

## Yukon Arctic Ultra Race Report by Jessie Thomson-Gladish #436



Feb 5-18, 2017

Day One-Whitehorse to Rivendale approx 36km (21.5 miles), and to bivvy spot at 55.5km

The MYAU this year held true to it's claim as the toughest and coldest ultra with brutally cold nights to start off with, reportedly down to -40C in spots. The athletes' training, gear, preparation, mental and physical strength and sense of humor were all tested to the limits.

My ultra started with my mum, Kirsty Thomson, and my sister, Naomi Gladish. They decided to walk the marathon section with me, a celebration of my mum's 60th birthday and retirement year, plus the pure enjoyment of what our bodies can do. The race route changed this year due to open water on the Yukon River and sections of overflow near Whitehorse.







Instead of a whole day spent on the river, we were sent up a steep climb onto the right side of the river bank after only a couple km on the trail. The trail followed Long Lake road for a while and then past the sewage lagoon which was smelly of course. 19km of rolling climbs and drops, in only -15C or so and sunny, made for a sweaty start even when traveling slowly. I had already



changed my shoes from my 'cold temp' Solomons to my 'warm temp' Sportiva runners. Felt like heaven until hitting the Takhini River where the temperature dropped and the wind picked up. I felt my right foot was getting too cold, and tried a couple times to warm it up with my hands and changing socks, but the only thing that helped was putting on my boot covers and throwing a toe warmer in there as well. My other shoes were frozen with sweat so I knew I had to thaw and dry them at Rivendale CP which was still about 18km away. The

overboots and toe warmers relived me of that cold fear, the mild panic over developing frostbite on the first day and getting pulled out of the race. It was a good reminder to stay on top of self care, things can happen on day one when your guard is down or your mind isn't in it yet. My mum and Naomi did well on the marathon. I was so proud of them, it's a long day to walk 42km, and the out and back 6km at the end is mentally tough, although Naomi has said since that it



was a beautiful time of the walk and enjoyed the darkness. I turned right into Rivendale CP while they went on to walk the last bit.

Rivendale CP was as always: dark, nice fire, friendly volunteers, good chili and a cookie. Robert P was still there (I realized he was probably waiting for the final marathoners, my family, haha, who were definitely last at this point) and the cameramen, Thilo and Yann who cornered me for an interview. Luckily, I very much like these guys and looked forward to trail encounters with them, even when it meant answering some questions for the camera. After which I always walked for hours thinking about the things I should have said, or the real answer to questions when in the moment I default to 'deer in the headlights' answers. I ate chili, changed my shoes back to my cold weather ones for the night walking after drying the soles out with the open pit fire, filled my thermoses with hot water and made a Nescafé coffee in my smaller thermos to carry along and sip while walking. Some of my family showed up just as I was leaving the CP, my aunt Gill, Naomi's fiancé Paul, and his aunt Karen. More cameras flashing and lots of love being handed out as I stepped out from the CP warmth and safety into the first cold and lonely night of the race.



I passed by Naomi and my mum on the trail shortly after leaving the CP, and had a dark congratulations on marathon finishing and they wished me well continuing up the Takhini River towards the Overland Trail. True solitude entered here, no headlamps to be seen ahead or behind and I felt myself relax into what I consider to be the ultimate experience, traveling alone in the wilderness with nothing to worry about except myself, moving forward and keeping my mind occupied with small goals ahead. Tonight it was the goal of at least 50-55km, and to find a reasonable place to sleep that wasn't in a low cold spot or exposed. I encountered another athlete at the Overland Trail head, where the river trail turns right onto land again and points towards the mountains, with Braeburn CP as a distant goal in the days ahead. He was sitting on his sled and seemed fine, though I found out later he scratched in Dog Grave Lake. I pushed on admiring the stars and cooling temperatures, though not sure what the temperature was. I

passed by many racers' bivvy spots, some chose the Overland Trail parking lot area which is nice and open and safe feeling. I had planned to camp here potentially but felt good and wanted to go on. The tree tunnel gave way to the open road as the trail used the road for a ways, rolling with some dips and hills. I watched my kilometers and once I hit 55km I began looking for a spot to sleep. I sort of remembered where Julie, Olly and I had camped the year before, but wasn't sure if I could find it again. Then I found myself on a higher bit of ground and decided rather than risking another few km stuck in a lower, cooler zone I was tired enough to get some sleep. It was somewhere around midnight, 13.5hrs since the start that morning, and I was happy with my progress. It was also very cold, so setting up my bivvy was done in the typical slightly panicked rush mode where everything needed to work out and go smooth. First thing, shoes off and booties on, down pants and jacket on, hand warmers opened and in the pockets. Then my bed: foamie on the snow, then my bivvy bag unrolled with my thermarest and sleeping bag inside already, blow up the thermarest, locate my liner in the bag and worm my way into the liner and the sleeping bag. I did not need to change my socks, and tucked my shoes inside my bivvy bag to try and keep them from freezing. Set my alarm for 3am and let myself go to sleep. I



slept alone with no one around, and luckily this was one of the few times on this years ultra that my alarm woke me up.

Day Two-Bivvy Camp to Dog Grave Lake CP (45.5km/27miles) to Bivvy Camp at halfway cabin (another 30km/18miles)

At 3am I stuck my face out and was slammed by cold air-so hard to motivate myself to get out of the bag, but also having to pee helped a bit. Again, only reversed, was the slightly panicked rush mode. Roll the bivvy up and stuff it in the large dry bag. Pack the pulk, and last thing to take down pants off, booties off and stuff my feet into frozen stiff shoes at the last second, as once you start walking the body heats warms and loosens the shoes and suddenly it's hard to recall they were ever so frozen and unwelcoming. As I started out I wondered who had passed me in the night, and who was still sleeping. It's an odd time to be awake, and I do feel a bit crazy sometimes and wonder what I'm doing here instead of at home in bed with my husband who lets me warm my feet on his legs. I came upon a man walking fairly slow and looking very tired, I learned later he was having trouble keeping any food or liquid down, which does no one a favour in this environment and under such physical stress. He was Québécois and we exchanged a headlamp dominated hello as I passed by. I also saw James Binks this morning, he is a YAU veteran and a steady walker and seemed settled in his pace, and we leap frogged each other much of the way into DGL, and in fact for most of trail to Pelly Farms.

