

## Plain 100-Mile Endurance Run

The Plain 100-Mile Endurance Run is not as advertised. Yes, runners do tackle the 75 miles of trail, and another 25 miles of forest service road on an unmarked course in the Entiat, Chelan, and Lake Wenatchee ranger districts of the Cascade Mountains. Navigating the course by written directions and a topography map, and input from a GPS makes the course very “doable”. The runners, if successful will navigate over two separate loops through some of the Cascades most serene settings. Add to this the fact that there are no aid stations (except one drop bag point at 55 miles), no wildly cheering spectators, 21,000 feet of elevation gain, wildly unpredictable weather, and rivers and lakes that serve as the only source of water makes this a difficult course to finish. So much so those in the course of the event fewer than a dozen runners have finished. This run is anything but Plain.

My involvement with this run began shortly after my abysmal performance at this year’s Western States (WS). Feeling that I was in excellent shape to have a great run at WS, I was devastated at the fact that I dropped at Mile 80. My training partner for WS, Bob Murphy said that I should join him, and others from HURT on the Cascade course in early September. Afterall, “you are in shape for it”, he would say. With barely any consideration, I thought that it might be a good idea. Logically it made sense, as the event was small in stature (23 entrants this year with 17 starters) and there would be no pressure to “bag a fast time”. I made up my mind quickly to proceed and go to the event and participate under the guise that this was to be an adventure and not a race. The training didn’t exactly begin in earnest.

From mid July to the end of August, I was able to get in a couple of long training run’s with Don Fallis, Cheryl Loomis, Bob Murphy, and Bob McAllaster. All of who would be joining me on the trail in Plain. Unfortunately those long runs were the only runs I would get in before the event. In fact I only had ten training sessions following WS up until Plain. Something told me I wasn’t going to tear up this course. Those few long training sessions proved to be my saving grace as the miles (and hours) spent with a heavy hydration pack would pay huge dividends at plain. However, I was predicting only a 30-40% chance of finishing based on my low mileage. Ever the positive one, Murphy would often remind me “it’s better to be rested and under trained than tired and over trained”.

Going into the run I had made a promise to Murphy to stay with him through the first loop. The rationale was that this would help me go out at a slower pace and help Murphy navigate the course. The plan was to have Bob McAllaster join us on the first loop. Don, Cheryl and Leon Draxler would join forces in an attempt to cover the distance. The prevailing theme at Plain is that it is easier to finish when runners work with one another over the course.

After an uneventful flight to Seattle on Thursday evening, Murphy and I headed to Jamie and Becky Gifford’s place in Seattle. Their home would serve as our home base on this odyssey. We were extremely honored and grateful by their generous housing offer. The four of us spent

the late night hours going over the expectations of the run. As all runs go, there are runners who are perceived to be the “favorites”. Jamie had mentioned that Tim Stroh with his course knowledge would be tough as would Jeff Heasley based on his past ultra experience. Murphy and I agreed that they in fact would be up front, however I also thought highly of Les Mignery based on his previous runs. I felt the dark horses of the run were going to be Chris Perry and Ian McIlvenna. Privately, I lamented the fact that I was in no shape to race these guys. I went to bed feeling that my Plain 100 would be an exercise in futility on severely under trained mind and body.

Friday morning came all too soon. Murphy and I were chomping on the bit to drive the 3 hours east to Plain. With a hug and a hearty “Aloha” we wished Becky well until we would see her at the 55-mile point (aid station) at Plain. The trip to Plain was as expected except for two small details. It was cool and raining. As we traversed Steven’s Pass we couldn’t help but notice the fine snow dusting on the peaks, which appeared to be at about 6500 feet. What a kick in the gut. For the past two months we had heard how the weather would be hot, and the trail extremely dusty. Now, I am all for a rain soaked trail, but I can do without the snow drifts. My chances of finishing just went down to 25%. I hadn’t even started the race and I was going backwards.

