

# Great Trail Race, Race Report by Steve Buelna

## **A Different Day and an Entirely Different Race:**

Still bouncing off the walls from the Truckee Marathon late last month, I was all too quick to jump at the chance to sign up for the Great Trail Race just two days before the event. I think I might start to agree with some of my friends that I have completely lost it at this point in that my biggest dilemma was not that I wasn't ready to run it, but whether I should do the Classic Course of 30K or the Elite Course of 36K. I joked at the starting line with some of the friends (I had made at the Truckee Marathon who were also running) that I was in fact running my own race, the "Elite Classic." I followed this by a comment that I would be the only one in this category, so I would in fact place first.....and last. In reality though, I had ultimately chosen to run the Classic Course since I thought this would be a more conservative choice and allow me to run the same event as my friend and neighbor (and the 2017 Women's Classic Winner) Raeleigh Harris.

Much like any other race I seem to run, the morning was a tad brisk. And by that I mean, it was pretty darn cold. Fortunately the race starts just a mile from my house, so we were able to hitch a ride up in the morning for bib pick up and then head home to warm up and finalize the clothing selection for the day. The race was scheduled to start at 9:10 but ended up being delayed due to the shuttle of athletes from Tahoe City. Although this did mean a bit more time in the cold before starting to run, it provided an opportunity to chat with other athletes getting ready to charge towards Tahoe City.

The race organizers did a great job of splitting the race starts into four groups runner and cyclists and which course you were running. The first group to go was the Elite Cyclists, followed by the Classics and then on to the runners. My group was the last to start out and I noticed that there appeared to be more folks in the Elite category and even more within the cycling groups. So the race was off and once we climbed the paved access road to the 06, I was delighted to look down at my watch and see that I was definitely taking a different approach to this race than I was at the marathon. My nerves were in check (so was my heart rate) and this was going to be a steady run with the primary emphasis on fun! With my heart rate in check, I was able to enjoy some conversation with friends for the first couple of miles of the course. Shortly after that, the field spread and it became mostly a solo race. The exception being brief chats with the volunteers or catching the occasional mountain biker on the climb. I felt a slight sense of joy in that I was traveling "light" and not pushing a 30-pound mountain bike up some of these climbs. (Karma later smacked me in the butt as the descent of the race experienced sporadic encounters of bikes whizzing by).

The first 4 miles or so of the race was relatively level with a gradual climb. It allowed for a very comfortable pace with not much exertion or strain. At about mile 5, things changed and the pitch really kicked it up a notch. I was fearful that this would continue for the next 5 miles in that I had seen a pretty steady incline up to about mile 10 on the race profile. It turned out that that particular climb was a one-time thing and the rest of the climb was pretty consistent and definitely not a problem to run. I did change my strategy some and allowed myself to walk portions of it to make hydration and fueling a bit more manageable. Not to mention, the scenery was SPECTACULAR! So I took a few moments to soak it all in. After a couple minutes of this I realized that I should step it up a bit and I committed to running the rest of the climb to the summit. Once at the top, I refilled my hydration flasks and shared in the conversation with a cyclist and the volunteer. I then wished all well and headed out from the aid station.

Now on to the "easy part", as I had been informed it was all down hill from there, I was a bit alarmed to suddenly get a bit nauseous and not feeling as great as I thought I would. I think the climb and stopped at the top had put my system into the mode of thinking we were done.

So a brief on the jog chat with my body and I was back into an easy stride downhill. I was glad that this weird feeling was very brief and I was back to "normal" in no time and headed down the road. From the top, this section of the course was all paved and that took some getting used to, as the previous 10 miles had all been fire road. I had hoped to really pick up the pace, but the legs being a little tired and the surfacing changed my focus to a normal tempo. The paved portion lasted for probably about 3 miles and then dropped into a nice flowy single track for the remainder of the race. Fortunately, this part of course was not too technical which made it easier to adjust on the trail to allow the mountain bike to pass (As many of them were now catching the runners). I was thankful that the vast majority would announce "on your left", which really helped to keep everyone safe (Nice work MTBers).

As I passed the last aid station and was told that there was less than two mile left, so I tried to speed it up a bit. In reality, there wasn't much of a change in pace until I got within earshot of the finish line. But once I did, what an experience! The cheers really travelled up the hill and there were several spectators standing along the side as you approach the finish line, all cheering and having a good time. Because of the cheering I found another gear or two and sped up until I ran through the familiar Big Blue finish line arch. At this point the awards for the cyclists were already underway and well as some tasty BBQ for all the athletes. After grabbing some snacks I met up with my neighbor, Raeleigh and was stoked to learn that she had placed first in the Women's Division (by the way, this was her longest distance running race as many of her triathlons end with a half marathon. Way to go!). So I grabbed some food and we stuck around for the awards. I particularly enjoyed getting to the picnic type atmosphere and the ability to get to know some fellow athletes. What a great day with amazing people! Thanks again Big Blue Adventures for helping me knock off another bucket list item with a fantastic run from Truckee to Tahoe City. Maybe next year I will see what this Elite Course is all about.....