

Headlands Hundred Race Report

Skipper Crockett

11 AUG 2010

THE BEGINNING:

I was never a runner. In fact I hated running. I was, for the most part, a 1.5 mile twice a year for the Navy's Physical Readiness Test (PRT) runner. My recreational running career consisted of a few jogs down the beach in San Diego (usually scheduled the week prior to the biannual PRT in a last minute effort to get in shape) and a handful of "inner's" and "outer's" while attending the Boat School whenever I started to notice my care packages in my hips. That's an important frame of reference to understand my shock when, a year and a half ago, Danny Nev said to me "Sidney, I want to run the Western States and I think you should do it with me."

Daniel and the family were in town for the night awaiting a Space-A flight back to DC. We got some beers and a few bottles of wine and started catching up. Jess and I had just moved to SF and were staying at my parents place in the city. Jess had a temp job and I was unemployed searching for something to do, some sort of direction. Daniel had just read a book by Dean Karnazes, the self proclaimed "ultra marathon man" and was inspired to the point of wanting to attempt the Western States 100 mile Endurance Run. I was somewhat familiar with the race because it started in my backyard in Squaw Valley but that was the extent of my knowledge. Like most people, I didn't think it was humanly possible for anyone to run 100 miles in one day let alone for a guy who hadn't logged a 100 miles in his entire life. I told him there is no way in hell I could run 100 miles nor would I ever want to try. I asked him if he thought he could do it and without hesitation he replied, "I know I can." Him, Maili, Makana and an unborn Stella D left the next day and I promised him I'd read the book and also promised him there wasn't any possibility of me running 100 miles with him but to keep me posted on his pursuit.

A few days later I decided to go for a run on the beach in SF and had a moment. No need to bore you with anymore details but suffice to say from that point on I started running. Probably a lot of unimportant information to most but it's important to me because Daniel got me started on this journey and three days ago after bumps, bruises, pain, fog, drizzle, mud, countless Cliff Block's, PB&J's, some vomiting, a few wrong turns, and 100 miles we finished it... for now.

ROOKIES:

Neither of us had been here before and neither of us knew exactly what to expect. One of the things we did know is that we were both under trained. Neither of us had logged more than 45 miles a week due to lack of time and injuries. In comparison, most ultra runners log upwards of 80 miles a week and the elite runners can do as many as 200. But we were at the point of no return. We talked almost daily the week prior, bouncing ideas off each other and ensuring we had all of our bases covered. Maili joked asking if we were going to wipe each other's asses too. But I think we both found comfort knowing that both of us were as clueless and ill prepared as the other.

I had been unbelievably nervous all week. I was experiencing two types of nervousness. The first was the one you get before running the 1.5 mile for the PRT. You're nervous for the impending pain and because you know it's going to suck. The second is the worst kind. It's the nervousness that comes from fear of failing, not making it, quitting, dropping, the unknown, the I-day nervousness. This is the nervousness that eats at me before these races.

Daniel showed up the day before the race and although it made it feel that much more real I found comfort in seeing someone who felt what I was feeling. We ran some quick errands and came back to my apartment to prepare. We made peanut butter, jelly, and honey sandwiches and laid out then packed eve-

rything for the next day. For dinner we met the Nev-Ordiz Crew (more on the Crew's performance in a bit) and Jess for our last supper of pizza and water. After dinner Daniel and I said our goodbyes, took some pictures and headed home. The race started at 0700 and in preparation I had been waking up at 0500 all week to go through my pre-race routine in order to get my body ready. I had some stomach issues during my last 50 miler and I NEVER wanted to go through that again.

RACE DAY:

I slept surprisingly well the night before the race. I woke up feeling good and walked out to the living room where Nev had been sleeping. Daniel and I just looked at each other and started laughing. What the hell were we thinking? I was obviously nervous but at this point there wasn't any use in worrying. We were going to do this or at least try. We had our pre-race breakfast of waffles with almond butter and syrup and a cup of coffee to wake up the stomach, took care of some bathroom business and rolled.

It was a typical San Francisco summer morning; cold, foggy and windy. I was surprised to see my final lap pacer, Charlie, there to cheer us on as we started. The sight of a familiar face does wonders for your morale during these events as we'd appreciate more as the day went on. We registered and huddled around the car trying to figure out what the hell we should be doing. We both kind of half assed some stretches so we didn't look like complete tourists. I'm pretty sure Hans Gruber from Die Hard gave us our pre-race brief. The combination of the wind and Eastern Bloc accent made it impossible to hear what he was saying. But I knew the course. It consisted of four 25 mile loops up and down fire roads and single track dirt trails. You would reverse direction each loop and each lap consisted of over 5,000 ft of elevation change... Yippie kay yay mother f#\$@er.



