

Rio Del Lago 100 Mile Race Report – November 5, 2022

By Jameson Henkle

The 21st running of the Rio del Lago 100-mile trail run occurred on November 5, 2022 with the race start in Folsom, Ca. I ran this race with the support of my wife as solo crew in 22 hours and 10 minutes. The race was beautiful, rugged, and challenging. Here is the play by play of the day's events.

Pre-Race

Kellee and I ate homemade pasta dinner in the hotel the night before the race and got to bed early around 9pm. We had a 3:40 wake-up to put down a 1 cups of coffee, a couple cuties, shower, get dressed, and drive the 15 minutes to the race start. 400 plus runners toed the line at the Rio del Lago (RDL) consisting of 350 100 milers and 50 runners running the new to this year 50k event. The parking lot was massive and there were cars and runners everywhere.

5:00 Race Start to Beals Point

The race started right on time in the dark and I was lined up near the front. The energy was high, and I felt very nervous. That excited anticipation I always feel before any big adventure. The first section of the course was a 21.5-mile loop around Lake Natomas and back to the start line. My rough estimate is that 80% of this section was on pavement. It had the potential to be very fast. I tried to hold back and keep my pace nice and easy and complete the miles with a 10 min/mile average. I met a few friends, chatted a little bit, and watched the sunrise over the mountains that I would soon be running towards. I passed a lot of runners and got passed by a lot of runners. This was a big shake down period of the race. Back at the aid station Kellee was waiting for me and we swapped out water and food in 1:40. It was a swift transition.

Mile 21.48 – Beals Point – 56/302 – 10:01 min/mi – 3:35:02

Beals Point to Granite Beach

This section consists of rollers along the levy of Folsom Lake. I was feeling pretty good hitting some dirt for the first time and wended through to Granite Beach. On point Kellee was waiting for me and we did another quick swap in under 2 minutes again.

Up to this point I could feel my legs starting to tight up. Specifically in my IT bands and Quadriceps. I was hoping this was an artifact of the pavement and they would loosen up as soon as I hit dirt. That did not happen....

Mile 25.92 – Granite Beach – 40/298 – 9:52 min/mi - 4:15:35

Granite Beach to Rattlesnake Bar

Almost immediately from Granite Beach, things went south. Some rolling single track and fire roads heads into the meat grinder. This section is short punchy rollers punctuated with big boulders and lots of deep ruts. It was about mile 26 that the muscles in my thighs locked up and I was experiencing significant pain. I knew that things were going to be tough but couldn't have expected to be in the pain cave so early on in the race.

Then something magical happened, 2 runners caught up to me. I asked if they wanted to pass and they said no. So they fell in line behind. Then 3 more runners caught up and joined in with us. Then 2 more. Then we passed a couple runners who were walking and I invited them to join in. Next thing I know, in the depth of my pain cave, I'm running strong leading the way for a train of 10 runners! This saved me during this section. I didn't have time to feel sorry for myself and I couldn't just stop and walk. These runners needed me! Well not really but it kept me moving at a good clip. Truth is I needed them...

Two miles short of Rattlesnake I stepped off out of the pace line because I couldn't bare the pain in my legs at that pace. It was mile 33 and had been a solid 7 miles of meat grinder at a decent pace. After about 30 seconds of walking I linked up with another group of runners and followed them into Rattlesnake Bar.

Mile 35.75 – Rattlesnake Bar – 46/297 – 10:30 min/mi - 6:15:31

Rattlesnake Bar to Overlook

I roll into Rattlesnake Bar on the struggle bus. First thing I do is sit down and ask Kellee to set a 7-minute timer. I know I need to get off my feet but don't want to get stuck for too long. I take some time to restock my pack. And share my struggles with Kellee and Sal (He was there to crew Lisa also running RDL). I throw my race goals out the window. I'm feeling way too sorry for myself. Very discouraged. Very painful. BUT. My spirit and stoke were still high. So, 7 minutes. later I was back on my feet.

The next 5 miles hurt. Bad. I was not running strong. And for the first time in any race ever, I was unsure if I would be able to complete the entire distance of the race. The thought of quitting wasn't on the table, but the capability of finishing was in question.

