

# Viaduct Trail 100 Race Report

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Lanesboro, Pa

By Dave Bursler

Every year something prompts me to wonder if it's time to move on to another arena to face a different challenge or to just observe, help and teach. At one time I functioned as though I were a machine focused on perfecting my ability while living in a funnel cloud where only few people were allowed to enter. A series of events occurred in 2006 that methodically broke through every inch of my inner being while cracking through that funnel cloud to force me to understand that it is much easier to let others in than to shut them out.

When I hurt my leg in 2006 I made a promise that I would recover and return stronger than ever. Things did not exactly play out to that script. The injury to my leg was never diagnosed or treated properly and because of that I still experience pain even today. The pain that I experience has never showed its ugly face in a race but it certainly limits the amount of time that I can train. My mind is still conditioned to give 100% but my body just can't do it anymore. I certainly will never renege on the promise that I made to myself two and a half years ago but I now realize that there are many definitions for the word strong. My body may be weaker but because I've rid myself of that pesky shyness that once dictated my life I am now a much stronger person all around.

A week prior to the race I came to a decision that I would not participate in the Viaduct Trail Ultramarathon. I came to this decision immediately after completing a story that I wrote about my experience as a Badwater crew person. When I read my own story about the suffering and inner struggles of my runner, myself and the others on the crew I went into deep thought and even a little depression. The question had to be why I would want to continue down this path of destruction. This question led to several others most of which I could not answer. I knew that if I could not answer these simple questions than I had no business participating in this type of grueling event.

Another eye opening experience happened weeks prior to the race. An older gentleman, with whom I hold in great regard, wrote a very sad note to the members of a running forum in which I participate. In the note his thoughts were profound and his feelings ran deep. A successful ultrarunner in his own right he was distressed by the fact that at 68 years old he had failed at his most recent attempt to run 100 miles. I could feel his pain as tears streamed down my own face but my tears were not created by his failure but instead they were created because I knew he was caught in the circle of death. Over the years this particular gentlemen has run several 100 miles races to completion but due to one unsuccessful attempt he considered himself to be a failure. Very few people can escape the vicious circle of death created by ultramarathons. The feeling of joy and accomplishment after crossing the finish line lasts a short time and is something that those of us who participate strive to recreate over and over again. Some people can complete the circuit and gain what they need from the experience and move on to something else while others get stuck in the loop circling around always in search of the same feeling over and over again. I couldn't help but wonder if in fact, I would ever escape this same circle of death and move on to something new.

Despite these thoughts and concerns I changed my mind and made a decision to participate in the VTU on the Monday before the race when my friend Rick told me that he decided to give the 100 a shot. I had lost all interest in the race but I couldn't turn down the chance to experience another adventure with my best friend.

The Viaduct Trail Ultra is advertised as a Fat Ass event meaning that the runners are expected to supply their own aid. Rick and I prepared for this by shopping for supplies at the local Walmart the

Thursday evening before the race. Both he and I have experienced this type of format before so we were on the same page when it came to shopping for our needs. Personally I look for foods that provide the calories that I need over the long haul and are easily digested. Some of the things that we purchased were Ensure Plus, Red Bull, Coke, Ginger Ale, graham crackers, peanut butter & jelly, soup, Chef Boyardee spaghetti, pudding, M&M's and Raisinets. The following day I paid a visit to the local supermarket where I purchased a couple of blocks of dry ice, a few bags of regular ice and a few gallons of water to complete our preparations.

Friday evening Rick and I left for Lanesboro, Pa without a plan in mind as to where we would spend the night. Most of the hotels recommended by those who organized the race were a significant distance from the start. Instead of booking a hotel 40 miles away Rick and I opted to gamble in hopes that there would be a small motel closer to the start. We passed through Scranton, Pa and into several small country towns where people didn't seem to exist. Plenty of houses and establishments but no people! It became obvious as we neared our final destination that we would have to go "old school" and sleep in the vehicle for the night. It was part of the adventure and something we took in stride. We arrived at the viaduct around 10 p.m. pulled into the parking lot and called it a night.

