



Hardrock Hundred Mile Endurance Run

July 14-16, 2006

A Double Hardrock by [Peter Bakwin](#)

My horoscope read: "You're about to go from a phase of relative inertness to one of mind-jiggling adventure." Indeed. Standing by the hardrock out front of Silverton High School near dawn on Wednesday, July 12, 2006, I knew I was in for that and more. So, it was with a mixture of fear and excitement that I set off at 6:00 that morning on my attempt to run a double Hardrock. All the planning, preparing, worrying and fussing was done. All that was left to do was run.

I called it the "Rockhard Hardrock 2 Hundred" (RHHR2H, thanks to Jack Jewell). I would run the first lap (the Rockhard Hundred) counter-clockwise, the race being clockwise this year. After completing the first lap, I would run the Hardrock race, finishing 200 miles within 96 hours. Each lap had the same rules: 48 hour cut-off, aid only at locations of the Hardrock aid stations, pacers allowed from Grouse Gulch on the first lap, Ouray on the second. No muling. While I had excellent crew support for both laps, I did not have aid at Pole Creek, Engineer Pass, Virginius Pass or Putnam Basin on the first lap (these are hike-in aid stations at Hardrock.)

Why? This is of course a loaded question for any ultrarunner. I just liked the symmetry of the double Hardrock. And, it seemed really, really hard. I didn't know if it would be possible for me to complete this run. I knew that it would take everything I had to give. I had to try.

ROCKHARD HUNDRED

My strawman plan for the first lap was to follow target splits for a 38:30 finish, but hopefully to sleep for about 90 minutes in Ouray, and so actually arrive at the finish in 40 hours (10pm Thursday). That would leave time for a significant sleep break before setting out on the second lap. I hoped the energy of the race would pull me through the second lap somehow, maybe even allowing some time for sleep on the 3rd and 4th nights. Maybe.

The imposed slow pace was very pleasant at first. Cruising over the first 13,000 foot pass was a joy. In any other race this 3700 foot ascent would be a mind-bogglingly big climb (it is bigger than Hope Pass at Leadville), but at Hardrock it is about average. A couple of mountain goats stared at me near the Little Giant mine. I made myself run very slowly down the steep, rocky trail into Cunningham Gulch. I thought about Kirk Apt's classic line: "Save your quads, you will need them later."

The next few climbs and descents are really not bad by Hardrock standards, though the altitude is high, all well above 11,000 feet. Between Maggie Gulch and Pole Creek elk had trampled most of the course markings, but I knew the route more or less and it was not hard to follow. Trotting through the high meadows I startled a few of the culprits. (The Hardrock course is marked days and even weeks in advance.)

Wild flowers were everywhere. The sky was deep blue and dotted with clouds. There was not a soul anywhere. I felt very alone, and very peaceful and alive. Hours and miles went by.

At Sherman I met my excellent crew again. Chris and Carole were rookies at crewing for ultras, but I knew they would be great and indeed they never missed a beat. They had everything ready, and responded perfectly and cheerfully to my every need.

Running up the Cinnamon Pass road to Burrows Park was hot, but was the only time the weather was uncomfortable that first day.

Handies. One of the major challenges of Hardrock is Handies Peak. It is 14,000 feet high, and a big climb in both

directions. And, it kicked my butt. How could this feel so hard? I picked my way down into Grouse Gulch, feeling worked. Fortunately, Buzz Burrell was there to pace me for the next section. Buzz has been injured for months, and had 2 surgeries, but said he just couldn't stay away. When I told him I didn't have a pacer lined up for this section he just dropped everything and drove down to help.

We made it to Ouray around 12:30 a.m. My wife, Stephanie Ehret, and our friend (and crew for the 2nd lap) Kevin Taverner had joined Chris & Carole. My plan was to nap there for about 90 minutes in the back of Kevin's pick-up. But, when I laid down my nose immediately stuffed up and I sneezed several times. With the obstruction to my breathing I was only able to sleep for about 20 minutes over the next hour. I got up, roused Stephanie from a deep sleep, and we took off up the Camp Bird road at shortly after 2:00 a.m.

Things were going south. I felt like crap walking up the easy road. I was cold, sleepy and had no energy. And, the thought of returning back over Handies on the second lap seemed out of the question. At only 60 miles I wondered if I could even complete the first lap. At Governor Basin I climbed into the front seat of the crew vehicle and slumped. I didn't think I could even make it over Virginus Pass.

My mind was full of fear and doubt. If I even made it over Virginus how was I going to do 3 more huge climbs? And then start another lap? Handies Peak loomed huge in the landscape of my psyche, like Mount Doom in Mordor. No, it was impossible. I knew what was needed was to stay in the present moment and just keep taking forward steps, but just knowing that does not make it happen.

