

A Personal Definition for the Word Endurance:
The 2014 Oil Creek 100 Ultramarathon



Eric J. Burkett

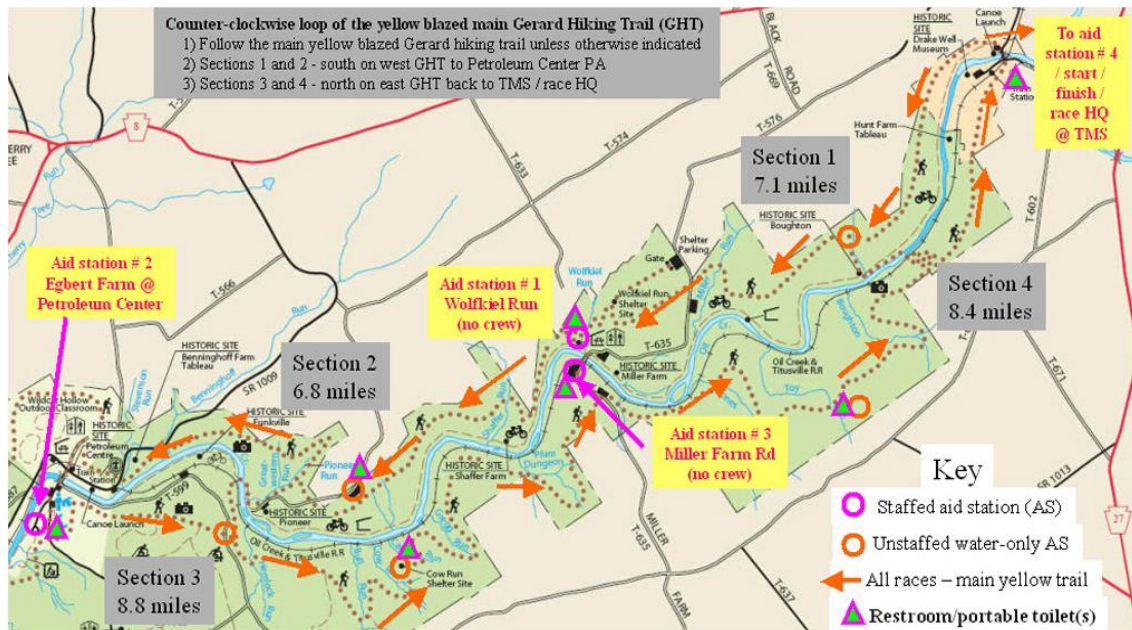
October 11-12, 2014

THE ORIGIN

The Oil Creek 100 takes place in Titusville, PA – a remote town in northwestern PA up near the city of Erie. Oil Creek offers 3 race distances; the 100 miler, the 100k (62 miles) and a 50k (31 miles). The 100 mile race begins at 5:00 am, followed by the 100k at 6:00 am and the 50k at 7:00 am.

Ultrarunning Magazine rates all ultras in terrain and difficulty on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being easiest and 5 being the hardest. The OC 100 is rated a 4/4 for the elevation gain and rocky, root-covered technical single-track trail.

In total the OC 100 mile trail climbs 17,785 feet of elevation gain and is comprised of three 31 mile loops followed by a 7.7 mile “Acid Works Coming Home Loop” reserved for the 100 milers. Each 31 mile loop has 4 aid stations; Wolfkiel Run (#1 - approx 7 miles in), Petroleum Center (#2 -13 miles in), Miller Farm (#3 - 22 miles in) and finishing the loop you wind up back where you started; Titusville Middle School (#4 - 31 miles). Crew is allowed access to only Petroleum Center and Titusville Middle School aid stations.



Oil Creek Course 1 Loop = 31 miles

I was very fortunate to have an incredible crew to support me on my run: My wife Cristina, her friend Danielle King, and my training partner and friend, Jeff Kascsak. Jeff would be pacing me 31 miles on my 3rd loop on miles 62-93 and my wife would pace me on final 7.7 mile “coming home” loop to the finish line.

My parents also made the trip to Titusville as well as my brother Rick who was racing in the 100k for his 3rd year in a row to seek out another PR (we both completed the 100k in 2012 and 2013).

I knew several other runners and friends running the OC course that day; David Hunter, Brian Newcomer, Steve and Lisa Beers (50k), Austin Sedicum and Matt Miller (100 miler). Matt was gunning for his first 100 mile finish, while Austin is a 'veteran' having completed the OC 100 in 2012 and the ridiculously grueling inaugural Eastern States 100 miler about 2 months prior.



Men in black- The crew (left to right):
Me, my wife Cristina, Danielle, My brother Rick, and my pacer Jeff Kascsak.

My publicly stated goal was simply to finish the race to obtain the coveted 100M buckle. My own internal predictions had me completing the first 2 loops at 8 hours each followed by the 3rd loop at 10 hours. This would bring me back to the middle school at 26 hours... allowing 2+ more hours for the final 7.7 coming home loop. I had planned on a 28.5 hour finish. If things went well and I could light up that last loop, I wanted to surprise everyone and do even better. It's good to have goals. It's also good to have a back-up plan for when things *don't* go your way.

THE START: Mile 0. Elapsed Time: 0:00. Clock: 5:00 am

Prior to the start I downed a pre-race meal consisting of two PB&J sandwiches and a ProMeal, a fortified granola type bar with 300+ calories. I wanted to be certain I started out with enough carbohydrates and calories so I wouldn't have to make up for a deficit later. The plan was to eat, hydrate, and balance everything out with an electrolyte tab once an hour.



Pre-race and lining up to the start.

All the contestants gathered in the middle school to listen to the pre-race instructions by race director Tom Jennings. He reviewed the usual dangers (wet leaves, slippery rocks, occasional confrontations with bear and stubborn porcupines) that we may encounter on the trail, then ushered us all outside to gather at the starting line.

As we walked outside, my wife and brother and a few others offered me luck and encouraging words. I was preoccupied with starting my Garmin watch on time, and before I had a chance to soak in the anticipation, the gun went off.

I wasn't anywhere near the front of the crowd – but having never gone this distance, my plan was to remain conservative and start out fairly slow. I also avoided jumping in with Austin or Matt, because I knew they had their own race plans and I wanted to avoid getting caught up in their pace. My initial goal was to find and settle into a comfortable groove and arrive at aid station #2 (petroleum center) around the 3.5 hour mark.

The course continued down a paved bike path for about a mile before the real off-road adventure begins. At that point, a sign marking the Gerard Trail appears on your right and you begin your ascent up the dirt trail and up the side of the mountain. Just a few minutes into the race I came upon Matt. We exchanged a few supportive words then I continued on past. The crowd began to bottle neck as the runners began to line up single file to step up off the bike path and onto the trail.

The morning was cold and dark. The beam of my headlamp revealed breath vapors every time I exhaled. Looking forward I saw a long progression of lit headlamps winding their way up the trail. A quick look back revealed the same. Perfect. This is exactly where I wanted to be.