We finally arrived in Plain and met up with Don, Bob, Leon, and Cheryl. We were all eager for our adventure to begin as we headed off to the race brief. Race directors Tom Ripley and Chris Ralph conducted the pre race brief. Tom discussed the nuances of the run, and then brought out a big map depicting the two disparate loops. He made mention of all the potential wrong turns, and the places where water could be easily found. Jim Ballard would occasionally chime in serving up some much appreciated course / logistic information. Coming into the run, my biggest fear was that I did not know where the water was to be found. I kept hearing “ the water is in all the usual spots”. Well for a guy who has never set foot in the Cascades that wasn’t too reassuring. Nevertheless Jim and Tom allayed all of my water fears. Tom also mentioned the points on the course where the Search and Rescue (SAR) folks would be. I memorized those locations and their faces so that in case I needed to drop, I would know who to look for and where to find them.

Following a pasta dinner a few of us headed out on the course to look at some of the turn points. Tim Stroh provided valuable insight on the mini tour describing the best water spots and critical trail junctions. Reassured that we would find our way once on the trail, we headed back to the cabin to prepare our packs, drop bag, minds and bodies for the difficult task that lay ahead.

Murphy and I roomed together. It was going to be a long weekend what was a few more hours together? While packing that evening we were dumbfounded at all the gear we would be starting out with in the morning. More than once we contemplated downsizing what we would be carrying out on the course. Wisdom prevailed and we decided to proceed with what we had trained with. For me, that included 9 packets of Gu02, 2 packets of Sustained Energy, 2 packets of Clip, 2 baggies of beef jerky and gold fish, 1 protein bar, 3 CLIF bars, 6 gels. I felt that if I could

consume all those calories in the first 17 hours I would be strong for the second half. I also borrowed a rain poncho from Murphy and threw it into my pack with my toilet paper and MP3 player. Added to this were a 20 oz. Filter bottle, 2 28-oz. Hand helds and a 96-ounce Ultimate hydration vest. The plan was to keep the hydration vest empty until we reached the climb up Tyee ridge, where I would need the extra fluid. Murphy taped his toes and after he sang me the "Ultra Runner Lullaby", we were off to sleep.

Morning came quickly and we woke to find that it had rained during the night. A quick look outside revealed a starless sky (was rain going to be with us throughout the day?). We quickly ate, dressed and got ready for the run. While attempting to lift my hydration vest, it slipped through my hands and I twisted my back awkwardly while trying to catch it. Immediately pain shot down my legs. I put the vest down and climbed the stairs to my room. I had to lie back down. Murphy was still upstairs and I told him what had happened. He told me to stretch and I did so, but the pain was still present. He tried to massage my lower back but nothing helped. Impulsively I decided to take a couple of Advil in hopes that I would be able to at least DNF after starting the race and not before. At the time I was thinking that my chances of finishing just went down to 10%.

It was time to start the race and nobody was in a rush to leave the start line at the sound of "go". On the initial out and back of a quarter-mile I commented to McAllaster and Murphy that we were in last place. We all chuckled as we started our watches, configured our GPS, tucked our maps away and headed out following the beam of the flashlight.

Since it had been raining previously I started out with two shirts, a shell, and gloves to keep my hands dry and warm. I thought that I would soon be able to shed the shell as the day warmed up; privately I was hoping that I hadn't overdressed.

The first seven miles of the course are slightly up hill on forest service roads. McAllaster, Murphy and I quickly fell in together and got ahead of Leon, Cheryl, Don, Jim, and Kathie Lang. However, we trailed everyone else, in fact in no time at all we lost sight of the flashlight beams from the other runners. The climb up to Maverick Saddle was pretty uneventful. I did stop frequently to readjust gear and this disturbed me. Early on Murphy asked me about me back, and I rudely let him know if that was the last time he asked about it, that I wouldn't mind. Little did I know that around this time Murphy had tweaked his knee. It soon became apparent that we would both be chomping on the Advil throughout this adventure. There were several sections that I felt we should be running but the plan was to get through this first loop as easily as possible while trying to finish it in 16-17 hours. Therefore, with any hint of slight incline to the course the three of us went immediately into a power walk to conserve as much energy as possible. Shortly before Maverick Saddle Murphy and I caught up with Dimitri Kiefer and Martin Miller, both of who had previously run many sections of the course. Unfortunately in the process Bob McAllaster fell a bit behind us. After checking in with the search and rescue vehicle Murphy and were about to

