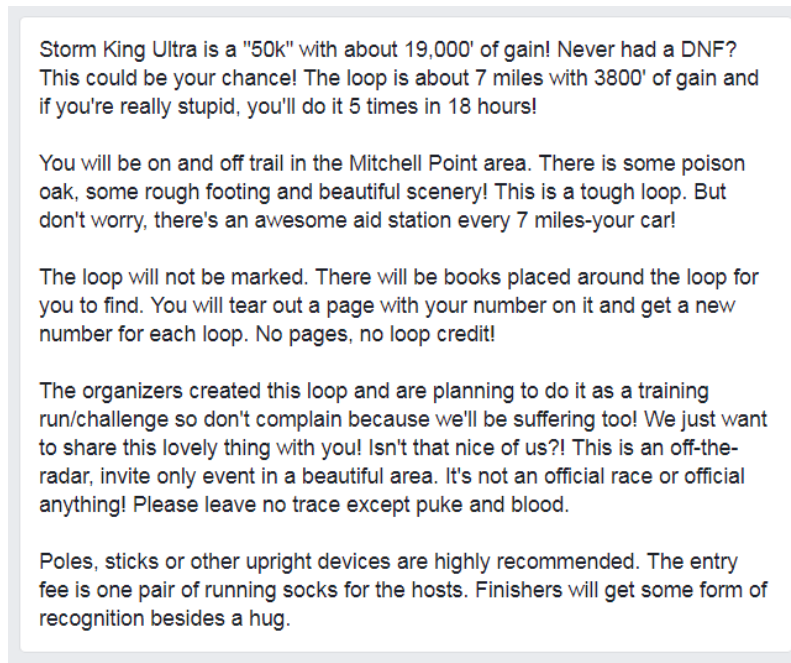
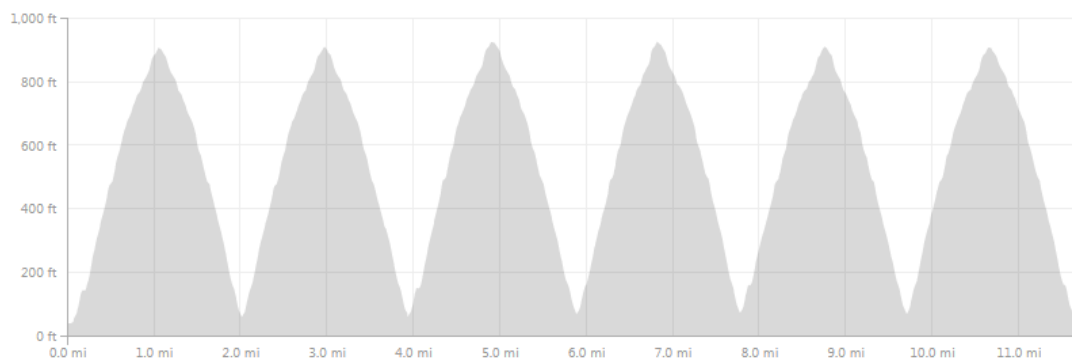


Introduction:

Storm King Ultra is a Barkley Marathons -inspired endurance event that took place on April 27 and 28, 2019. I believe that this brainchild of Scott Martin and Derek Wright is the culmination of several bad ideas coming together; notably Scott did not get into Barkley this year and Derek and Scott had been exploring the area around Mitchell Point in the Gorge as part of their training. Here is their facebook invite for the race:



Ignoring the stupidly-difficult prospect of 19000' of elevation gain (with most of it being off-trail), I was hooked by the idea of a orienteering/ultra/scramblefest/suffer-quest out in the gorge. Especially with Scott and Co., where you are guaranteed an interesting (if not great) time at their events. I did a workout a week before to prepare, 6 BPA road repeats to get my legs into climbing shape.



After the BPA workout made it exceedingly clear to me that my legs weren't ready to race SKU, I knew that finishing the event would be more of a mental exercise. So my preparation was mostly centered on

getting my mind wrapped around doing a lot of hiking- just fast enough to stay ahead of the cutoff time, but not so fast that my legs explode. And snack planning.