We continued onward. The trail was relatively uneventful at that point, and the race was just beginning so I was doing my best to focus on avoiding rocks and roots or any mud or water run-off coming across the trail. There was little opportunity to pass on the single track so I followed the same person nearly for nearly 6 miles as we began our descent towards aid station #1, Wolfkiel Run. As we approached, I admired the brightly lit strings of white Christmas tree lights strewn through the trees above our heads. On the ground were large beach balls, the aid station had a beach theme – truly an oasis out here in the dark. I would have appreciated the décor even more if I wasn't distracted with the overwhelming need to get myself straight to a port-o-john to relieve myself. Here I was, not even 7 miles in to the run and already I had to seek out a place to hit the bathroom.

In my research leading up to the race, one single piece of advice was reiterated in every article I read: Do not let yourself chafe! Take care of any issues before hand, or you will wind up with a wicked case of monkey-butt that will lead to a Did Not Finish (DNF) quicker than a monkey peels a banana. I'll admit I rarely pay much attention to chafing, but in a previous race I wound up with a bout that left me screaming in the post-race shower in the middle of a campground.

Yeah, soap and water don't soothe raw skin.

This time I came prepared. I had creams and ointments in every drop bag and a mini stick of glide tucked in my handheld water bottle pocket. I fumbled around in the port-o-john for what seemed like forever. It was still pitch black outside, and inside the beam of my headlamp was shooting this way and that. Outside I could hear all the activity, it sounded like a bustling metro station – as all the runners were passing through the aid station and onward and up the trail. Meanwhile, I'm stuck inside with my gloves in my teeth trying not to touch anything I shouldn't. Some things you just cannot rush. I finish, clean up carefully and pop open my mini stick of anti-chafe glide only to have the contents spring out of the container, bounce off a wall or two and skid across the bench to come to rest against the toilet seat. Nope, I wasn't going to touch that now. I gave up and decided to get out of there. I pulled up my shorts, washed my hands with a little sanitizer and kicked open the door to jump back into the bustling crowd of runners.

The door flung open to reveal darkness and *silence*. I looked around to discover everyone was gone. It was like the train left the station while I was taking care of my personal business. Seven miles into the longest run of my life and everyone left without me. I was kind of amused by the circumstances.

From there, I jumped over to the aid station, grabbed a banana, a drink of water, and was on my way. Next up was a short but tough climb they call sWitchback Mountain. I climbed up through the switchbacks and continued into the darkness.

Running alone was actually nice. It was *quiet*. I had the course to myself; I had more room and felt at ease. I decided not to push hard and catch up as everyone would certainly have to stop for their own bathroom break sooner or later. From there I made my way towards petroleum center and ran at a very comfortable pace. After a short bit of time I began to pass a few stragglers and knew if I'd be patient, I'd get back in the game. After all, I had the entire day to catch up.



Around mile 10: Feeling great - coming down to Petroleum Center

I came into petroleum center after 3 hours and 15 minutes and feeling pretty strong. I certainly wasn't pushing the pace, but the 13 miles had no impact on my legs. I felt fresh.

By this time the sun had risen so I swapped out some gear with my crew. I dumped the hat and headlamp, changed into a fresh shirt and a new sock. Yes, just one new sock. Why waste extra time if the other was dry? My crew made fun of me because my socks no longer matched. As they continued to critique my lack of fashion, I realized I still needed to apply anti-chafing cream under my shorts. *Crap*. More time lost as I wandered across the way into a restroom to once again take care of business. And once again, the crowd is outside running on by. Time to play catch up..... *again*.



Mile 13: Petroleum Center Aid Station

PETROLEUM CENTER: Mile 13. Elapsed Time: 3:15. Clock: 8:15 am

I left petroleum center and began the climb out of the valley and up the somewhat technical and rocky Heisman Hill until I made it to the top of the ridge. This section (this time) was relatively uneventful. I continued to run at a comfortable pace, occasionally picking off another runner here and there. I did a lot of running without seeing anyone else – and recall this section of the trail was very quiet.

There are a group of boy scouts who camp out every year approximately 5 miles from petroleum center. They hang amusing signs on random trees along the trail for about a stretch of a mile or so on either side of their camp. Reading the various signs in the middle of the woods is always entertaining, and they always seem excited to see a runner when they pass through.

I ran through the scout camp, said hello and continued onward. Another 3 miles until aid station #4 at Miller Farm. After reaching the station, I drank a bit of Coke and picked up a few gels, maybe half of a grilled cheese sandwich and a slice of banana. After just a few short minutes, I was on my way.

From that point, I knew I had a few good hills to tackle. Right after the aid station I climbed up Cemetery Hill – a climb next to an old cemetery dating back to the oil boom of the early 1900s. After that you come upon another hill called Rockefeller's Revenge. After completing both of those climbs, I picked up the pace – and was once again excited to catch up to more people

and better my overall position.

I cautioned myself about moving too fast and remained in a comfortable steady groove. My groove however, was a pace that was much slower than I prefer to run at. I kept reminding myself to move conservatively, I wanted to have energy left the late in the race. I actually remember wanting to run faster but my rational side convinced me to take it easy and keep things well in the middle of my comfort zone.

All good running from here on out. I allowed myself to stretch the legs on some good downhill and was moving along nicely. Near the end of this section, I heard someone coming up quickly from behind. I turned around to see it was Ashley (Moyer) Lister, central PA's own elite runner. She was well on her way to beating the women's course record in the 50k by more than 25 minutes. (She now holds the female course record in the 50k, 100k and 100 miler at OC). I asked how she felt and she smiled and said she was happy this race would soon be over. She was giving it her all and was definitely nearing the end of the course. I on the other hand, had more than 75 miles to go - my race was just beginning.

Coming down off the mountain I caught up to Matt again. We made our way around the Drake Oil Well, and then hopped onto the paved section of the bike path leading back up to the middle school (Aid station #4). At that point I was anxious to get off the pavement, so I offered some encouragement and was on my way. After about a quarter of a mile, I saw Austin coming down the trail, heading out for his second loop. He was looking strong, and encouraged me to catch up.

MIDDLE SCHOOL: Mile 31. Elapsed Time: 7:25. Clock: 12:25 pm

I came into the aid station at the middle school hungry for lunch. The sun was shining, and I sought out my crew and was led in by their loud cheers and whistles. I changed out of my Brooks Cascadias and threw on my Hoka Stinsons, and grabbed a slice of pizza for lunch. I was right on schedule at this point – arriving 7 hours 25 minutes into the race.

After a few minutes, I looked up and saw my brother coming into the aid station as well. He was moving fast, and I was surprised he caught up this quick. I expected him to catch me somewhere out on the second loop. His race started an hour behind mine, so he actually crushed the first 50k in about 6.5 hours. He was making great time.

Well, I must have been really hungry or concerned about not getting enough calories because at this aid station I ate a slice of pizza. The pizza was followed by a grilled cheese sandwich. The grilled cheese was followed by a cup of ramen noodles. It all tasted so good, so I decided to wash it all down with a Boost chocolate drink which contains something like 360 liquid calories.



Clockwise: Coming in. Tina, Danielle & Jeff assisting me at the middle school aid station. My father bringing my brother in to the middle school, My brother and I grabbing some food and heading back out for loop #2.

I was ready to continue onward. I was looking forward to the next section because I'd finally have some company for a while. I planned on sticking with my brother for several miles before he began to push his pace to chase his record in the 100k.

