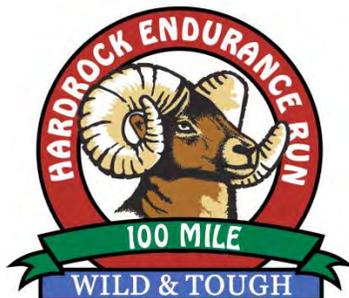


Hardrock 100

July 13-15, 2012



The 3Ps of Hardrock: Preparation, Patience and Perseverance

[NOTE: This isn't the typical Race Report. It's a chronicle of my Hardrock adventure , it's long, deservedly so, I believe. So for the majority of you, this won't be worth your while to read given modest interest – I understand - and I won't take it personal if you bug out now. Just know I REALLY appreciate all the support you've given me – it helped me carry the day. But if you're curious about the journey and Hardrock itself, read on and I hope you enjoy.]

1. Prologue

I'd heard about Hardrock from numerous ultra runner colleagues over the past twenty years and listened curiously to the tales of beauty, fortitude, elation, fortitude and defeat.

I've learned through my 30 years of trail running that my body and mind are more attuned to performing well at the 50K and 50 mile distances, especially when hills are involved – where I acquired the trail handle "Diesel" along the way. My previous 100 mile attempts have been good performances littered with three did-not-finishes (DNFs) at Western States. I always seemed to have a strong run until about mile 80, where I would begin to flame out, likely due to a lack of *patience and perseverance*.

Therefore, the hills of Hardrock appealed to me but the planning, patience and perseverance required to finish was extremely intimidating, not to mention the danger of completing such a remote and rugged course. Yet, curiosity persisted, with me wondering could I marshal myself to somehow overcome my deficits and attempt to conquer this self-proclaimed "graduate level challenge for endurance runs".

So I threw my name into the 2011 lottery (after having not been picked in 2010) for Hardrock (140 runners are selected from thousands of applicants) thinking it might take a decade before I'm selected given the ridiculously low odds of entry (~5%). My thinking was, "Hey, when and if I ever get in I'll assess how prepared I am at that time and make the go/no go call". On December 3rd, 2011 Chris "C3" Martin, a fellow running partner from the Trail Animals Running Club (TARC) in New England, sent me a text while I was in our garden in the backyard of our California home, which said, "You're in!", to which I replied, "Not possible. The Western lottery isn't until *next* weekend." Chris replied, "No, Hardrock!" at which point I went into a moment of disbelief.

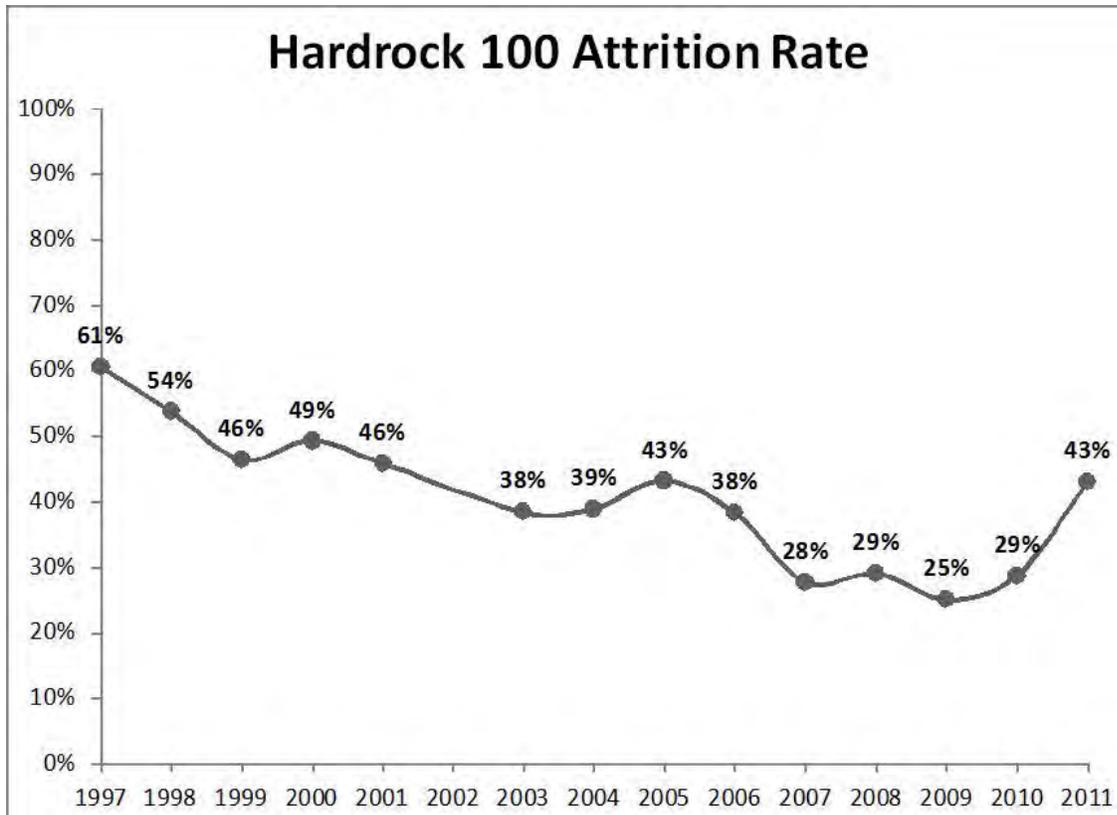
Gaining acceptance to Hardrock 2012 was not in the plans nor did I believe I was anywhere near prepared to attempt to take on this "graduate level" event. But as I allowed the notion to marinate a bit, I realized I'd never be adequately prepared for this type of life's challenge, but yet had to give it my best now that the

opportunity had presented itself. Thus began my quest to complete Hardrock, one of the most difficult endurance runs in the world.

2. Preparation

My first act, following my decision to accept the Hardrock challenge, was to discuss it with Marcy. As always, she gave me frank feedback about the pros and cons, including how much time, stress and angst it would impose not only on me, but her and the rest of the family. In the end, she always leaves the decision up to me and is unwavering in her support. She's my "hardrock" and has been ever since we first met.

I couldn't resist the challenge. There it was. So, I immediately began to contact colleagues that I knew had been previous Hardrock participants – either finishers or attempts. There had been just 515 individuals (men and women) that had completed Hardrock since its inception in 1992 with an average completion rate of 59% (i.e. number of starters that actually completed the course in the allotted time of 48 hours). Clearly this was an elite class of ultra runners.



So my first correspondence after sending in my check to Dale Garland, the race director, was with Jeff List, Howie Breinan, Steve and Deb Pero and Marcy Beard – all fellow members of TARC who had either attempted or completed Hardrock. Steve and Deb had also been accepted into the 2012 run so they advised me to quickly secure a reservation at the Avon Hotel in Silverton, "Hardrock Central" for runners coming to town. Now the Avon Hotel was an enigma to me since it didn't appear to exist. No web site, no phone number, no reviews on TripAdvisor – no trace of it anywhere in the digital universe! Yet both Steve and Jeff were encouraging me to email the proprietor, Tommy Burrell, the only form of communications to which Mr. Burrell would respond. Indeed, I did hear back from Tommy within a day and as luck would have it, he had one room remaining, which isn't common, to which he offered, "I'll put you down for July 1" and that

was that. No discussion of deposits, check-in, rates, amenities, etc. I'd no idea what I had just gotten myself into but more on that later.

With lodging out of the way, my fellow Animals allowed me to pelt them with inane question after question ranging from how likely it was that I'd get lost during the run ("it happens so be prepared...") to the brand of flashlight they use ("Fenix SD20"). Those initial few days of wrapping my head around what would be required to prepare properly for this event were exceedingly important as I reflect back, and having "go to" veterans to consult was a godsend.

Armed with additional insight from Hardrock veterans, I then endeavored to devour as much information as I could find on the web regarding Hardrock. This came in numerous forms but the majority were blogs, race reports and race reviews – prose, pictures and video – from a wide variety of sources including previous finishers, crew members/pacers, those that had attempted and dropped out, trail running bloggers, magazine editors, et al. I learned quickly that one has to develop a filter to sort out the hyperbole from the facts. Hardrock has developed into a bit of a legend-event, thus causing some participants to "enhance" their experience beyond reality. Whether this is done for ego or because of nativity, I'm not certain, but consumed unfiltered, no one might ever attempt this run. That said, Blake Wood's pictorial overview which was made available via a link off the Hardrock100 web site, which I found to be tremendous in allowing me to gain a decent initial perspective of the course. Blake is now the Hardrock president and has finished Hardrock 17 times including 2012.

I next purchased a topo map recommended by the race officials (*Drake Map of the Mountains of Silverton, Telluride, and Ouray (2000)*) and plotted the clockwise course using a highlighter (the loop run from/to Silverton through the San Juan Mountains goes clockwise in even years and counterclockwise in odd years). I then added the aid stations and printed out some of Blake's pictures and pinned them onto my map (backed by ¼" poster board) at the corresponding points along the route. This gave me the bigger picture perspective I needed before delving into the details of the run. This map remained hung on my wall in my home office, right there in front of me, for over six months – a constant reminder of the task ahead and planning that would be required to achieve the goal of finishing.

A second invaluable tool was obtaining the GPS waypoint file from Jeff List who had completed Hardrock in the counterclockwise direction in 2011. He had carried onboard with him his Garmin GPS which recorded detailed waypoints all along the route. Jeff was kind enough to give me his file which I then uploaded to Google Earth and had the entire Hardrock course in glorious two and three dimensions (since the course is the same, just running in different directions, the CCW waypoints were completely relevant for my clockwise needs). I now had a tool that would allow me to virtually run Hardrock by using the ground level perspective feature. Thus I could virtually run every step, in a clockwise direction, stopping to look 360 degrees around and seeing the glorious spring terrain around me. This gave me the ability to begin identifying mountains by name and direction, saddles, cornices, etc. (I've included this KMZ file as an attachment so others can benefit).

