

Hardrock 2006 Prologue

I was always intrigued by Hardrock. Any race that challenging is always neat to talk about. So I made it my unofficial goal / fantasy run. After a couple of HURT finishes, I started seriously considering actually going for it. I listened in awe to Don Fallis talking about pacing Jim Ballard at Hardrock. I was both scared and excited, kind of a shock and awe. There are a few places at HR that would be show stoppers for me, but I didn't want reality to get in the way of my fantasy. Do I have what it takes to do something like that?

First, I had to get a qualifier 100M to even submit an application. That was a real problem until Big John sent an email to Blake Wood requesting HURT to be a HR qualifier starting in 2005. Blake responded the same day and strongly agreed and HURT is now a HR qualifier and I have a chance to put my name in the hat. I was waiting on the 2005 Western States lottery before I submitted my application for HR 2005. Fortunately, I was selected for WS in 2005 and therefore did not submit a 2005 HR. This was a blessing in disguise because I was not ready for HR yet. During 2005, I completed HURT, WS and had a good try at Plain. These runs convinced me that HR was possible, but would take everything I had. However, HR was quickly becoming more and more popular and the odds of a first time entry being selected was only 20%. Jeff and I both submitted our applications for 2006, but we were not hopeful of our chances of being selected. I received a call from Jeff on the morning of Super Bowl Sunday. He simply said, "You're in!!" I was numb. I quickly went from being elated to feeling totally overwhelmed. I called Big John to tell him the "good news". I know I caught him off guard because he was struggling a bit in the beginning, but had me believing by the time I hung up. I promised all the well-wishers that I was really going to train hard for this race. My friend Jim jokingly reminded me about trying something new before a race.

Jeff and I talked about Tahoe if (when) we didn't get selected for HR. We had some very good training runs, but none over 8.5 hours. We even went to Maui to run the crater. That was an incredible training run, something I always wanted to do before I left Hawaii. This was my first chance of running at altitude and I learned a lot from the experience. As some of you know, I moved to Omaha in late June and that complicated my training schedule. My last training "run" in Hawaii was doing the 3 peak at Olomana with Jeff and Matt Stevens on Father's Day. That was great training for exposure and sheer terror. It's tough to run when your knees are knocking. After finishing that one, I was really happy just to be alive. Hope Hardrock wasn't like that. I wasn't sure what Hardrock would be like, but I was going to find out.

Hardrock 2006

On the way to Silverton, I visited my brother in Colorado Springs for five days. I spent about 4 hours on two days at the Pikes Peak summit and power-walked to 12K on the Barr trail. This altitude training was a big confidence builder for me. I no longer feared altitude. I was only concerned about not finishing – getting lost or getting sick. I met Don and Cheryl at the Denver airport and we flew to Durango. We got into Silverton about 9:00pm on Wednesday and HR started Friday morning. Thursday was a beautiful day, we drove around a little, gazed at the mountains, checked in (my heart rate was 80 – normally it is 60) and got my number and wrist band. We had a great Italian dinner and Karl came in and stopped to talk with us. A very nice guy and from what I hear, a pretty good runner. Back in the hotel room, I was having trouble getting focused. I was still giddy that I didn't have to sleep in the loft. Don took charge and got everything packed in my new Ultimate Directions camel (really cool!) and stuff to keep in the car (no drop bags). I went to bed early, got a good night sleep (very surprisingly) and woke up ready to go. We were all standing around in the gym to keep warm and I was getting really anxious. No more hype, I was ready and wanted to start. Just relax and focus.

Finally, we lined up and I started to settle down. It's race day, I feel really strong and excited, I know that I'm going to finish and that's a big stress reliever. The guy said, "go" and off we went. I waved goodbye to Don and Cheryl and hoped the next time they see me I would still be strong. I was moving well in the beginning, going slow along with everyone else. I found that I was moving a little faster on the up hills than some of the runners. I decided that my tummy would be the limiting factor on my speed. I convinced myself that I was strong enough, that only getting lost and getting sick would keep me from finishing. Eliminate those and enjoy an incredible journey in an amazing setting. We formed a conga line and moved up and down some hills for a couple of miles. Some nervous chatter, but I was pretty quiet and focusing on my footing. At the two mile mark, we had to cross South Mineral Creek. That was my very first real stream crossing during an ultra. Don and Cheryl were there cheering me on and I knew that would be the last time I saw them for 10 hours. I didn't stop and think, just plunged right through it. The water was cold and up to my knees. This was the first of many stream crossings and told myself it's a tough run so you have to be tough. That was a continuing thought throughout the race, be tough.

