

My Adventure at the 2018 World's Toughest Mudder

By Whitney Tilson, 11/18

(This pdf is posted at: <http://www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM18.pdf>; my friend Ryan Meade's 13-minute video of all of the obstacles is posted at: <https://youtu.be/FKNS47HW8KI>)

For the second time in the three years I've competed, I won the 50+ age group at the World's Toughest Mudder, a 24-hour obstacle course endurance race, completing 12 laps of the five-mile course (60 miles) and ~250 obstacles, good for 52nd place overall (top 4%) among the 1,207 individuals who started the race. It took place on a horse farm outside of Atlanta for the first time, after the last four years in the desert outside Las Vegas. All in all, an epic adventure that pushed me to my limits – with a very satisfying outcome!



(Many of the pictures here were taken by Brad Kerr, father of one of the racers – thank you!)

Two years ago, I completed 75 miles, still the all-time age group record (see: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM.pdf), but there was no chance of matching that this year because I'm two years older and not in as good a shape, my hamstring was still sore from a minor pull six days earlier, plus the cold temperatures were brutal. It was already quite cool (~50 degrees) and windy at noon on Saturday (Nov. 10) when the race started and it became downright frigid when the sun went down, with temperatures quickly dropping below freezing for most of the night (the low was 27 degrees), causing ice to form on many obstacles, making them so treacherous that TM closed some until morning, and forcing 40% of the competitors to quit and many others to huddle in their tents until sunrise (the course was nearly empty overnight). While 27 degrees might not sound so bad, keep in mind that we were getting completely submerged in cold water multiple times each lap, so were constantly wet.

I wasn't immune to the cold, as it sucked my energy and forced me to walk 8 of the 12 laps, but thanks to a thick 5mm wetsuit and gloves, Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and pants, and four layers of headgear, I was able to maintain my core temperature and keep walking (and walking and walking...) (though my fingers and toes got quite chilled at times – two weeks later, my toes are still numb!). I learned my lessons well from last year's WTM when I didn't get my full wetsuit on in time and didn't have a jacket or pants to wear over my wetsuit, so got crushed by the cold around midnight (though I still got 55 miles and finished 5th in the 50+ age group and top 11% overall; see: www.tilsonfunds.com/WTM17.pdf).

My Team

For the third year in a row, I was racing and sharing a tent/pit area with my buddy Mark James, a fellow geezer (he's a month younger than me) and former Navy SEAL and professional triathlete. Here's a picture of us with our pit crew, Steve Fazekas (on the left). He and his wife, Alice Fisher, a friend of mine from high school who lives in the area, were absolutely heroic in supporting Mark and me all 24 hours – we would have been toast without them!



Here's a picture of me an hour before the start started with the race MC, Sean Corvelle, who is beloved among Mudders for his inspirational pre-race speeches and words of encouragement throughout:



Here's a picture of the Mudder Village, where all racers get a 10x10 spot for their tent. The course runs right through it, so after every lap it was quick and easy to get back to your tent to eat, drink, change clothes, use the Port-a-Potties, etc.:



Here's a picture of Mark and me with our friend Tom Millerick, who ran the first two laps with me:



Race Description

The race started at noon sharp and 1,207 individual competitors plus 24 teams set out up the hill and under Mudderhorn (going over it was the last obstacle):



All of the obstacles were closed for the first ~90 minutes to allow the field to spread out over the entire course, and then they opened on a staggered basis. This allowed us to bank some easy miles – but also tempted us to burn ourselves out too early... It also made it hard to know what gear to wear, since we didn't know when we were going to start getting wet. (Some folks were in full wetsuits at the start of the race, which was a big mistake, as they were totally overheating.)

I started way back in the pack so got caught up on lots of traffic jams going through the woods on the first lap (and wasn't pushing myself at all), so was in 722nd place after one lap – in the bottom 41% (and the bottom 10% of folks who did 50 miles or more – 271st of 299). Thus, I was only halfway through my second lap when I hit my first obstacle, Underwater Tunnels, which required going into a lake and ducking my head under three sets of barrels:



This was quickly followed by another full-submersion obstacle, Cage Crawl (this picture is from another race):



Here's a picture of Tom and me coming into the pit after lap 2 and me a lap or two later:



I got pretty chilled from these two obstacles, so after lap 2 I went in for a 23-minute pit stop to put on my medium weight (3mm) “shorty” wetsuit.

On lap 3, only a few obstacles were open and I was able to keep jogging, losing Tom about halfway through, as he wasn't feeling well and slowed to a walk. But my stomach wasn't right and I had to make a five-minute detour into the woods, struggling to get my rear-zip wetsuit off by myself (I took a heavy-duty prescription anti-diarrheal pill after this lap, which solved this problem for the rest of the race, thankfully! It didn't, however, solve my pee problem – see below).

When I got back to the tent, Mark was there, having already lapped me! He was on pace to whomp me by 15 miles, like he did last year (70 miles to my 55). I was happy for him, but the competitive side of me thought, “Rats! There goes any chance of winning the 50+ age group...”

I slow-jogged most of lap 4 as well, nailed every obstacle (the toughest were Funky Monkey and The Gauntlet), and finished at 6pm, in 399th place of 1,129 racers, just as darkness was setting in. I knew it was going to quickly get very cold so I did my longest pit stop of the race, 39 minutes, to get my heavy-duty cold-weather gear on, consisting of a full-length thick wetsuit (5mm body; 4mm arms and legs), Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and mountaineering pants (waterproof and, more importantly, windproof), an extra layer on my head (the hood of the jacket), and 3mm neoprene gloves. The key difference with last year for me was adding the jacket and pants – in cold weather, a wetsuit isn't enough, as it's designed for underwater, not to block cold air/wind, which is what my jacket and pants did. (I saw a lot of folks with just wetsuits or adding only a cheapo \$15 Walmart windbreaker – and they paid a big price I suspect.)

I was feeling fatigued, was weighed down by the heavy gear, and was worried about rolling my ankle in the dark so I started walking the entire course starting on lap 5, which slowed me down to around two hours per lap. That was OK with me – I just wanted to survive and get 50 miles!

Offsetting my pathetically slow pace was that I was cruising through nearly every obstacle (~25 on each lap) – especially the 8 that had penalty walks associated with them – saving precious time and energy and conserving my grip strength, which is all-important in these races. My climbing skills and upper body strength were critical, resulting in me only doing 5 penalties in 25+ hours. Curses to the third leg of Gauntlet, which I got through the first time and failed the next two – those damn knobs! – before switching to the electric shock route when it opened at 8pm:



The only other obstacle I failed was Funky Monkey, which I nailed the first 5 times, then failed 3 of the last 4 as my grip faded a bit – here are pictures of me doing it at last year's WTM:



When I came into the pit after lap 6 just before 11pm, I found Mark huddled in a sleeping bag. He had finished lap 6 two hours earlier, but had gotten frozen during the lap and was trying to regain his core temperature. He didn't appreciate me taking a selfie of us!



