

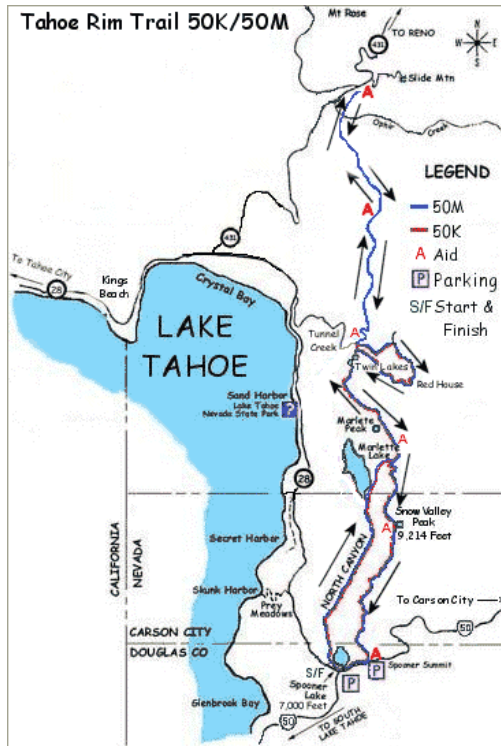
Tahoe Rim Trail 100 Report

"A Glimpse of Heaven, A Taste of Hell"
by Bill (The Trailgeeze) Rumbaugh
July 19-20, 2008

Much of the Friday before an event like this is consumed with final preparations. There was the medical check-in, packet pick up, mandatory pre-race briefing and then the traditional pre-race pasta dinner, which was to be held in a downtown Carson City eatery, B'sghetti's. There was such a crowd this year that they decided to cart the whole thing 2 blocks to the State Capitol grounds where the check-in and pre-race briefing had been held. The presence of abundant shade, moderate temperatures and low humidity made this a fairly pleasant option, probably better than an overcrowded restaurant, actually. All went well, I chatted briefly with some of the other NTTReer's in attendance – Lethal Letha Cruthirds (who signed up for the 100 miler) and Mike Potter (50 mi) and spied Linda Boggs (50k) and Deborah Sexton (50 mi) as we were headed to the car. Also saw Davy Crockett (without his coonskin cap) and Catra Corbett (with her orange/pink hair highlights and numerous tattoos, who could miss her).

There were some 40 additional entrants from the cancelled Western States Endurance Run who were allowed to participate by special permission. The list of "who's in" was not updated, so I did not know who any of them were, or what the final count was. I would guess that their presence upped the percentage of stronger runners over the typical mix. Besides who else is running, the other unknown was the extent of the smoke from the forest fires in the area. Reports had varied significantly over the week prior. There were no fires in the Tahoe basin, so it was presumed that the race would continue and that we would deal with whatever the smoke conditions were. There was considerable haze when we arrived on Monday, but a late afternoon shower settled the air and it was clearer in the subsequent days.

Being there a few days prior, and being exposed somewhat to the area's terrain and altitude, I was intimidated. Based on prior race reports and other input, I believed that I could do it, but it was to be a challenge to say the least. I was determined to have faith in my training, and rely on it to get me through this.



The complete Tahoe Rim Trail encircles the lake and covers some 173 miles. This event was held entirely in Nevada, on a relatively small section of the overall trail.

The format of the course was a 50 mile out and back that is repeated a second time for the 100 mile event. On the outbound leg is a distance-correcting side loop that is traversed only once per 50 miles. It is called the "Red House Loop," more on that later. The last 10 miles into the Start/Finish (S/F) area is on a route parallel to the outbound trail. So a little variety is thrown into the mix. The 50k runners complete the Red House Loop and head back, omitting the run to the Mount Rose Trailhead, and their route is traversed twice.

The motto of the race is, "A Glimpse of Heaven, A Taste of Hell," which pretty much describes it. There were ample opportunities to catch a glimpse of paradise looking down upon Lake Tahoe in the distance, with much closer and picturesque Marlette lake in the foreground. To the East stretched the Washoe Valley, with farmlands, small towns and Lake Washoe further away to the Northeast. To say that the trail followed a ridge would be somewhat misleading. There was no sharply-defined ridge with steep sides falling away

from the trail, it was much more rounded on top, with views of Lake Tahoe or of the Washoe Valley frequently visible, but not both at the same time.

Race morning found us standing around in temperatures in the upper 40's, not terribly cold. I declined the offer of coffee from one of the race officials, adhering to my caffeine-free regimen until the very last. After pinning my bib number onto my shorts and delivering my drop bag to the appointed area, I chatted with Linda, Deborah and Letha.



Deborah, Yours truly, Letha and Linda, before the start

I did not see Mike Potter, but knew he would be there, and then it was time to move down the hill to the starting line to attend the final words of wisdom from Dave Cotter, the Race Director. There were many in attendance, family and crew members milling about in the bright lights. It was a somewhat larger crowd than I expected, but then I could not tell really how many of them were runners. I looked around and did not see Letha anywhere, and there was not another soul there who knew me. Running with strangers is nothing new, and I knew we would be spread out before long. We started with flashlights when given the word GO, knowing that they would only be needed for the first 30 minutes or so. I fell in toward the back, as usual, but not as far back as I probably should have. I kept pace with the others nearby as we headed up the trail. I do mean up. The first section to Marlette Peak climbs almost constantly for the better part of 2 hours. Passing Marlette Lake on the way was candy for the eyes.



MARLETTE LAKE, AS THE SUN CAME UP



MARLETTE LAKE, WITH TAHOE VISIBLE IN THE HAZY DISTANCE

I had been cautioned about the long, sustained climbs but this was something else again. Dust was thick in the air from the runners ahead on the sandy trail. As the sun gradually illuminated the surroundings, I realized that the person immediately ahead of me was Letha. We chatted off and on as we climbed and huffed and puffed the thin air. Heading into the first aid station at Hobart Road, I fished my pace card out of my pocket to check on my progress. I knew at that point that it would take a minor miracle to pull off a sub 30-hour finish. So the pressure was off early in the game, and I made the mental adjustment of enjoying the course, and holding on for the finish without cutting it too close.



DID I MENTION THERE WAS SOME SAND?



LETHA AHEAD OF ME ON THE TRAIL TO MARLETTE LAKE

This race has three finisher's belt buckles, the traditional and durable finisher's prize of 100 mile events. The distinctive design of the buckle is one thing that first attracted me to the race, truth be told. It features a silver medallion which is captured in its center. The back side of the buckle (toward the wearer's body) is hollowed out so that the design on the reverse side of the medallion is visible when the buckle is removed. The front of the medallion shows the race's logo, complete with motto. The reverse side shows the great seal of the State of Nevada, this race being its only 100 miler. The design is individually hand-tooled into the buckle, not stamped or cast. The buckle for the sub 24-hour finishers is nickel with a gold-plated medallion. The buckle for the 24 – 30 hour finishers is nickel with the silver medallion and I really wanted one of those. The buckle for the 30 – 35 hour finishers is bronze, again with the silver medallion. The medallions, by the way, are all made on one of the coin presses once used by the Carson City mint. Quite a handsome and unique buckle, certainly a prize worth working for.



