

The Starting Line, Silverton, Colorado, 2001 Hardrock 100 Endurance Run, 6 A.M., (and Chapman Gulch Aid Station, Mile 18)

A TASTE OF FAME, BRIEFLY

THIS BELOVED, LITTLE known race in the San Juan Mountains has a year in the limelight, as trail running begins to shift from eccentric to mainstream. Last year, a feature article in Outside magazine spurs keen and heightened interest in the event, and toeing the starting line along with the runners at this year's Hardrock are photographers, film crews and writers working for Sports Illustrated, and, rumor has it, National Geographic.

It is thrilling for some to have this attention; others find it to be a bit disquieting and strange. At Chapman Gulch, the first crew-access aid station for runners this year, video crews surround our friend Kirk as he sits down to dry his feet and change his socks. All lenses are locked on this modest, unassuming, gentle soul from Crested Butte, who, in a spurt of uncharacteristic competitiveness, ended up winning the race in record time the previous year. While we are lubing Kirk up and slapping sunscreen on his shoulders, a well intentioned video cameraman zooms in for a close up of Kirk's toes and asks him the following probing question: "Kirk: **how important are your feet?!**" This earnest query is followed by an expectant and hopeful pause from the cameraman, a disciple bent at the feet of a guru. "Umm, pretty important" offers Kirk, a little bewildered.

Later, after the film crews leave, Keith Frates, Kirk's longtime girlfriend, suggests doing our own behind the scenes documentary of Hardrock . Replacing the predictable glamorization of the race's dramatic battles with scree, altitude, endurance, exposure, hypothermia, and exhaustion, our film would be a little more authentic and full-bodied, a work of non-fiction whose feet would be firmly planted in the tangible and eminently visual sensory details of ultra endurance events, a view that the runners' crews are generally all too intimate with.

Here's what Keith proposes: a documentary focused on the various eccentricities of ultrarunners - particularly the specific eccentricities of Hardrockers, a group residing on the margins of an already quirky lot. Carried away with the momentum of her creative vision, Keith suggests an audio track composed of ultrarunner bodily emanations, tight close-ups of delaminating feet and interactive Scratch and Sniffs on the Black Stuff that comes out of the stomach linings of Hardrockers Who Ate Too Much Ibuprofen Thirty Miles Earlier In The Race. We could also, she suggests, use the documentary to explore the answers to questions that viewers and aspiring Hardrockers REALLY want to know, such as understanding why it is not a very good idea to stick your hand in the bowl of M&M's at the aid station if you aren't among the, let's say, first 5 runners, and how Non-Running Hardrock Spouses **really** feel about their mate's hours and hours of pre- race training. This film, this very visceral view of the Hardrock 100, would fondly be known as the **View From the Crew**.

THIS IS WHAT happens when you spend too many hours pacing and crewing your ultrarunner partners and friends. You end up living too close to the Inside of something that the Outside tends to idolize as glamorous, be it mountaineering, Hollywood A-List actresses, or, for this brief moment in time, the eclectic and gritty world of ultra mountain endurance events. Long term, close-in proximity results in a jaded, blasé view of the epic, allowing commonly accepted - and sometimes carefully constructed- myths innumerable opportunities to get debunked, stripped naked by the banal details and messy reality of our universal human condition.

I suggest to Keith that no one *really* wants to discover that the chiseled visage and superior gaze of their mountaineering guide was once, on a run- out, sketched- out pitch in a storm, reduced to quivering self doubt and tears. In a similar vein, no one really wants to see the dark, mundane undersides of endurance, the moments when we falter, at the end of our strength and will - snot running out our noses, feet swollen to balloons, and our ego far past the point of caring about how any of that will look on camera.

But, she won't have it. So here's the following, a mis-en-mis scattering of scenes from the View From the Crew, compiled from 17 collective seasons of crewing at Hardrock.