We got up and made our way over to the bike path and started a slow run down the trail. As soon as we began I realized I was in a bit of trouble; the Boost drink with all that food began to slosh around in my stomach. I was familiar with this feeling; during a previous training run I went out too soon after a sizeable breakfast and a large cup of coffee. During the same training

run, less than a mile in, I hunched over and poured that entire cup of coffee back out of my stomach and all over the side of the road. I immediately felt better, and so I kept going.

But I didn't want to lose those calories today. I knew if I could settle my stomach they would serve me well later on. I hopped over the rocks feeling like a human percolator and was disappointed with my situation. What was I thinking? I don't eat that much for lunch when I'm *not* running. I didn't want to hold my brother back, so about another mile in I told him to continue on without me. The last thing I remember telling him was to maintain a comfortable pace back down to petroleum center and once he got there he should then fire up his final 18 mile push back to the middle school to shoot for a solid time. He nodded and continued on his way.

I kept moving forward as quickly as I could, but at this point I was now suffering from full blown nausea and remained determined to keep things down. In hindsight, perhaps I should have blown it all out there, and refueled at the next aid station. Who knows? What I do know is I continued onward, and was surprised to catch a glimpse of my brother every now and then off in the distance. I wasn't too far back, which gave me reason to believe I was still traveling at a decent pace.

I came into the Wolfkeil aid station some time later. The cheers coming from the aid station always pump me up, and I was glad to see other runners and quite a bit of activity there. All I kept thinking about was fixing my stomach. The volunteers refilled my water pack and the only food I requested was a few ginger chews – small pieces of ginger flavored candy which supposedly do wonders for relieving stomach issues and nausea. I needed them because immediately after this stop I was climbing up sWitchback Mountain again.

I climbed cautiously, and was relieved that I got to the top without too much effort.

Soon after the climb, I began experiencing a few new issues. For some reason I felt like an expanding bottle of carbonated soda. My stomach was bloated. Gas began to build and began to blow out both ends. The good news is I was running alone. The only unfortunate witness to my gassiness would be my pacer (later on my 3rd loop) and a sweet motherly woman who was kind enough to snap photos of runners as they crossed over a bridge. As I came across, I thanked her for taking the pictures and as if on cue, accidentally blew out a loud burst right as I went by. Talk about improper timing. I hope she understands that wasn't my intention. Sorry ma'am, I've been running for 40 miles - at this point, I'm really not responsible for anything my body does.



My apologies to the photographer.

PETROLEUM CENTER. Mile 44. Elapsed Time 11:16. Clock 4:16 pm

Once again, my crew was ready for me at petroleum center. My stomach was still turning and I had no intention of eating. I asked for more ginger chews, looking for something to continue to soothe my stomach. I surveyed the spread of food, looking for some crackers or something, but I recall nothing looked all that appetizing. I managed to have few bites from a slice of pizza then changed into some warmer clothes. I then grabbed my headlamp, a hat, my iPod, and took my watch off and connected it to a portable battery charger, and threw it into my pack. I'd tackle this section without a watch and without knowing my pace or elapsed time. I simply knew I wanted to hit Miller Farm aid station by dark. My wife was concerned about the dropping temps and tied another running jacket around my waist should I need it after sundown.



Petroleum Center: Food? No thanks.... Swapping some gear and heading out.

I asked about my brother, and to my surprise they said I just missed him. I was psyched that I was this close, but figured he was planning on pushing hard for the next 18 miles to bring it home, so I had little hope of catching back up to him.

I left petroleum center and begin the climb back up on to the mountain ridge. Here I caught up to a runner running the 100k. He had a good sense of humor, as I came upon him he was on his cell phone talking to his wife. He looked up at me then continued talking: *Aaah, honey? I gotta hang up now, I'm being passed.*

He and I kept up the same pace for quite some time, and we took turns leading the pace for a few miles. I enjoyed running with him – the company was nice and we joked about mentally pulling each other along. He even stopped at one point to snap pictures and point out a pretty fat porcupine scaling up a tree.

Heading up towards the boy scout camp, I caught up to Matt yet again. He was power-hiking this section, so I stopped to take a breather with him. He was seemingly frustrated and informed me he left his asthma meds in the wrong drop bag. His lungs were acting up, and he decided he wasn't going to push too hard. We talked for a bit – I told him to take it easy – he was still moving at a good pace and hopefully he'd be able to continue on. From there, I ran ahead, caught up with another runner who told me she was going to ask the boy scouts if they could offer Matt some coffee to alleviate his symptoms (they are not an official aid station so typically they don't offer anything to runners).

As I passed through the camp, I noticed the sun was beginning to go down. Not having my watch on, I wanted to hustle down to the Miller Farm aid station and hit my goal of arriving before dark. I don't know why, but this section (I believe its marked 3.4 miles) seemed to take forever. My thoughts seemed to slip a bit towards the back of my mind – my thought process was becoming a bit hazy. This happens quite a bit on long runs – I chalk it up to the loss of electrolytes and do my best to not those thoughts slip too far away, so I popped another

electrolyte tab just as I had been doing every hour of the race.

Running on, I noticed my stomach no longer felt full or bloated. I was moving much better on a light stomach, and my mood picked up a bit. I enjoyed picking up the pace here and there. I passed a few runners and popped out on the dirt road that leads about a half mile down to the aid station.

I realized that once again, nature was calling and that meant yet *another* stop at a port-o-john. I was mindful of my kidney function – something you always want to monitor. Sometimes during endurance events your body can begin to fail and your kidneys can shut down. Not peeing is a warning sign of a serious problem. But at this point I was in good shape - not only were my kidneys functioning, but my bowels were in overdrive. I looked around for a secluded spot in the woods, because half a mile or not, I realized I was *not* going to make it to the aid station. I surveyed the trail looking for a good place to jump off. Then I surveyed the trail looking for *any* place to jump off. I made it about a quarter mile down the road and spotted a gated trail off to the left. I sprinted over and then shot another 30-50 yards deeper into the woods for additional privacy.

Here I was, celebrating the halfway point by squatting in the woods. I was somewhat surprised that I retained the ability to squat, and hoped my legs wouldn't cramp up in this position. I cleaned up with some toilet paper and a few baby wipes. The only thing I didn't have (once again) was some body-glide to protect the private parts. Add that to the checklist of things to take care of when I arrive at the middle school, *again*.

I finished doing my thing, and ran several yards back out on to the trail. I continued on down another quarter mile or so and had the aid station in my sights. I made it as planned, the sun was going down and I reached up to turn on my headlamp. Major panic set in as I couldn't find the headlamp anywhere on my head. My heart jumped. I began to pat myself down... my wrist, my pockets - it was gone. I must have dropped it on the side trail during my pit-stop. I was a bit frustrated with the situation, because if you are trying to run 100 miles, you certainly don't want to run any further than you absolutely need to.

I turned around, and headed *back* up the dirt road from which I just came. I noticed a puzzled look on the faces of other runners as I was now running in the opposite direction. Fortunately, I arrived back at my make-shift wilderness outhouse to find my missing headlamp. Relieved, I put it on and began running – this time in the right direction.

Disaster was clearly averted. If I hadn't noticed it was missing, it could have meant some serious back-tracking or delays, not to mention additional mileage. Later that night I turned off my headlamp to see how dark it really was. I waved a hand directly in front of my face. *Nothing*. I could not see a thing. It was pitch black out here in the woods.

