

## Should you Lovit or Leave it.

If you're considering the LOVIT 100 mile race, you may want to read this first. With the number of 100-mile races ever expanding, let me tell you my experience with the inaugural Lovit 100 so you can decide if this race is for you. I live about 30 minutes from this course and spent a few months before the race running sections of this trail every weekend so I would know what to expect on race day. I've run 2 previous 100-mile races; one a moderate level race on hilly forest service roads and the second was a fast and very flat 4 loop course. Going into LOVIT I knew this was going to be my toughest test of endurance with over 20,000 feet of elevation gain. The race started 6pm on Friday night at the beautiful Mountain Harbor Resort in Mount Ida, AR. I rented a single room and got a surprise free upgrade to a full suite cabin with a hot tub. When the race started there were 13 of us that toed the line in the 33-degree rainy weather. The race directors, who are very experienced ultra runners and friends of mine, told us the first 4 miles to the top of Hickory Nut Mountain to the aid station may be the hardest on the course. This was the only section I hadn't yet seen and it was as promised. It was a combination of hilly asphalt that turned to a muddy ice covered service road with an uphill climb to the top of the mountain. The first aid station was blanketed in extremely dense fog. The descent from the summit-traveling west starts the beginning of the single-track trails. The first mile and a half of downhill is steep and rocky, but then turns to rolling hills thru the forest for the next 13 miles with 3 aid stations along the way with 2 of these being crew spots and the other being a drop bag location. You then turn back and travel the 13 miles back to the top of Hickory Nut Mountain again and hit the rocky steep climb at about mile 32. By this time the weather was a combination of moderate waves of rain, fog, and winds so strong that it blew the aid station away at the top of the mountain. From there you travel down the steep south face of Hickory Nut for a few miles to a 4 mile stretch of good gravel road to the only spur in the race that leads to Charlton campgrounds. This part is a moderately tough climb to the top of another mountain with a very quick steep descent on the edge of a mountain to the aid station. You return the same way back, up that steep climb but are rewarded with a nice few miles of downhill. From there it is an easier mountain run to the Crystal Springs Pavilion to mile 47. I made it there about 8 am. The rain, cold, and weather had me about 2 hours behind schedule. I switched to a lighter jacket thinking the rain may finally be done. The next 11 miles were tough. There is a remote minimal aid station 3.5 miles in, but be sure to carry what you need to go the 11. I switched to a camelbak and brought 8 gels. This saved my butt. About a mile in, the heavens opened up with the worst rain of the day. A thunderstorm hit when I was just leaving the remote aid station and I had to run the next 7 miles over the mountain to generate enough heat to fight off hypothermia to reach the Brady aid station. This would cost me later, burning so much energy to stay warm, but I had no choice. At mile 58 I got to pick up my first pacer and the rain finally stopped. I fought the next 7 miles to the far east end of the course trying to recover. This section is a combination of rolling hills, some rocks, and a long descent. The 2 aid stations really helped with some good warm noodles and quesadillas. Every aid station on this course offered a variety of foods and was staffed by experienced runners that knew how to assess what you need help with. When you reach the Avery Rec area you have seen the entire course and start the return toward the finish line. There's a big climb on the far east end then you follow the course back to the Brady aid station where I switched out pacers. Leaving Brady is a hard long uphill climb for what seems forever. With the weather clearing and the fantastic views of the lake, I started to feel decent again. But the return trip to Crystal Springs

was still long and difficult. The creeks were swollen and my pacer worked extra hard helping me cross them without getting my feet too wet. I could feel the blisters starting but didn't have many options but to keep moving. It was dark by the time I reached Crystal Springs (mile 83) where it was a welcomed relief to get some warm food and dry socks. The temps were dropping into the low 30's again as I traveled the course back to Charlton. The steep downhill to the aid station this time was really challenging. The path is narrow with a drop off, and after 87 miles on tired legs with blistered feet, it was hard to navigate. I knew the next 13 miles would take about 4 hours and I would finish about 1 am. I overheard an aid station worker say what I thought was something about the 30 hour cutoff being extended 1 hour. The climb out of Charlton was rough. The 4 miles back on the forest service road were painful due to blisters. The 3 miles back up Hickory Nut was a monster. The blisters on my feet were tearing open but I finally reached the last aid station with 4 miles to the finish. I thought I could make what I thought was the new 1 am cutoff. The race directors had told us before the race that the cutoff wouldn't be strictly enforced if we were making reasonable forward progress. I knew there were a couple of other runners behind me so I didn't have a sense of urgency. The dirt road that was covered with ice on the way up had melted and turned to slick mud. It took all I had at this point to stay upright moving at a snail's pace. When the road leveled out and turned firm again, that's when it got interesting. I had about 2.5 miles to the finish when my pacer asked me if I could run, and I said maybe a little. He told me my wife had texted him that I had to be to the finish by the 1 am cutoff time. I had 17 minutes to get there. I poured all I had into those last miles in a frenzied state and as I ran to the finish line. I saw the clock read 2:55 past 1 am. I was sucking wind and a little disappointed. I hadn't made it. Then the race director says congratulations and hands me a belt buckle. Not sure if I was an official finisher, I shared a few minutes at the finish with the other runners and crashed back at the cabin. At the awards breakfast the next morning I found out my wife's message to my pacer was misinterpreted and the 1 am cutoff wasn't really ever in play. I came in 5th out of 7 finishers with 6 people dropping. To summarize this race, it is what I thought I was getting into. It is an especially beautiful, mountainous course in a state where you can experience all four seasons in a single day. The weather on this day made a hard race even harder. I would not change one single thing that happened on that course that day. If you're looking for a PR race, don't LOVIT, leave it. If you want to test your will on a scenic course with some great volunteers, then you will just LOVIT.

Jason Armitage