

2008 Psycho Psummer 50K

My first official Ultra!

by Sophia Spencer



(Photo by Dick Ross)

I woke up at 5 am feeling a little funny. No surprise, I've confirmed I polished off a fine bottle of Cabernet at a rockin' 4th of July party the night before my first official ultra. What was I thinking? Oh wait I know—I never get the day off because of my job as a news anchor and rarely get invited to such a nice party.



I spent the first 5 miles cursing myself. I kept trying to remember how much I'd had to drink before Coleen's 35-mile birthday run. That day I easily trotted out 33, but it was at Clinton and today was Wyco...Psycho Psummer. My last time on the trail was in December for the Alternate Chili run. I got lost and bailed at 5, pledging to never, never run a trail again. Today the goal is -- just stay on the trail. But would I make it two loops?



*Psycho Summer Trail Run
50K, 15-Mile*

Sophia (right) with Coleen, sporting their “Mud Heart Tattoos” (Photo by Dick Ross)

It was a day I would borrow energy from my best Mud Babe, Coleen. And a series of distractions would make the day fun. First, I see a guy in a very short kilt with matching hat. “Hey Ben—there’s a guy in a skirt.”

Uh yeah, Bad Ben promised the email group he’d run in a skirt if there was a plaid one. Hmmmm...

We’re laughing so hard at the start I think I’m going to choke.



(Photo by Dick Ross)

In a pink skirt, I was sporting a fashionable number 49. I’d requested it since I work at 49 News in Topeka.



49



Psycho Psummer

50-Kilometer Trail Run, July 5, 2008
Wyandotte County Lake Park, Kansas City, KS

I confided in Coleen that I'd had a little booze the night before.

"Oh, I didn't drink a thing."

Thanks, that didn't make me feel better-- but she's effervescent with energy and it's taking my mind off the funny little feeling in my head.

Bursting into song with the funky chicken helped too.

"Oh you two are the social ones." Someone chatted with us as we passed.

"For now we are! Gotta make it fun!"

But insecurity is everywhere in my mind. Am I going to be a double-looper? "I hope I don't let her down." I think to myself.

We'd finally split up from a group of about 20 who all slammed into the Amos Aid Station at the same time. In fact there was no sliced watermelon left. I picked up a quarter watermelon and took a big bite out of the middle.

"Are you really going to eat all that?"

"Kyle -- there isn't any cut up."

Like a fly on honey-- Coleen bounced over and took care of half the watermelon. At the same time!



Photo by Gary Henry

"so what's going on?"

Coleen knew that I was in a funk-- not just because of the wine-- but a real personal life crazy funk. The kind you can only tell your Best Mud Babe. And we worked through it. By the second loop I only had love in my heart. Mostly because we made this race FUN!

"Hey Pat, look at the little skirted man!"

"What on earth?"

We'd arrived at aid station 2. Pat Perry was putting ice in our water packs. (oh how I love you for putting ice in my water.) Every sip I took, I was grateful. We all shared a little laugh over the funny guy. Later, Bad Ben would explain the fellow likes to wear strange outfits and had the skirt/kilt made for \$13. Not a bad price-- have you looked at the price of running skirts lately? Another chuckle and we're off for the last 4 muddy miles of the first loop.

"I see why they call them Mud Babes."

One runner had lost a shoe in calf deep mud.

"At least now I can buy the shirt."

"Hey...we're the originals on the shirt!"

Coleen and I had our first race adventure running Brew to Brew as under the team name "Bad Ben's Mud Babes." We didn't win the race by a long shot, but the name stuck and now there are a slew of us.

Suddenly my inner child came jumping out. Or perhaps it's due to a long family history of artists and painters.

"Coleen, come back!"

I dipped my finger in the sticky mud and painted a heart on her arm. She did the same for me and the excitement of showing off our "mud tattoos" made slipping and sliding through the next 3 miles even more fun.



"Ten Mile Creek" woodcut by
Orville M. Running, Sophia's grandfather

First loop done in 3:22 and there's no question on whether to head out for more-- we're on it. With iced up little Trail Nerds bandanas we're back on the trail chanting.

"trooper, troopers, double-loopers! Yeah!"



The Mud Babes filling-up with fuel for loop two.
(Photo by Ben Holmes)

Only trouble is, the second loop seems to take like dog years...

"I feel like puking." My stomach was a flutter.

"I'll wait."

"No I'm not really gonna do it—just feel like crap."

"Let's walk a little."

Coleen's a sweetie. The miles drag on-- and by the time we make it to Pat's aid station we're not quite so spunky. He teased us a little, but was calm and supportive.

"What can I get you?"

"Not the shower.. I don't know I guess I'll eat the watermelon. What's the theory on coke?"

I'd seen the brown liquid in dixie cups.

"Caffeine and sugar Sophia? What's there to wonder about?"

I took a sip.

Coleen grabbed what she could eat-- as a raw vegan she wasn't going for the coke or coffee.

"How about ice in your bandanas?"

"Yes!! Yes!!!"

We both cried in unison and glee. A couple cubes and we were off and running again.



"I hate pavement."

"I know-- think of Dr. Jessie Walden. He's at the finish and he'll do active release on the bad parts."

We'd just lumbered through a part of the course I hadn't noticed on the first round. (Amazing how all the little bumps in the path are so much more prominent on loop 2) For quite a distance we were going downhill at a slight pitch to the right.

"My ankle hurts."

"Oh Coleen that's not good, it's because of the sideways part."

"It's this pavement."

For some reason I got a little spurt of energy.

"Sophia, go ahead if you want."

"Are you kidding? Are you crazy? Nuts? NO Way.. You've waited for me through every turn—and I've been a dud. There is absolutely no way I'm finishing without you—even if we walk the rest of the way."

But we would not walk for long. Coleen got a burst on the final triangle which kept me going.

But before that I got to pay her back a favor.

"Do you have any lube on you?"

"I do! Here's the little tube. Wow this is so cool that I can give YOU the lube."



During Free State my lube tube fell out when I took a spill and Coleen picked it up and gave it to me when I needed it. Today it came full circle.

Then it was time for the final 2.8 miles of mud bogs.

"Hey Coleen, I need an indulgence."

She thought I meant a snack—instead I pulled out the cell phone, destroying the serenity of nature and called a friend. No worries, she borrowed my phone to call her husband. We hung up—I grabbed a flower for my hair and we finished strong.

Dreams of a negative split died on Fester's Wander, hope and strength came from the great company and incredible volunteers dishing up not only food, but the kind of solidarity and friendship only a fellow ultra runner can do.

I wish I'd run faster, I definitely wish I'd been more disciplined the day before, still—I promised to stay on the path—not just one loop, but two—and I kept that promise—even if it wasn't pretty. That second loop was so tough—but funny thing is—looking back it just didn't seem that bad.

And seriously—thank you Tony for snagging all the creepy ticks. God I hate those things. Here I thought this was a tick-less course.

Nick, I am tired-- I've been riding the bus all week-- I'll spruce this up for another blog and cleverly insert how great you smelled giving us the high five at mile 23.



Sophia after finishing, and still smiling!
Photo by Ben Holmes