

Mt Taylor 50K – September 26th, 2015

We knew we were moving to New Mexico in August. And as soon as we knew we were moving, we knew we were going to sign up for the Mt. Taylor 50k. We heard about Mt. Taylor two ways—through Alisha’s brother and the Runner’s World article on Craig Curly. With months of anticipation for the race before us, we occupied our time with a cross-country move from North Carolina. Settling in Las Cruces, New Mexico, we quickly scouted out local trails and hooked up with other ultra runners to discover our new home.

[In beauty I run.]

Race morning arrived early. Jake and I had decided to camp before the race so we could be close to the race start. Still wanting more sleep, I drug myself out from under warm blankets and got ready to race. The starting area was still under darkness, but the atmosphere was full of energy. Several friends greeted us before the start, giving me a comforting feeling... like I was back home racing in North Carolina. After a brief warm-up with Jake, it was time. At 6:30, I headed into the darkness with the pack. Keeping Jake in my sights, I headed up the first climb, watching the sunrise. I looked out as the sunlight spread across the expansive land before me... “How Beautiful” ... wondering if Jake was thinking the same thing.

[With beauty before me I run.]

I was hoping as I warmed up and started the first climb my legs would loosen up. After a night of tossing and turning on a half-way inflated air mattress, my back was stiff and my legs did not seem to want to cooperate. Looking out at the sunrise quickly washed the pain in my legs away. In that moment, I captured the rose colored landscape in my mind. The inevitable pain before me was now worth it. Starting the rocky, double track descent, my legs moved a bit more freely. Two aid stations behind me, I made the turn onto the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) single track. The pine tress and condensed forest made me think of North Carolina.

[With beauty behind me I run.]

I was surprised how quickly the early miles passed. It seemed sudden when I was making the turn onto the CDT single track. Fortunately, Jake and I were able to make one of the organized training runs when we first moved to Las Cruces, so I knew what to expect through mile 16. Not being the best at technical single track, my goal was to keep moving a steady pace through the forest with the hopes I would not lose much time. The trail was well maintained and shockingly easy to follow—not how I remembered traversing it a month or so earlier during the training run. I made it through the CDT and met my goal... only one person caught up to me, and we entered the halfway point aid station together. Volunteers quickly filled up my bottles and helped me find my drop bag. I wondered what lay before me... and I wondered how far Jake was ahead of me.

[With beauty beneath me I run.]

The halfway point aid station volunteers re-energized my spirits. I arrived at the base of Mt. Taylor realizing I was in for a hard climb. I hiked early on, in attempt to conserve my energy. Even though I was conservative, I found it hard to breathe. The higher I climbed, the slower my legs seemed to move. I thought, “Altitude really does affect me... more than I gave it credit for.” Continuing upward, a couple runners passed me. I came to a grassy summit, breathless and trying to regroup to run again. A half mile later, I realized the grassy summit was not a summit. I peered up the mountain before me, seeing people zigzagging up for what seemed like forever. I wanted to sit down and cry. Despite the searing pain in my legs, I pushed forward... the beauty of the landscape providing me solace.

[With beauty above me I run.]

“Is this EVER going to END??!?!” My head spinning, my breath audible, my legs aching... I thought about my brother who loves power hiking, and who also knows I hate it. I realized I underestimated the affects of altitude when I was dizzy most of the climb. I kept looking up, summoning within me to just. keep. moving. The summit of Mt. Taylor peaks out at 11,305ft. “What a phenomenal view... breathtaking, literally,” I thought to myself. As I descended down to the forest service road, I lost some time. My legs were just tired. I re-entered the forest and found my legs returning, just in time to summit Water Canyon. This last climb was a sheer testament of will—a mini repeat of Mt. Taylor. I power-hiked for all I was worth and made it to the final aid station.

[With beauty all around me I run.]

Starting the Water Canyon climb, I thought, “Not AGAIN.” The pitches seemed to be just as steep as Mt. Taylor. My mental strength crumbling, people began passing me. I began expecting and hoping that anytime Alisha would be coming up behind me. The thought of possibly seeing Alisha brought about feelings of satisfaction, knowing she is having a good day and gave me the motivation to keep moving. When I heard “2.5 miles downhill” from the final aid station volunteers, I was relieved. Then I saw a steep, rocky, technical downhill marked by a double-black diamond sign—one final, grueling obstacle to overcome. Navigating my way down as quickly and nimbly as my tired legs would allow me, I cross the finish line... a feeling of accomplishment washed over me. As I turned to grab a drink, I was thankful to see my wife finishing one of the most memorable races I have experienced to date.

[It is finished in beauty.]

Reunited at the finish area, we enjoyed some cold drinks and friendly conversation. Both of us felt so welcomed by everyone: the race directors, the volunteers, the other racers, and those at the event cheering. We are continually humbled by the relationships brought into our lives through running. Thank you to all who made this race happen. We will be back... *this feels like home.*

**Jake and Alisha Edmiston live in Las Cruces, NM with their two hyperactive dogs. They finished Mt. Taylor in 6:05 (Jake) and 6:07 (Alisha).*