

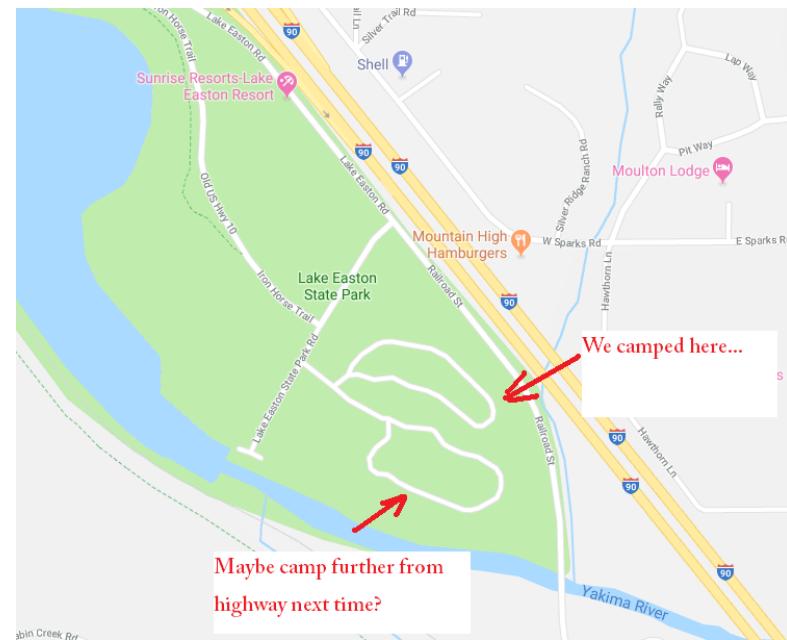
Cascade Crest Race Report: August 25, 2018

I'm lucky to be supported by a great crew- Bree, Kathy, and Jereme. Bree and her mother Kathy helped me immensely with preparation and race support as well as cheering me on even late at night. Jereme helped a lot as the wheels started falling off the car around mile 90 and he kept me moving for the finish. Thanks to them it made this event really special for me.

To kick off the weekend, I worked a half day Friday, and we left Portland for Easton around noon. It had been smoky and hot all week, and I was fretting over inhaling 100 miles of smoke during the race. Luckily the weather was looking like it was going to be cooler for the race, and smoke conditions mitigated by a marine front pushing through the area through the night.

We previously reserved a campsite at Lake Easton State Park. We checked in and set up camp- the campground was completely full and we reserved one of the last spots months prior to the event. Our spot was close to the highway, and the highway noise ended up waking up several in our group. If you are considering camping at Lake Easton- try to reserve your spot early in the year and get a spot the furthest away from I-90 highway as possible- the truck engines are loud!.

After settling into our site we headed to dinner in the lovely little town of Roslyn about 15 minutes away. The TV series Northern Exposure was filmed in Roslyn, and it has nice restaurants, art boutiques, a brewery, and other curiosities to explore. We had dinner at Roslyn Mexican Grill after a bit of a wait. Jereme and I fueled up on their impressive dinner with steak, chicken, and shrimp. Fellow ultra-Portlanders Brandon and Richard Benoit (father and son) dined next to us- (which I learned afterward: during the first climb in the race Brandon and I chatted for a while.



After a decent sleep we headed to the fire station in Easton for second breakfast and race check-in. Their breakfast was really good, with lots of fresh fruit, pastries, and delicious pancakes. The vibe was



really cool too- it's low key and it seems like lots of people know each other. I knew a few of the Portland crew that came- Jen and Jeff and Jeff, and a few others. After the breakfast, the briefing, and a couple stints in the porta-potty, the race was on!

The first mile is totally flat and it got real, quick. I was in the middle of the pack, and the first mile ticked by at 8:30 pace. This seemed totally unsustainable and way too fast. At this point I

counted my approximate position, about 50th place after the first mile. I consciously put the brakes on, slowed down more, and let more people stream by me as we started up the first climb- a 3000 ft monster over the next few miles. I stuck to my plan, keep the HR low (under 130 or about 70% max) for as long as I could. It felt too slow, and I was getting anxious and wanted to break out of the conga-line and really power-hike up the hill. Instead I made some small talk and met Brandon Benoit who I recognized from sitting next to at dinner the night before. By the first aid station I was in 85th place.

