

Blunders and Trail Comedy



I've probably spent nearly 7,000 hours out on the trail. I wish they could all be proud moments, but blunders happen and I do enjoy laughing at myself. Here are a collection of short stories that demonstrates that ultrarunning isn't always a serious sport.

Wrong Turn at Zane Grey 50



One of the toughest 50-mile races in the country is Zane Grey 50, held in central Arizona below the Mogollon Rim. One year, the direction of the course was reversed. I was running a pretty good race and with a mile to go, I wasn't paying careful attention, being pretty tired and hammered by the heat. I took a wrong turn. Finally after a half mile, I noticed there weren't any footprints on the trail and no trail markings. I went on and tried to figure out how to make it to the finish. I could hear music and other sounds from the finish line over a small hill.

As I approached, I stopped. If I continued to take this route, I would come in from the wrong direction and face the laughs and ridicule of my friends who had already finished. I couldn't face that. I turned around and kept trying to find a connecting trail that just wasn't there. Finally after wasting 15 more minutes, I decided that I would just face the music. In I came, from the opposite direction. I ran into the finish area and then wrapped around the finish line. Everyone was pointing and laughing. Yes, I had gotten lost with a mile to go.



Lost in Capital Reef



During my second visit to Capital Reef National Park, I decided to run Muley Twist solo, in the opposite direction as most hikers go, for a different perspective. After an hour of running, I turned into what I thought was Muley Twist Canyon. Because Muley Twist makes so many turns, it is pretty easy to lose all sense of direction. But as I continued I only saw one set of footprints and I had to keep convincing myself that I was in the right canyon. Finally after another hour, I was in a stream bed and noticed more foot prints. The big problem is that I soon recognized the familiar footprints, mine from two weeks earlier going in the wrong direction. I popped out of the creek bed, looked to the north, and saw my car at the trailhead. I had run for two hours in a complete circle. A couple weeks later I bought my first GPS.

Lost on Great Salt Lake



Going off course happens fairly often during an ultra. During the first year of the Antelope Island 100K, I was running fast and strong and found myself in first place overall at about mile 15. I was leading a small pack down onto the mud flats of the Great Salt Lake. It was still dark and I had a very difficult time picking out little red flags to mark the way. Sure enough, I went the wrong way and behind me were about a half dozen other runners following my light and blunder. I angled back toward the island in hopes to find the correct route and a little later all of us were bushwhacking together through brush, totally lost, trying to figure things out. Eventually as it got lighter we saw other runners out on the flats going the right way.

Follow the Map Guy



During the Bear 100, I was with others following behind Phil Lowry, assistant race director and the official mapper of the course. We were climbing up a canyon for about a half mile when Phil let out a yell. He had led us up the wrong canyon. We all laughed at the irony of this. We had been following the one guy who knew the course the best and we still got lost.

Surprise for Phil



Running 100-mile races is by no means as serious as running road marathons. Because you are out on the trail for some many hours, you have to find ways to entertain yourself. During a Wasatch 100, near mile 20 in thick bushes, I could hear Phil catching up to me. I decided to get his attention. I ran ahead and hid behind a thick tree. As Phil caught up, I jumped from behind the tree, screamed, and laughed as Phil jumped out of his skin. Jokes are plenty during a 100-mile race.

Distractions for race leaders

LOOK!
A Distraction!



There are always stories about funny things that happen to a leader of an ultra race. One year at Bighorn, Karl Meltzer encountered an angry moose that came after him. In another race, the leader stopped to help an older couple change a flat tire. My story happened while leading the 2009 Pony Express Trail 100. I was worried about Matt Watts catching me, a few miles behind, but I still stopped at mile 80 to conduct a radio interview. You can [listen to it here](#). I still went on to win the race.

Stolen Car



Years ago I took a few friends with me to do a winter run in southern Utah through an amazing petrified forest. We had a great run, but when we returned to the trailhead at the highway, my friend’s vehicle was gone! We reported it stolen and then tried to figure out how we would get home. I thought about all the things I had lost, my wallet, my keys and my cell phone. We flagged down a car, asking them if they had seen the car. They had not, and drove on. A few minutes later, they returned and were laughing like crazy. Just around the next corner was another trailhead and pullout. Our car was there. We had come out to a different place. We went home laughing but very relieved.

