

Tom's Run

by: Rick Meyers

Tom's Run, a 200 mile team building event relay that follows the mighty Potomac River on the C & O canal towpath from Cumberland, MD and finishes at the Naval Hospital in Bethesda, MD. Most normal folks enjoy this as a multi-person relay team. As the Race Director states on the registration form, each runner must be escorted by a cyclist then entire way due to the remoteness of the towpath at various points throughout the run.

Most teams share the running and cycling in which one member rides for a certain distance while their teammate runs that same distance, then at a designated point they switch out. Some teams follow along in support vans and rotate runners/cyclist, whereas, other teams meet at designated transition areas to take over a specific distance until another group of team members take over. But no matter the design of the team or the number of team members, the instructions are easy: a team must cover the entire distance, each runner must have a cycling escort, and the team must try to finish between 11am-1pm Saturday. The event is so relaxed that start times are based upon the teams finishing between those times.

Sounds easy, fun, good times to be had by all, a little nerve wracking at times, but overall a great way to hang out with some buddy's and meet new ones. But, why do some folks attempt this feat on their own? Good question...

Each year a few nuts come out of the wood work to try these crazy distances on their own. I'm one of them. I never tried this distance before but I have participated in similar relays before. These other relays also had runners who have attempted to cover the distances on their own. Some finished but more failed. Tom's Run isn't any different. I had some interest in attempting this distance before but this year it became a reality.

I heard about Tom's Run a few years ago through my local newspaper when Rochelle Frazier completed it the first time. Yes, she has completed it more than once, twice to be exact!! I thought WoW! Could I do something like that? The thought exited just as quickly as it had entered. I'm a marathoner and an ultra-runner wannabe. I have participated in marathons and completed the JFK 50 mile run 7 times. On a whim, I sent in my registration form for the HellGate 100k last August. To my surprise I was selected. I haven't gone this type of distance before nor have I run anything longer than 20 miles on any given trail. So, this became a huge concern for me but I was up to the challenge. HellGate's race director is the ultra runner phenom David Horton. If anyone knows anything about David Horton, then you know that his races are just a bit different than most. This particular race was a complete trail race that begins at one minute past midnight, middle of December, in the mountains of Virginia. Cold, snow, ice, darkness, frozen retinas, frost-bite, and that's just a few of the race's amenities. Oh and IF you finish under the 18 hour time limit, you get an official finisher tech shirt but that's not a guarantee because he orders them sparingly. Not many people finish. That's it, no medals, no pats on the back, no flash, no dash, no nothing!! But you finish the most difficult race of your life. Unfortunately, 4 weeks from HellGate, and one week before JFK 50, I broke two bones in my left foot. But, I sucked it up and ran the 50 then I did

three weeks of Elliptical running and ran the HellGate's 66.6 miles of freaking torture! Did I mention the 27,000 feet of elevation change? I snuck in under the cutoff time with 7 minutes to spare. Horton handed me a shirt and began to tear the finish line down. The next day, I remembered my promise I made to myself, "if I finish HellGate, I'll register for my first 100miler." What's this have to do with Tom's Run? Hang on, the story just gets worse.

I found many reviews about the Vermont 100 mile run held in July. The Race website promises spectacular views, an easy overall course with mostly packed trails, good course support, and many first time finishers. I thought perfect! This is the one for me. I handed over my money and made up a training plan and away I went. January came in with blustery cold and training was hard to come by. I faced the cold and ran, ran, ran, and ran some more. I started having troubles carrying the amount of supplies that I needed for some of the longer runs. I tried to plant stuff, I bought bigger bags to carry more crap in, planned to run to my car where I would store extra food/liquids but everything failed. I even tried to recruit my friends to run portions with me to get the distances in. Not many people want to run in the blustery cold if they don't have things planned. Most normal runners don't start planning races until later in the spring when they can start training in the late winter/early spring. Then I started to think about the Tom's Run as a perfect way to get in a long training run with support to carry food/liquids and since an escort was needed, I could get some company to keep my mind occupied. I don't listen to iPods when I run. Weird, I know, but I like to listen to my body while I run to make bio-mechanic adjustments and to let the stress of the day leave my head for that time while I'm running. So, January was in full swing and so was I. I started to recruit cyclist by making a list of those who would be up for such a challenge. Leigh was the first one I asked. Yes, she said, that would be fun. Surprised, I thought this is going to be easy. She committed to a certain distance, but not the whole way, details to be worked out later. As the weeks went by, more and more volunteers were recruited. I enticed most by saying that I doubt if I'll make it the whole distance so you may be off the hook. This would backfire later as you'll see. I did some more long distance racing to test my fitness and things were going along pretty well. I ran well at Holiday Lake 50k++ (Another Horton event). Terrapin Mountain 50k, I doubled the Chambersburg half marathon to keep the distance high, 4 marathons in 5 weeks (3 age group wins and one Master's Champion), American Odyssey relay as an ultra team, placed second team overall. Weekly hard track workouts with another legendary runner and coach Mike Spinnler, race Director for JFK 50 mile. Running was getting better, faster, and I was loving life. My goal for Vermont is twofold: first I want the buckle. A buckle is given as the medal if a runner finishes under 24 hours, and two: I want to do very well in my age group.

