

I slightly beat the two week deadline! This is, as usual, a little on the long side but hope it capture something of this terrific run.

For me, this was the ultra that almost wasn't. I signed up for the Vermont 100 in July but had to cancel because of business demands. I wanted to run the inaugural Grand Mesa 100 in Colorado but that didn't work out. So with a lot of support from Becca, I wound up at the Headlands 100 in Marin, just north of San Francisco. With all the heat training in the great plains of north Texas, I decided to run a four-loop 25mi course with 20,000ft+ of elevation gain and loss (more on loss later) where they actually warned people about hypothermia at the last minute because of the cold, windy, foggy conditions. Nothing like condition-specific training! The final omen was that I only packed half the race food I intended to; I was just a little disorganized. Then, in the coup de grace, in my concern that I not oversleep I set two alarms. However, on one I made the chime go off every hour, which it did, so I got a lot of 58 minute snatches of sleep. Despite the ill forebodings, I was totally relaxed. Either in the zone or not paying attention, we left our friends house at about 5am to drive the hour north.

For those of you looking for the bottom line, here it is. There is more color commentary following.

60 starters, 44 finishers. I was 23rd with a time of 26:10

Loop 1 – 5:07

Loop 2 – 6:18

Loop 3 – 7:35

Loop 4 – 7:18

Clockwise loops (1 & 3) were 5:07 and 7:35

Counterclockwise loops were - 6:18 and 7:18

So though my third and fourth loops are a little hard to compare because they're in opposite directions, I ran 75-100 faster than 50-75 by 17 minutes. I'm happy about that. Pace worked out to about 15:40/mile.



I must say that a great first experience was starting a race to the sound of ocean waves on the beach and a real foghorn. I did almost miss the start and forget my water bottle but given that I was planning on being out there for 30 hours, it didn't seem that big a deal to miss the start by 30 seconds. The whole event was very low-key, with about sixty runners, most all from California. I was certainly the only runner from Texas. The first loop goes clockwise and starts out with a 1.7 mile climb that gains about 1100 ft. So while (thankfully) I didn't have to acclimate to altitude, it was a serious hike to start the day. The first aid station was

approx 4 miles away so after topping out of the first climb, it was mostly downhill to Tennessee Valley where I would see Becca. We had planned for about an hour to get there and I pulled in after 48 min or so. I ran with a very nice woman Nancy for a while heading into the aid station and as we headed out to Muir Beach, also about four miles away, she introduced me to a friend of hers, Karen Bonnett, and after Nancy pulled away, Karen and I got in the same gear and ran the next 46+ miles together. She is an

accomplished athlete who completed a full IronMan distance triathlon THE WEEKEND BEFORE!!! Wow. She's also an ultracyclist riding 1200 kilometers at a time. But I'm jumping ahead.

The section from TV to Muir Beach is another serious up and down, going from about 900 feet back down to the ocean, back up again and down into Muir Beach. This is a really pretty section with amazing ocean views from high up above. Amidst the beauty, however, I already had a sense that the running that was going to most tax me was all the downhill. My guess is that less than five miles of the 25 mile loop were actually flat. So if didn't run the down hills, then I might need more than the 30 hours I anticipated. With a 33 hour cutoff and a course record of 18:44, the math did scare me a bit. When I got to Muir Beach after about 45 minutes, I was feeling good and checked in with Becca again before pretty much heading right back out with more calories, water and a boost from seeing her. Early on, everything is possible.

Leaving Muir Beach and following another trail back to Tennessee Valley, Karen and I continued to talk and run, just enjoying the trail and the cloudy, overcast day. Another four miles back in the now familiar format of long climbs and descents on a mix of rocky trail, wide horse trail and the very rare segment of pavement. We eased through a nice downhill into the eucalyptus trees, popping out at the aid station again. Changing from a short sleeve shirt into a singlet, more calories and water, then off again at about halfway through the first loop. I was still running ahead of my schedule but wasn't worried about it at that point.