I wanted to run with other folks so I wouldn't get lost. I had trouble running with individuals, so I try to run with a loosely formed group. I came to the first aid station (the one before any significant (13K) climbs. The lady told me the flies were really bad at the next aid station and sprayed me with bug spray. I filled up with water and knew the stretch to the next aid station would be my first real test. Going up Grant Swamp Pass was long with some steep sections. I found myself getting impatient, "where's the top?" All of the climbs would be very long (a couple of hours) so quit looking for the top...enjoy the journey, enjoy the view. Just keep going and see how far up in the sky you get. The scenery was awesome. There was a small island in the middle of a big lake at about 13K feet...incredibly beautiful. Had to take a double look to make sure I wasn't hallucinating. Finally I made it to the top; one down and a bunch to go. Not too bad.

I'm always happy to get to the top, but I need to keep going. At the top of Grant Swamp Pass, I watched runners disappear over the side. Oh-oh, what's going on here? I ran over to the edge and it was a steep, scree-filled slope. I was scared. I had to go down that bad boy, but I wasn't sure how. The guy behind me told me to watch him and do what he does. He starts high stepping down the scree and the scree starts moving down the mountain with him. No way, that's crazy. Be tough! Off I went. It was exhilarating. I was scared to death. I was totally out of control and moving pretty fast. Focus – don't fall, that would be bad, enjoy the ride. I reached the bottom and my heart was pounding, but not from exertion. Man, that was fun, but I don't ever want to do it again! About 15 miles into the race and I have already done and seen things that I have never done or seen before. This is a special race in a special place. I'm a lucky guy to be here.

The next section was a nice down hill with some good running. I was taking it slow because of the altitude. I had two voices in my head. One was saying you need to run a little faster to pick up some time. The other voice was warning me, save yourself for day two. Don't run yourself out of the race on the first day. I promised Rex that I would not drop, just keep running for 48 hours and see how far I got. I kept moving at my easy pace. Then came the toughest part of the whole run – Oscar's Pass. The temperature really heated up and the sun was beating down mercilessly. The jeep road was steep with very little shade. I had constant companions through this part – biting flies. They were buzzing around my head. Rats, this was hot, sunny, steep, and uncomfortable. I stop for short 20 second breaks throughout this part, but each time I stopped, the flies attack. No rest for the weary. Surprisingly, I was passing a lot of runners, even with all of my stops. Some of the folks were getting sick and dry heaving. I couldn't help them so I kept moving. Above 12K, I started to struggle. Other runners started to pass me. Hans was moving well and offered some encouragement. Rats, are the wheels starting to fall off? No negative thoughts, stay tough. I finally made it to the top. I really exerted myself and was breathing hard. I used up too much juice. I don't want to do that again – that was too tough and took too much out of me. Ok, no more drama, shut up and run.

On the way down, I hooked up with a great guy named Mark Blenden. We ran well together and really hit it off. I had to move a little faster on the down hills to keep up with Mark, but it was worth it. We ran into Telluride together and decided to run to Ouray together.

I saw Don and Cheryl at Telluride and that made me very happy, it's been a long time. I told them that it was really hot going up Oscar's and that those mountains are punishing me. They acknowledged all of my concerns (where's the love?) and got me ready for the run to Ouray. I changed my shoes and socks. I told them to be ready for me at Ouray, I still feel strong and it was cooling off. I was confident now that I had a running partner to Ouray. Mark and I left for Ouray with our flashlights in our packs and headed up over Virginus. That was a long, hard trek and the wind started blowing near the top and I was getting a little chilled. We were making 20 second stops every 20-30 yards. Still, this was easier than going up Oscar's in the heat with the flies. John Robinson ran with us much of the way. He was stronger, but got a late start because he over slept. We talked about HURT and Hawaii and he was wearing a Honolulu Marathon hat. The top of

Virginus was pretty steep, but a man named Guy cut in some switchbacks through the scree that really helped. The aid station was great – at the top of Virginus. They had to hike up all of the supplies – thanks guys! The way down Virginus would normally be a butt-slide through the snow. Unfortunately, there was no snow. It was a slow, careful trek down the scree field. I dislodge a medium size rock that was heading right for Mark. I yelled for Mark to turn around! He did and moved slightly and the rock barely missed him. He was unphased, but I was pretty shook up. That would have definitely left a mark – no pun intended. We saw a guy going up and I asked him if his name was Guy. It was and I thanked him for cutting the switchbacks for us. We then ran into Steve Pero sitting on a rock. Steve's a very good runner, but had tummy problems the whole day and was still feeling lousy. Despite this, he told us not to worry about him and that we were doing great and wished us luck. Classy guy.

