

Arrested Development, Part IV

Holdaway, 2015 Barkley Race Report



Let me begin by acknowledging that this is the first race report I have written about any of my various running experiences over the past 7 years since my brother introduced me to ultrarunning. Although those experiences have included big things for me like Badwater, the Grand Slam, Vol State, Tor des Geants, and three previous Barkley attempts, this year's Barkley was the most special experience of them all to me, and so I honor it with my first ever written race report. The report is much longer than I envisioned it would be, and it will mostly serve to preserve my own memory of the experience. I don't expect anyone to read this since I read very few race reports myself simply because I don't have the time, especially for ridiculously long and self-absorbed reports like this. In spite of the failure to achieve an official Fun Run finish again, the outcome of the Barkley for me this year was the result of cumulative investment since December 2010 when I received my first condolence email. And the result this year is most likely the ultrarunning accomplishment I am proudest of because I have invested so much more time, thought, and effort into the Barkley than I have for any other event.

In fact, I was telling my wife that the Barkley seems like being pregnant somehow, initial excitement followed by a long and increasingly uncomfortable and finally almost intolerable buildup, which is ultimately embraced with a mixture of fear tinged with anticipation and a desire to just be done with it to relieve the pressure and suffering. And although the acute physical pain subsides immediately following the event, the body is not the same for days, weeks, and even months following. Surprisingly to me, training in the stairwell of my 28 story São Paulo apartment building over the last three years has prepared my legs exceptionally well for the Barkley climbs and descents, particularly when I began carrying a 20 lb. pack up and down the stairs during my repeats. I had zero soreness following this year's run and just some briar wounds that found their way through my probably too thick hiking pants. But soreness and fatigue are definitely distinct animals, and I've made up for lack of the former with loads of the latter. After coming in from Loop 3 at about 47 hours, only

having had a single 5 minute nap during the race, I immediately had to pack my tent and get to Knoxville to run some required errands and start the mini marathon process of flying back to Brazil. Upon arriving at the Knoxville airport (where enroute, in spite of caffeine, I found myself asleep at the wheel at several stoplights), I learned that my flight to Brazil had been cancelled and I would need to spend the night in Miami. It was 3 a.m. Tuesday before I got into a hotel room in Miami and was finally able to sleep for a few hours before getting up at 7:30 a.m. for a work conference call and catching my flight back to São Paulo. For the next few days, every step I took was not painful but seemed to require extreme effort, and thus began about a week of just feeling extremely exhausted and weird. I slept a lot every night and took long naps whenever I could, I seemed to eat and eat and eat and not gain weight as I typically would with such a diet, and this has continued until now, 3 weeks later (although I know that the caloric consumption fest will end any minute now). But then the desire to have another child creeps in, and thoughts of the next year's drawing soon begin. My wife strongly advised me not to make the pregnancy comparison, or one to the menstrual cycle, which also seemed very apt to me in many respects, except for the briefer cycle. But if I always listened to my wife and mother, I wouldn't have run Barkley in the first place.

Pre-Race

My friend Eric and I spent a couple of days prior to the race hiking the park trails and enjoying the beauty of Frozen Head State Park at this time of year. The picture below is from the Spicewood Branch area, one of my favorite areas of the park.



Eric and I had run the Bear 100 and the entire Vol State together last year and we were hoping to stick together as long as possible in this year's Barkley to combine our efforts against the race. Over the course of my prior three Barkley attempts it seemed to me that I had made most of the big mistakes, and I felt this year I had to finish the Fun Run no matter what. As my wife told me before I left, come home with the Fun Run or don't come home at all. I had made a joking comment to this effect to her about a month ago when she ran the São Paulo half-marathon and I said, "Come home with a sub 2:00 hour or don't come at all." Although I was joking, she took the comment very seriously (and delivered on the challenge). But I think she was much more serious in her statement to me. I think she was getting tired of the same old pattern of incessant Barkley related talk and training during the course of the year followed by the highly predictable outcome of non-achievement. My three previous attempts can be boiled down to nutritional and mental failure very early in the Third Loop in my first attempt (about a quarter of a mile from Big Cove Campground), inadequate clothing and navigational issues coupled with fear of being alone in the cold, fog, and dark at the top of Jaque Mate in the Second Loop of my second attempt, and finally more navigational issues (between Fyke's Peak and the New River involving cliffs and highwall galore, rivers running backwards, and wandering way out of Frozen Head SP to the north) and being "timed out" during the Second Loop of my third attempt. I had to end the cycle of failure I told myself heading into this year's run, and all of the various reasons including running out of time were no longer acceptable reasons for stopping.

