



F.L.U.T. 110K: Redemption, Finally

By Cristina Dalton

The DNF

On May 10th, 2013 I embarked into what would have been my first 100K trail run at the inaugural Gold Rush 100K from Coloma, CA to Mid Sac. The decision to run this distance and this race was one made hastily 6 months prior. I figured, once I was signed up, I would have no other choice but to finish, just like I had done at my first half marathon and marathon 6 years prior. The new year came around and I began piecing together some training runs, not really knowing what I was doing, I signed up for my first 50k and completed it with a lot of shuffled miles, but the feeling I felt after knowing I had for the first time ever gone past the marathon distance was priceless. This ultrarunning thing, while painful, was very doable. The year went on with another 50k on the schedule a few 10ks, half marathons, and my first Boston Marathon. All those races, I felt strong, and left me feeling confident. Then Gold Rush time came around, it was a hot day, I was all by myself, no crew, no pacer, only a couple GVH familiar faces along the route. I made it to mile 32 at Folsom Point, and with a 'ghost' pain on my left foot, I made the decision to drop out, to DNF. I went through a low point from mile 20 on and was not able to talk myself out of dropping out. With no one to tell me to keep moving I dropped out, only to regret it 10 minutes later, 10 minutes too late. I felt defeated. I felt like a failure. I was done with ultras.

The Comeback

Fast forward 5 years to 2018, with a re-established confidence and inspired by the amazing runs my wonderful better half was accomplishing in the Ultra World, I decided it was time for redemption and the Folsom Lake Ultra 110 K would be my stage. This time I would armed myself with all the tools to keep me moving to the finish: a coach to guide me through my training (My wonderful husband), a well-structured training plan that would push me both physically and mentally, a positive mindset, and an awesome crew and pacers. 2018 would be my year, I was going to own the 100K distance and some.\

The Race:

Beal's Point to Rattle Snake Bar Aid Station (13.2 Miles):



This being my first time running on trails during the dark hours, I was a bit nervous for the first 3 miles. Goal one was to stay close enough to other runners so I wouldn't get lost and/or eaten by creatures of the night, and goal two was just to make it to the sunrise without tripping over. I successfully accomplished my first two goals of the first leg. I made it into my first crew stop AS right on time, even with minutes to spare. I was really looking forward to this AS because I would get to see my first set of Crew members (Andrea and Chris), and also there was a toilet which I had been needing for about 10 miles prior. I re-filled my bottles, drank my Ensure, used the toilet, kissed my better half and continued on with my journey.

Rattle Snake Bar AS to Gate 142 AS (21.6 Miles):

This section I was a bit hesitant to run, mainly because the last time I had been in this section, an over grown star thistle field had given nightmares for days. It was, however, a welcomed surprise to find the field completely groomed. I think it even gave me a small runner high, and my pace began to pick up. At this point I was Female #6 with Female #5 just a few steps on the lead. I was feeling confident and strong, and then Cardiac Hill made its entrance. I had heard many stories about this hill, and I must say, I had thought people were probably exaggerating, it couldn't be that bad...oh boy was I wrong! This hill has no mercy and it is not for the weak of heart. My calves were screaming the whole way up, the twists and turns kept on giving false hope that the end of this never-ending hill was near. But I knew it had to end eventually, so I just kept moving with a positive mind and giving gratitude for the opportunity I had been given that day to be healthy and strong enough to be doing that race. The end of Cardiac finally came and then it was time to get my legs moving again, to see my crew once again. Seeing Andrea from the distance as I made the turn into the aid station at Gate 142 was such a happy moment. Andrea got me moving through the AS fast and sent me on my way to my crew stop, where I would pick up my first pacer. Just 7.5 more miles to go.