I also hung the comparison map someone had given me years ago, showing the differences in altitude and elevation gain/loss amongst the top 100 mile mountain ultras (including Western States) – it speaks for itself (Hardrock is the top line).

As I created the list I realized just how different preparing for Hardrock was going to be from any other ultra I'd attempted before. The major categories where I needed to add a training regime to the obvious physical needs (no way will anyone finish Hardrock without being in top physical condition but it is no guarantee of a finish): 1) Wilderness/survival skills, 2) Navigation, 3) Hill training, 4) TOF (Time On Feet), 5) Altitude, 6) Equipment and 7) Physical. I elected to create a training program over the 6+ months I had until race day, that would incorporate each of these 7 elements which I believed needed to be addressed in order to finish Hardrock. I ran fewer 50K and 50 mile races (ran Way Too Cool 50K in March and American River 50 in April), more long, hilly training runs that kept me on my feet longer, running more tired – getting accustomed to the fatigue, constantly tested equipment that I knew I'd be using but with which I'd had little to no experience (i.e. trekking sticks, pack, hydration pack, carrying lots of food, rain gear, micro spikes, etc.).

I also knew I needed to test myself at altitude to determine if it was going to be an issue. My prior exposure to altitude had been at 6-9,000' in Tahoe and the one race I'd run at altitude in 1991, I contracted AMS (Altitude Mountain Sickness). So this was a huge concern for me in particular. My doctor happened to be an avid outdoorsman himself so he advised me to try prophylactically using Diamox (acetazolamine) and Dexamethasone (a mild steroid).

So to bring it all together I scheduled a high altitude, multi-day trip to the Mount Whitney region of the High Sierras in May with my good friend D. Marty Hoffman. Marty and I summited Mt. Whitney twice in two days from two different approaches while running or "fast packing" with 16 lb packs each, 45+ miles over three days, camping out in some nippy weather. We really were able to dial in equipment, any AMS issues, getting accustomed to steep, rocky and rough climbs. This trip really helped me exercise some demons and concerns that had been lingering in the back of my mind.

I trained pretty heavily on the Western States course, especially across the deep canyons – back and forth – for months on end, thankfully with many of my running compadres from Auburn. After many of my friends began tapering for Western, I began running longer and longer solo runs in the wilderness, which helped me get accustomed to being alone for long periods, further refining equipment, fueling, etc. I concluded my training in California by working an aid station at Western States all morning and then pacing Chris Martin from TARC for 40 miles. Chris had a perfect race day (finished in 22h:35m) and along the way I was able to learn further refined techniques from him for race walking and saving the knees on steep downhill descents.



Avon Hotel, Silverton, CO

On July 1 I flew to Silverton, CO via Durango and moved into the Avon Hotel. I wanted to acclimatize to the high altitude (average for run is 11,500', highest over 14,000' and Silverton was at 9,800') I really lucked out with the Avon as it turns out that the majority of Hardrock veterans were also staying there. Given the low-key atmosphere, the feel was more like a camp or retreat than staying at a hotel.

In fact the two week run up to Hardrock has been appropriately dubbed, "Camp Hardrock" – and as the only newbie to the Avon, I was welcomed and embraced by all. Access to so many varying veterans enabled me to gain extremely valuable insight into the run, terrain, techniques, fueling, equipment, etc. – all of which I directly benefited from for sure.



Buffalo Boy Ridge (13,060')



Handie's Peak (14,048')

I had chosen to participate in the daily trail marking work days which began 2 weeks before the race. Each day a portion of the course is marked by a small team which head out and walk the course, placing markers and ribbons along the way. This experience was invaluable and I can confidently say may have been the single biggest factor in helping me



Trail Marker

finish the run. Not only do you see the “features” of the course first-hand, but you acclimatize to the altitude, under some modest duress, slowly; meet veterans and make new friends who are extremely knowledgeable of the course and event, gain confidence that you can do this – somewhat like a chapter in book revealing more and more of the plot each day you head for the hills.

3. Crew

Marcy signed up to be crew chief early in the year. Soon thereafter, Drew came on as my first pacer. Once I figured out the basics of the course and the layout of the aid stations, I ascertained a crew would be more than a “nice-to-have” for this event – but a necessity if I wanted to be very efficient at moving through aid stations. I had studied the previous results in detail and discovered that on average, runners were spending 2:30 to



Da Crew: Marcy, Drew, Bogie & Norm

3:00 hours in the thirteen aid stations. That’s 5-6% of the allotted 48 hours! So my goal was to halve this time and targeted 90 minutes in total for aid station stopping. I felt it would be a huge advantage to have on the crew and as pacers teammates that both



Crew Member Donn Zea

knew the course, to avoid getting off course, as well as legs to move me along. Ironically (good karma), on the same day I received two unsolicited offers from each coast. Norm Sheppard, fellow New England TARC member and race director (and Ultra Grand Slammer in 2011....entailing completing Western States 100, Vermont 100, Wasatch 100 and Leadville 100 all in the same year) and Donn Zea (eleven 100 mile finishes, over 40 ultras and Hardrock familiar) emailed me and asked if



Crew Member Austin Violette 1

they could join the team. Meanwhile, Bogie Dumitrescu (eight 100 completions, Marathon des Sables, Badwater 135....) also expressed interest. So all of a sudden I had three pacers and tremendous – very experienced help for Marcy on crew. Things were looking up! As the run approached Donn added another huge asset in Austin Violette, who is a gifted cross country runner and more recently begun showing interest in ultras.

I wanted to follow the K.I.S.S. principle: Keep It Simple Stupid – for the crew and pacers. That meant lots of pre-planning on my part, simplifying and then simplifying some more what I would need. If we were to accomplish the goal of cutting the average aid stop time by 50% to 90 minutes, we were going to have to not be just good, but excellent. This was seemingly a very aggressive goal. Think of the team as a NASCAR pit crew where everyone has specific tasks that they need to complete efficiently and without error in a very short period of time and without stepping all over each other. AND, do it calmly thus not creating excess tension for their runner. This is a big job. Same goes for the pacers who have the responsibility of keeping the “wheels on the Diesel train” over extended periods of time and under extreme duress. I mean the pacer not only has to be responsible for running long distances for hours on end across



Crew Member Norm Sheppard

extremely challenging terrain, but they are asked to be completely responsible for their runner doing the same thing!

So the team took it upon themselves to sort out the roles, pack the gear, figure out the logistics and determine the optimum set up for each aid station that would get me what I needed, but move me through efficiently. Well the proof is in the results: total aid station stoppage time: 92 minutes! Incredible.

Marcy was our rock, chief coordinator and organizer. She did everything from sort our directions to waking up crew members and scouting out places to eat, shop and sleep! Donn doubled as the first pacer, taking me into the first night up the very challenging Engineer Pass climb and then down to Grouse, and as my “wheels” repairman – taking constant care of my feet which were taking a beating from being wet, bruised and eventually blistered. Norm and Bogie made



Crew Members Drew & Marcy



Crew Member Bogie Dumitrescu

sure I was fueling properly, helping me select the proper nutrients at each aid station to supplement what I was eating along the way from my pack. Norm was pacer #2, taking me over the highest point on the course – Handie’s Peak at 14,048’ all the way to Maggie’s – he had the longest pull and witnessed my low point on the course – between Pole Creek and Maggie’s aid stations. Drew also was doubling as the third and final pacer and he and Austin re-supplied my hydration pack with food, GU, electrolytes, salt tabs, fluids, etc. – assuring I’d be able to maintain my energy in-between aid station by having everything I needed on board. This was a crack, experienced, efficient and upbeat crew – the best a runner could ever ask for.

4. The Run

Up at 4:00 am Friday morning, I showered, lubed my feet, dressed and grabbed my pack and headed downstairs to the Avon kitchen to fix oatmeal, a bagel and coffee before walking over to the start at the Silverton High School for check-in and a 6:00 am start. The entire crew was there with me for the start, surrounding me with support, positive vibes and cheering .



My race strategy was designed to be simple to execute but required well hours of detail planning behind the scenes. My goal was to finish – period – no kiddin’ – just use the 48 hours we were given to complete the 102.5 mile course (2.5 miles were added because race officials had to skirt around some private land that refused to let us cross). I felt deeply – and this was confirmed by numerous conversations with race veterans – that I needed command *patience* at the start and throughout the first half to three quarters of the race in order to have the legs, energy and *perseverance* to thrive and survive the run towards the last quartile. There it was again – *patience*. Of all the skills required to complete Hardrock, patience had to be the most challenging for me. It wasn’t in my DNA. But without employing patience, I was certain to blow up and on this course; it would be extremely difficult to recover from a burn out.

115	David Collins
116	Kerry Collings
117	John Constan
118	William Cook
119	Bob Crowley
120	Dick Curtis
121	Reid Delman
122	Arny Delman

I also needed to be constant – be *persistent*. 48 hours – 2 days on my feet. I’ve never run more than ~25 hours at one time before in my life. Now I was going to practically double this time over much more rugged terrain and through not one but two nights and potentially some unwelcoming weather. Ironically, at the awards ceremony on Sunday morning, the all-time most finisher, Kirk Apt (18 finishes) told the audience that he felt Hardrock required two attributes: patience and persistence. Needless to say, I couldn’t have agreed more (but would have added a third “P” for Planning).