But, it was 5:30 a.m., and I realized that you simply can not quit at 5:30 a.m. Of course you feel like crap. Your body says you are supposed to be asleep. Never drop at 5:30 a.m. So, I got out of the car, and Chris and I set off to ascend Virginus Pass.

And, indeed my spirits rose with the Sun that morning. We made it over Virginus (no snow this year) and then ran on down into Telluride. With 28 miles to go I thought "OK, I can finish the first lap."

Stephanie went with me over Oscars Pass, another huge climb of 4400 feet. But, the relentlessly steep, rocky jeep road down into Chapman Gulch was much worse. We took it as easy as possible, but the unyielding grade just hammered my tired legs. Steph had to endure a lot of whining and complaining from me.

Chris joined me again over Grant Swamp. Climbing up was OK, but on the downhill I found that my quads were so sore that I could no longer run at all. It was very slow across the Kamm Traverse and into the KT aid stop. "I can't do this," I said to Steph when the others weren't listening.

Buzz would take me over the final climb and on into Silverton. We have done many adventures together, and Buzz reads me well. He could see exactly what was going on with me, and gave me a good pep talk. "You can finish this thing. Of course its going to be hard, but you just need to focus on getting to the next aid station. And, don't be afraid to take ibuprofen." And, in fact as the temperature dropped my legs felt better and I was able to trot the downhills again. By the Mineral Creek crossing I was feeling OK, and the icy water woke us up for the last 2 miles to the finish.

We arrived at 11:22 p.m., for a time of 41:22. The support crew and a few friends were there to cheer us in. The race clock was counting down to the start: 6 hours and 38 minutes to go. Intimidating.

The efficient crew did everything for me. I was able to get a shower, a good meal and be in bed by midnight at the home of our dear friends Ernst and Emily Baer.

HARDROCK HUNDRED

In the morning all doubts had vanished. I had no idea if I could finish this sucker, but I knew I would start. I would just take it one step at a time, one aid station at a time. In fact I was not thinking any of these things, I was just gearing up for the start. I put on my shoes; they were still wet from the crossing of Mineral Creek just a few hours earlier.

The nervous energy at the starting area was palpable, but I felt totally calm. After all, I was halfway done. I lined up at

the back of the pack.

Hardrock. Hardrock... It is difficult for some one who has not been there or spent a lot of time in the high mountains to comprehend Hardrock. The climbs at Hardrock are steeper, the descents are longer, the footing is worse. Hardrock is truly relentless. Fine runners drop out because they are afraid of falling off a cliff, or being hit by lightning. Others are simply worn down. To finish Hardrock you have to look deep within yourself and find something powerful that motivates you. You need to find a true connection with the mountains, the thin air, the rushing streams, the icy cold nights with their crystal, star-lit skies. You need to touch the softness that hides in those dark cliffs and deep chasms. Leave your self images behind and surrender yourself to what is. The race clock is ticking. But, time is an illusion. All that exists is the present moment. We can experience neither the past nor future directly, only the present is real. Yet, we try to dwell in either the past, through our memories, or the future, through our hopes and dreams. By looking to the past and future we constantly reject the present, which is reality. As Ram Dass said, "Be here now."

So, Hardrock is a whole new deal. Its fun running with the other Hardrockers, the mid-packers and back-of-the-packers. I get a chance to chat with Roger Wrublik, Matt Mahoney, John Dewalt, Mike Dobies and others. I run most of the first leg with my friend and neighbor Paul Gross. A lot of people know about my double project, but I feel a little embarrassed -- there's still a long long way to go. "You're the Double Guy!" is a frequent comment. Steph says she's afraid of becoming known as the "Double Guy's Wife".

Its hot! Climbing up Oscars is brutal. Steep, south facing, and HOT. Biting flies follow us all the way to the top of the pass at 13,100 feet. Runners are wilting from the heat and effort.

Telluride is great. So many friends are there at the aid station helping out their friends and family in the race. Very cool. Kevin and Steph are my main support crew now, so I am in the best hands possible. I feel like a Indy racer in the pit as they attend to my every need. Go!

Over Virginius and down the Camp Bird Road. I fall in step with Rich Collins, a Hardrock virgin from Maine. How these guys come out from sea level and run this thing I just don't know. Rich is fun to talk to as we putter along the road.

I decide not to sleep at Ouray as originally planned, but to push on to Grouse Gulch in order to sleep during the toughest hours of night. Ryan Cooper will pace me now, and with Rich in tow we head out of town and into the night. This is a big one -- 5400 vertical feet up to Engineer Pass.

Going up Bear Creek I'm practically falling asleep on my feet, and so is Ryan. But, I don't want to take caffiene because I'm afraid it will keep me from sleeping at Grouse. We laugh, silly with fatigue. When Rich wants to pause for 2 minutes to get some food, I lie down on the trail and nearly fall asleep. Man, that feels good.

