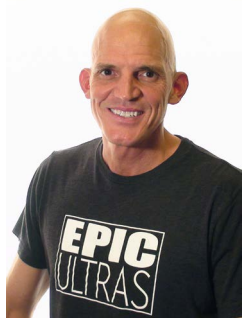


# EPIC ULTRAS NEWS



## Welcome From Epic Ultras Founder, Eric Steele



Welcome to the 25th issue of Epic Ultra News. What an incredibly exciting past month it has been! First off, due to our own "In House" Blogger, Zach Adams, diligent efforts, we have secured Marshall Ulrich to speak at our Inaugural Fall Ultra Extravaganza, scheduled for October 24th in Ottawa (KS), on the beautiful Flint Hills & Prairie Spirit Rails-to-Trails. We have distance options for all levels with a 50K, 40 Mile, 50 Mile & 100 Mile, on a primarily crushed gravel surface, lined with a shaded tree canopy that provides an absolutely spectacular array of stunning fall foliage. We are currently at nearly 75% capacity and chances are high we will "sell out" so don't wait much longer. Plus, you won't want to miss hearing one of the quintessential ultrarunning legends, Mr. Marshall Ulrich's, presentation, along with him signing copies of his book and being there for the start of all our events on

Saturday morning. By the way, if you don't know who Marshall Ulrich is, just do a quick Internet search and you will quickly discover why you won't want to miss out on this! Next, it was my sincere honor to crew and pace for our own "In House" Blogger and my brother from another mother, Mr. Zach Adams, in his first attempt at the Leadville Trail 100 a couple of weeks ago. I made the trip with two other ultrarunners and good friends, Zach's wife, Candi, and Ryan Schwatken. Aside from us all collectively crewing Zach throughout the race, we each took turns pacing him during the second half from the little town of Winfield back to the red-carpeted finish line at 6th & Harrison street where he finished with less than 30 minutes to spare on Sunday morning in a time of 29:30:48, once again, in his FIRST ATTEMPT...simply outstanding!!! It had been 16 years since I finished the LT100 back in 1999 in a time of 29:48:19 on my third attempt, so I was extremely honored and proud to have been chosen by Zach to play a small part in his MOST EPIC finish a couple of weeks ago at the legendary "Race Across The Sky!" You can read all about Zach's EPIC journey at the LT100 in GREAT detail as it is our only article in this month's newsletter...AND our featured runner this month is recent Badwater Champion, Hammer sponsored athlete, ultrarunning badass and all around nice guy, 27-year old, Mr. Pete Kostelnick, from Lincoln, Nebraska. Enjoy!

Be Epic,  
Eric

## September 2015...In This Issue

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## Our Mission

The primary mission of EPIC ULTRAS is to organize, manage, facilitate and deliver the highest quality ultrarunning events in the world. Our vision is to provide an environment that strongly encourages runners of ALL ability levels to discover, nurture and maintain their own personal greatness and "Be Epic" while co-creating EPIC "ultrarunning experiences of a lifetime" with us!





# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Kansas Rails-to-Trails Fall Ultra Extravaganza

R2T 100 Mile (Flint Hills & Prairie Spirit Trails)  
Prairie Spirit Trail Fall Classic 50 Mile  
Flint Hills Trail Fall Classic 40 Mile  
Prairie Spirit Trail Fall Classic 50K  
October 24, 2015 - Ottawa, KS



*Featuring  
Ultrarunning Legend &  
Honorary Guest Speaker:*  
**MARSHALL ULRICH**

## Kansas Rails-to-Trails Fall Ultra Extravaganza

Choose from your choice of four race distances all set on the Prairie Spirit Trail, Flint Hills Trail or BOTH. With a 50K, 40 Mile, 50 Mile and 100 Mile option, this ultra event really lives up to the name "Ultra Extravaganza"!

### Course Description

All of our race distances that make up the Kansas Rails-to-Trails Fall Ultra Extravaganza are great ultras for first timers, as they are all relatively flat and easy courses...they are also certainly excellent courses for more experienced ultrarunners looking to set a PR at any one of the four distances we are offering. Equally appealing for more social runners is the 8-10 foot wide trail, as it allows runners to easily move along the trail 3-4 abreast at any given time...in addition to the extremely easy to find (and get to) multiple crew access points on all of the courses, along with plenty of room for your crew to hang out and relax while cheering you on...AND the spectacular fall foliage along all four course routes is "absolutely stunning" this time of the year, to put it mildly!