We both woke up around 4:30 but instead of jumping up immediately to prepare we sat in the car and watched the others arrive. The once bright sky full of stars was now pitch black as clouds had accumulated throughout the night. I took notice of the darkness and made a mental note to be prepared to run alone in this type of environment. The mental demons that can destroy a race thrive in this type of darkness so I had to be prepared to fend them off.

Once we were up and about things flowed smoothly. We dressed; made sure our drop bags were arranged and identified the start area. Around 15 minutes prior to the 6 a.m. start one of the race organizers yelled for us to begin gathering under the viaduct where the event would begin. Rick and I grabbed our drop bags and an ice chest that we would leave at the start and made our way over. Though the fat ass format requires the runners to care for themselves the organizers took the appropriate action of checking each of us in. This would allow them to keep track of who was on the course so that they could maintain a safe event. I wasn't surprised by the mandatory check in but I was surprised when I was issued both a race number and a cool glow in the dark bracelet. Since a number certainly would not be needed to track so few participants I considered both novelties of the race.

Prior the start of the event a young lady sang the National Anthem to the backdrop of a harmonica soloist. Finally there was an opening prayer and then the start.

The race started underneath of America's greatest stone viaduct, built in 1849 by James Kirkwood and Julius Adams and still in use as a two-track Conrail line. It was run entirely on an old rail road bed that had been converted into a trail. It consisted of a 12.5 mile section that led from Lanesboro out to the town of Thompson at which time the runners reversed direction back towards the viaduct. Those attempting to run 50 miles would have to follow this out and back pattern two times and those with 100 mile aspirations would be required to follow the pattern four times.

The little bit of research that I did on the course left me feeling good about my chances to successfully navigate my way toward a finish but still I knew that there would be unknown factors that could determine my fate.

I went out conservatively toward the front of the pack to get a feel of what the other twenty two people had in mind. The pace was a bit slow but in retrospect probably what I needed to maintain. After 15 minutes I increased the pace to spread the field a little as a way to bring the competitors to the forefront. Not a smart move on my part considering that those alongside of me had their sights set on

50 miles and were more likely to maintain whatever pace I set. When the field spread I wasn't surprised to see that Byron Lane was still lurking behind. Byron and I went neck and neck at Vermont in 2005 so I was well aware of his ability. Also he has a fantastic history in the New York City ultrarunning circuit. In fact, during one of our many conversations on the way out he told me that he had just run 75 miles in a rain delayed 12 hour event the weekend before.

Tom Kanger joined Byron and I as the leaders going out to Thompson. Since I didn't know Tom I initiated the first conversation with him. He told me that he became interested in long distance running this year and that his first 50K was in May. He gained my attention when he mentioned getting lost in a golf course where he missed a turn. I too got lost in a golf course while running a 50K in May and as it turns out it was the same race and he was following me. Though I never met him I now felt as though we were close friends. Ultrarunning is a funny sport in that it brings commonality to people of all walks of life.

I was comfortable running with both Byron and Tom but at the same time I could feel some energy being sapped from my body. I didn't pay too much attention to what was going on but as the run progressed I realized that I had expended too much energy focusing on the competition instead of running my own race.

We maintained a consistent pace of around 9:30 as we navigated our way around the troublesome, pesky rocks of varying sizes. The course itself did not pose a particular challenge so I went out of my way to identify small areas that could potentially cause problems later in the day. The variations of rocks causing an uneven running surface were obvious but then there was also the old, disheveled bridge that would have to be navigated a total of eight times. The bridge, in particular, was a concern because the condition was such that the runners had no choice but to concentrate on each step or face the possibility of falling through the open slats. The slats were made of old railroad ties lined up together to form the platform that led across the ravine below. The bridge was constructed in such a manner that each 6x6 railroad tie did not butt up against the other but instead were separated by about six inches leaving enough of a gap for a leg to fall through but not the entire body. Concentrating during the day would be no trouble but during the night it could be a different story so I kept this in mind throughout. Another challenge came in the form of the gradual uphill grade of the course as it led out to Thompson. I could feel and see the uphill grade but it was not so severe that it would justify walking. While there are a select few who have the ability to run an entire 100 miles most of us look forward to obvious sections where we can walk and feel okay about it.