2003 Hardrock: 7:32 am, Cunningham Gulch, Silverton, Mile 8.9
IT'S A DOWNHILL SLIDE TO HEAVEN (AND TO HARDROCK, TOO)

WE PILE OUT of the car after pondering the merits of different parking strategies for a good ten minutes, attired in layers of fleece, polyester blends, and down. Keith's face is withdrawn, semicircles of dark underlining her eyes, since the Avalanche Coffeehouse doesn't open until 8. Our friend Catherine is already here, scanning the distant ridgeline a thousand feet above us for signs of the first runners. Chris, down from Idaho and a Hardrock virgin, takes a perch on the back end of the jeep and attentively reads through Kirk's carefully inscribed, hand written notes for What To Do at each aid while Keith and I do jumping jacks in the meadow in futile attempts to get the blood circulating back into our toes.

CHRIS WILL BE pacing Kirk at Hardrock this year, for the final 60 miles. He'll be pacing Kirk because Kirk's former pacer, runner Virgil Best, has decided to enter the race.

After Best's first season of pacing Kirk, in the summer of 1997, he vowed that nothing- *nada, nunca, rien*-would ever possess him to run a 100 mile race. In particular, nothing would ever possess him to run *this* hundred mile race, whose miles of unrelentingly steep downhill jeep road sections tend to reprogram runners quads into quivering, painful

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masses resembling the Jello salad at least one of your Midwestern aunts still serves at family reunions, pretending its some kind of treat.

Despite his vehement protestations, Hardrock had already begun to seduce him: Best returned the next year to pace Kirk again, running the final 42 miles of the course with him in the opposite direction. He returned to pace Kirk again in 1999, again in 2000 and once again in 2001. In 2002, he signed up for the race – **nada, nunca, rien!**– though the fires in nearby Durango and the Weminuche Wilderness cancelled the race that year. The 2003 Hardrock would be his first full attempt on the course.

THIS IS WHAT happens at Hardrock. Like a moral conservative's belief that experimenting with a little marijuana at the prom is a sure fire step down the inevitable road to an adulthood of homelessness, prostitution, and heroin, if you play around with pacing at Hardrock, your doomed and fated future is laid out before you, long before you even have a clue.

We glance over at Chris, perched innocently on his camp chair, excited for the adventure and beauty that awaits him in the night. His life is good: he lives in Ketchum; he works as a massage therapist; he's happily married; he looks like the exact dimensions of a casting director's sketch for a modern day mountain town demi-god. (Think Viggo Mortensen- As –Aragorn The King in The Lord of The Rings, alive and well and living in contemporary mountain Idaho.) Lean muscles, finely cast; shoulder length sandy blond- brown hair covered by a boater's requisite Kavu visor; a graceful intelligence, and an authentic, modest persona despite a vast array of athletic accomplishment on rivers and mountains, on bikes, boats and skis.

Kirk called him, in April. ***Sure, he'll pace Kirk at Hardrock this year.*** Really, how hard can it be to accompany a good friend through a night and an afternoon of running?

We shake our heads sadly for the future that lies ahead for this fine, decent man.

8:21 AM, Cunningham, and 10:18 AM, Maggie Gulch Aid Station

THE IRONIC JOY OF BEREFTNESS

KIRK COMES THROUGH at 8:21 AM, right on schedule and in 15th place, just in time for us to jump in the car and race back into town to hit the Avalanche before Keith goes into Americano Withdrawal.

One year, we foregoed the Americanos and ran up Maggie Gulch from the valley to catch the runners at the next aid station instead. Fields of columbine, rose paintbrush, delphinium, senecio and bistort swayed in a wash of color in the meadows sloping down from the road to the west. We head up the singletrack from the aid so we can cheer on the runners.

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By the time we see them, four and a half hours into the race, the racers are starting up their third climb of the day, up out of Maggie towards Pole Creek. Several already look tanked: heads down, quads heavy, dragging themselves slowly up the grade to the pass.

When Hardrock is run in a counter-clockwise direction, as it is this year, the runners are 15 and a half miles into the race when they leave the Maggie Gulch aid station. The total elevation gained has now been approximately 7,000 feet, a good average for a very challenging trail race that many strong runners would feel accomplished to complete. At this point at Hardrock, racers still have anywhere from twenty three to forty hours to go.

