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TO IN ELL IN COSTOR

GLENN STOUT, series editor

"It's Gonna Suck to Be You"

FROM OUTSIDE

The first time he tried it, the vomiting started after 67 miles, and it didn't stop until six hours later. The last time, his quadriceps cramped at mile 75, so he hobbled the last quarter of the course. But Kirk Apt is a resilient, optimistic, obsessive — some might say weird — man who describes experiences like being trapped on an exposed peak during a lightning storm as "interesting," and that is why he's here, in Silverton, Colorado, cheerfully tucking into a plate of pancakes, eggs, and bacon at 4:00 A.M., discoursing on the nature of fun while he prepares to take on, yet again, the most punishing 100-mile footrace in the world.

It's called the Hardrock Hundred Endurance Run, even though it's actually 101.7 miles long, and is known to the small and strange band of people who have attempted it as the Hardrock 100. Or, simply, the Hardrock. In 1992, the first year of the race, just 18 of 42 entrants finished. Today, nearly half of the 118 men and women who set off into the mountains will quit or be told to stop. Based on medical opinion, history, and statistical probabilities, death for one or two of them is not out of the question.

Apt could not look more pleased. "Enjoy yourself," he says to a fellow racer, a man staring fearfully at a strip of bacon. "Have fun," he blithely exhorts another, a pale woman clutching a cup of coffee, clenching and unclenching her jaw. Apt says "have fun" frequently enough to sound creepy. Even among other Hardrockers—many of them sinewy scientists from New Mexico's Los Alamos National Laboratory who tend to describe themselves with staggering inaccuracy as "mellow"—the thirty-nine-year-old massage therapist from Crested Butte, Colorado, is known as Mr. Mellow.



It's race day, the first Friday after the Fourth of July (the 2001 Hardrock will start on July 13), and Mr. Mellow is working over his pancakes at a worn wooden picnic table inside a café hunkered at the northern end of the only paved road in town. Silverton, population 440, is encircled by peaks, nestled at 9,305 feet in a lush mountain valley in the southern San Juans, at least an hour by way of the most avalanche-prone highway in North America from fresh vegetables, a movie theater, or a working cell phone. If you didn't know about the fifteen feet of snow that falls here every winter, or the unemployment rate that's four times the state average, or the knots of bitter, beery ex-miners who gather at the Miner's Tavern toward the southern end of the paved road most every night to slurrily curse the environmentalists they blame for shutting down the mines and trying to ban snowmobiles downtown, you might think that Silverton was quaint.

Outside, the sky is a riot of stars, the air clean and cold and so thin it makes you gasp. Inside the café, it's warm and cozy, a perfect place for Mellow to break bread with Terrified.

"The most important thing about the race," Apt says, "is to remember to make sure to enjoy yourself." Yes, there can be crippling cramps and hair-raising lightning bolts — big smile — but there are also remote, deserted vistas, long and lonely treks up mountains and across ridgelines, precious hours spent alone among old-growth forest and fresh wildflowers.

It sounds cleansing. If you didn't know about the dozens of unusually fit people who every midsummer collapse into near-catatonic, weeping blobs of flesh, their faces and hands and feet swollen to grotesque balloons because entire clusters of the racers' capillaries are breaking down and leaking (more on that later), you might think the Hardrock was fun.

Apt unfolds his six-foot-one, 168-pound frame from the cafe's picnic bench. Broad-shouldered, long-legged, clear-eyed, and, above all, mellow, he strides out of the emptying restaurant. He won the Leadville 100 in 1995, and though he's completed six Hardrocks, he's never finished first. Maybe this will be the year. Maybe not.

Big, big smile.

"How lucky are we?" he says.



Five minutes before six, the sun still not up, the competitors are turning in small circles on the gravel road outside Silverton Public School, taking in the surrounding peaks, scanning the distance for answers to questions most people never even consider. "Will I be hospitalized before sunset?" for example. They will spend the next day and at least one sleepless night in the deepest backcountry, almost constantly above 10,000 feet, climbing, sliding, wading, hiking, staggering, limping, and occasionally running. (Unlike other 100-mile racers, the fastest and most fit of the Hardrockers will jog no more than 60 percent of the course.) They will face five mountain passes of at least 13,000 feet and one 14,000-foot peak. Those who complete the loop will climb and descend 66,000 feet (more than would be involved in climbing and descending Mount Everest from sea level, as the race organizers like to point out). A large number of racers will vomit at least once. One or two might turn white and pass out. The slower runners will almost certainly hallucinate.