Initially I thought that this year's late conch blow favored me (after Loop Two I no longer held this view). I was late in getting to bed after trying to reconfirm all of my map markings and compass bearings the night before, and so being able to sleep in seemed like a blessing. At about 10 a.m. when the conch still had not been blown, I was feeling hungry and so Eric and I decided to drive to Hardees to get some real food (debatable I know). We both learned that Saturday mid-morning Hardees in Wartburg is the place to be for nearly everyone in the county. We finally made our way through the line, got our food, and hustled back to the campground with not a lot of time to spare before Laz lit up and we were off. It felt good to have a stomach full of Hardees breakfast to start the race on.



Loop One

Eric and I saw Jamil at the top of Jaque Mate where we chose a different jumping off point for the descent compared to the majority of other runners who were also beginning their descents at about the same time. This was to be the last I saw of Jamil until he and John passed me while they were descending Big Hell as I was finishing my second loop. Eric and I were trying to work steadily but also to monitor ourselves to ensure that we stayed out of the red zone, knowing that we were going to be at it a long, long time. The descents down Jaque Mate and Jury Ridge and the climb up Hillpocalypse were giving Eric a first time insight into what I imagined were some of the real differences between the Barkley Marathons and the Barkley Fall Classic, which Eric had completed last fall. They were also reminding me of how different the real course was from the uniform, straight-lined stairs that I had told myself over the past months were preparing me for the real Barkley. I began to question that assumption, but soon we were back on the Northern Boundary Trail and moving on. It was here that it seemed to me at least that Eric and I began to move at paces that were different enough that sticking together was no longer feasible if I wanted to maintain a pace that would keep me in the running for a Fun Run finish, so I continued at my natural pace and somewhere near SOB Ditch was the last time that I was to see Eric. In spite of running 5 plus days together at Vol State, we managed less than 3 hours together at Barkley. But Vol State has a 10 day cutoff and the Barkley has a 12 hour loop cutoff. I had learned the lesson many times over in my previous attempts that pace control at the Barkley is often significantly impacted by factors beyond one's own choice and control, and I felt that I needed to continue moving at the pace that was comfortable to me because based on probability, the unexpected would work against me from a time perspective before the race was over. True to past form, this occurred many times during the coming hours.

As I searched for the new book location at Leonard's Slide, the next group of runners came along, including Nikki and Heather I think. One of the others actually found the new book location, sparing me from losing much time searching myself for the unknown spot. This was another ratcheting up in course difficulty from the prior year's Leonard's descent, but this was not surprising since that is how Laz and the Barkley roll. It was standard procedure from there until descending Fyke's Peak to the New River. This area has confused and challenged me every year, and this year was to be no exception. The key difference this year was that I maintained my composure and stopped immediately when something didn't feel right, which disappointingly didn't take too long. After a bit of reconnaissance, I determined that in fact I had descended into an incorrect valley. I was able

to make my way over to the right draw to continue down to the river. This place on the course had cost me my race last year when, similarly, although at night, the territory just didn't seem right but when I quickly told myself "No big deal, if I just keep going down I will hit the river and find myself." Yea right. I found the river all right. In fact I seemed to find a bunch of them. And they were surrounded by impassible cliffs in all directions and were flowing in all the wrong directions. To this day I have no idea where I was last year, but it seemed like on another planet. I breathed a big sigh of relief to have crossed the river and highway, and I began working towards the next new part of the course.

