



# Hardrock Hundred Mile Endurance Run

## July 11-12, 2008

### Run report by [Nick Coury](#)

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Back in January, I sent in my application for Hardrock along with my older brother Jamil. I signed up almost on a whim, knowing little about the race and not having any prior desire to run it. I guess that kind of characterizes most of my ultra career, however, as that's what happened when I ran Angeles Crest in 2007. Jamil thought Angeles Crest might be a race he wanted to do, so I said "OK" and sent in the application several months before I realized what I had committed to. I went out moderately fast there, was hobbling by mile 50 and gutted out the last 25 on pure adrenaline to cross the finish line with Jamil in 23:49, earning the 24 hour buckle and a chance to apply for Hardrock. When the lottery results for Hardrock were released, I was 44th on the wait list (Jamil was 181). I listened to some of the talk on the Hardrock email list, and I was confident I would have to be really lucky to get in. In past years, the last runner to get in has been about 39 to 42 or so on the wait list, but I decided to act as if I was going to get in anyways. After all, what better way to spend a summer than in the San Juans?

The three months prior to arriving in Silverton I had been averaging less than 30 miles a week, largely due to a 2 month bout with peroneal tendonitis on my right leg. I completed Zane Grey 50 miler and did one run up in Flagstaff, but about 60% of my mileage was on the flat streets and canals of the Phoenix area. Largely because of this, Jamil and I drove up to Silverton two weeks early to acclimate and train on the course. We helped with course markings and trail work, and did some runs on our own. When all was said and done, I put in 120 miles of running and hiking in the San Juans in 11 days, with 3 full days of rest before the race.

Up until this point, I was still reasonably far back on the wait list. As of that Sunday I was 16th. By the official check in, there were 4 other runners ahead of me to fill spots. But on Thursday at 11 AM when registration closed, Dale Garland got up and announced that there were three openings, and I was the first one! This year was an anomaly for the wait list, and by the race start the next person in line was 112 on the wait list. I finished packing my drop bags, strolled around for another couple hours, then went to bed about 7 PM. At about 11 PM, I actually fell asleep. I awoke at 4 AM to my alarm going off, and quickly shut off the other two I had as backups. I ate a reasonably sized breakfast, got dressed and ready, and walked down the street to the gym around 5:20. I checked in and greeted my fellow Arizona runners along with many of the friends I'd made before lining up for the start at 6 AM.

Coming into this race, I didn't feel I had the base to put up my best performance. After acclimating very well, spending a lot of time on the course, and doing a 10 mile 3.5 hour run with Jamil, Kyle Skaggs, and James Varner, my confidence was noticeably higher. But I was still unfamiliar with the course, knew I would lose time to others because I wasn't comfortable running hills, and was doubtful how I would handle sleepiness for so long. I set a fantasy goal for myself between 34 and 36 hours, but really just wanted to finish before the second night in around 40 hours. Everyone seemed to advise me to stay conservative, and "start slow, then get slower". I'd been thinking a lot about what barriers we have to faster times in ultras, and I'd come to the conclusion that it's the body deterioration that occurs in the second half of a race when we crawl that really gets us. Because of all of this, I came up with a very specific plan for my run:

1. In everything I do, every step I take on the run, minimize the stresses on my body.
2. Hike all the uphill as quickly as I can without getting too tired.
3. Walk every single flat.
4. Run the downhill by putting all my energy into being smooth and efficient, and let the slope dictate my speed.

