

Erica's Mid State Trail Recap

An unsupported Fastest Known Time Adventure

Lead Up

This attempt was about 5 years in the making. In 2020, a friend of mine was in the process of completing his supported fastest known time on the Mid State Trail here in PA. I had taken some time off work to meet him and run a small section with him. The Mid State Trail holds a very special place in my heart. This trail, in particular the section that runs through Rothrock State Forest, introduced me to the idea of backpacking. I started my hiking journey on these trails, where I saw my first trail runner and backpacker. It was the first trail I backpacked on, which was also my first solo backpacking adventure. When I met my friend in 2020 to support them on their journey for the FKT, the idea of the unsupported style came up and I was very intrigued. I had just completed the Appalachian Trail as a thruhiker in 2019, and thought I knew a thing or two about back-to-back long days carrying weight over difficult terrain. This sounded like the perfect challenge for me to focus on next.

I spent the next 2 years "training" and dialing in my gear to be ultra light. I really had no idea what I was doing, but I enjoyed the process of figuring things out on my own. In 2022, I believed I was ready for my first attempt. I reached out to Bob Stewart to let him know I was going for the overall record. He was super supportive and excited for me, which is what I love about this community! However, I was not yet mentally or physically prepared for the challenge. By day 4, the pain in my hips was so terrible that I hadn't slept more than 1 hour per night and lost my drive. I quit around mile 143 ish after about 80 hours.

By 2024, I had hired a coach and completed numerous fastbacking training efforts on the Mid State Trail. I had completed each part in sections and scouted everything. I was ready for attempt #2. I started on May 4th. Again, I wasn't quite ready. I pulled the plug around mile 147 about 72 hours in. The very moment I got off trail, I was ready to try again. Over the next year I would hone in my training on the strengths and weaknesses that the first 2 attempts helped me to identify.

On April 25th, 2025 my husband drove me to Maryland where we'd stay in a hotel about 50 minutes from the official trailhead. The plan was to grab dinner in Hagerstown and head to the PA/MD border early to start at 9 am sharp.

Day 1 (April 26th, Saturday)

We arrived at the corner before the trail begins around 8:40 am and I began double checking all my gear. My devices were charged, the pack weighed at 29.2 lbs, and I was ready to go. Minor snag in my plans when I realized my new Coros Pace 3 watch no longer offers the Ultramax

feature, which saves tons of battery power. I realized I'd have to use the standard gps feature and conserve battery on all other devices which was a bit stressful to start, but I'd make it work.

9 am - go time.

It was a bit rainy which was nice to lower the temps a bit. The wind and occasional light rain was very refreshing on some of the climbs. With my pack weight at the heaviest it will be the whole trip, I planned to just hike all day. On the occasional downhill, I did feel strong enough to "shuffle run" down which felt fun. I passed the sign at the Dickens Trail / Burnt Mills Trail/ MST intersection where the pink lady slipper grows. This year there was only one pink lady slipper and she hadn't yet bloomed, but I took a photo anyway :) I love those weird looking flowers.

It was a fairly uneventful day. I know this section pretty well by now. There are 3 briar ridges that I needed to cover, but I was grateful they weren't fully grown yet and I could move more quickly. The third and final briar ridge was actually cleared by some volunteers recently, and it looked like an entirely different trail!!! That was such a nice surprise.

I spent all day in silence—no headphones, music, podcasts, etc to save battery. It was a very serene day with the sounds of birds.

I arrived in Everett before sundown and ahead of my planned schedule. As I set up my tent near a willow tree, a cop pulls into the parking lot and comes to chat with me. He just wanted to confirm that I'm the hiker who submitted the camping permit and wanted to make sure I knew to call 911 if there was any funny business in the park. We briefly chatted about what I was doing, and I gently suggested I was trying to get to sleep early for an early hike the next day since I was trying to cover nearly 50 miles to the next legal camping spot. He got the idea and left me to it.

That night I planned for 4 hours sleep, however the wind had other ideas for me. Several times throughout the night I woke up to wind gusts way stronger than the predicted 20 mph winds in the forecast. My tarptent pro lite has held up through many storms, but this wind gave it a run for its money. On a couple occasions, the sides of the tent were collapsing in on me while I laid there waiting out the gust. When it passed, I'd get out of the tent to replace the stakes that had been ripped out of the ground. It was an interesting night!

