

GEER 100K—2006
Steve Core



Anyone who has run near me for more than 3 minutes in the last year is well aware that I ran GEER last year—that's the Great Eastern Endurance Run. I had only been running for 16 months at the time, and my biggest race up till then had been a 1/2 marathon the fall before. My biggest training run in preparation for my first ultra had been a 17 miler during which Heather and Sarah embarrassed me by completely running away from me the last 3 miles. Naturally I decided to pay that no mind whatsoever. Besides, I was already signed up for the Marine Corps Marathon; therefore I must be in shape. I proceeded down to Waynsboro Virginia where I managed to have one of the worst days of my life. After a very enjoyable 15 mile jog out to the half-way point, I was excited to turn around and run back to the finish, and tuck my first ultra under my belt. No big deal huh?

Why not, I had gotten half way in 3:15, so estimating about 3:30 back, I figured I should be finishing under 7 hours, right? Wrong. Geer consists of a very enjoyable start, running 2 miles up a gradual climb on an asphalt road, then proceeding 6 miles down into the town of Sherando, where you catch the 2nd aid station. From there you run up over Torry Mountain (a 1200 ft elevation gain = 85 story building.) and then back down to Scherando Lake recreation area. At aid station 4 you simply turn around, and with the exception of a little trail change in the beginning to keep the runners apart, you return to the start. It's easy to forget that the elevation pattern for the first half of the course is downhill, uphill, downhill. It's reversed on the way back—uphill, downhill, uphill.

When I turned around and started my run to the finish, I started to experience what any runner would expect if you show up under trained and inexperienced—cramps, blisters, complete fatigue, disgust, and embarrassment. After being passed by no less than 15 - 20 runners, I showed up at the finish line 4 hours and 30 minutes later. I had to walk the entire last 8 miles—6 miles of up hill gravel road, which wasn't as enjoyable as it had been at the start that morning, and the last 2 miles of down hill. I had been broken. With a embarrassing 7:48 finish, I sulked off to my hotel room feeling sorry for myself and to take a much

needed shower. On the lonely 2 hour drive home, I made the mandatory cell phone calls to the family, and in the very common post race depression, announced that I had **not** found a new love for ultra running.

As we all know however, its very easy to sugar coat a bad race to friends and co-workers, and after about a week of telling my tale of woes, it was amazing to me that maybe that day wasn't as bad as I thought it had been. Could I have imagined it all? Maybe so. So after some more training, I ran a very good MCM and was reluctantly talked into JFK by good ol' Phil Holt, and remarkably for my 2nd ultra, JFK went very well too.

By the end of 2005 I was happy to be healthy and among good LLR friends, but something, I wasn't sure what, was swimming around in the back of my head.

Its now September 23rd 2006. I had signed up for GEER again, but this year I entered the 100K (62 miles). Please humor me here. . . .

"Call me Ishmael". About 9 months ago, I "grew hazy about the eyes" and decided to take a long journey. I set sail early to train, and after a long spring, summer, and early fall into which I had squeezed six ultras and over 900 miles of running, I was ready to confront my white whale.

I knew my first 100K was going to be tough, so I had taped the elevation chart to the wall of my office directly in front of me, I was forced to look at it several times every single day. I had estimated my time by taking 45 minutes off my last years time and then doubling it for 14 hours. Probably a little bold, but I had ran a few ultras this summer and hoped my training would pay off. The day started just as beautifully as it had a year ago, but with one big addition. I had brought a crew/pacer. Mike Caslin (let's call him Queequeg) had offered his services, and I gratefully accepted. The early morning jaunt was as enjoyable as it had been the year before. After aid station 1, 2, and 3, I proceeded up Torry Mountain as I had a year ago. Somehow, this year the Mountain didn't seem as big as it had a year ago. I dismissed this thought because I was running a smarter race than I had a year ago, and was definitely better trained. Mike met me as I arrived at the 4th aid station at Sherando Lake with one of my cure all bottles of Ensure nutrition drink. (Special thanks to Sean Andrish for this and many training tips and techniques in the past year.)