With this in mind, the race began. I started at the back of the front pack, as we quickly passed the Shrine of the Mines statue and continued downhill to the Nute Chute. This section is flat and slightly uphill for just over a mile, and everyone suddenly passed me as I walked and they ran. By the first crossing at Mineral Creek, I was at the back of the second pack. As we climbed Bear Creek, I quickly passed several people in front of me, and was soon at the back of the

first pack again. Talking with Kelly Korevec, we saw what looked like a pack of Llamas across the valley by some campers. I more or less settled into a place until the first aid station, KT, where I believe I was in 16th place. I grabbed some fruit and water and was off. After a shallow climb up the Kamm Traverse, a river crossing and some more climbing, I was soon on top of Grant Swamp Pass overlooking Island Lake. I put my rock on Joel's memorial and passed a couple people as I ran and standing glissaded down the snowy valley. I came into the Chapman aid station where I had a resupply of bars and gels, and an Ensure. I had started the race in some 8 oz New Balance 790s (the same shoes Kyle wore) and stopped to take some small rocks out, when I noticed the back tread on one of them was almost completely off. I decided to just leave it and quickly took off. I felt like I was going too fast at this point based on my place, but I also felt comfortable with my effort level and decided to keep doing what I was doing.

The next section is perhaps the steepest going up to Oscar's Pass. I caught Brian Fischer and chatted with him for a while, then soon passed him. Perhaps it was my strategy of sidestepping to keep my Achilles from stretching too far, or the training on "The Elevator" with James and Kyle, but I seemed to go up these steeper climbs with relative ease and it helped me keep a decent place despite walking the flats. I got to the top to see John Cappis and his big smile snapping off pictures. From here I descended down into Telluride with Brian right behind me for a large part of the descent. I came into the aid station to find Jamil, my friend Cullen, and many other friendly faces. I ate a grilled cheese, got my fuel and electrolyte tabs, cut the dangling grip off my shoe, and was off again up towards Virginus in 12th place. The climb up to Kroeger's Canteen was rather uneventful, although the last section is not for the faint of heart with the sketchy scree slopes you have to scramble up. I attempted to save my energy as I knew I would need it for the 11 mile descent into Ouray. I arrived at the aid station, had a cup of delicious warm soup, and was off again. Going down the next section was a blast as it has the steepest snow slopes of the course, great fun if you have the energy! Once I got to the road, I kept telling myself to stick to my strategy, which seemed to be working so far. I grabbed some more food at the Governor Basin aid station, then continued down the downhill. Walking all of the flats and letting the downhills carry me at their own speed, I continued to make good time and passed another person. I arrived at Ouray to change shirts, grab my night gear and a jacket, and refuel. My brother still helped crew me before meeting me at Grouse to pace me. I had planned to change shoes to a more cushioned pair, but felt good in the 790s so I had Jamil bring them with him for later. I still felt great, and it was almost half way through the run!

I passed Kevin Schilling who was having some stomach problems and Wouter Hamelinck not long after, and kept a steady pace all the way to the Engineer's aid station at mile 50. Not long after leaving, it got dark enough that I pulled out my headlamp. Soon a trail of light specks appeared behind me, and I knew I had half a dozen runners right on my tail. This wasn't a huge concern competition wise, but the section from Engineer Road Pass down to Grouse is a road section with many forks and no markers per Charlie Thorn's philosophy. I had neglected to check out this section or even read the course description, so I somewhat slowed down to make sure the trail of lights continued to go the way I was (and hope I hadn't led them off course!) I knew there was one particular section Charlie had mentioned where a wrong turn was possible that still led to the aid station, but in a roundabout way. I knew the whole time I was going to make that turn, but wasn't sure where it was. I began seeing the light of the aid station several miles out and gained hope, but sure enough I made the wrong turn and knew it right away. because of the dark, though, I wasn't sure where the right path could be and decided the detour was worth it to keep moving. Looking at Google Maps afterward, it is a slightly awkward turn in the dark when you don't know it, and it adds about 3/4 mile to the course. I think someone may have followed me, but I came out of the detour right behind Betsy Kalmeyer happy to be coming into the aid station. Jamil was waiting after arriving only minutes before due to a couple mishaps (maybe the detour was ok afterall?) I changed into my 9.4 oz New Balance 800s just in time as the tread on the other 790 had also about come off, grabbed some food and my resupply, and we left.

