

BANDERA 100K REPORT

Bandera State Natural Area, near Bandera TX – January 5, 2008
by Bill (The Trailgeezee) Rumbaugh

A week ago I was on the trail. Today as I write this, I am sitting here with my feet elevated, laptop actually on my lap. Had some swelling and pain issues and I've been RICEing as much as 'normal' life will allow. Swelling is finally down after several days, but there is still some lingering pain in the shin area. This was a tough course. I knew it going in, so it was no surprise. If you want a rocky, hilly course, put this one on your list for next year.

The course format was two 50k loops with aid stations roughly 4 to 6 miles apart, which is about the right distance, in my opinion. The middle three of them were locations where your drop bags could be pre-positioned by the race staff. This also seemed about right. This was my first 100k, and I know that it's nice to have your own stuff available in the longer races, especially where they last long enough that weather and other conditions may change.

For the interested reader, here is a table of where aid stations are located on the course:

A/S NAME	MILEAGE	DROP BAGS?
Lodge	0.00	Yes
Nachos	5.60	No
Chapas	11.04	Yes
Crossroads (1 st)	16.89	Yes
Crossroads (2 nd)	21.85	Yes
Last Chance	26.10	No
Lodge	31.00	Yes
Nachos	36.60	No
Chapas	42.04	Yes
Crossroads (1 st)	47.89	Yes
Crossroads (2 nd)	52.85	Yes
Last Chance	57.10	No
Lodge	62.00	No

As you can see, you pass through Crossroads twice per loop.

In the first section there are two tough climbs, Sky Island followed by Ice Cream Hill. It was foggy in the early going so the views were limited to a few hundred yards. We knew it would be different on the second loop, though the warm forecast was for cloud cover and some wind. Forecast temperatures into the mid 70's at mid-day meant that the cloud cover would be a welcome relief from the sun. I heard another runner say as we approached Ice Cream Hill that it was the last climb before the Nachos A/S. Great, we are making good progress. I looked up and saw a line of runners trudging up a long, steep section of trail in the distance. Oh, this was going to be fun. It was very reminiscent of pictures I'd seen of some of the big mountain races, though I suppose not as long. On the downhill side of Ice Cream Hill, it was not long until we could hear music from Nachos ahead. It was actually still about a mile away. Dave Billman had mentioned that you can hear them for a long time before you actually get there, so I was not too discouraged by the time the A/S actually materialized. A refill of fluids and a couple of cookies and I was on my way. I did not realize it but the next section was fairly benign. On through Chapas and the first time through Crossroads the trail was relatively flat and quite runnable. We were lulled into a false sense of security.

As I left Crossroads a couple of hundred yards out I recalled that runners come through it again, which meant there are two entries and two exits – had I taken the right trail out? I had not asked, just took off after a couple of other runners who had been a short distance ahead of me for the past mile or two. Not being a fan of bonus miles, I started back to check and be certain. About halfway back was a gal headed

out that I had chatted with briefly in the early going. I asked her if this was the right way. She said yes, that she had asked. I'm glad that someone had their wits about them. A/S volunteers have been known to be wrong, but this seemed right, so I decided that I was as certain as I was going to be. I did have a map of the course in my pack but did not know if it would do me any good, it was small and hard to read.

About another mile and a half out of Crossroads the hills returned. It was the Three Sisters, three hills in quick succession. A tough downhill and it was back through Crossroads for the second time. A minor issue with my right foot needed checking out. I was afraid that the edges of the tape on my big toe had rolled up and was causing concentrated pressure in that area. Not good for long term, best look at it early. So I found a place to sit down with my drop bag and pulled off my shoe. Careful removal of the Injinji sock revealed that all was still in place. Little sand had infiltrated into the socks so everything was OK at that point and I was relieved. I downed an Ensure, restashed the bag on the tarp in its bib number sequence and hustled out in the direction indicated. It was about 1:00 PM at that point. I was pretty tired, but had another 40 miles to go and was feeling reasonably good at that point. Still in the game, though I knew even then that my time would be nothing to brag about.