Day 2 (April 27th, Sunday)

At 2 am I woke up to break down camp and get moving. I was hiking by 2:45 / 2:50 ish and heading out of town. There is a long town road walk before you head back into the woods and head up to the trail that follows a narrow ridgeline. I had an interesting encounter as I walked past a 24/7 lotto club (one of those buildings with like no windows, and a neon sign that says "lotto"). As I walked past, a car turned its headlights on me, and I felt like he was intentionally shining them right on me. I had just watched him pull into the lot, back in, and turn the car off. So it was super weird that he was now just turning his lights on me. I kept walking. Moments later I hear the car start, pull out, drive up just in front of me and stop on the road. This guy now

has his window rolled down looking at me with a cig hanging out his mouth at 3:30 am. I'm on foot and he is in a car. I just shone my headlamp directly in his face and stared back until he said "oh wait, nevermind" and he drove off. For the next few miles, I was somehow expecting him to know what I was doing, the trail I was hiking, and surprise me out there while I was alone in the dark. The trail crossed about 5 utility roads before heading up the ridge. He didn't, but it freaked me out until I was finally climbing up to the top.

When I reached the trail out of Everett and up to the ridgeline, I felt comfortable once again and happy to be on trail. I saw a porcupine, as per usual, on the rock ledges up there and he hiked with me for a while. That was really cool :). Again, it looked like someone had been through to cut back some of the briars which was amazing! That section can be rough when it's grown in, especially since I'd be covering it in the dark before sunrise.

I passed the powerline before sunrise, which was a really cool milestone for me. On the past 2 attempts, I stopped at this powerline and cried before continuing for whatever reason and it was always right at sunrise. I was way ahead of "past me", and no tears today. I was feeling good. I even ran much of the downhill to the bridge over Yellow Creek. The next miles were beautiful as the trail winds along Maple Run. I took a photo of the sun shining through the trees and again enjoyed the silence of the forest. Just birds, wind, and my footsteps.

I filtered water at Twin Springs as I usually do. By now, the sun was in full swing. It was beginning to get very hot and there was no leaf coverage or clouds to protect me from the direct sun. I don't have a sun hat, which now feels silly. Instead I buttoned my sun shirt all the way up to my chin and swiveled my cap around to block the sun from my face. This would become a standard practice for the next 4-5 days of no rain, no clouds, and no shade.

Sometime towards the later half of the day, I noticed something wrong with my left big toe. Anytime I kicked a rock even lightly, something that ordinarily wouldn't phase me, I would feel searing pain and it would linger for quite some time before dissipating back to a dull ache. I began using the mantra a friend taught me during my first 100 mile trail race "Pain is just pain" which helped a little lol.

I stopped at the "persistent water spot" here to filter water and camel up for the next 20 or so miles. I knew I'd need at least 1 L for camp and about 1 - 1.5 L for the miles I'd be hiking. I drank as much as I could at this spot before heading out so I could carry less, since I know I usually drink 1 L per 10 miles on hot days.

I reached Tussey Mountain Road down into Martinsburg / Williamsburg (so confused by that town name) by around 4:30 pm EST. I called my husband around this time to chat before getting into town and hitting the rail trail. I enjoyed taking in the landscaping and scenery of the rural areas. I reached town and took a brief rest at the start of the rail trail before beginning the 6 mile trek to Mt Etna Station. This is the first time I decided to use my headphones for something to pass the time (other than to call my husband). I listened to a book I already read once and knew it could hold my attention.

I reach mt. Etna station by 9:15 ish and sent an InReach message to my husband to let him know I'd arrived and was setting up camp. I was going to allow myself some extra ZZs tonight to make sure I have a bank of sleep for if/when the hip pain returns. When I removed my socks and shoes, I discovered the source of my left big toe pain. A large blister had formed under the toenail and lifted the nail off. I've heard of this type of blister before but it had never happened to me. After some consideration, I decided I had the tools to lance it. My lighter sanitized my knife and I lanced the blister, trying to get the clear liquid all out without "squeezing" too much to reduce the chance of infection. I had a single-use packet of triple antibiotic ointment that I put on the tip of the knife and tried to insert under the toenail. I used one of my bandaids to cover the open wound and then wrapped the whole toe in leuko tape to make sure it all stayed put. I set my alarm for 3:15 am, charged my watch, phone, etc for the following day and hit the hay.