Gate 142 AS to Cool (29.1 Miles)

This section was the toughest, by this time I was pretty much running by myself with no one really around to catch up or to catch me. I was starting to get a bit grumpy, rocks were popping out of nowhere making me nearly trip numerous times, it was getting warmer, I was running out of water, I wanted to see other humans, and I was dreading the climb to Cool after No Hands, but knowing I would soon see my crew and get my pacer motivated me to run the stretches that otherwise I would have just walked. I began the climb to Cool, it was slow and hot and a bit painful, but I made it, still close to the planned schedule. The first person I saw was Allison, and as she was running me in, I fought really hard to keep smiling and not cry, I really wanted to cry...I was so



happy and emotional. I cleaned myself up, took in all the kind words of encouragement from my crew, refilled my bottles, refueled, and jumped by in the trail with Mike J. leading the way. I was more than half way done, I had made it farther than at Gold Rush. I was going to finish.

Cool AS to Salmon Falls AS (46.1 Miles)

This section was the funnest, despite the 6 mile road climb to Flagstaff. The views at the very top were breathtaking. Time and miles flew by so quick, well it took a while to get to the top but the great conversations with my pacer and a few runners along the route it because easy to not think about the climb and the pain. We made it to the Flagstaff AS and then we began the rocky descent to the boat ride! The boat ride was awesome! It was so great to sit down for a bit and just take it all in, I was getting closer to my goal, I was getting closer to seeing my crew again, I was getting closer to seeing my better half again, and I was getting closer to the next available toilet. Mike and I rode the boat alongside another fellow runner, Female #7. We stiffly go out of the boat onto muddy ground and made our way swiftly back into the main trail. Mike began to push the pace, I just followed. My watch had died, so I didn't know how much farther I had until the aid station, but I knew it was just up the hill. On my way in I got I ran into Clay and Mike P., making their way to the finish. And soon after I was entering the Salmon Falls AS, Mike had completed his pacing duties, and Sarah would take over. I was still right on schedule and only 22 miles to go.

Salmon Falls AS to Brown's Ravine AS (60.5 Miles)

This section felt the longest. The rolling hills in this 14-mile stretch are not very forgiving. However, having Sarah there distracting me with conversation and at times pulling me through in silence was amazing and I am so grateful for her help. This section was also tough because this was the section where 5 years prior I had began to doubt myself, where I had talked myself out of completing my first 100k. But this time it would be different, this time was already different. We made into NY Creek AS, and then began to pick the pace up, during this section I passed Female #5 and maintained my lead. This gave me a boost, and I rode that boost to mile 60.5, the start of the end.

Brown's Ravine AS to Beal's Point (68.2 Miles)

Entering Brown's Ravine was an awesome feeling for two reasons: 1. I was only 8 miles from the end, and 2. I had made it to 100K!!!! I got into the AS where Chris, Ranger and Nancy were awaiting. Sarah's pacing duties had been completed and now Nancy would take over. I refueled,



changed my shirt, grabbed my headlight, kissed my husband and took on that final stretch. Goal 1 was to make it to Folsom Point before sunset, I wanted to be out of the trail before dark, and goal 2 was to run as much as possible. As Nancy and I jumped back into the trail we almost immediately began to run catch up to runners. Within the first 2 miles we passed two other runners, and as we were getting closer to Folsom Point Nancy decided it was time for my legs to fire up again, she began to push the pace and kept me moving forward faster and faster. Motivated by my goal to be out of the trail before dark I ran as fast as my legs could give, which surprisingly was faster than I thought possible, I was logging 9-minute miles after 100K! This re-awakening of my legs moved me up in place from 5th to 4th, as we ran by Femal#4 just 1 mile from Folsom Point AS. And then, the easy miles came. Road and downhill for the most part, daylight still on, I was once again on a high. I was so overcome with excitement, but so tired to cry, so I just kept running. I just wanted to be done!

Soon enough, multicolored lights came into view and the finish line was right in front of me. I ran as fast as my legs would move, with Nancy cheering me on, and crossed that finish line in 14 hours 46 minutes, over two hours ahead of my projected time!

This race was a team effort. I would not have been able to complete my goal without my amazing crew: Heather J., Andrea B. and Allison A., my awesome pacers: Mike J., Sarah K., and Nancy R., and of course my amazing, talented and always supportive Husband. I am forever grateful to all of you for your help and support.