

My Mid-Life Crisis Adventures

By Whitney Tilson

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I'm glad you're considering doing a Navy SEAL weekend like the one I just did. It was an AMAZING experience – one that I'll never forget.

Below is a description and some pictures. Some parts of it look like pure hell – and it was indeed enormously challenging. It lasted for 62 hours (from the start at 4pm Thursday until they let us go back to the hotel and sleep at 6am on Sunday), during which they let us sleep one hour the first night, four hours the second night, and zero the third night (and those five hours of sleep were really crappy, as it's in cots in tents in a parking lot right next to the beach). I burned at least twice as many calories in that 62 hours than any similar period in my life.

But I never for a moment thought of quitting. At one point, at 4am on the second day, after we'd all been lying in the water, with waves crashing over us, shivering uncontrollably, singing God Bless America and the Star Spangled Banner at the top of our lungs (what a memory!), one of the meanest drill sergeants (he was just pretending, of course) came up to me and in a low voice asked, "How are you doing?" I replied: "I'm pretty miserable...but this is great!" And he replied, "That's what I want to hear!"

Pushing us beyond what we thought our limits were is an important part of the program – and it sure brings out both the best (and worst) in everyone, which is a heck of a learning experience. And keep in mind that nobody gets hurt: they carefully monitor everyone, the time we spend in the water, etc. and a five-person medical team is standing by 24/7 and checking us out every 12 hours or so. This is a *really* well-run program.

So why do this? Well, as midlife crises go, this is a lot cheaper than a Ferrari or a divorce! ;-) But seriously:

1) In preparation, you will get more fit than you've ever been. Right now, only two months after signing up for this, I'm doing as many sit-ups, pull-ups, chin-ups, and running and swimming as far and as fast as I was at my absolute physical peak in the late teens and early 20s. I've lost an inch around my waist (and I was already skinny), but haven't lost any weight because I've added muscle. I feel GREAT!

2) You will learn that you are capable of doing much more physically than you ever thought possible, which also feels great! Had you asked me whether I could lead a team on a 2.5 mile ocean swim, paddle an inflatable boat 11 miles (both in the middle of the night), etc., I wouldn't have believed it.

The net result of 1) and 2) is that I don't feel old and in decline anymore (which I was really starting to feel before this).

3) It's intense bonding with the people you're with. You get to know them (and they get to know you) very, very well.

4) You will learn directly from real SEALs (both active duty and retired) really cool things like self-defense techniques, how to carry an injured person, plan a mission, use cover and concealment, organize a patrol in hostile territory, and assault a room and an entire house (with realistic-looking guns that shoot BB's). More broadly, seeing how the SEALs operate really raises the bar for me, both personally and professionally, in terms of careful planning, attention to detail, contingency plans, etc.

5) You will get a lot of personal exposure to the SEALs, who are most amazing group of people I've ever encountered. I meant it when I wrote this:

I have never met a more impressive group of people than the dozen or so SEALs I spent the weekend with. In every word and action, they exuded every trait that we all aspire to: patriotism, courage, honor, duty, integrity, teamwork, attention to detail, humility, sacrifice, strength, intelligence... There wasn't one false note from even one SEAL.

I just hope a little bit of what they're all about rubs off on me...

Let's do this!

Best,

Whitney

PS—The first question I get is what kind of shape do you have to be in? I trained like crazy for two months and was one of the fittest guys there, but there were some big guys there who apparently hadn't trained at all, as they struggled to run a 12-min mile and do even three pull-ups. The SEALs might yell at the out-of-shape guys a bit, but they accommodate every level of fitness (and they yell at the fit guys too!). I would suggest to anyone going on this program the following pretty easy benchmarks to aim for:

- Run four miles in 40 minutes
- Swim a mile at a slow speed, using breast or side stroke, without stopping
- Be able to do 10 chin-ups in a row; 40 push-ups in two minutes; and 40 sit-ups in two minutes
- It helps to know how to paddle a boat (see pics below)

Below are 33 pictures with captions.



On Thursday afternoon, we started with a four-mile run.



On Thursday night, we did a long night swim. Here we are, lined up, about to jump off a pier into the water to begin the swim.



After the swim, they made the slow teams stand in the water...



...do push-ups in the sand (this picture pretty well captures how I was feeling!)



...hold our legs up to work our abs...



...do push-ups in the water...



...and roll in the mud and smear it all over ourselves.



We had to do chin-ups before every meal.



One of the very fierce drill instructors.



There are ~15 current and retired SEALs as instructors – these two guys were the lead (and meanest) ones.



The four teams all competed to win challenges (in this case, run around the lifeguard station and back). They were always yelling, "It pays to be a winner! 2nd place is first losers!" The winning team got to rest while the losing teams had to get wet, do more push-ups, etc.



This is Rob Roy, the legendary SEAL who runs the program.



We did plenty of exercises with 100-lb. logs.



...around the lifeguard station and back.



Each team did sit-ups with the logs in their laps.





Then we moved to boats...



...and tried to make it out beyond the surf (to no avail initially).





We carried the boats to a quiet bay and did race after race (and it paid to be a winner!).



Part of the races involved carrying the boats.

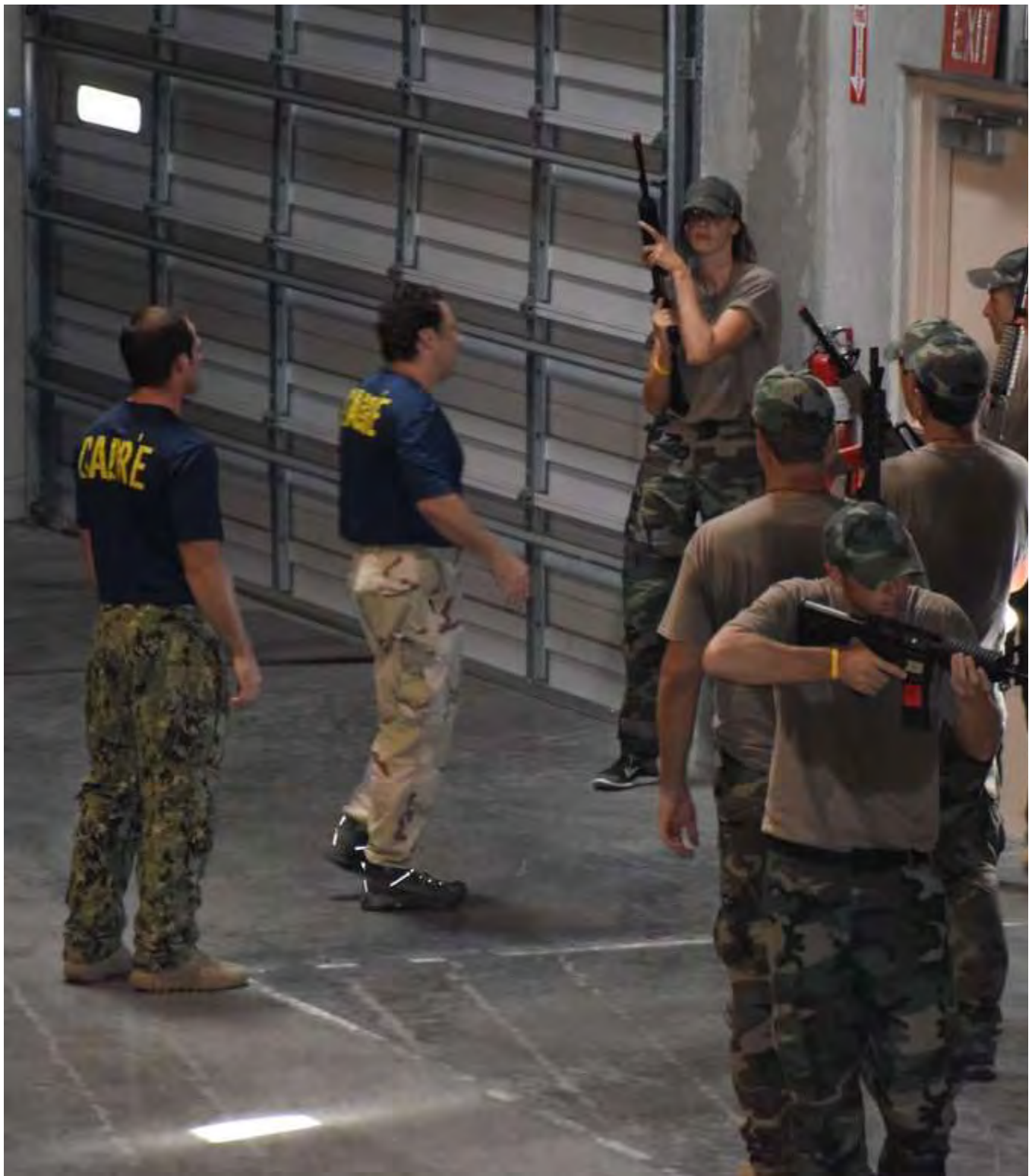


During the day on Saturday, we went to a Blackwater training facility where the SEALs taught us how to assault a room and house, using realistic-looking BB guns.



Here's a team about to go through a door and take down a room (with bad guys inside shooting at us). That's an active-duty SEAL (in the lower right) training us.





Two other active-duty SEALs trained us on how to walk a patrol in hostile territory. (I'm the point man, about to go through the door; my partner on the other side of the door was the only woman in the program – she was hard core!)



On Saturday night, we applied what we'd learned during the day and assaulted an abandoned hospital, where there was a hostage we needed to rescue on an upper floor.



The SEALs set off smoke bombs and loud firecrackers to confuse and disorient us (it worked!).



Going through the lobby and into the stairwell to reach the upper floors.



Two active-duty SEALs accompanied us.



We were sweating like crazy, which fogged up our goggles – we could barely see!



Here we are, preparing to burst through a door (there were lots of bad guys hiding and shooting at us).



We had to carry out an “injured civilian” we found (pretty realistic looking blown-off leg, eh?).

My NYC Marathon Adventure

As I woke up last Thursday morning, three days before my 49th birthday, I was having a dream about running the NYC Marathon on my birthday. It seemed very real, so I checked my calendar and, having nothing going on, thought, “Why not?” A few emails later (plus a \$2,620 donation to the NY Road Runners’ charity), I was registered!

A few more emails later with my great friend, David Saltzman, the co-founder and Executive Director of the Robin Hood Foundation, one of my favorite charities, and I was signed up for the 100+ person team raising money for Robin Hood.

Then I had three days to: 1) raise as much money as I could for Robin Hood; and 2) contemplate the fact that I had done no training and, in fact, having never run more than six miles in my life! If I failed at this, I was going to cost Robin Hood a lot of money – and it would be a very public embarrassment.

Fortunately, my legs held up and I’m pleased to say that I completed the marathon in 4:03:10 – and, much more importantly, raised more than \$76,000 for Robin Hood!

The whole experience – before, during and after the race – was an epic adventure (and one that was so emotionally, physically and mentally draining that I was in tears right after I finished)!

Below are the emails and pictures that I sent to my friends and family before and after the race. Enjoy!

Best,

Whitney

PS—It’s not too late to donate to Robin Hood – here’s the link:

<https://www.crowdrise.com/whitneytilson>. And join me next year on the Robin Hood team!

10/29/15

With my (first annual) 49th birthday coming up on Sunday (and my hair greying and thinning), I’m of course going through a full-blown midlife crisis, which has manifested itself in various physical challenges: two weekends letting Navy SEALs brutalize me, running six Spartan and Tough Mudder races since April, a plan to climb the Matterhorn next July, etc.

So, I suppose it’s not surprising that as I awoke this morning, I was having a dream about running the NYC Marathon, which also happens to be on Sunday. I checked my calendar and have nothing going on, so I thought, “Why not?”

(Well, actually there are plenty of reasons, starting with the fact that I've never run a road race longer than a 10k in my life and have exactly three days to train. Despite this, it's not quite as crazy as it appears. I've been training very hard for the past 15 months for the various events noted above, which has me in the best shape of my life. A week and a half ago, I ran 15 miles in 3½ hours, wet and freezing cold, in a Tough Mudder race, which included lots of hills and obstacles, so I figure I should be OK on Sunday.)

My favorite charity (along with KIPP) is the Robin Hood Foundation, which fields a team to run the marathon every year – and they had a spot, so I'm doing it!

You can help me in the following ways:

- 1) Give me lots of encouragement on the racecourse! I'm bib #19999 and you can track my progress by downloading the [NYC Marathon app](#) and entering this number.
- 2) Donate to Robin Hood on my fundraising page: <https://www.crowdrise.com/whitneytilson>. Consider it a joint marathon/birthday present.

I just donated \$100/mile (\$2,620), plus to give me motivation to run faster, I'll donate an extra \$10 for every minute that I finish faster than 4:22 (that's my target finish time: a 10-min mile for 26.2 miles) (secretly though, I'd love to break four hours!). I hope you'll consider also making a variable donation to give me extra incentive (just think: your money will not only go to a great cause, but lead to more suffering by me!).

- 3) Recommend your favorite running/workout song so I can download it onto my phone to listen to during the race.

Thank you!

Whitney

PS—This will be me at the finish line (hopefully minus the mud!):



10/31/15

Dear friends and family,

Less than 24 hours to go until the marathon – and I’m chomping at the bit!

First of all, I have a new bib number: 19999. (I learned that it’s not kosher to run with someone else’s bib for a variety of reasons, most importantly safety: if you collapse on the course, they’ll think you’re someone else and call the wrong emergency contact person.) You can track my progress by downloading the [NYC Marathon app](#) and entering this number.

If you’re going to be on the course as a spectator, I’ll be crossing the starting line ~10:20am and plan to run a steady 9-minute mile throughout (hopefully a little slower in the first half of the race and a little faster in the second). Below is a picture of me in what I’ll be wearing tomorrow (all black). Note that I put my name and “It’s my 49th birthday today!” on my shirt – a friend suggested this so that the crowds will give me extra encouragement, which I think I’m gonna need!

I also want to thank the 67 folks who have donated a total of \$22,296 to Robin Hood, in amounts ranging from \$26.20 to \$2,620, to support my run. Heck, if I’d known I could raise so much money for such a good cause, I would have started doing this years ago!

In addition, a few generous folks have given me incentive to run fast by pledging:

- Two \$10,000 pledges if I run 4:15 or faster
- \$30/minute for every minute under 4:22
- \$780 if I break 4:00
- \$600 if I break 3:45

So, all told, if I run 3:45, I’ll raise \$44,716 for Robin Hood – now THAT’S motivation! (It’s not too late to make a pledge at: <https://www.crowdrise.com/whitneytilson>)

All I really care about is breaking 4:15 to earn the extra \$20,000 for Robin Hood, but it sure would be nice to break 4:00. Do I have a chance at that? Who knows? Working against me is the fact that I’ve never run anything more than a 10k and my entire training consisted of an easy 4.3-mile jog on Thursday (now I’m tapering! ;-)) at an 8:50 pace – hey, it’s only six of those, right??? On the other hand, in the last two months I’ve run 15- and 17-mile Tough Mudder and Spartan races up and down mountains on grass, dirt and mud over 3+ hours, so it’ll be very interesting to see how well that translates to a marathon...

One thing I know for sure is that my tolerance for pain and suffering is dramatically higher now than it was 14 months ago thanks to some current and former Navy SEALs who kicked my butt over two boot camp weekends. And I’m counting on the crowds to give me energy!

Wish me luck!

PS—My little niece and nephew live in Brooklyn and are going to come out to cheer me on with a sign they made this morning – see pics below. So cute!

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10/31/15

Guess who's flying into NYC this evening to pace me in the marathon tomorrow?

My cousin Alex Tilson, who's boarding a flight from San Francisco right now!

This came together this afternoon – here's the story:

Alex (who's a HARD-CORE marathoner – a personal best of 2:21, three-time marathon winner, and one-time American record holder in the 50k) has been giving me great advice over the last few days. At midday today, he emailed me a final reminder: "Don't you dare get too excited and go out too fast!!!!!"

I replied: "Oh man, you know me too well! I jogged over here to the west side [I was watching the rugby World Cup final at a bar with a friend] 1.57 miles at a 7:58 pace and I'm tellin' ya that I was deliberately going slow, barely sweating and breathing easily..."

I felt really good running home as well, so I called Alex (his wife, Deborah, was on speakerphone):

Me: "Alex, I'm tellin' ya, I feel great. Screw four hours – I think I can run this bad boy in 3:30!"

Alex: "Whitney, you haven't trained. Of course you feel fine during a 3-4 mile training run. But over 26 miles, your legs are not used to this. They have never done it. Be fearful and respectful of the race. If it turns out that predictions were too conservative, blow a big wad the last 10k and really impress. Trust me. Go out slowly!"

Me: "Alex, do you crush your wife's hopes and dreams like this? What happens if I run a 9-minute/mile pace for the first 20 miles, I DON'T hit the wall, and finish fast, but with lots of gas left in my tank, wishing I'd run it faster? OK, how about this: I'll run the first half at a 9-minute pace and then, if I'm feeling good, I'll run the second half at an 8-minute pace? C'mon, you gotta let me do that!"

Alex: "In my entire life, I have never seen anyone run the second half of a marathon even five minutes faster than the first half, much less 13! But ok, if you run a 9-minute pace for the first 16 miles and are feeling good, you have my permission to slowly pick up the pace, as long as you're still feeling ok."

Deborah: "Alex, why don't you fly out there and pace him? It would be OK with me."

[All of us laugh]

Me [thinking, “Wait a sec, that’s a pretty good idea!]: “Alex, what say you?”

Alex: “If you buy my tickets, I’ll come.”

Me: “I’ll call you back in 5.”

[I found a nonstop from SFO-JFK leaving in a few hours, landing at 10:30pm, and a return one-stop from LGA, leaving at 5:04pm tomorrow, landing at SFO at 10:30pm for \$334 rt]

Me: “I found the following flights...”

Alex: “I’m packing now!”

I’m psyched!

PS—Here’s a picture of the three of us at my 20th and Alex’s 15th HBS reunion in June 2014. Look for us on the course!



PS—Here's Alex winning a marathon in his personal best of 2:21:16, qualifying for the US Olympic trials...



A nice article on the Benzinga web site:

How Running Can Help End Poverty In NYC

[Javier Hasse](#) , Benzinga Staff Writer

October 31, 2015 12:43pm Comments

<http://www.benzinga.com/news/15/10/5952979/how-running-can-help-end-poverty-in-nyc>



- *The New York City Marathon is one of the most famous running event's in the world.*
- *This year's marathon will be run on Sunday.*
- *Whitney Tilson, founder and managing partner of Kase Capital Management, will be taking part in the Marathon, while donating money to the Robin Hood Foundation. The opportunity to participate in some meaningful way is still open to the public.*

This year's New York City Marathon will be run on Sunday by roughly 50,000 people from all around the globe – including several celebrities like Alicia Keys, James Blake and Ethan Hawke.

Among the people making the trek from Staten Island to Central Park will also be 49-year-old hedge fund manager and philanthropist Whitney Tilson. But Tilson won't be running just for the rush or health benefits, he will also be sprinting for charity.

Tilson recently sent an email telling investors he would be racing to help Paul Tudor Jones' Robin Hood Foundation, his favorite charity (along with KIPP).

Robin Hood's In New York

For those unfamiliar with the foundation, “Robin Hood is New York's largest poverty-fighting organization, and since 1988 has focused on finding, funding and creating programs and schools that generate meaningful results for families in New York's poorest neighborhoods,” boasts the foundation's [website](#).

Every year, the foundation fields a team to run the marathon, looking to raise funds in the process. This year, that illustrious team will include Tilson.

Even though entrance in this year's marathon may not be possible for you due to timing or proximity, you can still participate.

Consider donating to Robin Hood on Tilson's [fundraising page](#). Your support will go far.

The hedge fund manager started by donating \$100 per mile (\$2,620 in total). In addition, for motivation to run faster, he promised to donate an extra \$10 for every minute that he finishes faster than 4:22 (a 10-minute mile for 26.2 miles).

Benzinga spoke with Mr. Tilson, who revealed that over the past 24 hours -- since the email was sent out, “62 friends and family have committed \$21,434,” including his own \$2,620. Furthermore, a few of them introduced performance hurdles, including \$30 per every minute under 4:22, \$10,000 if he breaks 4:15, \$1,482 if he breaks 4:00, and an extra \$500 if he breaks 3:45.

“I’m determined to get that \$10,000!” Tilson concluded, adding that running/workout songs recommendations were welcome. So, feel free to chip in!

11/1/15

Subject line: I just finished in 4:03:10 and gave it everything I had. I'm choked up with emotion...

Forgive the brief email, as I’m sending this from my cell phone, but I wanted to let you know that I just finished the marathon, feel fine, and am pleased with my time – and the fact that it means Robin Hood will get nearly \$60,000! More details and photos soon...

11/1/15

Dear friends and family,

As promised, here’s the follow-up email with more details and pics from the marathon.

Here’s the email I sent right after the finish for those of you who missed it:

Subject line: I just finished in 4:03:10 and gave it everything I had. I'm choked up with emotion...

Forgive the brief email, as I'm sending this from my cell phone, but I wanted to let you know that I just finished the marathon, feel fine, and am pleased with my time – and the fact that it means Robin Hood will get nearly \$60,000! More details and photos soon...

First of all, THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH for your encouragement – and 130+ donations to Robin Hood, totaling of \$69,172 (and they're still coming in – I've updated this number four times since I've been writing this email!; a special thanks to those of you who challenged me to break four hours, which I (barely) missed – yet made the donation anyway). In three short days (was it only three days ago that I decided to run the race?!?!), you made me the #1 Robin Hood fundraiser of the ~100 folks who ran on the team!

Secondly, I lied in my previous email: I most certainly do NOT feel fine. I lost four pounds (from 165 to 161) and my legs, from my ankles to my quads, feel like they've been beaten with 2x4's for hours (which is pretty much what happened to them!). Even after I just got the most necessary massage of my life this evening, it is painful to walk or climb even one step – and I fear what it'll be like tomorrow! (I'm almost afraid to go to sleep and let my muscles tighten up. Hmmm, given that I have a 6am flight for a day-trip to LA tomorrow for a business meeting (scheduled long before I thought about running the marathon), returning at 1am tomorrow night, maybe I should just pull an all-nighter and sleep on the plane??? Just kidding!)

As for the race, it was an incredible experience: the millions of cheering people, seeing new neighborhoods in New York, testing myself in new, demanding ways (and passing that test!) and, of course, raising a lot of money for a wonderful charity.

That said, I don't enjoy running – at least not long distances on pavement. It's not nearly as varied, scenic and interesting as running up and down mountains and mucking around in the mud with my buddies (what could be more fun?!) at Spartan and Tough Mudder races. And there's a lot of pounding – I have no doubt that my Achilles tendons (which are the sorest part of my body right now) would quickly break down if I started putting a lot of miles on them (on pavement anyway).

So I'd like to say that this was a great, but ONE-TIME, experience – except that I raised so much money that I can't in good conscience retire – it looks like I've created a monster and will have to do this every year (so prepare to be hit up again a year from now)! As for whether I will do some training and try to go under four hours next year, that remains to be seen...

I really wish I'd broken four hours – that was my real goal, and in the first third of the race, I was running easily and on pace to easily beat this with a ~3:45. But then my complete lack of training began to show and my legs slowly but steadily started to fade.

I never hit the proverbial wall – my heartbeat was steady the entire race, I was never breathing hard, and never walked (other than for a few seconds at water stations) – but my legs just got more and more tired (and painful, but that didn't slow me). The conversation I had with my legs went something like this:

Me (the first seven miles of the race), speaking to my legs: “Hey you guys are doing great! We're averaging 8:34 miles, which would have us finished in 3:44.”

My legs: “Thanks boss. We're feeling great. This isn't any worse than one of your long Spartan or Tough Mudder races.”

Me (the next six miles of the race, up to the halfway point): “Hey guys, what are these nine-minute miles?”

Them: “We're trying! But when are we going to take a break? Why don't you stop and do some monkey bars, climb a wall or muck around in some mud for a bit?”

Me: “Uh, boys, I hate to break it to you, but we're not stopping for another two hours.”

Them: “What?!?!?”

Me (miles 14-22): “OK, now I'm getting pissed – you slackers are down to 9:30 miles and, at this pace, I'm at risk of not breaking four hours!”

Them: “Hey, shut the f**k up! We've already carried your sorry ass 3x as far as we ever have – and the pounding we're taking from this pavement sucks! Let's get back onto the grass and dirt that we like so much!”

Me (miles 23-26.2): “OK, boys, now we're in the home stretch – let's break four hours!”

Them: “F**k you! We're toast – you're lucky we don't quit on your altogether!”

I finished with not one ounce in my fuel tank – I'm not sure I could have run another 100 yards – which is good because otherwise I'd be bummed that I might have broken four hours.

Alex and I discussed whether we went out too fast – what if we'd slowed down and run an 8:45 pace for the first seven miles? Might I then have been faster in the second half? We decided that this was unlikely. Early on, I was feeling great and running easily, and I think my legs were going to start crapping out at roughly the same point, so it was good to get some fast mileage completed before this happened.

Speaking of Alex, he was a hero. Not only did he drop everything on an hour's notice to fly out (and then rush to LGA right after the race to fly home, landing after midnight tonight after spending 19 hours in NYC), but I shudder to think how much slower I would have been without him to pace me – at least 10 minutes I'd guess. I likely would have made the mistake of going out even faster, plus he provided lots of encouragement, carried my waist pack and shirt for the

second half of the race – and it was a much more fun experience running with my cuz! Also thanks to Mike Zapata, who ran the last ~7 miles with us.

As soon as I crossed the finish line, Susan and Katharine (my 13-year-old), who were waiting nearby, plus Alison (my 19-year-old at college in MN) and Emily (my 16 year-old at a semester program in Maine) called me and told me how proud they were of me. Much to my surprise, I started crying (which made them cry too). I was so physically, emotionally and mentally drained, and I was glad that I'd been a good example for them about having a bit of [sometimes-you-just-gotta-say-what-the-f**k](#) and doing outside-the-box things on occasion, and not quitting even when you're really miserable. I'm turning into such an emotional sap in my old age (though today I proved that maybe I'm not so old yet!).

Below are 18 pics with descriptions, and here are two short (5-second) videos Katharine and Mike took:

- Saying hi to Susan and Katharine right before the finish line: https://youtu.be/_lUiRLzpTJQ
- Alex and me just after finishing: <https://youtu.be/35f8cCjJpDk>

Thanks again!

Whitney

PS—In addition to my 6am flight tomorrow, I'm scheduled to run a Tough Mudder in Jersey City twice (20 miles) on Saturday (again, something that was scheduled long ago). It will be VERY interesting to see if my body recovers enough to do it even once!

PPS—Here are the mile-by-mile split times from Alex's watch, with his comments (see photos at the bottom of this email for the data from my Garmin GPS watch):

Distance	Total Tune	Split	Notes
1	8.44	8.44	
2	16.39	7:55	downhill off of bridge, with tailwind. Slow it down!
3	25.07	8:28	slow it down more
4	33.50	8.43	
5	42.36	8:45	
6	51.16	8:40	
7	1:00.01	8:45	
8	1:09.07	9.05	
9	1:18.13	9:06	
10	1:27.13	8:59	good
11	1:36.00	8:46	
12	1:44.54	8.54	
13	1:54.05	9:10	
14	2:03.35	9.29	hoping for 3:59.59 if can hang sub 9:30s.
15	2:13.20	9.44	ouch
16	2:22.47	9.27	
17	2:32.06	9.19	
18	2:41.27	9:20	
19	2:51.09	9.42	
20	3:00.39	9.29	
21	3:10.27	9.47	wondering how bad decay could get - as bad as 4:07 if some walking?
22	3:20.00	9.33	
23	3:29.59	9.58	thinking more like 4:04
24	3:40.15	10.16	
25	3:49.55	9.39	Good push. Some downhill. Thinking sub 4:04
26	4:00.38	10.42	
26.21	4:03.13	2.36	



Alex and me in the starting corral for our wave.



The start: it took nearly four minutes to cross the starting line (which didn't count against our time of course).



Alex and me running up First Avenue maybe 18 miles in.



Notice that Alex is wearing my waist pack (and you can't see, but he's also holding my shirt).



Passing the Robin Hood cheering section in the Bronx at mile 20 (that's Robin Hood Executive Director David Saltzman giving me a high five).



David snapped this picture of us as we jogged by.



In the home stretch!



Running down the hill toward the Apple Store and Plaza Hotel.



Crossing the finish line!







We had to walk (hobble) another mile or so to pick up our nice lined ponchos and then we met up with Susan and Katharine.



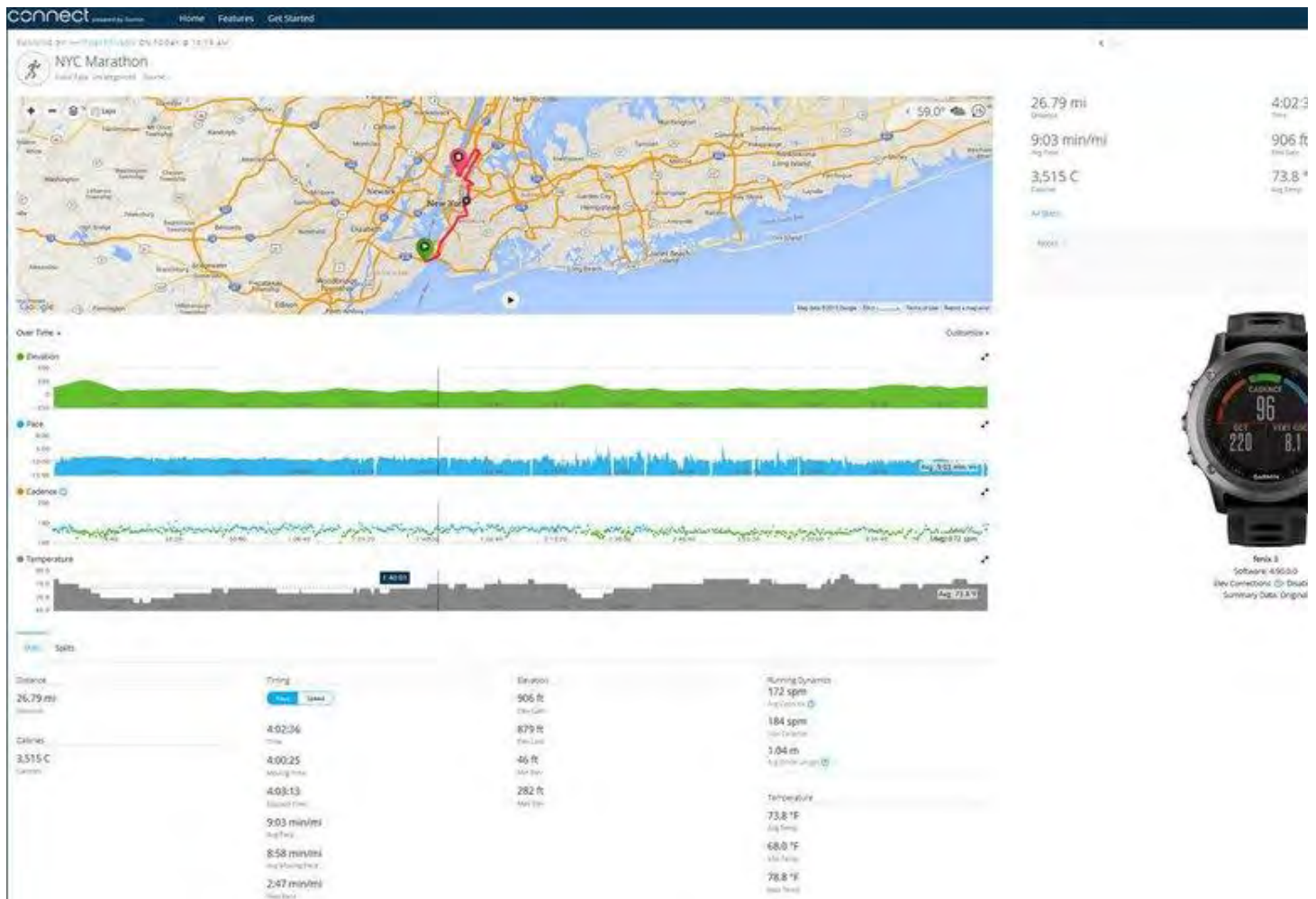
We took a bus up to 96th Street and walked across Central Park to get home – the foliage is beautiful!



Susan made a wonderful poster (which I didn't see during the race – I had my headphones on and didn't hear Susan and Katharine cheering for me around mile 19 – I only saw them in the grandstands right before at the finish line).



This is a close-up of the medal.



Here's page 1 of the report from my Garmin fenix 3 watch.

Splits *	Time	Cumulative Time	Moving Time	Distance	Elev Gain	Elev Loss	Avg Pace	Avg Moving Pace	Best Pace	Avg Run Cadence	Max Run Cadence
1	8:38.5	8:38.5	8:34	1.00	135	0	8:38	8:34	7:08	173	178
2	7:47.1	16:26	7:44	1.00	0	174	7:47	7:44	6:32	170	178
3	8:20.7	24:46	8:14	1.00	39	46	8:21	8:14	7:17	173	178
4	8:31.7	33:18	8:30	1.00	16	13	8:32	8:30	6:12	173	182
5	8:27.2	41:45	8:24	1.00	13	13	8:27	8:24	7:16	174	178
6	8:28.5	50:14	8:27	1.00	16	52	8:28	8:27	7:59	174	181
7	8:32.1	58:46	8:28	1.00	23	26	8:32	8:28	6:17	174	180
8	8:59.3	1:07:45	8:52	1.00	26	3	8:59	8:52	8:13	176	184
9	8:44.3	1:16:29	8:41	1.00	56	33	8:44	8:41	7:56	173	182
10	8:55.5	1:25:25	8:54	1.00	3	39	8:56	8:54	7:13	164	180
11	8:28.7	1:33:54	8:24	1.00	43	23	8:29	8:24	5:27	174	179
12	8:33.5	1:42:27	8:32	1.00	13	46	8:34	8:32	7:51	173	178
13	8:52.6	1:51:20	8:49	1.00	23	23	8:53	8:49	7:35	174	181
14	9:19.8	2:00:39	9:17	1.00	46	33	9:20	9:17	6:44	173	179
15	8:46.1	2:09:25	8:43	1.00	13	7	8:46	8:43	7:02	174	178
16	10:17	2:19:42	10:09	1.00	125	0	10:17	10:09	5:56	174	181
17	8:49.7	2:28:32	8:46	1.00	10	92	8:50	8:46	2:47	171	178
18	8:59.8	2:37:32	8:59	1.00	36	43	9:00	8:59	5:18	172	178
19	9:28.3	2:47:00	9:04	1.00	3	26	9:28	9:04	5:09	171	177
20	9:36.2	2:56:36	9:23	1.00	33	0	9:36	9:23	3:14	170	176
21	9:40.4	3:06:16	9:35	1.00	20	43	9:40	9:35	7:41	169	177
22	9:23.5	3:15:40	9:18	1.00	33	20	9:23	9:18	5:42	166	177
23	9:14.9	3:24:55	9:13	1.00	13	10	9:15	9:13	8:11	171	176
24	10:08	3:35:03	10:07	1.00	69	10	10:08	10:07	5:42	170	176
25	9:35.0	3:44:38	9:32	1.00	39	46	9:35	9:32	8:19	170	176
26	9:26.4	3:54:04	9:19	1.00	26	52	9:26	9:19	8:30	171	178
27	8:31.3	4:02:36	8:27	0.79	33	7	10:44	10:38	8:41	170	179
Summary	4:02:36	4:02:36	4:00:25	26.79	906	879	9:03	8:58	2:47	172	184

Here's page 2. Note in the bottom row that it says we ran 26.79 miles (an extra 6/10 of a mile!) – perhaps because the course was so crowded for the entire race (50,000+ racers, nearly 50% larger than any other marathon in the world; random trivia: nearly half are from overseas) that Alex and I had to dodge other runners constantly to pass anyone. Heck, 6/10 of a mile is six minutes, so maybe I *did* run under four hours for 26.2 miles – LOL!



We had dinner at home and ate yummy birthday cake!

11/3/15

A lot of folks have been asking how I'm feeling two days post-marathon, and the answer is: great (as you can see from the picture below that Susan took this morning as Rosie and I walked her to work).

Whatever pain I feel is far offset by the great feeling of both personal accomplishment – it's a birthday I will never forget, that's for sure! – and, more importantly, raising \$74,919.80 for Robin Hood!

“Ah,” you might be asking, “But what about my body?”

Well, I won't say it's feeling great – my quads and Achilles tendons are sore – but I'm feeling *much* better than I thought I would. I wasn't sure I'd be able to even walk for a week, but today I'm feeling so good that I went and played in my usual pickup basketball game at lunchtime for an hour with no problems.

In short, I'd say I'm already 90% back to normal (so I'm definitely doing the Tough Mudder in Jersey City this Saturday that I'd scheduled long ago; whether I do it twice will depend on how I feel after the first lap!).

The second picture below shows my official results from the NY Road Runners web site: I finished 13,520 overall, 10,117 among men, and 1,586 for those 49+ – not bad given that there were ~50,000 runners!

Also, I'd bet a lot of money that I finished first in two categories:

- 1) People who signed up three days or fewer before the race; and
- 2) People who'd never run more than six miles in their lives.

I can't prove this of course, but this is the story I'm going with so (as with most things I believe) don't confuse me with the facts, my mind's made up – LOL!

As for my future running plans, I think I'm going to have to run the NYC Marathon every year going forward or I'd feel like I was really letting down Robin Hood – but I have no intention of modifying the exercise regimen that I've adopted in the past ~15 months: lots of pickup basketball and riding my bike around the city, maybe 20 minutes of push-ups, sit-ups and squats most days, two one-hour workouts weekly with two different trainers, a Tough Mudder or Spartan race every month or two to challenge and entertain me, plus some miscellaneous activities (the occasional roller blade around the park, perhaps another SEAL weekend or two in January and/or May, climbing the Matterhorn next July, a few ski weekends this winter, etc.).

I like my current exercise routine, which does *not* involve endless miles of pounding for my legs. Maybe a month or two before next year’s marathon (and my 50th birthday!) I’ll start running a lap of the park twice a week – just enough so that I can break 4 hours – but that’s it!

Again, thank you for your support!



I’m standing on the blue line that marks the marathon route, right as it enters Central Park from Fifth Avenue on 90th St.



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1 match found.

Overall Place	Gender	Age	Bib No.	First Name	Last Name	Age	Team	State/Country	Finish Time	5 km	10 km	15 km	20 km	13.1 mi	25 km	30 km	35 km	40 km	Minutes per Mile
13520	10117	1586	19999	WHITNEY	TILSON	49M		NY USA	04:03:10			01:21:02	01:48:48	01:55:20	02:18:41	02:47:39	03:17:34	03:48:38	09:17

My official results.

Climbing Mt. Blanc: Part 1 of my Alps Adventure to Support KIPP Charter Schools (and the latest chapter in my ongoing midlife crisis...;-)

By Whitney Tilson, 7/4/16

(The latest version of this pdf is posted at: www.kasecapital.com/TilsonMtBlanc.pdf)

In July 2015, my wife and I spent a week hiking the famous Haute Route from Chamonix, France (the base of Mt. Blanc) to Zermatt, Switzerland (the base of the Matterhorn), mostly glacier trekking for 8-10 hours every day, staying in alpine huts. It was a grueling but magnificent experience, but in one way it left me dissatisfied: every day, as I looked up at the iconic peaks, I felt that I wanted to be *on top of them*, not in their shadows!

So I vowed to myself to come back and summit them and, having decided to do so this spring, had the idea to tie this adventure to raising money for my favorite charity, [KIPP charter schools](#) in NYC (on whose board I've served for 15 years). One of KIPP's primary mottos, which appears on the walls of every school, is "climbing the mountain to college," so I couldn't think of a better way to support and honor the 5,992 hard-working KIPP students in NYC than to actually climb two big mountains (a far more difficult climb than the ones I did!).

I'm delighted to report that I successfully summited both peaks (I summited the Matterhorn on August 8th – see my pictures from and a description of my climb [here](#)) and raised nearly \$130,000 for the KIPPsters climbing the mountain to college! (The donation page is still open [here](#), and [here](#) is the original email I sent out, describing what I was proposing to do and asking for support.)

Below is a description of my Mt. Blanc climb, with pictures and videos (and [here](#) is my 14:28 video from my Matterhorn climb; fast forward to 7:23 to see some heart-stopping footage).

So onto the story:

Four friends joined me on this adventure: Tarun Varma, Adam Storck, Mark James and Theodora (Theo) Skeadas (I ended up climbing the Matterhorn by myself, with only my guide).

Tarun and Adam are both Oxford MBA students and experienced mountaineers, whom I met recently. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to read essays Tarun and Adam wrote about the climb and the charity they're raising money for. Here's a picture of us:



(All photos were taken with my Samsung Galaxy S7 edge, which, as you can see from these pictures, has a well-deserved reputation for the best cell phone camera of any phone.)

I met Mark James on my Navy SEAL bootcamp weekends. He was a former SEAL and then a professional triathlete and is now a SEAL instructor at BUD/S. We've run a few Tough Mudder races together – here's a picture of us doing the piggy-back obstacle at one of them:



Theo was a late addition to the team – a mutual friend introduced us, she had just finished school and had a month before she got married and started a new job, so she wanted to join us. The only problem was that she had zero mountaineering experience and even confessed to me that she was afraid of heights. You can imagine my thoughts, but rather than saying “Hell no!”, I invited her to join me for five days of private training on some hairy stuff in northern Vermont at the [Petra Cliffs](#) mountaineering school, and she knocked it out of the park, so I was delighted to have her join us.

Here are pictures of us doing training in Vermont:



We all flew into Chamonix on Thursday, June 30th, rented the gear we needed, and met our three guides the next morning for a rigorous training day high in the mountains (on Mt. Blanc, the ratio of guide to clients is 2-1, so Theo had her own guide). The purpose of the day was not only to freshen our skills and begin to acclimate us to high altitude, but also for the guides to evaluate us and make sure we had the skills, strength and confidence for them to feel comfortable guiding us up Mt. Blanc (we did).

Training Day

What a day it was! We took the Aiguille du midi tram to 12,700 feet and, first, saw the sights from the top with a bunch of tourists (that's Mt. Blanc in the middle of the first two pictures):





Then the training started with a hike down a steep, snowy trail in crampons (which we wore the entire day), then across a glacier (here's a picture from the far side of the glacier, with the tram station at the peak on the right; we'd just hiked down the right shoulder and across in the path you can see):



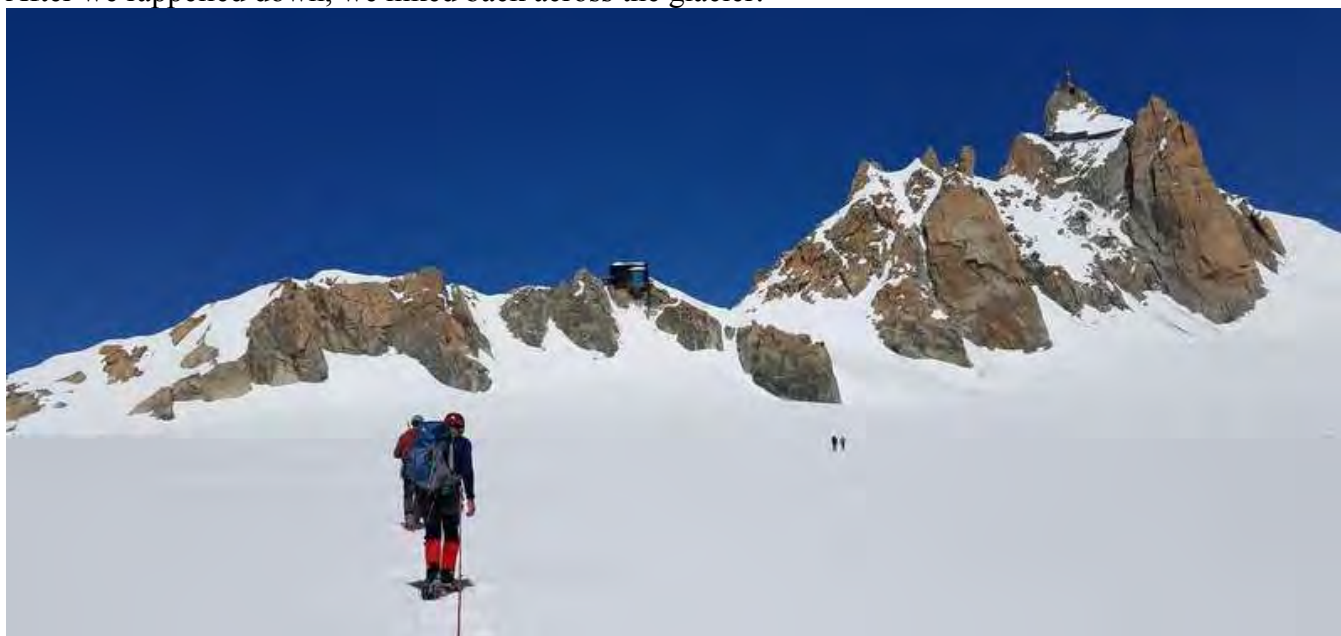
We then climbed up a steep snowfield (that's Mark with our guide, Geoffroy Arvis, who was Susan and my guide for the Haute Route the previous summer and who later guided me on the Matterhorn):



We ended up on the top of a “small” peak:



After we rappelled down, we hiked back across the glacier:



And started up a steep slope, hiking back to the tram station. We started in snow:



But soon we were hiking steep, big rock faces:









Finally, after a couple of hours of climbing, we reached the tram station:



Overall, it was a great, challenging day!

The next day (Saturday), we were supposed to start our Mt. Blanc trek, but there were thunderstorms so we ended up starting on Sunday.

The Mt. Blanc Climb

In total, it was a 29-hour adventure, beginning at ~noon Sunday, July 3rd and ending ~5pm the next day. We went up and down the most common route, called the Gouter Route, shown in red in this picture:



(We had originally planned to go up the Trois Mont Route (in blue) (and then down the Gouter Route), but the unusually heavy snow on the mountain this year led to a falling [serac](#) that killed a guide on the Trois Mont Route only the week before.)

We started by taking the Bellevue tram (see lower left in this picture), which took us up to 1,794 meters (5,591 feet):



We then connected to a very cool cog railway that took us up to Nid D'Aigle (2380m; 7,808 ft):







We then had an easy hike for about two hours, first on rock:



Then snow:



Up to Tete Rouse Hut (3187m; 10,456 ft.) (behind us in this picture):



We relaxed, had dinner, and went to bed around 8pm because we had to get up at 1am to make a long push to the summit (alas, I got maybe 30 min of sleep, even with an Ambien!).

After breakfast, we started off at 2:15am:



(Theo was ready before us, so she had set out with her guide a bit before us – and we didn't see her until we were almost at the summit ~6 hours later and she was passing us on the way down!)

Within about 20 minutes had to cross the infamous [Grand Couloir](#) (in the pitch dark!), a 100-meter dash across a steep snowfield that is characterized by frequent rockfalls and the occasional avalanche:



In less than one minute, we were safely across and hiking up to the Gouter Hut, which, at 12,674, is 2,218 vertical feet above the Tete Rouse hut.

I was expecting a glacier trek, but that came later. In the meantime, for the next two hours, we scrambled up very steep rocky, snowy unstable terrain – so hairy (and the consequences of a fall so severe) that there were cables bolted into the mountain for nearly half of it. It was pitch black, so all you could see was what your headlamp showed (mine broke about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up!), plus the legs of the person in front of you. It was a very surreal, spooky, disorienting experience – and you couldn't stop or even slow down, as it is a narrow path and there were a lot of people right behind you the entire time. And, physically, it was a real leg and lung burner. At least we were all roped to our three guides the entire day.

We made very good time and arrived at the Gouter hut at ~4am for a quick rest, put on warmer clothes as the air temperature dropped and the wind picked up at higher altitudes, and started out for the [Vallot hut](#) (1,638 feet higher at 14,311 feet), which took around 90 min. Here are pictures from this part of the climb – check out all of the climbers ahead of us with their headlamps in the background of the latter picture:





I got very cold because the wind picked up and I hadn't put on my down vest under my jacket, nor my warmest ski hat with neck warmer, nor my water- and wind-proof pants – all were in my backpack (GRRRR!) – so my fingers got especially cold.

The Vallot hut is just a filthy little room (plus a filthy little toilet), nothing more, but it was warm enough to put on all of my clothes and we set out for the summit, at 15,787, the last 1,476 vertical feet. By now it was ~7am and the sun was rising, which resulted in spectacular views, which you can see in this picture (that's Mark and Geoffroy on the right in both):



Mark and me on the way to the summit:



We reached the summit a little more than six hours after we started, having covered ~8 miles and climbed 5,331 vertical feet. (Note the pics with the American flag – it was the 4th of July! – and my two favorite t-shirts: KIPP and Trump NOPE!)













Much to my surprise, I felt great pretty much the entire climb, including at the summit. (I was having so much fun taking pictures and sending out WhatsApp and Facebook messages that I didn't want to leave!) For whatever reason, I think altitude just doesn't affect me as much as others, plus I was taking a ton of Advil plus a prescription drug, Diamox (Acetazolamide) which, according to WebMD, "is used to

prevent and reduce the symptoms of altitude sickness. This medication can decrease headache, tiredness, nausea, dizziness, and shortness of breath that can occur when you climb quickly to high altitudes.” It sure seemed to work for me!

We weren't done yet though: we not only had to hike back down to where we started the day, but all the way back to the train at Nid d'Aigle, 8,000 vertical feet lower! It ended up being pretty straightforward, except for the hairy part between the Gouter and Tete Rousse huts – doing so in the daylight made it easier (but also scarier) and it's actually much harder going down such steep, rocky, unstable terrain than going up it. These two pictures just don't do it justice:





The highlight of the descent was going from the Tete Rousse hut back to the train – there were nearly a dozen grooves in the snow sort of like alpine slides that we shot down on our butts and wicked speeds, such that it took us only 20 min. to go down what had taken us two hours to hike up yesterday!

PS—If you're looking for a great guide in Europe, especially France, contact Geoffroy Arvis at geoffroy.arvis@yahoo.fr or +33 06.85.06.33.56.

PPS—Here's the report from my Garmin watch, starting about 10 min after we left the Tete Rousse hut at 2:15am, and ending when my watch's battery died back at the hut (before we hiked/slid on our butts down the cog railway train: <https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/1242051579>

PPPS—Here are some videos I've posted:

- We slid, hiked and took a cog railway and tram down the last part of Mt. Blanc – very fun and beautiful: <https://youtu.be/4lxAJggpepM>
- The most fun we had all week was sliding down on our butts what we'd hiked up – sort of like an alpine slide built into the mountain – it was fast, there were rocks to avoid, etc. It was AWESOME! Here's a video of us coming down the last segment from the Tete Rousse hut down to the train: <https://youtu.be/PoDa-rKauOc>
- On our rainout day on Saturday, we hiked about two hours up to the Albert Premier hut, which is the first hut on the Haute Route that Susan and I took last summer. Here's a video of us sliding part of the way down: <https://youtu.be/zs2SdsfHxYM>
- Mark had his GoPro with him on our training day on Friday, so I took all of his video clips and created an 8-minute video with the highlights: <https://youtu.be/5iSsZC-k9K0> (warning: pretty boring, but some cool climbing clips – it was the toughest climbing we did all week)

Q&A

1) What was the hardest part?

Climbing the hairy part between the Gouter and Tete Rousse huts in the dark.

2) What surprised you the most?

How little the altitude affected me.

3) What conditioning/experience is needed?

Unlike the Matterhorn, which is a beast, I think any reasonably fit person could summit Mt. Blanc (with a guide of course!). To prepare, I'd suggest getting in very good shape (this is 8-9 hours of pretty sustained effort, so you should at least be able to run a half-marathon 2-2½ hours; ideally a full marathon). At the gym, work on (in order of importance: balance, lower body strength, upper body strength (5-10 pull-ups), and flexibility).

Then you need to get some mountaineering experience. In June I did five days of private training on some hairy stuff in northern Vermont at the [Petra Cliffs](#) mountaineering school. Or you can show up in Chamonix, hire a guide, and do a few days of training on less challenging peaks until your guide thinks you're ready.

4) What did you eat during the climb?

I had a good breakfast at the hut, ate a couple of small Snickers bars (I should have had at least four full-size ones with me – I was really hungry by noon back at the Gouter Hut!), chewed on Sport Beans much of the hike, and drank water from my Camelback periodically (a total of 2.25 liters, its capacity, over the course of the entire climb). I had a few packets of Gu Energy Gel (with caffeine) with me, but didn't use them.

5) How much does it cost?

Most guides appear to be in the \$1,000 range for the two days. With fees for the hut for both of you, it's maybe \$1,300. Flights, trains, hotels, additional training, and buying/renting gear is probably a few thousand dollars on top of this. Not cheap – but a heck of a lot cheaper than multi-week assaults on Denali or in the Himalayas.

6) What am I going to do for an encore?

Lots of folks are asking which mountain I'm going to tackle next (suggestions (tongue in cheek – I think!) have included Everest, K2, and Meru). The answer: next year I'd love to ski the Haute Route (maybe in March), summit Mt. Blanc again, but this time ski down (likely June), and climb the Eiger (but not the North Face!) in July or August.

Climbing the Matterhorn: Part 2 of my Alps Adventure to Support KIPP Charter Schools (and the latest chapter in my ongoing midlife crisis...;-)

By Whitney Tilson, 8/8/16

(The latest version of this pdf is posted at: www.kasecapital.com/TilsonMatterhorn.pdf)

In July 2015, my wife and I spent a week hiking the famous Haute Route from Chamonix, France (the base of Mt. Blanc) to Zermatt, Switzerland (the base of the Matterhorn), mostly glacier trekking for 8-10 hours every day, staying in alpine huts. It was a grueling but magnificent experience, but in one way it left me dissatisfied: every day, as I looked up at the iconic peaks, I felt that I wanted to be *on top of them*, not in their shadows!

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So onto the story:

I just returned from a quick weekend in Switzerland (I didn't miss even one hour of the market being open!), where I summited the Matterhorn on Monday morning, August 8th. Below are pictures from and a description of my climb, but my favorite is a collection of 28 short video clips I took with the GoPro mounted on my helmet during the ascent (the battery died right at the summit). In total, it's only 14½ minutes and there's some incredible footage that will give you a good sense of what I was experiencing. You can watch it [here](#).

It's funny: as I watch the video now, my heart is in my mouth, especially halfway through (starting at 7:23), as I'm climbing up the final, narrow ridge as the wind howls, with 2,000-foot drops on either side of me (at 7:56, if you listen closely, I mutter to myself, "Not a good place for a fall!"). However, at no point during the climb did I feel any fear or have a rush of adrenaline – I was just so locked in. It was like what a former Navy SEAL said at a lecture I attended: "Focus on your three-foot zone", meaning that when you're under stress/pressure, focus 100% on the challenge(s) immediately in front of you and block everything else out. So that's what I did.

I left on Friday night (landing in Zurich Saturday morning) not even knowing if I'd be able to climb. A snowstorm on Friday had dumped a foot of snow on the mountain, which pretty much shut down nearly all summit attempts on Saturday and Sunday (and killed two British climbers dumb enough to try to

summit in it right in the teeth of the storm, without a guide, and wearing light clothing – see [here](#)). The question, then, was: had enough snow melted in the hot sun to allow us an attempt early Monday morning?

On Saturday night (after an awesome afternoon of mountain biking!), my guide, Geoffroy Arvis, after checking the forecast and talking to local guides (he usually guides in France), called and said he was comfortable with us making a summit attempt on Monday, with the understanding that if he felt that the conditions and/or my climbing were making him nervous at any point, he'd turn us around. My answer: "I understand. Let's do it!"

He arrived in Zermatt at mid-day Sunday, helped me buy new crampons, a helmet and headlamp, and then we carefully packed my backpack with everything I'd need (I left my suitcase at the hotel).

We then walked to the other side of the charming, small town of Zermatt and took the Schwarztee gondola up to an elevation of 8,374 feet (Zermatt is 5,276'). Here we are in the center of town, which is in the shadow of the Matterhorn:



(All photos were taken with my Samsung Galaxy S7 edge, which, as you can see from these pictures, has a well-deserved reputation for the best cell phone camera of any phone.)

Here we are at the top of the gondola, about to hike two hours to the Hornli Hut to spend the night – it's at the base of the mountain, right in the center of Geoffroy's hair in this picture:



We are about halfway to the hut, which is above Geoffroy's head, at the base of the mountain along the ridge at the center, where the snow ends:



Arriving at the hut:



I'm smiling, but I felt tired and sweaty, had blisters forming on both of my heels, and have to confess that I was wondering, "If this is how I feel after an easy two-hour hike with only 2,400 feet of vertical, how the *heck* am I going to climb that mountain tomorrow morning?!" (Answer: "I'm just going to put one foot in front of the other until I get to the summit!")

At 10,696', the hut is 4,000 vertical feet below the summit, which is 14,692'. It's a lovely hut with spectacular views – here's a 360-degree panorama:



Looming over everything of course is the Matterhorn:



It was very pretty at sunset:



In the hut, there were nice reading areas with beautiful views:



We had dinner at 7pm, went to sleep around 8pm in comfortable bunk rooms, awoke at 3:30am, had breakfast at 4am, and started hiking around 4:30am in the dark:



Because the Swiss guides get to take their clients first, then the other guides, and finally the people foolish enough to try this mountain without a guide, we started in the middle of the ~100 guide-client pairs attempting the summit yesterday. As a result, after hiking for no more than 15 minutes, we hit a big traffic jam at the base of a steep section where there was only one rope to go up, so we had no choice but to wait ~15 minutes. GRRRR!

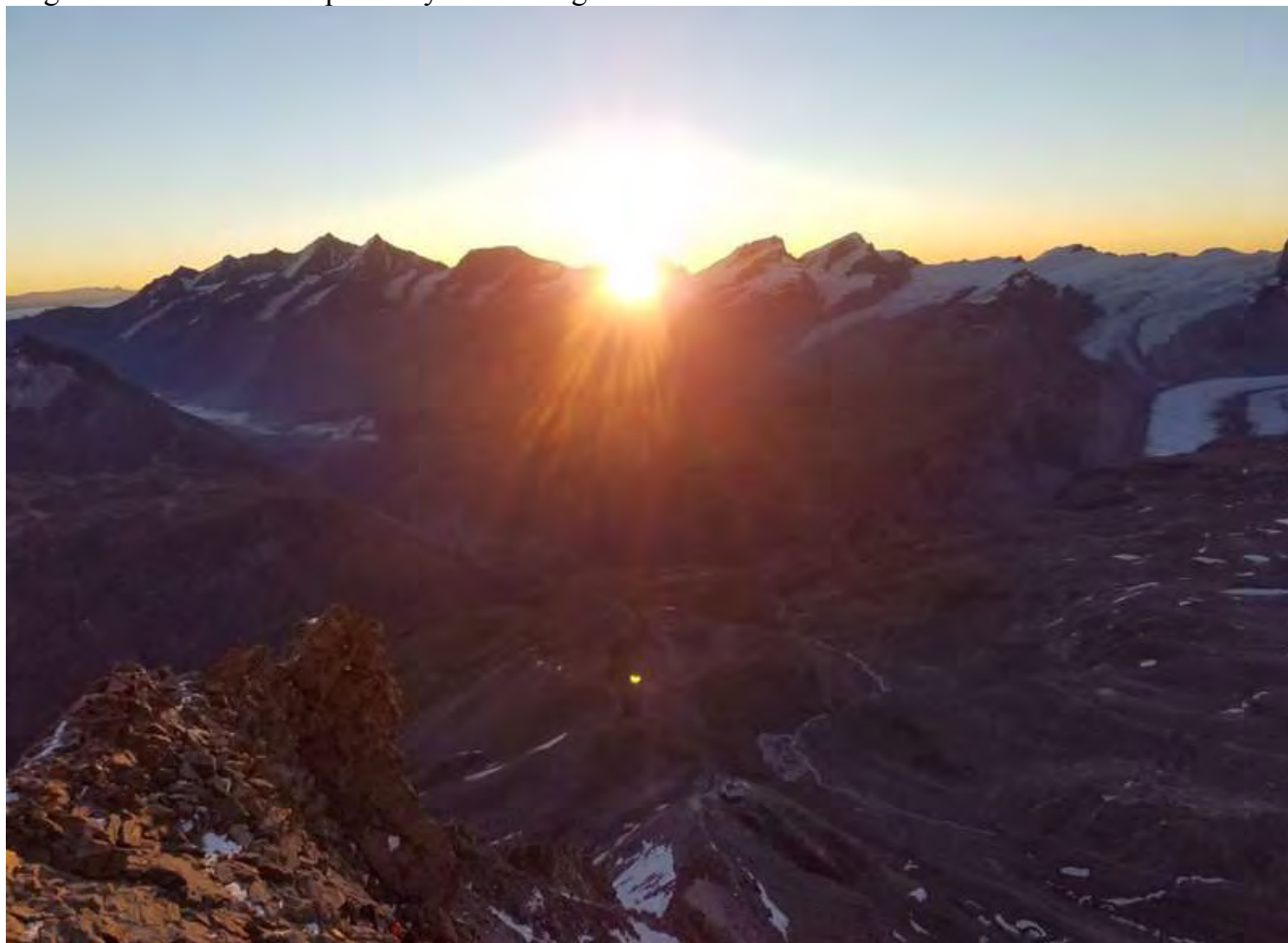


This was to become the story of the entire ascent (it wasn't so bad on the descent, as the climbers had spread out and we'd passed so many). The other climbers (clients not guides, of course) were of wildly varying abilities, and there were plenty of folks who should *not* have been up there, like the French woman I met at dinner the night before, who was celebrating her 71st birthday that day. I admire her

spirit – I hope I’m doing audacious things on my 71st birthday and, to her immense credit, she made it about 2/3 of the way up! – but she was incredibly slow, which was backing up everyone else because there’s only one narrow path, sometimes making it treacherous to pass (plus, near the top, we also had to worry about being passed by the people who’d already summited and were coming down).

The traffic was an especially big problem for Geoffroy and me because we were moving steadily and climbing more quickly than anyone else we encountered (we must have passed 30 pairs during the entire climb and nobody passed us all day), so 90% of the ascent we were stuck behind someone and sometimes had to do some sprint climbing when brief passing windows appeared, which left me completely winded. It often seemed futile, however, because within a minute or two, we’d have caught up to the next pair and be stuck behind them until another passing opportunity appeared (at least I could catch my breath!). From hut to summit, it took us 4:24 and I’d guess that: a) we’d have been at least 30 minutes faster without the traffic; and b) the average person probably took ~6 hours to summit.

Anyway, back to the story: about 90 minutes of hard hiking into the climb, we saw the sun rise – it was magnificent! – and could put away our headlights:





After another 30 minutes, we approached the Solvey Hut, which you can see in this pic just above Geoffroy's backpack:



Here's a picture I took of it on the descent:



At 13,133', 2,400 feet above the Hornli Hut, the Solvey Hut is 60% of the way to the summit in terms of vertical feet, but time-wise it's about the halfway point, since the upper part of the mountain is more challenging due to the altitude and tougher terrain, like this:



We stopped very briefly at the Solvey Hut to add a couple of layers, as it was getting colder and windier as we got higher, but we headed out quickly so we'd pass some of the slower climbers who had been holding us up.

We were now hiking a steep ridge, with more and more snow and ice making the footing tricky, with huge drop-offs on both sides to focus our minds. That was pretty much how it was the rest of the way up, as you can see in the video.

