

Review of the 2015 Edition of the Moab Trail Marathon, ½ Marathon and Adventure 5k

By Race Director Danelle Ballengee

The stars seemed to align themselves this year, at least from my point of view: The weather was spectacular. The participants were awesome. And most of all, my crew was amazing. What a beautiful race 2015 was! Thank you!

This event is more than just a job for me; it is my 'baby'. I feel I was drawn to organize this event for a multitude of reasons, most that even I cannot explain. It's a lot of hard work, but I love it.

There was something about surviving the fall in Taz's Canyon that somehow brought me back to that place—to display the 'life' and beauty of the area. To respect and to enjoy the sport and art of trail running, and the benefits that go with it. And to share this passion with others. And this place has changed my life and has changed the life of many of the participants. I want to thank the many many of you who reached out and shared your stories!

Many of you probably noticed Committee Films at the race, filming for the show "In An Instant" which will show on ABC sometime next spring: the story of my fall, survival and rescue.

When Dan Desroise contacted me in 2007 to set a course for the Ultimate XC in Moab; this course and a race in this region was already a vision in my mind. Dan was the motivation to follow through on the thought, and helped to make it a reality in 2008. The race has evolved over the years. There have been ups and downs, like all things in life. (I will write/post the race history in 2018, the 10th anniversary, for those interested.) This year though, while not perfect (never will be) it was a really really good year. There are always things to be learned and ways to improve, but all in all it went really well!

The week leading up to the race is spent mostly preparing the course. I kept a close eye on the storms and was able to dodge them all, with overall a super experience marking the course. One little bummer was the road plowed out by the power company destroyed our 'canopy' run. The trees were not natives and I assume will grow back for next year. The other bummer thing was the Beavers have made their way downstream where they built a dam right on the course. Dam. Sadly, a flash flood the week before the race left a dead Beaver on the course (in the creek) and thanks to Greg, the Beaver was removed and a proper ceremony was had. It appears the Beaver died of old age. And while sort of a 'good' problem to have, the worst thing to happen the couple months before the race was turning away 100's of runners wanting to participate. The race had filled to capacity-- for both our permit and for the trails, so I had no choice but to say 'sorry'. This was hard for me because I love that people love to run. I'm the mom that says 'run' when the other moms say 'no running'. I'm the one who doesn't need a gun to protect myself, instead I run (not that either would help...). I'm the one who would help solve the health care problem by making people run a mile a day because I think it makes people happy and healthy. So to have to turn people away sucked. Our plan for next year is to have a second Half

Marathon on Sunday; the 'overflow race', so that everyone that wants has the opportunity to participate and enjoy the experience.

On race day the storms had completely cleared. The morning was clear and cold. And dark. Really dark! It was 4:30am and I just finished brewing my coffee when the electricity went out in our house. Oh well, I left to get out there for *race day*, the day I had been working for all year. The drive through town was totally dark and quiet and I realized it was a county-wide power outage. "Hope my staff uses cell phone alarm clocks", I thought nervously. I feel guilty to say I enjoyed my coffee on the way out to the course, as I was pretty much the only one to get coffee that morning. Had I known I would have had 'Cowboy Coffee' ready at the venue. Next year! When I rolled into the venue our awesome timing crew, Racing Underground (I've been friends with Darrin and Jill for over 25 years now!) had the generators cranking—lights and music going. It was so weird. In the middle of 'nowhere' (well, not really, but sort of) **there was power here**, and town had none. Cool.

Slowly but surely the staff and volunteers rolled in with high spirits, ready to go. Then the participants showed, excited nervous and ready for a big day. Where's our band? Our native flute player? Turns out they both slept through the power outage and missed the start. I tried to talk my son Noah (7) into playing his native flute, but an audience of 1500 was a bit intimidating for him. Next year! The race goes on nonetheless and before I knew it it was game time. 8am.

As I gave the pre-race announcements I looked out at our first wave of runners. Wow. Inspiring. What an amazing assembly of the top elite runners. Over 30 elite runners were hopping about ready to amazes us all by flying through this course like water through a rapid. So cool. I know how hard they work to achieve the level they are at, so it's really special to me to see them all here: about to race this course that means so much to me. Next year, more prize money for these guys and girls, they deserve it. A 10 second count and wave one was off. Game on.

