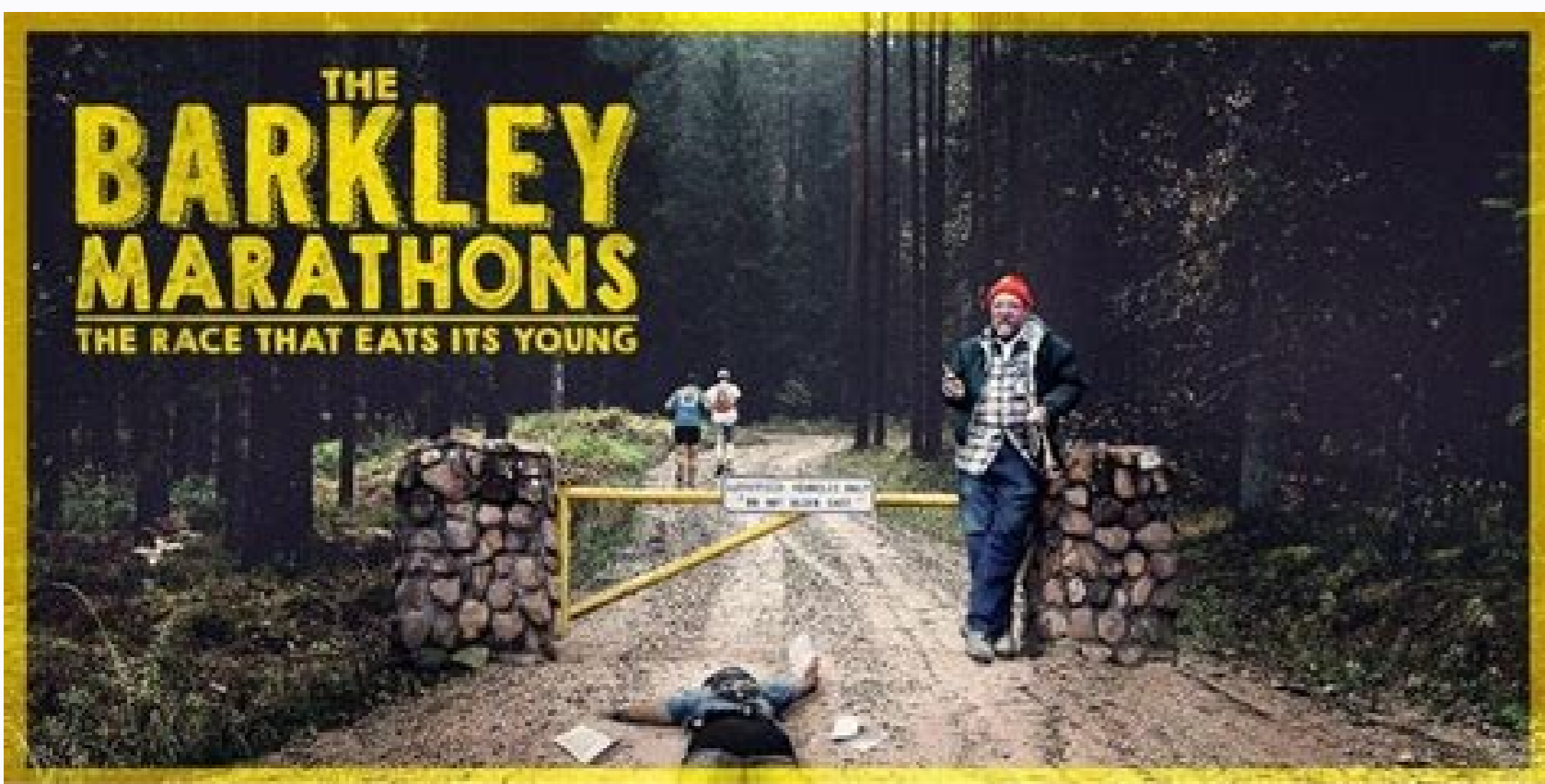


I'm not robot!