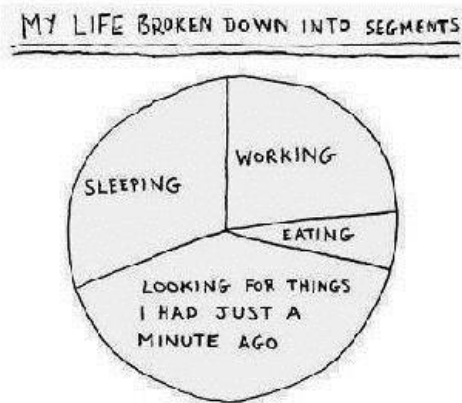
Lost Wallet



One year, just one hour before the start of Across the Years, where I would be running for the next 72 hours, I discovered that my wallet was missing. In a panic, I drove as fast as I could back to the motel where I had stayed and searched the room in a very hurried state, watching the clock tick down to the start. There was no sign of it. I stopped at a Subway, the last place I had used my credit card, but it was not there. I became convinced that I had left it on the counter and someone must have stolen it. How would I get back on the plane without my identification?

I returned to the race with just 15 minutes to spare. It was a very stressful way to begin a race. My wife helped, cancelled the credit cards and emailed me copies of my ID. My brother loaned me a credit card. Two days later, still during my run, the motel finally called to say they cleaning crew had found my wallet in my room.

Losing stuff on the trail



As I get older it seems that I lose stuff on the trail more often. I used to mock my older brother when he would seem to lose half his pack on the trail, but now it is happening to me more. I feel bad about dropping or forgetting things. In races I’ll often forget a water bottle at an aid station and need to run back once I notice it gone. Once on a backpack trip in the Uintas, after setting up camp, we ran up to Dead Horse Pass to take pictures. On return, I noticed that I didn’t have my camera. So I simply ran all the way back up to the top of the pass searching all over but returned without the camera. A couple weeks later I received an email. Some guy had found my camera, looked at all the pictures on it and somehow figured out it was mine and returned it.

Marketing in Maroon Bells



David finds the Frisbee, I laugh behind him

In 2007 I backpacked with my buddies in Colorado, on the Maroon Bells loop. When Carl and I picked up David at his office in Salt Lake City, he left us alone for a while. He should have known that leaving two mischievous friends is dangerous. We decided to pull a prank on him. David was in charge of marketing in his company, so we decided to borrow a small marketing Frisbee with his company logo on it. Several days later, high up in the mountains of Colorado, I ran quickly ahead of the group, deposited the Frisbee on the trail and then ran back and rejoined the group. As we progressed, David was flabbergasted to find this marketing item right in the middle of the trail. We congratulated him on his fine marketing skills that even made it to the high mountains in Colorado. We privately laughed and laughed, and it wasn't until a couple years later that he admitted that when he returned home, told his wife the amazing story, that she talked some sense into him and convinced him that he had been tricked.

Dropped at Leadville



A few days later, my backpacking buddies helped pace to a successful finish at Leadville 100. I joked with my buddies that even after 50 miles, that they wouldn't be able to keep up, that "I would drop them like a bad penny." Coming back down from Hope Pass in the mud, I discovered that I could really run fast. Brad just couldn't keep up. Soon he was far behind me. As he approached Twin Lakes alone, a spectator pointed and laughed at the pacer without a runner. I did slow enough coming in that we were able to take photo evidence of me arriving with Brad far in the background. Carl was next up and he dared me to drop in on the road going into Fish Hatchery. His mind trick worked and I came in running at 8:00 pace. We had great fun. Who would think that leaving buddies far behind would be a great motivator?

Help



I enjoy singing out loud while running in the middle of the night. During the 2011 Wasatch 100, high on the Wasatch Crest trail, I was singing at the top of my lungs a Beatles song. “Help, I need somebody, Help!” Finally it dawned on me that this just was not an appropriate song to be singing at night, high in the mountains.

