

Mt Taylor has been on my bucket list for years, and finally 2017 proved to be the time to get 'er done.

Friends commented that it was such a shame that we had some "weather" this year...you didn't get the views and all that usually come with this run. I guess I don't know what was missing but the "views" we did have were stunning. The surreal climb up the meadows leading to the summit, the inches of hail lying on beds of golden aspen, and then the opening, sweeping views of the lands below on the final descent to the finish...it all made for an exhilarating run. I'm sure the clear blue sky days are stunning and the vast, expansive views must be incredible, but you could say that this added elements of fog, hail, rain and wind added to the experience. Obviously, the views are different – bigger and broader, I suppose – on a clearer day but the experience on Mt Taylor on race day 2017 was something to remember.

All the runners gathered at Rock Tank Shelter for an early start, 6:30 was the target, and we all wondered what awaited as the dark gave way to early morning light. As we took off into the darkness, the first thing we became clearly aware of was that the run would be uphill, at least for a while. Takes your mind off the darkness and weather as you begin an arduous climb right out of the gate.

As we topped off that first major climb near the La Mosco tower, the much anticipated, heralded view was ....how shall we say it, limited. The first hearty race volunteer was posted up, shrouded in the cool morning fog, cheering on the runners and pointing us toward more fog, and mud. Having spent many a foggy/rainy/muddy hike in my Mom's native Switzerland, Tsodzil suddenly had the feel of the Swiss Alps. Already you could tell that this day on Mt Taylor would not be a normal one.

The fog and rain of the early morning miles gave way to muddy jeep roads, past Ridgeline, dodging around or splashing through some pretty stout puddles and into the idyllic little valley in which Spud Patch aid station is nestled. As the skies began to open a bit, the surrounding aspen, spruce and fir forest became obvious, and somewhat overwhelming. When you start seeing and feeling things that seem out of place, just remember that this entire course is above 9000 feet.

Following Spud Patch, we travelled the legendary Continental Divide Trail for roughly eight miles. As we passed through Rock Tank Shelter at mile 16.5, we were told to gear up – make sure you had some legit raingear as we headed out for the second loop. Up top, we were told, they were reporting.....if you can imagine it, we heard it. Sounded like we had an eventful second half on tap.

As you're leaving for the second "half", you realize that we have 16.5 down, with just 14.5 to go. Hmm...you start doing the math and realize that your time may be a bit better than imagined, in spite of everyone telling you that you'll be lucky to run a second half negative split, even with running two fewer miles. Seems like the veterans knew what they were talking about.

The much-anticipated run up Gooseberry Trail to the caldera rim was indeed epic. Again, our uncommon weather gave the climb added a surreal touch and kept the summit target ever elusive in the clouds. The meadows and surrounding ridges kept appearing and then hiding again, as the clouds rolled in and out of the area.

As we topped out on the summit and began the descent to Caldera Rim Aid Station, the slippery and slushy nature of the surface made for a fun ride. Hail, snow, slush....it was hard to tell exactly what we were running in at times, but it was certainly slick and a sloppy.

After arriving at the very well-manned Calder Rim A.S. and learning of the Water Canyon adventure that awaited (we'll let you experience that one of yourself), this rookie realized that he had once been here before...just a few hours ago on the first three-mile climb up toward La Mosca. After hitting mile 29 just past the station and still high up on the mountain, it was pretty clear pretty quickly that a big downhill awaited. The final two miles back to Rock Tank Shelter were indeed that and offered up the broadest

views of the day. My camera was put to the test, taking in the sweeping vistas and open spaces below...some of the best scenery in the Southwest.

Kudos to all of the amazing staff and volunteers of the Mt Taylor team. Ken, you could not have created a more organized, competent and encouraging team that what you had out there on race weekend, and all that in the context of that "weather" folks keep referring to. Well done.

Coming from Dine' Bikeyah, where Mt Taylor is revered as one of the sacred mountains, it seemed that the attitude and actions of everyone involved gave all due respect to this special place. Thank you all for making that extra effort.

What an awesome event! Looking forward to coming back next year.