About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up, we stopped for a five minutes to strap on our crampons and take out our ice axes to tackle the steep snowfields, where a slip could be fatal (if your guide doesn't catch you). I have never been more focused on each and every step – and sure was glad I'd bought new crampons that morning!

Before we knew it, we were on the summit around 9am, 4 hours, 24 minutes after we'd started. Woo hoo! We stayed up there for maybe five minutes taking pictures using the selfie stick I'd brought, especially of me wearing my two favorite t-shirts, "Keep Calm and Elect Hillary" and KIPP:









As with Mt. Blanc, the altitude wasn't affecting me at all, but it was very windy and cold and there wasn't room for anyone else on the narrow path, so we quickly headed down.

I was expecting the descent to be quite a bit easier and faster than the ascent – it's downhill after all, right? – but it wasn't. There's a reason 80% of all mountaineering deaths occur on the descent: you're fatigued both from the physical exertion as well as long exposure to altitude, your legs are less accustomed to downclimbing, bad weather and/or darkness can set in, etc. So we had to be super careful going down because it was *hairy*! I kept thinking to myself, "Damn, this is a lot steeper and harder than I remember it coming up!"

Another thing I'd hadn't fully appreciated until then: on the way up, Geoffroy was leading, so all I really had to do was follow right in his footsteps for 4+ hours and block out everything else.

But on the way down, *I was leading*, with Geoffroy handling the rope above me (we're tied together at all times, but he's always adjusting the length as necessary and sometimes, on especially dangerous parts, looping the rope around a rock or gear permanently affixed to the mountain). No more three-foot zone – rats! I had to pick the route (with frequent guidance from Geoffroy) and figure out every foothold and handhold, with extremely serious potential consequences if I made even the tiniest mistake.

As we descended down the snowfields from the top, I felt more than any other time how much my life was in Geoffroy's hands. If I'd made one misstep or caught a crampon on my pants and fallen forward down the steep slope, I'm not sure I could have self-arrested with my ice ax – it would have been all on Geoffroy to save me (fortunately I had total confidence in him, so I wasn't nervous – though perhaps I should have been!).

I expected the descent to be 30-50% faster than the ascent, but it ended up being only 18 minutes shorter (4:06 vs. 4:24, for total of 8½ hours), in part because we got stuck behind some slow folks (though not as bad as on the way up), but mostly because it was just hairy.

Here are some pictures from the descent:





And here's us back down at the Hornli Hut:



There, we had a drinks (beer for him; the best Coke my life for me!), relaxed about 30 minutes, and then headed down to the Schwarztee gondola, about 75 minutes away.

We were almost there when Geoffroy suggested that we put our aching feet and legs into the small cold mountain lake there, and I said, “Great idea, but screw dipping our legs in, let’s go swimming!” So I stripped down to my athletic neoprene shorts and jumped in!” (That’s the Matterhorn behind me – it’s hard to believe I’d been standing on the summit only seven hours earlier!)



It was *really* cold, but felt so good – and Geoffroy could see this, so he stripped down to his skivvies and hopped in too!



We swam back and forth across the lake, took the gondola back into town, grabbed my luggage at the hotel, and I just barely caught the 4:37 train (Geoffroy took another one), which got me to the Zurich airport by 8:15pm, where I stayed at a transit hotel inside the airport, and caught a 10:35am flight the next morning, landing at JFK at 1:40pm – just in time for two afternoon meetings and a dinner!

PS—If you're looking for a great guide in Europe, especially France, contact Geoffroy Arvis at geoffroy.arvis@yahoo.fr or +33 06.85.06.33.56.

PPS—I'm still giggling over this email I received from my mom *after* returning to Zermatt - it's an absolute *classic*!

Dear only son Whit,

I was told today about these two climbers who died on the Matterhorn last Friday. DO YOU HAVE WARM WEATHER GEAR because they evidently died due to lack of such when unexpected storm overtook them?

Please please please desist or turn back if conditions warrant it --- YOU ARE NOT AN EXPERIENCED CLIMBER and just one misstep could cause your death and perhaps others as well. Also, surgically removed digits would be a lifelong handicap.

We will be waiting and worried to hear of the outcome. Be sure to tell us immediately when you are safe or otherwise.

Love,

Mom

Good to know you still love me, mom!

She is right, however, that at many dozens of points, one misstep *is* likely fatal – that's why I hired an experienced guide, with whom I'd worked before, and was roped to him the entire time – though there have been cases of a client falling and the guide not being prepared, and *both* of them plunging to their deaths – so let's just say that at many points, I was *super* careful not to misstep!

PPPS—I've posted the report of my Garmin watch here:
<https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/1294946443>

Q&A

1) Was it as dangerous as the video makes it look?

No, though there certainly was some element of danger (what would be the point of doing it otherwise?! ;-). I'm secretly very pleased that parts of the video sounded like a hurricane was about to blow us off the mountain (it was a stiff breeze, but nothing more) and made it look like I was one misstep away from certain death (but I wasn't).

I was, in fact, at many times during the climb one misstep away from a fall that surely would have been fatal, but here's the key: *I was roped to my guide at all times*. That means the only way I could die is if I fell at the wrong point *and* failed to catch myself (self-arrest) *and* somehow caught my guide by surprise and pulled him off the mountain with me, a scenario that guides are trained (and highly incented!) to avoid. For example, on the very narrow ridge near the top, with sheer drops on both sides, if I fell to one side, he'd jump off the other side and the rope, stretched over the top, would save us both. (Definitely something to avoid, however!)

2) What was the hardest part?

My first answer is that there wasn't any part that was massively more difficult than any other: from the very start, it was just a BIG, hairy, steep mountain that presented a wide range of challenges: huge physical exertion for 8½ hours, hiking up steep slopes with loose, unstable terrain and unexpected patches of ice, a handful of vertical walls, using ropes and cables, and, near the top, using crampons to climb (and, even harder, downclimb) both steep rock faces and snowfields (the latter requiring extensive use of an ice ax as well). At no point did the climbing difficulty exceed ~5.5, but that doesn't mean that if you're doing 5.8+ in your climbing shoes in a rock gym that you're ready for the Matterhorn; it's just a BEAST.

Forced to pick one hardest part, I'd say the last hour at the very top: navigating steep snowfields and narrow rock paths, while wearing crampons, dealing with the altitude, high wind, cold, and steep drops – that was quite a challenge!

3) What surprised you the most?

a) How much harder and more dangerous the Matterhorn was than Mt. Blanc. I was expecting it to be twice as hard/dangerous, not *five times* more! (I'd guess that odds of death, for a fit person with a good guide, are 1 in 20,000 on Mt. Blanc and 1 in 4,000 on the Matterhorn; the actual fatality rates are higher, but those are mostly people without guides doing massively stupid things like those two British climbers who died three days before my climb.)

b) In light of a), how many people were on the Matterhorn who shouldn't have been. I think that at least 10-20% of the climbers I saw shouldn't have been on a mountain so hairy – they were very slow, struggling on easy pitches, etc.

c) How little the altitude affected me. I felt no effects whatsoever on either climb, which was a wonderfully pleasant surprise. Granted, the Matterhorn is only half the height of Mt. Everest, but 15,778' for Mt. Blanc and 14,692' for the Matterhorn is still some elevation. For whatever reason, I think altitude just doesn't affect me as much as others, plus I was taking a ton of Advil as well as the prescription drug Diamox (Acetazolamide), which, according to WebMD, "is used to prevent and reduce the symptoms of altitude sickness. This medication can decrease headache,

tiredness, nausea, dizziness, and shortness of breath that can occur when you climb quickly to high altitudes.” It sure seemed to work for me!

d) How much faster we were than others. I expected other climbers to constantly be breathing down our necks and attempting to pass us, but that didn’t happen once (and, as noted above, we probably passed 30 other guide-client pairs).

4) Why were you so much faster than others?

I’m sure we weren’t the fastest people on the mountain (the record for summiting via the Hornli Route is ~2 hours) – no doubt there were a handful of folks who started before us and were faster (plus they wouldn’t have hit traffic), so we never saw them except as they passed us during their descent. I didn’t think we were going particularly fast and we certainly weren’t rushing, but were keeping up a steady pace and weren’t stopping to rest, eat or drink. We only stopped twice, for ~5 minutes each time, to put on warmer clothing at the Solvey Hut (halfway up) and crampons about 75% of the way up.

But the biggest reason we were faster is the way we were climbing, which had to do with the confidence Geoffroy had in me, which he explained to me later. (Remember, while my life was definitely in his hands, to some extent, his life was in mine as well!)

Basically, there are two ways to climb a route like this: lead climbing or tandem climbing. In the former, the guide climbs first, goes up maybe 25-100 feet, and establishes an anchor of some sort: clips or loops the rope onto some fixed gear or wraps it around a rock, and then calls down for the client to come up, pulling in the slack as the client ascends. Lather, rinse, repeat, all the way to the top! It’s safe, but also slow.

Tandem climbing just means you’re climbing together, with about five feet of rope between you. It’s much faster because you’re both moving all the time, but also obviously less safe because nobody is anchored: if you fall, you’d better hope your guide can instantly establish a good foothold or handhold or you’re both in trouble.

Geoffroy and I did a combination of both: when we encountered very steep (often vertical) faces, where there was a chance I could fall, we’d lead climb: he would climb up and tell me to follow him as soon as the rope tightened. But I’d guess that 90% of the time we were tandem climbing, whereas my observation was that most others I saw were tandem climbing maybe 70% of the time.

Geoffroy explained to me that he, too, would have been doing much less tandem climbing if he didn’t have a lot of experience climbing with me (he was the guide for my wife and me a year ago when we did the six-day Haute Route from Chamonix to Zermatt, and we’d also climbed together for three days in July: a day of hard-core, high-altitude, big-rock-face training and then two days on Mt. Blanc). Because of these nine previous days together, he had confidence in my climbing abilities and thus felt more comfortable taking a bit of extra risk to speed up our climb and make it more fun for both of us.

5) What conditioning/experience is needed?

As noted above, apparently almost none. But to do it right, at a minimum, you need: a) a very high level of fitness (this is 8-9 hours of pretty sustained effort, so you should at least be able to run a marathon in under five hours); b) a high degree of athleticism (in order of importance: balance, lower body strength, upper body strength (10+ pull-ups), and flexibility); and c) fearlessness.

If you have these three things, then you need to get some mountaineering experience. In June I did five days of private training on some hairy stuff in northern Vermont at the [Petra Cliffs](#) mountaineering school, and then tackled Mt. Blanc first. Or you can show up in Zermatt, hire a guide, and do a few days of training on less challenging peaks until your guide thinks you're ready for the Matterhorn.

6) What did you eat during the climb?

I had a good breakfast at the hut, ate four Snickers bars (one every hour starting halfway up), sucked down two packets of Gu Energy Gel (with caffeine) at hours two and three, chewed on Sport Beans near the top for extra energy, and drank water from my Camelback periodically (a total of 2.25 liters, its capacity, over the course of the entire climb).

7) How much does it cost?

Most guides appear to be in the \$1,200 to \$1,500 range for the two days. With fees for the Hornli Hut for both of you, it's nearly \$2,000. Flights, trains, hotels, additional training, and buying/renting gear is probably a few thousand dollars on top of this. Not cheap – but a heck of a lot cheaper than multi-week assaults on Denali or in the Himalayas.

8) What am I going to do for an encore?

Lots of folks are asking which mountain I'm going to tackle next (suggestions (tongue in cheek – I think!) have included Everest, K2, and Meru). The answer: next year I'd love to ski the Haute Route (maybe in March), summit Mt. Blanc again, but this time ski down (likely June), and climb the Eiger (but not the North Face!) in July or August.

My Adventure at the World's Toughest Mudder

By Whitney Tilson, 11/17/16

(The latest version of this pdf is posted at: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM.pdf)

This past weekend I participated in the World's Toughest Mudder, a 24-hour obstacle course endurance race on the shores and nearby hills of Lake Las Vegas. It was a memorable adventure and exceeded all of my (very high) expectations: it was incredibly fun, I didn't injure myself (though in the days afterward, I've never been so sore!), and I did far better than I expected, completing 75 miles and nearly 300 obstacles, which placed me in the top 5% of the 1,240 finishers – and I won the 50+ age category! Here I am at the finish:



It was especially fun because Susan was there as my “pit crew”, feeding me after every lap, bringing me dry/warm gear, giving me encouragement, etc. As with most things I achieve, I couldn’t have done it without her! Below are some of her amazing pictures, and I’ve posted three short video clips she took of me doing two obstacles and at the finish [here](#) (other participants posted these two videos of [all of the obstacles](#) and of [the entire race](#)).

Here’s a picture of us setting up camp on Saturday morning with my buddy (and former Navy SEAL and professional triathlete) Mark James:



Here's a picture of the Mudder Village, showing our tent at the far end:



Here's a picture of us at the start a couple of hours before the race:



Here we are a few minutes before the start:



The crowd pressed against the course moments before the start:



At exactly noon, ~1,300 people pressed across the line and up the first hill:



Here's a map of the five-mile course:



My Goals

I had three goals:

1) Have fun. This was a given: what could be more fun than having 24 hours to horse around in a gigantic playground with more than 1,000 like-minded, friendly people?! Seriously! Some of my fondest memories from my childhood are when I was playing with my buddies and we'd go swim, hike, crawl around in the mud, climb everything in sight, etc. – so now I get to do this as a (sort of) adult!

2) Not get injured. This was going to be a tough one, as I have little experience with (and did minimal training for) hiking/jogging a long distance. “So,” you might be thinking, “if something starts to hurt, stop!” I agree, logically speaking, it's nuts to continue on through pain, especially at my age. One race isn't worth a real injury. I plan to live at least another 50 years and want to be healthy, active and pain-free for the rest of my life!

That said, I'm really competitive and have a high pain threshold, so I might have kept on going even if some part of my body (most likely a knee or hamstring) was really hurting. Fortunately, this didn't happen.

3) Complete 50 miles (10 laps) for my 50th birthday (which was on Nov. 1st). This was also going to be tough, as I'm not a runner. I don't like it – I find it boring and unpleasant (if not painful) – so I don't go for a run very often (I mostly play basketball and tennis). And when I do, I'm slow: even on a flat road, with running shoes, doing only a few miles, I get uncomfortable if I try to go faster than an 8-minute mile, which any serious runner would laugh at. Prior to this, the only long-distance run I'd done in my entire life was the NYC Marathon last year (click [here](#) for details), and when I crossed the finish line, I was so spent that I don't think I could have run another 100 yards – and that was only four hours of sustained effort!

So you can see why I wasn't sure whether I'd be able to do nearly double that distance, especially with the added difficulty of going up and down hills, over unstable terrain, much of it at night, being wet all the time – oh, and did I forget to mention 20 obstacles every lap (see below for my pics and comments about each one; also, one of the participants posted [this video](#) of all of them).

Given that completing 50 miles was highly questionable, if you'd asked me whether I could do 75, I would have laughed and given you 100-to-1 odds against it. And had you asked if I could do 75 miles not only without injury, but no blisters or chafing, only a few minor scrapes and bruises, and no stomach trouble after the first two laps, I would have given you 1,000-to-1 odds.

But I did, stunningly enough: I ended up finishing 58th overall (behind 50 guys and 7 women) among the 1,240 individual competitors (1,041 men and 199 women), and in my age group (50+), I was the only one to complete 75 miles (of 62 men and six women). In fact, even in the next-youngest age category (the 100 male and 9 female finishers age 45-49), only one person did 75. (The race results are posted [here](#).)

I'm really pleased that I did so well – and, frankly, totally shocked, as this race attracted hard-core obstacle course racers from all over the world. I'm not a religious person, but what happened last weekend was truly a miracle.

Race Description and Unique Challenges

In total, I completed three back-to-back-to-back marathons (according to my GPS watch, an unofficial total of ~78 miles due to penalties and pit stops; [here](#) is the report of my Garmin watch before the battery died after 10 laps) over the course of 25 hours and 12 minutes (I know, it's billed as a 24-hour race, but as long as you start a lap before noon on Sunday, you have until 1:30pm to finish it), with 20 obstacles each lap, some of which I found quite easy and quick, but others were really tiring.

I and almost all of the other racers were going quite slowly – I was actually walking (ok, speed hiking) all of the uphill (1/3 of the course). Where I made up time, however, was in two areas: a) I jogged the flats and downhill (albeit at a slow ~10-minute-mile pace) and; b) nailed all but one of the 20 obstacles on all 15 laps, so I didn't have to do many penalties (maybe a total of 10), which typically involved walking/jogging extra distance, often with a sandbag (racers who did every penalty had to do a total of two extra miles – 40% more distance – every lap!). (Although I never did the penalty, I did get ~15 severe electric shocks – like sticking your finger in a socket – over the course of the race at one obstacle called Operation – ouch!)

My Race Plan – and What Really Happened

My plan to achieve 50 miles was to run 30 miles (6 laps) before midnight, sleep until 4am, and then complete the remaining 20 miles (4 laps) by noon. What really happened reminds me of the famous saying, “No battle plan survives contact with the enemy”!

The first hour was a sprint in which everyone ran the course with no obstacles until a horn sounded at 1pm and all of them opened simultaneously – at points it got very dusty as you can see in the lower left picture (these four pictures were taken by Brad Kerr, father of one of the racers – thank you!):



I wanted to take advantage of not having to stop for obstacles (and staying dry) and also didn't want to be behind too many other racers once the obstacles opened, as the lines could be long, so I pushed myself moderately hard and covered a respectable 6.2 miles, bypassing the first 25 obstacles (20 on the first lap and the first 5 on the second lap). (I was really chagrined, however, to barely miss passing Operation (by maybe 50 feet), so I started with two nasty electric shocks.)

I wasn't feeling very comfortable on the first two laps – my Achilles tendons were burning and I felt early cramping in my upper legs – but I stretched a bit, and the pain went away. As my body got accustomed to what I was putting it through, I cranked out five laps averaging a bit over 80 minutes (not counting pit stops) so, much to my surprise, I completed 30 miles long before midnight (at 8:38pm to be precise) and was still feeling good so I decided to keep going.

I ate a lot right before I went out on my next (7th) lap and my stomach felt lousy the entire time, so when I finished 35 miles at 10:26pm, I told Susan she could go back to the hotel because I would just do one more lap and go to sleep. Then she could come back in the morning and help me with the last two laps to hit 50 miles.

Since I only had one more lap to go that night, I ate light at that pit stop and, to my surprise, that lap (which ended just after midnight) was my best in many hours – my stomach had settled down, my body felt strong, and I was running with a nice guy I was enjoying chatting with (Pieter Joubert, a South African now living in Minnesota; see pic below), so I said to myself, “What the heck, let's do another lap and see how I feel.” And basically that's what happened the rest of the race. I was feeling good and having fun, so why stop?



Plus, as I passed 40 miles, I was already starting to think about the coveted 75-mile silver bib (Tough Mudder has awards for competitors who finish 25 miles (a patch), 50 miles (a brown bib; 639 people achieved this, 52% of the finishers), 75 miles (a silver bib; only 62 (5%) achieved this) and 100 miles (an orange jacket; an unprecedented 7 guys this year)).

I did the math and figured out that if I could maintain a pace of roughly 100 minutes per lap (I'd been averaging 85 for the previous six laps) and keep my pit stops to around 10 minutes, I could (just barely) complete 75 miles. So even though it was still 12-13 hours away, I thought to myself, "Why not give it a shot? I'll just keep on truckin' until I hit the proverbial wall and/or my body breaks down."

But neither of these things happened – to the very end, I wasn't in any pain (though my legs were increasingly fatigued) and everything was completely steady: my heartrate, breathing, body temperature, pace (my last five laps were 101, 96, 99, 99 and 99 minutes) and, perhaps most importantly, my mind. It was very Zen-like – during the long night, when I knew I had 50 miles in the bag and was thinking about stopping and going to sleep in my tent, there was an incredible full moon, not a cloud in the sky, and I was just in a zone, running alone most of the time (though I said hi to most people I passed and did a couple of laps each with two guys going at my pace (thank you Pieter and also Eric Jenkins!; it's a really nice community of people as crazy as I am!)).

Here's a picture of Eric Jenkins (on the right) and me at the finish (I don't know who the guy in the middle is):



And here's a pic with Sean Corvelle, the Master of Ceremonies at most TM races, a great guy who gives motivational speeches beforehand, etc.



Q&A

Why do you do races like this?

I've always liked big challenges; they keep me motivated to get/stay in good shape; I really enjoy them – not the running, but the obstacles; and they're very social. I often do them with friends and family (my 76-year-old mom, 75-year-old dad, wife, three teenage daughters and many cousins have all done races with me), plus I've made many new friends. It's a great group of people and there's something about shared suffering that bonds people!

How does this race differ from other endurance races?

I've never done any other endurance race, but from what I've read of them, this race was different because we had to contend with:

- The obstacles (see photos and description of each below). There were a bunch of new ones and I found all of them fun and challenging, but after 200+, they take a lot out of you! Note that they tended to be very quick (if you completed them and avoided the penalty). How quick? I ran the first lap (a sprint of the course, skipping the obstacles) in 48 minutes and the second in 64 – the only difference was that I only skipped five obstacles on the second lap before they all opened at 1pm, meaning I did 14 obstacles on that lap. Thus, using my powers of higher math, each obstacle (including waiting in a couple of short lines and doing a quick penalty walk at Twinkle Toes) took just over one minute.
- Wild temperature swings, both within each lap and between laps. After every lap, racers can go back to their pit (tent area) to rest, eat, and change into dry and warmer/cooler gear, but that wastes time (my tent was at least 250 yards from the start/finish area) and it can be very tricky figuring out what to wear for a given lap. Last year, 300+ people had to stop soon after the sun went down because they got caught on the course when the temperature quickly dropped into the 40s and they became hypothermic. Fortunately, this year it was unseasonably warm: a blazing hot 80 degrees at the beginning and ending hours of the race, so a lot of guys went out wearing nothing but shorts and (the required) racing bib, but after a couple of dips in the cold lake, they were shivering. And then, after the second lap for most people, the sun was about to set and each of us had to decide what warmer gear to put on – guess wrong, and you might freeze...or overheat...or both (in fact, both were possible on the same leg, as the air temperature remained fairly warm (a low of only 55 in the middle of the night), yet the lake water was always cold).
- Speaking of being wet, that was constant because four obstacles on every lap (five once The Cliff opened at midnight) required you to completely submerge yourself (plus on three other obstacles, if you failed to complete them you fell into water, so some people were getting wet *eight times every lap*). This had a number of implications that made this race much more challenging than a typical endurance race:
 - a) It makes it very difficult to regulate your body temperature. In the first and last miles, we were submerged three times in lake water (which never warmed up, unlike the two pits/pools of water elsewhere on the course), so it was easy to get chilled at the start and end of every lap. But for the three miles in the middle of the course, when we were hiking up and down the hills, our physical exertion heated us up, yet there was only one water obstacle, so if you wore a wetsuit to stay warm during the first and last miles, you were

likely overheating in the middle of the course. (See the Q&A below for how I was able to solve this problem.)

- b) During the night you need to wear thick neoprene (3mm scuba diving) gloves to keep your fingers warm, which makes the many climbing/gripping obstacles extra difficult.
- c) Every time you go into the water, hike/jog through sand/dirt, and crawl through mud, pebbles can get in your shoes, which forces you to run through the discomfort and hope it goes away, or take the time to stop and shake them out.
- d) Your waterlogged feet swell, making your shoes too tight or requiring you to change into a larger pair (which thought I did only once, at the long pit stop from 3-4am, going from a size 10 to a 10.5 pair of identical shoes – except I didn't have my glasses and only realized when I got home that I'd switched to another pair of size 10s – LOL!).
- e) Trying to run a race while wearing a wetsuit (I put on my thin 3mm one at maybe 9pm and changed into my thick 5mm one at 3am) can cause chafing; was constricting, making it harder to climb, jump, etc.; and added a lot of extra bulk and weight, which got really tiring as I hiked/jogged mile after mile. Ditto for my constantly wet shoes and socks. Here's a picture of me in my warmest gear when I tried it on at home before the race (thankfully, I never needed the goggles during the race):



- The course map says there was 817 feet of elevation gain (and loss) per lap, but my Garmin GPS watch says it was 1,000 feet – either way, that’s a lot of hiking up and down over 15 laps (by the end, the down was harder than the up because my quads were spent).
- The terrain was very loose and unstable – maybe half of the course was on various packed dirt roads, but the rest was sand and gravel with lots of rocks, which made it very difficult to jog at any pace, especially at night, as the risk of rolling your ankle was high (I fortunately only rolled an ankle once, I think on mile 38; it was quite painful for a few minutes and I thought it might affect me going forward, but I’ve had countless ankle rolls playing basketball over the years, so the pain soon faded and it didn’t bother me any further).

How does this compare to an Ironman?

I don’t know, as I’ve never done one (not even a half or an Olympic-distance one – nor do I intend to). It also depends on how many laps you run at the WTM. But my buddy Mark James, who (long ago) ran the Kona (Hawaii) Ironman 10 years in a row when he was a professional triathlete, told me that the 60 miles he did at the race last weekend was massively harder than any of the Ironmans because: a) it’s twice as long (timewise); and b) you can’t get into a rhythm like you can at an Ironman (biking for six hours straight, for example). (I also later learned that he sprained his arm halfway through the race when he fell and put his arm out to brace his fall!)

What conditioning/experience is needed?

None is required – and I saw a few seriously out-of-shape/overweight people out there. They have my total respect, as this is really hard even if you’re in great shape.

But if you want to do well – say, complete 50 miles, as slightly more than half of last weekend’s participants did – then you need: a) a *very* high level of fitness (this is 24 hours of pretty sustained effort, so as one benchmark, you should be able to run a marathon in under five hours; ideally four); b) a high degree of athleticism (in order of importance: balance/coordination, lower body strength, upper-body strength, and flexibility); and c) fearlessness.

How did you train for this?

Obviously the best way to train for a long-distance trail race is to do a lot of long-distance trail running. However, I did very little – I just don’t have the time or interest, and worry about getting chronic injuries that all aged runners seem to have, so instead I did hour-long (but typically very intense) workouts pretty much every day (and in the weeks before the race, twice a day).

In a typical week, I play hard pick-up basketball a few times, a couple of hours of tennis once or twice, do a ridiculously hard hour-long workout with a trainer once or twice (often wearing a 20-lb. weight vest), and ride my bike a few miles a day to get to and from meetings – and that’s pretty much it.

Then, maybe one weekend a month, I do some sort of race/challenge: a Tough Mudder or Spartan race (typically two laps) if there’s one in the area (I’m not one of those folks who travels all over the country to do these races), the Bear Mountain Half Marathon in May, I climbed Mt. Blanc in July and the Matterhorn in August, etc. Thus, I was reasonably mentally and physically prepared, but this race took it to a whole new level.

While my running training was laughably inadequate (though to repeat what I noted above, I do think there’s something to be said for not burning out your legs and getting plagued with injuries, especially at

my age, by putting too many miles on your legs), I did work hard on building my grip and upper-body strength, which I think is the second most important area, as 2/3 of the obstacles demanded this. They were all somewhat different – climbing a cargo net, doing monkey bars, using pegs to pull yourself up a wall, etc. – but they all boiled down to being able to grip something and pull your body up.

There's a simple test for this: how many consecutive pull-ups can you do? For a race like this, the answer should be at least 10. A year and a half ago, I peaked at 26, but overdid it and partially tore my right elbow tendon, so I had to rest it for more than a year, but I trained hard and got back up to 20. That was key for me, as I only incurred 10 time-and-energy-consuming penalties during the entire race (mostly on Funky Monkey – see description below).

(For those of you who live in NYC and have an interest in a personal trainer, I highly recommend the two I use (once a week each): Richard Louis of FitSpace NYC (rplouisnyc@gmail.com) and Carlos Munoz at Definitions (munozcelo@aol.com). If you want to save money, a friend recently told me about [Tone House](#), which is known for having the toughest group workouts in NYC; I did it twice earlier this month and agree with this assessment!)

In light of your “laughably inadequate” running training, why didn’t your body break down?

- 1) I got lucky;
- 2) I jogged slowly during the race and walked all of the uphill;
- 3) My workouts with my trainers are super intense – pretty much everything to failure – which I think has really toughened up my joints, muscles, ligaments and tendons (and my mind!); and
- 4) I’ve become a big fan this year of shiatsu massage (I go to a place in NYC with a cult following called Salon de Tokyo). In your mind, you may be thinking of an elegant spa with candles and mood music in which you receive a relaxing backrub from a hot person of the opposite sex – but what I get at Salon de Tokyo is the opposite: a little Chinese women (ask for Mimi), holding onto a bar in the ceiling, stands on my back and legs and applies every ounce of pressure onto one-inch areas. It’s so painful! But I can hear and feel my tight joints and muscles loosening up.

What was the hardest part?

The hardest thing for me was to just keep on going for 25+ hours. Thankfully, I love obstacles – they keep me entertained. Had this been a 24-hour ultramarathon, I would have gone crazy from boredom after a few hours and stopped.

How did you manage doing half of the race without a pit crew?

Because I was a rookie at this race, I was assigned the worst tent spot at the far end of the pit camp down by the lake (on the far right in this photo), at least 300 yards from the start/finish area (on the far left):



If I’d had to go all the way to my tent and back after each lap during the second half of the race, I’d never have made 75 miles, so I did two things:

1) I filled my [wagon](#) with the food and gear I thought I'd need and left it in the corner of an empty tent spot close to the start/finish area; and

2) I twice visited the “orphan tent” (for the many racers with a pit crew). I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the kind folks there who took care of me (even though I hadn't registered with them) when I needed some hot soup (on the first stop) and a salt tablet and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich (on the second stop). Thank you!

What were the keys to success in this race, based on your personal experience and observation of others?

1) Being in shape, both running/endurance and upper-body strength.

2) Staying warm – but not overheating (see comments below).

3) Drinking enough water and ingesting enough calories (~400/hour?) to keep your body going. This is hard because when you're exercising you often don't feel like eating – but if you wait until you feel hungry, it's too late: you can't recover and you're gonna bonk. Thus, it's critical to force-feed yourself at every pit stop, however crappy it makes your stomach feel. (You can train for this, though I didn't.)

4) Controlling your pace so you never get winded or overheated.

5) Pushing with your (much stronger) legs rather than pulling with your arms on numerous obstacles, which preserves arm/grip strength (any rock climber will tell you how important this is). There's not much you can do other than be as fast as you can on pure grip/upper-body tests like Stage 5 Clinger, Pyramid Scheme, Funky Monkey, Double Rainbow and Kong. But you can do Augustus Gloop, Giant Wedgie, The Grappler, Abeseil, Backstabber, Ladder to Hell and The Gamble using 90% legs, with arms mainly for balance.

6) Being assertive in asking for assistance. I recall two instances when women at Humpchuck and Backstabber were quite hesitant in asking for assistance; had I not offered to help, they might have struggled for quite some time. I think they felt like they didn't want to bother the more fit, faster racers, who might resent being slowed down. Nothing could be further from the truth. We're all part of one big team and family, so every single person out there, even the elite racers going for max distance and prize money, is happy to help another Mudder. But don't assume that we know you want/need help – some people take pride in completing obstacles without assistance – so you need to ask!

7) Communicate clearly about what assistance you need. For example, I needed help every time on Everest 2.0, so when I was ready to run, I made eye contact with the people at the top, made sure they were ready for me, yelled “Two hands!”, and then held up both hands in the position I'd have them. Then, once they'd grabbed me and pulled my hands up to where I had a grip on the top, I said, “Let go” because I could pull myself up (i.e., I didn't need them to grab one of my legs).

8) Knowing when to give up on an obstacle you were never going to complete (to save energy and preserve grip strength) – yet also doing every obstacle possible (to avoid time- and energy-sapping penalties). Examples abounded: a) why take a penalty on Everest – there were always people at the top to pull you up; b) on Operation, assuming you don't have medical issues, just prepare yourself to get shocked and do it!; c) once The Cliff opened, it was a gift, as it saved a long run and/or swim, so I

strongly suggest overcoming the fear of jumping and doing it.

9) If you're not sure if you have enough time to make a particular milestone (25, 50 or 75 miles), it's okay to ask to cut a line. In general, cutting is frowned upon for obvious reasons, but on the last 2-3 laps, when I knew I didn't have much time to spare to hit 75 miles (I ended up finishing only 18 minutes before the 1:30pm course closure), on maybe 4-6 obstacles where there were lines, I went right to the front and said, "Hi, I'm really tight on hitting 75 miles. Do you mind if I go ahead of you?" And in each case, the answer was something along the lines of, "Sure, go for it, good luck!" Every Mudder is always willing to help out a fellow Mudder!

How did you maintain your body temperature and not get too hot or too cold?

Everyone seemed to have pretty much the same gear: a light top and shorts/tights for the hot weather at the start, some sort of transition gear (maybe a thin ["shorty" wetsuit](#)) as the sun went down, and a thin (3mm) full-body wetsuit and a heavy (5mm) one ([this](#) was the one I bought) for the night – plus associated hoods and gloves of varying types/thicknesses.

But there was a big difference in how people used their gear. After last year, in which the temperature dropped faster and further (into the mid-40s), leading hundreds of racers getting hypothermia out on the course on only their second lap (the race started two hours later at 2pm), the conventional wisdom this year was to change into at least a shorty (if not a thin full-body wetsuit) before the sun went down.

Doing so this year was a mistake, however, as the warm conditions just didn't warrant it, so I stayed much lighter than most other racers until quite late, donning only a thin 1.5mm top after a couple of laps (you can see me wearing it in the picture of Pieter and me, above) and not putting on my thin wetsuit until nine hours into the race.

But, in fairness, I had a *huge* advantage that, to my knowledge, no other racer had: I had the [Quiksilver Mens Ps+Qs Heated Vest](#). This is a thin, sleeveless neoprene vest worn by cold-water surfers under their wetsuits. It has a heat pad covering the entire lower back, with a small (Snickers bar-sized) battery in a pocket on the hip with two settings: high and low.

This vest was an absolute lifesaver for me. As I noted above, the first mile of the course involved being fully submerged in lake water twice so, especially at night, it was easy to get really cold – so I turned the heater onto high. Then, as I started into the hills, I turned it to low, and when I really started to warm up, turned it off for the rest of the lap. Then I turned it on again at each pit stop so I didn't get chilled as I ate and rested. Because I only had it on maybe 15 minutes each lap, the battery lasted for the entire period I was wearing the vest (about half the race). (At around 3am, when I finally changed into my warmest wetsuit, I took off the Quiksilver vest and put on the new one developed by TM veteran Jason Rulo, which has six Hot Hands around the entire waist, which kept me even warmer (click [here](#) and [here](#) for more info about this).)

Any tips on nutrition during the race?

I brought 5x as much food as I could possibly eat because I had no idea what to expect and what I might be craving. You don't just want to consume energy drinks and gel – that's fine for short races, but won't work for long ones.

My main go-to "real food" was a rotisserie chicken that I consumed in pieces over the first half of the race. After each leg, I also ate a Snickers bar or bag of peanut M&Ms. I washed this down with three drinks:

- a) Diet Coke (I like the taste, find it refreshing, and it has caffeine; I probably should have been drinking regular Coke (to add the sugar energy), but I stupidly didn't have any!);
- b) Ensure Enlive ("all-in-one advanced nutrition shake" – a ton of protein and calories); and
- c) Tailwind (like Gatorade).

I had an entire box of Gu, gummy shots, and energy jelly beans and didn't touch them. Go figure. It worked for me...

What would you have done differently/what will do you differently next year?

- 1) Not much – pray that I get as lucky as I was this year.
- 2) I gave more help than I received on the obstacles during the race, but feel like I could have done more. But then I likely wouldn't have hit 75 miles – that's a dilemma that I don't face at regular TM races (which are untimed).
- 3) I'd make sure I had two people in my pit crew – one person halfway out on the course who I could give instructions to, who could then call them back to the other person in the pit.
- 4) I'd fly in earlier (we didn't arrive until Friday night) and stay through the brunch on Sunday (we took the redeye back on Sunday night), so we wouldn't have been so rushed at both ends and could have been more social.

How did you feel afterwards?

Over the four days since the race ended, my upper body has been quite sore and my legs have never been more sore – really painful to sit down and stand up. I've been taking four Advil (800mg of ibuprofen) every four hours since the race ended (I only recall taking it twice during the race) to manage the pain and inflammation and I've needed Ambien to sleep. Today (Thursday) is the first day in which the pain has really subsided so I should be off the Advil and Ambien shortly.

Is there actually any danger?

Well, it depends on how you define danger. There are plenty of opportunities on many of the obstacles to slip and fall, get banged up, maybe even break a leg or arm, but there were no major injuries at this race – depending on how you define "major" I suppose. One guy posted this on FB (he ripped open his arm on the very first obstacle – and still did 55 miles!):

I want to send a special thanks to Team 4 Eyes. When the horn blew after the sprint lap I was at Stage 5 Clinger and did a muscle up to get up and over but apparently ripped open my elbow. Wondering where the blood splatter on the obstacle was from, I quickly realized it was from my arm. I crawled down in total shock to see my arm opened up and thought immediately, "Well that's it, I'm done." All the training and travel to get to those point was done on the first obstacle. Team 4 Eyes came over and quickly snapped me out of it. They took my buff from my neck and compressed it tightly around my arm and ran with me over to a medic. If it wasn't for them telling me I was fine I'm not sure how the rest of the race would have been. Unfortunately because a medic can't assist while on course, I had to run and complete the remaining 4 miles of obstacles. 7 stitches and 25 minutes in the medical tent later I was back out on the course and met up with those 3 guys from that team around Twinkle Toes. The camaraderie that I experienced throughout the 24 hours was like nothing I have ever seen. Coolest thing I have ever done in my life!

Another guy fell on Kong going across a strapline in the middle of the night, dropping ~15 feet – which happened countless times, except he had the misfortune of falling right in between two big airbags (you can see it happen at 2:52:55 on [this video](#)). He could have been seriously injured, but after being down for about a minute, he continued and also completed 55 miles.

And there's plenty of opportunity to mess yourself up jumping 35' off The Cliff. If you land slightly wrong, you can break your tailbone (on one jump, I was leaning back a tiny bit and bruised it, and the female winner a couple of years ago, Amelia Boone, actually broke it – but kept on racing and won!).

But if you define danger as the risk of death, you were probably more likely to die driving to/from the airport (15 miles away) than you were on the course. That said, at a regular Tough Mudder race in 2013, a guy drowned years ago when someone else jumped on him, knocked him out, and nobody noticed until it was too late. And just a month ago at a Tough Mudder in New Jersey, I saw a guy being rushed off the course on a stretcher on the back of a cart and heard the next day that he'd died of a heart attack (he looked to be very obese – it's not a good idea to do any highly strenuous physical activity if you're really out of shape).

Did you win your age category by a hair – was it a photo finish?

No. No other person age 50+ did 75 miles. The #2 guy did 70 miles (and could have easily beaten my time had he run one more lap, as he was 2 hours, 18 minutes ahead of me after 70 miles, but he stopped – I don't know why). The #3 guy did 65 miles, and three guys did 60 miles, so there was a lot of dispersion at the top. (The #1 woman age 50+ did 55 miles.) (7 of the 38 teams also beat me – there was a \$100,000 prize for any team that hit 100 miles, so I think this attracted some top competitors.)

Given that you just turned 50 two weeks ago, didn't that give you an advantage over others in the 50+ age category?

Hell yeah! I need to hurry up and do more of these races before I lose my advantage! ;-)

Seriously, I would have finished #2 among the 100 male and 9 female finishers aged 45-49 and #8 among 138 men and 26 women aged 40-44, so I did well even among those 5-10 years younger.

What advice would you give to Tough Mudder for future WTMs?

1) People love getting recognition: patches, bibs, awards, etc. I think having a patch for 25 miles and a bib at 50 miles (which 52% of finishers achieved) is just right, but having the next bib at 75 miles (which only 5% achieved) is too much. I saw a lot of folks get 50 miles and then mentally or literally stop, even though they could have kept going for another lap or two, because they knew 75 was out of reach. Why not have a 60-mile bib? Also, why not have awards by age categories (selfishly speaking!)?

2) I think some of the obstacles/penalties need to be made more difficult. I know a lot of folks struggled with many of the obstacles, especially in the second half of the race, and thus will surely disagree with me, but this is the world championship, not a regular TM race. My general feeling is that a 50-year-old like me should have been failing more obstacles than Funky Monkey 1/3 of the time. Specifically, I'd suggest:

- Humpchuck: make the wall 1-foot higher.
- Stage 5 Clinger: this was a good, tough obstacle – but then, after only two laps, they put up ladders and nets, making it much easier. I'd suggest not putting up the ladder and nets until, say, 10pm, and then remove them at 6am (like Funky Monkey).

- Operation: as I took the shock ~15 times, I didn't think it was fair that the penalty was so easy. In general, I think penalties should be much harsher for obstacles people *choose* to skip (vs. those they simply don't have the strength for). Thus, rather than putting Arctic Enema (a brutal obstacle because it chills you to the bone) as a penalty for The Gambler, I'd put it here.
- The Grapppler: for the entire second half of the race, the folks running this obstacle allowed racers to run up and grab the rope and start climbing as long as someone was still on it. Don't. Make every person throw the rope (and if they can't hook it by their third try, it's off to the penalty).
- Double Rainbow: this looked so intimidating – yet ended up being much too easy. There's a simple fix: move the second bar two feet further away, thereby requiring a release and then a catch.
- Kiss of Mud: a great obstacle, but should have been 50-100% longer.
- Twinkle Toes: the beam should be a tiny bit skinnier and five feet longer.
- Kong: should have been five feet longer.
- The Cliff: I never did the penalty, but heard it wasn't so bad. If someone is going to skip this bad boy, then there should be a high price.

3) Add another water station on the course. No matter how much water/Cellucor I drank at the first station, I was parched by the top of the hill a mile and a half later.

4) There was a lot of pee (mine included!) in the water at Block Ness Monster and Turducken, which didn't bother me but is sort of unsanitary. Maybe pour chlorine into the water at those obstacles regularly?

5) Why not set up a tent and strike a deal with a local place to provide a bunch of masseuses to give quick 5-10 minute massages to racers for \$10 or \$20? I think racers would really appreciate it and (in response to folks who think it would be too much over-the-top pampering) it might help reduce injuries.

6) Put a few Port-a-Potties near the start/finish area for use just by racers – the closest ones were much too far away.

How much does it cost?

Registration was \$550, but that's just the start. If you don't have the gear, you can easily drop \$1,000 (I spent quite a bit more, but I was over the top for sure), plus flights and hotel – not just for you, but your pit crew as well. It ain't cheap (though it should be cheaper in future years, as I won't have to buy any gear – I have enough for a decade I think)!

What does Susan think of this?

Not much. But she's been endlessly loving and patient with me for nearly 26 years of my foolish escapades – and I haven't killed myself yet! And she knows from long experience that if she raised doubts/concerns, it would just give me more motivation! And she takes comfort in my large life insurance policy... ;-)

What ridiculous thing am I going to do next?

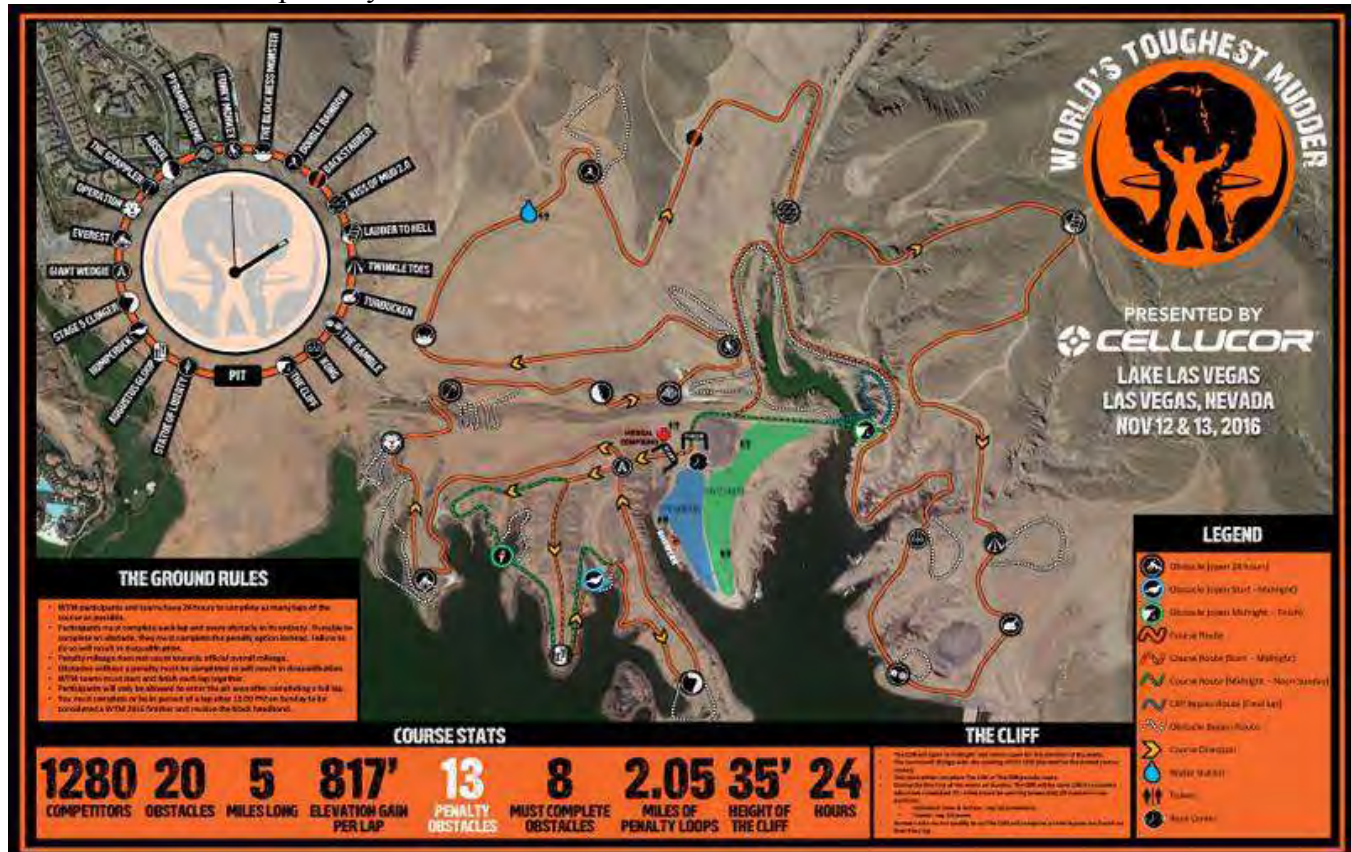
I have no plans until next spring/summer when I hope to summit Mt. Blanc again, but this time ski down (likely in June), and climb the Eiger (but not the North Face!) in July or August. The bulls in Pamplona are also beckoning...

A Description of Each Obstacle

(I highly recommend [this 8-minute video](#) one of the participants posted of all of the obstacles.)

(For six obstacles, I include the pictures Susan took of me doing each one, but she couldn't get out to the far-flung obstacles and still get back to the pit stop to support me, so I've included others' pictures as well – a special hat tip to Brad Kerr.)

Here's the course map – they're in the order of the clock/wheel on the left:



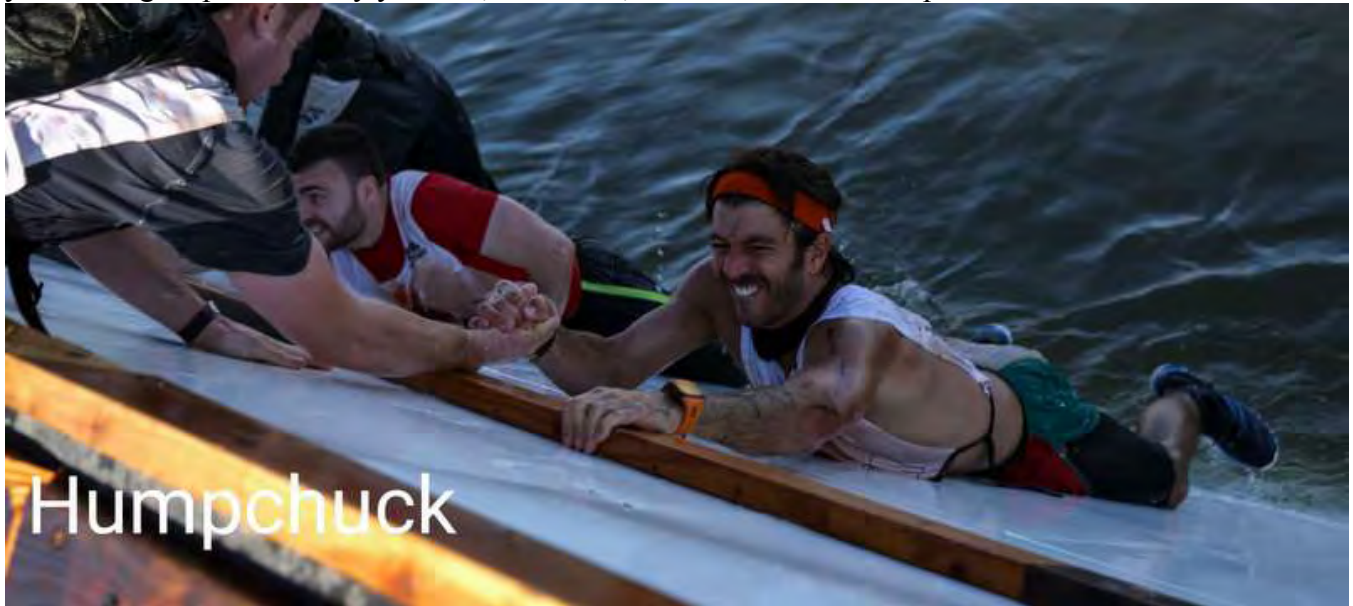
Augustus Gloop

This is a new obstacle that involves jumping in a neck-deep pool of water, wading under a fence (leaving 6-8 inches of breathing space), ducking your head into a tube, and climbing up it (using hand-/foot-holds on either side) while a firehose poured a ton of lakewater on your head. This obstacle would be a nightmare for anyone who has a fear of water/drowning or is claustrophobic.



Humpchuck

This involved wading/swimming across a short (maybe 100-foot) segment of the lake and climbing up a short, slick wall (with three horizontal planks) at the other end. If you had decent upper body strength, you could get up the wall by yourself; otherwise, other racers had to help.



Statue of Liberty

On the map, this appears as the first obstacle, but it didn't open until midnight (along with The Cliff), replacing Humpchuck (in other words, the first and last obstacles on the course were different in the second half of the race). Like Humpchuck, you had a swim a short distance in the lake, but instead of a wall at the end, you had to hold a lit torch (if you dropped it or the flame went out for any reason, you had to do it again). Being in the water at night was chilling, but otherwise it was an easy obstacle – and very cool visually, as you can see in these pics:



Stage 5 Clinger

This was another new obstacle that really challenged one's upper body strength. You walked under the monkey bars to the wall, climbed up a couple of easy steps, turned around and used the monkey bars (or side rails) to work your way back to the front, then grabbed the front edge and turned yourself around again, and then (the hard part) you needed to pull yourself up onto the "roof" (the key was putting your feet on the diagonal side supports). They made this easier after a couple of laps by putting up rope ladders and cargo nets – [here](#) is a video of it then.



Giant Wedgie

This is the huge A-frame cargo net that we ran under right after the start. It was simple – just climb up the net, over the top, and down – but it was long and tiring (and if you're afraid of heights, look out!). Susan got many nice pics of it – and me doing it:



Here I am going up and down it:



Everest

This is an iconic Tough Mudder obstacle, in which you run up a curved wall, grab the top, pull yourself over, and climb down. There was an interesting twist here: the left third of the wall (labeled Everest 1.0) was quite a bit shorter and had a plank to grip at the top, so it was much easier to do solo – I'd guess at least half of the racers could do it without assistance. The rest of the wall (labeled Everest 2.0) was higher and didn't have as good of a grip, so very few folks could do it solo (myself included). Thus, racers had three choices: skip it entirely and do a penalty walk that included going in the lake (like Statue of Liberty without the torch); do Everest 1.0 and do a shorter penalty walk with only a bit of water; or do Everest 2.0 without penalty.

Even though I'm not able to do Everest 2.0 solo (even when my legs are fresh), I opted for this every time because there were always fellow Mudders at the top who would grab my hands and pull me up (except for lap 15 when I had to take the penalty). Then, one of the people who helped me could leave and continue racing and I'd stay and help the Mudders behind me. (Racers are allowed to help each other on the course, but no spectators/pit crew are allowed to provide any assistance (water, food, a push up a wall, etc.) whatsoever – only in the pit area after each lap.)

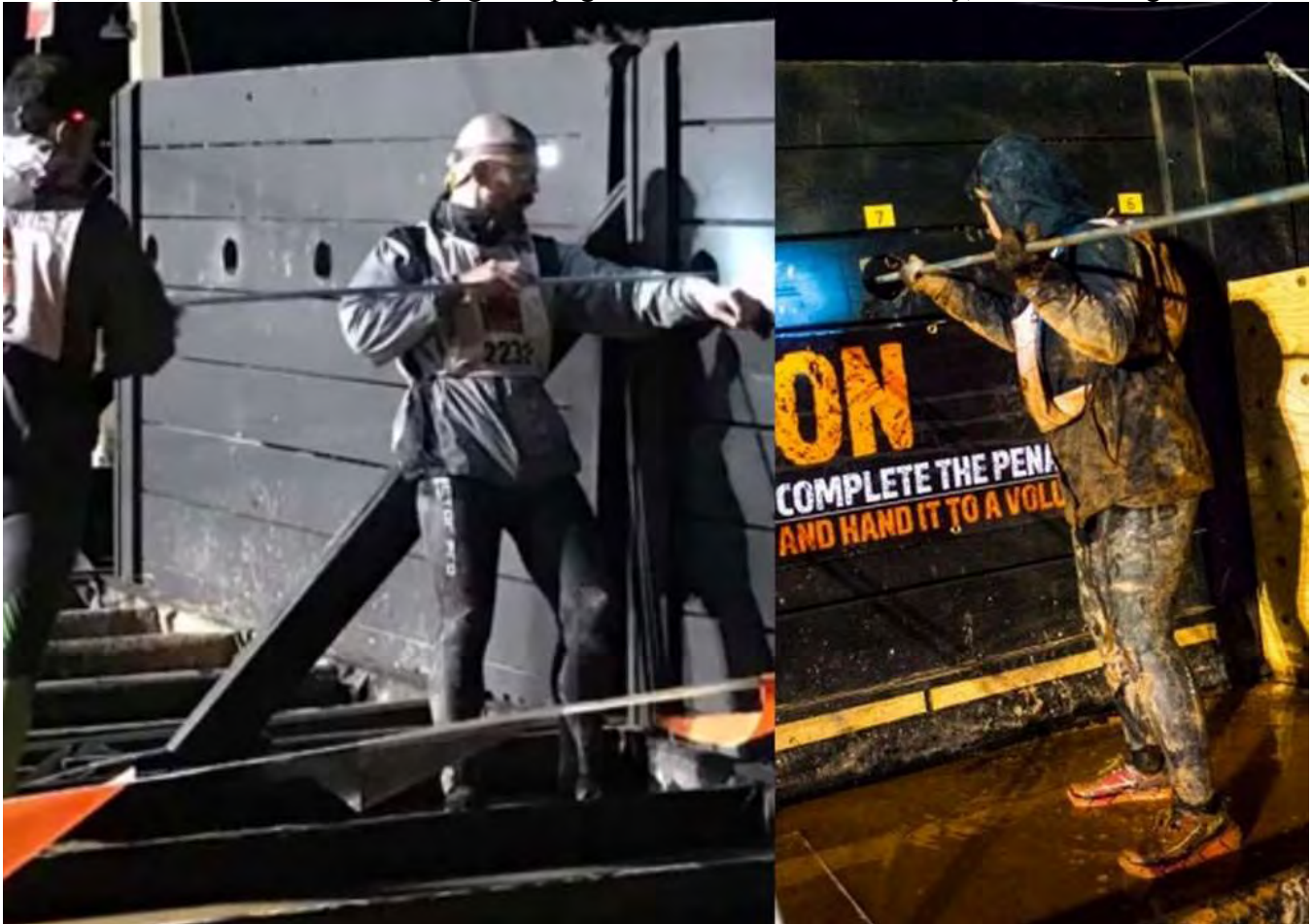
This picture shows how racers help each other:



(Funny story: my 76-year-old mother did a TM in New Hampshire with me in August. Unfortunately, she is the world's slowest runner so when we came to Everest 2.0, she couldn't get within a country mile of our outstretched hands. She had given up and was walking around it when a woman at the top suggested that we form a human pyramid at the base so my mom could climb up on top of us high enough to reach the people grabbing down from the top. As you can see from this video, it worked: <https://youtu.be/EgNnqvO2zWA> (4:31)! Everyone was cheering her and giving her high-fives!)

Operation

This was a new one that really messed with a lot of people (to some extent, myself included)! You stand in a couple inches of water, pick up a 10-foot metal pole with a hook at the end, poke it through a 4-inch hole, hook a rubber wristband hanging on a peg on a wall about six feet away, and then bring it back.



Simple, right? Except there's one catch: if your pole touches the side of the 4-inch hole (and maybe the peg? I was never sure), you get a heck of an electric shock – like putting your finger in an electric socket! While it wasn't strong enough to cause me to drop the pole, it hurt like hell and caused me (and everyone else getting shocked) to yell loudly in pain (it must have been truly comical for spectators – LOL!).

Making things worse, sometimes I got shocked even when I did it perfectly – apparently, if the person next to you got a shock, you would too because you were both standing in the same water. Now *that's* frustrating!

Of the 15 times I completed this obstacle, I got through without a shock five times, got shocked once five times, and got shocked *twice* five times – 15 shocks in total – ARRRRRH! You can see why many competitors didn't even try it – they just picked up a sandbag and did a short penalty walk. But I'm glad I did it for three reasons:

- 1) I like the feeling of overcoming a mental challenge – knowing I was going to get jolted, but still persevering;
- 2) In the middle and late stages of the race, I was often feeling really lethargic – and that jolt sure woke me up!; and
- 3) Given that I completed 15 laps with only 18 minutes to spare, if I'd done this (or any other penalty) on every lap, I wouldn't have made it.

The Grappler

This is a 50-foot cliff that you climb by grabbing onto the rope, which has lots of helpful knots. It was pretty straightforward the first couple of laps until they took the ropes away and left them coiled at the base. We then had to throw one end (which had a billiard-sized ball attached) up the cliff and hook it on the platform at the top, as you can see the guy doing in the top picture below. This was very difficult and they only gave you three attempts, after which you had to do a tough penalty walk. I was able to hook it on my 2nd or 3rd attempts for the next few laps – and then they made it much easier: if someone was going up the rope, they allowed you to grab the rope and climb it.



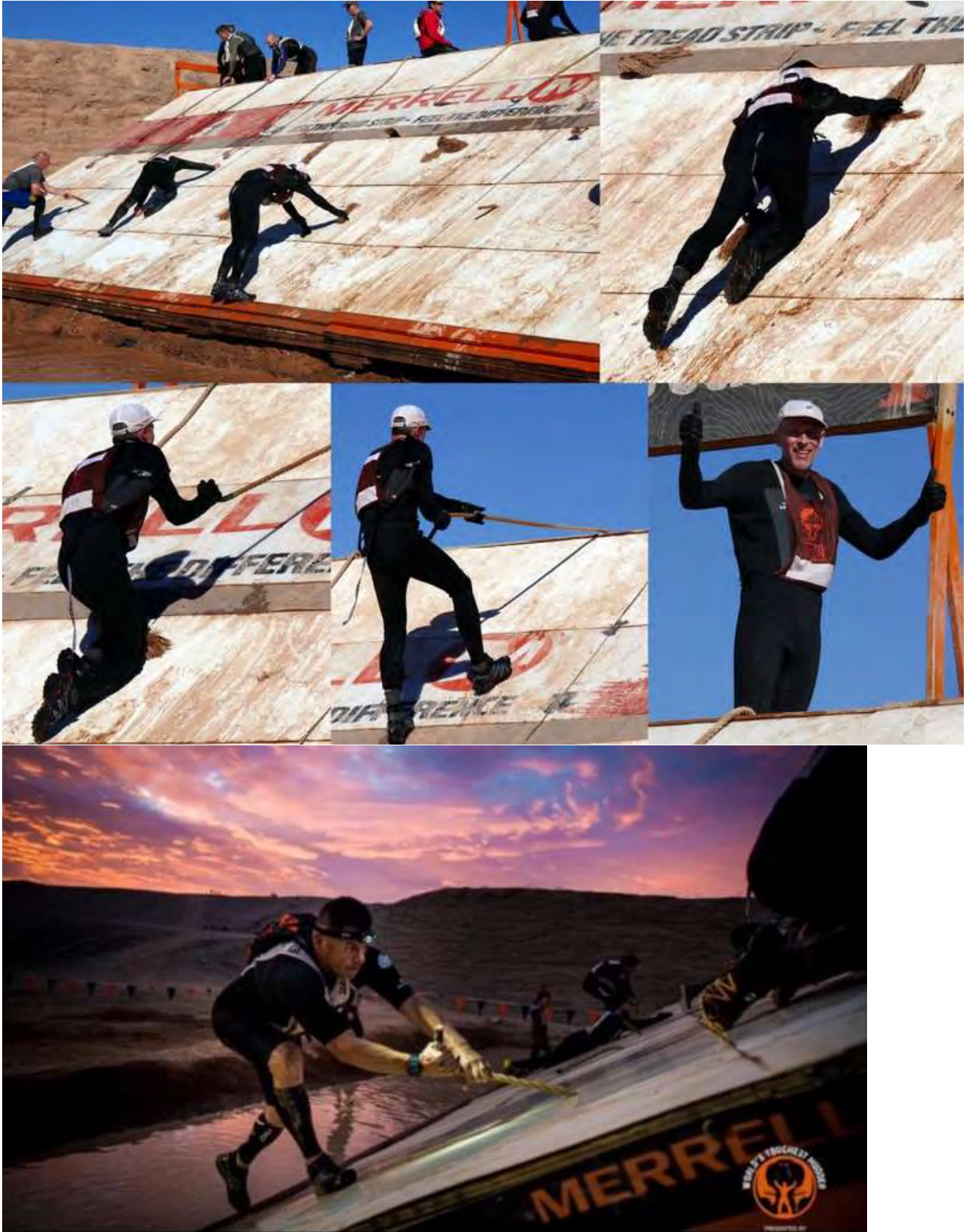
Abseil

This is the exact opposite of The Grapppler (and much easier): after a few minutes of walking along the top of the cliff, you rappelled down. Piece a cake (as long as you're not afraid of heights)!



Pyramid Scheme

This is a slick, sloping wall with two rope-stub handholds and a top rope. If you're tall and have upper-body strength, it wasn't too hard, but many needed a push from the bottom and/or a hand from the top.



Funky Monkey

This obstacle was my daddy – it's the only one I failed repeatedly (much to my frustration – if you heard loud cursing, that was me!). It was a new twist on a classic TM obstacle. First (as in prior iterations of this obstacle) you had to go up a set of maybe a dozen monkey bars (see lower left picture of me doing so at another TM race). But then it got tricky: you had to reach to a horizontal wheel and spin around on it and grab a big vertical wheel (which I'm doing in the top picture), and then go down two more smaller vertical wheels to the landing platform (lower right picture).



