

Coyote Two Moon 100 Mile Report March 22, 2011

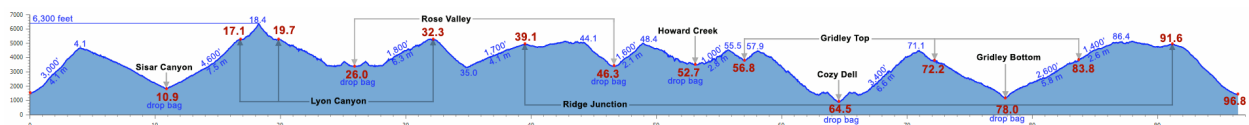
My event weekend started with runner check-in and bowling on Thursday night. With few exceptions, we were crappy bowlers. It was a great opportunity to meet some of the other runners and volunteers that I would encounter at the aid stations the next day. Each team was awarded prizes depending on their scores. My team won C2M embroidered airline blankets. Maybe that is why you don't see them on airplanes anymore. After bowling, I sifted through my goodie bag from check-in. As has become customary for this event, most of the contents were nonsensical. It included 25+ travel brochures from all over the country (wow, the Intercourse Pennsylvania wine festival!), mini-sized soap, shampoo and floss, a VCR tape simply labeled "Life" and a thrift store set of moon chimes (my favorite part!) We oohed and ahhed over the Donny Osmond record that Roch got in his bag. It seemed to fit him today with his bright green 70's style bowling suit and faux chest hair patch. We also received styling Nano-puff sweaters from Patagonia embroidered with the C2M logo.

After leaving Ventura Lanes we drove up to Ojai and out HWY 33 (the way to 3 of the valley aid stations). We camped at Wheeler Gorge in the van, which seemed appropriate. In the morning, we headed back into Ojai to explore the town a bit, and took in a view of the Ojai Valley and surrounding peaks from a viewpoint. Then we headed to Boccali's for lunch and a run briefing. We were also provided with some "entertainment" by the Patagonia team and a little sing-along.

We headed to the Start/Finish area at Thatcher School for final check-in. The first group of runners started at 6pm. Coyote has a staggered start, from slow to fast, which in theory gets everyone to finish closer to the same time on Sunday. I find it quite appealing in contrast to normal 100M starts where runners continue to spread out throughout the course of a race until you get to a point in those wee hours of the morning that you don't see anyone for miles. With the staggered start and out-&-backs on this course, later in the run when it is most needed I am among friends. My start wasn't scheduled until 5am, so I had the luxury of an almost normal amount of sleep before I had to toe the line. We parked the van near the starting area, which was convenient, but not the quietest with runners howling at the moon with each start (9pm, midnight, 3am).

I got up when I heard the 3am starters leave, had breakfast and dressed. As part of the silliness of the event, Jake had made a Santa Claus costume for me consisting of a shirt, skirt, armbands and gaiters in metallic red fabric with the classic white fur trim. I also had gold jingle bells attached to my shoes and my backpack. Instead of a santa hat, I was honored to wear the C2M propeller cap, which serves to bookend the first & last male & female runners while on the course. I was the last female starter, but anticipated handing off the propeller cap as soon as I passed another female runner from one of the earlier start groups. I put it over the top of my beanie and headlamp. In my pack I had a light windbreaker, a sun visor for later, food and water, and a bag of candy canes to hand out to volunteers at the aid stations.

I walked to the starting line, and shared a limerick I had written about the event based on "Twas the Night Before Christmas" with the S/F crew and other runners in my start group. This got us in the spirit, and soon afterwards we were off. As we climbed the first ridge, there was one point where I could see the glow of the moon behind the clouds, but it never cleared off enough to actually see the moon. It had rained off & on during the night, but was not raining now. I hoped for the best, but knew that the forecast called for more rain Saturday night thru Sunday.



The course consists of several major climbs from the valley to the ridge, including an ascent to the summit of Topa Topa peak early on. I saw a lovely sunrise on my way down to Sisar Aid Station. The song of a canyon wren also brought a smile to my face. At the bottom I crossed a creek and came into the A/S camp lead by Wild Bill. I got some more water, a breakfast Gu from my drop bag and picked up a rock to take to the top of Topa Topa to add to the Vicki Devita memorial.

The climb out was quiet, as the next and final start group wasn't until 10am. This early in the race, the climb back up the road and trail to Topa Aid Station was runnable. The Topa Aid Station egg & potato burritos remain one of the highlights. The tired-looking volunteers were still eager to help. A bottle of whisky and some other alcohol sat out on the picnic table. I handed out more candy canes to those that were both naughty and nice. I dropped my pack there, asked for another rock, and headed up to the Topa Topa summit with a rock in each hand.

