mind to hiking mode or running mode. It's interesting that I feel relief at the end of each of these segments. I'm relieved to run downhill when the time comes. But also I'm relieved to stop running and start hiking uphill when the time comes. When I'm hiking I might start digging at my pack looking for food or pills or to get out my battery charger. It's good to be distracted but not so much that it is slowing you down.

BEFORE THE RACE:

My time schedule I worked backward. The race starts at 5:30 AM. But I want to be there an hour early, 4:30 to register, see friends, chat, try to take a bathroom break, load stuff in car, and make last-second clothing/packing decisions. The drive takes 70 minutes from my house. So I need to leave at 3:20. Depending on how prepared I am I can sleep later. I set my alarm for 2:30 giving myself 50 minutes to dress, pack, cook/eat breakfast, load up cooler, mix lemon-aid in hydration pack, put stuff in backpack, etc.

WAKE:

When my alarm rang (I set 3 of them for security in case I slept through it) I instantly awoke ready to go. I did a thing the night before that I will probably continue. I took 2 pink allergy pills. I have found they help knock me out to sleep. So a bit before 10 PM when I was finally ready to get sleep I pretty much went to sleep and did not wake up in the night. So it was only 4.5 hours of sleep but at least it was a solid 4.5. I heard David Horton and Ed McKeown both say that what matters is how much sleep you get 2 nights back. I got 7 hours which is okay but not great.

The weather forecast was for temps rising from 50-69F with winds also rising from about 4-10 mph. Overcast all morning but with the sun poking out late. Little chance of rain. The good news on this is that I would not be tempted to wear a light jacket or long pants. Basically, my pack would not be consumed by clothes stripped off or taken "in case"

DRESSED:

I got up. Grabbed the pile of clothes. I have a favorite pair of running pants that with built in mesh underwear. I had planned to wear these but a week before the crotch wore through and gave up the ghost. I have a history of blisters or wearing myself raw at the waist and sometimes chaffing on my

inner thighs. Lycra (un-padded) bicycle pants largely solve this problem. I decided I needed to wear underwear under these and shorts over them because I need pockets for my phone and food. My mistake was in not getting pants with a drawstring. I struggled with my pants falling down (I've lost 30 pounds this year, the elastic in these pants used to keep them up). It wasn't a ridiculous problem. I'm a little bit hesitant with drawstrings because my long Lycra pants really cut up my waist at the cold TWOT race. If it is too tight this will cut on you after 60,000 strides.

FEET:

Toenails were recently cut I put rubber guards on my big toes then 12" tall Swiftwick socks that do great about drying off and preventing blisters. If I had these tall ones I would have saved a lot of pain at Barkley Fall Classic with the briers. It was cool enough that these did not make me hot and they could be folded down. In fact, I was glad to have a bit more warmth for most of the race. Then my New Balance trail runner 410v7 shoes. They already had 200 miles on them. Ideally, I think I would be about 70 miles into a pair of shoes so that I know they are broken in and won't make me blister but will also have good traction. I didn't fall or feel like I was slipping during the race so it worked out. My shoes have inserts in them that I credit with keeping me free of plantar fasciitis for 2 or 3 years now.

TOP HALF:

Band-aid and then duct tape on both nipples. Then short sleeve (not no sleeve, pack would rub me raw) traditional blue and white loose fitting but mostly Lycra, wicking shirt. This shirt has done me well and I will be in trouble when it dies. I brought several other shirts with me that I could add or substitute last second but stuck with it.

HAT/LIGHT:

I've recently finally discovered that a hat is a good idea. Because I sweat and it keeps sweat out of my eyes which is nice. I went with my Georgia Tech hat because my Gadsden hat buckle recently bit the dust. The trouble with a hat is I don't do well with a headlamp (under bill? over bill?). I ended up wearing a headlamp around my neck the first 12 miles of the race before stowing it and depending on the lights of other racers to show me the way for the first dark 4 miles. This has been true for me all 3 years of the race. Maybe I won't even bring a light next year. I guess it was nice to have in the dark port-o-john.

So, I'm dressed. The previous night I had gone through my equipment culling it. I was out of TP so I spun myself a new roll (I wish I had spun more). I tested earbuds (I've had trouble with them if you read past race reports) and USB wires for charging my phone (trouble here in the past too dealing with moisture and a bad phone battery). I would be lost without a complete Strava report. I packed 20+ electrolyte pills and a dozen ibuprofen, I had a bag of jellybeans, band-aids, Vaseline for blisters, a spare toe guard, and knife.

PACK/HYDRATION:

My pack I usually have to choose between the sleek model and the bigger backpack. In cold weather, I end up with the big one because I need the room to store clothes but I fit in the small one. I take note of which food I eat after the fact. I only ate 1/2 of my jelly beans and none of the half-tube of cookie dough I brought. I did bring a sleeve of crystal light that I used. I'm not sure what went wrong but I did not like the liquid much. Partly it was because I used the whole pack of lemon-aid even though the added water was less than a quart when it should have been for 2 quarts so it was too strong. I got

this water at aid station 4. I recognize that always carrying a full bladder of liquid is more for me to tow around and I need to trust the aid stations to have water and not carry so much around. I started with 2.5 liters of Cool Aid/lemon-aid. I had drunk maybe half of that by Aid 4 and added less than a liter of water plus flavor. Tasted too strong. I need to enjoy the liquid because it is important for me to drink. I did drink up at aid stations. I think I had 3 cups of Mountain Dew at 3 different aid stations and several cups of ice water at 2 aid stations. Plus 4 Popsicles at aid station 5. The ice came at aid stations 6 and 7. I took at least 12 electrolyte pills and maybe 15 during the race. 3 at a time at different points. I had 3 ibuprofen when I got up plus the same twice more during the race.

THE DRIVE:

So I get in my truck actually on time. Take 81 to exit 150. I love how Waze wants to save me 1 minute on the drive by cutting the corner through Blue Ridge instead of taking a straight shot to 220. At 3:30 in the morning, I don't need 10 extra turns on windy mountain roads with deep ditches on both sides and suicidal deer all around. I always struggle with where the highway splits in Bedford. I'm not supposed to take the Business route. I trust Waze this time. I exit off the highway and weave through town. I notice I'm following a truck. I end up following them all the way into the camp. Why else would anyone be out at this time of night?