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 26, 2015  
**SOLD OUT**  
FlatRock  
50K/25K

October 24, 2015  
Ultra Extravaganza  
100M/50M/40M/50K

January 2, 2016  
WinterRock  
25K/12K

April 2, 2016  
Prairie Spirit Trail  
100M/50M

April 30, 2016  
FlatRock 101  
101K

May 28, 2016  
Flint Hills Trail  
40M/Marathon

July 9, 2016  
Honey Badger  
100M

All EPIC ULTRA events  
sponsored by:





# Newsletter Bios



## Zach Adams - Blogger Extraordinaire

Zach's been competing in ultras since 2010 and is most certainly an EPIC ultrarunner. He loves running and has the sense of humor that Epic Ultras thrives upon! He's been our blog contributor since our inception and has a true passion for this sport. If you're easily offended, well, read his blog and get pissed, or don't! He "calls it like he sees it" and has no shame in doing so. Visit page six to "get a taste" of Zach's most Epic humor about our sport!



## Peter Kostelnick - Featured Runner

*In his own words.*

I ran a couple years of cross country and track in high school, but then gave up running in college until I was up 30-40 pounds as a senior. I worked my way up to a marathon before I graduated, and figured that was it--until I met my wife, who got me interested in running again. From there, I had a goal of Boston, then running an ultra, and then a whole new world came about. My marathon PR is 2:41, and I also enjoy running shorter distances like 10K's/5K's from time to time..



## Epic Ultras Needs Your Help

Epic Ultras needs YOUR HELP! With the expansion of events on the EU race calendar and the increasing popularity and participation in our beloved sport of ultrarunning, we need to add to the Epic Ultras Brigade. Just because you may not be able to run every event you would like does not mean you can't be a part of Epic Ultra's mission to "co-create experiences of a lifetime". It takes amazing people to pull off the absolute BEST events you will find ANYWHERE. By working at an aid station and assisting in other race day duties, not only will you be a part of the Epic Ultras Brigade, you may even earn your way into an Epic Ultras event. To find out more go to:

[www.epicultras.com/brigade](http://www.epicultras.com/brigade).

Thank You!

# EPIC ULTRAS



# The Race Across The Sky

By Zach Adams

## Leadville Trail 100

### *Intro*

"The Race Across the Sky." LT100. Leadville. Whatever you call it, it is now in the books for 2015. Less than half of the nearly 650 brave runners from all over the world who started the race managed to power themselves across the finish under the 30 hour time limit. I was the 281st finisher of the 2015 Leadville Trail 100, earning a finisher's medal and shiny new buckle on my first attempt. To be completely honest, I am still amazed by this fact. There were several points during this race where I just didn't think that I was a strong enough runner to move fast enough to stay ahead of the cutoffs. While I never seriously contemplated quitting, I several times resigned myself to the fact that the next aid station would probably be my last before my time ran out. But first, let's rewind a few months and lay the groundwork and build the context of this ultra-adventure.

### *The Lottery*

This was the first year that the race had moved to a lottery based entry. It is not weighted, requires no qualifier, and is purely random – as far as I know. It was pretty simple, once December rolled around, you would pay your \$15.00 and cross your fingers. In January I received a congratulations email that I had been selected and needed to confirm, which I immediately did. I was totally geeked up and telling anyone who would listen that my flatlander ass had gained entry to one of the oldest and most well-known 100 mile mountain ultras in the country. In about 8 months I would be climbing over the Rocky Mountains on foot, digging as deep as I could dig to find that "inexhaustible well of grit, guts, and determination" that founder Ken Chlouber so famously references each year at the pre-race meeting. Eight months is a long time to focus, train, and plan toward a single goal. This takes us to training.

### *Training*

I was dedicated to working hard. I was dedicated to the idea of doing everything in my power to give myself a chance at success. Hard work was the core strategy of my training plan. I decided on running faster, higher intensity miles but reducing the total number of miles in a traditional 100 miler plan. My point was that I had a strong mileage base and knew I could power hike a good long time if need be. What I needed was the power to be able to make the long, steep climbs Leadville is notorious for without eating up a massive amount of time. Scattered throughout the months of January, I also ran several races that broke up the cycle, and each forcing me to take a step-back week after a hard effort. I did 25k, (2) 50K, (2) 6hr timed, 50 mile, 60 mile track, 101K, and 30 miles of pacing on a road race. Nearly all of these efforts

