

Hardrock 100 Endurance Run 2017 Race Report

Steven Moore

Sometimes when a person thinks about a single event for years (8+ in this case), working hard just to keep open the possibility of it even happening, even dreaming about it, the expectations can never live up to reality and the anxiety ends up crushing the enjoyment of the penultimate goal. This is not one of those times...

Hardrock 100 is really hard to get into. It took 8 tries for me. There have been lots of discussions about the 'fairness' of the lotteries and a few hurt feelings by those who don't get in. While I certainly wanted to gain entry a little faster I never once regretted the process. Traveling around the country (and world) to run qualifying events in order to keep my chances alive is something I'll never forget. The places I got to run and the people I had the pleasure of meeting have been nothing short of outstanding and I doubt I would have experienced half of that without the need to stay in the Hardrock hopper year after year. Lottery day finally arrived last December while I was running in Spectrum Trail Racing's 'The Circus' event. This was a mudfest 12hr relay race and I didn't check my phone until late in the afternoon. When I saw the texts from friends telling me 'Congrats' I breathed a big sigh of relief and then went and ran my last leg in the pouring rain and deep mud with a big smile on my face, telling whoever I met on trail that I just got into Hardrock! Later, I told my wife Sandi and called my parents to make sure they put it on their calendar. Game on.

Spring running was going fine until I tweaked my knee running fast on the road the week before the Austin marathon (pacing). It wasn't bad and I paced Austin and then ran Spectrum's Saddleblazer 100k the following weekend. Knowing I was pushing my luck I dialed back a bit in March but didn't fully address the knee issue until I overcooked it in early April by running back-to-back 50k race weekends. I could barely walk and got in for an MRI. Just a sprained (hyperextended) MCL but I had to take all of April and the first part of May off completely, no running. I had to withdraw from Quad Rock 50 in Ft. Collins in mid-May out of caution and with my eye on the prize of running Hardrock in July. The knee healed up nicely and I got a few test drives in with some shorter local races just to make sure, but no doubt my training was not up to par for the steep terrain waiting for me in the San Juan's. I did what I could in June but Austin TX isn't exactly prime training ground for a mountain run. I was actually way more concerned about staying on the race course than I was about finishing or how hard it was going to be. I knew I would finish and I knew it would be hard. "Wild and Tough" is the HR motto after all!

I got to altitude a solid week before race day so I could acclimate to the altitude and get in some scouting hikes to loosen up and familiarize myself with some of the trail out of Telluride. I drove over to Silverton solo on Wednesday to soak up the scene and catch up with friends and meet some new ones. Sandi, Sierra, Calvin and my parents all arrived by Thursday afternoon and set up in a sweet hotel room just a hundred meters from The Rock (start/finish). We had a fun dinner out and discussed some crew plans before hitting the sack for the early start on Friday July 14th, 2017.

The race morning weather was perfect and it looked as if the usual summer storms would at least hold off for a few hours so we could get some miles under our feet and settle into the race. I said 'See Ya' to my family and mingled with my fellow runners to await the start. Another runner, Greg, introduced

himself to me and said we had a mutual friend from back in Texas. We chatted a bit and then the RD yelled 'Go' so we ended up running together for several miles getting to know each other. When Greg powered up the first big climb just a little faster than me I made my second conscious race decision (I'll tell you the first one later). Usually my race mantra comes in the later hours and has something to do with 'pay attention/watch your feet' or something like that. This time I said "My Race, My Way, All Day" and it stuck. I wasn't going to worry about getting passed on the trail. I knew I needed to be conservative and careful if I was going to make it all the way around.

