

It was New Year's morning 2011, and I remember it like it was yesterday. It was sunny without a cloud in the sky. It was eerily quiet – probably because most of the population was still in bed nursing hangovers or making foggy recollections of what transpired the evening before. Not me. I woke up bright eyed and bushy tailed at 6am, excited to join a small group of mountain bikers at Juan Pelota ranch in Dripping Springs, TX. After mountain biking for about an hour, a small group of us paused to regroup on a collection of pave stones at the top of a climb. There was a little chit chat about past mountain biking bravado, but what caught my ear was Leadville. Just days ago I registered for the Leadville lottery and was hopeful to be selected. “Oh man, I wouldn't bank on that lottery...I know guys that tried to get in for years...” “Are you serious?” was my reply. My hopes were dashed. “You should check out the Breckenridge 100...it's \*\*\*\* (expletive removed) hard.” Later that day, I looked into it. Breckenridge, Colorado. Wow. One hundred miles, mostly single track with a smattering of forest service road. Wow. 13000+ feet of elevation gain from a base elevation of 9800 feet. Wow. Cross the Continental Divide 3 times. I'm sold. I registered later when it opened up, and what transpired was a life changing event.

The Breckenridge 100 race is comprised of three different segments, forming a cloverleaf style of loops. Each loop brings you back into the ski village at Carter Park where you stock up on food, fluids, and give a friendly wave to friends and family. Looking over past results, it was obvious that this was going to be a difficult event. Previous winners (pro mountain bikers) finished in 8 hours, but the majority of finishers were well over 10 hours. There was a high DNF count, indicative of tough conditions. Gleaning over past results, I recognized some names that I raced with in the past, and set a goal of completing the race in 10 hours. My high mileage training started in April. In hind sight, it's difficult to train for an ultra-distance event when you live in Central Texas with unfathomable summer heat. Sure you can start

your ride at sunrise, but 6 or 7 hours into your ride, it commonly gets over 100 degrees and your ride needs to stop or it gets unhealthy really fast. However, I did my best, and even managed to put in 70 mile MTB rides at Flat Rock Ranch in Comfort, TX and Pace Bend Park in Spicewood, TX. Not much climbing in relation to Colorado, but the pounding that you get from riding a technical and rocky course served some purpose at least.



*Iconic distance sign at the top of Hoosier Pass, CO*

We (my wife and kids that were 3 and 5 years old at the time) booked a secluded cabin in Alma, Colorado for a week. Alma is a 15 minute drive from Breckenridge. Our cabin was nestled in tall majestic pine trees, and the elevation was a gasping 11250ft. This was going to be awesome! Get some training rides in before the race and get acclimated to the altitude. Ha-ha. Right! The first night we all woke up multiple times noticeably short of breath. It was the strangest feeling. Note to self: Normal consumption of beer is not a good idea at high elevation. ☺ When I first registered, I secretly hoped that I would get podium for my age group (40-49), but it became clearly evident that just finishing this race would be a good enough accomplishment.

The days leading up to the race were awesome, which were spent exploring abandoned silver mines and hiking countless miles of mountain trails. Before we knew it, it was the eve before the race. It took a good 2 hours getting the bike ready, setting optimal tire pressure, and stocking a cooler with enough food and electrolytes to last 10+ hours. I for sure was nervous and needed a good dose of Benadryl to calm the nerves and get some shuteye. Race day began at 4:30am with the usual dose of strong coffee and then trying to eat granola on a nervous stomach. Watching Tour de France highlights got my mind off the race enough to finish breakfast, and then