Tom's Run is closing in and I'm getting ready. I'm intimidated by the distance, but I find comfort in knowing that my friends are there with me. Also, if I can't do the full distance then I just need to get in as close to 100 miles so that I know what I'm going to feel like in the uncharted distances. 66.6 miles were all the further that I've gone. I had stomach issues which prevented me from taking in the calories that I needed to sustain for such a long distance. So no matter how long I run I need to beat that distance and learn some things about distance running. I read a lot but there aren't many topics on these types of distances and not many people to speak first hand to. The break down is that there are millions of people who run marathons per year; hundreds of thousands of people who run 50k's per

year; thousands who run 50 milers per year; hundreds who run 100k's and 100 milers per year. And about 5 who run 200 milers per year. The finishing rate of these, of course, is much lower in all categories. I know, I know, I've been asked this many times and I will be asked many more times. Why run 200 miles in training for a 100 mile race? Well, the support was going to be there and I had a support crew car following me the whole way. So, why not?

Two weeks out from the start of Tom's Run, I get a call that one of my cyclist has to drop. Ok, no problem. We'll just re-arrange the others. Two more people have forgotten about it and made other plans because I told them that they may not be needed because I may not go that distance. Hmmm, I thought. That's true, I did tell them that. I shouldn't have or I should've called them to tell them that the full distance will be attempted and that I still needed them. The bad thing is that one of them was going to drive the support car on Thursday and possibly Saturday. They were my ride home from Bethesda. Ok, I'll start looking for more people. Found some replacements, but lost more people over Memorial Day weekend. I sent out pleas to the local biking club, and two running clubs for cycling helpers. I also got in touch with my father in law, Bob, to drive the support car for me. He agreed to Thursday but didn't want to go any further than that. Through the pleas I got one guy who was a definite, and two guys that were iffy. Times and locations were their concerns. I recruited a guy that I run with to ride a short distance with me. So, in all as of Tuesday June 1st, I had 5 cyclists, and one Thursday support car driver. The cyclists were going to cover 8 hours Thursday morning until about noon. 6 hours Thursday evening. Friday 6 am until noon, then another cyclist noon until about 6pm. Saturday 6am until about 10am. No drivers for Friday or Saturday or a ride home. Meanwhile....

I was contacted about 2 weeks from Tom's Run by another soloist runner from California, Aaron Sorensen. We spoke at lengths about this type of distance and I admitted my longest distance of 66.6 miles but Aaron has experience with this distance before. I felt comfort knowing that he was going to be there. Then about a week out, I spoke with Aaron and we talked about running together and the possibility of sharing resources. He was going to get in touch with some Coast Guard people to crew for him and his wife was also going to do some running/cycling/crewing for us. I told him that I lost a few, gained a few and felt good knowing that between the two camps, we could piece meal this together and things may be just fine. I shot Aaron an email on Memorial Day when my confidence was rattled after losing the people over the weekend but I was looking for more people. I wanted to let him know that I was nervous about messing up his run by sharing resources and my potential inability of going the distance. He replied back by telling me that we probably won't stick together anyway and that he got some people to crew for him so things should be fine. But, my distance will probably go no further than 100 miles due to Bob not being able to drive on Friday. At the 100 mile mark from the starting line reaches Dam #4 and about 30 minutes from my home. Perfect place to stop and go home and I've experienced the distance and I would hit my goals without too much trouble. After talking some more to Aaron it sounds like he has a full crew and we may be able to put this thing together. And my iffy guys may be able to get me in to the finish. The only problems were the car and the ride home. I looked up Amtrak and found a train leaving D.C. at 6:20pm to Harrisburg, PA where I can catch a ride from someone home or a cab, only about a 40 minute cab ride home. Things were looking up. Tuesday evening, Bob, with reluctance in his voice said he may be able to drive the whole way in to the finish but