As Tom, Byron and I progressed I could sense that I was allowing outside influences to control my mind which ultimately would impact my performance. I would like to say that the course was beautiful and that there were many views from which I could use as a distraction but honestly I can't. In fact the scenery itself was quite ordinary and sometimes even boring. The race is held on a course surrounded by beautiful mountains but never once were we led up those mountains or to an area with spectacular views. Instead we maintained our route on a mostly open path littered with rocks and dirt polluted with creosote. While going out I noticed that directly in the woods to the right the ground rose up into a mountain while off to the left the ground dropped down into a valley. Based on that knowledge alone I was certain that we were being led around a ridge for the entire 12.5 miles. We crossed over a few local roads and passed by several single family homes so never once did I feel as though I was out of civilization. It was just a normal run that lacked the feeling of the unknown that a 100 mile adventure normally provides.

After forty five minutes of running Byron mentioned that we should be reaching an aid station soon. I wasn't aware that we would be given the luxury of a water stop so it was a welcome note. However as we continued to run past the one hour mark with no aid in site I began to wonder if Byron misunderstood. Since he was carrying two water bottles I also wondered why he was so concerned

about receiving aid. Upon questioning I found that the two water bottles he was carrying were in fact bone dry. I guess he must have thought that he could survive the first six miles without water and went out with empty bottles. I still had a bottle and a half of water so I shared what I had with him so that he wouldn't shrivel up and die.

It was just after I made a comment about the simplicity of the course that the terrain through a curveball at us. We were approximately 6.5 miles into the run when we encountered a short but sharp downhill into a ravine. The large, sharp rocks that covered the ground provided a challenge but certainly nothing to get worked up about. I have to admit the change in terrain snapped me out of the treadmill trance that I had once been in. Now concentrating but certainly not making good decisions I ran up the hill and out of the ravine at the same pace as I ran down. The opportunity to walk was there but I let my big ego get in the way and did not take that opportunity. Since it was early there were no adverse affects from that poor decision but I realized that trend could not continue.

Finally 8.5 miles into the run we reached a cross road where we were met by a volunteer who provided water. He showed up at the right time because both of my bottles were now empty and the sun had peeked through the clouds adding a little heat to the early morning humidity.

Humidity.....hmmmm....something I didn't consider. Who would think that there could possibly be humidity in August on the east coast? Well I certainly would have prepared for it but the cool 50° early morning temperature threw me off. The cool outside temperature was nice but the sneaky high humidity put us all at risk for dehydration.

After refilling our bottles the three of us crossed the road and continued in anticipation of finding the town of Thompson at the 12.5 mile mark. The path continued on the same route however there was one more slight change in terrain as we encountered a second small gorge covered with the same sharp, pointy rocks as the first. The drop down into the ravine below was again steep and also a little longer and the climb back up was a bit tougher as well. Overall to this point the course had been pretty simple so a few curveballs now and then could only stand to keep us on our toes. This time around I was smart enough to slow to a walk when I reached the bottom of the ravine but still I couldn't seem to justify walking up the entire way. Just prior to reaching the top I started to run again. Man what a dummy!!! I reached the top and slowed a bit at which time Tom caught back up with me. Together we picked up the pace and raced up the gradual incline toward what we had hoped to be the end of the outbound section.

After twenty minutes of hard running we came upon an orange cone on the side of the road that I was certain to be the turnaround point. When we went by the cone I saw what looked to be an unoccupied pavilion to the right and couldn't help but wonder if we had reached the turnaround before the volunteers just as we did the water at the six mile mark. We slowed to a crawl but continued moving forward until we saw what appeared to be a small town a quarter mile off in the distance. A few moments later we reached an intersection where the trail met a main road but still there was no indication of an aid station so we continued to move forward again. Tom stopped to take care of some personal business while I hesitantly moved forward. A minute later I saw people tucked away in a far away corner off to the left a few hundred yards down the path. I took a deep breath in relief and stopped to access my drop bag. I wasn't hungry or thirsty but knew that it would be important for me to grab something because aid would not be available again for another 12.5 miles.

