

Rocky Raccoon 100-Mile Race Report

Saturday, Feb 3, 2007

Well, I'm back in one piece, more or less.

I finished in 24:58. Not great for me, but I finished! And and I GOT MY 500-MILE RR100 FINISHER'S SHIRT! (This is for being stupid enough to run this race 5 times, which I am). Actually, I've run it 5 years in a row, and have never finished it in over 25 hours.



Me with my 500-mile shirt after the race.

Photo by Kristi Mayo

The Drive to Texas on Thursday:

Driving down for 13 hours to Texas by myself wasn't that bad, except for the weather. When it snows in Dallas, you know that you've got a white-knuckler on your hands. It usually only takes me 11 hours to drive down. I got to Huntsville unscathed, though. I drove right to Huntsville State Park (where the event was being held) and went right to the shelter that I wanted in the campground. I put the "Trail Nerds" banner on it to reserve it.

Then I went to the hotel, which is on the Sam Houston campus. It's a very inexpensive hotel...so inexpensive that I **was afraid that they would steal my towels**. It was still clean enough for a guy just bachin' it, and was devoid of cockroaches, which made it just fine. After checking into the hotel, I got some grub at a very decent restaurant. Then I headed to the hotel for some shut-eye.

Friday:

I made myself a veggie smoothie for breakfast. I headed to Starbucks, then to the shelter and put my crap into it. I got to talk with Joe Prusaitis, the race director, and gave him a Trail Nerds shirt. I ate lunch back in town, and then came back to the park to talk to the other runners and wait for "our talk" and the pre-race dinner. The meal was great, once again. Sammy Voltaggio does an awesome job with the food at this gig. The talk centered around course issues because of the previous weeks of rain. Muddy conditions don't bother me, though. I'm just fine with mud, so I wasn't concerned.

Race Day:

I got up early, and went through my pre-race routine. Everything was fine. Everything was perfect. I was ready for all five 20-mile loops on this course.

All in all, I basically had a bad race day. I've been really busy of late, and have not been well-rested at all. I think that was at the heart of my problem to start with. The run went well at first, but I went out too fast for the first 20 miles, and did a 3:28 first loop. I started having pain in my legs after that. I felt even worse after 40 miles. From there, things took a downturn. I'm good at persevering and running through pain, so I

put on a good front for a long time. Self-denial is truly an attribute in ultrarunning.

From mile 60 onward, I was on a frigging death march for the last 40 miles. My whole body ached, and I was unusually tired. I haven't felt that bad in a very long time. I was also colder than I've ever been in a race, (for at least the last 40 miles), and I could never get fully warm. I ended up dry-heaving the whole last 20-miles, so I was dehydrated and hallucinating. I also experienced sleeping while I was running/walking. It was hard to keep a straight line going across the park's bridges (that don't have guardrails). I made it to the finish line though, and even pushed myself to run the full last 2 miles (to make it in, in under 25 hours). I got to the finish line (and later) bent over heaving so hard that I actually did a shoulder roll.



The soggy course, this year. (unknown photo source)

I've come to view 100-milers as analogous to life in many ways, but also to the process of dying. I think some of the pain we experience during a race like this prepares us for the agony leading up to death. This may be a morbid thought, but it's based on how I have felt during most of my 100s and from watching my dad die from cancer. In fact, I think the "more mature" runners (such as this 49.99-year old) have a better chance of finishing "hundreds" than most younger runners, because we've experienced much more pain in our lives, both physical and mental. Sorry if I wax philosophic, but this one was a mind-f*ck to no end.

Fellow Trail Nerd, Rick Mayo did really well. I am really proud of him. He had some terrible times early-on in the race, but he pulled himself back together, readjusted his plan, and finished with style. Gabe Bevan (who had flown down to pace him for 40 miles) wouldn't have let him drop under any conditions, either. Rick knew that a mental (or physical) ass-kicking from Gabe would have hurt worse than anything he had been going through. Rick & Gabe passed me at mile 85 and really put the hammer down for that last 15 miles.

Fellow RBF Blogger, Rick Cook (aka Dirtrunner) from Woodlands, Texas, ran a strategically smart race, and did everything right. His preparation and discipline were exemplary. He had to drop at mile 80, though, due to an ongoing calf injury. It was a wise decision...he will live to run this thing again. I had to make a similar drop at CCC100 last year, because of a hamstring rupture. It's not a fun thing to DNF, after so much preparation, believe me. You have a year's worth of training and angst going into it, and it can be a let down. Rick will kill his Raccoon soon enough.

I got to run with Catra, aka Dirt Diva for a few miles. She's a lot of fun and very upbeat. She had a tough time, too, and finished just 12 minutes or so behind me. You'd never know that she was having a tough day, because she genuinely loves being with and talking to the people around her. Quite a nice person to run with. She just radiates positive energy.

My SLUG buddy Dale passed me at about mile 65 or so, but ended up dropping due to "feeling real ugly."



Sunset over Lake Raven.

Only 40 more miles to go!

Photo by Kristi Mayo

My friend, Patrick Perry (from Lee's Summit) finished his first 100 miler. We ran about 40 miles of it together, off and on. He had to tough it out alone, like me for the last 20...on a death march. I saw him as I was headed out of the mile 80 aid station. He looked like "death warmed-over" but still managed a familiar smile. He finished slightly behind me. I can't tell you how hard it is to go back out from the main aid station feeling as crappy, cold, and "run over" as Pat obviously did. It takes a lot of guts and determination. It also takes a belief in yourself that you can overcome some major physical, mental, and emotional obstacles. It takes a "well of spiritual strength" to do this. Once you've stretched the envelope of this well of strength, you can start doing even more amazing things, and handle even more adversity in your life. I truly believe this.

