

What a day and what a race! I'm not even sure how to put it all into words, but I will do my best.

Going into Kismet was a different type of approach and race for me. To give a little background, I originally was going to run an ultra this same weekend. In fact, one I had been dreaming of running for quite a few years. However, over the course of training earlier in the summer I didn't 'feel quite right'. I wasn't looking forward to training at all, in fact I was starting to dread it, even the easier days. When I thought of being out there on the course for 12 hours or more for that race, I kept coming back to the deep seeded feeling that I didn't want to 'suffer' for that long. We all know that ultras do involve some type of 'suffering', even if it's the best race we've ever had. Long story short, I was both physically and mentally feeling flat, stuck and burned out. I was becoming cranky, even in daily life, and constantly had this feeling of overall fatigue. I decided to pull out of that race. Around the same time one of my long time running friends, who had only done road running, was expressing interest in trail running. She joined me for a few trail runs and shared that she was thinking about running Kismet Cliff Half Marathon, and asked if I was doing it. I decided that I'd do it with her, and we made a plan to do all of our long training runs together.

Coach drew out a great training plan and we discussed making Kismet a C category race for me. We also discussed how this opportunity was the perfect thing at the perfect time to both take the "pressure" of training for an A or B race off me mentally, and also help a friend jump into something new. The long runs went really well, and over the course of doing them with my friend I was reminded of the "Beginners Mindset", which was exactly what I needed. Instead of pushing by pretty views like I had become accustomed to, we would stop and take them in. Instead of a quick glance at the creatures you see in the woods, my friend would stop and admire some of them, snapping a photo. It all helped me re-appreciate the beauty we get to see when we're out there, and reminded me to not take it for granted. I was starting to feel the joy in it all again.

Race Day:

We had very early wake-up times in order to get up to North Conway in time for bib pick up and race check in. We arrive about an hour before race start, got our bibs, got our hydration packs and all together and made sure we were set. The first snag occurred when we were getting our vests ready: my friend realized she had left the drink tube to her hydration bladder back at home, 2 hours away. First lesson on managing a problem on race day: She also had 2 soft

flasks so she switched out one of them from plain water to her liquid fuel and the remainder of that she still carried in her vest to refill later--problem managed. Once the race started we did our best to hang back and not get caught up in the rush of the start. Within the first mile or so, my friend was feeling a little off and realized she felt super hot already, as she had a long sleeve over her tank. We stopped, she took that off and instantly felt better--another issue easily managed. From there we kept a comfortable pace and when we reached some of the first steep climbs we switched to power hiking. We did this throughout the race, alternating between the two. We also stopped briefly at some of the ledges as we climbed up Cathedral ledge and took some photos. We went through the first aid station, took some hydration from there and continued on our way. The 5 mile course splits off from the Half just after that and we were instantly less crowded on the trail. The next few miles were a nice mix of descent and flat, where we were able to run majority of it. We came up on the 4-ish mile aid station, took the time to fully refill our hydration as we knew (and were reminded by the volunteers) that it's 6 miles to the next aid and includes 3 miles of climbing then some super steep ascent. These next 6 miles were simultaneously amazing and challenging. We kept a steady pace climbing, trying to push within our comfort but not overdo it. Towards the last bit of climbing I was starting to get some all too familiar pulling feelings in my calves and a bit in one hamstring. Quickly thinking and talking through it, I determined it wasn't electrolyte related and took part of a HotShot---this worked. The descent off the summit was more technical and steep than either of us anticipated so we kept a hiking pace on our way down. Once we hit the bottom and it flattened out, I checked in with my friend about running and she was up for it. We also both were nearing empty with our hydration as we kept an eye on the distance, thinking the next aid station was close. When we hit the mileage mark it was supposed to be at and it wasn't there, she became a bit concerned. If it had been cleaned up already, that meant we would have 3-4 miles with no more refills. I stayed calm, told her we would manage by power hiking instead of running, even on flatter, and to do our best to ration the last we had. About a mile later, thankfully that aid station appeared! We refilled and also drank some right there, then made our way. The last few miles included another decent climb, followed by another longer descent than wrapped about the lake to the finish. In those miles, my friend became nauseous on the climb, so I had her eat a ginger chew which helped immediately. We took the downhill a bit slower as her IT Band started locking up and when we hit the flat she could run. Somewhere within the last half mile she tripped and fell, but got right back up, quickly surveyed herself and said she was good to go. As we came around the lake to the finish, she asked me 'is that the finish?!' very excitedly and got more of a pep in her step. We crossed the finish together and she had the biggest smile on her face! I was

so proud of her accomplishing this rugged course, now I know why it's called "the beast of the east", it truly is a beast!

Lessons Learned

-The biggest lesson I've learned through both training and racing this in the way I did is that pivoting and taking something on with a beginners mindset brings so much joy back into it.

-I did learn that it can be challenging to help someone through a race. A few times during it my friend told me to go ahead but I told her no, I was staying with her. I also had to remember to check in and make sure she was fueling and hydrating regularly...which she was doing good for the most part on her own, but a few times my checking in helped her realize she needed some fuel and that's why she was starting to feel sluggish.

-I wasn't ready for the rush of emotion I had in seeing her complete this, and I will be forever grateful that she allowed me and trusted me in doing this with her. As Coach has said, seeing something through new eyes can absolutely change your mindset and heart.