Cuyamaca 100k Endurance Run

Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, San Diego, CA

October 1, 2016

A sign on the trail read, “Your body can stand almost anything. It’s your mind you have to convince.” That was an awakening sign near the summit of Cuyamaca Peak after grueling long ascent from two aid stations.

The course ran along the boundary of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. It comprised of three different sets of loops with the focal point at the start and finish. Runners accessed their drop bags at the end of each loop. Each loop was color coded orange, blue and yellow for directions.

The first and longest loop was a race on its own. It covered 32.3 miles to the park’s highest point, Cuyamaca Peak at 6500 feet. Joining me for this race were my training buddies Rowell and Peachy of Team FURT (Fil-Am Ultra Running Team). Both have trained religiously for their first 100k. I expected them to do well. My goal was sub 18 hours. Cutoff time is 19 hours.

The first eight miles were mostly single trail undulating downhill which kept the pack tight and social. It worked perfectly for my usual backpacker pace enjoying the landscape and mountain scenery. Thereafter, sound of silence filled the air as runners began the summit conquest. The tight pack vanished quickly. After refueling at Green Valley Aid Station Mile 14.2, the grinding began. The next nine miles of ascent was intimidating. Thus, I made small goals and divided this section into three. I didn’t mind being passed. Temperature started to warm up. With less than two miles to the summit, I caught up with others and boosted my confidence. The written signs a few yards to the summit provided added lift.

On paper, it appeared like the storm was over after Cuyamaca Peak. There were still forty miles of running left. The descent required eye and foot coordination plus balancing on very rocky single trail followed by vast meadows of rolling downhill until the first loop concluded. Volunteers were very assistive in handing drop bags as well as other needs such as food and hydration. This was typical at all aid stations.

The second loop was a short 12.6 miles with one major climb. The course ran through southeast corner of the park. Afternoon temperature was hot but luckily not in the 90s. I was well within my goal and slowly reeling runners. Noticeable upon my return to the basecamp were runners being carefully attended. Some couldn’t continue due to physical or health issues. Night section on this course is always cold and windy. I changed shirt, wore windbreaker, flashlights and downed two cups of hot chicken noodle soup and carried a slice of spam and cookies. This is it, eighteen miles to go.

After picking up my yellow bracelet to signify final loop, I headed to the meadows until darkness struck. Some runners were accompanied by their pacers for the night section. The last loop covered the northern section of the park, Anza Borrego and Pacific Crest Trail overlooking amazing desert views before returning to the south to finish. My legs were tired from shuffling running and walking. Rocky trails tripped me a few times causing my goal time to fall behind at the last aid station, Pedro Fages Mile 56.5 with 6.8 miles to finish. I gathered myself and slowly got into a rhythm again to finish 17:41:56.

Mind was convinced. Mission accomplished.