



***2010 Burning River 100 Mile Endurance Run Race Report
By Jason Robillard***

Back Story

I used to be a normal guy. I liked watching TV. I exercised in moderation. I ran in the same attire other runners utilized. I wore shoes. Then I caught the ultramarathon bug. Shortly after, I also caught the barefoot running bug. The last five years of my life have been spent learning how to intertwine these two passions. For the last five years, I have been working towards a goal of running a 100 mile race without shoes. Completely barefoot.

Most people were skeptical. Even dedicated barefoot runners expressed some hesitation. I was determined to prove them wrong.

I started with a 50 miler in aqua socks. Next was a barefoot 50 miler. In 2008, I thought I was ready for the barefoot 100 miler, so I signed up for Burning River. I made it to about mile 23, then ran into some of the most rocky trails I had ever encountered. I happened to be carrying a pair of Vibram Five Fingers in the unlikely (so I thought) event I would need them. I ended up swapping between barefoot and the VFFs for approximately 64 miles before DNFing. I was the first race I did not finish.

I regrouped and decided to put the barefoot 100 miler on hold. I had to learn how to conquer the 100 mile beast first before attempting it without some protection on my feet.

In 2009, I ran and finished the Hallucination 100 mile run in Pinckney, Michigan. This race taught me many things about running this distance. Most importantly, it gave me the confidence that I CAN finish a race of this distance.

After perusing the ultra calendars, I decided on the next race... the 2010 Burning River. Not only would I have the opportunity to finally reach this goal, but I would get some redemption for my failures in 2008. I could get this monkey off my back.

The next ten months would be spent planning and preparing to take another stab at my longstanding goal of running a barefoot 100 mile race.

Early on, I had my doubts. I remembered the bitter taste of failure from 2008. I remembered being alone in the dark on the trails of Northeast Ohio... feeling completely helpless as my body refused to move down the trail. I remembered the feeling of mentally giving up shortly after. When you set out to test your limits, most of us probably expect to surpass them. I found out what it was like to find your limit. It was not pleasant. Did I really want to do this again?

In the fall of last year, while contemplating my future, I had the opportunity to meet my ultrarunning hero- Scott Jurek. He was in the area to talk at a local running store. The store had organized a group run prior to the talk, so I had the opportunity to actually run with him, too. During the run, I was able to participate in discussions with Scott regarding all aspects of ultrarunning. One of the topics he discussed was the difficulty to ultras. He candidly revealed that the elites go through the exact same feelings of self-doubt; they go through the same internal struggle to quit or continue on. Jurek's discussions renewed my enthusiasm to continue chasing this goal.

Over the winter, I maintained a fairly ambitious workout routine. I ran once or twice a week on snow-covered trails to maintain my endurance base. I continued crosstraining two or three days per week. The goal was to simply maintain fitness. By the time spring rolled around, I was in better shape than I had been in years following my winter offseason.

The training took a significant upturn when my wife Shelly (spoiler alert: read her race report here) and friends Mark Robillard and Jesse Scott traveled to Rochester, New York in May to run the Mind the Ducks 12 Hour ultramarathon. I managed to run approximately 54 miles barefoot, though the mileage was split between relatively smooth asphalt and grass.

Over the next few months I would continue to test and train. I would continually work out methods to deal with the looming challenge that lie ahead... the brutal gravel that forced me to DNF Burning River in 2008.

I spent many hours training on the most technical trails in the area. I ran up and down sand dunes. I ran on hot asphalt. There were significant setbacks; I developed blisters that forced me to take a week off. My schedule, which revolves around my three young children, made it difficult to coordinate training runs. Luckily, Shelly is wonderful about working out plans that allow me to train.

I found many allies in this journey, starting with Shelly. She is an excellent training partner as she has the ability to push me when I am down. I also had Mark and Jesse as occasional training partners; they allowed me to push for longer, faster training runs. I had a few others, also. Some of my occasional training partners included Jeremiah Cataldo, who was also running Burning River, Phil Stapert, a two-time finisher of Burning River, Andy Grosvenor, a local barefoot/minimalist ultrarunner and frequent participant in my favorite running communities, Pete Kemme, my crosstraining partner, and a host of others including Roger Bonga, Brandon

Mulnix, Dave Wier, and Shannon Mitchell. My Crossfit trainers John DeVries and Brandon Armstrong also helped build my strength and endurance. All played some role in making me a better runner; all played a role in preparing me for this adventure.

The Forming of the Crew

As the race neared, I began the process of forming my crew. For me, ultras are essentially adventures. I try to wrangle as many people as possible to share the adventure with me.

Shelly was definitely in and would serve a crew chief and partial pacer. She knew what to expect based on her experiences crewing for the Hallucination 100 the previous fall. Jesse Scott needed little persuasion to join the party. As a frequent training partner and strong ultrarunner, Jesse would pace me throughout the night. A few other individuals tried to make the necessary accommodations, but were unable to sync the dates with their schedules. Our final member of the crew was Barefoot Art, a friend we had met at our barefoot running meetup in May of this year. The crew was set.

Shelly and I knew Jesse well as he was one of our traveling companions on our Mind the Ducks road trip earlier in the year. Jesse shares our juvenile sense of humor and is not easily offended... two critically-important prerequisites for my crew. We did not know Art well, but had a feeling he would at least tolerate our silliness.

Mark Robillard, our good friend, training partner, Hallucination pacer/crew member, and traveling companion to Mind the Ducks would not be joining us as he made a commitment to run a trail Marathon on Grand Isle in the middle of Lake Superior. Mark would be sorely missed, so Shelly created a stand-in... a "Ken" doll that made it into a frightening number of pictures.

The Trip to Ohio

The trip began at about 8:15am Friday morning. Once Jesse arrived, we dropped off our youngest son and hit the road. Art lived about two hours away. During those two hours, the conversation jumped from various topics. Jesse told a story that would become one of our running jokes throughout the weekend.

The drive to Ann Arbor was pretty uneventful... lots of catching up. We picked up Art and headed to our hotel near the start line. We stopped once to use the restroom, then again five minutes later to get something to eat. Yes, that was my idea. No, I am not always a "fast" traveler.

While dining at a local Panera Bread, Jesse was approached by a stranger attracted to his US Triathlon sticker on his car. The stranger sold athletic supplements and asked Jesse many questions. Being a good sport, Jesse humored the man and agreed to sit down with him. As the conversation progressed, the man was part of a group (still unknown) that was developing a special water for athletes. The gentleman described the water as having tiny molecules that were easily absorbed by the body. Being an exercise science major, Jesse questioned the science. The response became our oft-repeated phrase throughout the weekend:

"I'm not a sciencey sort of guy, but imagine if you threw a bucket of water at a chain link fence. The smaller molecules would go through, and that's what we sell."

It was clearly pseudo-scientific BS as anyone with even an elementary understanding of molecular properties would know... but it made for some VERY funny comments at 3am Sunday morning out on the dark trails!

[Warning- off-topic rant] As it turns out, the gentleman was an Amway tool. For those that are not familiar with Amway, it's a huge network of independent salespeople trying to sell crap products to their friends and family, such as water with tiny molecules, amid promises of great wealth and power. Those same friends and family are also recruited so the recruiter will get a chunk of their profits. They refer to the pyramid scheme as "multi-level marketing", and the profits all flow to a local family that uses the money to push their ultra-conservative political/religious agenda. This pretty much sums up the company: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot31XhgE_XE. I digress. [End of rant]

We arrived at our hotel, checked in, brought our gear up to the rooms, and relaxed for a few minutes before heading out. This was the point where I told Art he'd be rooming with Jesse after meeting him only a few hours earlier. I must have forgotten to mention that. Regardless, Art took it in stride.