Day 3 (April 28th, Monday)

4 AM start and I made it to Rothrock State Forest just as the sun was rising. It was really peaceful to turn the headlamp off while it was still a little dark and watch the world wake up around me. This section starts off with a gravel road hike so I could do that without tripping in the dark lol. The trail turns right and heads into the woods where I stopped to filter water for a 20 mile water carry. I drank as much as I could at that spot so I could try and carry just 1.5 L for the next section, just as I had before. I felt really good with my pack weight at this point, and was able to run many of the downhills.

I crossed the train tracks at Barree village just minutes before a train came by :) that was kinda cool. I was grateful for my timing so I didn't have to wait. I was excited to climb Spruce Knob and wake up my climbing legs. This trail so far had so much flat rolling terrain, and my legs missed climbing. In my opinion, this is where the serious rocks of Rockssylvania begin. I knew I'd be buckling up for rocks, nothing but rocks for the next 30 or so miles. Today was also going to be a hot one! I saw another large porcupine in this section, the biggest one I think I've ever seen. No rattle snakes this year. My feet were definitely getting a bit banged up but it wasn't nearly as bad as past years, so I was grateful for that. I remember crying throughout nearly this entire section last year. The rocks were all wet and slippery, I fell multiple times, and my feet were destroyed from 48+ hours of rain. This year was a complete contrast with no rain for the past 48 hours and I had still yet to shed a single tear. Everything seemed to be locking into place. Lancing my toe blister seemed to be the right call as well, and I could kick rocks without the searing pain from the day before lol.

In the miles leading up to Jo Hays vista / the road crossing, I started to wane. My energy was dipping and my mood was becoming harder to manage. I put on some music, my adventure playlist, and sang along to some of my favorite songs. The heat was definitely getting to me but singing helped to distract me.

I reached Metz Manor and filtered water. I decided to take a 15 minute nap by the creek to try and recover my energy. While it was super hot during the hike, as soon as I stopped moving, my

body would start to shiver. I closed my eyes and elevated my feet but didn't sleep at all. I hoped it was enough to just rest my mind and body so I could continue. After Metz Manor, the trail meanders along for a bit until you finally turn to climb back up onto the ridge line. I love this climb, it's always so welcome after so many miles of just flat rocks and small ups / downs. I tried to push myself to run a bit on this section. My energy was still pretty low but I had a goal today to make it farther than I had in past years. I really wanted to make it to the campsite off Detweiler Junction, which would be a record for me at this point in the adventure. I put on my "hard" playlist which is full of songs that are aimed at pumping me up. That got me moving faster for a bit. The sun started to go down after I passed the Little Flat Fire Tower and I started to feel better with the cooling temps. I started running more and feeling my mood lift again. This section of trail has slightly less rocks too :)

I reached Detweiler Junction well before sundown (around 7:30 pm) and super pleased with my day. I probably could have kept going, but I like the idea of falling asleep as the sun went down and getting an early start to the next day. I treated my toe blister again, charged my devices, and off to sleep. I did not sleep well.

Day 4 (April 29th, part 1 & 2, Tuesday - Wednesday)

Part 1:

I started hiking by 2:30 am and had big plans for today's mileage. I hope to cover 56 ish miles today. This is the day historically where everything unraveled for me, so I was determined to break old patterns. I collected hundreds of spider webs through the rhododendron sections here and used my old spider stick trick (waiving trekking poles in front of me to catch em). I reached Penn-Roosevelt State Park in the dark, used the bathrooms there, and took a photo of a bird that was chillin in their nest outside the bathrooms. The trail then climbs back up to the top of the mountain to meander through mountain laurels. The sun started to rise just as I was reaching the downhill to crawl under route 322.

After climbing back up to the top after the route 322 tunnel, my mood started to drop again. I planned to fill up water at Stillhouse Hollow Rd but decided to just do a 5 minute rest instead of 15. I didn't want to fall behind my schedule. The next section is pretty but long and a lot of the same. I tried to listen to a podcast about bird sounds and could not focus on it for the life of me. My mood was dropping fast and my pace was reflecting the dip in energy. I decided to stop once the trail hit a gravel road for a 15 minute nap and a caffeine pill.