Then I looked into the crowd and saw the enormous number of runners and realized how amazing it is, this gathering of trail runners, all with a special bond and with a strong link in common—we all love to run. So cool. Wave 3 was my favorite this year. They were so enthusiastic and excited with beautiful smiles—it was contagious: running is fun and running in amazing places with all our friends is even better. So cool! Wave 6 was my favorite too. I looked in their eyes and they were very internal, very nervous. I sense there is a special story each of them could tell. A story about overcoming something in their life, and here they are about to do this awesome amazing race. And off they go. So cool. Next were the kids, my 'another' favorite wave. These are our future. If we can start them off running, then they will succeed and so will our world. Maybe?! Ok, maybe not quite. It's a nice thought nonetheless. Then all the 5kers went off and there I stood still in this unique silence. 1500 runners are out there on the course. This moment was a feeling I cannot find words to describe. So cool.

I took a few deep breaths for about 5 seconds, and then I began my pacing. That is what I do until every runner has crossed the finish line safely and hopefully happy. The first ½ marathoner crossed the line not too far after the last 5k wave started and it was a steady flow of exhausted happy runners for the next 7 hours. We had some bees again this year (no allergic reactions, thank goodness!), we had one

collapsed runner (he was ok after some r&r), two broken leg (neither were broken, both walked out after 'shaking' it off). And other than that **all was good, great actually!** We had some amazing performances from our elites. Joe Gray and Mario Mendoza battled it out the whole way with Mario taking his turn for the win this time (awesome job!) and Stevie Kremer kept Megan Kimmel moving in the front at a near record pace to finish 1-2. (These girls are so cool—role models!) Dakota moved from 12th to 4th in the last few miles, very impressive. Many first time elites now know the course and are excited to come back next year. Many returning elites and master elites set personal records—that's what it's all about! And for the next 7 hours the runners came through the line, each collecting their medal with a different, unique, and special story about their day on the course. They ate, drank, gave hugs and high fives and shared stories. So cool.

At about 5:15pm the sun set and darkness once again spread across the venue. All runners were accounted for—safe and healthy. Time to stop pacing, breath deep, and smile before cleaning up.

The crew: Amazing! Many of the crew has returned for 7 of the 7 years of the event. They are awesome! First of all, our amazing Greg—we fly him in from Minnesota where he now lives because he's the most awesome and capable race director assistant anyone could ask for. Jeff Stevens and the Friends for Wheelin' Crew (7years!) at the remote aid stations, Melissa and John(7years!) at the Taz's Canyon aid station (that's where my survival story took place and those two were both a crucial part of the rescue). The Baileys—Bob and Kathy—who have been 7 years at the Hunter Canyon out and back, smiling every second—we love them! And Patrick, who usually ends up doing something crazy to save the day returned for the 7th year. Lisa who's a fixture at "Lisa's spot". Sarah, our finish line EMT returning for year 7 to help keep things safe. And back for at least 5 years is Mike Newbolt—who lives along the course, and plays a crucial role at the rope section. And Matt who makes Aid Station 2 just awesome. Thank you Matt! And also Kevin Minard and the Journey Adventure Racing Team, whose experience and skill are unmatched and have been amazing the last few years. This year we teamed up with several local non-profits who help out at the race in exchange for a donation. Community Rebuilds had an amazing team again, as did the Humane Society, Young Life, Grand County MTB team and others. And how about a high five for Brad who's done a superb job with the website! And Steve Moland our "Voice", the superb announcer who didn't miss even one finisher!

This event is a family affair and my husband BC is amazing and contributes so much to the event. He's learned over the years and this year he really 'got it' and played a crucial role to the smooth running. My dad comes to Moab a month before the race and runs race errands every day. It couldn't happen without him. My mom care takes the kids and makes sure they are happy which is so important to me. Both kids ran the race, I was proud of them!

There are more people than I can name here who made a difference, without turning this into a book. Thank you all so much, you are all awesome! And I want to pass on to the staff and volunteers the gratitude not just from me but from the 1000's of participants whom you've made a difference in their life by being a part of the event. THANK YOU!

Mother Nature really deserves most of the credit. This event wouldn't be the same if not for the spectacular scenery. Let's all do our best to protect and persevere our environment. My thought/opinion is that running trails teaches us all to respect the environment by instilling an appreciation of its beauty and power. The opportunity to have races like this to inspire us to train, be healthy, and be respectful of our environment. Thank you to the Moab BLM staff for their cooperation with the event/permitting. Also to Charlie Nelson and the Nelson family for allowing us use of their property for the event (and for keeping the land 'natural'!) Also to SITLA and the three other property owners of whom the course passes through. Also to USATF for maintaining the integrity of the sport and for nominating and respecting this course and our staff with the title of National Championships.

It's a magical 26 miles. Thanks to everyone and everything that makes it possible. And Thanks to the participants who are the sole of the event for their positive attitude and amazing efforts on, before, and after race day.

See you next year!