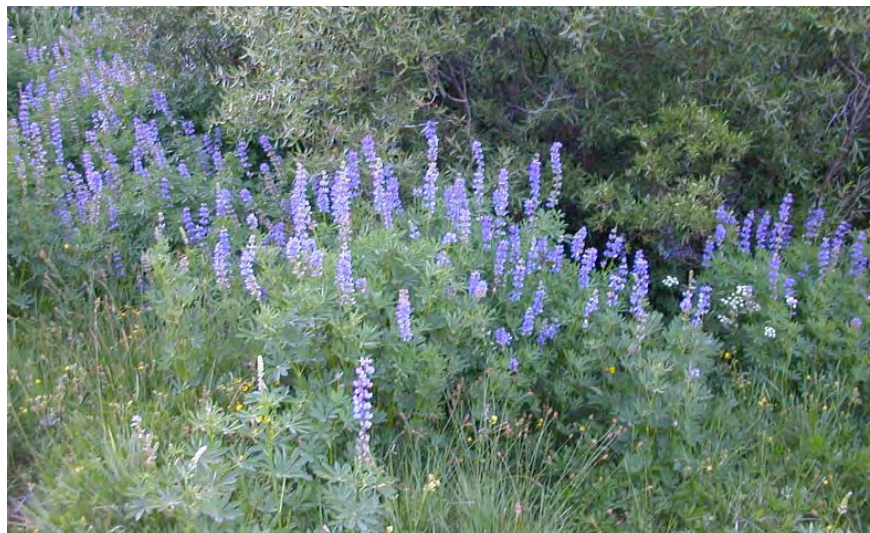
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BACK

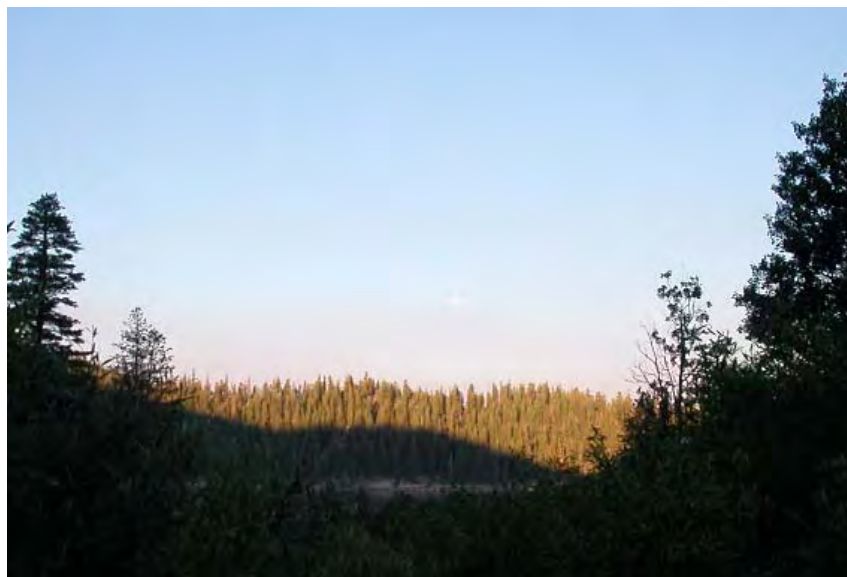
I don't recall exactly when Letha and I parted ways. It may have been at the Hobart Road Aid Station (A/S), it being difficult to synchronize stops at aid stations exactly right. Or, it might have been a little later

when nature called. I was to see her a couple of other times briefly, but it was the last time we were to run together in this race. Being a veteran of the Grand Slam in '03 and numerous long-distance events over the years, I had hoped to tap into her experience at these things, but now I was on my own, and that was OK. Neither she nor I had pacer or crew for this event. The miles passed pleasantly. Lots of wildflowers could be seen trailside, including the Nevada version of the Texas Bluebonnet.



NEVADA BLUEBONNETS

They were still in bloom many weeks after their Texas cousins had gone to seed and turned brown, a gift of the milder climates to be found in the area. The stimulating scent of pine could easily be discerned in the air most of the time.



SUNRISE AND MOONSET

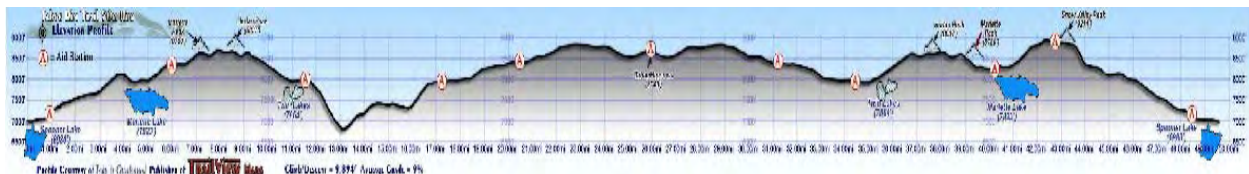
It was 6 miles to Hobart and then another 5 miles to the Tunnel Creek Aid Station. Tunnel Creek is passed just before and just after the Red House Loop, and then passed a third time on the way back from the North end of the course. And then 3 more times during the second 50 miles of the course. So it is a key place to put your drop bag. My strategy was to use just the one drop bag (besides the one at the S/F area) and to put everything in it that I thought I might need. This had to be tempered to some degree by the practical side of air travel these days, there is only so much you can take, and it costs extra. About 10

days before the event, race management emailed some final updates. In it was mentioned, as if we should have known, that drop bags had to be able to pass through a 6 X 8 inch opening and be no more than 16 inches in length. This caused major heartburn for me because it meant all my stuff needed to fit into something basically the size of a shoebox. After much gnashing of teeth, packing and re-packing and a plan B thrown in to boot, I eventually complied to the 11th-hour dictum. Sorta. Turns out that on Friday before the race, drop bags of any size were freely accepted without a second glance, much less a measurement. Just throw them on the pile over there by the sign and make sure it's marked with your bib number. I guess if I were to have just a teensy quibble about anything it would be this minor fiasco, which caused a fair amount of unnecessary anxiety on my part.