Just as I was making my way towards the new woman's book, Matt caught up to me and we found the book and worked together from there until Raw Dog Falls. I was surprised to see Matt coming from behind me because I knew he was a much stronger hiker and I thought he was way ahead of me. I noticed that he had blood on his ear, but I didn't even think to ask him what had happened, it seemed like the bloody ear sort of explained everything. When we got to the falls, I figured I could step in and use my hard earned veteran knowledge to help Matt out. I started to outline for him where the long cut was so that we could avoid scaling Danger Dave's wall. To my surprise, Matt immediately asked where the wall was and said he was going up it. After a quick recovery from my dumbfoundedness, I started to love this guy and decided he had the right attitude. Why come all this way and go through all of this and then avoid one wall? I followed Matt up Danger Dave's wall and we bumped fists and laughed at the top. Yea man, we were doing Barkley on its own terms, no shortcuts. Interestingly enough, I think it might have been easier and quicker to climb Dave's wall than going around it. Of course any idiot should have realized immediately that even the smallest sense of conquering Barkley is sign of arrogance that will be punished. This should have been a flaming red flag of warning to me, but this was Loop One and the sun was still shining. . .

After reaching the Prison Mine Trail, Matt began to pull away from me and as much as it was nice to be Out There with someone else, I felt I needed to just keep moving at a pace that was comfortable to me. In fact, I was beginning to become mildly concerned about my nutrition, my stomach felt on edge and my appetite was not what I thought it should have been. I was concerned that maybe I needed to hold back a bit on my exertion level and so I did. Pictures of Rat Jaw never do justice to the effort level required, and it is probably the climb I dread most in the race (thank you to John Price for the pictures!). This was the first year I carried a trekking

pole, which I usually supplemented with a naturally grown stick. I would probably seriously consider carrying two trekking poles in the future.



I tried to be more minimalist in my gear this year, but the pack still looks too big. I think I carried too much food and clothing, although I am adding a spare compass to my required gear list. I should have learned last year when my compass needle didn't work at all after Loop One, and Hiram graciously loaned me one of his compasses. More arrested development. More on that in Loop Three.

Going down Rat Jaw is much better though, although per Barkley usual, far from ideal.



The rest of Loop One was fairly uneventful. I was alone but had no major navigational issues, and I made it to the top of Big Hell and the last book literally as it became too dark to continue without a light. I pulled out my headlamp and headed to camp feeling pretty good, Loop One was down. I arrived to the Yellow Gate and gave Laz my pages at 10:13 race time, my fastest Barkley loop ever in spite of the consistent reigning in of my effort level. My spirits were strong. I decided at this point to be cautious and preventative in my changeover to Loop Two, and I went right to work checking and re-lubing my feet (they were fine) and worked to slowly eat about 3 inches of a Subway sandwich. My stomach was still not accepting food very well. I refilled my fluid and food and adjusted for nighttime gear and headed back up to the Yellow Gate to begin Loop Two at about 10:30 p.m. It seemed like I had only been in camp for about 20 minutes, but it turned out that it was 47 minutes. With no crew and left to my own devices I had somehow poured nearly an hour down the drain. I knew that I needed to fix that going forward, although Loop Two would reveal how true that was.

Loop Two

I felt confident and comfortable heading into Loop Two. Which brings me to one of the key learnings that I gained this year—with my skill set, I can't afford to EVER let myself feel comfortable and confident on this course. More arrested development. I could see Johan's and Toshi's headlamps ahead of me on the switchbacks heading up Bird Mountain, and I

hoped that I might catch them so that I wouldn't have to be alone in the dark looking for books. But I wasn't willing to push my exertion level beyond my comfort range to catch up, so I watched them gradually pull further and further ahead of me until eventually I lost sight of their lights. I passed the Pillars of Death and at my noted landmark, cut logs on either side of the Cumberland Trail, I turned right and began my descent toward Fangorn Forest. I passed some landmarks I expected although they weren't quite as I remembered them. Didn't I just implement that hard earned learning heading to the New River on Loop One? Wasn't that just hours before? I did, it was, and that was ancient history. I continued to descend and the more I dropped, the more wrong it felt, and the more unfamiliar the terrain appeared. But this was night and everything was expected to look different at night, so there was no need to panic I told myself. Out came the compass and the bearings seemed right but not really. Really, how many red flags did I need? A lot of them I guess. Eventually I came to the conclusion I had been unconsciously fighting to avoid—I simply needed to climb back up (this was what I dreaded) and figure out where the heck I was. I ended up hitting the Cumberland Trail but was confused about where on the trail I was and which direction I should go. I hiked for what seemed like quite a while in one direction and then determined that I should be going in the opposite direction. After what seemed like an eternity, I made it back to the correct departure point to Book One, and with my newfound love of attention to detail I noticed that there were in fact two places in the trail with cut logs on either side. I had breezed by the first set of correct logs and made my turn at a second set of incorrect logs that I had no idea even existed. Maybe single landmark navigation isn't the best Barkley strategy. More arrested development. I had lost about 45 minutes screwing around with all of this, but was very relieved to be back on course.

