



Hardrock Hundred Mile Endurance Run

July 11-12, 2008

Run report by [Craig Slagel](#)

Hardrock is something special, its more than any other 100 mile race I know of. Why? Well, here people arrive up to a month early, take over the small town of Silverton (a small mining town sitting at 9300ft that looks as if it has been preserved since the early 1900s), spend days learning the trails and acclimatizing to the high elevation leading up to race day. Over this time friendships are built with both the locals and other runners. I was living in Silverton for almost a month before Hardrock.

I got to run a little more than 1/3 of the course and was scared. Talking to Hardrock finishers and non-finishers I thought I had an idea how tough Hardrock would be, in reality I had no idea.

Going into most ultras, I know that there's a good chance I will finish, or roughly how long it will take me. With Hardrock I had no idea, some people had told me sub 40hr should be no problem, others told be maybe I should just stay in town.

There are risks with hardrock, a few places a mistake could be fatal, the good news is that nobody has died at Hardrock (yet). There are 12 passes over 12,000ft, most of them are around 13,000ft, one is Handies at 14,048ft. I had done a few of the trail marking parties, hike/ran some of the tough sections and still felt far from ready. Unlike the some other more eager runners I wasn't camping at 11,000 to 12,000ft or hiking up every mountain in the area. I felt slower running down the technical trails than others. The one strength I clung to was my abnormal ability to keep going without much sleep and often come back strong after a bad patch.

6am Friday July 11th the with Dale Garland's "Get out of here" we were off. Chatting and enjoying the first 2 easy miles before the first climb. At mile 2 we cross Mineral Creek, holding a rope we crossed thigh deep ice cold water then start the first climb up Bear creek. I did some of this climb with Mira trail horse riding, but now with fresh legs I comfortably hiked up the hill. On the way up I got to chat to John Dewalt , at 72 running Hardrock he's a true inspiration.

The first climb went well and I felt like it was going to be a great day or 2 days, after running for almost 4 hours I arrive at the first Aid station, KT at 11.1 miles. They filled my bottle and pack and made me a tasty cheese sandwich. Off I went up to the next climb. Here you get to climb to almost 13,000ft and the views, and wildflowers were just amazing. I was having a great day and felt at home in the mountains running with so many great people that I had gotten to know over the last few weeks.

Before I knew it I was up at the next peak, this was Grant Swamp. This is also where the Joel Zucker memorial plaque is, Joel ran hardrock several times and died shortly after the race in 98. At the top I there was a mountain goat just standing on the edge of the cliff, as I climbed a little higher I realized that was what we were about to go down. It was a very steep scree slope. I really don't like scree, I tend to fall on it. Scree is loose rocks, that move as you try and walk on it. This section is listed in the manual with the words "Acrophobia and Exposure" not a good area if you have fear of heights.

Not wanting to hold everyone up too much I carefully make my way down, I tried to take a picture and fell down, scraping my arms and bruising my butt. I got up and fell again. I lay on the trail for a minute not sure how to continue realizing this was going to be really hard. Hans Dieter Weisshaar came by and gave me some tips and encouragement to continue down the slope.

Eventually I make it down, bruised and scraped but happy to have survived the first dangerous and scary section. For

the next few miles we ran over rocks and snow. Over the rocks I turned my ankles several times, eventually my left ankle seemed to be slightly sprained. I tighten my shoelace and hoped it would be ok. I couldn't believe only maybe 15 miles and Hardrock was kicking my ass. I got to run with Fred Ecks while I worked on regaining my confidence that I had lost in my falls. Eventually I made it to Chapman at 18 miles. I ate a cheese wrap and got my water filled, also had a sprite and then off I went up the hill, as it got a little steeper I realized I left my hiking pole in the aid station so I ran back to get it. I had added about half a bonus mile and decided to walk fast to make up those few minutes, this was my biggest mistake of the day. After about 30 mins of fast hiking in the heat and humidity, I started to overheat. I felt nauseas and didn't feel like eating or drinking. I ended up taking several breaks but continued to get slower and slower. Everyone seemed to be passing me. I was starting to wonder about my training, if I had enough strength or skill to even be attempting something like Hardrock.

