

Introduction to the Project

I started running my freshmen year of college. I had a ligament reconstruction surgery for my hand three months prior to starting that fall semester. For the first time in my life, I was not able to do the activities I had always enjoyed: swimming, basketball, playing guitar, or even writing properly. I had to find something new to do, and that something new was running. It started off as a great excuse to see the unfamiliar college town I was now living in and a healthy activity to do almost anywhere. Eventually, the amount of running grew to a half marathon that spring and a full marathon the next following spring. As I started to run more, I began to read more about it, taking in every piece of running material I could find from popular to unpopular running accounts, magazine articles or research studies. This led me to discover the world of ultrarunning the spring of my sophomore year through the words of the most prolific athletes and the researchers that were trying to explain the feats.

By definition, ultrarunning is any race over the distance of 26.2 miles or 5 hours. The people who participated in these races confused me and seemed delirious. They would run to the point of exhaustion or seemingly unworldly levels pain. They would go through personal hell and come back up to collect a finishers belt buckle, a token of the misery they just subjected on to themselves. Yet through all of this agony, people claim to love it and have high level of satisfaction throughout the process, and the sport has consistently grown in popularity around the world. All of this did not make sense, and I wanted to understand why people would undertake this sport, which led me to the premise of my project, trying to answer three questions:

1. What does it take to run an ultramarathon?
2. What can be learned through the experience?
3. What is the appeal of ultrarunning?

Being an Aviation major, along with being in the Honors College for all four years of schooling, made thinking that doing an Honors Project on anything other than something aviation related was foolish. This endeavor proved to be the most rewarding and represented the goal of the Honors College: to embrace the chance of learning and pursuing something outside of your “field of study” and to take full advantage of exploring a topic with the prior knowledge and skills you do possess, whether relevant or not. That is what I learned through choosing this topic for my project, and I do not regret not going with something I formally studied. I found something in college that excited and intrigued me, and I dedicated my last year to truly embracing the experience and to learning more about the topic.

With that said, I hope you enjoy the reading.