The way down to Ouray was in the dark and we were both feeling the pre-aid station blues. We got a little confused with the markers, but managed to find our way to the aid station – thanks Mark. Mark's son Brian would pace him and Cheryl would pace me on the next leg. We decided to stick together. Mark had done some of Engineer's earlier in the week. Don and Cheryl met us outside the aid station and was hooting and hollering. My pre-aid station blues went away immediately. I was kind of demanding at the aid station. I knew the upcoming night run over Engineer's would be tough and I wanted to make sure I was ready. As always, D & C were great. They watered and fed me, had everything ready for me, got me out of there on time and I left a new man. I still felt strong, but not very talkative. Cheryl and Brian were great pacers. They took turns leading us and looking for the markers. Brian said, Wow, what is that? I shined my flashlight on a big doe that was laying down on the trail. I didn't know if deer were light sleepers or not, so I walked over asked her if she was asleep. She wasn't. We assumed that she must have fallen from the cliff. We talked about Bambi for awhile after that and I learned a lot about deer. Normally, deer don't sleep on trails and they are light sleepers. Good info for Plain, I bet Jeff didn't know that.

We went up Engineers in the dark and missed some awesome scenery, but heard the roaring water throughout most of the climb. Mark said that some parts were sheer drops and we were careful about hugging the cliffs. We were making some stops to catch our breath and moving steadily up the mountain. I stepped in some mud and lost my shoe. My dirty-girl gaiters kept my shoe hanging on. I was not happy, but I found out later everyone else was doing their best to keep from laughing. We reached the aid station that had a fire going. I put on my knit hat and wanted to get going. We stayed in the aid station a little longer than I wanted. I was getting chilled and needed to move. We left the aid station and made the final push up Engineer's. After the aid station stop and some hot chocolate, I was feeling good and wanted to go a little faster. Mark told us to go on and we'll catch up. I didn't want to leave Mark and Brian because I really enjoyed their company and they were a big part of my run. But I was getting chilled with every stop and felt I was falling behind on time. Cheryl and I charged up Engineer's, going from marker to marker. I would get to the marker and wait 5-10 seconds for Cheryl. Cheryl is so tough and we made it to the top and looked around for Mark and Brian. They still had a ways to go and I knew they were better down hillers than us so I decided to go on. We

started power walking the jeep road in the beginning at the high altitude, allowing us to catch our breath. I started panicking about the time. I wanted to get into Grouse Gulch at 0600 and we weren't going to make it. We started running and walking. The sun started to come up and I wasn't sure how far GG was. I started to get very concerned. I just wanted to finish HR and I saw that slipping away. Cheryl kept saying we're ok, let's just run some more.

We made it to GG at 0620 and I was trying to hold back my emotions. I told Don that I was still strong and ready to go...let's get going, we're behind. Don calmed me down, watered and fed me and replaced my batteries in my flashlight – something I was not thinking about at 0630 in the morning. He told me we won't see Cheryl until 11PM. I knew we were heading up Handies Peak, the highest point of the race at 14K and I was anxious to take the test. I think I thanked Cheryl for pacing me, but if I didn't, I'm very sorry. Thank you Cheryl for getting me through the night, keeping me safe, always checking on me, and keeping me moving and in the run – you're the BEST!!

