



Third Time's the Charm

By Andrea Brunsman

The first 100K that I ever ran was Miwok in 2014. The two 50 Milers I had done, JFK 50 or AR 50, were way easier; so much so that by the time I had gone 50 miles in Miwok I had been on my feet for 2 more hours than either of those two races. Allison, Heather, and Liz are the only reason I even finished. They would not let me stop no matter how much I cried and complained. At least once I was physically pushed out of an aid station just before a cut-off that I did not really want to make. I did (eventually) finish the race just under 16:30. Enough to say I finished, but short of the 16:00 hour cut-off for a Western States Endurance Run qualifier. Despite how awful I felt that night, I knew everything would be okay because on the drive home the following day I saw a trail that I wanted to run on.

After running my first 100 miler later in 2014 (to get that WSER qualifier) and getting even more trail and ultra experience in 2015, I once again toed the line at Miwok in 2016. New challenges in 2016 included a lowered cut-off time to 15:30 for an official finish and qualifier and an unrecognized bout with depression. I started Miwok in 2016 not even wanting to be there, let alone run for 62 miles. Once again, Allison, Heather, Annie, and Louise pulled me through to the end. I PR'd the race by almost 45 minutes but came in well over the 15:30 cut-off. Which, much to my chagrin, meant I would have to come back to try again.

So, I started working on treating my depression, volunteered at Miwok in 2017 to get extra tickets in the lottery, and bribed the Race Director with chocolate chip cookies.

For 2018 I decided I needed to take a different approach since what I had been doing didn't work in my last two attempts. I made my mental health a priority and adapted my training to what would keep me in a positive frame of mind. That meant NOT doing back to back long runs on the weekend; instead I would run long on Saturday (usually a local 50K) and follow up Sunday with an 8-12 mile hike that focused on hiking uphill. This allowed me to still participate in activities on Sunday like going to Lagoon Valley with other GVH-ers and then meeting up for coffee afterwards.

The race started just after 5:00 AM on May 5th and I was happy and excited to be there this time. It's still dark at 5 AM and everyone had on a headlamp going up the Dipsea trail from the Stinson Beach Community Center. The first mile plus gets pretty backed up for us mid-packers but it also helps keep the nerves in check and keeps you from doing something dumb like riding the adrenaline train and going out way to fast that early in the race. It's also about this time that I was getting to Insult Hill and I could look ahead and behind me at a string of headlamps. Whenever I



can do that in a race it just makes me smile. It really gives me a sense of community – I’m not the only crazy person out here. Not much later I was cresting the hill to Cardiac; the sun was coming up and the fog was starting to lift. Then the bagpipes kicked in.

No, really.

It’s another one of the special experiences of Miwok. The RD has a bag piper at the top of Cardiac welcoming everyone to the top of the first big climb of the day. It might actually be my favorite part of the race and really isn’t an experience that you can get anywhere else.

In previous years the race would turn left and run down Deer Park Fire Road to the Redwood trail. Last year and this Redwood trail was closed to racers and the course was rerouted down the Heather Cut-off. I was glad that I got to experience this trail earlier in the year during a training run at the Steep Ravine Marathon. It’s a great trail with gorgeous views and switchbacks. Lots and lots of switchbacks. During this section I was able to pass a lot of other runners without pushing too hard and was soon making my way into the Muir Beach Aid Station feeling pretty good. I started the climb up Middle Green Gulch and made my way to the first crew stop at Tennessee Valley at mile 13.

I came into TNV way ahead of my first estimate and felt good. Although, I’m fairly confident that this did not translate to Allison and Heather. I was lucky that there was another unexpected friendly face at this aid station – Chris Dalton was volunteering and treated me like a rock star when I came in. I was in and out of Tennessee Valley to make my way to Bridge View.

This is one of my favorite sections of trail... well, at least the part after the climb up Marincello Trail. You are running on the side of hill with gorgeous homes above you, the valley down to Rodeo Beach below, eucalyptus stands, plants and flowers straight out of Jurassic Park, topped off with views of the Golden Gate. Really, it should stop trying so hard to be such a great trail.

Pulling into Bridge View I knew I also wanted to make a bathroom stop. Which, if you have ever run with me you will know is highly unusual. I’m not saying it’s healthy, I’m just saying I very rarely stop for the bathroom in any of my races.