PARKING/CAMPING:

We pull into the parking lot just before 4:30. Again why do people feel compelled to back into spots? I get it if there is going to be a mass, rushing exodus. But that's not happening at the end of this race. I see the mass of sleepy cars with tents scattered between the cars. Race Director David Horton suggests we spend the night on site. I'd like to do that so I can experience the race more fully, make friends, get to know people, and eat the pizza and desserts. Sounds like a fun time. Maybe you get more sleep also because you don't have to do the drive in the morning. But I'm old and I feel very likely to wake up sore from not sleeping in my nice bed. I have had serious, multi-day back problems because I decided I needed to look to my left before. Too risky. Also, this means no ice in my water bladder. No running water to wash, no shower, no privacy, risk of forgetting things, fighting for bathroom time. Get cold, can't sleep, air mattress deflates. I'm just not a camper.

RACE NUMBERS:

I park and leave almost everything behind. I walk 100 yards to the pavilion which is still in darkness. Go to the desk and register. I'm #263 this year. I was #284 last year and #325 the year before. I'm not completely confident of the system of numbering. My best guess is that it works something like this. Horton seeds the male racers starting at #1 through 50 or so and the female runners from 100 to 150ish. Then he starts filling in runners based on how many times they have completed Promise Land in the past. Once men get to 99 the next is 200. Once women get to 199 I think they start getting mixed in with the 200's and 300s too.

People who are new to the race are likely seeded based on their past results on Ultra Sign-Up. They have a scoring system to show how accomplished of a runner you are. You get a 100 for winning a race. I tend to score near 50 so it must be impossible to go beneath that. It seems like you get a boost to your score for being older or for being female. It has to do with where you place relative to others in the race especially those of your age group and sex. But that's all based on observation.

If you see someone wearing single digits or low 100s you know you are looking at a star and you won't see them again for the rest of the race. If you see someone in the 300s it is probably their first race. If you spot an old person wearing a low number you are almost definitely looking at a legend who has been doing this for decades and will likely beat you still. For example (spoiler alert) as I was coming into the finish a 70-year-old woman named Ruth Kohstall flew past me like I was standing still. Now she finished 80 minutes behind my buddy Dru Sexton who just turned 72 this week. It's humbling out there.

REGISTRATION:

Horton is busy and doesn't acknowledge me. I pick out my race shirt. It is bright light green this year with a bear on it. I'm pretty sure runner Helen MacDermott has designed the shirt. I know she has in past years and someone praised her for doing it this year. Looks good to me. More line drawing than painting like it has been my first 2 years. I look around the pavilion there are boxes of probably 12-hour-old pizza and desserts. I have been excellent on my diet since New Year's. But race day is different. A single day to get calories without guilt. I look around for the best options. I end up breaking off a bit of cheesecake and this fudgy chocolate chip cookie/brownie square. So good.

REVEILLE:

4:30 hits. Time to rouse the runners. Horton gets on the bullhorn to wake people up. No conch here. They have an hour until the start of the race. I head back to the truck and put up my new shirt. I also assemble my other things. Get the pack out. Grab my GT hat, I go in the cooler and grab 5 smallish oranges. I stuff them in the stretchy part of my pack. I always wear my key on a lanyard around my neck. It also has a whistle so I can call my dogs back and so I can whistle for help if I break down somewhere remote. But the danger is if I shed clothing I need to make sure I don't leave the necklace and key behind. I'm pretty prepared this year. Not a lot of scrambling. And again that is because rain is not going to be an issue nor is cold, wind, or extreme heat.

I head to the row of about a dozen port-o-johns for a last bathroom trip. The lines will grow from 3 when I arrive to 30+ as race time approaches. Then back to the pavilion which is now lit up and buzzing with activity. There is a line to register. Friends start appearing. I graze for a bit more food. I sit down and take off my backpack to conserve energy.

VISIT FRIENDS:

I talk to a guy that introduces himself as the RD of Iron Mountain (my first official Ultra completion). Brendan McNulty introduces himself to me. I follow a bunch of people on Strava. Some are people I actually know, some are star runners, some are people I have run into at races, and some are people who just tend to run the same races or same trails as me. I like to encourage them and see where they like to run to get ideas of my own. Also, they sometimes post pretty pictures. He's from Charlottesville but you can sort of get to know someone online by comments. I tend to post a bunch of selfies so I get recognized more than I recognize. Really no one posts more pictures than me.

I'm not going to remember the order of people or all of them but I chatted with Jennifer DeForest, Kat Van Orden, Zach Davis, Jack Bugo, Dru Sexton, Beth Johnson, Jacob and Jared Coccia (before and after), Seth Thomas, Drew Kaerwer, Heather Stokes, Joe Dudak, and Tim Lewis (after race). I introduced myself to Sawyer Magnett who was top female each of the last two years. We traditionally take a group photo of the Roanoke Valley Trail Runners (RVTR) behind their flag before the race. But

the flag wasn't there, nor was Dru. But we ended up taking a group photo about 10 minutes before the race.

START LINE:

Horton starts lining people up at the start line. He's making announcements over the bullhorn mostly looking for people who paid but have not registered that morning. At some point, it becomes apparent that his time does not match actual/cell phone/universal time. He's about a minute late. Which, I guess was good. Otherwise, his prayer and the singing of the national anthem would not have been possible. I'm on the edge, nearer the front than I deserve to be. But I figure I need every second more than most people. We count down the time and we are off.

START OF RACE:

I admit I jogged most of the way across the grass to the road (200 yards). Once on the road (pretty flat here) I was walking and people were streaming by me. There is about 2.8 miles of road that transitions from pavement to hard dirt/sand/rocks. It is constantly getting steeper too. If it weren't dark you'd realize how beautiful it is. There is a big creek running pretty heavily beside us. As mentioned I'm committed to vigorous hiking on uphill sections. For about a half mile I'm constantly getting passed. I turn around a couple times and can always see 12-20 headlamps behind me. None more than 50 yards back.

WALKERS:

A point is reached where I'm not being passed anymore. Now you don't see anyone running. Those still running are far enough ahead that I can't see them. Those who are more in my class have given up their initial show runs and are walking now. Because it is getting steeper and running is hard. I start passing people and I count them as I go past.