THEN, at mile 40 on a 5-minute walk break. I checked in with my legs mentally. And what I could hear is that they were ready to run. So, I started running, and the pace picked up. The pain had subsided, and I started to run very strong. I think my positive attitude really helped get me to this point through that low moment (3+) hours. The course was very runnable through this section. And it ended with a 3 mile climb up Cardiac. I was so stoked when I got here that my legs were. back that I ran up the whole thing. I passed a lot of runners on the way up. I realized at this point that I was not taking my own advice. I changed my race goal because of a low moment. But this is where race goals need to double down. So my goals were back on the table whether I was feeling high or low....

This brings up an important point. I don't care about what place I get. My measure for success is, did I give it my best effort? I could get last place but if I finish and tried my hardest, I would be stoked. I want other people to give their best and if they pass me along the way than that is worth celebrating.

Mile 44.9 – Overlook – 43/294 - 11:14 min/mi – 8:24:21

Overlook to No Hands Bridge

Another shoutout to Kellee. Her aid was impeccable. She didn't miss a stop, and was always prepared with fresh bottles, energy gels, and clothes. In fact we talked a lot while I was out there. I had wireless headphones and we would check in and talk 1-2 miles before I got to the aid station and discuss our plan. We were a team and it was great to chat and talk in real time to be efficient through aid stations.

This stage had a significant drop in elevation over pretty steep and rocky terrain. No hands bridge was a non-crew aid station. This is a good time to mention that the volunteers at this race were the best I've ever seen! Hands down. Every aid station had plentiful volunteers who were there to serve you and help you in any way that they could. And they wouldn't let you linger. I heard many times them telling runners to get what they need and go... In the most loving and supportive kind of way.

Mile 49.17 – 40/283 – 11:26 min/mi – 9:22:05

No Hands Bridge to Auburn Lakes Trailhead

After the No Hands Bridge AS the trail split for a lollipop loop back to No hands. After the split and across Highway 49, there was a flattish section on the Quarry trail. This was tough for me. Another low point in the race. So I brought in an AR method to walk 40 paces and run 40 paces. I did this for about 45 minutes before some hills and was able to find my stride again.

Then up into the hills. This was my favorite part of the course. Beautiful trails, very runnable, some steep mountainous climbs, creek crossings, thick green lush vegetation. And it started to mist, then sprinkle, then rain. The temps were in the low 50s so it wasn't that cold while moving. It sure was for Kellee and the volunteers. Cold and rainy. It rained for a good 6+ hours. I was pretty wet and soaked through. But the effects the rain had on the course were amazing. The trail was pretty sticky (minus some mud puddles). The vegetation was very dank and verdant. And the treetops stuck out of the clouds like islands in the sky. I hadn't run an ultra in the rain before, so this was a cool experience.

I made a couple friends, Mel and Karen. We ran together for about 10 miles through the misty trails. In fact Karen had been on the run train earlier in the day. The three of us became buddies, we ran together, chatted the whole time, and even waited for each other and regrouped at the aid station. The comradery was great.

Mile 59.35 – 40/264 – 11:56 min/mi - 11:48:33

ALT to No Hands Bridge

Right out of Overlook I realized I hadn't picked up my headlamp and happened to be short a light. Karen actually had a spare that she let me use. It was pretty cheap though and provided minimal light. As the sun went down around 6:30 my legs were feeling amazing. I left the trio of running friends and ran by iPhone light down a super rocky technical section. it was not ideal. I prefer my bulky super bright adventure racing headlamp and light up the trail at night when running. It's kinda like the brights on your car to see super dark mountain roads. I came back into No Hands Bridge and the friendly volunteers recognized me by the moustache. In fact I was dubbed the moustache guy independently by people all day long! They really wanted to give me pizza, but I told them I was on liquid calories.

My nutrition plan was Bend Racing 4-hour fuel and Spring Energy. This worked so solid. I put 800 calories into a soft flask and drank it over a 3-hour period. I supplemented with spring energies when I needed more sustenance. At every aid station I ate 1 piece of quesadilla and here or there would drink some ginger ale. I didn't really need food from the aid stations because I had a plan. Although I found Gu energy blocks sat extremely well and ate 6 bags spread out towards the end of the race when I needed extra calories. This plan worked great! I had energy the whole race, never gut bombed, no indigestion, and flatulence was pretty low (which is good cause its no fun to be super gassy and running). My nutrition and hydration plan was on point. I

sweat the whole race even through the rain. I think I could have used a little more salt. I was doing 2-3 salt pills every 3 hours, and really should have done 2 pills an hour just like if it were hot out. Now I know.....

