

Race Report: Mind the Ducks 2012

Deb Patterson

I can't quite recall what compelled us to do an ultra at all, let alone one just six days post-Mountain Goat, but very early on 5/12/12 (4 AM, to be precise!) Joan, Nancy, Sue and I hit the road for Rochester. We were a motley crew, indeed. Joan had run several half marathons, Nancy had run just one, and poor Sue's longest run was a seven-miler. I'd done one ultra back in '07, and it had traumatized me so badly that I seriously took five long years to get over it. I don't know if we were tough and dedicated or twisted and delusional. Either way, we'd registered, so we were stuck with it. (Also, a fun loving colleague had been filling my mail box at work with rubber duckies and Make Way for Ducklings the entire previous week. If I wussed out now, I'd never hear the end of it.)

We drove to "Rah-cha-cha", set up our tent, met some very friendly people (including Mary, a runner from our very own county who is a running SUPER STAR!) and took off. Nancy and I stayed together, and Sue and Joan paired up. The course was beautiful – I was convinced that the swan in the pond was some Disney-esque prop, but it was real. We saw herons, geese, ducks, cardinals and 60+ fellow nut job runners. I thought it might be insanely boring to run around a ½ mile loop ALL DAY LONG, but that turned out not to be the case at all. Instead, I LOVED the fact that saintly volunteers and scrumptious oatmeal cookies were available every 5 – 6 minutes.

Nancy and I settled into an easy enough 10:00min/mile pace and did over 13 miles before noticing that almost everyone (including Mary, our hero) was taking the occasional walk break. We decided to incorporate the tiniest little walk into each lap, and thereafter we consistently walked from the end of the foot bridge to the "Eff You" tree. (Why the "FU" tree, you ask? Because that "easy enough" pace eventually grew to be VERY grueling, and after enough hours I found myself HATING that freakin' tree. I am certain that a cruel prankster was transplanting it each lap, moving it closer and closer to the bridge. Not amusing, Cruel Prankster, not amusing...)

After about six hours or so, Nancy – who had long since CRUSHED her distance PR! – decided to sit out a lap or two. I continued on my merry way, still flabbergasted at seeing our names on the leader board all day. I was certain they'd be erased at any minute, so I asked one of the aforementioned saintly volunteers to take a picture of it for me. Nancy and I were in 4th and 5th place! Go figure!

I continued plugging along, growing progressively more fatigued. It was VERY hot, about 75 degrees AKA 30 degrees higher than my optimal running temperature. I poured gallons of water over my head, and ate countless popsicles. I was getting a bit out of my head, and the printed jokes on the popsicle sticks first cracked me up, but later left me bewildered and confused. Were KIDS supposed to get these jokes?! WTF?!?! (Did I mention I was fatigued?)

Just before Hour 9, a race volunteer approached me and asked, "Are you Deb Patterson?" I said I was - though I frankly wasn't quite sure at that point. Deb Patterson didn't run for TWELVE hours! She ran, sure, but not like THESE people. (These people were INSANE – I met a guy who has run **900+** marathons. I've run **nine** marathons, but I much prefer to watch a 900- episode "Kardashian" marathon.) The kindly race volunteer said, "*You've got a shot at winning this thing.*" I nodded politely, but felt sad that such an amiable man was addled and/or drug addicted. Was his family/psychiatric facility/rehab center aware that he was on the loose?

That deranged man had planted a seed of optimism, though. By then I had moved up to #3 female, and was not too many laps away from the leader. What if it WASN'T the crack talking? Could I really WIN this thing? I thought of all the people I'd tell - my husband, my kids, my sister, my mom, my BFF, my Saturday running group, my first graders, that insane colleague who kept littering up my mail box with rubber duckies – and I told myself, "*Suck it up, Buttercup.*" I gritted my teeth and carried on.

I had identified #1 and #2 female, thanks to some covert volunteer reconnaissance and some cyber stalking the week before. (Thank you, Face Book) They both looked tough and strong and absolutely unbeatable. Still, I trudged along, and by Hour 11 the leader board listed me at #1. CRAZY, right?!?! I spend more time in pajama pants than running shorts, and I much prefer Red Cat to Gatorade. How

could I be in the lead? HELP!!!! Around that time, I became *completely* panic stricken. It was all well and good to be #3 and to chase the leaders, but to be the one BEING chased was terrifying. Rebecca passed me at one point, running SO fast that I must have looked like a paralyzed sloth in comparison. I knew I just had to hold on to the lead for one more hour, but my lead was SO narrow – just a couple of laps.

At this point, Joan had started running every other lap with me, and she was trying to keep me focused, as a hysterical meltdown was almost inevitable. She helped me do the math, and told me how many more laps I could squeeze in before 12 hours. I was so, so, SO scared that I'd blow it. My original dream goal had been to run 52.4 miles (2 marathons), but now I wanted #1 so badly I could taste it.

I stopped running at 11 hours 57-ish minutes and collapsed on the ground, still not sure who the winner was. Had Rebecca and /or Kelly beat me, or had a miracle occurred and I'd somehow managed to keep them at bay? Nancy and Sue and Joan told me I'd won, but I remained skeptical. We staggered to the car, drove to the post-race party and took "hobo showers" using Nathan Sports Wipes. My clothes were saturated and vile. My eyebrows and hair were crusty and caked with dried salt. I reeked. I was the last one in the bathroom, and I could hear the race director announce the male winner. Then she announced the female winner and it was - me. Unbelievable. Surreal. Incredible. I rested my head against the door of the stall and quietly wept.

The whole way home I hugged my GORGEOUS plaque and held my head out the window. I was very nauseous, and terrified I'd befoul Joan's vehicle. I made it to Fulton before yelling, "*Pull over! Pull over! I'm gonna puke!!*" Joan flew into the gas station parking lot while I wrestled with the door handle. Stupid child safety locks!!! One hand was clamped over my mouth to stop the flow of vomit, while the other pulled furiously at the door handle. Sue was trapped in the back seat with me and she yelled to Joan, "*The door! She's locked in!*" Joan released me just in time, and I proceeded to spew all over the parking lot. Fulton is a small Oswego County city not exactly known for its civility and decorum, and the patrons barely glanced at me. Still, I kept insisting, "*I'm not drunk! I'm NOT drunk!*" All evidence pointed to the contrary. I was staggering, puking and babbling incoherently. It was SO worth it.

Do this race. You'll meet wonderful people. You'll witness a USATF record be shattered. You'll eat salt potatoes with your hands. You'll watch an elderly couple feed bread crusts to the ducks in companionable silence. You'll see a happy, chubby boy catch a plump, slick frog, and a young man who looks like a poet gently save a turtle no bigger than a nickel. You'll have twelve long/short hours to regret/relish your decision. You'll be awed and inspired and amazed by your friends. You'll do something you never imagined was possible and it will change you.

STATS: **Joan:** 72 laps, 35.2944 mi. **Sue:** 67 laps, 32.8434 mi. **Me:** 127 laps, 62.2554 mi. **Nancy:** 85 laps, 41.667 mi.