

Way Too Cool 50km, March 12, 2011
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Sometimes change is good, like changing the oil in your car, the water in your hot tub, the kitty litter in the litter box, and your underpants. For the second time in an equal number of years, the Way Too Cool 50km course was changed, but unlike in 2009, this time it was for the better. Way better. The new course now consists of two loops using more available single track and eliminates the long out and back section where lead runners used to encounter back of the packers head on.

The new start was fast, like a road marathon, but with lots of talking. The banter was friendly and mostly about why we were going out too fast. I passed the one mile mark in 6:20, and I couldn't see the leaders! Short of two miles, a gorilla jumped out from behind a bush, scaring us onto the single track. [Rumor has it that at least one runner exacted revenge for the rest of us by sneaking up behind the gorilla and scaring it. Thanks, bro.]

Any thoughts of trying to keep the feet dry were immediately put to rest as we crossed the shin deep Knickerbocker Creek. At least we got that out of the way early as the creek crossings were numerous throughout the course, and rock hopping would be futile. The next six miles were sweet, mostly flat single track with some surprising views of the American River that brought us back to the start/finish area. Less than an hour for the first eight miles? Yep, too fast.

The next few miles were on the Western States 100 (States) course, running towards No Hands Bridge. If you've run States, you'll likely remember miles 94-96 taking just a bit more time and perhaps in different light. As I was hammering the downhill single track and dreaming of running as fast as Jim Howard did in 1983 to catch Jim King and win States by less than a minute, who do I catch just before crossing the highway at the lower quarry? Yep, Jim Howard! He's a bit older than he was in 1983, but he and I would run close to each other the rest of the race. That alone was worth the price of admission. Thanks, Jim.

The next five miles were on the very runnable double track Quarry Rd (the trail the horses use in the Tevis Cup race), which travels along the Middle Fork of the American River to Maine Bar, a "town" that used to have 10,000 people in the Gold Rush days. Today, there is nothing but an old outhouse and lost dreams down there. At this point we'd done nothing but run either flat or downhill, and we were more than halfway through the race. However, things were about to change.

We continued onward past Ball Bearing Hill, a signature feature of the old course that is really just an eroded gully with miserable footing that won't be missed, to the bottom of Dead Truck trail. From Dead Truck we took the American Canyon trail past some cool waterfalls along the Hoboken and American Canyon creeks. Uphill we went, the pace now considerably slower. The 1000' climb took us back to the 83

mile mark of the States course (19 miles into the Way Too Cool race), and back to easier terrain.

Jim had gapped me a bit on the climb, but I caught him on the way to ALT, the 21 mile aid station. My stride and turnover was definitely different than earlier, but I still had the presence of mind to acknowledge the memorial to Barbara Schoener, the wife and mother of two who was fatally injured in the vicinity by a mountain lion in April of 1994. Yes, I was thinking about what it might be like to get eaten by a cougar, and I still maintain that it would be a great way to go; however, at that moment I still had pain to inflict on myself.

After ALT, I continued following Jim at what I thought was a fairly decent pace until we were caught by my friends Meghan Arbogast and John Ticer, with another guy in tow. Apparently our pace was not that good as they went by very fast, and were out of sight by the time we reached the bottom of the next big climb, Goat Hill, at mile 25. Goat Hill was hard and steep. I was staving off cramps by popping S!caps, and was just whacked by the effort of the climb and my earlier pace. I was walking, but crazy Jim was running!

The last five miles were up and down and technical in spots. Runners caught me. I caught a runner or two. Jim fell. We ran through more water. I ate more S!caps. Finally, the last climb after crossing Highway 49 just like we do at States was behind me, and I was running on the flats to finish my 10th Way Too Cool. Yeah, sometimes change is good, and this new course is a keeper.