to try and find someone else or to get him out of there as soon as possible. Ok, things are slowly looking up. If I hang with Aaron on Thursday and share resources, I may be able to do it on my own for Friday and Saturday if I drop off from Aaron. I began to feel that I would like to try the distance and see how far I can go.

Wednesday morning I'm all packed up and ready to roll. We'll be leaving that evening about 5pm when I get off work to head to Cumberland. I talk to my first cyclist, Phil, who tells me that he would rather drive over in the morning instead of sleeping in the hotel. That made me nervous but he's a responsible adult, he'll show up. He's a Professor at Shippensburg University. He's a responsible upstanding member of the community....I hope. I picked up Bob at 6 pm and off we went. We arrived at the Holiday Inn and I'm getting those prerace jitters. I anxiously wait to meet Aaron and his wife who arrived earlier. While unloading some supplies from my car, Aaron and Christina walk to my car and introduce themselves. We talk for a few minutes and agree to meet at his room in about an hour. He's waiting for one of his crew members to arrive to discuss logistics and strategy.

Finally, the team was together. I met Amanda, Aaron's top crew member....and only crew member. We talked logistics and the probables, meanwhile in my head the uncertainty started to come back. I had 5 cyclists and one driver. He had one crew member and a wife that would run and drive for him. This was going to become a mess real fast. I started to think that if we split up throughout a very long run, crew management is going to become an issue. Two runners sharing one skeleton crew is not my idea of tackling such a long run. During the pre-run meeting, Amanda agreed to cycle Thursday between my two cyclists and made mention that her husband may help out Friday with either cycling or crewing. Driving would be shared between those who aren't riding. I could put my stuff in her truck if Bob had to leave. We concluded the meeting with a decent plan but with some doubt.

Thursday morning arrived pretty quickly. The nerves started right away. We planned on starting out by 4:30am to get in as much run time in the cooler temps of the darkness. We met in the parking lot of the Holiday Inn. Phil (first cyclist) arrived as I knew he would. Introductions were made and bags were packed. Water bottles filled and shoes tied. As a group, we walked together to the towpath terminus. Bob, Christina, Amanda, Phil, Aaron, and I chatted through the quiet streets of Cumberland. At 4:45am, Aaron and I said our goodbyes to the remaining three and off in a steady trot with Phil in tow. Aaron and I chatted and told each other our life stories. A steady pace of 5.5-6.0mph was comfortable and agreed that this is the pace we would hold for the next 200 miles. We also agreed that we would enter each transition to fill water bottles, grab some much needed calories, and head out without too much time wasted. We would stop for a longer period for larger meals. Medical attention would be our only other longer stop. A small amount of prevention will pay huge dividends later.

Eight hours and about 35 miles later things were going well. Aaron was having some troubles with the humidity. Coming from the Bay area, he doesn't have the humidity to deal with as we east coast dwellers have come to terms with. No real issues however, he was running strong. We parted ways with Phil at the Little Orleans transition. Lunch time was around 1:30pm where I decided to change into dry clothes, socks, and shoes. Sweat was pouring off of both of us and the dry clothes felt really good. With new layers of body glide and a full belly I was ready for many more hours of heading toward the finish

line. Amanda now on the bike, we headed out of the transition and began forward progression. It's a good thing that I changed clothes because ten minutes later a pretty nasty thunderstorm approached and dumped buckets of rain on us. I looked at Amanda and expected her to start complaining but she didn't and she kept the pedals rolling. Aaron seemed to be rejuvenated with the rain and cooler temps. But anyone who lives on the east coast knows summer time rains usually only caused higher humidity and the cool temps won't last long. The hours past and the miles accumulated. Things were going well and the humidity returned with a vengeance. Aaron made mention of the heat and our pace began to slow to 5mph with more walking breaks and longer stops in the transition areas. Night fall wasn't too far off with the promise of lower temps we just had to hang on.