2018 barkley marathon. 2018 barkley marathon results. Barkley marathon 2018 finishers.

** If you have no idea what the Barkley "Marathons" is, read this first! ** Frozen Head freezes over! "Come to the South," they said. "Enjoy the weather. Try some barbeque." "Fuck dude, it's snowing," I yell to my buddy Peter as we pull into Frozen Head State Park, home of the Barkley Marathons, just days before the race. "That's why I booked us a warm hotel room," Peter chirps proudly. "With free HBO?" I inquire sarcastically. "With free HBO!" Peter beams. "And also, I brought edibles!" he adds. #FistBump But, it was not yet time to let our minds wander to the many untold amenities awaiting us at the local Comfort Inn, which would undoubtedly include an all-you-can-eat sausage-patty breakfast buffet and make-your-own Belgian waffles. No, now was not the time for sausages. Now was the time for action! Our plan was to get familiar with the park, and to scout out a few key sections of the race course. About 50% of the course is technically off trail, and hence off limits - except during the race. That means, except for race day, you're not allowed to venture off trail. If you're caught, you'll receive a triple life-time ban from the race. And a fine. However, you are welcome to check out the sections of the course that use actual, official park-trails. Having never been to the park before, I was eager to see some of the signature Barkley "attractions" such as: "the Pillars of Death," "the Flume of Doom," "Son-of-a-Bitch Ditch," "Testicle Spectacle," etc. Peter and I put on our mittens and headed up the mountain. When we arrived at the so-called "Pillars of Death," I was deeply disappointed. "Pillars of Death?" I scoffed as I easily walked across a series of stepping stones that were probably only three to four feet off the ground. I joked to Peter that they should instead be named "Pillars of Mild Inconvenience" or "Pillars of Possible Ankle Sprain." For some reason, I suddenly laughed as I recalled a scene from the movie Spinal Tap where the band hilariously dances around a miniature replica of Stonehenge. I continued to amuse myself by obnoxiously pointing out other dangerous obstacles such as the "Broken Twigs of Terror" and the "Three Small Pine-cones of Despair." "Hey, watch out for the Acorn of Anguish," I yelled to Peter. "This place is fraught with peril!" Yes, I'm an asshole. And yes, I was pretty sure Barkley would ultimately have the last laugh. Big Johnny trying, quite unsuccessfully, to troll Laz That time Laz nearly uninvited me for showing up in my underwear and a cape! It was mighty nippily Friday evening as everyone congregated at camp in their puffy jackets for race registration. But, never one to let the possibility of penile frostbite get in the way of making a spectacle of myself, I sauntered up to the registration table in my superhero cape and star-spangled Speedo. The race director, Laz, was not impressed. Despite my best efforts to troll him, he never once looked up as he processed my registration. Either he's seen it all before, or he was perhaps thinking to himself, "God I hope this jackass actually tries to run in that outfit. The saw briars on the course are going to give new meaning to the phrase, Testicle Spectacle." I'd always heard that Laz has quite the sense of humor, so I was a bit disappointed that I hadn't been able to coax a smile out of him, much less a reaction of any kind. But, in fairness, the man was wearing hunting cap that literally had the word "Geezer" embroidered on it. So, truth in advertising I guess. But, at the end of registration Laz demonstrated that he does indeed have a sense of humor. He issued each runner an "emergency clicker" to be worn around our necks. Attached to a lanyard was a black metal device with a red panic button. The instructions on the side stated, "Barkley Marathons Emergency Clicker: In Case of Emergency Press Button". However, the button - and the entire device itself - was completely non-functional. It was all an elaborate setup to the punchline of a joke, as depicted on the official race tee-shirt that shows the skeletal remains of a Barkley runner sitting in the woods holding the clicker: "Help is not coming!" So yeah, funny guy. Big Johnny shows off his... map? Zoom in for full detail! A map, a map, my kingdom for a map! Unlike most other ultras, the Barkley course isn't marked. Instead, runners - who are affectionately referred to as "morons" in Barkley parlance - are required to navigate the course using printed instructions, a