We quickly check in at the Silverton High School at 5:45 am. Moments later I’m saying my goodbyes to my crew as we walk towards the starting line next to the famous Hardrock rock. I give Marcy an hug, lingering longer than usual. She has endured the preparation for this moment every step of the way with me and I know well the trepidation she has regarding the danger that lies ahead. She whispers in my left ear, “Good luck, be careful and don’t let anything happen to our son”, to which I reply, “Are we married?” (just kidding ☺).

The Start – Silverton – Friday, July 13th, 6:00 am MT

At precisely 6:00 am MT we hear Dale Garland say, “Get out of here!” and we are off. Temperatures were in



Jim Campiformio at the start

the high 50s, partly cloudy skies. I purposely lag at the very back of the pack along with my friend Jim Campiformio from Connecticut, who I met the previous week marking the course. Jim is back seeking his second Hardrock finish and had come out early as did I, to acclimatize and help mark the course. One of his pacers will be Jeff List, a fellow Trail Animal and New Englander who has completed Hardrock multiple times. Jim



The Start!

was an tremendous resource during the 10 days prior, not only imparting on me all of his wisdom regarding the course, but his methods for remaining calm and *patient*. So we departed together in the back of the pack towards the Nute Chute and Mineral Creek crossing. As we all left Silverton heading northwest, there was nervous kidding about updated life insurance policies and wills. In times of

danger and stress, it is a common behavior for those with steeled nerves to use humor as a tool to remain calm- or so I've read! At the beginning of Hardock, given all that the participants had sacrificed to get here, it was understandable that the amount of nervous energy and adrenaline was running extremely high – something that causes runners to go out too fast. So Jim and I were content to hang in the rear and let runner after runner pass us by before the river crossing.



Heading towards Mineral Creek

Mineral Creek is usually a knee to chest-high river crossing in normal years. But 2012 saw snowfall well below normal and thus the course is going to be one of the driest in the 19 year history of the event. This is a good omen. In 2011, participants running counterclockwise were greeted with raging rivers, snow filled fields and nasty weather, causing even the most stoic competitors to second guess their decision to continue on, with many just throwing in the towel. So the traditional rope across Mineral Creek was present but frankly unnecessary as the water was ankle deep and refreshingly cool.

We began our ascent towards Putnam-Lime Creek Saddle [12,400', mile 7.0], the first of 13 peaks that we would cross during the run. All the 140 runners settled into their stride and pace, most walking. Before long we

could see the leaders ahead a quarter mile or so, ascending– the last time we'd see them for two days. Jim and I quickly found a comfortable pace which we had refined the days before during the trail markings. I wear a heart rate monitor and would be pacing myself throughout the entire run using this “on board coach” as my governor. I'd determined what range of heart rate was going to be optimum for me based upon the practice runs and trial markings and dialed in a 60-70% max heart rate range. For me, with a max heart rate of 180 bpm, that translated to a range of 108 to 126 bpm. My resting heart rate had been 49 the day before during medical check in and blood pressure was 123/78 so I knew the acclimatization had worked and this heart rate range would keep me moving along yet not get into the “red zone” whereby I become overtaxed and short of breath; a sure recipe for bringing on AMS (Altitude Mountain Sickness).



Mineral Creek



Putnam Basin and Saddle

I've never run this far back in the pack before in any prior ultra. It felt really good to let others pass by and for Jim and I to run to the “beat of a metronome” as Jim said. Whatever the beat, was the speed we moved, adjusting for increases and decreases in elevation. Our breathing was steady as I let Jim lead. I did notice his breathing was laboring a bit more than what I had seen during the trail marking session but my heart rate was idling around 100 to 110 bpm. I made a mental note wondering if Jim was going to have an off day.

As we crested the first summit we enjoyed a 360 degree view of the surrounding mountains. Blue skies were now dominating the sky. It was magnificent. Jim spotted where we were heading next (Kamm Traverse) and we kept rolling along towards climb #2, Cataract-Porcupine Saddle [12,230', mile 8.6]. We began our descent

eventually towards the Kamm Traverse (“KT”) aid station through a beautiful wooded forest. Most of the pictures shown on the Hardrock100.com website of course is the dramatic vistas, sweeping meadows and famous abandoned gold and silver mines. But much of the course travels through some of the most outstanding pine, aspen and cedar groves I’ve ever seen. As we descend more steeply, Jim continues to save his quads (and mine) by quickly walking the down hills – no running.

KT Aid Station [10,600’, 11.5 miles] – 122nd place, Friday, 10:01 am

We arrive at the KT aid station together at 10:01 am, I’m in 122nd place and we are right on the suggested 48 hour pace. All is good. I grab food to go – PB&J, turkey sandwich, some Gu and fruit and head out of the station within 3 minutes of entering, yelling, “119 checking out”, waiting for the race official to repeat and confirm my race number – a deliberate habit that I would repeat 12 more times at the ensuing aid stations. I wanted to be extra sure the stations were tracking my progress so that the radio communications crew would relay my advancement to the web site which in turn would keep my crew well informed of my whereabouts.



Kamm Traverse in Distance
[picture by Blake Wood]

Jim and I leave together, him assuming the lead again as we quickly ascend up the Kamm Traverse, a steep single track trail that was carved out of the side of a granite face, to our right was a sheer drop off. I’ve no problem with heights and in fact rather enjoy situations where big drops are a

feature (i.e. Grand Canyon et al) but I could see where anyone with a touch of acrophobia would be more than a little disconcerted during this climb.

Jim is moving well but I do detect that he is still breathing harder than usual given the slope of the trail. I ask him how’s he doing and he responds, “I’m ok but don’t have the energy I had during our trail marking sessions.” I noticed he wasn’t eating much nor had he “watered the bushes” but once since the start (I’d already gone six times!) so I asked him if he was eating. I didn’t want to be a pest – Jim is an extremely experienced ultra runner – but I was growing a bit worried for my friend.



Climbing up Grant-Swamp Pass

This ascent up to summit #3, Grant Swamp Pass [12,920’, 14.8 miles] was the day’s first real test of fitness. It’s a long, steep climb with

good footing until the very end, where

one is required to get down on all fours and crawl about 50 yards up the scree to summit. We pass beautiful Island Lake on our left and I see that today, unlike the pictures where the lake glows a beautiful aqua blue/green reflecting the blue sky, the lake surface looks gray and dull. We are climbing under cloudy skies for the first



Island Lake Below

time. As we reach the Grant Swamp summit Jim marches ahead to our right and picks up a rock and places it in front of the plaque of the Joel Zucker Memorial – in memory of a past Hardrocker who passed away on his way home, after finishing the race. I do the same and then we turn to our left and I about poo my pants. This was NOT a section I had previewed during trail marking – thus only had seen in pictures and heard about from veterans. Directly beneath us is a 300 yard scree field (large and small boulders and rocks respectively). It was incredibly steep – maybe a 45% angle. Runners ahead of us were literally jumping off the precipice and throwing themselves down the mountain. It was crazy!



Looking East Off Grant-Swamp Pass- Oscar's Pass in the Distance

Jim went first and it was clear he knew what he was doing. He sort of “skied” down on top of the scree, holding both hands out for balance, and just rode the scree like surfing an avalanche to the bottom. It was poetry in motion. I on the other hand, having never encountered anything like this before, had to stop for a moment to assess the situation. Normally this scree field is covered with snow so runners can simply slide down the snow on their rears – a technique called glissading. In other years there has been a rope to hang onto allowing the runners to kind of repel down. This year we had neither. The scree was literally moving like an avalanche beneath the runners’ feet.

So I elected to take a route just to the left of the main shoot, which looked less crowded with runners – who were scattered all over the mountainside – and descend very slowly and carefully by using a crab technique. I got down on all fours and faced my chest against the mountain slope, head pointed up towards the summit, butt pointed down towards the bottom. I then let the sliding scree move me downward using gravity. My breaks were my feet digging into the scree and my gloved hands. This was clearly a slow process but I didn’t want to end my day early by being hasty and trying to balance on two feet while the earth literally moved under my feet. About half way down the slope was a little less severe and I decided to turn over and slide on my bottom for the rest of the way – about 150 yards. This definitely sped the process up. Aside from the accumulation of rocks that gathered between my legs which I needed to stop and dump every so many yards, this seemed to be the safest and most efficient method for me to descend. After reaching the bottom and dumping out rocks and pebbles from my running shoes, I was back into getting a rhythm for the descent to Chapman Aid Station. However, although the scree field was behind us, there were still huge boulders to cross and no clear line – real ankle twisters and biters. So the rhythm was short lived and it was back to boulder hopping for another 15 minutes. Finally we reached single track that was a bit smoother and runnable. This was my first real running of the day. I caught up to Jim about half way down the descent and we began talking about the bacon that was awaiting us at the Chapman Aid Station below. Breakfast with some needed fat couldn’t come too soon!



Heading Down G-S Pass Scree – [Picture by Blake Wood]

Chapman Aid Station [10,190', 18.1 mile] – 118th place [+4], Friday, 12:51 pm

Well it turns out that they are out of bacon by the time we arrive☹. No worries, I grab another PB&J, my go-to aid station favorite and a grilled cheese sandwich (sans the bacon) and a few other salty foods as well as more fruit for fast protein, glucose and glycogen (carbs) and head out. I'm there only 6 minutes. The next climb up to Oscar's Pass is a loooooong slog and is the steepest ascent of the day so far. The skies are now clouding completely over and we begin to feel a little drizzle so we don the rain gear. I had on board an outstanding Gor-Tex top from Ron Hill that was a prototype I picked up at a running show in Austin in December. It was light, breathable and 100% water and wind proof. I had matching rain pants to go with it and both items folded inside themselves into a small package the size of a softball. At this point Jim slows to get on his gear and I initially wait for him but after a while decide to begin ascending, figuring he would



Descending towards Chapman Aid – [picture by Blake Wood]

catch up. That never happened and it was the last I saw of my new friend for the rest of the race (Jim eventually dropped at Grouse Gultch – mile 60 – after battling bravely all day but just “not having it”).