This happened to him because he only had a 3mm wetsuit and didn't have the same windproof jacket and pants that I had, as you can see in this picture from the next morning:

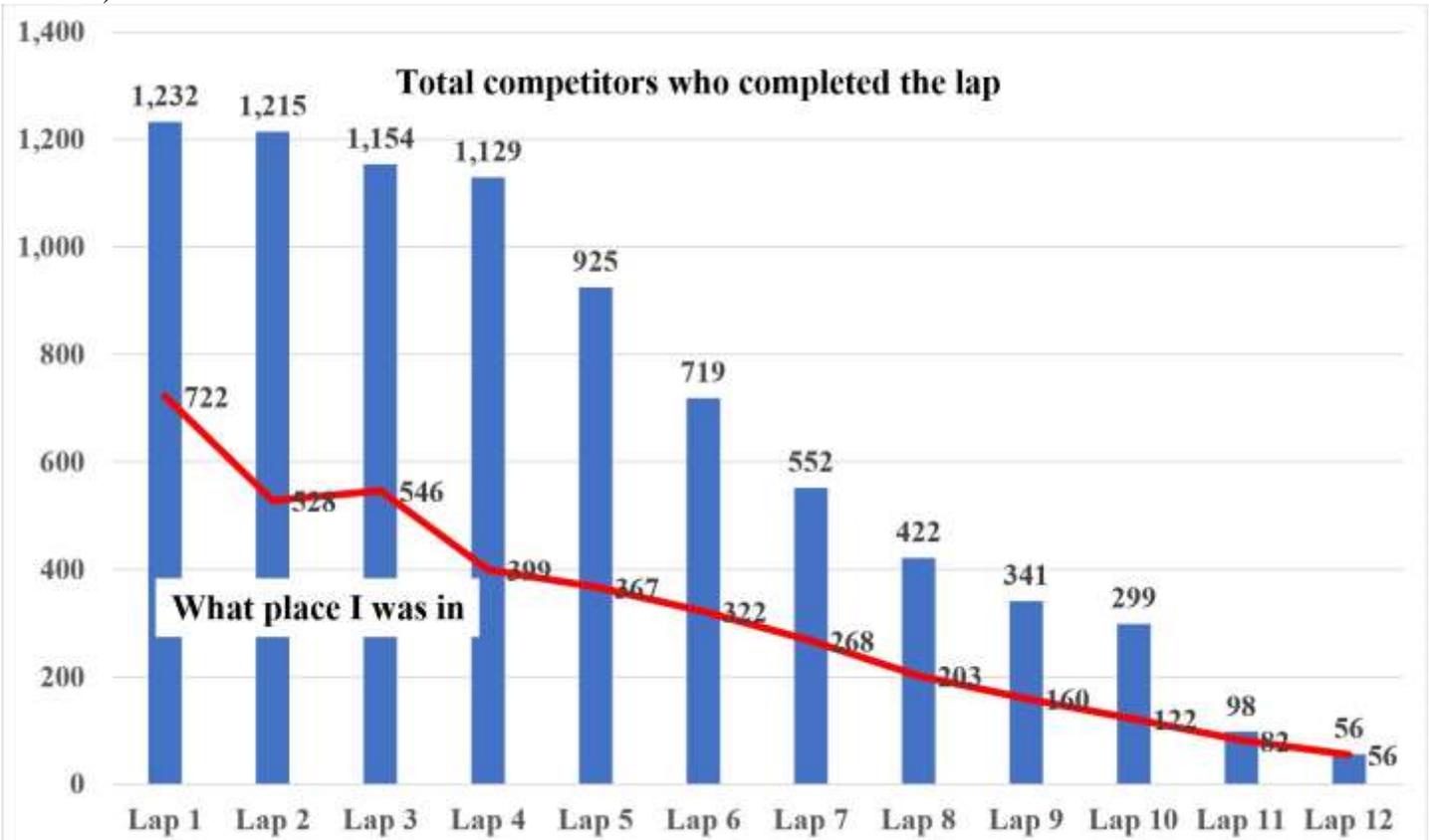


However, Mark didn't quit, to his enormous credit. After three hours in the pit from 9pm to midnight, he went out and did a 7th lap, got frozen again and, at that point, looked like someone from the Zombie Apocalypse and was huddled under the sleeping bag:



He had to take another three-hour pit stop from 2am to 5am, but then got back out there and cranked out three laps before noon, earning a well-deserved brown bib for 50 miles!

Mark's experience was typical, as evidenced by the plunge in the number of competitors who finished each lap. As this chart shows, 92% completed four laps, but only 34% completed eight (the red line shows what place I was in after each lap – by staying out on the course and plodding along, this tortoise ended up passing hundreds of hares):



The night was mostly a blur for me. My toes were frozen (they're still numb two weeks later) and my fingers were cold but not too bad once I switched to 5mm gloves and only took them off for one minute to do Twin Peaks and Funky Monkey. Adding a balaclava in the middle of the night (which I normally wear under my helmet when I'm skiing) helped keep my head and face warm. Most importantly, I was able to maintain my core temperature – so much so, in fact, that I never even needed to turn on the battery-powered vest I was wearing ([Quiksilver Mens Ps+Qs Heated Vest](#)) – I should have given it to Mark!



Here are some cool nighttime pics:



It was really beautiful as the sun came up:



For most of the night, I told myself that once I got 50 miles and earned my brown bib I'd stop, but once I finished lap 10 at 8:39am the sun was up, it was getting a bit warmer, and my competitive juices were starting to flow. I knew I had enough time to complete two more laps and figured (correctly) that 60 miles would be enough to win the 50+ age group and so off I went! (It turns out that 55 would have been enough, as I finished before the two other old guys who also did 55, but I didn't know this at the time.) Here's what I looked like as I started lap 11, with a nice, clean bib about to get very muddy:



I got a bit lucky on the timing of my last laps – while the race is noon Saturday to noon Sunday, if you start your final lap before noon, you have until 1:30pm to complete it so it's really a 25½-hour race. I needed almost all of that extra time. It was taking me a bit over two hours for me to walk a lap, so when I started my last lap at 11:20am, I only had 2:10 to complete the lap (there's zero credit for partial laps) so I knew I had to hustle and somehow found the energy to jog parts of the final lap and finished at 1:13pm, with 17 minutes to spare!

[Here](#) is Steve's short, grainy video of me crossing the finish line, and here are my lap and pit times – in 25 hours and 13 minutes, I spent 21:46 on the course and 3:26 in the pit (an average of 19 minutes after each lap):

Lap	Lap time	Pit time
Lap 1	1:01	1
Lap 2	1:12	23
Lap 3	1:30	12
Lap 4	1:37	39
Lap 5	1:57	23
Lap 6	1:59	27
Lap 7	2:09	8
Lap 8	2:14	32
Lap 9	2:11	7
Lap 10	1:56	20
Lap 11	2:08	14
Lap 12	1:52	
	21:46	206

Here's what my frozen, waterlogged feet looked like after the race:



My Pee Dilemma

This is sort of funny and crude, but it was no joke for me for about half of the 25+ hours I was out there: how to pee???