set off on the trail following Martin, before we realized we needed to check the map and directions. Our plans heading into the race was to check and double check every trail junction and verify with one another that we truly were heading in the right direction, instead of simply following other runners down the trail and possible in the wrong direction. We soon caught back up to Martin who mentioned that we should fill up at the Mad River that was running to our right. Coming into the run my sense was that access to the water would be easy, usually down a path. This however was not the case as Murphy and I stopped on two or three occasions along this portion of the Mad River to find a way down. Once down at the river we saw Martin enter up stream a short ways away. Murphy and I meticulously tried to filter and fill our bottles using a filter bottle as our dirty bottle. We vowed that we would treat all our water either by filter our by chemical purification methods. We soon figured out what the other runners had already known; filtering and treating stream water was very time consuming. After losing about five minutes at the water stop we vowed to never treat the water again during the run. As we were leaving the river Bob McAllaster was upstream at river's edge filling his bottle, which was a good sign. By the time we made it back out to the trail Martin and Dimitri were gone.

Bob and I headed up the trail and within minutes came upon a trail sign. Bob said that we needed to stop and look at the directions. I thought to myself that we hadn't gone far enough on this trail to be making a turn. As Bob was looking at the map and instructions, I looked over at the back of the trail sign and it read Hi Yu trail pointing to the left. Just then Murphy read, "Hi Yu sign is posted only on one side of the sign post". We high five one another and exclaimed how lucky we were to stop and see the sign. As we started up the Hi Yu trail we continuously called out for McAllaster to lead him on so that he wouldn't miss the cutoff. We had remembered the profile early on in the race and the climb up the Hi Yu was pretty strenuous. Since it was drizzling and cool we didn't overheat, and since the climb was long we took the opportunity to eat. Throughout the climb we wondered if Martin and Dimitri had missed the cutoff to the Hi Yu trail. We were moving well but we could not see them up ahead of us. As we crested the top of the climb and began our ridge running we came across a stream so we decided to once again top off our bottles, this time without filtering.

The ridge running was enjoyable as this provided one of the few opportunities (other than running downhill) that we had any extended running periods. We soon passed two little lakes; both aptly named after women whose names I have forgotten. By the looks of the green tinged water we decided that both women must have be less than desirous, so we opted out of filling the bottles here. We continued on towards Klone Peak in the drizzle that had been with us since the climb up Hi Yu. As our eyes scanned the mountains above we could see a thin veil of white all around. Could it be that there was to be snow at the higher elevations? The answer soon revealed itself as Murphy and I started a slight downhill section we came across ice crystals in the grass. Soon we were upon Dimitri and Martin, playing leapfrog with them us we took turns filling

water bottles at various spots. Murphy and I knew that we would need water before Klone Peak so we did not pass up any of the water supplies. We were so insistent in taking water that we filled our bottles prior to Klone Meadow in a stream that was just a trickle. Thoughts of Giardia surged through our heads as we quickly declared to one another that we would forego such poor running water the rest of the day and night.

Prior to crossing through Klone Meadow we passed Dimitri and Martin. We felt that both of them would catch us on the climb up to Klone. The next section of trail was very runnable and we were able to sustain a good effort for quite a while. As we began our initial ascent up Klone the snowflakes began, initially as a flurry, then the snow became heavier. Worse yet the snow was starting to stick. Despite the snow we weren't that cold. As we were nearing the top we met Rob Develice as he was coming back down from the peak. We were surprised to see that we were actually catching up with another runner. He quickly snapped a picture of Murphy and I, went on by as we resumed our climb. During our training sessions we had discussed taking a break at the top of Klone for a quick bite. However, with the inclement weather we thought it best that we touch the rock, and get back down. Besides there was another runner up ahead that we could try to catch. As we headed down we came across Dimitri and Martin as they began the climb to the top of the peak.