Amanda completed her cycling section after about 35 miles but not until I entered into uncharted territory. I had exceeded my longest run distance and I couldn't think of two people who I would rather share this new area of my running with. I was in telephone contact with Leigh who parked at Williamsport, MD and was on her bike heading toward us. Christina agreed to run with us for a while. Meeting up with Leigh gave me new energy. Leigh is a good friend of mine who has the gift of gab, exactly what I needed to keep me going a few more hours. We decided to stop at Williamsport for a sleep break since we weren't too far from the Avis Mill detour and vehicle access is much easier. Bob and Amanda had camp set up by the time we arrived. I gave a heart felt hug and good by to Leigh for her time. I gave myself quick dousing of cold water to wash away the sweat and grime of the day, changed into dry sweat clothes and into my sleeping bag and fast to sleep. Total for the day, 85 miles in just under 22 hours. I hate to think that with that many miles under our belts, we were still in triple digits to make it to the end. The morning plan was to awake at 5:30am and start running by 6:00.

Michele arrived for her cycling legs. I heard the vehicle drive up and with an eye open I could see her heading toward my tent with the exuberance only a full night's sleep could give a person. With a quick grab of my ankles and a tug, she pulled me from my comfy shelter. Aaron and I shared my tent that was actually a jr. size tent. Since we are both 6ft tall or taller, we had to unzip the door to allow our feet to stick out of the tent. Christina had made her way to Sheetz and brought back much needed caffeinated products. Aaron wasn't looking so good. He looked tired and his face appeared sunken. He assured me he was good to go and he'll wake up on the run. A quick blister tape job to my left big toe and I was bounding to go. Run time began at 6:30. The sun was peaking through the trees and a warm day ahead of us was a guarantee. Michele is a young lady that I met at my store earlier this year. She is an aspiring runner and will tackle her first marathon this fall, we chit-chatted and pressed on. Breakfast was at the end of our first leg and I have never tasted a McMuffin so good. I didn't realize how hungry I was. Aaron was trying to take in some fluids but he told me that he was feeling pretty warm and tired. It's only 7:30 am and he was already warming up too much. This isn't good for the course of the day and the heat that we are going to get involved in. Back on course and trotting along with Michele in tow, Aaron trying to hang on. We came up to the detour and hit the hard road with the sun beating down on our heads. I am very familiar with this area since it is a portion of the last few miles of the JFK 50 mile course. We finally reconnect with the Towpath at Dam #4 after a brief stop for refueling. Aaron is looking worse and running slower but we press on. Along the towpath are hand pumps that when pumped, cool water flows out. Not suitable for straight drinking, trust me I know, but for dumping over your head is an

absolute good idea. Aaron discovered this and at each pump he would stop and douse himself with the cool water in the hopes of cooling himself down enough to escape the heat of the day and make it to nightfall. Despite the cool water reprieve the exhaustion has caught up to him and won't let go. We trudged on at a slow pace with multiple walking breaks. Transition times were getting longer and time was slipping away.

Around 12:30 we met up with a new cyclist, Tim, who would ride with us for the next 5 hours or so. Tim is a very accomplished runner. At the Boston marathon this year he ran a 2:42 and 15th overall Master's place. Tim also took notice to Aaron's struggling state almost from the onset. After a few encouraging words from Michele, she pedaled away toward Shepherdstown where she lives. Forward progression was my main concern at any pace. Every step we took meant one less step we had remaining. The hand pump water stops continued along the way but the exhaustion wasn't letting go of Aaron despite what foods or fluids he consumed. At one stop Aaron requested to take a 30 minute siesta but I couldn't stop my forward progression for this period of time. I wasn't feeling tired and I didn't want to stand around in the heat. After a quick conference with my support team, I decided that the best thing for me was to move forward even if at a steady fast walk or slow run and after Aaron had time to recover, he could catch up to me. But as the competitor that Aaron is, he got out of the air conditioned vehicle and started to pursue me. Tim was with me and we could see Aaron about a half mile behind us. We kept an easy pace until he caught up with us. Over the next hour or so, Aaron continued the walk/jog/water dousing regimen that has become custom. Tim suggested to Aaron to take a dip in the Potomac but no easy access prevented him from taking the suggestion. We pressed on to Dargan's Bend where Aaron finally succumbed to the heat and exhaustion. It was nearing 5:30pm and a total of 120 miles covered. It's hard to see him drop after such a distance that he came from to make this run, not to mention the 120 miles he covered on his feet. In order for the run to be not a complete bust, Christina would run the last 80 miles just to cover the distance and not be a complete DNF. I became very concerned that now I had to face the remaining miles on my own.