I was drained from running and talking so I needed a quick energy fix. I drank some Red Bull for the energy and chased it with Ensure for the calories. Byron came into the aid station and exited without so much as taking a look at the drop bags. I made an early mistake by jumping up out of my seat and chasing him down. The mistake that I made was ego driven and a pattern that I could not afford to allow to continue. I couldn't get it through my thick skull that what I should be doing is running my own

race and following my own plan. Byron is an experienced guy who was on a mission to accomplish a separate goal and I failed to recognize this. After catching up to him he took the time to remind me that I was running 100 miles and should be taking it easy this early in the race. Though I knew what he said was true I continued to pursue his pace but when Rick appeared less than a minute later I found a reason to stop.

Rick was breathing erratically and obviously feeling bad. The funny thing about Rick is that no matter how much time he has to prepare prior to a race he always seems to forget something. Most times it's nothing critical so he's able to recover but this time he forgot to bring along his asthma inhaler. The loose dirt, high humidity and the pollen from the surrounding trees filled his lungs with enough gunk that he could barely breathe. The lack of air had sapped so much energy out of the poor guy that he was laboring to make it into the first aid station. During our brief conversation he asked me to grab his inhaler out of the vehicle and bring it out to him on my way back out the second time. We only spoke for a few moments before heading off into different directions.

Now that I was alone on the trail I found it hard to focus on running. I had no companion by my side to keep my mind occupied with thoughts of moving forward. My mind became consumed by negative thoughts which in turn depleted my energy stores and intensified a pain in my groin ten fold. An easy course was going to battle me tooth and nail and I wasn't certain that I could be a formidable foe on this day. These are the times when the character of a person dictates how he or she will respond.

The next several miles tested my heart and my soul. The course itself was a spectator of the real battle going on inside of my own mind. The arena was inside of my head and the combatants were fantasy and reality. I've been successful in the past in similar situation by twisting and turning the struggles of a grueling event into a fantasy that can be easily managed. I struggled on this day to fend off reality and because of this a normal, reasonable solution to the problem prevailed. I had pain, I was bored and I was tired so I should quit. I battled this thought over and over until I finally realized how much energy that I had expended in doing so. I was so flustered that I considered quitting the race but I used my experience to regain some control. I reminded myself that a 100 mile race consists of many baby steps and that each step had to be taken prior to making a drastic decision such as quitting. I countered reality by understanding this concept and by doing so I threw it off track which in turn settled the dispute in my mind.

The first baby step that I decided to take was a long rest break when I arrived back at the viaduct. The knowledge of this in hand eased my mind even more allowing me to think creatively which opened up the door to stored energy in the form of passion.

After twenty-five miles of running I arrived back at the viaduct in a little over four hours. During my twenty minute break I planned to reevaluate several things but time and performance would be the most important. Both internal and external pressure to produce is what initiated the difficult period that I had just survived. If I was going to be successful on this day then I had to be willing to accept any outcome. I used my time alone to convince myself that I should focus on fun which in turn would help me to relax. Finally the last thing that I did was to ask God to help me to clear my mind.

Prior to going back out onto the trail I stopped to refill my water bottles, one with water and one with Gatorade. Though most of my problems centered on a failure to focus properly I also suffered from an electrolyte imbalance which certainly contributed to the early fatigue. In order to reduce or eliminate the fatigue I planned to take small sips of Gatorade to bring my electrolytes back to an acceptable level. Once the bottles were filled I took three aspirin and two Succeed caps (sodium/potassium) and ate a can of spaghetti. My mind was now focused on positive matters and I was ready to run to my level instead of the level which I thought that I should be running. I was relaxed, thinking positively and enjoying the beautiful day on the trail. I only had to remind myself a few more times that I was not

there to do battle but instead I was there to have fun. Dam that sure is a hard concept for me to grasp. My mind is stronger than my body so if my mind is stressed than my body is stressed and visa versa. The plan was to remain in a calm state which in turn would allow my body to function at a high level.

I developed a plan that would relieve my mind of the stress associated with running the entire 12.5 miles out to Thompson. I employed a strategy that would allow me to incorporate walk breaks on both the outbound and inbound sections. Though I was certain my body was capable of running the entire distance I was just as certain that my mind would not allow it to do so. My thoughts are easily reeled in when I incorporate rest breaks but not so easily reeled in when running for long periods of time. In order to be successful I had to shorten the course and the only way to do that was to break it down section by section. A few rest breaks allowed me to remain in control of my thoughts which is something that would not have been possible with continuous running. I claimed success for traveling a mile or two instead of becoming distressed by the fact that I still had 75 to go.