The downhill running off of Klone was fantastic. Within 15 minutes we had caught up to Rob and soon went by him. As we ran through the burn area from a previous forest fire the sky began to clear, and the air began to warm. With the clearing weather and the breeze in our face our clothes began to dry out from the relentless assault of the mornings rain and snow showers.

We continued the long downhill run, and soon were able to see a paved road way down in the distance. I commented to Murphy that the road was our next objective. It seemed as though the downhill run went on forever. We finally came out to the paved road and were greeted by the race directors.

The next two to three miles would be run down the paved road. It was really warming up so Murphy and I took the opportunity to remove our jackets and gloves. After the quick stop we resumed running with me slightly ahead. Suddenly I came to a sudden stop. My back tightened up on me and a shooting pain went down both my legs. The pain was excruciating. As I stood there waiting for the spasm to resolve I popped another Advil. Bless his heart; Murphy wasn't about to ask me about my back. I think the continuous downhill was aggravating my back. Little did I know Murphy was in his own pain with his knee. Privately we were actually looking forward to the once dreaded climb up Tyee Ridge and Signal Peak. We were soon off the road and into a cul-de-sac. We were told that this was a critical turn point in the pre race brief. We were instructed to go to the trail on the left, not the wide-open trail on the right. As we looked to the right we saw Jeff Heasley blasting towards us. He stopped when he got near and explained that he had followed some bikers on the other trail and had lost nearly an hour and a half. After a few

expletives he dashed on down the trail to the left and we thought he was on his way to catch the leaders. It wasn't to be so. Around the next corner we caught up to him again. He told us that he was going out across the Entiat River to drop out of the race. Bob and I both knew that despite the fact we were nearly 2 hours down on the front-runners, the race was still wide open. We told Jeff that he was still in position to win the race. Despite numerous attempts to persuade him to run with us, he was resigned to drop. We went our separate ways.

It was a short descent to Fox Creek. At Fox Creek we filled our camelbacks for the first time of the day. During this section of the course we would traverse 14 miles of trail, with nearly 5,000 feet of vertical gain. I had originally planned to carry 150 ounces of fluid for this section, with Murphy carrying 140. We both opted for 120 ounces instead since the day was cooler than we had both anticipated. As the climb began Murphy settled in up front. We had decided in training that since he was the stronger climber he would assume the responsibility of getting us up the hill. I would return the favor by leading on the downhill sections. As we left the creek the sky was slightly overcast with the sun peaking through now and then. Within minutes the sky became dark under rain began to fall. Sensing that this might become a heavy rainfall, I opted to put on the rain poncho Murphy had given me the night before. I felt bad for Murphy, as he did not pack one. Thankfully he refused my offer to give him the poncho. The climb was uneventful except for the weather. As we gained altitude, the rain turned to ice and then later to snow. Throughout the climb Murphy maintained a thirty-yard lead, I just could not stay with him. For fear of getting too far behind I would run a bit when he wasn't looking. At one point of the climb I rounded a corner to see him sitting on a rock in the snow. He said he was bonking a bit and needed a rest. I told him that I would continue on up since he would soon catch me. The climb was not as difficult as I had envisioned, when I reached the false summit, I ate a gel and broke out into a jog. The jog soon faded as the climb started once again. After I crested the top of the hill and started down, Murphy caught up to me. I asked him if he wanted to take a break. He said he would wait until we got to the top. I then told him that we had just summited and that we were going to soon start down. He thought that we had just hit the false summit. We were both happy to look at our watches to find that the climb had taken two and a quarter hours. Coming into the run we were thinking that two and a half hours might be a good time for us to get to the top. Once again we were drenched from the rain, sleet, and snow. However a clearing sky and some downhill running would hopefully help us dry out.