I completed it two of the first three laps, but then failed the 4th time because my grip and upper-body strength was fading. Fortunately, however, all night long they put a plank out so that you could skip the monkey bars and start on the top wheel, which made it quick enough that I was able to do it again. But then once the sun rose, they took the planks away for the last few laps and I never completed it again – I just went straight to the penalty walk (thankfully some clever Mudders had dumped most of the sand out of many of the bags, so that made the five-minute walk easier):



The Block Ness Monster

This one requires a bunch of people working well as a team. As you can see from the series of pics below, everyone jumps into neck-deep water (this was the only water obstacle in the middle three miles of the course, so it felt really good most laps) and pushes on the rotating, triangular-shaped thingie (I don't know what to call it). On each rotation, 1-2 people hold onto the top, are pulled over, and then grab the top and help keep it rotating so the others can get over. Then repeat this once more and you're done – great fun!



Double Rainbow

This was a new obstacle – a variation on the classic King of the Swingers. The best way to see it is Susan's short video clip here: <https://youtu.be/2QxAalZY6Tc>. It started the same, with a jump, grab the handle of the bar, and swing down and up. But then, instead of stretching to ring the bell and dropping into the water, you grabbed another handle/bar and swung over to an airbag, thereby staying dry. If you had a lot of coordination and upper-body strength, you could quickly transfer one hand and then the other from the first handle to the second (as the guy is doing in the lower right picture below) or even release both hands from the first handle and grab the second, but I preferred the more conservative approach: grab the second handle by one hand (as I'm doing in the top picture), come to a complete stop as your body swings forward, then back, and then when it swings forward again, grab the second handle with your other hand and use two hands to get safely to the airbag (as I'm doing in the lower left picture). This required a lot of upper-body strength and, after the first few laps, a lot of people did a lot of swimming (plus a penalty walk). Fortunately, my technique worked for me until the very end – I nailed this one every time.



Backstabber

This is a peg wall – use a peg to steady yourself as you take a big step up and stand on the narrow black lower plank, and then use two pegs plus jamming your feet in the notches on either side to get up and over. This was a required obstacle (meaning you couldn't take a penalty walk), so there were a lot of folks helping out a lot of other folks...



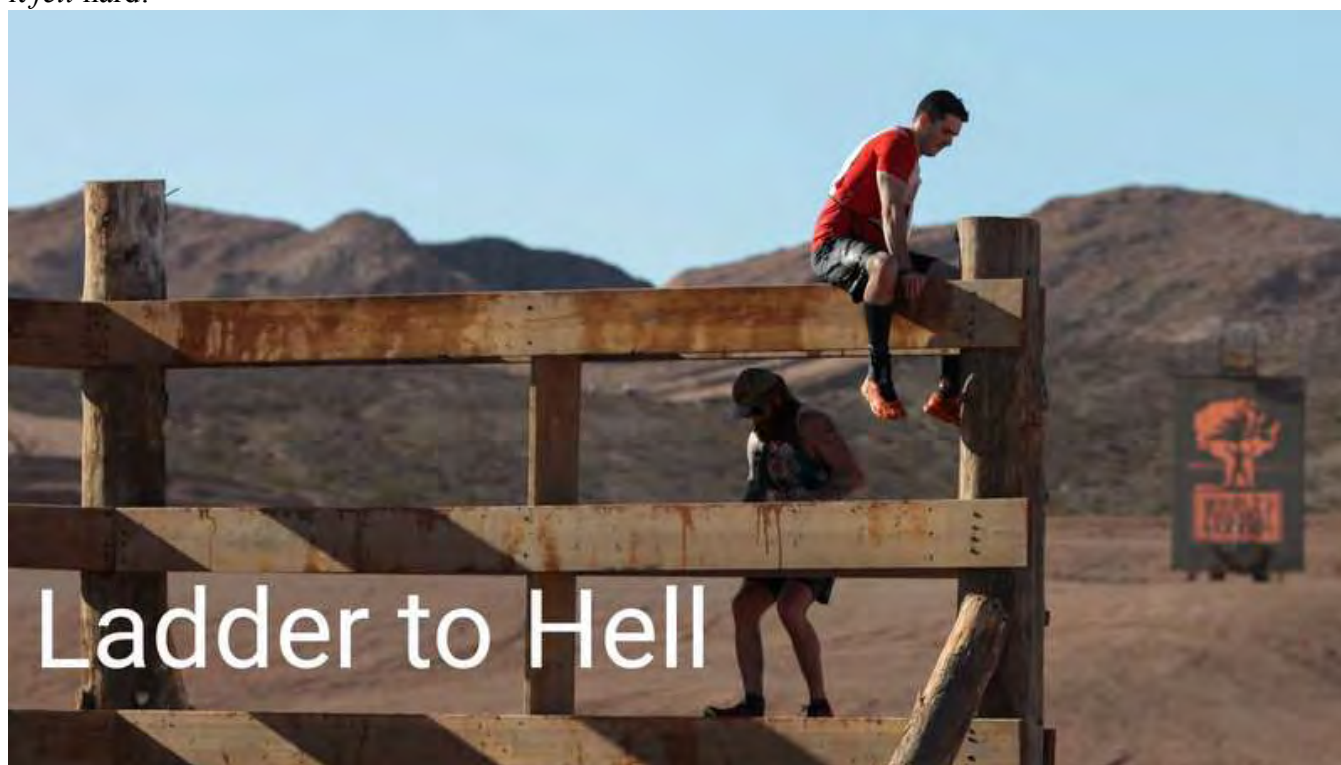
Kiss of Mud 2.0

This involved crawling under barbed wire through mud (and, at times, some muddy water) for maybe 50 feet. I long ago discovered that there's a hard way to do this – crawling – and an easy way – rolling. (You can see me doing so in Susan's short video clip here: <https://youtu.be/2QxAalZY6Tc>.) Yes, the latter can make you a little dizzy, but relative to crawling it's so much easier and faster and you don't get scraped up. I don't know why most people haven't figured this out – try it, you'll like it!



Ladder to Hell

This wasn't particularly hard – it's just that was at the highest point of the course, after a long uphill, so it *felt* hard!



Twinkle Toes

The long uphill to Ladder to Hell is followed by an equally long downhill to Twinkle Toes, a classic obstacle that TM brought back for this race, which requires you to balance while walking 20 feet (with a little pyramid in the middle) across a 3-inch wide plank, with water below. The first time I was too slow and fell, but then figured it out and nailed it the rest of the time until they closed it about halfway through the race (I'm not sure why).



Turducken

This requires you to pull yourself with a rope down a tube, drop into neck-deep water, crawl up and over a dirt wall (using a rope cargo net), go back into a second pool of water, duck your head for an instant under a log, and climb out using another net. It wasn't hard and it was usually a nice cool-down, as it was the first water obstacle in three miles since Block Ness Monster. Here are a couple of pictures of it from other TM races (yes, that's Mark James and Maxine Colvey on the left at TM Philadelphia this spring; both of them completed 60 miles at the WTM):



The Gamble

A new variation on the standard wall obstacles – this was a long wall with six different ways to get over it, some easy and some quite hard. Which wall you had to tackle was determined by the roll of a die on a table in front of the obstacle. You weren't allowed to re-roll, so if you rolled a number that corresponded with a section of the wall that was too difficult, you could do a penalty ice dip in Arctic Enema (a very bad idea, as it'll freeze up and cramp your muscles).



Kong

This was a fun new one. It started on a platform quite high up (another thrilling obstacle for those afraid of heights!) and you had to use five gymnastics rings to get other side – this was just pure upper-body strength. I had no problems with it the first two times, but barely made it across the third time – I had to use two hands on each ring – so I was feeling dread as I approached it a fourth time. But I was pleasantly surprised to see that they'd taken away the rings and put in two straight bars hanging down from chains, plus had added a slackline, so it was quite easy, requiring only balance, not upper-body strength. HOWEVER, this assumes that you were tall enough to stand on the slackline and be able to reach the bar – if not, it was much more difficult – and one guy had a very scary fall. Dropping 12 feet into the airbag was no big deal – it happened countless times – except he had the misfortune of falling right in between two big airbags (you can see it happen at 2:52:55 on [this video](#)). He could have been seriously injured, but after being down for about a minute, he continued and completed 55 miles.

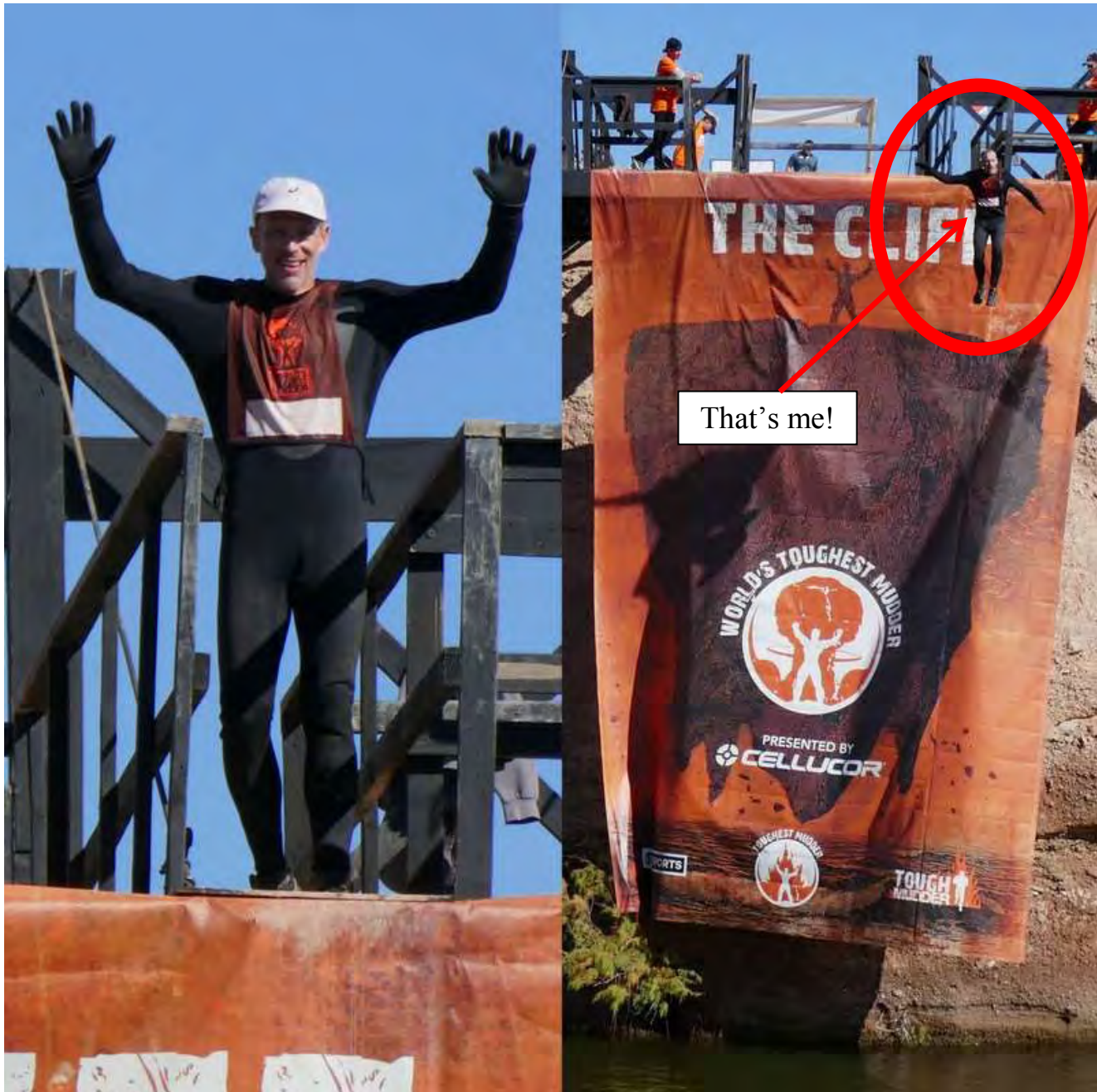


The Cliff

This is the iconic obstacle at the World's Toughest Mudder, and to build the suspense, they don't open it until midnight. It's very simple: step off a 35-foot platform, plunge feet-first into the lake, swim 100 feet to the other side and climb out using a rope cargo net.

If you're afraid of heights and/or water, this is your ultimate nightmare – 35 feet is REALLY HIGH! And there's plenty of opportunity to get hurt because if you land slightly wrong, you can break your tailbone (on one jump, I was leaning back a tiny bit and bruised it, and the female winner a couple of years ago, Amelia Boone, actually broke it – but kept on racing and won!).

If you wanted, you could skip it, but this required you to climb down to the shore and do a much longer swim, so it cost an extra five minutes at least I heard. I found it to be a thrill and enjoyed the half-dozen times I did it.



Here's a picture I liked of someone else jumping:



After climbing out of the water, it was a short jog back to the finish/start area (the third short video clip [here](#) shows me finishing my 15th and final lap):

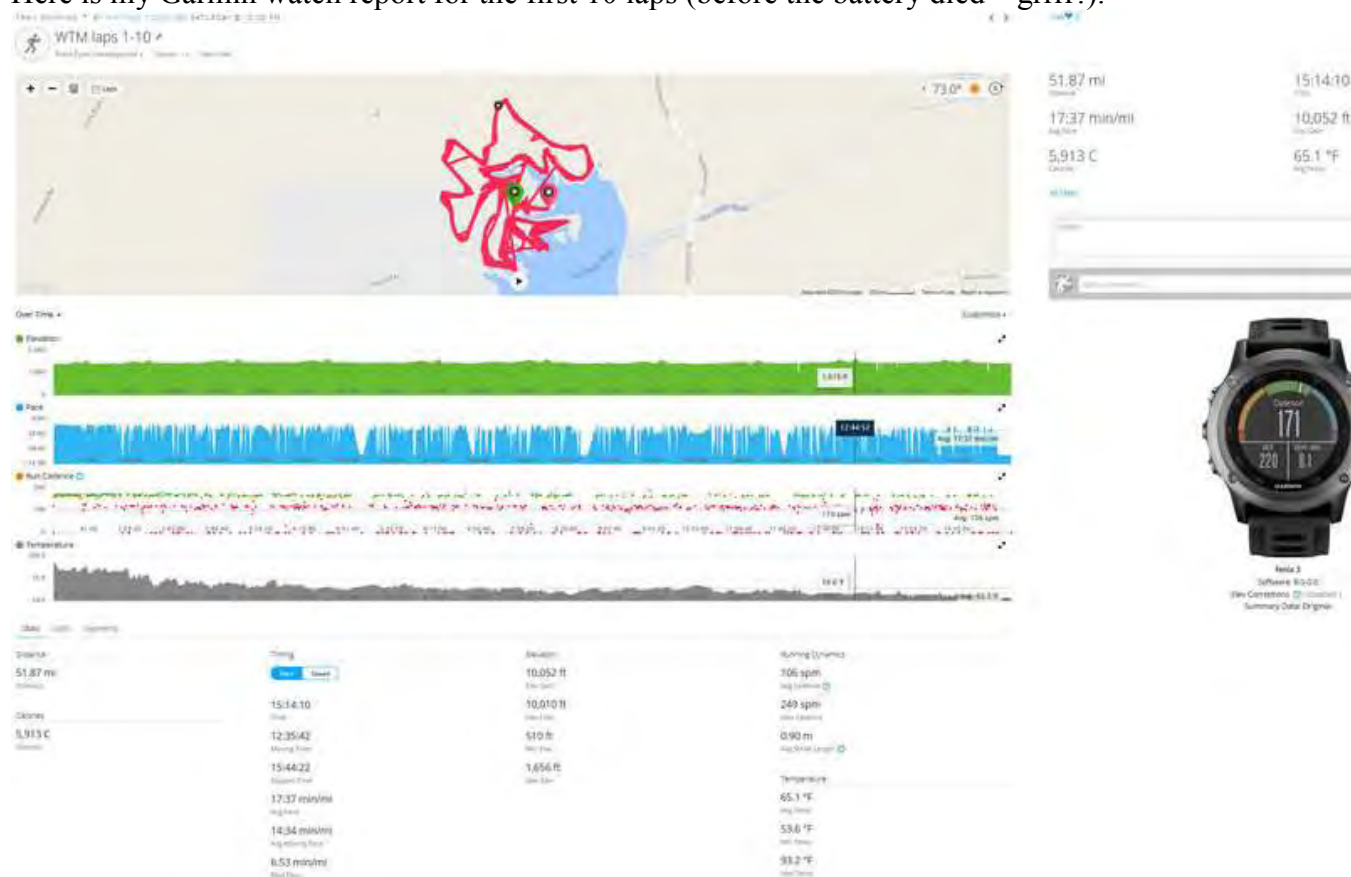


Appendix

Here is my lap report:

RACERESULTS		
World's Toughest Mudder		
Athlete		
Whitney Tilson Bib: 2238		
City, State: NEW YORK NY US Division: M 50-54		
Division Place: 1 Overall Place: 58		
LOCATION	TIME	PACE
# of Laps	15	
Total Miles	75	
Lap 1	48:12	9:39/mile
Lap 2	1:04:27	12:54/mile
Lap 3	1:23:34	16:43/mile
Lap 4	1:12:45	14:33/mile
Lap 5	1:26:09	17:14/mile
Lap 6	1:33:31	18:43/mile
Lap 7	1:28:26	17:42/mile
Lap 8	1:25:09	17:02/mile
Lap 9	1:26:20	17:16/mile
Lap 10	1:35:20	19:04/mile
Lap 11	1:41:18	20:16/mile
Lap 12	1:36:28	19:18/mile
Lap 13	1:39:24	19:53/mile
Lap 14	1:38:44	19:45/mile
Lap 15	1:39:02	19:49/mile

Here is my Garmin watch report for the first 10 laps (before the battery died – grrrr!):



Fenix 3
Software: 8.0.0.0
New Corrections: 0
Summary Data: Original

Here are my mile splits from my watch (again, just the first 10 laps):

Splits	Time	Cumulative Time	Moving Time	Distance	Elev Gain	Elev Loss	Avg Pace	Avg Moving Pace	Best Pace	Avg Run Cadence	Max Run Cadence	Avg Stride Length	Avg Temperature	Calories
1	8:48.8	8:48.8	8:42	1.00	89	66	8:48	8:42	8:53	168	172	1.12	87.8	127
2	9:04.7	17:53	9:03	1.00	82	56	9:05	9:03	8:04	170	175	1.06	84.6	130
3	9:47.8	27:57	9:40	1.00	138	141	9:48	9:40	7:58	162	174	1.08	88.4	126
4	10:08	37:59	10:07	1.00	180	184	10:08	10:07	7:02	184	236	1.06	85.2	120
5	10:47	48:32	10:28	1.00	98	105	10:47	10:28	7:34	153	180	0.98	85.8	125
6	9:05.4	57:37	9:02	1.00	89	82	9:05	9:02	7:01	169	184	1.04	83.9	127
7	13:43	1:11:20	13:27	1.00	115	89	13:43	13:27	8:55	127	178	1.05	84.5	120
8	13:30	1:24:50	13:19	1.00	128	157	13:30	13:19	7:40	190	179	0.97	77.7	116
9	14:04	1:38:54	13:36	1.00	203	137	14:04	13:36	8:00	125	174	0.99	73.4	119
10	12:40	1:51:34	12:12	1.00	128	131	12:40	12:12	8:21	148	188	0.89	72.8	123
11	14:00	2:05:34	13:21	1.00	89	64	14:00	13:21	7:47	125	174	0.94	71.2	125
12	15:00	2:20:38	13:30	1.00	151	154	15:00	13:30	7:58	124	179	0.99	71.9	118
13	13:54	2:38:27	11:18	0.73	184	95	13:22	11:45	7:44	95	201	0.94	67.9	77
14	15:14	2:53:42	13:45	1.00	184	184	15:14	13:45	7:51	90	224	0.97	70.4	116
15	16:08	3:09:51	12:31	1.00	137	246	16:08	12:31	7:35	106	181	0.97	68.0	117
16	16:11	3:29:02	13:11	1.00	98	108	16:11	13:11	7:53	95	173	1.00	69.2	121
17	14:08	3:43:08	11:39	1.00	144	128	14:08	11:39	7:12	124	241	0.94	69.8	119
18	14:24	3:57:32	14:09	1.00	128	98	14:24	14:09	7:49	190	178	0.88	67.7	119
19	16:59	4:14:31	13:52	1.00	131	187	16:59	13:52	8:03	106	175	0.94	64.5	118
20	14:18	4:28:49	14:05	1.00	217	213	14:17	14:05	8:54	125	208	0.89	66.2	117
21	13:01	4:41:50	12:20	1.00	138	133	13:01	12:20	7:53	138	235	0.92	63.1	117
22	21:20	5:03:09	8:47	0.32	10	30	-	27:14	8:51	40	175	1.11	60.2	34
23	16:34	5:19:44	12:02	1.00	144	106	16:34	12:02	7:35	111	242	0.87	66.4	118
24	18:02	5:37:48	17:21	1.00	106	115	18:02	17:21	7:56	107	226	0.92	67.6	113
25	16:43	5:54:28	15:01	1.00	171	128	16:43	15:01	8:56	113	174	0.90	65.4	109
26	15:56	6:10:24	15:09	1.00	207	217	15:56	15:09	8:19	118	227	0.86	64.0	109
27	16:37	6:27:00	13:56	1.00	151	203	16:37	13:56	8:04	113	208	0.88	63.5	112
28	19:17	6:46:17	14:01	1.00	56	52	19:17	14:01	7:50	100	183	0.90	63.7	124
29	21:45	7:08:02	17:16	1.00	121	138	21:45	17:16	9:39	96	242	0.84	63.5	102
30	19:59	7:28:01	17:06	1.00	144	89	19:59	17:06	7:12	98	184	0.89	64.4	106
31	19:30	7:47:32	17:01	1.00	171	187	19:30	17:01	7:53	97	180	0.86	61.7	111
32	16:42	8:04:14	16:04	1.00	174	240	16:42	16:04	8:09	117	229	0.88	60.0	111
33	23:36	8:27:50	16:29	1.00	361	423	23:37	16:29	8:30	86	348	0.85	60.0	112
34	6:11.0	8:34:01	0	0.02	3	3	0	-	38:19	20	121	0.31	63.9	1
35	16:36	8:52:37	16:43	1.00	151	131	16:36	16:43	8:02	107	229	0.81	62.2	115
36	20:24	9:13:01	17:53	1.00	128	128	20:25	17:53	8:04	100	182	0.82	63.4	108
37	16:21	9:31:23	15:32	1.00	210	246	16:22	15:32	9:27	104	186	0.85	63.3	109
38	17:54	9:49:17	17:18	1.00	258	253	17:54	17:18	9:15	111	178	0.84	64.9	107
39	14:48	10:04:05	13:59	1.00	121	135	14:48	13:59	8:49	127	178	0.84	63.2	113
40	28:22	10:32:28	18:16	1.00	82	92	28:21	18:16	8:00	73	209	0.84	66.3	113
41	18:48	10:51:15	18:50	1.00	187	151	18:49	18:50	7:21	99	209	0.83	60.7	111
42	16:38	11:07:53	16:05	1.00	249	246	16:38	16:05	9:20	119	175	0.83	59.4	113
43	17:12	11:25:05	15:53	1.00	190	213	17:12	15:53	9:02	111	178	0.85	61.4	111
44	27:13	11:52:18	18:48	1.00	476	482	27:12	18:48	8:21	79	173	0.79	61.8	104
45	18:18	12:10:33	18:04	1.00	128	112	18:16	18:04	8:35	105	249	0.87	59.2	118
46	16:48	12:27:18	15:28	1.00	213	128	16:48	15:28	8:23	111	178	0.86	59.0	112
47	19:31	12:46:48	18:18	1.00	389	121	19:30	18:18	9:16	109	201	0.77	58.2	101
48	16:59	13:03:47	15:14	1.00	118	299	16:59	15:14	8:36	114	240	0.82	58.8	115
49	23:11	13:26:58	16:02	1.00	1,194	1,201	23:11	16:02	9:11	74	234	0.90	58.3	94
50	19:48	13:46:46	16:03	1.00	151	154	19:48	16:03	10:03	104	236	0.80	56.8	109
51	21:14	14:08:01	17:58	1.00	253	154	21:15	17:58	9:59	97	173	0.81	57.4	100
52	19:24	14:27:25	16:27	1.00	187	217	19:24	16:27	9:41	104	201	0.78	56.0	113
53	16:29	14:43:54	16:50	1.00	187	246	16:29	16:50	9:57	117	237	0.82	57.2	117
54	30:18	15:14:10	16:38	0.81	630	653	27:28	18:06	10:09	52	173	0.97	56.6	78
Summary	15:16:16	15:16:16	12:35:42	51.83	10,952	18,896	17:37	14:34	8:53	140	240	0.80	60.1	3,913

Our Mt. Kenya Trekking Adventure

By Whitney Tilson, 12/23/16

(The latest version of this pdf is posted at: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonMtKenya.pdf)

Susan, Alison, Emily, Katharine and I are in Kenya for the holidays, visiting my parents, sister (Dana) and her 11-year-old son (Benjamin), who live here.

We arrived on Saturday night and, after spending a relaxing day on Sunday, seven of us (all but my mom, who broke a bone in her foot over Thanksgiving) set off on Monday morning to do a big trek on Mt. Kenya. Here are two pics as we were leaving my parents' home, which is about 40 minutes outside Nairobi:





Mt. Kenya, at 17,057', is the highest mountain in Kenya and the 2nd highest in Africa (after Kilimanjaro).

It took us about six hours (roads in Kenya in general leave much to be desired) to drive to the bandas (huts) at the Mt. Kenya National Park – here are two pics of them:





We arrived in the late afternoon, did a short hike and saw the scenery:







This pic shows the mountains we were about to tackle:



It was a really cold night (no heating in the bandas; I'd guess it was under 40 degrees), so we huddled in our sleeping bags and wore hats to bed! After breakfast, we all packed days packs, did the hair braiding (but of course!), took some pics, and set off!





(We gave our heavy clothing and other things we wouldn't need during the day to the 10 porters (plus a cook, a guide, and our host, Tom Gregory, the co-owner of the trekking company we used, African Ascents – in the red jacket on the left in the two pics above). It was like the old British expeditions to The Dark Continent, which felt a little lame – but we were creating lots of much-needed employment...and it was a long hike! The porters blew by us in the first mile or two, carrying enormous packs that must have weighed ~80 lbs. – in addition to our crap, they were also hauling tents and food for everyone.)







It took us about nine hours to hike 8.5 miles, including more than 4,000 feet of vertical (the bandas were at 9,600 feet, we hiked up the rim of a huge gorge up to a max of 13,850 feet, and then descended a very steep trail down to the campsite on the edge of a small, beautiful, deep (400'), glacier-fed lake called Lake Michaelson.

On the way up, we stopped for a rest at a stream:





We also mugged with a chameleon:





These two pics show the gorge well (Lake Michaelson is in the background of the second one):





These pics show the final, steep descent to the campsite – you can (barely) see the tents in the background next to the lake in the first and third pics):











This pic shows one tent (two of us shared each) with the lake just after the sun went down:



This was a VERY arduous trek – nothing steep (other than going down the last bit) or particularly difficult, but the distance, elevation and elevation gain were BEASTS (our guide said he almost always does this trek over two days). But Benjamin, the girls and my dad were total troopers (the guide said my dad, at age 75, was the oldest guy he'd ever guided up to Lake Michaelson). Yes, at certain points two of my girls (who shall remain nameless!) did get a little restless and were muttering, "Whose dumb idea was this?!" (for the record: this was my sister's great idea), but overall spirits remained high.

It was cold at the bandas, but it was REALLY cold at the campsite – I'd guess it dropped below 30 once the sun went down. Here we are in the meal tent, wearing every scrap of clothing we had, whipping off our gloves to scoop in a few bites of (fortunately quite tasty) food before our hands got frozen. It was pretty comical!





Of course it wouldn't be a Whitney Vacation without some extra suffering on my part, so after we all went to our tents at 8pm, I awoke at 1am (having gotten maybe one hour of crappy sleep – despite a minus-20-degree sleeping bag and wearing all of my clothes, my toes never warmed up and it was hard to breathe at 13,000 feet) and, with a Kenyan guide, David, set out at 1:45am for Point Lenana, the third-highest summit on Mt. Kenya at 16,355'. Here is the moon reflecting in the lake shortly after we left camp:

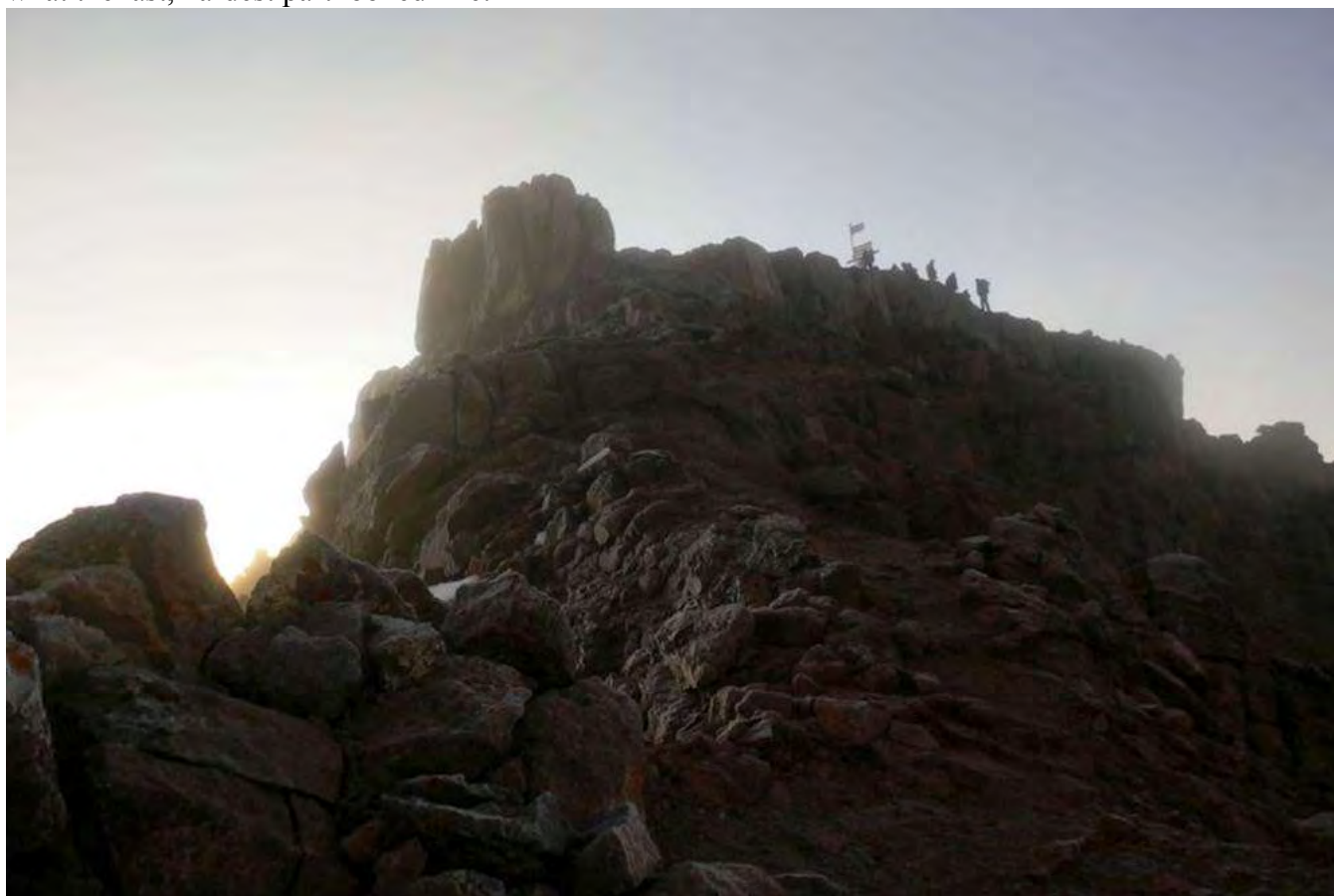


I'd guess the hike to the top was about 4-5 miles, with a 3,355-foot elevation gain, all in the pitch black – the goal was to arrive at the summit just as the sun rose.

I maintained a slow but steady pace and had plenty of warm clothing (by the time I reached the top, I was wearing six layers on my upper body, including the heated vest that saved my butt at the [World's Toughest Mudder](#)), so had a consistent body temperature – not too hot, not too cold. Also, thanks no doubt in part to Diamox (a great drug to offset the effects of altitude), I didn't have any headache or feel nausea.

But I sure was fatigued – every few minutes during the steep parts (maybe half of the hike), I had to stop and rest on my hiking poles for a moment, taking a few deep breaths before continuing. The altitude wasn't much more than [Mt. Blanc](#) (15,777') or the [Matterhorn](#) (14,692'), but for some reason I felt more fatigued – probably a combination of lack of sleep, hiking in the dark and not having a friend to talk to and motivate me.

It wasn't because the climbing was difficult. Unlike Mt. Blanc and certainly the Matterhorn, there was no snow and at no time did I need to use my hands – just a long trudge in the dark up a fairly steep loose dirt path. This pic, taken a short distance below the summit on my descent, is pretty representative of what the last, hardest part looked like:



At about 5:20am, maybe 15 minutes from the summit, David sat down behind a big rock where we were sheltered from the wind...and didn't get up. After a couple of minutes, I asked, "Why are we stopping? I'm good to go – let's get to the summit!" He replied that we had to wait a bit – we were ahead of

schedule and it didn't make any sense to summit before the sun rose – in that case, we'd just be sitting up there, freezing, waiting for the sun to rise.

He was, of course, exactly right. After 15-20 minutes, we kept going, summited just before 6am, and saw the sun rise. As you can see from the pics, it was an AMAZING sight!







David and me



After a few minutes, we retreated down some metal rungs drilled into the rock (making this the highest “[via ferrata](#)” in the world) to escape the howling wind, drank some water, wolfed down some peanut M&Ms and small Snickers bars, and headed down.

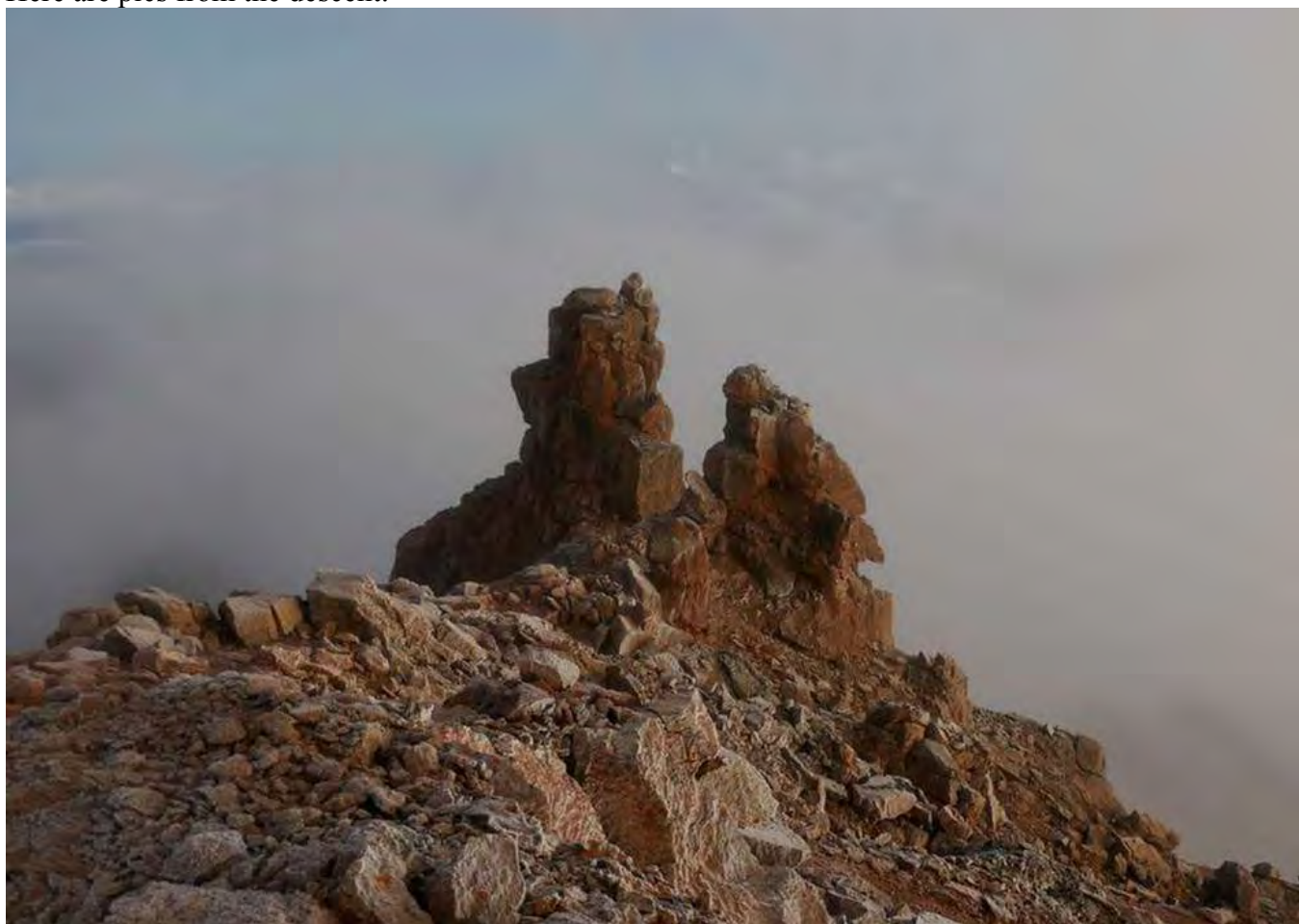
This pic is of one of the sister peaks that are the highest on Mt. Kenya, Batian (17,057') and Nelion (17,021), both about 700' higher than Lenana:



With a crew of 8, there was no way I could tackle them on this trip, but I will summit them on a future trip to Kenya – mark my words. They both require a skilled guide (like Tom) lead climbing up multiple pitches, with a difficulty maxing out at 5.8, which is right at my limit, so it would be a great challenge (especially when you consider the altitude and the cold).

We were the first people to summit that morning, but by the time we started down maybe 10 others (six trekkers and four guides) had joined us. All were coming up two other more common routes, likely part of five-day treks. I only saw two other people the entire 6+ hours: about 10 minutes into the descent, a guide with a young woman, who was really hurting – she looked like hell warmed over...

Here are pics from the descent:





David and I really flew down – we both landed on our butts a couple of times and I really banged my knee on a rock! – so we got back to the camp about 45 minutes ahead of schedule at 8:15am (in sum, the ascent took us a little over four hours, including the stop, and the descent a bit over two hours).

We weren't expected back until 9am, so everyone was just getting moving. We had breakfast, packed up, and headed out a little after 10am, taking ~7 hours to descend to the bandas. Here are my sister, dad and me at the end of the trek:



We spent another night at the bandas and drove back to Nairobi after breakfast yesterday.

All in all, a tremendous and memorable adventure!

My 2nd cousin, his wife and two young girls arrive from Doha this afternoon. We'll spend a couple of days here, and then fly down to the coast to my parents' [beach house](#) on Lamu Island for a week before heading home on the 1st (landing at JFK early afternoon on the 2nd – school starts on the 3rd for Emily and Katharine, while Alison connects directly to a flight to Tel Aviv for a [Birthright Israel](#) trip – phew!).

Happy holidays and new year to all!

Whitney

My Alps Trifecta to Support KIPP Charter Schools

By Whitney Tilson, 9/2/17

(The latest version of this pdf is posted at: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonAlps17.pdf)

Last week I climbed three challenging Alps peaks, the Eiger, Jungfrau and Mönch, to raise more than \$100,000 for my favorite charity, KIPP charter schools in NYC, and support the thousands of KIPPsters climbing the mountain to college (if you'd like to add your support, the donation page for my climbs is [here](#)). Here's a picture of these three mountains:



If you don't have the time or interest to read my entire write-up, I suggest skimming it to see the pictures and watching [this](#) 3:43 video with the highlights of my Eiger climb. I got some great heart-stopping footage!

Background

In July 2015, my wife and I spent a week hiking the famous Haute Route from Chamonix, France (the base of Mt. Blanc) to Zermatt, Switzerland (the base of the Matterhorn), mostly glacier trekking for 8-10 hours every day, staying in alpine huts. It was a grueling but magnificent experience, but in one way it left me dissatisfied: every day, as I looked up at the iconic peaks, I felt that I wanted to be *on top of them*, not in their shadows!

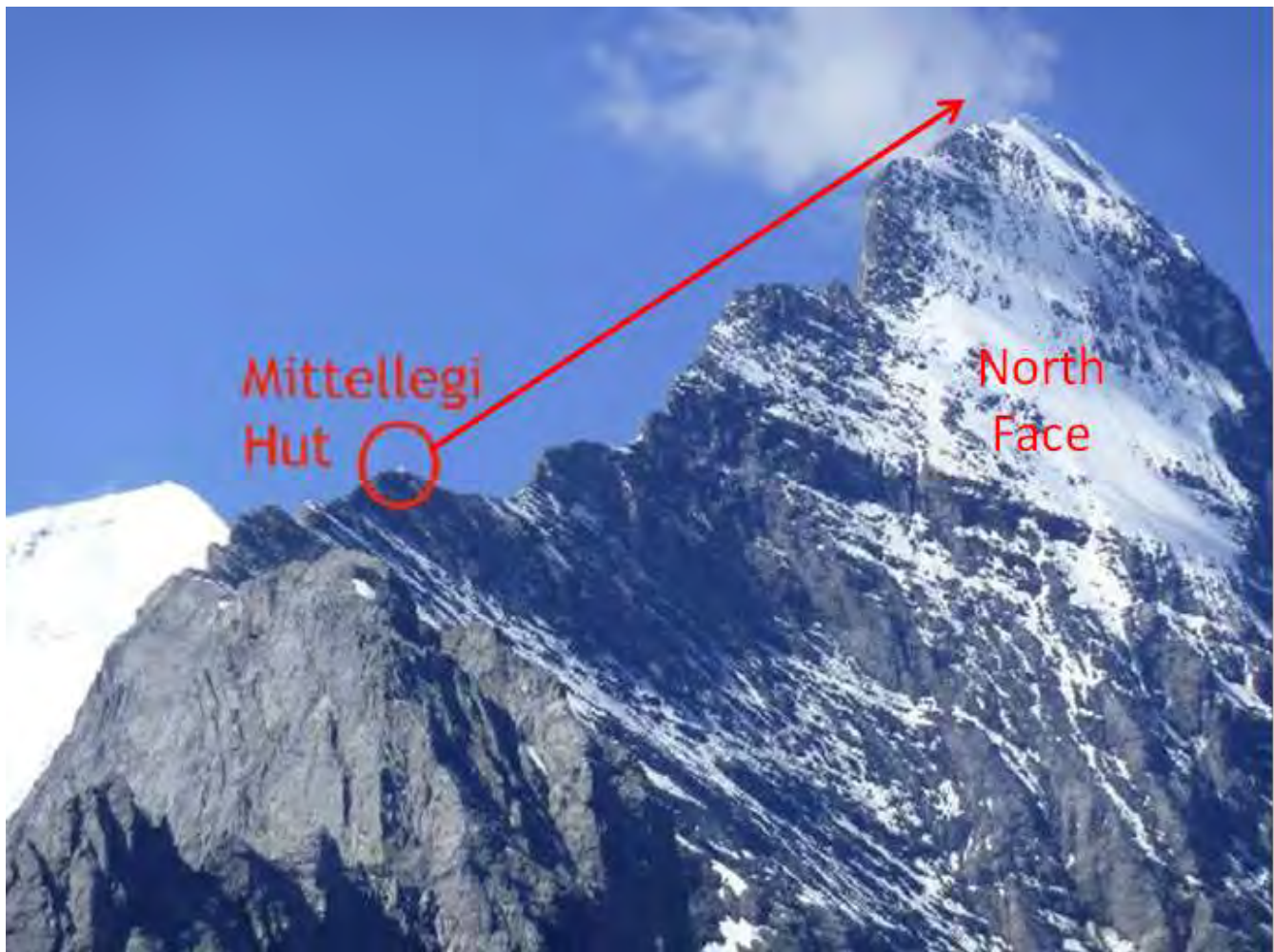
So I vowed to myself to come back and summit both Mt. Blanc and the Matterhorn and, having decided to do so, had the idea to tie this adventure to raising money for my favorite charity, [KIPP charter schools](#) in NYC, on whose board I've served for 15 years (the donation page for my climbs is [here](#)). KIPP, the Knowledge is Power Program, is a non-profit network of 209 college-preparatory, public charter schools in 20 states and DC that serve almost entirely low-income, minority students (click [here](#) for more information). I have seen with my own eyes – and numerous independent studies confirm – that KIPP gives children a far superior education than the nearby traditional public schools, resulting in college graduation rates *five times higher* – in short, it transforms lives. One of KIPP's primary mottos, which appears on the walls of every school, is "climbing the mountain to college," so I couldn't think of a better way to support and honor the 6,000+ hard-working KIPP students in NYC than to actually climb two big mountains.

I successfully summited both peaks (see my pictures from and descriptions of my climbs [here](#) and [here](#)) and fell in love with mountaineering. The combination of experiencing some of nature's most spectacular beauty, the physical and mental challenges, the adrenaline, the feeling of accomplishment, of

going places that very few people ever go (there are no shortcuts; you can't take a tram or chairlift to the top of these mountains) – it's just an incredibly intense rush! Also, it feels great to raise a meaningful amount of money for my favorite charity – over \$100,000 each of the past two years.

This summer, to top last year, I decided to both climb an even more difficult mountain, the Eiger, and also tackle two more peaks, the nearby Jungfrau and Mönch, which are slightly higher but not as difficult to climb. (The Jungfrau is 13,642 feet and the Mönch is 13,474 feet; somewhat ironically, the most challenging climb of the three, the Eiger, is “only” 13,015 feet.)

The Eiger, famous for its menacing north face, has captivated the interest of climbers for more than a century. That route, however, is beyond my abilities (for now anyway!) so my guide from the last two years, Geoffroy Arvis, and I instead planned to hike to the Mittellegi Hut and then summit via the Mittellegi Ridge, a very challenging, narrow route, as you can see in this picture:



The Start of My Trip

I flew to Zurich overnight on Friday, Aug. 28th and took the train the next day four hours to Grindelwald, which sits in the shadow of these three peaks (you can see the Eiger in this picture, but not the other two, as they're behind the Eiger):



Geoffroy and I had planned to hike to the hut on Sunday and summit early Monday morning, but the weather forecast was lousy for Monday, so he decided that we should delay by a day.

Mountain Biking

With an extra day to kill, I rented a mountain bike, took a bus ~30 minutes and 3,100 vertical feet up the valley, biked up another 1,000 vertical feet, saw a beautiful lake and viewing walkway built into a cliff, and then went bombing down the mountain through the woods on some narrow hiking trails, past some cows, all the way back to Grindelwald (see pictures below). In the center picture, behind me are the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, from right to left:



I probably shouldn't have expended so much energy right before my climbs – biking up to the lake was a real leg-burner – plus it would have been easy to take a fall and hurt myself, but the magnificent scenery was worth it!

Climbing the Eiger

[I've posted two videos of our Eiger climb, a [short one](#) with just the highlights (3:43) and a [long one](#) with all of the video clips I took (15:40).]

The forecast was great for Tuesday, so on Monday Geoffroy and I took the cog railway halfway up the mountain (elevation: 10,300 feet) and got out on the glacier. The two-hour hike/trek/climb to the Mittellegi Hut (elevation: 11,000 feet) was surprisingly challenging (read: hairy)! I posted a video of the hike [here](#), and here are some pictures:



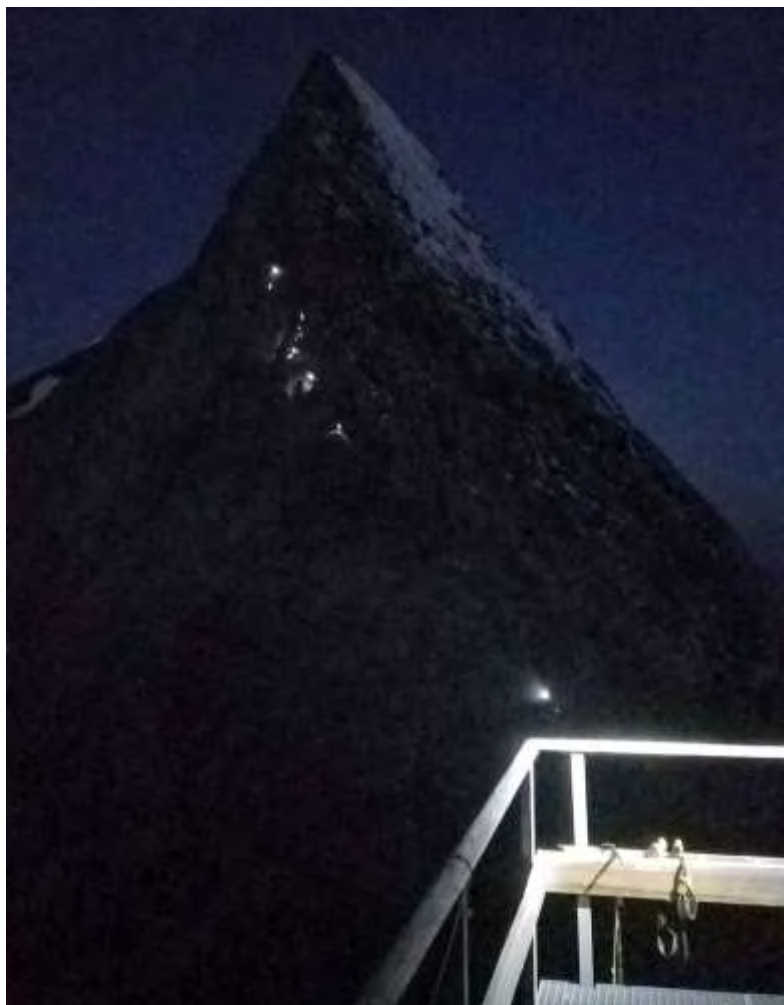
Here are some pictures of the hut, and the Eiger and Mittellegi Ridge behind it. As you can see from the pics, the views are amazing (quite a scenic toilet on the outside of the hut)!



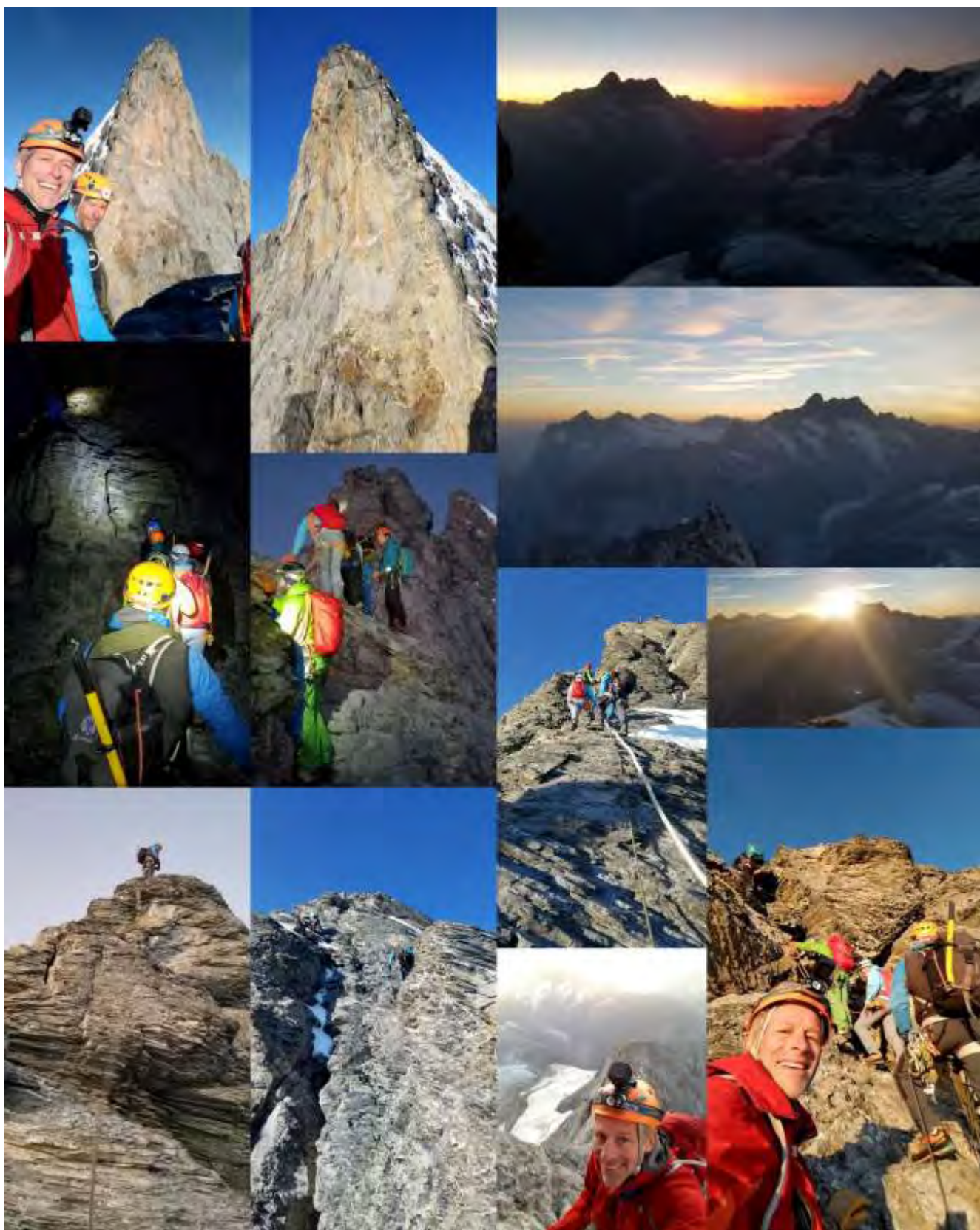
The next morning, we woke up at 5am and, after breakfast, began climbing at 5:45am. Here we are about to start:



And here is what we saw as we set out – the headlamps of climbers ahead of us:



It was a tough, heart-pounding climb of 3,000 vertical feet, which took us 3:45 (it should have been closer to three hours, but we got stuck in traffic a few times), so we summited at 9:30am. Here are a dozen pictures:

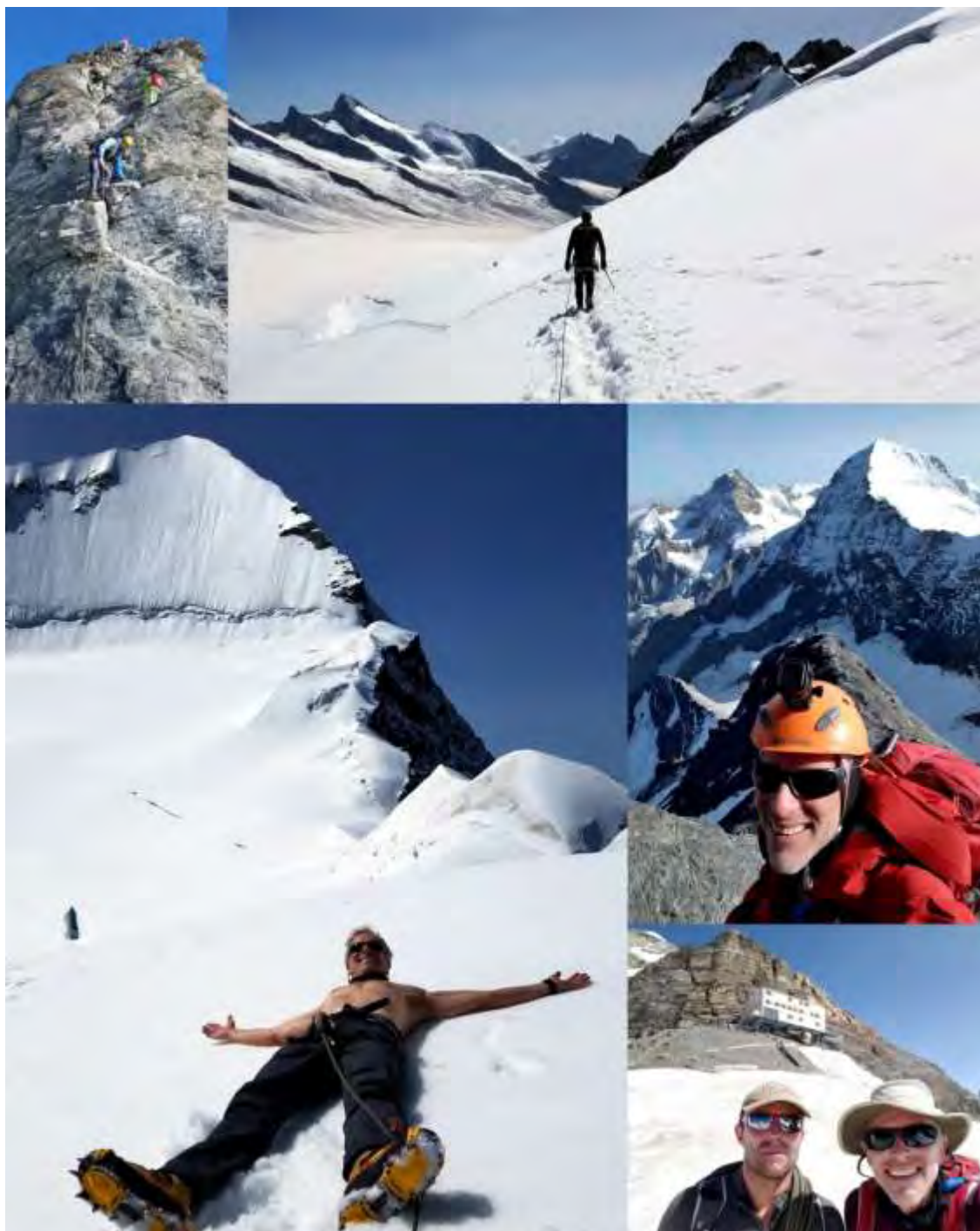


Here are two pictures from the summit (note the KIPP t-shirt, the Mönch under my armpit and the Jungfrau above Geoffroy's head in the first picture):



My biggest mistake was schlepping way too much water and food, turning what should have been a ~12-pound backpack into a ~25-pound one – I was really feeling that extra weight! Thank goodness for the fixed ropes in a half dozen places or I wouldn't have been able to climb it at all. And kudos to my stellar guide, Geoffroy Arvis!

After a few minutes at the top, we began a long downclimb, which wasn't too bad until we encountered another challenging nearly-one-hour climb up a nasty ridge (with no ropes) that I wasn't expecting! Once we got to the glacier, I celebrated by stripping off my shirt off and lying in the snow (funny pic below). From there, it was a bit under an hour of trekking across the glacier to the next hut, the Mönchsjochehutte (elevation: 12,000 feet), at the foot of the Mönch:



At that point (around 1pm on Tuesday), I bade adieu to Geoffroy, who had to get home. It was too bad we were delayed a day, but fortunately he was able to find me another guide, Simon Wahli, a 22-year-old apprentice guide. He and his father, also a guide, were guiding clients up the Eiger with us and Simon was available on Wednesday.

Climbing the Jungfrau

[My video of climbing the Jungfrau and Mönch is [here](#) (3:48).]

Because the weather forecast was awful for Thursday, I asked Simon if he'd be willing to guide me up both the Jungfrau and Mönch the next day. I could tell he was skeptical – each mountain is normally an arduous full-day climb and he'd never heard of a rank amateur like me doing both in a day – but he was willing to try, so we woke up at 2am and left the hut at exactly 3am to tackle the Jungfrau, the more difficult of the two. Here I am as we headed out (carrying much less weight, thankfully!):



Simon anticipated that getting up and down the Jungfrau would take seven hours (4½ up and 2½ down), which would give us just enough time to do the Mönch (an estimated 3 hours up and 2 down), for a total of 12 hours. He said we had to summit the Mönch no later than 1pm or it wouldn't be safe doing the super narrow traverse at the top of the Mönch due to soft snow.

I'd heard/read that the Jungfrau and Mönch are not nearly as challenging as the Eiger, so I was expecting two long climbs, but nothing particularly hairy. Boy, was I wrong! Indeed, they were neither as long, technically difficult, nor frightening as the Eiger – but they were both *much* tougher than I expected, with plenty of lung- and leg-burning and heart-stopping parts (a few of which were flat-out *hairy* – details about three of them below).

To get to the Jungfrau, we had to walk downhill for more than half an hour, losing 1,000 vertical feet, before we got to the base to start climbing it – what a bummer that was, turning a climb of 1,700 vertical feet into one of 2,700! Nevertheless, we made good time and summited the Jungfrau at 6:23am (3:23 after we'd started).

It was a fairly challenging climb overall, with two particularly hairy parts. The first was less than an hour in, when we were going across a very steep (~60 degree) snow field. We had to cross two 40-foot-wide areas in which the path in the snow disappeared and instead the surface was very hard and crusty, which made it impossible to make much of an indentation with your boots or ice ax (and, needless to say, the slope went down hundreds of feet into the pitch black).

Since we were in a hurry, Simon didn't want to take the time to have us put on (and then have to take off) our crampons (metal spikes we attach to our boots), so he carefully walked across the two-inch-wide icy traverse and set an anchor to catch me if I fell. I'm not sure I breathed as I walked across, trying to dig my ice ax into the snow/ice near my right shoulder to provide some balance. It felt like walking a tightrope or slackline. A few yards past the first traverse was a similar one, so we repeated the same process, again successfully.

In reality, I wasn't in any danger, as Simon was well anchored and kept the rope tight, but it was super freaky nevertheless.

Then, two hours later, as we approached the summit of the Jungfrau, there was a nearly identical snowfield: super steep, a huge drop below us, only an inch of crusty, icy snow, and it was still very dark (though no longer pitch black). But instead of traversing it, we had to go straight up it. This time we were wearing our crampons, so Simon went first, pounding his toe (with two crampon spikes) into the icy snow each step, with a little help from his ice ax, and then, maybe 100 feet above me, establishing an anchor and belay for me. It was easy for him because he's an experienced ice climber, but I've never done it, so it was a new and unnerving experience to climb up this steep slope with no handholds at all – just relying on each foothold and hoping the snow/ice didn't give way.

(Interestingly, I don't recall any particularly hairy parts of the Eiger climb – maybe because *the entire climb was so hairy!*)

I don't have any pictures from the ascent because it was dark, but got some spectacular ones from the summit, as the sun was just rising (the first is my favorite from the trip, in which I'm silhouetted, with the Mönch (center) and Eiger (left) behind me; the second is moments later in the other direction, with the sun in my face):



We headed down at 6:30am and arrived at the Top of the World (a big tourist attraction – the highest railway station in Europe, at 11,300 feet – in the center of the lower right picture below, with the Mönch behind in the center and the Eiger further back on the left) at 8am, exactly five hours after we'd set out and two hours ahead of schedule. We were really flying! (To put this in perspective, however, Simon said he'd done the round trip in under *two hours*!):



Climbing the Mönch

We used the facilities, refilled our water bottles, and 23 minutes later were hiking back up the hill toward the hut (at 12,000 feet, it's 700 vertical feet above Top of the World), where we would start climbing the Mönch. It was important for us to get going because the first train each day arrives at 8:30am, with lots of climbers and their guides ready to tackle the Mönch – and you don't want to be on the top of that mountain with anyone else given the wildly hairy traverse to the summit. Here's a picture right before we started up the mountain:



Again, we made good time and summited in less than two hours. It was an easier climb than either the Eiger or Jungfrau...until the last 15 minutes, the final traverse across the ridge to the summit, which was the hairiest part of the day (you can see it above me in the picture at the top of this page, as well as in the earlier picture of me lying shirtless in the snow). It's a very narrow path, with nothing for our hands or ice axes to balance, with 1,000+-foot drops on either side, as you can see in these two pics (also see 1:30 and 2:04 in my [video](#)):



I've never been so focused in my life! To the extent I was doing any thinking, it was: a) "Damn, the Mönch was supposed to be easy – and this is really scary – no fair!" and b) "If I fall one way, will my guide really jump the other way to save both of our lives?" (Answer: Yes, he would, if only for self-preservation. He's done this many times in training, but told me he's never had to do it for real; his father, however, also a guide, has had to do it for real **THREE TIMES** in his ~25 years of guiding!)