Although I was still feeling great at this point, I was wary about the cold and snow, and I definitely took this next section slower and more carefully than any other. It was good to have Jamil with me to keep conversation or just hike with, and that in itself helped keep me energized. He always kept behind me and didn't try to advise me on pace yet still helped keep up on how I was doing and helped find markers. We slowly made our way up to American Basin, and then worked our way through the snow up to Handies. I was starting to fade and so we both popped a NoDoz somewhere around this point, and it really did the job. We arrived at the top at about 2 AM. Even though the trail down from Handies is downhill, I felt my frozen feet would be hurt too much to run without the sensory feedback, so we mostly walked down, especially on the snowy and wet places. About half way down, Olga Varlamova comes running past us with Mike Burke right behind her, looking like a zombie being pulled on a leash at this point yet still keeping a blazing

pace. Not long after this, I decided if the old Bushwhacker can run this part, then so should I. Jamil ever on my heel, we kick up the pace and soon passed Mike again and ran all the way down to Burrows Park. The next section is a relatively flat/slightly rolling 3 mile road section, and I walked almost the entire thing. Down a short trail and we arrived at the Sherman aid station to find James Varner, bundled up in a blanket. He hadn't been able to hold down any calories since Grouse and ended up dropping out later when it didn't get any better. I was starting to have some stomach problems of my own, as I learned the stomach can only handle so many Tigers Milk bars. I filled my bottles with a sports drink for the first time all race to try and get calories in that way. Jamil and I also both had an incredible breakfast burrito which also helped. I switched into my beat up 7 oz Adizero LT DCs for the last 30 miles, and we left.

The Sherman to Pole Creek section was the one section that really concerned me because it was largely in the dark and I hadn't seen a lick of it. Luckily we made our way up it with minimal difficulty, moving up the sides of Cataract Gulch and facing slippery river crossings many times. We partially leveled out at the Cataract Lake area, and suddenly the miles seemed to drag on as we thought we were a mile away when we were maybe more like 4. We each took another NoDoz not long before finally coming to the river junctions right before the aid station. My stomach was still quite queasy and the only thing that seemed to help it was some coffee cake like substance, so I continued with the sports drink and was soon on my way. I had seen the last 20 miles of the course and knew it well, and realized I probably had a good chance of making it under 33 hours. I felt strong and was growing stronger with the light and the realization that I was in 8th place, and I decided it was time to start pushing the pace and start catching people. Soon after leaving the aid station, we saw two guys ahead of us. I was amazed we had caught someone so quickly, but as soon as I rounded another corner, there was only one person! We quickly passed Phil Kiddoo, who was looking in pretty poor shape. Quite a bit ahead we saw a bright colored spot, and wondered if it really was the 6th place runner. I wondered if the runner was trying to run from us. I started to jog some of the easier flats at this point knowing it was time to push the pace, but I still walked half of them, especially if I felt anything wrong. Finally on the climb up over Maggie Pole Pass, we passed Glenn Mackie who looked to be exhausted as well at this point. Another quick drop and we were at the Maggie station. I was now in 6th place, and I was feeling fantastic. I set my heart on getting 5th place, and as soon as I got to the Maggie aid station I asked how far the next person was. They said two people had come through close to each other, one 1:20 ahead and the next 1:30 ahead. My heart sunk a little as I knew that anyone ahead would probably still be pushing a solid pace, but I also knew that the next section was my favorite section, and I would push hard through it without any reason at all.

The climb up over Buffalo Boy Ridge is steep and took a while to get up, and I also took it slower going down to Stony Pass Road as my knees were starting to feel beat up. I climbed over Green Mountain also at an easy pace. Earlier during course markings, several Hardrockers had done this section from Cunningham back towards Maggies, but we had to turn back from a storm. I had no rain gear and it really started to pick up, so I found myself running from the storm. I flew down from Green Mountain faster than a mountain goat, and consequently it became my favorite section. So likewise, I threw myself head over heel down this section and flew into the Cunningham aid station. I immediately asked where the next runner was, and was told she (Diana Finkle) left 30 minutes before. I was amazed and in disbelief (rightfully so) that we had caught 50 minutes on her (note that she was actually 50 minutes ahead, but I didn't know that). Up to this point Jamil and I had both worn Nathan Elite 2V Plus waistpacks. We immediately dropped them, and took only a single bottle. At this point I was practically feeling brand new (especially with all the adrenaline), and apparently it was noticeable. One of the aid station volunteers suddenly said, "Wait, are you the runner? I thought he was because you looked so fresh!" With this I finished eating and grabbing gels and we started out.