Christina took off with the speed of a well rested 5k runner. Tim's shift had also concluded and with Amanda now on the bike she tried to keep both of us in her sights. Christina's and my pace weren't exactly matching and Amanda was scrambling to keep the needs of both of us satisfied. Amanda's husband, Mike, was enroute to meet us but he was being recruited to bike for Christina. This was going to pose a problem since there were going to be three cars and only two drivers. Christina pressed on at a pace that I couldn't match so late in the day. My 6mph pace was keeping me moving well, but her 8mph pace was putting some serious distance between us. In addition to her pace she was in and out of the transitions without wasting any time. I had heard through Amanda who decided to stay with me that Christina planned on running throughout the night to make it to the finish line by early morning. I knew that I wasn't going to be able to handle another 70 miles tonight and the pressure on the crew and I started to elevate. I wanted to catch Christina and discuss logistics but she was too far ahead and wasn't wasting time in the transitions. Mike finally arrived and agreed to bike for Christina however his bike wasn't ready and was experiencing mechanical problems. Nightfall had settled in and the towpath was dark and creepy. Thick slippery mud and downed trees were the obstacles for the 6 mile leg. Christina was a good three miles ahead of Amanda and I and Mike was still working on his bike. At a dark

crossroad, we encountered Christina who was awaiting someone to discuss the creepiness of the towpath and her desires to quit this race. After a few minute discussion she agreed to tag along with us but I had to lead the way to break up the cobwebs. We made it to the transition where Christina told Aaron her decision to abandon the run. I, on the other hand, wanted to put one more leg behind me before I bunked down for the night. Amanda and I took off to White's Ferry. This was the worse leg that I had. I was struggling and Amanda was cracking the whip. I tried to ignore the pain and think about a better place to be. My stomach was upset and I couldn't eat anymore. Drinking was an issue as well. Amanda would make deals with me that if I ran for 10 minutes I could walk for one minute. I flipped it and she didn't like that so much. I pretended I couldn't hear her because of the bull frogs that filled the night's air with their belches. I pressed on but it was a slow jog at some points and a steady walk during others. I admitted to having to use the bathroom and I promised her that when we found a porta-potty that everything would be good again. Finally, the porta-potty Gods smiled down upon me and I made the promise valid. With a relieved belly and a new spring in my step, we picked up the pace nicely for the remaining three miles. We arrived into White's Ferry by a running escort from Mike. He and Bob had set up camp and it was nearing 1:15am. I wanted a quick re-visit to the bedtime ritual but when I took off my shoes, the skin on the soles of my feet were in bad shape. After changing into my dry sweat clothes, Mike and Amanda went to town on my feet to get them to heal up during our three hour sleep period. Meanwhile, I looked around the parking lot to see a few cars of relay teams that were gaining time on me in a hurry. Earlier in the evening, one relay team of Military guys zipped past me. I was surprised that they were the only relay team to pass me thus far. But during my three rest period most teams passed me. I didn't sleep well because the vans of teams were coming in and out and the noise grew loud, not to mention the burning sensation in both of my legs from the swelling. Mental note for next year; crash before or after White's Ferry.