After about 2 hours of climbing I eventually made it and started the decent. Still even on the downs I couldn't get my body to move well, so I just plodded down the trail. The San Juan mountains that Hardrock takes you through are never easy, even the descents feel longer and harder. Roads and trails are often covered in rocks, scree or shoe sucking mud. The climbs felt almost impossible followed by tough descents. After about 3 ½ hours I made it to Telluride, over 10 hours after I had started and only covered 27.8 miles. I was exhausted both physically and emotionally, the last section had taken so much out of me and on top of it I thought I was behind the 48hr schedule.

I was so happy to see my crew but didn't have the energy to show it. I knew I needed to eat and drink and get myself together. Several times, just the sight of my crew running around and helping me was almost enough to make me break down and cry. I knew I couldn't stay long or I may never leave and realized why some people never make it past Telluride. Mira walked me out of the aid station, and I teared up, telling her how good it was to see her. It took all the strength I had to walk out of the aid station and start up the next brutal climb, knowing it would be many hours before I saw my crew again. I think she knew it because she rushed me out, telling me to just get to Ouray where Flora would join me. I refocused, dried my eyes and started the job of climbing the next mountain.

It was going to be another tough climb, heading up the 13,000ft with a final very steep section that would take us to Krogers Canteen, (Virginius Pass). At least I knew the descent would be fun with glissading and a fairly runnable road section. As I started the climb I met Steve Pero, I believe his advice at that moment was key to my finish. He told me to take it easy on the climbs, go as slow as you like but keep on moving and I would be fine, ignore the 48hr pace since most people go out too fast and slow down. I didn't really believe Steve at that time but decided to slow down and just see how it went. It was a major turning point for me. I also was trying to eat a grilled cheese sandwich on the climb, it took almost an hour to just eat ¾ of the sandwich, that's was all I could take, and all I ate. It took forever to climb up to Krogers, but on the way I pass a few people as was passed by many others. I was saddened to pass my freind Chuck Wilson, who was sitting on a rock having stomach issues, I checked that he was ok and then went on. As I climbed my pace continued to slow down. The sun started to set and the heat and humidity turned to cold wind. At my pace I wasn't generating any heat and stopped to put on extra layers as well as have a little break. My energy levels were low, every step was so much effort but I feared eating too much since my stomach was starting to feel a little better.

After what seemed forever, I made it to Krogers. They recommended walking down due to slightly icy snow but the snow was soft enough and I was able to glissade down. On the way down I got to meet up and run with Joe Prusaitis who gave me some great advice, especially not to eat too much at Governors' Basin. So upon my arrival I had a few bites of pumpkin pie and a few potato chips. I also tried a gu that seemed to go down well. I had fun on the road section but was sure I had missed a turn which eventually, I saw the turn that took an interesting route under a tunnel, that I had to run through while crouched so not to hit my head and then down some steep stairs. Eventually I was on the road in Ouray heading towards my crew and ready to pick up Flora as my pacer. I was really excited knowing I would have someone joining me for the rest of the race.

Everyone said how much better I looked at Ouray, I guess I looked as bad as I felt at Telluride. I took some time to eat a little, had some soup, potatoes and took a bag of potatoes, some ginger snaps and a cheese quesadilla and filled my bottle with sprite and was off for the longer climb of the Hardrock, over 5000ft over about miles. After a few bites of the quesadilla I knew cheese no longer was working for me, and most things sweet also turned my stomach. Flora was keeping me focused and I agreed to try and eat again at the meadow and then again at the Yellow jacket mine. For over 20 miles I had just been eating barely enough to keep going, 50-100 cal's an hour. With Flora pacing and reminding me

to eat as much as possible I got back to 100 cals an hour and felt I was moving well. I ate a few gu's on the climb and finished my spite and started to feel myself again. Maybe I could do this. We smelt the camp fire and then saw Engineer aid station, I sat down and had a bowl of noodle soup, they said was vegetarian, but the bits of chicken said otherwise, I needed the calories so ate the soup and noodles and left the chicken bits. I think I also had a hot chocolate, sitting by the nice fire.

After a few minutes we were on our way, up to the Engineer pass. After that we would have a nice "runnable" decent down to Grouse. I must have been tired or low on sugar, on the road my mind started to play tricks on me, every shadow, or puddle was something else. I saw fences, or old rusty mining equipment that would disappear back to a shadow or puddle as I approached. My contacts were also having problems and when I decided to remove them I realized one was missing. Being able to see a little better with my glasses we continued down the road. Eventually we were at Grouse aid station, with Mira and Leslie happy to see us and take care of me. I also found my missing contact and put my contacts back in so I could see better. I spent some time here, to eat, again soup and sprite and avoiding everything with cheese or sweet. I knew I would need my energy for the next climbs that would take me over 13,000, down a little then up to Handies at 14,048ft. I knew once over Handies then the hardest climbs were done.