SOMETIMES, KEITH AND I poke and prod Kirk's mind to try to uncover just how bad it can feel, at times, at Hardrock, and still make the choice to continue. Kirk tells us that there will be several moments during the race when he will feel.... (he pauses for a long time to search for just the right word) - **bereft**. Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus lists these synonyms for the word bereft: bereaved, cut off, deprived, destitute, impoverished, left without, naked, robbed, shorn, stripped, wanting. *Despair*.

We ponder this word often, roll it around our consciousness, imagine ourselves pushing through this emotion at 2 am, shivering on an icy talus field, full of anxiety underneath a brooding, angry lightening storm: every joint aching, legs protesting one more step upwards towards a far off distant ridge, will teetering on the edge and dreaming of warm beds and butter drenched garlic mashed potatoes, As always, Kirk comes through Maggie, as he will all of the later aid stations, smiling.

We turn tail and head down the road from Maggie to the road, where our car is parked a mere five miles away. Afterwards, we'll head into town, have a nice shower at the B&B, eat lunch at the Avalanche, think of Kirk and feel a tiny shred of guilt, paired with a much larger quota of envy.

Sherman Aid Station, Mile 29.2, near Lake City

YOU CALL THIS RUNNING?

WE DON'T GO to Sherman, as Kirk has kindly and diplomatically banned us from driving the jeep over the airy 4WD road across Cinnamon Pass after we nearly burned the brakes out one year while driving to Silverton down the similarly airy 4WD road from Ophir. This gives us lots of time to prepare for the next aid station at Grouse Gulch; lots of time to think.

I flip, once again, through the Hardrock course description. The lengthy pages outline, in painstaking detail, this 101 mile loop run through the San Juan Mountains of Colorado, a circumnavigation which embraces the rugged terrain between the towns of Silverton, Ophir, Telluride, Ouray, and Lake City. To call it a run is something of a euphemism: Hardrockers must also hike, granny step, shuffle, scramble, kick steps and claw their way up 33,000 vertical feet of talus slopes, snowfields, and switchbacks on invigoratingly steep goat trails and 4WD roads. The elevation is gained in a series of twelve

major climbs; the runners top out on one Fourteener and another thirteen times at ridges over 12,000 feet. John Cappis, one of the race's founders, supplies a glossary of race jargon in the hefty Hardrock runners manual. Heading the list is a definition for the word acrophobia, which asserts the following, in classic Cappis tone. "ACROPHOBIA: an abnormal fear of being in high places. If you suffer from this and see it in the course description, you will not enjoy that location on the course." The word acrophobia, paired with its capitalized companions "EXPOSURE. CORNICE", is listed eight times in the ten page long 2004 edition of the Hardrock Hundred course description provided to all race entrants.

In between each of the climbs, the runners must descend an equivalent amount of vertical. A typical year might require participants to run through ice cold alpine run-off, frightening electrical storms and rime glazed boulders; cross numerous snowfields, crumbling talus slopes and airy ridges; run through snow flurries, hail, rain and searing alpine sun, all while encountering significant exposure to altitude and its attendant opportunities for hypothermia, pulmonary edema, and hallucinations. Mountaineering skills and some knowledge of wilderness survival skills are highly encouraged for all entrants. At the finish line of the 2004 race, after thirty hours on the course, first time race participant and overall men's winner Paul Sweeney is purported to have turned to Race Director Dale Garland and politely said: *"No offense, Dale, but I don't think those trails were made for running."*

Grouse Gulch, 4:40 PM, Mile 42.4, Below Handies Peak FOOD (AND GUTS)

LATE AFTERNOON LIGHT graces the ridgelines of the thirteeners to the east of us as we bump the road up the Animas River drainage from Silverton. We squeeze the Jeep into a rocky edge of the pullout at Grouse and check in with the aid station. Then we compulsively arrange, and re-arrange, Kirk's assemblage of Go Potion, Body Glide, Ginger, Accelerade, arnica, rain shells, tights, gloves, hat, headbands, socks, arm warmers, headlamps, batteries, and Capiline once again, and wait. Chris pulls out a Tupperware of baked wild salmon, sent from a friend in Alaska, and works on homemade raw food concoctions that he hopes will sustain him through the night. He'll be accompanying Kirk from here to the end of the race.