4:30am came quickly and back on my feet I was. Not moving with the same spry that I had the day before but at least I was moving. A quick change into running clothes and a skin assessment found that my feet had dried out rather well. The skin may have been excessively wet and looking bad but now everything looks good and I'm ready to roll. Aaron was up and agreed to tackle the first leg with me on the bike. We meandered along the towpath and relay teams were all around. Some gave good job calls to me and others slinked by in a sleepy daze just as we were. We made it to the next transition where I was looking for my daily coffee. Next transition Bob said. I made a quick phone call to Daryl who was my next cyclist. He was waiting for me at Swain's Lock and I asked him to start riding toward me. Aaron and I pressed on. We finished up our second leg of the day but no Daryl, and no coffee. Hmm! Boy I could use some Joe. On we pressed. The running wasn't sore or painful and I felt rather good. Aaron and I chit-chatted as we did so many miles ago and we discussed strategy to get me across the finish line. Daryl approached us and introductions were made. Aaron and Daryl talked for awhile as I trotted along. After a short period, Aaron pedaled toward the transition and Daryl and I began to catch up with each other. Daryl is a talkative fella and a recent new runner. He has completed a few marathons and has aspirations of tackling an ultra for his 60th birthday. We trot along at a good steady pace of 5-5.5mph and I'm feeling really good. I talk to Daryl as we pass public people who were out enjoying the warm morning and taking in the sights of the towpath. I'm always impressed with the closer one gets to D.C. on the towpath, more and more people are out and using this wonderful path for family fun and

exercise. As we passed pedestrians, I could overhear Daryl telling people that I was running 200 miles and that we were nearing the end. The replies were just as different as the people were. Some were in amazement, some were expressed in explicives, some were in disbelief, and some just laughed. But no matter the response, I got a chuckle out of it and kept forward progression. Finally, breakfast came and was same as the day before but not nearly as good. I was able to get it in and down but not with the same starving animal approach as I did yesterday. The coffee wasn't as good either. Oh well, time to move. Drill Sergeant Amanda was starting to bark so off we went. Daryl and I entered Riley's Lock where I was greeted by Bob and Amanda. I have run in many races over my running career but I have to say that this was the absolute first time that anyone has ever fed me! I sat on the bench like a high school athlete getting last second game winning instructions by the coach while at the same time stuffing food in my mouth. This is the level that Amanda has taken this run. With one hand she was filling up my handheld water bottle that I use to douse myself with cool water as I run, and with the other hand, she was stuffing food in my mouth, all at the same time of giving me running strategy times and barking orders to Bob to refill my Camel-bak. I sat and listened and thought, how the hell is she doing all of that so quickly and after so many hours of no sleep? Bob obediently did as he was told. Just as efficient and smooth as a NASCAR tire change, I was back up on my feet and moving forward. My belly somewhat satisfied, full water bottle and hydration pack, and my time that I need to make it to the next transition point in hand and off we went. The first few feet of restarting was excruciating and slow moving. That didn't sit well with Amanda however. As Daryl and I went from a casual walk pace to a faster pace to a trot to a jog, we could hear Amanda yelling "Run faster" from a far-off distance.

Daryl rode to Lock 10 with me. I hated to see him go but his volunteered time was very much appreciated. He wished me well and wanted to see the finish but family responsibilities called him home. Mike began his cycling section which would include the last 5.6 miles of the towpath and the road leading to the finishing line. Bob and Amanda were hanging in there and busy jockeying cars around to avoid too much navigational issues through the neighborhoods. Mike and I chatted along side each other and took in the scenery of the busy towpath. I haven't seen this many people for days and I was in awe of the amount of people out and about. We trucked along and I could start feeling the exhaustion settling into my legs. My steady jogging pace was starting to turn into a trot, its ok I thought to myself, its forward progression. I had about 20 miles to go to the conclusion and I remembered some of my 20 mile tempo training runs that this distance would be covered in just under two hours. But today I'm looking at covering the same distance in about 4 or so hours. What a difference 180 miles can make. Mike and I came into Fletcher's Boat house. The last stop on the towpath and not a minute to soon. I ran the towpath for many miles between mile markers 120 and 80 in training. I also have run between mile markers 58 and 84 many times because this is the section for JFK 50 mile race. The boredom between those miles never seemed to bother me to bad but as I was nearing mile marker 3, which signified the end of the towpath, I was having some anxiety issues of getting off the towpath. The boredom of the same scenery was getting to me and I wanted a change. After 185 miles of trees and the quiet river, I needed to see something else. Finally, we came to Fletcher's boat house. I sat on a log and opened my mouth like a starving baby bird looking to its mom to be fed. Amanda instead offered me a Blue Bomb. I had no idea what she was talking about. A popsicle she said with childhood like exuberance. Oh, I said. Sure. She ran off and a minute later she returned with the popsicle and pulled my arm to get me up and

