

Finish #13: John Fegyveresi, 2012, 59:41:21

April 2, 2012

the bugle

bugle t. Finish #13: John Fegyveresi, 2012, 59:41:21. The Barkley Marathons. 2012 Apr 2 [last modified: 2014 Apr 4]. Edition 1. John Fegyveresi's Race Report, 2012 Barkley Marathons

"And Not to Yield"

2012 Barkley Race Report

– John Fegyveresi

"I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now, nor ever." – Thoreau

There have been moments that have punctuated my life when I've seen a very specific image, and something remarkable happens. I will be casually flipping through a magazine or a website...and then the world stops. Suddenly, there's an image in front of me that draws me in. Everything else around becomes vacant and I am pulled into that picture. Every small detail in the image becomes as large as life, and a small switch is flipped in my mind and in my soul. That switch tells me one thing. No matter how long it takes, no matter what it takes, I will find a way to be in that photo myself. This happened the first time I saw a picture of the Appalachian Trail terminus sign on Mt. Katahdin. I just knew, that I would be standing next to it one day, resting my hands upon it. Late last year, I stumbled across an image of Brett standing at the yellow gate at the Barkley....and it happened again. I knew I wanted to rest my hands upon that gate after a 5th loop. Here was that photo...



Getting In

I had heard about the The Barkley briefly in the past, but never really investigated it. Once I started reading through Matt Mahoney's website, I knew just how difficult it was going to be. How was I, an admitted "middle-of-the-packer", going to complete a race that only 1% finish? Over the next two months I dedicated myself to researching every possible thing I could about the race. I contacted some veterans, read countless race reports, and bought Ed's book (which I read in one sitting). I was so completely and ridiculously absorbed. I printed out USGS topo maps, began studying every mountain in the area, analyzed contours, looked at satellite imagery of Frozen Head...you name it.

I knew just getting in was going to be a challenge as well. I had a decent number of ultras on my resume, but hoped my thru-hikes and time in Antarctica would give me a better shot. I spent days writing an essay about why I thought I could finish, but in the end deleted it all and simply said something like, "...blah blah...you've heard it all before Laz. I really just want to feel what it's like to be at the complete edge of my capabilities. I want to feel what it's like to push myself to the absolute extreme point of whimpering in a corner, only to get kicked again while down. So I ask that you give me the opportunity to be tortured and maimed...so that I may call myself a Barkley Runner." I had to set up an email scheduler to send the email on the entry date as I was actually in Antarctica at the time. When I found out I was accepted, I told everyone at my field camp, and it became quite a hot topic down there. I was ecstatic. I wrote Laz asking if there's anything else I needed to do, and he responded by saying, "HILL TRAINING!". Every night after my ice-coring shift, I would pull out my maps, and race reports and study some more. When I did finally get home at the end of January, I made the decision to keep my entry quiet. Normally I would post something online about my race schedule and start swapping info with other runners. This one time though, I decided I wanted to do this

one for me...more of an inward journey. So I told no one and was quiet on the listservs.