I was drinking plenty of fluids and had to pee about once a lap (every ~2 hours). For the first couple of laps, no problem: just head to the nearest tree. Then, for the next two laps with my shorty wetsuit on – again, no problem: just hit a port-a-potty at the pit. But starting soon after the sun went down and the temperatures plunged, two things changed:

- 1) I had to put on my full body wetsuit plus my ski jacket, which made it more time consuming to undress to use the port-a-potty; and
- 2) Of far greater concern, it was so cold out that in just the few minutes that my upper body was exposed, I got chilled to the bone and didn't recover my core temperature for 15-30 minutes (which got worse as the night went on, due to colder temperatures and my increasing vulnerability to any exposure).

So after a couple of times taking my wetsuit halfway off and getting chilled, I started thinking of alternatives – and came up with two:

- 1) Pee in an obstacle (ideally the lake!) and then open the top of my wetsuit to flush water through. This would be fast, but the water was so cold that I was worried about chilling myself even more than if I took my wetsuit off; or
- 2) Pee NOT in an obstacle and run the race with the lower part of my wetsuit soaked in rancid piss!

I'm not squeamish and was so cold – on the borderline of hypothermia and having to retreat to my tent, which I *really* didn't want to do (I doubt I would have ever reemerged, and the competitive side of me wanted to win the 50+ age division again!) – so I chose option 2 (the first time I'd ever peed myself).

Initially it felt great – the pressure in my bladder lessened and it was so nice and hot!

And then an instant later it started to burn like a son-of-a-bitch – unbeknownst to me until that moment, my privates and the inside of my legs had gotten badly chafed, so it felt like someone had poured acid on them! This what the inside of my legs looked like:



For about 10 minutes, I just gritted my teeth and kept on walking and eventually (thankfully!) the pain subsided.

But then (far too quickly it seemed!), I had to pee again...and choosing option 2 wasn't so easy because, unlike the first time, I knew the pain I'd be in for.

So at least 3-4 times through the middle of the endless, frigid night, I had to make the decision: at best, get super cold for at least 15-30 minutes (at worst, risk having to stop racing), or pour acid on my privates???

ARRRRHHHHHHHHH! This really tormented me all night long!

I ended up rationalizing to myself, "You're already in so much pain – what's a little more?" so I continued to choose option 2 (at least until the sun rose and the air warmed on my last two laps).

It's stories like this that make it particularly difficult to explain to my wife, daughters, parents and friends why I do this race every year (and love it) – LOL!

(At future races, to prevent this, I will: a) wear a two-piece wetsuit or one with a zipper around my crotch; b) make sure my compression underwear is pulled up tight; and c) use lots of BodyGlide/Gurney Goo.)

My Goals

I achieved all three of my goals:

1) Have fun. This was a given: what could be more fun than having 24 hours to horse around in a gigantic playground with more than 1,200 like-minded, friendly people?! Seriously! Some of my fondest memories from my childhood are when I was playing with my buddies and we'd go swim, hike, crawl around in the mud, climb everything in sight, etc. – so now I get to do this as a (sort of) adult!

2) Not get injured. This was going to be a tough, especially with my pulled hamstring, which I was worried would act up, as it had six days earlier, forcing me to call it quits after only one lap. But, miraculously, it didn't bother me at all. Beyond this, given that I don't like to run and therefore do minimal training for jogging/walking long distances, I kept expecting something else (Achilles, quads, hip flexors, etc.) to give out, but it never happened – in part, I suspect, because I was going so slowly and also because I was taking 800mg of ibuprofen (the prescription dosage – four tablets – of Advil/Motrin) every four hours before, during, and more than a week after the race. It's not a good idea for endurance athletes to do this, as it can cause kidney failure, but I wasn't pushing it – my breathing and heart rate were close to normal for 99% of the race.

3) Complete 50 miles and finish among the top 3 in the 50+ age group.

Race Statistics

- You had to finish your final lap after 8am to be considered a finisher of the full race and earn a black headband. Of the 1,207 individual starters, 725 finished and 482 were DNFs (40%).
- 81% of the competitors were men.
- 40% of men were DNFs vs. only 38% of women. You go girls!
- Only 18 individuals earned silver bibs (75 or more miles) (16 men and two women), a mere 1.5% of competitors/starters, about one-third the ~5% level of the last two WTMs.
- 72 people (64 men and 8 women) (6%) got 55-70 miles (not counting the 6 folks (5 men and 1 woman) who got 55 but were DNFs).
- 183 people (167 men and 16 women) (15%) got 50 miles (not counting 17 DNFs).
- Add all this up and only 273 people got 50 or more miles and finished after 8am – 23% of those who started the race, about half the level of the last two WTMs.
- Among those age 50+, there were 39 male finishers (of 80 who started) and 8 women (of 16 who started) – not surprising to see a higher (50%) attrition rate among us old geezers (it's tough being old!). The 47 of us who finished accounted for 3.9% of the starters and 6.5% of the finishers. Among the male geezers, I got 60 miles, two got 55, and 10 got 50 (16% got brown bibs). The top two 50+ females got 45 and 40 miles, respectively.
- The age range of the finishers was 19 (three young men and one young woman) to 64 (shout out to Don Manley, who finished his third lap at 1:04pm!). (I was one of only three 52-year-olds; there were only 27 people 52 and older who finished: 2.2% of starters and 3.7% of finishers). Yes, I'm proud to have been in the 98th percentile by age and finishing in the top 4.3% overall! (It helps offset the pain I endured for the two weeks after!)
- There were 18 teams (11 finished) and six relay teams (four finished). The top team was Atomic with 75 miles (Wesley Kerr and Evan Perperis) and the top relay team was Lindsay's Angels with 80 miles (Ryan Atkins and Lindsay Webster).

Someone posted the following charts with additional data:

2018 WTM Finisher Percentiles						
Miles	Finishers	DNF	Total	Sum Finishers	Finisher Percentile	Overall Percentile
100	2	0	2	2	99.7%	99.8%
95	0	0	0	2	99.7%	99.8%
90	9	0	9	11	98.5%	99.1%
85	3	0	3	14	98.1%	98.8%
80	2	0	2	16	97.8%	98.7%
75	10	0	10	26	96.4%	97.9%
70	5	0	5	31	95.8%	97.4%
65	7	0	7	38	94.8%	96.9%
60	22	0	22	60	91.8%	95.0%
55	38	6	44	98	86.6%	91.9%
50	183	17	200	281	61.5%	76.8%
45	31	7	38	312	57.3%	74.2%
40	52	27	79	364	50.1%	69.9%
35	79	43	122	443	39.3%	63.4%
30	104	57	161	547	25.1%	54.8%
25	109	97	206	656	10.1%	45.8%
20	46	57	103	702	3.8%	42.0%
15	24	100	124	726	0.5%	40.0%
10	3	46	49	729	0.1%	39.8%
5	1	24	25	730	0.0%	39.7%
0	0	0	0	730	0.0%	39.7%
	730	481	1211			