I saw some familiar faces on the top of the first climb, took in the incredible view and buckled up for a screaming downhill to the first aid station. Several runners bombed past me on the downhill while I kept thinking about having something left 25+ hours from then! I ran/hiked with some runners I knew and some I didn't until I found myself essentially alone through Pole Creek to that aid station, mile 20. I fueled up on some yummy avocados and refilled my fluids for the next leg. I passed 4-5 runners through this section on the way up to the Continental Divide area where I saw some campers in the high valley. I was being careful to stay on trail and slowed a bit when the first lightning bolt struck nearby. I stopped to put on my jacket and 3 dudes I know (Jamil, Nick and James) came hollering and laughing up the trail in full force. Then the hail came. Only pea sized but driven by a stout wind we alternated from laughing at the craziness to cursing the pain of being pelted. It was a mad scramble alongside a now raging creek in the ice/mud/water to get down to the Sherman aid station where I'd see Mom and Dad for the first time.

I really thought me and the guys would dry off, warm up, have some hot coffee and laugh about how crazy the lightning and hail was but all 3 of them had NASCAR pit stops and were gone before I could eat half a burrito. Oh well. My Race, My Way, All Day. My plan was to eat solid food at the aid stations even if I wasn't hungry and stick to Tailwind up high till the next one. I caught up to the band of Merry Pranksters on the road to Burrow's (veggie pot stickers!) and then Greg as well. We formed a train for the long slog up Handies peak, just over 14k feet. The other 4 guys nailed the climb and bombed the decent and I was alone again but content. A light rain escorted me down to the Grouse aid station and another nice regrouping with M&D. I probably spent too much time here but it felt nice to lower the heart rate and make sure I ate some more food before hitting the road for the climb up Engineer. Lots of goats grazing and the beginning of an awesome sunset with a mix of the afternoon storm clouds and some clearing skies around.

I was feeling pretty good and passed one other runner on the long decent down Bear Creek towards Ouray. This section has a few dicey areas (drop offs!) that are likely pretty intimidating in the dark but luckily I had some daylight left. The last 2-3 miles into Ouray was the first time I had any real problem with the trail markings. Turns out I was on trail the whole time but kept backtracking to make sure and got a little frustrated trying to find the way through Ouray and get to the aid station. Once Calvin and my dad funneled me to my chair and I vented for a second, I looked around and saw tons of people I knew. Family, Austin friends, Telluride neighbors, both of my pacers...etc. I let go of my frustration from the last few miles and focused on refueling for the next leg. A new INKNBURN shirt, a veggie burger and some fries, and a Lonestar and I was good to go. My first pacer was Joe Uhan, who agreed to pace me from Ouray to Telluride on a last minute whim during the race briefing Thursday. He was at the race to watch and/or help in some way and I asked if he would join me. We stumbled out of the gate at Ouray but found the road UP soon enough. Some folks complain about this section because it is pretty lame

compared to the beauty of the rest of the course, but I was fine with some easy route finding and we made decent time up to the Governor aid station. The temp was dropping and I knew the pace was going to be slow up the final snow field to Kroger's so I put my jacket back on in advance.

I had the pleasure/honor of working the Kroger's aid station under Roch Horton two years at past races so I was really looking forward to sitting on the 'couch' at 13k feet and getting the royal treatment from that crew. It didn't disappoint! Roch allowed about 30 seconds of celebration and then kicked me out before I could get emotional about reaching that perch and start my rambling. Off we went down the other side. Joe was really on task here because I kept trying to slide my way over towards the trees (wrong way) and insisted that we were heading the wrong way when, in fact, he was 100% correct. Thanks Joe! What felt like bombing downhill was actually a respectable pace but nothing special. I was happy I was still feeling well and was looking forward to seeing the whole gang at Telluride, home-away-from-home.

In Telluride my stomach was a little jumbled from all the downhill bouncing so all I had was another Lonestar beer Calvin had ready for me. I filled up my bottles and made sure I had an Epic bar if I got hungry on the climb. I switched to a different pair of Altra shoes just for a change and my new pacer, two-time Hardrock finisher Matt Hart, took over for Joe in leading me out. I knew the climb but that didn't make it any easier. Slow and steady is all I can say. We passed one runner/pacer group and saw lots of headlamps above and below, all the way up to Oscars at the top. The hail storm from earlier in the day must have turned to hail/snow on this peak because the whole ridge was covered in a frozen crust that looked pretty surreal in the now pre-dawn mix of starlight and the next day's glow. The descent to Chapman was pretty slick at first and then just rocky but Matt and I pulled in and filled up. By now the sun was up and it was a new day. I had a shot of coffee, an egg burrito and a bathroom break and was ready to roll.