compass, and a map copied by hand from a master map that Laz unveils hours before the race. I was still rolling around in the backseat of my rental car, desperately trying to wriggle out of my two-sizes-too-tight Captain America Speedo when Laz brought out this year's map. A huge crowd of runners - armed with pink highlighters - immediately swarmed the picnic table. I quickly threw on my pants and grabbed my art supplies. Time to get crafty! Eventually I squeezed my way up to the table and got to work creating my cartographic masterpiece. In my rush to pack for the race, I'd only brought my small, travel-size, 96-count box of Crayola Crayons. So, unfortunately, I ended up having to use Umellow Yellow and Razzle Dazzle Rose instead of Neon Carrot and Jazberry Jam as I'd originally planned. Fellow runner, Melody Hazi and I were still putting some final touches on our maps when it suddenly started raining. I was in the middle of calculating and jotting down compass bearings for key sections of the course. And by, "right in the middle of" I mean that I had only just begun. But I took the sudden rain as an omen that I should wrap things up, start waterproofing my (still unfinished) map with packaging tape, and get to bed. As I was frantically trying to re-locate the lost packaging tape (that had fallen somewhere under the driver's seat), my crew-chief Peter decided that now would be a great time to bombard me with a bunch of super-important questions like, what color socks do I plan to wear tomorrow, and whether I think I will want Mild, Hot, Fire, or Verde salsa with my tacos after loop one. Several bursts of profanity later, I stuffed my half-completed, partially waterproofed map into a Ziploc bag and called it a night. Then I texted my wife Amy something upbeat and encouraging, along the lines of, "My map sucks donkey balls. I'm not sure I can even locate the restrooms with this thing. I'm so fucked. Good night!" Michael Warden showing me where NOT to go :) No sleep till Warburg! Lying awake in the back of the car listening to Peter snore in the front seat, I tossed and turned, not quite able to find an angle where the folded-down seats didn't dig into my spine. Unable to calm my mind, and terrified of what tomorrow might bring, I did what anyone in my position would do. I began humming Neil Diamond's greatest hits. Somewhere between "Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon" and "Sweet Caroline" I finally managed to drift off to sleep. I had half-expected Laz to blow the conch shell sometime in the wee hours of the night (to signal the start of the race), but I was pleasantly surprised when I woke up at 8 am and the race hadn't started without me. Thus, I'd already achieved my first goal for the race, which was to not sleep through the start. Now I could focus on my next two goals: not getting lost before finding at least one book, and/or not being the first person to get "tapped out" by the bugle player. As the race started, I tucked in behind Barkley veteran and previous "fun-run" finisher Jodi Isenor, with whom I'd been in email contact leading up to the race. Jodi was one of the pre-race favorites (along with Gary Robbins and Guillaume Calmettes) who people thought had a legitimate shot at finishing the whole thing this year. Everything went surprisingly smooth for the first few miles. I even managed to stay with the lead pack and reached book #1 on top of England Mountain together with the front runners. Woo hoo! But like a Twinkie that's been stuffed in the small back-pocket of your running shorts and accidentally sat down upon one-too-many times, things quickly got very messy. Suddenly we arrived at the "Flume of Doom" - a narrow crevice in a steep cliff wall only wide enough for one person to climb/slide/fall-down at a time. After watching Gary Robbins fail to properly slowdown in time and basically just plummet off the cliff (which he somehow miraculously managed to survive), I decided to descend slightly more deliberately. Exiting the bottom of the flume however, I found myself well behind the leaders. "Donkey farts!" I mumbled. Barkley-veteran Marc "Eagle Pants" Laveson randomly points at map during staged photo This is easy. Too easy. Although I'd lost sight of the leaders, I could still hear their voices. And, more importantly, I was downwind of them (and some of them were French). "Now is the time to harness your innate Native American tracking skills," I told myself. "Just close your eyes and follow their scent." Miraculously it worked, and I nailed the descent and arrived