When waking at 3am the sunrise takes a long time to happen. I was anxiously awaiting the light as I usually plan to have a nice break in the first sun rays of the day. A beautiful spot appeared in the sun and I stopped here for a snack and a drink, which was an effort since my thermos lid has frozen in place. I worked it for 15 minutes trying to tempt it open with body heat, grip strength and sheer mind power. The victorious moment when the lid turned made me laugh with success, and I drank the still warm water from Rivendale CP, and vowed to take better care to keep my lids from freezing, eventually realizing I could just leave the secondary lids off as the main lids were of a smaller circumference therefore easier to manhandle them open.

Dog Grave Lake is one of those CP's that just doesn't arrive when you want it to. It feels so far away and it only arrives after a very long slog up a long steep hill, plus some more meandering and climbing, and then finally creeping around some shore lines. The CP is on the right, on a little lookout over the lake. It's beautiful in the daytime. In 2015 I arrived in the dark, in -48C, to a mess of athletes and chaos, due to frostbite and other cold and injury related scratches, it was like a battleground. This year was much nicer, although still the usual high number of scratches at DGL due to the cold temps overnight-reportedly down to -37C and possibly -40C. This is a shock to anyone not acclimatized to the Yukon's harsh February weather. This year my teammate from the 300 YAU in 2016, Julie Pritchard, was volunteering, and her first placement was DGL. I was very pleasantly surprised to see her on the trail about 5 or 6 km before the CP. She had walked out to meet me and walk me into the CP. What a treat!! She filled me in on all the race news, which was a lot considering it was only a day and a half into the race. I told her about my day with my mum and Naomi, then the cold night. We missed the old times of walking together, so it felt great to trudge along both chatting and in silence, until we reached the DGL CP. Stuart Stirling welcomed us in just before the CP after joking that I still had 4km to go. He was down at the lake filling water jugs. I gave him a 'haha' and an eye roll.

DGL had a nice fire going and several athletes sitting around. It's hard to remember all who were there. I had been leap frogging with Jon Gupter and Tom Sutherland much of the day-who



seemed to be suffering from the 'what are we doing' thoughts, but were obviously strong and able otherwise. Australian Joel Rennie was there, suffering from chaffing and knee issues, waiting for medical attention. James Binks drying out his down jacket, Marcelo with an unfortunate camel back splitting open incident, Scott Smith who was bubbly and cheerful and strong looking. Everyone talking about how cold the night had been, and probably dreading the one coming up, likely to be no warmer. I dried my neck warmer, changed my socks, ate some goulash and a freeze dried meal and a frozen bun. Repacked my sled with topped up thermoses, filled my coffee thermos and set out for another 30km, aiming for the 'halfway cabin' between DGL and Braeburn. I leapfrogged with Scott Smith for this stretch. Eventually snowmobile guide, Spencer drove by, and told me the cabin was about 14km away. Knowing I was close spurred me on to aim for it, as I had been getting tired and cold and needing to sleep. I actually got very cold while walking, and ended up stopping to put on my down pants and using some hand warmers to try and keep my body temp up. It worked, I went from the panicked cold feeling to the overheating furnace in minutes. I was close to the cabin so I trudged on, nearly sweating in the -35C. I passed Scott Smith setting up his bivvy, he'd given up on the cabin, and then I caught up with Aussie Scott, and we wandered into the cabin location 500m after seeing Scott Smith. I laughed inside a bit, we had done the same thing the year before. Camped before the cabin after giving up on it..so this year I KNEW it was there and was determined to make it. One other was already camped out there, so Scott and I immediately set out to make our own bivvy's. I did my usual routine, but after climbing into my bag I was slightly wound up from being a bit hot walking, and could hear my heart pounding like mad. It was so cold (-35 to -40C again), I had to sleep with my face inside my bag, so the claustrophobic feeling didn't help with my pounding heart. I laid there listening to my own heavy breathing and heart for hours without sleeping it seemed.

Day Three-Bivvy at halfway cabin to Braeburn CP (approx 30km/18miles) and Braeburn to Cougland Lake Bivvy (29km/17.3miles)

Finally I looked at my watch sometime around the 3am time and decided to get up. Aussie Scott was moving and packing as well, he left just before me. I felt better once I was walking, it was a cold morning and I walked with my down on for a long time. This stretch to Braeburn is flat, but it's soul crushing because the trees are so tall that even when the sun finally comes up it only hits the tops of the trees, leaving the people far below in the cold shade. I felt like I was longingly looking up for hours as the straight stretches went on and on and on as they always do. I knew from previous years I was getting close to Braeburn, and all morning I was repeatedly ordering my meal I was anticipating on arrival: "two fried eggs super hard-no runny yolks please-and a piece of toast with peanut butter on the side". Literally 800 times I ordered this in my head on the slog into the CP.

I arrived at the final steep downhill onto Braeburn Lake, and of course Yann and Thilo are waiting with their cameras at the bottom. I took the safe approach and backed my sled down the hill, holding the harness and letting it slide down easily instead of trying to run ahead of it. I'd had enough times in the past where the sled is too fast and tips overs or pushes me too fast on aching feet and hips. My feet were sore at this point, and running downhill was not going to feel good. The guys interviewed me at the bottom of the hill, thankfully in the sunlight. As I set out across the lake towards the CP lodge they used the drone to film some shots of high above the lake and I couldn't help waving at the drone as it buzzed by me like the biggest mosquito I'd ever see. The final km into Braeburn is a twisty, hilly, frustrating section, but knowing it would end soon helps and then I found myself walking towards the 100 mile finisher sign beside the



lodge. I didn't walk under it, my race was far from over. Still 330 miles left, it felt like a long way and I was already struggling with emotions of wanting to quit. I'd completed the 430 miles in 2015, it felt like I had nothing to prove and that I was suffering for reasons I couldn't find at the moment. I found them later in the race, but the first 5 days were admittedly tough to find the motivation to keep going. No one was out front, so I left my pulk parked, and walked into the lodge to see if Diane or anyone was around. They were inside and greeted me warmly, as usual joking about how I appeared to have just casually shown up in a car and walked in fresh as could be. I sure didn't feel fresh, but I also didn't feel too bad, apart from a worrying foot pain on my outside left foot, which to me was a bit like what I imagine a stress fracture to feel like. I ignored it and hoped it would get better, which it did, but not for many days.