Here are pictures from the summit:





And here are pictures from the climb:



We were back at the hut by 11:45am, 3:22 after we'd left the Top of the World and about an hour ahead of schedule.

We summited both peaks and still got back to the hut before noon – that's quite a half day! It also gave us time for a long, leisurely lunch before we walked back down to the Top of the World and took the train down.

Reflections

My body held up surprisingly well (nothing more than mild soreness all over), given that I rarely exercise for more than 90 minutes at a time. I estimate that climbing up and down the Jungfrau – five hours of pretty constant movement – was the physical equivalent of running a marathon – and then, after a 23-minute break, immediately running a half marathon (and this after another marathon-equivalent the previous day on the Eiger)!

Then, consider the altitude, which, while only half that in the Himalayas, is no joke. Fortunately, it doesn't seem to affect me as much as most amateurs, plus I get an assist by taking Diamox, a drug that reduces/prevents the symptoms of altitude sickness).

But what really made it exhausting wasn't primarily the physical exertion, but the mental. For example, I burned more calories and put my body under greater stress when I competed in the World's Toughest Mudder last November, completing 75 miles in 25 hours, 12 minutes (for details, click [here](#)). But it wasn't very challenging mentally, as I did 15 laps of the exact same course. By the second time through it, I knew exactly what to expect in terms of the terrain and the 20 obstacles, so I was basically on auto-pilot for the last 20+ hours (though getting powerful electric jolts pretty much every lap at freakin' Operation raised my stress level!).

In contrast, over the three climbs last week (and the two in the Alps I did last summer), I could rarely go on auto-pilot for four main reasons:

- 1) It was all new terrain for me and I have very little mountaineering experience;
- 2) My guides were usually setting the pace, which is stressful, plus I had to work very closely with them, following instructions, etc.;
- 3) The fear factor is pretty crazy: these are BIG mountains and during large parts of the routes, the drops on either or both sides, often only inches away, can be thousands of feet (I'd guess 2/3 of the Eiger route, 1/3 of the Jungfrau's and 20% of the Mönch's are like this) (in reality, there's little difference between a 50-foot and 5,000-foot fall, but there's a big difference in the amount of adrenaline it produces!); and
- 4) The challenges are constant and highly variable: you use nearly every muscle in your body; you get winded quickly due to the altitude; the wind can be strong, which can quickly chill you, knock you off balance, and make it hard to communicate with your guide; climbing up is very different than going down (muscles used, balance, my guide is leading on the way up, whereas I'm leading on the way down, etc.); using crampons, especially on rock (try rock climbing – or, worse yet, downclimbing – on hard rock with 1.5-inch metal spikes on your boots!); controlling your body temperature (one moment you can be freezing and then five minutes later, after a tough pitch, you're sweating like mad); the terrain varies widely: snow, ice, gravel, solid rock, and brittle shale-like rock, where your handholds and footholds can easily break off; keeping the rope tight and not snagging on things; using the ice ax appropriately, etc.

You get the idea – you have to be totally “on” and focused nearly all of the time you're on the mountain, so this, combined with the physical challenge, is incredibly draining after many hours and days.

I'm pretty pleased with my climbing, especially since I only started doing this two years ago and I climb very infrequently (last year, I climbed Mt. Blanc in July (see description and pics [here](#)), the Matterhorn in August ([here](#)), and Mt. Kenya in December ([here](#))). I felt very comfortable up there (though there were a few especially hairy moments!) and didn't have any falls, just a few stumbles.

Thanks for taking the time to read this and for supporting KIPP! (If you haven't and would like to, the donation page for my climbs is [here](#).)

Q&A

Here are my answers to some questions I'm often asked:

1) Was it as dangerous as the pictures and video make it look?

No, though there certainly was some element of danger (what would be the point of doing it otherwise?! ;-). Indeed, some of the pictures and video clips make it look like I was one misstep away from certain death – which is, in fact, true. There were dozens of times during the climbs when an uncontrolled fall would surely have been fatal, but here's the key: *I was roped to my guide at all times*. That means the only way I could die is if I fell at the wrong point *and* failed to catch myself (self-arrest) *and* somehow caught my guide by surprise and pulled him off the mountain with me, a scenario that guides are trained (and highly incented!) to avoid. For example, on the very narrow ridge near the top of both the Eiger and Mönch, with sheer drops on both sides, if I started falling, he has me on a very short rope and would pull hard to stabilize me, but if I fell, he'd jump off the other side and the rope, stretched over the top, would save us both. (Definitely something to avoid, however!)

I've looked closely at mountaineering deaths, especially in the Alps (which max out at 15,800 feet on Mt. Blanc, so the high-altitude risk of, say, the Himalayas, the so-called "death zone", isn't an issue) and the vast majority are because people are climbing without local, highly experienced, superbly trained professional guides. These guys (they're 98% men) are unbelievably good and in a million years I would never have tried any of the five peaks I've done in the Alps the past two years without being roped to one every second I was on the mountain. Because of this, from a purely statistical standpoint, I'm taking far more risk of death/serious injury every time I ride my bike in the streets of Manhattan (which I do almost every day of the year).

2) What did you learn/would do differently?

- a) Buy food and water at the huts – just pay the damn usurious prices! – rather than try to carry three days' worth. Go light!
- b) Don't ever f**king drop your ice ax! I lost mine twice – a *major* rookie mistake, which can be fatal on some mountains. (At numerous points, climbers tuck it between their back and backpack to, for example, climb a rock face in between snowy areas.) Mine came out once on the Jungfrau when I forgot it was there and took my pack off; the second time was 10 minutes from finishing the Mönch when I was leaning forward on a steep downclimb and it shot out right over my head. Simon was nice about it, but I could tell he wanted to kill me!

- c) I stupidly forgot warm ski gloves (fortunately I was able to buy a pair right before we set out on day one – a wasted \$50, but worth it). I only had thinner gloves, perfect for climbing, which I used 90% of the time, but really needed the warmer gloves 10% of the time.
- d) I'd never used a buff before (I was using [this one](#)) and found it very useful in light of how quickly I'd go from being cold (when I'd pull it over my face, ears and hear) to overheating (when I'd pull it down around my neck)

3) Why did you make such good time?

I didn't think we were going particularly fast on the ascents, but were keeping up a steady pace and rarely had to stop for more than a few seconds. After a tough section, when I was really winded, I was able to take 3-5 deep breaths and continue.

I think we were much faster on the descents, where the primary issue is being sure-footed. I think I've benefitted from all of the obstacle course and occasional trail races I've been doing the past few years.

Lastly, we cruised by doing more tandem climbing than lead climbing. There are two general ways to climb a mountains like this with a guide: in lead climbing, the guide climbs first, goes up 25-100 feet, and establishes an anchor of some sort: clips or loops the rope onto some fixed gear or wraps it around a rock, and then calls down for the client to come up, pulling in the slack as the client ascends (belaying). Lather, rinse, repeat, all the way to the top! It's safe, but also slow.

Tandem climbing means you're climbing together, with about five feet of rope between you. It's much faster because you're both moving all the time, but also obviously less safe because nobody is anchored: if you fall, you'd better hope your guide can instantly establish a good foothold or handhold or you're both in trouble. Guides only tandem climb if they're certain the client isn't going to fall, or if you're in a place (like trekking across a glacier) where there are no consequences of a fall.

My guides and I did a combination of both: when we encountered very steep (often vertical) faces, where there was a chance I could fall, we'd lead climb: he would climb up and tell me to follow him as soon as the rope tightened. But I'd guess that 90% of the time we were tandem climbing, whereas my observation was that most others I saw were tandem climbing maybe 70% of the time. My guides had confidence in my climbing abilities/surefootedness and thus felt more comfortable taking a bit of extra risk to speed up our climb and make it more fun for both of us.

4) What conditioning/experience is needed?

It depends on which mountain. Anyone in reasonable shape (say, run a half marathon in less than 2½ hours) who doesn't get altitude sickness and isn't afraid of heights could do the Mönch (and Mt. Blanc). I put the Jungfrau, Matterhorn and Eiger (in ascending level of difficulty) in a different category. For these, you need: a) a very high level of fitness (this is 8-9 hours of pretty sustained effort, so you should be able to run a marathon in under five hours; ideally four); b) a high degree of athleticism (in order of importance: balance, lower body strength, upper body strength (10+ pull-ups), and flexibility); and c) fearlessness.

If you have these three things, then you need to get some mountaineering experience. In June 2016, in preparation for Mt. Blanc and the Matterhorn, I did five days of private training on some challenging cliffs in northern Vermont at the [Petra Cliffs](#) mountaineering school, which I highly recommend. I also started last year by tackling a less technical mountain, Mt. Blanc, first.

5) What did you eat during the climb?

I had a good breakfast at the hut and then just ate some Snickers bars and peanut M&Ms. I don't tend to drink a lot of water: for the Eiger, I drank a liter of Coke and Tailwind (like Gatorade); for the Jungfrau, 750ml of Tailwind; for the Mönch, 500ml. Liquids are heavy, so don't overdo it!

6) How much does it cost?

This isn't cheap. Gear (one time cost) is maybe \$1,000-\$2,000, depending on whether you already have good jackets/layers (ski gear works fine) and want to rent vs. own (mountaineering boots alone are \$500-600; you can rent them, but I don't advise this). Airfare, trains, meals, lodging – it adds up, and Switzerland is a very high-cost country (the first two nights in Grindelwald, I stayed in a youth hostel for \$47/night; huts are maybe \$100/night, including dinner and breakfast (you pay for your guide as well)). Lastly, guides are ~\$700/day, which is actually pretty reasonable in my opinion (a private ski instructor at a major ski area is \$600/day) – this is not an area to skip or go with the cheapest option!

7) What am I going to do for an encore?

I'm not sure – but am definitely going to continue mountaineering. Lots of folks have (tongue in cheek – I think!) suggested Everest, K2, and Meru, but I don't have a death wish nor can I disconnect from my business for more than a couple of days. Geoffroy is going to come back to me with some ideas.

Simon, who has climbed the truly death-defying North Face of the Eiger *ten times* said that if I did some ice climbing training, he'd guide me up this route. I'm not sure that's a very good idea, but let's just say the seed has been planted...

And the bulls in Pamplona have been beckoning for a while...

8) I've posted the reports of my Garmin watch here:

- Eiger (part 1): <https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/1952419208> (one hour and 34 minutes into the climb, my watch reset – grrrr!)
- Eiger (part 2): <https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/1952419219>
- Jungfrau: <https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/1952419245>
- Mönch: <https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/1952419259>

My Adventure at the Obstacle Course Race World Championships

By Whitney Tilson, 10/15/17

(The latest version of this pdf is posted at: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonOCRWC.pdf; in addition, I wore a GoPro during the race and turned it on for every obstacle – the resulting 46-minute video is posted here: <https://youtu.be/d3TC-y48IIA>)

Yesterday I participated in the Obstacle Course Race World Championships at Blue Mountain, a beautiful resort/ski area ~90 minutes north of Toronto. There was a 3k, 14-obstacle “short course” race on Friday, which I stupidly didn’t sign up for – it would have been a great warm-up for my race: the 15k (9.3 mile), 43-obstacle “long course” race yesterday.

Despite the fact that Blue Mountain is really not much more than a hill, with a mere 700 feet of vertical, it was an EPIC course – by far the hardest I’ve ever raced: the 43 obstacles were wildly fun and challenging, the footing was treacherous nearly the entire race (it was incredibly muddy and slippery, as it had rained quite a bit in the 24 hours before the race), and we did 3,400 feet of vertical, going up and down the entire mountain four times, with super-steep ascents and descents, plus two brutal sandbag carries part of the way up and down the mountain.

Every 20-40 minutes, a new wave of racers went off, consisting of pro men and women at 8:00 and 8:20am, respectively, followed by 14 waves of age-group qualifiers (by gender), and finally the “journeymen/women” (anyone who wanted to run the course) at 2:45pm.

By completing at least 70 miles at the World’s Toughest Mudder last November (I actually did 75 – see: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM.pdf), I qualified for the men’s pro division, so I was one of 197 guys who went off in the first wave.

I could have run in the age 50+ wave (which went off at 1:10pm), but I figured since I qualified to run with the top guys in the world, I might as well do so! However, I knew it was a total joke that I was running in the same heat as young guys who do this professionally – and I was right: the winner (Jon Albon) finished in 1:33:49, whereas I finished in almost exactly double his time (two seconds under three hours), plus I failed two of the last four obstacles (I was doing so well until my grip strength abandoned me at the very end – grrrrr!), each of which saddled with a 10-minute penalty, so my final official time was 3:19:58.

(Interestingly, if you fail an obstacle, unlike Spartan races (where you have to do 30 burpees) or the World’s Toughest Mudder (where there’s a penalty walk in the desert), at this race you could keep trying again and again, but at any point you could give up, take either a 5- or 10-minute penalty (depending on the obstacle; some obstacles were must-completes), and keep racing, so this introduced some interesting strategy.)

Though I was really bummed to nail the first 39 obstacles and then fail on two of the last four (my forearms were shot), I’m fairly pleased overall because I achieved my goal of not finishing last in my heat – in fact, I beat 39 guys in the pro wave, finishing 134th out of 173, despite being the second-oldest racer (a 54-year-old finished third-to-last in 5:56; the next oldest was 46, there were two 45-year-olds, and nine 40-44-year olds, with pretty much everyone else in the 25-36 age range). I checked the times of the guys in the 50+ age wave and my time would have placed me 36th of 124 finishers (I would have been 18th without the two penalties). Here’s a screenshot of my official time and ranking among the pros ([here’s a link](#) to the official results):



(Don't ask me why this shows me 136th of 197. I can only guess that two guys who finished ahead of me were later disqualified, and maybe 197 people signed up, but only 173 raced, or maybe 24 guys started but didn't finish or were disqualified.)
 (The 164/281 "Overall" includes the pro women, meaning 28 of 84 of them (73 finished) beat me as well.)

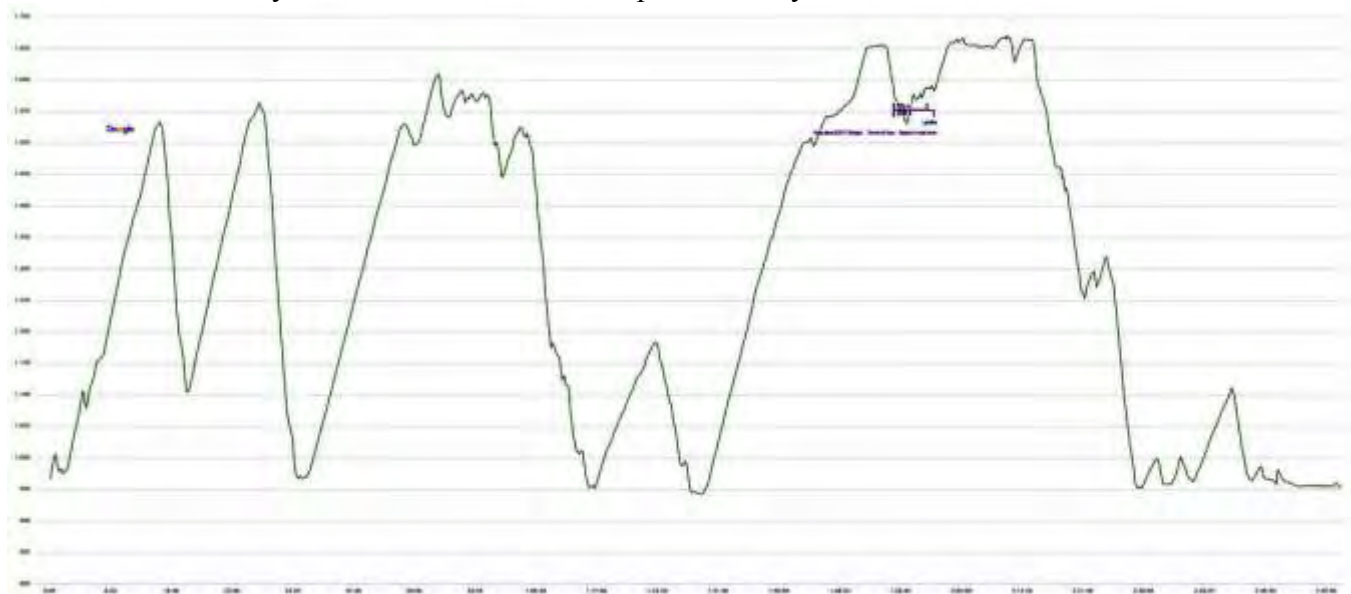
Here's a picture of me on the awards podium just after I finished (every finisher got that medal):



Here's a map of the entire course:



You can see the crazy vertical in this elevation report from my Garmin watch:



Here are pictures from the gondola on the way up the mountain and from the top:



The Start

Here are pictures of me at the starting line (with a college friend, Kim, who took all of the race pictures below that I'm in):



Here are Kim's pictures of the start of my wave:





(that's me in the middle at the back of the pack!)

I met an American Ninja Warrior

Early in the race, I hiked for ~10 minutes with this nice young guy:



During our conversation, he mentioned that he was training for American Ninja Warrior. I asked when he was planning to do the qualifiers and he said he'd already been on the show – and that I might remember him because his hair was dyed neon green. Sure enough, I did! Here's what he looks like on the show:



He's 29-year-old Jamie Rahn (aka "Captain NBC") – he's been on the show six times and completed four courses. Here's an [article](#) about him and here's a [video](#) of him competing in the Cleveland Finals.

Obstacles

(A 46-minute video I took of me doing every obstacle is posted here: <https://youtu.be/d3TC-y48IIA>)

Let's get the bad news out of the way first: the two obstacles I failed right at the end (they're at 34:10 and 39:06 in the [video](#)).

The first obstacle was #40, called Skull Valley – it consisted of five skulls (which are excellent handholds) you have to traverse, then a transition to six monkey bars on unstable chains, and then five more skulls. There's no place for your feet – it's pure upper body strength. Normally I could do this quite easily, but I was so tired from 9+ miles, 3,400 vertical feet, and 39 prior obstacles that I lost my grip strength going across the monkey bars and couldn't even get to the second set of skulls (much less traverse them).

Here are two pictures I took on Friday of a woman attempting this obstacle during the 3k race:



Here are pictures of me on my first attempt:



And my second (and last) attempt:



I also failed the second-to-last obstacle, 100 feet from the finish line, called Indian Mud Run Floating Walls. You have to traverse three unstable hanging walls, then climb up a cargo net, traverse four more hanging walls, and then down another cargo net. Again, it was an obstacle that I could normally have done without much difficulty, but I simply couldn't hold onto the wall. Here's a picture I took on Friday of the entire obstacle:



Here are pics from my first attempt:



Here are pics from my second attempt:



Other Obstacles

Here are pictures and descriptions of some of the other obstacles. After starting the race by running up and down the mountain twice, this was the first tough obstacle, #8, Ramp Wall:



The single hardest lung-, leg-, and arm-burning obstacle was #21, Green Beret Challenge Yoke Carry, which required you to pick up (with your arms; you weren't allowed to put them on your shoulders or back) and haul two ~35-pound bags of sand up and down a steep hill with 250 feet of vertical (everyone other than those in the pro division only had to carry one bag). I had to stop multiple times from total exhaustion – and I think this more than any other obstacle burned my grip, which cost me dearly at the end of the race. It starts at 17:35 in the [video](#), and here's a picture of it:



There was a similar obstacle near the end, #38, Wreck Bag Carry, which required carrying a Wreck (sand) bag up and down the hill, but it was “only” 140 feet of vertical, you could rest the bag over your shoulders, and it wasn’t as heavy:



In addition to the two obstacles I failed, the end of the race had a few other tough ones. This one, #37, was simply called Platinum Rig #1, which involved traversing from rings to ropes to bars:



This was #39, Platinum Rig #2, which had a tough climb under the cargo net at the end:



Here I am hanging on this rig on Friday as I checked out the course:



This was the 43rd and final obstacle, The Knot, with the finish line on the other side:



Here's me crossing the finish line:



Here are various pics of other obstacles (in order):

#7, Crawl (there were ~5 of these on the course, most longer, steeper and with barbed wire):



#9, Quintuple Steps (I chose the conservative way to do it; others just ran it):



#20, Mud Hero 14' Warped Wall (a tough challenge)



#22, Northman Race La Gaffe (a surprisingly tricky one I failed twice before completing; you have to make like a pole vaulter and grab one pole, swing across, grab the next, swing, grab the final one and swing):



#24, Traverse Walls:



#25, Conquer the Gauntlet Stairway to Heaven is on the right (you have to go up and down the inside of the A-frame without using your feet) (on the left is a simple 8' wall):



Here I am going over that wall:



#27, Urban Sky (three completely different upper body challenges, made easier by the fact that you rang and bell and could rest after each section; I wish they'd required us to go straight through):



#29, Diamond's Back, which requires you to jump from the platform onto the angled wall, grabbing the bar:



#30, Quarter Pipe (it had ropes during the race):



#31, Big Wall:



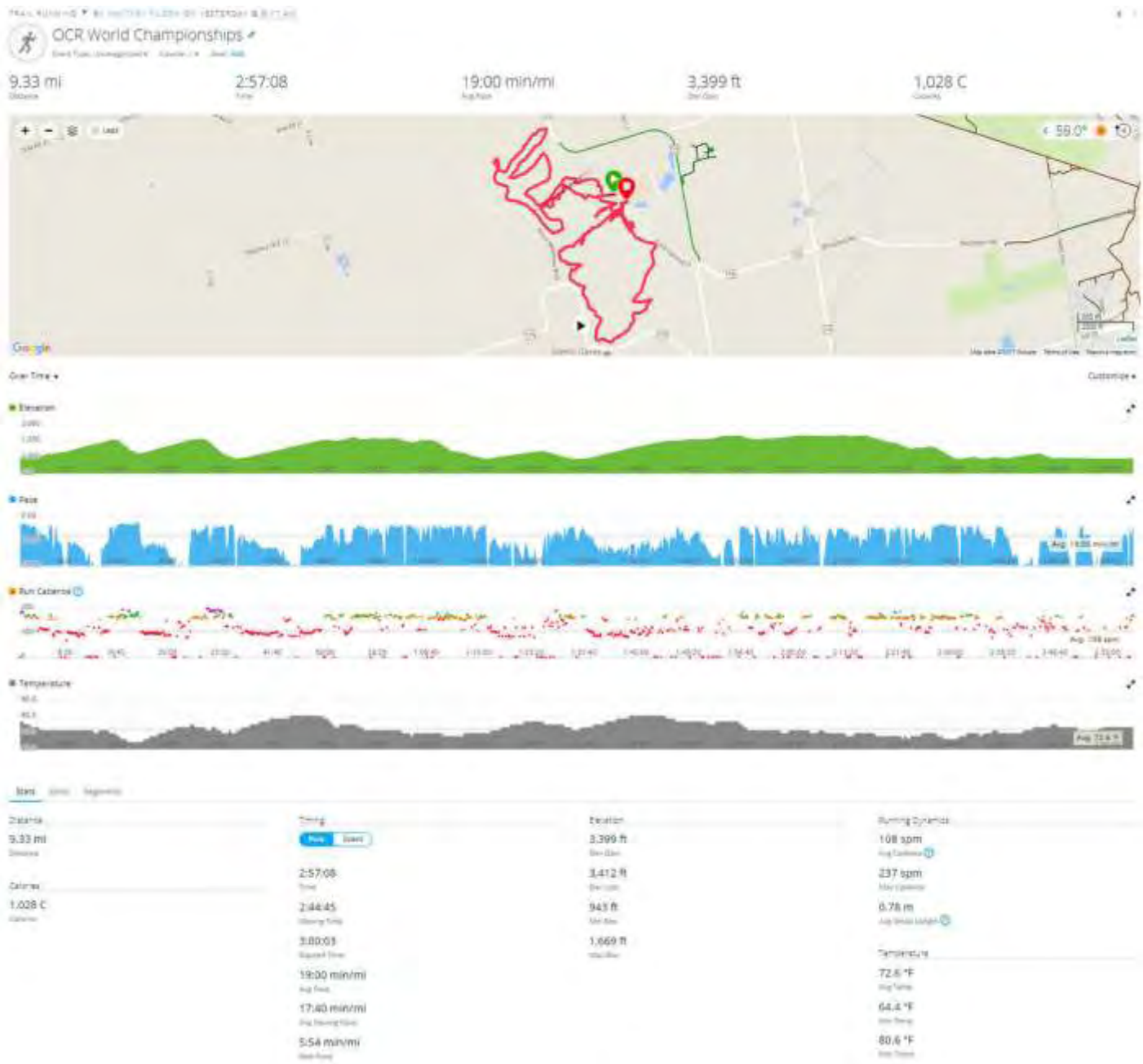
#32, Low Rig (this was a great obstacle – you had to use the high and low rope loops to work your way along without touching the ground):



#41, Forces Skyline:



Here is my Garmin watch report for the race:



Q&A

Why do you do races like this?

I've always liked big challenges; they keep me motivated to get/stay in good shape; I really enjoy them – not so much the running, but the obstacles; and they're very social. I often do them with friends and family (my 77-year-old mom, 75-year-old dad, wife, three daughters and many cousins have all done races with me), plus I've made many new friends. It's a great group of people and there's something about shared suffering that bonds people!

What conditioning/experience is needed?

To do a regular Tough Mudder or Spartan race, none at all as long as you're content to walk the course and have friends help you over the obstacles.

But if you want to do the course reasonably fast, with little or no assistance, then you need: a) a very high level of cardiovascular fitness (say, run a half marathon in 2-2.5 hours); b) to be super stable walking/hiking/jogging/running on steep, rocky, muddy, slippery terrain; c) a high degree of athleticism (in order of importance: balance/coordination, lower body strength, upper-body strength, and flexibility); and d) fearlessness.

How do you train for obstacle course races?

The best way to train for obstacle course races is to do a lot of them. In between, most people do a lot of long-distance running (ideally up and down mountains, not on roads) combined with upper body workouts. I don't like to run, however, so other than races I do almost none – I just don't have the time or interest, and worry about getting chronic injuries that all aged runners seem to have, so instead I do hour-long (but typically very intense) workouts pretty much every day (and in the weeks before a big race, twice a day).

In a typical week, I do four extremely hard workouts (two with two different personal trainers; a treadmill and weight session at Ripped Fitness; and a session at Tone House) and then fill in on other days with hard tennis and basketball and riding my bike a few miles a day to get to and from meetings.

Then, from March to November, roughly twice month I do some sort of race/challenge: a Tough Mudder or Spartan race (typically two laps), trail run, mountain climb, etc.

While my running training is laughably inadequate (though to repeat what I noted above, I do think there's something to be said for not burning out your legs and getting plagued with injuries, especially at my age, by putting too many miles on your legs), I do work hard on building my grip and upper-body strength, which I think is the second most important area, as 2/3 of the obstacles demand this. They are all somewhat different – climbing a cargo net, doing monkey bars, using pegs to pull yourself up a wall, etc. – but they all boiled down to being able to grip something and pull your body up.

There's a simple test for this: how many consecutive pull-ups can you do? To do well at most obstacle course races, the answer should be at least 10. (I can do 20-30, depending on which grip I use.)

(For those of you who live in NYC and have an interest in a personal trainer, I highly recommend the two I use (once a week each): Richard Louis of FitSpace NYC (rplouisnyc@gmail.com) and Carlos Munoz at Definitions (munozcelo@aol.com). I also highly recommend [Ripped Fitness](#) and [Tone House](#).)

In light of your “laughably inadequate” running training, why doesn’t your body break down?

- 1) I’ve been lucky so far;
- 2) I jog fairly slowly during races and walk all of the uphill;
- 3) At least half of my workouts are super intense – pretty much everything to failure – which I think has really toughened up my joints, muscles, ligaments and tendons (and my mind!); and
- 4) I’ve become a big fan this year of shiatsu massage (I go to a place in NYC with a cult following called Salon de Tokyo). In your mind, you may be thinking of an elegant spa with candles and mood music in which you receive a relaxing backrub from a hot person of the opposite sex – but what I get at Salon de Tokyo is the opposite: a little Chinese women (ask for Mimi), holding onto a bar in the ceiling, stands on my back and legs and applies every ounce of pressure onto one-inch areas. It’s so painful! But I can hear and feel my tight joints and muscles loosening up.

What are the keys to success in these races?

- 1) Being in shape, both running/endurance and upper-body strength.
- 2) Staying warm – but not overheating.
- 3) Drinking enough water and ingesting enough calories (~400/hour?) to keep your body going (for long races). This is hard because when you’re exercising you often don’t feel like eating – but if you wait until you feel hungry, it’s too late: you can’t recover and you’re gonna bonk. Thus, it’s critical to force-feed yourself regularly, however crappy it makes your stomach feel.
- 4) Controlling your pace so you never get winded or overheated.
- 5) Pushing with your (much stronger) legs rather than pulling with your arms on numerous obstacles, which preserves arm/grip strength (any rock climber will tell you how important this is). There’s not much you can do other than be as fast as you can on pure grip/upper-body obstacles, but others you can do using 90% legs, with arms mainly for balance.
- 6) Knowing when to give up on an obstacle you’re never going to complete (to save energy and preserve grip strength) – yet also doing every obstacle possible (to avoid time- and/or energy-sapping penalties).

What does my wife think of this?

Not much. But she’s been endlessly loving and patient with me for the 27 years we’ve been together – and I haven’t killed myself yet! And she takes comfort in my large life insurance policy... ;-)

What ridiculous thing am I going to do next?

The World’s Toughest Mudder is in four weeks and I think I’m going to have to do 80 miles to defend my title in the 50+ age group this year. Wish me luck!

Appendix

My friend Ryan Tillotson posted this great description of his race on Facebook:

We keep telling ourselves that this one will be easier, it's shorter, the hills aren't as steep but then reality sets in. It's been raining on and off prior, there are obstacles we've never encountered, and we're standing toe to toe with the best athletes in this sport from around the world. How awesome! It doesn't get better than this. And after coach Pain gives his speech, all self doubt gets left at the start line as we "conduct our business."

The hills were a complete mess of mud. The knobbyest of shoes failed to grip the grounds. Crowds of competitors piled up as they strategically place their feet so they don't lose ground. That same mud plagued the obstacles after making grips and footholds slippery. The first slip wall rope was impossible to keep hold. But I was not getting defeated. The mile mark alerts on my watch, mile 1. It's still misting. First thoughts, "just 8 more", self check "how am I doing, SOOO GOOD!" Thanks Rob Barger, this self check never lets me or the others around me down.

The miles start counting down. Mile 2, more hills, walls to climb, hills to descend, barb wire crawls and mud. Mile 3, slip wall, crawls, mud (pretty consistent on this). Mile 4, came down off the mountain to the monkey bars, 14' quarter pipe and crowds of spectators. Excited cheers as competitors succeeded, giving them an extra dose of motivation. On to the bag carry. I've since caught up to some of the pro women. Take a hint from the spectators below and motivate, "You are awesome! Keep it up! Your killing it!" Mile 5, le gaffe, stairway to heaven, calve cramps! Oh no! I thought I was over this on the last two races.

This is where my struggle begins. First round cramps weren't so bad, manageable. Stretch out and keep moving. Try to smile. Mile 6, traverse walls, crawls, urban sky (three part hanging), cargo A-frame. Still ok. Hit the slip wall at dragons back, cramps getting stronger. Every strong push and the legs start locking up. Keep moving. Get to low rig, start swinging the legs to a hoop and cramping imminent. Instant stiffening of the legs but I manage to make it to the other side, bell rung. More running, stretch those legs out, I need it.

Coming down off the mountain for the last time and I hit the tallest rope climb I've seen. Found a rope I liked and jumped on it. Leg muscles rolled up like a tape measure. Managed to lock onto the rope and accented it. Less than a mile left and the gauntlet remains, a series of hanging obstacles with a wreck bag carry in there for good measure. Get to the first rig, monkey bars to rope to rings to ropes to pipe to square bar and bell. You guys aren't taking my band! On to wreck bag. Grab that 50lb bag, sling it to the shoulders and set off on another muddy trek up a very steep hill. Fall to my ass once on the way down. Drop the bag and head off to rig 2. Rings to low monkey bars to rings to cargo net hang to cargo net low traverse to bell. Legs are cramping the whole time. I can barely hear the crowds cheer anymore, focus on skull valley takes over. Failed to grab a skull hold first try. Catch a breath and do it again. Skull after skull I pass, then monkey bars and more skulls. Hit that bell and the crowd cheers. Let's muster the energy to finish this. Get past the skyline then to the floating walls. Start the first wall and legs want to quit. Calves, hips quads, glutes all failing. First three wall behind me and get ahold of the cargo net to ascend to the next four walls. Left leg locked up fully, while on the net. Can't let go, so close to finishing this. Leg finally loosens up and I traverse the next four walls.

The finish line is within grasp. The men in front of the last slip wall named "the knot" were giving me and the others around fist bumps just before we attempt this last wall. Here we go! Grab a rope, plant my feet and pull. I'm close to another rope, grab that and step on the last. Grab the next and finally the top of the wall!

Throw a leg over and see two others next to me. We all climb down at the same rate. I belt out “c’mon guys! Let’s sprint this out!” We dug down one last time and smashed the last 50 yards, crossing that line!

Under and across the inflatable arch, we were greeted by high fives, commendations and finish medals. As I drank water and ate some bananas, I traded handshakes, fist bumps, back pats and hugs with all the competitors around me as we were all mutually rewarded and elated with our accomplishments. All the cuts, all the bruises, the mud, cramps, callouses, all the times where I thought this is where the quit is, we persevered! And through it all, I kept the band. Everybody feels it regardless of the language, racial or gender borders. That’s comradery that can’t be purchased and we love it. That’s why we do this time and time again despite people telling us how crazy we are. I feel like we play with superheroes!

Huge thanks to Ed Edward A. Patterson at Missfits Boot Camp for all this. You gave us the ability to represent the gym of which we love and gave us the tools to do so. For those that don’t know, it’s the best high intensity interval training facility in northwest CT. I’ve personally been training there for almost two years and his regiment still challenges me. Also like to give Mark Piombino a thanks for keeping us gym members motivated in Ed’s absence. His great presence there is always lifting.

Congrats to all my teammates, Carrie Ann Lake, Amanda Stuerzel Hill, Tara Chamberlain for your finishes. You all rock! Also congrats to Alex Hill and Shawn Murphy for your finishes as well. Everybody did an amazing job and put their best out. Thanks to Susie Gardiner and Cathy Robbins for your support and photography of the event. Thanks Susan Ballarin Marino for supporting us the whole time and enduring the car ride!

[Here’s a picture of Ryan and his friend Tara Chamberlain, who also completed the race:]



My Adventure at the 2017 World's Toughest Mudder

By Whitney Tilson, 11/17

(The latest version of this pdf is posted at: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM17.pdf)

(In addition to the pictures below, I also posted a 23:45 video I took with my GoPro of 15 of the 21 obstacles on my final lap, plus the start and finish areas: <https://youtu.be/d5x0NWEyr9Y>. Enjoy!)

I did the World's Toughest Mudder, a 24-hour obstacle course endurance race on the shores and nearby hills of Lake Las Vegas two weeks ago for the second time. Once again, it was a memorable adventure: it was incredibly fun (though incredibly hard!) and I completed 55 miles and nearly 200 obstacles in 22 hours and 15 minutes, good for 168th place overall (top 11%) and 5th in the 50+ age group.

It was a harder course and it got colder overnight, which sapped me physically and mentally, so I didn't do nearly as well as last year when I did 75 miles and ~275 obstacles, winning (and setting the all-time record) for the 50+ age group (see: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM.pdf).

Here's a picture of me with my friends before the race (from left to right): Tom Millerick, Tim Donovan, Rob Majors (my pit crew), me, Bruce Majors (Rob's brother, who ran the race), Kenny Majors (another brother, who was the pit crew for Bruce), and Mark James:



Here's Mark and me in our hotel room the night before (we also shared a tent during the race):



Mark and me in the lobby of the Westin on Saturday morning with Sean Corvelle (left) and Clinton Jackson, who do an incredible job MC'ing the race, giving all of us encouragement and inspiration:



Our tent was pretty close to the start/finish line, unlike last year:



That's our tent on the right, with the start/finish line about 100 yards ahead:



Here's a pic I took last year of the entire Mudder Village. This year, with 29% more registrants (1,655 vs. 1,280), the tent village was even larger, with a new section off to the left:



Me in the starting area just before noon:



Here's the starting line at ~11:30 (they released us at noon):



Here's a pic from last year, showing how crowded it gets right before the start:



[illegible]

I had three goals:

2) Not get injured. This was going to be a tough one, as I have little experience with (and did minimal training for) hiking/jogging a long distance. “So,” you might be thinking, “if something starts to hurt, stop!” I agree, logically speaking, it’s nuts to continue on through pain, especially at my age. One race isn’t worth a real injury. I plan to live at least another 50 years and want to be healthy, active and pain-free for the rest of my life! That said, I’m really competitive and have a high pain threshold, so I might have kept on going even if some part of my body (most likely a knee or hamstring) was really hurting. Fortunately, this didn’t happen – I didn’t even have a blister (though I was sore all over)!

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Race Description Part One: A Solid First Half

The race started at noon on Saturday in perfect conditions: not a cloud in the sky and a nice 72 degrees. 1,655 of us surged over the line, eager to bank some miles during the first hour in which all of the obstacles are closed, to spread out the racers and reduce the wait times at the obstacles. At 1:00, I'd finished the first five-mile lap and was a half mile into lap 2 (a few yards before Everest), expecting a horn to go off and all obstacles to open simultaneously (which is what had happened last year), but instead they opened the obstacles on a rolling basis over the first 2.5-3 hours, so we kept racing at high speed. Here are some pictures from the first laps (many of the pictures below were taken by Brad Kerr, father of one of the racers – thank you!):







I finished my third lap (15 miles) by 3:15pm, was feeling great, and felt like 75, maybe even 80 miles, was possible – and then the toughest obstacles opened. And, wow, were they tough – quite a bit tougher than last year and, worse yet, the penalties for failing an obstacle were BRUTAL – much longer than in last year's race (on average, I'd say they took 10-15 minutes to complete vs. 3-5 minutes last year)! (10 of the 21 obstacles had penalties – typically a walk in the desert, sometimes with a dip in the lake as well; the other 11 had to be completed or you'd be disqualified.)

“Well,” I figured, “At least it's going to be warm all night, so that'll help.” (The forecast was for a low of 56 degrees, which is quite warm for this time of year.) Boy, was I wrong! As soon as the sun went down around 5pm, the temperature quickly dropped and a ~10 mph wind picked up, dropping the wind chill to I'd estimate 40 degrees at the low in the middle of the night, and I started to get cold (especially since we were all getting completely drenched a half dozen times each lap).

Race Description Part Two: It All Falls Apart

After the sun went down, I wanted to stay light so I changed into my shorty (short sleeve, short leg) wetsuit, rather than my thick, heavy, full-body one, which was a big mistake as it got colder than I expected, mainly due to the wind chill.

By the time I finished my 7th lap (35 miles) just before midnight, a number of factors combined to break my spirit: a) I was really chilled, which sucked the energy in my arms (it's critical to maintain a strong grip throughout the race to complete the toughest obstacles) and my legs, which reduced me to a walking speed, even on the flats and downhill (which never happened last year); b) I failed a few obstacles (and I take pride in NEVER failing obstacles – that really crushed me mentally); c) I knew I had no shot at another silver (75-mile) bib; and d) I found out that my buddy (and fellow 50+ year old geezer), Mark James, was more than two laps ahead of me, so I knew I had no chance of winning my age group (yes, I'm a competitive guy – and it sure was fun lording over Mark for the past year that a NYC desk jockey smoked a Navy SEAL – LOL!).

So I gave up. After I finished the 7th lap, I went back to my tent and planned to sleep for six hours, wake up at 6am, do three more laps to get my brown (50-mile) bib. But then fate kicked in: because I hadn't slept at all during the race last year, I didn't plan to this year either – and didn't have room in my luggage anyway – so I didn't have a sleeping bag to warm up in. Instead, I was curled up on the floor of my tent, under a thin blanket, still in my wetsuit, shivering – I was truly a pathetic sight! After 20 minutes, I realized I wasn't going to warm up much less be able to sleep, so my only option was to go back on the course – at least there my movement would keep me from getting any colder.

So I got up and, as I was getting ready, Tim Donovan came by and we set out together, walking the entire time...

And you know what? Things got better. I was still chilled and miserable, but because I wasn't trying to run, I wasn't in any pain, nor was I out of breath. And somehow my grip strength rallied and I started nailing even the toughest obstacles, which was a real boost both mentally (my ego was somewhat restored; I saw a number of pros taking penalties) and physically (avoiding those awful penalty walks).

So I just walked all night, first with Tim and then alone, cranking out very consistent laps: my last four were 2:16, 2:16, 2:14 and 2:19 (for perspective, my last three laps at last year's race, when I was pushing for the silver (75-mile) bib, were 1:39 each).

Here are some pictures of me during the night:





When the sun came up, I expected it to warm up and thought I might be able to change back into my shorts, but it was cloudy so it stayed cool. By the time I finished my 11th lap at 10:15am, I'd had enough. I felt OK and had plenty of time (there's a 90-minute grace period until 1:30pm to finish your last lap), so I could have easily walked a 12th lap, which would have given me 60 miles, but I didn't see the point (I didn't care if I went from top 10% to top 7% and from 5th to 3rd in the 50+ age group) and didn't want to risk injury and further soreness – as it was, I felt like 10 trucks ran over me!

I'm not proud of the fact that I walked the second half of the race and very nearly gave up, but at least I persevered – and I'm really happy that I took only eight penalties in 11 laps (once on Rope-a-Dope, twice on Funky Monkey, twice on Hangin' Tough and 3x on Kong; every miss was so excruciatingly close – a few times, I literally touched the platform when I lost my grip and fell back!).

I really enjoyed doing so many laps with my friends, Tim Donovan and Tom Millerick, and a HUGE shout-out to Rob Majors for driving in from Salt Lake City and staying up the entire time and being my pit crew!

Also, a big hat tip to Mark James, who went out really fast and ended up completing an amazing 70 miles (top 3% overall, winning the 50-54 age group), despite spraining his ankle in the middle of the night and having his hands swell up like balloons, as you can see in this picture:



Here's me with Sean Corvelle, Mark James, and Rob Majors after the race:



My favorite moments of the race were at the end, when:

a) Long-time hard-core Mudder Chris Betcher proposed to another long-time hard-core Mudder, Melissa “Sharkbait” Duggan, right after they both crossed the finish line together to complete 50 miles. She said yes! (You can watch the two-minute video of it [here](#).)



And b) See one of the two wheelchair racers finish (one man and one woman):



Appendix A: Q&A

Why do you do races like this?

I've always liked big challenges; they keep me motivated to get/stay in good shape; I really enjoy them – not the running, but the obstacles; and they're very social. I often do them with friends and family (my 76-year-old mom, 75-year-old dad, wife, three teenage daughters and many cousins have all done races with me), plus I've made many new friends. It's a great group of people and there's something about shared suffering that bonds people!

How does this race differ from other endurance races?

I've never done any other endurance race, but from what I've read of them, this race was different because we had to contend with:

- The obstacles (see photos and description of each below). There were a bunch of new ones and I found all of them fun and challenging, but after 100 of them, they take a lot out of you! Note that they tended to be very quick (if you completed them and avoided the penalty). How quick? I ran the first lap (a sprint of the course, skipping the obstacles) in 56 minutes and the 4th and 5th laps in 94 minutes – the main difference being that the obstacles were open.
- Wild temperature swings, both within each lap and between laps. After every lap, racers can go back to their pit (tent area) to rest, eat, use the Port-a-Potties, and change into dry and warmer/cooler gear, but that wastes time and it can be very tricky figuring out what to wear for a given lap. Guess wrong, and you might freeze...or overheat...or both (in fact, both were possible on the same leg).
- Speaking of being wet, that was constant because five obstacles on every lap (six once The Cliff opened at midnight) required you to completely submerge yourself (plus on six other obstacles, you either got partly submerged or, if you failed the obstacle, you fell into water, so some people were getting wet *a dozen times every lap*). This had a number of implications that made this race much more challenging than a typical endurance race:
 - a) It makes it very difficult to regulate your body temperature. In between water obstacles, you could get hot in your full wetsuit, but mostly we were cold from 6pm onward. (See the Q&A below for how I was able to partially address this problem.)
 - b) During the night you need to wear thick neoprene (3mm scuba diving) gloves to keep your fingers warm, which makes the many climbing/gripping obstacles extra difficult.
 - c) Every time you go into the water, hike/jog through sand/dirt, and crawl through mud, pebbles can get in your shoes, which forces you to run through the discomfort and hope it goes away, or take the time to stop and shake them out.
 - d) Your waterlogged feet can swell, making your shoes too tight or requiring you to change into a larger pair.
 - e) Trying to run a race while wearing a wetsuit can cause chafing; was constricting, making it harder to climb, jump, etc.; and added a lot of extra bulk and weight, which got really tiring as I hiked/jogged mile after mile. Ditto for my constantly wet shoes and socks.
- The course map says there was 865 feet of elevation gain (and loss) per lap, which is a lot of hiking up and down.

- The terrain was very loose and unstable – maybe half of the course was on various packed dirt roads, but the rest was sand and gravel with lots of rocks, which made it very difficult to jog at any pace, especially at night, as the risk of rolling your ankle was high.

How does this compare to an Ironman?

I don't know, as I've never done one (not even a half or an Olympic-distance one – nor do I intend to). It also depends on how many laps you run at the WTM. Mark James, who (long ago) ran the Kona (Hawaii) Ironman 10 years in a row when he was a professional triathlete, told me that the 60 miles he did at the WTM last year was massively harder than any of the Ironmans because: a) it's twice as long (timewise); and b) you can't get into a rhythm like you can at an Ironman (biking for six hours straight, for example).

What conditioning/experience is needed?

None is required – and I saw a few seriously out-of-shape/overweight people out there. They have my total respect, as this is really hard even if you're in great shape.

But if you want to do well – say, complete 50 miles, as 45% of the finishers did (654 of 1,468) – then you need: a) a very high level of fitness (this is 24 hours of pretty sustained effort, so as one benchmark, you should be able to run a marathon in under five hours; ideally four); b) a high degree of athleticism (in order of importance: balance/coordination, lower body strength, upper-body strength, and flexibility); and c) fearlessness.

How did you train for this?

Obviously the best way to train for a long-distance trail race is to do a lot of long-distance trail running. However, I did very little – I just don't have the time or interest, and worry about getting chronic injuries that all older runners seem to have, so instead I did hour-long (but typically very intense) workouts pretty much every day (and in the weeks before the race, twice a day).

In a typical week, I play hard pick-up basketball a few times, a couple of hours of tennis once or twice, do a ridiculously hard hour-long workout with a trainer once or twice (often wearing a 20-lb. weight vest), and ride my bike a few miles a day to get to and from meetings – and that's pretty much it.

Then, maybe one weekend a month, I do some sort of race/challenge: a Tough Mudder or Spartan race (typically two laps) if there's one in the area (I'm not one of those folks who travels all over the country to do these races), a trail race, I climbed three big mountains in the Alps (Eiger, Jungfrau, Monch) in August, etc. Thus, I was reasonably mentally and physically prepared, but this race took it to a whole new level.

While my running training was laughably inadequate (though to repeat what I noted above, I do think there's something to be said for not burning out your legs and getting plagued with injuries, especially at my age, by putting too many miles on your legs), I did work hard on building my grip and upper-body strength, which I think is the second most important area, as 2/3 of the obstacles demanded this. They were all somewhat different – climbing a wall or cargo net, doing rings and monkey bars, etc. – but they all boiled down to being able to grip something and pull your body up.

There's a simple test for this: how many consecutive pull-ups can you do? For a race like this, the answer should be at least 10. My max is 30, which was key to my race, as I only incurred eight time-and-energy-consuming penalties during the entire race.

(For those of you who live in NYC and have an interest in a personal trainer, I highly recommend the two I use (once a week each): Richard Louis of FitSpace NYC (rplouisnyc@gmail.com) and Carlos Munoz at Definitions (munozcelo@aol.com). I also do regular group workouts at [Tone House](#), [Ripped Fitness](#), and [East End Row](#).)

In light of your “laughably inadequate” running training, why didn’t your body break down?

- 1) I got lucky;
- 2) I walked all of the uphill and, in the early part of the race, didn’t try to run too fast;
- 3) My workouts with my trainers are super intense – pretty much everything to failure – which I think has really toughened up my joints, muscles, ligaments and tendons (and my mind!); and
- 4) I’ve become a big fan over the past two years of shiatsu massage (I go to a place in NYC with a cult following called Salon de Tokyo). A little Chinese woman (ask for Mimi), holding onto a bar in the ceiling, stands on my back and legs and applies every ounce of pressure onto one-inch areas. It’s so painful! But I can hear and feel my tight joints and muscles loosening up.

What was the hardest part?

The hardest thing for me was to just keep on going for nearly 24 hours, especially after I got cold. Thankfully, I love obstacles – they keep me entertained. Had this been a 24-hour ultramarathon, I would have gone crazy from boredom after a few hours and stopped.

What are the keys to success in this race, based on your personal experience and observation of others?

- 1) Being in shape, both running/endurance and upper-body strength.
- 2) Staying warm – but not overheating (see comments below).
- 3) Drinking enough water and ingesting enough calories (~400/hour?) to keep your body going. This is hard because when you’re exercising you often don’t feel like eating – but if you wait until you feel hungry, it’s too late: you can’t recover and you’re gonna bonk. Thus, it’s critical to force-feed yourself at every pit stop, however crappy it makes your stomach feel. (You can train for this, though I didn’t.)
- 4) Controlling your pace so you never get winded or overheated.
- 5) Using your (much stronger) legs rather than your arms on numerous obstacles, which preserves arm/grip strength (any rock climber will tell you how important this is). There’s not much you can do other than be as fast as you can on pure grip/upper-body tests like Stage 5 Clinger, Funky Monkey, Rope-A-Dope, Hangin’ Tough, and Kong Infinity. But you can do Snot Rocket, Abseil, Double Dipping, and Ladder to Hell using 90% legs, with arms mainly for balance.
- 6) Being assertive in asking for assistance. The #1 woman, Rea Kolbl, who finished 4th overall with 90 miles, said she regularly asked for – and got – help on obstacles like Everest (as did I) (her excellent write-up of her race is posted [here](#)). I think some slower racers felt like they didn’t want to bother the faster racers, who might resent being slowed down, but nothing could be further from the truth. We’re all part of one big team and family, so every single person out there, even the elite racers going for max distance and prize money, is happy to help another Mudder. But don’t assume that others know you want/need help – some people take pride in completing obstacles without assistance – so you need to ask!

7) Communicate clearly about what assistance you need. For example, I needed help every time on Everest (either 2.0 or 2.1), so when I was ready to run, I made eye contact with the people at the top, made sure they were ready for me, yelled “Two hands!”, and then held up both hands in the position I’d have them. Then, once they’d grabbed me and pulled my hands up to where I had a grip on the top, I said, “Let go” because I could pull myself up (i.e., I didn’t need them to grab one of my legs).

8) Knowing when to give up on an obstacle you were never going to complete (to save energy and preserve grip strength) – yet also doing every obstacle possible (to avoid time- and energy-sapping penalties). Examples abounded: a) why take a penalty on Everest – there were always people at the top to pull you up; and b) once The Cliff opened, it was a gift, as it saved a long run and/or swim, so I strongly suggest overcoming the fear of jumping and doing it.

9) If you’re not sure if you have enough time to make a particular milestone (25, 50 or 75 miles), it’s okay to ask to cut a line. In general, cutting is frowned upon for obvious reasons, but if you’re tight on time, just ask “Do you mind if I go ahead of you?” Every Mudder is always willing to help out a fellow Mudder!

How did you maintain your body temperature and not get too hot or too cold?

Everyone seemed to have pretty much the same gear for the hot weather at the start: a light top and shorts/tights. Then, most had some sort of transition gear (maybe a thin [“shorty” wetsuit](#)) as the sun went down, and a thin (3mm) full-body wetsuit and a heavy (5mm) one ([this](#) was the one I bought) for the night – plus associated hoods and gloves of varying types/thicknesses.

During last year’s race, it stayed reasonably warm until far into the night, so I was able to run light. This year, I tried to do this again and paid the price, even though I had a *huge* advantage that, to my knowledge, no other racer had: I had the [Quiksilver Mens Ps+Qs Heated Vest](#) (it’s been discontinued; I don’t know where to buy one now). This is a thin, sleeveless neoprene vest worn by cold-water surfers under their wetsuits. It has a heat pad covering the entire lower back, with a small (Snickers bar-sized) battery in a pocket on the hip with two settings: high and low.

This vest was an absolute lifesaver for me. As mentioned above, my shorty wasn’t warm enough once the sun went down so the only thing that kept me from getting frozen (as opposed to merely chilled) was turning the heater onto high. Then, in between water obstacles, especially as I was climbing into the hills, I turned it to low or off. In this way, I was able to preserve the battery for the entire night. (I also recommend the Neptune Thermoregulation System, developed by TM veteran Jason Rulo, which has six Hot Hands around the entire waist – click [here](#) and [here](#) for more info about this.)

Any tips on nutrition during the race?

I brought 5x as much food as I could possibly eat because I had no idea what to expect and what I might be craving. You don’t just want to consume energy drinks and gel – that’s fine for short races, but won’t work for long ones.

My main go-to “real food” was a rotisserie chicken that I consumed in pieces over the first half of the race. After each leg, I also ate a Snickers bar or bag of peanut M&Ms. I washed this down with three drinks:

- a) Coke (I like the taste, find it refreshing, and it has caffeine); and
- b) Ensure Enlive (“all-in-one advanced nutrition shake” – a ton of protein and calories).

I had an entire box of Gu, gummy shots, and energy jelly beans and didn't touch them. Go figure. It worked for me...

What would you have done differently/what will do you differently next year?

- 1) Get into warm gear faster. Also, Rob Majors (my pit crew) lent me his Goretex windbreaker, which I wore over my wetsuit and it made a big difference. I should have also brought and worn my windproof pants.
- 2) I gave more help than I received on the obstacles during the race, but feel like I could have done more.
- 3) I'd make sure I had two people in my pit crew – one person halfway out on the course who I could give instructions to, who could then call them back to the other person in the pit.

How did you feel afterwards?

Every part of body was quite sore for 3-4 days afterward, but I recovered fairly quickly. I took four Advil (800mg of ibuprofen) every four hours once the race ended until the following Wednesday to manage the pain and inflammation, and I needed Ambien to sleep the first few nights afterward.

Is there actually any danger?

Well, it depends on how you define danger. There are plenty of opportunities on many of the obstacles to slip and fall, get banged up, maybe even break a leg or arm, but there were no major injuries at this race – depending on how you define “major” I suppose.

One of the lead women slipped on Funky Monkey, fell into the side of the pool, and knocked herself out, ending her race. And there's plenty of opportunity to mess yourself up jumping 35' off The Cliff. If you land slightly wrong, you can break your tailbone (on one jump last year, I was leaning back a tiny bit and bruised it, and the female winner a few years ago, Amelia Boone, actually broke it – but kept on racing and won!).

But if you define danger as the risk of death, you were probably more likely to die driving to/from the airport (15 miles away) than you were on the course. That said, at a regular Tough Mudder race in 2013, a guy drowned years ago when someone else jumped on him, knocked him out, and nobody noticed until it was too late. And a year ago at a Tough Mudder in New Jersey, I saw a big guy being rushed off the course on a stretcher on the back of a cart and heard the next day that he'd died of a heart attack.

What advice would you give to Tough Mudder for future WTMs?

- 1) People love getting recognition: patches, bibs, awards, etc. I think having a patch for 25 miles and a bib at 50 miles (which 45% of finishers achieved) is just right, but having the next bib at 75 miles (which only 2.7% achieved) is too much. I saw a lot of folks get 50 miles and then mentally or literally stop, even though they could have kept going for another lap or two, because they knew 75 was out of reach. Why not have a 60-mile bib? Also, why not have awards by age categories (selfishly speaking!)?
- 2) Put a few Port-a-Potties near the start/finish area for use just by racers – the closest ones were much too far away.
- 3) Kill Pandora's Box, which was totally lame? It wasn't dark and the wires were so high that you could pull yourself through in less than 30 seconds with almost no risk of a shock. I'd be surprised if even 5%

of the people going through it got zapped - and the couple of people I talked to who did hit a wire said they barely felt it.

The contrast with Operation last year was stark. Now THAT was an obstacle worthy of the World's Toughest Mudder (see pic below)! (Especially given that I think TM's best known/most iconic challenge is Electroshock Therapy.)

Operation required good technique, steady hands & nerves, and a bit of luck - and if you took a jolt, you FELT IT and couldn't help but shout/yell/scream! (Of the 14 times I did it last year, I only got through without a jolt 5 times; 5 times I took 1 jolt; and 4 times took TWO jolts!)

It was a bit of a physical challenge, but mostly a mental one - in some ways, like the Cliff, which isn't primarily a test of strength or skill but rather a mental one that forces many folks to face their deepest fears: of heights, darkness and water. That's one of the things that makes Tough Mudder races so special and unique: forcing participants to face - AND OVERCOME - their fears.

Imagine if The Cliff was lowered from 35' to 8'. Sure, a few people might be a little nervous, but mainly it would just be lame!

I think Pandora's Box cheated us all.

PS - Please don't read this as a general criticism - this was a GREAT race overall and I loved all of the other new obstacles!

4) I think there should be modifications on the course so that people (like me) who want an extra-tough challenge (and perhaps even qualify for awards and/or prize money) can have it, but others aren't hurt and/or demoralized, which I saw a lot of. But rather than making it men vs women, instead have it be elites vs. amateurs (I'll leave it to others to determine whether one has to qualify to run the elite course or can simply self-declare, just as, for example, anyone can do if they want to run the Tougher wave).

Here are a few ideas for how some of the obstacles at the WTM might have been modified for elite vs. amateur competitors:

- Everest: for elites, it's a must-complete; no penalty if they do 2.1; if they do 2.0, then they must do the long penalty; for amateurs, they can do either 2.1 or 2.0 for no penalty; skipping it would result in the brief sand-bag penalty
- Humpchuck: put a 2x4 step in the middle of the wall on one side, which can only be used by amateurs
- Pyramid Scheme: put ropes down from the top on the amateur half of the wall
- Snot Rocket: no barrels to duck under or water coming down on the heads of amateurs
- Rope-a-Dope: put some knots in the vertical rope for amateurs (and maybe shorten the penalty for them as well)
- Stage 5 Clinger: amateurs wouldn't have to switch to the metal handholds at midnight, and maybe put in a larger foothold for them
- Double Dipping: on the amateur half of the second wall, nail a 2x4 step halfway up the wall
- Funky Monkey: for amateurs, maybe just have monkey bars up and down (no wheels); also, shorten the penalty; lastly, maybe do what they did at WTM 2016: during the night, put a plank out so amateurs could skip the monkey bars and go straight to the wheels
- Hangin' Tough: straight rings (not up-and-down ones) and no bungee for amateurs

- Kong Infinity: I'm not sure how to make this easier, but maybe have a shorter penalty for amateurs
- The Cliff: have a platform 20 feet up for amateurs

I'm sure many old-timers/purists will cringe at these suggestions, saying it would make the course too easy, to which I say: a) this doesn't apply to you: just sign up for the elite division and do the hard course; b) I think the amateur course would still be pretty hard; and c) it would be easy to experiment with this next season, maybe modifying only a few obstacles and starting with regular TM races whereby the Tougher and Toughest heats would have the elite-level challenges.

How much does it cost?

Registration prices vary, but average ~\$550, but that's just the start. If you don't have the gear, you can easily drop \$1,000 on this (I spent quite a bit more last year, but I was over the top for sure – and didn't have to buy anything but food this year), plus flights and hotel – not just for you, but your pit crew as well. It ain't cheap! (Note that the 2018 WTM will be in Atlanta Nov. 10-11.)

What does Susan think of this?

Not much. But she's been endlessly loving and patient with me for more than 27 years of my foolish escapades – and I haven't killed myself yet! And she knows from long experience that if she raised doubts/concerns, it would just give me more motivation! And she takes comfort in my large life insurance policy... ;-)

Appendix B: Mark James's Write-up of the Race

I loved Mark's write-up of the race:

I'm still in bed with my forlorn Husky Sisu at my feet who desperately wants a walk but I can barely move without something stinging or hurting. I'm tired but also too wired still from the event and reading FB WTM posts to sleep. This is what I remember in no particular order from WTM2017. It's extremely long so feel free to just scroll past it look at a picture or just go to the next post.

Here goes:

1. The registration line for Contenders (which started before 0700) was longer than the one at the Metallica concert I went to last summer Open division had it way easier.
2. The mad rush to get a good pit spot was just that!
3. When setting up your tent leave something heavy inside it or it will blow away like mine did. Thank you Tank for rescuing it.
4. Ice melts in the sun. In your car. When it's not in an ice chest.
5. Waiting for a room for 3+ hours at the Westin is a great place to meet people. Especially by the entrance door. I officially meet Eric Emerson Botsford E-Roc and Coach for the 10th time and they kind of know who I am. Or that I do Tough Mudders. Or something.
6. Having to wait those 3+ hours for a room can get you a free breakfast if you play your cards right.
7. Still waiting for a room I spot Allison Tai the pool with her kids. She seems like a really cool mom.
8. Henderson Walmart has everything. I got the best deal on Halloween stuff and gift wrapping.
9. At least seven people recognize me from the Amazon video and actually say hi to me. Another 3000 walk by me like I'm a regular Mudder which is how it should be.
10. Not having my usual glass or two of wine before the race was very hard for me. Maybe I should go to meetings.
11. I think I slept. But I'm not sure.
12. Not having a cup or two of coffee in the morning before the race was very hard for me. Maybe I should go to meetings.
13. I spot E-Roc having breakfast with Jaime at the Westin. We do a solid hand shake. We are now bros. He so cool.
14. 0700-1100 on race day goes really fast.
15. The sound system was quirky in that it played music fine but whenever the race announcer talked it cut out intermittently.
16. Sean Corvelle does not need a Mic.
17. Jim Campbell is always the first guy up that Start line hill.
18. The buffs they gave us were worth a \$500 entrance fee.
19. Hey where did the Wedgie go?
20. Gotta love the "No obstacle" lap. Irony since all of us loathe doing marathons and are self-described obstacle course racers.
21. Hey there's Tex Ritter sporting the Irish colors.
22. It got really hot fast but I couldn't strip down anymore from my race bib, hat, shorts and shoes without socks. Maybe next year I'll just paint my outfit on.
23. A swim after Mile 4? Ah there is a God! I spot E-Roc and Jaimie on the river bank drinking wine and chilling. I choke on water. They laugh. It's great. He's married and I'm not gay. Damn. I Wait I'm married too! What is in this water?
24. I finally catch up to Joe Perry. He's kinda to spot!