I ran most of the road sections, panther run sections, and all the way to the where I planned to stop for water near Little Poe Valley. Just before you climb up Little Poe Mountain, there is a creek where I wanted to stop for water. I changed into shorts here, put on bug repellent and sunscreen, and climbed up to the top of the mountain ready to face the section that did me in twice before. Time to breath those old habits. I gave a small salute to the sign at hunter trail, where I got off trail on my first attempt. I then ran pretty much the entire top of the ridge listening to my pump up playlist and refusing to think about anything. I stopped near the register at Big Poe Rd to filter more water and dunk my head in the creek, it was getting very hot. I didn't want

to stick around, though, because this is where I lost control of myself on the second attempt. I ran through the park and didn't stop until I reached the tunnel. By then, I really needed a break. I'd run so much and my pack still weighed nearly 24 lbs. I found some shade on the other side of the tunnel and laid out my sleeping pad for a 15 minute rest.

While I was packing back up, I noticed a bulge under my bandage on the big toe. I poked it, and while it didn't hurt, the bulge was definitely there. I removed the leuko tape and bandage to find an even larger blister had now formed at the base of the toenail, but this time not underneath and I could easily see it to lance it. Minor toe surgery part 2 commenced then I was on my way. Now on the rail trail, I was in new territory as far as the FKT attempt goes. I've hiked this section a lot, but never during an FKT attempt. That was an exciting milestone.

By the time I reached Cherry Run Rd, the heat of the day was finally starting to actually slow me down. I think it got up to 85 degrees this day, and I hadn't trained in weather over 70 degrees in over 6 months. I was not conditioned for this. I had to take another 15 minute break to cool off near Cherry Run before starting my climb. I had planned to get water at Libby Run campsite, but decided to bypass that since I was already stopped at Cherry Run. I'd just carry the water uphill.

By 4 pm that day, I don't remember where I was, but that was the first time I cried. I remember just being overwhelmed by the urge to get away from the sun. I needed shade, or a break from it beating on me. Shortly after my little meltdown, I found an evergreen tree with one little spot of shade. I set up my sleeping pad and took a 15 minute rest.

Stopped for water at Cinder Pile Spring. I had many more miles to go so I moved along quickly. I reached Pine Creek Shelter around 7:15 pm and took a quick minute to plan out the rest of my night. I might have spent 5 minutes there and was hiking away from the shelter when I felt an atmospheric shift. I turned around to look up at the sky and found it to be incredibly dark. Within seconds, I could hear the gusts of wind fastly approaching, and then branches were falling around me. Not right next to me, but close enough to send me running back to the shelter. I made a decision to take a 90 minute rest in the shelter to wait out the storm. The storm was quick and brutal, but I was grateful to be at the shelter for it.

Part 2:

By 10:30 pm I was hiking again and heading to my camp for the night at Yankee Run Trail just shy of Crocodile spring. It was really refreshing to hike in the dark and enjoy the cool weather. I reached the spot just before midnight and set my alarm for a short sleep. Once again, sleep did not come easily and my hip pain was becoming a serious problem. I didn't quite make the 50 miles I was shooting for this day, so I wanted to make up for it the next day.

Day 5 (April 30th, Wednesday - Thursday)

With my broken sleep, I snoozed my alarm for the first time of this adventure. I didn't get moving on the trail until 4:08 am. This would be the latest start so far, and I wasn't a huge fan of that idea. It meant I'd be hiking into the night again to make my 50 miles.

The trail was pretty smooth into Raymond B Winter SP, and I made it there before sun up. I ran much of the trail to the park and then slowed down as the trail climbed away from the park. The sun started to rise as I approached Sand Mountain Fire Tire and I noticed once again, someone had been through to cut back all the mountain laurel. Yay! I ran down hill thinking how great it felt to use these different muscles and land on my feet just a bit differently. I stopped briefly at White Deer Creek, where I had hoped to make it last night, and took a 5 minute rest to elevate my feet. Continuing towards I-80, I saw a female turkey and remembered seeing a large male turkey glide down the gully a couple years ago when I was scouting this section too.

