

Plain 100 and False Advertising by Bob McAllaster

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In every race report or bit of information read in preparing for the Plain 100 mile run, I read about hot, dry, and dusty conditions. Even my friend, James Winchester, told me six months prior to the race, “be prepared for hot (possibly 90-degree weather) and dry conditions.” Running through the muck of Manoa and on other trails in Makiki, I often said I was looking forward to dry and dusty.

Those of us going to Plain openly discussed and debated the revered 5000 foot climb up to Tyee Ridge and the 14-mile stretch without water. Race reports told us we would need upwards of 148 ounces of water for this section and again, we spent countless hours thinking, planning, and discussing how to carry this much water. I am sure the other H.U.R.T. runners were tired of hearing us talk about Plain and all of our strategies—new packs, GPS, shoes, foods, etc.

This year Plain was different. Five Hawaii-based H.U.R.T. runners, Don Fallis, Jeff Huff, Cheryl Loomis, Bob Murphy and I, plus HURTPal Leon Draxler of Seattle were going to Plain. This year, Plain was different, instead of hot, dry, and dusty, it was cold, wet, and muddy.

My trip to Plain started as a Christmas gift from my wife Barbi. She entered me at the urging of the other Hawaii runners going to Plain in 2005. I joked with people after reading up on Plain, that I was not sure the entry was a gift. The run sounded very hard and very few runners had ever finished the event.

Training for Plain was in many ways like training for any other 100 mile race. Build up a good base of mileage and then slowly start increasing the distance to get in some good long training runs. I believe in addition to actual miles, time on my feet or spending 12 to 15 hours moving is also good training.

I got in some good, long training runs with the H.U.R.T. group including repeats on the “Run with a View” course, a night run with Paul Sibley from Honolulu to Kailua, followed up by a 20 mile run the next morning, and a 25 to 30 mile run through the Ho’omaluhia Garden out to Waimanalo and back. On most of these runs I was purposely carrying more weight in preparation for what lay ahead at Plain.

Plain is really more of an adventure run than a race. There are no aide stations or support along the route. The run is divided into two loops with a drop bag at approximately the halfway point. Runners get water out of streams and otherwise have to fend for themselves.

Our Plain specific training included a 40 mile (12 hour) day up on the North Shore at Peacock Flats and a 40 plus (15 hour) mile day from Kailua to the Nature Center and back. Both of these runs were really good training as I tried to carry exactly what I would be carrying at Plain. This meant training with a heavier pack and basically carrying all

my food for 12 to 15 hours. Since a group of us were going, it was fun to have others to train with.

I felt pretty satisfied with my training for the race and overall preparation. Even after the race, I believe the training I did prepared myself and the others from Hawaii for Plain. However, there was one thing we were not prepared for—cold and wet weather.

We checked the weather reports prior to departing for Plain. In fact, I sent the forecast to the other Hawaii runners noting the predicted cooler temperatures and possible rain as a good thing. If in fact it was wet, this would keep the dust down and if it was a bit cooler, the long climb would be easier.

Bob Murphy, Jeff Huff and I departed Honolulu on the same flight and met Don Fallis who had arrived a few hours earlier. Bob and Jeff got their own rental car and departed for the home of 2005 H.U.R.T. winner Jamie Gifford. Don and I got out the directions to Leon's house and hit the highway. We did fine finding his house in spite of Leon trying to confuse us by telling us his house was on the left side of the street. Cheryl Loomis had arrived a day earlier and they were glad to see we had all arrived safely.

We headed out to Plain about 11:00 a.m. the next day after breakfast and picking up a few last minute supplies. Plain is about three hours east of Seattle and our plan was to meet up with Jeff and Bob once we got close to Plain.

