

Haliburton Forest 100 race report

by Brian Thomas

Well, I successfully finished my first 100 miler last week in 28 hours 16 minutes. It feels awesome! Check out my race report below if you're interested.

I woke up early Wednesday morning and thought that I was still on some trail and supposed to be running. Now, the really disturbing thing is that I was a little disappointed that I was not out on some trail running through the night. There's an elegant simplicity to a weekend where all you have to do is run... and run... and run...

After spending the night in London, Ontario and enjoying some nice pasta at an Outback Steakhouse we hit the road early on Friday. As we headed north of Toronto I anxiously noted each of the steep and rolling hills that characterized the drive to Haliburton. I was crazy nervous. I mean I was nervous like when I was hopping on a plane to spend a year in China (well, almost). I was so nervous that I didn't want to go directly to the race start so we stopped at Subway for lunch. It was cool and misty with some rain predicted for that night so we quickly set up our tent and listened to other runners arriving as I read a book to keep my mind off things. Here's one strange lupus connection. The forest also had a wolf sanctuary so Holli and I took some time to visit the wolves before going to the pre-race dinner. Between the fundraising and the new Lupus Runner logo, it gave an almost supernatural feel to the weekend.

The pre-race dinner was initially intimidating, but Holli and I quickly found a couple veterans of the 100 miler who were more than happy to let us drill them for advice on the race (thanks Gavin and Rick!). Go slow in the beginning they emphasized. Everyone was extremely friendly and we all stood up to introduce ourselves at the end of the dinner. I didn't sleep much that night.

The morning came quickly and I found comfort in arranging all my gear. Holli and I had a bagel and coffee at the restaurant and then wandered around outside waiting for the start. A bagpipe player led us to the starting line and before I knew it we were off. The first 50 miles were relatively uneventful. Dark gave way to dawn, I encountered Gavin and Rick again who warned me against getting sucked into going too fast by following the 50 mile and 50k racers that also started with us. I'm glad I took their advice! I had some great conversations with Steve who was also doing his first 100 mile run and whose pace was similar to mine. We lost track of each other for a while, but again found ourselves running and chatting towards the end of the first 50 mile loop. I stuck mostly to gels and Gatorade (lesson 1 = HEED is kind of nasty tasting stuff) and switched shoes once (lesson 2=Brooks Adrenaline ASR give me blisters while Brooks Adrenaline GTS do not). The hills were tough, but not unmanageable and I finished the first loop with soreness, but no real problems. First 50 miles were completed in about 12 hours. I was

surprised, despite my motivation, at how distasteful the idea of heading out for a second loop was. Luckily, after some encouragement from Holli, a 15 minute walking break, a few cups of warm soup, and two ibuprofen, I felt both recovered and motivated. As the sun began to come down, the 50 milers heading for the finish kept wishing me a good night. What was I in for?

Night was interesting, to say the least. The first it was peaceful. Then it was surreal. Then it was lonely. Then it was discouraging. Then it was over. Holli was a trooper and I confess to a feeling of relief when she decided to stay up for the first part of the night to see me at aid stations. I'm glad that I've had a reasonable amount of experience hiking at night because the rocky and rooty terrain really slowed things down. I believe the temperature dropped into the 40s and, had I been able to run without fear of tripping and falling down, I would have been dressed adequately warmly. At my pace, I was barely dressed adequately (lesson 3=dress for walking). I ran/walked alone until about 4 AM, which only made the experience more surreal. The race was small enough that I rarely saw people during that time and they were all going the other direction--bobbing headlights that would appear suddenly, followed by a grunted greeting or word of encouragement, and then I was alone in my little cone of light. A few times I shut off my headlamp to experience darkness uncommon in urban and suburban America.

