

100 miles in the Haliburton Forest

By Derrick Spafford

The Haliburton Forest 100 mile Trail Run took place on Saturday, September 6, 2008. This was my first attempt at running a 100mile race.

I was a little nervous going into this race, but felt well prepared having had a solid year of training, in addition to a strong base built from 2007. The experience of having run a couple of 50milers last year, in addition to Rock and Ice this year, helped to give me confidence. I've also run Haliburton twice before (50km in 2004 & 50 mile in 2007). This was a big help in knowing the trails and what to expect and plan for in the training leading up to it and on race day. Personally, I don't think that I would have wanted to try to run my first 100 at Haliburton if I hadn't known the trails well beforehand.

Haliburton Forest is a private wildlife preserve located on the west side of Algonquin Park. It is home to lots of deer, moose, bears and wolves as was evident by all being spotted during the race. The trails there are simply gorgeous.

On race morning, a bagpiper paraded us to the start line for the 6am start as if we were going off to battle. Nice touch. It was still quite dark, so I was happy to be using the Petzl E+lite headlamp for the first 30 minutes or so, even though we began on a sand packed road. It was great to be finally moving even though I knew it was going to be a very long day. I settled into a comfortable pace and it was really nice as Sara and I ended up running together for some of the early miles. It almost seemed like one of our weekly long runs at times because of this.

The 100 mile course was a double out and back course, so we had to run the entire route twice. It was great early on because there were many people running the 50km and 50mile race on the same route.

My number one goal for the race was to finish, so I had planned on trying to take things pretty easy early on. I was surprised to meet up with Jeff Simpkins fairly early into the race. We ran together for a few minutes before he said he wasn't feeling well, and decided to back off a little in the hopes of feeling better later. I was also surprised when Jeff said that the only other person in the 100 miler in front of us was Jim Orr.

I have a great deal of respect for Jeff Simpkins, Jim Orr, Jim Morrison, Laurie McGrath, Theresa McGrath and Keith Peters, and all of the excellent 100mile races they have done between them. I told myself that I did not want to go out too fast and would prefer to be behind all of them in the early miles and wait to see how I felt.

Coming up to the 25 mile point turnaround, I saw Jim on his way back, so I

hoped that I wasn't too far to the turn. It was nice to get the first turn around on the day out of the way. I had placed drop bags at 12km, 25km and 40km, so got to pass them all at least twice to re-supply with extra gear and food if needed. This was in addition to the seven well stocked aid stations that were on the course.

Since 100 miles is such a long way to go, I took splits on my watch every 25 miles and just focused on that smaller period of time instead of the big picture. I found this very helpful in keeping things in perspective and being able to chip away at these smaller chunks instead of thinking about how far I still had to go.

It was around 40 miles that I ended up spotting the race leader, Jim Orr, just up ahead. I was a little reluctant to pass him at this point as I really wasn't 100% sure about the proper pace that I should be running for my main goal of being able to finish. I was feeling comfortable though and decided to just run at my own pace for as long as I could, so passed Jim shortly after that.

The remainder of the first 50 miles was uneventful, with just the focus being on running as relaxed as possible, and doing all the small things to stay hydrated and well fueled. I felt a slight bit of temporary panic when I passed the 50mile point and turned around to head back out for the last 50. I checked my watch and was a little startled to see that my first 50 miles was done in 8:21, which was about 5 minutes faster than I did for just the 50 miler alone last year. I knew that I was in better shape this year, but it was still a little unnerving to think of what the last half had in store for me.

I was very fortunate for the last half of the race as Sara was going to be able to crew for me, which would be a big help. Sara ran, and won, the women's 50km for the third time in a very solid race. She didn't even stick around for her awards ceremony, but came back out onto the course to help me out. This was going to be huge for me as I was going to be getting to the point where it would be a lot more difficult to do things for myself at the aid stations.

While 80% of the course is on technical trails, the other 20% is on forest road, so Sara was able to drive out to the checkpoints and help me. My goal was to make it to the 75 mile point before it got dark. I really wanted to run the least amount of challenging trail after dark as possible.

It was a huge psychological boost to get to 75 miles and know that you were on your way home, even though it was still 25 miles. Things continued to go well, and I had to keep playing little mind games and break the race down to just lots of small races from checkpoint to checkpoint. I had picked up my headlamps at an earlier aid station and was really pleased with the way they worked. I wore the Petzl Myo XP on my head, and the Petzl Tikka XP on a belt attachment around my waist. The trail was well lit and I just needed to keep moving now.

