

# Finish #14: Nickademus Hollon, 2013, 57:41

**The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself; to be conquered by yourself is of all things most shameful and vile. -Plato**

April 1, 2013

the bugle

bugle t. Finish #14: Nickademus Hollon, 2013, 57:41: The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself; to be conquered by yourself is of all things most shameful and vile. -Plato . The Barkley Marathons. 2013 Apr 1 [last modified: 2013 Apr 6]. Edition 1.

## Prelude by Lazarus Lake

The conditions this year were impossible, yet there were finishers. Nick Hollon, and Travis Wildeboer, each making their third attempt, made a lie of human limitation... at a price. To be at the yellow gate after a Barkley finish must be experienced to be understood. I felt like a child at the grownups table... listening in... 13 and 14, collapsed in their chairs, bundled in blankets, talking with the others who had been where they had been; in the rarified air of loops 4 and 5. talking of experiences I can only imagine with a combination of awe and shuddering fear their tales are harrowing ones. of numbing fatigue, desperate climbs and heart stopping descents, of constant fear and uncertainty of a time limit that is always just behind them, when a single error could bring down everything they had worked for. I felt, at once, both humbled... and elevated... at this glimpse into the thoughts of those who have been where no man can go and done what no man can do. it is hard to explain, but seeing the barkley done makes it seem more impossible. not less.

## Nick's Top Ten Strategies to become #15

1. Know the region, get out to Barkley 1-2 weeks before and run every Jeep road, Fire road and trail possible. You should be an expert in that regions topography.
2. Know how to orienteer. Spend time researching, reading, taking classes on using a map and compass. Barkley is at least 30% (likely more) orienteering skills.
3. Practice steep uphill climbs while hiking, train at a level where your heart rate stays low and controlled.
4. Train on running steep downhills and flat terrain after blasting your muscles from climbing. Many people forget but there is also 60,000ft of descent in Barkley, being a good downhill runner can make you a finisher.
5. Eat and run with the next loop in mind, that means consistency. No one cares if you run you're first loop in under '9hrs!'...what matters is whether or not you even made it to the third.
6. Help others during the race, its good karma: a lost virgin, a confused veteran, a hungry runner, a cold runner or even just a kind word.
7. Nutrition at Barkley is different than other races, you're working for 60hrs not 24. That means your body is burning mostly fats and proteins so consume these and get used to running and training with them as fuel instead of carbohydrates. Eat and run with the next loop in mind.
8. Master the power nap or a mediation technique! A well-rested mind and runner at Barkley is 100% stronger and faster than a runner and mind who has come in and out of the camp in under fifteen minutes. Remember your going for nearly 60hrs!!
9. If you are even considering quitting the race, get the hell away from 'convenient' spots to quit. The more pain in the ass that you make quitting, the more likely you are to continue.
10. Finally, be in a finisher's mindset. When you read below how I survived loop 2, it wasn't because of my gear or physical ability, it was because I was in the right mind-set.

## Just before Barkley

At 5:00am my friend finally hit the alarm and turned the damn thing off...The boat was rocking back and forth with a fury that caused me to develop some degree of nausea. I wasn't feeling well as I gathered my race bib and light warm jacket for the boat ride to the start line of the race on the south side of Catalina island. Ahh! I ran back in and grabbed a few more layers, it was freezing outside and a small dingy traveling at 13-15 knots was not what I wanted to hop into at 5:30am. By 6:00am we were off, the spine chilling breeze numbed my hands instantly as I gripped tightly to the sides of the dingy while we splashed over 3-4ft waves. The sea was choppy and white caps stretched out across the ocean as far as I could see. Then a wave came from the side and soaked what little cotton clothing I had on. I was drenched, shivering, numb and miserable at 6am in the morning..."think of a happy place...think of a happy place" I said over and over again to myself...My friends brother smiled at me and said "we're not even around the unsheltered part of the island yet, the wind and waves get way worse around the

corner..." And then we turned the corner and suddenly 9-10 foot waves rose and fell like an earthquake across a grassy field, a constantly shifting series of hills, the dingy was a small play toy for the ocean and I was a mere human...I eyed the shore and figured when the dingy capsized, it would only be about a mile swim..."think of a happy place" My friends Dad who was driving the small dingy then decided it wasn't worth risking our lives to continue and get to the race start, we turned around...I was freezing cold, demoralized but happy to be alive as I watched a beautiful sunrise from a small dingy while sailing gently back over 3-5 foot waves with the direction of the wind....Little did I know this seemingly insignificant (and stupid) moment would become a crucial point of reference to completing the Barkley Marathons 2013.

I arrived at the yellow gate a week early. As I drove up in my rental car which reeked of new car smell I could see that a few other runners had already arrived. "Barkley...ahhh...It felt good to be back...I felt at...at home..."

That afternoon it started pouring rain and a dense fog blew in over the seemingly small 3000ft mountain range. Perfect conditions to train for the race I thought, as I assumed these terrible conditions were going to be far worse than what I was going to be facing the race weekend. I got out to chimney top and played around on the park trails and jeep roads, just trying to get a 'feel' and understanding for the region. I wanted to be so familiar with Frozen head state park, that by the time the race came around, I could have easily been a park tour guide.