Helicopter Search



I’m not proud of this story. Years ago I started to run across frozen Utah Lake. I gained good experience on the ice and learned how to avoid areas that looked risky. Late in the season I decided to do one more run on a warm morning. I took off from our neighborhood recreation center to run 11 miles across the lake to Provo and back. When I was in the middle of the lake, about five miles away, I heard a helicopter off in the distance in the direction of my starting point. I didn’t think anything about it. When I returned back several hours later after my 22-mile run, a fisherman on the shore said, “A bunch of people were looking for you.” That is all he said. I had no idea what he meant. I returned home and later the phone rang. It was a guy who knew me, but he didn’t tell me his name. He just wondered if I was safe and said he didn’t know I was such an extreme runner. That was a curious phone call. A few days later I learned that this guy had watched me run out on the ice. I must have been moving fast because he lost track of me and was convinced that I fell through

the ice. He called the authorities and they sent up a search helicopter for me but found nothing (because I was miles away). That was pretty embarrassing.

Nap in the Cascades

Yes, people get concerned about me at times. One year while running Cascade Crest 100, I became very drowsy. I decided to take a quick catnap beside the trail. Later a couple of runners come up as I was trying to snooze. One of them said softly to the other, “Should we check his pulse?” I later learned that to avoid this problem, I needed to go hide off the trail to avoid being asked if I was OK by every passing runner.

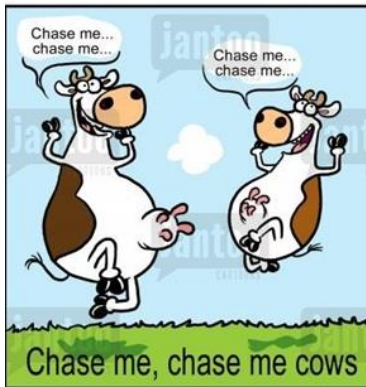
Herded by Dogs



One evening, while running the Katcina Mosa 100K course solo, a huge bear ran across my path. I stopped and heard him running away through the brush. For the next mile as it became dark, I kept checking behind me, making sure I wasn’t being chased. I soon came upon the largest sheep herd that I had even run through. It went on for more than a half mile. While making my way through, I heard some dogs barking at me. I thought, “great, now I have to worry about dogs chasing me.” As I continued on, passing by sheep who were really spooked because of my green light, I suddenly felt a nudge from behind. That scared me to death. Was it the bear? No, it was two dogs. They first started to herd me, pushing me

around, but then started to push their noses against my pocket. It took me awhile to understand that they smelled the bacon I had in my pocket. Finally as I exited from the herd, the dogs went back to work and left me alone.

Herding Cows



On the very same run, about 20 miles later, wee into the night, I started running down into a narrow canyon and in my path was a cow and calf. I hoped to get around them but it was impossible. Instead both started to run ahead of me pretty fast. Each time they would stop, look back, and here came my green light again. They just wouldn't get off the trail. This repeated for nearly three miles until both of them were just too tired to continue running. I approached, trying to get around them, but the cow would not let me get anywhere close to the calf and would start charging toward me. It was then slow going and I truly had to play cowboy to herd them along. Finally the cow got a little smarter and went off the trail a little. I took a route around them and finally was free.

Chased in the night



On my first night running on the Pony Express Trail in the middle of nowhere, I called my wife to pick me up. When she arrived, my young son wanted to run with me for a mile or so. He jumped out of the van and we ran ahead of the van using its headlights to light the way. Eventually a truck passed by but kept slowing, and just wouldn't continue on. It finally turned around, passed by, and then turned around again and pulled up beside us. He asked, "Are you OK?" He had been convinced that we were being chased by some bad people in a van out in the middle of nowhere. Certainly no one would be running on purpose out there in the cold night.