The fried eggs and toast were amazing. After the meal I did some socializing. Matt Weighman returned a very special piece of paper I had dropped at the start line and never expected to see again after tragically discovering I'd lost it. It was a good luck drawing my little cousin, Evan made for me, with an owl on it, like my stuffed snowy owl good luck charm I carry with me. I couldn't believe Matt carried that paper for 100 miles and was able to find me and give it back. I'll never forget it and how kind of a person he must be to have seen the significance of that paper to me. He finished his 430 race with amazing toughness, quietness, ease and grace. He looked so comfortable whenever I saw him. My spot wasn't working well, so I ended up switching mine for one of Robert's. I brought my damp gear in to dry, and then tried to nap in one of the cabins. It was 1pm by this point. Jon and Tom ended up in the same cabin as me and I swore they were going to scratch the way they were talking. I told them it gets better and to at least wait to Carmacks to decide, and as always "sleep before you scratch". They seemed tough and smart and fit, but uncommitted and unmotivated to continue the race where the days never seem to end. I did my best to be a positive influence and it



worked as they continued on. They both snored loudly in the room, and I didn't sleep much. I felt restless and a bit like sleeping during the daylight hours was a waste of time. By about 4pm I decided to get up and have a burger and get packed up to do another 20 or 30 km before sleeping. Jon and Tom did the same and we set out about the same time, with the Cougland Lake cabins being a destination. Julie was at Braeburn when I was gearing to go, so she walked for a half hour with me before turning back to the CP as she had a night shift from 10pm-6am. I was alone in the cold night again. And man did it get cold on those lakes. At one point in the evening I got extremely cold. I had to have my fur lined hood done tight up against my face with a tiny breathing hole, and then ended up needing to put my down pants on, along with my big down jacket, and my goggles to try and keep the warmth in. This worked and I ended up like a furnace again, needing to delayer eventually. After several lakes and forest sections between lakes I arrived at what I remembered was Cougland Lake, it was huge. Traveling by moonlight was such a blessing. I could see the impressive rocky shorelines, and the northern lights came out as well, pointing me towards the cabin destination. I could also see headlamps in the distance on the far side of the shore but it took a whole hour to finally get close. It was almost 2am and I was exhausted. There were a few others there, Matt Weighman's sled was one, plus I knew Jon and Tom were there somewhere making use of an open cabin. I felt very loud and annoying crunching around on the snow-so rather than trying to find the warm cabin I just tore my sled open and made my bivvy as fast as possible so not to disturb the racers sleeping nearby.

#### Day Four-Cougland Lake Bivvy to Ken Lake CP (40km/24miles)

My plan was to sleep until it was light out, since I'd had such a late night, but when Jon and Tom woke me up to see if I was okay I bolted up out of my bag and realized the sun was shining bright and it was 1030am! Thankfully the guys woke me up, otherwise I'd have slept until noon I am sure. They were on their way but said the sauna building they slept in was still warm. I rolled up my bivvy in a rush-it was quite chilly even with the sun. Overnight it was reported later to have been in the lower -30's and possibly even into the -40's in the low lying areas. My shoes were frozen so I ran to the sauna in my booties and was pleasantly greeted by the warm building. I propped up my shoes in the wood stove which was just ashes, and they warmed up nicely. I casually dressed for the day, enjoying the moment to check my feet and change socks. The mild panic during transition time from bivvy to walking didn't affect me today.

The day of travel to Ken Lake CP was a beautiful cold day. I was constantly layering up and down, and attempts to have a nice break sitting on the sled were shortened by the chill that set in as soon as I stopped moving. Jim Binks caught up to me today too, he'd left Braeburn at 4am or so and was doing the 70km day in one shot. I had considered doing this as well, but because I was having trouble sleeping at Braeburn it seemed better to get moving. This just goes to show no one method is any more right than another-we all do something a bit different but end up in similar places at similar times. I had a glorious sleep in, totally worth the fact I felt a bit behind on my schedule, though I was still ahead of my 2015 time. Jim looked strong and as a man of few words, only commented on the fact it was a nice day but chilly. I caught up with Jon and Tom about 10km from Ken Lake CP. They seemed to be in the low part of their day, which seemed about right on schedule for most of us. The last 10km are hard, it's dark, cold, and you just want to be there instead of having to put the effort into walking. But nothing gets you anywhere except for moving forward on your own power-even if it's slow. I assured them the CP was 10km away, and almost all lake travel, maybe one or two little forested sections. I left them



behind with their painkillers and music earbuds, telling them that if they just get to Carmacks they will feel so much better after a proper indoor rest there.