The worst training day was Tuesday...There had been snow blizzards for the past 24hrs and there was now over a foot of snow scattered throughout the brushy mountain state wilderness, not the ideal terrain I wanted to be running in for Barkley. I went on a run anyway and in the midst of a horrendous climb I came across three white tailed deer. Their tails, long elegant and lifted high into the air, prancing through the forest and snow...making a mockery out of my small labored steps...

What seemed like an infinity at the time had now passed and my crew which consisted of my Mom, Dad and Girlfriend were now putting the final touches on my nutrition plan before trying to get some sleep before the night of the race.

...The conch was blown at 8:05am...I had already been awake and ready to go since 4:00am...I knew I was going to be racing for the next 50+ maybe even 60hrs and knew sleep was important but my nerves weren't letting me have any of that.

#### **Loop 1, Day 1, Miles 0-20,Clockwise direction, Starters 40, Finishers: 21**

9:05am a bunch of anxious, hardy runners, hikers and endurance enthusiasts line up behind the infamous paint chipped yellow gate. The weather was crisp and overcast and I just prayed it would stay 'overcast' having remembered a video of the race from 2010 when it was pouring rain the entire time. I looked around and saw Bev and Alan Abbs lining up toe to toe with John Fegy and Jarod Campbell (two of last year's finishers) and I could tell they were ready to go..The simple flick of a lighter broke the silent morning and the smell of sweet nicotine penetrated the air...It was go time.

I learned last year that being the first person up Bird Mountain doesn't do much for you in terms of winning or even completing the race. So I held back with the middle of the pack, there was no need to push myself this early in the race. After all I was going to be out there for hours, no days on end. I hung back with my friend Ryan Dexter, an extremely accomplished runner who was well versed in 100+ mile and multi-day racing, I knew he had what it took to handle the sleep deprivation and pacing aspect of Barkley, so I decided he could help me with pacing and in return I would help him navigate the course. He started off with two packs though, one for nutrition and one for clothing...A bad mistake, Barkley is dangerous (well duh..) you run a very thin line each loop between bringing too much gear (weighing too much) and bringing too little gear (risking running out of food, water or inadequate clothing of which I experienced all). But clearly in my opinion, two backpacks, was over packing and I could tell by the end of the first ascent was placing unnecessary strain on his body.

33 minutes to the top of Bird Mountain. That was a whole 11 minutes slower than my time up from last year, but thankfully I knew where I was going this time. Getting lost was just something that was not going to happen this year...I wasn't going to allow it. After grabbing the first page at the coal bench, there was a pretty tight knit pack, myself, Ryan (a virgin Barker) and a mix of about five other hardy looking nervous virgins and overconfident veterans. The group began to spread out as I took point down the descent of Checkmate Hill...a wicked 1,300ft descent in half a mile, which I knew I was going to have to ascend on loop 3, 4 and possibly 5...

I joked with Tim England a runner who I had come to know in the last week while training out on the trails near the course about how he had a PhD in theoretical mathematics but was being led by a guy with a BA in Anthropology and Spanish.

At this point in the race I had become what I heard other veterans refer to as 'virgin latched'...First time racers latching onto anyone who has ever done the race before in hopes that they knew where the books were or knew how to navigate the course properly. The virgin I was with was talking about how the other veterans John, Travis, Alan and Jarod who had taken off ahead of me knew the course so well and knew what they were doing and he lamented that he was stuck back here with a potentially inexperienced veteran...Obviously he didn't know who he was running with. Rather than verbally correct him, I decided I would lead the navigation to the next two books (the new section of the course)...book #3 flawless navigation. Book #4 flawless navigation...The virgins (and veterans) were now believers in my navigational skills, I knew having trained and studied orienteering so much was going to help. Tim England said the following in a recent recollection email,

"Coming from Leonard's Butt Slide and heading towards Fyke's Peak. Nick Hollon was leading, followed at some distance by

Iso, Eva and Jon. I was bringing up the rear. Nick knew the area well and seemed very happy to share with us mortals. When I finally crested the rise at Hiram's Pool and Spa, there was Nick sitting on that nappy-assed bench seat grinning from ear-to-ear and looking pleased with himself. We regrouped and off we went again."

Then before the group really began to separate on testicle spectacle and pig head creek, the virgin who had once doubted my navigational skills was running alongside me and said, "hey I really, really appreciate you helping us back there, I don't know how many minutes or possibly hours I could have spent looking for those books...I don't know if you believe in karma but you're set man, you're going to kill the race this year" His words evaporated into the thick briar patches as I swam up the hill through slick mud and sharp briars...Having difficulty remembering that the course was this hard...

My intentions were to end the loop in around 9hrs flat. Leaving me sufficient time to refuel and get back out there for a quick night loop. I finished in 8hrs and 22mins, I caught up to Alan & Bev, Travis and John who were at the beginning of the loop almost an hour or more ahead of me.