As soon as I began the correct descent to Fangorn, I could see that Nikki, Heather, and Tim were just yards ahead. I hurried to catch up and enjoyed their company through Leonard's Slide, where Nikki said that she was not feeling very well. Tim and I continued up from Leonard's and made our way from there to the Fire Tower fairly uneventfully from my recollection. However to be honest, I have trouble remembering a whole lot from this part of the race. It was cold and dark and the course wasn't easy, it never is. But it was now light, which is always a good thing at the Barkley. The water in the jugs at the Tower was mostly frozen, but I managed to get enough usable fluid by bashing the side of just the right jugs on the side of the table to break the ice. I started down from the Fire Tower while Tim chatted with some friends at the top. I think I saw Eva on her way up, or maybe she saw me on her way up, I really can't be sure. More blank memory from there, but I remember seeing someone appear out

of nowhere a hundred or so yards behind me while I was climbing the Bad Thing, but then I never saw anyone again in spite of turning around and scanning several times in an attempt to identify who was there. Now I wonder if anyone was really there. I saw Toshi as I neared the confluence of Beech Fork as we headed on parallel paths toward the confluence. We got our pages and started up Big Hell, where we saw John and Jamil descending and looking very strong on their first counterclockwise loop.

As I ran towards camp and looked at my watch, I tried to make sense of Loop Two. Aside from the hour lost prior to Book One, there had been no major navigational issues during the loop and I felt fine I thought. It didn't even seem like lack of sleep or tiredness were bothering me. So why did the loop take me 14 hours from the Yellow Gate? I have no explanation. Loop One took about 10 hours, and I was lost for an hour at the beginning of Loop Two. Throw in some more time for darkness and normal Loop Two slowdown--rather throw in an extra three hours I guess even though my perception didn't tell me that I was taking any more time. I ran into Matt at some point in some loop and he related a similar Loop Two tale to me--no major navigational issues but the sucker just took forever for no apparent reason. It was at this point that I began to wonder how lucky I had really been with the late blow of the conch. I realized that I was quickly approaching the point where I needed to deliver steady state rather than deteriorating time performance if I wanted to finish the Fun Run so that I could go home to my wife. I saw Johan, Matt, and I think Georg on their first counterclockwise loops as I made my way to the campground. Walking back to my tent for the changeover to Loop Three, I resolved to not pour more time down the drain, so I forwent the foot check (they still felt fine) and decided to eat while walking at the beginning of Loop Three. I was disappointed to see that Eric had already left for home. That told me his race had ended, but I wasn't sure how or why. I hoped that it was not due to an aggravated ankle injury that he had suffered near the beginning of the Barkley Fall Classic last year and was still continuing to bother and concern him prior to the race.



Somehow the turnaround still took 21 minutes, but this was much improved over my prior turnaround and became new my pro-forma goal.