I made a push to Gasline Springs where I planned to filter water. I moved through this next section pretty quickly and didn't stop again until I reached White Deer Hole Creek. Here I took a 15-20 minute break. I filtered water, changed my bandage on the big toe, where I found a third blister to lance and re-treat. With the heat of the day fast approaching, I decided to put my dry socks on and place my wet socks on top of my sleeping pad/pack so they could dry out while I hiked. The trail then steadily climbs towards North White Deer Ridge. Along this ridge I heard a motor in the distance. The closer I got, the more I realized it was likely a weed wacker and became excited that I'd get to meet a trail volunteer. Sure enough, I met Ed, the Mid State Trail Association president. He was clearing mountain laurel from the trail. We talked briefly, I explained what I was out there for, and parted ways. As I ran down the trail away from Ed, it struck me how incredibly unique that moment was. I haven't talked to a single soul since the cop in Everett (Tenley Park) and that was over 150 miles ago.

Now noon, the heat was building once again for the day, and the routine set in. I reached Ravensburg SP and set up my sleeping pad near the bridge while I treated my feet, filtered water, and rested my eyes for 8 minutes. I dipped my bandana/buff into the water to drape around my neck and hopefully cool down my core temperature to avoid overheating like yesterday. Time to climb again! I was excited to be reaching the mountains near Zindel/McElhatten, where I spent a lot of time exploring over the past 8 years. I hoped to make it all the way to Henry Run, 8 miles away, before stopping again. Time to climb!

I passed the Old Prohibition Still Site where I'd camped here a couple years ago during a scouting trip. I remember arriving here in the dark and looking around at all the standing dead ash and evergreen trees, thinking, "Good Lord, I'm so glad it's not a windy night". Now the site is littered with dead trees. One of the dead trees I was especially concerned about that past night was laying right across where my tent had been. As I climbed up away from this "camping" area, I passed a second trail volunteer. He was carrying a chain saw and I thanked him for clearing the tree less than a mile back that looked freshly cut. He asked me if I'd seen any blow downs through Ravensburg, and I said no, but as I walked away I realized - I actually had no idea. For the past 5 days I'd just been plowing through / over / around blow downs as if they were just another part of the trail. The only reason I noticed the one he'd recently cut is because I love the smell of fresh cut pine. I hope my response didn't lead him wrong!

By 2 PM, I'm on Ramm Rd having my 2nd meltdown of the adventure. I set up my sleeping pad on the road to rest and recover. The sun was already driving me bonkers, and it wasn't even the hottest part of the day. At the next water stop, I dunked my entire sun shirt into the creek and put it on. My entire body went into a brief shock with the cold fabric touching my skin, but when I began to hike, it was heaven. Within 1-2 miles, my shirt would be bone dry from the heat and sun beating around me. I reached Henry Run and took another break to rest, dunk my shirt in the creek, and apply sunscreen. While there wasn't much shade in the forest at all, there would be less now as I walk roads and rail trails through McElhatten. I ran as much of this as I could to get past it and make up time. The day began to cool as I reached the end of the road walks and climbed out of Woolrich.

I stopped around mile 210 ish, 8:15 pm. I needed to change into warmer clothes now that the sun was going down, filter water for the rest of my night hike, and get the headlamp out. As usual, my energy began to wane with the daylight. This energy dip is why I prefer to wake up and hike in the dark vs hike into the dark after a long day. I had a goal, and I didn't want to risk losing sight of it. Just before the "view" over Gamble Run, I needed to stop to rest. I hugged my knees up to my chest in the fetal position, on my back, to reduce the pressure on my hips / lower back and went into a waking REM sleep. 15 minutes later, I ran down the long descent to Gamble Run. Forded the creek and said so long to my dry shoes to start the climb. I remember this being a very long climb, and encouraged myself to just buckle in for it and not check my phone until I reached the top. I almost made it! I check my phone literally .4 miles from the road crossing at Bull Run road, which is the top. Not far from there, I had a fun encounter with a porcupine who really loved the sound of my trekking poles clanging together. Everytime I tapped them, he would perk up and take steps towards me rather than run off in fear. It got to the point that I had to bushwack around the lil guy to keep moving lol.