We pull out Kirk's assemblage of food from the cooler. His current culinary passions are blends of mashed potatoes, egg, rice, avocados, and liver, pureed together and packed into a roll-down squeeze tube bottle for fast and slippery delivery. Word about the liver component of this concoction has been circulating through the Hardrock grapevine, and members of other crews, driven by a lurid fascination that someone would actually, voluntarily, choose to ingest this vital organ in the middle of an ultra, come by to check out the brown gooey ooze. After we give the gawkers a personalized tour of Kirk's cooler, we go and check out what the *their* runners are eating, so we can make our own naïve and misguided guesses about their lives.

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Here's what our sleuthing uncovers: Hardrockers tackle the course, and its requisite combat with the dreaded issues of ultra gut, with a vast armada of tastes, substances and culinary philosophies. In earlier years, our cooler reconnaissance revealed that Rick Trujillo used to survive on what can only be called Conoco-Food-Mart-Meets-Ronald-McDonald. Later stakeouts disclose that some of the strongest women seem to subsist on solely on handfuls of dried fruit and nuts; several strong men on unimaginable numbers of packets of Gu, Succeed, and E-Caps. In 1997, Mark McDermott and Mark Hartell, two Brits who had been training in the Himalayas, came to Hardrock and scorched the field, along with the prior course record. I watched their sole crew person sprint after them out of the Telluride aid station, hand feeding them slices of freshly baked homemade quiche.

Ouray, 9:09 PM, Mile 58
FOOD, TOO

OURAY IS KEITH'S favorite aid station. In addition to housing several opportunities for java, Ouray hosts the Bon Ton, one of her favorite restaurants in the San Juans.

Unaffected by the gastrointestinal problems of the racers, we happily indulge. I feel slightly guilty by the contrast between the high life we are enjoying and the culinary fate of her mate, but Keith is unaffected. Its hard work driving over mountain passes, staying up all night to support her man - changing his soggy socks, rubbing on his arnica and sunscreen, spending hours coaxing the camp stove to heat up soup he'll never eat, and then coercing him out, cold and wet, into the rainy midnight. And she does it several times a year, remuneration free.

After sending Kirk off with a Turkey Slider (turkey and mayo, no bread) and a cheap Styrofoam cup of Lipton's Instant Chicken Noodle Soup, we sidle over to the Bon Ton and order linguini con aglio et quattro formaggi to go. Keith tops it off with a bag of chocolate chip cookies. Then she orders not one, but two, espressos.

Telluride Town Park, Mile 73, 2:40 AM
HARD LOVE VS. SOFT LOVE (AND THE GRAPEVINE)

WE FIND CATHERINE again at Telluride, and hook up and compare notes. Long time life partner and crew for Roch Horton, Catherine might just possibly have earned the title of Queen of Crewing. Not only does she crew Roch through several hundreds each summer, when he's not racing, she adopts other runners to spur along through various ultra endurance feats.

A fervent adherent of the Tough Love version of crewing, Catherine cajoles Roch along with commands, demands, and the occasional threat of abandonment when the going gets rough, a technique that Roch responds remarkably well to. Once, at an ultra in Wyoming, impatient for an ailing Horton to make his way up a long uphill to the aid where she was waiting, Catherine hopped on a bike, rode down to meet him, and told him that if he didn't get a move on, she wasn't going to wait.

Anyone who has spent much time on the ultra circuit, of course, knows full well that Catherine's crusty exterior is really only a disguise for a crewer's heart of gold. She's the first to find a water source to cool off overheating runners at the aid, the first one to jump in when other crews are flustered, the first to drive over the pass at 3 am in the middle of the night, when the rest of us are catnapping, to cheer on weary runners. Even more important for those of us stuck at the aid stations, she is also a crucial link in the unofficial Hardrock communications network, the one that circulates through the crews, as opposed to the official grid of Hardrock radio operators. She always knows the dramatic turns of events in the race: occasionally, it seems, before they even occur.