After stopping for a fun lunch at a fifties-style road side diner, we arrived at the Davis cabin just minutes before the race briefing. My friend, James Winchester, drove out from North of Seattle and met us here. We met race directors Chris Ralph and Tom Ripley and some of the other participants. There were a few familiar runners; Jim Ballard, Kathy Lang, and Jeff Heasley. At the briefing, the course and overall race was discussed as well as introductions by the Search and Rescue teams that would be out on the course. Additionally, other racers, including Jim Ballard, were offering their tips and advice. The weather was sunny and cool during the briefing; however we could see some really dark clouds around us. The weather did not look good.

After the briefing we checked into our cabin which was in a great location just 100 yards from the race start and finish. Once we moved our things into the cabin we left for the pre-race dinner. This is held at a restaurant a few miles away and consisted of salad, pasta with either white or red sauce and with the option of chicken.

After dinner since it was still light out, we decided to drive up to some of the course that we could see by car. We drove up to Maverick Saddle which we see on both the start and finish of loop 1. We also drove out towards Alder Creek and looked at several sections of loop 2 which we would travel on at both the beginning and end of loop 2. This section has caused more than one runner to get lost and seeing it while we were fresh and in the daylight would hopefully help us if we got this far during the race. Accompanying us while we were looking at these sections was past two time finisher, Tim Stroh.

After this it was back to the cabin and final preparation and packing. In hindsight, this is where some of us started making changes in our plans that would impact us the next day as we tried to lighten our packs. In bed by about 9:00 p.m., I woke up the next morning at 4:00 a.m. feeling like I had not slept very well at all. Typical pre-race jitters.

James told us it had rained about 3:00 a.m. though not very much. It was cold and dark and the race start time seemed to approach all too fast.

I started off dressed in a long sleeve running shirt and a tyvek jacket. This was a mistake that would haunt me the rest of the day. Of course there was the usual joking and final adjusting of gear as we lined up for the start.

Plain starts with a quick out and back of about ¼ mile to continue the tradition of starting at the Thousand Trails Adult Lounge. I found myself in last place right from the start with Bob and Jeff as we were fussing with our GPS's and watches. In the darkness we started up the dirt roads toward Maverick Saddle.

I was running with Don, Cheryl, Leon, and Jim Ballard. Bob and Jeff had pulled away. Since the pace was quite slow, I started to pull away and ran with Kathy Lang for a while. I pulled away from her and caught up with Bob and Jeff at Deep Creek (drop bag area) and we continued up the road towards Maverick Saddle.

Jeff and Bob were pushing it with Jeff wanting to run on any flat section. I saw them pulling away from me once we made the hard right turn on 6101. I was enjoying the upward climb to Maverick Saddle as it started to get light and the views looking west towards Fish Lake. I knew the plan was for me to stick with Don, Cheryl, and Leon and I knew they were behind me.

Up at Maverick Saddle, I checked in with the first Search and Rescue (SAR) team and started to make my way down to trail 1409.1. It was here where I first noticed that I was soaking wet on the inside of my jacket. My long sleeve running top was totally wet from sweat and the tyvek jacket with its elastic cuffs and waist was acting like a zip lock bag covering my body.

This first trail had a fast moving stream along it and I heard voices up ahead. It was Bob and Jeff filtering water. I decided to do the same. They asked how I was doing and if I had seen other runners. I had not. Jeff was tracking that it had taken them 5 minutes to get water and that he didn't even really need any. Again, he was pushing it.

As I was finishing at the stream, I saw two people go by on the trail; however I did not recognize them. I quickly caught them at the next trail junction. I was surprised to see it was Kathy and Jim. I asked them about Don, Cheryl, and Leon and they said they were right behind them. I decided to remove the tyvek jacket at this point as Jim said this next section was a good climb.

Sure enough, Don, Cheryl, and Leon were right along and we started the climb up the Hi Yu Trail or trail 1403. Looking back, this was one of the steeper climbs for all of loop 1.

Even though the weather was cold and damp, I think my shirt was drying out more than if I had the jacket on. Somehow Don got stung by a bee along this section, his first sting of the day. Later along the North Tommy Trail on the descent to road 5605, he would get stung again by a bee in almost the same spot on his leg.