Don told me to go first and that was the right thing to do. We moved up the hill before American Basin pretty well and passed some folks. At the time, I thought we were headed up Handies. We got to the top and could see Handies, but unfortunately, we had a big down hill going to the Basin before we headed up to Handies. Roger Wrublik passed us moving very well on the down hill. Roger is a great guy and I had the chance to talk with him throughout the run. Going up Handies with Don was a lot of fun. Don was so strong, he was singing me made-up ballads from Broke back Mountain (long story) near the top of Handies. I was a little concern we were moving too slowly, but Don kept me focus on getting to the top of Handies. We did and wow, what a view! I was breathing hard, but was excited to be at the top. The way down was a little slippery and we did a shuffle. Other folks were moving faster and passed us, including Roger. I may have been a little stronger on the up hills, but Roger blew me away on the down hills. Don and I cruised through marmot city and waved at our hosts. Those marmots are really cute. I don't know what they do, but I got a kick out of everyone I saw. We did some good running through a wooded area and were on the way to Sherman's. Some awesome scenery with waterfalls and streams and mountain views. I really enjoyed my time with Don and the miles and time seemed to pass by. At the Sherman aid station, Kathy Lang gave me some Tums (calcium) for my calf that was getting a little tight. I didn't want to cramp, too many mountains to climb. From Sherman's to Pole Creek was along the Continental divide trails. I started power walking and really got in a zone. Don and I were moving pretty well across the valley, but still conserving our energy for the future climbs. It started drizzling a bit and got a little cool, but made for great power walking weather. I wanted to show that I can power walk as fast as I can jog. Don't know if I proved anything, but we moved pretty well and I still felt great. I can't stress enough how much I enjoyed being with Don doing Hardrock. I wanted to show him that I could do it. Don was always full of encouragement and was genuinely excited about my HR attempt. I wasn't going to let him down.

We left Pole Creek aid station and the mules and started towards Maggie Gulch. I seemed to be handling the altitude and was moving well, despite the occasional lost shoe

in the mud. Don was keeping pace and continued the constant encouragement – I loved that stuff. We needed to make some stops to catch our breaths, but we were still strong. The key was not to over-exert at altitude, it takes extra long to recover. We reached Maggie's Gulch and we're surprised that it was over 11.8K. We were pushing pretty hard at altitude, but seemed no worse for the wear. I was very encouraged by this. We topped off at the aid station and headed up Green Mountain. I was handling the steep climb just fine, but it was scary with narrow switchbacks on the exposed side of the mountain. There was no room for error, but we still had good light. I was leading, going from marker to marker, wanting to get off that mountain as soon as possible. We made it up and over and the down hill was easier than Don had remembered. We crossed the road and headed toward Cunningham. We had visions of getting there around 9:30PM, but that wasn't going to happen. We had to go down some steep hills with loose rocks and sand and that slowed our progress. Others flew down, including Roger and Jimmy. Don said that I go on without him if I wanted. That actually made me smile. The only reason where I'm at right now is because of Don and Cheryl and I'm going to take off by myself to save 10 minutes. I don't think so big guy, you're stuck with me. The sunset was one of the most beautiful sites I have ever seen. The flaming colors, the shadows, the sheer beauty of mountains were incredible. I'm a lucky guy!

The trail to Cunningham was not real fun. It was dark and I was getting grumpy and having trouble finding the markers. We were a little unsure of where we were headed. We followed the markers through a bunch of switchbacks. Don spotted cars on the road and later the aid station. Cool, we were a lot closer than we had thought. I was relieved. We were not lost, I'm still in the run, but I had a tough 13K mountain to get over before I finished. We decided to run into Cunningham in case anyone thought we had been walking. I was happy to be at Cunningham at 10PM, but wanted to leave as soon as possible. It's funny, I work so hard to get to an aid station and as soon as I get there, I want to leave.

I started to feel sleepy. It was the second night and I could feel my energy starting wane. Let's go Cheryl, we need to finish. I needed to get up that mountain while I still had the strength. I told Cheryl to take me home and I would follow. Off she went. We had a big stream crossing as soon as we left the aid station. Rats, I'm all wet, cold and tired and the wheels are starting to fall off. It's easy to be tough when things are going your way. Now is the time to be tough. Cheryl will get me home, she's done it at San Diego and Western States. This is the part of the run that's a bit blurry. All I know is Cheryl took me up that big mountain, waited for me, checked on me, encouraged me, and lied to me about how much farther we had to go. I thought we had reached the top a half dozen times, before we actually did. When we reached the top, I was too exhausted to be elated. Then, like something out of a movie, a big bright light shined on us. Cheryl said, "oh my gosh, look at that!" The moon was rising above the mountains, it was truly breathtaking. We were standing up there among the stars and the moon highlighted the surrounding mountains. That was worth the price of admission. We started on the way down and things went from bad to worse. The narrow trail was scree-filled with loose rocks and sheer drop off. We were moving very slowly and I thought this was taking forever. In a fit of desperation, I told Cheryl "this isn't challenging, it's dangerous!" We