We stopped at the start line to see Squire's Castle, a very cool building near the start line. I knew it would be dark when we arrived in the morning, so I wanted the crew to see this before heading to the packet pick-up at the finish line.

The drive to the finish line seemed very long. It was a subtle reminder that I'd be running even longer as twisting trails meandered through the countryside. After what felt like several hours, we arrived at the Cuyahoga Falls Natatorium to pick up our packets. Here we met Phil Stapert, Ben Eggers, and Rachel Sterk. Ben and Phil were crewing for Rachel on her quest for her first 100 mile finish. We talked for a few minutes, then headed out to Max McQ's, a local bar/restaurant.

We arrived at the restaurant, ordered some beer and food, and awaited the arrival of our friends. Ben, Phil, Rachel, and my crew discussed running in general while sipping their respective beers. Shortly after, our friends Shelley and Jim Viggiano (Shelley is the race director of Mind the Ducks) arrived with their crew Theresa and Patty, along with Matt Chaffin and Andy Carney. Jim, Matt, and Andy would be running in tomorrow's race. It was at this point that I casually noticed my 22 ounce glass was empty, whereas the rest of my crew barely touched theirs. Hmmm.... nerves maybe?

We caught up with our friends from New York and were soon joined by Tony and Jane Lindsey. Tony was a relatively new barefoot runner that lived near the course. He also recommended the restaurant. We were also joined by John Onder (Barefoot Johnny O), another local barefoot runner. I was happy all three made it to the restaurant; they were able to give us valuable insight to the course. It's also fun connecting with other barefoot runners.

I lost track of time after finishing another tall beer. The first sign should have been Shelley's crew leaving to get to bed. Then Rachel's crew left. Both were relatively close to the finish line; we had a 45 minute drive. Uh oh.

After finally saying our goodbyes around 7:30 or so, we headed back to our hotel. Again, the drive felt like it took forever. We arrived near the hotel and decided to make a pastry run for tomorrow's breakfast. We stopped at a store called Rick's or Pat's... I don't quite recall.

Upon entering the store, we were immediately met with a wall of aisles. After winding through the labyrinth of tiki torches and grocery store-quality bras, we found our mini donuts and cream cheese danishes. Shelly, Art, and I were impressed with Jesse's intimate knowledge of the caloric density per cent of many foods... it's one of the benefits of being a long distance runner living the college lifestyle. Shelly also picked up a bottle of wine for the hotel. Uh oh number two...

We made our way to the checkout lane, cracked a few jokes about the \$80 coffee pot on the "impulse buy" shelf, and paid for our goods. I tried paying with my Visa debit card, but they only accepted Discover. I was a little shocked; even the fruit stand near my home takes Visa these days. I hadn't encountered a "Discover only" store since the mid-90's. Luckily I had cash. Not wanting a ton of change, I gave the eighteen year old cashier an extra 15 cents with my twenty. She stared at me blankly as it was apparent she had no ability to calculate how much change I should receive. I told her twice before a manager arrived and confirmed it for her. Sigh.

Back at our hotel, the four of us congregated in our room. Art brought his home-brewed beer; I was drinking some I brought from home. We talked about our regular nonsense for about an hour before actually getting to race issues. By this time, I was getting slightly drunk. I suspect Shelly was also. Art and Jesse seemed to exercise a little more restraint. As I finished walking everyone through the aid station strategies, I glanced to the table where I set my empty bottles. Four bottles?!? I checked the clock, it was 11:00. I was waking up at 2:30. I really needed sleep.

Race Morning

I remember my cellphone alarm going off and thinking I hit snooze. Then Shelly's alarm went off. I got out of bed to shut it off. I don't remember setting her alarm, but apparently I had the wherewithal to not only set her alarm as a backup, but also set it across the room to force myself out of bed. I have absolutely no memory of this. As I looked around the room, I felt some slight spinning. Damn... I'm still buzzed a little from the beers. This would be the first time I had a vague "I'm really, really stupid" feeling.

Despite my chemical state, I went through my secret morning routine. Why is it a secret? Dramatic effect. The only unique occurrence- an odd encounter with a group of people parked near the hotel. They were parked in the road, had all their lights on and door open, and were listening to loud rap music. I walked around the corner into their headlights. All six people

stopped to look at me. My first thought- "What the hell are these people doing here... this is really odd." Of course, I was barefoot and wearing nothing but a kilt and walking with a water bottle at 3:00am. We mutually nodded and went about our business.

We finished getting ready, packed the car, and headed to the start line. The buzz had worn off, I was hydrated, and felt good. I was excited to actually begin the race.

We arrived amid a flurry of activity. Darkness still cascaded over the entire start area. The sound of a loud generator filled the air. A single tent was illuminated; this would serve as the check-in point. I gathered some of my gear and we headed for the tent. After checking in, we milled about for a few minutes.

The entire area was buzzing with nervous but subdued excitement. Headlamps and flashlights would dance around in the darkness as runners and crews made final preparations. We met up with Phil, then Jeremiah Cataldo (one of my training partners from Grand Rapids). A note about Jeremiah- he finished 32nd overall in a little over 22 hours. Jeremiah also wore New Balance MT100s, which are very close to a minimalist shoe. We also met a guy from Pennsylvania named Ben and his wife. I would end up running with him for periods of time throughout the day Saturday. Ben finished in a little over 26 hours for his first 100 mile finish. I was extremely excited to see that he had finished!

Eventually they called for us to move to the start line, which is in the middle of a large grassy field. I had been receiving an occasional glance or comment about my bare feet and kilt all morning, but the questions really flowed as we were waiting for the race to begin. About twenty people asked about one or both. I loved answering the questions as most people seemed genuinely curious. This would be a trend that would last the duration of the race.

We sang happy birthday to another runner (coincidentally named Jason), were treated to an excellent rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner", then waited. As is the case with every ultra I've run, I never hear the actual start. All of a sudden, everybody started moving towards the actual start line marked with glow sticks. I hit "start" on my Garmin and the race began!

Before I dive into the race, I should explain my sometimes controversial race strategy. In the past, I've tried a variety of methods. Most race strategies involved starting VERY at a VERY slow pace to conserve energy. This idea was manifested in a run/walk strategy. My favorite was an "eight/ two" ratio: run for eight minutes, then walk for two. Additionally, I would walk all uphill and run all downhill.

This strategy presented two major problems. First, it never felt good. I never felt like I was able to find a groove. The transition from run to walk and back again was too distracting. Second, it was too slow. From the beginning of the race, I would be close to the cutoff time. The conservative nature did not suit me well.

I found a new strategy thanks to Jeremiah Cataldo, my ultrarunner friend mentioned in the first part. He would run as long as possible, then switch to a more conservative run/ walk ratio.

Given that he is a MUCH better runner, I listened. Through experimentation, I found it suited me well.

For Burning River, this was my plan:

- * Run at a comfortable pace for the first 30 miles, likely between 10 and 12 minute miles, and walk all hills;
- * From mile 30 to 50, slow down as needed, maybe to 12 to 14 minute miles;
- * From mile 50 to 70, implement a 10/2 run/ walk ratio
- * Walk from 70 to finish, run when possible.

For the most part, this is what I did. If I had more training mileage, I am confident I could move the mileage back at each level. This plan was realistic, however.

The Race- Start Line to Old Mill Road (4.8 miles)

A stampede of runners made their way across the dew-covered open field. A few people commented about having to run in damp shoes. I smiled as my bare feet would be dry within minutes.