Once we got over the initial climb up Hi Yu, there were some nice trail sections along some alpine meadows and small lakes. We got a nice rhythm going here and made pretty good time up to the Klone Peak cutoff. Don was leading and he didn't realize we were at Klone Peak when we saw Kathy coming down.

We headed up and passed Jim on his way down. It was snowing pretty good here as we headed up to the summit and the trees looked pretty with a fresh dusting of wet snow. We paused for a few quick pictures and headed back down to rejoin trail 1425 and to head down to the road 5605. This is a very long section and the trail meanders forever it seems through forest and burned areas. We came across a nice stream and the sun was out so we took a short break for water and some food. Finally we came out to a parking area and the next SAR checkpoint.

As we headed down the dirt and then paved road, it started to hail on us. So far we had rain, snow, and hail. The paved road section seemed really long here and we started to get cold as it rained quite heavily on us too. We finally made it to the 112 cul-de-sac and the trail down towards the river. It was nice to be back on soft trails after the hard paved roads.

At the junction of South Tommy Trail we were surprised to see Race Directors Chris and Tom. They informed us Jeff Heasley was in their car on the road below. He had been near the lead, however had taken the wrong trail out of the cul-de-sac and decided to quit at this point. They also pointed out that usually during the race; the temperature at this part of the course was easily 90-degrees. It was far from that on our race day.

We quickly moved on to Fox Creek, the last water stop for 14 miles. Since this was the start of the big climb we all ate and fueled up before we headed up. Heading up, Cheryl and Don were leading and Leon and I were in the rear. I caught Cheryl and Don and then would stop and Leon would catch up. Climbing up we saw a rainbow which was just one more thing which made this run special. Of course, it also rained on us as we climbed.

We had been warned of a couple of false summits as we headed up towards Tyee Ridge. However, we were all surprised when we came to the junction and realized we had made the climb. We went a little further before stopping to make some gear adjustments.

As it was getting dark, the temperature was dropping and since we were still quite high in elevation, it was cold. We decided to get ready for the dark by trying to get warm. Leon gave Cheryl a dry shirt to put on. Her feet were really cold. I also stripped off my long sleeve t-shirt and put a dry short sleeve capilene H.U.R.T. shirt on. Don and I had brought large garbage bags and we both put these on. It was so cold at this point that our fingers did not have their normal dexterity so it was tough to do certain things, like put holes in the bags for our arms and head. I put my long sleeve T back over the garbage bag. Additionally, since my gloves were wet and cold, I pulled out a spare pair of socks to wear as mittens. This worked great for the rest of the night to keep my hands warm. I also had a Buff that I put over my ears and neck for warmth. That also really helped to keep me warm. As we started shivering and got really chilled whenever we stopped (even during the day), we didn't take much time here and started to move as soon as we were ready.

I enjoyed this next part of the trail as we were traversing Tyee Ridge and I went as long as I could without using my flashlight. The moon was out though it was a hazy crescent I think due to the moisture in the air. Don said to stick together but I was pushing it and Cheryl stayed with me and Don and Leon were behind us. This section had more uphill than I was expecting and seemed to take forever. We also started to come across lots of rocks on the trail. Finally we came to the junction and trail 1416.

This trail was a long descent to the Mad River. It was steep at times with lots of rocks and overgrown brush on the trails. The brush was very frustrating as it was hard to get past and it was all wet. It was a very long 3.2 miles down to the Mad River.

The Mad River Trail was also a long 3.7 miles back to Maverick Saddle. We knew by now we were going to be missing the 2:00 a.m. cutoff and that made it even longer I think. It was also colder along the streams due to the increased humidity and this also made it tough. Finally, we had to cross a couple of streams and I got wet feet on two of the stream crossings. By this point we were all hoping SAR would be at Maverick Saddle and that they would be able to give us a ride back to Deep Creek.

