

# Tahoe Rim Trail 100 Mile Run

## Prelude:

I decided to run the Tahoe Rim Trail race while perched precariously in the back of a State of Hawaii Forest truck that was weaving and twisting around the mountain roads of Tantalus on O'ahu. An hour before, my brother Adam and I had buried my father in one of the more beautiful mountain settings in all of Hawaii. Mike Garcia snapped me out of my daze by asking me if I was going to run another hundred miler this year. I said I didn't know and asked him if he was going to. He said he was going to run the Tahoe Rim Trail 100 miler along with several other members of H.U.R.T (Hawaii Ultra Running Team). "Yeah?", I responded, "me too". That's how ultra running is some times and that is what I love about it. It is still low key, understated and has a bit of cowboy in it.

A quick (or maybe not) word on H.U.R.T: My dad was a member of H.U.R.T and had a lot of pride representing Hawaii and the Hawaii Ultra Running Team. They are a loyal bunch. While I am not officially a member of H.U.R.T ( I no longer live in Hawaii), I consider that group my family. They went above and beyond by helping to coordinate a beautiful memorial bench for my dad on a high mountain trail in Hawaii. They went through a ton of red tape and bureaucracy for getting that bench put up. I am more proud of that bench than any other material item in this world. It is a bench and site that you could not buy for a million dollars if you did not know the right people and if they were not putting their name and neck on the line for you. While we stood on that mountain top in the freezing rain for my dad's memorial (with about 20 members of H.U.R.T), I stood with some of the most loyal and caring people I know. That is what true friendship is to me: loyalty, and why I will always have few, tight friends, rather than being someone who is an acquaintance to many. In short, if anyone from H.U.R.T ever needs me, I've got their back.

So, when I heard a big group from Hawaii was going over to run Tahoe Rim Trail, I was going too.

My training for the race was solid. I had placed in the top 4 in every ultra that I entered this year with the exception of Miwok 100K where I placed 11<sup>th</sup>. However, that is the placing that I am the most proud of this year. As it had, in my opinion, the most competitive field assembled in the U.S. this year. So, to place 11<sup>th</sup>, I was running with some of the best ultra runners in the country which was very exciting to me.

Usually by the time the race comes, I feel like I have all these regrets that I haven't trained enough, haven't done enough hill work etc. That was not the case this year. My training was solid and I had a nice two week taper before the race. Going into the race, I was confident that I would do well which was exciting.

The course itself is spectacular as you run two 50 mile loops on the Tahoe Rim Trail. It is a fairly hilly race with about 20,000 feet in elevation gain and an equal amount of loss. For those non runners, that is something like running 4 marathons and climbing and descending Mt. Rainier almost three times during those marathons. There was also the altitude to contend with. The race was between altitudes of 7,000 and 9,000 feet. I was not that concerned with the altitude as I had been training in the areas above Bend which

are usually in the 6,000 foot range (this would be a bad assessment by me ☺) The heat would also be an issue as the course is very exposed with almost no tree cover and it was a heat wave across the country. It was supposed to be about 100 degrees in Carson City and in the high 80's on the course.

So, on Thursday before the race, I loaded up my Eurovan, Ruby, with all my supplies and drop bags for the course and headed solo for Tahoe. I had planned on camping in the van but one of the H.U.R.T members, Jeff Huff, offered to put me up in his room before the race as he had two beds. Upon arriving, I had a great time with the H.U.R.T gang. Lots of laughs, good meals, and hazing was aplenty. Jeff is strong runner himself and I was excited to see him do well on the course as well.

I also had two of my very best friends out to support me on the course. Steve King was going to pace me for the last 25 miles, in the middle of the night, even though he had a stress fracture on his foot and had not run in weeks. Sam Raymond was going to meet me at miles 25, 50, and 75 and give me supplies, shut me up if I was whiney, and just be a good face to see if I was low. Yep, I pick good friends and truly appreciate their help as these races really are, in many ways, a team effort.

### The Race

Okay, I know, get to the damn race, Rod.

After all the pre race hoopla it was finally Saturday at 3:00 a.m. and I had that "I've been here before" moment as I laid in bed chewing on a PB & J sandwich and choking down a powerbar or two. We got in the car and headed to the start.

I don't know if there was a gunshot, a yell, or what, but at 5:00 a.m., 100 or so of us were running. My strategy was to really just kind of conservatively "go for it". I am not a particularly speedy guy and the way for me to place well in races is to run a very steady race. My "ideal" plan was to run the first 50 somewhere between 9 ½ and 10 hours and to try and shoot for a finishing time of 21:30 which I thought should at least put me in "the hunt" for a good finishing place. There were a lot of solid runners in the race so I tried not to worry about my place until the race really began at mile 50.