The detailed course instructions (from Scott):

Storm King Ultra

This is not a real race! Please don't use the name Storm King Ultra outside of this group. If someone asks you what's going on, just say we are some friends having fun in the woods. We don't think we're doing anything wrong-just enjoying our state park. Also, it's fun if there's a bit of mystery around it.

Please be safe out there especially at night! There are a few places you could get seriously hurt or die. There's no water on the course and none at the start/finish.

Good news: the course is easier than we thought! Bad news: we lowered the cutoff to 18 hours. You want a real challenge right?! We will start at noon 4/27 and you must finish the 5th loop by 6am. You can do as many loops as you want and there's no cutoff each loop. If you wanna see the loop you can check out Derek's or my Strava. We did 3 loops recently. We will give you nothing but bad advice at the start so BYO compass, directions, map... This course is seriously hard and seriously fun! We look forward to sharing it with you! All distances and elevations are approximate! All hills are imaginary! The poison oak is real.

We start at high noon 4/27 at Mitchell Point Trailhead. Cutoff to be an official Storm King finisher is 18 hours (6am 4/28).

Directions

Go up the paved path next to bathroom. After less than .1 mile go right on a use trail, cross the creek and head toward the cliff. Go left of the cliff up Pick Your Poison Hill. About elevation 630' traverse west to Fuck You Rock (670') and find book 1. Get your page and continue up the ridge.

Isn't this fun?! At the top of the ridge turn right at the road at 940' elevation. Go left on the power line road to elevation 1000' and 1 mile from the start. There will be a trail coming in from the left. Just past the trail junction is a large tree exoskeleton. Next to the exoskeleton, climb the steep slope in front of you and follow the trail up. When you reach the top of Storm King Ridge (1550') look for branches against a tree on the left and find book 2.

Look west for caution tape on a tree and go west/northwest down Sommersault! Aren't you glad you're not going up this?! Pick your own route here. When you reach the bottom, go north to the powerline road you were on earlier (there is an old road and also a trail you might find if you don't want to bushwhack). Turn right on the powerline road and go east, past the Storm King junction you were at earlier at 1000'. The powerline road descends east several hundred feet then ascends to a 5-way junction at 1050'. There are two obvious roads toward the east. Take the faint trail between those roads. Go to the top at 1310' and look for a tree stand on the left. Find book 3 there. You should be about 3 miles from the start.

From the book, go north 100 meters down to a road and turn left. Back at the 5-way junction go southwest straight up steep dirt, to the left of the power line pole onto a narrow forest trail. At 3.3 miles and 1160' turn right on a winding Mt bike trail. About 4 miles from the start and 1500' leave the trail and turn right up a limb-choked ridge. At the top, go past book 2 (don't get another page) and go down Storm King Ridge. Fun right?! At the bottom head toward Storm King briefly and go left down Storm King Tourist Trail. Go .1 mile and at 940' look for "A" Tree on the right (4.8 miles total). Go to "A" Tree and look NE for caution tape. Go to the caution tape and turn right up the rock pile