Somewhere around mile 10 I started getting into the zone. I put some good tunes on and set the cruise control at a super-easy pace as the miles just ticked by. The weather was cool and the smoke was gone. There was an aid station with delicious smoothies- the guy asked me if I wanted dairy or non-dairy and I told him why not



both. I was taking in a lot of calories, probably 400 per hour of mostly real food and my stomach was feeling great. I had a runner's high for hours, it was a perfect day, and I was in my best shape and the stars were aligned for me. I had queued up a classic two-night Phish set to listen to and was jamming-out up the mountain and down the other side. I also did the bonus climb to the top of Blowout Mountain for the wooden nickel. The race was front-loaded, a majority of the 23k feet of climbing was in the first half.



Feeling good at mile 25

that's so great sometimes. Avocado and cheese rolls... quesadillas, smoothies, great spectators, awesome trails, perfect weather, good tunes... I was in heaven for the first 10 hours or so.

People started slowing down around mile 25 and I started moving forward in a relative sense (I was maintaining pace). At one aid station I passed around 10 people. In the aid stations, I did the baggie trick- I'd just cruise through and throw a bunch of goodies in a baggie and then eat them when I got a chance on an uphill hiking section. That way the aid station stops were less than 1 minute, many of them were 30 second. I got to see my crew at mile 25 which was great. I didn't spend much time in the aid stations, and that's where I did most of my passing. The PCT section of the course (about 30 miles long) is really as good as it looks in the pictures. There's some nice rolling downhill sections with lush carpet-like trails to cruise, and the forest seems to go on forever.

Coming out of one aid station, Kathy told me to look on the side of the trail by the switchback. She put a heart-shaped rock out there for me. So sweet! In another section, the WTA was working on the trail and as you approached they would look up your number on a sheet and do a cheer yelling out my name. Then they had beers lined up on the side of the trail which was pretty funny. It's the small stuff

The race started getting more challenging around mile 50. At some point you need to turn off the PCT and head down to the Snoqualmie tunnel. The fog was coming in, and I was a little preoccupied by trying to get my headlamp adjusted right because I was a little clumsy and fumbled with my handheld bottle and my headphones and phone. I had too much stuff in my hands. Heading down a rough access road, I ran through a section of baby head-sized rocks that are obnoxious to try to run on. I wasn't expecting it and started to get a little spooked because it suddenly fogged in, it was turning twilight, and I didn't know the trail at all. After navigating this section in the fog, I found the steep bushwack descent with the ropes. Once again I was preoccupied with my gear- trying to hold on to my handheld bottle and phone while trying to hang onto ropes for support down a technical descent proved difficult. I made it down, but it was awkward and it rattled me a bit because I almost fell a couple times.

At the bottom of the ropes course it took me a minute to figure out that I needed to go to the right. I went a quarter mile without a confidence marker and I was feeling rattled again. What if I was going the wrong way? It was foggy and almost dark and I wasn't adjusted to the headlamp yet... did I miss the confidence marker? Eventually I found a confidence marker, and the yawning mouth of the Snoqualmie tunnel opened before me in the foggy twilight. Into the belly of the beast I went.

The first mile of the tunnel was cool. I got a chuckle out of the skeleton with the pacer bib. However, it started getting weirdly monotonous- It seemed like the tunnel should be over soon, but it just kept going. I didn't pay attention to when I entered the tunnel, so I didn't know how long I had been in there or how far I had come in there since the GPS didn't work. Where is the end? Am I hallucinating? Is that a light behind me? I turned off my headlamp and I could see a faint light behind me. I turned around and thought I could see a light in front of me. It was really quiet and dark. When I started running again it occurred to me that maybe I got turned around somehow and was now heading in the wrong direction. Impossible... right? But what if I was? My confidence was shaken. The thoughts were just kind of popping up and I decided to ignore them and get to the Hyak aid station. I didn't get turned around in the tunnel (why would I?) and it was completely dark when I got out of the tunnel and entered the Hyak aid station, 1 hour ahead of my predicted 24-hour pace.

