

Oil Creek 100 Mile Race Report

Training: After recovering from Laurel Highlands, my main training goal was not much different from what I normally do, that is run as much as time allows, for as hard as I feel on any given day. Each week I tried to get out for at least one run of at least 18 miles or more, and as I focused in on the hundred-mile distance, I shot for two long runs per week. My average mileage for the 16 weeks leading up to the race was 55.11 miles/week, and only two of those weeks lacked my eighteen plus mile long run. I topped out with a 102 mile week and also had a 95 mile week as well. There was a couple of low weeks (9 and 18 miles) needed rest though hard to accept mentally sometimes.

Pre-Race: Chris picked me up at my house at 9:30 Friday morning, and we were on the road for Titusville around 10:00. “Rosie” the friendly Garmin predicted our trip to take around 5 hours, and after a stop at Subway for lunch and a couple of rest stops we rolled into town shortly after 4:00 pm. We checked into the Comfort Inn, were pleasantly surprised when they told us continental breakfast would be served at 3:00 am (how many hotels cater to us ultramarathoners? This was a first for me), and headed to the pre-race registration and pasta dinner.

The pasta dinner and pre-race meeting were pretty standard, though worth mentioning is the amount of involvement the entire community of Titusville has for this event, in only it’s second year! The city manager welcomed us, and had a letter in our race pack saying how the town and local businesses are very happy we are there, the school district superintendent welcomed us and informed us she would be at Aid-Station 4 (race headquarters) all weekend volunteering...again how cool is that?! Also worth mentioning was the number of door prizes that were given away, the race committee definitely did some leg work to get the runners some schwag for attending their race.

Lights out around 9:00 pm, and I slept as well as I ever had the night before a race. I brought my own pillow from home, and I think it might have made the difference, for I got at least 5 solid hours. We were up at 3:00, hit up the continental breakfast, which had a waffle maker (awesome) and lots of muffins and danishes. We checked out a little after 4:00 and headed to the middle school to check in and get race ready. The time went by nicely and before we knew it we were lined up and off.

Race: The race is composed of three 50k loops, mostly single track with a 1.25 mile out and back on asphalt bike path, and several short sections of dirt road connecting trail to aid stations. After completing the three loops, we would run a 7 mile “headed home” loop, crossing a swinging bridge and going up a half mile “Hill of Truth” at mile 97. In the first loop however, the asphalt bike path section is extended to 3.5 miles to allow the runners to spread out before hitting the trail. I ran with Chris for probably a mile or so before slowing to a walk to take a drink (so I wouldn’t splash HEED all over myself). I ran the rest of the asphalt loop by myself and tagged along with another runner once we got onto the trail. I started out with only my Black Diamond headlamp around my waist since it’d only be a couple of hours max before the sun would be up. It was sufficient,

since we all were taking our time, and I noticed the trail wasn't significantly rocky. It wasn't too long and we were headed into AS#1, which was really lit up with Christmas decorations, along with Christmas music to guide us in.

I didn't really need anything at that point, just filled my water bottle, and grabbed a handful of Pringles and headed back out. As soon as we left the AS, we started a steep switchback climb that in the dark seemed like it was going to be the "tough" hill of the day, in retrospect, and seeing it in daylight, it was not all that bad. Once I got up the hill I started cruising along and quickly caught the tail end of an 8-10 person conga-line and just ran at their pace. I noticed Chris two people ahead of me and as we came to a water-only station with portable toilet, which he stopped to use, I was able to get ahead of a lot of the line and had some room to run the pace I wanted.

Sunrise came, and with the daylight I ran a little harder, still walking most of the inclines and as I pulled over to urinate, Chris and a bunch of runners passed. I should mention that the temperature was chilly, probably around 40, which for me means cold hands and stinging fingers even with gloves...this made fumbling with my drawstring and adjusting my handheld more of a chore than it should have been and I definitely lost more than a minute getting myself comfortable. Soon we passed the replica oil derricks and got onto a dirt road, which led us into AS#2. I dropped my headlamp into my drop bag, refilled my Amphipod with a couple of energy bars I pre-cut, filled up with Strawberry HEED, grabbed some Pringles (notice a pattern?) and a couple of pretzels and headed out. My fueling goals for the race were HEED, and eat something every half hour (hopefully at least 100 calories), I had Hammer Gel and a mixture of pre-halved Cliff Bars and Snickers Marathon bars in my pack at all times, and planned to eat the rest of my calories at the aid stations.

