

Pikes Peak Ascent: Aug. 15, 2009

Notes:

1. Overall—You could not have asked for better conditions on race day. It was 70° at the bottom and 50° at the top. The sun was shining and the birds were singing. The beautiful day made for a fast and competitive field. Of 1752 total entries for the Ascent, 1646 (94%) made it to the finish line. This is a notably high success rate.

2. My Race/Analysis/Plan for Next Year—I worked very hard to get up the mountain and am reasonably happy with my 4:22:42 time. I am disappointed that I failed to make it into the top half of all finishers (883 out of 1646 puts me in the 54th percentile) but if you count the drop-outs I'm right at the 50% mark. What is interesting is that the fine conditions encouraged an amazingly fast pace for most of the field. To get into the top half of the male runners you needed 4:12:02; to get in the top half of all finishers 4:17:31 was needed. Remarkable! In the old duffer 60-64 year old category I did fine by finishing 19 out of 55 (top 35%). It is worth noting that my times have been extremely consistent over the years. This year's time is only 1:51 slower than 2005's and 1:07 off my 2007 ascent leg.

In looking at my splits it is painfully obvious that I struggle above Barr Camp. This year, as in the past, I made it to Barr with a significant time cushion versus my 4:14:00 goal pace. I arrived in 2:04:53 versus the 2:09:02 goal. However, the hike up to the A-Frame cost me 57:04 versus the goal of 51:49. Even if I could have replicated my best ever A-Frame leg of 54:16 (2007) I'd still have been way off the pace needed. Things continued to deteriorate on the final push to the summit. There meeting the goal requires 1:13:09. This year I struggled horribly to produce a 1:20:45 clocking. Once again, my best ever 1:15:53 (2005) is still a long way from what's needed.

I am satisfied that Matt Carpenter's Pace Calculator accurately assesses splits for given finishing times. After all, Matt has been up and down the mountain more than any living human and has made a real effort to statistically analyze the segments of the course. However, he explicitly notes that the splits predicted by the Pace Calculator assume high altitude training and that without it all bets are off in the precincts above Barr Camp. My consistent failure to cope above Barr Camp is unquestionably the product of imperfect acclimatization.

I am absolutely convinced that I can do this race in under 4:15:00. However, doing so will require a serious commitment to high altitude training. Instead of arriving on Wednesday and doing recreational hikes on Thursday and Friday, I've got to plan on arriving Sunday and doing four solid training sessions on the mountain during the week. One should involve a trip all the way down to Barr and two should involve round trips to the A-Frame. I can taper down with a hike

on the top two miles of the course. While I'll still be seriously disadvantaged versus the Colorado-based runners, I'm certain that my readiness will be at an all time high. My confidence will benefit as well.

3. Clothing/Equipment—The weather was beautiful so I did not have to think too much about what to wear. I used pure running gear (nylon shorts, waffle-weave long sleeve top, Nike Pegasus shoes) and carried my minimalist fanny pack. This year the pack worked fine. All I toted was a spare long sleeved top, wallet, phone and small feeding bottle. I pre-loaded six GUs into the bottle and had high hopes that it would solve all my feeding problems. No such luck! The concept was great but I made the error of not field testing it before the race. What I found is that it was inordinately difficult to suck the GU out of the bottle. GU is thick and drawing it out required a lot of simultaneous squeezing and sucking. The effort was much greater than anticipated and as a result I actually ate much less than ever before. I was shocked to see that the bottle was still half full after the race. I honestly thought that I had had much more. Happily the fix is easy. Yesterday I experimented by diluting GU with water. With one part water to two parts GU the mixture flows easily and does not separate. Next year I'll use my larger feeder bottle and make sure that I consume all of my GU-water brew.

4. How I Felt—I was surprised by the fast early pace of the race. I stuck to my plan of running Manitou Avenue and Hydro Street up to the gate just beyond the Barr Trail parking lot. Last year this got me onto the Trail with the faster competitors and in relatively uncongested conditions. This year it seemed that everyone ran and that the field was materially bigger. As a consequence, crowding on the route became a major problem. I was not at all surprised to see that my split to No Name Creek (1:11:11) was over 3 minutes slower than last year's (1:07:47) because logjams were frequent. It was difficult to settle into a steady pace because of the constant need to jockey for position, pass and be passed.

On the pull up to Barr Camp I decided to be conservative and not run as much as last year. I rationalized that walking fast on the flat sections was almost as fast as running. While there was still plenty of company on this leg the only pinch points were at the water stations. On arriving at Barr I regretted my conservatism because my time (2:04:53) was at least a couple of minutes slower than anticipated. At that point I was tired but still confident of a respectable finish. However, I was bothered by the fact that my feeding routine had not worked well and that I was getting thirsty between water stations.

For me the trek to the A-Frame seemed endless. The steeper conditions and narrow trail caused lots of crowding and unpleasant jockeying. Since I was already unhappy with my time to Barr, the logjams en route and my increasing fatigue put me into survival mode and I abandoned the idea of trying for a best-ever finish. I decided that today was not my day. I just wanted the race to be

over. I was pleasantly surprised when I reached the A-Frame (top sign above the water station) in 3:01:57. I knew that this was not bad and that if I hustled I could salvage something from the day. Unfortunately, I had not rehearsed the full A-Frame distance in my race preparation and forgot what a nice part of the course the first mile or so was. It took me a while to figure out that I could step up the pace on the long switchbacks. Somewhere in the second mile I tried to be more aggressive and instantly regretted it. I jogged to pass a couple of people and my body responded with a chorus of alarms warning of anaerobic collapse and incipient leg cramps. At this point I gave up the ghost and traded aggressiveness for a life-sustaining rhythm.

