

Laura Knoblach ~ RACE REPORT

Virginia Triple ANVIL Triathlon – 13/15 October 2016

I realize I'm super-late in writing this...sorry! Also, reeeeeaaaaally long race, reeeeeaaaally long race report. You are by no means expected to stick it out until the end, but I figured I'd include it all in there for those who wanted the full story.

I'll start by saying that I don't race a lot. I've only done about 6 or 7 races in my life (excluding 5Ks), so I had never had the unfortunate experience of having a bad race.

Until the Triple.

I'm not sure exactly why I felt like death incarnate for every moment of this 421.8 mile race, but...I did. Apologies go out to all who had to witness the zombie stare during this race.

For those interested in how it went, the story begins not at the starting line, but about a week before. Scott and I had crazy weeks, chalked full with exams and packing for the trip. Scott pulled two consecutive all-nighters Sunday night and Monday night in order to finish schoolwork and pack. The all-nighter Monday night, he did for me. I was up super-late studying for a midterm and still hadn't packed my bicycle. Instead of going home and sleeping, Scott offered to stay up another night to pack it. Scott, if you hadn't done that, I probably would not have finished the race. Not all heroes wear capes, but you might want to consider investing in one. 😊;

All that craziness aside, this is the first race I have actually been excited for. Normally, I'm all nerves for weeks before a race (probably because I don't race a lot). There definitely were nerves before this one, too, but I was mostly just thrilled to be racing with so many familiar faces from the Florida Double.

THE SWIM- 7.2 MILES

(Finally!) 5am Thursday morning rolled around. My family shared a cabin with Dan Duran and his family; it was a relief not to worry about sleeping through an alarm! We all got ready, nervously ate breakfast, then headed down to the swim area at 6am. The air was cold. The only wetsuit I own was a sleeveless suit, and soon after entering the water for the 7am start, I began to shake. Goosebumps began to appear on my arms, and I found there was nothing I could do to stop shivering while swimming. 7.2 miles of this?!? I tried not to think about the distance. At least the water was warm!

Leaving the water, Scott told me I had a bluish tint on my cheeks and lips. I'd planned nutrition for a long swim, but not for the extra calories lost while shivering. To put it into perspective: my swim time for the morning was longer than my normal marathon time. He quickly gave me a warm towel and food, as I headed off to the locker room for T1. Teri, one of the Race Directors, explained the bike course to me as I dried off and changed into my dry and warm cycling clothes.

THE BIKE- 336 MILES

The first century of the bike ride went great. I hardly ever stopped (Scott had perfected the running-after-me-and-handing-me-food technique). It was a little slow, but I figured I'd pick up the pace later on. That, unfortunately, did not happen. As the temperature fell, so did my pace, and mid-way through the night, my toes felt like frozen ice-blocks. Even now, over a week later, my toes are still tingling from the many hours of numbness on the bike. I was also tired, something I hadn't predicted after doing the Double without a problem, along with 2 all-nighter workouts with Dan and Debbie. Somewhere during the endless laps of the bike (we had to do 60), I met up with [Michael](#) and [Joey](#), two friends I had met at the Double in Florida. We kept each other awake by telling stories and jokes into the wee hours of the

morning. By biking together, we were able to avoid a couple hazards of the bike: falling asleep and hallucinations. However, there was one hazard even our biker gang could do nothing to defeat: cats. Turns out, there are a LOT of feral cats at Lake Ana State Park, and they behave similarly to deer, dashing out in front of bicycles as you whiz by. Almost desensitized to them, I decided not to move aside when I saw a black one run into the street while riding with Michael. It'll move out of my way, I thought, too tired to put in the effort to swerve. Suddenly, I saw a white stripe along its back. "Skunk!" I yelled, swerving to avoid the stinky animal. Let's just say I felt much more awake after that.

I'd hoped to get off the bike at 2pm (at the latest) on Friday. The bike is always my best event, and I try to use it to bank extra time to complete the run. However, lap after lap I found it increasingly hard to get up to speed, and ended up getting off the bike at 5:30pm on Friday. Already nervous about the cutoff, I decided to forgo the 2 hour sleep I had planned to do halfway through the run. It was looking like I'd have to push all the way to the cut-off Saturday evening.

THE RUN-78.6 MILES

The first marathon went well. I'd been advised to push through the first two marathons quickly and leave myself plenty of time for the 3rd. I decided that I wanted at least 9 hours to finish the third marathon, just in case things went wrong. Marathon one was going well until my leggings began to chafe. I looked for my sweatpants, but couldn't find them anywhere. I decided to put on my shorts, but soon after walking into the cold night air, my left calf seized up. Just before this happened, I had started walking with [Vasilis](#), who gave me an electrolyte drink. We walked for several laps together, something I was very, VERY grateful for. It soon became clear that I would likely be unable to run for the rest of the race. [Vasilis](#) talked me through establishing a good power-walking pace, without which I likely would not have finished the race on time.