were passed by a couple sets of runners that were obviously moving better than us. We finally made it through to the jeep road and started down to Silverton. Cheryl kept me going and we were nearing the bottom and could see lights. I thought I was finished, but HR had one more challenge for us. We got confused. I thought we were headed for Silverton, but we had to go through 2 miles of forest trail. Cheryl kept following the markers, but I was getting anxious. Are you sure this is right? Here's another marker. I had flashbacks of Plain and getting lost at the end. I was nervous, tired, and confused, but I have followed her this far and she has never let me down. Be tough. Howie Stern passed us and I asked him if this is right and he said yes, almost there. Finally, and I do mean finally, we broke out of the forest. Don was waiting for us in the car. We talked about what happened and it all made sense. I took off my Ultimate Directions camel and jacket and put on my HURT shirt. That's my finisher's shirt for all ultras. I didn't want any confusion about who I was. Don and Cheryl started running with me through town to the Finish Line. This was very special for me, to have both Don and Cheryl run with me to the Hardrock. HR took me to a different level and I had to dig deep and take a hard look inside, but I was able to respond. Right in front of me was the Hardrock. I bent down and kissed that bad boy and it was all over.

Cheryl Loomis adds:

Amazing...well, that's not exactly how one might describe Bob Murphy.

But how he raced and what he accomplished at Hardrock this year is Amazing....Simply Amazing.

I was fortunate enough to pace Murph during the two nights....just being out there on those mountains is very special for us...coming from Hawaii.

The climbs were probably the most difficult I had ever done, but Murph just kept pushing forward.

He had a task to complete, and he kept on task, with no complaints.

As we reached the summit of our last climb, we took a quick break, leaned against the mountain, and looked at the beautiful orange moon, and watched the shooting stars. I told Murph, those stars were his Guardian Angels, and they would get us home.

Hardrock is like no other race I've ever been a part of.....

And Murph made all of us at HURT very, very proud.....

maybe he is Amazing....

Don Fallis adds:

BRUTALLY HONEST

The time has come...I finally get my chance...after all these years of running around in the woods with Bob Murphy, he says: "Don, be brutally honest". He's given me a blank check...the company credit card. It's payback time! Now to be brutally honest.

So, here I sit...speechless. Like Cheryl, I'm supposed to add my comments on Murphy's Great Hardrock Adventure, and I can't think of a thing. All I can remember is the past...the time when he had me rolling in the dirt hysterical, on Aihulama Trail at 2 am.

The time when he, Rex, McAllaster and I laid down in the middle of the road, almost falling asleep at 3 am, on a double-HURT night loop, heading into Paradise Park. It's funny how I can clearly remember the little pig that almost collided with Bob, in the middle of the night, scaring him so much that I'm certain he peed in his shorts. Then there was Benita's 50 mile training run and the Arkansas 60 mile training run...and on-and-on. So much fun (and drama). That's our buddy, Bob Murphy.

Come-on, Don...think...Hardrock. Okay! I don't believe in reincarnation, but if I did, I really think Bob Murphy died, and Matt Stevens came back to inhabit Bob's body. The voice was still Bob's, and he still looked like Bob, but that's where it all ended... everything else was Matt. The reason that I'm sure of this, is because Bob (Matt) never ONCE whined! That's a dead give-a-way. Another big tip-off was the fact that both Cheryl and I (at different times of pacing Bob) couldn't keep up with Bob on some of the long, high-altitude climbs, even with Bob already doing nearly half, or more, of the course, before getting to us. There's no way that "our" Bob Murphy could have done that. It was DEFINITELY Matt! Bob almost had me fooled, going up and over Handie's Peak, the only 14er, when he "acted" like he was out of breath, while I sang a bawdy, home-made version of Brokeback Mountain, for a laugh and to cheer him up. And he never used to stop and gaze at beautiful sunsets, like he did at Hardrock. Another big give-a-way was that he did everything right...paced himself...hydrated...grazed-and sipped...took his electrolytes...saved his quads for the second day...didn't sit down...did everything perfect...definitely not Bob Murphy!

So, all the credit goes to Matt Stevens...what a great job, Matt! I will always be on awe of your performance at Hardrock.