After about another mile the hills returned. With Lucky Peak behind me, I found myself on a jeep road for a time. As they paused to admire the view, I re-passed a group of four that I had leapfrogged with a few times in the past few miles. They gained on me again and then one of them called the others back for reasons I could not determine and I was alone on the trail. My insecurity began to work on me as I wondered if I had missed a turn. Had she called her buds back to the trail and left me to continue on in the wrong direction? Well, it was uphill (of course) and I was loathe to turn around only to have to re-climb it again if I was right, which chances are, I was. So I trudged on with no reassurance that I was anywhere near the right trail. Finally a trail marker came into view and my meager trail reading skills were validated.

After the marked turn it was about a quarter mile to the last A/S, Last Chance. There was no drop bag support here, so I looked over the table and not finding anything that looked terribly appetizing, I headed out toward the Lodge with my bottles refilled. It was not that there was a skimpy selection or that it was poorly presented, I was just in sort of a funk where I would be hard pressed to name something that did sound good. (Ribeye steaks grilled over mesquite? Um, what else to you have?) I felt OK, though, and knew I had calories in my drop bag at the Lodge, so I pressed on, anxious to get this loop completed. There was still Cairn's Climb and Boyle's Bump to go, however, and they appeared soon after leaving Last Chance. Tough, steep, rocky climbs with brutal downhills. Boyles Bump is over 1,000 vertical feet in what looks to be less than half a mile on the map. After Boyle's Bump there are no more significant climbs, it is largely technical trail the rest of the way into the Lodge.

I no longer felt much like running at that point but was still in good spirits, since it was the halfway point. I took a load off at the Lodge, downed an ice cold Ensure from my small ice chest, as well as a 10 oz bottle of Tonic water. Tonic water contains quinine, known to dilate blood vessels. I had experienced some minor tendency toward cramping on the trail and thought it might help. Tasted amazingly refreshing, too. Got my lights out and found for the umpteenth time that my headlight is not compatible with wearing a hat, even turned around backwards, so I stashed the hat in my bag. Dave Billman came in about then and sat down nearby and said that he was cashing it in, a victim of the unseasonably warm temperatures. Another runner nearby also indicated he had turned in his bib earlier. I was tempted, but did not deliberate too long. I was ready, so I got up and headed out, it was about 3:30, well ahead of the 6:30 cutoff. Antje and a couple of her friends were near the trail and cheered me on as I headed out of the Lodge area. I replied that this is not the smartest thing I've ever done. At this point I was hopeful that the warm temperatures would abate before too long and I could get some running in and not be on the trail all night. I did not feel badly, though my right shin was starting to protest a bit, it was really the only specific pain besides the usual general "don't want to's" that I suppose every runner's body tells him/her under the conditions.

To be honest, I knew it would be a long night. I plan on running the Rocky Raccoon 100 in less than 3 weeks though, and there were some things that I wanted to experience in preparation for that test. They were:

1. Run for a long time on a trail that I was not familiar with, in the middle of the night
2. Experience the sights and sounds of a remote trail in the dark
3. Experience aid stations late in a long race, manned by ultrarunners who themselves had been there/done that, and who would be of genuine help if anyone needed it
4. Try out my drop bag preparations
5. Try running with my MP-3 player after the crowd thinned out

I've been reading race reports from day one but have only seen glowsticks on the trail in the late miles of Sunmart. Huntsville State Park is a fairly familiar venue, and my exposure to the conditions have been not much more than an hour. I wanted to see what it was like in a more remote area. If you got off the trail you were going to have a very long night, and that's part of the deal.

In the dark many things are different. The beauty of the sunset and the arrival of cooling temperatures bring on conditions that can be entirely different from the first loop experienced in the daylight hours. While it was still twilight, I heard a couple of coyotes in the distance tuning up. Fairly familiar sounds, I hoped that I would not be hearing too many of them, and not too close as darkness continued to fall. Hearing them close by can be a chilling experience.

Later, I saw two rabbits in the middle of the trail about 20 feet away. They were good-sized and as soon as my light fell on them, one loped off the trail but the other one started hopping right toward me. Being charged by a belligerent bunny was about the last thing I expected. I was astounded and yelled at it, "Hey! What are you doing, you dumb rabbit?" That seemed to bring him out of his spell and he turned tail and joined his companion.