As I ascended alone for the first time I realized that my heart rate was remaining steady and low. So I decided to see if I could increase my stride and cadence just a bit and not raise the heart rate much. It worked. As I continued the long ascent, I increased my pace ever so slightly every 5 minutes. By the time I was 2/3 of the way to the summit, I had passed 8 or 10 other runners and was feeling extremely good. My breathing was consistent and steady and I was having no ill effects from the altitude. (I had trained with the Diamox at Mt. Whitney but during the trail marking session decided to see if I could acclimatize without any drugs. I never had any altitude issues the entire 10 days prior and thus, felt confident the acclimatization was complete (science says optimum

acclimatization period is 9-10 days) – so was not using any drugs for the race.

Climb #4, Oscar's Pass [13,140', 21.3 miles] is another steep summit at the end requiring hands on thighs to push up the last 100 yards. As I crested the barren cornice; I realized I was alone for the first time in the run. I decided to quickly get off the summit as the weather was unstable and the rain had been spitting most of the way up. The descent follows the Bridal Veil Basin all the way down to Telluride. So this was a good quality single track, turning to Jeep road on which to gain some time. Although VERY tempting to kick it into running gear for this 9 mile descent, I decided to race walk the entire distance, saving my quads for much later in the run when I'd need them for both monster ascents and descents ahead. I'd learned the basics of race walking from Marcy, who took a few classes in the winter. I could move downhill at about a 11- 12 minute per mile pace consistently and completely save my quads, hamstrings and lower back. I also employed a similar technique for running the steep downhills whereby I lean back, take a stiff legged step and land on my heel – taking the pressure off the knee joints and quads. This is the same technique



The Next Climb- Oscar's Pass

Chris Martin had used when I paced him at Western States just weeks prior on his way to a 22h 35m finish. For the climbs I deploy a steady gate that is a longer stride for lesser slopes and a short, choppy step for the steep stuff (on the balls of my feet).

Telluride Aid Station [8,750', 29.8 miles] – 105th place [+13], Friday, 4:44 pm

As you descend down the long Jeep road towards the Telluride valley you pass the actual Bridal Falls which are spectacular. About three miles from the aid station I see a person walking up the hill away from Telluride. Turns out it was Bogie who was cheering on all the runners. He sees me and gives me some positive vibes and then takes off back down the road towards the aid station. It was great to see a member of my crew after such a long spell since the start (10 ½ hours).



Telluride Aid – Double Fisting Soup

a few other assorted snacks – and then Drew and Austin loaded my pack with S-Caps (sodium), Shot Blocs (electrolytes, carbs), Clif Bars, Gu packets, headlamps and extra batteries. Soup was a staple I ate at every aid station that had it – great calories, lots of nutrients, all going straight to the blood stream. The Gu and Shot Blocs I had were laced with caffeine so I was getting a lift from them ongoing. I avoided drinking coffee or soda for caffeine as I worried it might upset my stomach.

Nicole Galt, a friend who had been one of Marcy’s campers at Camp



Pit Crew in Action!!

As I approached the aid station the noise increased – music, cheering, cow bells, people yelling – it really got the adrenaline flowing. After checking in my crew was like a NASCAR pit crew, ushering me to the food table, setting up a quiet spot away from the noise for me to sit, relax, assess what I needed and fuel up. It was perfect. I drank down some vanilla Svelte, a drink I have begun using during and after long runs to gain liquid glycogen, glucose, sucrose and protein – it’s fantastic with 260 calories and really tastes like a milk shake (yet gluten free). I also ate two cups of soup - tomato and chicken noodle – as well as another PB&J, turkey sandwich, watermelon, banana, a Clif Bar and



Surprise Visit from Nicole Gaul from Camp Waredaca days!

surprised me with a visit. She has lived in Telluride for 25 years and lived only minutes away from the Town Park where the aid station was established, so seeing her was another huge emotional lift. After just seven minutes in the aid station, which seemed like an eternity, I was up out of the chair and running out of the station towards the next climb.

I’d marked the course out of Telluride to Virginius Pass-Kroger’s Canteen the preview week so was very

comfortable finding my way out of town and back to the remote trails. This is the only stretch of the entire two days, remarkably, that I actually listened to music on my Apple Shuffle. I treat music as a treat so say to myself, "If you do such and such, you can listen to music for a while..." – it's an incentive for me verses a crutch. So I had 90 minutes of Band Perry, The Beatles, Boston, Bruce Springsteen, CSN&Y, Zack Brown Band, Jackson Browne and of course Dan Fogelberg who once lived in Telluride. The music enabled me to find a good rhythm for climbing consistently and I began to pass a number of runners along the 5 mile, 4,350' (870 feet/mile) ascent to Virginus Pass. The first person I passed out of town was Kerry Owens who is an outstanding ultra runner from Washington DC having completed over 95 ultras at the tender age of just 49. She is also the RD for the Potomac Heritage 50K in November every year, which ironically was a race Drew and I had run together (his second 50K) a couple of years ago; small world. (Kerry went on to finish in 44:20, 81st place).



Mendota Ridge - [picture by Blake Wood]

As I reached the meadow below the Mendota Saddle [12,560', 34.1 miles], I reached the point we begin a single track steep climb and had to stop and touch the old rusty bear trap that was leaning against a wooden pole. The week prior when marking this portion of the trail with Jim Campiformio, we had stopped here to catch our breath and grab a bite to eat. Jim had taken off his running cap and hung it on the post. As we ascended he realized he'd forgotten his hat. We decided to leave it be and pick it up on the way down after turning around at Virginus. An hour and a half later we returned to the spot to find Jim's hat had been literally eaten by marmots! It had a big ol' hole in the front and the sides were chewed completely off. It was hilarious! Jim put on the cap and it looked like he had a moon roof option☺. That hat became *THE*



Marmot Buddy

item that was talked about and the brunt of many jokes and laughs at the ensuing Mexican Night dinner that Tommy Burrell, the owner of the Avon Hotel hosts every year on the Tuesday night before the run start.

Jim's hat "incident" served as a reminder to me to not take all of this too seriously. It came at a good time as the climb up to Virginus that lay in front of me is long and steep and I'd need to remain patient to get up and over the Mendota Saddle and up the last steep grade to Virginus. As I summited the Saddle and crossed over, my ultimate target, Virginus came into sight. The "pass" is nothing but a 9 foot square notch in the summit that leads to a precipitous three-staged scree free-fall on the other side. Precariously perched within the notch is an aid station – called Kroger's Canteen, named after the man who conceived the aid station - that is completely back packed in by the aid volunteers. This is an admirable and monumental task – another demonstration of the Hardrock spirit.



Ascending to Virginus Pass –[picture by Blake Wood]

Virginus Pass – Kroger’s Canteen Aid Station [13,100’, 34.7 miles] – 98th place [+7], Friday, 7:18 pm

I arrive at Virginus still in daylight and decide immediately I’ve got plenty of aid on board plus my legs feel



Kroger's Canteen - [picture by Blake Wood]

good so would like to get up and down as quickly as feasible, taking advantage of the daylight for as long as possible. The immediate descent from Kroger’s Canteen is an extremely steep scree field that comes at you in three sections: the top which is the longest and steepest, the middle which is short and not so bad and the bottom which is surprisingly difficult to navigate because it is steep and rockier. I was offered three different descent routes from the aid station volunteers: “The black diamond down the middle”, or “the intermediate route down the left”, or “the long and easy route down the far left”. I watched as a fellow runner threw himself down the “black diamond” route, which was essentially straight down the scree field whereby you’d need to throw it in neutral and let gravity

do its work – hoping you didn’t take a header which could end your day. I had no interest in this option. The way left route was a little too remote and I felt good enough to hop on the “intermediate” route and found it to be not at all bad. As my shoes loaded up with scree along the way I reached the bottom of the first pitch undamaged. I scrambled over to pitch #2 which was modest in comparison. I then decided to stop and dump the shoes as I’d accumulated a bunch of annoying pebbles and stones that were pretty uncomfortable to the bottom of my feet. I chose not to wear gaiters over my shoes as I don’t like messing with them when I have to dump shoes – which in Hardrock are often. Pitch #3 is deceiving. It looks easier from atop the descent than it really is since the slope is more severe and the footing is more difficult due to larger rocks and boulders that must be negotiated. I started really slow at the top, getting my bearings and figuring out the optimal descent technique for me. I employed a rock hopping method – kind of like mogul skiing whereby you use the bumps to quickly “bounce off of” to the next bump. This worked for me but definitely was dangerous and heated up the quads.



Steep Descent off of Virginus - [picture by Blake Wood]

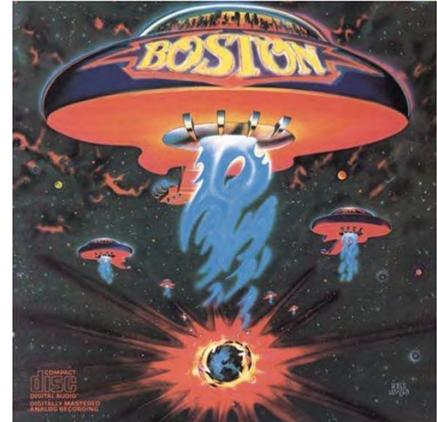
At the bottom of the three pitches we come upon a rocky Jeep road and begin the further descent to the Governor Aid Station. There I met Tom Mowchan (44) from Grass Valley, CA. It was great to meet a fellow Northern Californian AND first-time Hardrocker. We seemed to be descending using a similar race walking technique so we agreed to stick together to the aid station and as it turned out, all the way down the 11 mile Jeep road descent to Ouray. It was a complete bonus to have someone to run/talk with during this arguably most tedious and boring portion of the course.