The downhill from there was long and destroyed my wet feet. I earned 4 blisters in just that one downhill stretch. I sang songs to myself (Ironie by Alani Morissette, Sentimental Heart by She & Him, anything I knew by heart) to keep myself awake during those last 1.5 miles to my camp. I crossed Bonnell Run and was finally at camp by 12:10 am. I set up my system as quickly as I could. I barely chewed my food before passing out and leaving day 5 behind around 1 am.

At 2 am, I was awake and in terrible pain. I rolled around trying to find a comfortable position for seemingly hours. My mind was spinning with hourly paces, minute / mile goals, and what I'd need to pull off in order to make it to the finish before 8:39 am on Saturday, May 2nd. I still thought it was within reach and I just needed to hit new goals. I last looked at the clock around 3:45 AM.

Day 6 (May 1st, Thursday)

My alarm (a random song from my Spotify playlist) rang at 5 am and I snoozed it. 5:10 am, snoozed again. 5:20 am, and the song "I Have Everything I Need" by Trevor Hall begins to play as the randomized alarm song. My coach had sent me this song a couple years ago when I expressed concern that training was taking some of the joy away from trail running, and I was desperate to find ways to find the joy in exploring again. The lyrics:

*Mmh, I have everything I need
I have everything I need
I have everything I need
Mmh, from the mountain to the sea
All of this is within me
I have everything I need*

This song snapped me out of my sleepy daze and reminded me what I was out here for. I began to break down camp but was moving very slowly. This was the longest it ever took me to get out of camp because I broke down in tears in the process. I opened my phone and found the text message my coach had sent me prior to starting this journey on Friday.

Do this for all the versions of you that can't. Do it for all the past versions that would never have dreamed it was possible, and the ones that dreamed it was possible but it wasn't yet their time. Do it for the future versions of you who will no longer be in the phase where it is possible. Do it for you now, because you can! And it will be a gift you give to all the versions of yourself.

If your mind waivers, go back to the facts. Go back to the facts of your resume. Go back to the facts of all the wisdom you have acquired. Go back to the facts of all of the training you have nailed. Feed yourself facts like you would to a client or friend or stranger who you know needs to revisit the truth to recharge confidence to press on.

Go out and let your mind find peace. Following that vein of peace you will find your path, and you will continue to continue.

I began to hike at 6:09 AM. Made a wrong turn at the Pine Creek Rail Trail (a section I actually know incredibly well) and had to run back a half mile to take the trail through Bonnell Flats. The climb out of Ramsey woke me up, and I ran the majority of the next section to Ramsey Run bridge. I stopped for water and had one of those magical moments all to myself as the sun shone through the trees and sparkled off water cascading over rocks on the run. I remember saying something to that moment, but I don't remember what. Something about the beauty and my awe of it. I felt great until reaching the long rolling terrain after Dam Run Rd - the last few miles into Little Pine State Park. My mood began to drop here once again but I promised myself I would push through Little Pine, only stopping to get water from the bath spigot. I followed through. I bartered with myself as I climbed through all the incredibly cool hoodoos of this ridgeline. I allowed myself a 15 min break in the shade at Spike Buck Hollow intersection. I was again entering the hottest parts of the day, now at mile 231. I continued dunking my sun shirt in every creek or water source I could find.

A highlight of this day was Black Cabin Natural Area, around mile 236 around 1:45 pm. The pine needles underfoot were as close as I could imagine pillows might feel on my feet, and the dense conifers (hemlocks? I didn't look close) created a cool shade from the direct sun. I was excited

to realize I was less than 100 miles to the finish now. I've run 100 miles before. I could do this. The next sections were fairly quick and I felt good running - my pack was likely down to 22 lbs or less by now.

After the misery of the previous night, I told my coach I didn't want to hike all the way to Basswood run tonight. I wanted to cut it short by about 10 miles so I could finish my hike around 10:30 and hike more in the dark after waking up. There is something very rewarding about covering 20-25 miles before noon, and I wanted to feel that again. She agreed with my plan and encouraged me to still get up & out of camp early, 3:30 am.

A thunder/lightning storm rolled in as I climbed the back half of Gillespie, maybe around 9 pm. It rained buckets. One my way up, I noticed my back pain rolling in quite strongly. I took 2 advil and hoped for the best. The pain stuck around all the way up and down Gillespie, through Blackwell, and along the Pine Creek Rail trail. It lasted all the way up until the turn to climb up Johnson Cliffs. I began up the steps with my back at a 90 degree angle to take pressure off. The rest of the climb was a total downpour, but I felt so alive. I think this was the last truly spectacular moment I felt for the rest of the trip. I had some good moments, but the climb up Johnson Cliff was heaven and I couldn't tell you why other than everything seemed to click into place physically and mentally.