As the night wore on, the Charlie-horse in my calf tightened harder and harder. After hobbling nearly 17 miles with it, my left foot was pointing almost completely outward. [Steve Alan Kirby](#) saw me, and yelled, "Laura, do you need to see the massage-therapist?" My brain was too numb to make a decision, all I knew was that I was supposed to keep going. At this point, even though there were probably 15 hours left of the race, I was feeling very nervous about making the cut-off. What if I spent 20 minutes in the massage therapist's tent and it didn't do anything? Fortunately, I didn't have to make the decision. The next lap around, the massage therapist was there to straighten me out. I almost cried as he worked through my cramping muscles, but they soon began to release. Miracle worker! In 2 laps, I was almost completely better! Debbie, another racer, had seen me running in shorts and had also lent me her sweatpants. I was off! But also running out of time.

Scott kept telling me that I needed to sleep. I kept trying to push him away. "Laura, you're fine on time. You are literally the only person who is worried about you. However, if you don't sleep, then you'll slow down." One 15-minute nap later, and I was back on the track, feeling a whole lot better.

I finished the second marathon around 10am, just on time, and took another lap and a short break. Before 10:30, I was back out, ready to finish marathon #3. The run course was 45 laps of a 1.75 mile road. I had established a steady power-walk, but the monotony of the laps began to get to me. I had also developed about 10 large blisters due to the morning dew. Halfway into marathon #3, one ripped, spilling warm blood over my foot (whose moisture, of course, gave way to more blisters).

At this point, the encouragement of the other racers, crew members, and volunteers became vital to my finishing. Seeing people like [Erik Hanley](#), [Dan Duran](#), [Joey Lichter](#), [Michael Ortiz](#), Debbie, [Ruth Sleeter](#), [Lisa Wei-haas](#), [John Jenkins](#), along with many others, was a constant pick-me-up each lap. People stopped or slowed to give me advice on nutrition, pace, and sleep. [Josh Hageman](#), on his 2nd-to-last lap of the Triple, walked with me and held my coca-cola, while encouraging me to keep going.

John Jenkins gave me a piece of advice I will probably never forget. In the moment, these ultras seem so incredibly long and arduous. After they are over, though, they suddenly seem so much shorter. Almost every moment of this 60-hour race, I wanted to quit. I was cold, I was tired, I was in pain. However, as is the case with many things in life, it is the people around us who keep us going. I owe so much to my crew members, Scott and my mother Janet, along with all the other crews who shared with us. I owe so much to the fabulous race directors and staff ([Steve Alan Kirby](#), [Teri Smith](#), [Jade Kent-Medders](#), and many others), without whom these races would not exist. You all are incredible people, the unsung heroes of these events, who suffer through as much and more as every racer, yet don't receive medals at the end for your efforts. I also owe so much to my fellow racers in the Double, Triple, and Quintuple. The atmosphere you have established at these events is truly unique - you help each other and encourage each other, you race with each other instead of against each other. To anybody who has never been to one of these races, I encourage you to go. You will come away with a new definition of selflessness, a strengthened meaning of community, and perhaps, a restored view of humanity.

Many people asked me while I was training for this race whether or not I was doing it for a cause. While I am so incredibly heartened by their eagerness to give and to get involved, I decided to give my incredibly generous donor base a break, since I had just done a fundraiser last spring. However, this made me really question and be honest with myself about why I do races like this. The truth is something that I feel has been a long time coming and is something that deserves to be shared.

While I have often done events like this to raise awareness about sex trafficking (as well as donations for fighting it), I realized that most people don't know that my drive to do so came out of being sexually abused as a child and teenager. The experience left me with a desperately low sense of self-esteem, eating disorders, and thoughts of suicide which plagued me through my late teens and early college years.

Many people wonder why anyone would want to do a race like this; I encourage you to ask. From what I've seen, the people who end up doing these races usually have a compelling reason to. For my part, participating in these events has given me a renewed sense of purpose and self, as well as an opportunity to help those in much, much worse situations than my own. Most importantly, they have taught me to rethink what is possible, both for myself and for the world around me.

I encourage anyone who is currently in a situation of abuse to seek help, to realize you are not alone (and never have been), and to realize you are much stronger than you know.

I finished the Triple in 59 hours and 36 minutes, many hours slower than I'd hoped, and in much more pain than I'd imagined. I had the honor of being the youngest person in the world to complete a Triple Anvil, as well as the first woman in my age group to do so. However, as always, that joy is shared with all the marvelous people who held me up along the way.

Blessings, friends. You are all treasures. 