2018 WTM Mileage Statistics								
Miles	Finishers	DNF	Total	% of Finishers	% of DNF	% Total	% Finishers Overall	% DNF Overall
100	2	0	2	0.27%	0.00%	0.17%	0.17%	0.00%
95	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
90	9	0	9	1.23%	0.00%	0.74%	0.74%	0.00%
85	3	0	3	0.41%	0.00%	0.25%	0.25%	0.00%
80	2	0	2	0.27%	0.00%	0.17%	0.17%	0.00%
75	10	0	10	1.37%	0.00%	0.83%	0.83%	0.00%
70	5	0	5	0.68%	0.00%	0.41%	0.41%	0.00%
65	7	0	7	0.96%	0.00%	0.58%	0.58%	0.00%
60	22	0	22	3.01%	0.00%	1.82%	1.82%	0.00%
55	38	6	44	5.21%	1.25%	3.63%	3.14%	0.50%
50	183	17	200	25.07%	3.53%	16.52%	15.11%	1.40%
45	31	7	38	4.25%	1.46%	3.14%	2.56%	0.58%
40	52	27	79	7.12%	5.61%	6.52%	4.29%	2.23%
35	79	43	122	10.82%	8.94%	10.07%	6.52%	3.55%
30	104	57	161	14.25%	11.85%	13.29%	8.59%	4.71%
25	109	97	206	14.93%	20.17%	17.01%	9.00%	8.01%
20	46	57	103	6.30%	11.85%	8.51%	3.80%	4.71%
15	24	100	124	3.29%	20.79%	10.24%	1.98%	8.26%
10	3	46	49	0.41%	9.56%	4.05%	0.25%	3.80%
5	1	24	25	0.14%	4.99%	2.06%	0.08%	1.98%
0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	730	481	1211	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	60.28%	39.72%

Additional Write-ups

I loved these write-ups of the race:

- Rea Kolbl, the woman who's won it the last two years: *How I Won World's Toughest Mudder Two Years In A Row*, www.theocrreport.com/how-i-won-worlds-toughest-mudder-two-years-in-a-row;
- Kris Mendoza, who won the men's race, did an awesome rap video about the race: www.facebook.com/kdoza04/videos/10155825525877611
- Erin Rost, a young woman who I met on the last lap (we walked the last mile together and really hit it off), who came out of nowhere to earn a silver bib (75 miles) and finish 2nd among women: www.facebook.com/585106915/posts/10155598676376916;
- Mark James: www.facebook.com/markojames/posts/10215720822887978;
- Jason Rulo: <https://assaultfitnesscom.wordpress.com/2018/11/15/the-return-of-worlds-toughest-mudder-and>
- Charles Hauptert: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15jvOxEfH8Pv_g36GCwPnFtu3NG_21RW4/view?fbclid=IwAR19HlqwLBBzRnEGFHsWq300uynLdrJ5CFaaFmgPULNWdiIBXW_9L5hQe1g

I also loved this funny race map that Morgan McKay did:



Appendix A: Q&A

Why do you do races like this?

I've always liked big challenges; they keep me motivated to get/stay in good shape; I really enjoy them – not the running, but the obstacles – and they're very social. I often do them with friends and family (my parents at ages 75+, wife, three teenage daughters and many cousins have all done races with me), plus I've made many new friends. It's a great group of people and there's something about shared suffering that bonds people!

What inspired you during the race?

The wheelchair racers and their support teams like this:



And Diana Codispoti, who is the first person with dwarfism (she's 4' 5") to compete in this race. She was on the course until the very end, finishing her fourth lap at 12:24pm. Here's a great article about her, [World's Toughest Mudder Race draws small entrant with big heart](#), and below are pics of a team of Mudders helping her get up Everest – that's Joel Forsyth reaching down from the top:



And Jon Copper playing the bagpipes:



How does this race differ from other endurance races?

I've never done any other endurance race, but from what I've read of them, these races are different because we had to contend with:

- The obstacles (see photos and description of each below). There were a bunch of new ones and I found all of them fun and challenging, but after 200+ of them, they take a lot out of you! Note that they tended to be very quick (if you completed them and avoided the penalty).
- Wild temperature swings, both within each lap and between laps. After every lap, racers can go back to their pit (tent area) to rest, eat, use the Port-a-Potties, and change into dry and warmer/cooler gear, but that wastes time and it can be very tricky figuring out what to wear for a given lap. Guess wrong, and you might freeze...or overheat...or both (in fact, both were possible on the same leg).
- Speaking of being wet, that was constant because five obstacles on every lap (six once The Stacks opened at midnight) required you to completely submerge yourself (plus on eight other obstacles, you either got partly submerged or, if you failed the obstacle, you fell into water, so some people were getting wet *a dozen times every lap*). This had a number of implications that made this race much more challenging than a typical endurance race:
 - a) It makes it very difficult to regulate your body temperature. In between water obstacles, you could get hot in your full wetsuit, but mostly we were cold from 6pm onward.
 - b) During the night you need to wear thick neoprene (3 or 5mm) scuba diving gloves to keep your fingers warm, which makes the many climbing/gripping obstacles extra difficult.
 - c) Every time you go into the water, hike/jog through mud/dirt, and crawl through mud, pebbles can get in your shoes, which forces you to run through the discomfort and hope it goes away, or take the time to stop and shake them out.
 - d) Your waterlogged feet can swell, making your shoes too tight or requiring you to change into a larger pair.
 - e) Trying to run a race while wearing a wetsuit can cause chafing; was constricting, making it harder to climb, jump, etc.; and added a lot of extra bulk and weight, which got really tiring as I hiked/jogged mile after mile. Ditto for my constantly wet shoes and socks.
- The course map says there was 663 feet of elevation gain (and loss) per lap, which is a lot of hiking up and down.
- The terrain was very unstable – a ton of mud and lots of rocks and roots going through the woods, which made it very difficult to jog at any pace, especially at night, as the risk of rolling your ankle was high.

How does this compare to an Ironman?

I don't know, as I've never done one (not even a half or an Olympic-distance one – someday!). Mark James, who (long ago) ran the Kona (Hawaii) Ironman 10 years in a row when he was a professional triathlete, told me that the 60 miles he did at the WTM two years ago was massively harder than any of the Ironmans because: a) it's twice as long (timewise); and b) you can't get into a rhythm like you can at an Ironman (biking for six hours straight, for example).

What conditioning/experience is needed?

None is required – and I saw a few seriously out-of-shape/overweight people out there. They have my total respect, as this is really hard even if you're in great shape.

But if you want to do well – say, complete 50 miles, as 23% of starters did – then you need: a) a *very* high level of fitness (this is 24 hours of pretty sustained effort, so as one benchmark, you should be able to run a marathon in under five hours; ideally four); b) a high degree of athleticism (in order of importance: balance/coordination, lower body strength, upper-body strength, and flexibility); and c) fearlessness.

How did you train for this?

Obviously the best way to train for a race like this is to do lots of TM and Spartan races (ideally multiple laps) during the season. Second best is to do long-distance trail runs/races. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to do much of either due to a very busy schedule, plus I worry about getting chronic injuries that all older runners seem to have. Thus, my training mostly consisted of hour-long (but typically very intense) workouts pretty much every day (and in the weeks before the race, twice a day).