Reached camp at Upper Stone Quarry Run by 10:30 PM and set up my tent in a downpour. It rained hard all night, and I know, because I hardly slept. I might have gained 1.5 hours of sleep this night.

Day 7 (May 2nd, Friday)

3:40 AM and I was moving once again. The rain stopped while I was breaking camp but it didn't matter, there was so much water on the trail and on the trees it might as well have been raining. It was a slow moving morning, which I attributed to the wet rocks and dark navigation. As I approached Stony Fork, the thought occurred to me that the creek is likely flooded. The rain stopped a 2-3 hours ago, and I'd likely arrive at sunrise, so that gave me hope that it would become passable with that much time. I mentally prepared for a workaround, though, just in case. My first view of Stony fork was absolutely terrifying. I was grateful not to be crossing at that tight section because it was entirely impassable, deadly fast and flooded. This didn't bode well for my crossing, either. By 6 am, I was at the fording point, and I was right to be concerned. I decided to give it a go, telling myself I'd turn back if it got too dicey. I unclipped my backpack to be easily cast off in case of emergency. I moved all my snacks and gear to higher points in my pack and secured my inreach in my shirt's chest pocket in case I was separated from my pack and needed to contact someone for help.

- Attempt #1 - I started to ford moving sideways and facing against the current. Within 3-4 steps, the water was already to my ribcage and promised to only get deeper. I abandoned this attempt and went back to shore.
- Attempt #2 - A year and half ago, I forded this creek in November and found a more shallow section a bit further down stream within view of the trail crossing. I moved to that section and tried my luck a second time. I moved just as before - sideways facing

against the current. I took one step without testing the depth with my trekking pole first and it was a critical mistake. The stream swept me up and I was quickly floating downstream. I passed a boulder and couldn't gain a hand hold. I passed a second boulder soon after and this time I grasped it enough to pull myself around it. From here I had to find my way back to shore, and I'm not 100% sure how I did that but I got there.

- Attempt #3 I tried again ever so slightly upstream from the second attempt and made some adjustments. Instead of moving sideways, I moved diagonally forward against the current. I made no steps with my feet until the trekking pole reached out first to test the depth and gain stability first.

I made it across. The adrenaline that got me across the creek was rushing out of me and I needed to recover emotionally from this. I took about 15 minutes to just feel everything. Then I began hiking up to Roland Run. At Roland Run, I assessed the water damage to my pack, and was grateful I moved all my gear to be safe from the water exposure. Everything inside the contractor bag in my pack was dry. I changed clothes, swapped out my water to avoid drinking unfiltered Stoney Creek which might have merged with my drinking water through the holes at the top of the cap.

Back to it. I called my husband around the historical coal mining sites to explain what had happened. He normalized the experience for me by telling a story about a similar experience he had while fly fishing. I decided it is what it is and I did what I did. I made it across. "What if"s be damned.

I reached Antrim and was in rough shape emotionally, and I could barely move. I planned to run this section and it took all I had to just keep putting one foot in front of the other. My low back/hip pain was in full swing and the sun was high in the sky, beating on me once again. I decided I would need more sleep if I planned to move quickly today. I stopped at Robinson Steele Run and set my alarm for 45 minutes.

Feeling better, I was able to run periodically again and continued my habit of dunking my sun shirt in every stream I could find. Another 15 minute break at sand run falls where I filtered more water. Another break somewhere along the 3 mile stretch to Arnot Road. I called Jesse when I reached the road once more to chat and we talked about how I was doing. He asked me what food / drink I'd like to have at the finish, and it was such an amazing moment to think about.