“Team Red” Before the race

After weeks of worrying and build up the start was utterly anticlimactic. I told Daniel the same thing I'd been telling him all week, "Make sure I'm having fun." I think Hans had a countdown but I couldn't hear him. People just started running and we were off.

1-25:

I wanted to get somewhere out in front just so we didn't have to deal with the masses during the first climb. The race immediately starts on a 1000 ft ascent and Daniel quickly rained me in and we settled into a nice rhythm of power walking the uphill and running everything else.

I've had problems in the past because I think I'm a much better runner than I am and that gets me in trouble. Having Daniel there to control my pace is the ONLY reason I could have made it through the entire race. If not for him I probably would have made it to mile fifty and dropped.

I was instantly relieved when I wasn't experiencing the pain in my left foot that had sidelined me for the past two weeks and Daniel's knee was holding up. That also meant that if either of us were going to quit it was probably going to be mental not physical. We arrived at the first aid station expecting to see the Nev/Ordiz crew to no avail. We pressed on. We arrived at the second and then third aid station expecting to see them but still no sight of them. Finally, at mile 18 they found us at the aid station underneath the Golden Gate Bridge. Like I said earlier the impact of seeing friends and family on your morale is immeasurable and in all seriousness the Maili and the Ordiz's were unbelievable all day and night. I was starving at this point and this is where I went on my pb&j kick. I grabbed my refilled water bottle and Makana (Danny's three yr old son) promptly grabbed it from my hands, opened it up, sucked a quarter of it down, closed it up and casually handed it back to me; strictly business. He was ready to go and so were we.

As we ran by people Danny and I quickly became known as "team red" because we both happened to be wearing our Tiger Woods Sunday Red. This got old quick and anyone who knows me knows I don't need an excuse to lose my top. The first 25 were smooth. We finished in just over four and a half hrs and passed the time shooting the shit. A few aches and pains, Danny was having some knee pain and I had developed some ankle and shin pain in both legs but all to be expected. We didn't waste too much time at the start/finish and within 5 minutes or so we turned around to re-trace our loop for the next lap.

25-50:

It was at the first aid station when disaster struck Daniel. He tried to swallow a salt tab which triggered a gag reflex and he threw up. Aside from a debilitating physical injury this is one of the worst obstacles to overcome. You spend the entire race, especially early on, hydrating and eating to ensure you have enough energy to get you through the later stages. Vomiting everything you've consumed up to that point essentially puts you back at square one and it's almost impossible to catch up. Daniel's a stud though; he grabbed a Sprite and rolled. But by the time we came into the next aid station at mile 38 it was clear that the upset stomach had taken a toll on him. I was first to arrive and broke the news to Maili and the fam. You didn't have to be a runner to know that having problems this early was a horrible sign. When Nev arrived a few minutes later he said he was going to take some time and regroup and we both decided that I would move on without him.

Our plan was to run together for the first 25 and after that play it by ear. We both knew that the odds of starting and finishing one of these races together was slim to none. When one person was high the other would be low and visa versa. At mile 38 Nev was low. Mine would probably come but at that moment it was time for me to move on.

As I said before having a support crew out there does wonders for your spirit so when I heard my roommate screaming and saw Kenny Michel (USNA Classmate) and my parents at the mile 46 aid station I was all smiles. Jess and my Dad have seen me at my lowest during my only other two ultras and I could see their relief and surprise when I ran up smiling. I refilled my water bottle, had my now routine pb&j and three Cliff Blocks and pressed on to the finish.



All smiles at mile 46

50-75:

You were allowed to have pacers after mile 50. My roommate and Kenny had graciously volunteered to help out for this leg. I changed my socks and we got underway. Jess ran miles 50-62 and performed swimmingly, other than one misstep about two miles in. All I heard was a scream and a thud after twin-kle toes tripped and fell on the first downhill. My initial reaction in my head was “HONEY! If you tripped and rolled your ankle after I’ve run 53 miles and I have to go and get help...” But she was a trooper. She hopped back up with a huge gash on her hand and never complained. We did see Nev on the way up the first climb and he looked good despite still not being able to stomach any real food. Typical positive attitude, “Nah, I’m good I’m good.”

Kenny took over at mile 62. By this time it was getting dark so we dawned our headlamps and ascended into the fog. Kenny was fantastic, always entertaining. This portion flew by but I did get a taste of the visibility I would have during the last lap.



Kenny and me at mile 62 about to head into the fog

As Kenny and I pulled into the Vista Point aid station at mile 68 we got a pleasant surprise when we saw Kate Clemens (USNA Classmate) who had rode her bike over the Golden Gate in the fog and drizzle at night to come support Danny and me. Kate's positivity was a welcome and much needed lift.