My strategy included choosing a variation of rock that would be best suited to walk on rather than run. Since the larger rocks created an unstable surface where I could easily twist my ankle or lose my balance I decided I would walk on that surface. Though there were only a few sections covered with this type of large, loose rock there were enough to give me the mental breaks that I needed. The authoritative walk that I employed helped me to maintain a positive outlook while also making good time.

As a way to stay positive on the gradual uphill going out I made an attempt to convince myself that I am a strong climber. That thought alone provided confidence and momentum with every step that I took. I made the challenge seem less formidable by thinking of those attempting to run the entire Appalachian Trail or across the U.S. I thought of running in the darkness and how comforting it would be to feel the cool breeze whistling through the leaves and up against my skin. I thought of my nieces and nephews, my mom and dad and two brothers as well as God above. I sought out what was most important to me and latched on to those thoughts.

I marched through the next seven miles with little or no problems in fact I improved and became stronger as I continued. Like any race of this distance though there would be peaks and valleys and with less than two miles to go until I reached the aid station I faced yet another challenge. Suddenly I became dizzy and weak but I was not overly concerned because I knew that the cause of these symptoms was hunger. Though weakened I was still optimistic and managed a run/walk into the aid station where I literally stuffed my face as if I had not eaten for days. I grabbed a cold bottle of soda first to quench my thirst and satisfy my need for sugar. I then ate a can of spaghetti, an entire bag of graham crackers and drank a bottle of Ensure. While I sat at the aid station the co-race director, Dave Kennedy, mentioned to me that Rick had called it a day after twenty five miles and that he assumed that I would do the same after fifty. I smiled at Dave and said things have changed. After our brief conversation I noticed an injured Ruthann Helfrick arriving at the aid station. Apparently she had taken a nasty spill and banged up her leg as a result of it. Despite the injury she appeared to be upbeat and strong as she stood by the aid station table waiting for medical assistance. I took the time to chat with her for a couple of seconds before I decided it was time for me to head back out on my own again.

I walked slowly for the first quarter mile out of the aid station to the intersection of the trail and the main road. I had hoped that this would allow enough time for the food in my stomach to settle but when I started to run my stomach rebelled. Again I was not concerned because I knew that the discomfort was the effect of overeating and the only remedy would be patience. I convinced myself that I would be okay if I could ride it out for an hour while the food in my stomach digested. Occasionally some of the food would erupt from my stomach but after the hour things settled just as I had thought.

I would occasionally have the pleasure of greeting a person going by in the other direction. The human contact was short lived but long lasting. The fifty mile leaders had long passed by me and were now no where near in sight. I'm used to loneliness so I easily relaxed and allowed gravity to take me down the gradual down hill slope. The downhill grade let me run more on the way back than I did coming out. I had now made a total transformation from a person in despair to a person with hope.

The plan that I had developed allowed me to gain consistency. This is something that can be quite difficult for most to achieve in an event of this type. My goal was not to catch up to those in front but rather to stay within myself. When Tom Kanger appeared in the distance I was tempted to give more effort but his race was just about over and I still had fifty plus miles to go. I had no desire to waste my energy in an attempt to catch him but instead I stayed within myself and slowly caught up to Tom without increasing my effort. Once I passed by him I never looked back because the only thing that mattered to me was directly ahead. I focused hard on reaching the viaduct where the real race to see who could reach 100 miles first would begin. I cruised across the unstable bridge and back to the viaduct in 9:04. I wasn't impressed with my time but in order to stay positive I didn't spend a moment lamenting my split but instead I remained centered.

When I arrived back at the viaduct I looked at Rick and told him you know I'm going back out right? I think that he already knew and in fact he was prepared to go out with me for my third attempt. I was more than happy to accept his offer of keeping me company while completing his own 50 mile day. Prior to leaving I told him that he should not give up on his dream to run the entire 100 miles. There was still plenty of time and it could be done if he took baby steps. He didn't seem too receptive to my suggestion but he didn't say no either. I didn't push the issue but still believed that there was a chance.

