

A day to rest and reflect. I got everything in order, got a good parking spot and was preparing myself by 6:50 which gave me plenty of time to relax. Got my drop bag in order, chatted with some friends and got ready for the race. Last minute, I decided to bring my poles with me and while they weren't used much in the first lap, I did use them on all climbs throughout the race.

First lap in and I was still ahead of safe pace and doing pretty well with my other two goal paces. The legs were moving well and I was very pleased with how things were going. I fueled and drank appropriately and things were looking up. I ended up pacing a friend who just stuck behind me for the first 10 laps and we were both chatting and sharing old memories. First aid station was in and out within 5 minutes and by the 2:10 mark I was off for Lap 2.

Lap 2 began normally, still easing into the downhill section for 2 miles before the climb. During my previous BigA race, lap 12.5 where the climb back to Mt.A happens is where I started cramping. Same thing happened on my practice run 3 weeks ago and sure enough, same thing happened during the race. I take a Guldens and within 10 seconds I was back at it, marching up the hill. This prevented any cramps for probably 5 miles until they started back up again and by mile 16-17, I had to start really actively monitoring pace and muscle feel to ensure I didn't cook my legs for the last lap. Second lap 2:15 and 5 minute pit stop meant I was back out for the final lap by 4:30, giving myself 2:30 to complete the final lap and still get my goal time. The cramping began at the same spot on the third lap and was pretty epic. Not as debilitating as in the past, so I was still able to shuffle pretty good but I relied heavily on the poles. I had magnesium sulfate foam which I was applying liberally to the affected adductor areas and I think that helped a bit. I eventually ran out of Guldens as I hadn't anticipated this much cramping. Occasionally checking my watch, I knew I'd make it in under 7 hours so began to more judiciously run/jog/walk than just making sure I was mostly running.

Crossed the finish line with two calf cramps and a smile.

So that's the race recap, here's the mental side. It was great to run with an old friend. Kept the miles going, kept the pace appropriate and helped it be even more fun. Passed some people throughout which is always a nice feeling. Once I was by myself for the final 14 miles, it got a little less fun, but I run so much by myself it was just normal.

When I first cramped, I didn't panic. I felt it coming and got the mustard packet out, did what I did and then recovered and off I went. As I've cramped in the same location on the race course all 3 times I've done it, I wasn't surprised nor put off. Triage and move

on. The surprising part was how frequent they became after that starting at mile 17. The calves wrinkled from time to time but didn't affect me until the final mile.

When I left Lap 1 at 2:10 in, I had a moment where I thought 'holy shit, I could do this 6:30 time after all'. Then the cramping started and I let go of any pace goals and wanted to finish with a smile, as I had promised myself I would do. So I did. I know the course well enough that I have a good idea where I was anyway. Pace was irrelevant, distance was irrelevant, so I just stopped looking at the watch and kept grinding.

By the start of the 3rd lap, I shuffled out of the start line and started mentally checking off spots on the course I knew I wouldn't run again as I don't plan to race the course again. It helped check things off the list and make mental progress. 'That tree... goodbye beautiful tree'. Sort of thing.

Overall, I wish I knew how to keep my muscles from being so sapped and cramping BUT, I didn't let it ruin my day and I still PR'd by 6 minutes. In 2021 when I set the first time for myself, I was running hills at 1,000 ft per day or more. I was hill obsessed. I think that was an advantage for my body in being more toned for climbing and descending. I began to feel the adductors more often when I descended than ascended which was an interesting tidbit to be aware of. 3 years difference, two different approaches and I mostly had the same result, within a rounding error of time, but it was faster and I was way less miserable. Did I work through suffering this time? You'd best believe it. But I didn't go to a dark place. I just kept my head up and knew it would end at some point, the muscles would heal, and we'd be on to the next phase of training for Bigfoot.

I do wonder if faster paced elevation-based races just aren't my thing. I did 109 miles at BBU23 and no cramping at all. Same for BBU22. Even though I had some muscle issues, no cramping. When I do pemi-loop stuff and longer distance less pace-based, I never cramp. Its always the super high exertion things. My avg HR was 159 for almost 7 hours so that's... that's a lot. That's pushing it about as much as I can during that duration. Proud of that as well.