*Exploring an abandoned silver mine in Alma, CO.*

head down to the village at 5:30am in time for the 6am start. Kuddos to my wife and kids for getting up early and driving into town at this ungodly hour! Carter Park was buzzing with activity despite the cool 45 degree weather. Good ole' ACDC was playing on the PA speakers – it was time to rock and roll! The 6am sunny start was a neutral rollout from the village, and then once we hit the gravel service road, it was down to business. The pros opened up the gas and started their 3800ft climb up Wheeler Pass. This was something that I couldn't possible prepare for living here in Central Texas - a long sustained

climb varying from 10% to 20%. I opted for a conservative approach and kept my heart rate in between 60-80%. No sense burning up matches with 90 miles to go. After over an hour I reached the summit at 12400ft elevation, and started the insane, exciting, 30 minute single track decent into Frisco. I reached Frisco and missed an opportunity to draft with a group of racers on the bike path from Frisco to the Peaks Trail. No big deal – it was only about 5 miles on a paved path...or so I thought. I burned a match pushing against a head wind. I reached the Peak trailhead checkpoint, and stocked up on food, electrolyte and started the 11mi single track trek back into the village to complete loop 1. At the 25 mile marker I started to cramp. UNBELIEVABLE. How the hell was I supposed to even finish this race when I'm cramping a quarter into the race! I spent a couple of minutes on the ground stretching my hamstrings and quads and drinking water. I then hopped back on the bike and went slow and steady back into the village. I finished loop one in 3½ hours, downed some Zico and Core Power, and then started loop 2, the most challenging loop.



***Start of the ascent up West Ridge (Loop 2) - mile 42.***

The climb out of Carter Park to the Little French Gulch was challenging – a 1300ft climb in 5 miles. After a creek crossing at the top, it was a fun and fast ride on an irrigation flume that straddled the side of a steep mountain slope. The trail was only one foot wide with a daunting drop to your left. After a ripping fast descent down Sallie Barber Mine, it was another single track ascent up West Ridge. By now I've pleasantly realized that I haven't

been cramping. The stretch and extra fluids that I took in during loop 1 thankfully took care of that issue. Looking down at my Garmin Edge, I see that I've been racing for over 5 hours and not quite halfway done. The reader may think, oh man, that sucks! NO! This place is heaven on earth. Cool mountain air, majestic snowcapped peaks, and killer single track both up and down. No my friends...I was smiling from ear-to-ear, and didn't mind one bit that there was another 5 hours of this to come. Bring it on! The descent from West Ridge back into the village is what I would have to say is the highlight of the entire race. It was miles of steep, tight downhill single track switchbacks. At this point in the race, after having climbed over 7000ft in less than 50 miles, I needed to stay sharp. Any mistake could be very costly with huge pine trees and rocks eagerly waiting to embrace a mountain biker taking a deviated path. Thankfully, I kept my Ikons trail side down and arrived into the village unscathed to embark on the remaining loop to Boreas Pass.



Back in the village, I stuffed my pockets with replacement bottles and food and overheard the announcer reporting heavy rain at the top of Boreas Pass. GREAT (sarcasm duly noted). I added a rain jacket to the contents of my rear pockets and started loop three. It is now 1:30 in the afternoon – 7:30 hours into the race. Wow. Has it been that long? As I started climbing up Boreas Pass road, I see the first rider descending down Boreas Pass – it's Jeff Schalk, a Trek factory rider. I'm



*Cresting Boreas Pass (Loop 3) - mile 90.*

happy for him. His day is over, and it ended in victory. I feel good, because I know I'm going to make it to Boreas Pass before the cutoff and my day will end in victory too...my personal victory of finishing this challenging race. It does indeed start raining, and made the ascent up Indian Creek difficult. Four miles and 1100 feet of elevation gain later I found myself at the top of Boreas Pass at 11482 feet. I made the cutoff with a couple of hours to spare! The descent into Como proved to be the most technically challenging part of the race. Lots of rocks to navigate and jockey in Gold Dust trail. However, after riding the greenbelt and city park in Austin, the rocks were nothing too bad. I finally reached the little town of Como, and started the last ascent of the race back up to Boreas Pass. Words cannot describe the feeling I had as I crested Boreas Pass and would no longer need to climb anymore that day. It was now 6:10pm, over 12 hours into the race. As I descended back into Breckenridge, I knew that I wasn't going to finish in 10 hours as I hoped. THAT'S OK. I'm going to finish. I finished my first Breckenridge 100 race in 12:45:15.

That was July 16, 2011. I love that race, and I've been there again in 2012 and 2013, and managed to improve my times. We already booked our cabin for 2014 and I can't wait to be there again.

-Marty Kovacs  
December 26, 2013