### **Loop 2, Night 1, Miles 20-40 direction, Starters 21, Finishers: 5**

5:00pm I took about a twenty five minute break at the camp, enough time to get re-fueled with some warm soup, put on some new shoes, a new shirt and change my headband for some warmer night gear. I didn't bother putting on pants, the day had been overcast but I didn't feel or see any rain at the time so I begin walking off on loop 2 just a hair behind Alan, John and Bev with nothing but short shorts, long socks, a light rain jacket, a cotton scarf and a pair of fingerless weight lifting gloves which were already soaked in sweat from the previous loop.

I looked at Alan and Bev and they didn't seem to be wearing much more either, Alan was just in a plain t-shirt...Risky I thought to myself, for what could potentially be a very cold night.

I ran with John and the Abbs until the top of Jury Ridge where the course began traversing downhill, I then took off and figured I would run ahead and try to catch up with Travis who had been running strong.

After only a short few miles, I caught Travis on the ascent up to Garden Spot (book #2). The sun was now gone and although I had no idea what his face looked like we began running together. I referred to him as 'dude' and 'man' for the first few miles we ran together...As I couldn't seem to remember his name for some reason or another.

First one drop, then another and another...Something terrible was about to happen, I could feel it in my bones. Rain, constant rain began to shower down through the thin leaves of the Tennessee forest as we made our way through briars and cliffs to the jeep road that led us to book #3. This section of the course was called Leonard's buttslide because literally the only 'safe' way down the 75% grade was to slide on your butt...And now with constant showers, it was nothing but a death slide...I went down first, grabbed onto a tree and accidentally snapping it in half causing me to just tumble down through the briars and mud, I made a new personal record getting to that book! But not in the way I had intended...I don't know how me and Travis got back up that wicked buttslide...but somehow or another we did and we were off beginning to ascend to book #4.

That's when the fog began to set in. Like a slow creeping death I could see from a distance, my field of vision became more and more clouded while the rain remained constant. It was difficult now to see Travis and he was barely thirty feet from me. Luckily, without much trouble we grabbed book #4 and separated off down Fyke's peak.

Not that it mattered, but I beat Travis over to the next book and decided I would wait for him and just eat something while he caught up. By the time he did, the rain had intensified and then I looked ahead at the horrifyingly steep testicle spectacle and remembered it being difficult to climb on a dry year...

Halfway up the Testicle, it had already been about half an hour longer than normal, we had spent precious minutes stepping and slipping face first then five feet backwards on the 60% grade. There was no forward progress...No moving, every step forward was ten feet (or more) backwards...I yelled in pain as I slipped and accidentally grabbed a healthy red briar to catch myself (the red ones were the thickest and most painful). Travis joked about our slow progress and pulled ahead of me as we neared the summit and began reentering the thick fog that hovered around the 2000ft mark.

The rain was annoying and I was beginning to get pretty cold, but I really didn't think about it too much, I knew so long as I kept moving and I kept eating something that I wasn't going to die and so long as I didn't die...I figured I had a decent shot at completing the race.

Well the problem was now, that we were ascending Rat Jaw...a mess of cut down briars and fallen power lines with which desperate runners pull themselves up on and this portion was entirely out in the open. It was now raining harder than it had been all night and a gusty 20-30 wind ran amuck along the exposed, steep ridge. As we began to ascend the first of several pitches, I grabbed the wet and slippery power line and almost immediately lost my grip catching myself barely before falling face first into a patch of briars. Then the fog came.

This was the worst fog I had ever been in in my entire life. I know people joke about and refer to this all the time, but I literally couldn't see my hand out in front of me, my visual field which is essential to navigating properly during Barkley was reduced to my feet and a small diameter of about five feet.

I led the navigation up Rat Jaw with Travis right behind me. I would stop every 20-30ft and ask, "ok do you see cut down briars on the ground?" "yup"... "ok then we are still on the right course"... We continued climbing... I felt like a blind man walking through an endless rainy, windy, cold hell... When we had reached the second to last pitch (only discernible by a large sandstone rock) I was starting to shiver, I had been consuming ~300 calories per hour but had little to nothing left in my pack now at this point, my short shorts, light rain jacket and fingerless weight lifting gloves were no match for low 30's weather, cold rain and high winds atop a 3,600ft peak at 12:00am at night... And this was all starting to set in and run through my mind.

I thought back at that moment to a time when I was doing another race called the Arrowhead 135, where at 2:00am in the middle of February in northern Minnesota I had crossed an ice lake with a recorded temperature of -40 Fahrenheit... surely this couldn't have been nearly as bad. I thought then to a time at the death race in Pittsfield, Vermont, where the race director made me stand in a small reservoir full of 35 degree water up to my chest for thirty minutes... Surely... this wasn't as bad, and I knew in that moment, that I survived and made it through that... I could certainly make it through this now. And then suddenly we peaked out at the fire road... where a headlamp kindly greeted us in the storm. A crew member of Tim Englund's had braved the climb to the top of the tower at this dark hour and as we approached the book discovered he was caring for a runner who was curled in the fetal positions inside of a trash bag shivering violently from what looked like some degree of mild hypothermia. I couldn't think about it much or else I may have succumbed to the same fate. I thought again to myself, I've survived worse.. I've been through worse and I can damn well keep going... So I ripped out my page took my first step off the mountain, slipped on my ass and started rolling... I wish it was a more graceful exit but I did what I could in the conditions that I had.