Loop Three

I had just under 15 hours to finish this loop for an official Fun Run finish and just under 11 hours to be able to continue to Loop Four. I was optimistic about the Fun Run and hopeful for the rest. But no more slowing down for no reason would be a good idea from here on out. I ate about 4-5 inches of Subway sandwich as I began the trail to Chimney Top. I collected the first page and carefully selected what I thought was the correct point of descent based on my recent ascent a couple of hours earlier. I thought I had been paying very careful attention on my way up Big Hell because I knew this would be much trickier going down. This was the furthest I had ever been into a counterclockwise loop but I felt comfortably confident again, which for me is now the new red flag. After some healthy levels of descent, healthy enough for me to be extremely reluctant to go back to the top and try again, I realized that the compass bearings were not right. Somehow inexplicably I was not on the right ridge. After pondering a re-ascent of Big Hell, I decided to cut cross-country on the correct bearing in an attempt to ridge jump my way over to the right ridge. Frequent compass checks became the norm, and I checked the bearing every few steps until I looked down for another check and there was no compass. What? No panic yet though, I had been checking bearings so frequently that surely it must be nearby. But I am colorblind and I quickly realized that the slim red string that had held the clear plastic compass around my neck would be difficult for me to distinguish in the sea of leaves that covered the steep hillside. To my dismay and now palpable level of panic, it was dry enough that I was finding it impossible to retrace my steps so that after running a few steps here and a few steps there hoping to win the lottery and look down and see the compass in front of me, I concluded that I had an important choice to make. Should I spend precious minutes searching for a needle in a leavestack or should I forge ahead sans compass? I mentally reviewed the upcoming course and decided that I thought I had a decent chance to navigate the coming course without a compass. Decision made for better or worse, I plunged forward with the clock looming as an increasingly worrisome enemy. I came to Beech Fork Creek well downstream from the confluence but knew I needed to go upstream to get to the book, which I did. It had taken me an hour and 20 minutes to get to this book since the last book. I could recover, but this had to stop.

I was feeling OK about the ascent up Zipline (what an idiot). I got to the top and the Eye of the Needle was nowhere in sight. It seemed like to the left (where I am thinking it must have been) there were no capstones,

so I continued to my right checking the capstones. No luck, nothing. More to the right, and I just kept going and going around the mountain, which was very, very steep by the way and many times I didn't feel at all safe. I just kept looking up and down for something, anything familiar. This really went on forever, all the while I was realizing that the hourglass was now draining like no one's business. It was at this point that I started to feel more interested in perhaps finding Chimney Top Trail and a safe conduit back to camp than in finding the right capstone. I think this was because I really was not comfortable from a safety standpoint with the kind of bushwhacking that I was doing in the terrain where I was doing it. Eventually I caught sight of the Fire Tower across the way, and I felt renewed hope at the sight of something familiar. I continued my circumnavigation with the words "disastrous and time consuming search" flowing on an endless repeat loop through my mind. Somehow the Eye appeared, and I got the bloody page. This page had drained an hour and 45 minutes from the relentless clock. I was approaching the zero errors permissible point in order to get the Fun Run, and that it not a betting person's place to be at Barkley.

I thought I could now finally resume a normal navigation. But it was not to be as I once again proved my unwavering knack for route sub-optimization. I hit the bottom of the descent at the back of the reservoir behind the prison and went to get the next cursed page. I couldn't catch a break on this loop, every book was a pitiful exercise in screwing up. This was now the real climb up Rat Jaw, no Prison Mine Trail shortcuts. I would have fist bumped Matt at the top if he had been there. By the way, I had seen Matt on his way back to camp earlier in the loop as he had recounted passing out and not feeling safe in continuing. If I had passed out while searching for the Eye, it would not have been a good thing either. Nearing the top of Rat Jaw, I ran into Toshi coming down. I asked him if by chance he had an extra compass that I could borrow. He said, "As a matter of fact I do." Later I would compliment Toshi on his foresight in carrying an extra compass, and he told me that someone had once told him that "One is none" and then something else that I can't remember, but that stuck with me: if it's something that you really cannot live without and there is any chance of losing it, one really is none. More arrested development. It was nice to finally be around Toshi and intelligent human life, it had been a while for me, myself included. I took the compass, got the darn page and began back down. Just as it was starting to get dark for my second night Out There, I caught up to Toshi at the rusted drum and in spite of my earlier Matt inspired bravado of climbing Danger Dave's Wall, I never considered going down it. Toshi and I both ascended different routes to the jeep road above, but we connected again at the top and took off in search of the woman

book. Unfortunately for Toshi, my luck rubbed off on him and we appeared to not be on the right ridge leading to the book. After traveling back and forth, up and down, Toshi located the book and we resumed our way towards the New River. We crossed the river and went up the right draw. I thought. As we came out of the draw and looked to ascend towards Fyke's peak, the familiar landmark signs I was expecting did not appear. I was paranoically terrified of this area and wanted to be certain I was on a familiar path. At my insistence, more right and left, backwards and forwards, I even considered returning to the New River to ensure we had chosen the right draw.