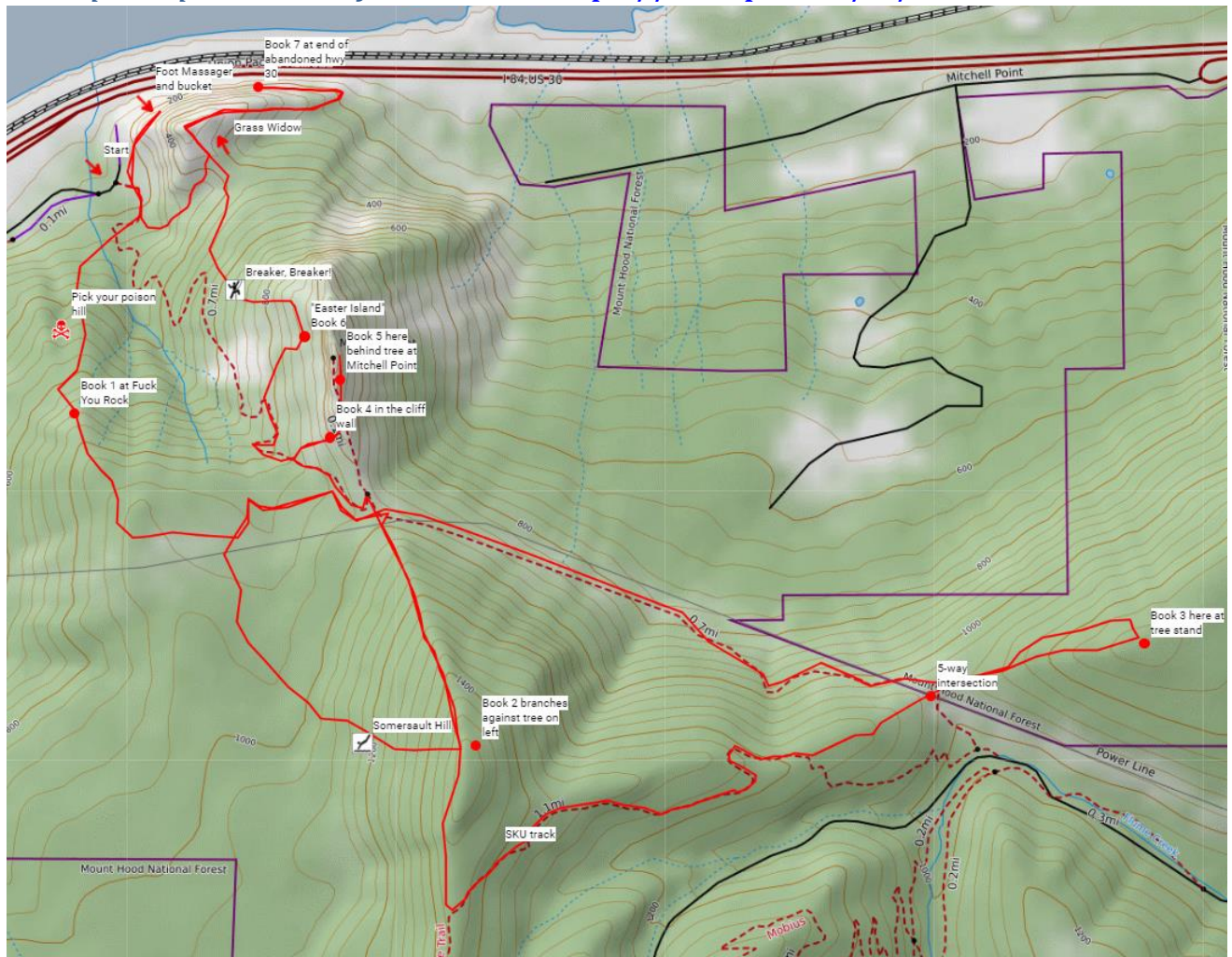
between a couple fir trees. Go toward the gap in the cliffs and find book 4 on the left. This is Smooth Criminal.

At the top, turn left and go to the top of Storm King. Just before the top, find book 5 on the right and behind a tree. Continue just past the book to the top and be careful!!!

Didn't forget your page did you? Go back, turn right and go down Smooth Criminal and past book 4 (no page needed this time). Go back to Storm King Tourist Trail and turn right. After .1 mile and at the switchback at 810' turn right. Go uphill and look for Easter Island where hopefully you'll find book 6.

Traverse the base of Storm King's cliff to the north and off trail. Head toward the river and Grass Widow. When you see Grass Widow, stay west of the ridge and pick your own route down Breaker, Breaker! to a trail. Turn right. Is that really a sentence? I mean it's only two words! Go up Grass Widow then downhill and east to the historic highway. Turn left, hugging the cliff on the old abandoned highway and find book 7 at the end. Careful here! Turn around, go back up Grass Widow and find your car any way you wanna go. Stay off the freeway! Back at the parking lot go up Foot Massager and find the official SKU bucket in the trees on the left. Write your name on your race number and the time of the day you get there. Put your race number and book pages in the bucket in a food storage bag. If you're heading out for loop two, get a new number, restock at your car and get out there! If you're quitting, well...you're a quitter.

