

## Well That Was a Screwy Idea by Chris Koppenhaver



I never would have expected it, but drilling a few sheet metal screws into the soles of my shoes worked like a charm. I could run across solid sheets of ice as though they were dry pavement with no slippage. The shoes even gripped on all but the steepest slopes. So simple, yet so effective. Almost everyone I saw had done it and more were having the race organizers do it for them before the start. Those I saw who didn't spent the race slipping, sliding, and falling on their butts, and some who were going longer even took the time to have screws added at the end of their first laps. I don't think I would have wanted to run the race without.

On the other hand, even though regulars swear by it and everyone was doing it, I doubt many of the others weigh in a good bit over 200 pounds like I do. My first reaction to the idea was that it was crazy because the pointy ends of the screws would be pointing up at my feet, but I got the shortest I could find, three-eighths of an inch, and the soles of my shoes were clearly thick enough that there was no way they could poke through. And they didn't. (At least not that I can detect when feeling with my hands, but there are three little holes in the bottoms of my inserts now that make me wonder; although even those holes don't go all the way through.) But the problem, which I didn't even realize was happening until I'd been running on them for a while, was that they sharpened the impact of every step. Instead of the shoe padding distributing my weight across the entire surface of my feet, they focused that pounding into 18 (per

foot) very hard, unforgiving points of impact. The heels of the shoes were thick enough that I never would have known the difference, but my forefeet . . . I'm amazed they're not covered with little black bruises today because that's how they feel.

At first my steps were just a bit more jarring than normal, which made sense given the fact that I was running on either frozen ground or hard ice through metal points. But the stability and grip felt great. I got off to a good start. I was pretty fast and pretty far up there in the pack, but I'd run out there before and thought it was a pace I could maintain. About a third of the way through they added to the trail an extra mile or so detour of ultra twisty-turney running. When we came out of that section I knew I was going to have to back off the pace a bit because I was beginning to hurt, but I didn't make the connection to my feet yet. A couple miles later we had some open running while crossing the dam at the halfway point, and it was during that stretch that I became aware that my feet were hurting. From there it got worse, and I was quickly feeling every one of those screws in my forefeet, biting into me. My feet tightened up against the pain, which tightened up my ankles and legs in response. Soon I was running stiff instead of loose like you need to when on a trail. I lost all stability and felt like I was on the verge of a stumble with every step. The last two or three miles my only goal was getting to the finish, my pace slowed to a crawl, and I walked up most of the steep inclines instead of fighting to reach the top.

The first thing I did after finishing--before getting a drink or changing into dry clothes or anything else--was limp over to my car and get out of those shoes (thank goodness I brought another pair to drive in). Then I drove the hundred yards back to the shelter by the finish for a bit of food, and by the time I got there my left foot was cramping and I had to jump out in a hurry to stretch it. Two days later they still feel all battered and bruised.



Still, it wasn't awful enough to ruin the experience for me. I had a good time and would do it again. Maybe not on ice since the screws don't seem to work for me and it's too slick without, but if the ground is dry I'll definitely give it another go next year. And if I wear comfy shoes now I hardly notice soreness; I took the dogs hiking for 90 minutes yesterday. I started fast enough that I still managed to finish in a decent time and the race organizers put on a really good event. Overall I have to give it a thumbs up.

Click [here](#) and [here](#) if you want to check out some photos of the event (remember, everything white you see on the ground is not fluffy snow but hard, slick ice; and that's not me on the right, but it's a good shot of the trail). And click [here](#) for a race description, a link to results, and--soon to come, I'm sure--links to others sharing their experiences of the event.