Time was so cheap now and we gave it away freely. My mind had stopped doing the math of potential Fun Run finish possibilities and just like that another year of oaths, planning, and preparation had been taken from me and Barkley proclaimed that I would not be a Fun Run finisher. But I had now been through enough at the Barkley that I was at least prepared to take what I could. Unlike years past when I pulled the plug on myself for what seemed to be justifiable reasons at the time (though I now believe none of them were), at least this year I felt more like the Barkley pulled the plug on me. Yes, I did make it easier with all of the dumb stuff done, but I was still alive and kicking. Toshi vocalized that he intended to finish the loop and get all of the pages no matter what the clock did, and I was planning to do exactly the same thing, so our intents were the same and we just kept going. But time changed from flowing freely to passing in extreme slow motion. Sections of the course that had passed in the blink of an eye on earlier loops were now loops in and of themselves. Previous stretches of a few steps and minutes now seemed to require hundreds and thousands of steps and hours and hours. But my perceived pace and effort levels seemed to me to be the same as they had been from the start of the race. Eva passed us at some point during the night, and I think heard somewhere afterwards that she had relayed news back at the campground that we appeared to be moving very slowly. Who knew? I thought we were soldiering on rather admirably. Maybe next time I need a Go-Pro mounted on a selfie stick so that I can do some honest post-race self-assessment.

I finally got comfortable with the correct line of ascent to Fykes and the landmarks indicated we were on the right trail. We got to the highwall that we should now bypass on the right side, but we couldn't figure out where to pass. In fact the entire highwall didn't seem like the right highwall, it seemed much too large. Toshi suggested maybe we were on the wrong ridge, but I didn't see how that could be possible. But I also couldn't recognize where to go. So after another no doubt intellectually razor sharp discussion, we came to the conclusion that we should retrace

our steps to the base of the ridge to determine the correct ascent. We did so, and the highwall at the bottom of the ridge near the jeep road looked to both of us unlike we remembered it. But yet the landmarks below seemed unmistakable as well. This was the Stallion Mountain theme, the place is cursed to me, it is the Twilight Zone. And thus continued the pattern that would repeat throughout the coming hours—a pattern of consciously and unquestioningly accepting mutually exclusive realities. But what choice did I really have when confronted with two things that I both knew were true but that I also knew couldn't both be true? It's an odd feeling to know that you can't trust yourself, but such was the stuff of my Loop Three. I was definitely not to be trusted, not by myself, not by Toshi, not by anyone. But a person with no options continues and so did we. We turned around and climbed again, while I uselessly reminded myself that such repeat ascents must not be free, that we must be paying various prices in terms of energy, time, morale, yaddi, yaddi, yadda. When we arrived at the previously unrecognized highwall, Toshi went left (I wasn't sure why, but I guess it made sense since the last time we couldn't find a route to the right). I quickly found the passage on the right, and I went back around to tell Toshi the good news. No real feelings of happiness, sadness, or relief at this point, only acceptance and moving on. We were taking whatever came our way and continuing, there was nothing really to discuss. Toshi was first to locate the book below Leonard's and that climb back up the slide was a big one this time, much bigger than Loops One and Two, no doubt about it.

We had a very lucid discussion about ascents up from the Barley Mouth Branch, and it seemed that we shared the same opinion about where to go and where it would take us. So we went that way and it took us nowhere where we thought. We climbed and climbed and climbed from one false jeep road above to another. Eventually we hit a road that Toshi recognized from his previous run with the Abbs, and so we followed the road. It went on for what seemed like a very long time, but as promised it delivered us to the right point. We began the hike around Stallion Mountain and this seemed to take so long that at multiple points I questioned whether we could possibly be on the right road. But we were, time was molasses, thick molasses. We got to the water jugs and had a bit to eat. I gave Toshi some animal crackers because he was low on food, but all of my food tasted like beef jerky (thank you Dick West, not Curtis) since I had packed jerky as one of my food items (note to self).

After leaving the Garden Spot, at least there were only two pages left to collect but I had a lot of thinking time to consider the remaining climbs. My feet were hurting by now, I had fallen in the creek at the bottom of Big Hell as I was trying to bushwhack my way back to the Beech tree. Rain and

wet trail during the night had continued to aggravate them and moderate pain and discomfort with each step were now my Barkley companions. Whatever, it was not intolerable and definitely could have been worse. At some point during our Northern Boundary traverse we discovered that we both worked in the field of internal auditing, a somewhat amusing discovery as we pondered the odds. All of that unbiased, fact-based, and clear minded thinking that one would assume that we would have cultivated and honed during our careers as auditors didn't seem to be manifesting itself very strongly on the backside of Loop Three. Some scary sounding strong winds had appeared during these hours of the night, but I personally was too mentally numb to think much about that type of minor nuisance. I was also getting pretty tired and it was at this point during the drizzle that I asked Toshi if he wanted to take a brief nap. We sat and slept in the rain for what I estimated to be about five minutes, but in truth could have been five seconds or 50 minutes based on my destroyed perception of the passage of time. This was to be my only intentional sleep during the race. At one point Toshi thought he saw a snake, and I have no doubt that he did. We both heard different voices at different times, Toshi's voices were a woman's, I am not sure what mine were.

We began our trudge along the Northern Boundary Trail and knew we needed to keep our eyes open for the Henry David sign to signal the drop off point to Book Two. Toshi somehow realized that rather than continuing on the Northern Boundary Trail we had turned onto the Cumberland Trail. Fortunately he caught this before we had gone too far. We forged on until at one point I asked Toshi if he had been paying attention for the last few switchbacks because I realized that I had been asleep while walking and could not be sure if we had already passed the Henry sign. Toshi relayed back to me that he had been asleep as well and was not sure if we had passed the sign or not. Another brilliant discussion followed in which we determined we should backtrack to make sure that we hadn't already passed the sign rather than continue forward and end up at Jury Ridge or Phillips Creek, which would require us to turn around and retrace a large section of the Northern Boundary Trail and re-ascend to the correct point. Time and distance were now completely disconnected and the ability to connect them was unattainable. So we turned back and soon came again to where we had made the wrong turn onto the Cumberland Trail. Now at least we were confident in our direction, and we resumed the Northern Boundary Trail and found Henry's sign.

I thought this descent down Hillpocalypse would be pretty straightforward, but why would it be? Did I have some prior empirical evidence to sustain this notion? No matter. We got to the real highwall in the course. I

know I have been using that word freely, but this was the highwall of highwalls. It was high and wet and slippery and dark and dangerous, and we could not figure out where we had come up on the prior two loops or how we could safely descend. We went from side to side in increasing distances in an attempt to discover a way down or how to go around one of the ends that supposedly was passable. I don't know how much time we spent here, but it must have been a lot. I even postulated at one point that maybe we should just return to the top and then cross over both to descend Jury Ridge to Book Two and then come back up again. But after having collected 34 pages the right way, and with the 40 hour Fun Run long gone, I don't think either of us was willing to not get the last 2 pages on the right course, it was really all that we had left to cling to justify everything and we wouldn't voluntarily let the Barkley take that from us too. So we kept looking until finally Toshi yelled that he had found a way. Hallelujah, and we continued on, and on, and on. Light was dawning, there was fog, and we were passing through dense underbrush. Not surprisingly to me by now, I once again realized that we were not descending the same trail that we had earlier ascended. How could I screw up every counterclockwise route choice with a 100% hit rate? Didn't the laws of chance, probability, and many other laws dictate that at least one key route on the loop had to be right? It seemed not, but we continued with the knowledge that unless rivers had moved since the last loop, which frankly I would have accepted as well, eventually we would reach the confluence with the book being corralled on the sides by the two rivers. Indeed this was true, and I found the book. One page and two big climbs to go.

We started up what I thought was the right ridge but Toshi was onto my skillset by now and he soon redirected us to the right ridge which took us to the top. Nothing looked familiar as I tried to mentally deconstruct my clockwise loops on this section and reassemble them in counterclockwise order. Down to Phillips Creek and then on to Jaque Mate. I told Toshi of my route recommendation and we took off, although amusingly I jumped up from the wrong point based on my own description. Toshi pointed this out and soon we were on the chosen route and climbing and climbing. I was a real piece work and a certified high maintenance running partner. It was very light by now and we had clear views above, the climb continued forever and ever but the views were beautiful. I seemed to see a tunnel that appeared in many respects much like the Spicewood Branch picture at the beginning of the report—except that the climb was elongated and stretched up at such a steep angle that it kinked my neck to look towards the top. The rocks around the small streams were covered in beautiful green moss and not a soul or trail was in sight. I was climbing as much with my arms as with my legs. I marveled at how long it took for the coal road to appear,

and just like the Barley Mouth Branch ascent, there were several false coal roads and hopes that required dashing before the true coal road would be reached. But appear it did, and the last big climb was over.