We wanted to complete the downhill section in the day as we were told the trail could get technical near the bottom at Cougar Creek. We headed off towards Cougar Creek and the cold refreshing water. As we headed down the trail we came to a road crossing where a SAR checkpoint was located. We got a bit giddy when told that we were in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> place. Upon leaving the SAR checkpoint we could be heard saying to nobody in particular "Yea, we're bad". On the downhill run I could sense something was wrong with Murphy, he wasn't capable of

keeping up to me despite the slow jog. Just like the downhill section off of Klone the trail seemed to go on forever. Worse yet we could hear the water running deep below in the canyons. However, it seemed as though we weren't getting any closer to the bottom. At on point Murphy ran out of water so we had to stop and give him some fluid from my camelback. As light was fading we made it to the creek. We quickly filled our bottles and got out our flashlights for the run back to Maverick Saddle.

After the descent from Signal Peak we were somewhat dry. However, that soon changed as we headed towards the saddle. The trail along this section was overgrown with bushes; bushes that were wet from the days rain showers. We were soon drenched and as darkness descended upon us "not exactly loving life". Soon enough we came to the Mad River, which meant we were also near Maverick Saddle. Our spirits soared as we hit the edge of the river and found Chris Perry standing there, trying to determine how best to get across. We all waded into the cold river and hit the far side, checking in with the SAR vehicle in a clearing near the saddle. . Once in the clearing where several trails converge we were confused at which way to go. After lengthy deliberation and time spent walking in circles Chris found the correct trail and called Murphy and I onward. We basically had a seven-mile downhill run on forest service road to the drop bag point at Deep Creek. It would be here at the fifty-five mile mark that loop one would conclude and loop two would begin. It was beginning to get a bit cold, and the river crossing did nothing to help matters. Soon, Murphy and I were disposing of the water in our hand held bottles so that we wouldn't get further chilled.

The road was very runnable but long. I had promised Murphy that I would stay with him throughout loop one. However, I was a bit cold, and wanted to see get this loop completed. Deep Creek aid station (?) beckoned. I took off down the road, all the while planning on getting into Deep Creek and taking a break while waiting for Murphy. After seeing a glow stick I turned the final corner in the road and I was at Deep Creek. It must have been around 10:45. Loop one had taken nearly 18 hours, a far cry from the 16 hours I had hoped for. Jamie and Becky Gifford along with Jim Kerby served as the aid station. This was the only place on the course that one could get any help from those outside the race. Our race directors Chris and Ralph were there to meet us as well. While Kerby cooked dinner, Jamie and Becky set about to get me resupplied. Jamie commented that if I were to head back out I would be in second place. He stated that only one other runner had started loop two and that he (Les Mignery) was only about an hour ahead. Two runners who had made it to Deep Creek before me had decided to drop. Tim Stroh, the only two-time finisher dropped due to a leg injury and the adventurous Mike Dobies also called it a day. Both these runners were off the course before I even arrived. The thought hadn't crossed my mind to drop. Since the effort level throughout the day was so low I felt incredibly fresh and eager to get out on the second loop. While I waited for Murphy, Chris Perry arrived and quickly filled his pack with supplies for the final loop and let me know that he was heading back out on the trail.

Murphy arrived and Jamie and Becky got him quickly supplied with what he would need for the second loop. Originally Murphy had wanted to take some time at this station but he saw me chomping on the bit to get going. Although I had promised to stay with Murphy through loop one, I figured with the front-runners so close that I would continue with him through the night. My sense was that with the time it had taken us to get to the aid station, there was no way the other HURT runners would make the cutoff and hence be out there for him to run with. With food in hand (thanks to Jim, Jamie and Becky) we headed towards the only glow stick on the course that marked the trailhead for loop two.

