

Race Report: 2007 Mt Hood PCT 50-Miler

By Bad Ben Holmes, Kansas City Trail Nerd

This was my 2nd year in a row for completing the “Mount Hood Pacific Coast Trail” 50-Mile trail race, in Oregon. This fifty-miler is a trail run on the Pacific Coast Trail, and is an out and back course from the Timothy Lake Area to Mount Hood's Timberline Lodge (and back).



Course Profile.

I had planned to run another event on this same day, my 6th Minnesota Voyageur 50-Miler, but when I found out that my “Ultra-Blog-Buddy,” Olga Varlamova was going to be co-race director, I just had to go back. Of course, with the event being held the same week as the Oregon Brewer’s Festival in Portland (and me being a homebrewer), I had a another great reason to go back. Any excuse to run on this beautiful course on any given year is alright with me!

My wife and son also went. We all needed a break from work, our normal routines, (and the thick Midwest humidity). I have a nephew and a few friends that live up

there, so that also makes it a natural vacation destination for us. We also used to live in the Pacific Northwest, and we always try to find ways to get back to our original “home turf” for a while.

We flew-in to Portland on late Wednesday night. By late, I mean our plane arrived at Midnight-thirty (our time), so we finally got to the De Luxe Hotel in downtown Portland at about eleven-thirty (Portland time). We used to stay in this same hotel back in the Nineties, when it was a discount hotel called the “Mallory Hotel.” It’s a vintage hotel with gorgeous high-ceiling rooms, furnished with period furniture but with all of the “modern trappings” of our modern lifestyle. I really like this hotel, and with a location right next to the light rail line, it makes it very handy for getting around Portland. It’s pricey, but if you shop well ahead of your stay on the internet’s “discount” hotel and travel sites, you can get a room for about one-half of normal price.

The next morning after breakfast, my son and I decided to walk and take the light rail system all over downtown Portland. A little after noon we went to the Brewer’s fest to check-out this year’s offerings. The weather was perfect; the attitude of the crowd was great, and we had a pretty darn good time. We paced ourselves and didn’t go too nuts; after all, I still had a mountainous 50-miler to run on Saturday. We met some interesting characters, and (somehow) got interviewed for a new Northwest Brewing publication, based upon my son’s and my previous professional experience in the brewing industry, and my trail running and ultra-running exploits. Go figure!



First Beer in Portland

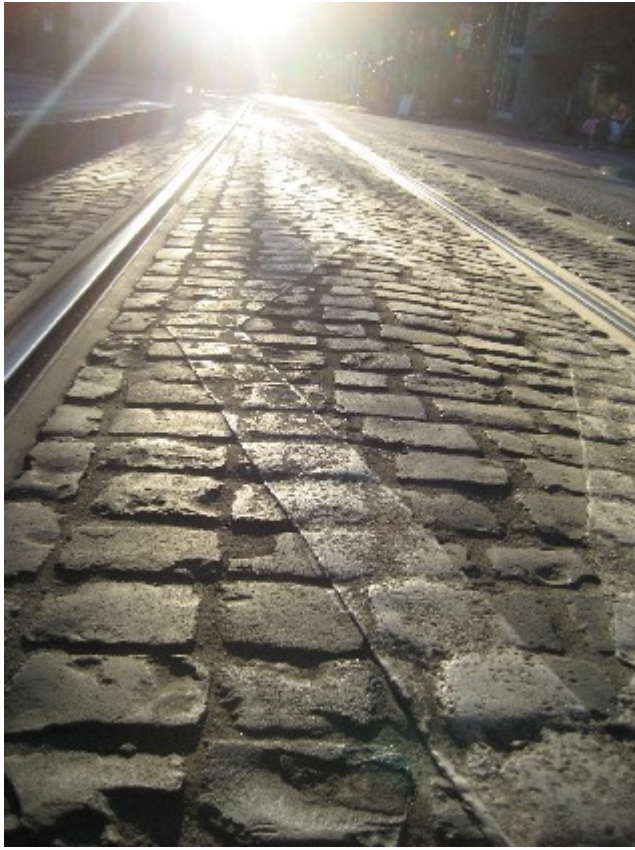


Oregon Brewer's Fest Server.

We were on our feet for about 16 hours on Thursday, and ended up walking at least 15 miles for the day. In retrospect, I don't think walking a lot on Thursday or Friday had much of an affect on my race performance. One of our high points on our Thursday walk, was seeing a guy in full drag wearing a fanny pack and a big, floppy & flowery hat, rifling through some trash to collect recyclables. He's "a regular" in the downtown area, and does his part for the environment.



An avid recycler.



Light Rail is Good.



The MAX is handy.



The wall at Voodoo Donuts.



A bunch of Savages in this town!