perfectly at book #2 at the river confluence in the Northwest corner of the park boundary just as the leaders were running off. A few miles later I caught up to Jodi on the switchbacks towards Bald Knob. I was shocked to see him, as I had expected him to be up ahead with the leaders. But he mentioned that his legs were feeling strangely heavy. I decided to back off the pace a bit and stick with him, figuring it was wiser to hang with a veteran rather than to forge ahead on my own. "Hey, is that Amelia Boone?" I yelled as I look back over my shoulder at two other runners (including Barkley veteran Johan Steene) quickly approaching from behind. "Yep, it's me," she confirmed. Amelia and I had spent some time together several weeks prior at another "Barkley-style" race in California that is even more underground and even more secretive than Barkley itself. It's so secretive in fact, that I'm not even allowed to mention it by name. Let's just call it "Skull Torrent." But, I digress... "Johnny, this way!" Amelia yelled. I looked back to see that Johan, Jodi, and Amelia had all turned off the trail and were headed up into the woods toward the summit of Bald Peak. "Fudge Nuggets!" I exclaimed. And with that I learnt my first Barkley lesson: never continue straight on a perfectly-good trail if there's a steeper, shittier off-trail option. "Thanks Amelia," I yelled as I gave Jodi the stink eye. All was forgiven when we found book #3 on top of Bald Knob. We then dropped back down to the North Boundary Trail and continued making our way East along the park boundary. When we finally found book #4 at Garden Spot in the Northeast corner of the park, I was elated. I was happy, of course, to have found another book; but I was even more excited about the fact that we'd just stepped across county lines, temporarily leaving alcohol-free Morgan County and entering Anderson County, where a red-blooded American can legally chug a beer in the woods if he sees fit. But alas, I had no beer to chug. Mandatory race-issued watch Walmart's finest \$10 timepiece Butt-slides and saw-briers Just before the race, Laz announced that this year's course should be faster than last year because he'd added four-hundred more feet of descent! Funny guy. As that also means - being a looped course with zero net-elevation gain - he's essentially made the race harder by adding another 400-foot climb. And he put that climb at the bottom of a terrible section affectionately known as "Leonard's Butt Slide." Jodi expertly lead us through Stallion Mountain - which is generally acknowledged to be the trickiest section of the course - without incident. And now it was time for some butt slidin'. I was stoked! In my head I was picturing a long, fun, amusement-park ride - like something from the movie Goonies. So, I was bummed when instead, Leonard's Butt Slide turned out to be just another steep-ass hill, laden with rocks, sticks, briars, and other unpleasanties. Also, we never did find One-Eyed-Willy's lost pirate treasure. But I did find book #5, hidden under a big rock. So yay. Finding the book gave me confidence. I was starting to feel like less of a noob. But then, sadly, I made an ass of myself by asking Amelia if she needed help lifting the rock to put the book away - temporarily forgetting that she's a four-time Spartan Race World Champion who could probably pick up the rock and run all the way up the mountain with it if she wanted. #MyBad Jodi continued leading the way and giving us a guided tour of the course. He was super helpful in

pointing out things that might help us remember where to go on subsequent loops. He also made sure to periodically quiz us on our compass bearings (to see if we had drawn a map correctly). Amelia missed the tests with flying colors. I received a red-ribbed, "please see me after class" on my test. I found book #6 - in a hole in rock, on the top of a mountain. We found book #7 - in the hollow of a tree, next to another tree. And we found book #8 - in an old tire, next to a bunch of other old tires, next to a rusted oil drum. [Did you write all that down. Voila! Now you're ready to run Barkley!] Book #9 was probably one of the easiest books to find, but one of the hardest to get to. The book itself was just lying on a table next to a lookout tower. Lookout towers aren't hard to find; you can generally just look straight up at the tallest peak and immediately spot them. It's the actual hiking up the tallest peak that presents the challenge. And while there is a perfectly good dirt road that gently winds its way up