Governor’s Aid Station [10,780’, mile 37.9] – 99th place [-1], Friday 8:21 pm

Tom and I were greeted again, by some of the most friendly, helpful and competent aid station volunteers I’ve ever encountered. There was plenty of hot soup, salty, sweet and carbo-loaded food so we both quickly chowed down and grabbed some goodies-to-go. One of the younger aid station volunteers had some rock and roll music playing and his elder compadre (Dad?) was complaining that, “The runners don’t want to hear

that crap.” I said, “Hey, it’s great but I’m feeling something more like Boston’s *More Than A Feeling* right now.” Within 20 seconds my wish became a reality as the speakers began to blare that great rock guitar lick leading into....

*I looked out this morning and the sun was gone ,
Turned on some music to start my day.
I lost myself in a familiar song,
I closed my eyes and I slipped away
It's more than a feeling
When I hear that old song they used to play
I begin dreaming*



What a great way to start the long Jeep road descent to Ouray! It was a great lift. Tom and I chatted the entire way down and pushed each other’s pace. We were definitely making up time while preserving our knees and quads. As civilization began to appear in the form of house lights, we began to anxiously anticipate seeing the city glow of lights from Ouray...but they never came. As it turns out, many Colorado towns have an ambient lighting regulation – Ouray apparently being one – whereby, *“These measures will curtail the degradation of the nighttime visual environment by encouraging lighting practices that direct appropriate amounts of light where and when it is needed, increasing the use of energy efficient sources, and decreasing the wastage of light and glare resulting from over lighting and poorly shielded or inappropriately directed lighting fixtures.”* Anyway, we came upon Ouray and instead saw the most beautiful glistening of lights – it looked like a giant Christmastime light display – simply marvelous. This signaled we were close to our left hand turn off the road which was easy to miss (although since I’d previewed this portion of the course with Jim days before I was certain I wouldn’t miss the turn). Over a narrow metal bridge which spanned across Box Canyon (where the famous ice climbing schools are held), through a narrow and low tunnel where we needed to duck to be sure we didn’t knock ourselves out on the granite ceiling, then down some steep stairs, onto the roads of Ouray and within minutes we were crossing a bridge which led to the Ouray Aid Station located in the town park.

Ouray Aid Station [7,870', 45.9 miles] – 95th place [+4], Friday 10:24 pm



This is the lowest point on the course in terms of elevation. My lungs were definitely feeling the relief of having more oxygen all the way down from Virginus. It really felt invigorating. My crack crew whisked me through check out and away from the crowds to the parking lot where they had set everything up from the back of the Ford Explorer they had been driving. Bogie



and Norm had wisely already left to get some sleep back in Silverton so Marcy, Drew, Donn and Austin swarmed and performed their previously assigned tasks. I had food, fluid in my hands in seconds, was sitting the “big red” chair (we had purchased at



Walmart on sale ;-)) and Donn began working on my “wheels” in rapid time, looking like a professional tire changer at the Indy 500. I had my socks off, feet cleaned, re-lubed, new socks on and shoes replaced in literally 2 minutes. It was amazing to watch! Meanwhile Marcy continued the flow of food and drink while Austin and Drew re-loaded my pack with all the necessary equipment including headlamp, flashlight, extra batteries, long sleeve Merloni wool shirt, wool cap and fresh gloves. I was prepared for whatever the night would bring us in terms of wet and cold. The climb up to Engineer Pass was famous for taking it out of runners since it was usually always in the dark, a very long and steep climb, subject to both damp and cold and a lonely, narrow treacherous portion of the course. I was not going to let the Engineer leg bring us down at this point. So I’ll say it again, there’s NOTHING like having a crack crew to be there in your corner – NOTHING.



Bob and Donn Ready to Roll Into the Night

Amazingly my official checkout time in Ouray was 4 minutes but that’s because my crew walked me though the aid station quickly and we spend more time after checking out in near the truck. However, I’m guessing I wasn’t there more than 10 minutes in total which is outstanding.

So soon enough Donn, my initial pacer, and I were ready to head off in the night and abyss together. It was so good having his company. Donn is a tremendous guy (both Drew and Marcy separately later had said the same thing to me about Donn) and his wisdom and experience immediately began to pay dividends. Donn knew this portion of the course well from previous running and pacing at Hardrock, thus I didn’t have to worry or even think about negotiating the “gauntlet” of getting out of Ouray



Looking Back at Ouray from Bear Creek

proper or finding the trail that led to the Million Dollar Highway (Rt 550 overpass). Instead, Donn and I were able to use the time for me to give him a vital check in and tell him what I hoped to do on the next leg – the climb up to Engineer Pass. We were in perfect sync within minutes. I elected to lead Donn and set the pace that met my heart rate.



Treacherous Single Track Trail Along Bear Creek

As we ascended we chatted and pushed, chatted and pushed, making the time fly by. It seemed as though the Engineer Aid Station, with fire aglow, came up on us way too soon. But there it was, with the cracklin’ of the fire distinctly within earshot. It’s hard to describe what a lift you get in the pitch dark of night, after having been on your feet for over 18 hours straight, in seeing this particular aid station.

Engineer Aid Station [11,800’, 53.9 miles] – 86th place [+9], Saturday, 1:58 am

Donn and I both went immediately for the hot soup. Unfortunately, there were quite a bit of runners huddled around the fire trying to warm up and gather their composure for the rest of the night’s running, so

there was a temporary shortage of soup. Donn was gracious and insisted I take a cup first, while he waited patiently for more to come. I was getting a chill quickly so we agreed I'd move on and he'd catch up – as the next climb to the Engineer Pass was still a 30 minute sojourn followed by a downhill roll on a long Jeep road into Grouse Gulch. So off back into the night I went, this time alone. I got back into my climbing rhythm quickly. The soup and aid I had eaten was having an immediate positive impact on my energy level. When I crested the hill at the top of the pass I was surprised I didn't see Donn behind me. But my headlamp needed new batteries so I really couldn't see that far back down the hill. A guy with a van was parked on the road which runs along the crest of the hill and I asked if I could stop and change my batteries using the light from his van. He had been yelling down the hill at the runners who were slowly ascending, "Hup one, hup two, left, right, left, right..." like a military drill sergeant. Although initially amusing, this got old pretty fast. Anyway, he was more than willing to oblige and within a minute I had a fresh set of batteries installed and was ready to get moving. The van owner offered me some Jack Daniels, "I've got the good stuff", he chirped, but I said thanks and "I think I've got enough gas in the tank already that it would be a waste on me" and headed down the Jeep road. At this point I was really surprised that Donn had not caught back up but decided I'd just move on down the road and he'd inevitably be there shortly.

It's about 5 mile descent to Grouse Aid, all on a rocky Jeep road. It definitely was a wonderful place to make up some time if one has the legs and is alert. I had enough carbs, caffeine and glycogen in my system that I was feeling just right and began to increase my cadence on the speed walk. I'm guessing I was doing about 10-11 minutes per mile pace, maybe faster. Because it was a speed walk and not a run I was feeling no pain in my knees, quads or hamstrings and my heart rate remained constant – so I continued on with the identical pace all the way down the mountain. As I began to pick off teams of other runners and their pacers I realized that I was moving faster with a walk than most other teams who were actually running. I also could easily see the next team down the switchback canyon row because their headlamps glowed steadily in the night. So I used the time to play the game of "fishing" that my dear friend Dan Fowkes had taught me three decades ago. He's always instructed me to think of picking off runners as a game of fishing, reeling them in slowly one by one. He even made the sound and motion of a fishing rod reeling in a big one. That image and those memories really flushed me with some positive energy and so I began to make believe I was reeling in each team by going through the motions quietly in the dark, like someone doing shadow puppets with an overhead projector. It made the time go by quicker. I came upon a crew member from another team walking slowly up the road towards me about a mile out of the Grouse Aid Station. He encouraged me and said, "Grouse is less than a mile away." Soon I could see the glow from the station which caused me to quicken my step further. As I approached the aid station up from behind me a familiar voice – Donn. We were greeted by our crew immediately and again, they had the entire aid station sorted out to optimize our time. It was sheer poetry.

Grouse Gulch Aid Station – [10,710, 60.4 miles] – 72nd place [+14], Saturday, 4:34 am

I knew coming into this aid station that it can be a bit of a M*A*S*H unit because of its proximity to



Silverton (only 20 minutes away). In other words, if someone was thinking of dropping this would be the most convenient place to do it because it is close to Silverton and your crew has access to you. So unsurprisingly, as I entered the large tent where the aid table were set up, there were bodies everywhere in various states of distress. Lots of runners wrapped in blankets, lying on cots, a few shaking uncontrollably from early onset of hypothermia, others that looked pale, hollow eyes, staring aimlessly into space. It wasn't pretty and honestly, as much as I felt for these guys, these souls, knowing what they had sacrificed to get here and how much finishing Hardrock meant to them, for most I knew their day was over and I had to remain focused on my task at hand. They were all safe and

had assistance so I needed to get out of that tent ASAP. My crew had once again set up away from the tent, the noise and the crowds. This was what I liked and they consistently obliged.