Of course I experienced what every nocturnal runner has seen, a black creature of grotesque shape on the trail ahead, charging toward me at about the same speed as my forward travel. The closing velocity between us allows for less than a second to decide, do I kick it, try to stomp on it or try to jump over it. The consequences of each option are quickly evaluated, and before a decision is actually made I realize it is just the shadow of a low-lying branch across the trail that my light has illuminated. I guess I don't run in the dark enough, since I continue to re-learn that lesson about every time I go out. Enough to cause a brief spike in the heart rate, though.

Later on the trail, I spotted what looked like a dark, round shadow up ahead. I did not see what caused the shadow, and it did not move as I moved my light. I realized it was an animal, not a shadow. In the distance, it looked like a very furry medium-sized dog. It was in the middle of the trail investigating some horse droppings which abound at many places on that course. I slowed down and for no reason that I can explain, I decided to hiss at it rather than yell at it or throw a rock or something. I got closer and identified a short pointed snout, small ears and short legs. Or were they longer, just looked short because it was so furry, I could not tell. It was not black after all, but a dark brown. All I could think of was that it looked like an opossum of ginormous proportion. The one animal with which I am most familiar is the 'possum, having encountered many of them on the North Shore and other trails. They were all standard size, though. This one looked like it could tip the scales at over 30 pounds – I weigh my dogs occasionally and have a frame of reference. A combination of hissing and waving my light back and forth was successful in reluctantly dislodging him from his quest. He began to back up slowly, always facing toward me, not making a sound. A surreal sight to say the least. The trail curved to the right, and he backed up straight, allowing me to slip past him. I continued on and I presume he returned to his previous occupation as I loped on down the trail. [I later described the animal to a zoology major where I work, and from my lame description, she had no idea what it was.] A benign encounter, at least.

Several times I heard trailside rustlings and figured they were lizards or mice or something disturbing the fallen leaves. When rustlings were louder, more like thrashings, I played my light into the vegetation a few times in hopes of seeing the source (Deer? Cougar? Skunk? Armadillo? My clue meter was pegged at zero). Whatever it was, was well camouflaged and froze when the light hit it. I never identified a single animal.

About the only other nocturnal anomaly was not once but twice during steep technical downhills, where I had to be absolutely certain of that next step, I saw a granddaddy longlegs skittering out of my way. Who knew these guys would be out and about with their top hats and canes? We've all seen them in odd places, doing whatever it is that they do (I'm not sure they even spin webs). That was just weird.

I came into Nachos as the sun set. I quipped that I had been hearing their music for the past hour and wondered if I would ever get there. (Really, there were several times that I knew the music was just ahead, only to have the trail turn in the direction away from the music.) Anyway, these guys (who did not have convenient road access to this location) told me that they had been relocating the A/S at several places along the trail just to keep us guessing. They asked me what I wanted and offered several attractive options. I knew I needed some calories, since my next infusion of Ensure would not be available until Chapas, another 5.44 miles away. I decided on chicken soup with rice. It was hot and though it contained a little gristle and a wing bone, I spit them both out, in true crude trail runner fashion and chowed down. No one seemed to notice or care. It was hot and tasted so good. The warmth and the camaraderie of the A/S volunteers was like a shot of adrenaline. I left recharged and feeling really good, ready to take on whatever was out there waiting for me in the darkness.

The next section passed uneventfully. It was twilight when I came into Nachos. It was now fully dark and as I crossed some of the lower elevations, there was a chill in the air, yet when I climbed some of the exposed sections, the trail was still warm and radiated heat, and I was sweating. I thought several times that I would change to a long sleeve shirt at Chapas, it was probably time.

Eventually I arrived at Chapas. Who was there but Drew Meyer along with Paul Stone and the ETUR crew. I got my drop bag and a cup of Ramen noodles. As I waited for the noodles to cool down, I fished out a bottle of Ensure and went down my checklist of items. (Yep, no need for sunscreen now!) The Ensure went down well, but there was just no long sleeve shirt in the bag. Guess I'll have to wait until crossroads where I remember seeing one stashed earlier. [Turns out I had packed one in an oversized Ziploc bag, but it was in my hotel bag for some reason.] Drew offered an extra shirt he had, but I declined assuring him I would be fine, though I was not at all sure at the moment. I downed the last of the Ramen noodles, marveling to myself how good such humble fare tasted under those conditions. Though I had the calories I needed from the Ensure, there was something about the warmth, the aroma of the broth, and the attention from Drew (who had ministered to me last year after my cross timbers 50 miler attempt) and a couple of the other volunteers that really recharged me and got me ready for the next section. I headed out, hoping that the temperatures would hold.