# Featured Runner - Peter Kostelnick

## The Basics

**Date of Birth:** 9/12/1987  
**Place of Birth:** Boone, IA  
**Currently Residing:** Lincoln, NE  
**Marital Status:** Married  
**Job(s):** Financial Analyst  
**Children:** None  
**Height:** 5'10"  
**Weight:** 140  
**Shoe Size:** 10.5  
**Best Physical Feature:** GI Joe Calves.  
**Worst Physical Feature:** Slight beer gut.  
**Religion:** Catholic  
**Political Affiliation:** No BS Libertarian  
**Educational Background:** Bachelor's in Finance & International Business, Iowa State University.  
**Personal Strength(s):** Dedication, ability to carry on a task (like running) until everyone else has given up.  
**Personal Weakness(es):** Taking a first step.  
**Make Of Car You Drive:** '02 Dodge Neon  
**Make Of Car You Would Like To Drive:** '15 Escalade  
**Pets:** Two cats.

## Ultra Stuff

**# Years Running Ultras:** 4  
**# Ultras Finished:** 22  
**Best Ultra Performance(s):** 2015 Badwater 135 - 1st place  
**Most Memorable Ultra:** 2011 Brew to Brew - first ultra.  
**Typical Training Week(s) Before A Major Race:** Depends on the race, but usually 100+ miles.  
**Injuries:** IT band stuff, haven't had it in awhile, knock on wood.  
**Ultrarunning Idol:** Marshall Ulrich  
**Why Do You Run Ultras:** The challenge. "It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. The hard... is what makes it great."  
**Advice For Other Ultrarunners:** One second you can be dying, but the next you can be flying. You're never feeling as good or bad as you think you feel. If you feel great, hold back a bit... if you feel bad, push thru it.

## Spare Time

**Book Currently Reading:** A Few Degrees From Hell  
**Hobbies:** Softball, fishing, fantasy baseball/basketball/football  
**Collections:** Belt buckles/medals from races, shot glasses

## Dislikes / Fears

**Least Liked Household Chore:** Cleaning  
**Pet Peeve:** People who can only talk to you by complaining about something.  
**Greatest Fear:** Snakes

## Favorites

**Favorite Author:** Jon Krakauer  
**Favorite Book:** Into the Wild  
**Favorite Non-running Magazine:** Teen Vogue  
**Favorite Movie:** Dumb and Dumber  
**Favorite TV Show:** Scrubs  
**Favorite Actor/Actress:** Owen Wilson  
**Favorite Music:** Anything but Justin Timberlake.  
**Favorite Musical Performer:** Tom Petty  
**Favorite Artist:** Goo Goo Dolls  
**Favorite Spectator Sport:** College basketball  
**Favorite Subject in School:** Geography/worldly topics  
**Favorite Game:** Knockout (basketball)  
**Favorite Vacation Destination:** Grand Canyon or Santorini  
**Favorite Time Of Day:** Night  
**Favorite Item Of Clothing:** Jorts  
**Favorite Running Shoe:** Hoka Cliftons  
**Food/Drink During An Ultra:** Avocado with Potato Chips/Mt. Dew.  
**Favorite Food/Drink Before An Ultra:** Eggs and hashbrowns/Water.  
**Food/Drink After An Ultra:** Pizza/Beer  
**Favorite Crew Person(s):** Kyle Clouston  
**Favorite Pacer:** David Ponak  
**Favorite Place To Run:** Anywhere on an island  
**Favorite Type Of Running Surface:** Road  
**Favorite Famous Quote:** "The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun."

## Achievements / Goals / Memories

**Personal Hero:** Billy Mills  
**Personal Philosophy:** Always be on a road to somewhere.  
**Short-Term Goal:** Make US 24 hour team.  
**Long-Term Goal:** Break trans-US running record (46 days).  
**Most Prized Possession:** Belt buckles.  
**Most Proud Achievement:** Convincing my wife to marry me.  
**Happiest Memory:** Marrying my wife.  
**Secret Ambition/Fantasy:** Be on a season of Survivor or The Amazing Race.  
**Greatest Adventure:** Drive from KC to Grand Canyon, run Rim2Rim2Rim in a day, drive back to KC = one Memorial Day weekend.





# The Race Across The Sky

*...continued from page 4*

ended up as new PRs for the course or distance. Two highlights were an 8:40 50 mile finish at Prairie Spirit and a 10th overall sub 5 hour 50K at War Eagle in Arkansas. One major observation throughout this process: Staying focused on a single race for 8 months is very challenging. Breaking the time into sections with step-stone goals (races) was definitely helpful.