At this point in the race I knew similar to the opening story, that I had to two choices: I could stay on the top of the tower and wait until I develop hypothermia and die... or I could keep eating things and keep moving down the mountain until I was relatively warm again. Unlike 16 other runners that loop, I decided to keep going.

Halfway down the climb we came across the Abbs and John just about to start the ascent towards the fire tower. John, last years finisher, was shivering and wearing a rain jacket about as thin as mine when he said, "I'm in a bad place man... a bad place" I couldn't help but think about the reality of his words... From where he stood he had to climb 1,300ft through mud, briars, fog and pissing rain just to retrieve a page from some old romance novel... A bad place was likely a gross understatement... I patted him on the back and told him that I wanted to see him finish loop 2 and that I would see him shortly back at camp. John ended up making it to the tower, but developed hypothermia and shivered his way back down Old Mac Trail to the campground. Barkley had just consumed one of its best young.

On the final descent to the prison Travis and I spotted a distant headlamp across the valley in the forest. "whoever it is, it looks like they are descending" "Jared!" Travis thought and quickly did some calculations. "That must mean he is like 5-6hrs ahead of us... that doesn't seem right..." We just ignored it and ran down until we descended into the prison tunnel. The moment we stepped into the tunnel, I felt the water rise to my mid-calves, a shivering chill went down my spine as I looked down the distant tunnel to pitch darkness, worse still, the tunnel was leaking and about every 10-15ft a downpour of prison water would fall onto me like a crappy shower in a cheap motel. I couldn't help but think about the millions of small bacteria of murderers, rapists and other psychopaths that were now traveling down my face being carried by the water... It slightly disgusted me... So I pulled my hood a bit closer and picked up the pace.

Although what was next were two of the most difficult climbs in the course, myself and Travis were excited. The Bad thing, Indian Knob, Zipline, Big Hell and Chimney Top were all in the forest and ran in dense leaves, which meant no mud and less rain! It took my mind off of the fact that both the Bad thing and Big Hell were 1,500ft+ climbs in a little over a mile.

We navigated perfectly up to the capstone where the 'eye of the needle' the distinct course marker for Indian Knob was... But the fog was so thick... we couldn't see anything, one rock was indistinguishable from the other rock... one ridge looked exactly the same as the next ridge... we could have been going in circles for all we knew. I quickly made the decision that we should navigate over to the Mart's field trail to the north of Indian Knob, a definite trail and an excellent handrail on the map for relocating our position on the course. Within minutes we were able to relocate and find the eye of the needle, avoiding what could have been potential disaster.

When we got to the spot where the book was supposed to be though, I panicked and looked around. There was no book! Travis and I spent about five minutes searching the knob before concluding that someone had taken the book and misplaced the thing... Jared must have shown up, seen that the book was missing and quit I figured, perhaps that was the distant light we saw. Or perhaps the conditions were so bad tonight that Laz has cancelled the race for the safety of the runners? What a nice guy I thought... And then I remembered... Laz would never do that... He was probably rolling around laughing, busy playing taps as hordes of runners poured into camp begging to be tapped out from their misery.

I left a note so that the Abbs and John (who I didn't know dropped out yet) would know that we had passed through as well but didn't see the book. I figured if they grabbed my note and showed it to Laz, that would verify that we all were at the book, despite the page not being there. Travis and I navigated the rest of the loop quite flawlessly, I had mastered at this point the

mental strength and sheer determination it was taking to stay warm. It was a combination of moving and eating, if I stopped doing one or the other my soaking wet short-shorts and light rain jacket would surely not be enough and I would have soon succumb to the same fate as John and the other 20 runners on that dreadful night loop.

### **Loop 3 Day 2, Miles 40-60 counter-clockwise direction, Starters: 5 Finishers: 5**

I got into camp about 10-15 minutes before Travis, which gave me enough time to get settled and slow down for a 45 minute nap. I had learned from years past that taking naps during Barkley was essential, after all I was trying to get my body to move for upwards possibly of 60hrs. I discussed with Travis on the way in too, that a well-rested body and mind can move and navigate flawlessly, where as a sleep deprived mind and sloppy body will make countless mistakes and waste endless hours 'out there'.

Before I left camp I saw a very broken and shivering John Fegy and heard word of his close encounter with severe hypothermia and was happy to see that both him and the runner who was previously dying at the top of the tower were now both back at camp, safe and warm, a feeling I knew I wouldn't get to experience until at least 38hrs from then.