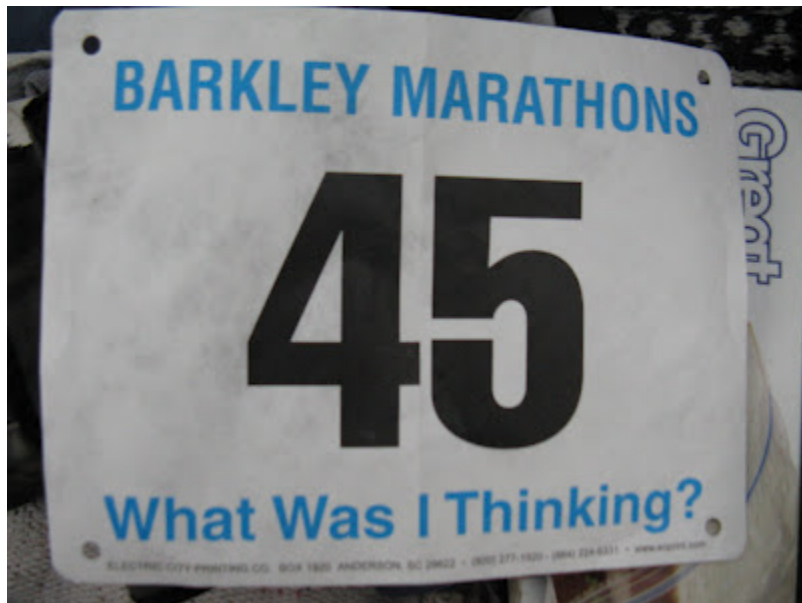
Training

I had no idea what would be proper training, I only knew that I would need thousands of feet of elevation (more so than miles). From the moment I got back from Antarctica, I focused all of my efforts on doing long, hilly weekend runs with lots of mid-week hill workouts as well. I gradually built up my weekly miles to nearly 100, and my elevation gain to 30,000 during my peak week. In addition I was purposely finding hills that were on gas-line and power-line cuts, or up unmarked hillsides at 40% gradients. As part of my training I also ran the 42-mile Black Forest Trail in a day and practiced orienteering and sleep-deprivation on a non-stop hike over 70 unfamiliar miles of the Mid-State Trail here in PA. I had never in my life trained as hard as I did for this race, and knew that my only shot was to push as hard as I could without injuring myself. When I drove down to Frozen Head a week before the race I felt that I was as trained as I could have possibly been. For the previous 5 months, I had done nothing but eat, sleep, breathe, and live the Barkley. I had originally planned on going down to the park 2 weeks early, but realized that there wasn't any point. I could only learn so much on the marked trails at Frozen Head, and I didn't want to push it to hard during my final taper weeks. The one week I spent proved to be invaluable as I was able to glean a lot of great tips just by chatting with previous veterans that were already camped at the park. I remember reading Jonathan Basham's race report about how he went to the park early to "immerse himself in it" before the race. I guess this was partly my goal as well. By walking around on the trails at Frozen Head, identifying various peaks, and simply taking it in, I was able to ease my nerves and go forth into the race with a sense of calm by my side. I was asked several times what my "goal" for the race was during the few days leading up to the start. Each time, I thought about something else I saw in Jonathan's race report. He said that you HAVE to go in thinking 5 loops. You can't be thinking "per-loop", or "fun-run". You have to think, 60 hours to finish. Period. I trained myself to think this way for the race. I would not settle for a "refused to continue". I would keep going until I either finished, or timed-out. I also knew, like Jonathan knew (and Andrew before him), that there would come a point in the race when I would have to pull away from a group, and be my own man...and run my own race. This terrified me, but I knew it would have to happen.

Friday Night

After weeks of speculation, Laz finally put out the map and our fears were proven correct. The new sections he had warned us about were in fact real. Thankfully, the entire rest of the course was unchanged from 2010-11, so I knew I would be able to possibly run with a veteran to help me navigate a bit if needed and I knew that studying all of the previous race reports was now going to pay off. Check-mate hill would be a monster though as it would feature a 1300+ foot climb over a half mile. Thankfully, it wouldn't be until laps three and four when I would have to climb it.

I turned in my Antarctic license plate (in lieu of a New York plate – my original home state), chatted a bit with some folks around the fire, and quietly retreated back to my campsite. Travis and Alyssa Wildeboer were sharing a site with me and I really enjoyed just sitting around and trading stories with them. They both ended up being absolutely critical to my Barkley finish....but more on that later.



Start

Oh no! Did I miss the conch? Frantically I woke up at 7:45 am and it was eerily quiet at camp. Did I sleep through it? I started hearing some people chattering and my heart rate came down as I soon realized I was ok. Everyone at camp seemed to think that the conch would blow right at sunrise this year. I was now beginning to wonder if this wouldn't be another 2009, with a near-noon start. How awful I thought, knowing the forecast was for 80 degree temps. But then at 8:11 it sounded and it was a frantic scramble getting ready. I came to Frozen Head with no support of any kind and had the back of my car strategically laid out with

all of my gear for each loop.

I began organizing my pack and prepping what I needed to. At some point about 15 minutes before the start I finally realized I was ready and stopped to take in the fact that I was about to start the infamous Barkley Marathons. I wished Travis luck and headed up to the gate. Cigarette lit...

Loop 1

I start jogging up the jeep road towards the trail head with the lead group feeling good and ready to go. For the entire climb up Bird Mountain I'm in the front with Nick just up ahead, and Jared in tow right behind. About 200 yards behind are Brett, Alan, Bev, Wouter and a few others. I immediately start wondering if I'm going to hard. I shouldn't be in front of Brett. I trust my heart-rate monitor and continue. At the top we start navigating the new section to book 1. In the daylight it goes quickly, we all grab our pages, and we begin the steep and gnarly descent down checkmate hill. We all take slightly different lines down, but all end up at the Phillips Creek confluence together and tear out our book 2 pages. It's at this precise moment that I made the first important decision that led to my finish. Before the race I told myself that in order to realistically finish 5 loops, I had to complete loop 1 in under 9hrs 15mins. This was based on Brett's time last year (which was a night loop). As we started the climb up to Jury Ridge, I decided to hike my own pace and aim for this 9 hours. The lead group was just pushing so damn hard, I knew I would burn out. It wasn't necessary to do a sub-8 hour first loop. So, I let them go.

For the entire North Boundary Trail I was by myself with Byron just in view up ahead. I ran solidly on the flats and downs and power-hiked the ups. All the hill training was definitely showing. I felt strong. I made it to Garden Spot in under 3 hours and began navigating to Stallion. I needed water badly and got to where I thought the drop was and....no water. What? I see Byron come up and ask him, "Where's the water drop?". "Oh...it was back there about a ¼ mile down the hill side" "Dammit!"