I pulled into aid station 5 around 4 AM. At this point, I just needed to run home. Rick, who I'd talked with a few times throughout the weekend, was sitting in front of a campfire and told me that he was dropping because his quads were shot. He also reminded me that the section between aid station 5 and 4 was one of the worst sections on the course. With some reluctance, I stood close to the fire to put on a second shirt picked up from my drop bag and sipped some soup and coffee cheerfully provided by dedicated aid station volunteers. It was warm and friendly there and I had distinct memories of the steep and rocky slopes of the next section. It was mostly downhill, but at that point downhill was hurting much worse than uphill. Still, I knew I just had to make it through 4 more aid stations and I was done. So I headed back out, slipping on my headphones hoping a little motivational music would help. Just as I moved into the cold realm away from the campfire, I realized the batteries in my MP3 player were dead. Seriously?!?! If I was going to have to fumble with some batteries, I was at least going to stand by the fire when I was doing so. I headed back to the campfire. Just in time to see Steve, who I spent hours running with on the first loop, head out of the dark.

Steve's company was much appreciated and I did not at all mind delaying my departure while he had something to eat and drink. We chatted and complained our way through the next sections of the run, informally competing to see who would site the next aid station first. We had some low times.

At one point, Steve, who was running behind me, said "Do you see that outhouse up there?"

I said, "I think so. That must mean we're close to the aid station."

Steve said, "No wait, I think it's some sort of machine. Like a wood chipper."

I responded, "No, it looks like an outhouse."

Steve asked, "Which side of the trail are you talking about?"

"The right," I said.

"Oh, I was looking on the left."

Of course, there was nothing on either side of the trail and we were still miles from an aid station. We did a lot of walking and tried to pick up the pace when the sun came up, but we never could accurately calculate how long it should take us to reach the next aid station (lesson 4= learn to convert from km to miles). Holli appeared walking up a trail before aid station 4, which helped me feel that we were finally getting close to the end (lesson 5=tell Holli how awesome she is more frequently).

We were sore. We were tired. We were sick of being on trails. But we were moving forward. Steve and I calculated finishing times hundreds of times. With about 9 miles to go, I started getting mad and I started getting scared. Despite aid station workers assuring me that I had plenty of time, I just got convinced that I might not make it before the cut off. And I got mad at the trail. I was just sick of stumbling on roots and picking my way over rocks. So I told Steve that I need to run and took off. I felt like I was flying. I was sick and tired of being in the woods and I was going to finish the race, regardless of how much it was starting to hurt my legs to take each step. I couldn't run the whole way and walked when necessary, but each step closer brought some new energy. Er, at least until I had about 3 miles to go, when my ankle hurt so bad I couldn't run more than a couple hundred yards. But after some dirt roads, that felt so short earlier but lasted forever, I was at the final aid station. "It's 2k, you're about 12 minutes from the finish," said the volunteer. "Really?" I thought. After counting the day and night in hours, I was baffled by the idea of 12 minutes.

My ankle hurt so I walked until the finish line came in sight so it took me over 20 minutes to cover the distance. There was Holli as I crossed the finish line.

"What do you need?" she asked.

"To sit down," I said.

I've spent the entire week thinking about the weekend. There was a mental element to the whole race that, to me, made it fundamentally different, and more difficult, than the 50 miler last year. However, I'm not quite sure how to put it into words. Physical endurance is necessary, of course, but I feel like there are mental elements that I confronted throughout the night and into the morning. I was never close to stopping (I think), but there were so many ups and downs as I was forced to confront and make decisions about my perceived (actual?) physical limitations. Are my muscles tired or do I just feel tired? Am I hurting or really hurt? How fast can I go without risking a potentially dangerous fall? What do I need to pay attention to (like where the trail goes) and what should I turn over to autopilot (like taking steps)? Why am I doing this anyway?

I'm not sure that I could have finished with the support of Holli and the many people who sent me email and wished me well the days before the race as I thought of them often. I confess though, the experience gets under your skin. In a complicated world, it almost feels purifying to spend a weekend with such a simple goal--keep moving forward.