The next section started with another mile or so climb, though more gradual, then dropped down to the ridge that we would run out and back on each loop to get to the aid station under the Golden Gate Bridge. Much of this section is exposed to some pretty strong winds from the ocean and the race director had even cautioned about hypothermia. The wind was definitely much stronger along here, maybe 20 miles/hour, but as soon as we dropped the over the ridge toward the bridge, it got warmer and calmer in a hurry. So the big 900 foot or so drop down to the Bay was a welcome respite even though tempered by the knowledge that we'd be turning right around and marching back up this steep path. Becca was totally ready at the aid station, of course, so a quick hello, picked up enough food and water for the 8-mile section to the start/finish started, then we started the steady walk back to the ridge.



Feeling strong, Karen and I made great time back to place where the trail split to this out and back and began a really long, steep descent back to the valley floor. We were moving easy, the temp was a little higher and we cruised into the aid station a little after noon, both recognizing that a 5:07 first loop was WAAAAAY too fast and more like a recipe for disaster. It was so companionable running with her that staying together was no effort and great for the spirits. To keep my pace a little more under control, I put on

my heart rate monitor for the next loop. Definitely glad I did, as I was about 5-10 beats over where I wanted to be. Wearing it really helped to dial me in.

The valley was an easy jog/walk and then changed to full walking up the long climb to the out and back trail to the bridge. I have to say that I don't remember much specific for this next loop. I was digging the weather, the company and the fact that I was feeling so good. When we got back to the split, I had the great surprise of seeing my friend Errol "the Rocket" Jones. He is one of the Bear100 co-RDs and the guy who talked to me about the Bear right after my Leadville DNF last year. He's a great spirit and he had come out to run with some friends that morning, knowing that I was registered and looking to say hello to me, Becca and the girls. We ran together for a while and it was another pick me up to hear his stories and enthusiasm. What a treat.

Becca continued to be upbeat and in total control of the support side of the race. She had managed to go to REI to pick up the rest of the race food and even find a bunch of non-caffeinated gel/shot blocks. That played a big part for me being able to eat and drink the entire race. She had a nice lunch on the water in Sausalito, talked to lots of folks on the phone and generally made the most of the time she had. That makes it a lot more fun for her and easier on me knowing that she's not stressed.

Karen's boyfriend (Nattu Natraj) was now on crew duty and planning to pace her the last 25 miles. He's an accomplished runner in his own right with lots of ultras to his credit, including three Badwater's, and is planning to run the Spartathlon this October. Not to mention a super nice guy who knew all about NTRR and seems to be a student of the sport. I hope to run into them both again soon. They were an ultra power couple for sure! We continued running smoothly, mostly, for the rest of the loop and pulled into the half way point at about 6:30. We both planned to regroup here. She changed shoes and picked up a pacer, I brushed my teeth. Felt like a whole new day.



Now with Karen's pacer, we headed out for the clockwise third loop. The three of us chatted and huffed/puffed up the big climb and soon were not as connected. I was definitely moving slower than the previous loops though I still felt great. I stayed on my nutrition and hydration all day and consistently gobbled or choked down 200-300 calories per hour, which is a gigantic improvement for me. I can't tell you how much it helps running in cool weather that lets my body work like it's

supposed to! At the next aid station, I grabbed my headlamp and flashlight but was pretty determined to run without turning them on for as long as I could. After a slight adjustment, I was surprised at how well I was able to see and feel. Eventually I couldn't safely move ahead, so I flipped the switch and got a pretty nasty surprise. The foggy day was turning into a foggier night and that made my headlamp nearly worthless. Just like with the highbeams in a car, when my headlamp was set on its strongest setting, I couldn't see a thing. With the low setting I could see but only about two feet in front of me. I was getting a little tired just when I need to ratchet up my concentration, not the best combination! Getting in and out of Muir Beach, with that long, slick downhill, was uneventful but I sure wasn't running much of the descent. More like a stiff-legged jig. Not pretty but it got the job done, I suppose. As the fog got a lot closer to rain, I had a harder and harder time with seeing the trail. Inevitably, I missed a ribbon and turned left when I should have turned right. Just as inevitably, it seems that no one ever makes a wrong turn that takes them uphill. So after pounding downhill for about 10 minutes, it looked/sounded and

felt wrong. So I trudged back up the hill just in time to catch a couple I had passed a long time ago who got me back on the right path. I was so turned around by then that I probably would have jacked it again up without their help. That probably took about 20-25 extra minutes.