I sprint back down the trail, heart-rate red-lining, fill up, and sprint back. I lost about 15 minutes to the ordeal, but needed the water desperately. Going over Stallion went well, I grabbed the Yellow Indian book page, and then met up with a large group up on top that had passed me while I was sprinting back for the water. Paul Melzer was in the group and offered me some encouraging words. We funneled our way down Fikes/Stallion fairly successfully to the New River where I opted for the wet crossing out to the highway (as opposed to the log). Little did I realize this would come back to haunt me. On the other side, we gathered the "swamp" book at the base of the Spectacle and began the muddy, briar-infested climb. I made it to the top and was welcomed by some of the film crew. I made quick work going down Meth Lab hill and contoured nicely around to Raw Dog Falls and book 6. At the climbing wall I freely and openly cowered to its insanity, admitted my feebleness, and chose the "pussy ridge" option...going around the long way. Once at the top of the wall, I jumped down the small valley to the rusty barrel and climbed up to the highway near Pig Head Creek, still by myself. The Pig Head Creek climb was a little confusing at the bottom, but once up on the old jeep paths, I followed it up nicely to the coal road. The confident smile on my face was promptly wiped clean as I turned the corner and looked up Rat Jaw. Holy Hell. It just looks so damn intimidating despite it actually being not as bad as some of the other climbs. Right as I started the climb, the lead group came charging down. They were now about 40 minutes ahead of me and still running hard. I pushed up the climb and was greeted by dozens of cheering spectators at the tower. What a nice surprise. I said hi to Alyssa, told her Travis was just behind me, and headed down. I passed Travis about 10 minutes later and then motored my way down to the prison. At the base of Rat Jaw, Tim Englund caught up to me after I took a wrong turn towards the prison and had to backtrack. We worked our way down to the tunnel (the correct way), got our feet wet again, grabbed our pages, and started the climb up the Bad Thing along with Nick Hollon who had also caught us. This climb was confusing but we still made good time up to Indian Knob where we nailed the right capstone dead-on.

Now came the part I was most nervous about. In all the reports I had read, the Beech Fork area seemed to cause the most problems. I was admittedly worried about screwing it up, and without my altimeter I felt naked. Tim, Nick and I agreed to navigate together and we managed to steadily make our way right to where we needed to be. Luckily, Nick ran last year as well and remembered some key visual markers. I took compass bearings on the way down to double check and tried to memorize any landmarks I could. The Beech Tree was just as described in the instructions and I let out a huge sigh of relief when we arrived. "That wasn't so bad" I thought. Of course, doing it in reverse, at night, was still to come. The climb up Big Hell was endless, but got us right to the capstone with book 11. Again, I took multiple compass bearings. We tore out our pages and I smiled at the thought of completing my first loop at the Barkley. The jog down from the top was uneventful. Nick bolted on up ahead, and Tim and I ran in together in just over 9 hours. My goal to break 9:15 was held despite my water drop fiasco, and getting turned around at the prison. I was feeling good. **TIME: 9:07**

Loop 2

I wanted to be in and out of camp in no later than 25 minutes. It was critical to me that I get up past book 2 before dark. I did not want to have to navigate the new checkmate hill section with a headlamp. I turn in my pages and scramble back to my car to resupply. All I wanted to do was sit and rest, but instead I had to crew myself and restock my pack. I was very glad I made a checklist before the race of exactly what I wanted to do between laps so I didn't have to think to hard. I stocked food, S-caps, water, drank an Ultragen, and then finally sat down to rest a bit. Alyssa offered to boil me some water for a hot soup and I gladly accepted. It felt great to put down some ramen noodles. As the 25 minute mark approached I headed to the gate for another go and I see Tim just heading out. Perfect. I grab my number quickly from Laz and jog up to meet Tim.

We make quick work up Bird and along the new section. When we get to book 1, we find someone out looking for Tim (different Tim) the cameraman. Apparently he'd wandered off the trail in the vicinity and was now lost. The search is under control and Tim E. and I scramble down checkmate hill while it's still light out. Along the North Boundary Trail the sun begins to set and we make quick work of the 5-6 miles to Garden Spot. This time I quickly get water and we both scamper along the Stallion Ridge with no issues. The first real test was the big descent down to the New River in the dark. I showed Tim the way that I now knew, and it worked again perfectly. After a little confusion at the New River trying to find the famous "log", we opt to just wet the feet again and pop out right where we are supposed to. Feeling strong, we powered our way up the moon-lit Spectacle, acquiring many new scars, and stop for a snack at the top. Raw Dog Falls and Pig Head Creek also go smoothly and I'm starting to get a little more confident in my navigation. As we begin our climb up Rat Jaw, I notice Tim starting to fall behind a bit. I figure he'll catch me at the top, so I continue to motor up. When I get to the top, there are a bunch of random (non-race) people camping there and cheering me on. Alyssa is also there, deciding to night-hike up to wait for Travis. We chatted a bit while I refueled and Tim finally came in...but looking spent. He sits down and tells me to go on ahead. *gulp* The thought of doing the Beech Tree section alone in the dark was a bit frightening, but I knew I had to move. This was the 2nd big decision that led to my eventual finish. I headed down rat jaw solo and again passed Travis on the way down. At the prison, I wasted no time getting work done and heading over to Razor Ridge and the Bad Thing. I pulled out my compass and carefully, but steadily made my way up to Indian Knob and hit the correct capstone. With all of my concentration, I began the descent to the Beech Fork. I stayed on the correct heading and trusted my compass. After what seemed like forever, I finally saw a landmark I recognized and knew I was going to be ok. The sound of water got louder and eventually I emerged right at the confluence. I looked up, sure enough...the Beech Tree. Big Hell was again endless, but I knew if I just kept going up along the ridge, I would eventually top out at the capstone. What's nice about the Chimney capstone is that it is the absolute farthest one South. So I knew if I arrived at a stone, but could see another one to the South, then the one I was at MUST be wrong. I arrived at the book exactly where I was supposed to feeling extremely confident now. Nothing would stop me I thought. I was so thrilled that I ran a good clip all the way back to camp showing up just 20 minutes behind Alan and Nick, and only 9 minutes behind Bev. **TIME: 20:01 (loop time ~ 10:20)**