A skiff of fresh snow covered the peak. The view back into Ojai was now obscured by clouds, but I could see off into the other side towards Rose Valley. I dropped my rocks into the memorial, but avoided looking at the picture. I wanted to remember Vicki the way I had seen her at my last C2M. I dug around in the snow for the playing card I was supposed to return as proof of my visit. Perhaps they had all blown away. The last 2 runners from my start group joined me on the top. Without a jacket up here I couldn't stand around long, so I headed back to the aid station. They tempted me with another burrito but I decided to wait for my next visit. Onward to Rose Valley I went.

The Lion Canyon trail to Rose Valley is my favorite part of the course. There are places where the trail clings to the side of the mountain, narrow and covered with scree, but following my recent running adventure on the Kalalau Trail this was much less frightening. I started to see other runners coming up the valley. I stopped to talk to Roch and Betsy, who claimed I sounded like a horse coming down the trail with my jingle bells. Jake was at Rose Valley to crew me. I took a little too much time there, chatting and going through the motions, and ran out without filling my water. I had to turn around and come back when I discovered that. Now I was at the back of my start group.

The climb out of Rose Valley is also runnable as I back-tracked to the Topa Aid Station. I encountered a group of young backpackers. They looked at me a little strangely as jingled by in my shiny red outfit. This visit to Topa Aid Station, I accepted another egg burrito. I started to pass a few runners. Going up the ridge road, I caught a woman from the 3am start group. I stopped and walked with her for a while, then handed off the propeller cap. She seemed delighted. As I approached the top of the ridge, I pulled on my windbreaker. There was light precipitation off and on in the form of snow or freezing rain. The wind was the killer, and the volunteers at the Ridge AS huddled together under their pop-up to keep warm. I had some warm soup and delivered more candy canes. I didn't tarry at this chilly stop, and moved on down the ridge. There was fresh snow on the ground, and I counted only 5 sets of tracks since it had fallen. I was now in the fog. This is where I had seen a bear and her cub 2 years ago, but I could only see about 20 feet now. I turned on Chip Seal road to take the plunge back into Rose Valley. My shins complained on the descent as I anticipated, but at least the rain had softened the ground somewhat.

At the aid station I sat in the tent and Jake rubbed my legs while I downed an Ensure. I loaded up with calories for the walk out of here. I passed 3 additional 100M runners here at the bottom, and a couple 100Kers. Time to push on, almost to the half-way point. I was still feeling good. The fast 100K runners were barreling down the hill as I walked up.

After a short time along the ridge, I turned at the sign with a cow drawn on it that read "Howard Freek." Now I started seeing many more runners as I descended, most of them the first 100k starters. They had butterfly wings and rabbit ears. Howard Creek Aid Station was a delight with its enthusiastic greeters and disco costumes. I read my limerick to them and they recorded me. I tried to eat but nothing sounded good. I left there in so much of a

happy daze that I missed the trail turnoff and ran to the top of the hill on the road. Of course once I got up there I realized my mistake and headed back. With all the silliness in this event, I was having troubles keeping my head about me.

I turned on my headlamp for the last part of the climb out. Jeff Browning, the men's leader, passed me on his way down the hill. He was flying! At the top of the ridge the wind was blowing and it was snowing hard. Now with full exposure, I had to take my headlamp off and hold it low so that I could see through the blowing flakes and fog. I was still dry and warm however. My stomach was bothering me so I didn't push too hard on the gradual descent to Gridley Top. I dropped below the fog and could see the lights of the Aid Station in the distance. I looked forward to running through the night and I was still solidly on my predicted split times. All was good.

Gridley Top was full of farm animals. At least they looked warm. I handed the furry volunteers candy canes and read them my limerick. Jeff Browning checked in and out while I tried to get some ginger ale in my stomach to settle it. He was raving about how great the course was, and I agreed. Chris, the Two Moon Buffoon was here at the top in his furry costume. He gave me a pep talk, warning of the mud at the bottom of Cozy Dell. I had no idea what was about to be unleashed on us all. I headed out guiding a 100K runner, as the road was very hard to see now with the thick fog and blowing snow.

As I started the descent down Cozy Dell, the snow turned to freezing rain, then just rain, then harder rain, then really really hard rain. My light windbreaker was not meant for this. I worked to keep warm, but running downhill slowly due to poor visibility and the slick mud at the bottom made it a challenge to exert enough effort to break a sweat. There were a few people coming out of Cozy Dell which lifted my spirits. And my stomach was feeling better. I knew however that to go back on the windy ridge this cold and wet would be disastrous.