Right out of the gate I was with the lead runners as we started with a 1,600 foot climb up to the beautiful Marlette lake. The scene was awesome with a stream right next to us, beautiful meadows, and a fun, fairly technical trail. I started passing a few people and soon realized that I was in the lead. I knew this was not smart but I didn't feel like I was pushing too much. By the first aid station, I was running alone with a strong runner from Oakland named Jasper Halekas. We both had to make a bathroom stop at mile 6 and were both surprised when we came out of the port-a-poopers that we were still alone. We both commented on the fact that we didn't feel like we were pressing too much so we just went with it and both laughed that we had never been in the lead of a 100 miler before.

We tackled a tough portion of the course at around mile 12 or 13. The Red House Loop is a 6 + mile loop that descends about 1500 feet or so then rolls along before climbing about 1,000 feet in a mile to complete the loop. At that point I noticed that I felt like I was pressing a bit to keep up with Jasper. I finally acknowledged that the altitude was having an affect on me. While I didn't feel horrible at all, I just felt kind of sluggish. After completing the loop, the course rolls and climbs over the flanks of ski resorts over to Mount Rose. It is a deceptively difficult part of the course and one that we would tackle 4 times. You are at altitude, the footing is difficult and there are tons and tons of

mini climbs and descents and it is hard to fall in to a good rhythm. You also don't have an aid station for 9 miles, which really does feel like a long time.

My eating and drinking was going well. I had tried taking "Perpetuem" drink for a while but I thought it sucked. It just gave me a gut bomb and a false sense of being full, kind of synthetically feeling. As Jeff Browning always tells me, "keep it simple stupid!!!". Man, why can't I learn that? So, back to 2-3 GU's an hour, one Succeed salt tab and a little fruit and potatoes at the aid stations.

During this traverse to Mt. Rose, I told Jasper to go ahead. I felt like I was running "his" race and running parts where I should be hiking and vice versa.

By the time I hit Mt. Rose (25 Miles), I felt pretty damn spent and was concerned. Jeff Huff's sister was there and she really was a hoot both before and after the race. A great cheerleader and gave me lots of encouragement as I came in. The "boys" (Steve and Sam) were there and ready to get me fueled up and back out there. I had a little soup and snack and got back on the trail. My spirits felt a bit low as I left the aid station as I felt a bit worked and knew I had a mere 75 miles to go!! I got a bit more bummed as about 5 minutes after leaving the aid station I saw a group of about 4 runners coming into the aid station I was leaving. It included Tim Turk and Jamie Gifford who both have won prestigious national races. I started stressing that I could be out of the top 5 here very soon. But, I just calmed myself down by thinking there was a lot of running ahead of us and just to stick to my game plan and let the rest unfold. I think I was about 4-5 minutes out of first place at this time.

On the traverse back, I got my mojo back and started feeling really good. My pace quickened and it was fun to cheer on the people who were still heading towards the Mt. Rose aid station. I saw Jeff Huff and gave him the pleasure of "flashing" him on the trail. Yes, Jeff, you weren't just hallucinating, it really was thaaaat big. ☺

The nine miles back really sort of flew by and I tried to offer encouragement to all the H.U.R.T runners I saw by assuring them that there were a lot more downhills on the way back.

But, as always happens, the good times stop. By the time I hit the next aid station, Tunnel Creek, mile 34, I was in a low again. After leaving the aid, there are several stout climbs ahead as you start climbing back to 9,000 feet. The views are straight up amazing as Lake Tahoe sits right in front of you and you run along ridgelines speckled with wildflowers. It was amazing but it didn't help me from feeling like crap. My stomach was starting to tweak and the elevation was really getting to me. I was walking sections that I knew I should be running and just wasn't having a great time. As I neared the high point and aid station (Snow Valley), I was passed by a young guy from New York who looked to me moving great. We offered each other encouragement and off he went. Bummer.

When I hit Snow Valley aid, I took a bit of time, had some soup and coke and tried to motivate for the final 7 miles to the start/finish area and the 50 mile point. The last 7 are all downhill but I did not feel affective at all and ran a really crappy pace to the 50 mile aid. However, all in all, I was encouraged as I got to 50 miles in 9 hours, 44 minutes, which was exactly in the middle of my "best case scenario" for the race. The boys were there and told me that Jasper had come through about 30 minutes before and did look strong. I also noticed that the guy (I think his name was Chris) was still at the aid station which surprised me as he looked very strong when he passed me several miles back. I

took the opportunity to get back out there as quick as I could. I find that loop courses are really tough. Its hard to run 50 hard miles, feel like shit, and then know that you have to go out there again and run the same distance and course, part of which will be in the middle of the night.