AID STATION #1/OVER STREET FALLS:

After 2.8 miles there is an aid station (Over Street Falls). We call out our numbers to the workers who are trying to track us as we all go by in a bunch. In years past all they have is water here (at the small waterfall where you leave the road and get on the single-wide trail and it gets even steeper). I didn't even slow down. Mile 1-13:50, Mile 2-15:44, Mile 3-18:30.

FIRST TRAIL:

It keeps going up for another mile and a half. There are some switchbacks. There are a lot of rocks with steps as high as 16", people are tightly packed so it makes it difficult to see what your next step is going to be but you want to pick the best line to reduce energy exertion and not trip. I'm mostly gaining and getting up to where there are about 60 people behind me once we complete the 4.38-mile first climb. We've gained 2214' of elevation. Mile 4-16:20.

FIRST DOWNHILL SEGMENT:

Downhill. And now we start running. It feels good to run. It has just started getting light out, so that helps. It's weird to run in tight formation. In a conga-line. It won't be long before the single-wide trail merges into a double-wide fire road and the congestion breaks up at this point. This portion of the race is a series of fire roads that circle around a mountain and eventually lead you up to the Blue Ridge Parkway. This section is cut out of the side of the mountain and is very grassy. I know from personal experience that it becomes nearly impassible in the summer. 6-foot high weeds, briars, and grass for

miles. This is probably where you feel the best. You get to see the sunrise and some beautiful views. The creeks are babbling, flowers blooming. Everyone is in a good mood. Not really tired yet. This first downhill segment is 3.73 miles long with 837' of elevation loss and 27' of gain. It is a pretty consistent grade. Easily the longest continuous run. Mile 5-13:56, Mile 6-10:18, Mile 7-10:03, Mile 8-11:24.

SECOND UPHILL SEGMENT:

At mile 8.1 it turns back uphill. The Second Climb Segment. This is the 3rd hardest climb of 4. In 4.3 miles you will climb 1337' and descend 55'. It is very comparable to climbing McAfee Knob on the fire road statistically. There is enough flat and it is early enough that I did a little bit of running at the beginning of this segment. Heather Stokes passed me and said hi somewhere in this section. Mile 9-13:56, Mile 10-13:25.

AID STATION #2/OVER STREET FALLS:

At mile 10.1 we get to the 2nd aid station (Reed Creek). This station had to be moved up to the BRP last year. But it was good that it was here because it split up the course much more evenly. There is a little bit of out and back to get to the aid station so you get to see the faces of runners coming back at you. I saw Helen MacDermott in here. At the aid station, I got 2 or 3 cups of Mountain Dew a couple of banana sections, and a piece of old pizza that I quickly threw into the woods. I decided to not fill my water up because it was still full/heavy. I could make it to the next aid station easily and had oranges in my pack still for hydration. So it was a very quick stop. This second half of the segment is definitely steeper. More people walking. Mile 11-16:55.

DISTRESS:

In my experience stomach distress comes on you pretty quickly and in a way that won't be denied for long. At mile 11.3 I had to find a pit stop. Unfortunately, this is a very open area. No thick forests, no big rock boulders. You can go way off-trail and waste time, I guess. My best option turned out to be a huge fallen tree on top of another tree. This was about 15 yards off the trail and blocked (most) everything beneath 4 feet tall. So what I am saying is that there was no mystery as to what was going on back there but there probably was not a good view. Well, there was definitely not a good view, hopefully there was no view. I also learned the lesson of packing enough TP. The end of the race was a bit of a battle to avoid a second visit with insufficient preparation. But I made it to the finish line. Finding a place in the last 2.8 miles would have been a major struggle.

BACK ON TRAIL:

I got redressed and tromped back out onto the trail. I merged in with a couple of young women. I spotted a Liberty logo on one. I asked if they were in Dr. Horton's class. They laughed and thanked me saying they had aged out of that some years ago. But it was the first Ultra for one of the girls and it had been a while for the other one. I think I saw them a few more times during the race. At this point you start to feel like you are getting to the top of the mountain, you hear some BRP traffic, and the top of the mountain seems close at hand. Each hill you hope is the last. There is a little downhill section. Another trail merges back in with your trail (an opportunity to make a wrong turn). Fog came on us. Mile 12-19:37, Mile 13-15:55.

BRP:

I can hear someone making noise. A race worker is stationed at the gate just before the BRP (mile 12.4). He's clapping and offering encouragement and congratulations. Great job! They say that to

everyone. But it feels good. He's there to point the way across the BRP to the well-marked gravel road across the street. Last year the 2nd aid station was moved to here. We are almost at the top. The 2nd climb done. I'm pretty sure I go digging in my pack at this point. I finally put up my headlamp that has been around my neck all day. Take some electrolyte pills. I got out my battery charger and hooked it up. My phone just won't last past about 4 hours. I carried the phone and battery pack hooked up together for a couple hours at least before packing up the battery pack.

SECOND DESCENT (BRP GRAVEL ROAD NEAR AOM):

This road is parallel to and above the BRP but beneath the giant golf ball at the top of Apple Orchard Mountain accessible on the Appalachian Trail (AT). Once at the high point (mile 12.7), it is probably the most run-able stretch of the whole race. There is a similar section beneath the AOF parking lot but I'll be more tired there. There are a couple people around me here. The girls from earlier are better runners (but slower hikers) they pass me here and pull away. I push myself and try to keep them in sight as long as possible. Another slower male runner is behind me and I push to stay in front of them. I ran this downhill road faster this year than the previous year. Probably my biggest effort of the day. I'll also note here that through 10 miles all 3 years were almost identical times. Almost to aid station 3 and the first time cut-off. Need to be there in 3:45. That's 9:15 AM. I'm about 23 minutes early. No worries. Mile 14-9:56.

THE FANS:

As I approach the aid station cars are parked along the road. These are aid station workers, friends, family, and crew. I see Zach Davis (a crazy good runner and biker who is crewing for his girlfriend Kat). We exchange greetings and I sarcastically ask if Kat is in front of me or behind me. She finished 5th among women at just over 6 hours. She mentioned to me that morning that she was being coached (remotely) by Rachel Spaulding Lemke who finished 2nd here a couple years ago and has graduated up to running in Colorado.

