

Pikes Peak Ascent 2012

Sunday, August 12

I left Albany just before 6am and after a quick plane change in Chicago arrived in Denver before noon. After a 117 mile drive and a stop at the grocery store I arrived at the cabin at 3pm. The cabin is at 9,000 feet so it will be perfect for acclimatization purposes. As is normal I felt a bit lethargic and headachy for the first evening but overall went to bed feeling fine. I did not attempt to do any exercising at all on the first day.

Monday, August 13

I slept well and left the cabin around 8am. After having a hearty breakfast at the Hungry Bear in Woodland Park I drove to Manitou Springs and parked on a side street very close to the official starting point for the race. I started out at with the thought of just going as far as No Name Creek. I vividly remembered the struggle I had getting up to No Name last year and did not want to be overly ambitious this time.

My respect for the course was justified. The trip up Ruxton Avenue is dreadfully steep and once you pass Hydro Street it actually gets worse. Benefitting from last year's experience I knew that the race-day connector to the Barr Trail would be open so I used it to get to the trail. It took me about 24 minutes to get to Hydro Street and another 8 minutes to merge onto Barr Trail.

I am always amazed at how quickly you gain altitude on the Barr Trail. The views are wonderful and the level of effort commensurate with the fast upward ascent. It is never easy to go up the Ws and for me this is where the awful reality of what it takes to do the Ascent hits home. You have barely started the route and it immediately punishes you. You do not have the consolation of having reached any real progress points and it is all too easy to begin fretting about the misery that the next few hours will inevitably bring. Think about something else!!!

I reached No Name in 1:20:00 and was happy to find that I was feeling pretty well. I was very satisfied with my time which was only six minutes off my race pace last year. Considering that I did not run at all and was minimally acclimatized, I was thrilled. After downing some water and resting for five minutes I decided to continue all the way to Barr Camp, another 3.5 miles up the trail.

I did the trip to Barr at a very conservative pace and finally arrived there after another 1:16:00 on the trail. I don't think I have ever done this leg so slowly but that was perfectly okay. The trip to Barr was an unexpected bonus and the 2:41:00 that I invested to get there should pay dividends on race day. I sat down for about ten minutes up top before heading back down the mountain.

The trip back to the official starting line took about 2:05:00. It took me 4:57:00 to finish the 15.6 mile hike, a very satisfying result. I was very pleased that getting to Barr Camp was less of a struggle this year than last. I felt that my acclimatization routine was one day ahead of schedule.

Tuesday, August 14

I left the cabin a half hour earlier than yesterday and following breakfast drove straight to the top of Pikes Peak. The toll was \$12.00 and on the way up discovered that a lot of work has gone into the road in the past year. The road is now completely paved for the full distance. I feel like this is the end of an era. The deliciously adventurous experience of driving on a dirt road to the top is now gone forever.

I started the descent down the Barr Trail with the objective of only going so far as the A-Frame but after only a few minutes began thinking about the possibility of continuing to Barr Camp. The weather was comfortably cool (it felt good to be in a fleece jacket) and I felt full of energy. Going downhill was no effort at all. I hit the top A-Frame sign in 1:00:44 and immediately decided to continue.

The trail conditions seemed about average from the top all the way down to Barr Camp. I reached Barr Camp in a total elapsed time of 1:56:04. Along the way it had warmed up considerably and I stowed my fleece for the duration. I only rested at Barr for eleven minutes before beginning the ascent.

The trip up the mountain was pretty hard. The stage from Barr to the top A-Frame sign took 1:12:57 to complete and seemed endless. I was very happy to finally emerge onto the face of the mountain above the tree-line. I disciplined myself to be heedless about time and did the final three miles to the summit at a pace I reckoned to be about 30 minutes per mile. I passed lots and lots of people who were clearly hurting more than me. I was feeling pretty miserable myself and really hated the finishing leg of the course from the 16 Golden Stairs to the top. It is truly horrible that you have to face the worst terrain of the entire journey at the very end. I finished the A-Frame-to-summit leg in 1:34:34 and gratefully punched the "Stop" button on my watch in a total elapsed time of 4:54:29.