Ken Lake was where I remembered it to be. Rounded the corner on the lake and there it was on the left hand side, complete with the super steep climb to get up on the shore where the cabin is located. I struggled up the hill, sliding back several times and swearing a bit, glad no one was watching from above or below. I pulled up beside the wall tent with the other sleds strewn about as Bernard, the owner of the cabin and CP manager, came out to greet me. I was fully covered with my fleece balaclava at this point, so I told him who I was and that I'd be inside in a minute. Athletes are allowed in the wall tent to warm up, dry some gear and hang out to eat a meal and socialize, but sleeping at Ken Lake is outside, no one is allowed in the cabin unless you've scratched. There were some athletes who were just leaving, Matt W, Scott Smith, Aussie Joel, and some others I've forgotten. The Italian 300 team couple was there, and the man was scratching due to injury. His wife, Laura, decided to continue the 300 mile race without him which I am happy to have encouraged her to do so. She asked me if I thought it was okay for a woman to go and do it alone. "Of course!" I said. She went on to finish the 300 as one of four finishers, and the only woman this year. Another girl power win. Jon and Tom arrived shortly after me, deciding to sleep there as well. It felt like a regular CP party by this time. Bernard had for us two slices of bread with butter, and an orange as an appetizer. The orange tasted so good! Turkey stew was the main meal, which went down fast. I hung out in the tent for a bit, Bernard checked my feet which were fine, no blisters and dry (trench foot was a problem this year for some, from sweating too much). After hanging my damp gear and setting up my bivvy I asked Bernard for a 3am wake up call since I was having trouble waking up on my own it seemed. I slept well once I got over the snoring guy near me, and ended up waking up a bit earlier than planned.

#### Day Five-Ken Lake CP-Carmacks CP-53km/31.5 miles

I was up around 2am, packed up and filled my thermoses and had a nice, real cup of coffee (Thanks, Bernard!) in the wall tent, then made one Nescafé to go. I felt pretty good, my one foot was still a bit sore which was worrying me off and on, but a painkiller before setting out seemed to do the trick as much as I hate taking them. My upper back between my shoulders was also bothering me most days, with the tension of pulling a sled and using poles in the cold kept me tense.

The night was beautiful, calm and cold. Crossing Mandana Lake was familiar, but as always, longer than I remembered. No northern nights this night. I hit the far shore after a long dark morning, and climbed up into the forest, a long section of trail with a burnt forest that occasionally overlooked the Yukon River, and then later in the day the trail dropped onto the river and followed it off and on all the way to Carmacks. This section is annoyingly hilly and never ending. I passed Scott Smith in the morning taking down his bivvy spot, and we leap frogged most of the way into Carmacks. As well as Jim Binks and Jon and Tom. I walked the last 5km into Carmacks with Jon and Tom, who were desperately over the whole thing. I swore I'd have bet money on them pulling the pin in Carmacks, you have to really want to do this race, and it seemed like they'd lost the desire. I told them it gets better, and the thing I always tell people now is to sleep before you scratch. Sleeping makes most things better, especially the mind. I told them Pelly Farms is amazing, and they should at least get to there, and then beyond

Pelly Farms is really the best part of the whole route. I quite enjoyed their company so I was hoping they would stick it out.

Carmacks as always is a welcoming CP. We can bring our sleds right inside and dry everything and re pack and organize-my favorite things to do! It felt like a busy place-Robert P was there greeting athletes arriving and ensuring we all made it in within the cutoff time of 1030pm. I arrived 530pm, so I was well within the cutoff this year, what a relief! The research team, Mathias and Adriane were there to greet us (Tom was in the study as well), and help with our gear and be moral support. Once I felt organized, I filled out the research questionnaire, socialized a bit with volunteers, and then ate my meal of mashed potatoes, veggies and beef, and a bun. I chatted with Thilo and Yann as I ate and picked raisins out of the cookie. I also had cell service here, so I talked to my husband, Brad on the phone which is always motivational. Brad is as supportive as I can possibly ask for, considering the time, effort and money these adventure races take. I also spent a bit of time on social media for some updates. By the time I was ready to sleep and get hooked up to the sleep monitor it was almost 9pm. Hours go by at a CP if your not careful. I tossed and turned to try and sleep, but it was hot and everyone was snoring, plus some kids were running around screaming at 11pm. I finally fell asleep and slept past my intended wake up time of midnight.

#### Day Six-Carmacks CP-McCabe CP-64.5km/38.4miles

It was 130am when I woke, and I gave Scott Smith a nudge as he wanted to walk together to McCabe today, a 65km day. He said he only had 2 hours of sleep, and seemed pretty tired. I was as well. Sleeping inside after 5 days outside in -20 to -40 made my feet and legs swollen, and my face was puffy and red in the mirror. I slept with my legs elevated on a chair, but I did not find relief until stepping back outside into the cool night air. The chance to dry gear out inside is time well spent, but getting out of a checkpoint is important before being lulled into thoughts of scratching and just staying where it is comfortable. I was frustrated this morning with Scott (sorry mate!). I was ready to go within an hour of waking up, including the time taken for the research team (blood tests, body composition test, weight, anti-oxidant test, and a small questionnaire), and was still waiting for him to gather his thoughts and belongings. I told myself to be patient and that leaving an hour later wasn't going to change things, but my experience from previous years jumped into my head and reminded me that the stretch from Carmacks to McCabe was mentally hardest bit of the trail for me. Maybe I have done it to myself, the stubborn side of me refusing to enjoy this section, but having read other reports I know that today is a hard one for most. I wanted as much daylight on the tail end of the day as possible and the longer we fuffed about in Carmacks the darker the tunnel of doom would be later on.

We finally got going around 330am. The trail leaves Carmacks on the river at first and then on the Free Gold Road for about 25km. Nice, wide, open road, and usually packed quite well which it was for us, thankfully. It was hillier than I remembered but we both seemed to have some steam and charged the hills, maintaining quite a good pace for the first few hours. Daylight was coming. We chatted a bit and tried to learn some things about each other but it's hard to hear over the sled and crunching footsteps. We did manage to start the basis of a trail friendship, and I learned quickly that Scott can talk and talk if you let him. One of our breaks, the longer break at the end of the free Gold Road section, Scott was on a roll talking about being a military turned personal trainer guy, and chastising me for not being a post workout stretcher, while I stood there hopping from one foot to the other trying to stay warm and hint at maybe making a move on. We started moving again and the trail left the road and headed towards the Yukon River



