

Mesquite Canyon 50k – White Tank Mountains, Az.



The temperatures are scheduled to reach 30c with full sun. The course is similar to the Lethbridge coulees except each canyon is 500m high and about 4 miles to the top. There would be 9 miles between aid stations so I loaded the pack with 1500ml of ice/water, a 600ml hand bottle, and a 500ml bottle with concentrated sport drink in my chest holder. I assumed the water at the top of the mountain would be warm as it was hiked up by awesome volunteers. The course would climb up 500m over 6 miles and down the same amount to a parking lot where full aid/ice is available along with Lori. Then back up again in an "M" format where the middle was only a drop of 200m. The last 7 miles to the finish drops down a granite canyon where parkour skills would be handy to get down the 4m water-carved granite section.



Starting at 17c with a blue cloudless sky, I eased up on the pace and got behind a wily veteran that I met on my last trip. He has done this course 4 times and says it is one of his most favorite for the views and variety. It was 2 miles of desert before we hit the pitch and I let all the young'ins pass and jogged/hiked the 4 mile, 500m up. [Coach's Note: don't let people push your pace, let them pass]. The down was sketchy (they posted a 500m section as Double Black Diamond) as it was steep, narrow, large rocks to wiggle your feet around and lots of loose slate – I was not going to gain back some time on the downhill. An older guy (63) was running with me and chatting for the last half of the descent. He was the other Canadian in the race from Williams Lake, BC. We cruised into the aid station at the bottom. 13 miles, 3 hours.



Lori was watching my wily veteran friend at the aid tent and he filled his buff with ice like an ice ring around his neck. I got that too and it was fantastic! It stayed cold for the whole way back up the mountain. I was using the hand bottle to dribble water onto my hat and forearms to keep cool. The hand bottle was also to be used as a cushion if I face-planted on the rocks (saw people with cut-up hands).

Both my wily friend and the Canadian left the aid ahead of me and they were run'n. I was jogging/hiking the up as I could only eat a bit and was doing the bargaining as to whether I would continue the race after I reached the aid station at the middle of the "M" for the last 2 miles up and 6 miles down through the granite canyon, or just go straight down from there 5 miles and dnf.



My legs were tired and stomach was so-so at the half way up mark. A girl (45ish) passed me so I thought I would try to keep up. She was chatty and there was not too many racers around us (behind the runners and ahead of the hikers). I noticed she just had a 750ml bottle for this 9 mile hot section... [insert a close-up of the bottle and eerie foreshadowing music]. With the ridge within reach, we started to pass

some guys on the trail and a few were sitting at the top, contemplating life. I checked to see if they needed anything, but they declined. I started to feel a bit better as we began a flat towards the descent. My hips were getting a bit tight as it was a bit slow following her. She stopped to talk with a girl (30's) sitting in the shade. As I still had over 1500ml of water in my bladder, I offered some. The running girl took about 600ml (she may have been hooped without it for hot 2 miles to the aid station) and the other girl said she would be ok (her bladder only had ~300ml left...). The running girl said "thanks sir" and left.... WTF??? Sir??? She is a "mam". Took me a minute to get my pack back together and I tore off down the trail. Passed her and never saw her again all day. Stretching out my stride on the very runnable downhill felt great.



Got to the aid station (mile 23) and they had potatoes! Best. Potatoes. Ever. Downed some, chatted with another friend Bill (ladies... the guy looks like Ben Affleck from the chin up when he smiles and Rob Krar from the chin down with a gnarly trail running beard. Just say'n). We met when we were volunteering together for the 8 hour night shift at the Javelina finish line. He said he will be racing it this year, so I said I plan to work the finish line again and will see him then.

They had run out of Gatorade, BUT I was prepared and had a pouch of my own. Refilled with water, mixed my Gatorade and off for the 2 mile up and 7 mile down through the granite canyon (note that Phil Fraser and I ran up that canyon last year, so I knew what we were in-for). I passed a few guys from the 50k and some from the 50mile (they were only halfway done...). The 2 mile section of granite wash was either big boulders, the size of a truck, or soft sand and rocks. It would be slow going for the next few miles so my hope of a 7 hour finish was gone. There were a couple guys on my tail and they were using me to scout how to get down some of the granite drop-offs. There was some butt-sliding on one section that was about a 15' drop. There are some old pools of fly infested green water (where the term White

Tank Mountains originated –granite tanks of water). A dad and his young daughter were sitting in the shade above one of the pools and I said “thinking of swimming?” The guy laughed “no, but a runner that was ahead of us dunked his whole head into the green sludgy water”... Yuk!



The last aid station was situated 2 miles from the finish where we exited the canyon and entered the desert floor. That was even hotter. I passed a couple more guys and started running the last section. Had to take some walk breaks as it was freak'n hot. Kept looking over my shoulder, but nobody was close. Jogged into the finish at 7:48. While sitting and eating, a person asked if I needed some tweezers. They pointed at my leg where 2 cactus needles are sticking out of my calf... I just yanked them out.

The second race of the day would be to get to the airport to pick up Lori's sister and 9 year old nephew who would be staying with us for a week... Luckily there was a shower at the finish area as it was a campground. Jumped into the car and headed for the airport. Even though it was Sunday, the I10 freeway was a 6 lane parking lot as Lori's sister's plane landed a half hour early (when does that ever happen...).



End Notes: Woke up on race morning with a scratchy throat, stuffy nose, and queezy tummy. Did NOT tell Lori... (Coach's note: never tell your "other" that you are not feeling well before a trail race). Wore my old Saucony Exodus shoes, with blow-outs on the little toes (love these shoes – feet were good all day and no soreness nor blisters!). Only a couple of cactus needles.