## Race Week

The last 10 days or before the race were brutal for me. The steep drop-off of training miles and idle time resulted in me damn near driving myself nuts. Over-thinking, over-analyzing, and just pure anxiety were the central theme of this time period. I had trouble focusing on anything not related to the race and sleeping at night got really restless and somewhat frustrating – to be honest – it really sucked. But, eventually the time passed, the race van was packed, and by 8:30am on Thursday, August 20th 2015 we were on the long desolate road across Western Kansas that would eventually take us to Leadville Colorado.

## Road Trip

Candi had taken care of most of the packing and organizing of our gear and aid stuff that we would need for the race. She did an excellent job at making sure we had everything we would need, without filling all of our bags and the van with a bunch of crap we wouldn't use. On top of being a master at logistics, my wife is a total badass who can go for days with almost no sleep and does not know the meaning of the word "quit". She can crew and pace with the very best of them – and I am DAMN GLAD she is heading up my Leadville crew. I would definitely need her if I stood a snowballs chance in hell to finish under 30 hours – plus she is really hot!

Ryan showed up well before the scheduled time, and only a few minutes behind "schedule" we hit the road. Ryan Schwatken is a fairly new ultrarunner, but has already notched several 50K finishes, 101K at FlatRock, and a very gutsy 50 mile effort where he demonstrated a toughness and tenacity that I am not sure that I have seen matched. Ryan made it to that finish despite nearly EVERYTHING going wrong for him and walking 20 miles on two of the largest blisters I have ever seen. Ryan has also crewed

# 2015 FlatRock Triple Crown

The 2015 FlatRock Triple Crown Series was 2/3 of complete and we currently have 18 hard core trail runners still on track to receive the title of: "2015 FlatRock Triple Crown Honoree" They are: Zach Adams, Dave Box, Shay Caffey, Polly Choate, Krystle Dalke, Carson Galloway, Joseph Galloway, Dennis Haig, Matthew Hall, Dave Meeth, Michael Mora, Debra Norman, Candi Paulin, Tom Rogers, Ken Schramm, Ryan Schwatken, Brian Smith, and Henry Yount. Upon completion of the 50K at our SOLD OUT Flagship event - FlatRock in September - each will receive special recognition, an award, and be only the third group honored into the "FlatRock Triple Crown Series"!



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# The Race Across The Sky

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for me before – taking on the horrendous driving responsibilities at Ozark Trail last fall. He is a solid addition to any 100 mile pace/crew and a great friend.

After five stops in two hours to drain the excess hydration, our first real stop was Wichita to pick up one of the most undeniably entertaining and inspiring humans I have ever met, Mr. Epic Ultras himself - Eric Steele. Eric has been running ultras himself for more than 20 years and now puts on the best ultras in the Midwest. Eric also earned his own Leadville buckle some 15+ years ago. A fountain of ultrarunning knowledge and motivation, Eric is more importantly my brother-from-another-mother. We picked up Eric and met with another Wichita ultrarunner, and good friend, Dave Meeth for lunch – who provided us with a bunch of great energy and mojo, wishing us luck and sending us on our way.

The drive out to Colorado was mostly uneventful and consisted of food and pit stops. You see, I was given the following advice: “The best way to avoid altitude sickness is to be massively hydrated.” I followed that advice before a training trip to the mountains in July and it worked perfectly. The downside is having to stop every 50 miles in order to keep your bladder from bursting.

After a long drive beginning in Southeastern Kansas and finishing up in the haze obscured mountains (courtesy of the California wildfires) of the high country of Colorado, we arrived at The New Summit Inn in Frisco. We got checked in and relaxed in our room. Ryan and Eric went on a beer run and watched some local teenager wiggle on the ground outside of the hotel. This is its own story, but basically they supposed he had too much of the newly legalized recreational “Colorado herbage”. I slept decently, knowing I still had one more day before the race started and that basically everything I could do was already done.

## Pre-Race

Friday would be the first time we drove into Leadville as a team. We arrived at the packet pickup on Harrison Street and I got my swag bag complete

## The All New Epic Ultras Mobile App



Be sure to check out the ALL NEW Epic Ultras mobile app on the iTunes Store and Google Play store! You can easily access race information, Epic Ultras social media sites, as well as special discounts and a TRULY UNIQUE Customer Loyalty Program. For each Epic Ultras event you run, you will get your virtual card “digitally punched” eventually earning yourself a totally FREE entry into ANY Epic Ultras event. Learn more today by downloading the app to your IOS or Android smartphone or tablet!

