

McNauhton Park 10, 30, 50 & 100 Mile Trail Races

April 3-4, 2004

A picture story of race weekend by Steve Hoger. Also a narrative on my first 100 mile attempt and my low mileage training.



The first weekend in April of 2004 was a great day for trail running in Central Illinois. By the end of the day even the park sign looked tired.



The day started at dawn. If you arrived at the right time, you could see a "deer" friend watching your car drive by. More deer were scared up during the first lap of the run.



By the time the race was ready to start there were many cars lined up along the road near the start / finish. As the day went on cars left as the "short" races finished up. That made it easier for my crew that drove to several spots to see me along the course to find a spot back at the start / finish area.



Sounds from a bagpipe were heard as the participants prepared for the start.

Race director, Andy Weinberg, gave directions shortly before the start. Andy runs an organized race and is a very friendly guy. He is one of the big reasons I drive 500 miles from Nebraska to run this race. Andy remembered my name when I showed up the

second year. He even remembered my family from the year before. Andy is very encouraging and helpful as you pass by the start / finish line at the end of every ten mile loop.





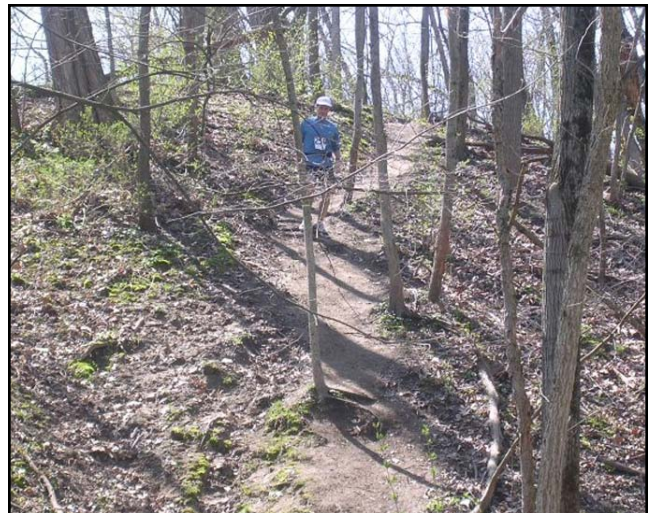
As the sun was rising the runners toed the starting line listening to the countdown.

At 6:00 am the McNaughton Park 2004 trail adventure started.



During the race there were flat sections with occasional branches to step over. Funny how those branches got a little larger and harder to get over each lap. There were some roots and rocks on the course but I had little problem with them. My only problems were when I was enjoying the scenery too much instead of watching where I was going and also late in the race when stepping over anything seemed more difficult.

There were downhills to run. Some like this one were pretty steep quad busters that required care not to get going too fast. One hill in the Heaven's Gate section was so steep that you just stepped onto the decline and slid down and grabbed a tree before stepping out again and sliding your way toward the bottom.





There are uphill on this course also. This is not a mountain course but the many hills make this a tough course. I am not the only one who thinks this is a tough course. Whenever I mentioned this was my first 100 attempt, they all replied, "you sure picked a tough one". Some hills may be small but you can see in the picture that the incline could be steep.



The famous hill on the McNaughton Park course is the rope hill. The first section is very steep and so there is a rope to help you pull yourself up the hill. That is just the beginning of the largest hill on the course. This hill seemed to get steeper each lap. I talked with a runner who said he counted fourteen formidable hills in the ten mile loop. I disagreed. It seemed to me that each lap had one more hill than the previous loop. My friend had to admit that he only counted once so I could be correct. It is hard to get lost on this course. You can see in the picture the red tree markings, the yellow ribbons and even a white chalk arrow in the upper right corner.