The aid station was a flurry of activity. I traded out my hand bottle for a vest, chatted briefly with my crew and left ASAP, with Jereme in tow. We had a flat road section before the next climb up to Keechelus Ridge. My legs were getting stiff, but I was still running 10-minute pace on the flats with some effort. I had passed about 50 people during the afternoon and evening, and Jereme and I picked off another handful of people as we powerhiked up to the ridge. We chatted about everything... the race, turning 40 (we both turned 40 this year), and how nice the evening was. As luck would have it, I was also bib number 40 for the race! The stars were really aligned for this one! At the aid at the top of the hill there was a nice station with Christmas lights and watermelon and some other goodies.

We started running down the backside of the ridge on a gravel road toward Kachess Lake. My legs were starting to complain louder but still cruised at a 9 minute-mile pace on the downhill section at around mile 66. I had the "Trail from Hell" bushwack-y section coming, and Jereme and I met up with fellow Portlander Jen Love at the Kachess Lake aid station. The "Trail from Hell" was absurd- it had everything from climbing up/down boulders to climbing over massive downed logs to mucking though springs and

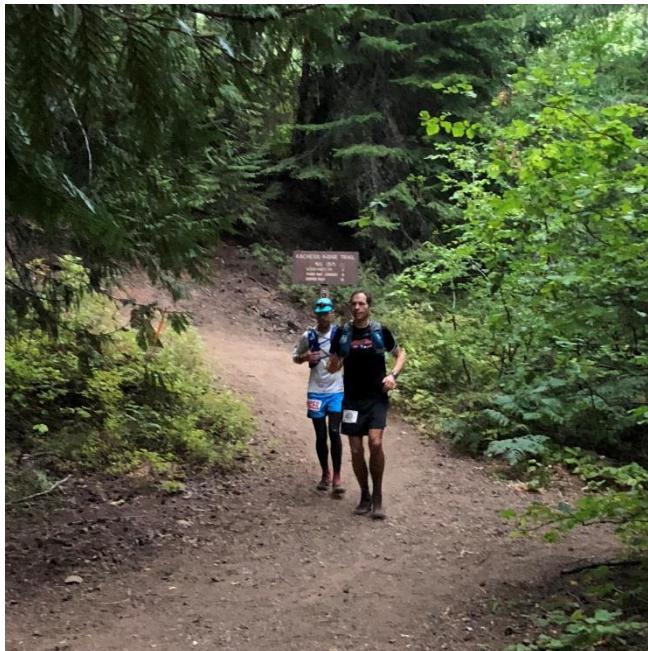
water hazards. I liked it because it was a real challenge at 70 miles into the race and a stark contrast to the last 8 miles or so of gravel road running. We picked off a couple runners in this section, but the rate was slowing down.

The final climb was a real challenge. It was kind of between what could be hiked and ran. I remember passing a crew with Ben Gibbard in this section. I was falling apart more- fatigue was setting in and the fog started getting thick toward the top of the climb after No Name Ridge. I started doing more caffeine: I had shot bloks with a good amount of caffeine, and that helped a little. But that's where the mistakes started. Just before Thorp Mtn I stopped at the aid station and chugged a good amount of ginger ale. I chased it with shot blocks and gummy bears. Then I climbed up to Thorp Mtn and collected the token and came back to the aid station where I consumed more soda and sugar. Lots of sugars- not much water.

The needles section after Thorp was difficult. At one point I had wandered off the trail into the fog. Jereme (who had stopped for a bathroom break) had to call me back to the trail- I was out looking for the trail near a cliff face in the dense fog, completely befuddled as to where the trail had gone to. He saved my ass there, I could barely see the ground and I was total disoriented. The climbs were steep and eventually we made it to French Cabin where I loaded up on some more soda and sweets.