Loop 3

I went through my routine again. Resupplied, put on dry socks, ate some food, changed shoes. Alyssa made me some spaghetti and I wolfed down some snickers bars. The thought of next loop was starting to get me worried. I felt that I got lucky on loop 2, and was worried that luck would run out. But then I soon realized that by the time I reached Chimney Top, it would be getting light out again. Awesome! Just as I'm about to head out, I hear that Bev is still at camp and would like some company. Even better! We gather ourselves, say our goodbyes and head out for our first counter-clockwise loop.

The Chimney Top climb goes smoothly and after hitting the book we very cautiously make our way down Big Hell. I'm taking bearings but start to fear we might be on the wrong ridgeline. Down, down, down we go and still no water. Finally, right as I start to panic a bit, I hear the creek. When we pop out at the bottom though, I am uncertain if we are downstream of the confluence or upstream. I start heading downstream for a long ways and find nothing.

Finally, we make the command decision together to turn around and go upstream as we simply don't remember the creek being so wide. After another 20 minutes or so, we finally come to the confluence. Thank God...crisis averted. While we did lose 20 minutes, it could have been much worse. Going up Zip-Line was also a bit confusing, but I managed to spot the right capstone from a ways down and we hit it spot on. As my confidence begins to grow again, we make our way down the Bad Thing and shoot down the drainage right at Razor Ridge. From this point, I know I can nail the rest of the course very confidently (except for maybe checkmate hill). Needless to say, I'm feeling really excited that we've made it through the tough part of the loop. As we climb Rat Jaw, I start gaining a bit on Bev, but she always manages to catch back up...so I'm not worried. At the top, we fuel up, turn around and quickly make the loop down Pig Head, around Raw Dog Falls, and up Meth Lab Hill. Going down Pig Head was a little confusing, but I was able to discern the faint jeep roads well enough to navigate. After a slippery and tick-infested descent down Testicle Spectacle, we finally made it to the New River. I could tell Bev was starting to slow up a bit, but she told me she just really wanted to get up Stallion safely, as that was what she was most uncertain about. This was one of my strong points on the course so I decided to go with her the entire way up.

During the climb, I could sense we were slowing, but I wanted to at least get to the summit before potentially pulling away. Several times she told me not to wait up for her, but it was nice having the company, and she helped me get through the Beech Fork area. Once on the top, I made the decision to pick up my pace. I figured if she wanted to stay with me, she would. Otherwise I knew she'd find her way back to camp from there. I looked back after about 10 minutes and didn't see her at all. Part of me wanted to wait...but then I thought of Andrew Thompson's advice to Jonathan...and I made the decision to break away. I pushed hard for the rest of the loop. I wanted to build on whatever cushion I had. Plus as checkmate neared, my worries began to escalate a bit. This was the one tricky place I had yet to do in reverse. I made quick work of the North Boundary Section. During a few spots, I got hit with a few flash rain showers. The lightning and thunder was a bit scary, but it all passed quickly. As I was descending to Phillips Creek, I could see Alan and Nick from a few switchbacks up. I yelled down to them but they didn't hear me and began heading up checkmate hill. Looks like I'd be doing it alone.

I pulled out my map and compass at Phillips and took a proper bearing up the right of the small drainage that was defined as checkmate hill, and I began climbing. Sweet mother of God was it steep. It was also painfully slow. I felt like I was making no

progress at all and still couldn't see the ridge. Was I heading off course? It's only 1300 feet of gain right? Panic sets in a little, but I tell myself to trust my compass. After a final exhausting climb I find myself on a small unfamiliar ridgeline. I walk along it and pop out right on the coal road where book 1 is located. Woo Hoo! I make the decision at this point that if I do somehow make it to loop 5, I will beg and plead to go clockwise as I don't want to do that climb two more times. After a well deserved sigh of relief, I bolt down the trail back to camp, passing a few day hikers in the process (with rather confused looks on their faces).

I arrive at camp to some hearty cheering and some congratulations on my fun run finish. It was a bit surprising because honestly, I hadn't even thought of that. Kinda cool. Alan and Nick had come in just 7 minutes before me. I make the decision to move quickly so that maybe I can head out on loop 4 with them. Dreaded loop 4. The night-time, reverse loop. Scary stuff.

