

## Race Report

### Psycho-Wyco 50K Trail Race – Winter Edition

Saturday 11 February 2012

#### Pre-Race

My preparation for this event had been less than ideal, for a multitude of reasons. I had been dealing with a right knee niggle that I'm still pretty sure is a case of ITBS, which can be rather painful at times. A few weeks ago I thought I had found the form problem causing it, but then found a week later the problem had come back, no matter how much I tried to emphasize good form. Combined with that, I have had ongoing problems in my right foot for about 9 months now, but that problem is much more intermittent – and for reasons that completely baffle me, doesn't appear much on trails, and it seems the longer I go, the less of an issue it is.

With two weeks before the race, I had a mild cold which kept me off my feet for a few days, and then when I got over the cold, I had work commitments (some 14 hour working days) that kept me from running in the week leading up to the race.

I could either use all of this as an excuse, or hope that it turned into a blessing in disguise, giving my whole system some rest and recovery time leading up to the race.

Winter here has been one of the mildest on record, by normal Kansas City standards. Over the last few weeks, we've even seen temperatures in the mid-high 60s (almost 20 degrees Celsius). So I was kind of hoping it would stay mild for the race, and have some "mercy" on an Australian who isn't used to cold conditions running. As lately as 1 week before the race, they were forecasting mid-40s – cool, but not terrible. Race week would see Saturday's forecast drop every day...

#### Race Day

Race day dawned (well, it started pre-dawn) at 0600 for me, and the outside temperature was 6 degrees. (That is -14 degrees Celsius.) I was well organized, had my best "technical" clothing ready, in multiple layers etc. Had breakfast (muesli), quick shower, dressed, and off I went. About a 45 minute drive to the lake (which was mostly frozen over, no surprises there! Stepped out of the car – and promptly stepped straight back into it! Quick rethink of the clothing strategy – shoes off, another pair of socks on. Jacket and shell coat off, another long-sleeve technical shirt on. The cold was almost unbearable – temperature had dropped further, and was now the coldest day I've experienced in the 11 months we've lived here. It would have to happen on race day, wouldn't it! Headed off to the men's room to do my "nervous pre-race business", and while there, heard a lot of whooping and hollering.

Oops! Looks like I missed the start of the race! I probably started about 1 minute behind the leaders – hardly a great issue in a race this long, although it did mean I was now behind many, many slower runners, and most of the trails are decidedly single-trail.

The first few miles were uneventful – all I wanted to do was get used to the conditions, and try to “warm up”. What with getting to the race later than hoped, and having to redress myself, I started the race with a grand total of no stretching whatsoever. So going out hard was going to punish me. Nice and easy does it early on! Trail conditions on this course are always tricky. Some winters it is snow and ice that are the problem. Most summer races here it is unbelievable mud. This time, it was frozen ground. Because of the muddy trails, they freeze solid in very formations – human footprints, and horse hoof prints etc. Certified ankle-breaking stuff. Indeed, the Psycho Wyco partly earns its name from the terrain underfoot. I personally saw at least 5 people who had taken falls throughout the day. Two of these had potential to be serious – one guy fell and got a stick in the eyelid for his troubles – could have taken out his eye. The other guy wore glasses, and fell and they smashed across his nose, leaving a very, very nasty gash that was going to need stitching. But first, he had another 7 miles to complete his race! Gutsy guy! At least his race shirt was red – he planned that well... During the first 6 miles or so, my outstanding recollection of the event was the bitter cold. Nasty, nasty, nasty. (There were frostbite warnings out in a county just north of us.)

I made it about 6-7 miles before I started having problems with my knee. I had already determined that I was going to finish this race today, having withdrawn at the 20 mile mark in the summer version. So I just resigned myself to about 25 miles of pain. Not long after this, I had my first experiences with cramp for the day. This course is so, so much tougher than anything I normally train on – cramp is almost inevitable. At the end of the first lap (10.5 miles), I was very sore in the knee, and knew my second lap was going to be slow. I stopped at the aid station at the start finish line to remove one of my shirts, stocked up with a 24 ounce bottle of hot chicken broth, had a couple of S-Caps (miracle tablets that help prevent/reduce cramp, and prevent all kinds of potentially nasty damage to your body organs which don't take kindly to ultra-marathons). I came through the first of 3 laps in about 2 hours 4 minutes, and was very happy with this – I had originally planned on doing about 2:15 for my first lap. Oh, and while at the aid station, I gave Jessica a call for a few minutes, just to let her know I was still alive.