25. One lap done and I'm in the zone. Joe pits and I don't. No need to at this point.
 26. Another lap done and I am the zone. Who needs to Pit anyway?
 27. Another lap and I can't remember if I've done an obstacle yet!
 28. Never mind the silver Bib I'm going for the orange blazer.
 29. Ryan Atkins passes me and I tell him I'm still 20 miles in Holy Grail points ahead of him.
 30. I'm liken Dope a Rope.
 31. I spot Jennifer Nelson the Tough Mudder Amazon film producer and offered to do a brief interview about how I'm just crushing it.
 32. 5 laps in 5 hours maybe I should eat something.
 33. Tyler Nash passes me like I'm moving backwards.
 34. About to skip Pandora's box again I run into Charles Tank Lukancich who tells me it's really easy so I take his advice and follow him in the dark box fearing for my life.
 That ended up being my sanctuary zone the rest of the event.
 35. I'm still without a wetsuit but the Suns going down so next Pit I'll put on a Shorty and put on my headlamp.
 36. First fail on the funky monkey. How long can this penalty be?
 37. OMG
 38. Fail the Kong with the dumb ANW bungees but nail the rotating Kong which I really like.
 39. Reward is another swim. Hmm!
 40. Can't wait for the cliff.
 41. Now it is certifiably dark.
 42. I do the mental math five laps down and only have to go for 75. I figure I can go two hours per lap and still get this done.
 43. Ryan passes me again. Again I remind him where he is in the HG standings like an idiot.
 44. I spot E-Roc and Jaime and the crew working hard pulling uphill going up to Double Dipping. We are like besties.
 45. I spot David Tyson Perry and his crew on the other side of DD. Coach is fired up.
 46. Everything is great.
 47. Everything is not great I just sprained my ankle so bad that I heard a couple popping sounds. Two Mudders behind me stop to assist and ask me if I need medical attention.
 48. I make it back to my tent and frantically search with the help of my buddy Whitney Tilson and our last minute shared pit crew guy Rob Majors for an ankle brace I have stuffed somewhere in all the crap I brought.
 49. Definitely a game changer.
 50. Breathe. Improvise. Adapt. Overcome.
 51. 10 minutes of pit time- my longest yet I slam two chocolate Ensures, a Gatorade and two bananas and head back out with a noticeable limp.
 52. Take my first Everest penalty. It's a run swim run. That used to be my favorite sport now it's becoming my least favorite.
 53. The showerheads at snot rocket are off. Quick sprint to beat them coming back on again.
 54. Too late just as I enter the tube they flash on and the water seems colder than any Arctic enema I can remember for a long time.
 55. I start struggling on obstacles I did easily before and fail Dope a Rope as I can't lift the weighted rope up with my swollen foot to climb the rope.
 56. Dope a Rope has a very long penalty I just found out.
 57. I not only fail Funky Monkey again I also feel both Kong's.
 58. Time to switch to a full wet suit I'm starting to get really cold.

59. 45 miles in I'm wondering how much further I can go. I put on the wetsuit and head out one more time before grabbing a cup of noodles from the wonderful Orphan tent.

60. Cliff is open and I wonder if I can make the jump and not rip my foot completely off. I pass Darth Vader and am reminded what real perseverance and putting out is and tell myself to shut the fuck up.

61. There's a certain I don't know what when you step up to the edge of the cliff. Best bet is just to jump and not even think about it.

62. Lap times have definitely slowed down a lot. I do the mental math which translates to loser math in retrospect.

63. Ryan passes me again. I notice he has the word "Nobody" written on the back of his bib. We are now tied for the Holy Grail lead. Ironically all the lead gets you is bragging rights there is no money purse everyone who finishes a Tougher, Toughest and WTM gets whatever is in store for us.

54. My usual great happy go lucky spirit that I'm sometimes known for is waning and I try and find solace in anything. From that 3 to 6am or so window when it's the coldest when you're the tireddest it's very easy to come up with excuses and reasons not to be out there anymore. I think of my family who aren't here with me because of my mother in law - their grandma dying of cancer in her last days perhaps. I think of my grandparents who inspired me and supported me throughout the years who are no longer with me and others who have motivated me.

55. 60 miles in I've tied my mileage from last year. But it feels so much longer. There six hours left on the clock and I wonder if I can make it to 70 let alone 75. It seems like so much time but not when you're in the desert like this. Not when you're failing practically every penalty obstacle there is and a 5 Mile loop becomes closer to 8.

71. Lap 13 was a blur but I think Ryan passed me. I know Deanna Blegg passed me and I was impressed.

72. Going into lap 14 I came upon the realization that there's no way I could do to four laps under four hours.

73. Sue Harvey Brown gives me words of encouragement at Everest which I start doing again.

74. It's light out but the clouds cover the sun and there is only cold.

75. My watch stopped working.

76. I'm glad my watch stopped working.

75. I run into a Motley crew comprised of Amelia Boone, Stefanie Bishop, Matty Gregg and others who invite me to join them. It's the bestest.

76. We walk and amble along and tackle obstacles together like Blockness and Balls To The Wall and Berlin Wall making sure everyone gets up and over.

77. We make sure Ben Asian Sensation Chan doesn't take the penalty again at Stage 5 by getting him to the top of the obstacle.

78. James Brown catches us and suddenly I fully understand every word of his beautiful thick Brit accent.

79. I'm having the fun time I started with and came here for.

80. I've lost the Grail lead.

81. I don't care.

82. I didn't get the silver bib.

83. I don't care.

84. E-Roc is a younger version of myself but has better hair, better tats and friendlier smile.

85. The Cliff bypass swamp is second only to the Kiss of Mud far as cruelty to animals.

86. At the Cliff cargo net I almost forget I haven't crossed the finish line and schmooze along the shore catching up with new and old friends showing off my battered very swollen hands.

87. Superman and his whole crew scoot by and I amble behind them to the finish line. They are the true heroes.

88. I wasn't very good at packing up stuff I was so fried. In fact this year was a complete role reversal of last year when I packed up all of Whitney's gear. This year he reciprocated just fine.
89. Back at the hotel I shower, try to sleep for hours and then drive frantically to get Whitney to his red eye flight back to New York with only 30 minutes to spare.
90. Don't eat a thing and wake up rabidness at 4:30. Have to wait till 0600 to order room service.
91. Go on Facebook and realize I'm not the only one awake at this hour. Mark Jones has already written several chapters and gone for a 20 mile morning run.
92. I pick up my holy grail award that we've all been curious about all year long. Despite it being "only" a mug apparently you can get a free beer if you want to lug it around to all the Tough Mudders next year. I'll probably take advantage of that.
93. I get to sit with famous people like Joe Perry, MJ, Melissa Dugan, Chris Betcher and JahLisa James.
94. I get a pseudo-honorable mention for the Holy Grail points which actually meant a lot to me.
95. Will Dean always makes fun of his own British accent. He still brilliant!
96. I drink two beers from my Holy Grail mug, chill for a couple of hours till they kick me out of the hotel room and drive back to San Diego.
97. Did you really think I was going to go to 100?

Thanks to everyone besides my sister and my mother for reading this. I really enjoyed the Tough Mudder season this year and meeting so many of you. I love being part of this TM family.

Appendix C: A Description of Each Obstacle

My video (<https://youtu.be/d5x0NWEyr9Y>) covers 15 of the 21 obstacles (with time stamps in case you want to quickly skip to see that obstacle):

- Everest: 1:17
- Humpchuck: 1:56
- Devil's Quagmire: 2:08
- Snot Rocket: 2:57
- The Block Ness Monster: 4:16
- Rope-A-Dope: 5:54
- Reach Around/Stage 5 Clinger: 7:00
- Kiss of Mud 2.0: 8:00
- Double Dipping: 9:22
- Shawshanked: 11:24
- Funky Monkey 2.0: 12:45
- Hangin' Tough: 14:30
- Kong Infinity: 15:22
- The Cliff: 17:14
- The finish line: 20:02

Here's the course map again – they're in the order of the clock/wheel on the left (note that the course got tougher at midnight, as shown in red: two more swims at Humpchuck and Statue of Liberty at the beginning of the course, a new long hike up a hill to Ladder to Hell, and The Cliff opened):



Everest

This is an iconic Tough Mudder obstacle, in which you run up a curved wall, grab the top, pull yourself over, and climb down. This year there was an interesting twist: the wall was split into two parts: the left two-thirds of the wall (labeled Everest 2.0) was the old Everest – still challenging but some racers (not me!) could do it without assistance. The rest of the wall (labeled Everest 2.1) was 2-3 feet higher but had a good grip right at the top so was only slightly harder. Thus, racers had three choices: skip it entirely and do a penalty walk that included going in the lake; do Everest 2.0 and do a short one-minute penalty walk with a sandbag; or do Everest 2.1 without penalty.

The “penalty” was so short that I was agnostic whether I did 20.0 or 2.1 – it just depended on how long the line was and whether there were fellow Mudders at the top to grab my hands and pull me up. (Racers are allowed to help each other on the course, but no spectators/pit crew are allowed to provide any assistance (water, food, a push up a wall, etc.) whatsoever – only in the pit area after each lap.)

Here’s a screenshot from my video (which is why the resolution is so poor – true of many pics below):



This picture (I found on the internet, from a regular TM race) shows the lengths to which racers will go to help each other (usually there are 1-2 people at the top and racers just run up, grab hands and get pulled up):



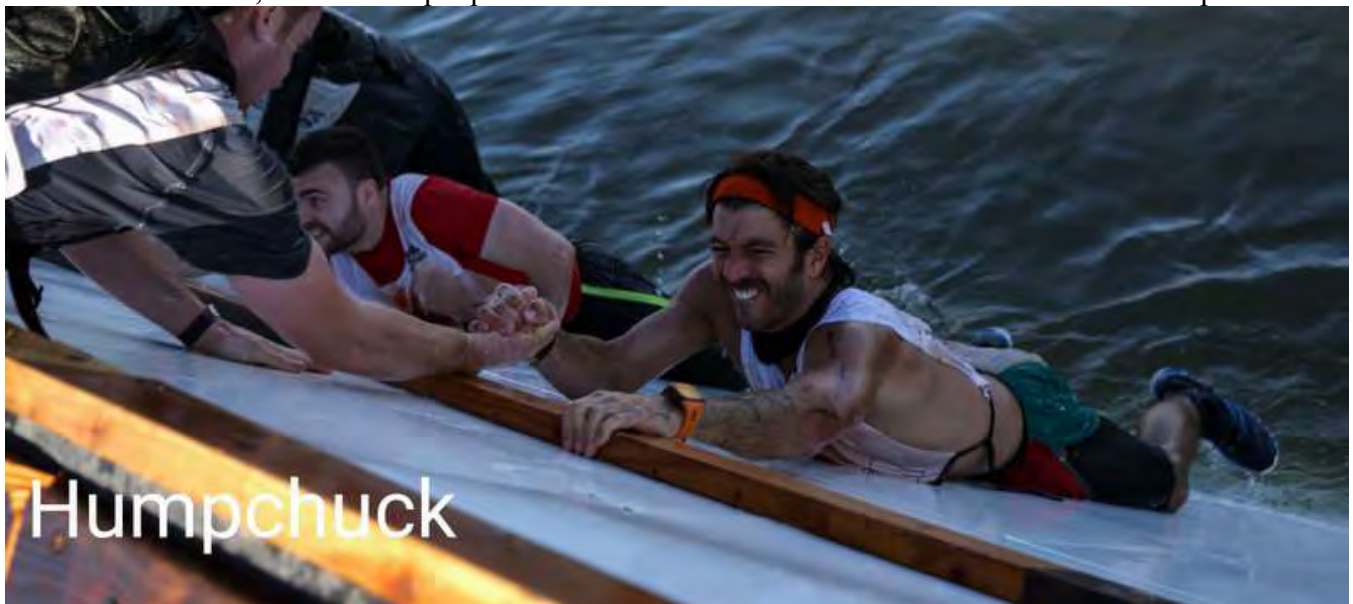
(Funny story: my 76-year-old mother did a TM in New Hampshire with me in August 2016. Unfortunately, she is the world's slowest runner so when we came to Everest 2.0, she couldn't get within a country mile of our outstretched hands. She had given up and was walking around it when a woman at the top suggested that we form a human pyramid at the base so my mom could climb up on top of us high enough to reach the people grabbing down from the top. As you can see from this video, it worked: <https://youtu.be/EgNnqvO2zWA> (4:31)! Everyone was cheering her and giving her high-fives!)

Humpchuck

This opened at midnight and involved wading/swimming across a short (maybe 100-foot) segment of the lake and climbing up an 8-foot slick wall at the other end:



Unlike last year, when there were two boards at the top (see pic below), this year there was just the board at the bottom, so even tall people needed a boost from the bottom or a hand from the top:



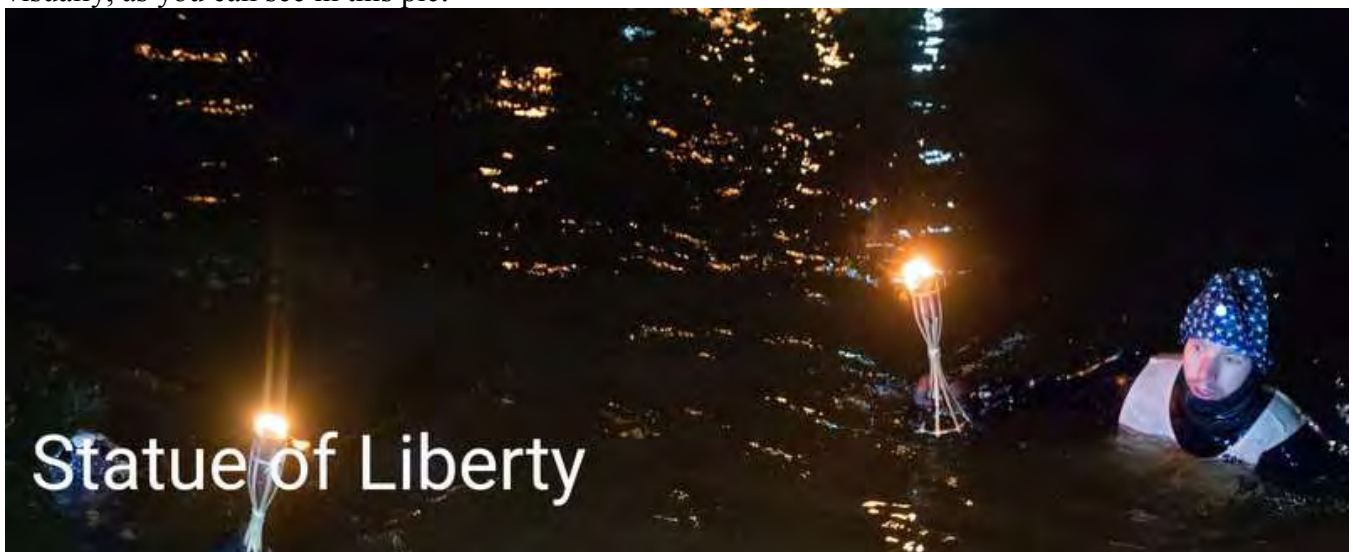
Mud Mile 2.0

I don't have any pictures of it, but here's a picture of a similar obstacle at TM Tristate in October:



Statue of Liberty

Like Humpchuck, this opened at midnight and involved a short swim, but instead of a wall at the end, you had to hold a lit torch (if you dropped it or the flame went out for any reason, you had to do it again). Being in the water at night was chilling, but otherwise it was an easy obstacle – and very cool visually, as you can see in this pic:



Pyramid Scheme

This is a slick, sloping wall that they made tougher this year by removing the top rope. So, if you're tall and have upper-body strength, you could grab the short rope in the middle of the wall and pull yourself halfway up, but then needed a hand from the top. Here are pics of me doing this last year:



Island Hopping

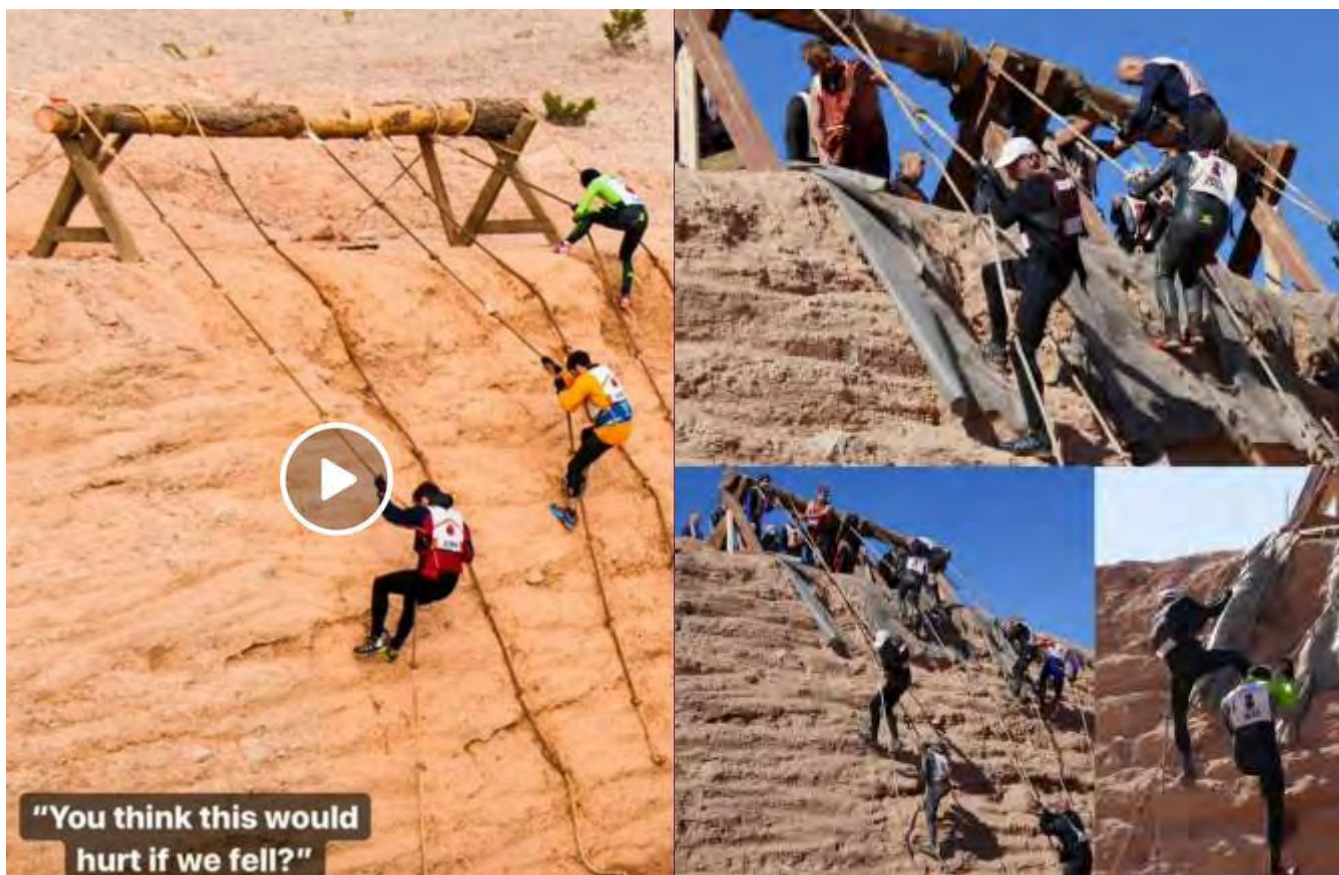
This is totally misnamed – it was just a very short waist-deep wade through a corner of the lake, which took ~10 seconds.

Pandora's Box

This was a new electric shock obstacle in which racers had to crawl through a dark box with electric wires and chains hanging down, but it ended up being totally lame. It wasn't dark and the wires were so high that you could pull yourself through in less than 30 seconds with almost no risk of a shock. I'd be surprised if even 5% of the people going through it got zapped - and the couple of people I talked to who did hit a wire said they barely felt it.

Abseil

This was a simple, quick rappel down. Piece a cake (as long as you're not afraid of heights)! Here's one pic from this year and a collage of pics of me doing it last year:



Devil's Quagmire

This involved crawling under a cargo net, dropping into neck-deep water, then crawling out using a rope net, with a cargo net on top of you. Here's a picture of it:



Snot Rocket (formerly known as Augustus Gloop)

This involves jumping in a neck-deep pool of water, wading across, ducking your head under some barrels and coming up in a tube, and climbing up it (using hand-/foot-holds on either side) while a firehose poured a ton of water on your head. This obstacle is a nightmare for anyone who has a fear of water/drowning or is claustrophobic – and was hard on everyone this year because the water coming out of the hose was FREEZING!



The Block Ness Monster

This one requires a bunch of people working well as a team. Everyone jumps into neck-deep water and pushes on the rotating, triangular-shaped thingie (I don't know what to call it). On each rotation, 1-2 people hold onto the top, are pulled over, and then grab the top and help keep it rotating so the others can get over. Then repeat this once more and you're done – great fun! Here's a pic from this year and a collage of pics from last year:



Ladder to Hell

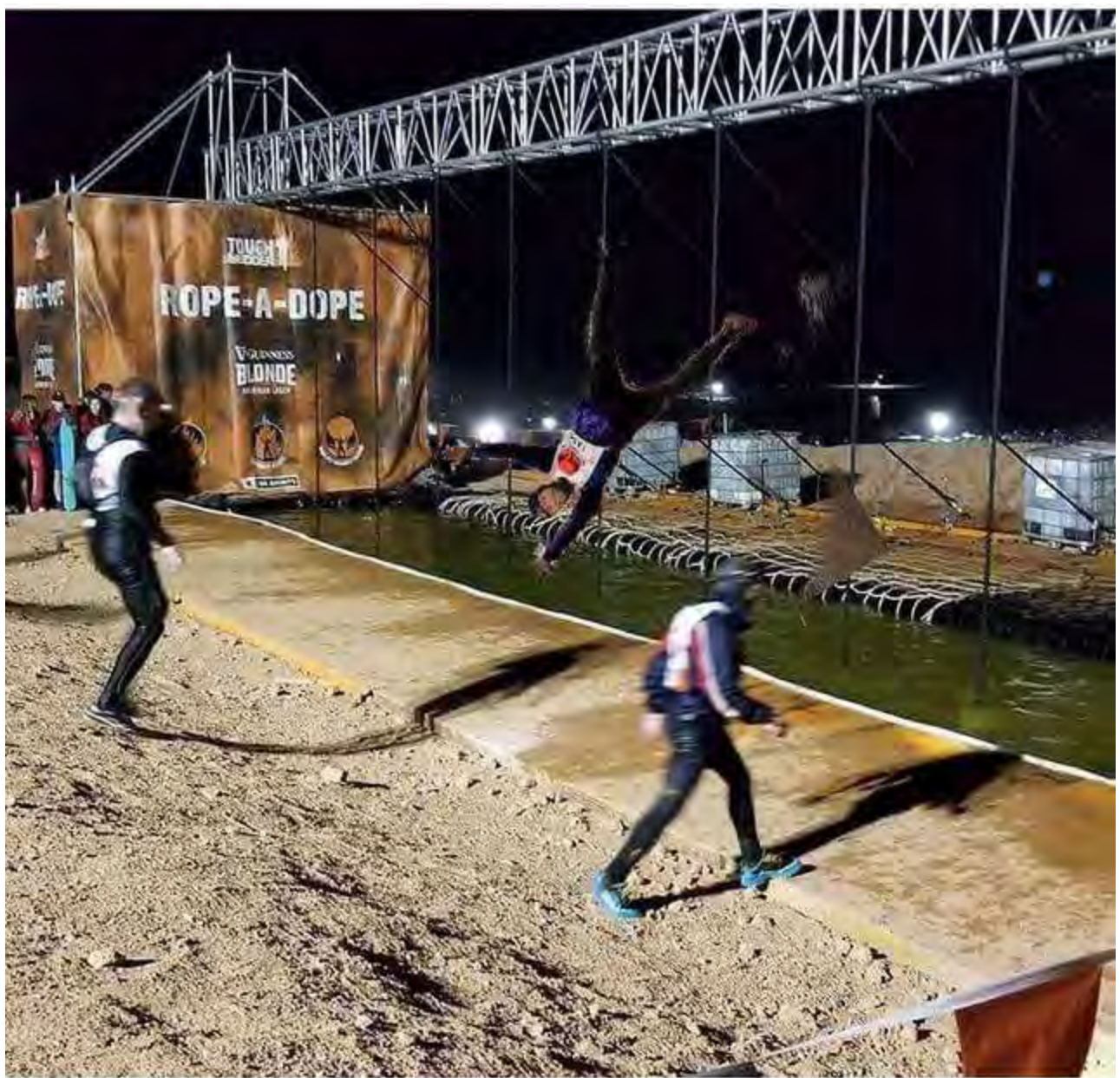
This opened at midnight. It wasn't particularly hard – it's just that was at the highest point of the course, after a long uphill, so it *felt* hard!



Rope-A-Dope

This was an outstanding, super challenging new obstacle that involved jumping from the side of the pool, grabbing the rope, arresting your fall before you hit the water, then climbing the rope, reaching a hand, arm and foot over to the 45-degree-angled down-rope, and then sliding down. I nailed this every time except the one time I was wearing scuba gloves, which had no grip, which was good because the penalty was really long. Here's my pic followed by one someone posted in which he Photoshopped himself falling head-first, which is what he did!





Reach Around/Stage 5 Clinger

Reach Around wasn't too hard as you could use your feet on the inverted ladder to climb up, as you can see in this picture:



At midnight, however, they shut down Reach Around (the first two platforms in the picture above) and instead you had to do Stage 5 Clinger (the back three platforms), in which there was no inverted ladder. Instead, you walked under the monkey bars to the wall, climbed up a couple of easy steps, turned around and used the monkey bars (maybe with a foot on the side rail) to work your way back to the front, then grabbed the front edge and turned yourself around again, and then (the hard part) you needed to pull yourself up onto the “roof” (the key was putting your foot on the little block of wood nailed to the side support). If you didn't have the grip or upper-body strength to do this, you could ask for help and kneel on someone's shoulders as they walked under the monkey bars, and then stand on their shoulders to get over the top. This was key, as the penalty was brutally long.

Kiss of Mud 2.0

This involved crawling under barbed wire through mud (and, at times, some muddy water) for maybe 50 feet. I long ago discovered that there's a hard way to do this – crawling – and an easy way – rolling. (You can see me doing so in Susan's short video clip from a year ago: <https://youtu.be/2QxAalZY6Tc>.) Yes, the latter can make you a little dizzy, but relative to crawling it's so much earlier and faster and you don't get scraped up. I don't know why most people haven't figured this out – try it, you'll like it!



Double Dipping

This consisted of climbing over two walls – made extra hard by the fact that this was at the top of a long, tough hill. Again, you didn't want to fail this, as the penalty was very long.



Shawshanked (a variant of the old Turducken)

This required you to wade through water, turn yourself around and pull yourself with a rope up a tube, drop backwards into a pool of, and then crawl out using a rope cargo net. It wasn't particularly hard but got you wet and tired as you approached the brutally tough obstacles at the end of the course. Here's the first part:



And here's an old pic of Mark James and Maxine Colvey about to drop (from TM Philly 2016) and me climbing out in the middle of the night:



Funky Monkey 2.0

This obstacle has always been my nemesis. You go up a set of maybe a dozen monkey bars (see lower left picture of me doing so at another TM race), then have to reach to a horizontal wheel and spin around on it and grab a big vertical wheel (which I'm doing in the top picture), swing down to a smaller vertical wheel (top and lower right pictures, from last year's WTM) and, finally, to a bar before getting to the landing platform.



When I'm fresh and my grip strength is strong, I have no problem, but when I get tired, my grip strength often gives out right near the end. The key I discovered this year is to go up the money bars backwards, with only one hand on each bar, which gets me to the top quicker so I can finish before my grip gives out. Here are pics from this year's race:



Hangin' Tough

(14:30) This was a new obstacle that was particularly challenging early on when the middle (of 5) rings was instead a bungee cord with a knot at the end. When you grabbed it, it stretched, which surprised me and I fell off the first time. The next time, when I knew what to expect, I nailed it (especially once I figured out that the best way to go across was sideways). One guy sprained his finger on it, so they substituted a ring maybe a third of the way through the course, as you can see here:



Kong Infinity

This was an awesome new obstacle that involved grabbing rings to make a barrel rotate to go up a ramp and then transition to monkey bars to the platform. It was wildly difficult and almost nobody was getting this at the end (especially since our grips and upper bodies were burned by Funky Monkey and Hangin' Tough).





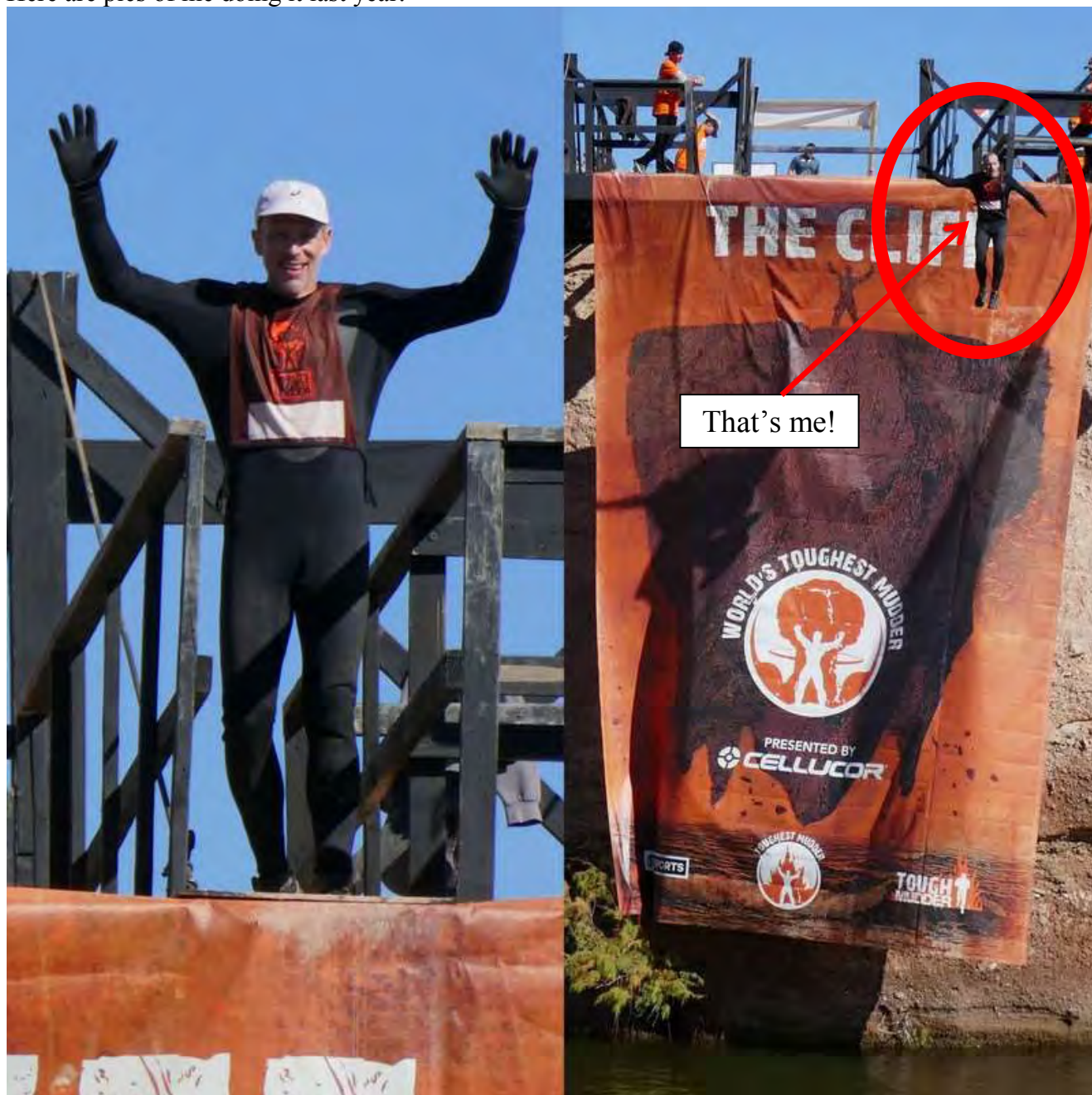
The Cliff

This is the iconic obstacle at the World's Toughest Mudder, and to build the suspense, they don't open it until midnight. It's very simple: step off a 35-foot platform, plunge feet-first into the lake, swim 100 feet to the other side and climb out using a rope cargo net.

If you're afraid of heights and/or water, this is your ultimate nightmare – 35 feet is really high! And there's plenty of opportunity to get hurt because if you land slightly wrong, you can break your tailbone (on one jump last year, I was leaning back a tiny bit and bruised it, and the female winner a couple of years ago, Amelia Boone, actually broke it – but kept on racing and won!).

If you wanted, you could skip it, but this required you to climb down to the shore and do a much longer swim, so it cost an extra five minutes at least I heard. I found it to be a thrill and enjoyed the half-dozen times I did it.

Here are pics of me doing it last year:



Here's what I saw right before I jumped this year:



And here's what I saw from the water – the next guy jumping:



Here's a cool picture of the male sprint lap winner (who gets a green bib) jumping:



I liked this pic of a guy breathing deeply to overcome his fear – but he overcame it and, with the crowd cheering him on, jumped!



After climbing out of the water, it was a short jog back to the finish/start area:

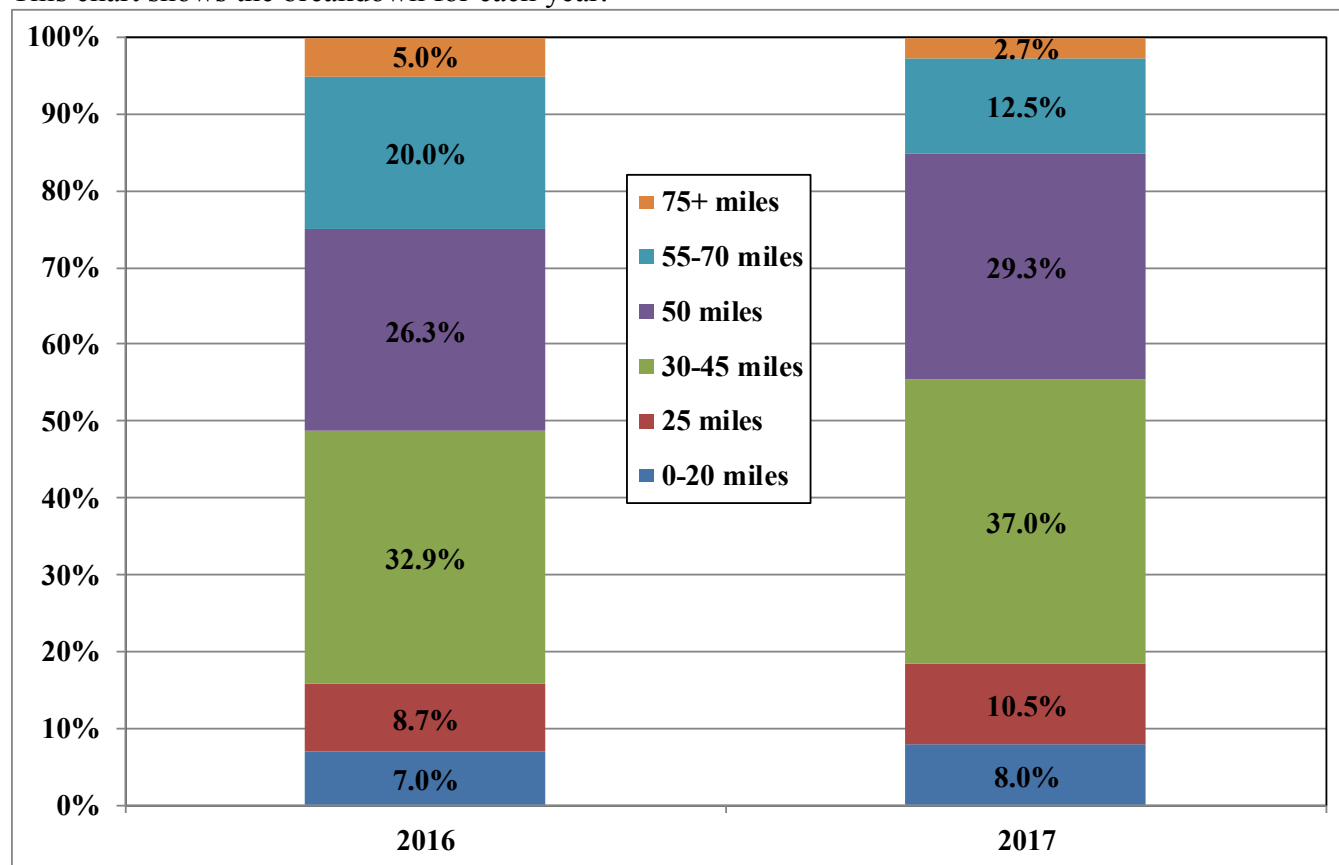


Appendix D: A Comparison of 2016 vs. 2017

After so many people got big mileage in 2016, Tough Mudder promised to make the course tougher – and (combined with the cold) it was!

Specifically, this year, only 40 people got 75 or more miles (2.7% of the 1,467 finishers), barely half of the 5.0% who earned silver bibs last year. And only 44.5% got at least 50 miles this year vs. 51.3% last year.

This chart shows the breakdown for each year:



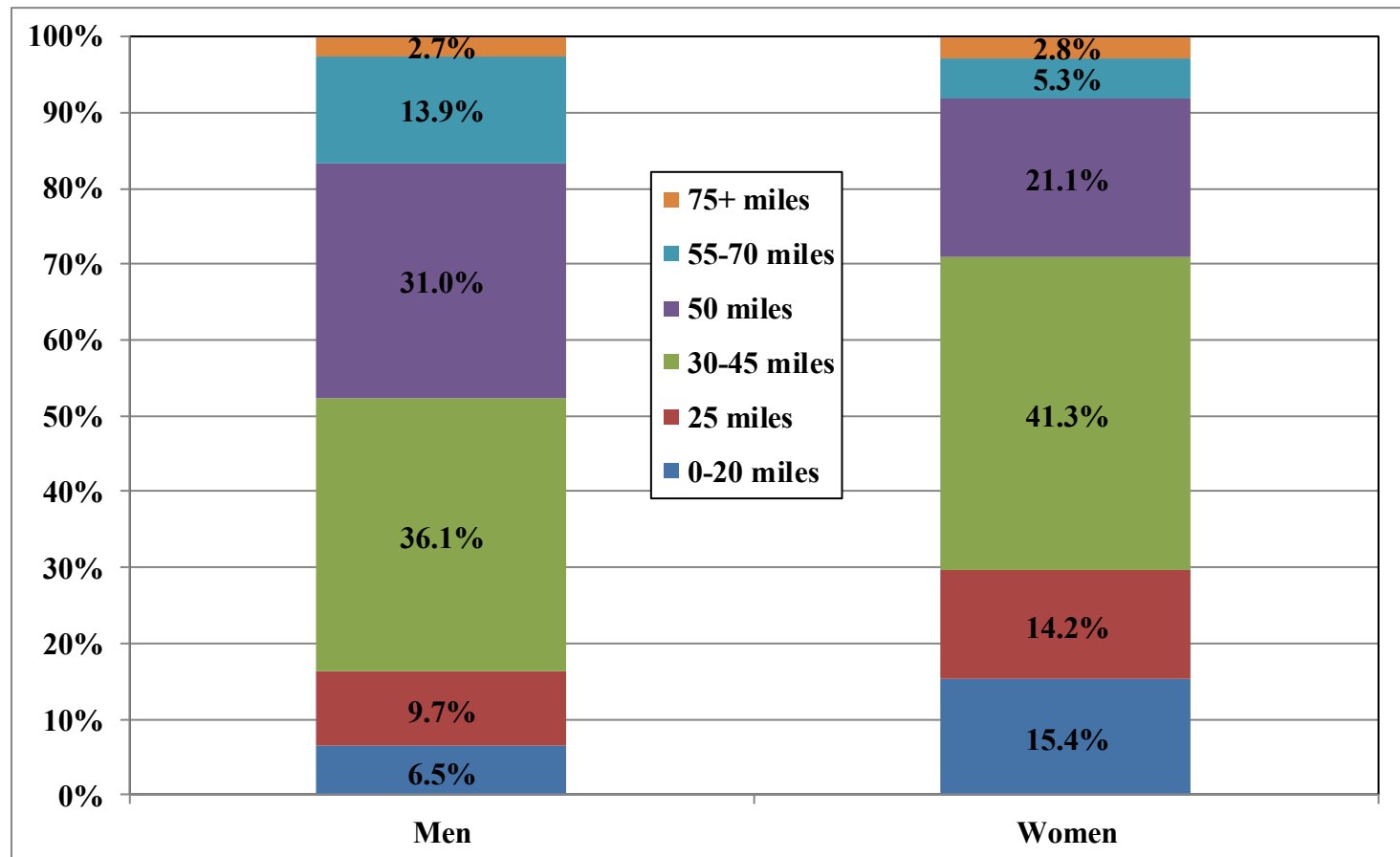
The decline reflects, I think, a number of factors (other than we'll all just getting older – LOL!): a tougher course (more vertical, especially after midnight), harder obstacles (Rope-a-Dope and the back-to-back-to-back three at the end, Funky Monkey, Hangin' Tough and Kong Infinity were especially tough), MUCH longer penalties (especially when they at least tripled the penalty for Kong midrace) and, most importantly, the cold, which I think was the biggest difference from last year.

I think many of us (myself included) were lulled into complacency by the wonderful forecast, which showed the temperature only dropping to a low of 56 degrees. But I think it went lower than that, plus most of the course had a ~10 mph wind for most of the night, which is bad enough when you're dry (making the effective temperature 40), but even worse when you're wet. Being cold for an extended period destroys you, both physically and, worse yet, mentally.

Appendix E: A Comparison of Men vs. Women

The 17% of finishers who were women (247 of 1,468) have my total respect: this was a really tough race with many obstacles that required enormous upper-body strength.

Remarkably, a higher percentage of women finishers (7 or 2.8%) got 75 miles than men (2.7%), though 47.7% of men got at least 50 miles vs. 29.1% of women, as this chart shows:



Appendix F: My Lap Reports

Here is my lap report:

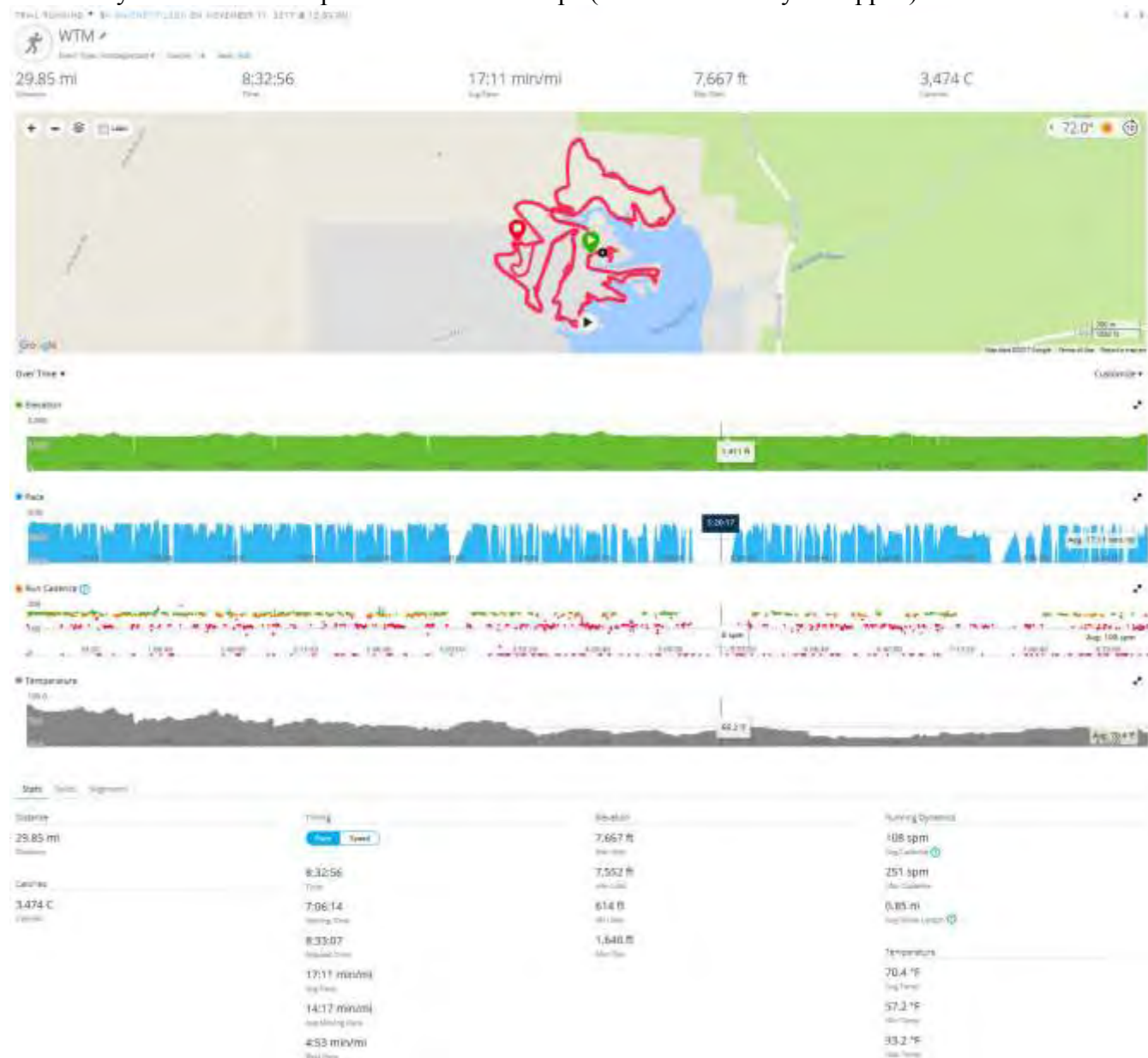
The screenshot shows the 'WORLD'S TOUGHEST MUDDER' website. The main heading is 'WORLD'S TOUGHEST MUDDER'. Below it, there's a navigation bar with 'WORLD'S TOUGHEST MUDDER' and 'WORLD'S TOUGHEST MUDDER'. The main content area shows a lap report for Whitney Tilson. The report includes a table with columns for 'LAP', 'WHITNEY TILSON', 'TIME', 'SPLIT', 'PIT', 'TOTAL', 'LAP TIMES', 'MINS/LAP', and 'CUM MINS'. The data shows 11 laps with various times and splits. The total time for the course is 22:15:00 @ 55Mi.

And here's my analysis of it:

athlete	ln	age	ln	h/b	time at last mi	total	mil				
Whitney Tilson	3	51	143	651	22:15:00 @ 55Mi	#####	55	Cum mins			
Mile 1	Mile 2	Mile 3	Mile 4	Mile 5	Start time	Finish time	Pit time	LAP TIMES	Mins/lap	on course	
9:00	10:46	11:35	13:33	10:46	LAP: 1	12:00	56:18:00	0	55:41:00	56	56
12:48	11:53	13:07	14:48	11:05	LAP: 2	12:56	2:00:23	1	1:03:42	64	119
12:13	14:28	14:36	16:28	11:39	LAP: 3	2:01	3:11:28	11	1:09:25	69	188
12:18	18:51	18:55	21:14	22:52	LAP: 4	3:22	4:56:36	34	1:34:12	94	282
18:19	20:39	20:56	20:46	14:00	LAP: 5	5:30	7:05:14	35	1:34:43	95	377
21:18	19:30	21:21	31:08:00	18:49	LAP: 6	7:40	9:31:40	26	1:52:08	112	489
16:15	21:06	18:31	31:58:00	21:26	LAP: 7	9:58	11:46:34	62	1:49:18	109	598
6:19:00	25:17:00	42:56:00	26:06:00	15:09	LAP: 8	12:48:00	15:03:14	10	2:15:48	136	734
5:45:00	25:08:00	35:29:00	27:35:00	22:32	LAP: 9	3:13:00	17:29:40	11	2:16:30	136	870
6:53:00	27:22:00	33:44:00	25:40:00	20:37	LAP: 10	5:40:00	19:54:23	2	2:14:18	134	1004
---	---	---	---	-----	LAP: 11	7:56:00	22:15:00		2:19:00	139	1143

Total pit time (minutes): 3 hours, 12 min.
Total hours on the course: 19 hours, 3 min.
Total hours: 22 hours, 15 min.

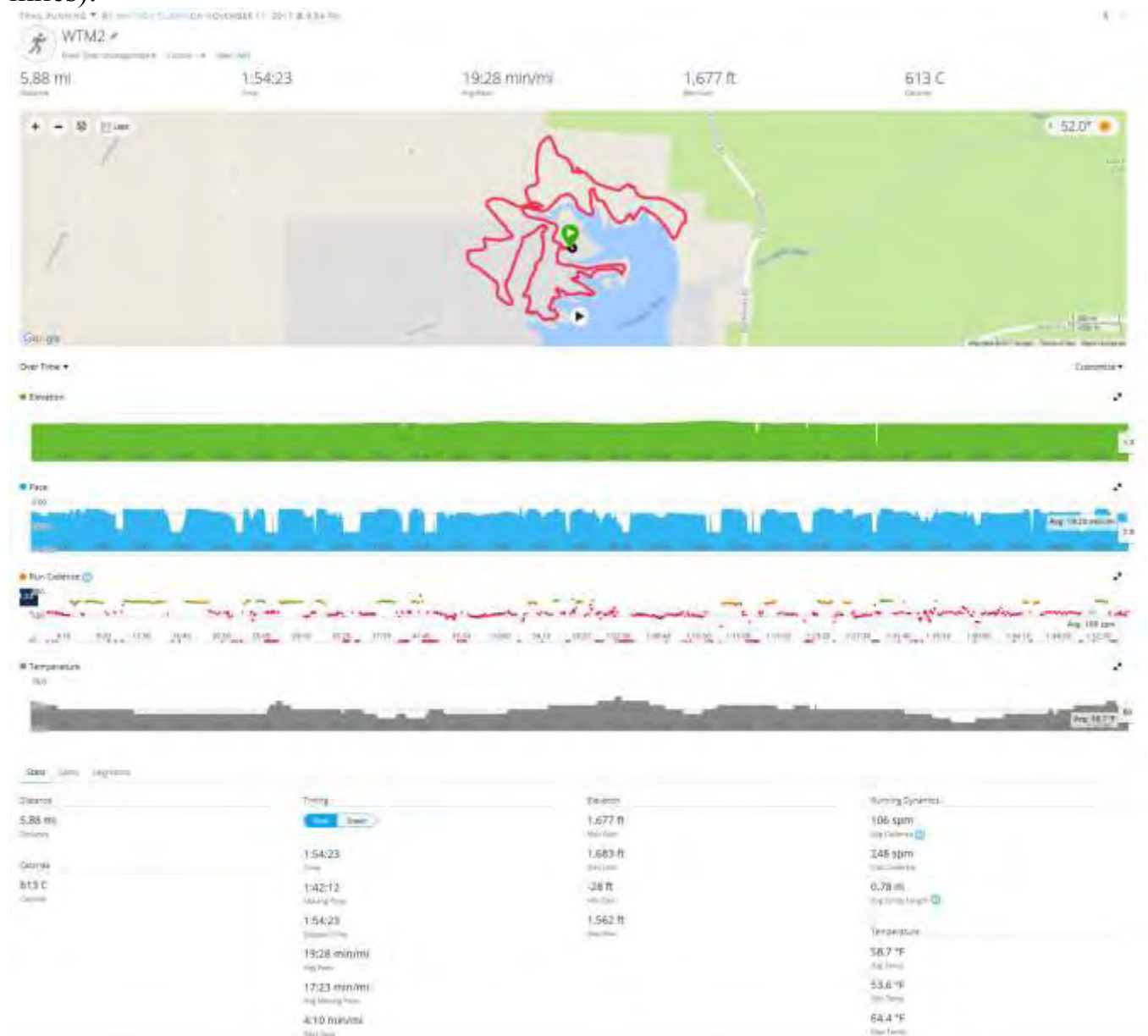
Here is my Garmin watch report for the first 5+ laps (don't ask me why it stopped):



Here are my mile splits from my watch (again, just the first 5+ laps & 30 miles):

Splits #	Time	Cumulative Time	Moving Time	Distance	Elev Gain	Elev Loss	Avg Pace	Avg Moving Pace	Best Pace	Avg Run Cadence	Max Run Cadence	Avg Stride Length	Avg Temperature	Calories
1	8:34.4	8:34.4	8:54	1.00	48	82	8:34	8:54	7:55	158	174	1.06	88.9	136
2	10:28	19:02	10:24	1.00	65	43	10:28	10:24	9:02	158	171	0.96	88.2	139
3	12:24	31:26	12:24	1.00	184	194	12:24	12:24	8:36	144	163	0.90	87.7	123
4	13:57	45:23	13:47	1.00	203	289	13:57	12:47	9:06	136	179	0.90	86.0	119
5	11:03	56:26	10:57	1.00	809	708	11:03	10:57	9:54	150	175	0.97	86.7	120
6	12:48	1:09:24	11:27	1.00	82	82	12:48	11:27	4:53	127	188	0.99	78.5	124
7	11:40	1:21:06	11:37	1.00	88	46	11:40	11:37	9:23	156	200	0.86	79.5	127
8	14:10	1:35:16	13:27	1.00	190	190	14:10	13:27	8:49	135	212	0.85	84.0	118
9	13:41	1:48:57	12:18	1.00	702	702	13:41	12:18	8:09	151	235	0.90	76.5	113
10	11:34	2:00:31	11:30	1.00	558	577	11:34	11:30	9:04	151	242	0.92	74.0	121
11	13:55	2:13:26	11:30	1.00	56	49	13:55	11:38	8:43	138	180	0.89	76.9	125
12	13:31	2:27:27	13:30	1.00	118	75	13:31	13:25	9:18	138	239	0.86	74.7	123
13	15:54	2:43:32	14:23	1.00	233	217	15:54	14:23	10:05	125	236	0.86	71.8	115
14	15:56	2:59:27	13:24	1.00	305	305	15:56	13:24	9:37	117	182	0.86	71.1	110
15	11:36	3:10:03	11:35	1.00	731	731	11:36	11:35	9:24	150	171	0.92	88.2	114
16	20:15	3:30:18	14:43	1.00	62	79	20:15	14:43	8:56	91	175	0.85	73.4	123
17	14:23	3:44:41	14:22	1.00	154	158	14:23	14:23	9:04	118	251	0.84	72.4	119
18	18:50	4:03:31	18:14	1.00	209	228	18:48	18:14	8:17	99	171	0.86	64.2	104
19	19:20	4:22:51	17:54	1.00	248	240	19:20	17:54	9:37	104	174	0.80	67.3	109
20	24:45	4:47:36	15:47	1.00	584	679	24:45	15:47	9:09	77	229	0.85	65.3	104
21	26:57	5:14:33	18:17	1.00	82	115	26:57	18:17	9:20	84	241	0.98	65.1	114
22	17:55	5:32:28	18:37	1.00	62	89	17:55	18:37	9:42	105	245	0.85	69.1	119
23	19:22	5:51:49	18:39	1.00	161	148	19:22	18:09	10:12	106	219	0.83	64.6	115
24	18:25	6:10:15	18:27	1.00	272	217	18:25	18:27	9:46	102	177	0.86	59.7	111
25	18:08	6:28:23	17:08	1.00	233	157	18:07	17:08	9:53	112	182	0.79	59.2	103
26	17:26	6:45:50	14:27	1.00	341	623	17:26	14:27	8:57	102	232	0.90	60.3	114
27	34:06	7:20:56	18:13	1.00	220	79	34:06	18:13	8:07	80	176	0.79	63.8	107
28	26:40	7:57:36	18:35	1.00	66	72	26:40	18:35	9:29	75	171	0.80	67.7	118
29	19:46	8:17:21	14:22	0.94	145	128	19:50	15:28	9:39	115	169	0.83	68.7	106
30	19:35	8:36:56	15:55	0.91	235	141	21:29	17:30	9:06	88	177	0.87	65.8	100
Summary	8:32:56	8:52:56	7:06:14	29.85	7,667	7,552	17:11	14:17	4:53	108	251	0.85	76.4	3,474

Lastly, here is my watch report from lap 6 (I did the penalty on Funky Monkey, which you can see on the far right on the map, which is why the five-mile lap was actually 5.88 miles):



GoRuck Tough

April 7-8, 2018

I added another chapter to my ongoing midlife crisis this past weekend, doing a 12-hour GoRuck Tough.

We met two instructors (called the cadre; two active duty special forces guys, one Navy (not a SEAL) and one Army/Green Beret) at Morningside Park in Harlem (pic 4), just a few blocks from the northwest corner of Central Park, at 10pm on Saturday night and then, all night long, did high-speed marching (rucking) around much of Manhattan and part of Queens, ending up at Battery Park at 10:30am the next morning. In total, we did 7 legs ranging from 1.2 to 5 miles, covering 22 miles. (Pics 2 and 3 below show our route and each stop.)

There were 27 of us: 23 men, 4 women; I was the oldest, one other guy was 45, everyone else was 20-35 I'd guess. 3-4 were former Marines. And seven were doing a combination GoRuck Heavy (24 hours, 40 miles; Tough (12 hours, 22 miles); and Light (6 hours, 6 miles), so they'd just completed the Heavy a few hours earlier – insane!

We were quite a scene – 29 of us, led by a person up front carrying a big U.S. flag (that's me carrying the flag in pics 13, 18 and 22). We attracted lots of stares and the occasional catcall.

They asked if anyone was from the area and I was the only one who raised my hand, so I was appointed navigator (which I ended up being for the entire 12 hours), which means at the start of each leg, one of the cadre showed me the destination on his phone with a route plotted on Google Maps and then I had to memorize it. Fortunately, I was familiar with most of the places we were going, so I proved to be an adept navigator.

Fast walking 22 miles is no big deal, but the cadre made it really tough in many ways:

- Everyone had a backpack (ruck) that had to have warm clothes, food and water for 12 hours PLUS anyone who weighed more than 150 pounds (the guys) had to add 30 lbs. of weights (anyone under – the women – had to add 20 lbs.). In total, my ruck weighed 47 lbs. at the start of the event and 41 lbs. at the end (due to drinking and eating a lot). We were not allowed to put our packs down at any time except for 5-10 min at each of the seven pit stops.
- Before we started, we did PT (physical training) for the better part of an hour (wearing our very heavy rucks), starting with holding a straight-arm pushup position (pics 6-7), then holding our rucks over our heads (5), then flutter kicks (8), then a crazy squat-jump drill in which we all linked arms in a circle (9), then a brutal bear crawl around the infield of the nearby baseball diamond (10-11), capped by doing fireman's carries of one another. I failed pretty much all of them, resting the ruck on my head, putting my knees down, crawling (not bear crawling) around the infield, etc. but a lot of other folks were as well, so the cadre didn't single me out. So we were already pretty gassed when we set out at ~11pm.
- As a group, we had to carry a half dozen heavy items: the flag (which was on a weighted pole, so weighed 25 lbs. – and was supposed to be carried straight up, not resting on your shoulder), a large jerry can of water (see pic 30 for my technique for the ~3 miles I carried it; also see pic 25), a heavy sand bag (center of pic 28), a large medical kit/backpack (right of pic 15; also pic 28), a weird box carried via two poles (pics 20 and 26), and an extra ruck of a guy who died recently doing a 24-hour GoRuck Heavy a couple of months ago (see this story).

- The hardest part of the entire experience was that the cadre announced a pace at the beginning of each leg, which at the beginning was an 18-minute mile (a fast walk), but that included stopping at traffic lights (29 of us couldn't cross streets against the light, even late at night). But it gets worse: we had to complete every half mile in 9 minutes – and if we didn't, we took a “casualty”, which meant that one person couldn't walk, but had to be carried. So we set up teams of three and rotated, with one person carrying another (either fireman's carry over the shoulders or, most commonly, piggy back) for ~100-200 yards until exhaustion, then the fresh person stepped in to carry the next person, etc. So each casualty took three people out. But it gets worse: those three people couldn't do the carrying while also carrying their rucks, so they gave their rucks to three other people, who were now carrying TWO rucks, or nearly 100 lbs.! So one casualty tied up SIX people! But it gets worse: after taking a casualty, the pace was still 9 minutes for the next half mile, but with six people burdened, we typically failed to make the time hack and took another casualty, burdening another six people. Lather, rinse, repeat... So by the end of the first leg, we'd taken four casualties, meaning nearly everyone had either carried another person or nearly 100 lbs. of weight for most of the leg, so we were completely wiped out!

Our first leg was the longest (5 miles), across the top of Central Park, down to the 102nd St. footbridge, over to Randall's Island, then across the RFK bridge to Astoria Park in Queens.

At each rest stop, we ate and drank, watered the bushes (if you know what I mean), rested a bit, sometimes (not often, thankfully!) did some PT (pics 16 & 17 are all of us doing 30 brutal burpees at the second stop at the base of the Queensboro Bridge), and learned about the Bataan Death March, which was the theme of this event (in April 1942, the Japanese forced ~80,000 American and Filipino soldiers who'd surrendered to march 66 miles in 8 days in 95 degree heat with little food and water and such terrible abuse and wonton killings that thousands died). Each of us had to pick someone who was on that march and tell their story, while the cadre told the overall history of what happened. That was pretty cool.

Speaking of cool, it was a cold night -- the temperature was in the low 40s when we started and got down to the low 30s, plus there was quite a wind, which was especially strong when we were along the water, which was most of the time. We didn't get too cold when we were rucking, but many of us got really chilled at the rest stops.

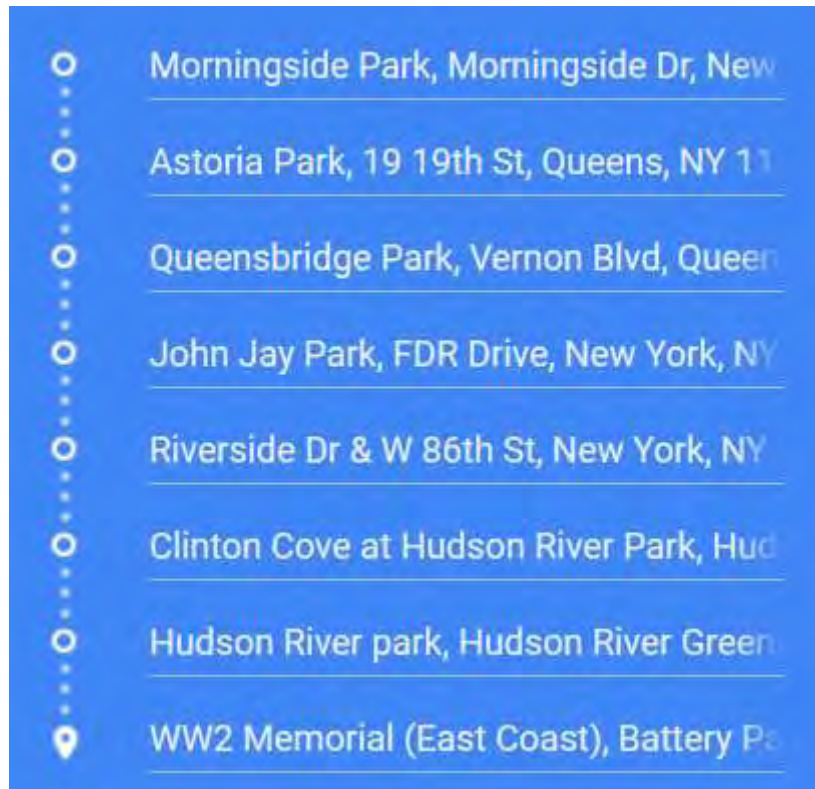
Every leg two new people were appointed Team Leader and Assistant Team Leader, but I remained as navigator. Because I was up front the entire time, I ended up being the pace setter and managed to figure out a pace at which we were making out time hacks, which wasn't easy given that we weren't allowed to have watches, much less GPS watches/devices, and had to factor in how much time was lost waiting at traffic lights, etc. Once we stopped taking casualties, we got into a pretty nice routine for the rest of the event.