IT'S EASY TO underestimate the value of this particular capacity for nuance and supposition if you've never crewed at Hardrock. To try to grasp its importance, think of this: the average racer at Hardrock completes the race in about 40 hours. That's 2400 minutes of running. There are six aid stations at Hardrock where crew access is allowed: Chapman Gulch, Telluride, Ouray, Grouse Gulch, Sherman, and Cunningham Gulch. Figure that on average, a crew person's actual contact with their runner is 75 minutes – approximately 10-15 minutes at each aid- but that the time they are actually at the aid stations, prepped and waiting for their runner, is closer to 6 to 12 hours. The driving between the aid stations takes an additional 6 to 9 hours, depending on whether crews elect to go to Sherman.

Even with the time outs for catnapping and some time for running, dining, espresso sipping and shopping thrown in, most crew will spend anywhere from 5 - 10 hours at Hardrock 's aid stations.... **waiting**. That's a lot of time to fill. And, being all too human, crews fill it best with theorizing about the runners, theorizing about the weather, and theorizing about each other in an effort to keep themselves entertained, engaged, and awake.

At Hardrock, this grapevine operates faster than urban DSL. We often try to catch an hour or so of sleep at Telluride, curled up in our bags while awaiting Kirks' arrival in the middle of the night. I sleep in boxers, and, in the summer, always keep a pair stuffed inside my Sierra Designs bag. One year, the boxers fall out onto the concrete at the Pavilion at Telluride's Town Park as we are transferring gear to the car. Before we get to the next aid at Chapman, just 20 minutes down the road, a story regarding a possible Hardrock aid station indiscretion has already beat us there.

4:00 AM, Chapman Gulch, Mile 82, near Ophir, Colorado

THE MINOR REBELLIONS OF SLEEP-DEPRIVED REGRESSIONS TO ADOLESCENCE

KEITH AND I leave Telluride a little after 3 AM, cranking the tunes to stay awake, roaring along to The Four Tops at a tonal scale and volume no one else should ever have to hear.

A half hour after arriving at Chapman, we hunker down in the front of the jeep in sleeping bags, attempting to be invisible. A few minutes earlier, up near the aid, a race station official had demanded that we turn around and park a mile down the hill. We drive back down to the demanded turn around, then mount our defiant dissent: sneaking back up like stealth fighters with the headlights off, thinking we're actually fooling somebody. *We're* not going to carry two fraternity size coolers, one mountainous bag of gear, two camp chairs and our own sleeping bags a mile up the Ophir Pass road to the aid station at 5:30 in the morning when Kirk might be cruising through, especially since we know that the trucks, vanagons and jeeps of crews whose runners won't be coming in for hours and hours are going to go ahead and park ahead of us in the no-fly zone anyways. There's an unspoken protocol of parking at the races, and, if the aid station volunteers aren't clued in, we decide we just aren't willing, this morning—at least not until the first espresso- to pay the price.

9:15 am, Kamm Traverse/Ice Lakes, Mile 89. South Mineral Creek

BEAUTY

KAMM TRAVERSE IS not an official crew access aid station, though many hike in to cheer on their runners. The fields are emerald green this year and filled with flowers, replenishing the landscape and the spirit after last year's drought and fires. Kirk and Chris come through in high spirits, in fifth place, looking like they are out for a Sunday stroll. No black stuff, no rolls of skin from delaminating feet, no balloon sized hands, and absolutely no drooling—completely ruining our last chance to create a documentary of epic sensorial drama. Which is okay, as it lets us move on to capturing the real heart of the race.