After a quick drink and a light snack from the aid table, I proceeded south out of the aid station instead of north, like I had last year for the 50K. Now I was sailing in the uncharted waters of my first 100K, and somewhere out there under the calm abyss lurked my white whale. Soon after leaving aid station 4, I noticed that it had only taken me 3 hours to make it there. Then the doubt started. Had I gone out too fast? Did I do the same thing I had done a year ago? I immediately went into crisis control and decided to tuck into line behind the runners in front of me and just run their pace. Surely they were smarter then me, so I would run

their race, not mine. But this didn't work. My run comfortable pace allowed me to pass a couple runners before the next aid station, where I met Mike with more Ensure. Then after a quick but brutal 4 mile loop, I returned to the next aid station to refuel and found out that I was in 10th place. O no, what had I done. I had gone out way to fast, and the white whale was set to attack at any time now. It's not if, but when? When will I bonk? I was now at the 1/2 way point of the race and only 6 hours and 15 minuets had gone by. You blew it Ishmael, your 45 minuets to fast. So much for running smart. I proceeded to push up Kelly Mountain to aid station 7 where you have to weigh in to make sure you haven't lost too much weight. Then it's off again down hill for 6 miles to aid station 8, then up and down for 3 miles to aid station 9.

A funny thing happened on the way to aid station 8. I knew Mike would meet me about a mile short of the aid station to pace me in, so with sure relief in the near future, I settled into a nice and easy clip down the mountain to meet him, all the time wondering when and where my white whale would attack. Here's the funny part; I passed 3 more runners on that down hill stretch. As I passed each one I would ask; Ahoy good Captain, have you seen a white whale today? (Well, I didn't really ask it, but I did think it real loud.) So with a chuckle inside and now claiming 7th place, I made the decision that I've never had to make before—"Are you running, or are you racing?" As I shifted into race mode, my attitude changed, and I started to run scared. I knew that 16 miles ahead lay the dreaded 6 miles of gravel road that claimed my dignity just a year ago. I decided that's where the white whale was, so I would not worry about him until then.

When I met Mike, I informed him of my new plan. As a good pacer, he calmly coached me into a good routine of steady drinking and gue intake. After flying through aid station 9, Mike helped me immensely by dragging me back up near the top of Kelly Mountain. (this was the hardest part of the race with 1900 feet of climb = 135 story building). Mike left back down the mountain to retrieve the truck and meet me at aid station 12 to pace me to the finish. Having shifted to race mode, I was using my salt and energy blocks at a faster pace than first planned. I was running low. As I trudged the last couple miles into aid station 10, I was re-passed by one of the runners that I had over taken on the technical down hill. Slipping from 7th to 8th was depressing, but at least she didn't ask about the whale when she passed me. I arrived at aid station 10 in good spirits and on a little adrenaline high having seen a rattlesnake on the trail about 1/2 mile back. I didn't know whether he was dead or just lazily sunning himself, but he paid me no notice as I ran by and I wasted no time inquiring of his condition. Besides I was looking for a whale, not a snake.

Aid station 10. After a much needed ham sandwich, I headed off onto the trail again. I left in 7th place again, only because I was quicker out of the aid station, but something told me I would see her again. After climbing up Kelly Mountain, it was time to run back down. This is a tough descent on single-track trails, but I was ready for it, and managed to pass two more runners in the first mile of the

descent, entering 5th place. It was 5.5 miles to the next aid station, and about 3 miles into it, as we meet at the bottom of the mountain, my nemesis passed me again. I moved back into 6th. I wished the whale would get her. I arrived at aid station 11 having run out of salt tablets. This freaks me out because the cramps from last years race are a memory that I will never forget, and have vowed to never let that happen again. With some table salt and a good gulp of chicken noodle soup that was just starting to be warmed up for the supper crowd, I quickly exited and jogged off to find my much needed crew.