Then it all came out. I had to stop to take a poop and had a somewhat explosive experience. I was feeling ill and the accumulated damage from the previous 90 miles hit me like a ton of bricks. I had a hard time getting back on the trail and moving again. Jereme encouraged me to get moving again, and a dozen steps later I projectile vomited out a syrupy concoction of several types of soda, unchewed and undisolved gummy bears and shot blocks. The previous hour's worth of calories had just sat in my stomach- I neglected to drink any water to dilute the sugars and aid absorption, and it all just came back out like a sugary geyser from hell. Two fruitful vomits and several dry heaves later, I could barely walk down the path. I will never forget the view of those half chewed shot blocks and gummy bears swimming in soda vomit. Gross. Jereme continued to encourage me, and I did everything I could to just keep moving forward.

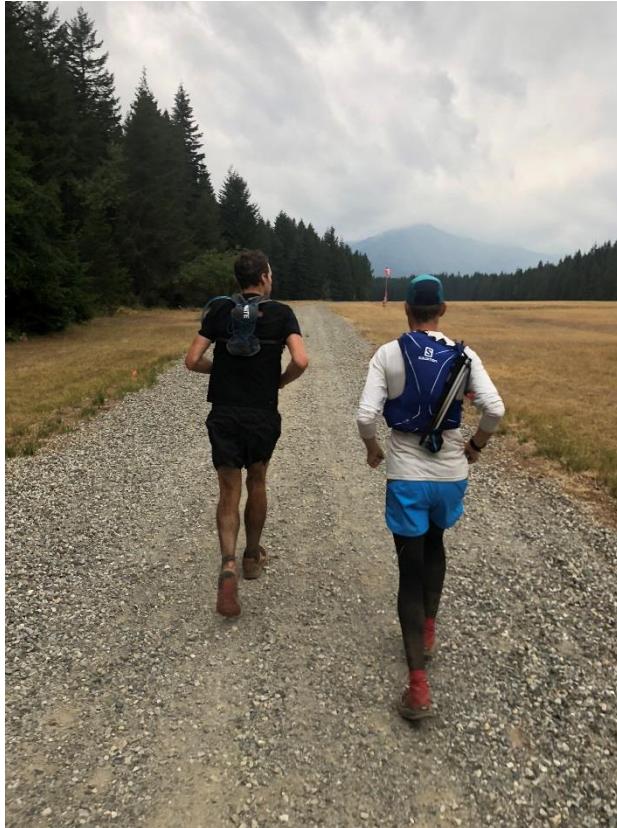
By degrees I felt better. That awful mile took 27 minutes, and it's a wonder that I only got passed once during this section. I also passed another person, so I guess we were all pretty shitty by this point in the race. I had some more water, and a little Gu, and started speeding up and moving again. My headlamp died, and instead of switching the batteries I ran with the light from my iPhone, which was sufficient as



More or less shuffling again by the last aid station.

the sun was starting to breakthrough the foggy twilight. By the time we got to the final aid station I was feeling human again and running, more or less.

Bree joined Jereme and I for the last 4 miles to the finish. We chatted a bit as we ran around the Easton airstrip. I looked behind me and there were a couple of people a half mile behind us. I picked up the pace. A mile later they were even closer, so I picked up the pace again. Finally in the last mile I was down in the 9:00 mile pace not wanting to give up my position. I could see the finish, and as soon as it started, it was over. 23 Hours and 4 minutes! I got hugs from everyone and was very happy to be done. Yitka Winn, the first place woman finished just after I did.









It was nice to put my legs into a warm bucket of water. My nice new socks and shoes got really crusty from 100 miles of dirt. My left ankle was swollen, and I had gotten some wasp stings on my left leg during the race. Everything hurt, but it was ok- I had the best race performance I've ever had. I got a sweet buckle, and exchanged war stories with some of the veterans at the finish.





Wrecked my legs for about two months



Showing off my sweet buckle and my sweetie Bree!

Race Analysis

