

# TRANSALPINE RUN 2010

by Mike Turano

Our adventure began in the fall of 2007 when an article about the Gore-Tex Transalpine Run inspired my wife, Laney, and she insisted we run it. I reminded her that I had just run my first marathon the previous year, and that she had never run more than 13 miles. I thought she was being ridiculous and suggested that maybe she should at least run a marathon before signing on for eight days and 180 miles of alpine terrain. She promptly signed up for one, and we were committed.

The 2008 Transalpine Run was not very successful for us. I trained myself right into a stress fracture 10 weeks prior to the event. My inability to train and my lack of trail experience limited us as a team and I withdrew on day five with a recurrence of my stress fracture. Laney persevered without me and completed the remaining stages with a new partner.

The 2009 western route proved that proper training and sheer determination can lead to success. This shorter but more technical route was redolent with 360° views of snow-capped mountains. We were rewarded with finisher jerseys for completing all the stages within

the cutoffs. Did we want to tempt fate and try the East Route again in 2010. We thought we had no reason to go back; after all, we were already finishers. Ultimately, I made the mistake of looking at the website early in 2010, and before I could log off we were signed up again. We just couldn't resist the beauty of the Alps or the challenge of returning to the scene of our previous defeat...

We flew into Munich two days prior to the start of the race and traveled to Ruhpolding Germany, the first stage town. Race Director Wolfgang Pohl schemes all year to lay out the most spectacular (and most painful) course possible.

Stage One began to the strains of AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" and we headed off to St. Ulrich am Pillerseeal, Austria, on a very runnable forest service road along a babbling river. Soon we began to climb in earnest on a steep technical trail that brought us behind a little waterfall. The seemingly endless climb continued up a muddy ski slope as we disappeared into a dense fog. Abruptly, the slope ended in a washed-out descent that delighted the mountain goats amongst us.



Stairs and waterfalls



The lead team rounds an impressive corner



The next big climb



Finally a little easy running

Stage Two took us from St. Ulrich to Kitzbuhel, Austria. After about 900 yards on asphalt, the first major climb of the day began. The climb became leisurely due to a single-track conga line up the side of a gorge. Then, free to run again, we gleefully descended on steep dirt roads, letting gravity pull us to the checkpoint. The second major climb awaited, a seven-mile ascent, but we were so absorbed soaking up beautiful alpine vistas, we hardly noticed the 3,280 feet of elevation gain. This stage was much tougher than we expected.

Stage Three went from Kitzbuhel to Neukirchen, Austria. This stage was the longest, measuring 46.9 km. Two formidable climbs struck fear in the hearts of the competitors, but the views inspired everyone to dig deeper just to see around the next peak. The most challenging aspect for me came after the second climb, on a 10-km traverse. Snowy and muddy scrambles with short rocky, runnable (for marmots, anyway) stretches demanded my undivided attention. A celebration ensued at the final checkpoint (Yippee, bathrooms and watermelon!) followed by stumbling and bumbling down some gnarly trails into Neukirchen.

Stage Four was a bear – 43.9 km from Neukirchen to Prettau im Ahrntal, Italy. After nine

km of pavement, we entered a fairytale wood and climbed to the top of a waterfall. The sunlight through the mist of the falls distracted us from our slog up the hill. Next, the trail opened onto dirt road through a picturesque valley surrounded by glaciers. This valley felt like a trotable reprieve though we continued to gain elevation. The second climb was the killer, bringing us to the highest point of the whole race, while testing our ability to navigate a snowy boulder-laden tract through blowing sleet. We staggered up and over the saddle, scrambling and butt-sliding our way to the final checkpoint, stocked with much-appreciated hot soup.

Stage Five, from Prettau to Sand in Taufers, Italy, was originally a shorter stage, until a mudslide wiped out a sweet section of forest road; we had to cover an extra five km on very slippery, rocky terrain. While Laney danced down the path, I tallied six falls along the new traverse. We did enjoy a spectacular climb over a snow-covered saddle as well as a bushwhack around some cows stuck on our course.

Stage Six took us 39.7 km from Sand in Taufers to St. Vigil, Italy. The roadrunners among us delighted in a half-marathon on asphalt to begin the day. We then tackled a 4,250-foot climb to the top of a famous ski slope, Kronplatz, before descending into St. Vigil.

Stage Seven, where a true test of our endurance awaited: St. Vigil to Niederdorf, Italy. It measured 42.2 km, with two very challenging climbs resulting in 6,440 feet of ascent and 6,528 feet of knee-trashing descent. Excited for our first views of the Dolomites, we flew up the first peak and the mountain rewarded us with views of a cyan lake surrounded by characteristic white rock. Gripping chains set into the rock, we descended to the lake, only to begin a long demoralizing climb before flying down a scree slope, racing to make the last checkpoint before the cutoff.

Stage Eight – a victory lap from Niederdorf to Sexten, Italy. We raced 33.40 km with only one major climb, committing the view of the Three Sisters rock formation to permanent memory. White rock on bright blue sky, we felt privileged to be alive. Arguably, stage eight was the most beautiful day of all.

That night we celebrated at a finishers' party. We proudly donned our jerseys, toasted our new international friends with German brews, and realized how much the race meant to us. The Alps haunt our dreams, while "Highway to Hell" provides the soundtrack to our nightmares. Mostly, we long to run with our friends again soon. ■