It was a big effort to tackle a round trip to Barr Camp from the summit with only two night's acclimatization to my credit. I have never done this route before and it felt great to accomplish it. Also, when combined with yesterday's hike, I have now got another complete ascent/descent to my credit. I just hope that I get rewarded for all this work on race day.

While at Barr Camp I spoke with the guy and woman who manage the place. Both are ultra-marathoners who do a 100-mile race in Texas (Huntsville) every year. They advised strongly that I stop training for the Ascent after today in order to give my legs a chance to recover and flush out any residual tiredness. I will have to think about this. I want to do some training with Maggie when she arrives but will definitely take a rest day tomorrow. That is a nice thing to look forward to!

Wednesday, August 15

As per plan, today was a day of rest. I drove in to Manitou Springs and hiked up Ruxton Avenue to the Barr Trail race entry point. It took me forty minutes to go up and back.

Thursday, August 16

Maggie's plane was delayed so instead of arriving at 11am she did not make it to Colorado Springs until 2:30pm. We went directly to the official starting line and set out for No Name Creek without a moment's delay.

Maggie was amazingly strong for someone fresh off the plane. I set a brisk pace and she had no trouble at all keeping up. We reached No Name in 1:25:06. It began raining and thundering virtually the moment we arrived so we made tracks back down immediately. On the way we got soaked and pelted by hail. To minimize our exposure to the wet and cold we ran most of the way down. We arrived back at the car in fifty minutes. It felt great to get inside the nice warm car.

Friday, August 17

After a pleasant breakfast at the Hungry Bear we drove to the summit and started the trip down. I felt uncommonly tired and limited my hike to the top two miles. Maggie did the whole trip down to the A-Frame. I spent about 1:45:00 on my round trip and Maggie did the longer distance in a respectable 2:33:00.

I was very glad we got to the top of the mountain and that Maggie was able to see the final three miles of the course. Hopefully another night's sleep at 9,000 feet will give enough additional acclimatization benefits for her to have a good race tomorrow. As for myself, I have no great ambitions. I feel tired and curiously flat. It may be that I have over-trained for this thing. It may be that I just am not acclimatizing as well as before. In any event, I think I am going to have to run a very conservative race to have any hope of finishing at all. I have resigned myself to just finishing and (horror of horrors!) have talked myself into the view that anything under five hours will be quite good enough for this year.

Saturday, August 18 (Race Day)

The best thing that can be said about my race is that I finished comfortably within my oh-so-modest goal of five hours.

The weather on race day was close to perfect, sunny and cool (about 60° top and bottom). As a consequence, everybody who had a number showed up and the course was as crowded as I have ever seen it. It is odd that you are actually rooting for bad weather on race day as the lesser evil to the overcrowding that comes when conditions are nice.

I jogged my way to Hydro Street and was grateful to abandon running at that point. Immediately upon getting off the pavement it was plainly apparent that the first part of the race would be jam-packed with contestants, most of whom (including me) were perfectly happy to accept whatever pace the pack dictated. A number of times the pack ground to a complete halt. As a result, I did not make No Name Creek until 1:20:08 had slipped away. This was a race-day personal worst by a wide margin. Before the day was over I notched personal worsts on each and every stage of the race.

My live-to-fight-another-day attitude was reflected in my very slow time to Barr Camp (58:07) and even more expansive time to the A-Frame (1:04:44). Given the relatively cool conditions, I was surprised at how many people on the Barr to A-Frame stage were sidelined with cramps. Although the stage from No Name Creek to Barr Camp felt a good deal less crowded than before, as usual, crowding was a big problem on the way to the A-Frame. I was more grateful than frustrated by this. When I saw that my elapsed time to the A-Frame was 3:22:59 I took some consolation from the fact that my finishing time would not slip into five hour territory. In the event, I finished in 4:48:57 and was simply happy that it was not worse.