As we came up from the Mad River to Maverick Saddle we got somewhat twisted around but finally found the road up to the saddle. We saw the truck lights of SAR and quickly asked if we could get a ride. It was a long ride back to Deep Creek, even by truck. The last six miles might have taken us another two or two and half hours had we run it in at this point in the race. We were very glad to get a ride!

Final thoughts and lessons learned:

If it is cold and wet, don't skimp on gear to save a few ounces. We all had warmer, better clothes in our drop bags. Being from Hawaii, we are pretty sensitive to cold, wet weather. It was probably in the low 40's and we were probably suffering from low level or mild hypothermia. Had someone gotten hurt or been unable to move, I am not sure how the other two would have kept the injured person warm while the third person went for help. It might be good to pack a space or emergency blanket.

When it's cold, we eat more and drink less. Don't skimp on food to save a few ounces, especially if it is cold. We all ran out of food. I had enough but shared with others so that I think we ended up with a bag or two of powder for our drink mixes and one or possibly two gels. The body burns more calories to stay warm if it is cold so plan accordingly. Since it was cool or cold, we didn't drink nearly as much therefore didn't need to carry as much up the big climb and along Tyee Ridge. In fact, I never got water again after I filled up at Fox Creek.

Don and I both agreed, we could not remember when we had been that cold and that wet for such a long time. Proper gear is essential in these events.

We all agreed the climbs did not seem as tough as advertised. I would compare them to climbing out of Paradise Park or out of Nuuanu/Jackass Ginger on the H.U.R.T. 100 course. They are just longer, however they are not necessarily steeper. I am sure the cool weather also made them easier.

You must keep moving--it's a long course. The first loop is supposedly 56 miles. My GPS clocked the first loop to Maverick Saddle on the return 52.3 miles. We were told from Maverick to Deep Creek is 6 miles. That would make loop 1 58.3 miles long, however I heard the SAR guy who gave us a ride in say it was close to 10 miles on his truck odometer which would put it well over 60 miles for loop 1.

So round off to 60 miles for loop 1 and if you only average 3 miles per hour, you are looking at 20 hours. There is a 21 hour cutoff for loop 1.

I only filtered water once as did Jeff and Bob. The water tastes good, seems clear, and so far, no stomach problems. Filtering in a race, when it is cold, is slow.

Arranging for a cabin for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night is a must. We ended up with no place to stay or shower after we dropped. Bob and Jeff faced the same and tried to drive back to Seattle after running 100 miles. This is not smart; it is a three hour drive. Not only do you need to have a place to shower and sleep, there is no food at the end of the race, so plan an easy to prepare dinner for Sunday night.

Would I go to Plain again? Absolutely, there is another loop I have yet to see. I've heard the scenery is great. Would I train or do anything differently? Yes and no. I feel the training we did was pretty good, so I might not change much of that. We all felt like we could have gone out and done more. We were just really wet and cold. I need to work on moving faster. My GPS showed a moving average speed of 2.8 miles per hour. Pretty slow! Picking this up to 3.3 mph makes a huge difference.

Special congratulations and utmost respect goes out to Bob and Jeff for getting out on the second loop and being two of only four runners to do so. You guys were amazing! Jeff was one of two who actually completed the entire course. Very well done!

All in all, even given the weather, we all had fun. It just wasn't quite as advertised!

Here are Cheryl's thoughts:

Plain, An Incredible Adventure with Friends...

I only want to add a few personal comments to Bob's great report.

This was an incredible experience.

And for me,,, a special way to spend my birthday.

Yes, it was tough,,, but so are we. I think the weather was the biggest issue for us....believe me, it was cold....

But we never felt like quitting, we never thought we couldn't do this, even when we ran out of time.

We learned to work as a team, and that worked well.

I will go back...I know I can do better,,, I know we all can.

I am so proud of us for doing as well as we did....I am so grateful for being able to share this experience with my HURT buddies.

We all share a special bond, a bond of Aloha.....