

As many of you know, there was one last challenge ahead of me before I could leave the country to return to Germany: run a 100 mile race.

After I decided not to run Umstead earlier this year because of the boring course this year, I headed down to Virginia to run the Massanutten mountain 100, "toughest course east of the rockies": a loop of 100miles and 16 700 ft of climbs. It started out with a course briefing and a spaghetti dinner in a nice and friendly family atmosphere. The only person I knew was John Geesler who sometimes runs the finger lakes trail races. The whole thing was in a vacation resort geared towards retired people in monster trailers and their grandchildren. So we runners were somewhat out of place and the personnel didn't quite have the right idea about the size of a spaghetti meal before a long race, but after the third refill I had eaten enough. I had no crew so I had elaborated my drop bag plan to have my rain jacket, long sleeve shirt, tights and lamps in several aid station locations along the course, where I thought I would need them most. I got a good night's sleep until 4 am, when my alarm woke me up. It was a nice, cool morning. Had a big home baked german bread (some people refer to it as a brick to build houses with) with nutella for breakfast to supplement the drop of orange juice danish pastry and coffee which we got from the resort. Right at 5am the race started, it was still night. We went out first on a road, so no light was needed, fairly fast paced I kept just behind the front group of the pack. I was hot at the first aid station and left my long sleeve shirt there. Someone told me I was in place 8, which was about where I wanted to be for a fast race. After AS 1 we entered the climb along the MMT east trail it was barely getting day and I was happy to follow someone with a flashlight (I had my emergency mini-flashlight in my waist bag, but at that stage in the race I didn't want to take the time to look for it)

Another 10 minutes or so and it was bright enough to follow the trail. I had no troubles climbing and had to walk only a few of the steeper or rockier sections of the trail. Reaching shawl gap I was 4th, and thought I better slow down not to overdo it at the beginning. The skies were nice and overcast, but I was afraid that the sun would come out soon and make it a miserably hot day. So I pushed forward to reach the long hot dirt road stretch of Rt. 717 before it was too hot. Descending from Shawl gap I overtook a guy in a remarkably yellow-black outfit and I was wondering if he wanted to imitate a yellowjack to deter the bugs which had eaten up the runners in the previous years. After this first downhill Joe Clapper caught up with me and we ran together for a while, me being slightly faster uphill and he catching up on the flat or downhill parts. Skies still overcast and with a light breeze it was very enjoyable running through beautiful forest, Joe pointed out the different birds that he recognized by their songs and we saw many blooming flowers, including a beautiful patch of Lady's slippers the trail crossed right through.

This took us along another up down to Rt. 717 and no sun - heureka! even though I could look along ways ahead I couldn't see John Geesler any more, the front pack must have been well ahead at this stage. I tried to make speed on this easy terrain. At habron gap aid station It was 9 am, only 4 hours for the first 25 miles. This is an excellent time for me, I was afraid it might be moving too fast.

Climbing Habron gap I felt for the first time that my legs weren't so fresh any more. But Joe wasn't moving any faster, so I thought I would be all right. I started feeling hungry. Root 675 overlook aid station came up.

The day before they had talked about potatoes and salt at the aid stations, it seemed to be the latest fad in the ultra running diet, I thought. And indeed, this was exactly what I was craving for at the moment. I think I had 3 or 4 potatoes with salt and felt better! Leaving the aid station Tim? whom I had overtaken on the climb to Shawl gap blasted by me on the downhill. I still felt good but not quite so fresh any more. Every now and then I could catch a glimpse of the guy ahead of me. After this aid station I didn't see Joe any more, I wasn't sure if he had slowed down or had to drop out for some reason. He seemed to be going strong before and I didn't quite know what had happened to him. On the 1 mile out and back stretch to Gap creek aid station I met the no 2 and 3 in the race, no 1 had already gone by !!

and not too far ahead of me Tim? again. It is getting warmer, I have a long stretch and a tough climb ahead of me. So for the first time I fill both water bottles, one with conquest, one with water. Returning up from the aid station I met one new person who was coming close to catching up with me. No other runners close. Another climb and downhill brings me to waterfall mountain. This is one tough steep climb. additionally the sun breaks out from the clouds. This is the first time I have to fight, my pace slows down to what I guess is about 3mi/hr. Luckily the downhill on the other side is not too bad, the sun disappears again and I can keep up a good pace to the visitor center at the halfway point.

It is just 2pm, less than 1/2 hour slower on my first 50 miler last year. And I think I was in better shape then! So I took my time had a long lunch ate through the whole selection of Pretzels, chips, potatoes, jelly beans, raisins to complement my bread cheese and prosciutto from my drop bag. 10 or 15 min. later I was ready to go again. The climb up to bird Knob was not too bad. Just before the