through a winter wonderland tree tunnel which eventually wound downhill to Yukon Crossing, 35km into the day. Just over halfway to McCabe now. Joe Bishop was there to take some photos of us walking by the historic site. We crossed the jumble ice section which wasn't as bad as previous years, but I could feel the rest of the day caving in on me already. With a few more hours of daylight the next 15km went by alright, in and out of river sections and forests. Sure enough, I'd arrived at the point in the day where I just want it to end. Sun setting, knowing we'd be arriving in the dark, later than I wanted to, my mood turned dark and I no longer could keep up to Scott's pace or match his cheery exclamations which were even more cheery with the dang Scottish accent. I tried to tell him to just go without me as I kept falling back and he'd wait and ask me if I was okay. Of course I'm friggin' ok man, I'm moving, I'm just over the day, I hate this section, it's the literal tunnel of doom, two straight treed stretches separated by a section of river. The second one is an island, and I swear it's a 10km straight line to end the day, plus a meandering weird 1-2km twisting through the river marshes to get to the right side of the river where McCabe is located. Glenn and Spencer drove by on their sleds and we had a short chat and I admitted how low I felt. I watched them drive away...forever. Lighting up the walls of trees on either side. Oh man this meant the straight away just kept going and going. I moped and sulked along, glaring at Scott up ahead, probably whistling and wondering why I was dragging my ass. He was in a low as well he said later, I just built it up in my mind that he was skipping along. My trail angel Julie had walked out earlier and wrote distances in the snow beside the trail. The first one was 6km to go, and she counted down all the way to 1km. Longest 6km of my freaking life. I swear I was walking 2km an hour, so tired, hungry and ready to lay down. After an agonizing hour or more the final couple km twisted their way into McCabe which up until the last second before seeing the lights you're wondering where the hell this CP is. It feels like a sick joke, like someone is going to pop out and say, sorry, no CP! Go onto Pelly, good bye! But then it appears, and like YAU magic that desperate voice is turned off and all I feel is gratitude towards the volunteers and the warm building with chairs and places to eat and sleep. We arrived around 830pm. Scott tried to joke with me about eating my cinnamon bun appetizer and I told him to leave me alone. I was not in the mood for jokes or deciphering his thick accent for the rest of the night. We ate our buns, then lasagne, which Scott also wanted to take from me as he had to wait for his in the microwave. I talked to Trish and Sarah, who are both on the medical team and both lovely. Trish especially was very expressive of her girl power pride, and I felt myself draw extra strength from her throughout the race.

McCabe is a CP everyone whispers at. It's a small shed. People are sleeping all over the floor in various stages of their rest. Some just went to sleep, some awakening and getting ready to set off. I took a spot in the corner and set up my bed, setting my alarm for around 2am. I saw Aussie Scott beside me, with his ankle elevated and iced, suffering from tendonitis and swelling, a typical injury seen after pushing it too hard in those first few days. It's too easy to get caught up in the race and forget what 19 hour moving days can do to your body even when well trained. I'm not sure if he pushed too hard, just speculation. I told Scott Smith what time I was getting up and leaving and imagined he would be doing a similar timing but I needed a day of my own pace. I was so glad to have the company on such a long hard day-but tomorrow was a shorter day and I was tired of trying to match pace with him. I slept like a rock, a dead, heavy swollen rock, if it's possibly for a rock to be dead.

Day Seven-McCabe to Pelly Crossing-44.5km/28miles

The Montane team, Tom and Jon had arrived in the early morning hours to McCabe, as well as the rest of the back of the packers, Jim Binks, German Uwe (his wife had scratched in the early

days and he continued on solo), Kiwi Marcello. Tom took my corner spot when I woke up at 230am (ish). Scott was up as well, and we both had coffee, filled our thermoses and enjoyed a tiny brownie. I could have eaten three! I was quick to be ready, so left the CP before Scott, expecting to be overtaken within a short time. He must've fuffed a bit, and travelled slow in the dark, as it wasn't until 5 hours later that he passed me.

I left McCabe and followed the familiar driveway out towards the highway and crossed the creek that flows underneath the highway. Sometimes this creek has scary overflow and barely any room to duck through, but this year was hard frozen and lots of head space. The next 10km follows the powerline trail, dead straight, slightly rolling and a nice way to ease into the day. A straight stretch at the beginning of the day is much much easier on the mind than at the end of the day. The Minto tower could be seen as a red light beacon up in the hills and it slowly faded into the background over the morning. At the end of the 10km powerline is a building which must be a powerhouse of some kind. This year it was dark with a slight buzz, but two years ago it was a glowing, buzzing thing in the distance that confused me. What was this thing in the middle of nowhere. It really seemed like an alien ship parked there waiting for my arrival. So this year I was expecting it, but it still surprised me because it wasn't lit up this time, so it snuck up on me and appeared in the darkness. I'd mentally planned to have a coffee break next to it as a goal, but changed my mind and kept trucking along. I felt pretty good this morning after such a good sleep, my body didn't hurt (maybe it was the Motrin), and I was making good distance and pace. After the powerline, the trail goes into the willows and low lying ground near the highway. Near enough to hear the big trucks motoring by, but far enough that there was no chance of bushwhacking and making it to the highway very quickly if you wanted to for some reason. Plus the overflow in this area can be very bad-although this year there was none on the trail! It was all frozen which absolutely delighted me more than I thought possible. What a time saver to not stop and stare at overflow, put on overboots and gingerly make your way across, take boots off and then keep going. Mentally, it's nicer to not have to change pace or wonder if it's worth keeping the boots on in case there's more overflow around the next corner. The morning travel before the sun came up was mild and pleasant with the full moon. The moon became one of my favorite aspects of the YAU this year. This day seven (Feb 11) was the full moon, so I knew even the days afterwards would have moonlight if they were clear. I relished in the glow of the moon and was thankful that each night the landscape could still be seen and a sense of movement was always present.