I did find it very tough getting from 75-85 miles as I was really dreading the Black Creek Trail. This is a boggy section that has a lot of logs laid down crosswise, almost acting like a floating bridge, I expect during the wet seasons. I had broken my ankle a few years ago and was very cautious in trying to get through this part in one piece. Doing it after dark seemed like it was going to be that much more difficult. Once again, I was very happy to get through this section and make it to the 85 mile point. Sara met me here and gave me a few sips of soup broth. I didn't think I wanted it, but it really hit the spot and was a nice change from all the gels, cliff bloks and liquid fuel I had been taking.

Sara told me that I looked the most out of it at the next aid station (about 88 miles). I had just taken a couple of falls and had gone about 100meters past where I was suppose to turn, so had to backtrack a little. It wasn't a big deal, but I was getting a little confused and was struggling the most through this section. I was happy to get to finally make it to the next checkpoint and know that I only had one loop of MacDonald Lake to go and that I was going to finish.

Pacers are allowed to run with 100 mile participants after dark for safety reasons. Even though Sara had already raced her 50km early, she was ready to run the section from 92-98 miles with me. While I knew that I could probably get around this on my own, it was very comforting to have Sara there with me. In fact, it was wonderful to share this experience with her since we have done so much of our training together. Through the final trail section of Normac, Sara got to witness another couple of finer moments of my race. First I took my worst fall of the day, and second I puked a solid stream of vomit on a tree right at shoulder height.

The end was getting much closer now and the goal was just trying to hold it together and finish in one piece. We were now back on the forest road, so finally the footing wasn't an issue anymore.

Making it to the final aid station at about mile 98 was a great feeling. Sara stopped here to let me run the last bit in on my own. One more nasty hill to get past then a long straightaway to the finish line. The sight of Sara flashing her headlamp from the finish line was such a welcome and warming sight. I finally made it across the line.

I found it interesting when I crossed the finish line that my time of 18:42:02 didn't really mean that much to me. It was more the fact that I had just completed a 100 mile footrace. The thoughts, memories and emotions of the day keep coming back to me and I will probably remember a ton of things that I have left out of this write-up. However, I will never forget the deep down feeling and satisfaction of what it's like to run 100miles in the beautiful trails of the Haliburton Forest.

Thank you very much to Race Director Helen Malmberg and her wonderful crew

of volunteers for organizing an exceptional race. Your efforts will always be remembered by those who take part in Haliburton.

Stats...

My time: 18:42:02

25 mile splits: 4:04:10 / 4:17:18 / 4:43:43 / 5:36:51. (Last 25miles in the dark).

My placing: First

Second Place: Jim Orr (19:32)

Course Record: 18:19 (Jeff Simpkins 2006)

Terrain: 80% technical trails, 20% forest road

Fuel...

Clif Bloks: Took 3 cubes on every hour (switched to exclusively gels between aid stations after 9 hours)

Gels: 1 gel on every half hour

Sport Drink: Mixed one scoop of Hammer Sustained Energy with one scoop of GuPowder. Drank 3-4 sips every 15 minutes past the hour and before the hour.

Endurolyte Capsules: Started taking 2-3 electrolyte capsules every hour after the first few hours, then increased to 2 capsules every 30 minutes for about the last 3 hours.

Water: Sipped water from my bottle with gels and bloks. Also drank water at aid stations.

Aid Stations: Ate small amounts of melon, bananas and drank some coke at most stations. I kept most of my fuel in liquid form as that is what I have found worked well for me in training. Had a little soup broth at the last few aid stations, which helped. Also ginger ale helped to sooth my stomach at a few aid stations.

Stomach issues: Puked at 9 hours and 18 hours. Both I felt were electrolyte issues and needed to adjust intake. Came around shortly after.

Gear...

La Sportiva Crosslites: No blisters, no hotspots, no foot issues! I was impressed. I have seen some really nasty photos of peoples feet who have run 100 milers and was prepared, but these shoes are awesome! Lightweight, glove-like fit and great traction.

Wigwam Trailrunner II socks. Wonderful fitting socks with great moisture management.

Sugoi 42k Split shorts: Lightweight and breathable.

La Sportiva team shirt: Breathable t-shirt made by Sugoi (ran shirtless for about middle 50 miles because of the heat).

Petzl MyoXP Headlamp: Excellent lighting on the dark sections of trail

Petzl Tikka XP: Worn with belt attachment around my waist on the diffuser mode for extra peripheral vision.

Petzl E+lite lightweight headlamp clipped to my hat for the first few miles.

Fuel Belt Double bottle holder with extra pocket attachment: Very comfortable double bottle belt for water and sport drink. The pocket attachment was excellent for gels, bloks, e-caps, etc...