TIME: 32:21 (Loop Time: ~11:45)

Loop 4

I go through the motions at my car. I enjoy some rest and hydrate well. I know there's enough daylight to last until the Beech Fork so I'm feeling cautiously optimistic. I get all of my gear and supplies together and sit back in my chair. I realize at this point that I haven't slept a single wink yet in almost 33 hours. Surprisingly, I still feel ok though. I notice Alan and Nick heading up to the gate and decide to get my butt moving as well. It takes me a few minutes to get my remaining supplies together and in my haste, I put on a previously used (and damp) pair of socks. I get my new number and begin a slow jog out of camp towards Chimney Top.

In not long at all, I catch up to Alan and Nick and we decide to navigate the Beech Fork area together. I'm thinking this is perfect. We grab our pages at Chimney Top and I notice the bottoms of my feet are starting to burn a bit. Weird I think, as I never ever have foot problems during races. We scramble down Big Hell and end up going all over the place. Somehow we completely botch the bearing and even between the three of us we wander around looking for the Beech Tree for what seems like forever. Finally...we find it, but by this point it's almost dark. And then....then came Zipline.

For whatever reason, the climb up Zipline was a disaster. We followed the old jeep road correctly, but then lost our course for a long time. We continued upward, but always managed to find the worst patches of briars, or boulders and had to keep backtracking. It was dreadful. I didn't understand how it could be so much more difficult than the last time I did it, but NOTHING was going right. After literally hours, we hit the summit and came around the capstone. No slot though. What the Hell? Where's the book? Calm down John, Calm down. OK.

"The Indian Knob capstone with the book is the furthest North right guys? "

"Maybe?"

"Do we see another capstone to the North?"

"Maybe?"

"Maybe Yes? Or Maybe No?"

We ended up pacing around on the summit for another half an hour trying to find the right capstone. I was trying to lead and felt like I was chewing into everyone's time too. I was tired, cranky, and frankly starting to whine a bit. I was just so damned frustrated. We did eventually find the book and began a more collected descent down the Bad Thing. But again, it went poorly. We wandered between ridgelines as we descended, unsure which was the correct one. Eventually we saw the prison lights and just started aiming for them.

Finally...after over 5 hours, we arrived at the prison. I was morally deflated and very angry at myself. Yet somehow I had to crack a smile knowing that I just had my "out there" moment talked about so often in Ed's book. I guess we all have to earn our moments, and I had just earned mine. I knew I could get myself all the way back to camp at this point without issue, but I was also starting to notice that the burning in my feet was getting much worse.

On the climb up Rat Jaw, both Nick and Alan began falling behind. I decided very quickly that I wasn't going to wait. I simply couldn't afford to. I made a hasty turnaround at the top and then quickly made my way down to the coal road. Nick caught back up and actually went ahead, which got me even more excited. I got confused and lost briefly as I headed down Pig Head Creek and made a couple of wrong turns. I figured Nick would now be way up ahead. But, when I made it to Raw Dog Falls though, something happened. I found Nick sitting on the ground by the book half-asleep. He started talking to me but his speech was slurring and he was half-in/half-out. He looked at me and told me he just needed to rest a bit.

As much as it pained me, I knew I would have to leave him. We started up the NEO butt-slide together, but I was quickly ahead of him. I went up and over Meth Lab Hill and then down a very muddy and slippery Spectacle. At the bottom I turned back and did notice a head lamp at the top. This gave me a little encouragement that Nick got a 2nd wind and would catch back up. But...I would never see him again.

As I made my way up Stallion and onto the North Section, my focus shifted entirely to the wretched pain I was now feeling on the soles of my feet. What the hell was wrong with them? I never had any sort of blister or maceration problems, so why all the

pain? Any time I planted my foot on a slant, it made me wince and grimace in pain. Thankfully, most of the NBT is flat trail tread, so I was able to bear it. This all changed however when I hit checkmate hill. As I began the awful climb, every step sent searing pain from my feet up my entire body. It was the longest and most excruciating climb of my entire life. My eyes were literally welling up from the pain. When I finally did make the top by some unexplainable force of will, I started walking to the Bird Mountain Trail. Then came the moment. The first major turning point in the race.

As I approached the Pillars, I looked at my watch. Somehow the checkmate climb took me over an hour and now I had only 14 hours to finish a fifth loop. Add to that the fact I still had to get back to camp AND I hadn't slept, and suddenly I realized the walls were closing in. I sat down on the trail and took my shoes off. My feet were a disaster. Huge blisters, macerated skin, bloody/raw spots...a nightmare.

DAMMIT! SON OF A BITCH! I screamed every profanity you can imagine at the top of my lungs. My legs felt great...I WANTED to run. But my feet. I yelled at myself for putting on wet socks. You STUPID IDIOT! WHY ARE YOU SO FRIGGIN' STUPID! SH*T!

Deep breath, and a small smile. My race was over.

I had just quit

I poured whatever water I had left over my head and took in my surroundings. It was a peaceful sort of calm, knowing my race was done.

I pulled out a little note I was carrying that someone gave me. It had a picture of a 4-leaf clover on it, to give me luck. I guess it got me through 4 loops right? As I was putting my shoes back on I started thinking about all of the countless hours of training and hill workouts that I did so that I could touch that 5th gate and it made me so angry.