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# The Race Across The Sky

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with my #5 bib. I was also given a wristband with name, d.o.b, and relative medical info. This band signifies your entry into the race, if you quit or miss a cutoff, they cut it off. If the band is cut, your race is over. After getting checked in, we had a couple hours before the pre-race meeting, so of course, we ate. After breakfast we walked around checking out the town. Leadville has a really touristy yet throwback kind of feel to it, and the streets were filled up with runners, their crews, and family members. I remember feeling a really cool vibe as though we were all on the verge of something pretty important. At Lake County High School gym, completely surrounded by a massive herd of runners and crew, the pre-race briefing had the hairs on my neck standing on end. The speakers featured Dr. John, the funny medical director, who was giving out great last minute advice in a very funny and most entertaining way, followed by race founder Ken Chlouber who has the ability to motivate a large crowd with just a few words. According to this old cowboy (and 10+ time Leadville 100 finisher), "You are better than you think you are and can do more than you think you can do." At the end of the meeting, I fully believed him. I took his oath and repeated out loud, "I commit to NOT QUIT." After the meeting was over, we drove out to the village of Twin Lakes where I would have aid available at mile 40 and 60. It is also the final aid station before the round trip over Hope Pass. After a while driving in the mountains, we ended up back in Frisco eating one of my favorite pre-race meals; KFC. Finger. Lickin'. Good. After a short trip to the store to get ice and water and we ended up back at our lodge and began to get my gear ready for the early (more like middle of the night) wake-up call needed to get us to the 4am start line on time. I had a couple pre-celebratory beers with Eric and Ryan, and Candi helped me get my race clothes ready and my race vest loaded for action – ensuring I didn't end up at the start line with two left socks, no underwear, and missing a glove. Did I mention how great she was?

## TIME TO RACE!

### *Start to May Queen*

The start of the race was pretty chilly (35-40 degrees), but Ryan let me wear his hoodie for the 20 minutes or so we waited around the start line. At exactly 4:00am, Ken blasted his shotgun signaling the start of the race. More than 600 unacquainted best friends all sharing a single goal, we effortlessly rolled downhill and out of town eventually getting to Turquoise Lake where the trail became single track. We were in an extremely long conga-line but somehow I never felt like I was being either pushed or held up. It was quiet and





# The Race Across The Sky

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dark, not much chatter. The first 2 hours and 22 minutes went by in a flash, and before you know it I had made half a loop around the lake and was at the May Queen aid station 13.5 miles into the race. I was quickly in and out of May Queen, filling my bottles and grabbing a bit of food. We had decided in advance that the crew would skip this stop because 1.) I really wouldn't need anything. 2.) Driving out to this aid station is a pain in the ass on a single road with 600 other crews. It was the least I could do for my crew considering what they were doing for me. It was a good decision

as I didn't even stay at the aid station for a full minute. My plan was well established from the start – I figured I could maintain the required pace, but would not have much extra time to screw around at aid stops – I kept telling myself to plan ahead, get what you need, and move your ass on down the trail.

## *May Queen to Outward Bound*

The first good climb is in this section on a bit of gnarly single track that takes you up to some dirt roads to get to the top of Sugarloaf. I mixed in some good powerhiking here at the steeper spots and ran what I could without sending my heart into an explosive range. Got rained on a bit as a little thunder shower rolled through. It was mostly overcast and but the sprinkle did seem to knock out the smoky haze somewhat. Eventually I crested the top of Sugarloaf Mountain and got to bomb down the section known as Powerline. Powerline is exactly what it sounds like, a trail/jeep/maintenance access road that runs under the power lines. No switchbacks, it can be very, very steep at times. I was trying to hold myself back so I didn't trash my quads, but found it very difficult to run slow. It was a lot of fun blasting down the side of the mountain! At the base was a couple miles of road that led past the Fish Hatchery (previous site of this aid station) to the Outward Bound aid station. This was basically set up off the road in a pasture. Candi, Eric and Ryan were here standing by the timing chute ready to crew me for the first time of the day. They took my trash, filled my bottles, and restocked my vest. This was roughly 24 miles



# The Race Across The Sky

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into the race, and I still was not in need of much, so I was in and out of OB very quickly and headed on toward Halfpipe. Knowing the first 40 miles of the race are the “easiest”, I wanted to make the most of them, without pushing too hard. That is a difficult balance to find, but I was for the most part sticking with my plan.