This is one of the reasons many of us love this crazy sport. As the race progresses, your persona slowly deconstructs. Actually, things start getting stripped-away, one "onion skin" at a time. Ego goes out the window. You are stripped down to your base emotional beast-self. Psychologists would have a field day, if they could listen-in on a person's thoughts during one of these events.

This Summer, I'm going to pace Pat on the last 40 miles of the Western States 100. He asked me about WS100: if he felt this bad at RR100, what would it be like in the heat, mountains and altitude. I said, "be afraid; be very afraid and train accordingly." I didn't mean anything bad or flippant by saying that. I think he knew what I meant, and took it to heart.

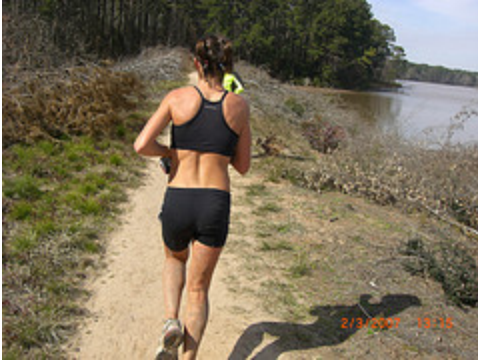
I got to see Anton Krupicka and Jorge Pacheco duel it out on the course. It was a beautiful thing. Anton looked relaxed, and Jorge looked focused. Jorge dropped after about 80 miles with an apparent injury, and Anton won the race in a time about 10 minutes slower than Jorge's near-all time record pace, last year. Jenn Shelton was the real story, though. She ran a (female) record-setting time for RR100, and was third in the race, overall. She may have set a female trail 100-mile record...I don't know about that. Read the story later in Ultrarunning or Trail Runner magazine.

1 13.32.20 Anton Krupicka M 23 CO

2 14.51.54 Akos Konya M 32 CA

3 14.57.18 Jenn Shelton F 23 VA

Jenn was awesome. She would cheer-on "normal" runners as she passed on the out-and-back sections, ala Stephanie Ehret.



Jenn Shelton (a TATUR photo)

After the race:

After the race, I showered at the campground. I inflated my Coleman mattress in the back of my car and took an hour-and-a-half nap before breakfast. I wanted to walk around some to get my stiffening body moving again, and I wanted to cheer-in runners. The breakfast was fine, and I enjoyed the awards ceremony.

I got to meet more than a few TATURs from Tulsa, and got to cheer them on during the race, earlier. They did well and I'm sure I'll see more of them in the near future at other events.

Time to hit the road, though. I always like to put a couple of hundred miles behind me that day, so that I can be north of Dallas when I wake up the next day to drive the rest of the way. I stopped once to nap for 30 minutes or so, and then continued on. I took a wrong exit in Dallas, but really didn't give a darn, because the road was going in a "similar" direction that I needed. I stopped at a Starbucks to refuel, and the kid working the counter looked like a punk rock band member, (which in fact, he was). Wow, sometimes X does equal X. I asked him if his group's done anything that I may have heard, and he said, "do you think I'd be working at 'Bucks if we had?" Good point. I said that he may have been working there for the good benefits, and he said, "good point." I pushed it too much though, when I asked him what FM channel the Superbowl would be on. All he said was, "blank football and those big jocks." Cool. A triple-shot Americano with an extra shot of 'tude. I took that as my cue to leave, and got myself back on track to head up I-35.

I stopped in Gainesville, Texas for my night's stay. I like Gainesville. Some Tex Mex food and lots of water accompanied me while I watched the Superbowl. By 4th quarter, I had to turn it off and sleep, though.

The next morning I had a great breakfast, once again at the "Fried Pies" restaurant, right across from the town center. It's one of those greasy-spoons that always has a cadre of oversized, loud, (and smoking) local men who really have a jolly time at breakfast. (I always wonder though, what the hell they do for a living...to sit there and eat breakfast until mid-morning). Anyway, it's one of the reasons I like the place. The place also has a real lived-in appeal. Right down to the Smokeeater, which has never had it's filter so much as changed since it was installed back in 1974 or so. I have a theory as to why that is so: The installer had a stepladder long enough, but the owner of the restaurant doesn't. There were actual stalagmites of greasy dust about 9 inches long hanging from the Smokeeater, but it was still running! The food was really good, though. A great breakfast with entertainment, at a great price. I even tipped the cook.

I settled into my "drive mode" pretty well, cranking the tunes and a recorded book on the iPod. The miles flew by, and I was back in KC in no time at all.

Epilogue:

Yes, I am stupid enough to go back next year for a 6th time at Rocky. I love this race. Joe is an awesome "General" of the event. Joyce Prusaitis makes a good co-RD. Henry Hobbs is a great "Captain" of the course and volunteers. Sammy Voltaggio cooks and prepares a wide variety of great food. It just plain works! The aid station volunteers are well-experienced ultrarunners (or race directors themselves, in many cases). The food is great, the water is good, and the smiles come often. The success rate is high at this race for a good reason: this race organization wants you to finish & succeed, and will do anything to help you with that success.

Happy trails,

Bad Ben



Part of the yummy course.

Photo by Kristi Mayo



Patrick and me still looking decent at mile 40.

Photo by Kristi Mayo



Three Trail Nerds after the race: Rick Mayo, Gabe Bevan, and me.

Photo by Kristi Mayo

2007 Race Results.

Rocky Raccoon 100 web site.