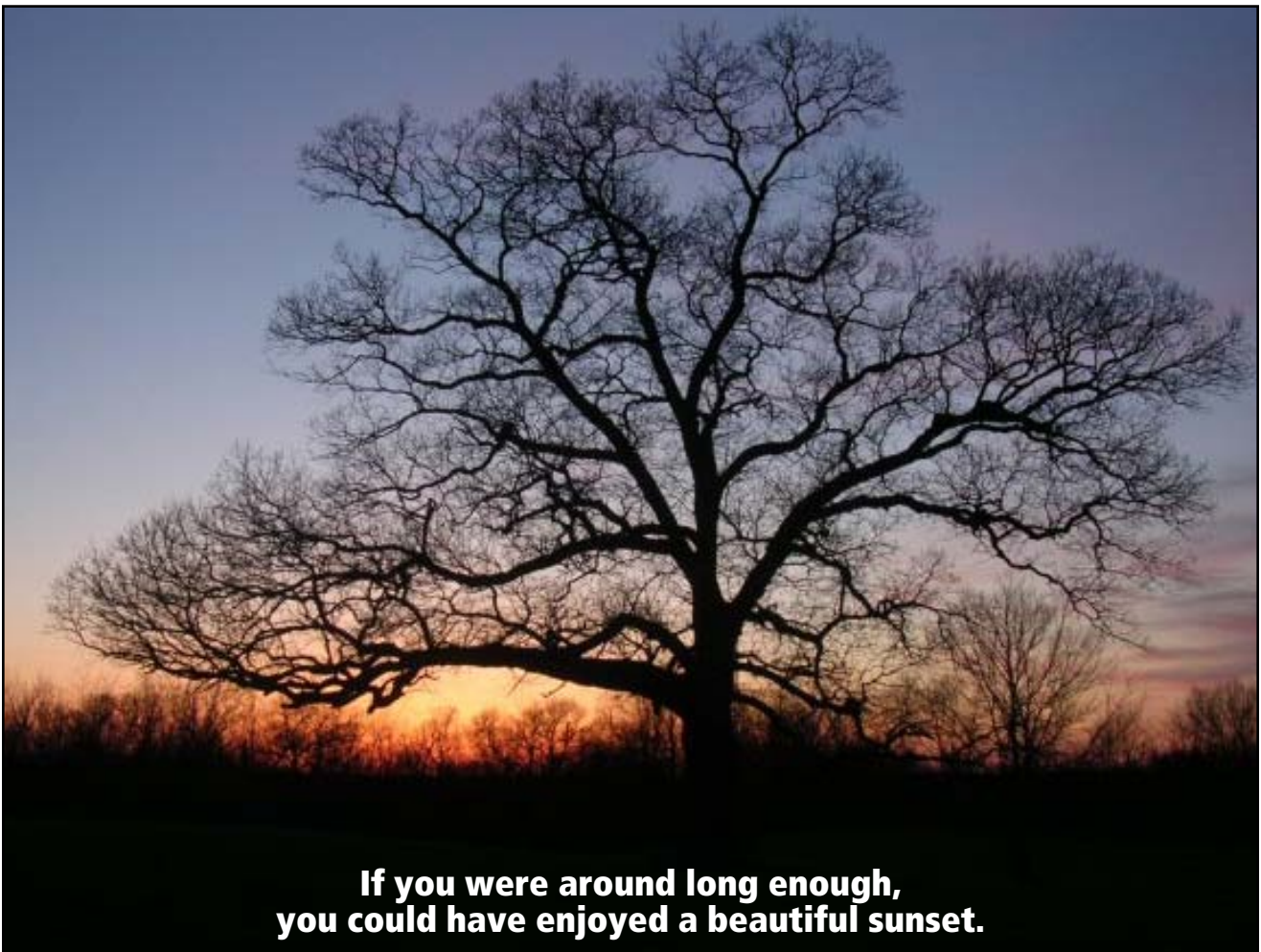


The McNaughton Park trails also include water hazards for ultra runners. There are three creek crossings per loop. How deep the creek is depends on recent rains. Water depths were fairly similar the last two years. The first crossing was one where your shoes definitely got wet.



Your feet could stay relatively dry on the second and third creek crossings. This is number two. Andy is correct. Some rocks are wobbly or slick.

The weather was great with high temperatures around 60 degrees. It was windy in the afternoon but the hills and trees blocked the wind on most of the course. The full moon helped night navigation.



If you were around long enough, you could have enjoyed a beautiful sunset.



The temperatures were in the thirties during the night but then there was a place to warm up. Don't get too comfortable by the fire before the race is over.

That is the end of my picture story. The pictures were taken by my son, Mark Hoyer.

*If you would like a copy of a picture let me know.
You can e-mail me at big_red_fan@hotmail.com*

If you have a question, let me know.

If you have advice for me after reading my story below, let me know.

THE LOW MILEAGE TRAINING

I average 4-5 miles per day running. I also cross train, on average, an equal amount of time on the exercise bike or walking. I haven't been doing any speed work. My runs will vary from zero to thirty miles. I run five or six days a week. I get in a 20-30 mile run once and maybe twice a month. My bike time is usually spent spinning with little resistance. I spend the time on the bike watching TV or reading. It may not be a quality workout but it is extra time that my legs are moving. I know this is toward the low end of training for ultra people but it fits my situation. I'd enjoy running all day but my legs and family life would object. Maybe I'll do better this year. I have done fairly well with only these few miles. I have run a sub nine hour 50 mile on an "easy" course. I did well in the McNaughton 100 for a long time – story below.

THE RACE

I decided to make the McNaughton Park trail run my first 100 mile attempt after running three 50 mile races. I came to Illinois from Nebraska because 1) I got free lodging from my sister-in-law 2) I was familiar with the course from last year's 50 mile 3) I like lots of aid stations and this one has plenty plus some crew access 4) I wondered about getting lost in the dark and this course is hard to get lost on especially after several loops in the light 5) I have a dream about doing a mountain 100 and these hills would be a good start 6) Andy Weinberg is the race director.