CalTopo map I created of the course: <https://caltopo.com/m/0S18>



Course description:

Start to Book 1:

After crossing the stream, Pick your Poison hill is literally covered with poison oak. There's no escaping it. There is no trail, and you gain 480 feet in 0.17 miles, so about 54% sustained grade to the first book.

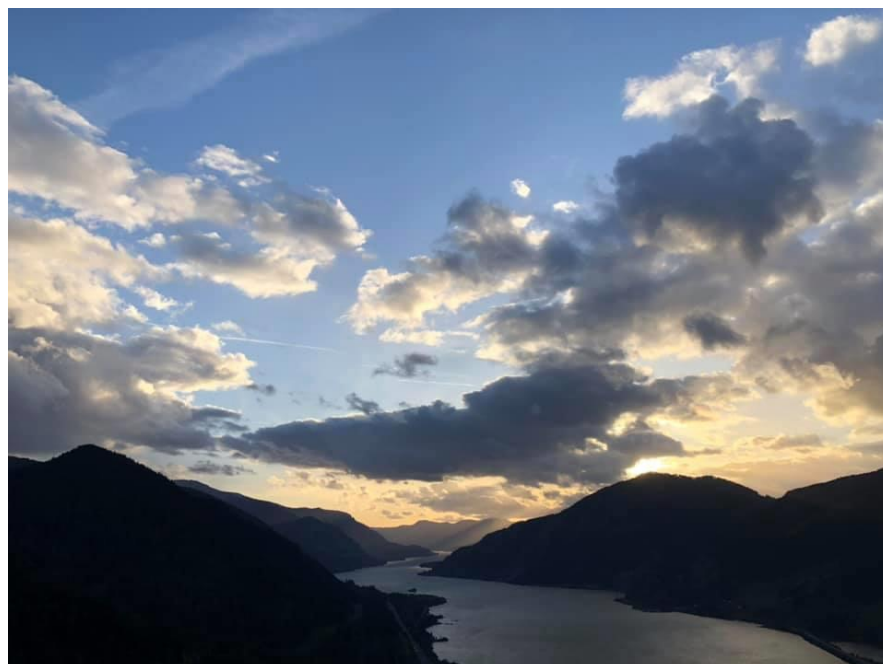


The lead pack heading up Pick Your Poison Hill toward Book 1



Fuck You Rock with Toxicodendron diversilobum, foreground

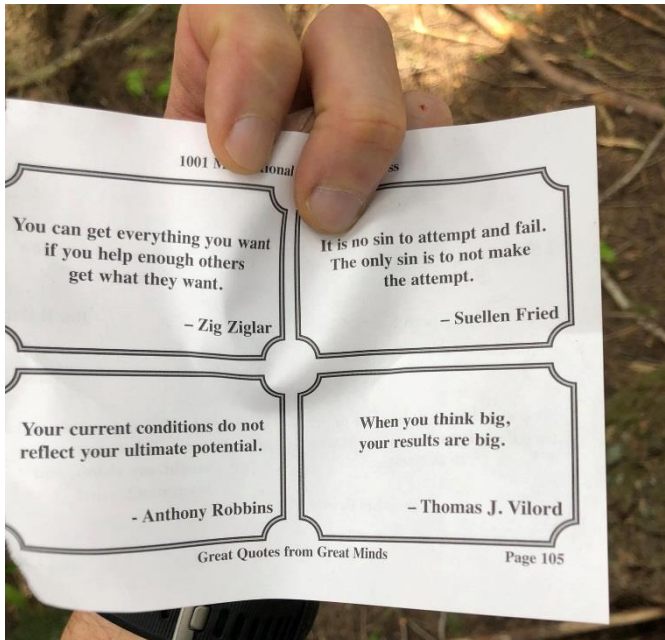
Fuck You Rock is appropriately named, as it looks like a giant middle finger saluting the climbers. The first book was hid on top of Fuck You Rock. It was appropriately named Storm Runners, which is funny because there isn't much running on this course.



