

## *The Kauai Adventure:*

Running Kalalau Trail, Na Pali Coast, and Waimea Canyons

Kalalau RT: Ke'e Beach to Kalalau Valley Out & Back

Total distance: 22.6 miles

Elev gain/loss: 12092/ 12024

Max elev: 800ft

Time: 11 hr 15 mn

---



We arrived Kauai Thursday, grabbed car, checked in at the Hotel, and hit Costco, Longs, and Foodland for supplies. Drove north to set up stashes for the perim runners and to check out their at-times-less-than-fun-looking road route. We were set to hit the trail @ 5am Friday for the out & back portion.

Friday - 4am start; drive to Ha'ena State park, hit the trailhead @ 5.15am, carrying a few litres for stash. NB: unless you are a camel don't attempt to run the out & back without a stash. Or, plan to allow enough time to purify the poop water along the way, approx 4 hours.

We started up the trail, team of 4: Kat, Jan and Mike, Frank. Very quickly Mike says "you girls go on ahead" to me and Kat. To which we both replied "oh, it's okay, we're good for right now." Translation: Its friggen dark. Its 5am and we got up at 3. We're not ready to bust out any speed records yet. And Kat adds: "I'm staying with whoever's got the key." [laughter] Smart girl though...

We pushed on in the dark, and frankly, you don't remember a whole lot of any trail, known or not, in the dark hours.

The memorable moments still abound however: cool temps, quiet, full moon, no rain, and lots of steep climbs already. So the day's workout had begun.

The trail had a lot of steep up and down switchbacks, but around every cliff was a beautiful and pristine valley. You worked your way up a nice climb, around the bend, and back down into the valleys. Pretty much Kalalau 'repeats' the first 1/2 of the trail. The nice thing was the view was different, every time. We heard, then saw the notorious Kauai goats pretty early on. The coolest thing about them is that there can be no trail that you can see, along the sheer cliffs, and yet they casually make their way in and around all over the place, seeming to just stick to the sides. Almost laughing at you. As if to say, go ahead. C'mon. Try. Try and chase us. And, you will lose. Bahhahhahhahha



We dropped the water stashes about 4 miles in; at the 6 mile mark is the first campground and helicopter landing area. There are no facilities other than an outhouse. It's rudimentary/backpacker camping style. And no water sources close by. You have to hike to get to any water sources, and then purify in order to refill your supply.



We came up on what is apparently called "Crawler's ledge". A section of the trail that if you have any vertigo issues whatsoever, you might not want to look down. To me, the trail was perfectly carved right into the sheer cliffs. Good traction, flat trail, rock and cliff on one side, and water a few hundred feet down a somewhat steep, sheer slope on the other. No biggy. Much to the surprise of the rest of the crew, I ran this section... and loved every second of it. Kid in a candy store. My ranking: 9 trail legs. Very runnable, as long as you've got the chops.

The remaining 6 miles, I found to be extremely runnable. I stayed out ahead and cruised along, happily enjoying the run, the views, and the trail. Kat trailed right behind me and Mike and Frank weren't far behind. We paused periodically so as not to bomb out ahead too far, but also, in the back of your mind you keep thinking about two things: Water supply - number one. And for me, the prospect of rain would have changed things quite significantly. Not so much the factor of getting wet, that's not a big deal. But it's how rain would have changed the runability and trail conditions. There are some very treacherous and steep climbs, and a few points of pretty gnarly, possibly fatal drop offs on this trail. Rain would definitely throw in an element of risk. Again, we lucked out and ran in the dry pretty much until the end of the day.

Once we got towards the end of the trail (beach, waterfall, and caves), just past the sign at the top there is an expansive view as you are coming down "the Big Red Hill". Big Red Hill overlooks beautiful grassy knolls (popular with the goats, once again) and wide open views of the mountains and water. Whales checked in in the far distance, and we chased a few goats on the way down. Probably one of my favorite spots on the whole trail.



After descending down BRH we ran the flats through the campground, onto the beach (queue the monk seal!) and over to the end which of course there is always some tradition about having to touch the sign, or the cliff, to mark the end of one way. We took a short 20 mins or so of downtime to refresh, eat, refill, and check out the falls.