AID STATION 3:

The station is at 14.2 miles. Horton's signs say 11.9 miles. I don't get it. He wants to think the race is 31.75 miles in some documents. The shirts say 34 miles. My Strava says 36. Tables are set up. I pass on filling my bladder (trying to stay light). I do grab some sweet snacks, a couple banana segments, and drink multiple cups of Mountain Dew. I waste little time. This section is steep and rocky. It's only 0.3 miles to where we cross the AT. But I don't make it there. Well, not easily anyway.

INJURY/CRAMPS:

I'm walking. Eating and peeling bananas. Ironically, I think. Bananas at races are made to prevent cramps. But pretty much out of nowhere, I get a savage cramp. I do my best to keep moving. Pausing, sitting, resting, whatever only makes it worse in my experience. I'm hoping around. I can't point my toes, my ankle is stuck in as acute of an angle as it can be. I pray for the cramps to loosen up. It's both calves. I keep walking hoping for relief. Racers pass me. It's discouraging because this section would be pretty good to run. It is very rocky. A wonderful place to fall and get hurt. Not loose rocks though. I got cramps really bad at the TWOT race in February at almost an identical distance into the race but that was when I slipped and fell (thrice in a short distance on a steep, slippery downhill). On that day it was calves and thighs. Today it was mostly all calves. Both times the cramps would hang around for the rest of the race. I learned that the surest way to bring back the intense cramps was to trip, stumble, or

kick a rock. Anything to make my foot not step exactly as it wanted to. So rocky terrain was very dangerous. The smoother ground would be safer for testing things out. Mile 15-16:46.

AT & CONNECTOR TRAIL:

I passed the AT (mile 14.5) and continued on down to Connector Trail (mile 15.0) where I left the AOF Trail and headed towards Cornelius Trail. Connector is double-wide and mostly grassy with some small, muddy creek crossings. I tried running 3 or 4 times in this section but my calves would have none of it. This was very discouraging. My brain was doing math. Could I physically complete the race? Could I do it in time? At what point would I have to be cured and able to run? Could I just hike it all the way in?

CAN I FINISH IN TIME (MATH):

I spoke earlier about banking time. This race is basically 36 miles in 10 hours. If you walk 3 mph (20-minute miles) for 10 hours you go 30 miles. So you need to do 6 miles or 120 minutes faster than that. As I'm running I think about how many total minutes I have saved up faster than 20-minute miles. I know I need 120 to beat the cut-off. I'm at about 88. So that means I have to go about 20 more miles with crampy calves, still do 2 big climbs, and make up 32 minutes in 6 hours. Ultimately I said what else have I got to do with my day other than go for it? So I decided to see what happens. There were 2 ways to do this. Depend on being able to run at some point or hike/walk very fast. Either way, hoping I don't get worse.

CORNELIUS TRAIL:

Mile 16-15:09, Mile 17-16:35, Mile 18-15:17, Mile 19-17:39. I'm pretty proud of this. This section is steep downhill with loose rocks. Pretty technical. Very easy to fall, sit on your butt, send calves into terrible pain. There are also a couple of big walk through knee deep creeks in this section. So I made up about 15 of those 32 minutes in this section. The truth is that I needed to make up more than 32 minutes because I knew that the 3 miles up AOF were guaranteed to be slower than 20-minute miles (in fact I lost 20 minutes in that section). But this was hopeful. I could make up time walking. I kind of think of 17-minute miles as max walk speed but I could do 15-minute miles. How does this compare to my running speed? Well, I did have a 9:56 mile coming into the 3rd aid station. But that is not sustainable. I'd say 12:00 is my fastest sustainable trail speed for distances beyond 3 miles. So walking 16-minute miles is pretty encouraging, though it doesn't say great things about my running speed.

CORNELIUS CREEK:

I get to chat a bit with some people in this section about how rocky and technical the trail is and how we are getting close to Cornelius Creek (mile 16.8). Some older dude is teasing some girls about how one pushed the other. Finally after crossing a couple bridges and through a couple creeks along Cornelius Creek ... Let me mention this trail is beautiful I paid very little attention to it and barely took a picture. Constant waterfalls and slides and a fair amount of water rush through here. My pain and determination were what was going on in my mind. BTW to this point, I had not listened to any music or podcasts ... It gets smoother but still steep downhill at the bottom of Cornelius Creek as you approach aid station #4. So I try running again. And finally have some success. It was probably only for a quarter mile but I was able to do that at a 12:00ish pace into the aid station at mile 18.6. It's now 4:36 into the race and I have gone 18.6 miles. I'm more than halfway there, have done more than half the climbing, and less than half the time has elapsed. That's a good sign. Just do the same thing again (while tired and injured) and you've got it.

AID STATION 4 (AOF LOWER PARKING):

I'm greeted by people with pitchers of water. Yes, now is the time. I decide not to sit (trying to minimize cramp risks). But I take off my pack and disassemble it. I pull out the water (lemon-aid cool aid) bladder and have her fill it with water. Turns out only about a liter fit. I make a mistake at this point. I probably would have been good with weak lemonade. Instead, I pull out a sleeve of crystal light lemon-aid and because I can't bear to waste it I pour the whole thing in there. Maybe I should have just poured half of it in. For the rest of the day, it was too strong and turned my stomach to where I did not want to drink. This may have happened anyway as I don't like warm drinks and for stupid biological reasons, it gets really hard to keep down food and liquid during endurance running. I also take some ibuprofen and more salt pills here. These are a struggle to swallow. I grab a couple oranges out of my pack. I drink some Mountain Dew. I was hoping to find some Cheetos or Doritos. They had "breakfast" there. This is a much friendlier atmosphere than Barkley. but the cheese burritos did not appeal to me. I know I grabbed some cut oranges, probably some bananas and I think some gummy worms. And a Reese's PB Cup.

BEST BLOOD:

I saw Drew Kaerwer (a Roanoke guy and Strava buddy, he'd finish #52 in 6:20) at the aid station but he was about 8 miles in front of me. This aid station is also Aid #6 as the course circles back to this point. He said hi and showed me his bloody knees. He was a definite candidate for the "best blood" award given. Ultimately he would not win but it was a very good attempt. Ultra races are clearly a sick event held for people who feel the need to be punished for their sins.