Now running a little more slowly, I headed out to the ridge. When I saw Becca at the last aid station, before we crossed the ridge again, she gave me the rain coat which I had packed for her at the last minute. On this section, I really don't know that I could have stayed dry enough to avoid hypothermia given the combination of wind, temp in the upper 40s and the moisture. I was lucky that I had the coat and that Becca had enough other warm clothes to let me borrow it. When I saw her at the Golden Gate aid station (did I mention how cool it was to have an aid station in that spot!) she was pretty worried. Even though I had pounded down to the bridge, I knew I was behind Karen and her pacer. That meant that when they got there, I hadn't checked in and Becca's stress level was going to go up. I was probably 90 seconds behind them because of getting lost, so the panic didn't last long. Becca was going to stay at this aid station and not meet me at the start/finish so she could grab a few hours of sleep while I did the 16-mile roundtrip. A quick kiss, the routine fueling up, and off I went. I passed Karen and her pacer but as I headed up the fog worsened and I missed a different turn at the same freaking intersection!!!! I only let myself go for about 15 min total this time and got back on the track. I caught up with Karen at the next aid station and she was again surprised to see me behind her. A little embarrassing to say the least.



The rest of the loop was uneventful and though it was the middle of the night, I was actually pretty jazzed for the last loop. I sat down and changed shoes to my much lighter New Balance MT-100s, choked down most of a grilled cheese sandwich and headed back out. My friend Matt Crownover has a saying about the "eye of the tiger" and that's exactly how I felt heading back out. I knew I was going to finish, barring any injury, and the course didn't hold any surprises. It really was all about my attitude. The counter clockwise direction seemed a little tougher to me but I was ready. I cruised

up the mountain steadily, saw Becca who had managed to get 3-4 hours of sleep, then headed right back up the windy and cold ridge. By the time I got to my Bermuda triangle intersection, it was daylight enough for me to realize how I had goofed up earlier. Somehow I was much calmer after seeing how I made the mistake. I settled into a serious walk up a long stretch to the top of the mountain and then ran, really ran, down to the next aid station at mile 87ish. No sitting down, no lingering... got some hot soup and kept on going with encouragement from the fantastic volunteers and my lovely wife. I would see these guys one more time but when I did, I'd be down to four miles!

Really feeling strong, I made great time to Muir Beach and hardly stopped before leaving for Tennessee Valley the last time. On the way out, walking up the hill, I passed Nancy who had been running so well for most of the race. She had had some biomechanical problems during the night and was going to mostly walk it in. She had a great attitude about her day and was still smiling at mile 92. I love this sport.

Running back along the beautiful coast, there is a long, delicious downhill to Pirates Cove, which presaged a beating of a climb up some gnarly stairs and a much longer than remembered climb back to the top. Despite feeling good at the bottom, now less than six miles from the end, I have to admit to cussing a bit about wanting some flat. But when I got to the gentle jeep road that was the trail for most of the way back to TV, I ran it. The previous loop in that direction had me peg-legging it down in a way that seemed slightly mocking after coming out of Pirate's Cove.



When I got the last aid station before the finish, I gave Becca my [Amphipod waist belt](#) (which might now be my favorite piece of running gear), put a shot block in my bottle and hammered out of there... for like 25 yards till I started the 1.5 mile climb out of the valley. Then it was back to a really strong ultra walk. I passed a number of brave people who were dealing with massive blisters and low spirits and we chatted about the finish we all knew was so close. When I reached the crest, I knew that the next 1.7 miles was going to be a struggle but I was equally determined to run it. And I did. All the way down, through the empty gun bunkers, the stairs, the painfully hard pavement and the last few

switchbacks down to the beach. I can't tell you how cool it was to come into the finish with the fog horn, the buoy bell ringing and those still crashing waves. Karen finished a few minutes behind me for third woman overall; just amazing. An awesome finish to one of the most enjoyable hundreds I have experienced.

Here are the overall results http://ultrasignup.com/results_event.aspx?did=6157