to the tower, Laz of course sends us up a different route. A much steeper, much muddier, much more heavily briar-infested route. Because, you know, Barkley, Jodi, Johnny, and Amelia hiking up Rat Jaw. Photo by Alfie Alcantara The light at the end of the tunnel The climb up to the tower sucked. It was so muddy that we could hardly stay on our feet - even with trekking poles. I looked over at one point and saw Amelia literally crawling up the mountain on all fours. I reached down into the mud and grabbed a downed cable (we're hiking up Rat Jaw, which is a power-line cut) and used it to pull myself up the hill. Jodi, meanwhile, was off to the side, preferring to bushwhack through a patch of razor-sharp briars rather than dealing with the mud. Eventually we reached the top and retrieved our respective book pages. Afraid that we might be too slow to keep up with Jodi on the muddy descent, Amelia and I took off right away to give ourselves a little head start while Jodi paused for a quick snack. As expected, he quickly caught back up to us and zoomed past. "Cheese whiz!" And then it happened. Amelia took a nasty fall. "Corn Nuts! That looked painful." I muttered to myself. Seconds later, I too went down in pretty much the exact same spot. "Tartar Sauce!" I mumbled. On the bright side, at least Amelia had pre-softened the landing for me. But on the considerably-less-bright-side, Jodi was now suddenly out of sight. Looking down to our right, we spotted the prison - where we needed to be. Apparently, we'd overshot our mark. "Fudge berries!" I cursed. Correcting course, we shot down to the prison and crawled into a dark, wet, underground tunnel that ran the entire length of the abandoned (and purportedly haunted) prison complex. Reminiscent of a scene from the Shawshank Redemption, Amelia and I squeezed through the bent metal bars and slipped into the dark tunnel. We could barely see our own feet as we tried to quickly-but-carefully wade through the ankle-deep water (or at least what we hoped was just water). Several hundred yards ahead, we briefly caught a fleeting glimpse of Jodi's silhouette exiting against the bright sunlight. Unbeknownst to Amelia and I, the ankle-deep surface we were running along was about to suddenly become knee-deep without warning. Boom, Amelia went down hard, headfirst, into the icy cold water. When she popped back up, she was soaking from head to toe. But hey, at least she wasn't muddy anymore. #AlwaysLookOnTheBrightSideofLife My awesome Ruhn Co., tights survived Rat Jaw! James gets abducted by aliens? Jodi was long gone when Amelia and I finally "escaped" from under the prison and grabbed book #10. We debated what to do. I suggested that we try to navigate on our own; head up Razor Ridge and make our way over to Indian Knob. Amelia - who was understandably reluctant to go off alone into the woods with a weirdo in a tight Speedo and super-hero cape - suggested we wait for Barkley veteran Johan Steene, who we saw climbing up Rat Jaw as we were descending. We agreed to wait, which was a bit of a risky roll-of-the-dice for Amelia, who was still cold and soaking wet from her fall in the tunnel. If we stopped moving for too long, hypothermia could set in. Thankfully, after just a few minutes, we saw someone running down towards the prison. Except, it wasn't Johan. It was another Barkley virgin, Scottish Terrier harrier, James Mace. We waited for James at the water tower above the prison, and then the three of us proceeded up the mountain together. James is a strong navigator (and a strong runner), and we quickly reached the capstones (i.e., big rock-cliff thingies) on top of the mountain without incident. His navigation was spot on! However, once we reached Indian Knob we struggled to locate the actual book and ended up wandering around aimlessly, losing precious time. "Pot stickers!" James double-checked his bearings; he was quite certain we were in the right spot. Amelia and I consulted the written instructions and decided to look a little further North. It was getting foggy and we were having a tough time seeing and communicating with each another. Suddenly, we couldn't find James. We yelled loudly, repeatedly, but there was no response. "Shitlike mushrooms! He was just here!" "What happened to James?" "I'm not a believer in zombies, alien abductions, or things that go bump in the night. That said, I was starting to get a little creeped out. Unsure what else to do, we had to press on without him - hoping he wasn't being probed and/or dissected by aliens. Alien abduction in