Travis left camp first, he was about five minutes ahead of me when I caught him going up to the third switchback in the reverse direction on Chimney Top. We passed the Abbs who were on their way descending into camp and I verified with them quickly that there had been no book at Indian Knob, but they hadn't grabbed my note, which turned out to be ok, Laz believed us and actually gave me another book to bring back out there and replace the one that had been lost.

Before long, we ran into a broken and beaten Jarod Campbell. The guy who had finished Barkley last year in 56hrs flat was now walking shuffling down chimney top with a beaten expression on his face. "I've been lost for at least seven hours" he said in an exasperated and tired voice. He had completely botched Indian Knob and turns out that the book had actually been at the knob, just at the opposite side (some runner misplaced it while putting it back). Jarod who was navigating by visual field and not by compass, knew that when he came across the book he was supposed to go left and did so, not realizing that left in this case (because the book was on the opposite side of the knob) was actually the direction he had come up already, hence the distant light me and Travis saw during loop 2.

All of loop 3 was navigated near perfectly, with very little mistakes and very few lows. Hallucinations had not yet set in and me and Travis were maintaining constant conversation keeping each other attentive, busy and focused on the course. However, we communally decided that we could take this loop 'easy' in order to conserve energy, memorize the markers in the opposite direction for the night and really focus on nutrition. Though the intentions were well and good, we ended moving a bit too slowly for my comfort, and I arrived in camp ahead of Travis just about an hour before sundown.

### **Loop 4 Night 2, Miles 60-80 counter-clockwise direction, Starters: 2 Finishers: 2**

I had been here before, this fatigue, this tiredness. This was loop 4, the second night, my nemesis, my worst enemy at Barkley. I knew what I was up against now though, I knew the sleep deprivation, the hunger, the sleepiness, the delirium were all going to settle in on me shortly...I just needed to remember it was all going to be temporary...temporary...temporary...

I took a thirty minute nap before heading out on the fourth loop, I knew it was going to be difficult and I knew that if I didn't get sleep now that I was going to either mis-navigate or hit an extremely bad low like I did last year. Although I was only a mere three hours ahead of the cut-off time, I sacrificed an entire hour to sleep, get mentally prepared and fueled myself properly for the next loop.

Travis again took off before me. We were now the only ones left on the course, Jarod, Alan and Bev all managed to get in Fun Runs this year and as for the other 35 competitors...They all got a healthy taste of what Barkley is like in rough weather...Me and Travis? I was just hiking in the forest...I wasn't racing or was I? Suddenly, I felt the urge to catch Travis and start pulling ahead of him. After all this was the fourth loop! Mile 60 out of 100, time to start surging or stay near your competition at least right?? I pulled off about 3-4 switchbacks ahead of him on the climb up Chimney Top, I was breathing pretty hard though, my heart rate was high and I wasn't able to chew or really eat any food because I was working too hard...What I was doing was not 'sustainable'. I slowed down and Travis caught me before the final pitch of Chimney Top, I told him out of instinct I had started to compete with him on this loop and that I was feeling the need for some reason to pull ahead. "Why? We've got a while left in the race, we should stick together through the night, motivate each other and nail navigation like we did in loop 3. I know the last loop was slow, but we just need to pull that off again this loop and then we can sleep for a whole hour before taking it 'easy' on the fifth loop" His logic resonated with me as we began descending down towards the beech tree...it was then that I estimated I had no rhyme or reason to competing with him quite yet. He had helped me out with navigation just as much as I had helped him, we were working great together as a team and I found myself constantly motivated and well-fed when I was hanging with him.

We were dead on pace in comparison with the last loop when we neared the summit of the tower. Travis's crew was cheering for us in the far distance, and then he started to break into what I thought was an extremely appropriate song "where is my mind? Wheeerreee is my mind? Way out in the water...I see it swimming..." And then I tried to sing along as my voice cracked trying to imitate the lead singers high pitched voice, "except for the little fYlsh"...my voice cracked. Everyone was laughing, we were awake, smiling and full of energy. We quickly grabbed our page and were headed back down the mountain into the

endless climbs of the second half. It wasn't until we reached the summit of Meth Lab Hill that it dawned upon me that I was now in new territory...Last year I had quit here. Atop the Testicle, alone in the midst of 2:00am. I yelled violently into nothingness of the woods and cursed at myself for being such a miserable failure. This year was different, I shoved my middle finger towards the spot where I had fallen over last year and taken a nap and then, me and Travis raged on through.

At about book #4, the reverse Leonard's Buttslide things were really starting to fall apart. Hallucinations, sounds, images were all starting to become a very horrifyingly vivid reality. I could stare at almost any rock, tree branch, stump or stick and suddenly it would become some wicked animal and start slithering, hissing or just staring at me from a silent distance. Travis was convinced he was hearing voices speaking to him from the creeks and kept telling me that your auditory functions are usually the first to go when hallucinating...What I always experienced was far more visual.