I came into Miller Farm aid station, refilled my water pack and got right back out on the course. I don't mind running alone, but after nearly 14 hours I had enough solitude. I was looking

forward to getting back to the middle school to pick up Jeff, who would provide company and pace me the next 31 miles. I forced myself up Cemetery Hill, followed by Rockefeller's Revenge, and rewarded myself with some tunes on the iPod. I flipped on my OC playlist which pumped a collection of energizing tunes I assembled over the past year right into my ear-buds. After running in silence for so long, the music was a welcomed change. There I was, out in the middle of the woods, alone and in the dark after 50 miles and I was actually having a pretty good time.

I finished off some more ginger chews and began picking up the pace. I hammered some of the downhill (my favorite sections) in the dark. My headlamp lit up the trail in front of me. Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains, New Politics, Vampire Weekend and more provided me with much needed company for the rest of this stretch.

The music really seemed to work wonders. I was able to regain some ground as I passed several people and my confidence started to build. If I could pull off one more 31 mile loop and push through the 7+ mile coming home loop, I could actually do this. I also thought of my brother – I figured by now he was finished and hopefully celebrating his finish. The next few miles flew by, and I began to hear the welcoming sound of the Drake oil well off in the distance – a sign that you are only a few miles away from the school.

I began the descent down off the mountain. I popped my ear-buds out only to be welcomed by familiar voice belonging to Dave Hunter – race director of the Megatransect, who was cheering for people as they came down off the mountain.

Dave is a great guy. I've come to know him after completing 6 consecutive years of the Mega. The Mega is a gnarly, technical 25-29 mile (the distance varies every year) brutal trail run set in Lockhaven, PA. This year was my toughest Mega (7th) because I decided to sit out, knowing the OC was only 1 week later. I didn't want to risk tweaking an ankle or other injury knowing how much I wanted a shot at the 100 mile distance. So this year, with my kids in tow, I stepped up to the starting line only to watch my brother and everyone else take off as the gun announced the start of the race. It was difficult to watch everyone go while I just stood there. Life wasn't meant for bystanders.

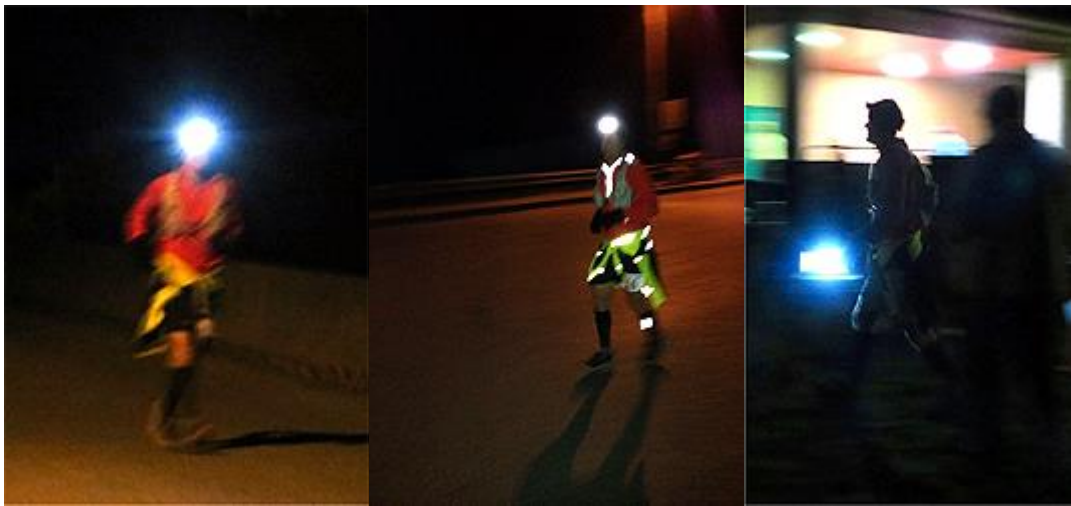
When Dave recognized me, he immediately sprung into action and asked me how I was feeling. I did a quick self-assessment: Aside from a calorie deficit and sensitive stomach, I actually felt pretty good. Dave continued to shout encouraging words for a few hundred yards. Out of the darkness Brian Newcomer (another notable east coast trail runner) suddenly appeared, and they both accompanied me for a short distance to further motivate me and charge me up for the last loop.

As I continued on down the trail, Dave yelled out that my daughter would soon be bragging to her friends that her dad could run 100 miles. That hit me, because a month earlier I watched the movie ***Unbreakable*** - a documentary about the Western States 100 ultra-marathon with my family. A few days after watching the movie, my daughter revealed that she was no longer

sure I would be able to cover the distance. She went on to explain that she saw one runner, Hal Koerner, drop out of the race – and he looked real tough. *Maybe* even tougher than I was.

That was the kick in the rear I needed. I was motivated. I completed a short loop around the Drake oil well and charged up to the middle school into the aid station.

MIDDLE SCHOOL. Mile 62. Elapsed Time 16:20. Clock 9:20 pm



62 miles. Coming into Titusville Middle School



Middle School Aid Station 16 hours in. Taping up, swapping gear, mentally prepping for another 31 miles....



Gear changed, last minute prep and Jeff is ready to pace

I arrived just after 16 hours of running at about 9:20 pm – about 20 minutes behind my anticipated schedule. I wasn't concerned, I was confident I could make some time up on the last lap.

I was happy to see the crew. They wisely guided me right to a table inside the school. Outside temps were falling fast and during an endurance event, your body begins to lose the ability to maintain its core temperature. A sweaty shirt in even a slight chill can cause uncontrollable shivering and hypothermia can quickly set in. Once inside, I struggled to swallow a few spoonfuls of Ramen noodles. My stomach was still not right – I couldn't shake the nausea, but I ate what I could hoping that no one would notice. I also taped up my right foot as another blister was developing deep under an existing callous. Tina encouraged me to change my contact lenses; I brought an extra pair in case my eyes began to dry out. At first I didn't think it was necessary, but she convinced me it was a good idea. While I was doing that, Danielle was rubbing my legs with icy hot gel. No need for a bear bell, I was sure they'd smell the icy hot menthol coming from a mile away.

At the station, I discovered the portable battery charger I connected to my watch and had tucked in my pack did not work. My watch read LOW BATTERY. A minor set back, but not critical - I told Jeff I we would have to rely on his to monitor our pace, and he'd have to remind me to take an electrolyte tab every hour.

I jumped into the men's room, applied some more anti-chaffing cream, and changed into a new set of clothes: some compression tights, a new moisture wicking shirt, hat, gloves, and a nice warm Patagonia outer layer for warmth. Once again I tied a light shell around my waste in the event that temperatures continued to drop. Jeff, my pacer, was ready to go. I asked him if he was ready to see what I've been doing all day. We hesitated long enough so my mom could snap another photo or two, and we headed out. By now the time was about 9:55 – I had spent roughly 35 minutes in the middle school prepping for the final lap. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but I was now off my pace by nearly an hour.

I immediately felt the cold temps as we stepped outside and recall for the first time having a bit of trouble getting my legs going on the paved bike trail. Several small steps loosened them up, and then I was running again. We maybe went a quarter mile, and took a brief walk break, then ran the rest of the way to the trail head. I reviewed the game plan with Jeff – we were on schedule so I wanted to take this section (to petroleum center) easy, and save some for the big push back from there back to the middle school.