One of the most horrifying Hardrock visions is often all too real. It occurs when a race official informs a racer that he or she is moving too slowly to finish within the prescribed 48 hours. Getting "timed out," whether at mile 75 or at the finish line itself, is a bitter experience. Just ask Todd Burgess, a thirty-two-year-old newspaper-page designer from Colorado Springs. Five-foot-ten and 175 pounds, Burgess is cheerfully cognizant of his limitations and aspires only to finish and to enjoy himself along the way. So last year he snapped pictures, meandered in the wildflowers, gamboled through the old growth. But toward the end of the race, he saw that unless he hurried, he wasn't going to make it. He sprinted. He stumbled. He panicked. And when he crossed the line at 48 hours, three minutes, and 35 seconds — which means that, officially, he didn't finish at all — another racer told him, "It's gonna suck to be you for the next year."

It was a cruel thing to say, but, as it turns out, somewhat prophetic. For Burgess, the last year has been one filled with doubts, fears, and horrific training sessions — 12-hour runs and 50-mile practice races and Sunday-morning sleep-deprivation workouts. While it has sucked to be him, it would suck more to be timed out again this year.

It's been said that recovering alcoholics and bulimics and drug



addicts are disproportionately represented among Hardrockers, which is tough to confirm, but it makes sense if you consider that addictive tendencies and compulsive behavior would come in handy with the training regimen. It's also been said that full-time Silvertonians tend toward the same kind of ornery optimism and obsessive, clannish, and sometimes perversely mellow brand of masochism exhibited by many of the racers. That's equally difficult to nail down, but having spent the better part of two winters here, I can vouch for the general soundness of the theory. It's no surprise that Silvertonians and Hardrockers tend to get along.

A few dozen townspeople have awakened early this morning to see the racers off, partly because three Silvertonians are entered, including one of the Hardrock's most popular hard-luck cases, fifty-two-year-old Carolyn Erdman, who has tried and failed three times to finish. Also at the starting line is the only Silvertonian ever to complete a Hardrock, Chris Nute. Nute, thirty-three, will be pacing Erdman the second half of the race. He is not entered this year largely because of his wife, Jodi, thirty, who is with him for the start and whom no one has ever accused of being mellow, especially when it comes to the Hardrock.

The year Chris Nute ran the Hardrock "was the only time I ever thought we might get a divorce," Jodi says. "I couldn't understand wanting to do that. The training time sucked. And it made me feel out of shape. It totally gave me a fat complex. I had a [terrifying] vision of the future: that I was going to be married to an ultrarunner."

Dawn. Race director Dale Garland yells, "Go!" and about fifty Hardrock volunteers and spouses and Silvertonians watch as Apt, Burgess, Erdman, and their fellow racers jog and walk down a gravel road, turn southeast, and then head into the mountains—and toward the cold and dark and pain.

Some 100-mile races are more famous. Many are more popular. Most have more corporate sponsors. None approach the Hardrock's brutality.

"This is a dangerous course!" warns the Hardrock manual, a fantastic compendium of arcane statistics, numbingly detailed course descriptions, grave warnings, and chilling understatement. When it comes to the temptation to scale peaks during storms, for in-



stance, the manual advises, "You can hunker down in a valley for two to four hours and still finish; but if you get fried by lightning your running career may end on the spot."

Though a forty-four-year-old runner with a history of high blood pressure, Joel Zucker, died of a brain aneurysm on his way to the airport after completing the race in 1998, no one has perished during a Hardrock. But, according to the manual, "It is our general opinion that the first fatality . . . will be either from hypothermia or lightning!" (A Hardrock-manual exclamation point is rare as a Sasquatch sighting; one suspects typographical error, grim subject matter notwithstanding.)

"There's a reasonable chance somebody could die," says Tyler Curiel, forty-five, a Dallas-based doctor specializing in infectious disease and oncology who's run eleven 100-milers and "fifty or sixty" ultras (any race longer than 26.2 miles). "I've fallen into icecold water, almost been swept away by a waterfall, walked six hours alone at high elevations in boulder fields," he says of his Hardrock experiences. "Had I sprained an ankle then, I might have been dead. I almost walked off a 2,000-foot cliff in the middle of the night once. Two more steps, and I would have been dead for sure. And I'm fairly competent. So, yeah, there's a reasonable chance."

By late afternoon, after ten hours of climbing and sliding and "EXPOSURE" (the manual lists dehydration, fatigue, and vomiting as "minor problems," so racers tend to take capitalized nouns seriously), the fleetest and most fit of participants are a good five hours from being halfway finished. At this juncture — the fifth of thirteen aid stations, Grouse Gulch, mile 42.4 — one would expect the appropriate emotion to be grim determination. So it comes as something of a shock to onlookers when a slender young man named Jonathan Worswick skips through a light rain, down a narrow, switchbacking trail, and across a stream into Grouse Gulch at 4:27 P.M. He is smiling. The thirty-eight-year-old runner from England is on pace for a course record.

The Hardrock old hands are unimpressed. These are retired runners, longtime observers of ultrarunning, in demeanor and worldview much like the leathery old men who hang around ballparks in Florida and Arizona, sneering at the fuzzy-cheeked phenoms of spring and their March batting averages. The old hands have seen young studs like Worswick before. Seen them tear



up the first half of the course, only to be seized later by fatigue, cramps, nausea, and a despair so profound they can't even name it. Besides, the promising dawn has turned into a chilly, wet afternoon. And this is Grouse Gulch. Dangerous things happen at Grouse Gulch.

It doesn't look dangerous: a wooden yurt twelve feet in diameter, a canvas elk-hunters' shelter with three cots and a propane heater, and a telephone-booth-size communications tent where a radio operator hunches over his sputtering equipment, all hugging the west bank of the fast-flowing Animas River.

But if you've just trekked more than 40 miles, climbed 14,000 feet, and descended 10,000, confronted Up-Chuck Ridge ("ACRO-PHOBIA"), which is nearly three times as steep as the steepest part of the Pike's Peak marathon, tackled the 14,048-foot Handies Peak ("Snow fields, altitude sickness, fantastic views"), where through a freezing rain you looked out upon the world and pondered the sleepless night (or nights) and the long hours that lie ahead, and now you are staggering down rocky switchbacks through pellets of freezing rain . . . well, then Grouse Gulch is danger itself. And nothing is more menacing than its banana pudding.

If there is some Higher Power watching over Hardrockers, urging them on, then surely there is a corresponding demon, tempting them to stop. What the fiend wants is for them to taste the pudding. Not the oatmeal, or soup, or mashed potatoes, or individually prepared breakfast burritos (meat or vegetarian) — though all are tempting. No, the pudding, whose scent floats along the riverbanks and up the mountain slopes as easily as the Sirens' lethal song wafted over the wine-dark sea.

The pudding itself is creamy, smooth, not quite white, not quite brown. (The recipe is absurdly prosaic: one large package of Jell-O instant vanilla pudding mixed with four cups whole milk and three fresh bananas; makes eight servings.) But for the weeping runner who has been slogging up and down talus slopes and through marshes for fifteen hours or so, the pudding . . . for that person, the pudding whispers to them.

"Stop," it whispers. "Rest." The rush of the river blends with the hushed static from the radio equipment, but the pudding won't shut up. "Don't go on," it whispers. "Have some more pudding."

Worswick wolfs a vegetarian burrito — he won't even look at the



pudding — and leaves ten minutes after he arrives. Fourteen minutes later, Kirk Apt strides across the bridge, looks around the aid station, sits down, changes his socks, and frets. Things are taking too long; he's wasting precious minutes. By the time he is ready to go, Mr. Mellow is thoroughly agitated. When he leaves Grouse Gulch, he starts too fast, realizes he's too "amped up," and has to breathe deeply in order to regain the calm he regards as essential.

Apt spends less than ten minutes at Grouse Gulch.

Todd Burgess had planned to be here by 6:00 P.M., but at 10:00 he is still struggling down the mountain, thighs burning, tentative, taking baby steps, fearful of falling.

He enters Grouse Gulch at 10:12 and leaves at 10:28.

Carolyn staggers in at 10:30, loses sight in her left eye, then leaves at 10:36, two minutes ahead of her planned 43-hour pace.

Others — swifter, more accomplished, less tortured — are not so strong. Scott Jurek, twenty-seven, who two weeks ago won the Western States 100-miler, hits Grouse Gulch at 6:05 P.M. and takes a rest. He will not go on. Eric Clifton, who has won thirteen 100-milers since 1989, walks into the aid station two minutes later, and also stops for good.

Soaked and cold and exhausted, other racers hear the rushing river and the steady drizzle and the devilish gibberings of the Pudding Master, and they feel the propane heat, and then they cast their weary eyes on the cots, soft as dreams.

Twenty-three Hardrockers quit at Grouse Gulch.

Vomiting, cramping, collapsing, whimpering hopelessly before the devil's pudding, and/or surrendering to that despair so profound that it's difficult to name, are all variations, in Hardrock parlance, of bonking. Typically, when a runner bonks, he or she also quits the race, as Apt did when he couldn't stop puking in 1992. Sometimes a runner bonks and keeps going, and even finishes, as Apt did when his quadriceps cramped and he trudged the last 25 miles of the course in 11 hours in 1999. To continue after bonking earns a runner enormous respect among fellow racers, most of whom have bonked at some point in their running careers. These people appreciate speed, but they revere grit.

When male Hardrockers bonk, they tend to quit. This is accepted wisdom among the racers, as is the fact that women bon-



kers, in general, do their best to finish. A racer can bonk without timing out, and he can time out without bonking. All things being equal, it's better to have bonked before being timed out than the other way around. Non-bonking runners who are timed out — especially late in a Hardrock — suffer the fate of Todd Burgess (it sucks to be them).

The Ouray aid station, at mile 58 and an elevation of 7,680 feet, would provide an excellent place to quit. Though there is no pudding of any sort here, nor heated tents with cots, next to the aid station is a parking lot, and next to that, a highway. Silverton is less than an hour's drive away, in a heated car.

But there will be no quitting here for Jonathan Worswick, who arrives at 7:42 P.M., still leading, and leaves at 7:56. Not for Kirk Apt, who arrives at 8:20 and leaves at 8:27 — "psyched," he says, "but in a relaxed, calm way."

Neither will there be any quitting for Todd Burgess, who trundles toward the aid station the next morning at 5:14. His pacer, Fred Creamer, urges Burgess to run the last mile or so to the aid station, but Burgess wants to conserve his energy until he eats something. He's sure that a meal will give him the boost he needs for the second half of the course. In Ouray he takes a bite of warm roast turkey, a long pull of Gatorade, and vomits.

Creamer asks Burgess if this has ever happened to him during a race, and when Burgess says no, Creamer considers ending their journey. But Burgess says he feels great. He does feel great. Creamer feels grave concern. They continue.

Like Burgess, Erdman approaches Ouray in the predawn darkness, moving fast enough to finish in less than 48 hours, but just barely. No one — not the aid station volunteers and not pacer Chris Nute — entertains the slightest suspicion that she might quit in Ouray. Not that they wouldn't welcome such an event.

Erdman entered the race for the first time in 1997, when she was forty-eight, eight years after she quit smoking and one year after she and her husband left their cattle farm in Wisconsin and moved to Silverton. Nute paced her that year, and she made it 85 miles before race organizers told her that she was moving too slowly and that she was done.

In 1998 she entered again. Four weeks before the event she ran a 50-mile warm-up race in Orem, Utah. Three miles into it she fell



and scraped her left knee. There was blood, and a little pain, but she thought it was no big deal. By the time she finished, she could see her patella; she was shocked at how white it was. The doctor in the emergency room told her she was lucky he didn't have to amputate the limb. She spent a week in the hospital with intravenous antibiotics. Surgeons operated on her twice.

In '99 she was timed out at mile 92.

Erdman has long gray hair that she wears in a braid, the lean body of someone half her age, and brown eyes that sparkle with an intensity peculiar to religious leaders and Hardrockers. She runs ten miles a day, more in the midst of Hardrock training, through rain, snow, and blistering sun. Her dedication has unified Silvertonians — like many residents of small mountain towns, notoriously resistant to unification unless it involves railing against silent black helicopters and the craven jackbooted federal thugs who claim the choppers don't exist. But they're worried about her. Will she endure too much, just to finish? What if she doesn't finish?

Nute knows that Erdman would sooner end up on an operating table than quit, and that's one reason he's agreed to pace her. They're friends. He wants her to finish, but he also wants her to live.

After thirteen minutes at the station, they walk along the Uncompaghre River out of Ouray and onto a dirt road, which they climb steadily through thick forest. The air is moist with dew and sweet with pine; birds are starting to sing. Though Erdman is falling further behind her 43-hour pace, and hasn't slept for a full 24 hours and won't for another 24, the approaching dawn invigorates her — for about two hours. Then she wants to take a nap.

Not a good idea, Nute tells her.

Leafy undergrowth and lush, grassy ground beckon. Just a few minutes lying in that pillowy green would be so nourishing, so healing. It would make her go so much faster.

Really not such a smart thing to do, Nute says.

She pleads. She whines. She begs.

Pacers are valuable precisely because they warn their charges not to surrender to their worst temptations — like gobbling fistfuls of ibuprofen and taking ill-advised naps. But Nute is also Erdman's friend, not to mention a fellow Silvertonian. Okay, he says, one nap. They settle on seven minutes.

She nearly cries with happiness. She spreads her jacket, makes a



pillow of her pack, and lies down in a perfect leafy spot. But it's not perfect enough. She picks everything up, moves to another leafy spot, and lies down again. Nute watches, looks at his watch; eight minutes have passed. She doesn't like the position of the pillow, so she adjusts it. Then she adjusts her jacket. Then her body. Three adjustments later, she sighs. It is a pitiable little sound.

"Go!" she chirps to Nute, who is sitting down, staring at her. "Start timing."

This is when Nute starts to worry.

Back in Silverton, Jodi Harper Nute is worried, too. She has watched over the past week as Chris has helped with various Hardrock tasks, handing out literature, signing in runners, helping pace Carolyn. Jodi watched him chat with other runners. She watched him study the course map. She watched him huddle with the old hands, doubtless revering grit.

And what she feared has come to pass. Just last night Chris told Jodi he wants to race again. (The couple has since moved to Durango, where less snow makes it easier to train.)

"Goddammit," Jodi says. "I can't believe this." Pause. "Yes, I can. I was wondering why I've been so pissy the past few days. Now I know why. Goddammit."

While Jodi worries, Hardrockers trudge 10.4 miles and 5,420 feet up to Virginius Pass (elevation 13,100 feet), then 5.3 miles and 4,350 feet down into the aid station at Telluride. They have traveled 73.7 miles and have another 28 to go. Soon they'll have to tackle Oscar's Pass, 6.5 miles away and 4,400 feet higher. "Basically," says Jonathan Thompson, editor of *Silverton Mountain Journal*, the local biweekly, "straight up a friggin' mountain."

After Oscar's ("Acrophobia, exposure, cornice"), surviving runners will face Grant Swamp Pass, the most difficult climb of the course, a murderously steep scramble over boulders and loose scree ("rock and dirt that will slide back down the hill with each step you take"). It would be daunting on a day hike.

Erdman has been awake, racing, for 31 hours. It's now one in the afternoon, and after she wolfs a slice of pepperoni pizza, she and Nute leave town, climbing, straight into the zone where Hardrockers too proud, too foolish, or too dense to quit often get themselves in danger. In 1998, as two-time Hardrock champion Dave



Horton was ascending Grant Swamp Pass, a melon-size rock dislodged by a runner above fell and struck his right hand. "A little later," Horton, fifty-one, wrote in his account of that race, "I noticed that my glove was soaked through with blood." After finishing (of course), he realized that it was a compound fracture.

Many runners ignore puffy faces, hands that have ballooned like boxing gloves, feet like clown shoes, telling themselves it's merely a lack of sodium or some low-level kidney failure. Probably not fatal. They'll try to ignore the moist rattling they hear with every breath. Chances are the swelling and rattling are the result of damage to the body's capillaries. High-altitude races tend to starve capillaries of oxygen, which makes them leak fluid, which pools in the racers' hands and feet. "The danger," says Curiel, the doctor from Dallas, "is that one of the largest capillary networks is in your lungs, and when those capillaries start leaking, you have difficulty breathing. Pulmonary edema. In a really bad case, your lungs can fill up with water and you'll drown."

Digestive problems barely merit consideration. Jonathan Worswick left Ouray still in the lead but vomiting every few miles and suffering stomach cramps and diarrhea. Mr. Mellow stalked him during the climb, enjoying the view, confident in his uphill power, even more confident that Worswick had expended too much energy too early. Just before passing Worswick and crossing Virginius Pass, Apt recalled later, "a mental shift occurred for me. I knew I was in this race, and really had a good shot at winning."

Worswick overtook him on the downhill to Telluride, but Apt was having fun. Just after beginning the brutal assault on Oscar's, Apt told his pacer he wanted to "get after it." Minutes later they blew by Worswick, who was too sick to fight anymore. He bonked. But he continued.

Burgess hasn't puked since Ouray, and though by midafternoon he's suffering fatigue, muscle soreness, chills, and a slight loss of motor coordination, he's still in the race.

Erdman? She regained her sight near Telluride. But three miles later, she begins to gasp.

She turns to Nute. "I'm not going to make it," she says.