progress? Photo by Deborah Brunswick A few minutes later, Amelia and I successfully found book #11 in a narrow passageway in the rocks called "the eye of the needle." Woo hoo. We did it! We were literally right in the middle of a little victory celebration when another runner stepped out of the fog and interrupted our spirited high-five with his forehead. Together the three of us dropped down the mountain to the Beech Fork river confluence where we found book #12 perfectly - perhaps too perfectly? Remarkably, the other runner, also a Barkley virgin, seemed to intuitively know exactly where to find the book - even without ever pulling out his compass or map. Even more remarkably, he ran straight up to the tree that the book was hidden in, as if he'd been there before. Which of course he couldn't have been, since as everyone knows it's clearly against the rules to pre-scout the off-trail sections of the course before the race (even though the books are placed out days in advance). Amelia and I grabbed our pages and headed up the mountain, excited to be on the last climb of the loop. Only one more book to go and we would definitely (well, almost-certainly) complete our first Barkley loop! We reached Chimney Top easily, but then struggled to locate the darn book. "Stupid rocks," I mumbled as we walked around in circles, inspecting every cave, crack, and crevice. Eventually we did find the book - with a little help from two other runners. As we headed back down the mountain towards camp, we were ecstatic to finally be back on real actual-to-goodness trails. No stupid saw briars. No muddy "butt slides". No sharp punji sticks and rusty fence-wires hiding under leaves. Actual runnable trails! It was glorious. Laz (left) and Peter "Russian Bear" (right) Meet my semi-elite crew team - Peter Rabover and Marc Lavesson Amelia and I trotted into camp with bright lights on our heads and big smiles on our faces. We triumphantly handed our pages to Laz, who slowly counted them out, and then offered them back. Amelia immediately snatched hers and proclaimed that she was going to have them framed, or bronzed. I reluctantly took mine and made some wisecrack about using them as toilet paper on loop two. As part of my extensive planning and meticulous preparations for Barkley, I'd reached out to dozens of potential candidates for my crew team including several former Army Rangers and Navy Seals, a retired four-star General, television-survivalist Bear Grylls, and some guy named Chris who works in the deli at Whole Foods. Unfortunately, none of them were available so I got stuck with my buddies Peter Rabover (who insisted on being called "Russian Bear") and Marc Lavesson (who I insisted on calling "Eagle Dick"). Bear and Eagle were both still relatively sober and not-yet-completely-stoned out of their minds when I came in, hours later than expected, after my first loop. They'd pre-heated our rental car to a toasty, if not slightly suffocating, 2,000 degrees - for my comfort? I immediately began stripping off my clothes with one hand, while shoving tacos into my face with the other. As I sat in the oppressively warm car, binge-eating tacos in my underwear, a wicked storm rolled into camp. Suddenly it started raining frogs and fish. I turned to Papa Bear and Eagle Pants (or whatever we are calling them). "Dudes, it's gonna be miserable out there. What do you think I should wear on loop two? I like my trucker-hat because it accentuates my cheek bones. But the red stocking-cap goes well with my complexion..." After a very spirited and exceptionally-detailed analysis of the various items of clothing I'd packed, we finally reached a consensus. As I waddled out of car wearing practically every garment I owned, I felt like the kid in the movie, A Christmas Story, whose mother swaddles him in so many layers that he can't get up after he falls down in the snow. "I can't move my arms!" I quipped. John dressed for loop two Two virgins alone the dark Dressed like a mummified sumo wrestler, I headed back "out there" with Amelia, ready to take on the night! Sadly, we immediately got off course in the first mile - and embarrassingly, it was on one of the actual signed park trails. Silly virgins! Luckily, we caught our mistake and corrected course just in time to see two other runners - Eoin Keith and Maggie Guterl - coming down off the mountain into the campground at the end of their first loop. [Remember those two names, as you'll likely hear them again in a couple paragraphs.] You may recall earlier when I described learning my first lesson