

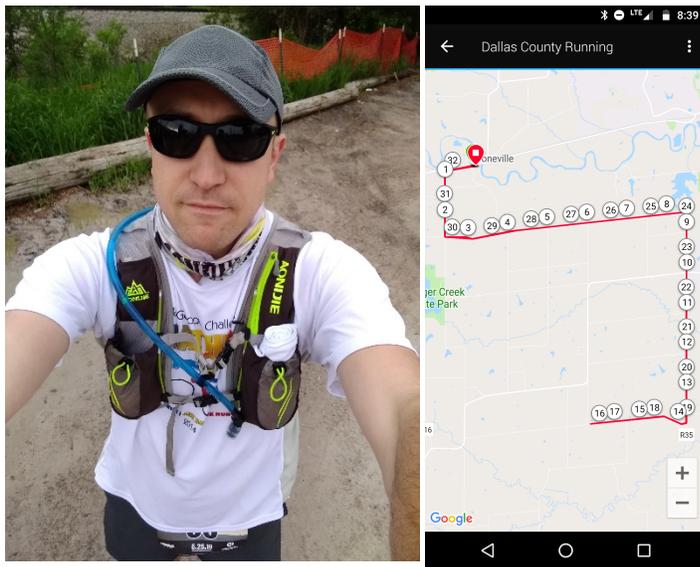
Boonville Backroads 50k (5.25.19) Race Report

Joel Martin

While gorging myself on comfort food in late December, prior to the perfunctory mode of weight loss ushered in by the New Year, I did what seemed perfectly natural and signed up for my first ultra-marathon, the Boonville Backroads 50k. An almost all gravel road ultra when you have never done more than a casual marathon doesn't seem as bad when you are crushing your third helping of mashed potatoes. This moment zoomed six months in time to when I was scrolling through updates the night before the race. The race directors had just emailed out an updated course due to river flooding. What was going to already be a challenge for me was elongated from 31.1 miles to 32.5. Naturally, I slept great that night, definitely not waking up multiple times to look at the course and question my training leading up to event.

The morning mercifully came, I put my gear organized the night before into my car, and drove to the parking area for the race. I was ironically annoyed by how much walking you had to do to get to the start/finish line, but that sounds pretty silly when externalized as it is just a footnote compared to the upcoming effort of 30+ miles.

Pre-race selfie and course layout:



The bagpipes which led you to the start/finish area definitely got me charged up. I need those before every race! One of the race directors gave a short speech, and off we went. More than anything, I was determined to not go too fast. I immediately started walking any uphill, and tried to go no faster than a 10:00 pace at other times. There was a lot of initial group jostling as people settled into their respective paces (or lack thereof).

From about mile 2 to the first aid station at 11.5, I ran with one other guy who was close to my pace. It was great to have someone to talk to and I mostly blathered about normal meet-and-greet. I felt like I was talking

non-stop but it helped to block out current activities. At the aid station, I grabbed two gels, refilled my water pack, and swallowed a handful of skittles.

From the first aid station (11.5m) to the second (16.25m) I ran with another guy who had said he had been behind me the whole time and appreciated my walk-the-uphill's approach as that is what he was doing. We ended up staying together for nearly the next 10 miles in total. Our conversation morphed from standard meet and greet to the more nitty gritty of how we were going to get through the race. At the second aid station, which was also the halfway point, I made a critical error by not filling up my water pack. My thinking was that I had made it the first 11+ miles on one fill, so I could make it from 11.5 to 21.25 on another. Big mistake. I only grabbed another gel, and a small cup of Gatorade. Heading to the third (and final) aid station as 21.25 miles, I gave a normal pull on my hydration tube and realized it was empty....with over 3 miles to go. A 5k at this point in the race with no water could possibly lead me to the path of losing the battle of staying hydrated. This was one time I felt actual fear because while I knew I could make to the aid station itself, if I was not hydrated, the final 11.5 miles would be brutal. My savior came in the form of two angels passing out water bottles to passing runners from the back of their vehicle. I took a bottle of water from them and drank it all by the time I made it to aid. At the 21.25m aid station, I maxed out my 2 liter water pack, refilled the now-empty water bottle with Gatorade, grabbed more gels, at a Snickers bar, stuffed my face with Skittles, and headed out.

As I mentioned before, this was now an 11.5 mile slog to the end. Before the course reroute the aid stations were set at 10/21/25. This allowed more aid at the end when it starts getting hot. I knew this would be tough. Coming up to mile 24 was another moment of fear. My legs were starting to hurt, I knew I had limited amounts of water/food, and there was still a lot of time which would pass between now and the finish. After mile 24 it was a straight shot with no turns and no major attractions until mile 30. This was definitely the hardest part of the race. I was by myself, and on this stretch I was never passed or able to pass anyone. I celebrated the mini-victory of passing 26.2 miles (the furthest I had ever gone before) and kept going.

I had another race angel pass by in a vehicle and chat some encouraging words. They made sure I had enough water and I was uplifted by the kindness of strangers. At the mile 30 turn I knew I had done it. Obviously I had another 2.5 miles to go, but even though I was cramping up, I knew for a fact that I was going to get to the finish before the cut-off even if I had to slowly limp. Since I walking a lot at this point anyway I called my mom. She's the best. Hearing her words made me even more confident I was going to complete this task. I made it to the final real turn and had less about a half mile of shuffling along on the side of the highway to go.

At the finish, I was overwhelmed by the about 20 people clapping for me (just me!!) as I crossed the line. This is the first time where I finished any race where I wasn't more or less surrounded by people. The individual support made me want to cry so I couldn't say more than "thank you" to the guy who gave me my medal. I sat down and checked my time, which was 6:34:58. I was completely thrilled and was much better than I had been expecting. After the race I consumed about 1500 calories of Burger King. I also forgot to put sunscreen on my legs so they were torched. Other than that, I felt as good as could be expected.

Thank you to all of the angels that helped me get to the end. Embrace the next opportunity for a challenge in your life. Thanks for reading!