Leaving Chapman was another place where even just one more strategically placed marker would have made all the difference. I likely overthought this one and if Matt had been by himself he probably would have motored on up the trail. Instead we scouted up the trail and back for a while until Greg suddenly appeared from behind and said he'd already been the wrong direction and was pretty convinced we all needed to go the way Matt thought as well. The 3 of us eventually made it up to the traverse that puts you under the Grant Swamp Pass scree field (from hell). I kept my face close to the rocks so that if I fell it wouldn't be backwards and fall down the mountain. As hard as this climb is, the view from the top down to Island Lake is so worth it. We didn't linger long before we hooked down towards KT. The last mile before KT seemed to take forever but we finally made it. It was starting to heat up a bit and I made sure to drink plenty of water and Tailwind before starting off again. Matt was game to continue leading us to the finish and I was thankful of that as well as knowing the end was in site.

My watch was set at a 30hour battery life and when I heard it signal its end I realized I could go sub 32hr if I got moving. At a point just after KT I realized I was having some auditory hallucinations and really felt like I needed to get this thing finished soon. Matt was encouraging and I began to focus exclusively on a 3 foot diameter circle in front of my feet and picked up the pace a bit. We past some runners and got passed by some too, everyone was in the home stretch and ready to close it out. Putnam aid station appeared and I barely stopped for water. The next few miles were gently downhill but covered in rocks. I

felt like I was making pretty good time and it was all I could do to keep from crashing sometimes. The river crossing finally came and a few more familiar faces shouted encouragement.

With only a few turns left I finally noticed my son Calvin up on the hill awaiting my appearance. He joined Matt and me at the turn down from the Christ of the Mines statue and we headed for the finish. It was only a quarter mile or so around the corner to the finish chute and there were plenty of people around to make some noise. The whole family and lots of friends were all there to watch me kiss the rock. It was over. Wild and Tough. 31 hours 42 minutes; from 6am Friday morning to early Sat afternoon I hiked and ran through some of the most awe inspiring natural landscape in the world and now it was over. The RD, Dale, gave me a medal. I kissed my wife. I stood around in a daze for a few pictures and then Sierra led me to a chair and took my shoes off (brave move!).

Now, back to my first conscience race decision. Anyone who knows about ultra races knows that it can get ugly sometimes. The 'down' spots in a race where you feel crappy both physically and mentally are almost inevitable. The trick is to keep them brief and move on to a better place. Not only did I establish 'My Race, My Way, All Day' early in the race, I chose to have a good race before I even left Austin. Two simple facts made this choice possible to implement: 1) I waited so long to get to this starting line it would have been a disservice to me, and my family to have anything other than a good time out there. 2) The natural beauty of the space I got to run through and the grandiose scale of the mountains humbled me to an extent that is was impossible to ignore. Like an invisible wave of energy that passed right through me, at once demanding my best yet also so much larger than just me. I didn't have a choice.

I always want to do better but I'm real happy with this result, not just the time/placement in the race but also the way it panned out and the entire experience. As always, my wife and kids deserve huge thanks for their support in training as well as taking the time out of their summer schedule to be there in the mountains for and with me. Also my folks who have been looking forward to me running Hardrock for as long as I have and with as much enthusiasm. They drove all over the place and stayed up past even my bedtime to make sure I had what I needed. Thanks to my pacers Joe and Matt! Your company during my run is much appreciated and made it even more fun and memorable. Thanks to all my friends who followed from both near and far. I run with you all in mind. Till next time, see you on trail. SM
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