Sunset, PC: Scott Martin

Book 1 to Book 2:

This section was pretty straightforward. Continue heading up the hill and bushwack until the power line access road. Take the access road until the unmarked "trail" that heads up Mitchell ridge. Mitchell ridge is a 40% grade to the top, where book 2 was hidden under a pile of branches next to a tree.



My page from 105 was quite inspirational. I knew I couldn't not finish the race after I read the quote in the upper right corner.

Book 2 to Book 3:

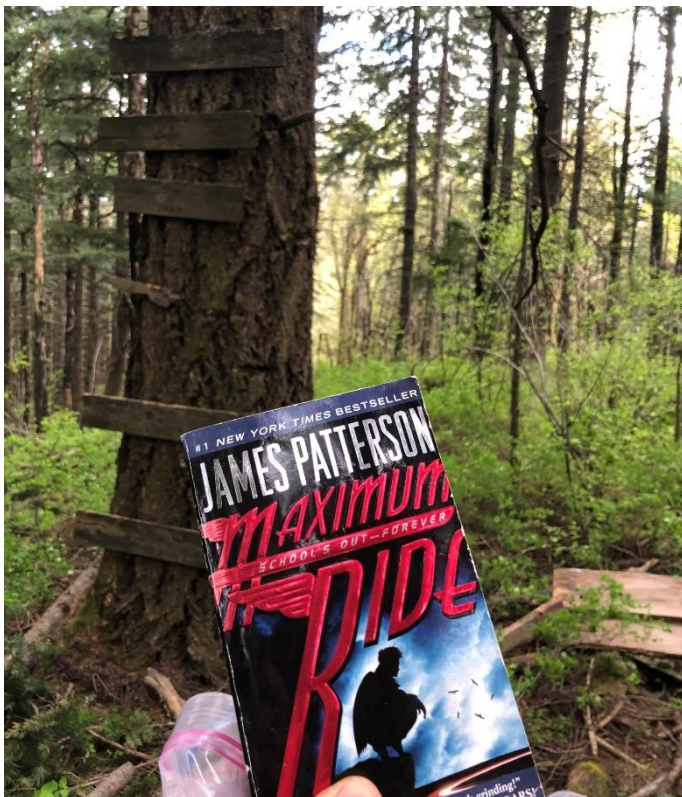


Crime scene begins here, -70% grade ahead

The start of somersault hill is marked by a piece of Sheriff's tape. Somersault hill is soft forest duff at -60% grade. It is so-named from an epic video (on the facebook event page) of Derek Wright catching a foot on a log and somersaulting down the hill. This is also the location of the bear video from the event page.



Screen captures of the bear and Derek's somersault from the videos



Toward the bottom of Somersault hill, there is large talus slope covered by moss and grass followed by a tough bushwack through vine maple and downed trees. After the tough bushwack section is a mile of access road to the five-way intersection where a faint trail can be picked up that heads up a ridge to book 3, located at an abandoned tree-stand. Maximum Ride by James Patterson... looks like a winner!

Book 3 to Book 4:

After heading back to 5-way, climb up a steep bank and find a trail into the biking complex. After some bike trail, head back toward Book 2 up the Mitchell Ridge and then back down toward Mitchell Point. Near Mitchell point, head off trail at the A tree and scramble up "Smooth Criminal" to find Book 4 hidden in the cliff wall.