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IN AN ARTICLE on Hardrock published in a 2000 issue of Outside magazine , writer Steve Friedman ended with this anecdote: a Durango reporter asking Kirk, after his record setting win, whether anything interesting had happened during the race. In response, Kirk had looked up with a smile and answered: *"The flowers were amazing."*

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Friedman used Kirk's words to illuminate a certain irony: the winner of an epic run through storm, exposure, and thousands of dramatic vertical feet remembers the most eventful moment of his journey in the quiet beauty of alpine flowers. But the truth is, Kirk says this every year. And every year, Keith and I look at each other and know this: *its true*. Hardrock is full of this beauty, and its the view that is always there, behind all the weary hours, the moments of bereftness, the bantering humor that keeps runners and crews awake and functioning. Its the vision that keeps not only the runners, but most of their pacers and crew coming back, year after year, to embrace this race. There's something *about* Hardrock: an intangible, elusive, nameless something, that causes most of us here to return, again and again.

A YEAR PRIOR to the 2003 running of Hardrock, I was hiking up this section of South Mineral Creek with my friend Sara. We had come up to escape the oppression of several weeks of heat and ash and smoke: the fires bearing down on Durango were approaching an evacuation line just two miles up the valley from the house. We packed up her husband Chris's family paintings, put them and a few other family heirlooms in storage in town, and, for a day, headed up out of the heat and ashes. On the drive up to Silverton, a light rain began to fall; a small meadow of wildflowers we hiked past up South Mineral was the first cool green to have graced our vision in weeks.

Sara's daughter Emma, at the time a strawberry blond towhead nearly two years old, was tottering up the road ahead of us when we saw a lone, lanky runner winding his way down from the pass above. Emma held out a single brilliant sunflower that she had picked as the man approached her. He stopped and bent down to accept her offering, speaking kindly words of appreciation in German. Tiny Emma stood stock still before him, entranced.

The courteous gentleman turned out to be Hans-Dieter Weisshaar, a 64 year old German who has run Hardrock many times. When we saw Hans that day, he had just learned that the race had been cancelled that year, due to the fires. He described how deeply saddened he had been to hear of this news.

Later on, in the fall, I enter the Silverton Silver, an unofficial mountain trail marathon encircling Kendall Peak, and the irrepressible Weisshaar is also there. We run much of the race together. Han's eyes twinkle, he flirts outrageously with his friend Lisa Richardson, he tells me, in his heavy accent, that I " *'must run ze Bear 100!'* with him later on that September. And then he tells me how, after his desolate sadness at thinking of missing Hardrock that year, he had decided that he would go ahead and run his own personal Hardrock anyways, supported only by his wife Susi. Then he tells me how, after completing the course, he had decided to turn around and do it again, in the opposite direction, to enjoy the views once more.

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Such is Hardrock's hold on its entrants. Its the reason we feared - and envied - so mightily, for our friend Chris when he took his first Hardrock steps at Grouse Gulch. We know, from our own years running through the course's terrain - albeit in shorter segments - of the beauty which will grab ahold of him, and never let him go.

Early afternoon, the Following Day. The Finish Line, Silverton. THE LONG AWAITED RELIEF OF ENDING

KIRK COMES ACROSS the line at 1:36 pm, good for an overall time of 31 hours, 36 minutes, and 37 seconds, and fifth place. After accompanying him for over 60 miles and 20 hours, Chris pulls back a hundred yards from the finish to let Kirk cross the line on his own.

We gratefully slide down to the curb near the finish line to watch other friends complete their long journeys. The first woman this year will be Betsy Nye, who will cross the line at 33:02. . Roch will come in a little over 37 hours, our friend Jim from Oklahoma at just under 45. John DeWalt, at age 67, will finish his eighth Hardrock in 44 hours and 44 minutes; Kirk's old pacer, Virgil Best, will finish his first Hardrock in exactly 47 hours. Hans Dieter will be the last official finisher, at 47 hours, 45 minutes and 32 seconds.

Twenty hours later, The Finish Line, Silverton COMMUNITY

OUR HOTEL ROOM is right on the race course, two blocks from the finish line in Silverton. Its possible, if you are awake, to hear the quiet shuffle of runners and their pacers come in all throughout the second night of the race, long after Kirk, and many other early finishers, have showered, enjoyed a dinner out with family and friends, and comfortably curled themselves up in bed.