Soon after leaving Chapas, I crossed a low-lying section of trail which was pretty chilly to me in my sweat-soaked short sleeved shirt. Eventually that section passed and I warmed up, and there were no further issues. I consider myself lucky, had the temperatures dropped suddenly, it could have gotten a bit ugly.

I got to Crossroads and found the long sleeved shirt in my drop bag and changed. I took an extra couple of minutes to get ready. The crew inside the tent was partying down and I was an outsider. No matter, I had what I needed, and got water from them to refill my bottles and headed out. I hustled down the next section trying to make decent time before the hills started. The hills arrived on schedule and climbing them was not so bad. Coming down the back side was often problematic. My right shin was hurting pretty badly by then. I stopped at one point and loosened the shoelaces which helped for quite awhile. It seemed that the small adjustments in foot placement one makes to maintain balance had become fairly painful. Keeping my balance coming down technical sections of trail had become a matter of pain avoidance more than anything. My speed must have been under 1 mph on these sections, pretty poor.

But I was long past being committed. I kept thinking of Jeff Snyder, whom I had carpooled with. The poor guy was probably finishing about now and would be sacked out in the van wondering what the heck happened to me as I struggled on in the dark. It was after 9:00 PM at this point, and I still had 15 miles of tough sledding to go.

I did not recall from the first loop where the hills began again, but presently they materialized. In the meantime, I had taken out my MP-3 player from my drop bag and it was time to get it cranking. At this

point I was alone on the trail, save for two gals and a guy who passed me before Crossroads. They passed me again, being inside the A/S tent partying down with the Hill Country Trail Runners while I changed my shirt and etc. They eventually finished about 2 hours ahead of me. There was a guy behind me at Nachos, whom I saw again at Chapas. He was probably the only person who was likely to overtake me. I was in full powerwalking mode at this point and there are not many that can catch me unless they are running. And I guessed there were not many left on the course that were running at that point. I've never run trails with headphones, and have mixed feelings about the practice. Folks who wear them are mostly non-communicative, and it's not that they don't wish others well, it's just that they don't communicate any of that while they are plugged in. I like to chat with my fellow trail runners and don't want to miss any opportunities to do so. However, the chances were very slight under these circumstances, and I had put together a pretty tasty playlist of classic rock tunes that I was anxious to try out. So, equipped with a long sleeved shirt, adequate calories, electrolytes and hydration, I was anxious to "get down" the trail. So the tunes were my companions the rest of the way in. I have to say it really did help to give me something to think about other than my slow progress and the associated aches and pains.

I did notice that the coyote calls, trailside rustlings and even animals on the trail all came to a screeching halt as soon as I cranked up. Not sure if it was worth the tradeoff, but I did want to have both experiences.

Regarding drop bag preparations, I had used them before, on 50 milers and though 62 miles is not that much longer of a distance, the difficulty of the course conspired to extend the time significantly. In addition, having the bags positioned on the trail for me (rather than only at the S/F area on multiple loops) was an entirely different situation. I typically only use about 1/10th of what I put in a drop bag and this was no different. What I learned from the exercise, even though I know I over-prepared, was that there are still opportunities for dumb mistakes. I should not take anything for granted and need to check and double-check everything the night prior, before I consider myself ready. I did prepare a checklist, laminated it and attached it to the zipper pull of each bag to where I could locate it easily and made myself go down the complete list each and every time I unzipped one. I think this is part of the discipline of making sure you take full advantage of the drop bags when you have no crew. I've read too many accounts of runners who forget to take something on the next leg of a run and either have to do without or return to the A/S.