AOF LOWER PARKING ROAD:

I left the parking lot. I was fairly sweaty. This is where I noticed my non-draw-string shorts were causing problems. I was trying to carry too much. All the food, the oranges, the battery charger, and phone. My pants were in danger of being around my ankles. This is a gentle smooth downhill on either hard dirt/rock road or asphalt. there was probably a bit of jogging here, but not much. Mostly fast walking. I think I finally unwrapped my earbuds from around my neck and listened to a bit of music. My mind was too busy to pay attention to a podcast. This carries you down to the low point in the course and you leave the road to head up Colon Hollow. This downhill from the BRP was 6.29 miles with 2347' elevation loss and 119' gain. Mile 19-17:39, Mile 20-13:48, Mile 21-14:45.

THIRD CLIMB/COLON HOLLOW:

Time to start the 3rd and easiest climb at mile 20.6. It was now 5:04 into the race. I had done a practice run through here about 10 days earlier. There were a number of fallen trees but I was glad to see they were all cleaned up. There are wet spots and small creek crossings in here. This 3rd section of the course is easily the low point in terms of beauty. These trails and fire roads are never chosen to hike or run on except for this race. There is nothing wrong with them. A lot of side-hill single trails and side-hill double-wide roads. Never too steep or too continuous. The uphill portion is 4.06 miles 984' gain and 230' loss. Definitely the most mixed with ups and downs of any segment of the race.

In past practice runs I had twice gone the wrong way. The more obvious trail stays lower and doesn't get up to the Colon Hollow Aid Station. I had learned that when you get to sort of a pasture/opening you need to go out left into that area. But it was marked and blocked from going the wrong way. At this point in the race, I was not sure I was not last. But at this spot, I passed a stopped runner. So I was

at least 2nd from last. It was just a couple hundred yards up to Aid Station #5 at mile 21.8. Mile 22-18:45.

AID #5/COLON HOLLOW:

There were probably 3 workers and a couple runners at aid station #5. I had been looking forward to this stop. I was hoping my memory was correct. I think this is the Popsicle station. I drank a trio of Mountain Dew Cups again. Then I asked - Do you have popsicles - they said yes, what color do you want? I'm greedy. I said is anyone behind me? Are we last? Can I have 2 a red and an orange? Sure. I think there are still about 10 people behind you. Great. So you look like you have a bunch of popsicles. Do you think I could have 2 more? They relented. These are the plastic tubes of liquid that you scissor open. I mentioned how hard it is to eat and take in calories. Oh, how much I love cold things. This was like the perfect food in the world. I would have gladly taken a dozen popsicles with me. I spent the next couple of miles working on popsicles.

I also now had some company. There are about 4 of us sort of swapping places. Someone runs past me and then a bit later I hike past them. One of them is a younger, tall, skinny guy. I tell him I'm impressed he can still run some. He explains that he injured himself like 6 weeks ago and that messed up his training. Had to be off it for several weeks. Normally he's a lot better. I tried hard to figure out who he was. I saw him after the race and he thanked me out for helping him out today. I asked how. Not really sure I understood the answer but I had encouraged him somehow. I think I was actually able to pull ahead of the other 3 guys. This section would be fairly easy to get lost in. In fact, I think this is where Beth Johnson got lost and added distance to her race last year and missed the cut-off, but at least she won the 2023 stupid award. Somewhere in here, you can see the golf ball on top of AOM. It's a cool view but disheartening for how far away and worse how high above you it is. Fortunately, the route does not quite go that high but it gives you a sense of how much climbing you have left. Mile 23-15:37, Mile 24-16:18, Mile 25-16:35.

DOWNHILL SEGMENT #3/BIG CREEK CROSSING:

At some point, this turns downhill. Last year it rained and turned this segment into a sloppy, wet, poison ivy-filled mess. This year it still had the poison ivy and there is still a lot of water. But it wasn't sloppy until the last half mile. This is the shortest segment at 2.27 miles with 492' of loss and 44' of gain. It starts at about 24.9 miles and goes all the way down to Aid Station #6/AOF Lower Parking at mile 27.1. At about 26.4 the trail takes a sharp right and heads downhill and it gets wet and sloppy. This is step in the mud and lose your shoe territory. There is about a half mile of this before you get to a very wide creek/river. As Nate Hale would say it is time for a free shoe wash. And you need it. There is a bridge that has long been out here. There is no crossing without getting very wet. Thigh high, 40 feet across. It is very refreshing. If I had been overheating I was committed to laying down here. But all the walking instead of running and the moderate temps meant there was no need for that. There is a temptation to just turn left and head up to AOF but there are workers watching you and pointing you downhill to the aid station at the parking lot. So there is an extended out and back section. You again get to see some people's faces who are just in front of you in the race. It is reassuring that there are some other people not that far ahead of you. Mile 26-15:52, Mile 27:15:51.

AID STATION #6/AOF LOWER PARKING:

This is the 2nd time cut-off. You need to get there in 7:15 or 12:45 PM. I beat that by 23 minutes. I had gotten to 130 minutes in the bank. But I knew I would be trading in some of those minutes on the

climb to BRP up AOF. Two years ago this is where my race really fell apart. Caleb Johnson was working at the aid station. He had me sit down and tried to rub my legs which threw me into spasms. I limped out of there off to start my fatal uphill limp. It was much different this year. For one it was much cooler, for another I had not been running. My heart rate was completely under control.

HEART RATE:

Heart rate is something that has come to mean a lot to me in terms of how I run a race. I don't trust my Fitbit to accurately measure that but I trust myself to judge it. But I need to be conscience and check in on my HR. I've got to keep it under control. Mentally I'm trying to keep my HR and effort pretty level the whole time. Running downhill at an 11-minute pace might be the same effort as a steep 30-minute pace climb. But today I rarely even had to think about HR because my cramps were the limiting factor, not HR. Even on the AOF climb, I was tired going uphill but the cramps were what delayed me as I tried to go up the steps.

MORE AID:

My best running friend and constant encourager Ed McKeown had told me that week that he had hoped to be at this aid station. Had asked me what window I expected to be there in. My assumption was that he was working the station. So when I pulled in I looked for him. Asked a worker if he had been there. No. That was disappointing. I could use a friendly face and some encouragement. My oldest son Ty had texted me a few times suggesting bananas but mostly encouraging me not to die or stroke out. He assessed the race as, "mildly uncomfortable." At least. My wife Ruth was busy and was absent from encouraging texts.

I knew what I wanted. I asked have you got any actual ice? Yes. Thankfully. They pulled out a bag and filled a cup up. Water went on top of that 4 or 5 times as I chugged down refreshing water. I didn't grab much else. Maybe some more bananas.

