



Jill Childers 2008 San Diego 100 Mile Endurance Run: a love story

As I stare at my bronze buckle, the hardest piece of hardware I earned in my short ultra career I think back to the satisfaction I got from my first 50k run in 2005 and the same time the next 100 miler I want to run. You see, I LOVED SAN DIEGO 100 and everything associated with running 100 miles in under 31 hours. I loved the vibe, the volunteers, the runners, the crews, the pacers, wildlife, the beauty of the mountains and desert, the hot, the cold, the rocks, sand, tree branches, shrubs, the big hills and the not so big hills which go on forever, the cold water creek crossings, but mostly I got to run for a real long time. So long my IT bands hurt, they never hurt. My feet boiled but never blistered. My stomach drive heaved too many times to count between miles 30 – 36 in the heat of the afternoon sun. My voice was almost gone at mile 86 from talking & drinking in the 40 degree p.m. cold. My hands swelled so bad my fingers were white and my hands red, good thing I did not see this till Sunday's sunrise. But on the other hand I ran so long that I received confirmation that I am a natural born spaz with an endless source of energy (took my first caffeine at mile 92.4 at my pacers, Chris Harrison's advice). Also learned that I'm not afraid of those dang mountain lions which live in the Cuyamaca Mountains but more afraid of rattle snakes like the big fat one at mile 44.5 that hissed and rattled the same time and made me do the proverbial 10' snake jump with a loud "snake!!" I made my friend Xy Weiss come to a dead halt plus she got a laugh but I cleared the way for her and Sandy. But one of the biggest rewards I got out of this race were friends that I got to train and race with all spring and at SD100, I could not have completed this without any of you, you've motivated, supported, made me a better runner and person: Paul Schmidt (race director SD100 and ultra mentor, we ran on these trails for a lot Saturdays), Toby Guillette (one of youngest finishers at 25, we stumbled upon each other months ago and have become great running partners and friends), Jennifer Griste (low stress, never gets mad, tough trail runner who knows no pain), Eric Grade (spent many Saturday's mountain running together whose developing into a great trail runner), John Martinez (race director of PCT50, spent many of those Saturdays with all of us, I have a ton of respect for this man). He lead me to my two extraordinary pacers, Chris Harrison (mile 70-100) and Stephanie Robinson (mile 50-70), ladies, I cry as I write this you have no idea how key you two were in getting me to the finish. More on you two later. I owe a huge thank you to my coach Gordy Haskett, who laid out the perfect run schedule this spring and who crewed me. This race was very tough on him, physically (up all night + more) but emotionally more, watching & waiting for me at aid stations in the wee hours of the night, so concerned about my well being. Dirty Gaiter girl extraordinary 100 mile runner, Xy Weiss, since I started this sport I admired her accomplishments so and wanted to be just like her so imagine how great it was for me to start a 100 mile run with her! Another 100 studette, my dear friend Carmela Layson from L.A. we've run a few races this year together and each time I see and talk to her she is so bubbly, laughing and having a blast! Her strong energy and love of trail running rubbed off on me and I'm following in her steps, AC100 is on the list baby! Lastly I love my Chris so much for letting me disappear every Saturday. His patience, love and support are self sacrificing and amazing. Other notables: Karl King...dude your products ROCK! I took your advice...CLIP2 in the day and Amino at night. Other than the heat causing nausea for those 10 miles, the CLIP2 prepared me to eat real foods with fat better and I was like a coyote at night, vision clear and mind sharp! SCaps one on the hour till 8 a.m. then 2 an hour until mile 55 when it cooled down then back to 1. I chilled on the SCAPs in the wee hours 2 a.m. to 5 a.m to give my stomach a break. Not once did I cramp. My pacer Chris, a nurse, told me when I could take my SCAPs, Advil, when to eat etc. so having a pro-nurse was like having you at my side Karl. To Don Lundell from Zombie Runners, thank you for Inov8 295 try on, I wore those for the 2nd 50 and LOVED them! I'm ditching the heavy

Montrail Hurricane Ridges which I wore for the first 50 and buying a stash of 295's from you. To my other cool ultra friends: Marc and Tanya Johnson, Pete Vara, and Greg Hardesty (SD100 finisher)....you all rock!

The Day:

After greeting the dozen or so people I knew at the start the gun went off at 6:00 a.m. Saturday and all 81 of us charged ahead as if it was a 10k. Talk about what a taper will do to a ultrarunner! I immediately met up and talked with gals who ran like I, that was Jess Mullen (27:43), Marisa Willment (28:17), Xy Weiss (drop mile 86.2, knee problem, heck she's running Western States in 2 weeks!), Jennifer Griste (drop mile 62.9, bad blisters), Sandy (drop mile 62.9). We held a nice pace up to Sunrise mile 5.9 and it was a beautiful morning. Most this section is a long uphill climb that is runnable but I ran it sensible; speed walking when necessary. The aid station volunteers were awesome! Ultra Mo was there and I was thrilled to see her and gave her a big hug. I was in/out in minutes.