at Barkley (i.e., always take the steeper, shittier, off trail route if presented with two options). Now we were about to learn our second Barkley lesson: anything that is even remotely-easy during the light of day, can become nearly impossible in the dark-of-night, in the fog, when your fingers have gone numb from the cold. Just an hour or two previously, Amelia and I had located book #13 at the end of loop one. Now, there we were again, looking for the exact same book again as we attempted to navigate the course in the reverse-direction. Except now the book wasn't there. Or - more accurately - it was there, but we were apparently somewhere else. As we wandered around... and around... and around, searching in vain for the book, the weather conditions continued to deteriorate. Not only was it raining, but now the fog was rolling in. Suddenly we couldn't see more than a few feet in front of us. Our headlamps became virtually useless, as all they did was reflect the fog in front of our faces and bounce the light back into our eyes. Barkley "aid station" After a few more superfluous laps around Chimney Top, Amelia and I decided to take shelter under a rock overhang and wait it out, hoping that other runners would soon come along (preferably before we froze to death). Luckily, we didn't have to wait long. "Hark! Rejoice, a pair of headlamps doth approach. Yonder cometh Maggie and Eoin!" I loudly proclaimed. Amelia, who was so excited to see her friend Maggie, completely ignored the fact that I'd suddenly started speaking as if we were at a Renaissance Faire. "Ahoy, me Hearties! Ye're a sight fer sore eyes. We dunno where th' book be. We is fixin' to walk th' plank. Arrgh!" I barked out at Maggie and Eoin, inexplicably switching from Ren-Faire to Pirate dialect. Maggie and Eoin - who were oddly unfazed by running into a pirate-captain on top of a mountain in the forest Tennessee, nearly 600 miles from the nearest seaport - graciously invited us to tag along with them. Eoin quickly tracked down the missing book in just a matter of minutes. "Goodness gracious! Well, I declare. Heavens to Betsy. Come hug my neck." I drawled. Amelia and I were thrilled to have company - especially such good company! Eoin Keith is one of the UK's top endurance athletes. He holds numerous FKTs, Irish national records, and course records including Britain's Spine Race - one of the hardest races in the world. Maggie Guterl, aka "Maggotron" has finished in the top 10 at Western States, and has represented US at the IUA 24 Hour World Championships where she finished 4th, helping lead team USA to gold. Don't worry. Help is not coming. :) Jamil Coury is in no hurry (has no worry?) Eoin led our party over the hills and through the woods, impressively navigating through the rainstorm and dense fog. But somewhere on the way down to book #12 he took a hard fall and fractured his collar bone. As I mention in my interview with journalist-historian-writer Sam Robinson, Eoin would take at least half-a-dozen more painful falls on the same broken shoulder - each time momentarily screaming out in agony before bouncing back to his feet and continuing onward. We found book #12 at the confluence without too much trouble, but then we got a bit disoriented trying to choose the best line up Indian Knob. Part of the problem was that in addition to the previously existing rivers, there were now several new rivers that had sprung up due to the rain. It is amazing just how quickly - and how dramatically - a rain storm can alter topography. After a few false starts we finally made our way up to Indian Knob. As we approached the summit we noticed a glowing light emanating from a cave. As we moved closer we could see the silhouette of an ancient shaman sitting cross-legged, deep in meditation. "Oh wait, never mind, that's Jamil Coury eating a burrito!" I exclaimed. Jamil explained that he'd spent several hours wandering around the cliffs in the rainstorm, unable to find the book alone in the dark and the fog. "Jamil, is that you?" But now, there were five of us. And everyone knows that five brains headlamps are better than one. "Go! Go! Power Rangers. It's Morphin Time!" I shouted enthusiastically. Maggie shook her head. "Obviously, we're Gandalf, Bilbo, Boromir, Legolas, and ..." [Dude, this race report is hilarious and all, but let's start wrapping it up.] Unable to reach a consensus as to which fictional team we wanted to be, we continued with the business at hand. It took a while, but we eventually found each of the remaining books as we successfully