

Free State 40-miler Race Report by Emily "Mud Doc" Horn (April 26, 2008)

Ultra #2 is now in the books. This, after saying to myself at around mile 25 of Psycho Wyco less than 3 months ago, "this is horrible, I never want to do this again." But, a force that I can't explain or ignore compelled me to decide, just a short time after Psycho, to go for 40 miles at Free State. "If I can do 31 miles at Wyco, I can do 40 miles at Clinton Lake," I said to myself (I never used to talk to myself this much either). In the wise words of Gary Henry, "that's how they get you." I've been gotten.

Race day weather was absolutely perfect. This was a big relief to me because I ran the marathon distance at the inaugural Free State race last year and was on a death march for most of the second half due to the warm temps combined with high humidity. I was definitely cold starting out in shorts with temps in the mid-30s, but had enough layers on top to handle just about anything. It had rained quite a bit the week prior to race day, and I've got to admit I was absolutely dreading the mud. I was having flashbacks to the last loop of Psycho Wyco, where my running was reduced to trudging at best. Part of trail running though is to be able to take on whatever the trail serves up, so I tried not to think too much about it.

Other than the obvious goal of finishing, my main goal for this one was to do a better job of fueling. I can't say that I bonked at Psycho, but I definitely didn't do a great job of eating or drinking. I think Perpetuem had saved me from getting into trouble by picking up some of the slack from minimal eating, so I started out with my standard Perp mixed with Gatorade, and had additional supplies of both in each of my two drop bags. I was also carrying Endurolytes with me this time. I also put in my head that I would make a strong effort to eat something solid at each of the manned aid stations, whether I felt like it or not.

I started out feeling great as usual and was thankful to find only pockets of mud in the background of a very runnable trail (so far, anyway). I wasn't cold for long, except for my hand from carrying my bottle. I tried switching hands back and forth, but before long both of my hands were stiff and numb. What a ridiculous problem to have at the end of April! I resorted to putting one finger through the hole in the lid and carrying it that way for awhile. That worked well until I warmed up enough in general for my hands to thaw out. I was having a great start and kept a decent pace. I was glad to see the course markings send us down on the red trail – one of my favorite sections, with a very technical rocky course along the shoreline that doesn't look like Kansas at all. I wondered how much I'd like running on this terrain during the second loop with more mileage on my legs. Just after coming off the red trail was the first manned aid station at Lands End, 6+ miles into the course. I looked down and saw a nearly-full bottle of Perp/Gatorade in my hand. Damn. I scanned the assortment of food and ended up eating some watermelon (yeah I know that's mostly water), a few pretzels, and a piece of PB&J. I didn't want to burn up too much time at the aid stations, so I quickly moved on. My feast (relatively speaking) was settling well. I tried to drink more, but decided that the Perp wasn't really doing it for me this race. It was kinda like trying to drink milk when you're thirsty. As I was approaching my first drop bag at the 10-mile aid station and debating whether or not to abandon the Perp idea, I found the mud that I knew was waiting for me on the blue trail. This trail is always more muddy than the white trail (it's downstream of the white trail, so to speak). Even though there were places that were very reminiscent of Psycho with

deep mud with water floating on top, they didn't continue on for more than a few feet. And the sections in between were very runnable. What a relief. I got to the next manned aid station at mile 10 and let one of the volunteers fill up my bottle with Succeed. I shed my jacket and long-sleeved shirt, and stuffed them into my drop bag to keep my Perpetuem company. I ate some more solid stuff (including watermelon again – that really hits the spot) and got out of there, taking a package of Shot Blocks for the road. The rest of this loop was relatively uneventful and, before I knew it, I was back at the start/finish aid station. I didn't linger too long before setting out for the second loop.



The Red Trail

Photo by Gary Henry



Tree Tunnel on the Blue Trail

Photo by Gary Henry

The fact that I can't recall everything that I ate during the course of this race is a sign of improvement. At each manned aid station, I kept to my goal of eating something solid, and always refilled my bottle with Succeed (although oftentimes it wasn't completely empty). After awhile, I even left the aid stations

with a handful of pretzels to eat along the way. I also kept up fairly well with taking an Endurolyte capsule about every hour, and never got the swollen hands that I had by the end of Psycho. I only ended up eating one gel the entire race – a Hammer gel that I carried in my hand-held for over 30 miles.

The second loop went incredibly well. I was still going at a decent pace and feeling great. I passed a few of the marathoners on the blue trail, headed towards the red trail. Two of them said they thought I might be the first female in the ultra, as I was the first female so far to pass them (although they had a few miles they couldn't account for on the marathon course that weren't on the ultra courses). As fantastic as I felt, and as great of a run as I was having, I didn't really think I could be the first female. I thought that if there is someone ahead of me, she's way ahead of me and I'm not likely to catch her (turns out there were 2 women ahead of me, who tore up the course in 6 hours and change – awesome). What it did for me though, was give me extra motivation to keep my pace so at least I was harder for someone else to catch. Even the second go on the red trail went well. This time at the Lands End aid station, I discovered potatoes. Potatoes covered in lots of salt. I put those right up there with the watermelon (information I will file away in my brain for future ultras). I honestly felt fantastic for most of the rest of the race. I was starting to feel a little tired when I hit the Lands End aid station for the 4th and final time (about 4 miles from the finish). But knowing that I was 36 down and 4 to go made it easier to handle. Still, the mile markers between Lands End and the finish didn't tick by as fast as they had before. It must've been another 10 miles before I saw that turn-off onto the dirt road leading up to the finish! I felt the need to run up that hill before turning onto the grass into the finish, and finished feeling much better than I thought I would, with a time of 7 hrs and 26 mins. I can't say that I could have gone out for another loop, but Ben's response to that statement was this: of course you couldn't – if you could, then you didn't run the 40 right. Makes sense. Then I started thinking, "if I feel this good after 40 miles, then I can do 50." And that's how they get you...

Thank you to all of the wonderful volunteers, RD Bad Ben, and my fellow Nerds.