After a few hundred yards, we turned onto the asphalt road that would carry us for the next nine or ten miles. This section was uneventful. A lot of runners were engaging in conversation. I answered a myriad of questions about the kilt are bare feet. I settled into a comfortable 10:30 pace for this section.

As we neared the first aid station, darkness gave way to dawn. This area of Ohio is quite striking with what appear to be large horse ranches dotting the countryside.

The aid station at Old Mill Road was a very fast stop. I refilled my lone water bottle with HEED and quickly headed out.

Old Mill Road to Polo Fields (4.8 miles, 9.6 total)

Section two was nearly identical to section one. The entire section consisted of rolling hills on asphalt roads. There was at least one fairly long road that required walking, and it showed in my average pace which dropped to 10:40.

I met up with Scott Handley, a fellow Kickrunners forum member and Michigander. He had recently finished his first 100 miler at Javalina late last year. He would go on to finish the race shortly after me. I also met a gentleman from Sacramento, CA. Since that area would be one of my dream destinations for future relocation, I asked him a ton of questions. He graciously answered them all. As it turns out, he had also considered moving to Auburn, CA, the finishing point of the Western States 100 Mile Endurance Run. Western States is the highest profile event in ultrarunning.

At the end of this section, I met my crew for the first time. The Polo Fields aid station was quite busy as the runners were still fairly close together. This would also be my first experience with the spectators cheering for "the barefoot guy in the kilt". The reception was definitely warm and welcoming.

My crew, despite this being their first aid station, quickly and efficiently exchanged my water bottles, replaced my supply of electrolyte capsules, and had a large selection of food waiting. I chose a pint of chocolate milk and a handful of Pringles from the aid station. The crew offered me a Toronado from the local gas station, but I declined. I had asked them to get me a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich from McDonalds, but they were closed. We should have learned our lesson during the Mind the Ducks trip; we should have checked closing and opening times for area stores and restaurants.

I said goodbye to the crew and headed out to the bridle trail that made up the next section.

Polo Fields to Harper Ridge (5.8 miles, 15.4 miles)

The first half mile of this section was a bit rough as the chocolate milk did not sit well. I normally do not have this problem, but it could be the result of this being the first dairy product I had eaten in three weeks. Regardless, the problem resolved itself quickly.

The bridle trail was relatively smooth. It was mostly gravel-covered, but it was easy to dodge the injurious rocks. It was uneventful as I chatted with the occasional runner and focused on maintaining a steady pace.

The slightly rough terrain and a net altitude gain of almost 500 feet slowed my pace to about 11:25 miles. I was still feeling great at this point, though I was anticipating a mini-crash at the end of this section.

I was in a zone for most of this section. I missed a turn at one point. Thankfully, another runner yelled to warn me. Luckily I had only run about 50 yards. I have no idea how I missed the turn, it was VERY well-marked.

Harper Ridge to Shadow Lake (3.2 miles, 18.6 total)

This next section was quite uneventful. The trails were easy; there were no significant climbs.

The most significant event was the aid station- I met my crew for the second time. When coming into the aid station, I got the same applause and cheering due to the kilt and lack of shoes.

This aid station went even smoother than the first. My crew was becoming a well-oiled machine! This time, my crew found an open McDonalds. They managed to score me a Bacon, Egg, and Cheese Biscuit and hash browns. I think they may have also had an orange juice. I decided to drink another pint of chocolate milk along with the OJ. I'd carry the sandwich and eat

it on the run. I declined the hash browns. Lucky me. My crew showed me this picture later after the race:

Since the temperature was increasing, I'd begin carrying my second handheld water bottle at this point. With two water bottles and a Bacon, Egg, and Cheese Sandwich in hand, I hit the trail.

Section for pace: 11:15

Shadow Lake to Egbert Station (4.8 miles, 23.4 total)

This section was equally uneventful. There were some short but frequent climbs which slowed the pace, but they did not provide any problems. Feet felt good, legs felt good. I was drinking and taking electrolytes on a regular basis. I was urinating about every 90 minutes or so. Sidebar- kilts have many advantages, one of which is ease-of-access.

As it turns out, I didn't eat the sandwich. I tossed it in a ditch after about a mile. At this point, solid food was not palatable. I wasn't worried, I still had a huge supply of Slim Fast, Frappuccino, Mike's Hard Lemonade iskiate, and Red Bull.

The Egbert Shelter aid station did not have crew access, but the aid workers were great! I got the usual questions about barefoot running. A few of the volunteers had recently tried Vibrams so I gave them some advice. I didn't stay long, as I knew what was ahead.

My big worry: the next section. Based on my 2008 attempt, I knew the next section included some VERY gnarly gravel. This was the beginning of the end to my attempt that year. This section gave me nightmares.

I was ready, though. I trained on the roughest trails I could find in West Michigan. I ran on chip and seal asphalt. My feet were as tough as they have ever been. My gravel-running skills were honed to perfection. I was ready... or so I thought....

Section pace: 12:18

Egbert Shelter to Alexander Road (5 miles, 28.4 miles total)

I took a deep breath as I left the Egbert Shelter aid station. I knew this part was going to get dicey. In 2008, this is the section that forced me to don my one-size-too-small Vibram KSOs, which ultimately led to a host of foot problems. I was ready, though. Through training, I forged by body and mind into a fearless gravel-running barefoot ninja.

The loop starts out smooth. Hard-packed dirt mixed with an occasional rock... as my daughter would say "It was easy-peasy!" That false sense of security vanished quickly. The gravel starts out fairly smooth. Then you hit a climb. It took a little evasive hopping around, but it was still doable. At the top of the hill, the rugged trail REALLY began.

My thought process:

The first 100 yards as I am still running: "Damn! This is more rugged than I remember."

The second 100 yards, still running despite stepping on at least ten VERY large, sharp rocks: "Okay, this is a lot harder than I anticipated. Be cool, Jason, be cool. Just relax and float over the trail..."

By the 1/4 mile mark, now walking: "What the Hell was I thinking? This shit is impossible to run on!"

By the one mile mark as about twenty runners have passed me and my pace has slowed to a 30 minute/mile tap dance "Oh my god, what am I doing?!? If there's any chance of finishing this race, I'm going to need some protection! I think I packed my huaraches. This was the stupidest idea I've ever had! I have almost nine more miles before I see my crew!

After the two mile mark, the trail smoothed out to allow some occasional running. The damage had been done, however. My average pace shot up like a rocket. I was passed by what seemed like forty runners. My feet were badly bruised from the relentlessly tight-packed sharp rocks. I tweaked my left Achilles on a particularly rocky climb.

I had to make a decision. Do I continue the race barefoot and accomplish a long-standing goal, or do I change to my huaraches and dramatically increase the chances of finishing. At that point, I seriously doubted I could run another 70 miles or so on bruised feet over terrain that will be just as rugged in select sections. I agonized over this decision for the next seven miles or so.

It's worth noting- many of the runners that passed me commented how brave I was for running this barefoot. I have to be honest... if I saw someone doing what I was doing, I would think they were idiots. There's a fine line between bravery and stupidity... I think I overshot that line by a safe distance.

Eventually I came to the Alexander Road aid station. Barefoot Johnny O was one of the volunteers here, so he was a welcome sight. I know I didn't represent barefoot runners very well as I'm sure I did a lot of whining and complaining about the rocks.

Johnny and the rest of the volunteers gave me a very good description of the next section. I'd be on relatively smooth trails for two or three miles before hitting the crushed limestone towpath. I could handle this...

Section pace: 14:12

Alexander Road to Station Road Bridge (4.9 miles, 33.3 total)

This next section was a breeze compared to the last. The trail was comprised of hard-packed dirt with large, flat shale-like stones protruding in various places. It took some focus to avoid tripping, but this section allowed for a MUCH faster pace than the last. I ran as much as possible to make up for the time lost in the previous section.