Mile 76.20 – 35/229 – 12:33 min/mi – 15:10:50

Cool Aid Station

There was a bonus crew station between ALT and No Hands Bridge called Cool. It was dummmmmmping when I arrived. I got to say hello to Fresno friends Cori and Erin who were there to pace Lisa. I did an in-car aid stop changing my clothes and getting my headlamp. When I got out of the car I was instantly shivering! So real quick I swapped a t-shirt for a long sleeve under my shell and thick gloves. In 2 minutes, I warmed back up. And in 15 minutes I was overheating. It was good info for me to keep figuring out how to dress for the rain...

No Hands Bridge to Overlook

Once back at No Hands Bridge, the lollipop was complete, and I was reversing the course back to the start/finish. Now I had already experienced the terrain once and knew what I was getting into. I took off running. This was a nice short 4-mile stretch and I had some running legs underneath me! I think at 75 miles in I started to settle into the race for the first time.

Mile 76.84 – 32/204 – 12:54 min/mi – 16:30:37

Overlook to Rattlesnake Bar

This was the best part of the race for me! I ran so hard, and so strong. I was absolutely crushing it. The running felt good. My legs were loose. And I was stoked! This part was patchy service, and I couldn't get ahold of Kellee. When I rolled into the aid station, she was asleep on the platform in the Prius! She had her alarm set for 11:40 but I arrived at 11:20. She was confused but happy to wake up and see me doing so good. We were reeling in the miles, and the finish line was in my sights. At this point, my confidence for finishing was 100% and I was able to manage my body to ensure that would happen.

Mile 86.02 – 25/203 – 12:52 min/mi – 18:27:14

Rattlesnake Bar to Granite Beach

Leaving Rattlesnake Bar, I was riding the wave of stoke. I knew the meat grinder was coming up. I had about a solid 4 miles of running then my legs decided to stop working. Looking back, I think I needed salt, bad.... So back on the struggle bus I went. I got passed by a lot of strong runners. And every time stepped aside on the trail to cheer them on and tell them they were doing so good. Also, I thought the next AS was at mile 94. But it was 96. Those last 6 miles through the meat grinder to Granite Beach were sooooo tough. I did what I could to get through it. But walked a fair amount. I had met a friend William early on who I bounced around all day, and he passed me through here. I told him my legs were locked, and he said keep pushing you'll get them back. Sage wisdom and it helped a lot.

Mile 95.84 – 29/187 – 13:24 – 21:23:43

Granite Beach to Beals Point

Struggle bus does weird things..... I had called Kellee and made a plan to sit and stretch when I saw her at Granite Beach. I think I was looking for a solution to the pain to stop running. But when I got there, I could see all the runners who had passed me at the AS. So, I guess I wasn't doing so bad. I checked in with Kellee, got some water, ate some salt and caffeine and decided not to stop, but to keep running!

I wanted to finish strong. So I started to move the legs. Then the legs responded. And they were feeling great! 4.5 miles to go and I ticked off miles between 11 and 12 minutes consistently. I didn't stop running the whole time. I passed a lot of people who were walking it into the finish. Cheered them on. And made my way back to Beals Point. Special shoutout to William who I pass with 4 miles to go as he was stopped with his pacer. With 1 mile left he came screaming by me for the 100-mile kick! I had never seen such a thing. So impressive.

Then there it was. The brightly lit oversized finish line. I couldn't believe it. Kellee was there waiting for me, and I hooted and hollered with my usual vigor. I can't help it. Emotions overwhelm me and I must get them out. I hung out for about 20 minutes and cheered on all the runners who came in after me while soaking in the joy of the moment. With something as big as this, I don't want to let it pass by.

Mile 100.5 – 23/170 – 10:55 – 22:10:03

Post Race

A huge thank you to my running coach Nate Moore for providing me the training plans, encouraging me to run, and believing in me. I can't thank my wife Kellee enough for all her support not only during this race, but in life to allow me to take the time to train and prepare. I had a crew of people following along on a text message thread and getting buzzes to my watch during the race is an instant injection of support and belief. And thank you to all the organizers, volunteers, runners, and everyone else who comes together to make this crazy thing of running 100 miles in the mountains possible.

100.5 miles – 23/170 – 13:18 min/mi – 22:10:03