Page 36 was tucked into a zip-lock bag for no one but myself to count. But I was content given the going ons of the past two days. A lot of stuff had happened Out There and things had not turned out at all like I had wanted. But I felt OK in taking what I could, a new feeling for me at the Barkley. But similar to my previous attempts, I continued to feel that I could do even better. But the pace of progress has been so slow. . . Just before dropping onto the Cumberland Trail, nature finally called me after I had been calling nature for 46 hours. Toshi graciously offered to wait, and when I returned a few minutes later I asked him how it was going. He was standing there leaning on a stick and informed me that he had enjoyed a nice nap while I had been otherwise occupied. Route finding disasters in the rear view mirror, we began the hike back to the campground. I wasn't consciously counting the switchbacks, but my unofficial mental tally told me that it was closer to 28 than 14. I also noticed that the vegetation and scenery on the Bird Mountain Trail seemed nothing like I remembered. I actually contemplated the possibility that once again we were not on the right trail, but although my eyes were questioning, my mind told me that there was no other trail. More mutually exclusive realities. So down we went, time seeming to stand still until at last the jeep road appeared, and we broke into a run down to the Yellow Gate.



Amazingly to me, there were people at the gate as though they had been waiting for us. Of course, I figured out soon enough that they were probably really waiting for Jamil as the time was getting close for the Loop Five cutoff. But everyone at the gate was very kind and genuinely interested in hearing what had happened to us Out There. But I didn't have too much time for dilly dallying because I had a plane to catch, so I went straight to my campsite and started to pack my tent and gear.

So how long should one plan on for a Barkley loop? Based on this year's race, I might as well spin the wheel below that my wife brought home today in preparation for an upcoming event at our children's school (the scale is in hours).



Want the 24 hour Barkley Buckle? Better hope that you spin a 1 or 2 for the first couple of loops. I happened to spin 10, 14, and 22 this year, and I

wasn't alone in "running" a 20+ hour loop. And times much greater than 22 hours are firmly in the realm of possibilities for those who keep going.



Laz asked me afterwards what my pace per mile was on the last loop, and even after being awake so long at least the math was absolutely easy: 1 mile an hour or 60 minutes per mile. This was for sure going to impress all of my friends who would ask the inevitable "How far did you get?" question. This question always frustrates me because the difficulty of the Barkley is not measured in distance, and it is impossible to convey to anyone I think, except fellow Barkers who know, a sense of what one accomplished Out There. The paces are ridiculous. I got 36 pages this year and am proud of that, but I didn't even come close to finishing the Fun Run. Time is everything at the Barkley. Given enough time, maybe I could have finished two more loops, maybe not. But no matter. To finish within race time limits--that is the quest that for me is unachieved. But I came closer this year than I ever have before, so although arrested, I am still developing.

I now plan to hit the proverbial Easy Button and spend more and better quality time with my family in the coming months. What else can I do to further my chances at the Barkley in the future? Get a PhD in whatever? That feels like about the only path I haven't yet probed. But I was fortunate enough to win a place in the John Muir Trail lottery, and I will hike the entire trail this summer using gear that I tested this year at Frozen Head. No loop time cutoffs and no one with me until my 17 and 14 year old sons join me for the last 50 miles of the hike where we will continue to summit Mount Whitney. Backpacking will be a new experience for me as an adult, but I used to love Boy Scout backpacking trips as a teenager. I am really looking forward to some solitude and enjoying nature at my own pace on the hike. I am also kicking around the idea of a Mount Aconcagua summit attempt before I move back from South America, the summit is largely non-technical (i.e. safe) and is the second highest of the seven summits after Everest. If anyone is interested in joining me, please contact me off list. And so begins the long wait until the next drawing. . .