## ***OB to Half Pipe***

This section kind of sucked. Leaving OB was a section of mowed grass leading across the pasture, followed by a section of pavement, finally followed by a forest road before getting to Half Pipe. It was pretty hot and dusty and I was firmly in my first rough patch, but managed to eat and drink my way through it. Along this section there was an alternate crew access point and I got to see my people for a couple minutes, which I did not expect. They filled me up, but more importantly they perked me up, which I was definitely needing at that point. Arriving in Half Pipe at the 50K mark in just a couple minutes under 6 hours, I was still right at my goal time. I am not really sure what the hell Half Pipe is, but it was a pretty cool aid station, just not crew accessible – so needless to say, I didn’t lounge around here very long. I grabbed a handful of GU’s, my primary fuel source, and hit the dusty trail.

## ***Half Pipe to Twin Lakes***

Once you leave Half Pipe it is a pretty steady climb for about 5 miles. Nothing real steep, just kind of always going up, and it is mostly not-really-that-technical single track. I got into a pretty good groove here, but was a little slower than I felt, I am guessing it was due to the steady uphill. It is 8.5 miles to TL but seems like at least 15. There was a small outpost on Mt. Elbert sponsored by CamelBak where they had fluids, but otherwise there is not much to break up this chunk. I was ok mentally but was a bit sleepy and kind of slow, which led to me getting to Twin Lakes at noon, about 20 minutes behind my goal time, but well within the cutoff. This aid station was freaking huge! I am telling you it was like a circus of people and shelters about a half mile long. The aid station was in an old fire station, or at least the bays where you park firetrucks. I found my crew, and they took expert care of me, getting some different foods in me. I think I managed to eat a banana and some mixed fruit along with some watermelon and sandwich quarters. It definitely felt like lunchtime, and I hit the aid table like an all you can eat buffet.

## ***Twin Lakes to Winfield***

Twin Lakes is the last stop before going up and over Hope Pass. In a span of about 5 miles, runners ascend from 9200’ to 12,600’ above sea level on rocky, single track trails. To make it even more fun, leading up to the climb, adventurous runners get to wade through knee deep water for about ½ of a mile after leaving the aid station to get to the base of the mountain. Once you get just above the tree line is the Hopeless aid station. This crazy group of volunteers pack all supplies up on llamas. Yes, llamas.

# The Race Across The Sky

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They are an awesome bunch and made the best potato soup on the course. I fought like hell to get up the mountain – getting passed by a lot of folks who were either a.) Much better climbers than me. b.) Much better at high altitude than me. 3.) BOTH. Whatever the case, I just kept hammering away at the mountain, hiking 50-100 yards and leaning on a tree or sitting on a rock for 6 deep breaths. I was really struggling to keep my heartrate below about 5900 bpm. Eventually I made it to the Hopeless aid station, albeit much slower than I would have liked. I ate some soup and sandwiches, filled my bottles and sat for 3 minutes (I timed it). One would assume that since you made it to the aid station, it would be time to head on down the back side.... Nope... There are probably another 500 or so feet to climb before reaching the summit on some very steep switchbacks. Once cresting Hope Pass, I got to stare in awe for miles in both directions before beginning the steep ascent that would take me to Winfield and the half way point of this very tough race. The back side of Hope Pass is super steep, and I fell on my ass more than once. It was steep enough that I was not doing too much running, feeling like I would end up rolling off the side of the mountain and die should I catch my toe. At the base of the back side, the course turns and heads to the aid station that marks the turn around, and I thought it was much closer than it actually was. This section of the race was easily the most painful, depressing, and not very much fun part of the entire adventure. I came hauling my out-of-water-not-eating-anything-ass into Winfield at just before 4:45pm. The cutoff here was “gone by 6 pm”, and to be honest, I did not know if I would be ready to leave in time. I had planned on being here by 3:45 but took an ass-whoopin’ climbing up and down Hope. Ken Chlouber had quoted Mike Tyson at the pre-race meeting, “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.” That had proved so true, and my jaw hurt like hell from the uppercut that the mountain gave me. Coming up the road I was greeted by my wonderful wife who had had been pacing nervously, waiting for me to arrive. I handed her my bottles and said, “Fix me.” She asked what was wrong, but honestly I was pretty loopy and said I wasn’t sure. Our plan had been made in advance, that WHEN I began to struggle, they were to force-feed me, take no excuses and kick my ass down the trail. Ryan and Candi were giving me food to eat (not options) while Eric was getting ready to pace. I asked for my knee braces because it hurt to run down – not a good sign when you are HALF way through a 100 mile mountain race. I also took an Aleve and drained a bottle of Sustained Energy (THANK YOU HAMMER NUTRITION). After 15 minutes and what felt like an eternity, they helped me get up of the ground and start walking me out of the aid station. This is where I could say that my crew saved my race, but it would actually be more accurate to say that this is where they STARTED saving my race – details to follow.