At Cozy Dell I grabbed Jake and my drop bag and went to the van. I stripped off my soaked santa top, sleeves and sports bra and replaced them with a dry layer. The van heater was some relief to my shivering. I pulled on my waterproof rain jacket. I had never run with this before (no, not even in Seattle) as it was actually a climbing shell and not breathable at all. But desperate times call for desperate measures. With a new lease on life, I grabbed some warm beans at the aid station and headed out. Amazingly I was only 15 minutes behind schedule now. There were a lot of runners standing around at the bottom. The first two people I met coming down said they were done too. I passed only a couple as I power-hiked up the hill. Near the top the wind howled and in exposed places I was blasted by powerful gusts and sideways rain. I guessed 30-40mph gusts. I had to hunker down a couple times, afraid these blasts would push me off the trail and over the edge into the darkness.

These are times when questions run through your head. I have not DNF'd before and my stubborn brain pushed back the thoughts of throwing in the towel for a dry one. The final traverse of the ridge was on my mind; with full exposure to the storm for several miles late in the game. Was it worth it? I knew I needed rain pants to complete this journey. The jacket had kept me dry and warm on top but my skirt clung to my wet skin. Jake would have pants in the van, and I would survive. Soon I would be in the sheltered canyon on my way to Gridley Bottom to meet him. I just had to push this last chilly mile over the top of Nordhoff peak and back to the aid station.

Something was wrong. I saw lights coming towards me but they were swinging low...handhelds vs. headlamps, meaning they were not runners. My heart sunk. "The race is cancelled" they declared. "Back to Cozy Dell with us." It was 1:24 am, 20:24 into my run and somewhere just under 72 miles. My tired and frozen brain panicked as I tried to comprehend this change in plans. I pleaded with them to go forward to Gridley Bottom where my crew and dry clothes were waiting. I knew there was no heat at Cozy Dell, and I was afraid of standing around for even a moment would send me into hypothermia. I borrowed a phone and shot off a voice mail to Jake. We walked into the wind now, heads low, and tails between our legs. We picked up 4 other runners on the way out but then no

one for miles, as most of the others had either already dropped or were held at Cozy Dell. It was 7 miles down, and the sweeps wanted us to walk to guarantee our safe return. This was a cold proposition, for walking couldn't generate enough action to keep me warm in my skirt. I bounced and shivered for the long wet walk down, wondering what would come next. I finally realized some relief that I wouldn't need to face the ridge again after all, but it felt like a consolation prize. The rain came harder. I asked about the crews on the ridge, if they could get out with their cars. It was only then that I started to realize how intense the storm was.

I cramped and stiffened, but through the even slicker mud now I hustled to reach Cozy Dell with high hopes that Jake would be there. I heard him as I approached, and was extremely relieved. I piled in the van with 2 other soaked and frozen bodies from the top and he drove us to the Start/Finish area. Hwy 33, (the road Cozy Dell was on) was now closed. Rocks were strewn about and mud or water covered many places. We dropped the others at their cars. Even with the heater blaring, I was chilled to the bone and insisted that we get a hotel so I could take a hot shower to revive my core. It was now 4 am. The Casa Ojai was sold out. I saw Chris in the parking lot there. I asked if everyone was accounted for, and he nodded. Then I asked where I might get a shower. I must have looked pretty desperate because he graciously pointed me to Sue's room where I brought my numb body back to life.

Jake drove us back to Thatcher and I crawled into a warm, dry sleeping bag for a couple hours of blissful sleep. The rain and wind continued to howl all night, shaking the van. I woke when I heard people outside discussing drop bags. The start/finish area was underwater so they were taking them to the hotel. It was still pouring. Now light, the amount of water coming down the mountain was unreal. We stopped by the hotel, said our goodbyes and headed for drier ground.



Later I learned that Ojai received 5¼" of rain in 24hrs, a new record. Hikers had to be rescued (probably the ones I had seen in Lion Canyon). Some of the crews on top had to abandon their vehicles and hike out, or opt to spend the night in those conditions. Following the C2M Facebook site, I learned that everyone made it out but there were some good adventure stories to share, maybe for years to come. Definitely one night I will not forget. Now with my brain thawed and a little sleep I was thankful to have been given orders to get off the course by someone much smarter than myself. I can only imagine what the volunteers were enduring through these conditions, yet through their heroic efforts all the runners made it out safely.