I had two breaks, one fairly quick one, a coffee/sitting the sled and a snack, and then once the sun had risen a bit I had a more substantial break. Again, sitting on the sled with a coffee, and also a bathroom break, hoping that Scott wouldn't come around the corner with the worst timing imaginable. He didn't, but it wasn't long after that he did come along by. I was almost through the willow section and close to the upcoming lakes when he came up behind me. Obviously he was traveling faster, so I let him go by as we exchanged a good morning, seemed we were both feeling good as he remarked on how well he had slept at McCabe as well. After a bad night at Carmacks I'm glad he was able to really sleep.

The lakes en route to Pelly Crossing are a nice break from the willows and the trees from the previous couple days, as the 'Ken Lake days' are a distant memory by now. I knew I'd get to Pelly Crossing in the daylight so felt relaxed and enjoyed my time. Just as I was dropping onto one of the lakes I spotted two snowmobiles, Glenn and Spencer! Yay! And, someone on the back who looked very excited to see me. It was Julie! She hopped off the machine and we had a nice hug, I hadn't seen her since Braeburn, even though she'd done a shift at McCabe since, it



was before I arrived there. I made sure to thank her for the nice distance markers into McCabe and told her what a hell of a day that was, again, as usual. Glenn and Spencer said a quick hello and I enjoyed our reunion on the trail. They are always a high point in my day. They were heading back towards Yukon Crossing to pick up Quest markers. Oh how good I felt to know I wasn't the last person getting the markers picked up behind me.

Julie had walked out from Pelly to meet me, and lucked out with the snowmobile ride, otherwise it would have been much longer until we saw each other on the trail. We were now 17km from Pelly, which sounded close and easy. But it's never easy. The first 10km went by quickly, with our chatting and gossiping the entertainment factor was high. I feel very lucky to have met Julie during the 2015 YAU, another woman who is obviously tough and able to take care of herself, who actually wants to do something this challenging. We get along well, and possibly will be back in 2019 for the 430, either together, as a team, or me volunteering, and then try the 350 ITI in March right after the YAU. My goal of the 1000 mile ITI faded during this last YAU in my low points. I wondered why I would want to do 1000 miles when 430 seemed like more than enough. But now those feelings have faded, leaving me with the 'what next' thoughts, and the 1000 mile is still on my list. On bike? On foot? Not sure.

Julie and I had a couple nice breaks like old times on the 430 and the 300 mile races. I realized on this race I had been taking far fewer and shorter breaks than in the past. I shared some deer jerky that she likes a lot as she remarked on how much sugar she'd eaten lately, one of the drawbacks of volunteering is the long days and sugar fixes to stay awake. A couple snowmobiles went by, not associated with the race, and shortly after that I was looking down and noticed wolf tracks. Fresh! We admired them and kept going, and came across a note in the snow that said "wolf" with an arrow pointing to the forest. We decided Scott must have seen a wolf here, likely the same one whose tracks we were on. A few minutes later I asked Julie if she smelled something bad, and she was wondering if it was her buff, at the same time I was wondering if it was me! I smelled bad, but it was different. It smelled like wet dog we decided, so the wolf must've been close, or very stinky. We didn't get to see it though.

About 5 or 6km out of Pelly I started spiraling into my usual 'where the f\*\*k is the CP' mindset. The trail was also quite choppy from the skidoo traffic and my sled was pushing and pulling me every step, sapping energy. Even with Julie there I became grumpy and tired. She said she'd put a 3km marker in the snow, which turned out to be 2km thankfully, as 3km at that point just seemed like too far. It had only been a 48ish km day, short and 'sweet'. But the mind is set for a certain amount of time/expectation and mine was done with the trail for the day, even at this mid afternoon daylight. It had also started snowing, so the fresh snow meant a bit slower going as well. We finally dropped into the town, and followed the highway for a bit until turning down the street towards the rec center. I apologized for my attitude, and perked up at the thought of the meal, people, sleep, and chance to dry gear again. Mathias and Adriane were there to take some pictures and walk us into the CP. Adriane's hands were freezing, and she started to comment and then realized how silly it sounded after I had spent so many days outside in the cold. I laughed and said cold hands are cold hands no matter what. Just a few weeks earlier I thought I was going to turn into an ice cube at -4C while cross country skiing with kids as the pace was so slow. I was a frozen popsicle and the kid skiing beside me was groaning about being too hot.

The Pelly Crossing CP is another indoor stopover. My pulk was brought inside and Adriane had whipped my outer layers and anything damp away to dry. I relaxed and visited with whoever

was milling around. Matt Weighman who was always leaving when I was arriving was getting ready to go. The 300 milers were on their way to the farm already, so I would get to see them tomorrow when they were on their way back to their finish. Scott was there, Uwe was there with his wife Magdalena who was volunteering now, and the guys, Jon and Tom arrived shortly after I did, although I think I was sleeping by the time they rolled in. My memory is getting fuzzy now that it's been a couple weeks. I brushed my teeth and used a real bathroom. I decided in Carmacks not to have a shower, so I was going on a week with no shower, it sort of wrecks the focus for me like it is cleansing the mental strength out of me, weird I know.

I slept like a rock again, after a rice and turkey meal with a cookie. One bad dream that was so vivid I can't forget the feeling. I was being pulled by a force so strong that it felt like my body was going to turn inside out, a swirling vortex sucking me into a world I didn't want to be in as I hung on for dear life to a railing with my hands and arms stretched out. I woke with a start and saw it was 9pm or so. I'd wanted to sleep until 11pm. I went back to sleep and accidentally slept until 130am or so. Dammit. Slept in again. I went through the medical stuff with Mathias and Adriane which is about half hour of stuff, packed my gear up and was pleasantly (and selfishly) happy to see Scott had slept in as well. Uwe was just getting ready to go, and the Montane guys were just getting up as I was gearing up to head outside. This made me happier than I care to admit. Not being last felt good this year, and I was hoping to maintain my position. I knew Jim and Marcello were still sleeping as well, so that was a whole bunch of guys behind me at the moment.