As we were climbing up Little Giant, we became aware of someone else making quick ground on us. Before we could speculate too much, he yelled out, "I'm not a runner!". It was Andy Holak, who quickly caught us and chatted with us for the rest of the climb. His wife Kim was in 3rd for the women and he was out for a hike. By the time we got to the top, Jamil was out of fluids and I dumped mine because I couldn't even stomach the sports drink anymore. I filled my bottle with snow to get a couple ounces of water, and we started the 7 mile descent. We thought it strange that we hadn't seen even a glimpse of Diana below, as I had been keeping a solid pace and we figured we'd at least be moving somewhat faster than those in front of us. Nonetheless, we hit the road section and began to fly. I was still letting the hill take me and I wasn't pushing it, but the road was steep and I wasn't braking either. Every turn I expected to see someone ahead and every turn I saw a new empty stretch. We reached the last major river crossing at the Arrastra Gulch Stream, and entered the forest onto singletrack again. I was running full stride at this point, and even started running most of the uphill. Jamil was out of water and getting exhausted, and I was 58 miles more tired, as well as

dehydrated and down to my last sip of snow. I kept telling myself 5th place would be around the next corner, that her 30 minute lead was almost up and that our pace wasn't fast enough only because she was trying to break 31 hours. I suddenly went into a frenzy, sprinting through the trees, going through streams and mudpits like they weren't there, surging sections at what must have been 6 minute a mile pace. Jamil couldn't keep up and dropped back, but I kept going. After two miles of this charge, I became almost completely depleted, especially of water. I slowed to jogging and walking and Jamil caught up, and I became content with walking the rest of the race in. We saw Silverton through the trees finally, and soon after emerged from the trees to the top of the Ski Hut. A few steps down the slope and I nearly stopped in my tracks. I looked over at Jamil in disbelief, because right below us, halfway down the slope, was Diana! I looked over at Jamil one last time as if looking for an affirmation, and finally something in his confused face looked enough like "GO FOR IT" to me. I took off down the hill like I was in a high school track meet. As I crossed the bridge into town Jamil yelled at me from 20 meters behind not to wait up for him. At this point I entered the most surreal moment of my life. I was clearly sprinting as hard as I could, yet I don't remember getting tired, and I don't remember slowing down. I saw Tana Wrublik clapping and cheering, followed by many others I had come to know and love. I was overcome with a sense of pride and amazement for the magnitude of what I had accomplished. I had hoped to surprise myself with my performance, but I was really unprepared for just what I was able to do. I came flying around the last corner and up to the Hardrock, kissed it, and was given my finisher medal by Dale Garland. My final place was 5th, in a time of 31:07:10.

Looking back on the race, it was nothing of what I expected. I've always loved the mountains, but the San Juans are simply breathtaking on a level I've never experienced. It was not nearly as painful as I imagined, and I really attribute this to actually taking the advice to be conservative. I know I will never approach a long ultra the same again, because it was far more enjoyable to have patience at the beginning and use my speed at the end, rather than speeding at the beginning and suffering at the end. Hardrock is unique to most other hundreds because of the great amount of climbing and descent it has, meaning there weren't many flats to run so I didn't lose a whole lot of time walking them. But I do feel like the walking was critical to in-race recovery. Angeles Crest took me well over a month to recover from, but by Wednesday I did a double Hope Pass, so I guess my strategy works well for recovery too. I've come a long way in 6 months from barely knowing what Hardrock is to feeling like it is "my race". The San Juans are an amazing place and it was hard to leave, but I know that soon enough, I will be back.

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Back to the [Hardrock Hundred Homepage](#)