FOURTH/FINAL/WORST ASCENT/UP TO BRP:

I left the aid station. The final ascent is 4.13 miles with 2082' climb and 48' loss. I passed at least one of the guys I had been with on the last segment as he was coming into the station. Do I have to do this? Yes, you have to check in at the aid station. I got to the split and in front of me was a sight for sore eyes - Ed McKeown. I'm pretty sure I hugged him which was kind of a joke about how wet and sweaty I am. We speak for a moment. I'm surprised to learn that he is not heading on to the aid station to work but is planning to follow me back up AOF to his car at the BRP. This isn't a pacer, it's an unplanned (by me) hiker who will happen to be on the trail next to me for the next 3.5, hardest miles of the course. Super!

Each mile gets steeper. The first mile is pretty easy. And beautiful as you walk above and beside a beautiful creek, all the water that has come over Apple Orchard Falls. We catch up on how my race has gone, who I've seen, what I have eaten and drank, my cramps, how we forgot to get the RVTR flag for the morning photo, etc. Ed, Joey Klein, and I have a FB Messenger chat that goes constantly talking about all number of things. Short of my family I communicate with them more than anyone else. In our relationship Ed is the earnest one, I'm the sarcastic (hopefully funny) math nerd. But on this trip, Ed is pushing math on me. He keeps talking about how much time is left, how many miles, what our pace is. He tries to get me to set a goal pace up the mountain. I quickly dismiss his suggestion. No way. I tell him that I've got this. The only way I won't make the 10-hour cut-off is if I do something stupid

and push too hard up this mountain and stroke out or go into ridiculous, debilitating cramps. I don't have the exact time in mind where I would be in trouble but I left the aid station at 6:52 race time. 3:08 to do 9 miles. A 20-minute pace will get me there. I'm going to lose some time going up this mountain but half of that distance is downhill. I'll be able to make up time there. Two years ago those 3 miles were 65:06, 41:05, and 47:23 as I died. Last year it was 20:23, 26:46, and 25:02 when I was doing great. Mile 28-20:43, Mile 29-23:15.

APPLE ORCHARD FALLS:

We made it to the falls at mile 29.2. We stopped and took pictures. There were a couple people there who offered to take our pictures. Thank you. Ed had a rubber chicken (for reasons that I did not explore. If I had more energy I would have explored that). Ed posed the chicken so it would be in the photo. He managed to drop it and had to go climbing into the treacherous area to rescue it. He got in a conversation and I left him behind knowing he would quickly catch up as I was about to face the stairs. Over and over I tried to count the stairs but no way was I going to keep my mind on track for that task. Stairs really brought back the cramps. Paroxysms of pain. Had to pause numerous times. I can feel Ed calculating every delay. Worried about my on-time finish. I push on. We finally make it above the falls. We take pictures of the great view of the valley. That was hard but I know the worst is yet to come. We continue on to the smaller, upper falls. Very pretty. I told him how I had seen campers here recently. There is a bridge over the creek here. More cramps. Then more stairs. More cramps, probably the most painful of the day. We are crawling at this point. More math from Ed. He starts telling me how I'm going to need to jog on the way down (my math disagrees with him but I'm in no position/mood to argue). He makes me promise to jog. I promise him that I will jog as much as I can (knowing that means none unless a desperate finish is required). He tells me how I need to eat something at the aid station. I press on. We talk about those who are doing the Roanoke/BRP Marathon today also. He tells me a story about Keya Price and Pop-Tarts and how they are special to her. I'll have to go back and understand how that all fits together.

AID STATION #7/SUNSET FIELDS:

We inch our way up the steepest part of the mountain. Mile 29.8 we get to Connector Trail again and continue up the trail. Mile 30.3 we cross over the AT. I can see the ridge from here. I'm going to make it. It gets a bit less steep. I point out to Ed where I got my first cramps of the day earlier. Finally mile 30.6 we get to the BRP and Sunset Fields Aid Station #7 (same one as #3). Mile 30-32:26 (easily the slowest of the day). It's 8:24 into the race. There is actually more uphill (but not so bad) in the next 0.8 miles. Then 4.4 miles of downhill. So I've still got over 5 miles to go and 96 minutes to get there. I've got to be faster than 20-minute miles. Ed is worried about me. I'm not.

Again I ask if they have ice. Again, yes. Thankfully. Fill a cup with ice then 4 or 5 cups of cool water. Ed forces me to pick some food. I choose half a chocolate pop tart. This pleases him. I'll spend the next couple of miles forcing this down my throat and getting my fingers sticky. I hand off my Styrofoam cup trash to Ed as I carry my new cup of ice with me. I say goodbye to Ed and he wishes me well. That was very nice of Ed to make this long, special trip out to drag me up that hill. He contemplates driving to the finish line but the drive is so long and convoluted that he ultimately thinks better. All the other RVTR people are so far ahead of me he probably would not have gotten to see anyone he knows.

I cross the BRP being very careful of cars knowing that I am not at my mental sharpest. I see Eric Fogleman (learned name later, a 63-year-old from NC. We had passed each other numerous times that

day) He's sprawled on the ground just over the parkway. I ask if he's okay. The answer was positive but not completely convincing. I know I have some uphill left but I don't expect it to be too taxing. I'll watch my pace. Hopefully, I can make up some time on this section. At mile 31.4 I reach the high point. It's all downhill from here. Mile 31-25:13.

FINAL/FORTH DESCENT:

All I have left is 4.38 miles with 2214' elevation loss. This is single-track with some little mushy crossings. This trail can be rocky and steep. It would be easy to fall or kick a rock and go into cramps. There are switchbacks. It's a mile and a half downhill before you get back to the road and the closed aid station #8 at Over Street Falls at mile 32.9. At one point I feel someone on a switchback above me. I'm not sure if he ever catches me, maybe on the road way later but not on the trail.

AID STATION #8:

I get to the aid station at 9:03. I am confident that the distance is not more than 2.7 miles from here. I've made up enough time than I know I can do over 20-minute miles and still make it. It's all downhill and safe. I've got this now. Mile 32-17:15, Mile 33-15:36.