At this point in the race I've decided that although my feet were damp from sweat, they were not getting soaked from stream and river crossings, as I'd been able to rock hop across almost every crossing except a couple, and that was before changing socks and re-lubing at Ouray. So I just needed to reload the pack and get moving.



Grouse Aid M*A*S*H* Unit

Here Donn ceded his pacing duties to Norm who was set and ready to go. I've known Norm for years as a fellow Trail Animal in our running club back east and fellow race



Handie's Looms in Foreground

tough as nails and very intelligent. So I felt extremely at ease in running this next long section with him by my side. We were very comfortable in running style and neither of us forced the conversation or pace. So within minutes – 10 at the most – we were gone. Daylight appear almost instantly as Norm and I climbed towards American-Grouse Pass, climb #7 [13,020', mile 62.9]. We started out slow to allow the food I had just chowed down on to work through the system. But soon



Atop Handie's

enough we were back up to full heart rate cadence and moved efficiently up and over the pass and into the next meadow.

There Handie's Peak, climb #8, the highest point in the race

[14,048', mile 65.7] came into full view. It was daunting and loomed in front of us the entire approach. We swung around and down on a bench in a meadow, then began the climb which involved numerous switchbacks across every kind of terrain possible. As the last quarter mile pitch steepened sharply, we both put our heads down and just



Last Push Up Handie's Peak [14,000']

methodically stepped our way to the summit. The wind had picked up and the clouds were swirling and since both of us had been to the summit before (Norm during a practice run and I during course marking) we decide to keep pressing on rather than stick around and gawk at the amazing view. I also knew the next little descent was tricky and would require some patience and time to navigate down. So off we went across

the cornice and then dropped right, down a steep, rocky precipitous path that switched back every ten feet or so.

We bottomed out onto some runnable single track that would lead all the way down to the Burrow's Park "mini" aid station [10,590', 69.7 mile]. This was a great place to test the legs a bit so we began to run and speed walk for the next four miles. It felt good, no real severe impact on the quads and knees so we kept up the good pace all the way down. We arrived at Burrows at about 9:00 am and saw Kristina Irvin who had been our aid station captain at Duncan Canyon at the Western States 100 Endurance Run at which I helped out a few weeks back. Again, it was a relief to see a familiar face and receive encouragement. Kristina is a Hardrock veteran of many finished so she simply said, "You look great, keep it going, you are in great shape." Boom, we were in and out of there in a flash and down the Jeep road towards Sherman.



Heading down to Sherman Aid

This is when I turned to Norm and said, "OK, let's do the math. Can we figure out what pace I need to run per mile in order to finish?" Within a few minutes, even though my brain was only half functioning, Norm had confirmed that if we kept up a 1.52 mph pace we could finish within the allotted 48 hour cut off. That's a 39:22 pace. I'd asked because I hadn't allowed myself to run the numbers up to this point simply because I wanted to run to my heart beat, not some arbitrary deadline I'd set. But at this point I was curious where things stood – but in no way did I doubt our ability to bring it home. In fact, that notion never crossed my mind, never. So knowing we had essentially all the time in the world to get this done gave me the confidence to actually try and push it

a bit more – without risking injury or flaming out.

We moved quickly down the road to Sherman Aid. This was the place I'd hoped to have my feet checked as they were beginning to feel like hamburger helper – or cottage cheese. My feet were wet and spongy. This was starting to create some rubbing and hot spots on my heels which was an issue since with my downhill race walking stride, I landed on my heels. So ascending wasn't painful but going downhill was very painful and we had a bunch of both to go! I'd heard from Kristina at the Burrows Aid Station that they had folks to work on your feet at Sherman so Norm and I resolved we'd look into that upon arrival.

Sherman Aid Station [9,640, 73.9 miles] – 69th place [+30], Saturday, 10:16 am

Well it turns out there was no podiatrist and no one to really work on my feet. So that was that. I was just going to grin and bear the pain for the last 30 miles. I ate a fairly dry chicken quesadilla (which I eventually tossed) and a bunch of fruit. It's pretty darn hard to create delicious Mexican food in the middle of nowhere! The folks at this aid station were again extremely helpful and caring. Norm and I didn't linger too long as we knew we had a big climb ahead and one of the longest pulls between aid stations (9 miles). So off we went after about 13 minutes of hanging around and chowing down.



Refueling at Sherman Aid

Neither Norm nor I had previewed the next section of the course. It was a long, steady climb on a single track trail that followed a creek all the way up to the Cataract-Pole Divide [12,200', mile 79.0], climb #9. As beautiful as the trail was (mossy, shaded, wooded, lots of greenery), it was hard to enjoy the surroundings as the trail continued to wind endlessly up and up and up. I continued to maintain a steady cadence and stride up hill, sometimes soliciting a, "How is your heart rate? Are you going too fast?" from Norm. He was doing his job, keeping me in line. We eventually came out into a series of meadows that eventually crossed the famous Colorado Trail and Continental Divide [11,110, mile 81.9]. The Pole Creek Aid Station was another mile away as it came into view. At this point I was really starting to lose some energy and between the sore feet and a newly developed issue with my pack rubbing my left shoulder blade raw, I was becoming slightly impatient. This had also happened to me on the Mt. Whitney fastpacking trip in May so I think it was less about the UltrAspire Omega pack (which otherwise performed stellar) and more about a residual issue with my shoulder. So I said to Norm, "Let's diagnose the problem I'm having and fix it." I'd prepared a list of possible "Things That Can Go Wrong" for myself and my crew. On that list (attached to this report) were all the possible things that I anticipated could go wrong to me during Hardrock. I'd created a list of issues followed by symptoms followed by possible remedies and run all of them by Dr. Marty Hoffman, one of the



Climbing Up to Continental Divide

ultrarunning sport's preeminent scientific researchers and medical advisors (and close friend).

We determined that although I was slightly light headed, I didn't have other symptoms of early onset of AMS. I was lacking energy but my stomach was fine and my muscles were all feeling good. So we determined I was in need of energy/fuel – specifically glycogen or carbohydrates. Then it hit me. At Grouse Aid Station I had made the mistake of not asking for two bottles of the CarboPro/GU Brew powder mix that I had been adding to my hydration pack for the entire race. This mixture gave me a constant flow of glycogen which quickly hit my bloodstream, since it was pure carbohydrates coming into my

body as a fluid. It had enabled me to be very steady in energy and my stomach. BUT, I'd run out of it at Sherman so this last 9 mile pull was without any of the mixture. That had taken its toll and now I was falling quickly into a glycogen deficit. Thankfully, we had diagnosed the problem without panic and knew it was an easy fix. We just needed to get to the Pole Creek Aid Station and fuel up on carbos.

Pole Creek Aid Station [11,460', 82.8 mile] – 69th place [+0], Saturday, 2:10 pm

Upon arriving at Pole Creek Norm and I quickly began surveying the aid available and began snarfing down anything that looked like a good source of glycogen. It wasn't hard! After a short stay (4 minutes), we grabbed some more food and took it with us on the way out so that we could keep moving. I immediately got a lift from the fuel. My heart rate monitor strap around my chest had been slipping down my back for the last hour so Norm suggested I just take it off as he felt at this point I could "Fly by VFR (Visual Flight Rules)" – in other words by feel verses using the HRM for reference. I agreed, but I'm guessing Norm regretted his suggestion as I immediately bolted into a trot and began romping across the meadow at a pace

for which he wasn't comfortable (for me). Norm tried to get me to slow down on a few occasions and it wasn't until the initial impact of the aid station fuel wore, that I abided. And then the second crash began to seek into my system. I was running low on fuel yet again and we had 3.5 miles to go until we reached Maggie's, the next aid station.

So we backed off, tried to stay within the envelope my body was willing to give, and make sure I didn't lose my stomach. After having the ability to move at will all day, this was the first time I felt Mother Nature was beginning to control my pace. I couldn't let that negativity into my head. So Norm tried to carry on a conversation, bless his heart, as he took the lead, but I was a silent respondent in the rear. I was just focusing on his heel like a zombie, wanting to get to a fueling station in the worst way. We ascended climb #10, Maggie-Pole Pass [12,530, 86.2 mile] and kept moving.



Getting Closer to Pole Creek Aid

Soon enough Maggie aid came into view and we slowly trundled down to the gulch where it was encamped. I saw Drew, who was scheduled to spell Norm and become my third and final pacer for the run. But I also spied Austin standing next to him, and then Bogie and then Donn. This was a very good sign. They'd all elected to walk in the four miles to the aid station to see me. Norm and I were actually moving along pretty quickly as evidenced by the fact that we passed a couple of more teams.