We headed back out the same route, only, once we got about midway up BRH, Kat and I are there, Mikey's at the bottom, but no one knows where Frankie is. "Where the F is Frank"?? We look down and here he is, running along the headlands below, heading away from BRH, and the right trail. "Frank." "Frank!" "FRAAAANK!!!" He finally gets back on BRH and as we found out later somehow he got off track and was running what he thought was the right trail. I still think he was chasing Goat. Apparently, he did not see their vertigo cliff tricks earlier and was probably headed for some very sketchy cliff navigating that they would sneakily draw him in to. Yeah. Never trust a Goat.

We all headed back up to the top and this time Mikey says "hey we're gonna be a bit slower, you guys go on ahead". We got the green light to pick up the pace a bit and make some time. I was stoked, and I think Kat was just going to stay with whoever had the key, and that was me. It was just as enjoyable on the way back only a little nicer on pace, however, we'd all noticed within the first few miles back that water consumption had changed. Now it was after noon, and although overcast, the temp and humidity had gone up. Not to worry because we have a stash, right? And we know where it is, right? Yeah. We'll be fine.

Enroute back, we came across one other ultrarunner, a dude from San Diego. He was just getting started as an ultra, we had a quick chat, he'd heard of HURT, and said "oh yeah, I read about some guy from HURT that ran 60 hours for his birthday or something like that [insanity]". We replied, yeah, that's Mike. He's here, that was him back there. (of which Kat and I are just smiling, giggling). We explained that Mike and Frank would be doing the perimeter AFTER finishing the Kalalau out and back. The dude's jaw dropped and he just shook his head. We of course are trying to explain that that is normal. For Mikey.

We took off again, keeping a nice even pace going, still enjoying the heck out of the trail, incredible views, nice weather (perfect...an ultrarunner's dream) and the run, pausing occasionally to refill or take an S-cap.

Now. It is never an adventure, if something doesn't go quite right. (I do not like to use the word "wrong". It's only wrong, if you planned something and didn't do it correctly -- on purpose). Nope. Aaaa I suspected, this adventure would at least have one or two elements of surprise. First, did you know that when you run through an unmarked campground coming BACK the other direction it looks completely different? And that there are all these little 'branch' trails that come off in all directions? Oh, yes. Once you figure out that you took a bad turn, eventually, you are blazing trail, not running it. And, since you are heading up a river, not across and away from it in the right direction, you can figure out pretty quickly that you may have flubbed the turn in the campground and gotten off piste. Easy fix. Turn around, go back the way you came to the point where you are supposed to cross the river, in the campground. Which of course is marked because there IS actually a posted sign, on the other side of the efn water crossing!!! Grrrrr... [Select vocabulary here. Follow by fit of laughter.] Sorry about the extra .50 mile, Kat. My bad. ;-D

Second. The one lesson we should all know better: don't take your eye off the ground for a second. Not one. Because...if you do, you will know what it feels like to step on air and go down so fast that you beat your thoughts. WHOOSH, WHOMP. Down I went, and am now looking up at the trail -- over my head -- hanging on to the edge of it. Luckily I chose to do this trail trick in a brushy section, with lots of trees to break the fall. Needless to say I'm yelling out for Kat to come save me, which she did (who knew she was that strong to hoist me back up on the dirt!) only when recapping the moment later on, she said, "all I heard was



"Kat! Kat!" but she couldn't see anything or anyone. Until she came up on my hands gripping the edge of the trail. And of course, I still had that dang Gu in my left hand - Strawberry Banana with 2x caffeine. Hi. I was determined not to let go of the damn thing (in fact, it was the Gu pack that caused the air-step off trail in the first place!). Yeah, I had a few scratches, okay about 30 of them, and the Gu got dirt inside of the packet, so I lost it. But I got lucky this time. Thanks Kat. I owe you one. Thanks trail gods for letting me off the hook. Lesson learned: Keep the concentration and focus constant. And have a trail buddy there to save your butt .