Well, I successfully finished my first 100 miler last week in 28 hours 16 minutes. It feels awesome! Check out my race report below if you're interested.

I woke up early Wednesday morning and thought that I was still on some trail and supposed to be running. Now, the really disturbing thing is that I was a little disappointed that I was not out on some trail running through the night. There's an elegant simplicity to a weekend where all you have to do is run... and run... and run...

After spending the night in London, Ontario and enjoying some nice pasta at an Outback Steakhouse we hit the road early on Friday. As we headed north of Toronto I anxiously noted each of the steep and rolling hills that characterized the drive to Haliburton. I was crazy nervous. I mean I was nervous like when I was hopping on a plane to spend a year in China (well, almost). I was so nervous that I didn't want to go directly to the race start so we stopped at Subway for lunch. It was cool and misty with some rain predicted for that night so we quickly set up our tent and listened to other runners arriving as I read a book to keep my mind off things. Here's one strange lupus connection. The forest also had a wolf sanctuary so Holli and I took some time to visit the wolves before going to the pre-race dinner. Between the fundraising and the new Lupus Runner logo, it gave an almost supernatural feel to the weekend.

The pre-race dinner was initially intimidating, but Holli and I quickly found a couple veterans of the 100 miler who were more than happy to let us drill them for advice on the race (thanks Gavin and Rick!). Go slow in the beginning they emphasized. Everyone was extremely friendly and we all stood up to introduce ourselves at the end of the dinner. I didn't

sleep much that night.

The morning came quickly and I found comfort in arranging all my gear. Holli and I had a bagel and coffee at the restaurant and then wandered around outside waiting for the start. A bagpipe player led us to the starting line and before I knew it we were off. The first 50 miles were relatively uneventful. Dark gave way to dawn, I encountered Gavin and Rick again who warned me against getting sucked into going too fast by following the 50 mile and 50k racers that also started with us. I'm glad I took their advice! I had some great conversations with Steve who was also doing his first 100 mile run and whose pace was similar to mine. We lost track of each other for a while, but again found ourselves running and chatting towards the end of the first 50 mile loop. I stuck mostly to gels and Gatorade (lesson 1 = HEED is kind of nasty tasting stuff) and switched shoes once (lesson 2=Brooks Adrenaline ASR give me blisters while Brooks Adrenaline GTS do not). The hills were tough, but not unmanageable and I finished the first loop with soreness, but no real problems. First 50 miles were completed in about 12 hours. I was surprised, despite my motivation, at how distasteful the idea of heading out for a second loop was. Luckily, after some encouragement from Holli, a 15 minute walking break, a few cups of warm soup, and two ibuprofen, I felt both recovered and motivated. As the sun began to come down, the 50 milers heading for the finish kept wishing me a good night. What was I in for?

Night was interesting, to say the least. The first it was peaceful. Then it was surreal. Then it was lonely. Then it was discouraging. Then it was over. Holli was a trooper and I confess to a feeling of relief when she decided to stay up for the first part of the night to see me at aid stations. I'm glad that I've had a reasonable amount of experience hiking at night because the rocky and rooty terrain really slowed things down. I believe the temperature dropped into the 40s and, had I been able to run without fear of tripping and falling down, I would have been dressed adequately warmly. At my pace, I was barely dressed adequately (lesson 3=dress for walking). I ran/walked alone until about 4 AM, which only made the experience more surreal. The race was small enough that I rarely saw people during that time and they were all going the other direction--bobbing headlights that would appear suddenly, followed by a grunted greeting or word of encouragement, and then I was alone in my little cone of light. A few times I shut off my headlamp to experience darkness uncommon in urban and suburban America.