Bike trails

Animal at Mitchell Ridge turn

Turn off trail at "A" tree

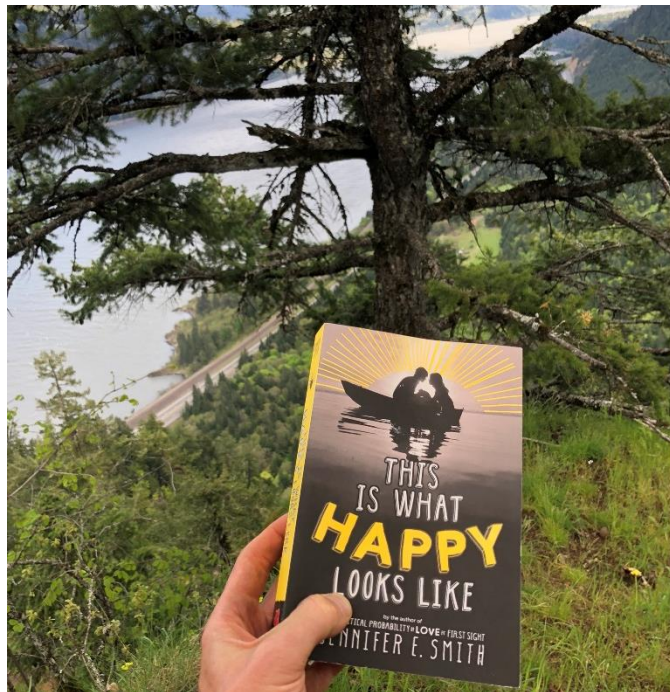
Nice book hidden in the cliff wall

Book 4 to Book 5:

Head up the smooth criminal wall to Mitchell Point. Book is hidden in a tree near the top of the point.



Smooth criminal... 100% grade



I was happy to find it the first time but it got less fun after that.

Book 5 to Book 6:

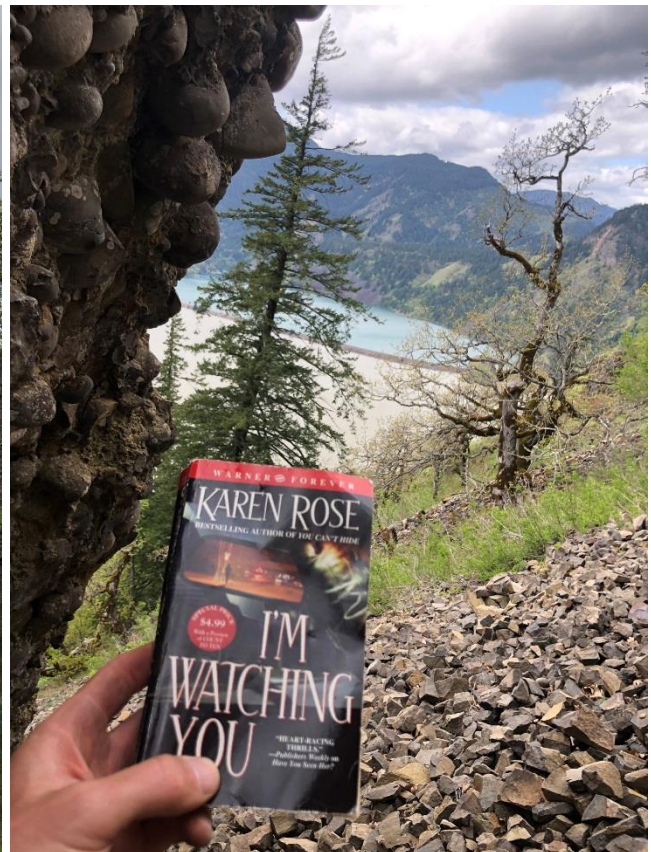
Get the view of the gorge from Mitchell point. Then head back down smooth Criminal. At the switchback, go up the hill of loose rock (at the angle of repose) until you find the "Easter Island."



Top of Mitchell Point



Easter Island



Ominous!

Book 6 to Book 7:

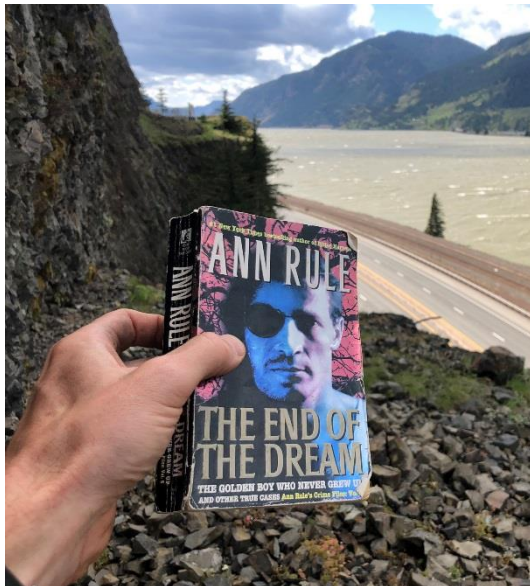
Traverse the cliff base and head down Breaker, Breaker! (a treacherously steep downhill section, average grade is -90%). Head over to GrassWidow, and follow the cliff edge until the abandoned highway 30 grade- book is at the end.



