

## 2008 Psycho Psummer 50K Trail Run

By Chris Hoffman, Ottumwa, IA

Alex (my youngest son) and I headed to St. Joseph, Mo. to meet up with Gregg and Suzi. We went to the home of a friend of Gregg's and ate a wonderful meal. They cooked to feed an army! We had brisket, ribs, hot dogs, brats, baked beans (the best I've ever eaten!), potato salad, corn on the cob and all kinds of dessert. I was stuffed! Alex set off a few fireworks (and then set off some more after Suzi decided he didn't have enough of the fun stuff and went to get more) then we went to the high school to watch the city fire works from the comfortable stadium seats. It was a really fun night. Got to bed around 11PM, which was pretty late but you usually don't get much sleep the night before anyway.

Woke up at 4:15AM before the alarm went off at 4:30 and headed to Perkins for a big breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, hash browns and toast. I was actually still full from the night before but I still managed to eat almost everything. We arrived at Wyandotte County Park in plenty of time before the race. We got all our prerace stuff done and visited until the start of the race. Gregg has run this race before, in February, but they had to change it just a bit. Instead of three loops a little over 10 miles each we ran two 15.5 loops. We also headed in the opposite direction than what he was used to so this threw him off a little.

The weather was actually very good. I can't believe how lucky we were considering it was July 5th. The heat and humidity held off until the second loop and it didn't get too bad even then.

We started off feeling great for the most part. My hamstring was extremely tight but never became a major issue, thank goodness. We were at the tail with just a few stragglers behind us. There was really no opportunity to pass unless the runner in front of you stepped aside, in most places. The hills were just incredible. One in particular came around mile 6 or 7 of the first loop. It was so steep that you really needed something to hold on to just to get up it. I was so scared I might slip on the wet clay and go rolling down the hill. This would not be a good thing because it was a long, steep way down! There were many very steep hills and I began to wonder if this was more like a hike instead of a run. Gregg stayed ahead of me and left me in his dust on those hills. He is an awesome climber and it was extremely tough for me.

Towards the last segment of this loop you had to deal with a couple creek crossings and a lot of mud. I'm talking thick clay that sucks your shoes right off. The first time we were stuck behind a lady that was not moving very fast and we could not get around her easily. We had to follow her for quite a while and this made it even harder to get through the mud. Truly the best way is to just plow right through it. It is so hard to keep moving when it's sucking your feet down but you have to muster all your strength and keep pushing forward. In the second loop Gregg actually hit a bad spot and I swear it sucked his leg darned near up to his knee! Once we passed a lady that was looking for her lost shoe. 😬

One other really tough portion that sticks out in my mind was a steep downhill. It zigzags

straight down and you have to try and find something to hold onto. There were several times that I slipped and was so fearful of ripping my ACL. I am amazed that I did not pull something. So many times I slipped in the mud or slipped on a steep downhill and felt a really hard pull in my knee and groin. Right before this portion on the second loop I got stung by what I thought was a bee. That was not a pleasant way to go into one of the toughest parts of the course!

Once we finished the first loop we had to take awhile to fix our feet. Gregg had some blisters and I wanted to change into fresh socks (why, I don't know because we were just going to get them muddy again!). I really began to question my sanity thinking I was going back on to that course again. Ben, the race director asked how I felt and I said, "That was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life and I'm about ready to go back in and do it again!" And off we went.

I seemed to get my second wind on the second loop. It just felt better- not easier, just better. I had struggled a little in the first half and felt really good now. It just seems like the further I go, the better I feel (sucking down a Slimfast sure doesn't hurt). I'm sure there is a limit to that but you take it when you get it. I love that feeling that you get when you know you are doing something most people wouldn't even attempt and you are so proud, and it fills you full of adrenaline and just keeps you going forever, it seems. 😊

The mud did seem a little tougher this time. It seemed like it lasted a little longer on the second loop than it did on the first loop. I'm sure it had more to do with my attitude, at that point. Gregg was starting to feel rough about midway through the second loop but he was such a trooper. He would tell me how bad he felt but still run harder than he had any business doing. I even told him a couple times to slow it down. We both dropped the "F" bomb several times through the rocky and muddy portions this time around. 😊 Both of us were having trouble with our feet- blistered toes, arches and heels. We both commented that it felt like our feet were on fire. I remember that during the Free State 42 miler also. If I can just figure out how to keep the blisters at bay, nothing will stop me.

Once you come out of the woods you have about 2/10s of a mile or so (I'm guessing) before the finish line. We had two guys pass us here, which sucked, but we did our share of passing too. At the second aid station we were told there were four people behind us. We ended up passing several more and it felt awesome. We left about 4 guys at the final aid station and I told Gregg "let's keep them behind us!" It's just fun to have that little competition even at the back of the pack. Results aren't posted yet but I plan to keep checking. We had hoped to do a sub 8 but finished in 8:09. Not too far off and we gave it our all on an extremely tough course so we weren't disappointed. It's just so hard to explain to someone how tough this really is unless they run it.

If you are looking for the next thing- a real challenge, this is it. This is not a sissy run. I told Gregg this course makes the Living History Farms XC 7 mile race (November, in Des Moines) look like a sissy race! They even give you ropes on the wimpy hills there! This is truly a matter of guts and determination. I don't have a clue yet what the fastest time was but I am amazed at how fast some of these guys can run it. It's beyond my comprehension.

Ben Holmes, the RD for several trail runs in KC puts on a top-notch race. He does Free State too and he knows what he's doing. Very well stocked aid stations and volunteers that are fantastic. They will do anything to help. They actually walk up to you and ask what they can get you. They take your water bottle right out of your hand and fill it. They get ice, food, whatever it is you need. All you have to do is ask. I got a really nice beer mug, medal and great technical shirt for \$30, not to mention all the great food and drinks during and after the run. How many races do you get all of that for so little?

I can't wait to do it all again!!!!!!