I could see Chris a little ways ahead of me, but there were some decent hills to climb as we got back up onto the trail and soon he was out of sight. I worked my way up them and soon hooked up with Donna Utakis, who was running a pace that was very comfortable to me. We chatted, I knew of Donna from race results, primarily the success she's had in many previous Laurel Highlands races, and we discussed the usual, races done, goals for the day etc. It was a nice pace and I felt I was running and walking the right amount for that point in the race. Towards the end of the section between AS#2 and AS#3 there was a stretch of trail that was getting the spring/water runoff from the park, and it was soft and slightly muddy, after the 100k and 50k runners went through it would get sloppier for sure.

We rolled into AS#3, I ate a cookie, grabbed a handful of Pringles and a couple of pretzel rods and started walking back to the trail. We had to go up a flight of stairs then up a decent hill, around a short jog then up a significant hill. No switchback, pretty steep...in my opinion it was the hardest hill on the course. Once we got up that hill it was rolling hills, more up than down, but nothing too substantial. Climbing is one of my strengths, so at this point I passed Donna and would only see her once on the out & back portion of the bike path. I caught up to another runner Brian who was in his second attempt at the 100 mile distance, he DNF'd last year after two loops. We stuck together for the

remainder of this loop. Eventually we came around to where the trail descends to where the Drake Well museum is located, and we had to complete a one mile loop around the perimeter before heading back onto the bike path back to the Titusville middle school for AS#4.

As we got onto the bike path, I was feeling tightness in both my knees and also my quads. Enough tightness that I started thinking it was going to be a long day, most likely I took the descent too hard, I should have known better that downhill's are my weakness and should have went a little easier. I was a little concerned since it was so early, but just rolled with it and looked forward to getting loop one finished. I passed Chris as he was heading back out for his second loop and he said he was doing good.

I got in and out of AS#4 pretty quickly, and with the sun shining, the temp. was warming up perfectly for me. I still had on my long sleeve tech shirt and a cotton t-shirt, but was only sweating a little. I got back onto the trail solo, and really couldn't see anyone around me, so I focused on my running, my breathing, kept my heart-rate in check and just ran...and it felt good. Soon I realized my knee and quad pain disappeared, and I was feeling very good. I was keen to the fact that I couldn't get careless and go too hard, still walked the steep uphill, took the downhill easy, but the level and gradual uphill I ran steady and strong. I hardly remember going through AS#1 or up the switchback, and soon I was running with a girl that sat at our table for the pre-race dinner. Her name was Rachel and I think she said this was her second attempt at the 100-mile distance. She was a strong downhill runner, so we leapfrogged between the downhill and I would catch her on the uphill. We didn't talk much, but I think we fed off chasing each other down.

Again before I knew it we were in and out of AS#2 and up the hills. Rachel got a little ways ahead of me for awhile, but eventually I caught her again on some climbs and passed her. I put some distance on her, but had to stop at a bathroom for a few minutes, then she caught back up to me on the descents into AS#3. I was still feeling very good, and ran the descents harder than I should have, which prompted my left knee to start aching again. As I came into AS#3 I saw Chris who said he was having stomach issues again, similar to Laurel Highlands. He said his energy levels were low and climbing the hills were very slow for him. He headed out, I grabbed yep some Pringles and a couple of pretzels and quickly caught up with him on the first hill. We walked together and I tried to encourage him to push through it, hopefully his stomach would come around, and then so would his race.

I left him on the second big hill, ran with Rachel a little while then passed her for the final time on a smaller hill. Rachel would go on to win first female overall and new CR of 23:42:51, Donna who I ran the first loop with was second only 6 minutes 1 second behind Rachel. I was again running very strong, and with minimal downhill at this point, I kept a steady pace, and really felt like I was going to have a phenomenal day. I descended to the Drake Well Museum, ran the one mile loop, walked briefly with several 50k runners finishing their race and headed into AS#4 feeling great.

I spent a little extra time at the middle school, getting what I needed for the night portion of the run, drinking a can of generic Ensure, and ribbing one of the older volunteers who seemed like he wanted to joke around. I headed back out with sun starting to set and passed Chris who said he was going to sit down, try to regroup and see if he could get his stomach back. I also saw Donna who was very encouraging to me, telling me that “You Rock”, which was nice of her to say. At this point I had my headlamps, but since I was feeling strong, and had 62 miles down, I decided to “race the sun” and see if I couldn’t get to AS#1 before needing them. It was around 5:45 pm, and I had 7.1 miles, so I cranked it up a notch and ran hard. It felt wonderful, the trail was perfect, I was landing smoothly and everything felt glorious. I sang some David Crowder and made it to the aid station just as the sun sank for the evening.