During our training runs we had envisioned running this next 7-8 mile section to take advantage of the relatively gentle elevation profile. Unfortunately elevation profiles do not tell the whole story. The trail while relatively benign in ascent / descent was littered with motorcycle whoop-de-do's (whoops) throughout. The mogul like trail was very frustrating to run. Not only were the whoops deep, but also they were filled with tons of trail dust. Made my hamburger taste awful gritty. We soon reached Goose Creek Campground, which was a critical juncture in the run. In previous years runners would wander aimlessly through the campground and never find the trail. Ironically we caught up to Chris here and we all decided to continue on down the trail together. Within minutes I became nauseated and Murphy and I let Chris go.

Over the course of the next 4.5 miles the elevation gain would be a mere 200 feet. It was time to run again. As I was doing my run / walk effort based upon whether we were going uphill or running level, Murphy commented that type of effort was more fatiguing to him. I was in a quandary of what to do. Since it was night and hard to see a long way ahead it was difficult to judge what was uphill and what was level. Since the goal of the run was to finish the race I thought that we should maybe just walk and try to keep his fatigue level to a minimum. Oddly enough during this effort we went by Chris and resumed our second and third place position.

At the 66.5-mile mark we would begin our climb up to Chikamin Tie Trail. At this point my energy level was really beginning to wane so Murphy took the lead. I was glad that this was uphill, as I really didn't feel like running. Murphy sensed my fatigue and throttled back a bit on his effort. We were still making progress and staying ahead of Chris even though we had basically been walking all night. As we rounded a corner we were startled to see a person trying to stand up in the trail while shining a light in our direction. It was Les Mignery the front-runner in the race. Apparently he was tired so he had laid down for a short rest. We were happy with the opportunity that his nap had created. The three of us continued on running where we could, but then resuming our power walk on the uphill. We let Les know that there were only four of us left in the run, he wasn't surprised. We pretty much played leapfrog with Les for a while until my energy level dipped really low. I asked Murphy if we could back it off a bit, and promised him that I would be better when the sun came up. Les immediately widened the gap and was gone. As sunrise approached we continued making our way to the next SAR station at about 75 miles. Within

eyesight of Tom and Chris I sat down on a big rock to gather my senses. I was quite fatigued and a little bit dizzy. Tom and Chris urged us on so we headed up towards them. The 75-mile point was the crucial part of the run as far as race strategy was concerned. Coming into the run I had made it known to Murphy that the race would start at this point. We got to Tom and Chris to find out that Les, despite our problems was only 10 minutes ahead. Chris was still behind us by a similar amount. Murphy and I felt good about not only our chances of finishing, but possibly of winning this thing. I felt even more confident in the fact that from mile 85 on we would have good downhill running for about ten miles, and then rolling terrain the rest of the way. We continued our uphill power walk and as daylight arrived were beginning to make very good progress. So much for feeling good, as Chris went blazing by Murphy and I on the steep uphill section. We now were in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> place, or last depending on how you look at it. We pressed onward up the slope. In no time we came upon an incredible switchback, which traversed a boulder, strewn field. My eyes looked upward at the rocky slope and I wondered how much more loose stuff was up there and how frequently it came crashing down on the trail that we were now on. Murphy commented that the sooner we get off that portion of trail the more comfortable he would feel. I couldn't agree more. The relentless climb felt to be never ending. I had hoped to do this part at night so I wouldn't have to see the difficulty of the climb. No such luck.

At long last we made it to the next critical section of trail. It was at a point where the trail went either to the right or to the left. Coincidentally we caught up to Les at the very same trailhead. He was looking at his map and reading his directions when we came across him. He commented that previously Chris had come by him and that he was flying. Les wasn't quite sure which way to go. Although the directions and map said we should be turning right, we found no footprints heading in that direction. However, we did see prints going to the left. After another glance at the directions and map the three of us were convinced that we needed to go to the right so off we headed. We once again got into our leapfrog effort. Les would put some distance on us during the climbs, but Murphy and I would slowly and methodically reel him in during the descents. This portion of trail was 4.1 miles long. Murphy and I kept saying that if in fact this course was long (106 miles), why had the race directors opted to send us on this trail rather than send us down the shorter 1.7-mile trail that constituted the left hand turn at the trailhead. I would later find out from Chris that the 4.1-mile route had a difficult climb that they wanted included in the race. It was during this section of course that Murphy and I started to bonk. On top of that the balls of my feet were both blistered and incredibly sore. The friction rub on my feet had me stopping nearly every 5 minutes to readjust my socks within my shoes. I was beginning to get into a foul mood, and was taking it out on poor Murphy.