At the Garden Spot about 8 rough miles from camp I decided to drink an entire energy drink and packed down a bag of skittles...I felt great for about ten minutes and then started violently dipping into one of my lowest lows yet of the race. I had foolishly pulled ahead of Travis at this point because he had me convinced that we weren't going to make the cut-off time for the next loop if we didn't hurry (truth be told we were actually pretty close to the time cut-off for this loop). I was crashing hard though, there were centipedes some real, some not crawling all over the ground, I heard a baby crying somewhere in the distance and then I looked back and say a runner dash behind a tree. I stopped for a moment. Turned around and investigated the other side of the tree...nothing. A few miles later I heard Travis in the distance yelling for me "help!" "help!" I stopped again, turned around and could not see his headlamp or a light in the distance, I turned around and saw something else dash behind a nearby tree...There were a few snakes on the ground that turned into sticks as I stepped on them, a porcupine and a weasel possibly real, possibly not, were playing around on the trail towards the top of Jury Ridge. I was really starting to lose it.

And then it happened, the worst low of the race. Emptiness, vast nothingness. It wasn't depression, it wasn't sadness...the problem was, it wasn't anything, yet a hollow emptiness was slowly creeping into my soul. I remember Thomas the Choo-Choo train from when I was a kid... "I think I can...I know I can...I think I can...Come on Nick...Come on Nick...Come on Nick" I started to cry out of delirium....I laughed...I saw a menacing black shadowed figure dart behind a tree and chuckle. "Come on Nick...Come on Nick...Si se puede...si se puede...echale ganas guay...ponte perro...vaminos! Come on Nick...Keep your shit together." I started to pretend I was my parents, "Nick we're so proud of you, keep going Nick, we believe in you" I said out loud to the forest...Then suddenly I was my friends from High School "Nick, you crazy bastard...How do you run so far?"...Then I was my girlfriend, "come on Nick, keep it together, you got this, you can pull through! I love you! Come on!" I was everyone, all at once, ten or twenty different people possessed my body for the next thirty minutes as my mind drifted off into the clear obsidian sky that night. I just had to make it to sunrise...I just had to make it to sunrise...

When Travis caught me, I was talking to myself and cursing at some deer in the forest that had been whispering incoherently to me. It was good to talk to someone human again, though my parents, girlfriend and friends all kept me company...I began to doubt they were there...And I knew at least Tra? Travertine? Trevor? Traroy? I couldn't remember his name...Who was he? What was I doing in this forest? Barkley...Barkley...hmm what a strange sounding word... "hey man...(I couldn't remember his name) how are you holding up?" "Dude...(maybe he didn't know who I was either...) not so well, I am seeing things like mad man...you?" he said and I responded "ya definitely...it's pretty rough, we should probably stick the rest of this loop out together." As I fell behind his pace on the downhill, I knew I could have ran faster, but I didn't want to risk losing my race to my mind at this point...I had come too far and I wasn't going to let insanity stop me.

At the last climb, nerves got to Trev...Travis...and he began surging up Checkmate Hill, I couldn't keep the pace...my stomach wouldn't shut up...It was as if I was battling against three different forces throughout the entire race: my mind (which was lost on loop 4), my body (which was in a constant state of loss since loop 2) and nature (which constantly beat me down each loop). Sometimes these three forces worked together, something they fought violently against one another. The sun was just starting to rise as the more vivid and frightening hallucinations began to fade and the climb came to an end, I was thankful that I was through the worst of it.

### **Loop 5 Day 3, Miles 80-100 counter-clockwise direction, Starters: 2 Finishers: 2**

I came into camp about two to three minutes ahead of Travis despite him pulling ahead on the climb, I managed to catch him on the downhill, he had worked out the math and informed me that we only now had about 45mins of 'cushion' to make a sub-12hr loop for an official sub 60-hr Barkley finish.

At 8:15am, I started off in the counter-clockwise direction for my final loop, I was anxious to get going and worried that I may not be able to produce a 12hr and 45min loop at this point...especially if I got lost...

"I want to be in you when the sun goes down...oooo yyaaaaaaa...I want to be in you when the sun goes down...oooo yyaaaaaaa" This was the worst techno song I had ever heard in my life...The sun was just starting to come up over the mountain when I ascended rough ridge for what I realized was the last time...I paused, took a look around, admired the rhododendron and plodded down the hill...That stupid techno song...It was ruining my mood, "gah a snake! Nope that's a stick...Oh look a pig! Nope, that's a log..." The hallucinations were still coming in pretty strong. I could hear voices whistling in the wind and speaking to me from the distant creeks, indistinct but audible. I had clearly lost my mind somewhere on the fourth loop, but that was ok, I really didn't need it anyway, it was starting to weigh me down.

At the top of Chimney Top Trail in the rising sun, I spotted what looked like the same three deer I had been seeing throughout the entire race. Spiritually, I decided that those deer were my crew watching over me during the course, my mom, my dad and my girlfriend, carefully watching over me ensuring that I completed Barkley this year. I muttered to myself and the deer, "frikkin' showoffs..." as they pranced away at what I figured was a 5:00min/mile up the mountain...I bet those deer couldn't run Barkley non-stop...