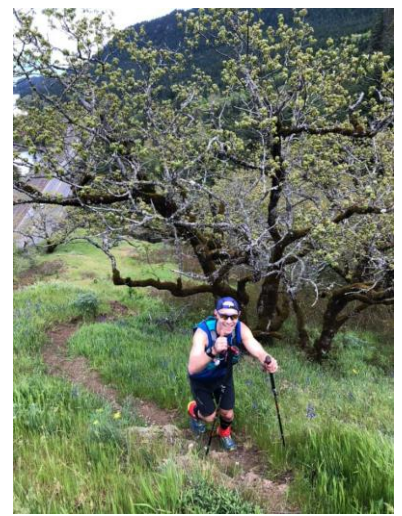
Grass widow (AKA tick country)



Abandoned highway 30 grade



The final book was at the end of the old grade. The end of the dream. Except now you have to do the loop four more times. Below is JonMark and Derek cruising up Grass widow from Hwy 30 (pc: Scott Martin)



Book 7 to finish:

Heading back the way you came (back up and down Grass Widow), look for a path to the right toward the parking lot (marked by a stuffed animal on the course). At the parking lot head back up foot scratcher to drop the pages into your bag inside the bucket. Grab another number, head back to the car for fuel, and do it all over again!



The turn to the parking lot, marked with a stuffed animal



The bucket with the numbers and retrieved pages



Aid station 1, 2, 3, 4, and the finish line

The “not a real race:”

We were scheduled to start at 12 noon on April 27. After picking up a pair of SmartWool PhD socks from REI (the entrance fee) for the race directors, I made my way to Mitchell Point parking lot with about 15 minutes to spare before the start. From the highway, some of the landmarks of the course are prominent.



At the parking lot seven brave souls assembled to have our “last-seen” picture taken.



Caveman, Abbey, Bushwacker, Nils, Phil, Derek, and Jonmark



At 12:06 we were off. Before long the group separated, with the lead pack of Scott, Derek, and Jonmark forging ahead. Nils and I grouped up for some of the first lap and found books 2 and 3 together. Abbey and Bushwacker took the rear guard.

The first lap was the most fun- some of the books were hard to find and the terrain was the most challenging the first lap. Easter Island was very difficult to get to since I took a more difficult route than optimal, and lost a bit of time looking around for the route.

By the second lap it was starting to become more challenging, mostly due to the difficulty of the terrain. I didn't see anyone on the second lap.



During Lap 3, Caveman took this picture of me

The third lap I saw Scott as well as Jonmark and Derek. Scott was an hour ahead of me by this point, but he was going to drop at the end of the lap. Jonmark and Derek were racing, and they were two hours ahead of me by the time I saw them (they were coming down Mitchell ridge (after book 3) while I was going up to get book 2. They were moving quick still and in good spirits. I was slowing down, and didn't really have any desire to push myself, so I set pace just to finish comfortably.

The end of the third lap was the hardest part. The sun had set, and while I still had energy, I felt like my time might be better spent calling it quits and sleeping through the night (instead of bushwacking). I had brought along pancake mix, whipped cream, homemade blueberry jam, and a stove to make an awesome pancake dinner with. I had planned to do this from 9-10 PM before setting out for the overnight push. However, I had lost an hour from the plan and finished Lap 3 at 10 PM.

So I ditched

the dinner idea and kept going. This was hard to do, as I had really looked forward to the nice dinner. At the rate I was slowing I couldn't take a substantial break without risking missing the cutoff.

