

Psycho Wyco 50K Race Report

by Emily "Mud Doc" Horn (Feb. 14, 2009)

Well, I'll get right to the punch line – this one was damn near a DNF. This was my second go with the 50K at Psycho Wyco, my first time (and first ultra) being last year, where I had a pretty good run but missed my sub-7 hour goal because of mud. Same basic story this year, only worse...

Loop 1: I knew it had rained a lot the week prior to race day and, right up until race time, was clinging to the delusion that maybe it wouldn't be so muddy because the ground had been relatively dry, and it wasn't even supposed to be above freezing until well after noon on race day. I didn't so much account for the fact that it had rained A LOT, and the mild temps that went along with that rain meant the ground was nowhere near frozen solid. I could tell the minute my feet hit the trail that it was going to be bad. It was already slushy in places, but definitely runnable so far. A few areas were deceptively icy. A lot of people fell; I saw someone go part way down a hill luge-style on his back. Screwed shoes might not have been a bad idea, but would be useless later. My strategy was basically the opposite of last year – go out faster in the beginning to cover as many miles as possible before it became a mud fest. I was feeling great, keeping a fairly decent pace. I did a dumb thing though. I was sporting a brand new Nathan Pack that I had never ever used before. It's generally not such a good idea to try new things during a race, especially an ultra. This is not new information to me. I know this. I was about 3 miles in when I tried to take my first drink...and got nothing. My first thought was that the thing was defective in some way. This is typically what happens to me. If there is a warehouse full of a million items, I will get the item that is missing a part, not put together right, or not functioning in some way. I'm still not entirely sure what was going on – best I could tell, the hose was already frozen. Seems like the freezing point of Gatorade should be lower than the temperature it must have been inside that pouch, but somehow I was getting nothing. This wasn't a huge problem at this point because I usually have to force myself to drink much during these things anyway. I grabbed a cup of Gatorade at the Dam Hill aid station, and planned for some troubleshooting at the next aid station. Once I hit the Amos aid station, I had a swarm of KC Trail Nerds to my rescue. They got it unfrozen fairly quickly (turns out the valve was frozen too), but I burned up way more time than I wanted to so early in the race. I could hear the trail melting. Still, I blasted through the Three Hills section and finished the first loop in 2 hours flat, exactly like last year. I drank some Perpetuem/Gatorade mix that I had in my drop bag. I had also stolen an idea from Rick and Gabe, two very fast and experienced ultra runners. On one of our training runs, they were eating what I thought must be a highly specialized ultra running food. I asked what they were, and Rick replied "Star Crunch," as in the Little Debbie snacks. Brilliant – I had thrown several into my drop bag. What I didn't realize is how frozen they'd be. I took one for the road, but mostly had to just gnaw on it for awhile. Maybe a better idea for milder days.



Water crossing early in loop 1

Loop 2: This loop reminded me of the third loop at last year's race – mud, mud, mud. It was going to be a real long 20 more miles. Something about trying to run in the mud makes the sides of my knees hurt, and that was starting already. Great. I started to get pretty discouraged. I am perfectly capable of running that course at a respectable pace, and it pisses me off when the trail conditions don't allow for it. Seems like race day is always more muddy than any training run. When I start to have not such a great run, I do another dumb thing – I slack off on my fueling endeavors...which makes me feel worse...which makes me run worse...which makes me more frustrated. You get the idea. By the time I got back to the Dam Hill, I just wasn't feelin' it. I grabbed some food at the aid station, and was very seriously starting to consider dropping after 2 loops. I really didn't feel like schlepping through the mud for the rest of the day. Then I realized that, if I am going to continue to be known as "Mud Doc" by my fellow Trail Nerds, I had better come up with a better reason for dropping than mud. I really couldn't. So when I got back to the start/finish aid station, I traded my jacket for my fleece vest, drank some more Perpetuem, looked longingly at the people who had finished their shorter-distance runs (now standing around eating soup), and set off for the third loop.



Did Dick Ross photo-shop the mud off my shoes???
Or was the mud during the second loop just in my head?

Loop 3: At this point last year, I said I'd never seen so much f&*%ing mud in my life. Well now I've seen more. The exponentially increased mud combined with the inherent loneliness of the third loop really got into my head. I was really wishing I had dropped at 2 loops. I looked forward to seeing some friendly and familiar faces at the Wyandotte Triangle aid station, set up at the entrance/exit point of a single track switch-back section off the main trail. I decided I should probably stop and pee incase it got less lonely later. On the way back up, I somehow misjudged the distance between myself and the fallen tree branches behind me, and acquired several...well, I guess racing stripes of sorts. Awesome. Perhaps a metaphor for what the rest of the loop would be like. As I entered the Wyandotte Triangle, requesting new legs and a new head when asked what I needed by the fantastic crew at the aid station, I found this section to be nothing short of a mud slick. I walked most of it, staying off to the side of the trail where there were more leaves to provide some traction. As I staggered out of the Triangle, back onto the main trail, all I wanted to do was go back the way I came and go the hell home. Some encouraging words came my way from the aid station, to which I said "thank you" without turning around because I was

near tears. I was also afraid that I would not be able to resist the urge to just park it at the aid station for awhile or maybe forever. I tried to get REM's song "Superman" going through my head. This worked well when I was longing for the finish line at MS-150 (a 2-day, 180-mile bike ride) last fall, struggling from an entirely different kind of pain. By the time I was approaching the Amos aid station for the last time, I was starting to bonk. It had taken me this long to finish off the Gatorade in my Nathan Pack, and I had not eaten much (my consumed food inventory consisted of a couple of handfuls of peanut butter-filled pretzels, a Hammer gel, a Star Crunch, and a few peanut M&Ms). Stacy Amos hooked me up with some Coke and I ate a couple of Valentine's Day cookies, both of which were nearly returned to the trail less than half a mile later.



Refueling attempt late in loop 3 – probably too late...
And there's the mud I remember

The Three Hills section was definitely a struggle, my feet sliding backwards with every step up these muddy and incredibly steep hills that seem to get steeper with every loop. I'm not sure I've ever been so glad to see a finish line before. I crossed it at 7 hours and 17 minutes, eluded once again by the sub-7 hour Psycho Wyco finish, but finishing nonetheless without any regrets.

Thank you to all of the awesome volunteers who help us get through these crazy things, and to RD Bad Ben for making them happen (I'll help you Shop Vac the course next time if it rains).