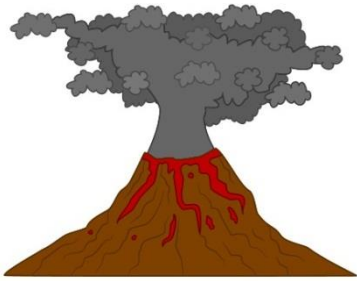
Reenacting the chase

Aliens on the Mountain



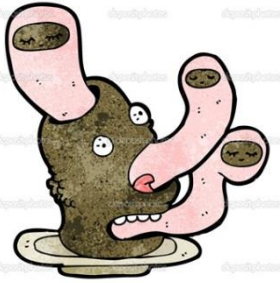
I often run up Mount Timpanogos in Utah during the night. On weekends there can be more than 100 college kids on the trail trying to reach the top by sunrise. My green light gets a lot of attention. I have fun chasing the lights on the mountain and trying to quickly catch groups who are obviously tracking my progress as they shine their headlamps down to me. On one particular night, I was also using a red headlamp, giving myself a Christmas tree look. When I finally caught up to a slow-moving group, they at first had panicked looks on their faces. They actually thought I might be an alien. After all, nothing could move that fast up the mountain. They were stunned. I invited these young guys to keep up with me. They tried and I chuckled that they could only keep up for about 100 yards.

She's going to blow



As I run down Mount Timpanogos very fast, I get strange reactions. Usually I get a “deer in the headlights” look as young hikers see me coming and just can’t figure out that they should simply step aside. But other times, people think there is something wrong and ask, “Why are you running? What’s wrong?” I now answer that question with a quick comment, “She’s going to blow! The mountain is going to blow!” They give me a shocked look and I run on, hoping they can figure out that Mount Timpanogos is NOT a volcano.

What the . . . ?



Other times, I’m the one wondering if I’m being chased. When you get very tired on 100-mile races or on long adventure runs, hallucinations start kicking in. This has affected me the worst down in the Grand Canyon after being awake for about 48 hours. As dusk approaches, the rock formations start turning into houses, water tanks, and even people. I’m convinced that they are there and puzzled that I had never noticed them before. It finally gets so bad that I force myself not to look up, but to just stare at my feet on the trail because it is so disturbing. Many times my mind detaches itself from my body. Thoughts like, “We need to make him eat something” go through my mind. My mind starts having a dialogue about the best things to do for the body that is trying to keep moving. It’s like I’m two beings, a mind suggesting actions, and a body that it takes care of. It freaks me out when I finally wake up enough. I yell out loud, “stop it!” Another time in the Grand Canyon in a sleepy fog, my mind was telling me that the steep trail without switch backs that I was going up was constructed by a friend purposely to torment me.

Busted Hand



punched a mountain.

Accidents happen. One year during Bighorn 100, at about mile 30, I was trying to quickly run down a slick grassy slope. My shoes had poor traction and soon both feet flew forward and I fell on my rear putting out my right hand to catch myself. I was mostly embarrassed because I had just passed another runner who saw me fall. I picked myself up, continued to run. Several minutes later as I was taking inventory of my injuries, I noticed my hand hurt a little bit as it swung back and forth. It didn’t think much of it but it became worse. Eventually I discovered if I gripped a stick, the pain would go down. Ten miles later as I reached a major aid station, the medical staff looked at it and guessed that I broke it. They weren’t alarmed, taped a couple fingers together and said they would see me again in 36 miles. When I returned, it had swelled a bunch more, but I was determined to finish. Three days later at the doctor office, the X-ray told the story. The technician asked how I busted it, and didn’t believe me. He said it looked like I had punched something. Well, yes, I had

Midnight Pitty Party

One year while running the Wasatch 100, my stomach was in knots and as happens, I was throwing up above Desolation Lake. On the switchbacks up to the Wasatch Crest, I sat down beside another runner having the same problems. As we watched other runners approach, I kept inviting them to join our party by the side of the trail – just two guys trying not to puke their guts out.

Frozen Feet

At times, laughing at the pain is about all you can do. One year running the Bonneville Shoreline Marathon, the course was covered with snow and we had to climb up a creek flowing with ice cold water. Phil Lowry was with me and we were both screaming in pain and laughing. It didn't work for another runner. I came across a girl sobbing because of her painful frozen feet.

Crushed toes

One of my big blunders during a 100-mile race occurred one year while running The Bear 100. I met my crew and told them I would be changing my shoes. I asked if they could switch out the insoles, I wanted to keep the custom insoles I had in my current shoes. But it was late and I was very tired, and not clear. As I went on for the next 35 miles, my feet hurt terribly. My toes were being crushed. I was in agony but continued on. As morning arrived, I took off a shoe to tape a crushed toe and screamed with pain trying to put my shoe back on. But I went on and finished slowly. After I returned home, a couple days later I looked at my shoes and discovered that in each shoe, I had two insoles in them. No wonder my toes got crushed!