#### Day Eight-Pelly Crossing to Pelly Farms-50.5km/30miles

I think it was around 3am when I finally set off for Pelly Farms. It was snowing hard and the fresh snow on the ground was upsetting. The nice, wide, clear driveway to the farm would be a slog. Darn. And what a slog it was. The high points were seeing the 300 racers, Steve Hayes, then Stefan, and Laura en route to the finish line. Steve had a massive lead but apparently was struggling with the last leg, and after reading his race report it seemed mostly due to boredom. I



wasn't jealous of the 300 guys, after having done it last year I knew the out and back was a killer. 51km to the farm, then turn around and head back the same 51km. It sucks. I'd rather continue on for the extra 165 miles to Dawson than do that last 32 miles backwards. I knew the day would get better, the sun would come up to reveal the beautiful poplar and aspen stands alongside the road, covered in fresh snow and shimmering. The snow machines would come along and maybe pack it down a bit, plus with each person I saw meant there was some semblance of a track to follow. Glenn and Spencer did come along mid-morning so it was nice to see them and chat. The trail was easier going with the pulk now, I didn't have to pull it downhill, but still soft underfoot and slow. It wasn't until much later when I was already on the long downhill section to the farm, about the last 10km, when Robert, Diane, Trish and Sarah

pulled up in their gangster SUV looking warm and comfy. We had a nice chat, I always like to see them, plus the vehicle tracks packed the driveway down much better and made the going easier. I was closer than I thought to the farm and eventually popped out at the bottom and saw the fence line. 1km to go! I could see the farmhouse and wood smoke curling up into the air like a beacon. I was dreaming hard about the lasagne and a warm bed and the all encompassing generosity of Dale and Sue and everyone else helping out on the farm. Their son was there this year, along with some extra help from woofers living on the farm. I walked up and received a giant hug from Dale, and to my surprise he brought my whole pulk bag into the house for me to sort my gear. What a place. I walked in and was overwhelmed by the number of people there.



Many of them were volunteers who were just about to leave with Robert back to Pelly, who would then be back with some others including Julie. I said hello and good bye to the ones leaving and sat down to relax and enjoy the lasagne and as much food as I could reach. This included several muffins, some bread, many salted crackers, a delicious apple and some left over trail mix from other competitors. The final 300 competitor arrived as I was relaxing with food. His name is Borja. I felt for him, he had no time to relax, he ate his food and didn't even take his shoes off and he was out the door heading back to Pelly Crossing in order to make the cutoff time which he did just fine by a couple hours. I was happy to know I was going to

settle in for a nice sleep. At 530pm I was walked over to a nearby cabin that was set up with at least 5 beds. I chose one by the window and asked for a midnight wake up call. I knew Scott was just coming into the farm, and Jon and Tom would be close behind followed by Jim. I'd heard Marcello scratched due to a wolf encounter. I felt bad for him, it must have been scary enough to throw off his race focus, but it's so rare that a wolf would cause a person harm.

Day Nine-Pelly Farms to halfway to Scroggie Creek-about 61km/36.3miles

I was thankfully woken up at midnight, or I'd still be sleeping out there in that glorious bed. Scott and the guys had come in overnight, and Scott and I found ourselves getting ready at the same time and set off together after the amazing pancake and egg breakfast and lots of coffee. Sue sent everyone off with a burrito to go which would be a second breakfast later. I regretted for days that I hadn't grabbed more food from the 'free' box-all food racers were tired of, had too much of, or scratched and left behind. I was running low on the good quick snacks, although had more than enough freeze dried food to last for days and days. I wanted more chocolate though.

The morning was slow, starting off with a sustained climb through a forested tunnel. Scott seemed to be taking his time, nursing a very sore quad muscle. We were following wolf tracks all morning. I had to keep stopping to pee, and occasionally poo, which was more frequent than usual probably due to all the food and coffee. I like traveling by myself because I can stop and go at my leisure without explaining why-Scott was surely wondering how the hell I could possibly pee so much. I started to feel very trapped by traveling with someone, even though company can be motivating. Just as it was getting light we decided to have a real break, sit down on the sleds. I ate the burrito and some other snacks, and enjoyed some coffee and hot



water and entertaining conversation which Scott is very good at. As we were sitting, Jon and Tom came charging up towards us-looking fast and strong. They stopped to have a break with us and said they were hurting like mad but figured speed was the way to do it. Not to mention they realized their flight out of Dawson was planned for Friday afternoon, and considering the race technically ends Saturday morning at 1030 they needed to finish well ahead of the cut off time to make the flight. Impressed they were still doing it, I was happy to know we'd all be out there on this section more or less near each other. It's so remote, it's comforting to know others are around.

We all cooled down quickly and decided to make a move, with the Montane team charging ahead. Scott and I traveled together for another section-but my stomach was feeling rumbling from the burrito, and Scott was behind me traveling slowly. I let him catch up so I could take a bathroom break, and we had a chat about pacing, and maybe not trying to travel together due to difference in paces. He shot ahead like a man-on-fire and I didn't see him again until the evening. I felt better after the break, and knowing I would walk at my own pace. The temperature was heating up, and during one afternoon climb I realized I had to de-layer all the way to my long johns! So I powered up the hill in the sun and in my underwear, and had a nice lunchtime break at the top. I was trying so hard not to, but I dipped into my day twelve food bag for some sweet stuff. Fruit and nut and chocolate trail mix and a chocolate energy bar. Oops! I needed to save the rest for later but it was worth it at the time. I was feeling a low energy slump and needed the sugar. The rest of the day included an interview with Yann and some photos by Joe Bishop, a visit with Glenn and Spencer, and then caught up to Tom and Jon at the base of the long 4km climb, before the trail finally descends into the valley on the other side and towards Scroggie Creek. We all arrived at the top after just over an hour, and found Uwe and Scott setting up their bivvy. It was only 530pm, but already 52km into the day. Tom and Jon decided to continue, as did I, to try and take a bigger chunk out of the distance and make tomorrow shorter. The couple km downhill from the hill summit was fast for the guys and slower for me. I wasn't comfortable riding my sled down in the dusk without contacts or glasses. They shot ahead and I was left in the dark, feeling like I should have just slept back where the other two had. I was tired and didn't want to sleep by myself. I picked up the pace to try and catch up and it took an hour at least to finally see their headlamps; it helped that they had stopped for a quick rest. I had been looking for a spot to sleep all this time, and it was only about 730pm by now, but having left the farm in the middle of the night I was feeling exhausted. Both guys were tired and in pain as well, so we traveled together looking for a bivvy spot. I was relieved to have found them, and after beating myself up for pushing on just because they were, I was now in the mindset of being glad I pushed on for I was now much closer to Scroggie and was with people again. Now the thought of sleeping way back almost 10km ago was gone and thoughts of tomorrow's shorter day was promising. I was having trouble keeping up with the guys' pace, and was eyeing up every possible spot to sleep. Finally they stopped up ahead and I stopped and saw a nice spot on the right. We talked back and forth and I said I was stopping whether they were or not, but they stopped as well just up ahead 50 meters. It was warm, maybe 0C, so I casually set up my bivvy and enjoyed the ability to reorganize my sled for the morning. I used my snowshoes to stomp down the site-the only time the whole race I used them. I climbed into my bag and was comforted with being able to hear the guys talking to each other, seeing the stars and trees above my head, and laying down to sleep with my face exposed to the warm night air.