When Hans rounds the corner to cover the last fifty yards to the finish at 5:45 am in the morning, race director Dale Garland is there, waiting to cheer him across the line, despite being up for nearly three straight days. In another three hours, Dale will still be on his feet. He'll don his trademark Tevas and red cap and gown, and individually recognize each Hardrock finisher at the awards ceremony at the high school gym. As each of the runners walks up to be acknowledged by the crowd, they also receive a joyful bear hug from Dale and his cohort in Hardrock arms - runner and Silverton resident Lisa Richardson.

Watching Dale and Lisa embrace the sixty nine official Hardrock finishers, many in the crowd would never guess that Garland, once a passionate and talented ultrarunner himself, has had hip replacements that no longer allow him to run. Or that Richardson, in another attempt at Hardrock, had to drop from the race, several hours earlier, at Mile 89, due to the condition of her feet, once again.

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WHEN I WATCH these moments between the runners and Dale and Lisa at the awards ceremony, I often feel a well of emotion that threatens to break out as tears. Its an odd, embarrassing feeling: I have not run the race; many of the people up there receiving their congratulations are people I barely know. Yet as much as the beauty of the terrain itself, as much as the exhausted and giddy hours of running and crewing that Keith and I have planned to capture in our theoretical documentary, I find myself thinking that a big piece of the heart of Hardrock is, along with the course's epic struggle, challenge, eclecticism and beauty- contained right here, in this room, for this hour.

It is embodied by Dale, up on the stage, who, despite the enforced separation from something deeply, deeply loved, fully embraces the success of others who can accomplish what life has taken away from his own journey. In part, it is embodied in all the runners and their crews seated in the bleachers surrounding him, all of them returned to Hardrock once again.

There's something about this returning, year after year, this spending of hours monitoring runners' progress though the night and all the long hours spent with their crews at aid stations, that causes a sense of familiarity, a sense of caring, about all these people we barely know. There's Margaret and Mark Heaphy, down once again from Montana, and Keith's friend Steph Ehret from Boulder, who will do the race next year. There's Tim Seminoff and Candy, down from Utah once again. Ruth Zollinger's here, another talented and strong Utah runner. There's our friend Jim, the only ultrarunner we know whose high mountain racing tactics include the banishment of socks. Blake Wood is here with his family, as is Tyler Curiel,- up from the flatlands of Louisiana. Nute's

here, with Jody and Abram: if he's not running, he's running an aid station somewhere on the course. Jerry Gray, over from Lake City, and Betsy Kalmeyer and Dick Curtis, down from Steamboat. There's Gordon Hardman, whose idea this whole thing was in the first place. And Charlie Thorn, another original culprit, who still runs it every year. There's Roch, playing the banjo with lyrics inscribed just for this race, and, course, the ubiquitous Catherine. All of them gathered together, for another three days in July, in Silverton, to add their unique moments of struggle, camaraderie, joy, competition and caring to this place.

THERE'S A GOODNESS to Hardrock, still, a goodness that graces the race, a largess of spirit still bigger than the narrow focus that competition and the limelight can sometimes bring. It's a goodness that graces the San Juan landscape that Hardrock runs through that seems, for these few brief days of the summer, to somehow touch us all.

And of course, it's this goodness that's the true View From The Crew. We don't know if it's a vision that film and words can ever truly capture, but here's what we know for sure: we'll be back, once again, next year. We want to watch Kirk as he's amazed by the wildflowers during his 12th Hardrock. We hope to get a hug from our little buddy Abram, and watch him run across the finish line with Chris Nute, his Dad. We can't wait to hear more stories and wry observations on

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our human foibles - as told in a slow, subtle Oklahoma drawl- from Sockless Jim; to see the swatch of columbine running down from Ice Lakes, the basins full of white and rose paintbrush up on Giant-Little Dives and the miles of bluebells gracing Cataract Gulch; to smile at Dale tooling around the finish line on his bicycle at 5 am. And, as for our friend Chris? This year, he's #88 on the Hardrock Waitlist.

See you there.