The rest of the day is road walks and private property walks. My emotions got the best of me on these private property walks, where you're either walking through a sloshy overgrown farm field, trudging through mud and cow pies, or through a completely unmaintained forest littered with downed trees and no real path to follow other than the orange blazes. I reached camp by 8 PM and the rain was beginning to roll in. I prepared my cold soak of ramen and mashed potatoes for "breakfast" before hitting the hay. The original plan was to "nap and rally" for 90 minutes, but after the last 24 hours, I didn't think I could handle another day of not allowing myself to sleep enough. I chose to allow myself another opportunity for 3 hours sleep. I tried to charge my phone, but my battery pack was dead. My watch had 70% charge which I knew should get me

through the next day, but my phone was at 20%. I would need to find a way to make 20% last me a full 35 miles of navigation.

Day 7.5 (May 3rd, (Saturday))

By 12:30 am, I was up and breaking camp. I believe I got ~2 hours of sleep considering the pain that woke me over the last 3.5 hours. It was raining and would continue to rain for nearly the rest of the day. The trail returns to road walks and private property walks. At one point I heard a couple bard owls hooting and then I heard sheep baaing somewhere in a field next to me behind some bushes. That was interesting. I made it to Hills Creek in the dark and planned to refill my water at one of the bath houses. Unfortunately, the bathhouse was temporarily closed. I was out of water and the Far Out guide said I wouldn't see water again until Stephenhouse Run nearly 4 miles away, after a long climb. I decided I'd find a puddle. Sure enough, there was a gutter running under Carpenter Rd and I filtered water from that lol. It tasted fine.

As per usual, I felt great at the climb and was excited to be on real trail again. The trail hits a road and then turns left into some Spruce trees before heading back down towards Stephenhouse Run. It started to rain again here and I decided to stop and put my raincoat on, thinking I might get chill on the downhill. After situating the rain coat and throwing the pack back on, I was moving again. I looked around noticing that this section of trail, which I've probably traversed dozens of times (I run loops here every year for an event), looked different. I chalked it up to sleep deprivation - I'm just out of it. Then the trail dumped me back out on the road I had entered on, and I realized why it didn't look familiar. I was going the wrong direction, back the way I came.

Laughing at myself, I turned back around and continued on my way, again. It was hard to consider the finish at this point. I was too far away in my mind. 25+ miles was still too much to contemplate and feel any amount of excitement. At the fire tower, about 11 miles in for the day and 24 miles from the finish, I laid down with my sleeping bag at first light. I must have been 5:30 am? I laid there cowboy camp style letting my down sleeping bag get rained on (it was a light sprinkle) not giving any cares.

As I reached Ives Run, I realized I was really enjoying running on squishy ground. It was a welcome break from the hard, dry ground that was covered in rocks so much of the time. My feet were okay with this. Then came the miles of road walking again. By this point I was crying 60% of the time. I desperately needed to lay down and rest my eyes, but the rain made that very difficult. The climb up to Scenic View Campground was a total downpour. When I reached the top, though, the day flipped for me. I started to run and suddenly I could feel the finish line in my veins.

I ran the entirety of Shepard Creek Road, dodging 100s of little orange newts along the way. I hit the road, and **didn't** cry. Finally I had reached the 9 miles of trail around Cowanesque Lake! It was a bit harder to navigate than I remembered, but I still had 4% battery power and could still reference my Far Out App guide. By the time I reached the north side of the lake, my feet were intensely inflamed and I was slowing down again. I'd run 90% of the last 8 miles and it was

taking its toll. I stopped to change into the only pair of dry socks I had and felt “great” for about .25 miles before the trail took me through wet terrain again and bye bye dry socks. I thought about my dad and how he believes in me, I thought about my mom and how she was worried about me, and about my friends who are just standing in the rain waiting for me to get this over with.

I was crying when I reached the turn to hit the road and head uphill to the finish. But when I hit the climb, I looked down at the dirt and gave it everything I had left in the tank. I ran hard until I couldn't, then ran more. I promised I wouldn't think about seeing the finish line and just kept my head down until it was right there. When I finally came around the corner and saw my parents, my husband, and a couple close friends all standing there in the rain waiting for me and cheering, I could have died. It was the most magical moment. I thought I would cry more, but the tears were all gone. I was happy, relieved, proud, and exhilarated.

The end.

I started writing this on Monday, just 2 days after finishing and after my first day back to work. I am finishing it on Wednesday, now 4 days after finishing and 3 days back to work. I don't believe I've had time to really sit and think about what the hell just happened. I'm hoping to take the rest of this night to let it soak in.

What a wild adventure that was.