



Hardrock Hundred Mile Endurance Run

July 14-16, 2006

A Report by [Matt Mahoney](#)

The Hardrock 100 mile run is held on mountain trails starting and finishing in Silverton, Colorado on a loop course through Telluride and Ouray and over 14,048 ft Handies Peak. The race has 33,000 feet of climb, a series of 11 mountain passes mostly at altitudes of 10,000 to 13,000 feet. Temperatures ranged from 20's to 80's F (-5C to 30C). There was very little snow this year. Of the 131 runners selected by lottery and meeting qualifications (finishing another mountain 100 miler), 81 finished within the 48 hour cutoff. The race started Friday July 14 at 6:00 AM and ended 6:00 AM Sunday.

You will notice a blank where my finish time would normally go. Unofficially it was 48:06:58. My troubles started with the warm and sunny weather on the climbs to Oscar's Pass and Virginius Pass during the first afternoon. Being from Florida, I like warm and sunny, but so did the swarms of flies that tortured me as I climbed. I went as hard as I could just to get away from them. But the result of prolonged hard breathing at high altitude is fluid accumulation in the lungs, a precursor to pulmonary edema. The vertical mile from Ouray at 10:30 PM to Engineer Pass at 5:30 AM was less than half the 2000 ft/hr rate of ascent I had been doing in training at similar altitudes. All the runners I passed on the earlier climbs were easily passing me back as I coughed up the gunk in my lungs. When I arrived at Grouse Gulch (58 miles) at 7 AM, I was 2 hours behind my planned arrival time. I tried to eat but could not create saliva, so I rested another 2 hours until my appetite returned. I knew I would go nowhere if I couldn't eat.

I summited Handies Peak at 12:20 PM in last place, climbing at 1500 ft/hr, but after descending I felt really strong for the rest of the day with no more lung problems. But I knew I would have to push it to make the cutoffs. My next problem was the new section between Maggie Gulch (mile 85) and Cunningham Gulch (mile 91). I did not know until the day before the race that this route had been changed, when I compared my old map with the master map at race headquarters. So I saw it for the first time at night. I was miles from any other runners. The new route traversed two 13,000 ft mountains, descending to the top of Stony Pass in the middle. I could not see the mountains I was climbing. I blindly followed the reflective metal markers every 100 yards across open tundra and rocks. Sometimes the metal tags were edge on, and I wasted lots of time looking for them, scanning with my flashlight and continuing by dead reckoning when I couldn't see them. I used my map, orienting it to the north star. I made the 2:00 AM Cunningham cutoff by 7 minutes and wasted no time there.

The last section was a miserable, grueling 3000 foot climb in the first 2 miles, but at least it was familiar. But now the hallucinations started. They always do after two nights without sleep. The hallucinations were mostly internal. When I took a drink of Coke from my water bottle, it was not me who took the drink, but another person inside my body. The other people inside me controlled my legs separately, causing me to stumble over rocks and weave off the trail, which had steep drops on one side. They intruded with random thoughts, fragments of vivid dreams, trying to distract me from the goal of getting back to Silverton. During the climb I found another runner huddled in a blanket, his pacer explaining he was unable to move. He had left Cunningham 3 hours earlier. I stepped over him, unconcerned with his troubles.

The climb took 2 hours, leaving 2 to go. The first mile of downhill trail above treeline was too steep and rocky to run, and took 45 minutes. When I reached the jeep road, I ran hard 2000 vertical feet to the bottom, leaving 32 minutes to run the last 3.6 miles of muddy trail to the finish. The third dawn refreshed me. I felt like I was running a 5K race. My legs felt great, but in the end just weren't fast enough. My watch said 6:00 as I passed the ski hut entering town, 0.6 miles to go.

I am not sure how I would have done it differently. I spent three weeks altitude training in Leadville at 10,200 ft elevation, climbing to 14,000 almost every day that the weather permitted. I ran two high-altitude marathons in the last two weeks for training. The day after each race, I climbed Mt. Elbert, the highest mountain in Colorado at 14,440 ft.

My legs were never tired. I ate massive quantities of food, especially protein, at every meal and lost several pounds. I took two rest days before Hardrock.

I ran Hardrock with no crew, no pacer, and no drop bags, even though these are allowed. I carried a two bottle waist pack and tied extra warm clothing around my waist when I wasn't wearing it: a polyester shirt, polypro shirt, jacket, nylon long pants over shorts, knit hat, wool gloves. I had a 7 Luxeon-LED light (4 AA batteries changed nightly), 4-LED backup light, and 8 extra AA batteries. When it was warm I drank most of my water from streams (untreated) to stay hydrated. The 12 aid stations had great food: M&Ms, potato chips, turkey sandwiches, cheese eggs, spaghetti, macaroni, pumpkin pie, shrimp and dip, orange slices, chicken soup, Succeed, Coke, and Mt. Dew. I ate everything and never had any nausea. In training I had been rotating 3 pairs of shoes and selected the most comfortable for the race, 8 oz. Nike Zooms without socks. They dried fairly quickly after the frequent stream crossings. I had no blisters for most of the run, then only minor ones at the end that did not interfere with running.

I am back in Florida now, elevation 17 ft. My feet are swollen.

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