LOOKING EAST TOWARD WASHOE VALLEY AND WASHOE LAKE

Anyway, going into Tunnel Creek, I was ushered over to the medical tent and weighed, the first of 11 such weigh-ins. Hmm. My weight was down about 4 lbs, I was cautioned that I needed to concentrate on hydrating. After only 6 miles, in the coolish air, I was surprised that I had lost that much weight. But I drank one of my Ensures and a couple of cups of Coke and was on my way. I knew it was not enough weight to make much difference, but I topped off my hydration vest and was determined to drink more water before the next weighing. That was the first Coke I had consumed in 2 weeks. I had stopped with caffeinated drinks so that caffeine would have maximum effect when I needed it, in the wee hours. I had a real problem with low alertness during the Rocky Raccoon 100 last February, and was determined to not let that happen again. I also had caffeine pills in my pack, just in case. I have to report that, though giving up coffee and diet Coke was tough, the plan worked perfectly. There was never any flagging of alertness the entire night, and well into the next day. I plan to use that regimen in the future, should I ever run another 100 miler. Which I probably will.



ELEVATION DIAGRAM OF THE 50-MILE "LOOP"

The Red House Loop was next. A fair amount of press had been given to this feature of the course because of the steep climb down to the lowest point on the course. It can clearly be seen in the elevation

diagram above (even if nothing else is clear enough to read). Both the RD and one of the reports I had read prior to the event indicated that it was probably overrated. The sun was fully up at this point and there were few clouds in the sky and little shade on the way down. We ran when we could, following the jeep road. I thought to myself, "Whoa, this is steep!" knowing that we would have to come out the same way we came in. The road turned sharply to the right revealing yet more steep downhill that had to be traveled both ways. This was disheartening. Presently the trail split and the actual loop began. After awhile it began to climb significantly, and then we came to the red house itself. It really wasn't red and I don't think it was a house where anyone lived currently, but there was an aid station there and I reported my bib number, drank a coke and moved on, anxious to get this thing done. The trail was quite lush in this part of the loop, with lots of vegetation and even some shade. Eventually, the loop rejoined the two-way traffic of the steep slope and the grind began. The full sun was exacting its toll from the runners, or more accurately, the trudgers. There was NObody running this section. I ground to a halt a couple of times to catch my breath. Mike Potter passed me on his way down, I did not recognize him until he was past and it appeared he was doing well, cutting into the hour's head start the hundred milers had on the other runners. But eventually we climbed our way out. As the terrain leveled off, I attempted a trot back to Tunnel Creek and concluded that it was not as bad as I had been led to believe, it was WORSE! I said as much to Deborah who was coming out of Tunnel Creek as I was coming in. She mentioned that she was just ahead of the cutoff, and I recommended that she run where she could, because there would be no running on the climb out of the loop.



YE OLDE RED HOUSE

My weight was down another pound or so, I topped off the hydration vest, grazed from the table and started off in the direction of the Mt. Rose A/S some nine miles distant. Need to keep drinking, I admonished myself. Mt. Rose is the turnaround point, a little more than halfway to the 50 mile point. When I get this one behind me, I will feel like I'm well into this. I was still feeling relatively fresh and was soaking up the amazing scenery.

We had reconnoitered the area of that aid station a couple of days prior via car, so I might be better prepared. It was not terribly clear whether the trail actually crossed the highway to get to the aid station site. It might be on the summit for all I knew, though I certainly hoped not. Surely if it crossed the highway, I eventually concluded, some mention would have been made of it in the course information. The busy highway (S.H. 431), which goes to within a stone's throw of the aid station, is the highest pass in the Sierra Nevadas that is kept open continuously the year 'round. The way there was not without its difficulties, but it was fairly uneventful from a topological perspective. Some climbs, some descents, lots of trees and sections of the trail passed through outcroppings of large rocks which encroached on the trail and made footing tricky enough to slow most runners to a walk.



THE TRAIL WAS A MITE ROCKY IN PLACES

Not far out of Tunnel Creek the first of several bouts of lower GI issues began to work on me. No big deal, this is what trail runners do, it's all part of the fun. I found appropriate cover in the form of bushes or large rocks and took care of business. By about the third episode, I had to admit this was getting old, not to mention costly in terms of time spent not making progress on the trail. The miles passed and I figured that surely we must be nearing the turnaround. An opening in the trees revealed the distant highway. Ah, yes, it can't be that much farther now that the highway is in view. But distances can be deceiving when viewing a faraway object from a higher elevation. The road again became hidden from view and did not reappear for at least another 40 minutes. When it finally reappeared, there was still a substantial distance to go. The trail at that point winds through what had the appearance of a park. After a sharp turn to the right, the aid station tents came into view off in the distance across a meadow. After another 20 minutes I eventually arrived.



**MT. ROSE AID STATION, WAAAAY IN THE DISTANCE
NOTE RUNNERS IN THE FOREGROUND AND MIDDLEGROUND**

The scale said my weight was still down. Drat. I took a load off and diligently tried to take on liquids and calories. An outbound runner said that they had cold drinks at the turnaround. I also saw that they had ice and Ensure, so I asked for a cup of ice and one of their Ensures. I drank the chilled Ensure and decided that was definitely the way to drink this stuff. It was not the heavy, overly-sweet liquid I was used to, but actually tasted fairly pleasant. I downed it and asked for another cup of ice and a Mountain Dew (known to be well-laced with caffeine). Both were quickly produced by the attentive volunteer. I downed it too, thanked him for the personal attention, refilled my nearly empty hydration vest, and headed South. There may have been ice at other aid stations, but this was the first A/S where I saw it being given out. So I told runners coming toward me that the A/S was X minutes ahead and they have ice. Both bits of information would have heartened me, and I hope it helped them.



**GLIMPSES OF HEAVEN WERE EVERYWHERE
IT WAS EASY TO GET JADED**

It was early in the afternoon. The temperature was in the upper 80's. Most of the trail was in full sun with shade from the occasional tree or group of trees. It was pretty hot in the sun, but passing through shady spots under the trees I noticed that the temperature seemed a good 15 degrees cooler. The magic of low humidity.



THERE WAS SOME OCCASIONAL SHADE TO BE SAVORED

Somewhere on this leg of the trail I started to feel the beginnings of cramps in my hamstrings. I had been taking S-caps every hour on the hour, my usual practice. They have always gotten the job done pretty much regardless of whether it's hot or cold. I don't trust my ability to recognize when electrolytes are needed, or to even think to check to see if "my body is telling me" that I need them. One capsule per hour is easy enough to manage, so that has become my usual practice. It was now about 30 minutes past the hour. I decided to up my dosage to one every 30 minutes as long as it was necessary. This is a fair amount of sodium and I could not recall having needed more than one capsule per hour on previous occasions. But I knew any excess sodium would be dumped with no ill effects, so I took it and the cramping did subside. I continued at two per hour as long as it was necessary, about another 2 – 3 hours. Evidently I was sweating a lot but it was evaporating quickly in the low humidity air. My clothing was not soaked as it usually is during training runs back home, though there were salt deposits on it in a few places and considerable dampness.



THIS TEXAS BOY DOESN'T SEE SNOW IN JULY VERY OFTEN!