I also wanted to try out my new headlight/handheld flashlight combination. The headlight still had its original batteries in it and has led a sheltered life thus far. I changed batteries in both the day prior, just in case things ran into extra innings. I was glad that I had done so. Rather than extra innings, it was more like a double-header. Both came through with flying colors, though, meeting my expectations on performance. I have full confidence in them going the distance at RR100.

I have already remarked about the course. The rocks were everywhere, I have not seen a course that was so rocky. Some were fist-sized, others more like grapefruit. It would have been easy to twist an ankle on them. Trail shoes were needed to protect your feet from bruises. Then, on the steep downhills, the small diameter gravel was like ball bearings, threatening to dump you on your butt in milliseconds. Pretty challenging.

There are climbs and there are climbs. Relative newbie that I am, most that I have seen were not the frontal assaults that were found at every turn on this course. Straight up and straight down with nary a switchback in sight. This is enough to tax the toughest runner. And I use the term loosely. There is no running most of these. The folks who finished in 11 hours and change may have run them, but I started in the back of the pack and stayed there. I saw no running of any of this stuff. It is definitely a tough course.

Much ado was made of the Sotol plants. You could probably hurt yourself on them but you would need to work at it. There were a lot of them and they were spiny, but unless you fell into one or kicked it, there was little chance that you would actually hurt yourself on them. I did see one runner with some kind of

rubbery covering protecting his lower legs, and saw them on some of the horses on the trail, but I did not suffer from any significant injuries myself. Conclusion: Nothing to worry about.

Trailside observations. This was typical Texas trail running. Limestone rock, mountain cedar, live oak, not a lot of shade. The fog lifted mid-morning, and while it made for a lot of exposed running under a relentless sun, it rewarded runners with clear vistas under blue skies as they surmounted the high points of the course. The forecast cloud cover did not materialize.

Carin's climb. Cairns are the traditional method of marking trails, dating back to biblical times. A series of piles of rocks which would not occur in nature. There were a few cairns in evidence in this section, not as many as I expected. I had been told that glowsticks would be placed in them, but I saw none in my night-time traverse of this section. That's OK. There were other trail markings that were curious, though. The rocks in this section of trail had a lot of holes in them. Who knows what causes them, erosion? Dripping from unknown sources? Acid deposits? Anyway, many of the rocks had sizeable holes in them, some of them all the way through. Presumably as a means of marking the trail similar to cairns, I noticed a number of mountain cedar trunks that had been uprooted, bleaching in the sun. They resembled driftwood. As an alternative to cairns, earlier pilgrims had taken some of these rocks with holes in them and impaled them on the dried roots of the uprooted tree trunks. A fairly surprising thing to see trailside, an uprooted tree trunk with several rocks hanging from it. Nothing you would expect to occur naturally. Oh. Must be a trail here. OK, guess I'll continue on. On the trail, the approximately spherical configuration of the rocks, along with the holes contained therein, was disturbingly reminiscent of the opening sequence of *The Terminator*. An apocalyptic scene depicting skulls being ground under the treads of machines gone amok. I picked up the pace here just a bit.

Though I did not arrive in time Friday night to attend the dinner and pre-race briefing, Dave Billman and Fred Thompson informed me of RD Joe Prusaitis' decision to mark the course with a minimalist approach this time. This meant that when the trails crossed with other trails/jeep roads etc., the intersections would be clearly marked. Great. Where trails cross is the best chance of a wrong turn. But other sections of trail would not be marked. So, m'dear, if you chose poorly and ended up on the wrong section of trail, you might go for miles before you realized the error of your ways. I can't say that I am a fan of this approach. It may be fine for those semi-familiar with the course, but I do like the reassuring flags from time to time telling me I have not gone astray. Recall my comments earlier about not being a fan of bonus miles. I have to say that, despite my prolonged angst on several sections, I did manage to stay on course. This was not the case for others, as I found out later. At least one runner ran significantly off course and an adjustment needed to be made for his finish to count. If I had been more than a mile or two off course, I'm sure I would have called it a day. I do want to say that the night-time trail markings were as clear as anyone would have wanted. A clear sign indicating the proper direction, plus at least two glowsticks in the distance indicating where you should go was a beacon in the darkness to me. This was amazingly consistent throughout the course. I was in full darkness for over 20 miles, this was too long of a distance to have been managed by one person. Whomever was responsible for this part of the run certainly did his/her job.

