

## **2012 Wickham Park 100 (not so fun) Fun Run**

As I sit here on a plane back to London I cannot stop thinking about the Memorial Day weekend, and of course the fake pebble that's sitting in my carry on bag. It was back in March, whilst planning my trip to Florida, that I happen to find the race online. It immediately peaked my interest and the price was right. In England I enjoy running 2 - 3 Ultras/Marathons per month. The weather is much more runner friendly than in Florida and you can easily find an Ultra/Marathon to run on any given weekend year round. I arrived in Florida about 2 weeks before the race and tried to acclimatize as best I could by doing daily runs in the heat of the day. I also put on a couple extra pounds, which wasn't hard considering I was on vacation.

With the support of my mom and a trunk full of well stocked coolers I was ready for race day. Somehow I got confused as to when the race started. I thought the park opened at 0730 for an 0800 race start. Oh was I surprised to find the gates open and dozens of runners ready to start when we arrived at 0715. Someone told me I needed to sign a clipboard. I quickly found the clipboard then returned to the car thinking I still had 30 minutes. I soon noticed that everyone started running...ok guess we've started. It was nice (well not really nice) to see what the course was actually like. My nerves got the best of me on the first loop and I went out too fast. After loop 1 I shot for 45 minute loops which felt comfortable and still gave me time to walk/crawl Sahara Street. The course was just as I pictured - hot and sandy, but carpeting was a nice touch.

The first few loops went by pretty uneventful and I tried to get through loop 7 as fast as possible so that I was 'over the hump'. Loop 8 was my first bad loop, both physically and mentally, so I decided to put on some music. One of the millions of tree roots along the course jumped up and tripped me during this loop. No matter how fast you're running, you will always fall faster. Now I had two more scrapes to match all the little cuts from the palmettos. I also saw my first snake of the race on this loop, which I must admit scared the hell out of me. I've never bought into the idea 'Snakes are more scared of you than you are of them'. One of the things that helped me during this loop, and the rest of the day, was crossing paths with so many wonderful people on the course. It didn't matter if you were running or walking or what the distance - You were doing it!!! Hearing 'good job' or simply seeing another runner smile back at you can make all the difference sometimes.

I was glad to get Day 1 out of the way. Matt said he thought maybe 4 -5 people would show up on Day 2. Upon arriving on Day 2, on time mind you, there was approximately 20 runners near the start area. I thought 'Wow what a turn out'. I soon learned that they were part of a running camp and not part of the race. I was surprised to be the only starter but was eager to get the day started, and more importantly over. It was apparent during loop 1 that due to less runners pounding the trail there were more snakes out (yes I'm a city girl). If nothing else, this was encouragement to keep going and not stop. On my way back in from loop 3 I came around a corner to find a very large raccoon standing in the trail. It's amazing how quickly you can stop running when you put your mind to it! We stared each other down like in Clint Eastwood movie. Luckily I won the standoff and the raccoon ran off into the heavy brush, never to be seen again. I quickly sprinted away just in case he changed his mind. Once safely away, and out of breath, I stopped and walked. I walked around a corner to see a friendly face. It was Kati Craig who had run on Day 1. We went back to the start then Kati ran loop 4 with me.

Unbeknown to us, this would be the hottest loop of the day. Just over a mile in we

bumped into another snake. It was huge and was slowly crawling back into the brush. It wasn't moving fast enough for Kati who told me to 'Throw a stick at it'. What, are you crazy, I replied?? Kati threw a stick at it which finally did the trick. We ran/walked/chatted the loop and still managed to come in comfortable in 50 minutes. She was passionate about running and life in general and was a breathe of fresh air. Sometimes you don't know you're at a low point until it's over. Luckily for me, Kati was there just when I needed someone. Thanks Kati!!!

The temperature dropped considerably for loop 5 to the halfway point thanks to cloud cover from Tropical Storm Beryl. This seemed to give me a new lease on life and the loops quickly started going by again. Then the rain started. There was torrential rain for loops 8 and 9. I don't think it could have possibly rained any harder. For the first time in the race I was actually cold. Luckily I had brought a change of clothing with me 'just in case'. Unfortunately when it started to rain my mom quickly jumped in the car, forgetting to close the trunk lid. Now I had two sets of soaked clothing. Oh well, at this point everything hurt so it didn't really matter.

Loop 10 stayed cool but then the 'sauna effect' began on loop 11. This is when I started to give up the will to live. I thought I would drop the pace to an hour a loop but the thought of running for 3 more hours was just too much to bear. The only thing that kept me going was that I wanted it to be 'over' and the sooner the better. No point in dragging out the pain. My running mantra for this race was 'I didn't come here to walk', which helped keep me on pace. I'm just so glad that I didn't trip and fall during the last few loops because I probably would have stayed there. The 2 ditches on the course, which had been dry, had now partly filled with over a foot of water thanks to TS Beryl. It took me everything to jump over them. There was also a family having a BBQ by the building with the water fountain. They looked at me stranger and stranger every time I ran by, maybe because I was talking to myself at this point. I asked Matt if I could run the 12<sup>th</sup> loop backwards (no not literally). At this point going in the reverse direction was an exciting change. Matt offered me sweets and chips to help keep me going but all I wanted was pain killers.

As I started loop 13 Matt said 'You're going to break 10 hours'. That was exactly what I needed to hear and I felt like I was running with purpose again. I was so excited to collect the turn around marker on loop 14 and head back to the finish line. I left the 200 Mile rock where it lay in case anyone is interested. As I came in to the finish I felt as if I was sprinting like Usain Bolt, though I'm sure I looked more like a limping hunchback. Yes, I made it! Hats off to anyone who even attempts the 200 Miler. I think I lost a few marbles out there and cannot even imagine running that course for 2 more days. Usually after a long hard race I say 'never again'. I usually change my mind after a day or two, but not this time.

Matt and all the runners make this event truly special. Thanks again Matt for putting on such an insane event and good luck to everyone for next year.

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