

Finish #6: Jim Nelson, 2004, 57:28:25

April 5, 2004

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Abstract

BARKLEY'S RACE REPORT JIM NELSON

The following items are what I remember from the 04 Barkley's marathons: Mike and I arrived at Frozen Head State Park about 4:00 am on Friday morning and camped out on the picnic tables near park headquarters rather than wake everybody up in the campground. We spent Friday setting up camp and scrounging the local grocery stores for food and Red Bull. The party began in earnest as we signed in and got a big ole chicken quarter, burnt on the outside and frozen on the inside. The trick is to eat the burnt parts then throw it back on the grill to cook more deeply. Repeat as necessary. Hal was registering and I heard him say he had a map of the park and had acquired some topo maps. I thought, "Hum, those might come in handy." Read more ...

Subject: My Barkley Experience

From: Jim E Nelson

Date: Fri, 16 Apr 2004 09:22:36 -0600

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I turned in early as I was tired and at least a little apprehensive that Gary might sneak out and blow the damned horn at midnight signaling one hour to starting time. As it was the horn didn't go off until everyone was up and breakfasted in the morning. It was a warm sunny day and the forecast called for more of the same throughout the weekend. From experience the feeling was "Yeah, right".

Gary lit his cigarette and we took off at a fast walk up the hill. Mike and I outpaced the others and spent the entire first lap by ourselves. We were both feeling pretty well physically and mentally and ran the 1st lap without a single mistake. We had been out on an exploration trip three weeks earlier to memorize all the tricky spots and compass bearings. We left camp as the 'chase' group of 5 was arriving. David Horton was leading them through at a pretty torrid pace. They were about one switchback behind up the first climb then we put distance on them down to the 1st book. The climb after the 1st book Mike started feeling a tad low so we slowed down. The Horton entourage caught us as we were getting out our flashlights. It was getting rather dark but David still wondered why we were getting out our lights. We hooked on with the group and pretty much stayed together throughout the 2nd lap. I noticed that often we would arrive at a book and if Mike and I were 1st we would take our pages and leave. If the Horton's got there 1st, they would take their pages and hand the books to us. Either way, David would take off his pack and get food and sit a spell before continuing on, giving us a chance to build a bit of a lead. Then he would lead his group quickly to catch up with us.

It looked all the world to me like he was putting them through an unwitting interval session. Mike and I just continued at a steady workload. As we got to the backside of the course, only David, Mike, or myself took pulls up the hills. It felt good to have someone else to pull for a while when you were tired. You could just stare at his heels and take a walking nap for a bit and let them do the navigation. I do remember leading the whole group inadvertently through a huge briar patch going up Little Hell. No one swore out loud but I'm sure there was some discontent amongst the troops. When we arrived back to the gate I asked for my next number and Gary told me I couldn't have until I left so I told him, "I'm leaving." David heard the conversation and asked me "aren't you going to take a rest?" I didn't understand what he was asking until I saw him leave ahead of us, sans entourage. They had all gone to their tents for a nap.

Mike and I loaded up and left for our third lap. The third lap was uneventful. We made our first navigation mistake and it cost us less than two minutes. Towards the bottom of Big Hell Mike noticed that we were on the wrong ridge but he caught it right near the junction so we just angled over and no harm no foul. About midway through the North trail Mike's Achilles started acting up and he was having a rough time. Finally he told me to go on alone and it seemed like the right thing to do so I left. I spent about an hour alone then I heard a bally hoo (or a hoot in the holler) and here comes Mike, feeling all the world like a new man. His legs were better and now he was dragging me along. We finished the 3rd lap about 40 minutes behind David and before we

even left camp he came back in citing a return to sanity and not wanting it badly enough. We left feeling pretty good. The second night lap was really rough. Everything was inordinately slow. We had a hard time finding our way up Leonard's Butt Slide but after that it was smooth albeit slow sailing. Again about half way through the North trail I started to pull away from Mike. I was having trouble focusing and kind of just wanted to be by myself. Coming into camp I had to stop to take a quick 5 minute nap because I couldn't keep my eyes open coming down the trail. I pulled into camp 4 or 5 minutes ahead of Mike and the race was now on. We had decided ahead of time which way we were going. I felt like I could climb the big three climbs easier than navigate down them so I wanted to go clockwise. This fit for Mike because he felt the big 3 would hurt his already tender Achilles. I took off and beat feet up the trail.

I started fine but had a rough time on the north trail, as I knew I would. Another nap. It was here that I started mild hallucinations that would last the rest of the day. For me, both here and at Nolan's, hallucinations tend to be 'shapeshifting'. I would see a shape made from trees, rocks, etc., not know what it was so my mind would assign a noun name to it. I first saw a huge structure that looked like a big deck or boat dock out towards Sob Ditch. As you approach, they disappear and turn into the things they really are. I saw people, chairs, and other things I can't remember. It wasn't scary, more amusing than anything. I made good constant time through the 1st half of the course and met Mike at the bottom of Little Hell, exactly where we each thought we would meet. From here I started picking up the pace. So did he. I climbed Little Hell in 50 minutes, Rat Jaw in 35 minutes, and Big Hell in about 40 minutes. I knew that to go the way I went I would have to run all the down hills, whether my legs and feet liked it or not so that's what I did. I also knew I would need to get to the gate at exactly 12:00 on my watch or before to beat Mike. I got there at 12:03. I ran the entire way down from Chimney Top with the exception of where it climbs out of the creek and I ran a bit of that too. When I ran around the last corner I saw Mike standing w/ Gary and knew he had just arrived. Me too late. We ended up 3 minutes apart, not bad after 57:28 and running the last lap solo. The sense of accomplishment was huge. I wasn't so entirely trashed as I was at Nolan's. The climbs being shorter it was easier to recover between and the lack of the altitude factor made a significant difference. I appreciate all of the support we got from Gary and Trail Dog, and the other runners that cheered us on when they saw us. Congratulations to everyone who has the gumption to start an event such as this that has such a huge mental factor associated with it.

Jim Nelson



Jim passed away in a climbing accident in Colorado in August, 2014. He is greatly missed by The Barkley Community.