I don't like roads but this is pretty. No one drives here unless you live in one of the few houses along the creek. I'm surprised how steep it is here. At mile 34 I lose 686' in elevation. I'm glad I do not have to go up this now. Hiking up the 3rd mile early this morning I got to go up this. Much easier then. Somewhere in here Ruth Kohstall a 70-year-old woman from Ohio flies past me. I looked her up later. She finished a 100-mile race 18 months earlier. But she would finish 80 minutes behind my 71-year-old friend Dru Sexton today. So if you ever think I'm too old for this you are probably just too lazy or unmotivated.

ERIC FOGLEMAN:

I walk on. At some point, red and white striped Eric shows up behind me. He asks me about the time and if we are going to make it. I assure him we can safely walk it in. He pauses with me for a moment. I notice that he is wearing NC State colors (they just had a great ACC/NCAA Basketball run that my friend Ed McKeown also enjoyed). We quickly strike up a good conversation. I'm not sure what his plan was initially but he ended up walking with me for 2 miles. I told him that I wasn't running again until the final 200 yards on the grass to the finish line so we could impress David Horton and those still at the finish line. He told me stories of his health risks, we talked about races we had done, weight loss/maintenance, keeping food down, sports, squirrel mailboxes, and t-shirts, really a lot. We had a moment. He's not on Strava so it will be difficult to keep up with him.

THE FINISH:

Finally, we get to the home stretch. I notice a young girl (Maddie Kliment) coming up behind us. I was glad it was time to run so I could finish ahead of her too. We turn the corner and the crowd can see us. I think I heard someone call my name (probably Jared Cocchia). David Horton is on the bullhorn cheering us in. I know he called me Winn. I cross the line. I go over to the table where they are giving out the coveted running shorts that come with a finish. I have my choice of a solid color or something with a spicy design. I go for the design. I like these shorts much better than last year's shorts. They have mesh underwear, drawstrings, and front zipper pockets. Light blue/green. Someone mentioned to me that I could ask for my official time. 9:42:36. I finished #285 of 295. Not sure how many DNFs

there were. 300-340 people are allowed to register for the race. Mile 34-13:43, Mile 35-14:01, Mile 36-13:50.

DAVID HORTON RD:

I go over and greet David Horton. I thank him and take a couple selfies. Again he seems to remember who I am which is nice. He's a legend. First Barkley Marathon finisher, former record holder for AT time and I think PCT too. He's the race director and teaches running classes at Liberty University. Several movies and documentaries have been made about him. He's inspirational and encouraging. His most famous saying is "It doesn't always get worse." I thought about this when I cramped up and it wasn't going away. One could think it's only going to get worse and quit. But I thought, maybe it will get better, it doesn't always get worse. And it was true, it got better, not all better, but good enough for me to finish and have a good time.

COCCHIA TWINS:

I wander around looking for people I know. I struggle to find anyone. Finally I find the Cocchia twins who finished 5th and 7th in basically half the time I did. They had been watching people finish from their lawn chairs for nearly 5 hours. Wow. They are so encouraging and friendly. God does well to keep me humble. I'm not sure I would fraternize with people like me if I could run a 5-hour Ultra.

BETH JOHNSON:

Time is ticking down towards the 10-hour cut-off time. I see a blond woman finish. I wonder if that was Beth Johnson. But her hair is up and I remember Beth's hair was down this morning. I wander over to the finish line. Seeing her face, I recognize it is her. She's asking and making sure that she makes it in time. She shows me her watch which says something like 10:09. I assure her that it's before 3:30 and thus under 10 hours and there is the race clock at the finish. She finished in 9:49:28. Last year she just missed out on finishing because she got lost. She was so excited and emotional. I took pictures with her and David Horton. She had her finishing shorts and last year's Dumbest Award for the photos. This was a great moment. I received texts later from Ed wanting to know if Beth had finished.

OTHERS:

I saw Don Baradell at the finish. We spent some time together at the end of last year's race but he beat me by 37 minutes today. I found the famous legend of McAfee Knob Tim Lewis in the pavilion eating and assumedly editing photos for a social media post. I said hi and had a brief chat with him. I've probably run into him on McAfee 4 or 5 times (of my 64 summits and his 500+). Finally, I realize I've run out of people to chat with and I've got a lot to do at home so I decide to leave.

NO CELL COVERAGE/REPORTING RESULTS:

I don't get cell coverage for much of this race. Not for the first and last 4 miles anyway. When I finally got coverage I sent out a Strava Beacon text to family and friends so they could live follow me as Strava updated my progress. But if I don't have cell coverage it looks like I have stopped. This caused worry among some who weren't familiar with this "feature". Did you stop? Did you quit? Did you die? Did you make it in time? When I drove away and finally got close enough to Bedford to get cell coverage I could see Joey and Ed worried as to whether I had made it in time. I finally was able to assure them and my parents that I had made it.

When I was in high school I took Calculus with Ruth and we were assigned a fresh out-of-school teacher named Angela DeVoss. This means that she was not much older than us. Well, 35 years later she goes to the same church as my parents. I was told that my Dad was showing her live coverage of my race progress while they were at a hymn sing at Park Avenue Baptist in Titusville, Florida (where we were married).

Ed shared with Keya Price that I had eaten pop-tarts and she thought that was cool. Keya had spent the day (and week) staring in the Blue Ridge Marathon. I know she ran the Blue Ridge double (52+ miles) while I was doing PL.

HOMEWARD:

I take off. Fortunately, I don't have problems with cramps and am able to drive the stick shift without many problems. I communicated that I had finished the race to family/friends. Ruth texts asking when I am leaving (already on my way). I did leave myself very little gas so I had to stop by the highway for gas. There were about 40 senior citizens wandering around the parking lot blocking traffic. While filling a passenger bus shows up and they load up. Looked like lost children. I contemplated picking up Little Caesars on the way home like I had done at TWOT but honestly, my stomach was still sour so I waited.

HOME/UNPACKING:

I got home to not much of a reception other than dogs who were glad to see me and wanted to go on a hike (not today, but tomorrow). I chatted with Ruth a bit while I unloaded the cooler and backpack and dumped my water bladder. Wet clothes into the basket. I have a rule that I can eat on race day then I have to give it all away so I distribute my uneaten jelly beans and cookie dough (not touched). The next morning I will send out a text telling people to please eat the leftover pizza and ice cream. I can't let this turn into a binge. If you looked at a graph of my weight last year you would see that I put on 40 pounds starting at the end of Promise Land going through the end of the year. Not this year.