I pulled into aid station 5 around 4 AM. At this point, I just needed to run home. Rick, who I'd talked with a few times throughout the weekend, was sitting in front of a campfire and told me that he was dropping because his quads were shot. He also reminded me that the section between aid station 5 and 4 was one of the worst sections on the course. With some reluctance, I stood close to the fire to put on a second shirt picked up from my drop bag and sipped some soup and coffee cheerfully provided by dedicated aid station volunteers. It was warm and friendly

there and I had distinct memories of the steep and rocky slopes of the next section. It was mostly downhill, but at that point downhill was hurting much worse than uphill. Still, I knew I just had to make it through 4 more aid stations and I was done. So I headed back out, slipping on my headphones hoping a little motivational music would help. Just as I moved into the cold realm away from the campfire, I realized the batteries in my MP3 player were dead. Seriously?!?! If I was going to have to fumble with some batteries, I was at least going to stand by the fire when I was doing so. I headed back to the campfire. Just in time to see Steve, who I spent hours running with on the first loop, head out of the dark.

Steve's company was much appreciated and I did not at all mind delaying my departure while he had something to eat and drink. We chatted and complained our way through the next sections of the run, informally competing to see who would site the next aid station first. We had some low times.

At one point, Steve, who was running behind me, said "Do you see that outhouse up there?"

I said, "I think so. That must mean we're close to the aid station."

Steve said, "No wait, I think it's some sort of machine. Like a wood chipper."

I responded, "No, it looks like an outhouse."

Steve asked, "Which side of the trail are you talking about?"

"The right," I said.

"Oh, I was looking on the left."

Of course, there was nothing on either side of the trail and we were still miles from an aid station. We did a lot of walking and tried to pick up the pace when the sun came up, but we never could accurately calculate how long it should take us to reach the next aid station (lesson 4= learn to convert from km to miles). Holli appeared walking up a trail before aid station 4, which helped me feel that we were finally getting close to the end (lesson 5=tell Holli how awesome she is more frequently).

We were sore. We were tired. We were sick of being on trails. But we were moving forward. Steve and I calculated finishing times hundreds of times. With about 9 miles to go, I started getting mad and I started getting scared. Despite aid station workers assuring me that I had plenty of time, I just got convinced that I might not make it before the cut off. And I got mad at the trail. I was just sick of stumbling on roots and picking my way over rocks. So I told Steve that I need to run

and took off. I felt like I was flying. I was sick and tired of being in the woods and I was going to finish the race, regardless of how much it was starting to hurt my legs to take each step. I couldn't run the whole way and walked when necessary, but each step closer brought some new energy. Er, at least until I had about 3 miles to go, when my ankle hurt so bad I couldn't run more than a couple hundred yards. But after some dirt roads, that felt so short earlier but lasted forever, I was at the final aid station. "It's 2k, you're about 12 minutes from the finish," said the volunteer. "Really?" I thought. After counting the day and night in hours, I was baffled by the idea of 12 minutes.

My ankle hurt so I walked until the finish line came in sight so it took me over 20 minutes to cover the distance. There was Holli as I crossed the finish line.

"What do you need?" she asked.

"To sit down," I said.

I've spent the entire week thinking about the weekend. There was a mental element to the whole race that, to me, made it fundamentally different, and more difficult, than the 50 miler last year. However, I'm not quite sure how to put it into words. Physical endurance is necessary, of course, but I feel like there are mental elements that I confronted throughout the night and into the morning. I was never close to stopping (I think), but there were so many ups and downs as I was forced to confront and make decisions about my perceived (actual?) physical limitations. Are my muscles tired or do I just feel tired? Am I hurting or really hurt? How fast can I go without risking a potentially dangerous fall? What do I need to pay attention to (like where the trail goes) and what should I turn over to autopilot (like taking steps)? Why am I doing this anyway?

I'm not sure that I could have finished with the support of Holli and the many people who sent me email and wished me well the days before the race as I thought of them often. I confess though, the experience gets under your skin. In a complicated world, it almost feels purifying to spend a weekend with such a simple goal--keep moving forward.