## ***Winfield to Twin Lakes***

I have now passed half way, and seen the entire Leadville Trail 100 course. I have Eric Steele pacing me for at least the next 10.5 miles back to Twin Lakes, with only 2 things standing in our way. The first is a big-ass mountain and the second is a 9:45pm cutoff. We left Winfield at exactly 5:01pm and the way I



# The Race Across The Sky

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was feeling I might not make it back up Hope Pass before 9:45pm! As I had experienced in other ultras, I began to feel much better very quickly after taking in food and fluids. A combination of having someone like Eric to leech energy off of and the food I had ingested breathed new life back into me. After a while we passed people still headed to the turn and it hit me that they would not be making the return trip. They would be timed out at Winfield and their LT100 dreams would be over for the day. While I felt bad for them, it also lit a fire under me that I still had a chance and that I needed to push hard if I really wanted that belt buckle. Digging deep is a central theme of Leadville, and that is exactly what I did. I dug as deep as I ever had and propelled myself back up the steep side of Hope Pass. The front is steep, but the back side is a fucking wall. With the help of Eric's expert singing and hilarious dirty limericks echoing on the mountain, we made it back to the top of Hope Pass, passing several runners on the climb. At this point I was feeling GREAT, literally and figuratively on top of the world! We stopped for a bite at Hopeless before jetting on down the mountain. Everything was going perfectly, and I was making good time as the sun went down. Once getting back under the tree line, it started getting dark very quickly. Eric and I bantering back and forth, tired legs, and dim trails led to a couple of falls fairly close to the bottom. Both times I rolled my left ankle just a bit, but both times it burned for a minute but was OK. We crossed the meadow and eventually made it back to the water crossing which at mile 60 felt pretty damn good to me. Upon arrival back at the Twin Lakes aid station the crew was excited and glad to see me feeling so much better. I was in at about 9:00pm, 45 minutes ahead of the cutoff. I thanked Ryan and Candi for saving me at Winfield and started eating. And eating. I also lubed up my feet and put on fresh socks and shoes. Amazingly, a fresh pair of socks and shoes can really give you a nice boost. Ryan was all set to pace, and after maybe 8 minutes I was headed toward Half Pipe and the 69 mile point – by way of a long climb up Mt. Elbert.

## ***Twin Lakes to Half Pipe***

There is not too much to say about this section aside from the fact that right after round tripping Hope Pass, you have about a 3 mile section of single track that gains about 1400 feet. To put this in perspective, that is only about 100 feet less than the Powerline climb at mile 80. Not sure why this section does not get more attention, but it is pretty rough. I had been warned by a number of people to be ready for it, and I was. The plan was to hike it as hard as we could and then try and make up some time on the 5.5 mile descent into Half Pipe. We stuck with the plan, and Ryan pushed me whenever he could, and always kept me eating on schedule, the method Eric had started on his section. This worked great, and my energy never lagged too much. We leapfrogged the same 12-20 people for the entire section into Half Pipe, and saw one guy puke at least 10 times. I just kept thinking, "I am tired, but I freaking glad I am not THAT GUY." I was really slowing down at this point, but we still managed to gain back a few minutes and got farther ahead of the 1:15am cutoff. We got to Half Pipe and almost exactly midnight and I sat

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for a minute while Ryan got me broth and filled my bottles. I knew it was another 6.5 miles to get back to Outward Bound, which means it was almost time to climb the dreaded Powerline. It also meant that Candi would be pacing me soon, which is always a huge boost for me.