My second 10.5 mile lap was pain, pain, and more pain. Mainly the knee, occasionally cramps. Downhill was unbearable, and there is no shortage of it on this course. I hobbled/limped down these hills, getting overtaken by a lot of people... When I heard them coming behind me, I just stepped out of their way and apologized if I had held them up at all. The aid station volunteers were awesome, and very encouraging. I should mention that during the course of my second lap, I got not overtaken, but **lapped** by the 4 leaders. Watching them finish their 3<sup>rd</sup> lap before I had finished my second puts it all in perspective. Yup, I'm slow! But they are so, so fast. The guy who finished 4<sup>th</sup> (I think) had a beard, complete with snot-icicles hanging from his moustache, and sweat/drool icicles from the beard. Cool! If only I could grow a beard...

I finished the second lap around 4hours 39 minutes into the race, if memory serves me correct. Slow, but I was determined to finish. At the start/finish line aid station, I once again stocked up on chicken

broth, no equipment changes this time, popped a few more S-Caps, and next to them was a tray of orange tablets. I asked what these were, and was told they were Ibuprofen. I figured with the way my knee felt, I may as well pop a few of these – they couldn't make things worse! I've never really been a believer in Ibuprofen, but now I want to buy shares in the stuff. I headed off on my third and final lap. By this stage, the field had thinned out dramatically, and I spent a lot of the final 10.5 miles slugging it out alone. I had only one goal – finish, and hopefully do it with joy. You can finish with joy, even if you are in intense pain. For the first 3 miles of this course, I took it easy on my knee, and tried to preserve myself for what lay ahead. Then it suddenly hit me – hold on – I'm not in pain any more! Could this be Ibuprofen, or did God heal me, or what? I was rather doubtful that things would stay pain free if I upped the pace, so I did it gradually. After the last time at the dam wall aid station (about 5 miles to go), I really decided to go for broke. And was pleasantly surprised to find that overall, my knee coped fine. And my cramps had gone – maybe all those S-Caps were doing their job, or maybe Ibuprofen helps with cramp to – I don't know. I don't care – suddenly, I was enjoying my race again! I was even bombing down the hills (well, not the dangerous steep ones, but the steady downhills, I was motoring! Last aid station is 2.8 miles from the finish, and I had one more S-Cap, one more Ibuprofen, a couple of cups of Mountain Dew, and off I went. Now I was starting to catch and overtake people – at quite a rate, which was nice. The last 2.8 miles has three very nasty hills, and while I'd be lying to say that I ran them, I did clamber up them fairly well. I thoroughly enjoyed these last 2.8 miles. Yes, I was tired. But at least I wasn't sore. (Relatively speaking, in comparison to what my knee felt like earlier in the day.)

So I finished – and felt strong in doing so! Had I discovered Ibuprofen earlier in the day, I'm sure I would have finished much sooner. My third lap was faster than my second, and not too many people do that on this course. Finish time? 7 hours, 8 minutes, 48 seconds. I had hoped to go under 7 hours, but considering my second lap and the pain I had to endure, I'm happy with that result. This race is brutal. The cold was bad, the course is rough, rugged, steep. In fact, it has been measured that this course is 40% uphill, 40% downhill, and only 20 percent is considered relatively flat. It has more elevation change than the famed Pikes Peak Marathon (or so I have been told). Many people have reliably informed me that 50kms on this course is harder work than 40 miles on most trail race courses.

In summer, this course chewed me up and spat me out. So, did I get my revenge this time? No, but I think I "made peace" with the course. This is not a course which respects patience, so much as it punishes impatience! It is a great trail race – never a dull moment. You have to be constantly paying attention to terrain, footing, rocks, roots, mud (in a few places), ice, creek crossings, overhead branches to smack your head on, sticks to poke your eyes with. You know, the usual fun stuff you like to contend with on your Saturdays!

At the finish line, I got my medal (every child wins a prize!), and more importantly, I got my 50k sticker to put on the back of my car. My 13.1 mile and 26.2 mile stickers needed a 50k sticker to accompany them. I thanked Bad Ben (the Race Director) and Dick Ross (the official course photographer) for their time and efforts. I thanked the aid station officials, gathered my stuff, and headed off home. I did my usual post-race celebration – popped by the Friendly Bean coffee shop for a latte. I asked the lady there how she was going. She said "cold and tired". She shouldn't have said that! I gave her a 20 second review of my day, and she smiled and said "I'm not cold and tired any more".

Well, now I'm forcing myself to take a full two week break from running. Rest my knee, and use this time to start working on some strength and flexibility, hopefully I can fix these niggling injuries. I'm not even sure what my next race will be. I don't want to start thinking about that just yet!

I thank God that although I'm not a quick runner, he has given me sufficiently good health to be able to enjoy this sport, and the opportunities to get outdoors in His creation. Running has taught me a lot about Christian living, and I'm thankful for the lessons.

The Kansas City Trail Nerds organize a mean event. That has a double application, both of which are equally true!