Next up, we hop on the Pacific Crest Trail for about 8 miles, single track, rocky but drop dead gorgeous, the Desert Mountains are huge and to the right. The winds always strong here blew off my sweat as the temperatures went up. It was now, me, Xy, Jennifer and Sandy. At Pedro Fegas aid station mile 12.6 it was good fun and I was looking forward going back to Camp Cuyamaca (home base) to restock on some supplies plus I knew a very fun downhill section was coming up. I thought how nice it was that I trained on this section so many times that there were no surprises. When I got back to Camp Cuyamaca mile 19.3 it was 10 a.m....oh poop! I'm running 5 miles an hour, too fast. My goal for daylight hours was 4.5 mph and night time 3.5 mph. But I was close enough plus I felt great and knew 10 extra minutes in the bank may come in handy.

Going up to Paso Picacho (mile 25.3) is a long uphill starting at the Camp C 4,100' and ending 5,000' over 6 miles on rocky trails and overgrown shrubs, I knew it was going to be tough. I've only run the 30 mile loop once in 95 degree heat so I was prepared for the worst and the worst is what I got miles 25-40. While this section is rugged it is beautiful and a part not too hit bad by the Cedar 2003 fire. But a mile into it I realized I forgot to refill my water pack! Oh crap! First thing I thought of was Linda Dewees saying "take your time in the aid stations" I could feel the invisible hand slap. She was out on the course that day crewing for her husband Randy Dewees (drop 69.3 due to bad blisters). I only filled my handheld bottle with CLIP2. It took me 1:42 to get to Paso Picacho. When I got here the A.S. folks worked on cooling me off. Ate anything cold and drank a lot of water. Forgetting to fill my Ultimate Direction bladder would not be repeated! I took my time here.

The next stop Big Bend mile 30.4 is my favorite A.S. ran by Steve Bean. I worked here last year's race at night for "research" and found Steve to be the most attentive and caring Captain. Getting there was a 5.1 section in the woods and some meadows mostly "flat". I was beginning to heat up internally bad. I stopped at the porta john right before the A.S. to take care of biz...felt better. I took to the tent and sat down for the first time today just to let my core temp come down. I drenched my bandanas with ice cold water. Glenda Kimmerly gave me a popsicle but less than a minute later it had melted. My water bladder and handheld were filled now with ½ ice as it would quickly melt. The present time was 1:04 p.m. = HOT!

Going up middle peak is the hardest climb of the course, from 4,600' to 5,710' in 2.9 miles is a bear in the heat. It is a rocky, rocky trail, not a lot of fun. When you think you are near the top you see more up's. My stomach was arguing with me and the dry heaves started and didn't cease till mile 38. Xy was a dear and hung close to me all the way up to Milk Ranch A.S. mile 36.2 to mile 50. Fruit, water, CLIP2, Clif blocs, GU, bagel stayed down nice, I dropped anything fatty to give my stomach a break. Not once did I think of dropping I knew this was the worst part of the entire 100 miles. I did well on that 95 degree run weeks ago and had that to count on to get me through. I did slow my pace quite a bit but knew that was essential and I had time to pick up the pace once cooled off. When Xy and I got to Milk Ranch mile 36.2 I had to take cover and sit again. But soon enough we were off and I was actually running and enjoying the upcoming downhill on wide trails and in parts not devastated by the fires. There were a few creek crossings but Xy would not let me put my bandana in the cold streaming waters (fear of bacteria) so poured her drinking water on it...see how great she is! I was thrilled to be

running free without nausea. We arrived at Sweetwater mile 42.4 at 4:32 p.m. Cool! I'm right on pace for a 12 hour 50 mile split. I saw my friend and ultrarunner Madonna Bentz there, I told her before the race if you aren't busy please give me a ton of ice/cold treatment when you see me. Well she was prepared and iced me up! Woe! I left that A.S. with more energy than at the start! The next 7.6 miles is the longest stretch between A.S.'s and it is wide open, very sandy, single track, hot, and ½ climbing 800' over 3.5 miles. It was at mile 44.5 that I scared that rattler...boy he was mad! Thank God for quick reflexes! I kept thinking along this stretch...I'm almost to my crew and pacers! Yoo Hoo!!!!!! I've run plenty of 50 milers and know that I finish them feeling great so this day was no different. I arrived at Camp C at 6:37 p.m. A ½ hour over what my goal was but I was there feeling like the dickens! I saw Steph & Gordy and gave them big hugs and it was evident that I was excited for the next 50 and the unknown beyond 62 miles that I have never done. At Xy's advice I did a full clothing change since the night will be cold & I wanted to be perfectly dry and warm. I took off my shoes, cleaned off my feet and reapplied Bag Balm, new toe socks and my new Inov8's. Steph and I took off about 6:55 p.m. and up to Sunrise again!