We picked our way through the trail – I wasn't moving all that fast, but really didn't need to. I gave myself a full 10 hours to complete this loop – a completely reasonable pace given the darkness and the deteriorating conditions of the trail. I noticed things were much muddier now, the trail was slick and we were moving much slower than I was during the day.

I should probably also reveal that I was now running without any underwear. Believe me - with all my chafing concerns, I had no intention running that free out there. But back at the middle school when I was changing clothes I asked my wife for some underwear to go along with my tights. She informed me that she couldn't find any in my drop bag. As I explained the situation to Jeff, we laughed and found a bit of comedic relief in my predicament. Worse of all, my compression tights were designed to maximize airflow around the crotch, and yes, the temperature had dropped down below freezing. So I came up with a solution, I pulled a bandana out of my pack and tucked it down the front of my pants, making a makeshift wind barrier. Add that to your list of reasons to carry a bandana on an ultra, Austin.

Warm at last.

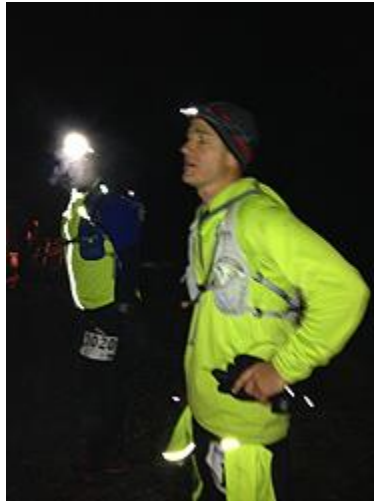
We kept the slow pace until we began the descent towards Wolfkeil aid station. Jeff was surprised at the enthusiasm of the volunteers and food selection at the station. To have them support the runners all night long out in the dark is incredible. I cannot thank them enough. I took a small drink of water, and asked for more ginger chews.

We left Wolfkeil aid station and began climbing the steep switchbacks up the side of the mountain. I was relieved knowing this was the last time I would be climbing the sWitchback section. I don't recall much at this point, other than it was slow going, but I knew it was OK because there were some nice runnable sections ahead.

I surmised at that point that Jeff was very cautious about talking too much because he was unusually quiet. Prior to the race, we both read articles about how over-enthusiastic pacers can easily annoy an exhausted runner with constant jabber. But I think I was looking for a small diversion, so I continued on as a tour guide and did my best to point out a few good views he was missing in the darkness, and tried to announce when we were about to hit my favorite (or least favorite) sections of the trail. We then came out of the woods into a little clearing and ran under the oil derricks. That part was fun. I don't remember seeing many other runners at all. It was after 2:00 am – and we were making our way down to Petroleum Center.

We finally exited the single track and made a left on the dirt road leading to Petroleum Center.

We crossed the rail road tracks, a steel bridge, and wound our way towards the aid station. At this point the air was heavy with fog – the reflection of light from the beam of our headlamps was glaring off the fog in the air. We ran by the slide in the playground. I briefly thought of climbing up to slide down, but then quickly changed my mind as I imagined landing wrong and doing something stupid like wrecking an ankle.



Mile 75 - Approximately 2:20 am

PETROLEUM CENTER. Mile 75. Elapsed Time Approx. 21:20: Clock 2:20 am (Day 2)

Petroleum Center was a blur. It was cold, very dark and foggy. I noticed that the crew and volunteers were heavily bundled up in winter jackets, hats and scarves. Once again, I was searching for ginger chews, trying to manage my stomach. I hadn't eaten anything in quite some time, but my stomach was *still* turning. The ginger chews helped, but as soon as they dissolved, the stomach issues returned. Somehow in the dark I spotted a bottle full of Tums on the aid station table, so dumped 5-6 into my pocket and popped 2 in my mouth. I began the race mixing 50% water and 50% Gatorade in my hydration pack, and every time I refilled I asked for less and less Gatorade. I just couldn't stomach anything with too much flavor or sugar. This time, I'm fairly certain I asked for just 100% water.

Anxious to get moving, we didn't stay long. It was cold. I needed some calories but still couldn't eat. Nothing seemed appealing, so I grabbed a few pretzel rods and jammed them in my pack. I refused repeated offers to sit - I knew the best thing for me was to remain vertical and keep moving. I wanted to appear strong in front my crew and didn't want to worry my parents, but my legs began to stiffen and I had a really tough time getting them to loosen up. I'm sure whatever effort I made to hide this didn't work. We turned to face the mountain; I knew we had a big climb ahead.

Jeff and I walked out of Petroleum Center. I focused on getting the legs moving again, and prepared for the technical climb up Heisman Hill up out of the valley into the mountains. The 3rd climb was pretty slow going and rough. My legs were trashed, but I just kept moving forward. Relentless forward progress – don't stop, just keep pushing.

Once up on the ridge, I pointed out another vantage point to Jeff, where during the day you could see across the valley to the oil derricks we ran under before we reached petroleum center. All Jeff could do was imagine the scenery since it was pitch black outside.



Above: This would have been our view if it weren't in the middle of the night. Looking down across the valley at the oil derricks.

The trail markers at Oil Creek were flawless. Each of the flags has reflective tape, so as your headlamp hit the flags, the reflectors brightly lit up. In the dark it was as if you were being guided by airport runway lights. Here Jeff took the lead and began keeping pace for us. I heard the race slows up at night, but I typically do all my mid-week training runs after dark so I was hoping to use that experience to my advantage and continue to move fast. The one thing I didn't take into consideration was how sloppy the trail would become. Where it was wet before, it was mud now. And wet leaves, rocks and mud made for some slow, cautious running. Moving at a quick pace proved to be a challenge.

As we continued onward, I really began to feel the strain in various muscles of my legs. The soreness turned into pain. I experienced an odd sensation of someone repeatedly dragging a comb across my thighs. It was a pronounced feeling, so much so that I looked down several times to see if there was a branch or something I was dragging along, but nothing was there.

By now my muscles were beginning to scream at me. Even though I acknowledged it was turning into a real struggle, I still had no intention of quitting. I remember acknowledging the pain and casually mentioned it to Jeff. I didn't want to concern him; I just wanted to offer him a little perspective and insight into my condition.

We made our way across some rocks when suddenly a pop and searing pain tore through the bottom of my foot. The deep blister I had developed under my calluses had blown. I could feel the fluid gush forward towards my toes. When I put my foot down it was like stepping onto hot coals. If my mind had drifted before it was definitely present now. Every step now hurt. Miststeps and slipping off rocks hurt worse.

Shortly thereafter, about 4 miles out of petroleum center, we began a gradual climb when my right calf suddenly became extremely sore. It felt as though it seized or cramped, and I reached back to grab it. My calf felt swollen and the pain shot right up behind my knee and it immediately swelled there too. I know I winced in pain, hopped once or twice and plopped down right along the trail. Something went. Back at the middle school I had slid a knee brace around my left knee for extra support. Now I wanted to remove and place it around this one in the hopes of stabilizing my injury. Jeff sprung into action and pulled off my sneakers so I could slide the brace off and onto the other leg, but as soon as it made contact with the swelling behind my knee, the pain became unbearable. The pressure of brace was too painful so I pushed it down around my lower leg where it would remain until the end of my run. Jeff pulled me back up to my feet, but I was visibly limping. He commented that my limp was quite noticeable, so I did what I could to hide it and tried to regain some sort of forward motion. With the pain in my calf and my knee swollen, I could no longer fully extend my leg, and I had to rely on my hip flexor to pick up and throw it forward. It stayed bent as I ran and hopped along. The pain was pretty intense, but I was determined to stretch it out and manage into an awkward stride again.