Eventually I hit the towpath which follows the river (Cuyahoga I'm guessing). This was a welcome change. Even though crushed limestone can be somewhat tough on bare feet, it was like a relaxing shiatsu massage compared to the meat grinder rocks of the previous section.

Since I was more or less on auto pilot this section, I did a lot of soul-searching. I still had to make a decision about the huaraches. I knew I was in great condition to PR the course despite my bruised feet and tweaked Achilles, but I would need to be able to run over the rough gravel sections. I couldn't afford to walk. My competitive side kicked in and I made the decision to go with the sandals.

Towards the end of this loop, I ran into Buzzie, a fellow Kickster. We chatted for a minute, she was looking strong. Two runners in front of us had missed a turn. She shouted out to them. Good thing... I didn't notice the turn either. I would have absent-mindedly followed those two.

This aid station seemed to have more activity. As I turned the corner and crossed a bridge, I saw Jimmy V.'s crew waving frantically. I thought they were cheering for me, which made me feel great! As I got closer, I saw my crew right next to them. All three were breathing hard. Later, I found out they had just arrived. Shelley V. and crew were waving at them to signal I was coming in.

I immediately asked for my Injinji toe socks and huaraches, which they did not have. I knew the huaraches were in a Rubbermaid container that was still in the car. The Injinjis were in a black duffel bag, still in the car. I think Shelly may have replied "But they're not here."

All four of us silently stared at each other. I didn't want to be rude, but I needed the shoes. I fully expected one of them to go to the car and get them. Jesse piped in "I'll get them!" and sprinted off. I went through my normal routine of eating what I could.

The crew had bought me a Wendy's hamburger, so I ate that. I think I may have drank another Slim-Fast, which worked very well. I started applying some lube and wondered where Jesse was. Damn, I hope I did pack the huaraches...

He came sprinting back carry the large bag. The socks were in there, but the huaraches were in the large rubbermaid container. When I came into the aid station, I told the crew the socks and huaraches were in the bag. Jesse took off again as I put on the socks.

Amid this chaos, I briefly saw Lloyd Thomas (Roots) from Kickrunners. He's this aid station's captain and does a wonderful job.

A minute later, Jesse came sprinting back with the huaraches. I put them on, thanked the crew, and was off!

It wasn't until later that I learned the car was actually parked about a half mile away. Jesse had actually sprinted about two miles trying to recover my shoes. Thank you, Jesse. :-)

Section pace: 12:02

Station Road Bridge to Ottawa Point (6.3 miles, 39.6 miles total)

This next section went very well. The huaraches made a world of difference. This section consisted of some paved trail interspersed with long sections of hard-packed dirt trails. It would have been very easy to run barefoot, but the huaraches allowed me to run a little faster.

Admittedly, the pink-laced huaraches, black Injinjis, and Sport Kilt looked a little ridiculous. If I would have planned on using them, I would have opted for the black laces.

About two miles into this loop, there was an unmanned water stop. I topped off my bottles as a precaution. The day was beginning to get warm, and my increased pace was causing a fair amount of sweat. I also began to closely monitor my electrolyte intake.

One third of the race had been completed. I was well below a 24 hour pace, which is exactly where I wanted to be. A sub-24 hour finish was a pipe dream, though. I knew my pace would slow considerably after dark. Right now, I was just riding the good feelings.

At some point I hit the Ottawa Point aid station. This was a quick stop. I changed shirts, ate a bit, took a leak, and was off. My crew was beginning to really gel at this point. This stop felt very smooth.

Section Pace: 14:36

Ottawa Point to Snowville (4.2 miles, 43.8 miles total)

This section was also mostly forgotten. Except for a single bizarre. I was cruising along around mile 40. I was feeling pretty sore at that point, so I was likely running at about a 13-14 minute pace. Suddenly, I felt an incredibly sharp, shooting pain in my right heel!

My immediate thought- "Oh my god, my Achilles tendon just snapped!" A second later, I realized it was a bee sting. A few years ago, Ava (age 4 at the time) and I were stung multiple times by wasps in our backward. In a panic, I took off sprinting as fast as I could. According to the Garmin, I hit an 8:00 mile for about 400 meters.

Once I thought the coast was clear, I stopped. I looked down at my right ankle AND THE BEE WAS STILL THERE! It was trapped in my huarache strap. I beat it a few times with my water bottle, then flung the sock and sandal off. I looked for a protruding stinger, but found none.

Once I put the sock and sandal back on, I took off again. The pain interfered with my gait, but subsided by the time I reached the next aid station.

The Snowville aid station was pretty busy. About five or six runners all came in at the same time. I think I ate some bananas and drank a lot of Coke... maybe a few gels, too. The aid

station workers asked a lot of questions about the kilt, including the now-common "What do you wear underneath?" :-)

Section Pace: 14:32

Snowville to Boston Store #1 (5.3 miles, 49.1 total)

This section starts with a large climb. As I was climbing, I was surprised my legs felt as good as they did. After 40+ miles, my only problem was my tweaked left Achilles. Everything else felt great! Fatigue was setting in and my knees were getting a little sensitive on downhills, but there was little muscle soreness. The crosstraining I do was clearly paying off.

This section has a lot of hills... 2000ft.+ of elevation change. I was still running the flats, power-hiking the hills, and gingerly navigating the downhills. I was traveling at about the 24 hour pace at this point.

Like several of the earlier sections, I do not have too many memories here. I do remember following a group of about four guys. I would catch up on the up hills, they would pull away on the downhills. I passed a few people that were hiking... most stared at my kilt/pink huarache combo.

As I neared the aid station, I could hear the voices and music. At least I remember music. As I crossed the bridge, my crew was easy to spot since they were still dressed in their blue and orange "Crew" shirts. I think this was the first aid station I sat down to actually rest. The juxtaposition next to the road gave it a pit stop-esque feel.

I sat down and my crew jumped into action. I'm not quite sure who did what, but Art, Jesse, and Shelly efficiently swapped my water bottles, refilled my electrolytes, gave me a cup of Mike's Hard Lemonade and a cup of chia (I mixed the two to create an iskiate-like mixture), a can of Slim Fast, and a gel or two.

There were tons of people surrounding us on all sides. This made lubing somewhat difficult, but Jimmy V.'s crew acts as human shields. Thanks guys!

After resting and chatting for a minute, I meandered over to the aid station table and downed a few cups of water and Mountain Dew. At this point, I was draining both water bottles regularly. The little extra hydration would really help.

I wandered back over to the chair and Art firmly told me to get going. For the first time, they had to kick me out of the aid station. I'm glad, otherwise I would have lingered even more.

Section pace: 14:20

Boston Store 1 to Boston Store 2 (5.4 miles, 54.5 miles total)

This section is a loop. At the end of the loop, I will be able to pick up Shelly as a pacer. Since I was near the half-way point, I would begin a 10 minute run/ two minute walk strategy.

I was definitely feeling the effects of around 10-12 hours on my feet. The walking sections were a welcome relief, and it was somewhat difficult to get back to a respectable pace once I began running.

This section starts with a flat bike path, jumps to a pretty cool trail, past some waterfalls I decided not to stop and admire, back to trails until reaching Boston Store again. During this loop, I chatted with a few runners, but mostly ran by myself. I was eager to get back; Shelly would provide some much-needed company and distraction.

This section had some relatively tough climbs, but it was the downhill sections that were really slowing my pace. This was the section that caused me to completely break down in 2008. I was pleasantly surprised to find I still felt good mentally.