My plan was to change to my 2-bottle belt when I cycled through the S/F area and stash the hydration vest. I didn't think I would need as much water after sundown and looked forward to the lighter weight and quicker turnaround of filling bottles versus messing with the bladder of the hydration vest. I was concerned, however, about the long stretch between tunnel creek and Mt. Rose. Depending on conditions, 9 miles can be a long way for only 40 ounces of water, the combined capacity of both bottles. As I retraced the trail, about halfway back toward Tunnel Creek, I came upon a guy I had noticed earlier because of his two dogs of some breed which had little or no tail. He had set up a water station by the side of the trail and it appeared to have about 8 – 10 jerry cans of water. Well this was the answer. I could refill here and make it to the next stop with just the two bottles. I asked if he was going to be there all night. He answered back, "No, but there will be plenty of water here even if I'm not." Good news. I thanked him and forged ahead.



NORTH END OF THE LAKE AND THE COMMUNITY OF INCLINE VILLAGE

Eventually I cycled through Tunnel Creek again. And again I was down from 167 to about 162 pounds. I don't recall where I crossed paths with Letha, who was ahead of me. She said she had gained a couple of pounds and was having stomach problems. With my lack of progress at reversing the weight loss trend, I was surprised to find that someone could actually gain weight. I asked for a cup of ice and a Mountain Dew. I downed the iced 'Dew and chased it with an Ensure from my pack poured over the ice remaining in the cup. This came to be my usual aid station practice at the major stops. I also replenished my supply of electrolytes and other needs from my drop bag. This was the 35 mile point and I still felt good, about a third of the way into this thing. I had taken a couple of ibuprofen about noonish to take the edge off of some places that were hurting a bit, and things seemed to be working well.

While sitting in one of the aid station chairs trying to get my liquids down as quickly as I could, I noticed a male runner near the first aid tent being ministered to, who was stretched out on a narrow table. The person working on the runner was clad in a brightly colored matching outfit and was turning him this way and that. There seemed to be a lot of contact and, you know me – I idly thought about asking one of the other volunteers what I had to do to get worked on by her. Then the person changed sides and I saw the bushy gray beard! Glad I had not voiced my lame attempt at humor. Momentarily, I heard another runner come by and josh with both of them briefly and I heard the name, "Gordy." Then I realized that the bearded person was Gordy Ainsleigh (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordy_Ainsleigh), the person who ran the first recorded 100 miler. I knew he was a Chiropractor, but I had not made the connection. I introduced myself and thanked him for getting this business of trail running started, some 35 years ago. He was quite gracious and we chatted for a minute or two until I had to go. He was still on duty the next morning when I came through Tunnel Creek for the last time. I headed out for Hobart Road with the knowledge that I had met one of the pioneers of this offbeat sport.



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE NORTH END OF LAKE TAHOE

The next couple of miles are yet another a steep climb. Eventually it levels off and there are some nice sections where sustained running is possible and I did my best to take advantage of them. A short distance out of Tunnel Creek, I ended up positioning myself between a man and a woman whom I noticed were both wearing technical shirts with "Auburn Running Company" on them. The man introduced himself as Glenn and his wife, behind me as Tania. Upon learning I was from Texas, he asked if I knew Jay Norman. "Of course," I sez, "Everyone knows NTTR's 'Dean of Running.' I've shared lots of trail miles with him." He said that he ran The Costa Rica Challenge with him 2 or 3 times. The trail running community is like a small town, everybody seems to know everybody else. Or know someone who knows them. We swapped positions a couple of times until they passed me for good just before Hobart Road.



**TYPICAL VIEW OF THE TRAIL
HEADING TOWARD TUNNEL CREEK FROM MT. ROSE**

I stopped at Hobart for an Ensure smoothie, their specialty. It is strawberry Ensure combined with a banana in a blender. Not bad, and I needed the calories for the climb up to the next A/S which has the unlikely name of Snow Valley Peak, the highest point on the course at 9,150 feet. A sign outside the tent proclaimed: "No Trail Shoes, No Bib, No Service."

It was another couple of miles of steep climbing and the trail passes from a nice, fairly shady area into an area mostly devoid of trees. Not that we were above treeline at that point, just that it must not have been a good habitat for trees and there were none to speak of. The climb was uneventful but pretty tough. I stopped at least once to catch my breath and then was immediately winded as soon as I resumed. Here is where those who live at elevation really have an advantage over the rest of us. I can only imagine what the folks go through at the tougher mountain runs where you really are above treeline. And with no trees to slow the wind, it was pretty windy as well.



**EARLY PART OF THE CLIMB TO SNOW VALLEY PEAK
CAN YOU SAY OXYGEN DEPRIVATION?**

I saw a trailside sign that said, "Food and drink, next exit, ½ mile." Well, dang, still another half mile to go, the A/S was still not in sight. But eventually I did arrive and was weighed in. My weight was now down to 160 pounds, the weight at which they were supposed to pull me from the course. The A/S was manned by Boy Scouts and Scout leaders. The Scout who weighed me did not pull me, but cautioned me to drink lots of liquids. The RD told us at Friday's briefing that they would be using the 3-5-7 rule, where you would be cautioned to drink more if you lost 3% of your body weight. At 5% they would hold you until you drank enough to get your weight to 3%. And pull you from the race at 7%. The Tyvek wristband I was given showed my weigh-in weight from the previous afternoon (167) and what I took to be the three magic numbers (165, 162, and 160). I had read that if you lose 7% of your weight, you would be crawling, but I actually felt fine. Later calculations showed that the lookup table they used was incorrect, the numbers actually should have been 162, 159 and 155. But I did not know at the time, only that the numbers "seemed" a little high. As I downed my liquids I saw that the tent was fairly substantial, well-anchored and that most of the volunteers seemed to know what they were about. In any case, they were in for a long night at this exposed, windy site. I thanked them for being there for us and headed out, looking forward to the downhill section ahead.

Going from Snow Valley Peak to the Spooner Trailhead A/S is a distance of 5.4 miles, during which 1,850 feet of elevation is lost. In the early part of this section, the exposed trail crosses frequent outcroppings of rocks and forces the runner to slow down and step carefully. It was along here that my lower GI issue reasserted itself and I was hard-pressed to find anyplace that afforded any privacy in this exposed section of trail. All part of the fun, right? Back on the trail, I noticed a few black fuzzy caterpillars crisscrossing the trail and I tried not to step on them. The farther I went, the more numerous they became and avoiding stepping on them got to be a lost cause. They seemed to be pretty inept, as I noticed they sometimes would slip on a rock and roll to the bottom. Or lose their footing and slide down a sandy slope. Fuzzy little buffoons, who would have thought that with all those feet and low center of gravity, they would have trouble walking? Idle thoughts of the trail. I did notice that they seemed to feed on a certain type of low bush and had removed most of the leaves from a few of them. Black caterpillars on thin branches replaced the green leaves. One thing seemed certain, that area will have a bumper crop of butterflies or moths in its future. I hoped the bushes survived.