In a typical week, I play hard pick-up basketball for 60-90 minutes once or twice, play a couple of hours of tennis, do a couple of group fitness classes and a ridiculously hard hour-long workout with a trainer once or twice (often wearing a 20-lb. weight vest), and ride my bike a few miles a day to get to and from meetings – but no long distances.

Then, maybe one weekend a month, I did some sort of race/challenge: a Tough Mudder or Spartan race (typically two laps) if there's one in the area (I'm not one of those folks who travels all over the country to do these races), a half-marathon trail race, I climbed three big mountains in the Dolomites (Tre Cime de Lavaredo; see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) in July, etc. Thus, I was reasonably mentally and physically prepared, but this race took it to a whole new level.

While my running training was laughably inadequate (though to repeat what I noted above, I do think there's something to be said for not burning out your legs and getting plagued with injuries, especially at my age, by putting too many miles on your legs), I did work hard on building my grip and upper-body strength, which I think is the second most important area, as 2/3 of the obstacles demanded this. They were all somewhat different – climbing a wall or cargo net, doing rings and monkey bars, etc. – but they all boiled down to being able to grip something and pull your body up.

There's a simple test for this: how many consecutive pull-ups can you do? For a race like this, the answer should be at least 10. My max is 30, which was key to my race, as I only incurred five penalties during the entire race.

(For those of you who live in NYC and have an interest in a personal trainer, I highly recommend the two I use (once a week each): Richard Louis of FitSpace NYC (rplouisnyc@gmail.com) and Carlos Munoz at Definitions (munozcelo@aol.com). I also do regular group workouts at [Tone House](#), [Ripped Fitness](#), and [East End Row](#).)

In light of your” laughably inadequate” running training, why didn't your body break down?

- 1) I got lucky;
- 2) I walked all of the uphill and stopped jogging after four laps;
- 3) My workouts with my trainers are super intense – pretty much everything to failure – which I think has really toughened up my joints, muscles, ligaments and tendons (and my mind!); and
- 4) I've become a big fan over the past two years of shiatsu massage (I go to a place in NYC with a cult following called Salon de Tokyo). A little Chinese women (ask for Mimi), holding onto a bar in the ceiling, stands on my back and legs and applies every ounce of pressure onto one-inch areas. It's so painful! But I can hear and feel my tight joints and muscles loosening up.

What was the hardest part?

The hardest thing for me was to just keep on going for nearly 24 hours, especially after I got cold. Thankfully, I love obstacles – they keep me entertained. Had this been a 24-hour ultramarathon, I would have gone crazy from boredom and stopped.

What are the keys to success in this race?

- 1) Being in shape, both running/endurance and upper-body strength.
- 2) Staying warm.
- 3) Ingesting enough calories (~400/hour?) to keep your body going. This is hard because when you're exercising you often don't feel like eating – but if you wait until you feel hungry, it's too late: you can't recover and you're gonna bonk. Thus, it's critical to force-feed yourself at every pit stop, however crappy it makes your stomach feel. (You can train for this, though I didn't.)
- 4) Controlling your pace so you never get winded or overheated.
- 5) Using your (much stronger) legs rather than your arms on numerous obstacles, which preserves arm/grip strength (any rock climber will tell you how important this is). There's not much you can do other than be as fast as you can on pure grip/upper-body tests like Funky Monkey, The Gauntlet and Leap of Faith. But you can do Augustus Gloop, Ladder to Hell, T-boned, Skidmarked, Lumberjacked and Mudderhorn using 90% legs, with arms mainly for balance.
- 6) Being assertive in asking for assistance. I think some slower racers felt like they didn't want to bother the faster racers, who might resent being slowed down, but nothing could be further from the truth. We're all part of one big team and family, so every single person out there, even the elite racers going for max distance and prize money, is happy to help another Mudder. But don't assume that others know you want/need help – some people take pride in completing obstacles without assistance – so you need to ask!
- 7) Communicate clearly about what assistance you need. For example, I needed help every time on Everest, so when I was ready to run, I made eye contact with the people at the top, made sure they were ready for me, yelled “Two hands!”, and then held up both hands.
- 8) Knowing when to give up on an obstacle you were never going to complete (to save energy and preserve grip strength) – yet also doing every obstacle possible (to avoid time- and energy-sapping penalties).

Any tips on nutrition during the race?

I brought 5x as much food as I could possibly eat because you never know what you might crave during the race. You can't just consume energy drinks and gel – that's fine for short races, but won't work for long ones.

My main go-to “real food” was a rotisserie chicken that I consumed over the course of the race plus Dinty Moore stews, which are loaded with fat and calories – my pit crew had one piping hot for me after each lap. Also piping hot broth and chocolate Ensure Enlive (“all-in-one advanced nutrition shake” – a ton of protein and calories). Every leg I also ate a Snickers bar, either in the pit or out on the course. And when it wasn't too cold at the beginning and end of the race, I drank some Coke (I like the taste, find it refreshing, and it has caffeine).

How did you feel afterwards?

For the first week, I felt like a truck ran over every part of my lower body again and again (my upper body was fine). I had serious edema in my legs, which were all swollen – so much so that I went to the doctor the following Thursday, who had me get an ultrasound to make sure I didn't have any blood clots (I didn't). After a week, I was able to walk mostly normally and two weeks later I played basketball for the first time. I took 800mg of ibuprofen every four hours for the first week afterwards to manage the pain and inflammation, and I needed Ambien to sleep the first few nights as well.

Is there actually any danger?

For me, not on a relative basis. Riding my bike in NYC every day is 100x more dangerous than running a handful of TM and Spartan races each year, plus I do some pretty hard-core mountaineering and rock climbing (see: www.tilsonfunds.com/Tilsonadventures.pdf). But there have been serious injuries and even a couple of deaths. I saw a guy at the TM in New Jersey two and half years ago being rushed off the course in an emergency cart and heard the next day that he'd died of a heart attack. A year later, at the same race, my friend Ben slipped and fell climbing down the back side of an obstacle and broke his arm, requiring surgery:



At last year's WTM, one of the lead women slipped off Funky Monkey, fell into the side of the pool, and knocked herself out, ending her race. And there's plenty of opportunity to mess yourself up jumping 38' off The Stacks. If you land slightly wrong, you can break your tailbone (on one jump last year, I was leaning back a tiny bit and bruised it; and the female winner a few years ago, Amelia Boone, actually broke it – but kept on racing and won!).

This year, Ryan Meade fell going over Lumberjacked and knocked himself out – but after 29 minutes in the medical tent (you're disqualified at 30) he got back out there and got 35 miles!

The main problem this year was people getting hypothermic – apparently the medical tent (which was heated) was full of shivering folks trying to warm up. The worst case I heard of was Victoria Jackson Graham, who posted: "I ended up in the ICU on life support...hypothermia, 89-degree core temp, complete respiratory failure, and rhabdomyolysis that caused a heart arrhythmia...all of my gear cut off in the ambulance." This, despite having proper gear: "2xu base layer, a 4/5 wetsuit, and a wind breaker jacket and pants." She concluded: "They think I had such bad issues because my potassium and calcium levels were off before the race ever started, probably from diet and training. They have been addressed and fixed. I'll be back, just as soon as I figure out a way to swing all the costs!" RESPECT!!!