By the time I hit the top of Chimney Top, I was awake, I felt new, fresh almost. The sun was out, I literally hadn't seen the sun in about a week. I had been running since late March, it was now April. The weather had been raining, snowing, overcast and raining. But now the air was fresh, the trails seemed dry, the sky was blue and the sun...it was just there and that was simply enough.

I slowly awoke while simultaneously moving and navigating through the course with perfect accuracy. I would like to think that at this point, it would have seemed unnatural to me to even deviate slightly from the route that I had been running now for the past 30+hrs of my life.

By the time I hit begin ascending lower Rat Jaw, I looked at my watch and realized I was moving about 45mins faster to this point than both loop 3 & 4. Something had either left me or taken over me

Halfway up the climb to the top of Rat Jaw, I came across a dark coal filled mud puddle. I then turned towards the trees and addressed the woods of Tennessee, "Barkley, you have taken my blood, you have taken my pride, you have taken my strength...I will now take from you your blood, your strength and everything you have left...You have left me nothing...I will strip you bare" I took off my shirt and dipped my fingers into the soft, dark mud and coated my arms and face in the Barkley blood.

I raged up the rest of the climb, in a state of fading admiration and respect for the course. In the default world, I constantly yearned to find climbs this steep and here I was complaining about it? No that simply won't do, I cherished that moment from then on and began singing a Modest Mouse song out loud. Then in the far distance, I noticed my girlfriend and mom atop the jeep road at the radio tower and once within earshot of me, I let out a raging roar. As I got closer, I got happier, this was the last time I had to ascend Rat Jaw...I said with my arms flexed out to the side leaning back on the last steps of the climb, "DO YOU THINK THE BRIARS ARE YOUR FRIENDS?? I WAS BORN AMONG THE BRIARS!!" doing my best to impersonate Bane from the most recent Batman movie, my mom and girlfriend cracked up, hurried me over to the book and filmed me as I ripped out one of my last pages. "Nick, we will see you back at camp at around 7:00! Go kill it!"

I raged down the hill and disappeared around the corner before I could even process how quickly I was moving. Travis was headed in the opposite direction, as is customary in Barkley tradition (you don't want the runner to experience the whole race without being alone now do you?) And I was worried that if he was near Rat Jaw, that he would have a more than decent chance of beating me back to camp.

As I came down Pig Head Creek, I made a last minute decision to descend Danger Dave's climbing wall instead of Pussy Ridge, for which I had taken all of the other four loops. Danger Dave's is an 85% grade and descends about 200ft in roughly 0.0001 miles...it's basically a 200ft cliff with some cushy leaves on it so you can fall semi-gracefully. I don't know where the energy came from, but I gracefully flew with style down Danger Dave's, making fresh tracks, apparently I was the first and only runner to attempt this ridiculous descent this year. I figured the blood I took from Barkley was in some sort of Buddhist-Karmic sense making me 'one' with the forest.

When I finally met Travis going the opposite direction, he was about half-way up testicle spectacle moving at a decent stride. "Have a good hike!" he said. I still couldn't remember his name from the previous night...and said "best of luck to you man!" I was down Testicle Spectacle in a record eight minutes. I don't know how I was moving so fast.

And then as I was ascending Fyke's Peak for the last time, I noticed what had been there all along on this entire loop. There was a light breeze blowing at my back, pushing me forward. This breeze was the manifestation of the love, support and positive energy outpouring from those who were watching me at this race, the fellow ultrarunner's, the fallen virgins of the race, my friends, my family. They were the wind at my back and suddenly, I realized why I felt so good and why I had that energy on the fifth loop...it was simply the wind pushing me along.

The hallucinations returned towards the top of Fyke's Peak, a runner in a red rain jacket disappeared behind a tree, and then another runner in a blue flannel yelled out to me before disappearing behind another tree to my left. Ahead of me an older man was walking in a yellow rain jacket, leaving boot prints in the muddy ground. None of this was real...or was it? I liked to believe at this point, these images, these people, were real, they were the spirits of those fallen, of those who didn't make a loop, a fun

run or a finish and their souls were doomed to walk the Barkley forever. I wasn't going to become one of them.

As I was listening to the sounds of my feet shuffling through the leaves on my ascent towards Garden Spot for the final time, I thought hard on the word 'final.' It was so weird for me to be using that word 'final'... 'final'... this was it, these were the last times I would have to be out here. I paused, took a look around and just stood and admired the sheer beauty of the course. The waterfalls, the yellow beech trees, the moss-covered and dirty sandstone caprocks...I had really come to love this course and this part of Tennessee. Now, getting to run through it for the last time...it almost felt like I was saying goodbye to a really good friend who was moving to another state or something for a job promotion. What I felt was a combination of elation, respect, admiration and sadness.

The cocktail of emotions, hallucinations and wind blowing at my back was producing some extremely powerful energy as I burst into one of my more powerful runner's highs.