My mind continued to assess the situation. I had nearly 22 or so miles to go, and I imagined how ridiculous it would be to line up to the start of a marathon in this condition, but after coming this far I had no intention of stopping. My quads and hip flexors were in pain, my left foot was searing and I surmised my right calf suffered a decent tear or I did something to the tendon behind my knee. Physically, I'm literally beginning to fall apart.

Not another mile went by when the blister on my left foot blew. Same place, same exact searing pain tearing up from the bottom of my feet. Now *every* single footfall was painful. My left leg was straining to compensate for the injury on my right calf. *Welcome to Sufferfest.*

When I signed up for the 100, I wanted the full experience. I researched and read about how you will experience the lowest of emotional lows. You will begin to question your every step, you will swear this is your final run. You have to dig so incredibly deep not only to keep running, but just to keep yourself from *not* quitting. I was in a great deal of pain, but my biggest fear at that point was still the thought of quitting, or simply not being able to finish. I was concerned was that another strained body part would begin to fail, and I would be unable

to reach my goal.

It had to be around 3:00 am or so at this point and I was exhausted and struggling. It was here that I was moving my slowest - it took me nearly 2 hours to cover the next four miles.

But I kept pushing forward. My mind was racing, constantly analyzing and assessing the pain, but I was committed. We passed through the Boy Scout camp. I did my best to muster an upbeat sounding hello and from there we plodded what seemed like an endless 3.4 miles to Miller Farm aid station.

Miller Farm aid station, on the third loop, seems to have the highest percentage of dropouts (DNFs). People become desperate; it's dark, you're completely exhausted, you're suffering and you hurt, *bad*. Any semblance of fun has long since disappeared along with any rational reason for why you may be putting yourself through this.

I was suffering, and this was a true test of endurance. I now had a personal experience to support the definition of the word. I was living every step of this. The focus changed from covering a 100 mile distance to my ability to endure, persevere, and keep going at all costs. It was about taking control of that little voice in your head telling you to quit and shredding every last thought and pushing forward. It became about the fear and the hope, and the praying that the muscles in your body will hold out long enough to bring you across that finish line. My finish time became secondary, my goal now was to continue to endure and hold it together until I could drag myself to the end of the course.

I signed up for this. I was here for the full experience. Bring it on.

Surprisingly, the one component that remained strong was my mind. After pressing on for nearly 24 hours, I was still relatively sharp and I was present. I felt the searing pain every time a foot hit the ground. I felt the strain as my body struggled to propel my right leg forward. My mind was in overdrive constantly monitoring and assessing the situation. Although my body was in pain and beginning to fail, mentally I felt pretty strong. It was a battle, but I never sank to a desperate low. I experienced frustration with not being able to move faster, but I remained focused on getting myself back to the middle school.

As we approached Miller Farm aid station, I reminded Jeff *not* to let me quit if I expressed any desire to stop. I knew a lot of people dropped here, and honestly my biggest fear coming into this area was having an encounter with the desperate and negative thoughts that drive so many people to DNF just 15 miles from the finish line. Fortunately, those thoughts never entered my mind. I wanted to survive the night.

I focused all my attention on getting myself to and through that aid station. On the other side, I knew I'd be able to focus on getting back to the middle school. Jeff and I hopped off the trail and began heading down the dirt road leading to the volunteers. Once we hit the road I slowed even more. Not sure how or why, but the flats caused more pain in my right leg and really

limited my ability to propel myself forward. Forward mobility was a struggle. I was running, yet moving at the same pace as Jeff who was walking. As I was trying to figure this out, I noticed Jeff was eating a cracker, and for the first time in about 16 hours, something looked appetizing. As much as I didn't want to take his food, I asked if I could have one. He had one or two left and gave them to me. Anything I put in my mouth just sort of stuck there, so I chewed it up as best as I could and washed it down with water.

MILLER FARM AID STATION. Mile 85. Elapsed Time Approx. 24:30?: Clock 5:30 am? (Day 2)

I came into the aid station looking for more peanut butter crackers. My stomach was still sensitive but I figured crackers were a safe bet. I drank some ginger ale and they offered me fresh breakfast burritos. Another runner dove right in. I was jealous and wish I could stomach one and I was in desperate need of calories, but the thought of eating one almost made me puke. I stuffed a handful of pretzel rods, a chocolate chip cookie and a Fig Newton onto my running vest. That was it. A few more runners came in and some headed right over to warm themselves by a fire the volunteers had going to keep warm. The thought of doing that scared me, it looked too comfortable and I signaled to Jeff for us to get out of there.

We headed up the road and took the wooden steps up onto the trail. Hello again, Cemetery Hill. We pushed onward. The climbs were a serious battle now. I dug deep. Rockefeller's Revenge was next, and things got quiet again. All you could hear was the nice rhythm of Jeff's footfall coupled with the erratic rhythm of mine. Rockefeller's Revenge was behind us, and I told Jeff I was going to reward myself with some tunes. I untangled my headphones and looked up at Jeff. I recall uttering three words; *This. Is. Hard.*. Again, I acknowledged the pain. Then I put on the iPod and we started running.

Short bursts – that's all I seemed to have left. We would get going, I would trip up on some roots or rocks and the searing pain jarred up through my feet through my legs and into my stomach. Repeat, again and again. And again. We kept that up for quite a while, and I was proud that in my condition, I never let it turn into a death march. I wasn't moving fast but I kept moving forward and I could still manage some form of a run.

Eventually, Jeff looked up and pointed out that the sky was beginning to brighten. The moon was still overhead, but the sky around it was beginning to become lighter. At first, I felt a bit frustrated because I was hoping to be much closer to the school. Then I noticed Jeff kept looking at his watch. I picked up on the sense of urgency, and at one point he even asked if I thought I could pick up the pace. That's all I needed to hear – I mustered all I had and started to move as quickly as I could. I wanted to know the exact time, my watch had long since died, but I put my trust in him as a pacer to get me back to the middle school with enough time to pull off the 7+ mile coming home loop.

I felt somewhat rejuvenated as the sun was rising. I realized it was the second time I had seen the sun rise since I started this endeavor. It was as though a blanket of darkness was being lifted and it had instilled new hope that I could survive this ordeal. At the same time I remained frustrated, I so badly wanted to harness some adrenaline and break into a fast paced run. I wanted to announce that I was alive, but my leg just would not move the way I wanted it to. I had a limited range of motion around the swelling and couldn't open my stride at all. I was making a running motion, but I knew I wasn't traveling very fast. I used some down hills to my advantage and pushed as hard as I could. There, I actually managed to run fairly well - all things considered. I know Jeff would agree.

The sun continued to rise and I shut off my headlamp. We began to navigate ourselves down off the mountain. I was going to survive.

We came down off the trail and took the sharp left for the Drake Well loop. Once again, it became obvious that I had issues with the flats and harder surface. Things slowed dramatically. I was unable to propel forward with my right leg. I recall running a few short segments up behind the Drake oil well, but then we hit pavement again. We managed a few more short bursts. Then I looked up the trail, I saw my brother making his way down toward me.