Lap 4 I took it easy. I just walked it all and listened to music after midnight. It was clear and dry out, and bushwacking and route finding got a little more challenging as I got more tired and couldn't see anything. My mind played some little tricks on me- I couldn't find my spare batteries or my spare headlamp even though I had them right in my vest. There wasn't much to look at, and the wind was strong at the top of the ridges, maybe 50 mph gusts. Enough to chill me to the bone. I lost my



Bushwacking at night



Night selfie, why not.

hat somewhere so my head was cold, but ended up finding it again on the next loop. By the end of Lap 4 I realized I was really burning time and I might not finish by the cutoff. This motivated me and it felt good to start pushing. My elbows hurt- something akin to tennis elbow from using poles for so long. The poles started out straight and finished bent.

Lap 5 was enjoyable. I was convinced I would finish and it became a game to move economically through the course. The tricky parts were getting easy, and I was surfing down the rock slides with greater ease. All systems were go. And as soon as it started, it was over. Derek and Scott and I celebrated in the parking lot with chips and sparkling water.

There were three finishers out of a starting field of seven. It is the first time I've simultaneously gotten a podium position as well as DFL.



"What the fuck was that?"



Scott Martin

2 hrs · 📧

Storm King Ultra 2019 Results! Nice work everyone! Let us know if you see a mistake.

Jonmark Smith Finisher! 12:14

Derek Wright Finisher! 12:14

Phil Brundage Finisher! 17:40

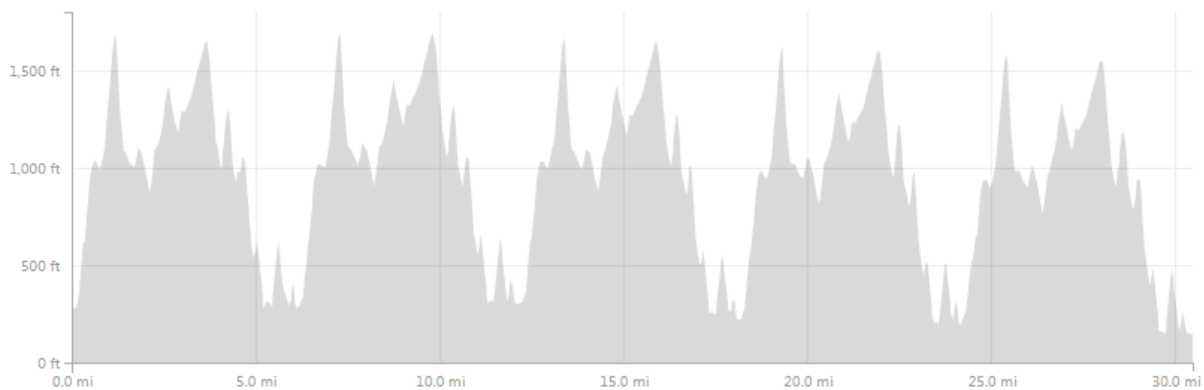
Scott Martin 3 loops

Abbey Hendricks 1 loop

Mike Burke 1 loop

Nils Wagman 1 loop (missing 1 page)

👍❤️ Rick Kneedler, Sean Harrasser and 3 others



SKU Vert: ~19,000 feet.

The aftermath:

At the finish I scrubbed off my legs the best I could in an attempt to remove the urushiol from my skin. There wasn't any easy way to avoid brushing into the poison oak, but in hindsight I think I would have worn pants all day if I could have a do-over. A day later I started seeing the inflammation from the poison oak on my skin and immediately went to urgent care for glucocorticoid steroid treatment that suppressed the rash greatly.

At home I found an engorged tick burrowed into my leg. Others also had tick bites and poison oak. So we all suffered a bit.

My muscles weren't sore at all from the event and I was running again after a day of rest. I think the leisurely pace I took paid off in recovery time (although at the time of this writing, it has been 10 days and my poison oak rash still itches at night). In hindsight I am glad I completed the course, although I am not sure I would do the same event again mostly because of the injury risk and time involved.



Carnage... tick bites and poison oak rashes