

From Meredith Murphy (meredithmurphy@comcast.net)

Long race report if you are bored :)

Crossing the finish:

<http://www.putfile.com/pic.php?img=6209286>

The North Face Endurance 50M

August 4, 2007

Not sure where to start with the race. Even before race day we were receiving emails with mixed messages about trail markings and course directions. I decided it would all make sense when i got there, it usually does. The night before the race, Derrick and I went to the mall behind our hotel to pick up our race packets at the North Face store. Dinner with Linda, our crew, Derricks wife, Mandy and her boyfriend. After some ice cream, it was then early to bed for a 3:15 wake up. I did not sleep well at all and Linda and I both had weird dreams about waking up that early. I would be shocked if i slept more than 2 hours.

Race morning, I met Derrick in the hotel lobby at 4:04 am (I was 4 minutes late in his eyes) and we headed over to the park where the race was going to start. Once there, we got our drop bags together, donned our headlamps and headed over to the start/ finish line to check in and set up our drops. The most interesting thing about the prerace was that we had to wear a timing chip, but there was a purse on the winning spots, so i guess exact times mattered. Right before the race began, the race "host" Dean Karnazes, showed up with his entourage. He is tiny in real life, kinda weird.

The race started right about 5am and we headed up a gravel road towards the trail in the pitch black. The field took off and within minutes Derrick, myself, and another runner, were dead last. I had never seen a field go out that fast and really wondered how they expected to keep that pace for the remainder of the day, especially with the forecast of hot and humid, temps supposed to be near 100F. Within an hour, even though it was still dark, it was so muggy that my shirt was already saturated with sweat.

It was dark and hazy and i was having a hard time seeing where we were going. I did not want to fall that early in the race. We hit the first aid station in good time and were running a pretty speedy pace at about 10:30 miles.

The next section was "difficult run" and ironically it was probably the least difficult section of the race. It was a three mile out and back to the aid station. At the end of the 3 miles, there was a lone table and a sharpie marker to mark our bibs. For the most of the morning miles, Derrick and I were near each other and he was usually next to me, or in my line of sight. At one point i did fall and i have no idea how. Bad words and noises came out of my mouth, as falling has become more the norm than the exception in my last couple races.

Right before we hit 14 miles, Derrick got a bit ahead of me and i entered a section, alone, called "the cliffs." I am VERY afraid of heights and there were these huge rocks and sheer drops down to the river below, hundreds of feet below. I was petrified and missed a trail turn. I turned around shortly after missing the flag and I finally neared the start finish line, where i saw Derrick. I was confused, but just kept following the arrows on the ground.

I then hit the aid station, where Linda, our fearless crew and cheer section waited. Turned out that Derrick thought the start finish line was the aid station. Good thing we saw each other! The race volunteer filled up my camelbak hydration pack, Linda cleaned up my legs from the fall, i picked up some more cliff blocks and headed back on the trail. The volunteers told me that it was a 15 mile round trip and 5 miles to the next aid station. I was soon by myself and kept running and running and running. After a little while, 50K lead runners started to pass me. After over an hour, i got a little worried and just kept trudging on. I kept asking the 50K'ers if they thought we had gone more than 5 miles, and every one said YES! At one point i got passed by two 50K front runners, TWICE, they got lost and think they veered many many miles off the course.

As i was running this endless section, i ran out of water, the woman did NOT fill my hydration pack up and i was hot, hungry, thirsty, and feeling like i would never hit the aid station, but i finally did! The volunteers said that people reported to them that they thought that section was 6-8 miles and that it was 5 miles to the next aid station and the turn around. Around 25 miles into 50 mile races, i always hit my low point, and this was about that time. I was sluggish, tired, and a wee bit cranky. I kept running and walking and when i started to see runners heading back the other direction, i was happy. I got distracted at one point reading a sign about being careful running along the edge of the golf course, and I fell pretty hard, tripping on a big ol root. My hand was cut up in multiple places, as was my left leg and i was covered in dirt. Not happy about that!

Finally, i hit a long gravel road and I could just barely make out the aid station at the end. I had not seen Derrick come back down the trail, so I hoped to see him there. I got to the aid station and runners were sitting in chairs looking beat and worn out. I looked around and could not find Derrick. I started to panic and asked if there were any drops, they said no, and then they said there was one runner that had just gone into the portapotty. It was Derrick!!!!!! i was so happy to see him, it really revived me. We headed back out on the trail, but unfortunately he was having some tummy issues. I kept oscillating between running with him and running with a couple other runners near us. I started to feel really good and just took off running. I knew it was about 1:15 to the next aid station.