navigated loop two. One of the major highlights of that second loop was wading through the tunnel underneath the prison at night. Whereas earlier in day the stream of water running through the tunnel had been relatively mild, by evening the rains had transformed the gentle brook into a raging class-3 white-water rapids. If you haven't already watched it, check out the crazy scene (starting from minute 16:50) in Jamil's short 26-minute video. Touching the gate :) The Magnificent Five meets Reservoir Dogs I've run in a few races with Jamil before, and I've watched many of his hilarious YouTube videos on Mountain Outpost and Run Steep Get High (my favorite of which is still probably the Pumpkin-Spice Latte Mile; though the Unicorn-Frappuccino Challenge is a close second). So, while I knew he was a funny guy, I never knew what an amazing person he is. I can't thank him enough for taking four Barkley virgins under his wing and giving us a personal guided tour of the course (potentially sacrificing his own race). I don't know that I'll ever get back to Barkley again (more on that in a minute), but if I ever do, I'll certainly have a much better grasp of the course. That's not to say it'll be any easier - because nothing about Barkley is easy. But hopefully it will be a teeny-weeny-bit less hard. My mantra going into the Barkley was simple: "Refuse to refuse-to-continue." Years before I'd read a Barkley race report where Laz listed the respective reasons why various runners had failed to complete the Barkley. Along with gems like, "spent the night at the Frozen Head Hilton (i.e., on the ground in the woods), the one that really caught my attention was, "refused to continue." "Ouch," I thought. I didn't want to be that guy. I vowed that if I ever got into Barkley I would, "time out, not tap out." I'd rather have Laz mock me and say something like, "he got lost for days due to gross incompetence" or "he limped in after the cut-off with a clearly self-inflicted injury" than, "he refused to continue." As our motley five-person crew lumbered down the path back into camp, we were filled with a sense of accomplishment. We had refused to refuse-to-continue. We hadn't quit. We knew that even though we'd collected all the required pages, we were way over the cut-off and our second loop wouldn't count (and we wouldn't be allowed to start a third loop). But that was fine. Having a little too much fun! Photo by Deborah Brunswick As Laz poignantly remarked as we stood there at the gate smiling like idiots, "That second loop is for here (gestures to his heart) and for here (gestures to his head)." And he was right. We knew in our hearts and our heads what we had accomplished "out there". We hadn't completed the Barkley - and maybe we never will. But we fought, we fell, we got back up, we ate burritos, and we pressed onward! Will I ever go back to Barkley? Do I even want to go back? And for that matter, will Laz even let me back in? These are good questions; and I don't have the answers. I guess for now, all I can say is, I really hope so. I know I'm capable of so much more. The Barkley won this time. But if it wants a rematch... I welcome the fight! That was easy(ish). He he. Photo by Deborah Brunswick Food, clothing, and equipment that I used at Barkley Salomon Speed Cross 4 trail shoes Ruhn Apparel Co., compression tights Ruhn Apparel Co., compression long-sleeve base-layer Montane Atomic waterproof pants Marmot Minimalist Goretex jacket Black Diamond Distance Z trekking poles Black Diamond Icon headlamp UltraAspire Lighted Waistpack Naked Running Band Honey Stinger Dark Chocolate Cherry Mocha protein bars Honey Stinger Mango Orange gels Other race reports, interviews, and videos! Good luck! Bonus: here's how to apply for Barkley!!! Now that I've been to Barkley, people are asking me to how to apply. Lots of people! Friends, family, colleagues, neighbors, UPS drivers, even that guy Chris who works in the deli at Whole Foods. Which is to be expected I suppose. So, although this might get me banned from Barkley for life, here are the super-secret details on how to get into Barkley: Applying for Barkley is quite easily actually. But timing is everything. And unfortunately, the enrollment deadline for this fiscal period just expired. So, you'll need to sit tight for a while. Check back with me during the next super blue blood moon, when Jupiter and Uranus are in alignment. Bring two chickens. And a Rod of Epic Splendor. Presto, you're in. That was easy! Also, read this.

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