At the AS, I sat down for only the second time of the day, probably for less than a minute and mentally got ready for the night. I felt ready. I had run some night trail training runs, and felt confident in my ability to stay strong and finish the race in good spirits. At the middle school I grabbed my cell phone, and whether you’re a critic of phone calls during races or not, once I got service, I called my wife and luckily got to talk to her for a minute and say goodnight to my almost 3 year old daughter. Even though I was out doing something I really loved, I still missed my family and talking to them as night fell, helped me out mentally especially for finishing out that third loop. Shortly after hanging up though, I tripped and fell for the first time of the day, not a hard fall, but enough to remind me to stay focused on the task at hand.

I came into AS#2 around 8:30, still in the clothes that I started out in, and though I put on a knit beanie and gloves, I was still sweating a little, so the cold wasn’t affecting me at all...the volunteers told a different story, they were very cold. I drank an Ensure, refilled my pack with gels and energy bars, grabbed some Pringles, a boiled potato and got out of there before I cooled down. I headed into the hills, walking a little more than before, but still feeling relatively good. The section between AS#2 and AS#3 is 8.9 miles (longest stretch of the course) and it seemed to go on forever. I don’t know if I was starting to head into a valley, or just got lonely, but I thought my pace was trailing off significantly. Looking back I think I was doing just fine considering it was dark and I was over 80 miles into the race, but the mind was tired and my stomach was getting tired of any food, not nauseous, just not hungry.

I don’t remember when I made it to the dirt road to head to AS#3, but as I was running a volunteer was running towards me, trying to warm up, and he paced me in. That was pretty cool, like I said I was getting lonesome on the trails. At the aid station, nothing looked good, so I took some Ritz crackers and got out of there as quickly as I could. I had the big hills ahead of me, and I wanted to get them done ASAP, so I just put my head down and hiked them as best I could. I don’t remember a lot of details from this last section other than once I got to where the “headed home” loop joined in, I remember thinking, “good grief I still have to come back and do this descent one more time!” One tell tale sign of me bonking is dreading any part of a race, and I knew I needed some more calories. I forced an energy bar, and got down to the Drake Museum one mile loop,

and on the bike path forced a gel. I got back to the middle school and it was then, at just before 1:00 Sunday morning I started feeling the cold.

I wasn't looking forward to the last 7 mile loop, I knew some of the hills that were ahead of me, and also knew that the "Hill of Truth" was still to come. I left tired and shortly down the bike path realized I still had my compression long sleeve wrapped around my waist. I stopped, put it on and continued. As I got on the trail and warmed up again, I started to perk up. I told myself, "this is it, last time, let's go finish this race!!" I started mixing in some easy running and soon caught up to another runner who was walking painfully. I could have easily passed him and probably finished a little faster, but at that point, I was ready to talk to someone, anyone, so I tagged along with him for a couple of miles. We crossed the swinging bridge and tackled the "Hill of Truth" together. It was a tough hill, don't get me wrong, and at mile 97, it seemed kind of cruel to make us climb it, but overall it was no big deal. At the top, I passed the runner and headed into the descent...my quads were mad at this point and I was grunting going downhill, but I made good time and was soon on the bike path headed to the finish line.

The last half mile is a blur in my mind. I remember the AS#4 volunteers cheering as I made the turn to the finish, I gave them the ole "Maopolski" fist pump and charged it on in. My finishing time was 22:05:18 according to the race officials (I thought the clock read 22:06, but my right eye was awfully blurry, and who am I to argue with the race officials) My placing was 11th out of 63 finishers (around 135 started). Chris was there to see me in, he dropped at mile 76 due to body temperature issues. Thanks for seeing me in brother! I got my buckle and bumper sticker from RD Tom and thanked him for a great race, ate some soup, showered and quickly stiffened up for a painful nap on the gym floor.

Post-Race: I still cannot find a single thing to criticize about this race. Tom Jennings and his crew of volunteers have an awesome course that they should be very proud of. The aid stations were well stocked and the volunteers were great. I wouldn't suggest that they change a thing.

Lessons learned from this race: Whenever I run a race I try to pluck something that I can do to make the next race better. Ultra-races are always unique to the distance, terrain, organization, etc. but the constant will always be how we adapt to run them. I feel this race was one of my strongest, if not the strongest. I trained and ran it very much the way I intended to, even when I was hurting early on, I tried to stay positive and work through it. I think I learned that downhills are always going to be my weakness and though I can train downhills more and strengthen my quads, I have to remember to go easy on the early downhills and save strength for later in the race. I did pretty good with that in this race, but there's always room for improvement.

Thanks for taking the time to read my report. To God be the Glory.

God Bless,
David Kennedy