Eventually I came back to Boston Store. I really don't remember much from this stop other than a brief discussion about lights. Based on the pictures, I also lubed my feet for the first and only time. I wanted to take my headlamp, but Art insisted we'd make it through the next 9.6 miles well before dusk. I hesitantly agreed, grabbed a few things from the aid station, and Shelly and I headed out.

Section time: 16:18

Boston Store to Pine Lane (4.1 miles, 58.6 total)

This section was filled with memories. In 2008, I was on a death march. It took me about two and a half hours to navigate this 4.1 mile section. This year, I was feeling immeasurably better. I had Shelly to keep me company.

The trails were pretty gnarly, including an incredibly root-laden stretch. This section was a net gain in altitude, so I powered uphill more than down. We tried to stick with the 10/2 ratio, but our efforts were thwarted by the hills.

Shelly gave me the run-down of the crew's experiences throughout the day. As I expected, their day had been spent frantically rushing, relaxing, and laughing. She told tales of goiters, the dude that had his crew spray him down with Axe body spray, a side-trip to a gourmet deli at a local grocery store, Jesse fixing our car (the guy really is the jack of all trades), Art's unnaturally-large big toes, and some other assorted shenanigans (some cannot be printed to protect the innocent... or not so innocent). Also, it seemed as though NE Ohio does not open until later in the morning. McDonalds doesn't open until 7:00?!? A grocery store that doesn't open until 9:00?!? WTF?

The conversation and fun terrain took my mind off the 55+ cumulative miles I ran to this point. We quickly approached Pine Lane, the next aid station. This was the aid station where I was pulled from the course in 2008. I had bitter memories of slinking back to the minivan my crew had at the time, my head hung in defeat. Still feeling as good as I did was a huge moral boost!

The volunteers had A LOT of questions about the kilt. One of the gentlemen had previously run a 5k in a traditional kilt. Needless to say, I was impressed! Another lady asked her friend "Is that what I think it is?" in a not-quite-quiet enough whisper.

I think I ate a grilled cheese and a few Gu packets. I refilled my water bottles, Shelly refilled hers. We said some goodbyes and were off!

Section pace: 18:18

Pine Lane to Happy Days (5.5 miles, 64.1 total)

I would like to say this section went as smoothly as the first. I would also like to say I stumbled upon a briefcase full of unmarked fifties.

The section started well. There were a few trails that gave way to a bike path. I was trying to maintain the 10/2 ratio, but it quickly broke down. This was my first and most severe low point of the day.

Unfortunately, Shelly has never been with me through a low like this. We went from being very talkative to dead silent. When I go through a serious low, I tend to focus inward. I monitor my body at this point being very careful to meet all my needs. I know the low will pass, but it can be a very dangerous time IF I were to stop eating or drinking.

As if by some intuitive sense, Shelly handled this rough patch extremely well. She reminded me to keep eating Gu, keep drinking, and keep taking the occasional electrolyte capsule. This section felt like it took forever.

At some point, Ben passed us, as did Liz Bondar (Movingon). Both looked as if they were in much better shape than I was. Eventually, we entered a large field and could see the aid station at the other end. Just as we began crossing the field, I began to perk up. What horrible timing!



Jesse and Art were waiting. They took my water bottles and exchanged them. They led me to the chair and I eagerly plopped down. Being off my feet was definitely a relief at this point. I drank my Mike's iskiate and a Starbucks Frappuccino. After gathering my lights, I checked out the aid station fare. They had a great selection, including ramen noodles. They gave me a cup and I immediately took a big gulp. Bad idea... the noodles were scalding hot! I asked for a few ice cubes and the obliged.



At this point, I was just stalling. Jesse was going to be pacing throughout the night. I could sense his anticipation as we chatted with the aid station workers. I answered the requisite kilt questions, but declined the request to show everyone what I was wearing underneath. None of us needed that, especially Jesse.



Barefoot Johnny O was working this aid station, also. The last two pictures above were taken by him. He was a HUGE help as he was able to give us specific advanced recon for the next section.

After another minute or two, Jesse and I headed out.

Section pace: 18:33

Happy Days to Pine Hollow 1 (6.8 miles, 70.9 total)

We were immediately greeted with a small climb which brought us to a sheer rock face. For the next half mile or so, we followed this trail along the wall. It was one of the more scenic sections of the entire trail. I was very happy we managed to see it in the daylight, though the darkness was beginning to encroach around us.

I switched on my headlamp, though it was still too light to make much of a difference. Jesse and I idly chatted about the events of the day. I relayed my physical and mental state, along with my rough plan for the rest of the race. He in turn entertained me with several crewing stories from the day. Some were very funny, though the memories have faded due to the fatigue of the time.

Jesse and I seem to be remarkably similar personality-wise. From the onset, he instinctively knew when and how to effectively motivate me to keep moving. I don't respond well to pretty much any "firing up" methods. Call me a wimp, make fun of my mother, threaten to kill my dog... it won't make me go faster. It just annoys me. My motivation is 95% intrinsic... I will run when the mood strikes. This is the reason I like Shelly so much as a pacer, and I was glad Jesse was of the same mindset.

My specific memories of this section are fuzzy, though I remember Ben passing once again. A few more runners passed us. At this point in any ultras, my "start fast" strategy puts me relatively far ahead. This is the point where the more conservative and consistent runners begin to pass. We would be passed on a fairly regular basis throughout the night.

As darkness fell, I switched to my trusty Fenix handheld, my most valuable piece of gear. I prefer the handheld to the headlamp because shadows cast from waist-level make it easier to discriminate between flat obstacles and obstacles requiring me to pick up my feet.

We twisted through some trails, ran through some new-growth fields, and eventually came to the Pine Hollow aid station. As we approached, we could see the runners ahead of us climbing what appeared to be a very large hill. I remembered from reading race reports that there were two climbs up to Pine Hollow. Even though I was still able to climb hills with relative ease, the downhills were becoming pathetically slow.

Upon arrival, I had been running for somewhere in the ballpark of 17 hours. It definitely felt like it. Art and Shelly looked amazingly alert, as did Jimmy V.'s crew. My abilities to estimate time had long-since passed, I could only guess it was somewhere around 2am (it was really only about 10pm).



I ate a grilled cheese and some Ramen noodles, pounded some Mike's iskiate and Slim Fast, applied a little lube, and reapplied the tape around my knuckles. I had tried this earlier as a means of preventing knuckle chafing from my water bottles... this is the black tape that can be seen in many of the pictures.



Eventually Art and Shelly got me out of my chair and Jesse and I were off! This next section was short- 3.3 miles. I expected it to be a breeze. I was wrong.

Section pace: 20:35

Pine Hollow 1 to Pine Hollow 2 (3.3 miles, 74.2 total)

To say this was my worst section would be a huge understatement. It was my mental low point for the race. I knew I still had a long way to go, I had little energy, and the darkness and fatigue were working their voodoo on my head.

The section started with a downhill over a grass-covered hill. I carefully hobbled to the bottom. Looking at the section elevation chart, this section looks quite innocent. It appears as if there is a steady descent down to a low point near the river, then a climb back up to the aid station. Simple.

In reality, this section felt like a never-ending series of mountains. Up, down, up, down, up, down. I was barely walking this entire section. I distinctly remember the aid station workers telling us this was a very easy loop. It very well may have been, but by mid-section, I was cursing them as sadistic liars.

More people passed us. I vaguely remember some being pretty cheerful. Me... not so much. I'm sure Jesse and I were engaging in some grippingly-fascinating conversation, but I was probably just mute. Eventually this Hellish loop came to an end and we ended up at Pine Hollow for the second time.