Soon after I started down the hill out of the aid station I again felt like I needed to use the facilities. WTF? What was going on? So, after I got to the bottom (and saw fox!) I found a place in the brush to go before starting the climb back up. Sadly, this stop didn’t seem to help either and now it was getting to me.



Finally, I was on my way back in to TVN to see Allison and Heather. Those 13 miles felt like they took FOREVER. But! I was back in well ahead of the first cut-off (6 hours). Allison and Heather once again took care of getting more food and water into my pack for my while I visited the port-a-potty yet again. They also let me know that Candie, the last member of my crew and the one that would pace me for the last 13 miles, would be waiting for me at Muir Beach, about 4 miles away.

I did not realize how tough those 4 miles would be for me.

Usually, I love this section of trail out to Pirate's Cove. Yes, it's tough and has a lot of steep stairs that are usually slick, but the view more than makes up for it. This time, it is where I started to really get into my head. All of my bathroom stops (you guys did realize how much bathroom talk there was going to be when you started this, did you?) started to build up and I thought there was no way I was going to be able to go on. I started having a big ol' pity party for myself. Finally, I was about a half mile out from Muir Beach and tromping down a hill when I spot Allison waiting for me. She encouraged me to run into the aid station and see Heather and Candie.

Coming across the bridge I saw the rest of my crew and basically started crying and going in for hugs. I didn't want to go on. I didn't think I could go on. I wanted to stop and I wanted them to let me stop. I felt like I need to use the restroom yet again. Heather and Candie took my pack and when I came back out just kept maneuvering me towards walking back out of the aid station. I just wanted to keep crying. Finally, something Heather said to me made its way through everything else in my brain: I just have to leave the aid station. That's all I had to do and so I did. But not after a couple of more hugs and a reminder that the next 5 miles were going to suck no matter how I felt. Which was surprisingly helpful and completely accurate. I high-fived Allison and made my way back to all those switchbacks on Heather Cut-off.

Somewhere in this section things got a little bit better when I realized that I had to 19 miles until I could see my crew again.

I know, it seems counterintuitive but I think the apparent lack of a choice helped. There wasn't really anything else to do but get to them at Randall. Once I got my shit together and started feeling better I was able to start passing people again on the uphill which of course, made me feel even better.

Coastal Trail out of Pan Toll is some great narrow single-track. I was with another runner at this point and we briefly joked that we could take the left ahead of us and be at the finish line in less than 2 miles. I don't think the volunteer thought we were as hilarious as we did. Eventually, I dropped my running buddy and the race leaders passed me on their way to the finish. Going to the Bolinas Ridge Aid Station was otherwise uneventful but I was definitely ready to pick up my pacer.



I had gone just over 17 miles when I finally came to the volunteer telling runners to take the turn down to Randall. Frankly, I was surprised at how well those miles went after the breakdown that I had at Muir Beach. I was then and am now proud that I was able to get out of my head and into a better mood. I can't say all of those miles flew by but they felt much better than I expected them to when I left my crew.

I made it into Randall to cheers and 20 minutes ahead of cut-off. This meant that I had 3:30 hours to go 13 miles and make the cut-off. Sounds like plenty of time.

After a quick stop I headed back out with Candie and handed my watch over to her. This way there was no chance I could be in charge. I stopped thinking and let Candie take over bossing me around. She told me when to run and when I could walk. She told me when to eat and made sure I was drinking. When I would start getting back into my head and hyperventilating she would make me take deep breaths. She told me stories and she yelled at me. A lot. When I told her I thought her watch was a big fat liar who lies a lot she apologized and told me to keep running. When people wanted to pass me while going down Matt Davis (aka the Devil Trail) she told me to keep running – they had plenty of room to pass me.

The Matt Davis trail is about 2 miles long and takes approximately 7 years to run down. I swear to God it felt like it would never end. I was going to die on that trail. Then, suddenly there was a volunteer yelling at me that I had 2 minutes to finish. I hit the road right off the trail and saw Allison and Heather screaming their heads off. I got a little push (literally) from Allison and tried harder than I ever have before to make my legs turnover and get me across the finish line.

And I did. With 45 seconds to spare. And then I basically collapsed into a volunteer and was taken to the medic.

Everything was fine, I was just really tired and maybe couldn't stand up on my own right then. I didn't really care so much. I never had to run that race ever again.