I actually finished this lap with a negative split, meaning it was faster than my previous lap. We'd run a handful of people down and I was feeling surprisingly well although the downhills were growing increasingly painful.

75-100:

I didn't stick around the aid station too long. At this point I was ready to get this thing over with. My pacer for the final lap was Charlie Epperson; a good friend, coworker, and much better runner than I will ever be. Much to Charlie's dismay he's quickly become my go to pacer. He got me through the last half of my last 50 and I was going to need a similar performance and then some.

Again, we left the aid station and quickly ascended back into the fog. The climb was slow and somewhat painful but just after we got to the top we bumped into Daniel and his pacer Ray Ray. I was ecstatic to see him. It was the first time I'd seen him in about 30 miles and honestly was thinking that he had to have stopped, not because I didn't think he could do it but because I didn't think it would be physically possible for any human being to run 100 miles completely dehydrated and malnourished. But Danny looked strong. We didn't waste any time chatting. I think we were both over it.

The visibility had gotten worse. The fog seemed like it reflected the light from your headlamp back at you reducing your visibility to a few feet and making it difficult to follow the trail. I actually made a comment to Charlie around mile 86 that if we took a wrong turn and got lost that I wouldn't be able to take it mentally. Ironically, I would come to find out that Daniel took a wrong turn around that same location and ended up adding about four miles to his 100.

I got another surprise when we got to the aid station at mile 88. My dad was there. I can't remember exactly what time it was but it had to be around 2 or 3am. I asked him where the hell he came from and he said he went home and tried to sleep and couldn't. He said, "You're out here why aren't I?" Again, another boost from the support crew and at this point I needed it. I think I hit the wall just after seeing Danny around mile 80. I was fortunate not to have any stomach issues for most of the race but by this point I was feeling noxious, physically on empty, tired, and the shin and ankle pain I was feeling in the first lap had reduced me to a slow shuffle. It was at this point that I decided to screw what had been working for me all day and switch to Coke and cookies. I needed caffeine and I figured by the time it damaged my system hopefully it would all be over. The last twelve miles were as low as I've ever been. It was freezing. I was mostly walking and when I was running (I use that term loosely) Charlie was walking faster than me. I was dreading the downhills, every step was excruciating. It was also around this time that I got run down by two people. One of which was the top female finisher who I had been neck and neck (necking) with all day. To put in perspective how slow I was going at this point, her and I were at the aid station at mile 92 together, left at the same time, and she ended up beating me by a half hour.

The only thing I can remember going through my head for the last 8 miles is that I thought it would never end. I wanted to move faster to get it over with but I couldn't. When we crested the final climb at mile 98 and change I legitimately thought about dropping. It was all downhill and I could see the finish and I thought about quitting because I was dreading the downhill that much. I had zero emotion most of the way down. I had to stop and side step down some steps with Charlie spotting me because I couldn't move my ankles. With about a quarter mile to go I began to close my eyes hoping that when I opened them it would all be over. The second I closed my eyes I had an "Inception" kick and realized I had just fallen asleep while running. Eyes open from here on out.

Like I said before, I wasn't emotional for the first 99.9 miles but as soon as I could see Jess, Kenny, and my dad it started to hit me. I distinctly remember saying to myself that I just ran 100 miles and I immediately lost it. I started crying so hard I couldn't see a step in front of me. Like the start, the finish lacked fan fair. My audience consisted of Jess, Kenny, my dad, a few volunteers and Hans. But it didn't matter. I crossed the finish line in 22 hrs and 57 minutes. My dad was the first to hug me and we both started bawling. I said I just ran my first and last 100 mile race.



The finish at 0557 Sunday Morning

I sat down in Kenny's car and immediately past out, mouth open and snoring. Jess and Kenny left me in the car and got breakfast and I woke up back at the finish waiting for Nev to come in. It was at this point I heard about him and his pacer, Epi, taking a wrong turn which only compounded his already rough day. I got emotional again when I saw him coming through the finish. I was in utter awe that he survived the day/days. I couldn't do it justice by trying to describe what he went through but suffice to say that my day was easy relative to his. It was an unreal performance and he is the toughest dude I know.



My favorite pic of the Day. Daniel at Mile 96



30 seconds after sitting down in Kenny's car: OUT

One last thanks to Maili, her parents, Staci, Nikki, Ray, Epi, Kate, Jess, Kenny, Charlie, my parents and especially Danny Nev. I couldn't have done it without you.



My crew minus Jess. From left to right: Kenny, Charlie, me, my dad



Daniel and me at the finish