I think this was a relatively fast stop, but my time perception was pretty skewed. I don't remember any details other than pounding a Red Bull and leaving. As Jesse and I were about 50

feet from the rest of the crew, I realized I forgot to ask them when they last changed the batteries in our light.

I could lie and say I was in too much of a hurry or running too fast to go back and change the batteries. In reality, I didn't want to have to travel an extra 100 feet. So we slogged on towards the next aid station... Covered Bridge. Turns out that was a really, really bad decision.

Section pace: 24:33

Jesse and Art having fun while Shelly was pacing me:



Mark and a roll of duct tape...



Mark and a tube of lube...



Art's poisonous spider

Pine Hollow #2 to Covered Bridge #1 (6.6 miles, 80.8 total)

This section started innocently enough. I drank a Red Bull at Pine Hollow, and it definitely picked me up! Within about two minutes of leaving Pine Hollow for the second time, I felt a surge of energy that I hadn't felt since mile 20. I felt very good physically and mentally. My legs were still stiff, but the only pain radiated from my left Achilles.

Jesse and I were making great progress. I don't remember if I ran at this point, but I was definitely hiking faster than I had over the last few sections. I'm pretty sure this was about the time Jesse and I started discussing his Mind the Ducks 12 Hour performance. At the end of the race, Jesse ran one half-mile loop at a blistering 5:20 pace. It was the fastest lap anyone ran all day... after he had already run over 64 miles.

I have also witnessed Jesse exhibiting this kick on some of our long training runs. On our now-famous 68 mile training run, he stopped to take a leak. Mark Robillard (the same Mark now played by the Ken doll) and I continued on. We covered about a quarter mile before Jesse sprinted to catch up to us. This was at mile 60.

Anyway, we talked about the body's ability to squeeze out more performance even when you think you are on the brink of death. I have always been fascinated by the idea. Dr. Tim Noakes talks about his "central regulator" theory in "The Lore of Running". The idea is simple- fatigue is merely a mechanism your brain employs to prevent maximal effort. It is your brain's method of keeping something "in the tank" in the event of an emergency. Even at the end of a 100 miler, your body should be capable of more than a slow shuffle.

That conversation planted the seed. At this point, even though I felt better than I had for hours and hours, I could not fathom the idea of a fast run to end this race. Still, I knew I should be capable of a kick. This idea brewed for the next 25 miles.

Just as I was silently imagining what it would be like to cross the finish line in a sprint, my Fenix handheld died. Since it is a regulated light, it doesn't dim before dying... it just dies. At first I thought I may have accidentally clicked the on/off button, so I clicked it back on. After ten

seconds, it died again. I stopped and fiddled around with it. Jesse tried the same. No luck. It wasn't a disaster; I still had my headlamp. Jesse was also sporting two lights, and he had both of his. We continued on.

I was silently questioning whether I had reminded the crew to change the batteries after the start. I brought the handheld with me way back at the beginning and dropped it off at Polo Fields. I was supposed to tell them to replace all batteries to make sure they didn't die during the night. A sense of dread slowly built as I realized I had said nothing. My Red Bull-fueled train of thought went something like this:

"Okay no problems I still have one light and Jesse still has two the aid station is only about five or six miles away let's see at this pace that works out to be about two hours damn two hours is a long time if one already died oh my god what will happen if they all die how will we navigate to the next aid station in complete darkness shit shit shit this is how it could end Jesse and I will be lost wandering around the wilderness for hours..."

Maybe the Red Bull had something to do with the paranoia. Maybe not. About five minutes later, Jesse's handheld died. This was a bad omen. I could see his headlamp was dimming, also. Okay, this was about to get really, really bad.

My headlamp was still fairly strong, but I knew the batteries hadn't been changed since my last 100 miler last September.

It was then that I remembered my impulse buy from a week earlier. Shelly and I were buying some race supplies at a Meijer (Midwest department store/ grocery store). While waiting to check out, I saw a display of LED keychain flashlights that were reduced to clearance prices. I immediately thought back to many race reports I had read where a runner's light had died. I remembered harrowing tales of wandering through the wilderness by the light of a cell phone or attempting to navigate via stars while surrounded by complete and total darkness. I picked one up. Sometimes I over-prepare. Sometimes it saves me.

I had clipped the keychain light inside the pocket of my water bottle sleeve. I dug it out and gave it to Jesse. It was a bit of a nuisance to use as it required continually pressing the "on" button, but it was surprisingly bright. This three dollar life saver would be just enough to allow us to make it to the Covered Bridge aid station.

The rest of the section was uneventful. I believe we continued talking about a lot of ultra-related topics, including Jesse's own 100 mile race he plans on running very soon. The time went by faster than it had in previous sections, and our pace was better than it had been in a long time.

After some time, we came to a field with parked cars in the distance. I remembered the layout from my previous attempt in 2008. Rich, my pacer, had paced someone else after I dropped out. Jason (my other crew member) and I had slept in the Covered Bridge parking lot. Anyway, we ran through the parking lot and into the actual covered bridge.

This aid station was quite a sight. It was illuminated with Christmas lights. It appeared to be heated, though that may have been some sort of psychosomatic effect. About half of the thirty people in the bridge were sleeping, the others look a little like zombies. My crew still looked alert. We gave Art our lights to change the batteries, and Shelly immediately rattled off the food available at the food table.

I stopped drinking the Mike's at this point as I was worried it would make me too sleepy. Instead I drank the chia with only water. Note- water-only iskiate... not good. I also drank another Red Bull hoping to capture the magic from the previous section. I think I may have eaten some solid food, too. Art gave us an update on our pace and relayed what to expect on the next section. This was a 4.7 mile loop, then we will end up at Covered Bridge again.

Jesse and I re-affixed our lights, grabbed our water bottles, and headed out. The last section was fast; I wanted to continue that trend. We were momentarily held up by a group of people at the end of the covered bridge. They were asking for pictures of Jesse and me. Being polite, we stopped. I vaguely remember our crew physically pushing us out onto the trail.

Section pace: 18:15

Covered Bridge #1 to Covered Bridge #2 (4.7 miles, 85.5 miles total)

Someone at the aid station mentioned this section was easy. By now, I should have learned to ignore such advice. We were immediately met with a fairly large climb. This section essentially contained three substantial climbs and three equally-large descents. The climbs were no problem; the descents continued to be painful crawls. I'm sure Jesse grew tired of my incessant complaining and my vow to solve my downhill running issues.

This loop was fairly uneventful. It was relatively slow compared to the last loop. We ran with Rachel Sterk and Phil Stapert, our friends from Grand Rapids for some time. Rachel seemed to look much better than I did. Eventually we lost them when Rachel stopped to stretch.

We also ran with an older gentleman that was being paced by his daughter. We caught him at the top of a large climb. He was vomiting at the top. Jesse asked him if he was okay. He responded with some nonsense. He was clearly in rough shape. As is the case with most pacers, his daughter feigned concern and kept him moving forward. She was playing music through an iPod, but was not using headphones. We could hear her music from a considerable distance. It was odd to hear music playing in the middle of the darkness.

About this time, I started hearing frequent footsteps behind us. I would turn and we'd be alone. Ah, the joys of auditory hallucinations! I would also hear occasional voices, but Jesse assured me he heard them, too. Either our hallucinations were syncing up in some strange shared sleep-deprived state, or there were actually people on another part of the trail just out of our line of sight.

After what felt like an especially long section, we came back to Covered Bridge. I was feeling better than expected, but still very tired. I spent a little longer in the chair than planned, but it

was a welcome break. I ate my usual aid station fare, re-taped my hands, applied some lube, and rested momentarily.