And then a small thought crept into my mind. Travis. He just seemed like the kind of guy who might know how to deal with bad feet like this. Maybe, just maybe he might know a way to pop my blisters correctly, or tape my feet somehow, or *something*, just to get me one more lap. Shoot, maybe he had some 600mg ibuprofens. I didn't even know if he'd be at camp or if he was on a fourth loop as well, but I had to try. Plus I figured maybe there were other people at camp that might have some kind of magic fix. I HAD TO TRY. I told myself before I started the race, that I would not quit, and I meant it. So came the 2nd turning point in my race. And so I ran. And I ran hard and fast, and it felt like I was running on raw nubs. I started singing loudly in order to distract myself from the pain. I suppose it was rather apropos that I chose songs from bands like Rage Against the Machine and not Paul Simon. When I ran up to the gate, Travis was there giving me all sorts of great encouragement. He said, "You're in great shape and are ahead of where JB was in 2010". I looked right at him and said, "Travis, I'm in big trouble man...and I don't know if it's fixable". **TIME 46:26 (Loop Time 13:30)**



Loop 5 – The Bell Loop

As we headed to the car, I found out that both Alan and Nick had dropped. So I was the only remaining person besides Brett and Jared. When we sat down and I took my shoes off, there was a collective “Oooooooooucccchhhh!!!!” from everyone standing around. It was bad. Travis, Paul, Joel, Ed, and a few others kept me calm and told me that they could patch something up that might hold...but would probably still be painful. I went through a painful process of blister popping and draining, super gluing, taping, corn-starching, and various other homegrown remedies. In the end, my feet were a powdered, glued, taped, fiasco...but they felt much better to walk on. Paul gave me a nice warm and dry pair of socks to wear, and I switched back to my other shoes. As I stood up and realized I might still have a chance, I sincerely thanked everyone for patching me so well and I headed to the gate to make history.

“I’d like to go out on a lap 5 please”

“Which direction?”

“Clockwise! Woohoo!”

“Here’s your number...be safe out there.”

I looked down at my watch and I had 12hrs 45mins to finish lap 5. As I left the gate I waved to everyone and thank them. I faintly heard Ed say, “This is historic! There’s never been a 3rd Loop-5 runner!” Kinda cool...I thought.

And now, I was in sacred territory. The magical and coveted loop 5. I couldn’t believe I was now included in that special group. Regardless of the outcome at this point, I was very excited just knowing I was on my fifth loop. Still...don’t blow it, I thought. As I headed up to the Bird Mtn Trailhead, Laz loudly rang the Swedish Bell indicating that I was starting my “Bell Loop”. BANG! CLANG! BANG! CLANG!. Awesome....

My strategy was simple. Bank as much cushion as I could while the feet weren’t too painful, and while I was on the North Section. I knew I would need it when it came time for the Beech Fork. Somewhere on the climb up Bird, I suddenly realized that I still hadn’t slept and I immediately began to think I was setting myself up for one of those really ridiculous 2005-type stories. Nothing I could do about it now though so why worry. I had caffeine tabs if I needed them. Surprisingly, at 47 hours, I was still functioning.

The descent down checkmate was painful and slow, but I hit Phillips right on and began the long process of making my way to Garden Spot. I ran whenever I could and kept thinking I was building a great cushion. I didn’t realize that I was barely holding on though. I hit Garden spot in a little under 4 hours and hopped right over to the water cache. When I got to there, the sun was beating down and it was HOT. I sat there baking and drank almost an entire gallon of water. I poured another gallon over my head and it felt incredible to drop my core temp. Super refreshed I made my way up to the ridgeline of Stallion. As I neared the crest I looked up and saw Jared coming at me.

This was it. This was one of those very rare and magic moments in the Barkley when two runners pass each other on lap 5. And...it was happening to me. We exchanged a few words and I had a ridiculous grin on my face. I will never forget that moment. Two strangers meet...in the middle of the woods....in the middle of nowhere....on the same quest. I immediately thought back to that very first climb up Bird Mt on loop 1 when Jared and I hiked together. With a somewhat surprised look on his face, he asks me, “Are you on loop 5!?” “Hell yeah I am!”

“Awesome! Let’s make this a three-person finish John!” And then he was gone.

Energized I made quick work of the descent down Stallion/Fykes and found myself at the New River. My feet were still doing ok, but starting to hurt again. I knew if I forded the River, I would not finish. I needed to keep them dry. I searched around for a safe crossing and managed to find some rocks to hop across just nearby. If only I had looked for these earlier in the race! Doh!

Once safely on the other side, I knew the climb up the Spectacle would be blistering hot. I decided it would be worth it to use 5 precious minutes to lay my upper body back into the river. It was truly magical as the cool water flowed over me. I did not want to get up. A brief glance at my watch gave me cause for alarm as I realized I was a little behind my original schedule. I hurried across the street and grabbed book 5 being careful not to step in the swampy area. As I climbed Testicle Spectacle I was greeted by the last of the film crew. Apparently they were waiting for me to show up. As I hit the summit, I heard one of them radio in that “John is headed down the power line now and still moving!”.

