

Western States Endurance Run 2000

This year I entered the Western States 100 miler. This was my 3rd 100 miler, after Massanutten and Hardrock. For difficulty it ranges somewhere similar as Massanutten and not as hard as Hardrock. However it is certainly the most competitive of all 100 mile races with stringent entry requirements and a lottery among the well over 1000 applicants for the 400 entry spots. There are quotas for elite runners and for foreigners in effect. I was lucky to get in via the foreigner quota without the lottery requirement.

In contrast to my earlier 100 milers this one didn't get me all so excited and I did not worry about not finishing nor about not reaching a decent time. I knew I could do it. Maybe it was for this reason that this years race didn't leave as deep impressions as the previous ones did.

So here is the story.

I got up at 4am on my campsite, dressed and drove some 10 minutes to the start in Squaw Valley. Until I got through the crowds and had received my race number it was too late to have a decent breakfast, so some musli was all I had in the morning. We started out at 5am under the illumination of the ski slope lights and headed up along these slopes to emigrant pass. I was running the easier angles and hiked the steeper slopes. Already here I noticed that there was a different breed of runners out here as compared to Hardrock. People were pretty fast on the (dirt) roads but on the sections with steep rocky or slippery footing I was passing everyone, including Ann Trason. On emigrant pass there was a splendid view of the sunset over Lake Tahoe, unfortunately one has to turn around to see it. From Emigrant Pass follows a pleasurable run along a hiking path through the Granite Chief wilderness, where I ran pretty close to a Japanese guy, for most of the time. A second aid station, some dirt road and good running along Red and Lyons ridge. This is a kind of never ending up and down until you drop into Canyon, where the second major climb to Robinson flat follows. This climb at mile 30 already felt a good bit tougher than the first one. Just before the aid station Ann Trason overtook me again. It was 10:28 when I left the aid station. For an optimum result I had calculated 10:30 for this point: What a timing. Over the next ridge temperatures began to soar and the downhill to Dusty Corners was pretty steep and not very good footing. Here is were you start to ran on some 5 miles of dirt road, mainly downhill. A good stretch to cover some ground quickly. But this was running on a dusty road at noon with no shade. Slowly I fell behind schedule. After this long stretch a steep hot drop into Duncan Canyon follows. By the time I reached the bottom the two handfull of ice I had placed into my cap to cool me down had already melted and I was HOT. To cool down I left the trail and took a dive into a pool in Duncan Creek. A minute in the creek had reinvigorated me and I climbed the hot long climb at a decent walking pace until the cooling effect of the water was gone. The remaining 2/3 of the climb took some effort but the heat wasn't quite as bad as I had feared. After dipping down into another Canyon and climbing up Michigan Bluff the worst climbs were done – so they say. But I was done, too. I had to pay tribute to the heat, despite the fact that I was hydrating well, drinking 2-3 quarts of gatorade per hour. Climbing up to Forresthill (mile 60) I felt getting stronger again and was quite confident to reach a decent time, even though I was 1 hour behind my 'best case pace'. From Forresthill you drop into the American River Gorge – not without climbing up and down the sidewalls of ist Canyon several times. This is where my state suddenly changed. I felt tired, my legs wouldn't move without a specific command from the brain and my feet developed badly hurting blisters. Until now I had barely seen anybody in the race, just 2 runners overtook me in the Canyons and me and the Japanese guy had overtaken each other several times. Now more people began to pass me. On the last two flat miles the first woman and her pacer went by, while I dind't have the strength to keep up with her. Ruck-A-Chucky river crossing at mile 78 is a special place: You cross the American river in more than waist deep water, helped by a rope and volunteers who stand for hours in the cold waters to hold the rope steady whilst the runners pass.

After the river Xing I changed into dry and slightly larger shoes, but this only brought very temporary relief to my blister problem. After the climb to Green Gate it was night. Theoretically an easy winding trail follows the Canyon walls for the next 10 miles. But my feet hurt so much that I had to walk the downhills not to be in too much pain. The flats I still managed to run and the uphill I tried to run as much as possible. Nevertheless, more than a dozen of runners must have passed me on those last 15 miles. Another climb brings you to Highway 49, then there is some gentle running followed by a grueling downhill where I banged my sore toes on rocks innumerable times. Finally No hands bridge was reached – and I saw a walker. Indeed for the first time since 80miles I would actually pass

somebody. In the fading light of my batteries (I had calculated to be in the finish at this time of the day) I worked my way up the last Hill into Auburn and down the last 0.5 miles where the guy whom I had passed on no hands bridge caught me again and finished some 3 minutes ahead of me. After 22:26 hours the race was finally over I fell onto a lawnchair and the pain of my feet ceded. 10 days after the race the worst is over, I can walk normal again, just that big right toe is still very sensitive to being banged against things.

To summarize this was a good race, I finished in a decent time, but the net downhill grade and the hot conditions (even if this years 90's or 35°C were relatively low temperatures for this race) are not really the conditions I dream of when running 100miles. So my thoughts are already wandering if and what race to do next year. It might be Hardrock again, but who knows what the future will bring.

And if you think I am crazy, let me tell you that I met a German couple on my campsite. The husband told me that he had just retired with his 60 years of age and they are now spending 6 months in the US doing ultramarathons. Western States was already his 10th 100 miler this year, and he had several more on his agenda until his return in October. Somebody like me, mentally and maybe also physically able to do not more than 100miler per year is just a little nobody in the big ultrarunning community.