As I headed out of Last Chance in what I thought was the correct direction, a volunteer called out and pointed the correct direction. The way I was going was used for the 25k and 50k events. He motioned and said, this is the way to the Lodge. Well, that had a nice ring to it, less than 5 miles to go. I knew this of course, but it was nice to hear it all the same. The last couple of miles I did not remember very well from the first loop. When I traveled it the second time in the dark, it seemed interminable. No major climbs after I was loose from Boyle's Bump, but fairly technical trail. At every turn I expected to be out of this mess and on the road to the Lodge. At long last, I eventually reached the road, just a relative stone's throw from the Lodge. Pitch darkness. I saw an arrow pointing the way where the trail divided. There was a park road leading off to where I knew the trail did not go, and an opening in the fence with a wide trail heading toward the Lodge. It all seemed so clear in the daylight. But after 3:00 in the AM, there was no clue. I headed down the trail where intuition told me was the correct direction. I went for _ mile or so and saw no indication that it was correct. No sound of generators or music in the distance. No glimmer of lights, however dim, indicating the Lodge and the finish line. Doubts assailed me, and I became

convinced that this could not be the correct way after all. Just my luck to choose the little-used trail that led to the park dump or something.

So, I turned around and headed back to the last trail marking, not in a charitable frame of mind, to say the least. I finally got back to the last trail marking. There was the arrow, and there were two glowsticks indicating the trail that I had just come back from. This just had to be the right way. I don't remember it being anywhere near this long, however. So I turned around yet again and headed back toward, what, the dump? The Lodge? Who knows. I plodded on. A single glowstick or surveyor's tape streamer would have made all the difference at this point, but there were none to be seen.

Finally, I saw a glimmer of light in the distance and heard sounds generated by people. I homed in on it and in a short time saw dozens of glowsticks leading the way in. I crossed the chip mat and heard the reassuring beep from the yellow box somewhere. I had finished at long last. It was nearly 4:00 AM. Two people were nearby, one I recognized as Joe Prusaitis, the RD. He extended his right hand and I instinctively shook it as he congratulated me on my finish and presented me with my Bandera 100k buckle with his left. I thanked him and told him it was a tough grind and that I won't be getting a second buckle like this. The other person nearby turned and said, "Never say never" and I realized it must be his wife, Joyce, whom I'd never met. I told him I was impressed that he was still up and around, given the rigors of an RD's life during a race of this scale. "Oh, no, I'm always awake whenever there are runners on the course." An RD after my own heart. I really do appreciate his concern and dedication. After all the preparations of the past few days he was still up on his feet as the last stragglers came in. I finished in 20:18, there were still another 11 runners on the course who finished after me.

I appreciatively gauged the heft of the buckle which I felt I have earned and will wear with pride as I made my way to the van expecting to find a snoozing Jeff Snyder. I found a note taped to the driver's window saying that he had found a ride back to the hotel. Well, that's a relief, I'm glad he got a decent night's sleep instead of wondering what happened to me on the course. So I made the necessary preparations, and saddled up for the hour's drive to the hotel at Boerne.

At the awards meeting the next morning, I retrieved my drop bags and had a breakfast of eggs, ham, potatoes and various other items in the company of the Billmans, the Thompsons, Lynn Ballard, Antje Spethman, Drew Meyer and the Crownovers. A pleasant ending to the event.

Then it was the long trip back to Dallas. With less than an hour's sleep in the past two days, I was in no condition to drive. Jeff stood in the gap and took the helm, pointing the van Dallas-ward. I violated the Man Code and conked out as soon as we were on I-35 and slept until past Austin. At which time I did provide companionship for the remainder of the ride.

What a trip. Not likely that I will repeat this madness anytime soon. It was a tough go, but I was glad I did it, and I learned from the experience. The Cactus Rose 100 is held on the same course, with Joe the RD. The buckle is quite handsome. The course is 4, 25-mile loops. There are no manned aid stations. The runnable sections of trail have been eliminated. I can't imagine doing it.

Bill
The Trailgeeze