In the last two miles congestion was an intermittent issue and I definitely could have made better time but for the pack ahead. However, I frankly did not care anymore and lost all sense of competing for a good elapsed time. Finishing and stopping were the only things that mattered to me. In the last quarter mile or so I was cheered by knowing that a couple of easy traverses were ahead but this did not inspire me to finish with a burst of speed. I was mildly surprised to see that my finishing time (4:22:42) wasn't much different from what I've done in the past. I had feared that the leg to the finish might cost me as much as 1:30:00 so was pleasantly surprised to have clocked the distance in 1:20:45. Obviously, that's nothing to crow about it's not a disaster either.

I suffered a good deal in the thin air above the A-Frame. Every time I've done this race I've bumped right up against my physical limits and by the finish have spent pretty much all that I had. In the last two miles it was perversely cheering to pass people perched on rocks at the side of the trail who had blown up and couldn't muster the strength to go on. There were quite a few First Wave runners among these and my heart went out to them. They were clearly having a horrible day. I was encouraged that no matter how miserably rotten I felt, I was able to keep moving and must have looked like a juggernaut to those poor, hopeless souls.

5. Post-Race Condition—Just like in past years I felt remarkably sound after the race. Maggie greeted me at the finish line and astonished me with the news that Germaine had finished just a few minutes before. I had not seen her since Manitou Avenue and thought for sure that she was headed for a sub-4 hour performance. While disappointing to her because she just missed the First Wave cutoff, her 4:16:53 performance was wonderful. She now holds the family record for the Ascent as well as the Marathon!

My only physical complaint was a bit of soreness in my right foot. During a training hike on the mountain a couple of days before the race I turned my ankle. By race day it was largely better and did not factor much in my performance. However, by the time I topped out it was tender and needed cautious treatment. I ran yesterday and now it is decidedly sore. I'll have to be careful for a few days but, overall, I've recovered extremely well and have come away from the race

virtually unscathed. It is great that I can do big events like this one without any physical qualms. One thing that I'm sure was helpful is that I stayed on my feet for an hour after the race while collecting my gear and waiting on line for the shuttle bus to Devil's Playground. This allowed a nice transition between the race and full-on rest and recovery.

6. Prospects for Next Year—I am encouraged that with better acclimatization and more consistent eating during the race I'll do much better. I'll definitely come to Colorado a few days early and follow the training regimen described above. I've now got a handle on how to get plenty of GUs down with minimal effort so I'm confident I'll not run out of gas. I will try to be a bit more aggressive and get to Barr Camp within 2 hours. If I can do that and the weather is not terrible the rest should take care of itself. Making the First Wave is a great goal and well worth pulling out all the stops to achieve.

7. Logistics—Parking in Manitou Springs was no problem. On race day we were able to get a spot near the Library. Traffic was allowed to flow on Manitou Avenue until shortly before Wave 1 went off. We arrived in town about 6:45am and this worked out perfectly. The only thing that I'd want to change is the location of the rental house. This time we were a solid hour's drive from Manitou Springs. I think that next year we should get a place closer to Woodland Park no more than 45 minutes away from town.

August 19, 2009

Pikes Peak Ascent (Aug. 15, 2009)

<u>Waypoints</u>	<u>Cum Mileage</u>	<u>Stage Miles</u>	<u>Altitude</u>	<u>Alt Change</u>	<u>Cum Time</u>	<u>Stage Time</u>	<u>Pace/mi</u>
Ascent Start	0.0	0.0	6,295	0			
No Name Creek	4.3	4.3	8,800	2,505	1:11:11	1:11:11	0:16:33
Barr Camp	7.6	3.3	10,200	1,400	2:04:53	0:53:42	0:16:16
A-Frame	10.2	2.6	11,800	1,600	3:01:57	0:57:04	0:21:57
Summit	13.3	3.1	14,110	2,310	4:22:42	1:20:45	0:25:43

Cumulative ET=> **4:22:42** **0:19:42**

2009 Ascent v. 2008 Ascent

	<u>2008 Time</u>	<u>2009 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
No Name Creek	1:07:47	1:11:11	0:03:24
Barr Camp	0:52:10	0:53:42	0:01:32
A-Frame	0:54:52	0:57:04	0:02:12
Summit	NA	1:20:45	

Cumulative Difference=> **0:07:08**

2009 Ascent v. Prior Years

	<u>2009 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
2005 Ascent	4:20:53	0:01:49
2007 Marathon	4:21:35	0:01:07
2008 Ascent	NA	NA
2009 Ascent	4:22:42	

2009 Ascent v. 4:14:00 Pace

	<u>4:14:00 Pace</u>	<u>2009 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
No Name Creek	1:14:25	1:11:11	0:03:14
Barr Camp	0:54:37	0:53:42	0:00:55
A-Frame	0:51:49	0:57:04	0:05:15
Summit	1:13:09	1:20:45	0:07:36

Cumulative Difference=> **0:08:42**

2009 Ascent v. 3:59:00 Pace

	<u>3:59:00 Pace</u>	<u>2009 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
No Name Creek	1:10:02	1:11:11	0:01:09
Barr Camp	0:51:23	0:53:42	0:02:19
A-Frame	0:48:45	0:57:04	0:08:19
Summit	1:08:50	1:20:45	0:11:55

Cumulative Difference=> **0:23:42**

Best / Worst Stages

	<u>Best</u>	<u>Worst</u>	<u>When</u>
No Name Creek	1:07:47	1:12:00	2008 / 2005
Barr Camp	0:52:10	0:54:00	2008 / 2005
A-Frame	0:54:52	0:58:04	2008 / 2009
Summit	1:15:53	1:23:46	2005 / 2007
Total	4:10:42	4:27:50	

Note on 2009 Race:

Near perfect weather conditions: sun + 70° / 50° start / finish