The expected downhill had much level trail and even a few climbs thrown in. The mountain gave up its elevation grudgingly. This was taking a really long time to get down. I kept expecting to see Spooner

Lake in the valley ahead. Trees eventually reappeared and hid any possibility of sighting the lake and the nearby S/F area that was our goal. The trail meandered around and about, with still an occasional climb thrown in for fun. It appeared to be in no hurry whatever to get us to our destination, and I was getting antsy to start the second act of this play.



**HEADING DOWNWARD, EVER SO GRADUALLY
FROM THE HIGH POINT OF THE COURSE**

Finally, at long last, with the long shadows of late afternoon filtering through the tall evergreens, the Spooner Trailhead A/S appeared. I downed a small cup of Coke, reported my number in and out and was on my way. It was another 1.7 miles to the S/F area, recalling the R.D.'s words that it is, "The longest 1.7 miles you will ever run." It did take awhile, but there were signs of increased proximity to the goal at every turn, so it was not so bad.

At the S/F area, I retrieved my drop bag and sat down about the time that Letha was finishing up her preparations for the second 50 miles. I had decided to call my wife, Mariana, and let her know that things were not going as well as I had hoped, and that a nickel buckle would not be in my future. If I had to peg a finishing time for her to come by the park to pick me up, it would be around 33 hours at the very earliest. I still felt good and was in good spirits, but told her about my numerous trips off trail. She suggested that I take some Imodium, which was in my pack. Of course, why did I not think of that? Guess I thought/hoped things would stabilize and it would not be necessary. So I took two of them, washing them down with Mountain Dew and Ensure. End of problem. I changed socks per my plan, appalled to find that my feet were almost black from the fine dirt that had filtered through both the shoes and the socks. The tape on my big toes was largely intact so I did not mess with it, and then put on a fresh pair of Injinji socks. I changed from my lightweight short-sleeved shirt to my long-sleeved Rockledge Rumble shirt from a few years back, which has a half zipper down the front. I noted that Letha also had changed to a similar shirt on from the same event. I stuffed the fanny pack which held my camera into my drop bag, I

had taken enough pictures that I did not need to carry it any further. Tied my shell around my waist, donned my headlight and carried the flashlight in my hand, since darkness was falling fairly quickly. In the last few miles, I debated about changing to my bottle carrier at the turnaround, which was my original plan. I finally decided that I would stay with the hydration vest. I knew my shell would fit over it, so that was no issue. I decided that the shell, when tied around my waist, would interfere with bottle access. This is not an insurmountable problem, but was something with which I did not want to have to contend for hours on the trail. This stop cost me about 37 minutes, but it was worth it to get regrouped mentally and physically for the second half of the event. I truthfully told Mariana that I had never felt better after 50 miles, and I attributed it to being made aware of my weight loss due to dehydration and my concerted efforts to counteract it. She had watched the weather report recently and said that there were a few showers in the area, but that they were to the South and East and it was unlikely that I would be affected. This was a good thing, something I had wondered about, since storms can form with little warning at high elevations. Aid station volunteers are usually too busy to have the latest weather updates even in the unlikely event that they have a TV nearby.

A young lady runner was in the first aid station near where I was changing socks. She was on a cot, shivering under a blanket and being fed warm broth. I had noticed her earlier in the race flying down the trail to the Red House. As I admired her departing form, I thought that she looked like a gifted trail runner by the manner in which she fearlessly attacked the fairly technical terrain. She had fallen victim to digestion issues, her day was done. A shame, she would undoubtedly have won a nickel buckle.

I asked for directions for the way to the trail (things look different in the fading daylight) and headed out for another 50 miles. I had grown chilly and stiff during my regrouping exercise in the S/F area, so I took the shell from around my waist and put it on. About the time I felt I had loosened up and could start running again, the climb to Marlette Peak began. Well, heck, there was no running now, too steep. So I settled in to power walk it at my fastest sustainable speed. The last rays of the sun were long gone at this point and it was me and my lights, alone on the trail. Not many of the folks behind me would be passing me at this stage of the game. We had all sorted ourselves out according to speed in the early going and, barring some infusion of energy from sources unknown (steroids?), we would stay in our relative places pretty much for the next 50 miles. The inbound leg of the trail into the S/F area which includes Snow Valley Peak is on a path which roughly parallels the outbound one I was on currently. So I did not meet the late 50 miler finishers still coming in. I was at last alone on a remote trail in the middle of a country that was strange to me. There were no runners lights ahead and none behind as far as I could see. This was finally what I like best about trail running, just me against the trail, sort of mano a mano (if you somehow forget about the aid stations and other aspects of a supported event!)

The trail was obvious in most places, but the race management had done a good job of marking it anyway, to remove all doubt. Something I appreciate a lot. Instead of the usual glowsticks which are standard equipment in the nighttime hours of most long events, the RD had obtained streamers with reflectorized yellow rectangles at their ends. One of these was in view almost constantly. It did not take much light at all for them to stand out from their dark surroundings like a beacon. With a little wind, they moved back and forth. Sometimes other streamers would flutter in front of them and give them a blinking appearance. They were much brighter than glowsticks, and there were literally thousands of them on the course. I predict that we will see more of these in future races.

It was the night after a full moon, so the moon was still quite bright when it came out from behind the scattered clouds. I don't trust my running ability in the half light, so I continued to rely on headlight and flashlight. Most of the nighttime hours were spent in trying to make decent progress down the trail and in adjusting my clothing to fit the constantly-changing conditions. The half-zipper on my shirt went up and down like a yo-yo, the shell went on and off several times. It's all about staying warm but not sweating any more than necessary, and getting chilled.

I cycled through Tunnel Creek and headed down the Red House Loop alone. I met two runners coming back on my way down, otherwise I had the entire loop to myself. The vegetation seemed a lot closer to the trail the second time than I remember it on the first pass. There was not a lot of breeze here, so the climb out would be hot, despite the cooler night time temperatures. I was much more aware the second

time of the details of the trail. There were a couple of places where you had to carefully step around some water crossings. No real problems there, but I did not relish getting my feet wet which could throw another unwelcome complication into the mix. It seemed even farther down in elevation this time, and I had also not realized the amount of climbing that was necessary to get to the house. Though I was alone, the trail was dusty enough that occasionally my headlamp would illuminate dust that only I could have generated. Eventually the Red House appeared, with a solitary volunteer. I reported my bib number and thanked him for being there. We exchanged some comments about the toughness of the loop and then I moved on, focused on getting it done. The next section of trail has an above ground water main off to the side of the trail which I had noticed the first time. I didn't remember it being very long, but in the dark I noticed that it parallels the trail for a really long time. Finally, when I was beginning to wonder if I had somehow lost the trail, the inbound and outbound trails merged and the climb out was on. I glanced at my watch and trudged on. 25 minutes of solid effort putting one foot not very far in front of the other eventually got me to where the trail leveled out. I saw the lights of Tunnel Creek in the distance, I had made it and this "Taste of Hell" was over for me. There would be other climbs, but they would be in the daylight, and would not be as severe. I noticed some medium-sized logs in the trail and thought how odd they looked. Then I realized they were arranged in an arrow pattern, pointing me in the correct way to the aid station. I was about to go many yards off course. Appreciate that, fellas.