Raw Dog area went ok, but the climb up Pig Head Creek went painfully slow for some reason. I just couldn’t get any momentum going. I remembered I had some caffeinated gels and decided it was finally time to put a few down. I was worried about a crash, but I needed the jolt. When I rounded the coal road to Rat Jaw, I was actually relieved. As awful as Rat Jaw looks, I had decided it was my favorite of the climbs. It goes quickly, and is easy to navigate. Plus, you get the possibility of spectators at the top. Would there be anyone at the top this time?

I pound my way up middle Rat Jaw and come to the turning point on Upper Rat Jaw where the tower first comes in to view. I squint. Are those people? Then I hear it.

“WOOOOHOOOOOO!!!! GO JOHN!!!!”

Sure enough, Wouter and Paul had hiked up to wait for me. Awesome. Nothing like a little extra motivating to get me to the top. When I hit the tower road, they tell me that the ranger had come through and taken all the water AND THE BOOK.

“WHAT!?”

“Don’t worry though...we got the book back and a single jug of water for you.” Thank God. I’m not sure what I would have told Laz if there wasn’t a book (and I was out of water). I would have had witnesses verifying I was there, but what a kick in the groin regardless. I wasted no time eating, hydrating and filling my bottles. I wanted to be heading down from the tower with 5 hours left. I asked Paul and Wouter if they thought that was enough and they both said “Definitely!”. They also asked if I wanted anything once I finished and I said yes: Ice Cream. Ben and Jerry’s. Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough.



As I headed back down Rat Jaw I was right at 5 hours to go. I was getting hoots and hollers from the guys until I was well out of sight. It was incredible. It reminded me a little of a video I’d seen on youtube that Wouter had taken in 2010 of Jonathan heading down Rat Jaw on his loop 5 (minus the fog of course). When I hit lower Rat Jaw I slipped on some loose soil and experienced a horrendous 30 foot butt-slide along a rather unpleasant patch of briars. Needless to say I have some rather awkward scratches and wounds in many places the sun does not shine. It only figures it would happen on loop 5.

At the prison I am finally faced with a serious dilemma. There really is no easy way to keep your feet dry in the tunnel. I try as best as I can to walk the center rail, but at the end, I am reminded that you have to walk through the one deep section.

Screw it! (Dunk)

I hastily begin my climb up The Bad Thing now frantically trying to do the time-math in my head. The problem is that my mind is incapable of doing any math at this point. I am trying to rationalize that if I can get up Bad Thing in under an hour, that it is a

good thing. I get to the top and am at the wrong capstone. I can't remember if Indian Knob is the furthest North or South. I'm starting to lose it. I stumble along to the next capstone and luckily it's the right one. I had found it in about 50 minutes (from the Prison) so I convince myself that this was good...but then can't remember why. My mind is getting very cloudy at this point and I go through the motions at Indian Knob almost robotically. I start the descent down Zipline and pick a horrible line. I don't remember so many awful rocks and have to constantly stop and back track. My wet feet are beginning to fully throb again and it's all starting to fall apart. And then an utter moment of panic hits.

I suddenly realize that I have no memory of tearing out the Indian Knob page at the previous capstone. I am already 30 minutes down the descent. I frantically open my pack and pull out the baggie of pages. I immediately think, "Oh no, I don't remember taking this baggie out at the top. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no." I carefully count them out. "...6, 7, 8, 9". Nine. Is that right? Or is it supposed to be Ten. Why is this so hard? Let see. Checkmate Hill, Phillips, Garden Spot.....uhhhh....Raw Dog, no wait Yellow Indian.....uhhhh. Crap.

After about 10 minutes I finally realize that I have the Beech Page and the Chimney page to get and that there are 11 pages on the course. So, 9 pages was correct. Well, now that I've just wasted 10 minutes I have to get to the Beech Tree before it all falls apart.

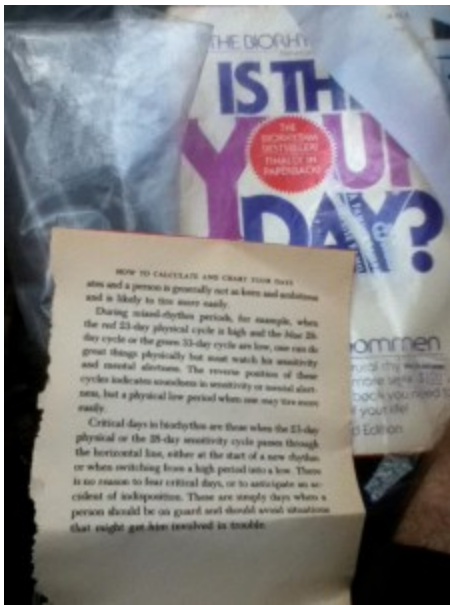
My feet are throbbing and I'm not seeing any recognizable landmarks. I frantically check my watch every 5 minutes. I keep redoing the math to think how much time I'll need to get to camp before the cutoff.

Wait! I remember this tree! It has all the little fungus discs on it. YES! There's the old jeep road! It was at this moment that I first began to feel that I was actually going to do it. I was actually going to finish the Barkley. I followed the road down and then bushwack to the fork... and the Beech tree. I splashed some cool water on my face and neck and began the last big climb of the race. One more Big Hell to go. Each step I make I think to myself, that it's one step closer to that last summit. As I near the top, I catch a glimpse of a faint track in the leaves. I know I'm right on target to hit the stone. I look up and see the capstone and I'm overjoyed with excitement. As I approach it, it suddenly morphs into a fallen tree. What the heck just happened?

What do you know...I just had a real hallucination. Cool I think, but then I start wondering if I'm even on the right mountain. My mind is so barely holding on the I start convincing myself that I've climbed an entirely different peak. How's that possible though? I mean there are tracks right here, aren't there? It's falling apart for me fast, and now the sun is starting to set too. I just keep climbing hoping that something good will happen. At the point where I'm ready to give up and lay down on the side of the mountain I see a faint outline of something. Another hallucination maybe? It kind of looks like it could be the capstone though. As I walk up to it, I can see the corner of the plastic bag holding the book. I had made it.

I sat down on a rock, tore my final Barkley page from its binding, and took in a very large breath. I savored the moment. Here I was. Alone on the third night of the Barkley, just a few miles from camp, with all 55 pages now collected. Holy Sh*t. It was an incredible feeling. I glanced down at the book and noticed the title, "Is This Your Day?" and was immediately jolted out of my fog. I have to get moving! How embarrassing would it be to miss the cut-off but have all the pages.

I look at my watch: 1hr 20 mins left. I can do this. As I start walking along the ridge back to the candy ass trail, I realize my feet have completely and altogether gone South. I figure if I can just make it to the nice tread of the Chimney Trail, I'll be at least able to hike fast. I grimaced and groaned my way along the capstones until I hit the main summit and the trail back to camp. 1hr 7 mins left. I start descending but quickly realize that the steep section at the top is causing me excruciating pain in my feet, so I have to take it slow. I tell myself I'll make it up once on the switchbacks. When I hit saddle and the switchbacks, I now have 60 mins. I start hiking fast...even try a sort-of hybrid jog-hike. It's ugly, but I'm moving. As I near the creek before the final climb to rough ridge I start stumbling a bit. I can feel my head floating around and I realize I am losing it big time. Just ONE MORE CLIMB JOHN. I make the handful of switchbacks up to Rough Ridge and when I am at the saddle I stop. I look down on the trail, give it a big fat middle finger, and tell it what it can go do to itself. I also tell it, rather politely (and I think even in a Scottish accent for some reason), that it can kiss my ass (although I probably said arse). I look at my watch, 42 mins left.



The Finish

I pop half of a caffeine tab just to be safe, and begin the final switch backs down to the road. Every switch back I turn I can feel that gate getting closer and it begins to well up inside. I round another switchback and now I can see a light down a ways on the road, and I can't hold it in. I let out an enormous scream. I pump my fists in the air and scream again at the top of my lungs. I yell, "WAKE UP FROZEN HEAD, I'M COMING IN!". I put on my headlamp at this point as it's sufficiently dark enough to need it. I reach the sign indicating the turn to the ranger station and I follow straight up to the bridge. I cross the river and make my way towards the picnic area when I notice a few small lights through the trees. And then I maybe hear a faint whistle? I look down at my watch, 30 mins left. For the first time in the entire race, I finally, and calmly, admit to myself...that I actually am going to finish. Suddenly all of the pain in my feet is gone.

I pop out near the parking of the picnic area and there's a van with some of the film crew that had waited to see if I would make the cut-off...hence the source of the whistle. They wanted to film my final run into camp and they just couldn't hold back the cheers. I didn't really know who they were at first as all I saw was headlamps, but I didn't care. I had one mission left. Hop over to the day-use foot path, jog up to the big bridge, and run up the road to that magical yellow gate.

I hit the big bridge with 23 minutes left and I rounded the corner up the road into camp. I could feel myself beginning to sway and stagger a bit and the last little adrenaline rush was making me very dizzy. I round the last corner and still don't hear anyone in camp. But then I catch sight of the gate, and the cheers roar up. I manage a delicate and feeble jog up to the gate, reach out my hands slowly, and touch it. **Final Time: 59:41:21.** And there it was. I was in that picture. I was standing at the gate, after a loop 5 of the Barkley, living what it felt like to have actually done it. Just like I had imagined when I saw that photo all those months back of Brett standing there when that single photo pulled me in. There are no words to possibly describe it, but it is a feeling like no other.



I am now a Barkley Finisher.

-John Fegyveresi

"We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." – Tennyson

A would like to extend a sincere congratulations to Brett and Jared who showed incredible determination and athleticism. I am in awe of both of you guys. Also I want to personally thank Wouter Hamelinck, Paul Melzer, Ed Furtaw, Joel Gat, Alan and Bev Abbs, Nick Hollon, all those that I had the privilege of running with, Annika and Tim, Laz and Raw Dog of course, and especially...Travis and Alyssa Wildeboer.