small southern loop begins I met again no. 2 in the race followed closely by John Geesler. Did the loop through beautiful forest and met another 3 runners on the downhill. The loop took me 50 minutes so I thought I had a good space between me and them, except for the guy who I thought was following me pretty closely. On the second aid station on Rt. 211 I was still at a pace which I had thought might give me a 20hr time! I had made up a time bracket for each aid station for a finishing time between 20 and 30 hrs. So far I had been very close to the 20hr limit. But I was feeling a lot weaker now, the sun was out and it was getting warm. I had to fight to keep a somewhat decent pace up towards waterfall mountain and scothorn gap. Somehow I made it down to Scothorn aid station. I think it was here that I realized that the woman who I had met on a few of the previous aid stations wasn't an aid official, but actually the crew for the runner behind me. She took great care of me at all these aid stations, filled my water bottles while I was eating, cut orange slices, offered to clean my glasses and was a great support for me, as if she had been my crew! Thanks a lot! You wouldn't believe how much effort it is to refill your water bottles from the right tank after running 60+ miles! I was so grateful for every little help. I picked up my light head lamp here. I thought I should make it the two more aid stations before to reach my big head lamp, but to play it safe I carried these few grams extra. Coming up was another fairly flat road stretch, perfect for some speed work. But at this time it meant something like a 10-12 minute mile for me. I still would call it running, but very sloooooow. Come aid station at Rt. 730 I knew another climb was ahead (except for the last two right before the finish). At this stage I had to walk all the up hills but could force myself to a running pace whenever there was a short flat or near flat section in the trail. I reached Edinburg gap before darkness at 7.40pm. This was still a fairly good pace, one that could give me a sub 21hr time, if I could keep it up. as planned, I took another longish rest with a lot of drink and food to prepare me for the last 27 miles. It wasn't cold yet but I took tights and long sleeve shirt with me, it would be 14 miles to my next drop bag and I would quickly get cold if I don't have the energy to keep up a decent pace at some moment. A tough climb brought me to Waonaze peak, the last major peak of the course. Along flat stretch towards Woodstock tower was to follow. Last year the average pace on this section was really slow, but I had attributed that of the severe thunderstorms the runners had to go through at that time. Night was falling, the trail is getting hard to see. Lots of rocks buried under leaves, the trail is constantly meandering up and down instead of just following the contour lines. Now I know why the average pace had been so slow on this stretch in the previous years. I banged my blistered toes numerous times into rocks and trees. So far I had stumbled a few times but had never had a crash. This was the stretch where it was about to happen. My shoe laces caught a strong branch on the ground, pushed it forward with the next step, where it got caught on its other side on the ground and catapulted me over that pivot point. Miraculously just when I was falling my left hand grasped a perfect handle size diameter tree and reduced to a minor spell what would have been a major crash. Somehow I managed to finally reach Woodstock tower aid station. I believe it was Joe Clapper who greeted me there, but I was just too tired to be sure if this was the same person I had run with at the beginning of the race. He had good words for me and promised a much gentler downhill trail to Powells fort AS. The trail was much gentler, but I didn't feel much of a downhill. It was gently rolling terrain, few rocks, ideally suited for running. But my legs felt otherwise. I only could keep running on the flat parts even the short gentle uphill stretches made me fall back into a walking pace. I feel my legs stiffening up, I don't have cramps but they are getting very very stiff. The steep downhill to Powell's fort is everything but enjoyable. Something on my left shin starts hurting. Finally I arrive at the aid station. They have fire there nice and warm. It is 11.30pm now. I'd give anything for a bed now! I don't take much time at the AS. some Pretzels, banana, and a drink. In the meantime my mind is set to finishing, because this will be the quickest way to get me into my sleeping bag and in my tent. The woman who had taken care of me so wonderfully at the previous aid stations wasn't there. I thought her runner and the competitor closest behind me must have fallen back. This kind of soothed my pain, knowing that the other runners must have as much troubles as I have. A gentle climbing dirt road leads up towards the second last hill. I manage to keep a running pace for the flatter sections. A well rested person probably could walk faster than I am running now, but I know to finish asap I have to move as fast as possible on the easier stretches. Another tough climb and it'll all be downhill to the next aid station. This is one of the longest down hills I have ever experienced. An ideally pitched trail for fast running, only I didn't have it in my legs any more. This trail wandered down zigzagging along the mountain side, across stream up and down ridges -forever. Finally I reach Elizabeth furnace. I must have made an amazing speed of around a 20 min mile. Some chicken soup and more drink and I am out again. The person at the aid station told me 4.9miles. 2 mi uphill./ I calculated if I have a slow walking speed uphill I'll make it in 2hrs and then another 2 hrs should bring me down to the finish. Even in the bad shape I was in. I managed to run a few steps out of the aid station but at the first sign of a slope I slowed down to walking. Even though I wasn't walking very fast up that last

hill my lungs were bursting. I was breathing incredibly hard only to keep up a pace that I normally would consider a Sunday afternoon stroll. Finally I reached Shawl Gap 2hrs after leaving the aid station. The steep downhill hurts my stiff legs, somehow I stumble down. This morning I had to run down the same stretch and I was just flying down jumping over rocks and fallen trees. Now each of those trees posed a major obstacle. And instead of heading straight down to the resort I managed to follow a trail which was again meandering through the woods. Sometimes my route selection was pure guesswork. But with a solid hashing background I always picked the right one and found one of those omniglow light sticks hanging in the trees to reassure me that indeed I was right. I looked on my watch, just before 3am. For a second it crossed my mind that I could finish in under 22hrs but then I quickly disposed of that thought when I tried to move my legs any faster. So I finished in 22:02, 2 hours faster than I wanted to. Certainly the near ideal weather conditions contributed a great deal to this great time. 9 hrs out and 13 hrs back. This tells you that I wasn't feeling that great any more on the way back! I was sitting at the finish for about 1/2 hour to wind down eat and drink and then fell asleep as soon as I entered my tent.

My whole body was sore the next day, climbing down stairs a major pain. Today the muscle aches are much better, only this left shin still hurts a lot. I got 5 blisters on my feet, but given the fact that I felt already after 25 miles that I was developing some blisters they are far smaller than I had feared during the race.

Running a tough 100 mile course is certainly a great experience. Running one on such a beautiful varied terrain makes it mentally much easier than doing a long race with smaller hills but boring terrain.

I am glad I did the MMT100 ! Thanks Joel, for your advice and for probably being the one who finally made me run a 100 miler!

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P.S. for more details about the MMT check out <http://www.tmn.com/~asad/an02003.htm>