The plan was to walk all the hills. That meant any incline that involved more than just a couple of steps. My first goal was to finish. My second goal was to finish in less than a day. Using the formula of multiplying your 50 mile time by 2.5 to 3 made the 24 hour finish seem unlikely. My 50 time here last year was 10:15. I could get under 24 hours using my "easy" course 50 time and the smaller multiplier. That seemed unfair especially since this was my first 100. I wrote down some lap times that would get me to the finish line in under a day but the plan was to just run easy and see what happens. I would not force a dictated pace.

The first 15 miles went great but then they should. It was early. I didn't know or care what place I was in.

My wife and son met me by the first creek crossing after parking by the dog run and walking in. They watched a couple of guys near the lead make a mistake. Do not try to cross a stream without slowing down. The water will slow your ankles more than the air slows your shoulders. Swimming at about 6:20 a.m. with temperatures in the thirties is not suggested. They also met me at approximately the five mile mark where they could park right next to the course. My great crew encouraged me at those two spots and the start / finish area all during the race. I went through 10 miles at 1:44 or just under 10.5 minute pace.

Miles 15-30 were not good. I started to feel tired and a little sore. To make matters much worse, diarrhea appeared and did not go away for about thirty miles. There were many pit stops in the bushes or an outhouse. I'm glad my crew was around to resupply toilet paper. Several days after the race I figured out that I took an occasional Gu early and may not have had enough water to dilute it in my system. I did remember during the race that when ever I felt tired and weak I was usually underweight and dehydrated. I upped my water intake and running became much better. Lap two was in 1:51 or just over 11 minute pace. Lap three was in 2:13 or over 13 minute pace. I knew I would hit the first wall around this point.

At mile thirty the words “quit early” had entered my mind as a possibility. Andy told me that I was in second. I soon found out I was actually tied for third but one in front of me planned to drop early. I couldn't drop when this close to the lead. I hung in there for twenty more miles and was in second at the 50 mile mark because two in front of me had dropped. The word was first place had stomach troubles. The chase was on! Loops four and five were both in 2:20 or 14 minute pace. I was at 10:28 for fifty miles and on target for a sub 24 hour. The race was exciting!

Lap six went fine in 2:22. Still just over 14 minute pace. I found out I was 26 minutes behind the lead. There was a long way to go and I could always hope for the best.

Lap seven went by in 2:24. Closer to 14.5 minute pace. I had been very steady with my times for the past forty miles. I had closed to just six minutes behind the lead. Jeff was struggling. I was steady. I was excited. With more than a marathon to go, anything could happen.

Lap eight I checked in with the aid stations and my crew to see if I was gaining on the leader. He was well aware that Nebraska was in pursuit. I was still running the flats and downhills and walking the uphills. It was a slower pace (now 2:41 or 16 minute pace) but I was still running close to as much as I was on the first lap. I wasn't gaining on first place.

I pulled in to the start / finish area at mile 80 and was told by my family that the leader was sitting by the fire having soup. Jeff came over and said hi. I was hoping he thought I was the eventual winner who finally chased him down. I was soon to find out that he was just gathering himself for a charge. I left the aid station in first place in a great mood. It was still early. Things could change. Twenty miles to go. Two sub three hour laps would give me a sub 24 hour first 100 mile run!

Things got tougher during miles 81-85. This part of the course has the worst hills. I was moving okay and got to the 85 mile mark in 1:25 or ahead of 3:00 pace for the lap. The bad news was that a flashlight was catching me the last few minutes. As I grabbed a new water bottle, Jeff said hi again as he raced by. Congratulations Jeff Heasley. He had picked up the pace and went on to finish in just over 23 hours.

The last few hills had finally killed my legs. Running was very hard. There was more walking. First place was out of sight and the 24 hour finish was in doubt. I tried to get going again in miles 86 & 87 but had to walk even more. I couldn't force myself to run at all during miles 88-90. I was walking at 30 minutes per mile. My last lap was 3:15. My mind gave up.

I came into the start / finish area at mile 90 and told my family I was done. They looked at me and did not argue. Walking the last lap would have been very slow. I think I could have finished but I didn't care. I forgot what I had read about ultras. Finishing a race may be painful, but not finishing a race is more painful. Within 24 hours after my DNF, I knew they were right. It turns out that if I could have walked the last ten miles in under six hours, I would have finished second.

I started getting mad at myself for giving up. I know I could have done it. I knew I could have done it when I quit at 3 a.m. but I just did not care at that time.

I am still mad at myself but I am moving on. I am using the feeling of a DNF as motivation to train a little more diligently in the upcoming months. I need to train my legs, my head and my stomach. I have trouble eating much food when running. The diarrhea made me cut back while trying to solve the problem. I estimate I averaged 500 calories per ten miles while burning 1000 calories each lap. That would put me 4500 calories down for the day when I stopped. I was lucky to make it as far as I did. I need to get in more hill training. I need to get tougher mentally.

I am 47 years old and don't know how long I will run ultras. I do know that I will finish a 100 mile race before my ultra career is over!