I came in and went through my routine, taking a little longer due to the darkness and not being able to readily see the contents of my drop bag. I swapped my shell for one that was slightly heavier and newer. In its zippered pockets were lightweight gloves. It was to get me through whatever awaited me on the exposed higher elevations that lie ahead. I was at that point in my race where nothing really sounded good to eat. I knew I should take on some calories, but wrongly thought that I had enough in reserve to get the next section done. So I took only a small cup of broth. It tasted good, but there were not many calories in it, and I was anxious to get going. I noticed quite a bit of activity in the first aid tent about then. While I was getting ready to go, a huge diesel pickup truck, loaded with people who were dropping from the race, headed slowly out, the cab and bed loaded with at least 10 folks whose day was done. It was about 3:00 AM. As I left, a runner and her male pacer were just behind me. I stopped to make an equipment adjustment and allowed them to get ahead of me. We were going about the same pace, so I was with them for about a mile or so. They evidently did not know each other and he was apparently a local person. I grew tired of unintentionally eavesdropping on their 'getting acquainted' conversation. I thought I could do better, so I asked to take the lead and they obligingly stepped to the side. I put it into gear and put some distance between us. I was alone again in a fairly short time. In the distance many miles to the North, I could see rain falling from clouds illuminated by the moon. I saw one lightning flash, but never heard the thunder. So it was many miles distant. I did not see any more lightning and that was as close as we got to inclement weather, thank goodness.

I was now well into the 9 mile out and back section to Mt. Rose. Not far away in the predawn darkness, I heard a woodpecker at work on a dead tree. The sound was loud enough that the impact on the bird's head must have been quite severe. I surmised that the older birds of that breed surely must slur their speech, and maybe fly with a bit of a stagger, like the gait of aging boxers, the effects of accumulated impacts over a lifetime.

An occasional sub-30 hour finisher, usually accompanied by his/her pacer came toward me. These guys earned their nickel buckles, they were running when I could not (or dared not, due to the dicey footing). We usually exchanged encouraging comments, something I like about trail running. No matter how poorly you feel (and probably look), someone is always there to tell you that you are doing a "good job."

I had figured that I would be getting to Mt. Rose about daybreak and it was slowly starting to get light. With the sun coming up soon, I expected to get my second wind and a renewed resolve to get it done that accompanies a new day. I was looking forward to Mt. Rose, not only because it was the three-quarters point, but also to stop, regroup and recharge. I was seriously low on energy and was now pretty hungry. My feet had also been bothering me a lot due to some rocks that had found their way into my shoes despite the presence of gaiters.

Arriving at Mt. Rose, I got what I needed from a very attentive volunteer and was invited to take a seat near a warming stove, which felt very pleasant. Downed the liquids, and went through the lengthy process of taking off my shoes and brushing off my socks and groping around inside my shoes for small rocks that felt like boulders. You know the ones. Put them back on, retied, re-gaitered and stood up ready to refill my hydration vest and be on my way. The volunteer asked if I wanted a grilled cheese sandwich. Sounded good, so I took one and headed out, feeling pretty dang recharged. He mentioned that I was about 43 minutes ahead of cutoff at that point. His words did not really sink in until I was on the trail across the meadow, headed for a moderate climb back onto the trail proper. I fished out my pace chart. I thought I had well over an hour until cutoff, but I realized, in that panic-stricken moment, that I had been reading my own chart wrong! The human mind has an amazing ability to see what it wants/expects to see, and I expected to see that I had plenty of time to get this thing done. The very last thing I wanted was to be pushing the cutoff times from one aid station to the next. So I retrieved my game face from wherever it had gone and vowed to make up some time on the next section of trail. I knew that the cutoff times were established on a pace of ~21 minutes per mile. I knew I could do better, and had to do better. I wanted an hour's cushion between me and the cutoff times, to provide a safety margin for the tough climbs that awaited from Tunnel Creek to Hobart, and from Hobart to Snow Valley Peak. So I set about making up lost time.

A couple of things happened in this section of trail near Mt. Rose. I passed Catra Corbett and later Letha on my way into Mt. Rose. Letha looked strong and I knew she had it in the bag. On my way out, after the lengthy stop at the aid station, I passed the runner and pacer I had passed after Tunnel Creek, on their way in. They looked to be in good shape in the daylight. I also realized that the time I took to take my shoes off and clear them out had done little good. Evidently the rocks had infiltrated my socks and were still with me. I'll just have to tune them out and hope they gravitate to a benign location where they won't be a problem. Hey, it could happen! In my present situation, I just could not agree to taking several more precious minutes to clear them out, just for my own comfort, I would have to make the best of it, period.

I hustled down the trail noting each semi-familiar landmark as I passed it, feeling that I was making decent progress. Bikers had been asked by a sign near the trailhead to use the trail only on even-numbered days. Well, guess what. It was now the 20th, and here they came. Even though it was relatively early Sunday morning, there were a lot of them out and about. The decomposed granite which comprised the trail surface gave some warning of their approach, emitting a "ssssss" sound I had not heard on trails in Texas. The tires would raise a small dust cloud as they passed, multiple tires raising larger clouds. The riders were generally somewhat better-mannered than I am used to, too. Some of them even knew of the event and commented on it. The only section where biking was permitted was the 9 miles from Mt. Rose to Tunnel Creek, so the exposure was limited.

At Tunnel Creek, I stashed my lights and shell and changed into a short-sleeved shirt. I checked my watch and my pace card and satisfied myself that I had established an hour's cushion between me and the cutoff times, even though the aid station was in the latter stages of being torn down. The volunteer took a seat next to me to advise me that I had 28 minutes before cutoff. WHAT??? It can't be! I was certain that I had almost exactly an hour. She went and checked a binder somewhere and eventually came back and assured me I was right after all, she had misread the times. (Sorry about your cardiac arrest, sir!) I asked about the next two cutoffs and she told me what the times were. One agreed, the other was 10 minutes shy of what I thought it should have been, but I can absorb 10 minutes. I might have miscopied the time, or the RD may have changed it at some point. It didn't matter, I was determined to get it done regardless.