It was a furious and ephemeral high I yelled as loud as I could into the empty woods of Tennessee. Lyrics from a techno song my uncle had once shown me, "is THAT ALL YOU GOT?!?!? LET ME SEE YOUR WAR FACE!!! AHHHHHHH!!!" The raw stumps that were my legs were suddenly oiled and moving at break neck pace (literally—had I fallen—I would have broken my neck!) I was pounding out what felt like miles...only to discover thirty minutes later when the high was finally wearing off that I had only covered about 1 mile.

I stopped and stared at what I thought was the most beautiful bird, an extremely vibrant orange and red cardinal just sitting atop a leafless gray tree. As I got closer and admired it, I was happy to see it wasn't flying away...when all of a sudden it took off, but not like a bird...like a leaf and fell slowly to the ground...

I was now on the final ascent of Barkley 2013, I knew I had the finish within my grasp, I figured Travis had already finished now and that I was definitely going to be second place, none the less, I powered up the final climb, looking back, catching the last few glimpses of the last 57+hrs of my life.

"NOW YOUR PLAYING WITH POWER!!!! GRAHHHH!!!!!!!" A manic insane yell exploded from my mouth, my legs were bleeding, my knees bruised and on the verge of collapse, my shoulders throbbed in pain....I split the distance between me and impossible....coming up over the final ascent before reaching the Cumberland trail I was getting anxious...I started hiking quickly and then nailed a huge rock with my right foot and fell face first into the leaves right at the final steps of the climb...Barkley...you bastard...you don't get to have the last laugh...not this year...this year is mine!...and down to the steps of doom I went...I had tears coming down my face...I wasn't crying, I wasn't laughing...it was some strange combination of laughing, crying, breathing and running a 6:00min/ mile...

Once I hit the peak of Bird Mountain I looked at my watch...6hrs and 29mins...I wanted to be done by 6:45...let's get flying Nick—this ain't no sob story, GO!!

And then I fiercely raged...raged like no Barkley runner has ever raged before...with the spirits of ultrarunner's past and present at my back, those three deer somewhere in distance watching over me. I was the impossible.

As Laz said, "we made a lie out of the human limitation" no one should ever be capable of running that fast after running for 57hrs and 20mins straight...however, I was running as if I was competing back in a high school cross country meet...flying around each corner with such precision and accuracy while placing my feet for microseconds on the tips of rocks, roots and muds as I floated over this hellish terrain for the last time. In what I figured was a few switchbacks away from camp, I let out a huge roar into the empty forest...had there been anyone not associated with the race I would have scared the living daylights out of them...Tick—Tick—Tick...it must have looked like I was coming back from a 5k the way I was darting through the forest.

Laz described what he saw in the distance as a fast moving blurry image somewhere up on the mountain...And then the final muddy switchback...the end...this was it...all that had come to be...all that I had become...was about to end. Without thinking about it, I ripped off my earphones from my iPod that were still fresh with the blood and sweat from the descent, flexed my arms and let out a mighty roar as I raged at what must have been near the fastest 200 meters of my life and slammed my fists onto the yellow gate as Laz, my family and the few remaining Barkers burst the silence of the woods with applause.

I have watched at previous years Brett finish, Jarod finish, John finish, it had always looked like such a struggle such a difficult and labored motion...over-exaggerated arm swimming, legs that looked broken, a face that said it all...I was nothing like them, if only for that 13 minutes it took me to cover the last 2 miles of the race...I was immortal...I was invincible...I had just conquered the impossible and was damn well going to look like it...Barkley...I wasn't going to let it have the last laugh....

My message to you all then at the end of this race report..isn't that I hope you ever complete Barkley...but that you find something or have something out there in the world that is your 'own' Barkley and that you decimate it...Forward, relentless, determination...A wise friend once asked me "what's the wealthiest place in the world?" To which I simply replied, "probably China...because of all the billions of people or maybe the Middle East? Maybe even Africa with all their diamonds and natural resources? No...wait..." The expression on my friends face was unwavering "...ok, ok so maybe something more metaphorical...uh...the United States?" "Why?" he demanded. "...uh...because of the vast amount of opportunity and chance for upward economic mobility?" "No Nick...none of these places are the wealthiest...if you look at life's value as a collection of



'lived experiences' not monetary wealth...than the 'wealthiest' places in the world are graveyards, cemeteries, burial grounds...why? Because this is where everyone has gone with their un-lived experiences, this is where the person who never ran that 5k, ran that 10k, wrote that book, sung that song, painted that picture, talked with their dad again, quit that job they hated, this is where people have taken their hopes and dreams to the grave."

I understood immediately at the moment what he meant. As I wanted nothing to do with it, I resolved that my grave will be nothing but a pile of bones and a corpse with the bearings of heavy use. I encourage you all to do the same, find your own Barkley and do your part in making cemeteries that much less wealthy.

If the Barkley Marathons are the race that eats its young, I advise that all finishers (such as me) coat themselves in syrup of Ipecac prior to starting the race, in order to be less appetizing.

-Nickademus Hollon XIII