I explained to Rick how my pace would be dictated by the size and type of rock that covered the path. His primary mission was to keep me company so even though he may have felt strong he accommodated my idea. In the past I haven't responded to pacers in a positive manner because of my tendency to use them as a crutch. Instead of taking a punch in stride I'm more inclined to whine and cry about the pain when accompanied by a pacer.

Though I enjoyed Rick's company I failed to stay on track and I slowed and walked more than I did the previous time out. I felt strong but just as I did not want him to run a way from me I had no desire to run a way from him. I justified my pace by saying that I was conserving energy but in fact I pulled back so that both Rick and I could take it easy. The result of the slow pace was realized when I found that my nearest competition was within four minutes of taking the lead when we left the outbound aid station.

I was motivated to make it to the town of Thompson where I would have a chance to get ice cream from the corner store located just prior to the aid area. While my thoughts were of ice cream Rick suffered hunger pains similar to those that I had experienced earlier in the race. Once we reached the store I bought a root beer float to satisfy my wish but not a fan of ice cream Rick refrained. We then made our way to the aid station where Rick proceeded to stuff his face with everything in sight. I felt reenergized by the ice cream and was ready to run but after the large feast Rick was feeling bloated. We walked from the aid station to the road and then down the trail for a while in hopes that the contents of his stomach would settle. We walked a little further than I would have liked but it was important to me that Rick and I run together so we continued to wait it out. Once running again we pushed for a while but when it became apparent that Rick's stomach would not respond he told me to move on without him. I felt bad but I knew that I had to continue to follow the plan that I had developed earlier or face the possibility of a late death march. Since we were in agreement I pulled away just before we reached the six mile mark. I fell back into my own little world of running and walking at an

easy consistent pace on the down hill grade. I took a peek back after moving forward for twenty minutes and was surprised to see that Rick had not let up. He remarkably had found a way to overcome the pain and remained on pace to finish this section of the course by my side. When I recognized that he was back together I joined him for the trip the rest of the way back to the viaduct.

It was getting late and though I had my light I tried my best to beat the sun before it exited for the night. When we were within a mile of the viaduct I was finally forced to turn it on as a way to brighten the narrow path leading across the dilapidated bridge. We made our way across and into the start finish area just before 9 p.m.

I had been in the lead the entire day and now with only twenty-five miles left I would not be willing to let it go that easily. Prior to arriving back at the viaduct Rick and I discussed what I would need to prepare for the last leg of the race. I needed batteries for my light, a swig of pedialyte, an aspirin to fend off the pain, a bottle refill, and a Red Bull. When we arrived I scrambled through my bag to find batteries for my light and then quickly tended to my other needs before heading back out again. Just as I entered the trail Glenn Butcher, who was in second place at the time, was exiting. I was impressed that he had gained time from the last aid station because Rick and I maintained a good pace back to the viaduct ourselves. The once four minute lead was now one minute and my sense of urgency was raised to the next level. I became aware that if I were to maintain my lead over Glenn than I would have to run a good portion of the uphill section leading back into Thompson. Based on his strong showing on the last section I surmised that Glenn was a strong down hill runner so to counter this I had to use my strength as an uphill runner or face the possibility of a sprint to the finish. Just as before I convinced myself I am a strong uphill runner and gained energy from those thoughts. I continued to incorporate short walk breaks but only long enough to satisfy my mind. I blocked everything completely out of my mind except the thought of getting to Thompson while still feeling strong.

I was confident but couldn't help to recall my debacle at the 2004 Massanutten 100 when I took over 12 hours to navigate the last 25 miles of that brutal course. I let that thought enter my mind and I allowed it to exit just as easily. While I didn't like the thought it wasn't worth expending the energy to fight it. I was certain that if I could keep myself under control and maintain a high level of confidence that I could put this race to rest by the end of the outbound section. I had no doubt that my experience would allow me to maintain my lead and even extend upon it. I honestly believed that one of us would stumble and I refused to let it be me. I wasn't certain as to what extent Glenn's inexperience in this type of event would factor in the outcome so I pushed hard to find the answer.