It was pretty cool at the end, marching past the 9/11 Memorial (pic 23) and running the last few hundred yards (pics 24-28), ending up at the WWII Memorial at Battery Park City (pics 29 and 32). I was proud to earn my patch (pic 31) and am not that sore, other than my shoulders!

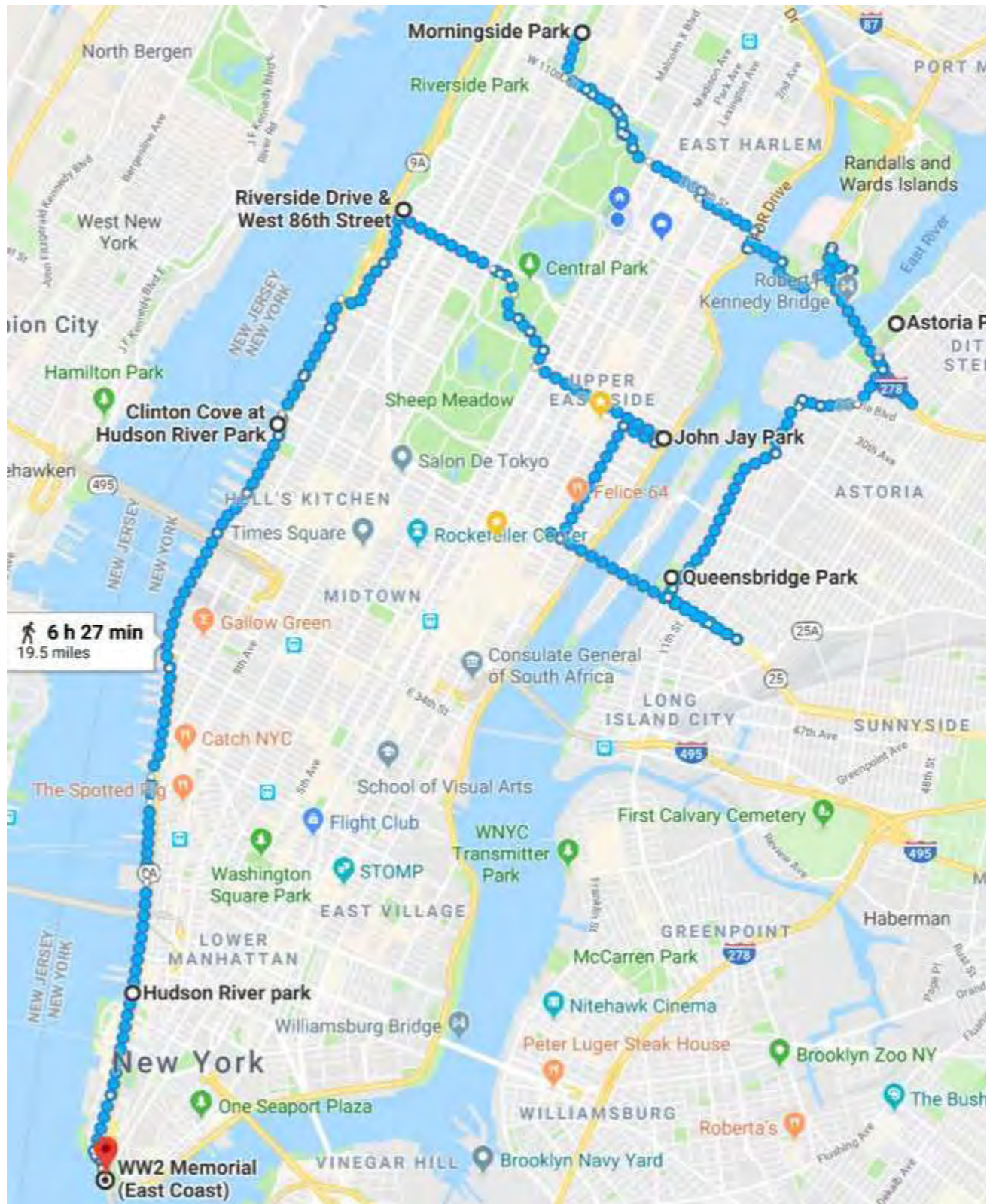
Overall, a great experience -- highly recommended!



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2 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-08 19.30.30.png



3 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-08 19.30.30.jpg



4 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.14.07.png



5 of 32: *H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.15.58.png*



6 of 32: *H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.16.06.png*



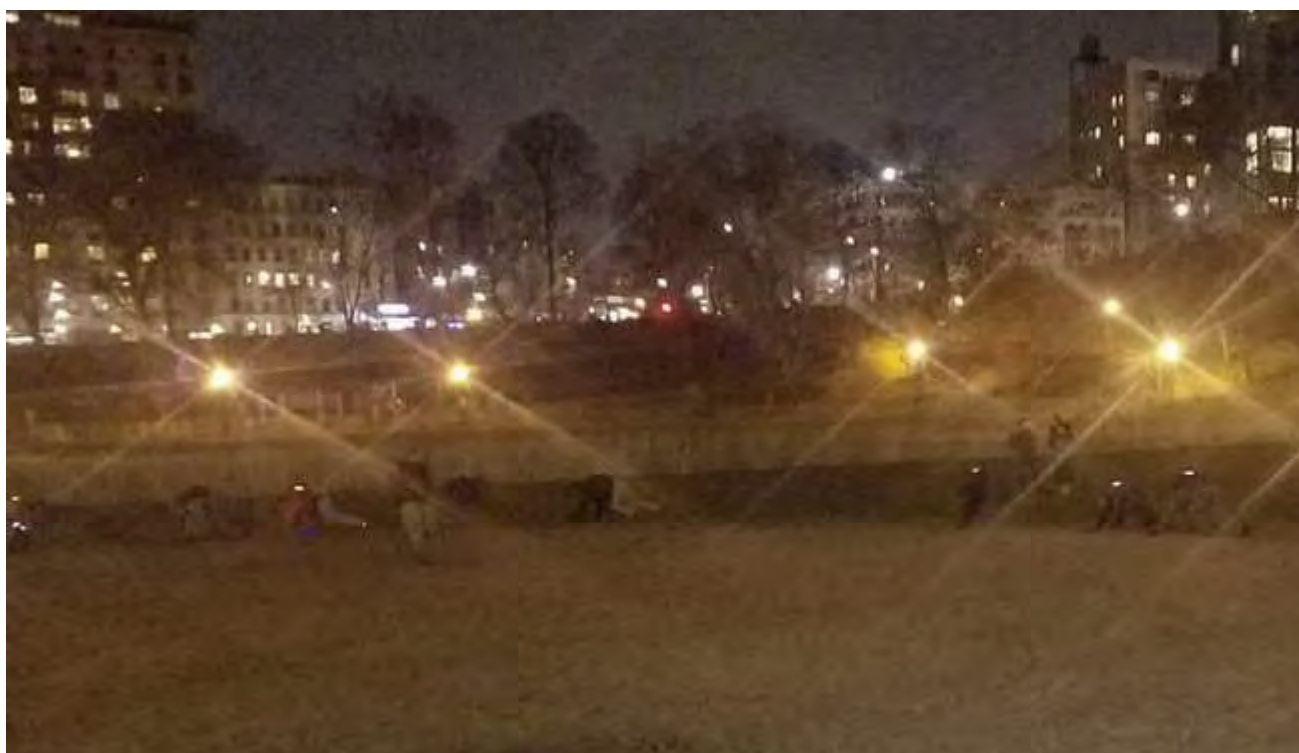
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8 of 32: *H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.13.49.png*



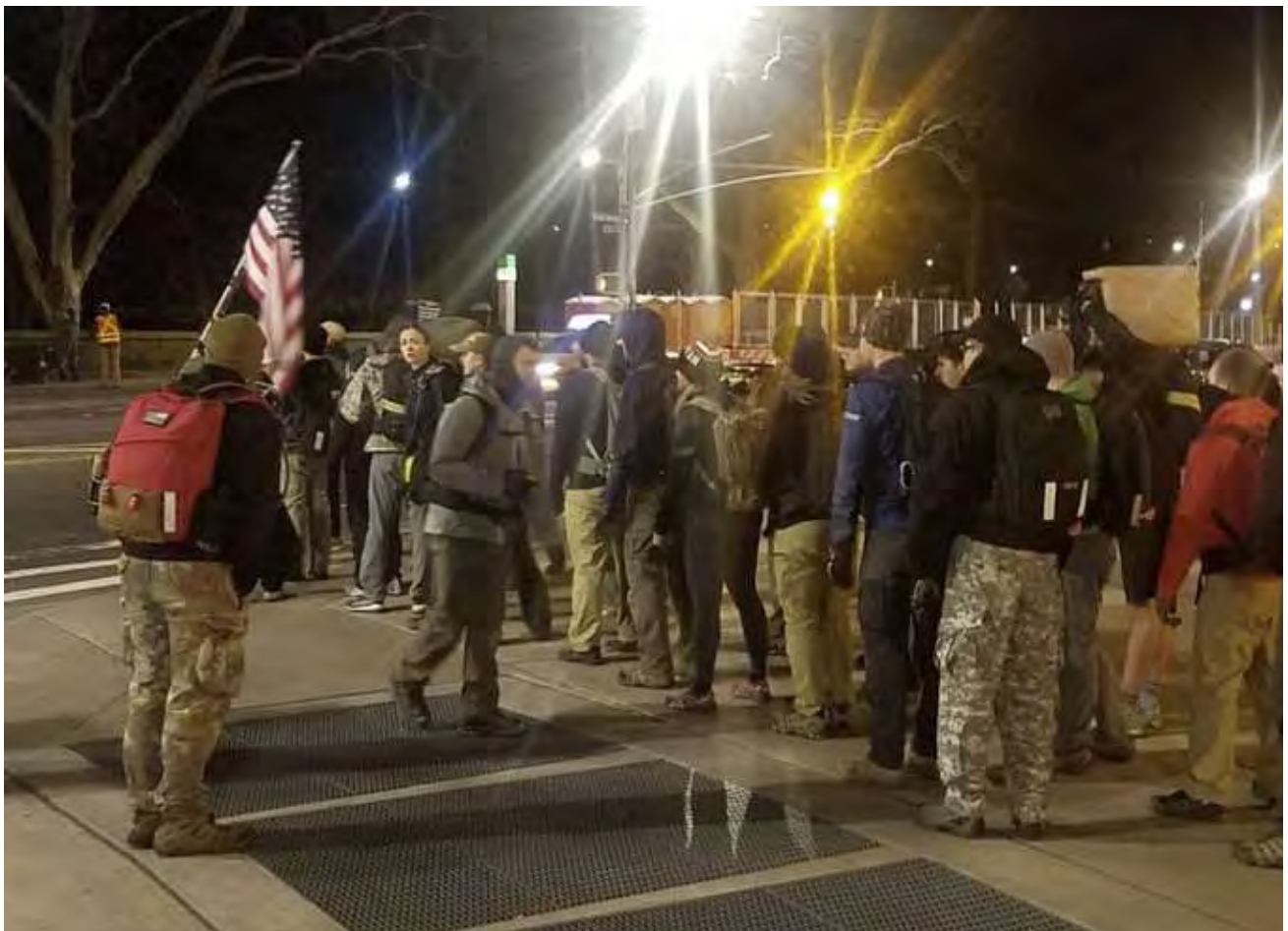
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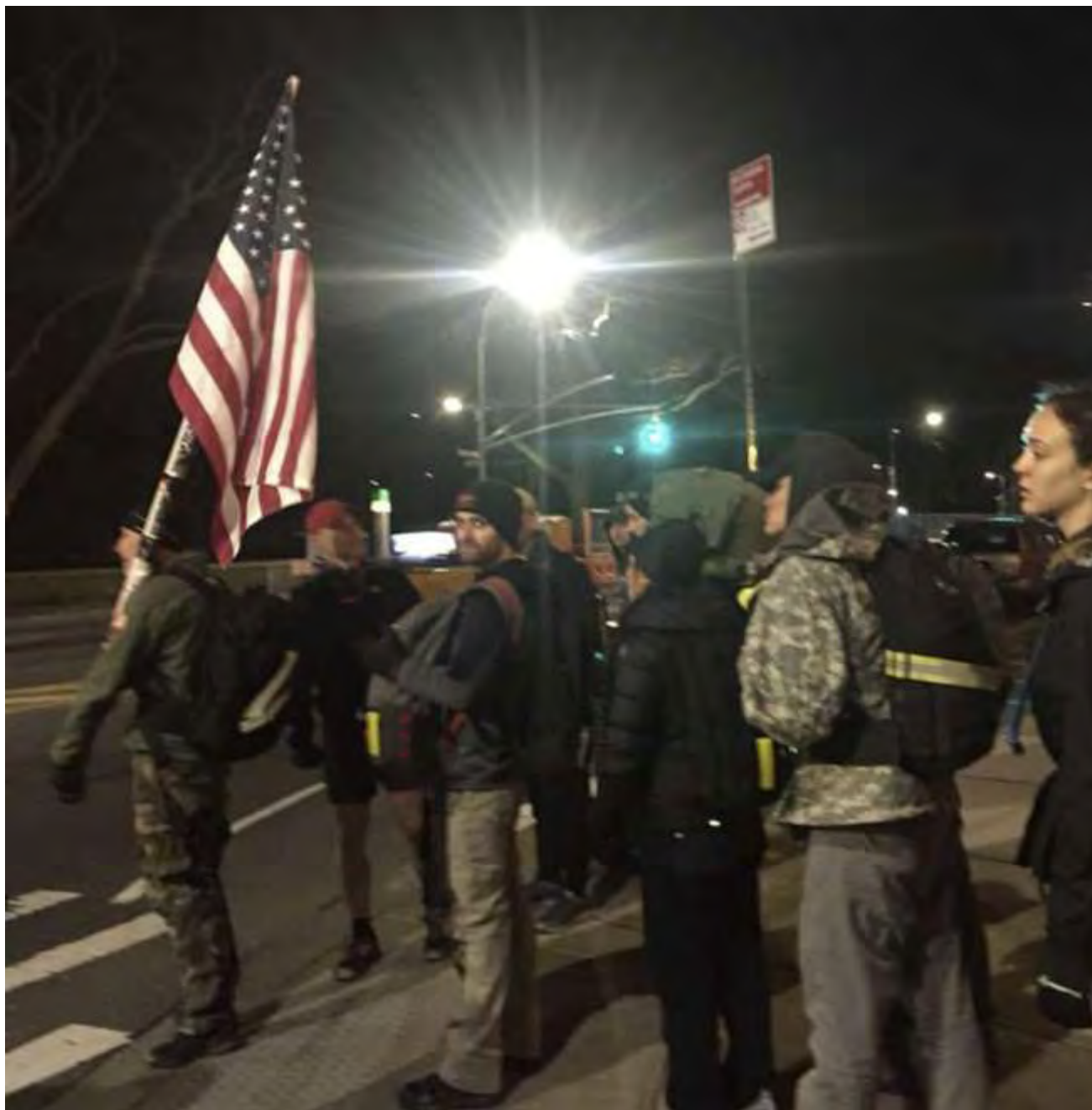
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14 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.10.33.png



15 of 32: *H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 09.36.40.png*



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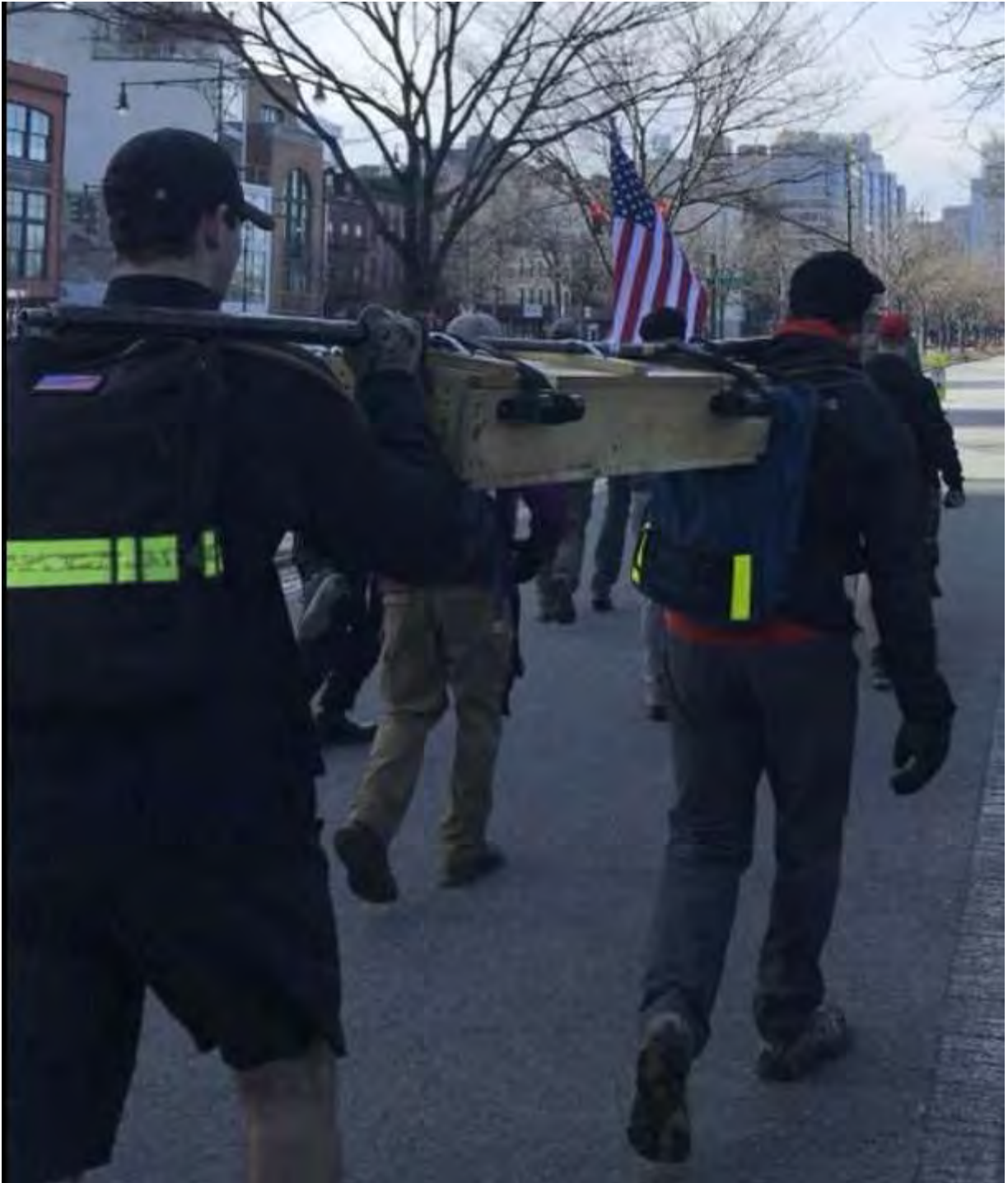
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21 of 32: *H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.09.24.png*



22 of 32: *H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.10.07.png*



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24 of 32: *H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.15.01.png*



25 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.15.15.png



26 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.15.22.png



27 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.15.38.png



28 of 32: H:\Pictures\2018\Apr 18\GoRuck Tough-4-7-18\Screenshot 2018-04-09 21.15.47.png



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Rock Climbing in the Dolomites To Support KIPP Charter Schools

July 2018

This is the thank-you email I just sent to everyone who [donated](#) to KIPP re. my climbs.

Dear friends,

I'm halfway across the Atlantic, heading home after nearly three weeks in Europe, capped by my annual Alps climbs to raise money to support the KIPPsters climbing the mountain to college. Thanks to your generosity, we raised nearly \$110,000 – thank you!!!

Over the past three days, my professional guide and I climbed all three peaks of the most iconic formation in the Dolomites, the [Tre Cime di Lavaredo](#) (“three peaks of Lavaredo”). Here's what they look like:



On Sunday, we climbed the one on the right, Cime Oeste, as a warm-up so my guide could evaluate me and we could develop an effective climbing relationship for the tougher challenges the next two days. Here's the route we took:



(We spent three nights at the Rifugio Auronzo hut shown at the base. Most of the people there were hikers, enjoying the spectacular scenery – see attached.)

On Monday, we climbed the classic [Spigolo Giallo](#) (“yellow edge”) route – over 1,000 feet straight up the Cime Piccolo (which wasn’t very piccolo at all – it was a beast!):



Finally, yesterday we tackled the Cime Grande, going up the [Dulfer route](#), another hairy beast:



Below are some pictures. I've posted many more and detailed descriptions of each day on my Facebook page:

- Day 1: <https://www.facebook.com/wrtilson/posts/10156388821888632>
- Day 2: <https://www.facebook.com/wrtilson/posts/10156392171693632>
- Day 3: <https://www.facebook.com/wrtilson/posts/10156395009238632>

Again, thank you for your support!

Whitney











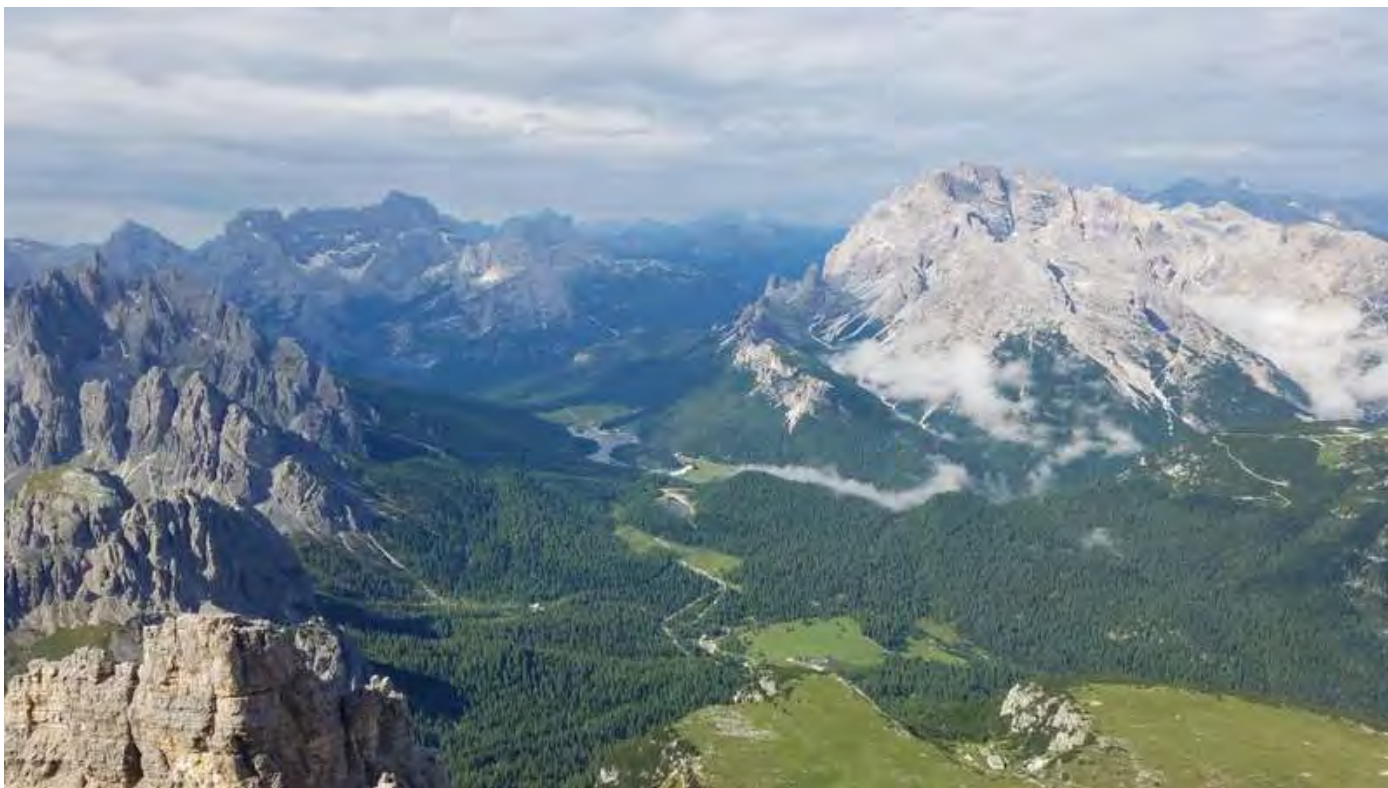














My Adventure at the 2018 World's Toughest Mudder

By Whitney Tilson, 11/18

(This pdf is posted at: <http://www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM18.pdf>; my friend Ryan Meade's 13-minute video of all of the obstacles is posted at: <https://youtu.be/FKNS47HW8KI>)

For the second time in the three years I've competed, I won the 50+ age group at the World's Toughest Mudder, a 24-hour obstacle course endurance race, completing 12 laps of the five-mile course (60 miles) and ~250 obstacles, good for 52nd place overall (top 4%) among the 1,207 individuals who started the race. It took place on a horse farm outside of Atlanta for the first time, after the last four years in the desert outside Las Vegas. All in all, an epic adventure that pushed me to my limits – with a very satisfying outcome!



(Many of the pictures here were taken by Brad Kerr, father of one of the racers – thank you!)

Two years ago, I completed 75 miles, still the all-time age group record (see: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM.pdf), but there was no chance of matching that this year because I'm two years older and not in as good a shape, my hamstring was still sore from a minor pull six days earlier, plus the cold temperatures were brutal. It was already quite cool (~50 degrees) and windy at noon on Saturday (Nov. 10) when the race started and it became downright frigid when the sun went down, with temperatures quickly dropping below freezing for most of the night (the low was 27 degrees), causing ice to form on many obstacles, making them so treacherous that TM closed some until morning, and forcing 40% of the competitors to quit and many others to huddle in their tents until sunrise (the course was nearly empty overnight). While 27 degrees might not sound so bad, keep in mind that we were getting completely submerged in cold water multiple times each lap, so were constantly wet.

I wasn't immune to the cold, as it sucked my energy and forced me to walk 8 of the 12 laps, but thanks to a thick 5mm wetsuit and gloves, Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and pants, and four layers of headgear, I was able to maintain my core temperature and keep walking (and walking and walking...) (though my fingers and toes got quite chilled at times – two weeks later, my toes are still numb!). I learned my lessons well from last year's WTM when I didn't get my full wetsuit on in time and didn't have a jacket or pants to wear over my wetsuit, so got crushed by the cold around midnight (though I still got 55 miles and finished 5th in the 50+ age group and top 11% overall; see: www.tilsonfunds.com/WTM17.pdf).

My Team

For the third year in a row, I was racing and sharing a tent/pit area with my buddy Mark James, a fellow geezer (he's a month younger than me) and former Navy SEAL and professional triathlete. Here's a picture of us with our pit crew, Steve Fazekas (on the left). He and his wife, Alice Fisher, a friend of mine from high school who lives in the area, were absolutely heroic in supporting Mark and me all 24 hours – we would have been toast without them!



Here's a picture of me an hour before the start started with the race MC, Sean Corvelle, who is beloved among Mudders for his inspirational pre-race speeches and words of encouragement throughout:



Here's a picture of the Mudder Village, where all racers get a 10x10 spot for their tent. The course runs right through it, so after every lap it was quick and easy to get back to your tent to eat, drink, change clothes, use the Port-a-Potties, etc.:



Here's a picture of Mark and me with our friend Tom Millerick, who ran the first two laps with me:



Race Description

The race started at noon sharp and 1,207 individual competitors plus 24 teams set out up the hill and under Mudderhorn (going over it was the last obstacle):



All of the obstacles were closed for the first ~90 minutes to allow the field to spread out over the entire course, and then they opened on a staggered basis. This allowed us to bank some easy miles – but also tempted us to burn ourselves out too early... It also made it hard to know what gear to wear, since we didn't know when we were going to start getting wet. (Some folks were in full wetsuits at the start of the race, which was a big mistake, as they were totally overheating.)

I started way back in the pack so got caught up on lots of traffic jams going through the woods on the first lap (and wasn't pushing myself at all), so was in 722nd place after one lap – in the bottom 41% (and the bottom 10% of folks who did 50 miles or more – 271st of 299). Thus, I was only halfway through my second lap when I hit my first obstacle, Underwater Tunnels, which required going into a lake and ducking my head under three sets of barrels:



This was quickly followed by another full-submersion obstacle, Cage Crawl (this picture is from another race):



Here's a picture of Tom and me coming into the pit after lap 2 and me a lap or two later:



I got pretty chilled from these two obstacles, so after lap 2 I went in for a 23-minute pit stop to put on my medium weight (3mm) “shorty” wetsuit.

On lap 3, only a few obstacles were open and I was able to keep jogging, losing Tom about halfway through, as he wasn't feeling well and slowed to a walk. But my stomach wasn't right and I had to make a five-minute detour into the woods, struggling to get my rear-zip wetsuit off by myself (I took a heavy-duty prescription anti-diarrheal pill after this lap, which solved this problem for the rest of the race, thankfully! It didn't, however, solve my pee problem – see below).

When I got back to the tent, Mark was there, having already lapped me! He was on pace to whomp me by 15 miles, like he did last year (70 miles to my 55). I was happy for him, but the competitive side of me thought, “Rats! There goes any chance of winning the 50+ age group...”

I slow-jogged most of lap 4 as well, nailed every obstacle (the toughest were Funky Monkey and The Gauntlet), and finished at 6pm, in 399th place of 1,129 racers, just as darkness was setting in. I knew it was going to quickly get very cold so I did my longest pit stop of the race, 39 minutes, to get my heavy-duty cold-weather gear on, consisting of a full-length thick wetsuit (5mm body; 4mm arms and legs), Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and mountaineering pants (waterproof and, more importantly, windproof), an extra layer on my head (the hood of the jacket), and 3mm neoprene gloves. The key difference with last year for me was adding the jacket and pants – in cold weather, a wetsuit isn't enough, as it's designed for underwater, not to block cold air/wind, which is what my jacket and pants did. (I saw a lot of folks with just wetsuits or adding only a cheapo \$15 Walmart windbreaker – and they paid a big price I suspect.)

I was feeling fatigued, was weighed down by the heavy gear, and was worried about rolling my ankle in the dark so I started walking the entire course starting on lap 5, which slowed me down to around two hours per lap. That was OK with me – I just wanted to survive and get 50 miles!

Offsetting my pathetically slow pace was that I was cruising through nearly every obstacle (~25 on each lap) – especially the 8 that had penalty walks associated with them – saving precious time and energy and conserving my grip strength, which is all-important in these races. My climbing skills and upper body strength were critical, resulting in me only doing 5 penalties in 25+ hours. Curses to the third leg of Gauntlet, which I got through the first time and failed the next two – those damn knobs! – before switching to the electric shock route when it opened at 8pm:



The only other obstacle I failed was Funky Monkey, which I nailed the first 5 times, then failed 3 of the last 4 as my grip faded a bit – here are pictures of me doing it at last year's WTM:



When I came into the pit after lap 6 just before 11pm, I found Mark huddled in a sleeping bag. He had finished lap 6 two hours earlier, but had gotten frozen during the lap and was trying to regain his core temperature. He didn't appreciate me taking a selfie of us!



This happened to him because he only had a 3mm wetsuit and didn't have the same windproof jacket and pants that I had, as you can see in this picture from the next morning:

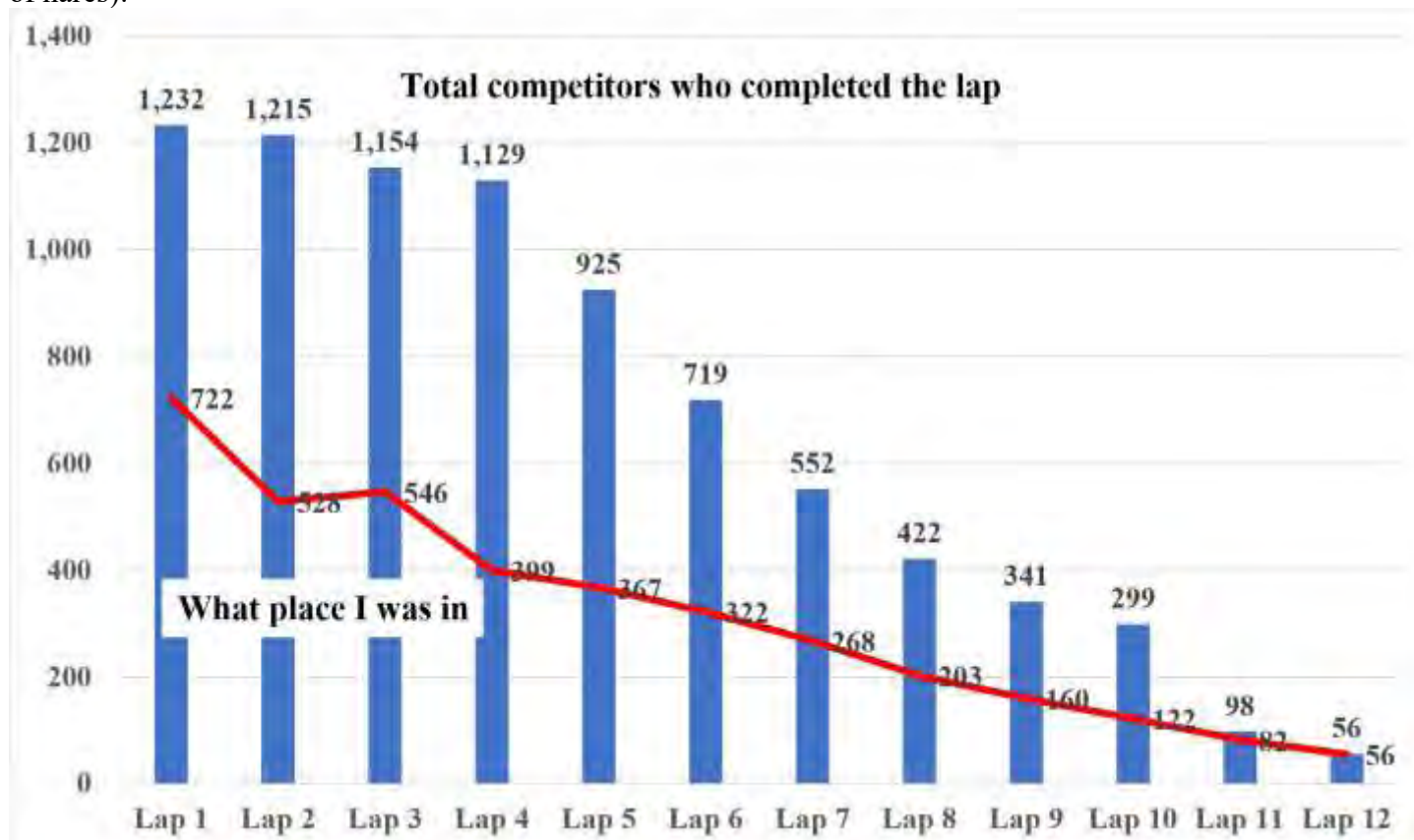


However, Mark didn't quit, to his enormous credit. After three hours in the pit from 9pm to midnight, he went out and did a 7th lap, got frozen again and, at that point, looked like someone from the Zombie Apocalypse and was huddled under the sleeping bag:



He had to take another three-hour pit stop from 2am to 5am, but then got back out there and cranked out three laps before noon, earning a well-deserved brown bib for 50 miles!

Mark's experience was typical, as evidenced by the plunge in the number of competitors who finished each lap. As this chart shows, 92% completed four laps, but only 34% completed eight (the red line shows what place I was in after each lap – by staying out on the course and plodding along, this tortoise ended up passing hundreds of hares):



The night was mostly a blur for me. My toes were frozen (they're still numb two weeks later) and my fingers were cold but not too bad once I switched to 5mm gloves and only took them off for one minute to do Twin Peaks and Funky Monkey. Adding a balaclava in the middle of the night (which I normally wear under my helmet when I'm skiing) helped keep my head and face warm. Most importantly, I was able to maintain my core temperature – so much so, in fact, that I never even needed to turn on the battery-powered vest I was wearing ([Quiksilver Mens Ps+Qs Heated Vest](#)) – I should have given it to Mark!



Here are some cool nighttime pics:





It was really beautiful as the sun came up:



For most of the night, I told myself that once I got 50 miles and earned my brown bib I'd stop, but once I finished lap 10 at 8:39am the sun was up, it was getting a bit warmer, and my competitive juices were starting to flow. I knew I had enough time to complete two more laps and figured (correctly) that 60 miles would be enough to win the 50+ age group and so off I went! (It turns out that 55 would have been enough, as I finished before the two other old guys who also did 55, but I didn't know this at the time.) Here's what I looked like as I started lap 11, with a nice, clean bib about to get very muddy:



I got a bit lucky on the timing of my last laps – while the race is noon Saturday to noon Sunday, if you start your final lap before noon, you have until 1:30pm to complete it so it's really a 25½-hour race. I needed almost all of that extra time. It was taking me a bit over two hours for me to walk a lap, so when I started my last lap at 11:20am, I only had 2:10 to complete the lap (there's zero credit for partial laps) so I knew I had to hustle and somehow found the energy to jog parts of the final lap and finished at 1:13pm, with 17 minutes to spare!

[Here](#) is Steve's short, grainy video of me crossing the finish line, and here are my lap and pit times – in 25 hours and 13 minutes, I spent 21:46 on the course and 3:26 in the pit (an average of 19 minutes after each lap):

Lap	Lap time	Pit time
Lap 1	1:01	1
Lap 2	1:12	23
Lap 3	1:30	12
Lap 4	1:37	39
Lap 5	1:57	23
Lap 6	1:59	27
Lap 7	2:09	8
Lap 8	2:14	32
Lap 9	2:11	7
Lap 10	1:56	20
Lap 11	2:08	14
Lap 12	1:52	
	21:46	206

Here's what my frozen, waterlogged feet looked like after the race:



My Pee Dilemma

This is sort of funny and crude, but it was no joke for me for about half of the 25+ hours I was out there: how to pee???

I was drinking plenty of fluids and had to pee about once a lap (every ~2 hours). For the first couple of laps, no problem: just head to the nearest tree. Then, for the next two laps with my shorty wetsuit on – again, no problem: just hit a port-a-potty at the pit. But starting soon after the sun went down and the temperatures plunged, two things changed:

- 1) I had to put on my full body wetsuit plus my ski jacket, which made it more time consuming to undress to use the port-a-potty; and
- 2) Of far greater concern, it was so cold out that in just the few minutes that my upper body was exposed, I got chilled to the bone and didn't recover my core temperature for 15-30 minutes (which got worse as the night went on, due to colder temperatures and my increasing vulnerability to any exposure).

So after a couple of times taking my wetsuit halfway off and getting chilled, I started thinking of alternatives – and came up with two:

- 1) Pee in an obstacle (ideally the lake!) and then open the top of my wetsuit to flush water through. This would be fast, but the water was so cold that I was worried about chilling myself even more than if I took my wetsuit off; or
- 2) Pee NOT in an obstacle and run the race with the lower part of my wetsuit soaked in rancid piss!

I'm not squeamish and was so cold – on the borderline of hypothermia and having to retreat to my tent, which I *really* didn't want to do (I doubt I would have ever reemerged, and the competitive side of me wanted to win the 50+ age division again!) – so I chose option 2 (the first time I'd ever peed myself).

Initially it felt great – the pressure in my bladder lessened and it was so nice and hot!

And then an instant later it started to burn like a son-of-a-bitch – unbeknownst to me until that moment, my privates and the inside of my legs had gotten badly chafed, so it felt like someone had poured acid on them! This what the inside of my legs looked like:



For about 10 minutes, I just gritted my teeth and kept on walking and eventually (thankfully!) the pain subsided.

But then (far too quickly it seemed!), I had to pee again...and choosing option 2 wasn't so easy because, unlike the first time, I knew the pain I'd be in for.

So at least 3-4 times through the middle of the endless, frigid night, I had to make the decision: at best, get super cold for at least 15-30 minutes (at worst, risk having to stop racing), or pour acid on my privates???

ARRRRHHHHHHHHH! This really tormented me all night long!

I ended up rationalizing to myself, "You're already in so much pain – what's a little more?" so I continued to choose option 2 (at least until the sun rose and the air warmed on my last two laps).

It's stories like this that make it particularly difficult to explain to my wife, daughters, parents and friends why I do this race every year (and love it) – LOL!

(At future races, to prevent this, I will: a) wear a two-piece wetsuit or one with a zipper around my crotch; b) make sure my compression underwear is pulled up tight; and c) use lots of BodyGlide/Gurney Goo.)

My Goals

I achieved all three of my goals:

- 1) Have fun. This was a given: what could be more fun than having 24 hours to horse around in a gigantic playground with more than 1,200 like-minded, friendly people?! Seriously! Some of my fondest memories from my childhood are when I was playing with my buddies and we'd go swim, hike, crawl around in the mud, climb everything in sight, etc. – so now I get to do this as a (sort of) adult!
- 2) Not get injured. This was going to be a tough, especially with my pulled hamstring, which I was worried would act up, as it had six days earlier, forcing me to call it quits after only one lap. But, miraculously, it didn't bother me at all. Beyond this, given that I don't like to run and therefore do minimal training for jogging/walking long distances, I kept expecting something else (Achilles, quads, hip flexors, etc.) to give out, but it never happened – in part, I suspect, because I was going so slowly and also because I was taking 800mg of ibuprofen (the prescription dosage – four tablets – of Advil/Motrin) every four hours before, during, and more than a week after the race. It's not a good idea for endurance athletes to do this, as it can cause kidney failure, but I wasn't pushing it – my breathing and heart rate were close to normal for 99% of the race.
- 3) Complete 50 miles and finish among the top 3 in the 50+ age group.

Race Statistics

- You had to finish your final lap after 8am to be considered a finisher of the full race and earn a black headband. Of the 1,207 individual starters, 725 finished and 482 were DNFs (40%).
- 81% of the competitors were men.
- 40% of men were DNFs vs. only 38% of women. You go girls!
- Only 18 individuals earned silver bibs (75 or more miles) (16 men and two women), a mere 1.5% of competitors/starters, about one-third the ~5% level of the last two WTM.
- 72 people (64 men and 8 women) (6%) got 55-70 miles (not counting the 6 folks (5 men and 1 woman) who got 55 but were DNFs).
- 183 people (167 men and 16 women) (15%) got 50 miles (not counting 17 DNFs).
- Add all this up and only 273 people got 50 or more miles and finished after 8am – 23% of those who started the race, about half the level of the last two WTM.
- Among those age 50+, there were 39 male finishers (of 80 who started) and 8 women (of 16 who started) – not surprising to see a higher (50%) attrition rate among us old geezers (it's tough being old!). The 47 of us who finished accounted for 3.9% of the starters and 6.5% of the finishers. Among the male geezers, I got 60 miles, two got 55, and 10 got 50 (16% got brown bibs). The top two 50+ females got 45 and 40 miles, respectively.
- The age range of the finishers was 19 (three young men and one young woman) to 64 (shout out to Don Manley, who finished his third lap at 1:04pm!). (I was one of only three 52-year-olds; there were only 27 people 52 and older who finished: 2.2% of starters and 3.7% of finishers). Yes, I'm proud to have been in the 98th percentile by age and finishing in the top 4.3% overall! (It helps offset the pain I endured for the two weeks after!)
- There were 18 teams (11 finished) and six relay teams (four finished). The top team was Atomic with 75 miles (Wesley Kerr and Evan Perperis) and the top relay team was Lindsay's Angels with 80 miles (Ryan Atkins and Lindsay Webster).

Someone posted the following charts with additional data:

2018 WTM Finisher Percentiles								
Miles	Finishers	DNF	Total	Sum Finishers	Finisher Percentile	Overall Percentile		
100	2	0	2	2	99.7%	99.8%		
95	0	0	0	2	99.7%	99.8%		
90	9	0	9	11	98.5%	99.1%		
85	3	0	3	14	98.1%	98.8%		
80	2	0	2	16	97.8%	98.7%		
75	10	0	10	26	96.4%	97.9%		
70	5	0	5	31	95.8%	97.4%		
65	7	0	7	38	94.8%	96.9%		
60	22	0	22	60	91.8%	95.0%		
55	38	6	44	98	86.6%	91.9%		
50	183	17	200	281	61.5%	76.8%		
45	31	7	38	312	57.3%	74.2%		
40	52	27	79	364	50.1%	69.9%		
35	79	43	122	443	39.3%	63.4%		
30	104	57	161	547	25.1%	54.8%		
25	109	97	206	656	10.1%	45.8%		
20	46	57	103	702	3.8%	42.0%		
15	24	100	124	726	0.5%	40.0%		
10	3	46	49	729	0.1%	39.8%		
5	1	24	25	730	0.0%	39.7%		
0	0	0	0	730	0.0%	39.7%		
	730	481	1211					
2018 WTM Mileage Statistics								
Miles	Finishers	DNF	Total	% of Finishers	% of DNF	% Total	% Finishers Overall	% DNF Overall
100	2	0	2	0.27%	0.00%	0.17%	0.17%	0.00%
95	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
90	9	0	9	1.23%	0.00%	0.74%	0.74%	0.00%
85	3	0	3	0.41%	0.00%	0.25%	0.25%	0.00%
80	2	0	2	0.27%	0.00%	0.17%	0.17%	0.00%
75	10	0	10	1.37%	0.00%	0.83%	0.83%	0.00%
70	5	0	5	0.68%	0.00%	0.41%	0.41%	0.00%
65	7	0	7	0.96%	0.00%	0.58%	0.58%	0.00%
60	22	0	22	3.01%	0.00%	1.82%	1.82%	0.00%
55	38	6	44	5.21%	1.25%	3.63%	3.14%	0.50%
50	183	17	200	25.07%	3.53%	16.52%	15.11%	1.40%
45	31	7	38	4.25%	1.46%	3.14%	2.56%	0.58%
40	52	27	79	7.12%	5.61%	6.52%	4.29%	2.23%
35	79	43	122	10.82%	8.94%	10.07%	6.52%	3.55%
30	104	57	161	14.25%	11.85%	13.29%	8.59%	4.71%
25	109	97	206	14.93%	20.17%	17.01%	9.00%	8.01%
20	46	57	103	6.30%	11.85%	8.51%	3.80%	4.71%
15	24	100	124	3.29%	20.79%	10.24%	1.98%	8.26%
10	3	46	49	0.41%	9.56%	4.05%	0.25%	3.80%
5	1	24	25	0.14%	4.99%	2.06%	0.08%	1.98%
0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	730	481	1211	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	60.28%	39.72%

Additional Write-ups

I loved these write-ups of the race:

- Rea Kolbl, the woman who's won it the last two years: *How I Won World's Toughest Mudder Two Years In A Row*, www.theocrreport.com/how-i-won-worlds-toughest-mudder-two-years-in-a-row;
- Kris Mendoza, who won the men's race, did an awesome rap video about the race: www.facebook.com/kdoza04/videos/10155825525877611
- Erin Rost, a young woman who I met on the last lap (we walked the last mile together and really hit it off), who came out of nowhere to earn a silver bib (75 miles) and finish 2nd among women: www.facebook.com/585106915/posts/10155598676376916;
- Mark James: www.facebook.com/markojames/posts/10215720822887978;
- Jason Rulo: <https://assaultfitnesscom.wordpress.com/2018/11/15/the-return-of-worlds-toughest-mudder>; and
- Charles Hauptert: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15jvOxEfH8Pv_g36GCwPnFtu3NG_21RW4/view?fbclid=IwAR19HlqwLBBzRnEGFHsWq300uynLdrJ5CFaaFmgPULNWdiIBXW_9L5hQe1g

I also loved this funny race map that Morgan McKay did:



Appendix A: Q&A

Why do you do races like this?

I've always liked big challenges; they keep me motivated to get/stay in good shape; I really enjoy them – not the running, but the obstacles – and they're very social. I often do them with friends and family (my parents at ages 75+, wife, three teenage daughters and many cousins have all done races with me), plus I've made many new friends. It's a great group of people and there's something about shared suffering that bonds people!

What inspired you during the race?

The wheelchair racers and their support teams like this:



And Diana Codispoti, who is the first person with dwarfism (she's 4' 5") to compete in this race. She was on the course until the very end, finishing her fourth lap at 12:24pm. Here's a great article about her, [World's Toughest Mudder Race draws small entrant with big heart](#), and below are pics of a team of Mudders helping her get up Everest – that's Joel Forsyth reaching down from the top:



And Jon Copper playing the bagpipes:



How does this race differ from other endurance races?

I've never done any other endurance race, but from what I've read of them, these races are different because we had to contend with:

- The obstacles (see photos and description of each below). There were a bunch of new ones and I found all of them fun and challenging, but after 200+ of them, they take a lot out of you! Note that they tended to be very quick (if you completed them and avoided the penalty).
- Wild temperature swings, both within each lap and between laps. After every lap, racers can go back to their pit (tent area) to rest, eat, use the Port-a-Potties, and change into dry and warmer/cooler gear, but that wastes time and it can be very tricky figuring out what to wear for a given lap. Guess wrong, and you might freeze...or overheat...or both (in fact, both were possible on the same leg).
- Speaking of being wet, that was constant because five obstacles on every lap (six once The Stacks opened at midnight) required you to completely submerge yourself (plus on eight other obstacles, you either got partly submerged or, if you failed the obstacle, you fell into water, so some people were getting wet *a dozen times every lap*). This had a number of implications that made this race much more challenging than a typical endurance race:
 - a) It makes it very difficult to regulate your body temperature. In between water obstacles, you could get hot in your full wetsuit, but mostly we were cold from 6pm onward.
 - b) During the night you need to wear thick neoprene (3 or 5mm) scuba diving gloves to keep your fingers warm, which makes the many climbing/gripping obstacles extra difficult.
 - c) Every time you go into the water, hike/jog through mud/dirt, and crawl through mud, pebbles can get in your shoes, which forces you to run through the discomfort and hope it goes away, or take the time to stop and shake them out.
 - d) Your waterlogged feet can swell, making your shoes too tight or requiring you to change into a larger pair.
 - e) Trying to run a race while wearing a wetsuit can cause chafing; was constricting, making it harder to climb, jump, etc.; and added a lot of extra bulk and weight, which got really tiring as I hiked/jogged mile after mile. Ditto for my constantly wet shoes and socks.
- The course map says there was 663 feet of elevation gain (and loss) per lap, which is a lot of hiking up and down.
- The terrain was very unstable – a ton of mud and lots of rocks and roots going through the woods, which made it very difficult to jog at any pace, especially at night, as the risk of rolling your ankle was high.

How does this compare to an Ironman?

I don't know, as I've never done one (not even a half or an Olympic-distance one – someday!). Mark James, who (long ago) ran the Kona (Hawaii) Ironman 10 years in a row when he was a professional triathlete, told me that the 60 miles he did at the WTM two years ago was massively harder than any of the Ironmans because: a) it's twice as long (timewise); and b) you can't get into a rhythm like you can at an Ironman (biking for six hours straight, for example).

What conditioning/experience is needed?

None is required – and I saw a few seriously out-of-shape/overweight people out there. They have my total respect, as this is really hard even if you're in great shape.

But if you want to do well – say, complete 50 miles, as 23% of starters did – then you need: a) a *very* high level of fitness (this is 24 hours of pretty sustained effort, so as one benchmark, you should be able to run a marathon in under five hours; ideally four); b) a high degree of athleticism (in order of importance: balance/coordination, lower body strength, upper-body strength, and flexibility); and c) fearlessness.

How did you train for this?

Obviously the best way to train for a race like this is to do lots of TM and Spartan races (ideally multiple laps) during the season. Second best is to do long-distance trail runs/races. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to do much of either due to a very busy schedule, plus I worry about getting chronic injuries that all older runners seem to have. Thus, my training mostly consisted of hour-long (but typically very intense) workouts pretty much every day (and in the weeks before the race, twice a day).

In a typical week, I play hard pick-up basketball for 60-90 minutes once or twice, play a couple of hours of tennis, do a couple of group fitness classes and a ridiculously hard hour-long workout with a trainer once or twice (often wearing a 20-lb. weight vest), and ride my bike a few miles a day to get to and from meetings – but no long distances.

Then, maybe one weekend a month, I did some sort of race/challenge: a Tough Mudder or Spartan race (typically two laps) if there's one in the area (I'm not one of those folks who travels all over the country to do these races), a half-marathon trail race, I climbed three big mountains in the Dolomites (Tre Cime de Lavaredo; see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) in July, etc. Thus, I was reasonably mentally and physically prepared, but this race took it to a whole new level.

While my running training was laughably inadequate (though to repeat what I noted above, I do think there's something to be said for not burning out your legs and getting plagued with injuries, especially at my age, by putting too many miles on your legs), I did work hard on building my grip and upper-body strength, which I think is the second most important area, as 2/3 of the obstacles demanded this. They were all somewhat different – climbing a wall or cargo net, doing rings and monkey bars, etc. – but they all boiled down to being able to grip something and pull your body up.

There's a simple test for this: how many consecutive pull-ups can you do? For a race like this, the answer should be at least 10. My max is 30, which was key to my race, as I only incurred five penalties during the entire race.

(For those of you who live in NYC and have an interest in a personal trainer, I highly recommend the two I use (once a week each): Richard Louis of FitSpace NYC (rplouisnyc@gmail.com) and Carlos Munoz at Definitions (munozcelo@aol.com). I also do regular group workouts at [Tone House](#), [Ripped Fitness](#), and [East End Row](#).)

In light of your” laughably inadequate” running training, why didn't your body break down?

- 1) I got lucky;
- 2) I walked all of the uphill and stopped jogging after four laps;
- 3) My workouts with my trainers are super intense – pretty much everything to failure – which I think has really toughened up my joints, muscles, ligaments and tendons (and my mind!); and
- 4) I've become a big fan over the past two years of shiatsu massage (I go to a place in NYC with a cult following called Salon de Tokyo). A little Chinese women (ask for Mimi), holding onto a bar in the ceiling, stands on my back and legs and applies every ounce of pressure onto one-inch areas. It's so painful! But I can hear and feel my tight joints and muscles loosening up.

What was the hardest part?

The hardest thing for me was to just keep on going for nearly 24 hours, especially after I got cold. Thankfully, I love obstacles – they keep me entertained. Had this been a 24-hour ultramarathon, I would have gone crazy from boredom and stopped.

What are the keys to success in this race?

- 1) Being in shape, both running/endurance and upper-body strength.
- 2) Staying warm.
- 3) Ingesting enough calories (~400/hour?) to keep your body going. This is hard because when you're exercising you often don't feel like eating – but if you wait until you feel hungry, it's too late: you can't recover and you're gonna bonk. Thus, it's critical to force-feed yourself at every pit stop, however crappy it makes your stomach feel. (You can train for this, though I didn't.)
- 4) Controlling your pace so you never get winded or overheated.
- 5) Using your (much stronger) legs rather than your arms on numerous obstacles, which preserves arm/grip strength (any rock climber will tell you how important this is). There's not much you can do other than be as fast as you can on pure grip/upper-body tests like Funky Monkey, The Gauntlet and Leap of Faith. But you can do Augustus Gloop, Ladder to Hell, T-boned, Skidmarked, Lumberjacked and Mudderhorn using 90% legs, with arms mainly for balance.
- 6) Being assertive in asking for assistance. I think some slower racers felt like they didn't want to bother the faster racers, who might resent being slowed down, but nothing could be further from the truth. We're all part of one big team and family, so every single person out there, even the elite racers going for max distance and prize money, is happy to help another Mudder. But don't assume that others know you want/need help – some people take pride in completing obstacles without assistance – so you need to ask!
- 7) Communicate clearly about what assistance you need. For example, I needed help every time on Everest, so when I was ready to run, I made eye contact with the people at the top, made sure they were ready for me, yelled "Two hands!", and then held up both hands.
- 8) Knowing when to give up on an obstacle you were never going to complete (to save energy and preserve grip strength) – yet also doing every obstacle possible (to avoid time- and energy-sapping penalties).

Any tips on nutrition during the race?

I brought 5x as much food as I could possibly eat because you never know what you might crave during the race. You can't just consume energy drinks and gel – that's fine for short races, but won't work for long ones.

My main go-to "real food" was a rotisserie chicken that I consumed over the course of the race plus Dinty Moore stews, which are loaded with fat and calories – my pit crew had one piping hot for me after each lap. Also piping hot broth and chocolate Ensure Enlive ("all-in-one advanced nutrition shake" – a ton of protein and calories). Every leg I also ate a Snickers bar, either in the pit or out on the course. And when it wasn't too cold at the beginning and end of the race, I drank some Coke (I like the taste, find it refreshing, and it has caffeine).

How did you feel afterwards?

For the first week, I felt like a truck ran over every part of my lower body again and again (my upper body was fine). I had serious edema in my legs, which were all swollen – so much so that I went to the doctor the following Thursday, who had me get an ultrasound to make sure I didn't have any blood clots (I didn't). After a week, I was able to walk mostly normally and two weeks later I played basketball for the first time. I took 800mg of ibuprofen every four hours for the first week afterwards to manage the pain and inflammation, and I needed Ambien to sleep the first few nights as well.

Is there actually any danger?

For me, not on a relative basis. Riding my bike in NYC every day is 100x more dangerous than running a handful of TM and Spartan races each year, plus I do some pretty hard-core mountaineering and rock climbing (see: www.tilsonfunds.com/Tilsonadventures.pdf). But there have been serious injuries and even a couple of deaths. I saw a guy at the TM in New Jersey two and half years ago being rushed off the course in an emergency cart and heard the next day that he'd died of a heart attack. A year later, at the same race, my friend Ben slipped and fell climbing down the back side of an obstacle and broke his arm, requiring surgery:



At last year's WTM, one of the lead women slipped off Funky Monkey, fell into the side of the pool, and knocked herself out, ending her race. And there's plenty of opportunity to mess yourself up jumping 38' off The Stacks. If you land slightly wrong, you can break your tailbone (on one jump last year, I was leaning back a tiny bit and bruised it; and the female winner a few years ago, Amelia Boone, actually broke it – but kept on racing and won!).

This year, Ryan Meade fell going over Lumberjacked and knocked himself out – but after 29 minutes in the medical tent (you're disqualified at 30) he got back out there and got 35 miles!

The main problem this year was people getting hypothermic – apparently the medical tent (which was heated) was full of shivering folks trying to warm up. The worst case I heard of was Victoria Jackson Graham, who posted: "I ended up in the ICU on life support...hypothermia, 89-degree core temp, complete respiratory failure, and rhabdomyolysis that caused a heart arrhythmia...all of my gear cut off in the ambulance." This, despite having proper gear: "2xu base layer, a 4/5 wetsuit, and a wind breaker jacket and pants." She concluded: "They think I had such bad issues because my potassium and calcium levels were off before the race ever started, probably from diet and training. They have been addressed and fixed. I'll be back, just as soon as I figure out a way to swing all the costs!" RESPECT!!!

Of course horrible bruises and chafing are the norm – this is what one person posted:



In comparison, my legs looked fine!



What advice would you give to Tough Mudder for future WTM's?

1) People love getting recognition: patches, bibs, awards, etc. I think having a patch for 25 miles and a bib at 50 miles (which 23% of finishers achieved) is just right, but having the next bib at 75 miles (which only 1.5% achieved) is too much. I saw a lot of folks get 50 miles and then mentally or literally stop, even though they could have kept going for another lap or two, because they knew 75 was out of reach. Why not have a 60-mile bib? Also, why not have awards by age categories (selfishly speaking!)?

2) Make sure the electric shock obstacles actually shock people. Starting at 8pm, racers could skip five tough obstacles by taking the "High Voltage Course Route", which consisted of three electric shock obstacles, but almost nobody was getting shocked, even when they hit the wires! (I hit the wires multiple times on Electroshock Therapy and never got a jolt.) And while it was great to see TM bring back the epic Operation obstacle, they made the hole twice as big, making it super easy. The one time I did get sloppy and hit the edge and got a shock, I barely felt it, in marked contrast to the same obstacle two years ago when the huge jolt caused me to shout "ARRRRRHHHHH" when I got hit.

3) Last year, the penalty walks were too long (especially Funky Monkey's 20-30 minutes); this year, they were too short (Funky Monkey took maybe 3-5 minutes), especially for The Stacks, which anyone is capable of doing. If you don't want to face your fears and skip it, fine – but that should be a half mile penalty.

C'mon TM, this is the World's Toughest Mudder, not the World's Easiest Mudder!

4) I loved the re-introduction of the Golden Carabiners (allowing one to skip a bunch of obstacles at two different points on the course) and thought giving one to everyone after their 5th lap made sense, but the other two ways to earn them – extra-hard routes on Funky Monkey and Leap of Faith – were too tough. I think only a few people earned them. I think the difficulty should have been set so that ~20-25% of people who were out there in the middle of the night could earn them, not 2-5%.

PS - Please don't read this as a general criticism - this was a GREAT race overall and I loved the new obstacles!

How much does it cost?

Registration prices vary, but average ~\$550, but that's just the start. If you don't have the gear, you can easily drop \$1,000 on this, plus flights and hotel – not just for you, but your pit crew as well. It ain't cheap! It saved Mark and me a ton of money to have a local pit crew who we could stay with, plus they had a lot of gear that we didn't need to buy: wagon, tarp, tent, cooler, chairs, etc.

Are you doing it again?

Hell yes! The 2019 WTM will be back in Atlanta, but a week later (and maybe colder!), Nov. 16-17.

What does Susan think of this?

Not much. But she's been endlessly loving and patient with me for more than 28 years of my foolish escapades – and I haven't killed myself yet! And she knows from long experience that if she raised doubts/concerns, it would just give me more motivation! And she takes comfort in my large life insurance policy... ;-)

Hydrophobia

This was a new obstacle that involved climbing up into a tube, crawling through it (while in a few inches of red water, and then climbing down. It wasn't difficult, but it was quite awkward getting into and out of the tube – and the water was chilling. Video [here](#). That's Chris Betcher in the two pics on the right.



Twin Peaks

Another new obstacle that involved climbing up a tough wall (most people required a boost to get on it, as it started three feet off the ground), then rappelling down a steep wet wall, stepping over to the opposite wall (being tall really helped), grabbing the other rope, and climbing back up. Great fun for rock climbers like me, but most folks ended up in the drink and had to do a penalty walk. Video [here](#) (skip to 1:26).



Spread Eagle

A new obstacle where you had to lie across two nylon straps and pull yourself across (though I saw some folks roll sideways). I observed a lot of people making this harder than it had to be.