Nute knows she might well be speaking the truth. He's been monitoring his watch, worrying as Erdman has slowed to a 40-minute-mile stagger. He's been despairing that she'll never make it out



of the next aid station, Chapman, at 83.1 miles, before the cutoff time. But Erdman is the one who inspired Nute to run his first and, depending on Jodi, possibly only Hardrock. Plenty of people have told Erdman to stop. Nute's not going to be one of them.

"Let's sit down for a minute," Nute says. "Let's just process this.

Let's do the math."

But what calculus of the spirit can take into account years of training, hours alone, broken bones, and the taunting of the devil's pudding? Has an equation yet been written so elegant that it can encompass impossible dreams?

They sit, and they sit some more. They peer upwards, above tree line, where the skies are black with monstrous storm clouds. Lighting crashes.

Erdman does the math. Instead of a number comes a word.

"All I can think," she says, "is why?"

She doesn't bonk, and she isn't timed out. But after 77 miles, Erdman drops out of her third and — she says — final Hardrock.

Ten miles from the finish, Todd Burgess forgets how to walk a straight line. Counting, he decides, will solve the problem. If he can put eight steps together, one ahead of another, without wavering, and name the number of each step, he won't swerve into the wilderness and be lost forever. He is sure of this. He counts aloud for an hour.

When he steps onto the abandoned rail bed that will take him the last two miles to Silverton, Burgess can see the gentle, aspencovered hill ahead. Once he climbs that, he'll be able to look down into the town. He'll be able to see the finish line below. He knows he's going to make it. Only one thing can stop him.

He knows it's a silly fear, most likely the result of exhaustion and chills. If he knew about leaking capillaries, he might ascribe his anxiety to that. But Burgess's attempts at rationality won't banish a dreadful notion, born of sleep deprivation, or cellular rioting, or the desperate, fearsome need to finish under 48 hours:

"This would be a terrible time for a nuclear bomb to fall."

Burgess isn't the only one losing his mind. Gigantic june bugs wriggle from the soil and onto the damp and wobbly legs of Hardrockers unlucky enough to find themselves on the course after



dusk on the second day of the race. Chostly condominiums waver on top of mountain passes. Severed elk heads bob in the arms of grinning aid-station volunteers.

It's probably not capillary leakage. The visions seem to visit the slower runners, the ones who have been awake the longest.

"We know that people who have been sleep deprived have been noted to have visual, auditory, as well as tactile hallucinations," says Dr. Clete Kushida, director of the Stanford Center for Human Sleep Research. "They can also suffer irritability, as well as changes in memory, focus, and concentration. And psychomotor deficits."

That's one way of putting it.

After 40 hours, phantom Texans in ten-gallon hats walk beside the sleepiest Hardrockers at 13,000 feet, drinking beer and laughing. Grass turns to snow, rocks morph into Chevy Suburbans, plants transmute into Gummy Bears and bows. Before he died, Joel Zucker saw Indians.

Burgess finishes at 47 hours, 41 minutes, and three seconds, the fifty-eighth of sixty finishers (none of them Silvertonians). Then he sits on the ground.

Race Director Dale Garland walks to Burgess and asks if he would mind turning off the digital clock when it hits 48 hours. "I think this is good therapy," Garland says.

Burgess sits next to the clock and stares at it. At 48 hours he pushes a button, but the clock keeps going. Burgess keeps sitting, staring at the running numbers.

Jonathan Worswick finishes sixth, at 30 hours, 46 minutes, 16 seconds.

Kirk Apt wins in 29 hours and 35 minutes — beating the course record by more than 35 minutes. His legs tremble, and he weeps. Some onlookers get teary, too, even a few of the old hands. They don't like to talk about it, but they know that some of the fastest finishers are the most patently competitive, the loudest, the least liked, and the most likely to quit when outright victory seems impossible. Then there's Apt, who bonked and walked the last 25 miles of the course last year, enjoying the scenic vistas and the lonely ridgelines. Cramped. Limping. Having fun.

Local newspaper reporters gather round the champion. It's almost noon, clear and sunny. Apt tells one note-taker that he consulted a nutritionist before this year's Hardrock and that his



"homemade goos" (various combinations of blendered hard-boiled egg, potato, tofu, avocado, rice, yogurt, salt, honey, and chicken liver) helped him stay the course. He tells another, "I'm really not that competitive, but I saw I had the opportunity to win, so I thought, Why not?" He mentions that he ran about 60 of the 100 miles — "the flats and downhills, and I ran a few uphills, too."

The reporter from Durango has one last question. "What interesting things happened in the race?" she asks. Interesting things? Mr. Mellow grins. "The flowers were just amazing."