UPSTAIRS:

I head upstairs to put up all the bonus clothes and equipment I brought. Turned photos the correct way, and added them to my Strava post. Made a quick Facebook post with photos. Jumped in the shower. Laid down in bed for a bit to congratulate all my friends who had finished Promise Land or the Blue Ridge Marathon. Then responsibilities. Watched some videos on how to replace a 2004 Chevy Tahoe water pump. Convinced myself I could do it. Got out the PC and priced the parts. Do I need gaskets? Do I need a new thermostat or can I re-use the old one? I make an online purchase.

SHOPPING:

Head downstairs. Tell Ruth I'm going shopping. Order a Little Caesar Pizza online. Need to return a car tool, pick up the water pump, get pizza, and get ice cream. Ruth accepts my offer to get her ice cream too. When I arrive at Little Caesars they don't know me. Show them my order on the app. Notice that it is for Hollins, not Salem. So stupid. I don't actually start crying but I ask if they can make me a pizza. The guy pulls out a pizza and gives it to me. Thank you very much. Delicious. I go to Kroger and get Ruth some Rocky Road and me some Chocolate Brownie Swirl. If I had it to do over I think I would have just eaten the whole box of ice cream and skipped the 4 slices of pizza (which was good). Then home.

EVENING:

Think I watched a bit of Braves baseball. Had no energy to watch the (disappointing) Liverpool match from earlier in the day. I had been up early that morning and quickly passed out.

SUNDAY:

Sunday morning I woke went to church, had lunch, and headed outside to replace the water pump. This took about 4 hours. The most difficult part was getting the radiator fan off the old water pump. There is no good way to grip it to get it to turn and unscrew. I used an old wire clothes hanger and a plumbing wrench to get it. I took the car for a test drive. Seems okay. I've had so many car repairs lately. Finished too late to make it to evening church. But the dogs were the beneficiary. I was able to take them on a hike. It was great that I had recovered enough that I was able to climb our 1500' mountain. Now I couldn't run any. I was able to run some on Tuesday. So this was a pretty quick recovery. There had been no waking up with cramps in the middle of the night. I'm sure not pressing it/running at the end helped my recovery.

DAMAGE:

I don't get a cold after the race like I have done fairly often in the past. There was evidence of some internal bleeding again, but just the normal stuff. No cuts, bites, or rashes worth mentioning. I did get some relatively minor wear at the back waistband/belt line from my pants. The worst was that I rubbed myself almost raw under my left arm. Not bleeding, not horrible. It was a bit surprising because this is what I might get if I had worn no sleeves but I had on sleeves. Also had some chaffing lower on my sides (both sides) 3 or 4 inches above the belt.

SOCKS:

I was surprised when I took off my shoes that both socks (\$25 12" Swiftwick Aspire socks) had worn completely through at the heel. During the week I checked for a guarantee. This was only the 3rd time I had worn this pair. I save them for big events. They have a satisfaction guarantee so I called and then filled out an online form. They quickly got back to me and asked for a picture. They say they are sending me 2 replacement pair. So, that is good. Hope these last. Swiftwick has done me well in terms of preventing blisters which used to be a fairly large problem for me.

CRAMPING ADVICE:

I asked Ed and Joey and now I will ask you, reader -

I wanted to ask you all's (y'all's) advice. TWOT and Promise Land I was crippled by leg cramps at about 15 miles each time. PL was basically all calf. TWOT was calf and thighs. Both legs in each case. TWOT there was an initial accident/fall that kicked it off. Not really at PL. After both of these when I kicked a rock or did something funny with my feet it was likely to set off cramps.

How can I prevent this? I was pounding the electrolyte pills all day. Took like 15 of them. I drank about 3 liters over the course of my day from the bladder. Plus Mountain Dew and 3 aid stations plus ice water in abundance at another couple of aid stations. Plus 4 popsicles. 6 oranges. Jelly beans. A couple pop-tarts. Not sure I was under-fed. Maybe. Would have liked to have eaten some salty stuff but they did not have much in the way of chips.

Just run longer in advance? Weigh less? Run harder in training? Don't be old? Why all the cramping?

Ed said - I am not sure about cramps. It seems to be a combo of hydration, electrolytes, fuel, training, and overexertion. It may be that you need to do more double-digit mile runs?

AFTERMATH/THOUGHTS:

I'm happy to have finished the race in time. I have now finished twice in three tries. But it is kind of hard to judge. It is sort of an incomplete since I got injured and did not run the last 20 miles much at all. It's a challenge to defy age and time as the years go by. I'd like to challenge myself to improve my time. Not sure what to set as my goal. I'm going to say 8:30. Definitely under 9:00. I wasn't to be under 200 pounds. I probably should be more like 185 pounds. I also want to have found the answer to my cramping problems.

I have been accepted to Barkley Fall Classic on September 21. I want to finish the full race in the 13:20 cut-off. I did not even get a marathon in 2023 when I was accepted about 3 weeks before the race and was out of shape. I've been on in terms of diet for almost 4 months now. I need to stay on and lose the weight. Also, keep up the hiking and running. I think this will get so much easier and more pleasant when I am not carrying around so much extra weight.

I looked at a friend's recent run. It was twice as distant as mine (though flatter) in about the same time as mine and with the same calories burned. This tells me some interesting things. I should be able to go twice as far and fast with the same energy expended if I was in great shape. That's sort of good news but it is sort of bad news. The calories are harder to burn. I will have to train harder to burn fewer calories. Losing weight is going to get harder I'm going to have to reduce my diet to properly feed a shrinking me. Also, I want to get back to lifting weights. I need that for strength and looks and to reduce injury risk. I feel motivated. I think I have a good plan in terms of diet rules. I am going to have some limited-defined days/meals where I can have bad food. I'm not going to allow a slow drift where I lose sight of my rules and my goals.

NEXT YEAR:

Joey asked me if I was going back to Promise Land next year. It really didn't take any time for me to say yes. I recognize that I need a next thing to keep me in line with my diet and training and I love and enjoy this race and the people involved.

STRAVA:

<https://www.strava.com/activities/11226593277>

You can find all the stats, maps, and a bunch of photos at that link.

https://ultrasignup.com/results_event.aspx?did=112344 - Ultra Signup Results