Espresso at Stumptown Coffee.



The bathroom at Stumptown Coffee. A bunch of Savages in this town!



A great place to find Dub, Reggae, Hip-Hop or Punk.

My son ended up spending Friday and Saturday with my nephew, so my wife and I had some quality sightseeing and race day time together. We left Portland in the early evening on Friday, after rush hour had subsided. We already knew the race start location, so we spent our time getting to and settling-in at our lodging for the evening. There was no air conditioning, but there was no need for it. Just open the windows and let the spruce, cedar, and hemlock-scented (cool) forest air in. In the background, you could hear a river crashing its way toward its final destination with the Pacific Ocean. It was a little slice of Heaven on Earth.

Saturday was race day, and our alarm clock went-off at 4:30 a.m. I had laid-out all of my race preparation the night before, so I had a leisurely time going through my normal "pre-race rituals." It was a 40-minute drive to the start of the race, but we didn't mind the drive, because it was so beautiful winding our way through the forests and mountains.

I signed in and I finally met Olga in person, (and she gave me a hug). It's like we now

know each other pretty darn well, based upon the blogging world and emails. I guess it's no different from being "pen pals," the get-to-know media of previous generations. St. Louis ultrarunner, Travis Liles was at the starting area, also. I first met him at our Psycho Wyco 50K race in February.



Olga and me.



Travis and me.

The race started on time, and we were off. We had a little half-mile out-and-back on the pavement go get out of the way first, before we hit the trails. Matt Hart, the eventual winner, was about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile ahead by the half-mile point. He would later tone-down his speed to a "reasonable pace" for the fifty-miler. Travis and I ran together and chatted for a spell, until I had to take a much needed "bear in the woods" break. We would end up seeing each other, throughout the race day.

Once my pit stop was complete, I was running completely alone for a while. It was weird that I saw no one for over 20 minutes; then I remembered that there were fewer runners allowed in the race, this year. I finally started overtaking runners. I caught up with Steve Gruel from California, and ran with him for a long while. We had

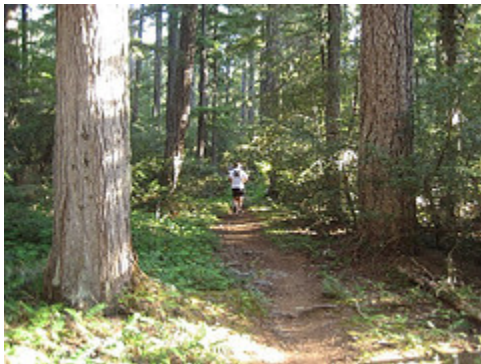
both played support roles at the Western States 100 this year, and had a lot of fun getting to know each other and talking about that.



Steve on the trail.



Our turn-around point (goal).



Big Trees

We got to the Highway 35 aid station at mile nineteen in 3 hours and 35 minutes. This aid station is at the base of our climb up Mount Hood. Vicki was waiting for me there. I didn't need anything but water, so I gave her a kiss and told her to meet me at Timberline Lodge.

The slog up Mount Hood has some runnable parts, and a lot of "grunt-walking" parts, as I like to call it. I'm sure that Matt Hart and others of his talent run 80% of the climb, though. For me, the climb had a lot of fast walking, interspersed with the occasional slow jog. Steve and I had picked up Jeff Flaker from Boise, a few miles back. The three of us "new trail friends" were just plodding along and talking, when Matt Hart flew by (from the other direction), coming down the mountain at full steam. He looked relaxed and confident, with a wry smile on his face. That was at four-oh-seven into the race. In about a half mile, Steve and Jeff took off ahead of

me. That was fine with me; I needed to run my own race, at my own pace. I passed a lot of runners going up, and a lot were coming down. Many of these runners had taken an early start.



Getting closer to turnaround.





Mile of Sand.



I got to the top of the climb, after having gone through the “Mile of Sand” that is on the part of the trail above the tree line. The aid station at Timberline Lodge was a

couple of hundred feet below me, and I made my way down. I got there right at 5-hours and 10 minutes, about the same time as I did last year. Vicki was waiting to help put sports drink powder into my bottles, and see to any other needs. No...I was pretty much fine. I wanted to eat some potatoes, but the ones at that aid station were raw. I grabbed a "Green Bar" to munch on during the run, and headed out.

The trail heads back up the mountain "a ways," before descending the mountain. On the way down, I didn't run as fast as I did the previous year, (by design). Last year, I hit that downhill section really hard, and my stomach "went south," in a big way. I think all of the pounding may have contributed. This time, I took it conservatively. I got to the bottom okay, but still had a little bit of sour stomach. Hmm. Maybe I wasn't taking-in enough electrolytes. Vicki was there at the aid station, and she helped me get out my secret weapon for this sort of circumstance: Alka-Seltzer. It tends to help my sour stomach, it has some aspirin in it, AND it has a lot of sodium content. I took some food with me for the next long uphill, and let my stomach settle before running hard again.