Luckily Mike was only a 1/2 mile away and I was immediately gulping down 2 Succeed capsules and a pack of energy blocks. Now we were on the last stage of the race--the last 11 miles. I'm familiar with this area, since I was here 10 hours ago running out from town. Now its 3 miles back to town, 6 miles up that infernal gravel road and 2 miles back down to the finish. We were in great spirits though, joking about carrying our headlights, but we were not going to need them, knowing that we were now looking at about a 12 and a half hour finish. Once again we ran in to the quiet, tiny town of Sherando and passed through the last manned aid station. The volunteers are very helpful and lied convincingly about how good I looked. One last Ensure and a change of shirt, and we were off for the 6 mile 800 foot climb. Yes, this is a relatively small climb, but after 51 miles of running in the last 11+ hours, it a sick, sick joke.

So off we go, with harpoons in hand. The climb was as tough as I remembered it, but with Mike there, making me keep my pace up and reminding me to drink every 10 minutes, it seemed to go easier. I had tried to run as hard as I could as long as I could to create as much gap between me and the two runners behind me. Something told me it wasn't their first 100K. As you would expect, about 2 miles into the climb, it was no surprise to hear the familiar clip clop of a runner approaching from behind, I envy those guys that can still manage to be running up hill after 56 miles. I've trained with guys like that all summer, and I am still in awe of their endurance. So settling back into 7th place, we continued our trek up that ol' gravel road. About another mile later I thought the whale had arrived for his revenge. Sure enough, the 8th place runner arrived at our heels. He slowed to our walk and struck up the usual conversation. During our chit-chat, he announced that he was out of water and asked if he could have some of ours. Mike gladly obliged, and we discussed our finishing time and places. He announced that he had just used up his last bit of fuel, and at this time was just happy to finish near 12 hours.

That's all I needed to hear. Losing 7th place was no longer an option. Soon we crested a hill, and Mike and I decided to run for a while. Number 8 gave it a good try, but after tightening up from the up hill walk, he could only muster the very common ultra runner shuffle. Mike and I however were still running. The next couple hills were trade-offs. I would pick the points where we would stop running and start walking. Mike would always bargain for a spot a little further up the hill. That's what pacers do. They do the thinking for you, and you just run! So that's

what we did. We kept running with Mike reminding me to drink. When we knew the last aid station was near, we switched up so I was full of water and wouldn't have to stop. Amazingly, the top of the hill came much sooner than I could have ever imagined.

As we crested the last hill and saw the turn, I glanced at my watch and announced to Mike that I had just gotten unbelievably greedy. At the turn, I had 2.1 miles to go. My watch said 11:45—I had run the 2nd half 30 minutes faster than the first! So if I could run, and run fast, I would be able to beat GEER out of a sub 12 hour finish and 7th place. With a sharp left hand turn, I proceeded to run — fast. It hurt — don't think it didn't—but not near as bad as it had hurt last year when I couldn't even run this stretch of road. As the last 2 miles flew by, I came around the last turn to see the official time clock—11:58 and change. I would make it. I came across the finish line in 11:59:06—7th place. As I stood at the finish line with my hands on my knees, too tired to walk over to a chair, I honestly had one thought in my head: “Good luck to everyone out there, because right now somebody is battling that white whale.”



My motto this summer.....

An adventure takes your body out of its comfort zone and shows you how you will react. You probably won't enjoy it at the time, but the memories are unforgettable. Good luck, and keep running.

Steve Core

Special thanks....

Sean. We met on the Blackburn trail run, and that day changed my life forever. Thanks for coaching me this summer, and allowing me to crew at your record breaking Tuscarora Trail run. Congratulations on winning Superior Trail 100 miler 2 weeks ago.

Brian (and his wife Lisa). Thanks for meeting me Sunday mornings at 5:30 for our Appalachian Trail hill training. Congratulations on winning Highlands Sky 40 miler this summer.

Harland. For all my speed work. Thanks.

Phil. (aka Dr Phil, aka Jedi Master) Thanks for planning all the long runs this summer.