About then another runner with whom I had swapped places several times earlier in the race came into the A/S with his pacer. I called him by name and wished him well as I headed out. His pacer was getting a lot of attention for his runner, and things seemed to be happening in fast-forward mode for them. Not far down the trail they caught up to me. I can power-walk faster than most, but these guys were really moving. The pacer asked if I wanted to hook up with them and I told him that I did not think I could hold their pace. I thanked him anyway and they moved on. They were out of sight within a few minutes. The fact that I saw them shortcut a switchback and that the pacer was carrying the runner's Camelbak gave

me a little satisfaction that I did not become a part of that. He eventually finished over an hour ahead of me, but still got the bronze buckle, same as me.

The extended climb to the Snow Valley Peak was uneventful after cycling through Hobart. I held my time through Hobart and lost a little ground getting to Snow Valley Peak. I was still under weight but making slight progress on my deficit. I idly wondered why they bothered to weigh anyone with less than 7 miles to go. But they weighed me there, and again at the finish. The decent to Spooner Trailhead can only be called interminable. It went on and on to the point where I seriously began to wonder if I was ever going to get there. With the decent, the rocks in my socks were really bothering me, due to the increased pressure on the front part of my foot where the rocks settled. I finally had enough, found a place where I could sit with my feet slightly elevated (so I could reach them), and took my socks off, brushed off my bare feet and put them back into the shoes. Re-gaitered and retied and started out. The expected relief was not there. Aughhhh! I had forgotten to clear my shoes, and some new rocks were present. This would have to do, the end just can't be that much farther. The runner and pacer I had passed in the darkness passed me while I was taking care of my feet, they were moving well. There were occasional hikers on the trail pretty much throughout the event. Only two of them, on the first day, looked like they had the equipment to be traversing the whole trail. Near the end of the event, there were many more out for a day hike. Some of them knew about the event and gave encouraging comments or asked questions. A couple of light sprinkles instantly brought out a variety of raingear from the hikers. To me it felt good, and I continued on without breaking stride. I asked a young man who seemed familiar with the trail how much farther was it to the trailhead. He assured me it was "just ahead." About a half mile later it finally appeared. The youthful volunteers cheered me on and told me that they would be expecting me at the finish line. I made the turn and was determined to not lose any more time. I knew it would be well over 34 hours, but so long as it was comfortably under 35 hours, I really did not care.

About a quarter mile from the end, I looked up the trail and discovered that Mariana and her sister, Kathleen had come down the trail to walk me in. She noticed that I was leaning to one side and commented on it. I had hoped that my lean was not that obvious. We hiked it in as quickly as I could go. I heard a runner and pacer coming up behind. I did not care if they passed me, if they can still run, more power to them. Turns out they were either walking too, or not running fast enough to catch me. I crossed the finish at 34:22 and was ushered into a chair, given a commemorative glass and a can of beer from the Buckbean Microbrewery to pour into it. I helped the officials remove my bib from my shorts so they could collect the tear-off portion and turned myself over to the care of my wife and relatives who were present. We retrieved my drop bag, hiked up the incline to the parking area, and found a water faucet where I could clean up a wee tad.

It never ceases to amaze me how a little fresh water and some dry clothes can bring one back from a really spent place. Of course it took a fair amount of time, and some able assistance from my brother in law, Pat to get it done, but I felt almost human again as I slowly climbed into the rent car for the ride into Carson City and the awards ceremony.

At the awards ceremony I found out that there was a tie for the win. Two runners, Erik Skaden and Mike Wolfe, ran most of the last 25 miles together, and finished at the same time. They split the \$1,000 purse. There was a lot of obligatory rhetoric from RRCA and USATF, most of which was lost on me because I kept dozing off, but finally the buckles were handed out. There were 9 sub-24-hour finishers and more sub-30-hour finishers than sub-35-hour finishers. I really wanted to get this done in under 30 hours, but there was just no way that I could manage it. The altitude and many sustained climbs were two factors I could not overcome. I collected the third from last of the bronze buckles and was glad to get it. In my mind, there was never any doubt.

I liked the course and the event, but will not be coming back for another try for a nickel buckle. There are too many other hundreds out there, each with it's own character, and I'm not sure how many more this aging body will be able to manage. But you know, when you shine up that bronze buckle real good, and hold it in the light just right, it looks a lot like gold!

The remaining items are some miscellaneous personal notes and observations intended primarily for the use of someone interested in running the course at a future time. No particular order.

Notes/Observations/Recommendations:

- We hear a lot about “well-stocked” aid stations. These really were. I can’t think of an ultra food that was not present at the major aid stations. After dark, they went the extra mile to provide hot broth, soups and other sustenance we ultrarunners hold near and dear. Except for the Snow Valley Peak, the A/S’s were staffed by ultrarunners. They have been there, done that and know what we need. This makes all the difference. The Scouts at the exposed Snow Valley Peak get an E for effort, they had a tough job hanging in there during the long and windy night and were one of the last A/S’s to get torn down at the end. I hope they got at least part of a merit badge for their efforts. This is a well-run race altogether.
- Train, train, and train, knowing that in the end, the long steady climbs and altitude will be the deciding factor. There was a 42% attrition rate in a fairly strong field (with the addition of the WSER runners). You must be prepared for unseasonably warm temperatures, if they develop. This is something that you CAN train for in Texas, so take advantage of the ample opportunities to acclimatize to the heat. Here is the training I did 3 months before the event (note back to back long runs):

WEEK OF	MILES DURING WEEK	MILES SAT	MILES SUN
14-Apr	12.4 Indoor on treadmill	27 Trail miles	Off
21-Apr	11.2 Indoor on treadmill	27 Trail miles	Off
28-Apr	10 Indoor on treadmill	30 Trail miles	Off
5-May	14 Indoor on treadmill	30 Trail miles	Off
12-May	12.4 Indoor on treadmill	30 Trail miles	20 Trail miles
19-May	11 Outside in sun	Memorial Holiday	Memorial Holiday
26-May	11 Outside in sun	18 Trail miles	18 Trail miles
2-Jun	11 Outside in sun	25 Trail miles	Off
9-Jun	16.5 Outside in sun	30 Trail miles	20 Trail miles
16-Jun	5 Outside in sun	19.5 Trail miles	30 Trail miles
23-Jun	5.5 Outside in sun	Michigan trip	Michigan trip
30-Jun	Michigan trip	Michigan trip	18 Trail miles
7-Jul	11 Outside in sun	Off	Off

- Acclimatization to the altitude requires something of the order of 3 weeks. It's all about red blood cell count, just a few days won't make that much difference. It's just a wild card of this event, thrown in to make things interesting.

- The effect of this much altitude was that I was breathing heavily for almost any exertion. I am not used to breathing in on every other step and exhaling on alternate steps. This was the usual case during most of the event.

My stamina was reduced because of the lower oxygen content. This was most noticeable during the tough climbs where I ground to a halt sometimes, then was winded as soon as I started up again. My heart rate was relatively low, but I was breathing hard, something I had not experienced before. I think this tells me my muscles could have done more, but they did not have the oxygen they needed for efficient use.

