

WAY TOO COOL 2016 – RACE REPORT BY JEFFREY AUWINGER

I always said I'd never run an ultra marathon. For years I had volunteered for the Way to Cool 50k race, cheering on runners for their last 1/2 mile, but I as much admired them as I thought they were crazy. I thought the human body was not meant to run that far. Back in 2006 I ran a half marathon, which I under prepared for and it almost killed me. The chafing was unbearable. Fast forward 10 years and I am now an ultra marathon runner. Don't get me wrong, I was not training for this event those 10 years, in fact for many of those years I did not run at all. For years I thought my running career was over.

That all changed back in December 2013 at NorCalUltras' holiday party. I was talking to one of the guests at the party and was explaining why I couldn't run any more and right away he said its your IT band, and he suggested a number of stretches and a foam roller. At this year's NorCalUltras' party the pain was long gone, I was regularly rolling my lower body, and had lost my excuse to not try the Way to Cool 50k. At the party Julie Fingar, the race director and owner of NorCalUltras, gave her brother John, my close friend, and I the hard press. We both relented and said we would sign up and train together.

Through Julie we were given a training plan to follow and had about 10 weeks to get ready. I wasn't sure that was enough time, but we both agreed we would go as far as our bodies allowed us. Due to schedule conflicts John and I only did about 50% of the runs together until an injury sidelined John.

For the most part the training went flawlessly. I was progressing at what felt like a nice pace and was feeling good about the race. Trying to replicate the race course I did a number of runs up in Cool, but my attempts ended up with me getting lost. I felt the hills runs were really helping me to be able to climb at a comfortable pace in areas I had to walk before and I was learning more about hydration and fuel.

Finally, two weeks before the race my final long run had approached and I woke up that morning just not feeling it. This had never been an issue before and I wanted to stay on schedule so I decided to push through it and do the run anyway. It did not go well. I did not bring enough food and what I did bring was not going down easy. I had to walk a good portion of the run and was suddenly feeling very nervous about the race, which was just two weeks away. I figured that at least the taper period was beginning and maybe all I needed was some rest.

The week of the race arrived and I was feeling much better, but unfortunately the weather forecast took a turn for the worst. Saturday morning John arrived at my house ready to head up to the starting line, his injuries hopefully healed. As always, the energy and the atmosphere amongst the runners was amazing, despite the wet weather, and all of the volunteers and staff did a great job setting up. The course took us on a trail I had not been on before which offered great views of the American River and because of the rain numerous waterfalls. We had to wade through a few creeks, but all of the racers helped one another across, making sure no one slipped. The aid stations were stocked with PB&J sandwiches, chicken broth, gels, electrolytes, and Cliff bars. The course was absolutely amazing and I almost forgot it was raining. Arriving at the second to last aid station I announced that this was officially the furthest I had ever run, which was unexpectedly greeted with applause.

Finally, I reached the area 0.5 miles from the finish line, where I'd spent years cheering on the runners and I knew I was home free. I rounded the corner to the finish line where rain soaked spectators continued to cheer on every runner who came through. I picked up the pace to finish strong and came through the finish into the arms of my wife. She gave me my medal and a kiss on the lips and I had completed the race.

Now it is a week later and my feelings about this race are much different than my first 1/2 marathon. I feel great and can definitely say that I would do it again. Thank you Julie for talking me into doing this race and to NorCalUltras for putting on such a great event. I can't wait for the next one.