Stopped in my tracks



One morning I did a very long adventure run of nearly 50 mile in the desert not far from my home. I ran out into a very remote section of a valley without fences, along a power line road. Soon I came upon an obstacle I had never faced before: piles, and piles of tumbleweeds more than six feet high. There was no way to get around them. For the next half hour I stumbled and plowed through piles and piles at a very frustrating slow pace. I would get through one terrible section and then face yet another. I wished I had my camera with me. I've never seen anything like it before.

Stabbed



While on a long run in the Grand Canyon I felt a very sharp pain in the ball of my foot that felt like I had been stabbed. What was that! Was it a rock? I limped on for another 100 feet trying to figure it out. Finally I had to stop and take off my shoe. Wow! A thorn had gone all the way through the bottom of my shoe, through the insole, and deep into my foot. I took my foot out of the shoe and spied a point sticking up from the insole. I couldn't get it out of the shoe but with some effort broke it off. Feeling better I ran on and thought about minimalist runners trying to run down there, bonding with the ancients. "Good

luck with that,” was my thought, “I’ll stay in my shoes.” Another needle story in the Grand Canyon: As I was running suffering from a blister, I was wishing I had a needle or a safety pin to pop a blister. Hours later it finally dawned on me that I was surrounded by millions of needles on cacti.

Kicking the Cacti

Speaking of cacti, while running Zane Grey 50 in Arizona I wasn’t paying careful attention to the trail and ended up kicking a prickly pear cactus. That is really painful. For the next 15 minutes I sat by the side of the trail carefully getting my foot out of my shoe and all the needles out of my shoe, socks, and foot.

Face Plants



Falling down is a frequent activity that is part of ultrarunning, at least for those trying to push the pace fast, or for those of us getting up in years. I call these face plants. Face plants are embarrassing to ultrarunners. When I fall, I’m hopeful that no one saw it. If someone does, I quickly jump up like nothing happened regardless of how much blood is now flowing. I recall doing that while running down the steep North Rim trail of the Grand Canyon. I crashed right after passing a couple of hikers. I jumped up and waved, no problem. But actually I was pretty beat up. When I run Mount Timpanogos in Utah, I fall frequently running down fast because I take my eye off the trail to pass oncoming hikers. I’m sure the hikers are thinking, “Boy is he stupid running, he deserves what he gets.” Once while running Rocky Raccoon 100 on a wet year, I took a true face plant as I was trying to run through a mud bog fast. I ended up head to toe in mud, including my face. I didn’t stop to clean up for seven more miles and got funny complements. At Salt Flats 100, I was feeling great and fast around mile 65 at night and crashed very hard on sharp rocks. That took the wind out of my sails and I ran into the next aid station with a very bloody arm that they kindly helped me clean up. Sometimes dribbling blood down a leg is a sign of toughness.

Stuck in the Mud



One early morning I was doing a rural 80-mile run around Utah Lake. As I was at about mile 20, running south near massive farms in the Mosida area, I wanted to get off the highway pavement and run on a farm dirt road that parallels the highway. As I ran along in the dark, the dirt road branched and I took the wrong branch. I soon detected that I was angling away from the highway. To avoid more distance, I thought I better get back on the right road. I climbed over a berm and in the dark saw what looked like a lightly snow-covered field. If I ran across it, I would reach the right road. After a few steps, I crashed through ice and fell up to my knees in thick icy mud. I tried to take steps to continue on, but that only made me sink lower, just like quicksand. I had fallen into a farm canal full of mud. The mud was doing its best to pull off my shoes. I kept sinking lower. Finally I laid down on my back (which also broke through the ice into the mud) but kept weight off my feet. Little by little I was able to free my feet and crawl back to canal shore. I was a total mess but continued on my run for about 45 more miles.

Hopefully the reader is convinced that ultrarunning can be a lot of fun, but also involves pain. In the end I look back and laugh at myself.