I felt awesome when I arrived at the six mile mark much quicker than I did the two previous times. It was here for the first time that I took a peek back to see if I could see Glenn or his shining headlamp in the distance. I continued to feel emotionally charged so I took off before I wasted too much energy worrying about how close Glenn was. My energy level peaked through 8.5 miles but I hit a valley while traveling uphill as I exited the second gorge. I started to feel very hungry and weak. I had expended a lot of energy to get to this point and with the aid station still a couple of miles away I had no way to replenish prior to feeling the effects of hunger. I was forced to walk, stumble and crawl as quickly as I could to the aid station. The slower pace made me paranoid which in turn caused me to look back a few times. Even though I was slightly concerned I believed that I had put enough distance between Glenn and I to earn this walk break without losing ground.

When I walked into the aid station I enjoyed a cold coke, more spaghetti and a few raisinettes. I was ready to get the race over with so I wasted very little time before heading back out. As had been the pattern the entire day I walked from the aid station out to the main street but this time I made a wrong turn to the left and wound up on someone's front lawn. I rushed back to where I came from and immediately recognized where I had gone wrong. So now back on the trail I was in search of Glenn.



Once I identified where he was on the course I would know exactly how to pace myself to maintain the lead. I was very confident that I had increased my advantage but wasn't sure if it was insurmountable. Anticipation alone caused me to pick up the pace and now that I had satisfied my hunger I found that I had the energy to run once again.

I had hoped to reach the first gorge before seeing Glenn. I believed that if I could make it there before him than it would just be a matter of keeping it together. When the gorge came into view I saw no one at first but as I started down Glenn and his bright light were now in full view. He was moving slowly and methodically up the hill toward me. When I came upon him he seemed sluggish but still alert. The first thing that he told me was that he was ready to call it a night but I emphatically told him no. Instead of quitting I suggested that he take an extended break at the aid station which would give him enough energy to finish the last leg of the race. I reminded him that it was only midnight so he still had almost twelve hours to complete the last leg. He seemed receptive to my suggestion and even led me to believe that it was something he would consider so I ended the conversation and started my trek forward. I felt bad about leaving him out there to suffer all alone but I was ready for the end and I was certain that he would be okay.

The pressure was reduced to a minimum with Glenn struggling but still I continued give my best effort. By focusing on the finish and maintaining my lead I was able to stave off the demons that dared enter my mind this late in the race. I had no plans on changing my outlook and ran as if I were still being chased.

When I reached the second gorge I encountered Steve Wehrle and his pacer. They too were moving slow but Steve was in excellent spirits and good physical condition. I told him of Glenn's troubles and of the suggestion that I left with him. Steve agreed that Glenn should not quit and we both expressed our hope that he nap and go on to finish. We then wished each other luck and moved in our respective directions.

Shortly after seeing Steve I reached the six mile mark at which time I knew it would only be a matter of time. I felt good and continued with the same walk/run method that had gotten me to this point. I was excited to be so close and wanted to take the time to stop and look around to enjoy my last moment but I was overwhelmed by emotion which cause me to run more than I walked. I remembered how Rick and I navigated this section together in just over an hour and I used those thoughts to help me to duplicate that effort.

I tasted the finish line but refused to release my feelings for fear the release might expend needed energy. When I crossed the final road that led to the trail across the old bridge I finally slowed to savor the moment. The thought of becoming the first person to finish the Viaduct Trail 100 was not the prevailing thought. In fact what I felt most satisfied about was that I was able to reverse the feelings of despair and fear of failure that I felt on the first outbound section. When I did finally cross the finish line in 20:45 I was greeted by both race directors Carl Albright and Dave Kennedy. As an impromptu photo was taken I tried to come to grips with what I had just accomplished. When things settled Carl told me that I was a machine. I couldn't help but laugh at that statement because today I am more human than I have ever been in my entire life. I feel pain, I cry, I laugh and I understand that I need people in my life and I even realize that there is a time to quit. Machine no but a confident individual who understands his own mind yes.

I had a good day while learning an awful lot about who I really am. I enjoyed the company of my best friend while also making new friends and hopefully representing myself in a respectful manner. I was the first to finish this race but every individual who started underneath of the viaduct on August 9, 2008 are champions because they did not fear what others believed to be impossible.