My crew informed me that the rest of the course would be very easy. Their source- our friend Phil. He had finished the race the previous two years. I learned a valuable lesson in the next hour or so... Phil's idea of "easy" is significantly different than my idea of easy.

Section pace: 23:50

Covered Bridge #2 to O'Neil Woods (3.3 miles, 88.8 total)

This section started on an asphalt road. In the first few hundred yards, I think I stopped to pee twice. This is a trend that started a few miles back. For whatever reason, I see to urinate frequently late in 100 milers. The urine frequency and volume seems to be out of proportion to the amount being consumed. The urine is clear and I have no other symptoms of dehydration, hyponatremia, or other kidney issues. It's a bit of a mystery...

Anyway, the section started with a sweeping climb uphill. The road then flattened out as we passed multiple horse ranches. About half way through the loop, I had to stop to take a #2. It was a little tricky as there was no good cover... only a few bunches of trees in the ditches. Luckily I found a bunch that offered decent concealment. I left a little lighter afterward; I'm sure it helped my performance.

With about a mile left, he hit trails. Hmmmm.... I thought it was supposed to be easy. As it turns out, the trail section of this loop sucked. It was comprised of several large climbs. Our pace took a beating, but we finally came to the O'Neil Woods aid station.

We arrived to blaring music and glow-in-the-dark jewelry everywhere! It was a pretty surreal atmosphere given our state of fatigue.

The aid station volunteers took the reverse route of the other aid station volunteers. They immediately noticed our attire:

Girl at aid station (to Jesse): "Are you wearing a dress shirt?!?"

Jesse: "Yeah, it's like a fancy Nathan vest. See? It has pockets."

Girl (to me): "Are you wearing sandals?!?"

Me: "Yeah, the course was too gravelly to run barefoot any more."

Girl: "Is that a kilt?!?"

Me: [I have no idea what I said here]

After spending too much time eating and procrastinating, Jesse and I prepared to head out. I asked the girl about the section ahead. She said "It's pretty easy. You'll start on some easy trails with a few steps, then hit the tow path." Perfect.

Section pace: 19:41

O'Neil Woods to Merriman Road (4.5 miles, 93.3 total)

I was very confident heading into this section. With only a little over 12 miles left, I knew I could slowly walk to the finish. All I had to do was keep moving. It sounds easy, but this is the point in a 100 miler where your body has long-since rejected the idea of responding to your demands to move. The pain is analogous to getting a tattoo. At first, it hurts a lot. Then you get into a groove and just accept the pain. Eventually the persistence wears on you. The pain builds and builds. You cannot ignore it. You cannot embrace it. You simply tolerate it.

Fatigue grips your body in ever-increasingly violent waves. Even routine tasks like avoiding pissing on yourself become arduous. Bouts of sleepiness hit you like a hammer. You will be alert and fully awake one moment; catching yourself falling off the side of the trail the next. Sleep comes in quick, involuntary spurts.

This was my state heading into the trek to Merriman Road.

The girl at the aid station lied. Or wasn't a runner. Or had never run this section after previously running 88.8 miles. After exiting the aid station, we were immediately treated to a very long decline. According to the elevation charts, the decline was only 400 feet. It felt like a mile plunge into the depths of hell. It started with a series of stairs. I gingerly sidestepped each one. At the bottom, we were lulled into a false sense of accomplishment as we hit flat ground. That lasted about twenty feet before we plummeted down another steep downhill section.

Eventually we hit flat asphalt. I think. My memory of this section is very blurry. Jesse was obviously as sleepy as I was. We met up with two other runners for awhile, and three of us missed a turn onto the tow path. Luckily the fourth saw it and we were saved the pain of having to backtrack.

The towpath was very surreal. The sky was lightening as dawn crept in. I could not wait as I knew it would help ward off the overwhelming sleepiness that was taking control of my psyche.

Even though the tow path was only about two miles long, it felt like ten. I was wavering in and out of consciousness. Our conversations ceased. Jesse would be running ahead of me on the left. The next instant, he'd be on the right. At one point, I opened my eyes a fraction of a second before crashing into a rock retaining wall that ran along the path. At another point, I saw what I thought was the bridge that marked the end of the tow path. I blinked and the bridge moved 100 feet down the path. Shit. A hallucination.

The only solid memory I have from this section is the compost plant. Everyone warned us about the smell. Having grown up in close proximity to a dairy farm, I was accustomed to offensive odors. Or so I thought. As we neared the plant, I smelled a slightly offensive odor. "Hey, this isn't so bad!" I remarked. I'm not sure if that was a thought or I actually said it to Jesse. As we advanced, the smell grew. It was as if you started with decaying plant matter, added some spoiled milk, maybe some turkey shit, then a dead body, and finally you tossed in a pile of vomit that crept under your car seat in the summer after a weekend keg party in college. It caused immediate and uncontrolled gagging. I'm not quite sure why I didn't vomit; I wish I had. The good news... it only lasted about an eighth of a mile.

Eventually the tow path came to an end and we wandered into the town of what I was assuming was Cuyahoga Falls. Since it was Sunday morning, the town was deserted. We passed a gentleman taking pictures. We saw the car wash that served as the aid station. We saw Art and Shelly. Finally, we could rest for a moment.



This aid station went pretty fast, or so I remember. I drank some Slim Fast and Red Bull and ate some ramen noodles. The Red Bull magic never returned, so I will likely use it as a one-time booster for future races.



Later Shelly said both Jesse and I looked like train wrecks. Shelly asked Jesse if he wanted her to pace me. before she got the words out of her mouth, Jesse enthusiastically yelled "YES!"

Shelly would be pacing me for the last two sections, so we quickly got ready and headed out. As we were leaving, I couldn't help but think about that kick. How could I possibly have the energy to move faster than this slow crawl?

Section pace: 19:06

Merriman Road to Memorial Parkway (3 miles, 96.3 total)

This was a mostly flat section comprised almost entirely of tow path. Shelly was now pacing me. We walked a lot. I peed a lot. Apparently I was hallucinating a lot... I repeatedly asked Shelly if she had said something. She had not.

When she did talk, she told some more stories of the crew experiences throughout the night. I really don't remember any of them. We were passed by a handful of runners at this point, including a pair that were running. I marveled at their ability to run at this point. We were also passed by a few runners unaffiliated with the race. All seemed aware of the race as they congratulated me for making it this far.

Shelly reminded me of all the vomit piles during this section. She could identify them as Burning River runners based on the partially-digested aid station food. It was pretty gross.

We were passed by one dude that was still running... I yelled out "Great job running at this point!" He looked down at my huarache-clad feet and exclaimed in a douche-like voice "Thanks, it's my shoes."

This section took us over an hour, but we pulled into the last aid station- Memorial Parkway- a little before the 27 hour point.

When I arrived at this aid station, Shelley Viggiano recorded me for a minute. (See Jimmy's video [here](#)). I really didn't remember what I said until seeing the footage later. I was still a bit out of it.

I knew if I hurried, I could still walk in to a PR. I ate quickly, got my water bottles, and Shelly and I were off.

Section pace: 23:00

Memorial Parkway to the Finish Line (4.8 miles, 101.1 total)

As far as I know, Shelly and Jesse never discussed the kick idea. I don't think I discussed it with Shelly, either. Regardless, as soon as we started this section, she said "Let's try running a bit."

There were orange traffic cones marking the path through the early part of this loop. Shelly challenged me to run to the cone about fifth yards ahead. I managed to break into a labored, plodding trot at a breakneck 15:00 pace. As I neared the cone, I asked her if this was the one she was talking about. She said no, the next one. I did it. It didn't feel horrible.