The Night

Knowing I was 2 ½ hours ahead of the race cutoff I took the uphill to Sunrise mile 55.9 easy yet briskly. Steph and I talked the entire 20 miles together. We shared things together to get better acquainted and let my soul open more as the thought of running 100 miles really hit. I was deeply moved and taken away by being so abundantly blessed to be able to do what is unthinkable to most humans. Steph listened so well and I felt her compassion. While we talked I teared up over I don't know what but the time flew by up to Sunrise and past Sunrise. When we got to the A.S. it was 8:32 p.m. I did my research and knew civil sunset was 8:24 p.m. and I wanted to be out of there by darkness. We spent a few minutes there picking through foods, taking in my 2nd soup of the day, and I saw Jennifer there sitting down with shoes off..darn. The heat did a number on her feet and she looked so upset. Her husband was there to try to fix them but to no avail she had to drop the next A.S. I felt really bad but knew I had to go on, she was in good hands plus Gordy who coaches her too was there at the A.S.'s to help. Steph and I left that A.S. like 2 schoolgirls going into recess...I yelled "Get'r'done!" as loud as I could as a tribute to my favorite human being..no just kiddin' but Larry the Cable Guy is a funny thought 66 miles into a 100 mile run! The radio guys laughed.

From Sunrise to Pedro Fegas my absolute FAVORITE part of the race was going down...pitch black with beautiful clean star filled skies! The air was getting cooler, the winds gusted time to time...oh how I loved this section! Off to the right before the PCT we say these very yellow bright lights way on the horizon, Steph & I think we saw downtown San Diego! Cool! That is frickin' 50 miles away! Wow! When we arrived at Pedro Fegas I ate warm foods, refilled as usual and did not need to sit, I was anxious to head back to Camp C for the last time before the finish and pick up my new pacer, Chris. Steph & I maintained a steady pace. Chris later told me that as she waited at the Camp C that Paul told her at my pace I probably would not arrive Camp C mile 70 until 1:30 a.m....poor Chris she was volunteering all afternoon at Sweetwater and I told her I'd probably be at mile 70 at midnight. He offered her a sleeping bag and trailer to sleep in then all of a sudden she found out I was close. I arrived at 12:30 a.m. Sunday, the cutoff was 3:00 a.m., this was the last cutoff before the finish so I took advantage of it. I told myself earlier that I'd allow myself 3 times to sit, eat, gain quality composure and those were miles 50, 70, 80. Time now to sit, warm up and get ready for the last 30 miles, the most difficult sections of the course. It was here 14 runners had dropped, prior to mile 70 19 had dropped. The field had thinned out and I was determined not to be one of them. Gordy greeted me with my down blanket, Steph refilled my drinks, Paul had a grill cheese made for me. I sat in a tent with a fire and it was wonderful! Gordy told me yesterday my coloring was real pale and he was concerned, I felt frozen in time for a few minutes but after soup, sandwich my insides were warmed up and I was ready to go. I had put on my fleece jacket on top of my other 2 warm tops + my fleece ski cap and thick gloves. It dropped to 40 degrees that night. A huge swing in temps from the daytime, but that is the mountains! We were out of Camp C at 12:45 a.m. Chris was a doll the entire time we were together. She did not know the course as she does not train in Cuyamaca but I assured here I knew where I was going plus the course was marked extremely excellently well! The white powder on the ground light up with our headlamps and handheld lights. Thank you Paul & Scott! From Camp C to Paso

Picacho it was a tad warmer and the closer we got to the A.S. you could see cabins lite up and it looked really comfy and cozy there. It took 2:25 to get there! Nighttime is slow time! Along the way we heard the birds chirping...hey in the city they don't chirp at night, we heard owl's calling on each other, heard frog's / saw frog's!, saw more field mice as we did on the way to Pedro Fegas. Chris saw a large animal with glowing eyes leap in the shrubs, probably a mule deer. It was like this all the way to Big Bend. It was getting colder but once were out of Paso Picacho we held a good clip to Big Bend and arrived at 5:04 a.m. I had one other goal...leave Big Bend by daylight. When I volunteered there last October all the cool runners left at night the ones that didn't make it to the finish arrived in the daylight. So I was thinking...oh no, with civil daylight at 5:11 I have 5 minutes to get out of here...rubbish! In October it gets light at 6:30 a.m.! How in the world did I make sense of that 80 miles into this when in planning my math was in error?@! Must be that Amino drink! When I saw Steve Bean he was sweet offered me a chair and I stuck to my sit at 80 plan and loved it! Someone made me a PB&J with banana and it was delicious! Gordy and Steph (who had decided to help Gordy crew me till the finish) were awakened by our head lamps and shouting as they sat in his Element...sorry guys! They rushed up the hill behind us to the A.S. and he gave me blankie once again. I was feeling pretty good and was upset the night time was soon to pass as well as the cool temperature.