## ***Half Pipe to Outward Bound***

This section was weird. The road was smooth, dusty and gray. I felt like we were running on the moon, although my legs did not agree that it was moon gravity. Ryan eventually pulled out a handheld flashlight and it was super bright and helped a great deal to give depth to the world. I was in a hazy, dreamlike state and just kept shuffling along at this point – eating when Ryan said eat, shuffling when he said run. It seemed like no time before we covered 3 miles and returned to the alternate crew access point, which was good, because I was getting very sick of GU gels and was having a bit of trouble swallowing them. Candi and Eric mixed me up a bottle of Sustained Energy, and it was a great boost. We got in and out and made good time toward the OB aid station. A couple miles before the aid station we got to the open area out of the wooded mountain and it got cold. To me it felt as if the temperature had dropped 25 degrees. I was shivering and only had a light jacket on, and zipping it up only helped a little. Thankfully, Ryan had his rain jacket stowed on his pack and let me wear it. Chances are that I would have been battling hypothermia had he not had it. So once again, the crew just kept on saving my race. We got to OB a full hour before the cut-off at almost exactly 2am. Candi was on deck and ready to run! I sat and gathered myself for a minute and they briefed me on time, cutoff, and what I would need to do to get my buckle. It seemed impossible that I could go another 20 miles as tired as I was feeling, but I had long ago decided that it didn't matter what the "outlook" was- I was just going to keep going until I either crossed the finish line or they told me I missed the cutoff and I was pulled.

## ***Outward Bound to May Queen***

Leaving OB at 2am means I would have 4 hours and 30 minutes to get up and over Powerline and back to May Queen, a section about 11 miles long. Aside from the steep-as-shit climb up Powerline (with 80 mountain miles on your body), there is also a section of really technical single track just waiting to twist your ankles and pop your knees for you. Also, if you get to May Queen at the 6:30am cutoff, that only leaves you 3:30 to cover the last half marathon which is either single track or going uphill at a fairly steep slope. 3:30 sounds like a lot to do a half marathon, but trust me, at the end of a Leadville, it sounds like a sprint. Candi prodded me out of the aid station and it was up the road until we got back to the Powerline trail. I took the advice of a few Leadville veterans and just kept grinding. Don't look up to the top – just focus on the next 50 feet - then do it again. Candi did a mixture of cheering me on and challenging me to push harder. She is as good a pacer as she is wife, and I am sure glad she is mine. We grinded away at the climb and I rested when my heartrate got too high. Eventually, after the 200 or so false summits, we

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made it! At the top was an oasis we were not expecting – a party on the mountain masquerading as an aid station. While I am pretty sure this is not an officially sanctioned stop, I was glad it was there. Folks were partying their asses off and I only wish I felt good enough to sample the libations. We burned down the back side of Sugarloaf at a nice interval shuffle and eventually got back to the single track. It was slow going, but eventually we made it back to the road into May Queen shortly before 6am.

## ***May Queen to Finish***

Coming into MQ, the crew was there to meet us and take care of us as they had done all day and night. Eric and Ryan filled my bottles while I used the porta-John. I felt like time was running out and was somewhat in panic mode, even though I had 4 hours to cover the last 13.5 miles. I knew I had slowed down a lot and desperately did not want to be coming up 6th street as time expired. Candi gave me a Red Bull and told me when it was gone, we were running until we got back off the road and onto the trail. As we took off, a guy said, "Great job, but you need to RUN some around the lake, you need the time!" It was strange how hearing it from someone else can light a fire, and it did. We took off and actually knocked down a 12 minute mile in the first time since very early in the race. Candi told me to just take what the trail



gives, and that is exactly what we did. We were able to run most of the way back around Turquoise Lake at about 15 minute mile pace, pretty good for 90 some miles into a race, over rolling single track. We got a surprise from Eric and Ryan at Tabor boat ramp, they had stopped just to cheer us on and ask if we needed anything, but we just took a hug and rolled on. After we finally came up off the trail and onto the road, it feels like you should be done... but you are NOT. I was also warned about this, and just kept telling myself that we are close, but not there yet. Time wise we were in pretty good shape and I realized in my mind I could walk the entire rest of the race and get the finish, but still had this strange feeling that something bad could still happen. We jogged/walked intervals off and on and I marveled at how damn steep these hills were while getting ever closer to town. We finally came off the last long dirt road hill and got back onto the pavement that would become 6th street and lead us to the finish line. In the last mile, Eric and Ryan joined Candi and I as we marched proudly toward the red carpet and ultimately the finish



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line. As we looked up the hill and saw runners and their families crossing the finish, it hit me for the first time that I was actually going to do this. With the help of my wife and best friends, we were going to make my Leadville dream a reality. We joined hands in unity, raised them in the air, and crossed the finish line together with about 30 minutes to spare. After a round of hugs for my team, Marilee hung the medal around my neck and Ken gave me a big sweaty hug. Needless to say it was a long, difficult adventure and that moment crossing the finish line is most definitely one that I will never forget.