The Stacks

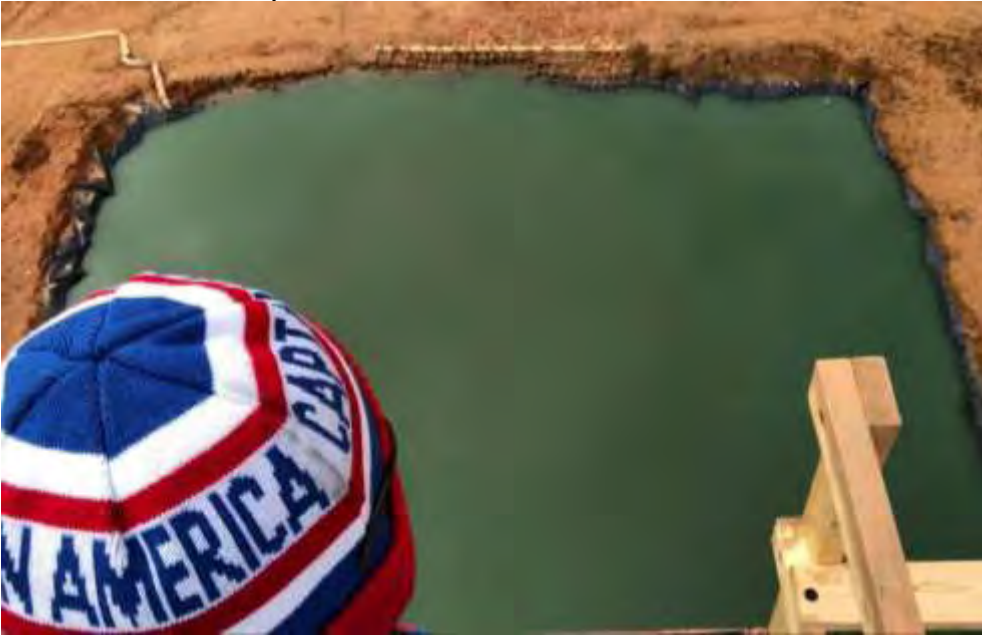
This replaced the iconic obstacle from Vegas, The Cliff, a 35-foot drop into the lake. This time, TM used shipping crates to create an even higher obstacle (I read 38 feet) plus, unlike Vegas, you had to climb up the back, which wasn't easy so most folks took a penalty walk. I had a blast doing this every lap starting at midnight – but if you're afraid of the dark, heights and/or water, this is your ultimate nightmare. [Here](#) is a video of Joel Forsyth doing a back flip off it – mad props!



Here's the climb up the back:



The view from the top:



Here's the woman's winner, Rea Kolbl, jumping off:



Augustus Gloop 2.0

A slight variation on the old Augustus Gloop/Snot Rocket, this involves getting in a waist-deep pool of water, wading across, ducking your head into the tube (you could actually pull it out and avoid putting your head underwater), and climbing up it (using hand-/foot-holds) while a firehose poured a ton of water on your head. I think getting rid of the tube made it easier, and the water wasn't coming down the times I did it. Video [here](#).



Black Widow

This new obstacle involved walking across nylon straps over a pool of water while holding onto other straps. I never saw anyone fall. More fun for a rock climber! Video [here](#).



Here's Alexandra Walker, who finished 4th among women with 65 miles:



Funky Monkey – The Revolution

A classic, in which you go up a set of maybe a dozen monkey bars, then have to transition to a horizontal wheel and spin around on it and grab a big vertical wheel, swing down to a smaller vertical wheel and, finally, to a bar before getting to the landing platform. The key I discovered is to go up the monkey bars backwards, with only one hand on each bar, which gets me to the top quicker so I can finish before my grip gives out. These pics are from previous races:



I have a love-hate relationship with this obstacle. It's a great challenge and when I'm fresh and my grip strength is strong, I have no problem with it, but when I get tired, my grip strength often gives out right near the end and I fall, cursing loudly! Here is a pic from this year's race:



Ladder to Hell

This wasn't particularly hard (especially if you're tall) – but it was at the highest point of the course, after a long uphill, so it *felt* hard! Also, it got icy and slippery overnight.



Underwater Tunnels

Nothing hard here – just wade into the lake and duck your head under three sets of barrels. But it sure was cold! TM closed it overnight to try to reduce the hypothermia people were suffering.



Cage Crawl

A TM classic. The pits were filled to the top initially, which left very little room to come up and breath, which freaked a lot of people out. It was much easier once the water level went down a bit. Like Underwater Tunnels, TM closed this overnight.



Trench Warfare

An easy 100-foot crawl in soft sand. Video [here](#). This is Jolie Rodriguez:



Electroshock (part 1 of the High Voltage Course Route, which opened at 8pm)

Another TM classic – except it wasn't working – almost nobody got shocked!

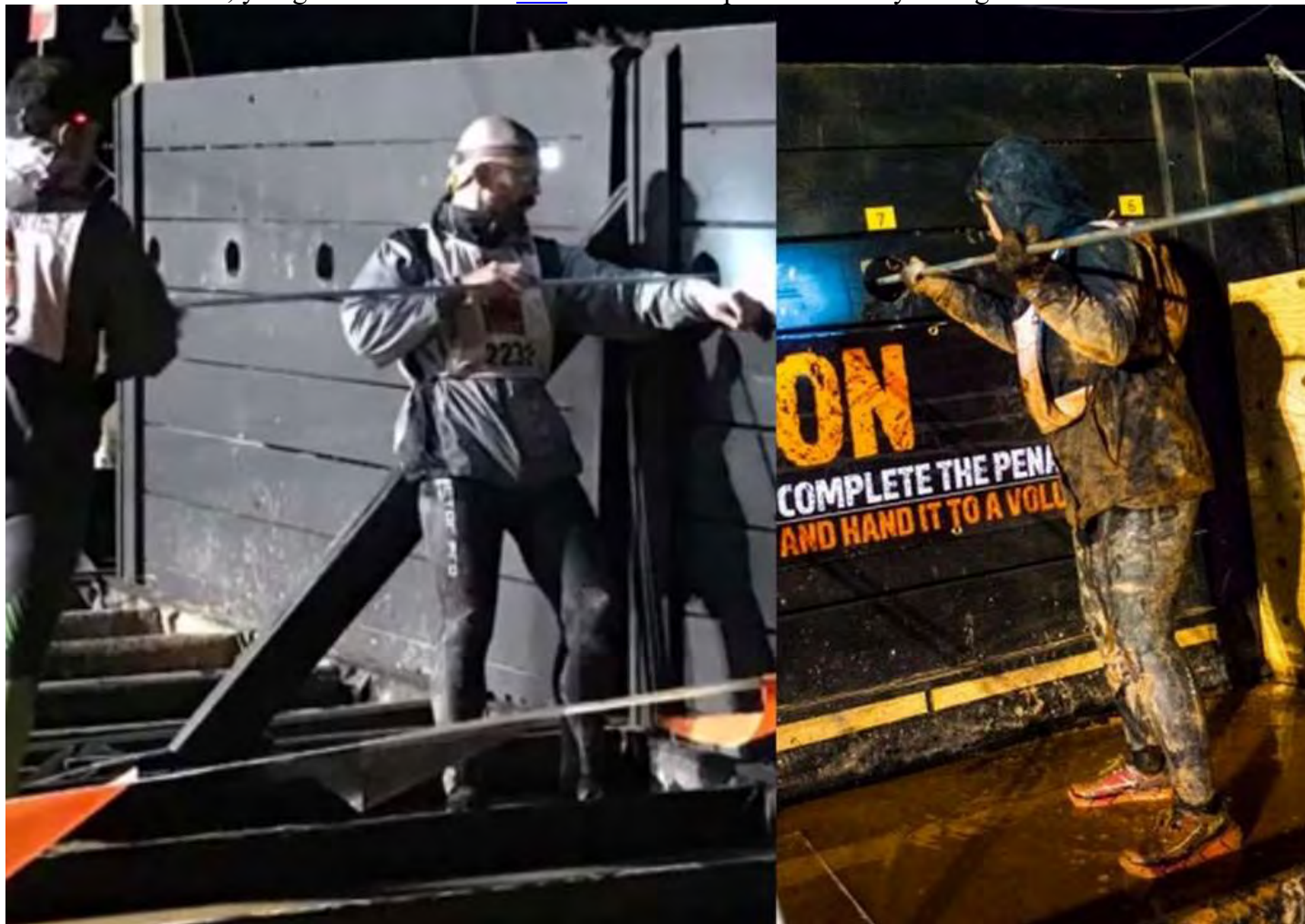


Entrapment (part 2 of the High Voltage Course Route)

A sand crawl under low wires that were supposedly electrified, except I didn't see anyone get shocked.

Operation (part 3 of the High Voltage Course Route)

TM brought back this epic obstacle from the 2016 WTM. You stand in a couple inches of water, pick up a 10-foot metal pole with a hook at the end, poke it through a hole, hook a rubber wristband hanging on a peg on a wall about six feet away, and then bring it back. Simple, right? Except there's one catch: if your pole touches the side of the hole, you get a shock. Video [here](#) and here are pics from two years ago:



This year, however, TM made it easier – the hole was twice as big and shocks (at least the one I felt) was a tiny fraction of what I remembered. Lame!

Quagmire

An easy walk into waist-deep water, up a small muddy hill, back into water and out. Yawn.

The Block Ness Monster

This one typically requires a bunch of people working as a team (though I was able to jump up and clamber over it by myself in the middle of the night and on the last lap, when no-one else was around). Everyone jumps into neck-deep water and pushes on the rotating, triangular-shaped thingie (I don't know what to call it). On each rotation, 1-2 people hold onto the top, are pulled over, and then grab the top and help keep it rotating so the others can get over. Then repeat this once more and you're done – great fun! Video [here](#).



The Gauntlet

A challenging new obstacle with four components (with three platforms to rest in between): a balance beam, rings to a rope, an upper-body-burner called Just the Tip (see pic below), and finally arching across a gap. I found all but Just the Tip easy – but if you failed any part you had to do the penalty walk. I got through it the first time, but my grip failed on those damn knobs the second and third time I tried it – GRRRR! Video [here](#).



Leap of Faith

This was a fun new obstacle, similar to Rope a Dope at last year's WTM, but instead of jumping to a rope, you instead grabbed a mesh net, climbed up and transitioned to a 45-degree down bar.



Everest 2.0

This is an iconic Tough Mudder obstacle, in which you run up a curved wall, grab the top, and pull yourself over (almost everyone needs help from Mudders at the top; *huge* thanks to Darth Vader, Jason Harley and the other guys who hung around at the top of the wall for nearly the entire race and helped countless fellow Mudders get up it). Video [here](#).



(Funny story: my then-76-year-old mother did a TM in New Hampshire with me in August 2016. Unfortunately, she is the world's slowest runner so when we came to Everest 2.0, she couldn't get within a country mile of our outstretched hands. She had given up and was walking around it when a woman at the top suggested that we form a human pyramid at the base so my mom could climb up on top of us and reach high enough so the people at the top could grab her. As you can see from [this video](#), it worked! Everyone was cheering her and giving her high-fives!)

Mud Mile 2.0

This was an epically good Mud Mile, with six deep, slippery trenches that required teamwork (at least until the sides got worn away and it became easy to do solo).



T-Boned

A high wall with a ledge that came out like a T. The first of three tough climbing obstacles that a lot of people struggled with (when they got icy overnight, TM closed them until dawn). My key insight was to step through the crack between the walls just to the left of this guy, rather than go over the top:



Skidmarked

An inverted wall. I didn't get a pic from this race, but here's one from another race:



Lumberjacked

You had to get over six logs each about five feet off the ground. The key was to climb the sides, but it was slippery (and, later, icy) and required good climbing skills or a helping hand.



Pyramid Scheme/Happy Ending

This is a slick, sloping wall that TM made easier this year by having ropes come down all the way, so no teamwork or even real exertion was required. Yawn.



Kiss of Mud 2.0

A quick crawl/roll under barbed wire. I long ago discovered that there's a hard way to do this (crawling) and an easy way (rolling). (You can see me doing so in my wife's short [video clip](#) from two years ago.) Yes, the latter can make you a little dizzy, but relative to crawling it's so much earlier and faster and you don't get scraped up. I don't know why most people haven't figured this out – try it, you'll like it! Here is a pic of me doing this obstacle last in 2016, when it was harder, plus a generic pic:





Mudderhorn

TM brought back Giant Wedgie from two years ago and made it harder, with a slick 10-foot wall to get up to the netting, which was pretty much impossible to do on your own – a final obstacle worthy of this race! As with Everest, *huge* thanks to the guys who hung around at the base of the wall and helped countless fellow Mudders get up it, including Chris Aranda, Nathan Herron and Ryan Cray. Videos [here](#) and [here](#).



Toughest Mudder - East

12-hour race (8pm Saturday, May 18 – 8am Sunday, May 19)
Coatesville, PA (outside Philadelphia)

By Whitney Tilson

I ran a 12-hour Tough Mudder race last weekend, from 8pm Saturday to 8am Sunday. (I've done the last three 24-hour World's Toughest Mudders and one 8-hour overnight Tough Mudder race on this same course two years ago, but this was my first 12-hour one.)

Overall, it was a great race. I did 40 miles (8 laps, officially, though I actually put 43.9 miles on my legs according to my Garmin watch), 5-10 more than I expected (Buffett and Munger joke that the key to a happy marriage is having low expectations going in; ditto for me and long races!). The 20 obstacles/lap were fun and I really enjoyed running with four of my buddies, especially Tim Donovan, who was with me every step of the way. Importantly (when you get to be a 52-year-old geezer like me), my body held up remarkably well. At no point was I in any real pain – just a lot of fatigue. I'm sore all over today, but nothing that 800mg of Advil every four hours for another couple of days won't take care of!

I finished 78th of 472 total racers (top 17%) and 4th of 29 men (top 14%) in the 50+ age group.

Here are my official stats (which are posted for all racers here:

<https://toughmudder.com/toughest-results#/race/esUXKo/1>):

Bio	WHITNEY TILSON NEW YORK NY		Final Time
1616	Age: 52		11:50:40
	Gender: M		
DIVISION	DIVISION PLACE	GENDER PLACE	OVERALL PLACE
M50&UP	4	70	78
	29	384	472

Individual Results		Charts		
Location	Time	Pace	cTime	Ranking Overall
# of Laps	8			
Total Miles	40			
Lap 1	54:00 (5mi)	10:48/mile	00:54:00	246/472
Lap 2	1:17:56 (10mi)	15:36/mile	02:13:41	227/472
Lap 3	1:29:34 (15mi)	17:55/mile	03:45:24	167/472
Lap 4	1:41:20 (20mi)	20:16/mile	05:29:00	136/472
Lap 5	1:43:45 (25mi)	20:45/mile	07:15:17	125/472
Lap 6	1:44:41 (30mi)	20:57/mile	09:03:58	109/472
Lap 7	1:25:39 (35mi)	17:06/mile	10:33:44	95/472
Lap 8	1:12:46 (40mi)	14:34/mile	11:50:40	87/472

I wasn't surprised to see that I was in the bottom half of the pack (246 of 472; 52nd percentile) after the first lap – the “sprint lap,” in which all of the obstacles are closed. I'm not a fast runner and I never push it hard in the early going of a long race, as I don't want to get burned out. As you can see, every lap I passed lots of people, as I did at the World's Toughest Mudder last November, when I was 722nd of 1,232 after the sprint lap (bottom 41%), but finished 52nd overall (top 4%) and won the 50+ age group. It's a marathon, not a sprint, you silly jackrabbits!

Here were the top finishers in my age group (all of us got 40 miles):

DIV	PL	PLACE	DIV	NAME	TOTAL MILES	TIME
	1	31	M 50&UP	Shayne Williams	40	10:45:34
	2	57	M 50&UP	Joe Perry	40	11:33:49
	3	77	M 50&UP	Jeffrey Hunnewell	40	11:49:31
	4	78	M 50&UP	Whitney Tilson	40	11:50:40

I'm a little bummed to learn that I missed 3rd place by only 79 seconds – I made up more than 20 minutes on Jeffrey Hunnewell during the last lap, as I hustled to finish by 8:00am (I finished at 7:50:40, so I had 9 minutes and 20 seconds to spare, or the entire last lap wouldn't have counted).

Here's a picture of me with my buddies before the race – we shared a pit (tent) area and ran some laps together (all 12 hours with Tim):



From left to right: me, Tom Millerick, Doug Hughes, Mike Trbovic and Tim Donovan

Here's the start of the race (I'm on the far left; it almost looks like I'm in the lead – LOL!):



Here we are at one of the first obstacles, Pitfall, where you have to wade through a muddy pit with a very uneven bottom (kudos to Tim for the great idea of holding hands so you don't fall on your face, as I'm almost doing here):





Shortly thereafter was the infamous Mud Mile, six deep, muddy, water-filled trenches:



Then, with our hands slippery from the mud, we had to do Funky Monkey, a real upper body and grip-strength test that involves going up a dozen rungs, around a side wheel, down a big wheel, a small one, then, finally, a bar hanging on a chain. (Note Tim in the background of two of these pics.)

Being fast and smooth is key. A key trick I've discovered is to do the first half of the obstacle (up the rungs) *backwards* (it's much faster because you do only one hand per rung, whereas going forward most people have their hands side-by-side on each rung going up). Then, when you reach the top, you spin around on the side wheel and go down facing forward.



The last obstacle was the even-more-infamous Electroshock Therapy, which gives you a massive jolt if you're not careful (one time I barreled through it and got knocked flat on my face!):



Tom and I ran the entire race together and here's how we finished:



Here's a picture of us after the race (minus Tom, who was already on his way home):



On the way out, I ran into Joe Perry (who finished 2nd in the 50+ age group, 17 minutes ahead of me; he always paints his face for races – a new way each time!) and Maxine Brown:



Funny story about the last lap

After the fourth lap at around 1:30am, Tim and I did some math regarding the rest of the race. By that time, we were walking/speed hiking maybe a third of the course (anything with an upward slope) and *very* slow jogging (it felt like shuffling) the rest. Plus we were taking relaxed 10-minute pit stops after each lap. As a result, lap 4 (including the pit) took 1:41:20, as you can see in the table on page 1.

To be conservative, we assumed that we'd slow down and additional laps would take two hours, which meant our 5th lap would be 1:30-3:30, our 6th lap would finish at 5:30, and our 7th at 7:30am, giving us plenty of cushion before the 8am cutoff – but also no chance at doing an 8th lap.

So we were very relaxed – we knew we could walk the rest of the night and get 35 miles, which we'd be happy with, and had no chance at 40.

Sure enough, our 5th lap was even slower at 1:43:45. When we returned to the pit, we encountered Doug for the first time since the start. He had gone out fast and was 25 minutes ahead of us after the first two laps, but then started to feel sick, which slowed him a lot. He had also finished five laps, and decided to come out with us for lap 6, which was an even slower 1:44:41.

We left for lap 7 at 5:18am. Certain that it would be our last one, we jogged it – the finish line was in sight! – and used our wristband passes to skip three obstacles.

As we were finishing the lap and coming back toward the finish line/pit area, I looked at my watch and was startled to see that it was 6:30am. I exclaimed to Tim and Doug, “You guys, it’s 6:30 – we just did that lap in 1:12! We might have enough time to do an 8th lap!”

None of us could believe that we'd done the lap so quickly. Maybe I'd misremembered and we hadn't started at 5:18?

We skipped the pit area and ran straight across the finish line to the timer's desk and asked what our lap time was. The guy said 1:55. Well, that made more sense! Defeated, we prepared to walk back to the pit and start packing up.

But then I remembered and said, “The 1:55 included our last pit stop, which was a long one. I think if we really push it, we can do it!”

Doug was done at that point, but Tim was game so we took off. I said to him, “What’s the worst that can happen? We don’t make it and spend an extra hour and a half out here on this beautiful morning, doing what we came to do?”

After more than ten and a half hours, it was *so hard* to start pushing it, running faster and even jogging the uphill. Worse yet, we were hungry because we hadn't stopped at the pit, so we were worried about hitting the wall (bonking). The course ran through the parking lot, so we looked for anyone who might have food for us. At the very last moment, nearly a mile into the course,

we saw a guy and ran toward him (I'm sure with crazed looks in our eyes), saying, "Dude, do you have any Gatorade or food?!"

And then the heavens opened and a light shone down... He said, "This is all I've got" and pulled out a bag of soft chocolate chip cookies. It was a miracle!!! You have never seen two happier guys than Tim and me at that moment...

We each grabbed five, thanked him profusely and stuffed them in our mouths as we kept running.

But I had a problem – my mouth was so dry that I could barely chew them, and the next water station wasn't for half a mile, after two mud obstacles for which I needed both hands, so what to do? I looked for discarded bottles by the side of the course – and found one! Germs be damned, I gratefully washed the last cookies down with the two swigs of water that remained. (Tim didn't stoop to such grossness – somehow he got the cookies down.)

(None of this compares to Mark James' last lap on this very course during the eight-hour race here two years ago. He was scooping used mustard packets off the ground and sucking on them – and finished the last lap with less than 10 *seconds* to spare!)

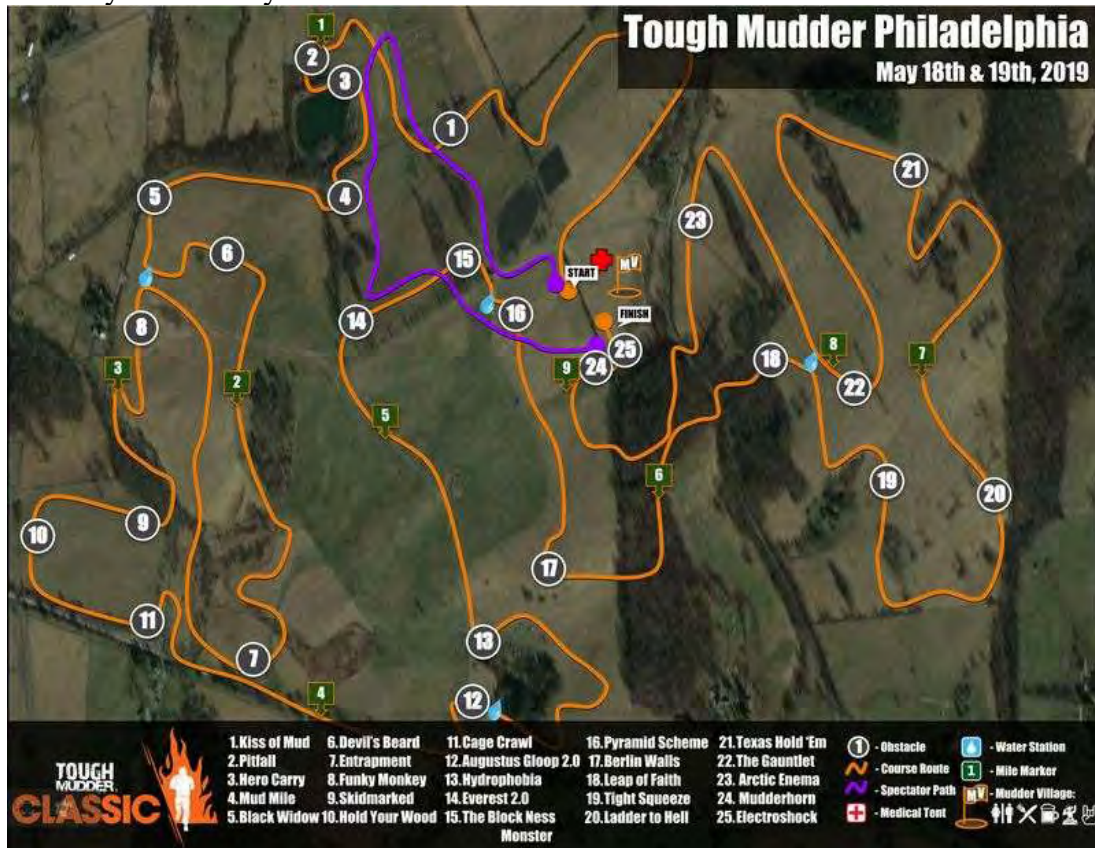
The cookies were lifesavers. Tim and I cranked through the last lap in 1:12:46 and finished at 11:50:40, with nearly 10 minutes to spare.

The course

Ryan Meade has posted a wonderful 8-minutes video of all of the obstacles here:

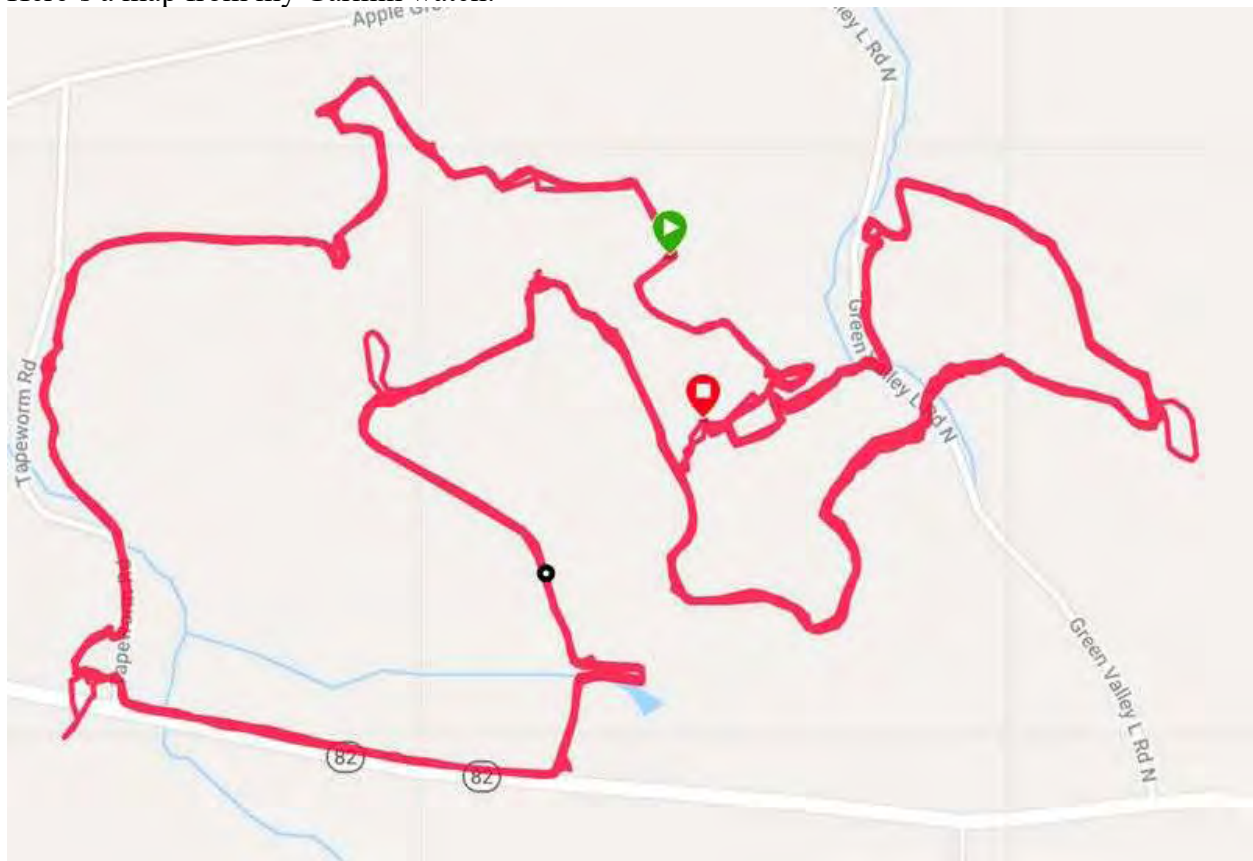
<https://youtu.be/vwOpnIPsAk>.

Here's a map of the regular 10-mile Tough Mudder course, which ran during the day both Saturday and Sunday:



The following obstacles were not part of the Toughest course – 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 19, 20 and 21 – which reduced the mileage from 10 to 5.

Here's a map from my Garmin watch:



Note that the finish line (red dot) is different from the starting line (green dot), which I think is most of the reason that the actual mileage I covered was 10% more than the official mileage. The other reasons were very short diversions going into the pit after all but two laps, plus the two penalty loops I did, which you can see in the map above, on the far right (Gauntlet – I misjudged the distance from the 2nd ring to the 3rd and missed the grab – a silly mistake) and middle toward the left (Everest – on the last lap, nobody was at the top and neither Tim nor I can run up it solo; huge thanks to Francis Lackner and Nick Shook, who spent most of the race pulling people up).

This was the easiest OCR course I've ever encountered (I've done about two dozen of them, mostly Tough Mudder and Spartan), for a variety of reasons:

- There wasn't much vertical (maybe 500-600 feet/lap and only one hill of note);
- Very little mud or slipperiness – the bulk of the course was pretty smooth and solid;
- It was positively balmy (my watch said the temperature never dropped below 60 – what a contrast to the WTM last November, when it dropped below 30 most of the night!);
- The penalty loops were laughable, taking at most two minutes (on Gauntlet, Doug did the penalty walk, but was finished by the time Tim and I completed it!);
- The obstacles were pretty standard, but on the easier side (e.g., on Leap of Faith, for example, you barely had to jump to reach the net; at Electroshock Therapy, it was easy to avoid getting shocked); and

- Starting after the fourth lap (mile 20), every racer got an orange wristband upon the completion of each lap (so I got four in total) that allowed you to skip any obstacle. That's pretty generous (some would say lame).

Anyone who thinks that doing World's will just be two laps of this race is going to be in for a *rude* surprise. The WTM last November was *massively* more difficult!

Tricks on staying warm: ski shell and Bleggmits

In any long, overnight race in which you're constantly wet (and getting re-soaked regularly), staying warm is key, both to maintain your core temperature and avoid hypothermia as well as to keep your hands warm so you'll be able to grip well for the majority of obstacles that require it.

At last November's WTM, 40% of the people who started the race didn't finish (meaning didn't complete their final lap after 8am, 20 hours into the race) – nearly all of them because they froze in the sub-30-degree night. Here's what I wrote about this topic in my write-up of the race (which is posted here: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM18.pdf):

I wasn't immune to the cold, as it sucked my energy and forced me to walk 8 of the 12 laps, but thanks to a thick 5mm wetsuit and gloves, Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and pants, and four layers of headgear, I was able to maintain my core temperature and keep walking (and walking and walking...) (though my fingers and toes got quite chilled at times – two weeks later, my toes are still numb!). I learned my lessons well from last year's WTM when I didn't get my full wetsuit on in time and didn't have a jacket or pants to wear over my wetsuit, so got crushed by the cold around midnight...

... I slow-jogged most of lap 4 as well, nailed every obstacle (the toughest were Funky Monkey and The Gauntlet), and finished at 6pm, in 399th place of 1,129 racers, just as darkness was setting in. I knew it was going to quickly get very cold so I did my longest pit stop of the race, 39 minutes, to get my heavy-duty cold-weather gear on, consisting of a full-length thick wetsuit (5mm body; 4mm arms and legs), Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and mountaineering pants (waterproof and, more importantly, windproof), an extra layer on my head (the hood of the jacket), and 3mm neoprene gloves. The key difference with last year for me was adding the jacket and pants – in cold weather, a wetsuit isn't enough, as it's designed for underwater, not to block cold air/wind, which is what my jacket and pants did. (I saw a lot of folks with just wetsuits or adding only a cheapo \$15 Walmart windbreaker – and they paid a big price I suspect.)

You can see most of what I'm wearing in this picture:



I really want to emphasize this part: “in cold weather, a wetsuit isn’t enough, as it’s designed for underwater, not to block cold air/wind.” A high-quality windproof shell jacket is *critical*!

At the race last weekend, I never needed to change even once. Look at what I’m wearing in the first picture above: nothing but a thin top, shorts and tights. After the 2nd lap, I put on my Arcteryx ski jacket shell and after the 3rd lap I grabbed my swim cap (everyone has the [blueseventy](#) one) and Bleggmits. That was it – no heavy wetsuit or anything! It’s key to stay light, and I did.

Speaking of Bleggmits (<https://www.bleggmit.com.au/>), I got them last month, have done two races with them (the Spartan Beast last month and this one), and am now a *huge* fan. They keep my hands warm, mostly mud-free, and protect them from getting chafed. An absolute must-have for all but the shortest and warmest races!

The winners (and others of note)

The overall winner was Johan Ingemarsson, who did 11 laps (55 miles) in 10 hours and 46 minutes (he had plenty of time for another one, but I assume he stopped because the 2nd place guy, Mark Gaudet, was 17 minutes behind him and likely didn't have time to do a 12th lap to pass him). Ingemarsson flew in from Norway and has three obstacle course (OCR) race wins in the last three weeks!

The women's winner was my friend Erin Rost, with whom I ran a couple of miles on the last lap of the WTM last November (my 12th and her 15th, to finish in 2nd place at her first Tough Mudder race!). Here's a picture of us before the race:



Erin finished 9 laps (45 miles) in 10:53 for 12th place overall, beating the #2 woman by 62 minutes. She's a beast!

The #3 woman (22nd overall) was Bella Crane, who finished her 9th lap with only 2:51 to spare. Quite a combo with her brother Cason Crane, who won the sprint lap in a blazing 33:58 and finished 10th overall with 50 miles. Fun fact: Cason is the first LGBT person to do the Seven Summits (climb the highest peaks in all seven continents – the most epic of which, of course, is Mt. Everest). Here's a picture of Cason, Bella and my friend Fran McGill (who did nine laps and finished 18th overall):



PS—The *New York Times* just published an incredibly moving story, [She Had Stage 4 Lung Cancer, and a Mountain to Climb](#), about Cason and Bella’s mother, an amazing woman who, despite fighting stage 4 lung cancer, is doing epic things with her five children. I promise it's one of the best articles you'll read this year. Excerpt:

For two decades, Isabella, 55, an outdoors enthusiast, longtime mountain climber, veteran marathoner and triathlete, and her husband, David Crane, a top financier in the energy industry, have raised their five children, who all use the surname Crane, on adventure. These excursions, like riding horses from Siberia to the Gobi Desert, often with no one but their mother, led them to extraordinary athletic feats.

At 20, her eldest son, Cason, became the first openly gay mountaineer to climb the highest peak on each continent, which are collectively known as the seven summits. Her second child, David, cycled from Cairo to Cape Town when he was 19. When Bella was 19, she hiked the Pacific Crest Trail, a 2,650-mile route that winds through the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range, stretching from Mexico to Canada. Last year, Isabella’s fourth child, Oliver, became, at 19, the

youngest person to row solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Her youngest son, Christopher, 16, is among New Jersey's top high school distance runners.

When Isabella's lung cancer was diagnosed, in January 2018, she was not sure if she had months or even weeks to live.

A shout-out to Tex Ritter, whom I had the pleasure of meeting for the first time (briefly) in the middle of the race. At age 62, he was by far the oldest racer (followed by a 59-year-old guy and a 58-year-old woman), yet he still did 30 miles, finishing 159th overall and 14th in the 50+ (and 1st in the 60+)!

Finally, mad props to Diana Codispoti, who last November was the first person with dwarfism (she's 4' 5") to compete in the World's Toughest Mudder. I've never met her, but saw her in the starting area and on the course a couple of times last weekend.

Here's a great article about her, [World's Toughest Mudder Race draws small entrant with big heart](#), and below are pics of a team of Mudders helping her get up Everest at the WTM – that's Joel Forsyth reaching down from the top:



Hiking the Presidential Traverse

Friday, August 23, 2019

Last week my best friend from high school, Bob Fisher, invited me to join him and his 19-year-old daughter, Lily, on Friday to do the most famous hike in New England, the Presidential Traverse, most of which is part of the Appalachian Trail. Its name comes from the fact that it hits eight peaks, all named after presidents: Madison, Adams, Jefferson, Washington, Monroe, Eisenhower, Pierce and Jackson.

There's no technical climbing, but it's long (a little over 20 miles), has a lot of vertical (my watch said 9,173 feet), and the weather can be very unpredictable. Mt. Washington, the highest peak in New England at 6,288 feet, is notorious for the worst weather in the world. For nearly sixty-two years, it held the world record for the fastest wind gust ever recorded on the surface of the Earth: 231 miles per hour, recorded April 12, 1934 (it was surpassed on April 10, 1996 when an unmanned weather station in y Barrow Island, Australia measured a 253 mph wind gust during Tropical Cyclone Olivia).

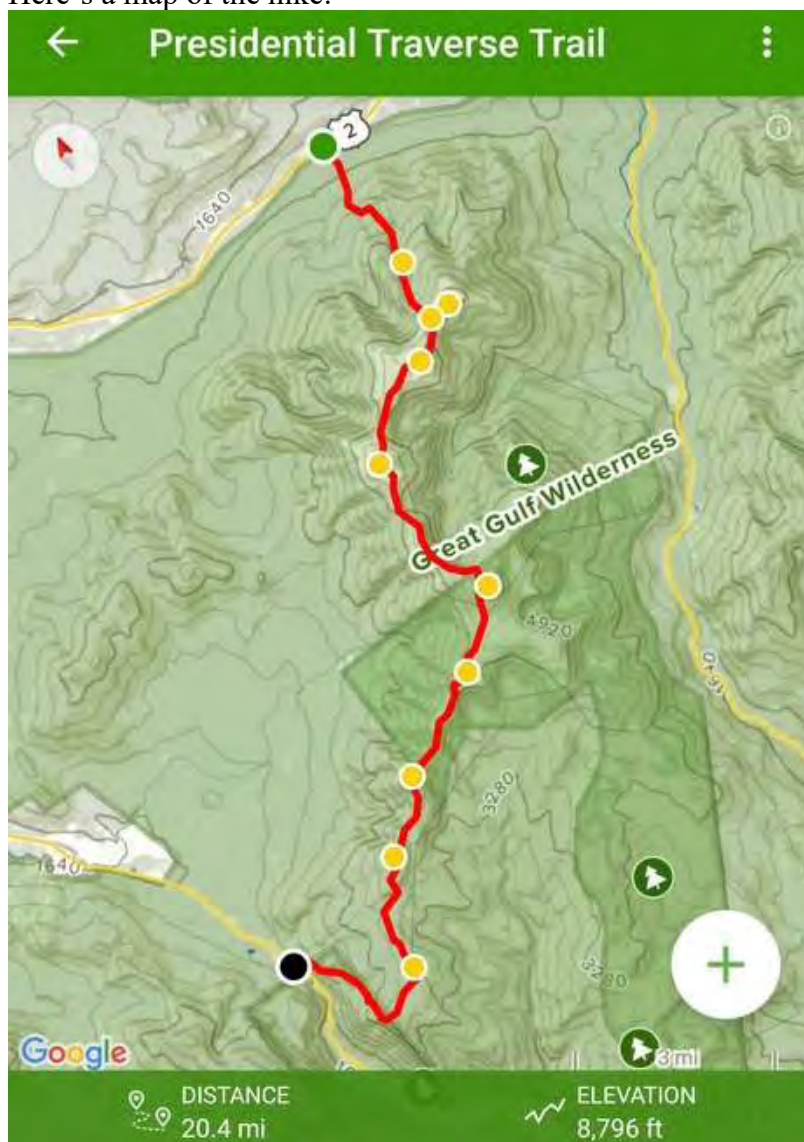
I was already at Lake Sunapee, NH (spending the week with my parents – it was my mom's 79th birthday), so I was only two hours away, which made it an easy decision.

Because the hike takes 10-14 hours, you have to start super early, so I called my cousin, Steve Piotrow (you may recall that he was my triathlon and doubles (tennis) partner at the National Senior Games, where we won gold and silver). He, his wife Meredith and their two boys (Darren and Foster, ages 20 and 18) live in Jackson, only 35 minutes away from both the start and end of the Traverse, so their place was perfect for us to crash. And best of all, Meredith had the day off, so she was able to join us for the entire hike. And Foster didn't have work until the afternoon, so he came for the first two hours to the top of Mt. Madison before going back down the way we came up.

Here's a picture of all of us at the Piotrow's home the night before the hike:



Here's a map of the hike:



And this map (from my Garmin watch) shows the vertical – you can see the eight peaks (the top of the fourth peak, Mt. Washington, isn't flat – it looks that way because we spent an hour up there having lunch):



We decided to do the hike the most popular way, from north to south, to get the big climb out of the way early.

With five of us and three cars, the logistics worked perfectly: on Thursday afternoon, Bob and Lily drove three hours from their home in southern Vermont, I drove two hours from Sunapee, and Meredith drove a half hour from Jackson and we all met at the parking lot at the end of the hike. Here's a picture near where we parked of the famous Mt. Washington Resort with Mt. Jefferson (on the left) and Mt. Washington (on the right) in the background:



We left Bob and Meredith's cars there so that when we finished, Bob and Lily could drive straight back to Vermont while Meredith and I could go back to Jackson (we didn't need to return to the parking lot where we started because Foster had driven my car home). We all then piled into my car, went out to dinner, and then crashed at the Piotrows.

The next morning we got up at 4:30am, had breakfast, and left a few minutes after 5am and arrived at the parking lot and started hiking at 5:41am. Here's a selfie of us as we headed out:



As you can see from the chart of the vertical (above), the first two hours – roughly four miles – was straight uphill to the top of Mt. Madison. This was a fit crew – the Piotrows are all crazy athletic, as are Bob and Lily (who's a Division I cross country skier for Colby) – so we were hiking super fast. It was perfect, as nobody was holding the group back – but I was sweating like a madman!

Here's a picture that shows what the terrain was like for the first 3½ miles:



This is very typical New England terrain – dirt and rocks in the trees. But then we got to the tree line where there was the Madison hut, right at the base of Mt. Madison:



From here, it was a half mile up to the peak. As you can see, while the weather was perfect down in the valley for the entire day, we were in a fog bank once we got above the tree line – visibility was maybe a couple hundred feet (and remained that way for the next five hours until around 1pm, when we were descending from Mt. Washington). Worse yet, the wind started HOWLING – we were buffeted by gusts of 50 mph I'd guess. You can sort of tell by this picture from the summit:



The temperature was in the 50s and, with the gusts, the wind chill was much lower, and we didn't have much cold weather gear as you can see, so we hustled down off the summit and into the hut – but it was fairly slow going because the terrain was now all over rocks (and remained that way for much of the next 10 miles). Here's a picture of us coming down – as you can see, you really needed to be a billy goat to avoid slipping and/or rolling your ankle (thank goodness it wasn't raining!):



After 20 minutes in the Madison hut to warm up, use the bathroom, eat some of our snacks, and refill our water, we were off to Mt. Adams, which took a bit less than an hour. Here we are on that peak – as you can see, the weather hadn't improved:



An hour later, we were on the top of Mt. Jefferson:



And two hours later, we were approaching the top of Mt. Washington:



We arrived at the summit at 11:20am, 5:40 after we started. Other than the brief stop at the Madison hut, we'd been hiking super fast the entire time. My watch showed 10.45 miles, so we were averaging a little over two miles per hour when we were moving, which doesn't sound fast, but is, in light of the vertical and the rocky terrain.

At the summit, we most relaxed and ate for an hour. There's a full cafeteria, so I had a slice of pepperoni pizza, a bowl of chili with bread and an ice cream sandwich. We also checked out the small museum and the old hotel, the Tip Top House, first built in 1852 (there are no longer any accommodations there). Here's the old bunk room:



Here's a famous sign:



Here are some exhibits on the wall:



Here's a list of the 162 people who've died climbing these mountains since 1849, three this year (a 37-year-old guy died "from a long sliding fall of more than 300 feet in Huntington Ravine" on Feb. 10; a 32-year-old guy died on April 11 after triggering an avalanche; and a 63-year-old woman died on June 13 "of medical complications related to hypothermia and exposure in winter-like conditions while attempting to summit on the Tuckerman Ravine Trail")!



There are three ways to the summit: hike, drive, or take the famous cog railway – here’s what it looks like:



And of course, here’s the tourist shot with the summit sign – there was actually a line to pose with this!



Not long after we began our descent, the skies parted a bit and the sun appeared. We were so excited (and weren’t sure if it would only be temporary) that we rushed to take a picture. Behind Bob and Lily you can see our next two peaks, Mt. Monroe and Mt. Eisenhower. In front is the Lakes of the Clouds hut, which is where most people stay who do the Presidential Traverse in two days (it sleeps 90 people; it’s at 5,032 feet, 1,300 vertical feet below the peak of Mt. Washington):



Here we are next to one of the Lakes of the Clouds (which you can see in the picture above):



We stopped at the hut briefly and then continued to the top of Mt. Monroe:



By now, the skies had finally cleared. Here's a beautiful panorama from the top of Mt. Monroe:



Here we are at the top of Mt. Eisenhower – you can see Mt. Monroe and Mt. Washington over my shoulder:



Note the rock piles on either side of us. They're called "cairns" and they're used to guide hikers. When there's a well-defined path with clear visibility like you see here, they're not necessary, but they were invaluable on the first half of the hike.

Here we are on the last peak, Mt. Jackson (the only summit I didn't take a photo of us on was Mt. Pierce):



The rest of the hike was a fairly steep 3-4 miles down through the woods, similar to what we'd started with that morning. We crossed a very pretty stream:



Here we are at the end!



We finished at 5:20pm, 11:39 after we started. Here's the data from my watch, which shows 9 hours and 21 minutes of moving time, which sounds about right: we stopped for around an hour at the summit, maybe 15 minutes at each of the three huts, and a few minutes to take pictures at each of the summits:

Speed		Training Effect	
Avg Speed 🏃	1.9 mph	Anaerobic 🏃	2.0
Avg Moving Speed	2.4 mph	Aerobic 🏃	1.4
Max Speed	6.4 mph	Elevation	
Pace		Elevation Gain 🏃	9,173.2 ft
Avg Pace 🏃	31:40 min/mi	Elevation Loss	8,635.2 ft
Avg Moving Pace	25:25 min/mi	Min Elevation	879.3 ft
Best Pace	9:22 min/mi	Max Elevation	5,771.7 ft
Timing		Calories	
Total Time	11:39:03	Calories	3,503 Cal
Moving Time	9:21:13	Temperature	
Elapsed Time	11:41:10	Avg Temperature 🏃	59°F
Heart Rate		Min Temperature	46°F
Avg Heart Rate 🏃	102 bpm	Max Temperature	77°F
Max Heart Rate	141 bpm		

All in all, it was a totally epic adventure! There wasn't any part of it that was especially difficult, but you need to be sure-footed and have warm enough gear. To do this in a day, you don't need to be a super athlete, but definitely need to be in decent shape – able to maintain a brisk walking pace for many hours, both uphill and downhill. My legs have been a bit sore the last three days, but nothing more.

For those who want to do it in two days, stay at the Lakes of the Clouds hut, which breaks it up nicely. That's what Katharine did a couple of years ago when she and 8-10 fellow campers at Camp Walden did the Traverse.

Recommendations if you do this hike

1) You MUST have a good GPS to aid you – a paper map isn't enough. It's easy to get lost, especially in poor visibility, given that you often can't see the trail because it's over rocks and, even when you can, there are many trails going here and there.

I used the AllTrails app for the first time and really liked it. If you pay a few dollars for the paid version, you can download a detailed map of seemingly every trail in the U.S. and then – this is key – *even if you don't have cell phone coverage* (which was most of this hike), you can pinpoint exactly where you are at all times relative to the trail (and, if you're off it, it will show you the direction to get back on it).

2) I love packing super light when I travel – it's like a game. So that's what I did for this hike. But being in Europe and realizing I should have brought a particular item of clothing vs. the same realization in a storm at the top of a mountain are two VERY different things!

As you can see in the pics, I was wearing only a light trail running vest, weighing maybe one pound, whereas Meredith, Bob and Lily were all carrying backpacks weighing maybe 10 lbs. – mostly water, but also extra clothing. It worked out fine for me this time, but was a mistake.

Here's what I had in my vest: two 6-ounce and one 16-ounce water flask (all initially filled with Gatorade, then water on refills), \$50 in cash, a credit card, two pieces of moleskin, a small tube of sunscreen, a few handfuls of trail mix and two granola bars (which I ate during the hike), and a handful of candy and two Gu's (which I didn't). I carried no extra clothes in my pack most of the time since I was wearing my windbreaker and light mittens (thank goodness I had them!).

I think the amount of water I carried – 3.5 cups, a bit less than a quart – was about right because there are three huts (at roughly miles 4, 12 and 17), all of which always have water and usually have snacks, plus there's the summit at mile 10. I drank a lot at the start and at each hut and the summit, so I only needed to carry enough water for roughly two hours. And after the steep hike the first two hours (and drop in temperature), I wasn't sweating much. On each leg, I didn't even drink half of my water. Ditto for food – I didn't even touch half of it over the course of the day.

But it was a real mistake going so light on the clothing. Despite moving at a fast pace and generating a lot of body heat, I got fairly cold from hours 2-6 when we were above the tree line exposed to the high winds. As Meredith notes below, if we'd had to stop for any reason, which is very common (injury, lightning, visibility, to assist another hiker), I would have been chilled to the bone within five minutes.

Here are the items of clothing I should have brought:

1. A wool hat (not the baseball cap I had);
2. A buff (a wonderfully versatile item that keeps your neck warm and can be pulled up over your head and/or face when needed);

3. Heavier/warmer mittens/gloves;
4. Waterproof and windproof pants;
5. A light puffy jacket; and
6. A windproof and waterproof shell with a hood (the windbreaker I had was too light/thin).

All of these things would have weighed only a few pounds and fit easily in a small day pack.

Here are comments from three folks with far more experience than I:

1) Meredith: Through my own experiences and by hearing about many rescues in the Whites, I strongly encourage hikers to go with a little extra, particularly water, food and layers. While it all worked out beautifully on our hike, one mishap on our part could have changed the picture quickly. If for any reason we would have needed to stop en route (injury, weather, visibility, etc.), we would have chilled incredibly quickly once we weren't moving if we didn't have warm layers to add. So, I embrace carrying those few extra pounds as an easy security feature. Their impact on speed is negligible, and they certainly didn't detract from my immense enjoyment of the day. Here are a few links to hiking gear I recommend:

- www.outdoors.org/trip-ideas-tips-resources/gear-advice/Ten-essentials-gear-checklist
- www.outdoors.org/conservation/trails/hike-safe
- www.outdoors.org/trip-ideas-tips-resources/gear-advice

2) My cousin Ethan: As a former Search and Rescue guy in New England and Colorado, I want to highlight the fact that people die on Mt. Washington a lot, at all times of the year. Having the bare necessities is nice when everything goes according to plan. You, especially, are in tune with your body and your capabilities, and have experience enough to know what to expect. The real danger is when things don't go to plan. Even experienced, fit people can get lost, say in the heavy fog you experienced, or for who knows what reasons. Hikers of all aptitudes and experience levels can and do get hurt, from sprained ankles, to broken legs, to head injuries. If you need help, even where you have cell service, real help is hours away. If you are lost, the time for help to arrive can be delayed by an order of magnitude. Even if you are around other people, how will they help you? By using the stuff in their packs to keep you dry, warm, hydrated, fed. And how bummed would somebody who needs help be if you show up, and all you can do for them is give them a Gu?

3) Lastly, my friend Michele, who's hiked every peak in New England *in the winter*: I would NEVER embrace the go-light. I've been in the Whites on 80-degree days in the valley where suddenly temps dropped to 35 and there was HAIL in August. I always carry a sleeping pad (for being injured, to insulate yourself from the ground), mittens, wool hat, wool base layer, rain gear top and bottom, first aid, extra food, down jacket, headlamps and two rescue beacons – a SPOT and a real beacon.

If you hike a lot, you see it's ALWAYS the light hikers who injure themselves and then die or need rescue for failure to carry an extra pound or two. You're a strong guy – don't hike light! Yes, you are fit but if you sprained an ankle or tripped or broke a bone, you'd freeze to death. Rescue takes HOURS. I've not used much of my emergency gear, but I never regret carrying it. And look how strong I am now! Whether I'm carrying 15 or 25 pounds, I just haul it and hike a bit slower.

PS—I used my emergency gear to help a hiker who had a heart attack on Mt. Abe and was glad I had extra food as I spent 8 hours waiting for rescuers. It's good for you – carry more stuff! You're a SEAL – they don't pack light!

My Adventure at the 2019 World's Toughest Mudder

By Whitney Tilson

I had a blast over the weekend (Nov. 16-17) at the World's Toughest Mudder, a 24-hour obstacle course race on a horse farm outside of Atlanta. I completed 70 miles and nearly 300 obstacles, finishing in 4th place in the 50-plus age group (in the previous three years, I'd finished first, fifth, and first – see write-ups [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

The weather was beautiful – nearly 60 degrees during the daytime and it didn't drop much below 40 degrees overnight – so it wasn't nearly the suffer-fest that it was last year, when temperatures plunged to 26 degrees and knocked out 40% of the competitors due to hypothermia. That said, I can barely walk today...

“Pain is temporary, glory is everlasting!” This is my new favorite phrase these days (LOL!), as I suffer in the aftermath of the race. While I officially slow-jogged/power-walked 70 miles (not to mention more than 250 obstacles), my watch said it was actually 77 miles (with penalties and going to and from my pit) – and my aging 53-year-old body is rebelling!

My upper body is fine – a bit sore, no more – and I only have three minor blisters on my feet and a few scrapes and bruises on my legs, but, internally, everything below the knee is very painful and is swelling up a lot, which is exactly what happened the three previous times I ran the race. Overnight is especially tough, as I have to keep my legs elevated, which disrupts my sleep, and when I make my middle-of-the-night trips to the bathroom, the pain of shuffling 12 feet jolts me fully awake.

I'm trying to treat it better this year by:

- Popping four Advil every 4 hours...
- Using my [Air Relax compression leg sleeves](#) regularly (highly recommended if you do long runs)
- Seeing my physical therapist yesterday, who worked on me, massaging the excess fluid out of my feet and lower legs (Marcus Forman of Centurion Physical Therapy in Carnegie Hall Tower is the best PT ever!)
- Going to Salon de Tokyo last night for a shiatsu massage, which I do both after any long race to aid recovery, but also beforehand to loosen up my muscles, ligaments and tendons, which I'm convinced is a major reason why I've never injured myself doing ridiculous things for which I haven't trained.

Let's hope everything heals quickly, as I'm in Zurich this weekend for my buddy Guy Spier's daughter's bat mitzvah and, since it would be criminal to be in Switzerland and not climb in the Alps, that's what I'll be doing this coming Monday and Tuesday before flying home on Wednesday for Thanksgiving!

It was the most enjoyable of the four WTM's I've run, for a few reasons:

- I knew what to expect, so was mentally well prepared
- I did more running training in the months prior, so was physically well prepared
- For the first time, I ran the entire race with a buddy (Tim Donovan)
- I wasn't nearly as cold!

- The carabiners (discussed in the appendix below) enabled us to take shortcuts on the last three laps, which made them *a lot* easier

Below are some pictures, including ones of the guys I ran with (Tim, Tom Millerick, Daemon Anastas, Mark James) and our pit crews (Steve and Alice Fazekas, Scott Anderson, Alan Chan).

Tim and I ran every step together of *three* Tough Mudder races this year: 16, 40, and 70 miles – 126 miles, side by side!

Tim and I had a good plan for the race, consistent with our capabilities, and we executed it well. Thanks to the carabiners, we even got an extra lap or two in. My only (small) regret is that, had we known, say, halfway through the race, how much the carabiners/shortcuts would help at the end (taking all three shortcuts on the last couple of laps), we could have been five minutes faster at each pit stop and slow-jogged a little bit more and completed one more lap to get 75 miles and earn the coveted silver bib (which I earned at my first WTM in 2016). But in the middle of the night, as were we walking 2+ hour laps, it looked like we'd only get 60 miles, so we weren't pushing it, either on the course or in the pit.

Here's a [three-minute video](#) of five clips my buddy and pit crew, Steve Fazekas, took of:

- The start (you can hear Sean Corvelle's inspirational words and then, about a minute in, see me in the pack amidst the fog – I'm wearing a long-sleeve light blue top; Daemon is in the neon top right behind me)
- Tim and me doing Arctic Enema
- At the mid-course pit/party station
- Crossing the finish line
- Me congratulating my buddy Mark James for finally (in his 4th try) winning the 50+ age group and tying my all-time record of 75 miles

Obstacle Racing Media posted an *awesome* 13-minute video of the race [here](#) (Tom, Tim, Daemon and I are at 1:47 running at the start; Mark James at 11:25 at Mud Mile).

Here's a [detailed description](#) of the race by Joe Perry (who finished in third, place, just ahead of me, in the 50+).

Some stats/observations:

- There were 790 individual finishers, 641 guys (81%) and 147 women
- 356 people got 50 miles or more (45%) (last year: 15%)
- 49 people got 75 miles or more (6.2%) (last year: 1.5%)
- It's amazing to see how the winner, Trevor Cichosz, had an average pit time of a mere 2:46, nearly a minute faster than anyone else (it kills me to see Timothy Donovan and my avg. pit time of 15:52!)

COURSE STATS

21

OBSTACLES

?

SECRET HAZARDS

5

MILES LONG

623'

ELEVATION GAIN PER LAP

5

PENALTY OBSTACLES

9

LEVEL UP OBSTACLES

30'

HEIGHT OF MUDDERHORN

24

HOURS

BOUCKAERT FARMS
ATLANTA, GA
NOV 16 & 17, 2019

LEGEND

- Obstacle (see manual)
- Obstacle (see High Voltage section)
- Treasure Marker
- Hidden Treasure (see Secret Hazard)
- Treasure Marker
- Water Station
- Rest Area
- Treasure Marker & Guard
- Treasure Marker
- Treasure Marker

THE GROUND RULES

- All participants must finish within 24 hours to complete the course and receive a medal.
- Participants must complete the course within 24 hours to receive a medal.
- Participants must complete the course within 24 hours to receive a medal.
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Electric Avenue

- Electracheck
- Therapy
- Electric Eel
- Operation

Course Route

START

- Devil's Taunt
- Kiss of Mud 2.0
- Pyramid Scheme
- Spread Eagle
- Everest 2.0
- Shidmarhead
- Berlin Walls
- Black Widow
- Mud Mile 2.0
- Mudder Press
- The Blackness Monster
- Funny Monkey
- Statue of Liberty
- Waterworks
- The Gauntlet
- King of the Swingers
- Augustus Gloop 2.0
- Cage Crew
- Lumberjacked
- Arctic Enema
- Muddershorn

PIT

Here's the gang before the race, in front of the Mudderhorn net climb obstacle (from left to right: Daemon, Alan, Tim, Tom, Scott, Mark, me and Steve):



Dragging our crap from the parking lot to the pit area on Saturday morning, trying to stay warm (the race is on an 8,000 acre horse farm):



The pit area:



Daemon, Tim and I shared a pit in a horse stall (those who earned “contender” status got stalls; everyone else was in tents):



Crawling out of Kiss of Mud:



Tim and me entering Arctic Enema (an ice bath in which you have to duck your head underwater):



A night view of the course (Berlin Walls and Skidmarked are at the top of the hill):



On our last lap:



Some pics of obstacles... Here's Berlin Walls:



Skidmarked:



The iconic Electroshock Therapy:



Operation (more electric shocks):



Finished!



Tim and me at the finish:



We ran into Mark at the finish – he won the 50+ age group and finally earned his silver (75-mile) bib!



Post-race pic:



Appendix

Carabiners

In an new twist, the Tough Mudder folks had certain challenges in which competitors could earn small metal carabiners (they were also hidden all over the course), which allowed one to skip one of three sections of the course (including obstacles).

I earned carabiners in every way imaginable. Every time I came up to an obstacle that might have a carabiner, I asked the attendant. Sometimes they told me to look and gave me hints.

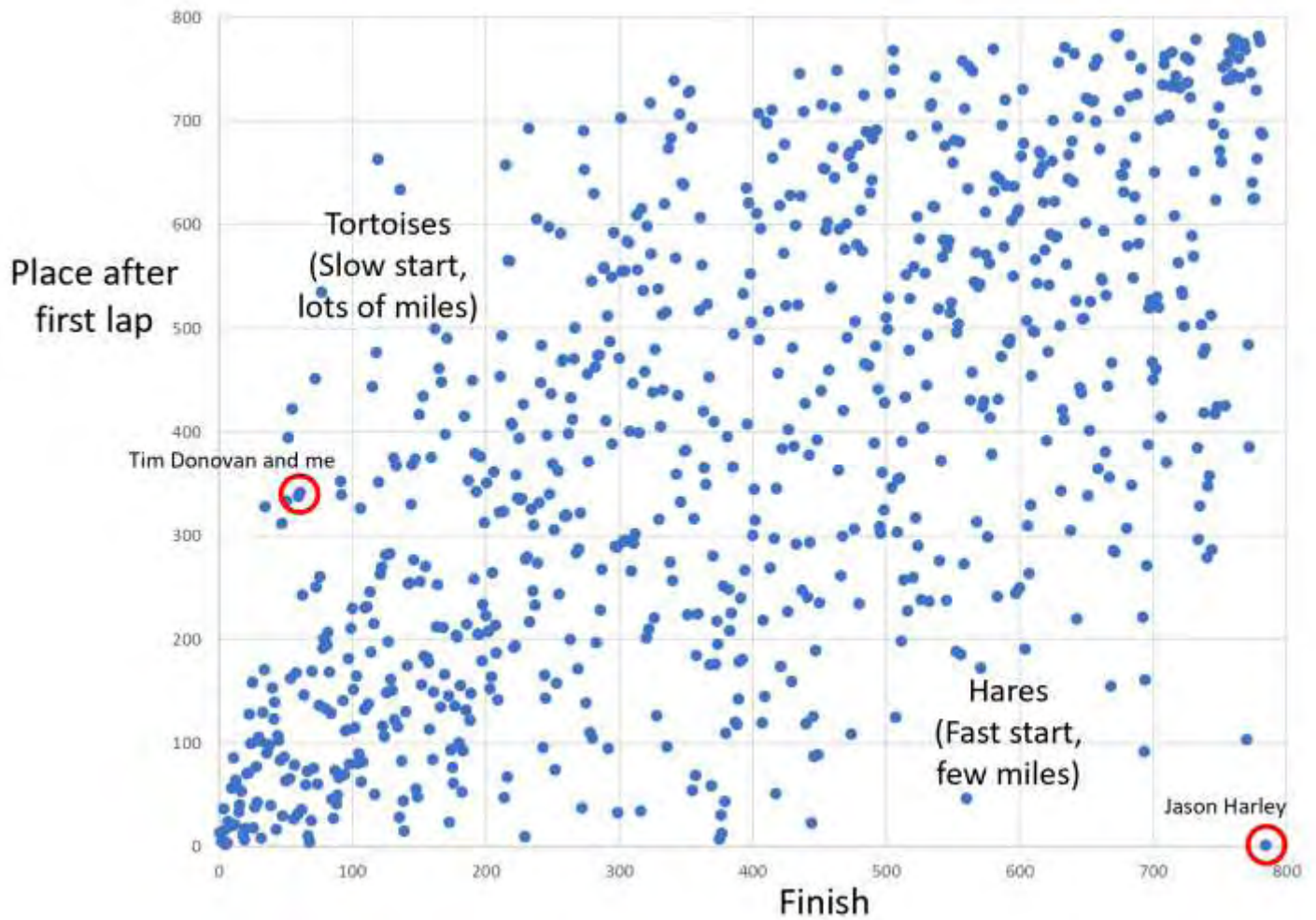
- I earned my first two by successfully completing the step-up lane at Funky Every twice; then, on my second-to-last lap, I was gassed so I was going to just do the regular Funky Monkey, but the attendant told me that there would be a big reward if I successfully did the step-up lane, so I tried it. To my surprise, I did it – and the guy handed me *five* carabiners. That was a big reward – but they told me nobody was even attempting the step-up lane, much less completing it, so I think it was well earned (but I'm biased!).
- Found a marked duck at Blockness Monster and they gave me a carabiner in the pit area for it.
- Found one just sitting on a post in the pit area as I was walking out to start a lap halfway through the race.
- Got one by doing 10 spins with the unicorn/horse on my nose at Mud Mile.
- Got one by doing 30 push-ups (barely!) just before Augustus Gloop.
- Got one that was hanging on a peg at Operation (and took a shock to get it).
- Found one hanging in a tree and another clipped to the tape approaching Cage Crawl (had to get some hints to find them).
- Found one hanging on the bottom of the cage (in the dark under the tarp) at Cage Crawl.
- Won one by beating Tim in a race through Arctic Enema.
- The only two I didn't feel like I earned was when the guy at Waterworks was handing them out to everyone in the last two laps.