Arriving at Grouse Gulch well before 4:00 a.m., we're way ahead of the 48-hour targets. I eat some food, set my alarm for 6:00, and climb into the sleeping bag in the back of Kevin's pick-up.

I awaken before the alarm, Kevin rousts my next pacer, Dan Brillon, and we are on the trail again in the icy morning air. Up up up. Handies has haunted my mind for 2 days, but now I don't ask questions, I just climb. Reaching the top there is the joy of accomplishment and connection with the vast open spaces and mountains and sky. Dan is excited by the endless mountains we see in all directions. Dan says he wants to run Hardrock.

Its becoming a blur now. Time does not exist. Dan and I are suspended in the vastness of all that is in this moment. There are mountains and flowers and rushing streams, marmots, birds, sky, wind. And this trail, this endless trail. With each footfall the world is recreated totally new, everything is new.

At Sherman I thank Dan and pick up my last pacer, Stephanie. This is it, 28 miles to go. I have dreamed of this moment. Stephanie and I have been through everything together in the 27 years of our partnership. And now we will share this thing, this gigantic vastness of Being that exists everywhere, but which I find most easily in the wild mountain landscapes, which comes closer and closer to my awareness as the miles and hours go by. This is what I have been searching for. This is why I came here, why I have done battle with The Beast.

Stephanie & I leave the aid station and walk up the switchbacking trail through the woods. On and on, up and up. As we leave the trees thunder is rumbling and the sky is dark. Rain. We push on as best I can to get over Cataract-Pole Pass to a less exposed position. Dropping down into Pole Creek I'm having a lot of trouble. I am just SO TIRED. The trail is slippery from the rain, travel is slow. I think its going to be a long night.

We arrive at Pole Creek aid station as the rain lets up, and plop down on the grass. The cheerful volunteers help my mood as they serve up noodle soup, but I still feel so, so tired. Why are they here? What do they get out of serving a bunch of grumpy runners out here in the middle of nowhere in the rain?

Walking through the wide meadows above Pole Creek I notice something gnawing at my chest. What is this? There is a softness here, tenderness. Sensing deeper, it is like an ocean of sweetness in my chest. Love. I feel supported. So many people came out to selflessly help me in my quest for the double Hardrock. No one ever complained, they just did exactly what needed to be done. And, all these volunteers are here to help the runners achieve their dreams, no questions asked. No one asks "Why?" No one says these dreams are not worth it. The RD puts in hundreds of hours a year so we can be here in communion with the mountains, so we can challenge our limits and test ourselves to the very core. Support. Now I feel the mutual support of all the runners, everyone spread out over tens of miles of mountain trails and tundra. We need each other, we all hope that every one of us will succeed.

Now it is deeper. There is a universal support, a loving, unconditional support for each and every one of us. I see that the true nature of the universe is tender and compassionate. All we have to do to experience that is open our hearts. There is no need to struggle and fuss. There is no need for fear. We are all one, and that oneness is beauty and love. As we talk, Stephanie feels it too.

We are at the Cunningham Gulch aid station before dark! I am astonished by our progress. I have surrendered completely to the loving support that is all around me, all around everyone and everything, it is the true nature of everything. Time to do the last climb.

The day fades into night, and we ascend slowly into the inky blackness. Up and up, until it seems we will step into the stars. Finally, there is no more up. We pick our way across the saddle and down the often poor trail into Little Giant Basin. When we hit the jeep road we are ready to run. Understanding has transformed me. There is pain, but it is meaningless. There is nothing to do but run down the hill. That's what were are doing, so that is what exists, and there is strength to do what needs to be done. It all seems very ordinary, very calm and very peaceful. There is nothing for the mind to do. There is no excitement or upwelling of emotion at the impending finish. Just run.

We crank it out and in no time we are on the Beaver Ponds Trail, 2 miles from the finish line. It is a blast, it feels like we are absolutely flying along the single track trail.

One mile from the finish there is suddenly no energy left. I am stumbling, as though drunk. It is funny, and I laugh at how ridiculously worn-out I feel. I need to sleep. We stumble along slowly. There is no need to worry. We will be done soon.

We hit the ski hill and run down into town. Though I have been this way many times, nothing looks familiar. My brain is completely gone. We turn left on Reese Street and can see the finish. People are cheering. Then we are done.

42:50. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect to finish the second lap in 42:50! I can't believe it. What happened? We have hugs all around, Kevin, Stephanie, Emily, Ernst, everyone. Dale Garland hangs a finisher's medal around my neck and asks "How do you feel?" "Supported," I answer, "I feel supported."

Thanks!!!

Peter Bakwin
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Boulder, CO

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