At long last we came out into a clearing and saw the sign for Mad Lake. By this time I was all turned around and the trail map made no sense to me. I was convinced we were heading north when we should be heading south. Murphy politely reminded me to turn the map in the

correct orientation (instead of upside down), and instructed to show me which way we needed to go. I didn't believe him. He pressed his point and I reluctantly followed. Good thing I did, because within minutes we were on the Alder Ridge Trail. We had successfully negotiated 82 miles of the course. At this point we were projecting a 34-35 hour finish. The next 10.5 would be pretty much downhill trail and some forest service road. If we were going to catch anyone it would have to come on this section of course.

We plodded along the trail and I finally started to get a positive energy swing. I commented to Murphy that I was feeling good and asked him if he would be ok if I took off? I felt that this was my only chance to make up time on Chris and Les and I was eager to try to reel them in. He told me to go for it and that he would see me at the finish line. I bounded down the trail. Within a couple of minutes I spotted Les just ahead of me. I thought that if I could get Murphy to catch up to him maybe he would work hard to put some distance on Les. I eased back off the pace a bit, then sat down and readjusted my crumpled socks on my blistered feet, Murphy caught back up to me and I told him that Les was just ahead of us. He didn't appear to be too concerned. We took off together and quickly closed the gap on Les. I passed Les and hoped that Murphy would follow. As I continued down the switchbacks I would occasionally look back up to see that Murphy and Les were indeed running together. I felt reassured that the two would stay together the rest of the way to the finish line. I bolted on down the trail in hopes of closing the gap on Chris.

At about 1:20 p.m. I came across Tom at the next SAR point. He commented to me that Chris was only 15-20 minutes ahead (little did I know that he was actually 40 minutes ahead). A feeling of excitement coursed through my body as I realized that for the previous 3-4 hours I hadn't exactly been tearing up the trail in terms of speed. To be so close was beyond my wildest imagination, especially this late in a 100-mile event. I felt that if I could continue to push hard on the downhill that I might have a chance to catch him in the last 8 miles.

As I crossed the stream that put me at the trailhead for the Lower Chiwawa Trail I asked the SAR people how far ahead Chris was. They replied that he was 30-40 minutes ahead. I was devastated. I had worked incredibly hard after seeing Tom (at the last SAR point) and I had lost 20 minutes, how could that be? Morally deflated I neglected to get water at the stream, and my bottles were empty. The only fluid I had left was the Cran-Apple juice in my backpack; it would have to suffice.

With only 7 miles to go I had no doubt that I would finish the run. However, I was now projecting a finish time of 35 hours. I soon passed Goose Creek Campground and had to run through all the dusty motorcycle ruts. The trail seemed to go on forever. I was continually looking at my watch trying to determine when I would be coming out to the road at Deep Creek. The trail just kept going, and uphill and away from the dirt road below. I kept thinking to myself that this couldn't be right. I was getting further and further from the road and time was becoming a