I was really happy to see him. I don't recall a single word of our conversation, but I'm sure I congratulated him on his time in the 100k. I'm guessing he was filling me in on the status of the crew and doing what he could to pump me up for the final coming home loop.

The three of us slowly made our way back a half mile to the middle school, and I believe I asked Rick and Jeff to relay instructions that I did *not* want to waste anytime there. I wanted to get right back out onto the course to tackle the last coming home loop with Tina, who would pace me during this section.

MIDDLE SCHOOL. Mile 93. Elapsed Time Approx. 27:20: Clock 8:20 am (Day 2)

As I came into the middle school, I noticed the size of my crew had grown – a large number of people gathered to show their support. Dave and Ashley Lister were there with their family. My colleague Lisa Beers was there with her husband Steve. Dave Hunter, Brian Newcomer, and my parents, crew and volunteers gathered to motivate and push me towards that final loop. I greatly appreciated this show of support, even though I probably didn't do anything at the time to acknowledge it.



Frost on the ground. Mile 93. Coming in to the middle school after the 3rd loop.



Above Left: Dave & Ashley Lister, My brother and Dave Hunter. Above Right: Tina getting ready for the 7.7 coming home loop.

I was physically spent. I realized there that I never really hallucinated – something that many endurance runners experience through the night as their brains try to sleep. I was oddly disappointed that I endured all of the pain and survived the night, but somehow missed out on seeing things that weren't really there. Dave Hunter tested my cognitive skills and asked to do some basic math for him. $4+4=8$. I was good to go. My brother handed me a bite-sized candy bar and I motioned to Tina that I needed to get going. I feared what could happen if I stood around any longer.

Tina and I headed out for the coming home loop. I had been awake and at this for more than 27 hours. She was excited to see a small portion of the trails that I had been on. She was full of energy and enthusiastically led me down the trail, telling me how great I looked and that I was doing a great job. I knew better, but I enjoyed hearing it anyway. The pavement continued to be a struggle and my legs were responding less and less to my demands.



7.7 miles to go. Tina and I heading out for the final stretch.

We climbed up on the Gerard trail and I did what I could to run. I think it was more of a hopping motion, but if I kept at it, I figured eventually my legs would loosen up enough to work. Searing pain continued up from my feet into my stomach as the trail was really beaten now – very muddy and slippery, and my feet kept jarring and slipping off the rocks. I knew I had one large climb ahead – they call it the Hill of Truth. Yeah, its not enough that you've traversed 90-some miles already, they want to test you with a final, wicked climb.

We made it to where the coming home loop makes a sharp left off the main trail. Fortunately we had a bit of a downhill there and I could muster a bit of forward motion. At one point, Tina looked back and told me to just power hike. *Power hike*? The thought was counter intuitive – I wanted to get this thing done. She went on to point out how my power hike was actually faster than my run. I relented, and continued through a nice section that snaked towards a suspension bridge. It was beautiful here, thick frost covered the ground and I realized the

temps must have dropped significantly during the night. At last we hit the suspension bridge. The bridge was actually pretty cool. Tina took a few pictures of me crossing and I think I managed a brief run – only to reach the other side and read a sign that announced “Hill of Truth”. Here I go.



Left to Right: (1) Sill managing a 'run' (2) Frost on the ground (3) Suspension Bridge (4) Tina selfie - dragging me forward....

In all honesty, the climb would not have been too bad on any other day, but after nearly 29 hours and 95 miles, it may have well been Everest I was climbing. The only thing that kept me moving was the realization that it was the last ascent on the course. There was another runner and pacer up ahead – they recently passed me, and I kept looking up only to see them higher on another switchback above. And another switchback. We continued on. It was daylight, but when I looked down at the trail, I could see the circular glow of my headlamp on the ground. I reached up to shut it off, but it was no longer on my head – it was back at the school. That happened numerous times – my eyes or brain must have been used to seeing it for the past 12 hours – I was still seeing it now.

We continued our push up. Near the top, I thought I saw a wooden building or shed-like structure. A second look revealed that it was simply a jumble of trees.

Finally, we reached the top of the Hill of Truth. The trail made a sharp left and intersected with the main course trail. At this intersection we ran into another 100 mile runner. He invited me to take the lead and explained that even though he was at about mile 90 he would be unable to finish the race in the allotted amount of time as he had yet to begin the coming hope loop. For a second I tried to comprehend how he must feel – 90 miles into the course and not going to have time for an official finish. I hoped he would continue on and finish the 100 anyway. I would have.

From here I did my best to pick up the pace again. Tina looked back and politely asked if I could manage to lengthen my stride a bit. I looked up with what I am sure was visible despair and

calmly responded. If I *could* lengthen my stride, don't you think I *would*??

We continued moving forward. I somehow managed to break into a run again, but I was beyond exhausted. We made our way another couple hundred feet and I looked up to my left and saw a large two-story house to the left of the trail. I was somewhat surprised that I had passed through this section three times already, and hadn't noticed it before. It was only about 15 yards off the trail. I began to study it. Brown wooden siding, with a two-story porch. Shudderless windows. As I continued to investigate, it began to melt away and turned back into the trees of the forest. That's right - a full blown hallucination. I was looking at the details of a 2 story house that *wasn't even there*. Mission accomplished.

Finally, we began our descent back down towards the paved bike trail. Looking ahead, there was a crowd gathering there too. A loud set of cheers began, and I tried to decipher whether or not I knew anyone. There, with his hands in his pockets, was my dad anxiously waiting for me. It reminded me of my teenage years when I'd get home late after my curfew and he would be standing there, waiting. He didn't even have to say anything; he would just turn around and march up the stairs. I knew I'd hear it the next day.

I recognized the worried state he must have been in. I cautioned both parents about coming this weekend, as the last thing I wanted to do is put them through an entire weekend of worry and anxiety. I could surmise what he was probably thinking, but I also saw relief on his face. He was as happy as I was that this ordeal would soon be over. And I was happy to share this last mile and a half with him. I hit the pavement, which once again brought me to a grinding halt. I asked if I was in danger of missing the cut off time. I was relieved to hear the answer was no. All I needed to do was traverse up the bike path this one last time and I would be done.

The finish was amazing. Each step of that last mile was difficult, the pain that I had pushed out of my head fought hard to step back in. I rounded the corner, and saw the finish line in the distance. From there, I heard cheers erupt as I came closer and closer. Thoughts were racing through my head as I tried to comprehend what it was that I just accomplished. I tried to pick it up and run it across the finish, but the pain screamed back at me along with Dave who yelled that it wasn't worth adding to the injury. I limped closer. I began to recognize my family, crew and friends standing around the finish. The cheers became louder. I looked over at Tina who began to cry. Her ordeal was over too - the past year was filled with give and take as I constantly negotiated for running time and regularly disappeared during the night and weekends to pursue a knowingly selfish goal. I promised I would make other more important things a priority... if I could just have this one shot at the 100 mile distance.

And with that, I raised my arms and stepped across the finish line.

Video of Finish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwbCYp0nn4M>



Above Left: Off the mountain, my dad was waiting for me. Above Right: Approaching the finish line....



100.6 miles.