When the event was over, my throat was sore for several days, to the point that I thought I might be coming down with a summer cold (yuck). Thankfully, it did not materialize.

- A 70-ounce hydration bladder was about the right size for me, a moderately heavy drinker. The A/S's are close enough together that it can be refilled often enough. I saw several with at least one handheld in addition to the same unit I had.

Ice was available at most A/S's after midmorning, it helped the water to stay palatable. Drain your drinking tube back into the bladder so that the water in the tube does not get warm, and drink, drink, drink!

- Nathan hydration vests seemed very popular at this race. Only saw 3 – 4 Camelbaks but dozens of the Nathan units. Their bite valves are not as good as the Camelbak product, so I would consider using a Camelbak 70 oz. bladder in the Nathan vest, I noticed this is what Letha used. Even with careful filling, the bottom of the bladder pouch seemed to be constantly wet. Don't know if my relatively new unit leaks or what. In the low humidity it was not an issue, but could have been, under other circumstances. Need to find out what's going on there.

One advantage of the Nathan product is that the load is carried higher and your waist is unencumbered. I took advantage of this during the daylight hours to carry my camera in a fanny pack. Later, my shell went around my waist, neither competed for the cumbersome waist belt that is a part of some hydration vests.

- I was surprised to find that the water from the condo tasted quite brackish on the trail. I dumped it and refilled at the earliest opportunity. It tasted OK from the faucet, but was terrible on the trail. Go figure.
- I stayed with water this time, rather than messing with the various sports drink powders. They are messy, time consuming, and require additional planning to have them with you when you need them. Then your hands are often sticky for having to mess with the stuff. I seemed to do OK with only water this time.
- Caffeine starvation worked like a champ. Highly recommended, if you are a user. 2 weeks worked for me, you might be OK with less.

Also recommend that alcohol be suspended from your diet a week or so prior, to ensure that you get maximum rest from your sleeping hours.

- I took my time at the aid stations. Time passes quickly. In retrospect, it was probably a bit extravagant in the second half, and in a close race with the clock, it might have done me in. (See the table below.) I did learn the value of staying hydrated, it really helps you to stay in the game. Realized through this experience that I have been under-hydrating most of my training runs. Maybe I need to put that extra bathroom scale in the trunk of the car to have with me on my training runs. Weighing periodically during long training runs is not a bad idea.

AID STATION	MINUTES
Hobart Road	2
Tunnel Creek	3
Tunnel Creek	8
Mt. Rose Trailhead	6
Tunnel Creek	19
Hobart Road	6
Snow Valley Peak	10
Spooner Trailhead	0
Start/Finish area	37
Hobart Road	13
Tunnel Creek	24
Tunnel Creek	14
Mt. Rose Trailhead	20
Tunnel Creek	19
Hobart Road	3
Snow Valley Peak	5
Spooner Trailhead	0

- Ensure over ice was my main source of calories and I did not have a visit from my good buddy Ralph the whole time, for a pleasant change.
- This race is unofficially rated as approximately equivalent to Western States in difficulty. I thought that if I came away from this experience in relatively good shape, that I would throw into the lottery for next year for States. It's not gonna happen. I was chastened by the severity of the course and decided that I was not ready for 'States. One of the last things I want to do is go into WSER half-prepared, not finish and keep someone else out of the running who could have finished and earned that coveted buckle.
- I knew the course would be dusty, so I took the advice of John Vonhof (author of "Fixing Your Feet") and did not use any lubricant on my feet this time. Lube tends to attract and hold grit and is a bad idea. The approach worked well (and there was a lot of grit out there). I had planned to change socks at the 50 mile mark and that was probably a good idea. A spare pair of trail shoes were in my Tunnel Creek drop bag along with another pair of sox. Unfortunately, that was where my small shaker of foot powder was, too. Despite obsessing over the details for a week, I had not realized that I should have had foot powder at both locations. It was not a deal breaker, but just shows that you can miss some minor details no matter how careful you are.

The episode with the rocks in the socks may be at least partly due to the sock material pilling up, as synthetic materials sometimes do. I still have not sorted this out, but it's something to be aware of. The socks were relatively new, did not have that many miles on them. I do know that it was quite uncomfortable toward the end.

- Dust gets in your eyes, too. Have some eye drops in your drop bag at the end. I had some, but I was so tired that I could not locate them in the disarranged drop bag at the end. So my eyes smarted for hours unnecessarily. If this is something that bothers you, a word to the wise.
- I had both heard of and seen firsthand, the condition known as Runner's Lean. This was my first experience with it personally. An A/S volunteer at Tunnel Creek called out, "You're leaning!" as I came into the station. I had suspected as much and did not think too much about it. I still had ~14 miles to go at that point. The condition got progressively worse. When I focused on it, I could easily straighten up, but as soon as my mind wandered elsewhere, there I'd go, leaning to

the left again. A really odd situation. It can affect your balance, but fortunately the course was not technical enough that this was an issue.



**LISTING TO PORT,
WITHIN SIGHT OF THE FINISH**

- I was the oldest finisher out of the field of 64. Several folks older than me signed on, but they did not complete the journey.
- Here is my clothing and equipment list:
 - Brooks Cascadia 3 Trail Shoes, an OK but not great choice; go with what has worked for you in training, obviously
 - Injinji sox, black, crew length
 - Gaiters (these are a must)
 - REI wicking underwear, boxer brief style
 - Columbia medium weight shorts, with inner mesh liner, two pockets and a rear zippered pocket.
 - Short-sleeve silk-weight Patagonia shirt, for day use
 - Long sleeve half-zipper Patagonia RLR shirt, for night
 - Cotton bandana
 - LL Bean mesh-lined shell, for night
 - Hind runners gloves for night
 - OR desert hat, with provisions for sun-drape which I did not use. This protected my head from low-hanging branches and shielded my eyes when the sun was low.
 - Nathan HPL 70-oz hydration vest

The temperatures were noted as being ~10 degrees warmer than normal this year. This equipment was about right for the conditions. Rain or a storm on the exposed stretches especially at night might have taxed the selections here, but this worked well for this year. I did have a poncho in my drop bag at Tunnel Creek and it probably would have helped me get by if needed. Sunglasses are not recommended due to the frequent changes from full sun to shadow. My eyes had trouble adjusting to the changing light levels.

- The local microbrew that was featured in this race was the Buckbean Brewery (<http://www.buckbeanbeer.com/>). If you are a Willie Nelson fan (aren't we all?), check out the website (under "Beer Songs"). If that's not my main man Willie singing part of "Beer for My Horses" I'll eat your 10 gallon Stetson. An agreeable ditty, at any rate.



**TRAILGEEZE SELF-PORTRAIT, ON RETURN FROM MT. ROSE
(SHOULD PROBABLY LEAVE THESE TO MY SON, THE EXPERT!)**