

Notes from a Newbie

I woke up nervous. This was the morning of my first 50k. After being dropped off at the start and seeing all the other runners (more than I expected!), I started to transition from nervousness to excitement. The side of Coastal Trail Runners van had this slogan “Have fun out there” and I kept repeating that mantra. This was going to be fun. Right!?! Prior to the race, I didn’t study the course map or elevation. I just knew down was good, blue ribbons bad—stick to the pink ones. This was my first time running the course and I was looking forward to the element of surprise.

The race began and it was a slow start. I tried to hold myself back flying down the hills of the first few miles because a fellow runner had warned me that he had thrashed his quads doing just that the year before. After passing some runners and getting some breathing room, I found a peaceful gait all the way to the first aid station. There I encountered the amazing cheering squad who turned up at every aid station. What awesome spirit, signs and words of encouragement they brought to my day. Thank you whoever you are! The course was amazing. The trails were lush, rolling hills padded with redwood bark and needles. I was loving the shade the course provided and couldn’t help smiling at how perfect the day and terrain was. During the first third of the race, I chit chatted with many fellow runners out there and tagged along with a fun group of guys. Hearing their banter back and forth distracted me from the distance and let me enjoy the run. Before I knew it, I was a third of the way through!

The next few miles were equally gorgeous as I paused to enjoy the views of the redwoods and fog layer below. I made sure I landed safely on both feet, especially as we entered a section that had a lot of exposed roots, rock faces and steep declines. For a stretch of this section, I was alone in the woods enjoying the sounds of wild birds and a lone peacock.

I came to an open section of the course and to the next aid station. My pack was nearly empty so I asked the volunteer how far until the next aid station. Luckily he noticed I was doing the 50k and this was the start of the Garzo loop (studying course map prior to race will be on my to-do list before the next one!). He said “about 2 miles of a little uphill and then the rest downhill”. I looked off in the direction he pointed and said, more to myself than to him “ok, yeah, I can do that”. Off I went until I reached the incline. Then it became a hike. On my tired legs, this climb seemed to go on and on. I fantasied about how nice it would be to just sit down and rest, but then my competitive side kicked in and I thought I couldn’t let the person behind me pass. Up I climbed until finally, we reached the summit. My stiff legs shuffled back into a slow trot as I wound down the mountain again on single track trails. At this point was when I began to feel my knee contract. I had had IT issues and had seen a chiropractor numerous times in preparation for this race, so I worried this was flaring up again. I changed my gait to be smaller, shorter steps, and that seemed to relieve the pressure on my knee. Thankfully, I arrived back at the aid station with minimal knee pain. I was two thirds done!!!



After a quick snack of fruit and electrolytes, I got my rubber band to prove I did the loop and jumped back on the trail. 8 miles until the next aid station. There were a lot of people out on the trails with strollers, backpacks and little kids, so I had to be sure to go slow when passing. At many points, the trail dropped off to a steep canyon on one side and I did not want to step off the trail after running 20 miles!

I was tired, power hiking up any incline that I came to. My stomach was upset and the Gu I tried to eat made me gag. Luckily, no one was near to see that! To entertain myself, I had many random thoughts and visualizations to keep me going: 1. I'm having fun out here right?!?; 2. Every step I take gets me closer to the finish line; 3. Imagine you are a Kenyan and you're traveling to the next village; 4. Imagine you are a Native American and you lived in that empty redwood tree stump; 5. Thank GOD I'm not running 50 miles!; 6. singing "can you blow my whistle baby, whistle baby" refrain over and over in my head because those are the only words I knew; 7. Got to keep running to make my family proud; on and on my thoughts rambled....



(Almost to last aid station)

The course widened to a fire road and all my mental tactics were spent. Luckily my other running friend had lent me her iPod so I took that out and matched my steps to the beat. After a few more miles, I rounded the corner, and couldn't believe I had made it to last aid station! Hallelujah. From my watch, I thought we had 4 miles to go so I was ecstatic when the volunteers told me I only had 2 miles till the finish. Yes, 2 miles, I could do that! Off I went and soon I could hear the cheers from the finish. Even though I couldn't see it yet, I started to get emotional because I knew I was nearly done! I descended the last hill, rounded the bend, and there was the finishing shoot. My time was 5:49, 5th in my age group. I couldn't believe it, I had finished strong, much faster than the time I was expecting (I thought it would take me about 6:30)! The post-race beers and soup were perfect as was celebrating with my running buddies. I FINISHED MY FIRST 50K!!!