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## ■ Stupid Is as Stupid Runs

You don't have to train. You just have to get outside.

I did something stupid at the end of this summer. I ran 24 miles with 4,000 feet of elevation gain from Red Cliff up over Two Elk Pass and down to Vail. Now that's fairly normal stuff for Coloradans. It was stupid for me because, well, I didn't train. I had probably only gone on two or three seven- or eight-mile trail runs all summer. And I had never run more than 10 miles in my life.

It was simply one leg on the Gore-Tex TransRockies Run. Competitors in this race spend six days doing what I did for just one, running a total of 113 trail miles in less than a week, many of them waiting all year to do this and training hard.

In the spring when I was first approached to run in the race, I figured I would spend the summer training for it. Ah, but summer slipped by and so did my training schedule. I got out and rode bikes, hiked, sea kayaked with whales in Quebec, spent lots of time with my kids. But training is a pretty easy thing to blow off.

I spent all twelve seasons (plus summers) of my high school athletic career running. I ran until I puked. Until it gave me cramps at night. I still have dreams wherein I am coming around the last corner in the 800 and my legs won't move. I was decent, but never good enough to satisfy myself. By the end, I was burned out and bitter that I had lost the chance to play baseball or football.

Much later, when I was living alone in a cabin in Montana, I started trail running. I would set out in the evenings—exploring dirt roads that dead-ended in hunting camps, trails that turned into scrambles up over sage-brush covered hills littered with the rusted ruins of mining camps. As I got back in shape, I pushed harder, listened to my lungs, concentrated on my feet, fell in love again. But the demons of those competitive days gnawed at me. I fell in and out of running.

Since I was so unprepared, those demons surfaced as the TransRockies approached. "I haven't been training," I said. "It doesn't matter," I was told. "You'll be fine." I was to be paired up with local writer and all around ultra-running monster Brian Metzler. "I haven't been training," I told him. "It doesn't matter," he said. "You'll be fine," running friends told me. "Metzler is injured." I couldn't comprehend how this was supposed to make me feel better.



So I did it. I showed up unprepared. I was corralled in with the group and set off and up. Metzler was injured and bagged the race so I was partnered with Stan, a 50-something attorney from the Bay Area who raced the 800 and is now obsessed with ultrarunning. The first eight miles felt effortless, a long slow grind up. There was chatting and joking between the runners. We were undertaking a big run but the vibe along the trail was very social, like a big, moving party even. One woman flashed us her buttcheeks when she passed. By the time we hit the real climbing, I was tired but energized. On the horizon, the jagged tops of the Gore Range stuck out against the blue Colorado sky—and we were running straight up into it. We topped out on Mongolia Bowl and I was positively high.

Then came suffering. The 12 miles down, which I had thought would be a blessing after the uphill turned into pure pain. As in my recurring dream, my legs froze up, the classic "wall," at about 22 miles. But Stan helped me soldier through, and soon I was running again, no, sprinting as Stan and I saw the finish and put on an 800 kick that must have come from muscle memory and pure joy.

Yes, I realized, they were right. I was fine. I am a runner again, the demons dispelled. This is the beauty of playing in the mountains. Sometimes it's about nothing more than simply going there.

What's the stupidest thing you have ever done? Let us know at [ElevationOutdoors.com](http://ElevationOutdoors.com)