Of course horrible bruises and chafing are the norm – this is what one person posted:



In comparison, my legs looked fine!



What advice would you give to Tough Mudder for future WTMs?

1) People love getting recognition: patches, bibs, awards, etc. I think having a patch for 25 miles and a bib at 50 miles (which 23% of finishers achieved) is just right, but having the next bib at 75 miles (which only 1.5% achieved) is too much. I saw a lot of folks get 50 miles and then mentally or literally stop, even though they could have kept going for another lap or two, because they knew 75 was out of reach. Why not have a 60-mile bib? Also, why not have awards by age categories (selfishly speaking!)?

2) Make sure the electric shock obstacles actually shock people. Starting at 8pm, racers could skip five tough obstacles by taking the “High Voltage Course Route”, which consisted of three electric shock obstacles, but almost nobody was getting shocked, even when they hit the wires! (I hit the wires multiple times on Electroshock Therapy and never got a jolt.) And while it was great to see TM bring back the epic Operation obstacle, they made the hole twice as big, making it super easy. The one time I did get sloppy and hit the edge and got a shock, I barely felt it, in marked contrast to the same obstacle two years ago when the huge jolt caused me to shout “ARRRRRHHHHH” when I got hit.

3) Last year, the penalty walks were too long (especially Funky Monkey’s 20-30 minutes); this year, they were too short (Funky Monkey took maybe 3-5 minutes), especially for The Stacks, which anyone is capable of doing. If you don’t want to face your fears and skip it, fine – but that should be a half mile penalty.

C’mon TM, this is the World’s Toughest Mudder, not the World’s Easiest Mudder!

4) I loved the re-introduction of the Golden Carabiners (allowing one to skip a bunch of obstacles at two different points on the course) and thought giving one to everyone after their 5th lap made sense, but the other two ways to earn them – extra-hard routes on Funky Monkey and Leap of Faith – were too tough. I think only a few people earned them. I think the difficulty should have been set so that ~20-25% of people who were out there in the middle of the night could earn them, not 2-5%.

PS - Please don’t read this as a general criticism - this was a GREAT race overall and I loved the new obstacles!

How much does it cost?

Registration prices vary, but average ~\$550, but that’s just the start. If you don’t have the gear, you can easily drop \$1,000 on this, plus flights and hotel – not just for you, but your pit crew as well. It ain’t cheap! It saved Mark and me a ton of money to have a local pit crew who we could stay with, plus they had a lot of gear that we didn’t need to buy: wagon, tarp, tent, cooler, chairs, etc.

Are you doing it again?

Hell yes! The 2019 WTM will be back in Atlanta, but a week later (and maybe colder!), Nov. 16-17.

What does Susan think of this?

Not much. But she’s been endlessly loving and patient with me for more than 28 years of my foolish escapades – and I haven’t killed myself yet! And she knows from long experience that if she raised doubts/concerns, it would just give me more motivation! And she takes comfort in my large life insurance policy... ;-)

Appendix B: A Description of Each Obstacle

My friend Ryan Meade created an awesome 13-minute video, which captures nearly every obstacle and the spirit of the event! You can watch it [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...). In addition, here are a few short videos that TM posted:

- Overview: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10156819470482790&id=121520047789
- Overview (2): <https://www.facebook.com/toughmudder/videos/1955774587848271/>
- Men's and women's winners: <https://www.facebook.com/toughmudder/videos/307273343440136/>

Here's the course map – they're in the order of the clock/wheel, starting at the bottom (6pm) (note the two Golden Carabiner routes, the short penalty walks in red for eight obstacles, and the optional High Voltage Course Route, which opened at 8pm; The Stacks opened at midnight):



Hydrophobia

This was a new obstacle that involved climbing up into a tube, crawling through it (while in a few inches of red water, and then climbing down. It wasn't difficult, but it was quite awkward getting into and out of the tube – and the water was chilling. Video [here](#). That's Chris Betcher in the two pics on the right.



Twin Peaks

Another new obstacle that involved climbing up a tough wall (most people required a boost to get on it, as it started three feet off the ground), then rappelling down a steep wet wall, stepping over to the opposite wall (being tall really helped), grabbing the other rope, and climbing back up. Great fun for rock climbers like me, but most folks ended up in the drink and had to do a penalty walk. Video [here](#) (skip to 1:26).



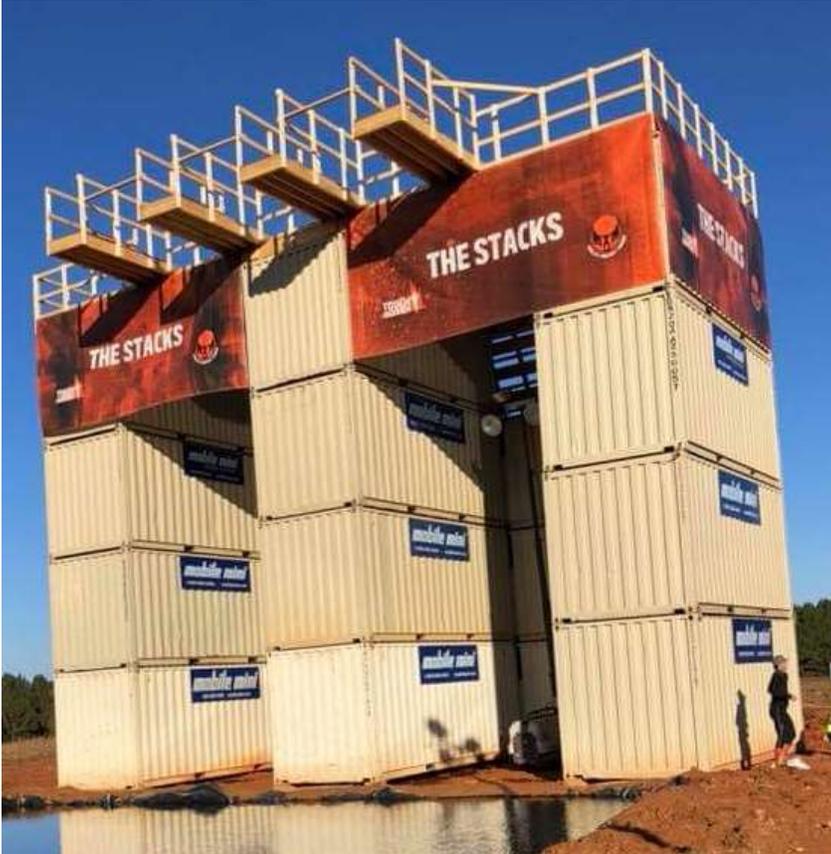
Spread Eagle

A new obstacle where you had to lie across two nylon straps and pull yourself across (though I saw some folks roll sideways). I observed a lot of people making this harder than it had to be.