The final part of the adventure was not so funny. Now, we knew where we'd stashed the water, but again, when you are coming back, and at a different pace, you might think you've run too far and gone past it. Which, we did, and we were also sure of one thing: we'd run short of water. So, water-cooler conversation now becomes talking about survival and that we are going to have to dig in and start to purify. The thing that sucks is that purifying takes 4 hours. We knew we'd have at least 3-4 hours to go, but each of us was down to about the last half bottle or less. Well. You start to conserve and also feel the frustration. How could we have ran past it? We knew where it was!!! Arghhhhh!!! So, in the midst of figuring that we'd have to start to purify...all of a sudden. I am calling out again, still ahead of her by 50 feet or so "Kat!! Kat!!!" She's thinking of course that she'll have to haul my ass up on the trail

again. Nope. Trail Luck...once again. Found the stash. We were both never so relieved, so thankful, happy to have found the buried treasure, and at that point, if you are not religious, you almost feel like you have found that, too.

Phew. We have at least 1.5 bottles each to get us back. Lesson learned here. Know your distances, time, and where the stash is. Pay attention. Watch out for changes during the day of heat, humidity, and increased water consumption. In fact, count on that. It is tricky business, no question about it. But sometimes, you just get Trail Lucky ;-)

Kat and I pushed on to get back and finish the ~23 miles of Kalalau in just over 11 hours. Surprisingly, Mike and Frank weren't far behind us, less than an hour. We had an amazing day running this trail, it is a gem. I highly recommend it, just be prepared if you are going to go. Make it an early start, pack your supplies, and enjoy the run.

Mike and Frank took a short rest break before heading out to start the rest of the Perimeter slog run. Kat and I waited until they got underway, snapped a final photo and headed back for some food, a shower, and a night's rest. We assumed Support Crew on-call duty, which did end up being a 3am phone call. Sadly, Frankie's feet gave out on him around mile 50 and he ended up having to drop. I drove out to collect him and bring him back safely to the hotel. Once I came back up on Mikey the "Powerhouse Perimeter Plover", I pulled over, handed him a large bag of chips and a cold Coke, and wished him well as he continued on his journey. Making sure that he was still smiling and cracking jokes (that's the ultrarunner check-&-balance...)

For me and Kat, Saturday would be another phenomenal day of running the beautiful trails of Waimea Canyons and Koke'e State Park reserve. Another 12 miles and 6 hours of bliss, running trails overlooking the Kalalau Valley from 4000 feet elevation. Of course, there are some gnarly, super gnarly steep sections across hard-packed, slick clay and dirt to get out to the canyon vistas. (Another day in the candy store for this kid!) Kat and I successfully navigated the steepies on the way out to the vista and then headed back on the Awa'awapuhi Trail (totally runnable...more bliss) back to the state park campgrounds. The trails here are another mecca and the wilderness is populated with tons of trees and plant species, especially Acacia Koa. Beautiful.) And of course, more Kauai goats. (They were wondering where Frank was...). There is a wealth of trails yet to be run in Koke'e, Waimea Canyons and all of the surrounding areas that warrants further investigation from this ultrarunner (hint: great training grounds for mainland races) . I will be back, and soon.



Mikey of course finished yet another Powerhouse Perimeter slog run. He successfully navigated the traffic (sadly, Kauai is becoming overrun with vehicle traffic), miles of endless road, and local weirdness to complete the 90 mile perimeter in approximately 33 hours, finishing around 2am Sunday. Congrats Mike. You well deserve kudos a few times over for what you do.

Our final day Sunday we all enjoyed leisurely beach walks, swims, jacuzzi for the sore muscles, and lunch at Kapa'a just up the road. Even had enough time to squeeze in a jaunt up to Kilauea Lighthouse, in spite of the now pouring rain (thank you weather gods for being so kind to us on running days), spotted a few more humpback whales in the distance, and then called it a weekend.

Kauai, I now have learned, is more to the name Emerald Isle. The true gem is in the mountains, trails, and unspoiled wilderness of this beautiful island.

Adios Trail Amigos,  
- until the next Trail Adventure,  
*Trippy*