THE AFTERMATH

30 hours, 27 minutes, 11 seconds. That's how long it took me to earn one of 416 finisher buckles that have been handed out to those who completed the OC 100 since its inception in 2009. I arrived in 74th place out of 93 finishers. 43 did not finish. I understood that my run was not about my finish time, but about my ability to endure and suffer without giving up. I crossed the line and accomplished something so few people in the world will ever try, and gained an experience that I'll forever carry with me. It was an extraordinary experience – I pushed through and didn't let the trail win. I didn't quit, I endured.

At the finish, I received my buckle from race director Tom Jennings. I shook hands and reminded him that I told him earlier in the year I was coming for this. The previous year, after I obtained my own personal best in the 100k I came across the finish fast and all hopped up on adrenaline. Tom acknowledged the strong finish, and asked if I wanted to continue on. I stopped for a moment, and looked down the trail and responded; next year.

After that I walked over to the clock – I wanted a few photos with the time clock in the background. My family, friends and crew all came over to congratulate me. Austin was also at the finish, he completed the course - nearly 90 minutes before I had. I learned Matt had a DNF at mile 75 and was on his way home (he's already registered for another attempt in May 2015). I sat down on a chair for a few more photos and watched a few other finishers come through. At this time I could no longer ignore the pain – it came back with a vengeance as my legs filled with lactic acid and my feet were throbbing in my sneakers. Sometime during the last loop, Tina had told me what a beautiful day it was going to be – and that we could sit in the grass at the finish to take it all in. Ironically, that was the last thing I wanted to do. I just spent the last 30 hours outside enjoying what Oil Creek had to offer. After about 20 or 30 minutes, I was ready to pick up and head home.

Tina and Danielle gathered around to help me up off the chair. My right leg was visibly swollen and refused to move. Add that to the fact that every time either of my feet hit the ground, searing pain shot up from the bottom of my feet more vividly and worse than before. A volunteer offered a wheel chair but I declined. That wasn't how I was going to go out. Oil Creek would not win that day.



Left to right: (1) 60 minutes after the finish, I couldn't lift my leg over a 6 inch curb. (2) Swollen ankles. (3) Healing blister (4) The next day.

The next few days would be a slow recovery. Swelling in my leg, calf and both ankles limited my mobility in a big way. I did manage to get back to work after only one day off, but I sat with ice on my knee and calf the entire day.

One week later and I can almost straighten my right leg. The rest of my body has recovered well and I feel energized. I plan to take the rest of the month off, and I will start running again in November. I'm looking forward to it.

SPECIAL THANKS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



I want to thank my wife Cristina for allowing me to chase this crazy goal of mine. As I began running trails, I read books about trail running, ultra marathons, and about people who ran 100 mile races. In my mind that was simply unimaginable. Those people were extraordinary, possibly superhuman. The odds of me running 100 miles were probably the same as me going to the moon. But year after year my mileage built up, I finished longer and longer distances, and this year was my opportunity to shoot for the moon. Tina realized this too and we had a long discussion about what a year of serious training and running would look like. She was on board and supportive.



Secondly, I want to thank my kids, Avery and Taylor. I did my best to minimize the impact on their lives over the past year by running late at night after they have gone to bed. But they weren't immune to it. Frequently they would ask about my whereabouts, and then later they didn't have to ask anymore. They knew I was running. But more importantly, they often asked to join me on my shorter runs. They were more a part of this than they will ever know.



Next up; my mom and my dad. They both thought this was ridiculous from day one. I don't think they will really ever truly understand what drove me to do it. Not sure I'll completely understand it either. But they caught a glimpse as they watched the Western States 100 documentary. Too bad the story follows four elite runners who will finish in about 15 hours. The real stories are with those who finish much later and have to endure much more to get themselves across the finish line.



My brother Rick – I wouldn't let him pace me for two reasons: I didn't want this weekend to be just about me, and more importantly I didn't want him to miss an opportunity to race for himself. Oil Creek only comes once a year. He succeeded this weekend too in a big way by grabbing a 16th place finish and new PR with an incredible time of 14:15 in the 100k. Knowing he was out there on the course was a huge lift to my spirits. I may not have been running alongside of him, but I was out there with him. He's a great runner, and has more raw talent than I do. He *usually* runs fewer monthly miles, but the results of his races indicate otherwise. Even though we live 3 hours apart, we provide constant motivation for each other with the mileage we track online through our weekly training runs.



Next comes my pacer: Jeff Kasczak for running countless training runs and races with me, and for blazing a 31 mile trail on loop #3 in the OC 100 mile run. If he hadn't been out there, I'm sure the situation would have looked a bit more desperate from my end and I'm not sure if I would have been able to pull it off. Jeff is always up for a night run after work and he's pulled me off the couch and encouraged me to keep up the training on more than one occasion. Sometimes we'll run to the next town, grab a slice of pizza to go, and run back.



Danielle Tomlinson – Tina’s lifelong friend. Danielle just plain rocks. The crew simply sits and waits around all weekend for hours on end and then springs into action for a few minutes when a runner comes by. Year after year, Danielle makes the road trip out to Oil City to crew and support us. She has incredible enthusiasm, and doesn’t hesitate to massage icy hot into my legs every time I come into that station. She does whatever you need to help. She is a rock out there.



Austin Sedicum, whose mere presence for any run is a moral boost. This guy has more energy than anyone I know. He simply never stops. But that’s how it is if you want to be hardcore. He’s always up for a long run, and won’t miss a midnight 20+ miler at green lane and then rushes home at 4 or 5 am because he also registered for a 5 or 10k that begins at 8:00 am. He also knows 100 uses for a bandana while running an ultra. Make that 101 now.



Stephanie Radisch. I’ve spent countless hours on the trails at Wissahickon (Philadelphia) after work over the past few years, and she regularly came out to join me. We also had an incredible adventure on the Dipsea Trail north of San Francisco, CA while traveling for work. Another time she spontaneously jumped into a pond to wash off after an 18 mile trail race, changed clothes, and drove straight to a wedding - missing toenails and all.



Matt Miller, who I met after reviewing the OC 100 registration list. Two people from the small town of Perkasio? I thought it must be a mistake. So I contacted him after seeing his name on the registration list. One morning I drove over to his house, picked him up, and we ran 22 miles on the Appalachian Trail. That was the first day I met him. He’s been on several training runs since, and he particularly loves stringing together back-to-back 10+ milers on the road.



And of course there is Dave Hunter and Brian Newcomer. Race director and course designer for the Megatransect. My first official trail run, and the most technically challenging trail I have been on. Both these guys have imparted words of wisdom, motivation and training advice throughout the years. Trail running family. Real solid people with incredible hearts.



And then Lisa Beers – who I attribute the start of all this craziness after she introduced me to the the Megatransect and encouraged me to sign up back in 2008. I never ran more than 7 miles before that race. Her husband Steve too.



Dave and Ashley Lister for inspiration. They are elite runners who consistently prove that there are no egos in trail running – they have waited around long after their finishes on more than one occasion to see me cross the finish line.

There are others, more friends and family members and a list of trail running friends that continues to grow. Thanks to those who have made my trail running experiences ones that I will never forget.



Cut out and banner compliments of my wife. Race Director Tom Jennings, Brian Newcomer and Dave Hunter having fun while I was out on the course....