As we started the initial climb again, I laughed at how I had run every step of the climb on the first loop while now I was hiking at least half of it. I was moving pretty well though and soon caught and passed Chris to reclaim 2<sup>nd</sup> place. The stomach was in the red though and I felt really nauseous as I climbed out. I kept trying to pump in the GU's but I was being a bit more sporadic with them as I was worried I would puke. Chris caught back up to me at about mile 55 and we stayed together for a while and "talked story". He was a good kid. 22 years old, his first 100, and he was running a solid race. He surged again and left me in the dust. I genuinely though, "good for him". He was a nice guy and I was happy to see him do well. Upon arriving at mile 56, I had a bit of food and about 100 yards after the aid station, started puking it all up. I was bummed to be puking but it felt good not to feel nauseous anymore and figured I could kind of start fresh again. However, whether it was the altitude, or just running 100 miles, I just couldn't seem to get my "A" game back. I was moving but it really was a struggle. However, during the Red House loop I again caught and passed Chris. However, before I could even enjoy it, another Cali runner, "Flyin' Bryan Morrison passed me with his pacer. This one kind of pissed me off as they were pretty giddy while passing me and I could tell I was a "feather in his cap" as his pacer had him put the hammer down on me. To his credit, he just flat out dusted me!! I could not have stayed up with him to save my life. Nothing I could do about it but put a foot in front of the other. My real low point happened though as I made that long 9 mile traverse back to Mt. Rose. It felt fricking endless!!! There were so many false "summits" where I thought I was near the end but it just would NOT come. I felt pretty darn deflated and felt like I was "rode hard and put to bed wet" when pulling into mile 75. This was definitely my low point. It was mile 75 and my time was somewhere around 16:45. That last 25 had taken me about 7 hours. In my experience, you usually do not get faster as the race goes longer, especially with night approaching. I was worried that if I went even a little slower for the next 25, I would not break 24 hours which was my second goal if I didn't achieve my first. Steve was all ready to pace me and assured me we would finish under 24 hours. He said Jasper had passed through about an hour or so before me.

Off we went. It felt really good to be running with my best friend. Steve is an awesome pacer. Good solid, tough love. He got me back on track with eating GU's and having a positive attitude. I was really bummed about facing the nine mile traverse again. I was surprised by two things leaving the aid station. Flyin' Bryan was not too far ahead of me anymore but Tim Turk was right on my heels. Oh well, the race was on. I figured Turk might pass me as he, unlike me, has great leg speed but I thought I might have a shot at Flyin' Bryan.

Having a pacer made all the difference. Running became more fun again as we ran along the spine of the Tahoe Rim Trail, laughing, and having great conversations that you can only have in tough situations like this.

As we got close to the aid station, Steve said I should take some advil. He said my stride looked short and it might loosen me up. Usually I do take Advil during races but I had not this race as I was worried about kidney dialysis as I was not peeing very much and

this has happened to a number of runners. Finally though, I did take them. About 10 minutes later, I seriously felt like a new man. I had a new life!! As we hit the last real crux of the course which is in the mid 80's, I felt awesome. I was running the steep ups and feeling more and more confident. I also felt good that I had under 24 in the bag. Maybe now I could catch Bryan or even Jasper??? As we hit Hobart Aid station (mile 89 or so), Flyin' Bryan was in the aid station so we just grabbed some quick bites and got back on the trail and put the hammer down. I ran as hard as I could, running as many "ups" as I could and I felt better than I had the entire race. The night sky was simply amazing. Best stars I have seen in years and the moon was giant and orange. THIS is why I do this! Running in an amazing setting, being with my best friend, and loving life! I was stoked to be in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and wondered if I could pass Jasper since I knew I was running well. When we hit the last aid station, mile 93, they told me Jasper had passed through about an hour before! Oh well! He was running a hell of a race and was just faster than me on this day. The last downhill, while long, was wonderful! A perfect running grade and we really were kicking ass. We finally hit the last checkpoint at mile 98 and were heading for a loop around the beautiful Spooner Lake. Two miles and we hit the finish in 21:30 (funny huh?) which was good for second place. I was over an hour behind Jasper and over an hour before the next guy came in. Okay, I must confess to my wife, there were no ladies throwing bras at me or beer being poured over my head. Just a few onlookers and hopefully my dad from above.

I didn't have my best race and I really struggled for a good chunk of the race. But, I'm proud of my effort, time, and placing considering all those things. Tahoe is a tough course. Tougher than Western States but not as tough as the really difficult 100's. It's a great race and a beautiful course. It will also be the 100 mile Trail Championship next year. I would highly recommend it.

A last thanks to my friends and training partners and especially Steve and Sam for being there for me. Lastly, and most importantly to my wife, Katie. She preps my drop bags, listens to my dumb running stories and dreams and puts up with all the training and time that it takes to do this silly sport that means so much to me.

Rod Bien

Bandit, self proclaimed, H.U.R.T dude