The only truly disheartening thing about this year's race is that I seem to have lost the knack for acclimatization. Six nights at altitude gained me very little in the way of tangible benefits. After feeling fairly good on Monday I never really had much to be encouraged about for the rest of the week. I think that I may have over-trained a bit and would have benefitted from another day off. However, once I returned to New York I immediately did one of my standard hikes in record time. This suggests that my acclimatization failed rather than my fitness. Apart from investing even more time in acclimatization (which I am not willing to do) I have few options for improving my performance. Probably my best one is to concentrate on starting aggressively so that crowding is less of an issue and that I am in the company of a faster cohort of runners. You tend to stay with the same cluster of people through much of the race and pacing along with a slightly quicker group makes a big difference in an event as long as the Ascent.

Overall, the nice weather encouraged quick median times: for men it was 4:16:32 and for all finishers 4:26:23. About 1,800 people had numbers and 1,687 finished within the allowed time. For the first time ever I failed to make it into the top half of my age group, a very embarrassing result that I hope never to have to suffer again.

Maggie finished her first Pikes Peak Ascent in 5:42:19. This was much slower than expected and directly connected to the very short acclimatization period she had before the race. She suffered from Acute Mountain Sickness most of the way up and fought her way to the finish line by dint of sheer determination. Job well done!

Next Year

I will definitely do the Ascent again next year. My main concern will be to get a bit more fired-up about competing than I have for the last two or three years. I am graduating to a new age bracket in 2013 and this might provide the incentive that I need. Maggie is also excited about coming back and she may be able to talk Germaine into doing the race as well. With an extra day or two of acclimatization time, the Germaine-Maggie race will be fantastic.

September 26, 2012

Pikes Peak Ascent (Aug. 18, 2012)

<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	1:20:08	1:20:08	0:18:38
Barr Camp	7.6	3.3	10,200	1,400	2:18:15	0:58:07	0:17:37
A-Frame	10.2	2.6	11,800	1,600	3:22:59	1:04:44	0:24:54
Summit	13.3	3.1	14,110	2,310	4:48:57	1:25:58	0:27:23

Cumulative ET=> **4:48:57** **0:21:40**

2012 Ascent v. 2011 Ascent

	<u>2011 Time</u>	<u>2012 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
No Name Creek	1:14:10	1:20:08	0:05:58
Barr Camp	0:56:53	0:58:07	0:01:14
A-Frame	1:01:50	1:04:44	0:02:54
Summit	1:21:21	1:25:58	0:04:37

Cumulative Difference=> **0:14:43**

2012 Ascent v. Prior Years

	<u>2012 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
2005 Ascent	4:20:53	0:28:04
2007 Marathon	4:21:35	0:27:22
2008 Ascent	NA	NA
2009 Ascent	4:22:42	0:26:15
2010 Ascent	4:30:16	0:18:41
2011 Ascent	4:34:14	0:14:43

2012 Ascent v. 4:14:00 Pace

	<u>4:14:00 Pace</u>	<u>2012 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
No Name Creek	1:14:25	1:20:08	0:05:43
Barr Camp	0:54:37	0:58:07	0:03:30
A-Frame	0:51:49	1:04:44	0:12:55
Summit	1:13:09	1:25:58	0:12:49

Cumulative Difference=> **0:34:57**

2012 Ascent v. 3:59:00 Pace

	<u>3:59:00 Pace</u>	<u>2012 Time</u>	<u>Better/Worse</u>
No Name Creek	1:10:02	1:20:08	0:10:06
Barr Camp	0:51:23	0:58:07	0:06:44
A-Frame	0:48:45	1:04:44	0:15:59
Summit	1:08:50	1:25:58	0:17:08

Cumulative Difference=> **0:49:57**

Best / Worst Stages

	<u>Best</u>	<u>Worst</u>	<u>When</u>
No Name Creek	1:07:47	1:20:08	2008 / 2012
Barr Camp	0:52:10	0:58:07	2008 / 2012
A-Frame	0:54:52	1:04:44	2008 / 2012
Summit	1:15:53	1:25:58	2005 / 2012
Total	4:10:42	4:48:57	

Note on 2012 Race:

Beautiful weather: sunny and cool 60° at start and finish

Placement in 2012 Race

age group	39 of 68	top 57%
men	773 of 1117	top 69%
all finishers	1065 of 1687	top 63%