Maggie Gulch Aid Station [11,640', 87.1 mile] – 65th place [+4], Saturday, 4:18 pm

Upon arrival Norm quickly gave the team the bad news – I was dragging badly. Bam – the next thing I knew I



was in the chair, Donn rubbing out the knot in my shoulder from the pack, Austin and Drew refueling the pack with all the nutrients I would need to bring it home – including LOTS of CarboPro/GU mix, and Norm and Bogie assembling and bringing me food that was loaded with the nutrients I needed. Bogie has a clever idea of creating a smorgasbord of food from

the aid station on a single plate – all with the vital ingredients I needed. He encouraged me to “try a little, make me happy”. It was really comical – and it worked! Normally a tired runner



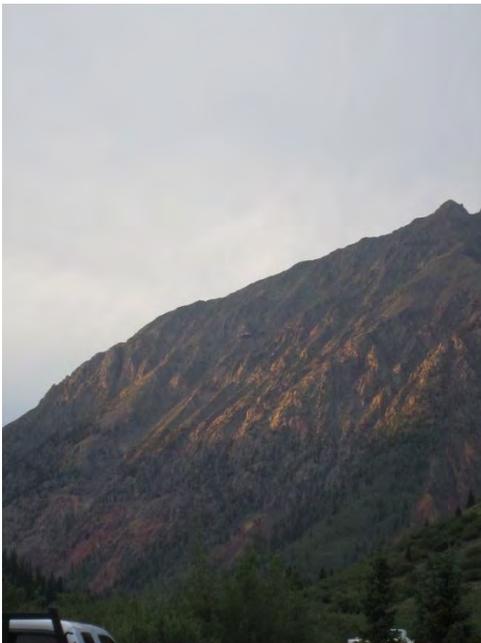
Taking Stock at Maggie Gulch Aid

comes into an aid station and is comatose, just standing there staring at the dozens of options of food to choose from, and being overwhelmed, eating NOTHING. This method Bogie has devised allowed me to see a smaller sampling of the right kinds of food (since we knew what kind of nutrient deficit I had) and allow me to nibble on things – seeing if it tasted good. By the end, I'd eaten five or six samples including a full piece of pumpkin pie (because Bogie said, “If you eat the whole piece of pie I will be *really* happy!”). Again, my crew saved my bacon.

Drew was ready to rock and roll and so as soon as I couldn't eat any more, Donn and Norm heaved me out of that chair and away we went. My energy level was still very low but we all knew it would take 15 or so minutes for the glycogen to kick into my bloodstream so we needed to ascent the next mountain with patience. The last thing I needed to do was to push myself into the red zone on heart rate and bring on a dose of AMS late in the race. So I elected to have Drew lead us up the mountain to Buffalo Boy Ridge, climb #11 [13,060', mile 88.5]. I'd learned an adventure racing technique from Grant Sisler, an Ultra Grand Slammer and extremely talent ultra runner I paced at the VT100 during his Grand Slam bid in 2010, whereby the weakest member of an adventure team (usually four members) latches onto the "train" of the other three in the rear like a caboose, focusing only on the person's shoes directly in front of them. He did it at the VT100 for about the last 20 miles, despite being injured and completely worn out, and he finished comfortably under 24 hours – it really works. So Drew set a good cadence and I methodically followed, step by step up this increasingly steep slope. About half way up I told Drew he could pick it up a bit as my energy was returning. He complied and before I knew it we had summited. The view was outstanding and Drew was literally on top of the world – he was thrilled.

We kept moving however, as I'd learned before that my energy was coming more in spurts and I didn't want to squander a good period by standing around. So onto climb #12, Green Mountain Pass [12,980', mile 90.2] we went. There was little terrain upon which to recuperate. Now the climbs were coming at us more frequently, saving the best for last! I was feeling strong enough that I decided to lead the descents. We went down to Stony Pass on our way up to Green Mountain Pass. We really got into a groove and were feeling like a steel ball in a track. It was fun and Drew was doing remarkable on the uneven terrain. He's a natural.

As we reached the summit of Green Mountain Pass we noticed the weather had changed for the worse. It happen suddenly and before we knew what hit us, BAM, the skies opened up and we were trapped on top of the exposed granite summit at 13,000' being pelted by hail with a 40 mph gust. We were the only ones on the summit, completely alone. Drew and I had waterproof rain jackets on and gloves but it still was almost immediately freezing. We hugged and huddled trying to protect each other from the pelting hail which increasingly hurt our bare legs and occasionally getting around our hoods into our faces. After five minutes of hoping it would subside, I made the decision that we needed to press on and get down off this mountain as soon as possible. The danger wasn't lightning, it was hypothermia. We needed to move to warm up but moving meant turning directly west, into the throat of the storm and hail which now was hitting us sideways. Drew agreed to the plan and I let us quickly down the single track path. We were moving faster than normal and with purpose. Our descent pace was borderline dangerous due to the slippery conditions but we both remained in control ,checking back often with each other, difficult as it was to hear each other's voices over wind and hail.



Drew & Bob Specks on the Ridge Approaching Cunningham

Soon the Cunningham Aid Station came into view far below in the gulch. It was still 2.5 miles away but by coming around the ridge

we had achieved shelter from the storm and now had a clean run all the way down to the station. We took advantage of the break in the weather and boogied down the hill.

Cunningham Aid Station [10,380', 93.2 mile] – 65th place [+0], Saturday, 7:37 pm

We arrived to the reception of our entire crew. This was the last aid station and ahead the last climb, #13. I was euphoric. All we had to do now was be smart and bring it home. I wanted to dump my pack which at this point had really irritated my back. I felt we could switch to a bottle/fanny pack for the final 9 miles. I took a single bottle; Drew took two in his pack. I changed into a dry jacket loaned to me from Austin and got a dry set of gloves and wool cap. While refueling on food I sat in a warm tent and aid station volunteers covered my shoulders and legs in blankets, just to keep my core body temperature up. It was heaven. But Drew and the crew knew I needed to get up and out and on our way home. So after staying in Cunningham for 17 minutes, the longest I'd stayed at any aid station all day, we took off to the cheers and elation of our crew and aid station volunteers. This was it, the final climb and pull and I was going to knock it off with Drew leading the way.



Last Strategy Meeting and Equipment Check

Drew quickly found the trail head and up we began, again deploying the adventure racing technique of him setting the pace, nice and steady and slow, and me locking onto his heels. This ascent is the worst of any of the other 12 climbs. It is steeper and longer and needless to say, after 93 miles, the most exhausting. It took us 2.5 hours to go 1 mile on the ascent to give you some idea of how challenging climb #13 can be. Darkness came upon us about 2/3 of the way up the mountain. It was lonely up there for us. Drew set a steady pace. As I followed Drew's heels I realized I was starting to see black spots and doubles. I was growing more and more dizzy the further we climbed. It required me to stop more frequently to shake my head and try and clear the spots and double vision. It wasn't helping. So I decide I was likely getting a small

dose of AMS combined with exhaustion so the only way out was to get down out of altitude. And there were two ways to

descend – going back to the aid station or heading towards the summit and down the other side to the finish. It was an easy decision but nonetheless disconcerting. As we summited I became disoriented and was certain we needed to keep climbing towards the top of the summit to the left. Drew found a trail to the right where the marker had been



Off To Conquer the LAST Mountain Climb!



Feeling Better with Warm Clothes and Fueled Up!

blown away by the gusts, leaving only the marker stand. We

stopped and took our high powered Fenix SD32 flashlight and

scanned the horizon for any sign of a reflective marker. There was nothing either to the left or right. Drew was convinced we needed to go right. I had marked this portion of the course the week before, albeit in the daylight, but it seemed to me we needed to keep climbing. I had seen the headlamps of other teams ascending behind us so we decided to wait and see if one of them knew the way. It turned out the first team we encountered was very familiar with the course so we fell in behind them. Drew had been correct all along – we needed to go right.

Just as we summited the final mountain, Dives-Little Giant Pass [13,000', 95.4 mile], I heard the rumbling of thunder in the distance. I said, "Drew, oh no this can't be, not again; and just as we are on the summit?"

Sure enough, within 60 seconds the skies opened up and it began to pour rain. This was quickly followed by thunder which was now very close. The lightning soon followed. It was hitting directly on the mountaintop where we were standing. The previous hail storm on the summit was very uncomfortable and disconcerting. This was downright frightening. Days before I'd met Bob, a veteran Hardrocker who a few years back had been actually struck by lightning while on the course, knocked completely off his feet. He showed me the deep scar on his left sternum. It was a miracle he lived. What was even more unbelievable was that Bob, after gathering himself, dusted himself off and went on for 10 miles more to complete the race. Hardrocker indeed!



Little Giant-Dives Pass - Where Drew and I Confronted the Lightning Storm in the Dark –
[picture from Blake Wood]

So all this is running through my brain as Drew and I turn at the metal stake which designates the place to descend. It's really coming down hard now. We are cold, soaked, running out of energy and fuel and still 7 miles from the finish. It was going to be a long night ahead and an classic Hardrock finish. Ma Nature was not going to let us have this one without the ultimate test.



Descent into Little Giant Basin -
Where Bob Took His One and Only
Header! –[picture from Blake Wood]

So we began following the team in front of us down the steep slope which featured a granite wall on the right and the dark abyss on the left. It was rocky, now slippery, single track trail cut into the side of the mountain. We descended at a pace that was too fast – out of fear of the lightning. We had little choice. But eventually it was inevitable that someone was going to fall. Drew had slipped a couple of times prior on his rear, no big deal. I had not fallen the entire two days. That probably was in the back of my mind as we descended faster and faster. Then it happened in a flash. I slipped on a slab of granite we were hopping over and went down on my hands hard, slipping to the left with a leg dangling off the edge. I made an "oof" sound and Drew immediately stopped and turned around (he had been following the team in front of us trying to keep pace). He saw a dazed look in my eyes. I tried to immediately get up and slipped again, this time falling on top of the trekking sticks that we both had been using in the second half of the run since Grouse. I snapped my stick. I got up, assessed that I had hyper extended my left thumb and bruised my right

pointer finger, but it could have been much worse. So Drew loaned me his stick and we continued down, Drew with one stick, me with two but hardly able to grip with my left hand.

I told Drew at this point the storm seemed to be subsiding and we needed to slow down. The only thing that would stop us from finishing now was a bad injury. It was about 11:30 pm on Saturday night and we had literally all night until 6:00 am Sunday to finish about 7 miles. So we settled into a slog of sorts,



Jubilant Father & Son Approach the Finish

eventually reaching a Jeep road that was extremely uneven and rocky which we followed all the way down into the Silverton valley for miles on end. At this point all the adrenaline and energy has exited my body. I was literally sleep walking for 7 miles. Drew stayed behind me as I swayed from side to side; trying to find a smooth path on the Jeep road so I didn't trip and fall again – but to no avail. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, we came upon the left hand turn to get onto the final single track trail to Silverton. We'd been warned this section too would feel like an eternity – and they were right!