The Stacks

This replaced the iconic obstacle from Vegas, The Cliff, a 35-foot drop into the lake. This time, TM used shipping crates to create an even higher obstacle (I read 38 feet) plus, unlike Vegas, you had to climb up the back, which wasn't easy so most folks took a penalty walk. I had a blast doing this every lap starting at midnight – but if you're afraid of the dark, heights and/or water, this is your ultimate nightmare. [Here](#) is a video of Joel Forsyth doing a back flip off it – mad props!



Here's the climb up the back:



The view from the top:



Here's the woman's winner, Rea Kolbl, jumping off:



Augustus Gloop 2.0

A slight variation on the old Augustus Gloop/Snot Rocket, this involves getting in a waist-deep pool of water, wading across, ducking your head into the tube (you could actually pull it out and avoid putting your head underwater), and climbing up it (using hand-/foot-holds) while a firehose poured a ton of water on your head. I think getting rid of the tube made it easier, and the water wasn't coming down the times I did it. Video [here](#).



Black Widow

This new obstacle involved walking across nylon straps over a pool of water while holding onto other straps. I never saw anyone fall. More fun for a rock climber! Video [here](#).



Here's Alexandra Walker, who finished 4th among women with 65 miles:



Funky Monkey – The Revolution

A classic, in which you go up a set of maybe a dozen monkey bars, then have to transition to a horizontal wheel and spin around on it and grab a big vertical wheel, swing down to a smaller vertical wheel and, finally, to a bar before getting to the landing platform. The key I discovered is to go up the money bars backwards, with only one hand on each bar, which gets me to the top quicker so I can finish before my grip gives out. These pics are from previous races:



I have a love-hate relationship with this obstacle. It's a great challenge and when I'm fresh and my grip strength is strong, I have no problem with it, but when I get tired, my grip strength often gives out right near the end and I fall, cursing loudly! Here is a pic from this year's race:



Ladder to Hell

This wasn't particularly hard (especially if you're tall) – but it was at the highest point of the course, after a long uphill, so it *felt* hard! Also, it got icy and slippery overnight.



Underwater Tunnels

Nothing hard here – just wade into the lake and duck your head under three sets of barrels. But it sure was cold! TM closed it overnight to try to reduce the hypothermia people were suffering.



Cage Crawl

A TM classic. The pits were filled to the top initially, which left very little room to come up and breath, which freaked a lot of people out. It was much easier once the water level went down a bit. Like Underwater Tunnels, TM closed this overnight.



Trench Warfare

An easy 100-foot crawl in soft sand. Video [here](#). This is Jolie Rodriguez:



Electroshock (part 1 of the High Voltage Course Route, which opened at 8pm)

Another TM classic – except it wasn't working – almost nobody got shocked!

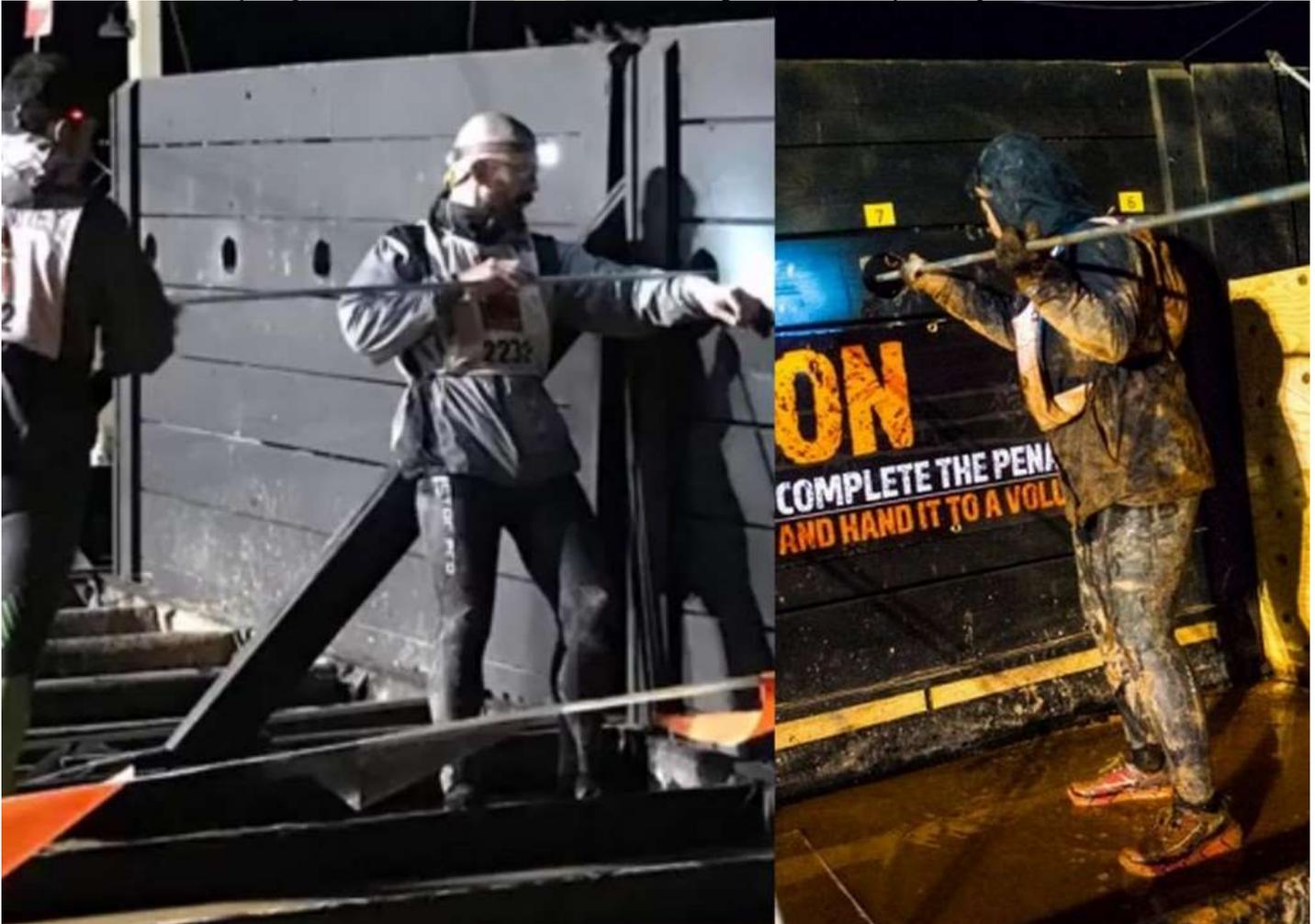


Entrapment (part 2 of the High Voltage Course Route)

A sand crawl under low wires that were supposedly electrified, except I didn't see anyone get shocked.

Operation (part 3 of the High Voltage Course Route)

TM brought back this epic obstacle from the 2016 WTM. You stand in a couple inches of water, pick up a 10-foot metal pole with a hook at the end, poke it through a hole, hook a rubber wristband hanging on a peg on a wall about six feet away, and then bring it back. Simple, right? Except there's one catch: if your pole touches the side of the hole, you get a shock. Video [here](#) and here are pics from two years ago:



This year, however, TM made it easier – the hole was twice as big and shocks (at least the one I felt) was a tiny fraction of what I remembered. Lame!