We came to a hill, which I walked. Once we crested the top, Shelly told me to try running again. To my surprise, I was able to run downhill fairly well. The pace was still hovering around 14:30, but it was faster than walking. Shelly was running ahead of me and I was trying to keep up. We crossed a road and headed into some trails. Or pace slowly crept up.

14:15.

14:00.

13:45.

Damn, I was starting to feel pretty good. The pain went away. The stiffness went away. I took the lead ahead of Shelly. I sped up to a 12:00 pace. It felt as if I were flying!

I don't think we had passed any other runners at that point. We came to the first set of dreaded stairs. By instinct, I sped up. I LOVE running both stairs and hills... there's no greater feeling than pushing hard on hills. I took the first few steps harder than I should. I could feel the high beginning to crash, so I dialed it back a bit and power-hiked upward. When I got to the top, I broke into a run again.

Eventually we came to the second set of stairs, which I galloped up a little faster. Once we got to the top, we ran into several small groups of runners. With each group, the killer "catch the person in front of you" instinct kicked in. I had an even greater surge of energy! We had a long, flat section of trails along a power line. During this section, our pace was steadily in the 10:30 range and occasionally flirting with 10:00.

I did not remember how long the section was, but I knew the rest of the crew would be meeting me with one mile left. After flying over the trails for what seemed like only a few minutes, I saw Art and Jesse in the distance. As we approached, I could hear them yelling. When Shelly and I passed them, they took off with us. Picking up these two really caused an adrenaline spike.

I picked up the pace to about 9:00. Jesse commented about me sandbagging. He walked 30 miles with me throughout the night with our pace never exceeding 16:00s. Now Shelly got to do all the running.

Shortly after, an obese lady driving in a van yelled for me to get on the sidewalk (I was running on the shoulder of the road). That bitch. Had I not been in such a zone, I would like to have yelled something back. Later we laughed about it.

I managed to keep a sub 9:30 pace until we had about 3/8 of a mile left. At that point, my pace started to slow. I was actually out of breath. Push as I might, I could not muster the reserves to maintain the sub-10:00 pace. Until I saw the finish line.

We came over a small hill or turned a corner... I really don't remember which one. All I remember is seeing the clock in the distance. I picked up the pace. With about 100 yards left, it was as if my body suddenly became weightless. I just relaxed and ran.





I don't remember exactly when I crossed the finish line, but suddenly I was aware that I had stopped. Joe Jurczyk, the race RD, was shaking my hand. I also remember Shelly placing the medal/belt buckle over my head and hugging me. My crew was surrounding me. There were pictures being taken... I think we posed for a few. I hugged Shelly. It seems like I talked to a few other people, but I really don't remember.





I do remember stopping the timer on my Garmin and noting the average pace for that section... 12:00 flat. Damn. Turns out I was capable of this mythical ultramarathon kick, too. I would have to wait until later that night to find out my pace over that last 100 yards.



I think I may have drank some water, then collapsed on a grassy spot near the finish. The next hour or so was a blur of sleeping, cramping, and congratulating other runners.



It is difficult to describe exactly how I felt. In my previous 100 mile finish, I didn't feel great joy or a sense of accomplishment... I was just happy to be done. I wanted to get off my feet and sleep. This race was much different. I was very excited about the burst of energy I had over the last 4.8 miles, but the enormity of having just ran 101.1 miles didn't really set in at the time. That came in the following days. I did feel a sense of relief that the Burning River monkey was off my back after the 2008 DNF. Mostly, I was just absorbing the atmosphere at the finish line.

I saw Jimmy V. finish, followed closely by Rachel. It was so proud of both, though I couldn't move to congratulate either. I also saw a few other people I ran with finish., including Scotchkee from Kickrunners. It was awesome to be able to spend even a small amount of time at the finish. Seeing people finally reach the end of something so enormous was very cool. It was a bit strange... almost as I had dissociated from the fact that I had just run it, too. Seeing this **STRONGLY** reinforced my desire to get involved in ultras as more than just a participant.



After awhile, we slowly made our way back to the car, packed it up, and headed home. The road trip back went very fast on account of me sleeping the majority of the way. After we arrived home, unpacked the car, and picked the kids up from the babysitters, I finally relaxed at home.



Still eager to find my pace at the end, I dug out my Garmin. I connected it to the computer, uploaded the data, then took a look. I managed to hit a 6:45 pace over the last 100 yards. I WAS capable of a kick at the end of an ultra! I did not reach my initial goal of running a 100 miler barefoot, but I did rekindle a dormant competitiveness. My short and long term goals will center around lowering my 100 miler times. My next goal- sub-24 hours.

Final time: 27:47:45, 118th place out of 166 finishers. Hardly a notable performance, but it set my 100 mile PR by about 77 minutes.

I could not have done this without the unconditional support, expert crew leadership, and great pacing from Shelly. She has made all this possible. I also could not have done it without Jesse. Not only did he do a great job as a crew member and pacer, but also as a training partner on most of my long runs in preparation for Burning River. I also could not have done it without Art. His precision and attention to detail as a crew member gave me confidence that each aid station stop would be fast and worry-free. I am habitually blessed with the greatest teammates in the world.

Epilogue

Now that it has been over a week since the race, I am 95% recovered. The time after a major race is always a let-down... the lack of exercise can be somewhat depressing. I've had plenty of activities to fill my time (impending release of the second edition of my barefoot running book, book signing later this month, barefoot/minimalist shoe running workshop planning, reviewing a variety of products including Barefoot Ted's Luna sandals, etc.), but nothing replaces the excitement of racing.



I'll be running the Fallsburg marathon in a few days, and the North Country Trail 50 miler in a little under three weeks (I'm planning on running barefoot and in the kilt in both). In both races, I hope to set PRs (3:55 and 10:20 respectively). I'm eagerly awaiting the North Country Trail trip as many of my running friends (Mark, Jesse, Andy, Phil, Stuart, Rick, Tony, Jeremiah, and a slew of others). Shortly after I should be helping Jesse run his own 100 miler. I am extremely excited about this... I finally get to serve as a crew member and/or pacer.

As far as the barefoot 100 miler, I think I will put those plans on hold indefinitely. Todd Ragsdale, the recent world record setter for total barefoot miles in 24 hours, is planning on taking a crack at the record in September. I have a feeling he'll be able to do it, and I will be rooting for him the entire time!

As far as long-term, I'll leave it up to fate. Burning River qualifies me for the Western States 100 Mile Endurance Run, and I will be entering the lottery. Last year, I had about a 16% chance of being chosen. If I get picked this year, that will become next year's goal race. If not, I'd still like to run a mountain ultra in the Western US. The most appealing race at this point- the Tahoe Rim Trail 100 miler. Michael Helton, one of my pacers for the Hallucination 100, successfully ran the 50k earlier this year.

As far as the rest of life, we'll see. I will continue my quest to greatly simplify my life. I will also continue to experiment with my pseudo-paleo diet. Both adventures will be documented here. Of course, I will continue to educate people about barefoot and minimalist shoe running; it has become my passion. A major part of that will be to continue to document my own adventures, shamelessly promote the Barefoot Runners Society as THE leading organization supporting barefoot and minimalist shoe runners, and continuing to review products relevant to us. I will also continue to persuade people to get involved in ultrarunning by running, crewing, or volunteering.

For those of you that have yet to take the plunge in barefoot or minimalist shoe running or even ultrarunning, give it a shot. I think you will find it to be a life-changing journey. If you do, I would urge you to start blogging about your adventures. Your own shared experiences will inspire others to adopt a more healthy lifestyle and add to our collective knowledge base.

Best of luck! And thanks for reading. Okay, bye now.