The 2nd Day

Next up one more time up to middle peak to Milk Ranch A.S. only 6.2 miles but it took 2:08! Lighting stay on for only a mile more then the layers of clothes started coming off. It remained fairly cool up to Milk Ranch but the mileage was catching up. Chris monitored my SCap and Advil intake telling when to take them. My right IT band had been hurting for a while and when I left Camp P at mile 70 Steph gave me a knee band, I've never used of these before but I guess it is o.k. now. After we got to 5,710' and a downhill running was available I could not run, it was a painful trot down, sometimes walking backwards, sometimes stopping to message my calf, thighs anything to relax the surrounding muscles. This sucked! So more speed walking, that did not hurt and in fact it was pretty efficient, I spent less energy going forward. Note all the while with Chris she kept commenting "Jill you are doing just great, you are strong, you are so far ahead". While she meant them and I was doing well I know pacers lie from time to time but it's all believable when you feel so bad. When we arrived at Milk Rancho mile 86.2 we were both hot! It was 7:12 a.m. and temps in the high 60's if not low 70's already. Leaving out of Milk Ranch I was hoping to run some as my legs warmed up and the knee aches subsided a bit but my abs were toast from the dry heaving the day before. Oh well...I had one more A.S. to go through or 13.8 miles to the finish with 4 hours and 45 minutes to do it. No problem.

I noticed that my voice was starting to give out, I was horse, was it all the constant talking and no rest for my vocal cords? Was it drinking in the cold temps and wind? Probably a combo of both so I reserved my words with Chris. We arrived at Sweetwater at 9:00 a.m. sharp. Chris insisted I drink some caffeine, so on a whim I packed a Starbucks iced coffee with cream in my crew cooler. Jeff Sweetwater captain gave me a cup with ice in it and that ice coffee was a rush!!!! Tasted and felt great!! Chris and I put on hats and iced up again for the last 7.6 mile Sweetwater loop. This time no rattle snakes but some friendly milk snakes. The horse riders were out and one asked me, how my run was going and I said, "98 miles done, 2 to go!" he was impressed. All the riders were very courteous and stepped off the side with their animals. While I got emotional time to time before Sweetwater with Chris so gave me orders "no crying! Save your energy, you can cry at the finish". But I was thinking hard about those tears and told her when I get my buckle I will cry and don't try to rescue me...let me stay in the moment, she understood as she finished her first 100 miler at Rocky Raccoon this year. The last 2 miles I tried to run when my abs didn't hurt but that didn't last long. I noticed at mile 99 I was leaning to the side and it is pretty obvious in the finishing picture attached! Yikes! Kind of scary looking. But talk about that finish line...I gave Chris that knee band, my hat and ran the dirt road to the thin white finish line where it all began 29 hours and 22 minutes ago!

Scott Mills (co-race director) greeted me with my bronze belt buckle and I bear hugged him and wept like a baby saying "that was so hard!!" He smiled and laughed...next up big hug for Paul Schmidt saying "all that

running you did with me out here is not for naught.” He smiled and knew his work with me was complete. Next hugs for Steph, Chris and Gordy and my Chris. All were proud!!!

That was it at the finish no pomp and circumstance I learned from Jeff that 38 people dropped and my jaw dropped the same time...another low completion rate at SD100! Chris told me he talked to Xy and found out about her knee and he told me Marc and Tanya and Jen dropped...I had no idea. There were 43 finishers out of 81 starters, that is a 53% completion rate and low. Again, I felt completely full of gratitude for finishing such a tough race and on my first attempt at 100 miles.

It's Thursday 4 days later and my ankles, feet are no longer swollen, my weight is back to normal even though I'm eating everything in sight and hoping to run a bit this weekend with my dog Hunter. I miss the mountains already but will be back very soon! Next up Mt. Disappointment 50 mile endurance run in August, looking to improve my 13:38 finish there from last year and do a little mental research as I plan to put Angeles Crest 100 Mile Endurance Run on my 2009 to do's along with San Diego 100 again.

I highly recommend this 100 miler to those who seek a “challenging yet fair course”.

Jill Childers
San Diego, Ca
June 12, 2008