Off we went, the sun was up again and I had been going for a little more than 24hrs and had covered 58 miles. The new day and knowing this part, having some food in me and know this next section of the course brought me energy, Flora went ahead for a bit to use the bathroom, of course somehow just being alone for a few minutes I turned off course, I realized it all looked wrong and saw Flora backtracking calling me. She got me back on course after my small detour and we continued back up the mountain, quickly making it to American Pass followed by a little glissading down into American basin. We had an amazing clear blue sky and I knew the views from Handies would be great, I just didn't want to have to climb up it. It looked too hard, too long and I was going in to my second low point. Flora kept telling me how well I was doing. I was thinking everyone is going to be walking by me soon, my pace just seemed to get slower and slower. For every climb we seemed to have a drop around the corner and didn't seem to be going up. Eventually we got to the switchbacks, I wanted to get this mountain done with, I wanted to get to Sherman, I wanted it to get easier. I pushed on, I wanted to stop and take a break, but I just pushed on. We passed a few other Hardrockers, and then I could see the top, I wasn't sure it was the top but I keep going, I was a little cold but didn't stop to put extra layers on, I had to keep going. There we were there, on top of the world, Flora signed the register (I did this during course marking) and we took in the view for a moment. Just over the peak stood a Mountain Goat, I knew the day was going to get better now, I knew the hardest was over. We carefully made it down the rocky part onto a good trail and ran for a long time, then made to the road. It was hot and dusty, with Jeeps and 4wd passing us leaving dusty clouds. I knew I could run it but wasn't motivated and walked some ran some but just kept moving. I felt a hot spot or something wrong in with my foot, I eventually decided to take a look, luckily it was just a small stone that had got inside my sock. From Grouse to Sherman is almost 14 miles the longest section between aid stations. I knew Mira and Leslie were going to be at Sherman so I just wanted to get there. It took forever, the road just kept going on and on, after a while we dropped down on to a steep trail and made it to Sherman. I was so happy to be there with almost 72 miles done. I knew the next section was one of the easiest and then the last 15 miles I had done before during course marking.

At Sherman I was hungry, the first time since mile 18 I actually wanted to eat. I had soup, ginger snaps and some other stuff. I tried the mash potato but didn't want it. As I was about to leave, my hydration pack fell off my chair right into the bowl of mashed potato. I didn't really care that I now had a mashed potato covered pack but Mira ran off and cleaned it for me. I changed my socks and cleaned my feet that were doing really well considering they had been wet for the last 30+ hours. My ankle was also still sore and had been a little unstable on the last few technical climbs. I decided to take my first my first 2 Advils of the day.

I carefully crossed the log across the river and knew I would have dry feet for about an hour, then they would be wet again until the finish. The food and break and Sherman was what I needed. I'm not sure if it was the food, Advil or both but soon I felt like a new person and was on a high, feeling like the race had just started. We were moving great up the trail running every down and flat, we made to the creek crossings then up the trail to Cataract lake, this Lake sits right on the saddle between 2 peaks on the Continental Divide. Then we were on the Colorado Trail, we did countless crossings of pole Creek, some easy some a little scary due to the high and fast moving water. I started to hear voices, then saw a camp site, I knew it had to be Pole Creek Aid station, we were in and out this one fast since I wanted to get down to Maggies before it was dark. We heading up the next pass, this is where Flora started to feel a little off, she had

been with me for about 19 hours. We were still moving well but Flora was concerned the elevation may be getting to her, or the lack of sleep. I knew Hardrock is really hard for everyone and there are many unknowns so we decided to keep going. She made me promise I wouldn't let her slow me down, and if she felt there was still a problem she would stop at Cunningham and I was sure I would be able to find another pacer if needed. We made it over the pass and down to Maggies in great time. I had some yummy mashed potato and headed out quickly trying to get over the next 2 passes before darkness fell. Racing the sun we made the pass, then the next pass as the sun finally set behind the mountains, this was it, next time I saw the sun I hopefully would be back in Silverton.