After slogging for hours we reached our final big turn off the single track and onto the streets of Silverton. Drew had been an outstanding steady companion for me. He was the right mix of patient, supportive, assertive and fun. We both missed not having Patrick, my elder son who had shared pacing duties at Western States, on the team this time, but could feel his energy there with us in spirit.



Big, Wet Sloppy Kiss on THE Rock to Stop the Clock

We were greeted by a lovely local gal who guided us from the ski hut towards the streets. Drew and I decided to run it in all the way. She

laughed and said, "Wow, you're the first team to run the entire way, most others walk until they see the finish line." I figured I'd saved up all that energy on the last descent, the least we could do was run on the smooth road! And then there we were, crossing Main/Greene Street and making the left hand turn towards the finish line. Marcy has been out ahead filming our final run in and then as we made the final right hand turn in front of the high school and into the finish shoot lined with the flags of every state and country with representative runners, I asked Drew to join me to cross the finish and kiss the rock, which is the Hardrock tradition. We both laid a sloppy one on that big ol' slab of granite and that was that. Over, finis, completed. Holy crap. 43h:13m, 73rd place.

5. Epilogue

This journey took my body, mind and soul places that I've never ventured before. It was more than just another 100 miler, but instead a spiritual pilgrimage. The amount of preparation, patience and perseverance required to complete this sojourn was beyond anything I'd attempted in my life.

Without the support and encouragement of my best friend, partner and wife Marcy, I could not have trusted my instincts to believe I could accomplish this goal – a goal of finishing one of the most demanding ultra

runs in the world. But she knows me better than anyone; bit her lip when she recognized the danger, held her criticism when she heard me complain of pain or weariness from training and reminded me that, “This is your choice, so “deal with it princess” and buck up.” If there is an award for the best Hardrock spouse, Marcy wins hands down.

I want to thank Dale Garland, the enduring Hardrock race director and leader and his entire outstanding team of volunteers and Board of Directors, for hosting a magical event. The goal of the run is tip one’s cap to the spirit of the miners – the Hardrockers – who had persevered brutal weather, terrain and working conditions in their quest to bring home their fortune to their families. I believe Hardrock truly serves as a fine modern-day tribute to those pioneers. The volunteers were all so generous with their time, kind with their comments and caring in the way they handled each one of the runners, crews and pacers. As a fellow race director I was inspired and in awe of the family atmosphere at Hardrock.

To my ultra running friends – both east and west coast, I cannot thank you enough for all the hours you spent with me on the trails, providing me advice, support and guidance. Your encouragement gave me the confidence to keep training when my mind and body were thinking otherwise. You are dear friends and I look forward to returning the favor as you pursue your own endeavors on the trails.

To my family and friends who watch what I do and sometimes gain inspiration, sometimes just shake your head (and make that circling motion with your finger around your ear ☺) I thank you for all the good vibes that you’ve sent me for this race, and all the other crazy stuff I’ve done. I guess when they were handing out loose nuts and bolts in heaven they gathered them up and gave them all to this nutty Irishman and said, “Let ‘em loose and see what he does....”!

And to my crew, what else can I say? Donn, Austin, Norm, Bogie, Drew and Marcy – you came together from across the country, with little notice and minimal briefing and pulled off one of the greatest crewing performances in all of ultra running. Your encouragement, humor, efficiency, anticipation of my needs and reading me like a Hemmingway novel were brilliant. If I can ever return the favor, don’t ask, I’ll just be there.

If you got this far in reading this short story you are either really bored or very curious about Hardrock. If it’s the latter, I’ve two words of advice for you: *Do it!* This is a life changing transforming event that is difficult to put into words. It must be experienced to be appreciated. Hardrock isn’t a race; it’s not even a run. Hardrock is an experience. A place where few can go and fewer can be touched by the euphoria that comes with saying, “I am a Hardrock finisher.”



The Jeep Has Some New Schwag!

	Problem	Cause	Solution
HEAD AND HEART	<i>NOTE: I'll be prophylactically taking Acetazolamide (Diamox) -before & during the race</i>	AMS	Acetazolamide (Diamox)
	Pins and needles	Diamox side effect	Hydrate, Dexamethasone
	Headache only	1) Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar); and/or 2) AMS (Altitude Mountain Sickness) 3) Hyponatremia	1) Consume more carbs; 2) take Extended Strength Tylenol if necessary; 3) monitor for more signs of AMS or hyponatremia
	Shortness of breath upon exertion	Impact of high altitude	Slow down, take breaks, reduce heart rate
	Flu-like symptoms (headache, fatigue, stomach illness, dizziness)	AMS	Dexamethasone
	Peripheral edema (swelling of hands, feet, and face)	AMS; hyponatremia; normal response to altitude	Dexamethasone for AMS
	Chronic headache + unsteady gait + gradual loss of consciousness + increased nausea, retinal hemorrhage	Cerebral edema (swelling of the brain)	Take Dexamethasone; if not working stop and rest, take in more calories; worst case - get down to lower altitude, seek medical assistance ASAP
	Nosebleed	AMS; dry air	Dexamethasone ; hydrate; apply pressure with gauze nose plug
	Persistent rapid pulse	AMS	Dexamethasone , slow down
Symptoms similar to bronchitis, persistent dry cough, fever, shortness of breath even when resting, wheezing sounds, inability to speak full sentences ,excess sweating, pale skin, decrease in level of alertness	Pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs)	Get oxygen, get to lower altitude, seek medical assistance ASAP	
ENERGY	Dehydration	Heat, excessive sweating, caffeine	Drink electrolyte solution, slow down, eat salty foods
	Drowsiness	AMS	Dexamethasone , caffeine
	General malaise	Tired, low on energy, maybe AMS	Take in more calories, hydrate, rest if necessary
	Fatigue	Hypoglycemic, low blood sugar	Ingest carbohydrates, decrease salty snacks, caffeine colas, sports drinks, fruits
	Dead legs	Going too fast, not taking in enough calories	Slow down, ingest more carbohydrates, hydrate
MUSCLES	Muscle Cramping	Dehydration, inadequate blood supply, nerve compression, too little electrolytes (potassium, calcium or magnesium)	Drink electrolyte solution, slow down, eat salty foods, massage, stretch
	Lower back pain	Poor running posture, fatigue	Correct to erect run posture, stretch, reduce pack weight if possible, NSAIDs as last resort
STOMACH	Nausea	Too much fluids, Too much food, NSAIDs, acid in stomach	Wait to refuel, refuel with smaller portions more often eat saltine, salty foods, ginger, TUMS, stop NSAIDs
	Stomach Cramps	antacids, fiber, lactose, "impact" exercise	eat while walking uphill
	Gas/Bloating	Beans, sorbitol (some fruits), air ingestion	Food avoidance, avoid sucking air from H2O bottle, burp, Gas-X
	Gastric Distress	Dehydration, anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs/ibuprofen/Advil)	Drink electrolyte, eat smaller portions/slower, avoid wheat, bran, seeds, nuts, brown rice, raw veggies, raisins, grapes, fruit, dairy, Tums, Pepto
	Vomiting	Too much fluids, Hyponatremia, AMS	Stop drinking H2O, eat carbs with electrolytes (salt), vomit
	Diarrhea (Osmotic Diarrhea)	Fructose, fruit, table sugar, dairy, fiber, anti-biotic, sorbitol, decreased blood flow to GI	Stick with corn, wheat, potatoes, rice (maltodextrins), replace lost fluids with salty solutions/foods, reduce intensity of exercise
WEIGHT	Weight gain or <2-3% weight loss	Possible hyponatremia	Reduce fluid intake until urinating, particularly if there are signs of swelling (rings are tight, feels puffy)
	3-5% weight loss	Normal	OK but need to keep an eye on for further weight loss.
	5-7% weight loss	Early dehydration	Increase fluid intake & consider salt intake if weight has consistently been in this range.
	≥7% weight loss	Dehydration	Assess mental status and if lucid, increase fluid, consider salt intake. If vomiting or the inability to

			rehydrate is evident, remain at aid station until recovery after rest, food, and rehydration (may take 1-2 hrs)
	Right knee ache	Acute patella tendonitis (chronic)	Tylenol, stiff legged downhill technique to relieve concussion on knees
	Blisters	Wet socks, not enough lube	Drain blister, New skin, tape, re-lube, dry socks, consider Tylenol and different shoes

Mini magnify glass	0.78	0.78
2 Apple shuffle and earphones	1.02	1.02
Turn-by-turn Directions	0.71	0.71
	26.18	13.77

SAFETY/FIRST AID	Epipen	2.15	2.15
	Skin lube in plastic container	0.95	0.95
	Nextcare waterproof tape		
	Tinture of Benzoin		
	New Skin	1.55	
	Couglin's germicidal tabs		
	Compass/whistle	1.06	
	Pills (NSAID, Diamox, Dexamethasone)	0.60	0.60
	Sunscreen	0.49	0.49
	Chap Stick	0.32	0.32
	Bandaides	0.25	0.25
	T-paper	0.25	0.25
	Duct tape	0.25	0.25
	Safety Pin	0.09	0.09
		7.96	5.35

TOTAL WEIGHT	ozs	199.25	167.08
	lbs	12.45	10.44
	Excluding consumables = lbs	5.65	3.64