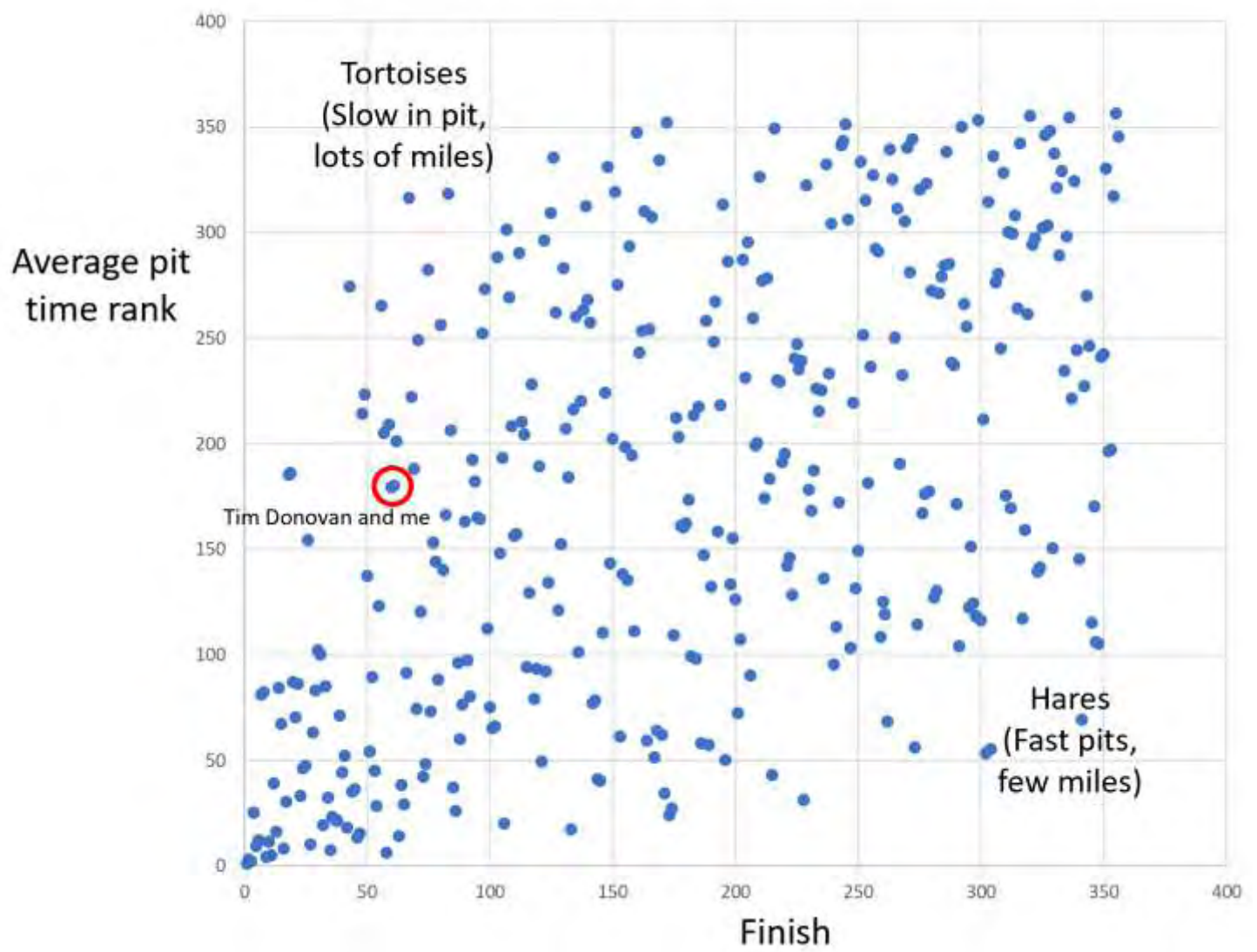
Tim earned a bunch as well (maybe 10?). Then, we hoarded them until the end, when we knew we would be most tired, and used them to take all three shortcuts the last three laps, enabling us to get an extra 1-2 laps.

I've heard that some folks felt that using the carabiners was a form of cheating, but I disagree (though they – plus the obstacle-skipping wristbands every lap after 25 miles – do make it hard to compare this year's distances with prior years). The rules were different this year. I figured out that carabiners were a new, key advantage, so I figured out how to earn a lot of them, incorporated them into my race, and it paid off. It's like finding and using immunity idols on the TV show Survivor...

Two analyses

Here's an analysis I did of how first lap speed and average pit speed correlated with how many miles someone did...





Big Wall Climbing in Yosemite

I just flew in from San Francisco, after five EPIC days of climbing in Yosemite.

I can't decide which blew my mind more: the scenery or the climbing. This is not a postcard – I took this picture of Yosemite Valley yesterday – with my cell phone camera!



Regarding the latter, on our fifth and final day together (of this trip), Paul and I had an AMAZING day yesterday climbing the first ~20% of The Nose of El Capitan – excellent preparation for climbing all of it later this year. (I've posted pictures and descriptions of our first four days climbing together on Facebook [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).)

One of the many nice things about El Cap is that it's an easy 15-minute walk to the base (in contrast, the "approach" to many of the world's epic peaks takes hours if not days or weeks!). Here we are walking there:



Note that Paul is carrying a big bag (called a "pig"), which needs to be hauled up the mountain for multi-day ascents like the one we did on Saturday and Sunday on the South Face of Washington Column. But since we were just doing a day-climb yesterday, we left it at the base and I just brought snacks, water and the first-aid kit in my small blue pack, while Paul had the heavy climbing gear attached to his harness.

As we approached the base, we could see Paul's wife, Breezy, climbing with a friend a few pitches up – you get a sense of how massive El Cap is by the tiny specks that they are (circled):



Here we are at the base, ready to go!



Here is a picture of Paul leading a pitch:



The main rope is hard to see – it's in the crack on the left. I'm belaying from below while Paul climbs, setting gear (mostly spring-loaded cams) in the crack, and clipping in the rope as he goes so he'll be protected if he falls.

(You can also clearly see the orange "chicken rope" hanging down – that doesn't protect him; rather, it's a second safety line for me that he clips into his belay device when I'm climbing after him. Very few climbers use one because it's extra time/weight/hassle/rope snarl, but the Yosemite Mountaineering School requires its guides to use it, and both Paul and I took comfort in an extra layer of safety!)

Once Paul climbs up to the next anchor (the "top of the pitch"; there are 31 pitches on the 3,000-foot Nose of El Cap route), he clips into 2-3 bolts that are drilled into the rock, pulls up the slack in both the main and chicken ropes that I'm on, puts the ropes in belay devices, and then calls down to let me know that the ropes are fixed. Then, I clip my ascenders into the main rope, detach from the anchor, yell "climbing" to Paul, and start up the pitch, as you can see here:



You can see that the rope runs through a carabiner attached to a loop (together called a sling), which is attached to the loop at one end of a cam, which Paul placed into the crack (circled). As I come up to it, it's my job to "clean" the gear, clip it to my harness and then give it back to Paul when I get to the top of the pitch so he can use it again for the next pitch.

Here I am having reached an anchor, safely strapped to the wall using a “daisy” (there are two, one blue and one yellow):



After four hours of great climbing (we did two easy free climbing pitches followed by four aid pitches to Sickle Ledge), we decided not to push it and rappelled down so I could get started on my 4+ hour drive to the Bay Area.

On my way out, in addition to the first picture above, I took this pic of one of the big walls Paul and I will definitely climb, the West Face of Leaning Tower:



I'm planning to come back in May and again in November to climb this plus The Nose. I can't wait!

Whitney

PS—I spent last night with my cousin Alex, his wife Deborah, and their wonderful kids!



PPS—If you’re interested in some nitty gritty about big wall climbing, read on...

AID CLIMBING VS. FREE CLIMBING VS. FREE SOLOING

Paul and I did two pitches of free climbing on Thursday, then a day of training for aid climbing on Friday, then two days of aid climbing on the South Face of Washington Column over the weekend, and finally two pitches of free climbing followed by four pitches of aid climbing yesterday.

Aid climbing means both he and I were pulling on gear and/or the rope to ascend. Some climbers only do “free climbing,” which means getting to the top solely under your own power (but using ropes for safety in the event of a fall; this is NOT free soloing, where one slip is fatal).

Some purists look down on aid climbing because they think it’s sort of cheating to move upward using artificial means, but Paul dismissed this, saying: “*Aid climbing allows mortals to climb with the gods.*” So true... The route we climbed over the weekend on Washington Column has been free climbed by only one person *ever*; the Nose has been freed by only six people. Thus, aid climbing is the only way thousands of people like me can experience big wall climbing.

And it’s not like you’re taking a chairlift to the top – it’s CRAZY hard. We ran into a young climber on Washington Column who told us he’d done a lot of free climbing, but had never done aid climbing before – and confessed to us that after getting his butt kicked on the big wall of the South Face, he’d never look down on aid climbing again...

FEAR OF HEIGHTS/EXPOSURE

You can’t climb big walls (or pretty much anything) if you have a fear of heights (or “exposure”). I’m lucky: I have none of it. When I’m up there, I’m so focused on what I’m doing (what Navy SEALs call your “three-foot window”) that I don’t even look down or think of the consequences of a mistake. (In case you’re wondering, I have a \$10 million life insurance policy.)

I totally get it that 99% of people will (sensibly) react to being 1,000 feet above the ground, hanging only on a thin rope, with emotions ranging from discomfort to utter terror.

But the people I don't understand are the folks who are climbing well, get a day or two up on the wall, and then get scared by the exposure and rappels down. Here's why: once you're more than ~60 feet up, any uncontrolled fall is fatal. So it makes little sense to be comfortable at the top of the first pitch, 150 feet up, yet become afraid of the height when you're further up (though in fairness, if you need to get off the wall because, say, a storm comes in, you get sick, etc., it's much better to be at the top of the first pitch, not the 20th!).

Once I'm past the first pitch, I PREFER to be higher up because the views are better!

CLEANING GEAR

Over the course of a day of climbing, Paul will set – and I will clean – over 100 pieces of gear (an average of roughly a dozen per pitch). Every piece to be cleaned is its own unique challenge. Sometimes it's easy and takes no more than five seconds: I just grab the cam, squeeze it to close its “jaws” to release it, then detach the carabiner from the rope and clip the whole thing to my harness.

But I have to be SUPER careful not to drop it, which is easy to do because I'm wearing leather gloves, because: 1) it's expensive; 2) a big cam, falling far enough, could kill someone below; and 3) you might need that particular one for a placement later in the climb.

Sometimes it's really difficult to remove the gear because: 1) the cam (or worse yet, a “nut,” which is just an oddly shaped piece of metal that's not spring-loaded) can get jammed; and 2) if the rope is anything but completely vertical (meaning it's angled through the carabiner, as it is slightly in the picture above), then all of my weight on the rope is pulling hard on the cam, making it difficult if not impossible to release.

If this happens (which is often – maybe half the time), I have to figure out a way to get my weight off the rope, if only for an instant. The easiest way is to find a place on the rock to stand on – even a tiny nub for one foot is enough. Barring that, sometimes I give a little hop, but that rarely works because there's so much tension in the rope (you'd laugh watching me). Or I detach my top ascender and then reattached it above the gear. Or maybe I attach myself to the next piece of gear if it's not too far away, switch my weight to that, and then “back-clean” the lower cam. I faced just about every gear-cleaning challenge over the last five days!

JUGGING

Moving up the rope using ascenders (called “jugging” or “jumaring”) is the most basic skill one needs to master for aid climbing. Each ascender slides in only direction, up the rope, with teeth so when I pull on it, it bites into the rope and I can stand/pull myself up. In addition, each of my feet is in a stirrup with a strap up to each ascender.

So, as I stand in the left stirrup, putting all my weight on that side, I can then, with my right arm, move that ascender up the rope (with my right foot along with it). Then, I stand up on my right leg and put all my weight on that side and pull the left ascender up until it's right beneath the other one. Lather, rinse, repeat and, before you know it, you're at the top of the pitch (stopping to clean gear as you go).

When I first learned jugging during a two-day training session 14 months ago in the Gunks with a guide Paul referred me to, I was a mess. My arms and legs were going everywhere, the rope wouldn't go through the ascenders, and I was drenched in sweat and completely exhausted after only five feet. I leaned back in my harness and thought to myself, “There's no way I'm going to be able to do 3,000 feet of this!” It does indeed

require a lot of balance, strength and stamina, but after an hour of practice I started to get the hang of it, and now I really fly... It's sort of like doing the Versaclimber in the gym.

RAPPELLING

Rappelling simply means lowering yourself down on the rope, using a belay device. It's super fun almost running down a rock face in one minute that might have taken you the better part of an hour to ascend – but it's also potentially very dangerous. If you attach your belay device to the wrong rope or only clip your carabiner to one of the two ropes, when you lean back to rappel down, you will plunge to your death. Or you can sail off the end of your rope, as Brad Gobright, one of the best climbers in the world did a few months ago... So the lesson Paul drilled into my head was: don't get sloppy during the fun part at the end of the day, when you may already be thinking about getting back on tierra firma, slapping high fives with your partner, and looking forward to a big dinner!

Here's Paul far below me on the second-to-last rappel pitch yesterday:



And here I am following him:



LOWER OUT

A necessary skill for big wall climbing is a “lower out,” which you do when you need to move horizontally across the rock because, say, the crack you’ve been climbing ends and you need to switch to a better crack nearby. You can see this in the picture above where I circled Breezy and her partner, Shawn, who’s in the lead: he is far to the right, having just completed a lower out.

When the lead climber is doing a lower out, the second climber simply belays him/her. But it's trickier for the second climber. You can see me doing it in this picture:



The problem I have is that there was no place for Paul to place gear for 5-10 feet across the rock, so if I just unclip from the piece I'm attached to (circled; it's a fixed bolt with a ring, not a removable piece of gear), I would take a nasty fall/swing across the rock (you can see the rope going off to the left in the picture above). Therefore, I needed to lower myself out.

To do to, I took the rope attached to my harness, pitched it in half and put the "eye" through the fixed ring in the wall, and then held the loop, slowly letting the rope through my hands as I moved carefully across the rock. Once I was safely in a vertical position below the next piece of gear, I let go of the rope and pulled it through the ring (hoping it didn't get stuck!).

A Month of Climbing in/near Yosemite

I recently returned from nearly a month of *epic* climbing in/near Yosemite National Park.



When I flew to San Francisco on June 12 and drove to Yosemite, I was planning to stay only a week or so to climb The Nose of El Capitan, through which I [raised \\$75,000](#) for my favorite charity, KIPP charter schools. (This trip was a follow-up to five days of training with my guide, Paul Koubek, in February – see pics [here](#).)

But after successfully conquering The Nose, my schedule was was open, as was Paul's – and Susan gave me her blessing – so I stayed another two and a half weeks!

Paul and I climbed 19 of the 22 days I was out there. Here's a quick summary of routes we climbed:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>COMMITMENT</u>	<u>DIFFICULTY</u>	<u># OF PITCHES</u>
Snake Dike	Grade III	5.7R	7p
East Ledges of El Capitan	Grade II	5.6	4p
Sickle Run (first part of El Capitan)	Grade III	5.7	6p
El Capitan (Nose) (4 days, 3 nights)	Grade VI	5.9 C2	31p
Royal Arches	Grade III	5.7 A0	16p
Commitment	Grade II	5.9	3p
Munginella	Grade II	5.6	3p
E. Buttress, Middle Cathedral	Grade III	5.10a	10p
Hermaphrodite Flake / West Country	Grade II	5.7	4p
Cathedral Peak (SE Buttress)	Grade II	5.6	5p
Matthes Crest (S to N Full Traverse)	Grade IV	5.7	8p
Mt. Conness (W Ridge)	Grade III	5.6	12p
West Crack, Daff Dome	Grade II	5.9	6p
Bear Creek Spire (North Arete)	Grade III	5.8	10p
Temple Crag (Venusian Blind)	Grade IV	5.7	12p
Crystal Crag	Grade II	5.7	3p
Regular Route, Fairview Dome	Grade III	5.9	12p

In total, we did 152 pitches of climbing, up to a difficulty of 5.10a – an average of 7 pitches a day, including rest days, which Paul says is unprecedented for an amateur like me.

During my trip, I was posting regularly on Facebook. Here is what I wrote in each of my posts – click the link to see the pictures – and below is a collection of my favorite pics.

June 14:

I flew to SF on Friday morning, had lunch with my cousin Alex and his family, and drove to Yosemite, which had just opened the day before.

I'm staying at this beautiful house, right in the park, owned by friends of Samaritan's Purse:

https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/15238098?s=67&sharer_id=17555135&unique_share_id=2f6c35ef-70b6-4d43-a73a-57e0c28f568e. It kills me that I'm here by myself when it could easily sleep 8-10 people!

My guide and friend, Paul Koubek, and I are doing 2-3 days of warm-up/refresher before we tackle the Nose, likely Wed-Sat, so yesterday we did a classic hike/climb called Snake Dike. We did a beautiful hike up the Mist Trail, past Vernal and Nevada Falls – a very popular route that's usually jammed with tourists, but had maybe 25% of normal traffic yesterday since they're restricting access to the park to only half the number of cars as usual.

Then we cut off the main route and hiked on an unofficial "climber's trail" to the base of Snake Dike – which took us a total of nearly four hours.

The weather was windy and cloudy and it looked like storms in one direction, but Paul correctly assessed that they weren't coming toward us, so we put on our climbing gear and off we went! As you can see from the pictures below, it's not a vertical slope – but very steep and lots of rough rock to get hand and footholds. Not super difficult – a couple moves rated 5.7 – but I did it in my approach/hiking shoes so it was more of a challenge.

Overall, a good warm-up for me after doing no climbing since I was last here in Feb. (pics from that trip are at: www.tilsonfunds.com/Yosemite.pdf).

Two hours later, we were at the top of Half Dome, with incredible views of Yosemite Valley! Then, it was another four-hour, gorgeous hike back to our car...

In total, as you can see from the report from my watch, it was nearly 11 hours, 18.45 miles, and 5,256 feet of vertical – quite a day!

Today, we're heading over to El Cap and plan to climb a side route with fixed ropes and then up to the top – it's the route we'll hike/rappel down after we finish our climb of the Nose. We'll stash some water at the top so we don't have to carry as much.

June 16:

Yesterday and today were the last days of training for my four-day climb of The Nose of El Capitan, which begins early Wednesday morning (tomorrow is for rest and packing).

Yesterday, Paul and I "jugged" up four fixed ropes (meaning we used ascenders) on the East Ledges, on the right side of El Cap and then hiked up the rim to the top, to the place where The Nose tops out – it's the route we'll be descending on Saturday. It was a 10-mile hike with 3,400 feet of vertical – a piece of cake compared to Saturday's 18+ mile, 5,000+ vertical foot hike/climb to the top of Half Dome!

Today, we climbed up the first six pitches (each approximately 100 feet) of El Cap and stashed a heavy bag with seven gallons of water on Sickle Ledge (circled in the picture below, which shows the entire route and eight major features). Then we rappelled down three long ropes, which we left in place so that the first stage of our climb will be faster on Wednesday. Our goal is to make it through the Stove Legs and get to Dolt Tower or maybe even El Cap Tower to spend the first night.

June 17:

Greetings from Yosemite – truly one of the most awe-inspiring places on earth...

Today is the big day! In an hour, my guide and I are starting a four-day climb of The Nose of El Capitan to support the thousands of KIPPsters climbing the mountain to college.

He tells me that only a dozen amateurs like me successfully complete this epic climb every year, but I've now trained with him out here for eight days – five in February (see www.tilsonfunds.com/Yosemite.pdf) plus the last three (see my earlier Facebook posts) – so I'm feeling confident.

Might you be willing to support my climb for KIPP? Here is the donation page:

<http://www.kippnyc.org/whitneysclimb>. Even better, we've received a challenge grant so your donation will be matched this year, doubling your impact!

I've been on KIPP's board in NYC for two decades, and there's never been a more important time to support this incredible organization's amazing work sending thousands of low-income, minority students to and through college.

Thank you!

Whitney

June 18 (1):

Paul and I had a good day yesterday, climbing steadily up The Nose of El Capitan to the top of Dolt Tower, where we camped for the night. It got quite windy at times during the day, but otherwise the weather is perfect. My feet, waist (from sitting in the harness) and arms are sore, but nothing too bad. Lots of Advil during the day, and lots of Ambien at night and I'm good! Here are some pics...

June 18 (2):

Greetings from Camp 4, halfway up El Cap. Sore but all good and on schedule! Paul and I are sharing the port-a-ledge tonight because there are 2 other guys here...

June 19:

We passed the guys who were slowing us up yesterday so made great time today. The highlight was the Great Roof pitch (see first 2 pics below), which was a real challenge. There's enough room for Paul on the Camp 6 ledge, so I have the port-a-ledge to myself for our last night on El Cap - luxury! We only have five pitches left, so should summit by 1pm tomorrow. Then, we have a 2-3 hour hike down, with three fun rappells down the East Ledges!

June 20 (1):

We just summited The Nose! This was the view upward from my port-a-ledge this morning. 5 pitches and 7 hours later, we were at the top! Thank goodness we hired porters - will make going down much easier...

June 20 (2):

When we got down from climbing El Cap, we went for a swim in the freezing cold Merced River. Here's a video of me doing a back flip off the bridge, with El Cap in the background...

June 23:

I'm in the climbing mecca of the world, have an awesome guide whose schedule is wide open (as is mine), the forecast is perfect, and there's no coronavirus anywhere near here, so I've decided to stay out here for another week, maybe two... (especially since Susan and the girls don't seem to mind my absence, though I'm sure Rosie misses me terribly!) Paul and I are going to be prototypical "dirtbag climbers," living out of his van and climbing every day... My attitude is captured in pics 7-8...

After finishing El Cap on Saturday, I felt fine, so Paul's wife, Breezy, took me on a classic not-too-difficult free climb called Royal Arches yesterday (you can read about it here; see first 5 pics below).

Today, Paul and I did two shorter climbs, a very challenging one called Commitment (see pic 6 looking up from the base; it's rated 5.9, which is about my limit, especially climbing in approach shoes; my climbing shoes arrived an hour ago – don't ask...), followed by an easier one, rated 5.6, called Munginella. Tomorrow we're tackling a classic climb called East Buttress of Middle Cathedral – see a picture of the route in the last pic below.

On Wednesday, we're going to drive to the cooler upper part of the park called Tuolumne Meadows and climb the West Crack of Daff Dome, followed by Cathedral Peak on Thursday and Fairview Dome on Friday. Then we'll drive down to Mt. Whitney on Saturday, hike to the base, and set up camp, from which we'll climb Mt. Whitney's East Buttress on Sunday and then nearby Mt. Russell on Monday.

After that, we have no plans – maybe a day of rest and then another week of camping and epic climbing – there is no shortage out here!

PS—All of these climbs will be free climbing, as opposed to aid climbing (what we did on El Cap, in which we pulled on ropes and gear to ascend the extremely difficult route that would otherwise be impossible for even Paul to climb).

These will also all be one-day climbs, so we won't be hauling "pigs" like we did up El Cap – huge, heavy bags with water, food, port-a-ledge, sleeping bag, etc. Instead we'll be carrying medium-sized backpacks, packed only with what we need for the day.

Free climbing is also not the same as free soloing, in which there are no ropes – one slip and you're dead – like what Alex Honnold did in Free Solo.

Rather, free climbing means one person (Breezy or Paul) leads the route with a rope, setting gear and clipping the rope in, with me belaying from the anchor below. If they fall, I catch them. Then, once they're at the next anchor 75-100 feet up, they clip into the wall (either on a fixed bolt or they create an anchor using cams and slings), pull up the excess rope and put me on belay. Then I climb up, with the rope tight at all times so if I fall (which is expected of the amateur – I lost my grip once in the past two days), it's only one or two feet – no worries.

It's a very safe system – as long as nobody screws up by, for example, unclipping from the wall before the rope is tight and on belay, so you gotta pay attention! There are also random external dangers like a rock falling on your head or a lightning strike, but those are rare (and you don't climb if the forecast is iffy).

June 24:

Today Paul and I left what locals call "the ditch" (Yosemite Valley), which is super hot this time of year, and drove 90 minutes to the higher elevation eastern part of the park, which is much cooler.

We went over the Tioga Pass Road – in pic 1, I am at a pull-out by the side of the road, with Tenaya Lake in the background. We climbed an easy 5.7 route up Stately Pleasure Dome, which is on the left side of the lake, directly above my head in the picture.

Pics 2-4 are of us at the top (note the beach behind/below me in the first one).

After we descended, we went to that beach for a cold, refreshing swim in the lake and hung out a bit (pic 5; Stately Pleasure Dome is above me to the right):

We then drove 15 minutes to Tuolumne Meadows and took a nice walk and went for a swim in the Tuolumne River (pic 6).

In the background of pic 7 is Cathedral Peak, which we're climbing tomorrow.

I saw my third bear of the trip by the side of the road on the drive (pic 8) and saw two deer in Tuolumne Meadows (pic 9).

June 26:

Here are pictures from today's climb of Cathedral Peak, where we were joined by Paul's wife, Breezy Jackson, and their friend, Scott Fruhan...

Tomorrow, Paul, Scott, and I are doing the Matthes Crest Traverse.

June 28 (1):

There was a 5.8 earthquake south of here on Wednesday that caused a rock slide on the road to Mt. Whitney, which is still closed, so we are delayed going down there – and may not go at all. No big deal – it's just giving us more time in the gorgeous Tuolumne Meadows area of Yosemite.

After Breezy, Paul, their friend Scott and I hiked to and climbed Cathedral Peak on Thursday (pics in my last email), an 8-mile, 8-hour adventure, we ramped it up the last two days.

On Friday, Paul, Scott and I did a 12+ hour, 12.6-mile hike/climb of Matthes Crest (first 12 pics) and yesterday Breezy, Paul, their friend Shawn and I did a nearly 12-hour, 15.8-mile hike/climb of the tallest peak in this area, 12,589-foot Mount Conness (next six pics).

June 28 (2):

Today Paul and I took it easy, doing a 2½-hour climb called the West Crack of Daff Dome (I show the route in red in the first picture). The approach was only 20 minutes – quite a difference from yesterday's four-hour, 9.5-mile approach to Mount Conness!

Two of the seven pitches were rated 5.9, which pushed me to my limit (on the second one, I pulled on gear – cheater!). There was a howling ~40 mph wind most of the climb – but the view of Tuolumne Meadow (in the center of the last pic) and Fairview Dome (to the right – probably climbing it on Saturday) at the top was worth it! Tomorrow we're leaving Yosemite and driving south, aiming to do three huge 12+ hour, high-altitude (14,000-foot) climbs: Bear Creek Spire on Tuesday, the East Buttress of Mt. Whitney on Thursday, and the Fishhook Arete of Mt. Russell on Friday.

July 1:

Paul and I drove south in the Eastern Sierra Mountains on Monday and climbed Bear Creek Spire yesterday – a long, awesome day: 18 miles total over 14½ hours (six of climbing).

Today we took a rest day in Bishop, doing laundry, shopping, and catching up on e-mail (I can't remember the last time I was off the internet for 48 hours). I even got my first haircut in months!

Tomorrow, we're tackling our biggest hike/climb yet, the Temple Crag, then drive to Whitney Portal on Friday and hike in to camp at Iceberg Lake, where we'll climb the East Buttress of Mt. Whitney on Saturday (the highest peak in the continental U.S. at 14,505 feet) and the nearly-as-high Fishhook Arete of Mt. Russell on Sunday (both ~12-hour days, from the same campsite). Then we'll make our way back to Yosemite and then San Francisco on Monday and Tuesday (climbing both days of course!), before flying home from SFO on the redeye on Tuesday night... Phew!

July 3:

Paul and I weren't able to get a permit to climb Mt. Whitney and Mt. Russell, so I'm ending my trip two days early and flying home on Monday morning. We did a huge hike (8 hours)/climb (6 hours) of Temple Crag yesterday -- pics below... Today we're climbing Crystal Crag on our way back to Yosemite, and tomorrow Fairview Dome in Tuolumne Meadows in the park.

July 6 (1):

Paul and I weren't able to get a permit to climb Mt. Whitney and Mt. Russell – I plan to come back and tackle them in September – so I ended my trip two days early and am on a flight home right now.

We ended our 22 days together (only three rest days, which is three too many in my book!) by climbing Crystal Crag on Friday (pic No. 1 – that's Mammoth Mountain ski area behind me) and Fairview Dome back in Yosemite on Saturday (pic No. 1 – the fourth of the "Fifty Classic Climbs of North America" that I did this trip)...

Here's a quick summary of routes we climbed:

NAME:	COMMITMENT	DIFFICULTY	# OF PITCHES:
Snake Dike	Grade III	5.7R	7p
East Ledges of El Capitan	Grade II	5.6	4p
Sickle Run (first part of El Capitan)	Grade III	5.7	6p

El Capitan (Nose) (4 days, 3 nights)	Grade VI	5.9 C2	31p
Royal Arches	Grade III	5.7 A0	16p
Commitment	Grade II	5.9	3p
Munginella	Grade II	5.6	3p
E. Buttress, Middle Cathedral	Grade III	5.10a	10p
Hermaphrodite Flake / West Country	Grade II	5.7	4p
Cathedral Peak (SE Buttress)	Grade II	5.6	5p
Matthes Crest (S to N Full Traverse)	Grade IV	5.7	8p
Mt. Conness (W Ridge)	Grade III	5.6	12p
West Crack, Daff Dome	Grade II	5.9	6p
Bear Creek Spire (North Arete)	Grade III	5.8	10p
Temple Crag (Venusian Blind)	Grade IV	5.7	12p
Crystal Crag	Grade II	5.7	3p
Regular Route, Fairview Dome	Grade III	5.9	12p

- 152 pitches of climbing in 22 days, up to a difficulty of 5.10a (an average of 7 pitches a day, including rest days).

Yesterday I drove back to SF and visited my cousin Alex and his family for lunch (pic 3), my college buddy Sam Klepper and his family in the afternoon (pic 4), and my old friend Chris Brawer and his family for dinner (no pic – silly me).

PS—San Francisco's airport at 8am today was a ghost town, and my JetBlue flight was maybe 35% full – see last three pics below.

July 6 (2):

Storms around NYC led to an unplanned, one-hour stop in Buffalo on my flight from SFO to JFK, but I finally got home at 8pm, where my five ladies rushed to smother me in hugs and kisses, having missed me so much after 3½ weeks away!

Yeah, right... (At least Rosie did...)

Susan and the girls told me to go take a shower and put on fresh clothes – good coronavirus protocol!

My climbing adventure/marathon was amazing, but it's great to be home!!!

PS—Note my new favorite t-shirt – my Father's Day gift I just received...

Below are my favorite pictures and some nitty gritty about big wall climbing.

Best regards,

Whitney































12 Days of Climbing in Red Rock Canyon

I recently returned from 12 days of *epic* climbing with my buddy/guide Paul Koubek in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area on the outskirts of Las Vegas.



I flew to Vegas on October 12 and, starting the next day, Paul and I climbed every day until I flew home on the 24th. This follows five days of climbing together in February (click [here](#) for pics and details) and 19 days in June and July (click [here](#)) – an amazing 36 days this year!

Here's a quick summary of routes we did this month:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>COMMITMENT</u>	<u>DIFFICULTY</u>	<u># OF PITCHES</u>
Tunnel Vision	Grade III	5.7	6
Lotta Balls	Grade II	5.8	4
Black Magic	Grade II	5.8	4
Frogland	Grade III	5.8	6
Epinephrine	Grade IV	5.9	11
Triassic Sands	Grade II	5.10b	4
Sand Filippe	Grade I	5.10	1
Wholesome Fullback	Grade I	5.10a	2
Our Father	Grade II	5.10c/d	3
Tales From the Gripped	Grade I	5.11a/b	1
Crimson Chrysalis	Grade IV	5.8+	9
Dream of Wild Turkeys	Grade III	5.10a	7
Frigid Air Buttress	Grade III	5.9+	7

Plus we did two days of cragging single pitches in the Calico Hills:

- Day 1: [The Last Panty](#), 5.7, [Boxer Rebellion](#) 5.8, [PantyLine](#) 5.10a, [Panty Raid](#) 5.10a, [Crude Boys](#), 5.10d, [Black Corridor #4](#) 5.11a, [Black Corridor #5](#) 5.10d, [Vagabonds](#), 5.10a, [Bon EZ](#) 5.9+ (9p total)

- Day 2: [The CEL](#) 5.9 redpoint, [Unknown 5.9 \(aka L2\)](#) 5.9 onsight, [Unknown 5.9 \(aka L3\)](#) onsight 5.9, [Black Corridor #4](#) 5.11a redpoint (2 hangs), [Vagabonds](#), 5.10a redpoint, [Dancin' With A God](#) 5.10a (6p total)

In total, we did 80 pitches of climbing, up to a difficulty of 5.11a – an average of nearly 7 pitches a day, without a day off. No wonder my fingers were chewed up!



During my trip, I was posting regularly on Facebook. Here is what I wrote in each of my posts – click the link to see the pictures – and below is a collection of my favorite pics.

[October 13:](#)

Greetings from the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, which is in the Mojave Desert on the outskirts of Las Vegas. It's totally wild to go from the bright lights and action of The Strip into the desert in only 20 minutes of driving! Even if you're not a climber, I highly recommend the beautiful hiking and scenery here.

My guide, Paul Koubek, and I were originally planning to climb Mt. Whitney, Mt. Russell, and Charlotte Dome in the southern Sierra Nevada mountains in California, but all of the state parks there are closed until December 1 because of the wildfires, so instead we're climbing some of the thousands of routes on the featured sandstone here for the next week or two. It's gonna be EPIC!

Today, as a warm-up, we climbed Tunnel Vision, an easy 770-foot, six-pitch route rated 5.7.

Here are some pictures (you can see The Strip far in the background of the first one)...

[October 14:](#)

The last two nights, my guide Paul Koubek and I camped at the Red Rock Canyon Campground, which is pretty spartan – no flush toilets, showers or other amenities. No wonder climbers have nicknamed it "campghanistan" – but, hey, it's only \$23 per night! I slept in the van (it's actually quite comfy) while Paul was in a tent.

Below are some pics – I took the first just before sunrise (one of my all-time favorites – look at the lighting!), while the next three are at sunset...

Yes, I do appreciate the irony of a guy who lives in a fancy apartment on Central Park, in the wealthiest Census tract in the U.S., living the life of a "dirtbag" climber. It's a cultural experience – albeit only for a week or two (and we intend to splurge for one night at a five-star hotel on The Strip – available for under \$100)!

October 15:

Paul and I had good fun today doing an intermediate six-pitch, 5.8 route called Frogland (see pics 1-2). We're now ready to step it up by tackling THE red rocks classic, Epinephrine, which is a sandbagged 5.9, meaning it's actually more difficult because it features three hellacious chimney pitches (among a very long 13-pitch route). I took a picture of the route this afternoon – see pic 3. To get a sense of how big it is, in pic 4 I enlarged pic 3 to show the two climbers just exiting the top of the chimneys.

Here are two write-ups of the route:

- [Mountain Project](#)
- [Red Rock Super-Classic: Epinephrine](#)

Pic 5 is a cool Cholla cactus I saw...

October 16:

Paul and I were up at 5am and hiking to the base of Epinephrine by sunrise (see two pics below) to beat the crowds on this iconic red rocks route.

It lived up to its reputation – long, challenging, and some brilliant, incredibly fun chimney climbing.

Below are two pics of Paul entering the chimneys, two of me in them, and one of me climbing the upper, more traditional part of the route.

October 17:

After the long day yesterday on 5.9-rated Epinephrine, today Paul and I climbed two shorter but more difficult routes, Triassic Sands (5.10b, four pitches) and Sand Felipe (5.10-, our first single pitch and our first sport climb (meaning Paul clipped into bolts that had been drilled into the wall) rather than “trad” (traditional) climbing, in which he places cams and nuts in cracks for protection).

In the first pic below, I'm pointing to the crack we climbed on Triassic Sands to the top of Whiskey Peak. In the last one, I'm having PB&J and Cheetos for lunch; you can see the skyline of The Strip in the background.

October 19:

Yesterday Paul and I ramped up the difficulty to the hardest routes I'd ever tried, starting with 5.10b Wholesome Fullback and then descending 5.10d Our Father, where Paul belayed me via top-rope so I could try the “crux” (most difficult) moves again and again.

It was great practice as I try to improve my climbing skills (my current limit is a 5.10a) – and also gave me the chance to test my new climbing shoes, the TC Pro, which I bought on Saturday (they made a big difference).

Unfortunately, such tough climbing chewed up my fingertips so we had to tape them, as you can see in the pics below.

It also led us to choose an easier (though very long 1,000-foot) classic climb today called Crimson Chrysalis, which is rated 5.8+, so I was able to wear gloves to protect my fingers. It was a long day – about eight hours car to car – but a great climb!

Pic 1 is from the top of the crux pitch on Our Father.

Pic 2 shows my chewed up fingertips.

Pic 3 shows my taped fingers.

Pics 4 and 5 are at sunset at our campground last night.

Pics 6 and 7 are at the base of Crimson Chrysalis, pointing to the crack we climbed.

Pic 8 is from the top.

Pic 9 is a view of Red Rock Canyon on the walk back to the car.

October 20:

Today Paul and I did cragging (see description below) for the first time in the Calico Hills that are part of the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (you can see them in red in the right side of pic 1, with a bit of a close-up of the first area we climbed, Panty Wall (yes, it's mostly young men who name the climbing areas/routes), in pic 2, and a super close-up in pic 3).

After I did four warm-up pitches of increasing difficulty (5.7-5.10a) over a couple of hours, we moved to another cragging area called The Black Corridor, which you can see behind me in pic 4. I easily climbed another 5.10a route, so we bumped it up four notches to a 5.11a called Black Corridor Route Four (the difficulty grades start at 5.1, then go 5.2, 5.3 to 5.9; then – don't ask me why – each number has a, b, c and d, so it's 5.10a, 5.10b, 5.10c, 5.10d, 5.11a, 5.11b, etc., all the way up into the 5.15's for the world's best climbers).

Having never previously completed any route above 5.10a, I knew I wasn't going to be able to complete the 5.11a on my first try, but I actually came very close, so Paul lowered me down to the part with the "crux" (most difficult) move and I tried it again and again until I got it. Then he lowered me to the ground and, after another couple of tries, I finally completed the entire route, which I celebrated in pic 5!

Cragging is what most climbers do most of the time – it means climbing single-pitch routes, belayed with a top rope. So, Paul climbed the route, with me belaying him from below, as we always do. Then, when he got to the top of the pitch, he looped the rope through a bolted anchor and I lowered him down using my belay device (called a GriGri). With the top rope now in place, Paul belayed me as many times as I wanted to climb the route.

In contrast, what Paul and I have been doing the previous seven days of this trip (as well as my entire trip in June/July) is called multi-pitch climbing, in which we are doing routes that are hundreds – sometimes even thousands – of feet long. When we're doing this, when Paul reaches the top of the first pitch, he clips into the anchor and belays me from above. Then, when I reach the anchor next to him, I clip in, give him the gear that he placed (which I "cleaned" and put on my harness), put him on belay again, and he climbs the next pitch. Lather, rinse, repeat... and a few hours later, we're at the top (and either walk off or rappel down).

October 21:

Paul and I did the most difficult multi-pitch climb we've ever tackled, a classic seven-pitch, 5.10a-rated route called Dream of Wild Turkeys (first two pics below), and then rappelled down (pic 3).

We had time to do another shorter route, but my fingers are so chewed up (pic 4) that we decided to give them a break and called it a day.

Since we've been camping the last three nights (meaning no showers!) and I had dinner last night with my colleague Enrique Abeyta and the newest addition to the Empire Financial Research team, Gabe Marshank, I splurged on a sweet room for Paul and me at the five-star Aria Resort & Casino on The Strip, which was only \$215 all in...

Then it's back to camping – #vanlife! – the last two nights before I fly home on Saturday afternoon.

October 23:

Today I did a vigorous 2,000-vertical-foot, five-mile (round trip) hike to the top of Turtlehead Peak in Red Rock Canyon with my colleagues Enrique Abeyta and Gabe Marshank (Paul stayed back at the hotel because he had a Zoom call). Pictures 1 and 2 are us at the bottom and the top.

Paul and I were planning to take a day off from climbing, but it was only 2pm when we got back from our hike and I dropped off Enrique and Gabe and picked up Paul at the Aria, so Paul suggested that we

head back to the Calico Hills (right near Turtlehead Peak), where we were cragging on Tuesday – so off we went, sore fingers be damned!

I only did four fairly easy pitches, but that's because Paul was teaching me the beginning of a new skill: lead climbing.

Prior to today, Paul (or another professional guide I hired) had always led each pitch, placing cams or nuts ("trad" or traditional climbing) or clipping into fixed bolts (sport climbing) on the wall, clipping the rope into the protection, and then, once they'd finished the pitch (roughly 100-150 feet) and established/clipped into an anchor, belaying me as I climbed after them.

Leading is more challenging because you have to figure out the route (rather than just following the rope) and have to place or clip into protection every 5-10 feet, which can be quite a balancing act.

Leading is also more dangerous because if you fall, you fall the distance down to the last piece of protection, then an equal distance below the "pro", plus the rope stretch. So, imagine you clip the rope into a bolt, climb up 10 feet, and then lose your balance and fall when you're trying to clip into the next bolt – you're going to have a 25-foot "whipper", which can be quite nasty. In contrast, the follower is always on a tight rope, belayed by the lead climber, so a fall is no big deal – I've had many, and generally fall less than a foot.

To learn how to lead, you first start on a bolted (sport climbing) route, because placing gear (cams and nuts) into the wall is a higher-level skill. It's much easier to simply remove a "draw" from your harness, clip one end into a bolt, and the other end to the rope. Pic 3 is what a draw looks like, attached to a bolt. Paul is a great, risk-averse teacher, so we started on an easy 5.7 route (I've never fallen on anything below a 5.9). First, he climbed to put up a top rope, so he could belay me from below. Then, I climbed it, clipping draws into the bolts, but not clipping the rope yet, nor taking any danger of a whipper because I was on a top rope.

Once I'd familiarized myself with the route, Paul removed the top rope and I did it as the lead climber – an exact role reversal from what we'd always done prior. Pic 4 is a stock photo I found that shows what it looks like (the woman is placing the first piece of pro; the follower is always belaying the lead climber from below; he'll want to keep the rope tight once she's clipped it into the first (and maybe second) draw/bolt because otherwise, if she fell, she might hit the ground and break an ankle).

I didn't have any trouble, so we moved down the wall to an easier 5.6 pitch because this time I would do it without first practicing it – called climbing something "on-sight." Again, no problems, so I on-sighted a different 5.7 and then a 5.8+ before calling it a day as my fingers were getting sore again.

It was great fun beginning to learn a new skill – but "beginning" is the key word. I have no illusions about my lead climbing abilities, so I'm going to let Paul continue to do 99% of it!

Pic 5 is of the east side of the Calico Hills as we walked back to the car – you can see the moon in the upper right and a tiny climber on the side of the big boulder on the left.

Paul then cooked us hot dogs for dinner in the parking lot of the Red Rock Casino (see pic 6), where we're spending tonight.

Tomorrow, we're tackling Frigid Air Buttress, another big 800-foot, seven-pitch, 5.9+ climb.

October 24:

Paul and I had a great last two days, climbing seven-pitch, 5.9+ rated Frigid Air Buttress yesterday (pics 1-4), having dinner with my buddy John Climaco (who drove down from Park City with a friend to climb this weekend) (pic 5), and going back to The Black Corridor in the Calico Hills to crag this morning (last two pics).

We picked up where we left off there a few days ago, as Paul continued to teach me lead climbing. I started by on-sight leading a few 5.9 and 5.10a pitches; after a couple of fails, successfully led the 5.11a route I did on top rope the other day; and failed a bunch of times on a tricky new 5.10b. (You might ask why I failed a 5.10b, but successfully did a route three grades harder (5.11a); the answer is: I don't know!)

Now I'm halfway across the country, on a JetBlue flight to Newark (which only cost \$61!). Will be wonderful to be home!

Below are my favorite pictures.

Best regards,

Whitney











































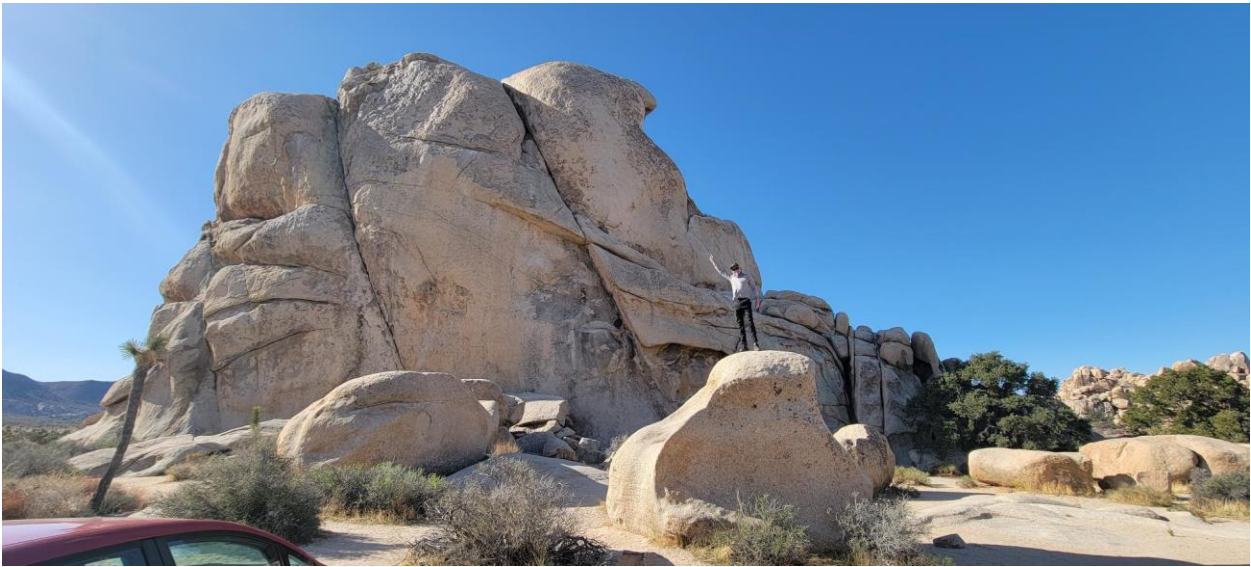


Climbing in Joshua Tree National Park

March 20-26, 2021

Flew in yesterday, first climb this morning up Intersection Rock. Paul and I are doing van life, living like dirtbag climbers!







Paul and I just made our first trip into town (about a half hour drive from the Hidden Valley campground) to wash our stinky clothes (I didn't change out of my climbing clothes for three days – and nights!), buy me some new gloves (unlike every other climber, I climb mostly in gloves because otherwise the rough rock tears up my fingers – it makes the climbing harder, but keeps me on the rocks!), and pick up supplies (including a shower system – much needed!).

We're ramping it up slowly, as my arms and fingers are out of shape because I haven't done any climbing since we climbed 12 days outside Vegas last October because of my sore elbow tendon (due to 36 days of climbing last year). We started on Saturday with easy 5.6 and 5.7 routes, did harder stuff yesterday, and did two 5.9s and a 5.10a today – pushing my limits. My fingers and forearms are a bit sore, but they're holding up – and my elbow is fine!















I bought us an outdoor shower kit - nice! And what a magnificent sunset!







I sent the first picture to Susan with a juvenile (typical Whitney) comment, to which she replied: “So cool that you sent me a photo of a rock that you think looks like a big toe!” 😂😂😂

Speaking of juvenile humor, Paul introduced me to a new food (see pic 2; Pho is pronounced “Fah”) – we had a lot of fun with that...

Paul and I continue to climb lots of fun, increasingly challenging routes. Below are five pics from the [Direct South Face of Moosedog Tower](#). Paul took the last two of me doing the fun rappel down the back...

To protect my fingertips, we covered them with Crazy Glue yesterday morning – below you can see what they looked like. I just Googled it and learned this (<https://www.bandgrip.com/blog/can-i-use-super-glue-to-close-my-wound-10-myths-about-wound-care>):

“Myth 9. You can use Super Glue to close wounds: Technically, you could, but it’s not recommended. Super Glue is a cyanoacrylate adhesive, and it contains toxins that can be harmful to tissue. So, keep it in your toolbox. For the medicine kit, however, the FDA has approved a less toxic, more flexible formulation (2-octyl cyanoacrylate) called Dermabond. It dries fast, stops the bleeding, keeps out dirt and air, and typically stays in place until the cut is healed. It is not, however, recommended for deep or jagged wounds, use on mobile areas such as joints, or contaminated wounds.”

No more of that! I'll just keep using my gloves (though it's getting expensive – I put holes in the fingertips every two days!).

At the campground we met and hung out with an awesome dude named Jon who was six years in the Navy, lives in the Bay Area, and works for Facebook.

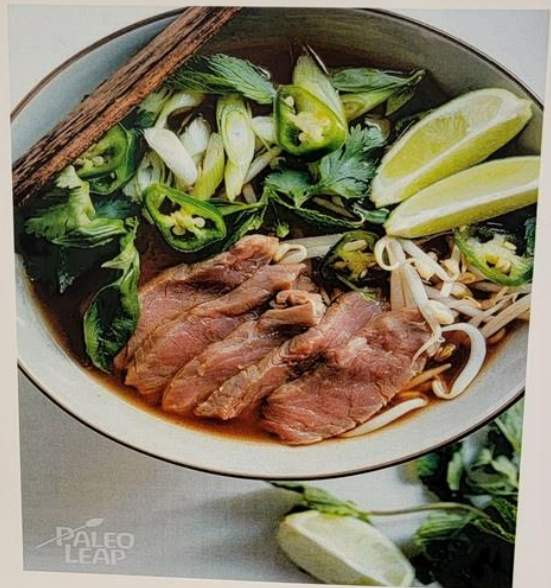
Yesterday evening, we saw a spectacular sunset at Keys View, overlooking Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley.

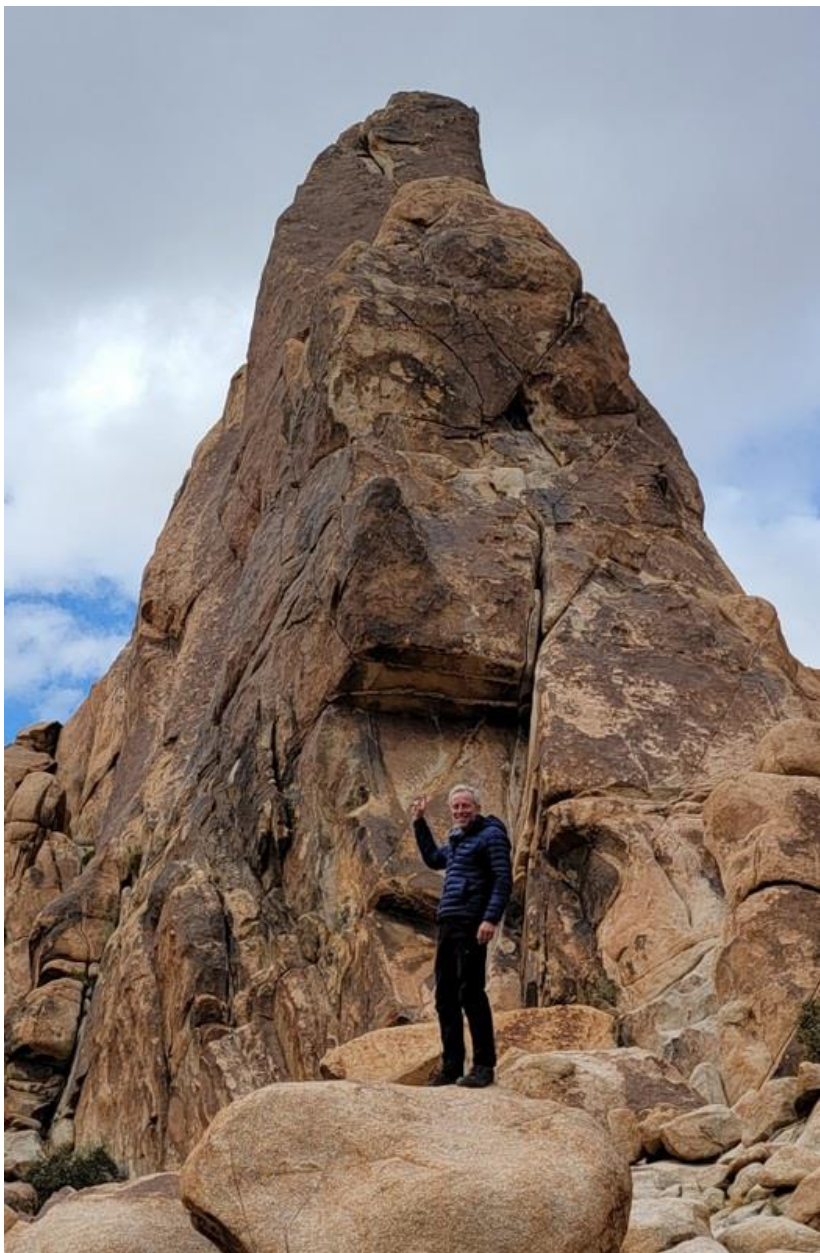


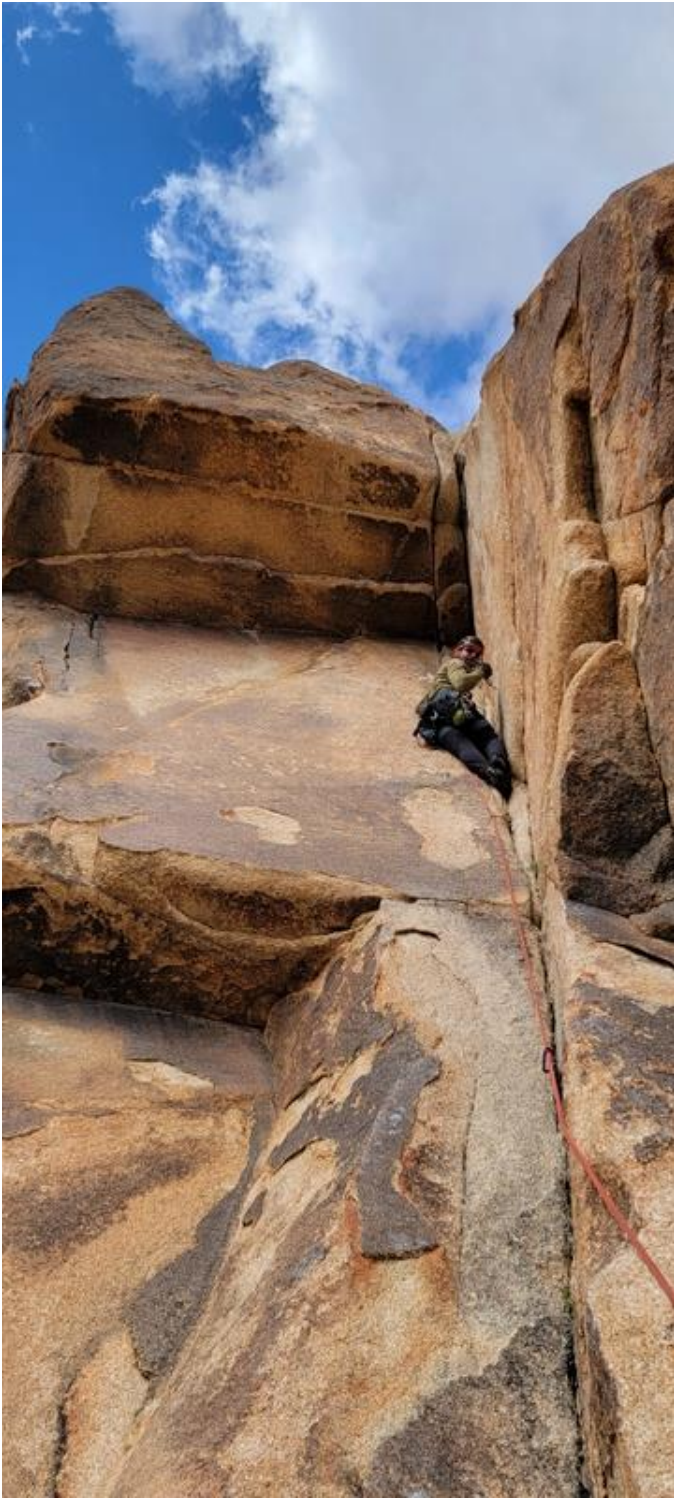
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THE ORIGINAL BEEF NOODLE SOUP

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Paul and I were up at 4am this morning to get to me to my 7am flight from Palm Springs to LAX, where I had a tight connection to my flight to Jackson Hole.

I got to the gate with 25 minutes to spare and was hungry, so I went to get a bagel, which the sign promised would be ready “within 2 minutes.” But it wasn’t... 10 minutes later, I grabbed it and ran to the gate, arriving 12 minutes before departure – only to be told they closed the flight three minutes earlier and the bus had departed! (I hadn’t realized the plane wasn’t at the gate – it was a small plane out on the tarmac.) All of my begging and pleading was for naught – I was screwed! To make a long story short, my only option was to pay American \$397 for their flight 2½ hours later. That was one expensive bagel!

Fortunately, Susan (whose flight from LGA we’d carefully scheduled to arrive at the same time as my original flight) was able to pick up the rental car and get some shopping done before coming back to the airport to pick me up. Once again, I am thankful for having such an understanding and loving wife!!! ❤️❤️❤️

Our last two days of climbing were great, as we tackled some iconic routes and I tried leading three “sport” routes, which means that I, rather than Paul, went up the pitch first, clipping the rope into “quick draws” I attached to fixed bolts. (Sport climbing means a bolted route vs. “trad” or traditional climbing, which is what we were doing most of the time, in which Paul would put spring-loaded “cams” into cracks and then clip the rope to this “pro” or protection. I haven’t yet learned the art of placing pro, so I have only led sport routes.)

Leading a route is much more difficult and dangerous than following because you have to stop every five feet or so to clip the rope and, if you fall, you fall twice the distance to your last piece of pro, plus rope stretch, which can lead to a painful and scary “whipper” if you fall the wrong way and/or at the wrong time. That’s why most people only lead routes in which they’re highly confident they won’t fall.

So, for my first lead on Thursday, Paul and I started with a 5.6 route, up the left side of the iconic huge boulder in the first picture below (you can see the entire feature in the second picture) (I also climbed the 5.8 route marked on the right, but Paul top-roped me). Normally, I can do a 5.6 route in my sleep, but the ratings in Joshua Tree (and California in general) are often sandbagged by the macho guys who first “sent” the route. This was no gimme 5.6 – plus the wind was HOWLING – so I’m declaring it a 5.8! I rarely fall on a 5.8 – and fortunately didn’t this time – but I was sweating!

Yesterday Paul lead two classic difficult routes and then I led a 5.8 and a 5.6.

A guy walking by (thank you Ivan Chase!) took pic 3, of Paul and me preparing to climb one of the routes, and I took pic 4 of Paul “rapping” (rappelling) down off it.

Pic 5 is Paul’s van (where I slept the last seven nights) under a full moon.

Pic 6 are two bunnies making like bunnies and pic 7 is a coyote.

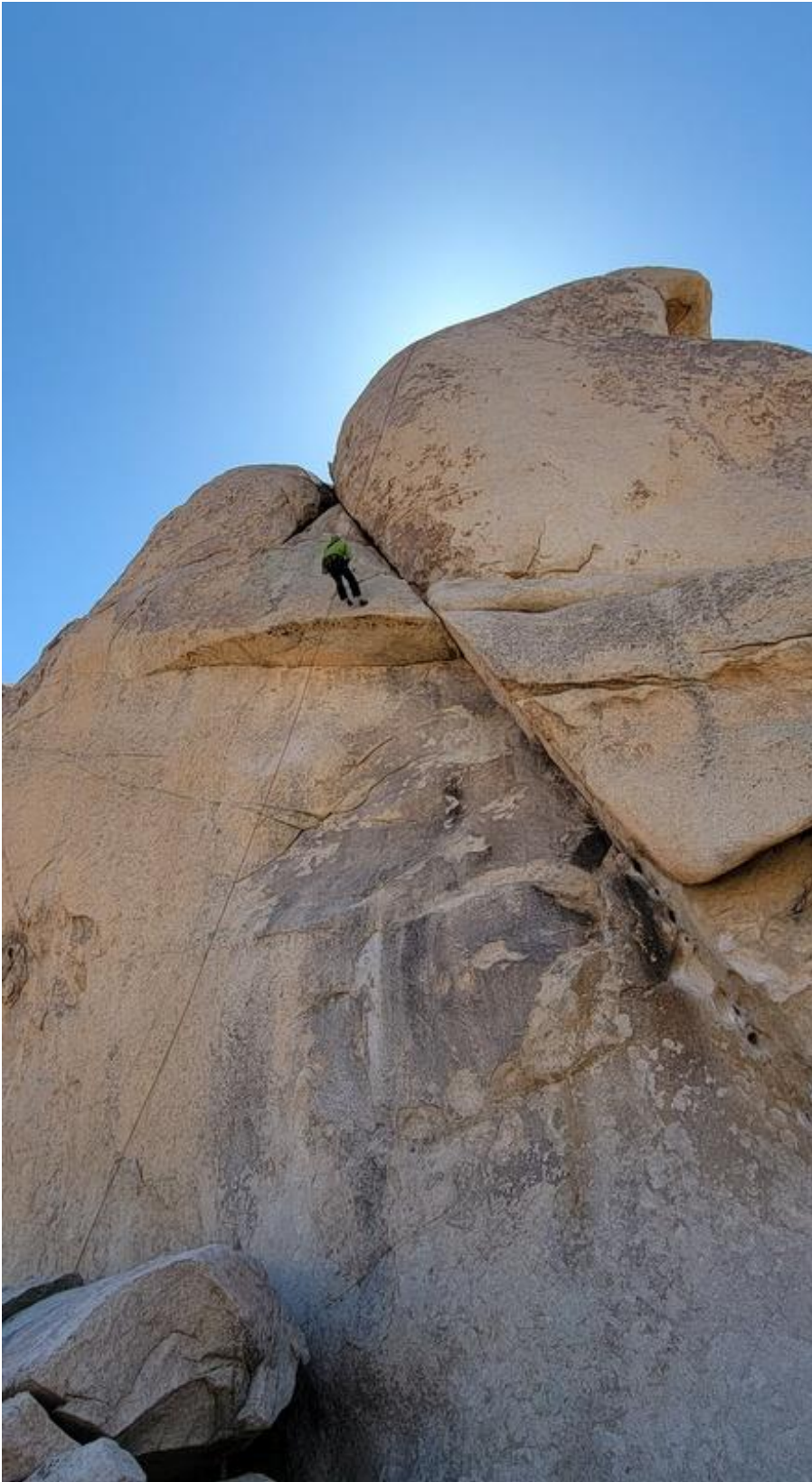
Ivan took pic 8 of a sunset.

Pic 9 is my arrival in Jackson with the Jackson Hole resort in the distant background.

Lastly, pic 10 is me about to take my first shower in eight days!!! 👍👍👍













Susan took a look at the back of my hands and declared them “disgusting old man hands” – LOL!

I have to admit – she does have a point:



This is what a week of crack climbing on the super-rough rock at Joshua Tree will do – and I was even wearing belay gloves on most of the climbs (all but the most difficult ones)!

This is what my brand new pair of gloves looked like after only two days:



While climbing in gloves didn't protect the back of my hands very well (I shudder to think what they would have looked like had I not been wearing them, however!), they did protect the pads of my fingers – a lesson I learned the hard way last October when Paul and I climbed 12 days in a row in Red Rock – check out the pics of my fingers back then:



