

Finish #3: Blake Wood, 2001, 58:21:01

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To: ultra@LISTSERV.DARTMOUTH.EDU

From: "Blake P. Wood"

Subject: Unofficial Barkley results, comments, and observations

I had a lot of fun reading through the ultra posts when we got home last night. I never imagined that David and my "tie" would generate such a lively discussion. So... to answer the question as to who will be listed first: It's David. We never got around to discussing how we'd handle this during the run, nor during the months since David first called to suggest we run together. Nevertheless, I thought the issue was pretty clear and let David touch the gate first.

Here's why: I was never able to get my mileage back up after RR100 in February, and David was obviously in better shape than I was. It was clear that he could have gone faster than we did (whether he would have actually finished doing this is another question – I believe that maintaining a reasonable pace and having two sets of eyes and brains to spot navigational errors was critical to our success). Particularly in the last five hours of the fifth loop, my feet were shot and this limited the pace. David could have easily run away from me at that point, but, being the gentleman he is, he stuck by our agreement to finish together. It was certain that we would be well under Mark Williams' time, anyway. In addition, I knew that the "record" and "first American finisher" title mattered a whole lot more to David than it did to me. We made a successful team, both contributing individual strengths, and I would have preferred to have us listed in a tie. But since that wasn't an option, it was clear to me that David deserved to be listed first.

That said, here are some miscellaneous observations about this year's Barkley: The weather was the best I've seen in the five years I've been there. It never got too hot. There were some moments of heavy rain during the second loop, but the course dried out nicely for loops four and five. David and I never stopped to sleep. Starting that fifth loop without sleep was really hard! We stayed near each other, but not always together, during the first 1.5 loops. After that, we stuck closely together. We did the fifth loop in the backward direction. I would have preferred the forward direction, which I still believe to be faster, but David was adamant that he preferred climbing Zipline and Leonard's Butt Slide to Big Hell, Little Hell, and Rat Jaw. At that point in the run, David was having more trouble on the climbs, and I was having more trouble on the descents. But we had plenty of time for the fifth loop, so the direction wasn't a critical decision. We managed to avoid serious route finding errors, but it still took us three backward loops to get the Little Hell descent right. We also missed the book on the Leonard's Butt Slide ascent in the fourth (nighttime) loop, and had to go back down for it. Typically, I'd give compass bearings, and David would lead to find a good path through the sawbriers. This worked well. Taking a compass bearing saved us from making serious mistakes at least twice, when we otherwise would have headed in a direction that was 90 degrees off. I was really impressed by the large number of runners who made it through the fun run – 10, counting David and me, but not counting David White who narrowly missed the 40 hour cutoff. In most of the previous years, there were only 2-3 fun run finishers.

I have no desire to go back. Five times is enough. I finished five loops, and think I proved last year that I could have done it alone as well. Better to give my slot to someone else.