ready to run. I thought I could sit and eat my blue bomb, but Drill Sergeant Amanda had another idea. Off you go she said. Eat it as you walk but don't take too long. Mike and I are back up and moving. A two minute stay in the transition and we were gone. Later, I'll appreciate it but for now I wanted to sit a bit longer. The Capital Crescent Trail was not a welcoming section. The anxiety that I felt with the never changing scenery of the towpath was exactly the same. In addition, the Crescent trail was macadam surfaced and hard. My feet were swollen and hurting. The hard impact drove pain straight up my legs to my back, despite the soft landing that I have changed to after years of working on my gait. I pressed on though. The steady uphill climb started to take its toll on me as well as the hard impact. I was walking during some portions but maintaining a steady trot during others. I begged for a flat soft surface but as I looked ahead, no such thing was in sight. Mike kept turning the pedals without as much of a whisper of a complaint for how slow I was moving. At a pace of 3.5mph on a bike usually causes one to wobble around while trying to keep balanced. As other bikers, roller-bladers, skateboarders, and such were attempting their Lance Armstrong like passes of us, they would give him the evil eye and verbal comments for his wobbling. He didn't seem to mind however. We just kept moving forward. We made it to the foot bridge that took a sharp upward direction. I'm usually not one to complain when it comes to running, or when it comes to something that I voluntarily signed up for, but this time I did. I whined about the climb over this bridge like I was climbing Everest. Well, actually, it felt like Everest. My legs were screaming to stop, my belly was upset, and my back ached like I've never felt before. I made the climb to find Bob and Amanda just on the other side sitting on a park bench. My bitching stopped...temporarily.

I sat on the bench for a few minutes and watched all the bodies zipping pass like they were going mach 10. Or was it my brain that was just processing so slow that it seemed like they were moving so much faster? I didn't know anymore. "9.7 miles to go!" Amanda said while staring me in the eye." No more transition areas, the last stop is the last stop! Get up and get moving" she barked. Back up but not moving. I got to get this misery over as soon as possible, I thought to myself as I stood in place looking down the path. I drifted back in a time where my fastest ten mile run was 58 minutes. Now the agony of these last ten miles was going to take me about 2.5 hours. Onward and what appeared to be upward, I started. I'd like to think that I would've enjoyed the trail and the scenery of the people also on the trail but I really didn't give two shits about anyone or anything other than finishing. I trotted while Mike wobbled. Step after step toward the finish. I tried running as much as possible but the lack of caloric intake was taking its toll on me. I was able to sip at my camel-bak but that was about it. My hand held bottle was strapped on with the occasional squirt of water over my head or in my face to keep me cool. Road crossings gave me a chance to lean against a barrier or tree until the light changed and I had to get across the street in front of people who were sitting in their air conditioned cars looking at me like I was a long lost mountain man. I didn't care what they thought, but I wondered what they thought. Maybe they didn't think anything. I smelled so bad that I couldn't even stand myself. We trudged along and for the last 4-5 miles which it was all walking. I knew that I was starting to get under Mike's skin for how long I was taking. He still never said anything but it had to start to become painful for him to go that slow and that long. He gave me directions at various points with an occasional timeframe for finishing. I didn't like anything that he was saying. The only thing I wanted to hear was you're done! We climbed up over a nasty little hill and then down the other side to the last left turn onto Rockville Pike. Mike said,