At one point i was running with two runners, a man and a woman, and we got off course. We could not find our way back and had just come up a big climb we did not want to have to repeat. We kept walking and

walking and walking and did not find the trail. Finally, the woman said that the outbound trail was along the river, so we should bushwhack it down to the river and hopefully hit the trail. We came up to a large downed tree and as she climbed up on it, her legs cramped up. It was very bad, but luckily brief. We finally did return to the correct trail and spread back out.

At one point on this stretch i passed Mandy who was very unhappy and not doing well. She thought she was going to not make the cutoff and had previously run out of water. It was way too hot of a day for that, and i think she reached that point of no return once she had hit the aid station to refuel. I gave her a hug and we parted ways.

Back at the next aid station, Derrick caught up to me and we passed a handful of 50 miler racers and headed back to the start/finsih aid station where Linda was. This was the endless stretch and we both were very hungry. I was starving and my tummy was growling. I had run out of cliff blocks, because they told me it was only 15 miles total out and back. Derrick heard someone at the 20 mile point say their Garmin read 25 miles. Who knows how far we had run. When we finally did get back to the aid station, Linda made us ice bandanas and we chowed. I drank a chocolate soy milk and ate a bag of cookies they had there. My hands were very swollen from the humidity and i soaked them in the bin of iced bottles of Accelerade to relieve the pain.

Derrick and I headed back out for the final 14 miles of the race. After our short walk, we hit the trail and started to run. We both had very full tummies and decided we needed to eat some ginger and walk for a bit while we digested more. Well, turned out we took a wrong turn again and eventually we did head out to where we needed to be. We ran and walked until we hit the "difficult run" aid station. We were ten minutes ahead of the cut off and knew we were cutting it close. We had to head out and back in a little over 1:30 (6 miles). We headed out and hoped that there was some water left on the table with the sharpie marker. It was not and we were both thirsty when we returned back to the aid station. I handed off my camelbak to Derrick to give to the aid station volunteers and hit the portapotty. I drank a cup of mountain dew and powerwalked it down the trail. Derrick and I were not together, but within ear and eye shot of each other, with a mission to finish.

After about 20 minutes, i had some cliff blocks and electrolyte caps and was shocked to have no water left in my hydration pack. They must have barely filled it. I was so mad and thirsty and learned on that day that a camel back is only as good as the person who fills it. I knew we were just a little over 4 or 5 miles from the finish and just did my best to move forward and ignore my thirst. A couple times i bummed some sips from Derrick to take electrolytes and wet my mouth. We met up with another runner who caught up with us. He was in the Army and heading out to Iraq very shortly after the race. Turns out his wife was just there and i learned that the military can send BOTH parents to war and the parents have to find arrangements for their children. This made me sad.

Finally, the three of us hit a turn in the road and a volunteer pointed which way we were to go and said we had 1.6 miles left. Unfortunately those miles went back over the cliffs. Neither of us cared at this point though. As we neared the finish line i suggested that we run in together, but Derrick insisted that he finish last, behind me, so he could make his Team Slug proud of his DFL finish. Mandy, her friends and family, Derricks wife, and Linda were waiting for us. We finished right under the 13 hour cut off, my slowest 50 mile race by far, but i am still standing by that i ran at least 55 miles, i would bet closer to 60!

I drank about 5 or 6 cups of ice water and a poor man had to untie my very dusty shoes to take off my timing chip. I knew there were only a few women in my age group and that the awards were going to be three deep, so i asked the race management how i placed and was surprised to find out that all the other women in my age group dropped out and i was first AG!!! Also, only four women finished the race, with 26 runners finishing overall, and there were almost 60 people registered for the race. The temperature is reported to have been anywhere from 98-100F, depending on the source and very humid. The heat never actually bothered me where i said "it is hot" but i know it did zap my energy and i was more sluggish than i normally am in 50 mile races.

All and all i was happy with my mental state during the race. Once i got past the expected 25 mile down point, i was in chipper spirits the whole time. Once back at the hotel, i decided to take my first ever ice bath. I got in a cold water bath, just up to over my thighs, and had Linda pour multiple buckets of ice in. It was great!!!!!!! I felt so good afterwards and talked Derrick into taking one next. Afterwards we went to Bertucci's and had a well earned dinner of pizza.