Following the markers on some of the cross country sections at night were tough, my light served me well and on full brightness I could see the reflective markers well. We made it to the trail now. I just had to keep going to Cunningham. I could feel the excitement building in me. one more AS, one more pass, one more big climb. All the up's and down, highs and lows, I had plenty of time! Just have to keep on going and not do anything stupid. We get to the switchbacks and I slip on the loose gravel, I remind myself "plenty of time" "don't do anything stupid" and ease up my pace a little. Half way down the switch backs I see someone at the side of the trail. I stop to see what's up, he's a pacer, his light is broken. Since I have 3 lights I give him my emergency backup light and tell him to leave it with my crew at Cunningham. Off we run. I tell Flora how a pacer should always have a backup light. He mentions umm.. I'm still behind you. And i am relieved that i didnt mention to her any other thoughts. The lights of Cunningham come and go, as we take the switchbacks eventually we make the road, up the road and there it is the final AS. I'm so happy and so ready to be done.

It's a little after 10pm, I have almost 8 hours to go 9 miles. I get myself ready, Wendell Domain is there, he was planning to pace Chuck Wilson who unfortunately dropped in Ouray. Flora asked Wendell if he would like to pace me, he was happy to get a run in. So I ate and got ready for the final pass and Wendell got ready to run me in. I started a little before Wendell, I was getting tired and cold and had to get moving, I crossed the ice cold Cunningham creek and started the switchbacks for the final climb to 13,000ft. I started well after about 10 mins Wendell caught up to me, as did my lack of sleep. I just wanted to lie down and nap, but the trail is narrow with drop-offs not a good place for a nap. I was also cold, I was too close to the finish, I had to just keep going and fight my fatigue. At times I couldn't find the trail or markers, I was confused everything looked different in the darkness and sleep deprived haze. Wendell just kept me going, reminding me to lean into the mountain so if I slipped I would fall on the trail vs off the mountain. It took longer and felt harder to get up that mountain. I remember how easy it felt on trail marking day. I'd been going for 40 hours and been awake for 42 hours.

I just had to make it to the top, but at the top laid my last fear. Over the top was a my most feared section of the course, a steep narrow scree descent, I fell during trail marking on fresh legs during the day. Night time, half asleep, low energy left me terrified of this final challenge. I was now there, I turned my light to turbo mode, that almost turns night to day. And carefully made my way down, I slipped, but stopped myself using my pole and hands and butt, I sat there, caught my breath, and just slowly slid down on my butt, I wasn't going to risk injury this close to the finish. It took a long time for me to get off that nasty section but I made it without an incident. Now it was just a nice run to the finish which was mostly jeep road, covered in rocks and ruts. I had run this before in less than an hour, I knew I could be done in a hour if I pushed it. However, I feared 3 things if I pushed it. Wendell wouldn't be able to keep up, (of course he would), I would trip and fall on a rock (very likely), my crew wouldn't be there at the finish (somewhat likely). I decided to play it safe and just take my time, I was still fighting the fatigue. I should have really taken a break and slept for a few mins on the trail but I wanted to get back. After the long road section we were back on the trail, we crossed Arastra Gulch Stream, and ran along wet muddy trails. I was so tired I thought dirt on the road was snow. Eventually we made it to ski slope, then passed the ski lodge, and finally into town! I saw people on the street corner, but they didn't wave, cheer or even move. As I got closer I realized they were stop signs. I kept going...I turned on to Reese, my energy renewed, I ran down the street, turned on 12th, the rock was there. I bent down and kissed it, then Dale Garland placed a medal round my neck, next I kissed Mira. After 44hr:39min:59sec the adventure was over. I climbed up on to the rock for a picture, then went inside the gym to get some food, I was so hungry. Mira wanted to video all my thoughts and finish comments, but all i wanted to sit down, eat, then sleep.

Hardrock was the hardest thing I've ever done and there were so many times I really wondered, now how can I do this? How can I finish? I have a little DNF rule, as long as I can move, I will still go forward and will only stop if someone tells me to because I've finished, missed a cutoff or for medical reasons. Without my crew, pacers and the advice I got

fellow runners I don't know if I would have finished. Mira, my girlfriend helped so much and was the driving force for me to get to the next crew AS, she made it to every one, even Sherman that is around 150 mile drive each way. Leslie was so efficient and had me ready to go in no time, Flora was the ideal pacer, with her amazing sense of direction, I never had to worry about being off course when I was with her. And Wendell, there just when I needed him for those last 9 miles, guiding me along the trail, when my mind was somewhere else.

Thank you, everyone who supported me! Both at Hardrock and from afar, via email, forum or web tracking. Glad you could all be a part of this truly adventurous race!

Craig

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