“we’re just about there.” He got his phone out of his shorts pocket and made a call to Amanda. I kept walking but listening to his words. He pedaled up to me and said that the gate is just up here. We entered the Naval Base grounds at 1640. As we approached the guard shack, Mike gave his military I.D. to the soldier. A quick snap to attention with arm raised in a salute by the soldier grabbed my attention. I looked at Mike with some confusion but the soldier spoke to me to draw me back toward him. I handed him my PA driver’s license but the soldier asked if I was with him? I replied yes, and the soldier then snapped back to attention and saluted a second time. He then made a smart 180 degree about face and walked to his shack. I looked at Mike and asked, what’s your rank? He simply replied “Cap’n.” I shook my head with a new respect but started walking again. We snaked our way through the base and it seemed like it was going on for ever. Amanda had mentioned a few hundred miles ago that she wanted to run with me the last 100 or so yards but when I saw her driving the car toward us to give us the last few directions I thankfully realized that she was not prepared to run. I walked along the sidewalks and finally saw Bob and Amanda standing at the entrance to the parking garage. They both disappeared for a second then returned holding hand made banners bearing “You did it” messages. She also played Queen’s “We Are Champions” on her iPad. She then told me that the entire finishing line and all the fanfare were gone for the day. I finished a few hours later than planned. I really don’t need fanfare, I just wanted to sit down and take off my shoes.

I was an official 200 mile finisher, second ever for Tom’s Run and only solo finisher for this year. I was proud to have gone the distance.

Overview: Started 0445 Thursday June 3 in Cumberland, MD. ended 1658 June 5 at Bethesda Naval Hospital, Bethesda, MD. 85 miles in 22 hours on Thursday June 3; 65 miles in 19 hours on Friday June 4; 50 miles in 11 hours on Saturday June 6. 60 hours of total time, 49 total hours of run time. Starting weight was 164, ending weight was 146. I wore Newton’s half day on Thursday and all day Fri. Wore Inov-8 Roclite 295 half of Thursday and all Saturday. One small left big toe blister, one big spider/bug bite on left forearm. No other physical complaints.

Made it home and hit the bed by 2030. Slept until 0830 Sunday am. Spoke to Aaron on Sunday afternoon and he was doing fine. Heading back to California.

Thank you’s: I feel ever grateful to all of my volunteer cyclist-Phil, Leigh, Michele, Tim, Daryl. Also to Aaron and Christina for getting me through the first 120 miles. The last 80 was so much easier to tackle alone than the entire 200. Mike for getting roped into this and for putting up with me and my slow motion running. Bob, my Father-in-Law, who initially agreed to drive Thursday but unselfishly hung in there to the end. He stood by my side and helped wherever he was asked to. Taking him way out of his comfort zones and putting him in unknown areas. Sleeping in the driver’s seat for two nights and eating fast food on the fly. This is something that he just has never done. But he handled it well and much appreciated. And to Amanda....What a God send! First, she was Aaron’s crew member and only crew member. She accepted his request to help even though she didn’t even know him. She took two days off work to crew for a stranger and drove from Alexandria, VA to Cumberland, MD in a borrowed pick-up truck. She paid for gas and her hotel room out of her own pocket. She bought other supplies along the

way and never asked for reimbursement. She biked through a nasty thunderstorm in regular shorts and only complained.....

When Aaron stepped out of the run, she could've ended her commitment there, but she joined up with my camp to see me to the end. She and Mike bathed and assessed my feet after the second day and taped my left one in the am of the third day. She fed me food and forced me to drink when I didn't want to. She gave me encouragement, sympathy, and a kick in the ass when I needed it. Quit was never in my mind and she made sure that it never entered in. She was in touch with the race director when they left for the day but instructed no one to tell me in fear that I may have quit if I wasn't going to be an official finisher. She authenticated my completion with a few extra miles, perhaps. She had a make-shift finishing line with child like hand drawn banners and We Are Champions streaming from her iPad. She went above and beyond her call to crew for a run such as this. She didn't have to help me when her runner left and she and Mike surely didn't have to waste their weekend staying with what looked like an old broken down runner who had a dream of finishing a 200 mile run. I can't thank her enough for her unselfishness and generosity. If it wasn't for her, I would've never finished such a run. Thank you....

Update: I'm recovering well and gaining the weight back. I'm setting my sights on starting to run again Sunday June 13 to keep training for the Vermont 100 miler. I have a new confidence but at the same time respectful of the distance. Bob has recovered as well as has been telling all of his friends and family the great time that he had and how impressed he was with the whole thing. I spoke through email to Roger Butturini who says that I am in fact an official finisher and apologized for leaving before I finished. He wants to meet in person to present my finisher's medal.

Question of the day: Will I do this run again? Hey, Amanda! What are you doing next year around June 2-4? Well have I got a favor to ask of you.....