For the next few miles, my motivation was lacking, somewhat. Nothing much was wrong (with me), I just needed to run more than I was. I needed something to pick up my spirits, and I didn't want to resort to using my iPod on this run. I finally got to the FS-58 aid station, at mile 40.7. Last year, they had some homemade Lefse here, (which is Norwegian potato-based flat-bread). And there it was! I grabbed two pieces. It really hit the spot last year, and this year was no exception. I started to feel energized again.

I started running with a vengeance. I was passing rocks and trees like they were

standing still! I passed a few runners along the way. Some of them I had a chance to talk to; like Russ Hammond from Connecticut, whose wife was running the race, and was slightly ahead of him.

I stopped for about 30 seconds at the next aid station, ate some fruit and filled one water bottle. That's all I'd need, with just six miles to go!

I took off running and was making some good time on the trails. I got to a non-technical section of wide trail near Timothy Lake. It was smooth and fast, and I was cruisin'. I recognized this part of trail...this was the same section that I ran into a bull and three cows, last year!

All of a sudden I was flying "Superman-style," parallel to the ground, with arms outstretched! I landed hard, on my face and upper chest area. I skidded in the loose dirt and was stopped suddenly by a big round rock. It felt a lot like getting a roundhouse kick in the face, from my old "martial arts days." My ears rung, but the ringing was subsiding quickly.



I took a quick inventory of my situation:

My eyesight hadn't narrowed and I could still hear. That's good; that meant I wasn't going to go unconscious. My nose was broken and skinned-up, my chest was bruised, the inside of my cheek was bleeding, and my knees were bruised and bleeding. There were no "gushers," just oozing blood. There was one more thing. During my skid on my face, my mouth and nose had filled with loose dirt. I had used the rest of my water to rinse and gargle the dirt out of my facial orifices. Other than that, I was good to go, especially with the extra shot of adrenaline that was coursing through my veins.

But go where? I had lost track of which direction I was supposed to be running! I looked for footprints. Most of them were heading in one direction. I started walking that direction, and someone with an orange shirt appeared behind me (running). Good. This must be the way!

I took off. I really took off. I passed a couple of runners. Someone that I had run with earlier was coming up from behind. It was John Powell (from Seattle). He said that what I had told him earlier (about finishing in under eleven hours) had inspired him. He knew he could do it, and was making a valid attempt. We caught up with Erin Wolford (from Ashland, Oregon). She and I had played cat-and-mouse coming back from mile 25. She's an awesome downhill runner, but had run out of downhill on this flat section. She said that we were inspiring her to run faster, and we all made a pact to finish in under 10-1/2 hours. So we cruised.

When we finally got to the pavement again, ½ mile from the finish, we were stoked. And they finally noticed my dirt and "damages." We crossed the finish line in 10:25:15, locking arms. This finish was good enough for 2nd place in my age group.

Olga came over and gave me a hug, and I apologized to her, for "injuring" her trail. When Vicki first saw me, she had a look of shock on her face, and then started laughing. (She's used to this, by now). I got my medal, the EMTs cleaned my knees up a little, I said my goodbyes, and we left. (I was real hungry, you see). I didn't wash-up much for dinner. I put a pair of long pants on over my grimy and bloody legs, left my running shoes & socks on, put a new tee-shirt on, and used baby wipes on my face, arms, and hands.

Thirty minutes later we were at the Mt. Hood Brewing Company, in Government Camp, Oregon, and we were watching the Tour de France on their flat-screen television. I ordered an Ice Axe India Pale Ale, and a large burger with fries, followed by a Hogsback Oatmeal Stout. Ah...calories in a hurry! We finished up and headed back to our digs in Welches, Oregon.



The next day, we met back up with my son. He and I did a lot of walking all over Portland, which was good therapy for my legs. The plane ride back on Monday morning wasn't uncomfortable at all, due to all of the walking, I think.

If you ever want to run on a beautiful course and meet some really nice people, you've got to do this race. You'd better sign-up early, though. It filled up by March 8th, for 2007.

Happy trails,
Bad Ben

More photos:



No visit to Portland would be complete, without having breakfast at the Bijou Cafe.



Breakfast is served at the Bijou Cafe.



The OBF has some crazy characters at it.



The Voodoo Donutmobile

Blog version of this report

<http://badbenkc.blogspot.com/2007/08/race-report-2007-mt-hood-pct-50-miler.html>

Kansas City Trail Nerds web site:

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[Race Website](#)