Quagmire

An easy walk into waist-deep water, up a small muddy hill, back into water and out. Yawn.

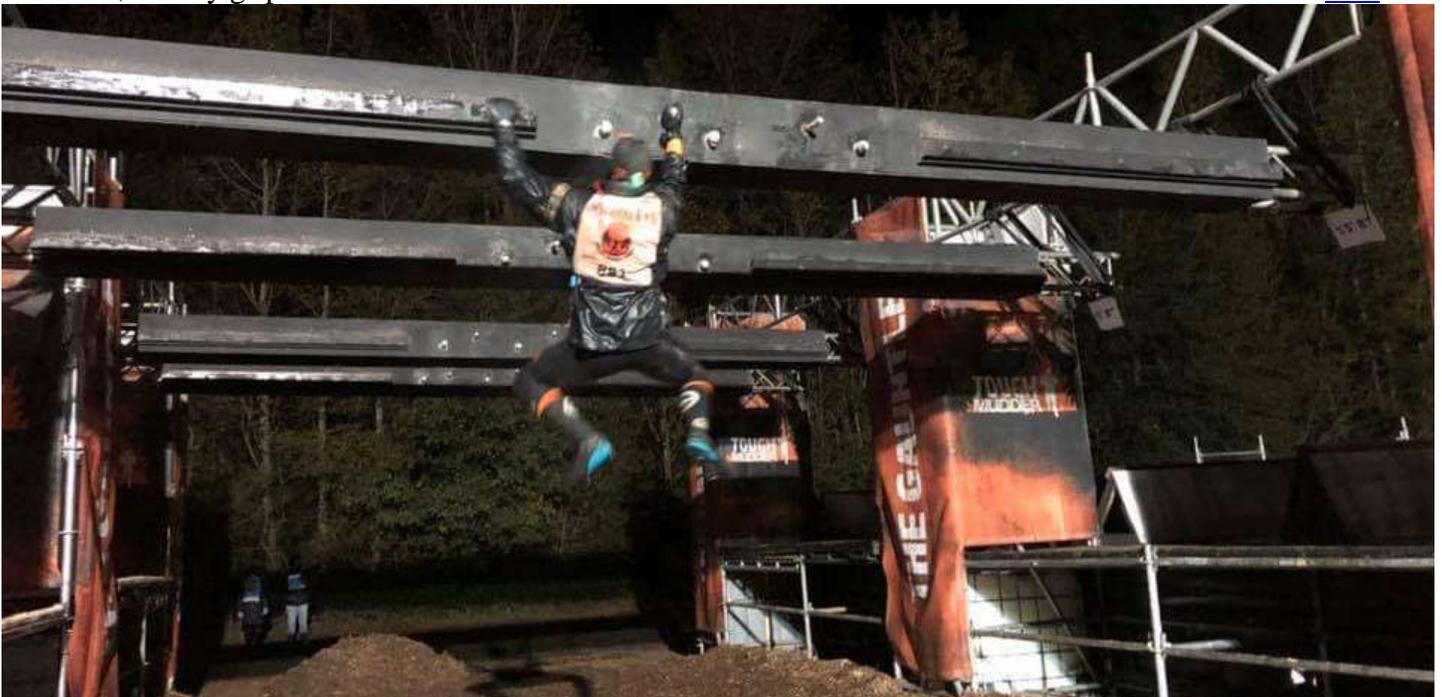
The Block Ness Monster

This one typically requires a bunch of people working as a team (though I was able to jump up and clamber over it by myself in the middle of the night and on the last lap, when no-one else was around). Everyone jumps into neck-deep water and pushes on the rotating, triangular-shaped thingie (I don't know what to call it). On each rotation, 1-2 people hold onto the top, are pulled over, and then grab the top and help keep it rotating so the others can get over. Then repeat this once more and you're done – great fun! Video [here](#).



The Gauntlet

A challenging new obstacle with four components (with three platforms to rest in between): a balance beam, rings to a rope, an upper-body-burner called Just the Tip (see pic below), and finally arching across a gap. I found all but Just the Tip easy – but if you failed any part you had to do the penalty walk. I got through it the first time, but my grip failed on those damn knobs the second and third time I tried it – GRRRR! Video [here](#).



Leap of Faith

This was a fun new obstacle, similar to Rope a Dope at last year's WTM, but instead of jumping to a rope, you instead grabbed a mesh net, climbed up and transitioned to a 45-degree down bar.



Everest 2.0

This is an iconic Tough Mudder obstacle, in which you run up a curved wall, grab the top, and pull yourself over (almost everyone needs help from Mudders at the top; *huge* thanks to Darth Vader, Jason Harley and the other guys who hung around at the top of the wall for nearly the entire race and helped countless fellow Mudders get up it). Video [here](#).



(Funny story: my then-76-year-old mother did a TM in New Hampshire with me in August 2016. Unfortunately, she is the world's slowest runner so when we came to Everest 2.0, she couldn't get within a country mile of our outstretched hands. She had given up and was walking around it when a woman at the top suggested that we form a human pyramid at the base so my mom could climb up on top of us and reach high enough so the people at the top could grab her. As you can see from [this video](#), it worked! Everyone was cheering her and giving her high-fives!)

Mud Mile 2.0

This was an epically good Mud Mile, with six deep, slippery trenches that required teamwork (at least until the sides got worn away and it became easy to do solo).



T-Boned

A high wall with a ledge that came out like a T. The first of three tough climbing obstacles that a lot of people struggled with (when they got icy overnight, TM closed them until dawn). My key insight was to step through the crack between the walls just to the left of this guy, rather than go over the top:



Skidmarked

An inverted wall. I didn't get a pic from this race, but here's one from another race:



Lumberjacked

You had to get over six logs each about five feet off the ground. The key was to climb the sides, but it was slippery (and, later, icy) and required good climbing skills or a helping hand.



Pyramid Scheme/Happy Ending

This is a slick, sloping wall that TM made easier this year by having ropes come down all the way, so no teamwork or even real exertion was required. Yawn.



Kiss of Mud 2.0

A quick crawl/roll under barbed wire. I long ago discovered that there's a hard way to do this (crawling) and an easy way (rolling). (You can see me doing so in my wife's short [video clip](#) from two years ago.) Yes, the latter can make you a little dizzy, but relative to crawling it's so much earlier and faster and you don't get scraped up. I don't know why most people haven't figured this out – try it, you'll like it! Here is a pic of me doing this obstacle last in 2016, when it was harder, plus a generic pic:





Mudderhorn

TM brought back Giant Wedgie from two years ago and made it harder, with a slick 10-foot wall to get up to the netting, which was pretty much impossible to do on your own – a final obstacle worthy of this race! As with Everest, *huge* thanks to the guys who hung around at the base of the wall and helped countless fellow Mudders get up it, including Chris Aranda, Nathan Herron and Ryan Cray. Videos [here](#) and [here](#).