concern. The good news was that there was still one set of footprints that I was following (Chris?). Suddenly, I heard a motorcycle, within seconds I was diving off the trail for three riders. As I got back on the trail I realized that there were no more footprints to follow. I continued on for 10 more minutes, all the while running as I was getting worried that I might have missed the turn off to the trailhead. I tried to remember back to the previous night when Murphy and I had down this section in the dark at the beginning of the second loop. I contemplated turning back and heading to look for a turn. Again, I heard a drone of motorcycles coming in the distance. Once again, I jumped off the trail as they passed. Since the other bikes that had previously passed me did not come back, I ventured a guess that I must be heading in the right direction, since the bikes needed to also get on the trail at the trailhead. I nervously looked at my watch. If I turned back now, I would risk not making the cutoff. I told myself that the only choice I had was to continue on, and if I were wrong that would be the end of a long journey. Again, the trail jutted to the left and uphill. This can't be happening. My pulse quickened, as did my pace. I had little or no time to lose. I felt sick to my stomach, to come all this way only to get lost in the last 5 miles and not finish. "No shit, you are the man", I shouted to myself as I rounded the corner that dumped me out onto the road at Deep Creek. I immediately thought of Les and Murphy. Certainly they must be right behind me. My only hope was that they wouldn't get as worried as I did while on the section of trail that I had just been on. Of significance was the fact that the motorcycles would have obliterated both Chris footprints and mine so they would have no reassurances out there.

I lumbered on down the forest service road to the finish only 1.5 miles ahead. At one point I stopped in the road and looked back to see if Murphy and Les were coming. I didn't see a thing. I was tired, and hungry and I just wanted to get done. I could envision the finish line with all my HURT buddies there. I was incredibly happy. Oh what stories would be told. Four of us were going to finish, not with fast times mind you, but finish nonetheless.

As I made the final turn I could see the finish in the distance and the few people that were assembled. Emotion overcame me and I wept softly at the accomplishment. I really hadn't given myself much of a chance of finishing, given the lack of training. Nearly 35 hours after starting this epic adventure I crossed the finish line (an hour behind Chris). A quick hand shake from Tom and Chris and I was off to the cabin for food and drink. They had commented to me that Murphy and Les were about 20 minutes back, and that there was going to be 4 finishers this year. I was elated. I knew that Murphy would be incredibly proud of our execution throughout the course of the run. I was anxious to hear the details of his final 15 miles.

Time quickly went by. Twenty minutes had passed since I finished the run. I got up from my chair and walked back out to the road. As I looked down the road I couldn't see anyone coming. I started to worry. It was nearly 35:30 into the run. Where were they? I quickly got into my car to drive to Deep Creek 1.5 miles down the road. If they were going to finish they would have to push it. I sat at Deep Creek until 5 p.m. or nearly 36 hours into the run (cutoff point). I didn't

see them; dejected I drove back to the finish line. On the drive back I realized what had happened to them. The distance and course of the Lower Chiwawa Trail must have disoriented them. Had they turned back like I had thought of doing? It was the only explanation I had for them not being at the finish line by now.

As I got back to the cabin Tom and Chris asked me what I thought happened to Les and Murphy? I told them that I could only speculate that they must have turned around somewhere on the Lower Chiwawa Trail. The cutoff time had come and gone. What an incredibly cruel ending; to have gone nearly 100 miles and not be credited with a finish. I was sickened by the thought and regretted leaving Murphy. If I hadn't gotten greedy and went after Chris we would all be celebrating, instead race organizers were sending out a search party for Les and Murphy. Suddenly my finish was not so important. As twilight descended the Search and Rescue folks mobilized. It wasn't long before a call came over the radio that they had found Les and Murphy sitting along the dirt road near Deep Creek. Apparently they did turn back on Chiwawa Trail, and in fact they bushwhacked down to the road. Once there, they did not know what direction to go. My sense is that they, like myself were very close to the trailhead and had they continued on, undoubtedly would have finished the run with plenty of time to spare. Naturally, Murphy was incredibly disappointed with the fact that he got off course. He had an incredible run out there and was in control throughout. He kept me going at a nice and easy steady state effort, which allowed me to finish. In my book we were all finishers. Now that we know the course maybe we can head back next year and "bag a fast time", yea right.

The Plain 100 is an incredible adventure. The course itself is not overly difficult, what makes it difficult is the fact that the runner needs to take care of himself. There are no wildly cheering crowds or buffet style aid stations; just an easy to read map, great written instructions, and miles of great trail in a beautiful setting. This is one run you really don't want to miss.