## Day Nine-Bivvy to Scroggie Creek CP-approx 43km/25.6miles

I awoke a couple times in the night but fell back to a deep sleep each time. Best sleep on the trail! Luckily, the guys woke me up at 3am, just before they left their camp spot. I had turned off my alarm I'd set for 230am. Why was I doing that this year!? Arg. I bolted awake and said thanks for the wake up. They guys took off as I was packing up. The temperature was still warm, I packed up with bare hands casually once again, what a treat! It didn't take long, and by 323am I was off walking. The trail from here to Scroggie was almost all downhill, except for the many gullies to cross, which had overflow (frozen) and a small climb after each one to get back on the contouring trail. I experienced the most extreme tiredness of the race this morning, even after a 7 hour sleep. The warm temps made my pulk nap very effective. I wore my down jacket and sat on my sled with my head in my hands and had a solid 10 minute nap which revived me considerably and surprisingly! I traveled well all this day, and happy. I stopped to make a coffee around 11am, reheating some thermos water to make it hot with my Primus stove, and enjoyed the best tasting Nescafé instant coffee. What a pick me up! I continued on my way and was somewhere around the 35km mark for the day and stopped to change my socks for what I thought was going to be 10km to the CP. Glenn and Spencer motored up as I was changing, and made my day by telling me I was only 5km from Scroggie! Woo hoo! It was actually more like 7km, but I strode off excited to arrive at the CP so early in the day. I found Scott about 2km before the CP. He was a bit delirious and walking slow, actually laying on his sled when I walked up behind him. He looked at me and only said "Scroggie". He admitted later he was hallucinating. He only slept for 3 hours the previous night, and kept stopping to nap on his sled, getting cold each time. I told him we were close to the CP and followed him the rest of the way. Glenn, Spencer, and Robert (guide) were all outside the CP when we arrived, so I had a nice visit outside the cabin with them. I finally went into the Scroggie cabin to be greeted by Sue the medic, and the CP manager, Jessica, who wrote my name and time in on the wall, alongside all the Yukon Quest mushers and other YAU athletes. Tom, Jon, Uwe and Scott were all in the cabin now, drying gear and eating meals. I joined in and was excited to have the fruit salad appetizer Jessica put in front of me, and a hot cup of tea. The meal was Antoinette's chicken curry with a super stale bun and man was it delicious. I arranged with Jessica a time to awake, 10pm, so she could have my thermoses filled with hot water before I left. It was hard to sleep with the alternating snores coming from all four guys. I learned the next day I was snoring as well-so I must've slept a bit. Jon was very kind and said I had the quietest snore of all of them. They all sounded like chainsaws to me. It was also very very hot on the top bunk, I felt swollen and sweaty. I woke up feeling like I was in a sauna. Compared to my previous nights sleep on the trail it was quite uncomfortable. I finally decided to get up and get going, as I wasn't getting any more sleep this hot.

## Day Ten-Scroggie to Indian River CP- approx 72km/43miles

It was about 1130pm when I walked out the door and hooked up to my sled and dropped onto the Stewart River and into the night. Roughly 7km on the river, and then a long section of treed trail, and finally into the beginning of the gold fields and wide open road with mounds of snow covered tailings piles and mining equipment. The moonlight helped with the all-night travel, as well as the massive wolf tracks to keep motivated to keep moving. I also passed by a non-racer camped out on the trail, and then Jon and Tom who had left Scroggie at 930pm and were

catching a 'kip' as the Brits say. I should have done the same but I kept going with the goal of making the Black Hills climb and descent in the daylight this year. The morning came finally with the light and I had a break on my sled. Uwe caught up with me and looked and sounded very tired. I passed him again shortly after. The base of the Black Hills finally arrived around 10am. It was a familiar place to me, as I'd worked here in the summertime in 2015 for mineral exploration, as well as from the 2015 YAU 430. It was warm again, SO in my long johns once again I started up the long 2 hour push to the summit. At the top I had a break, and then down the other side. It was obviously some tough going for the competitors ahead of me, the wind drifts were significant and the foot prints were deep. For me it was easy and hard packed, so I felt a bit guilty but happy to have the firm top to walk on. The road is downhill for a ways and then back up and rolling across the ridge line. Being up here in the sun was a treat, the views incredible and motivating. It was just before the long long decent into the Indian River area when all the guys caught up with me. I was a bit discouraged and felt like had I slept for a couple hours on the trail maybe I would have been able to keep a faster pace. But now in the daylight there was no way I was going to sleep, I made the decision to just trudge it out until Indian River CP, when ever that would happen.

The downhills off of the Black Hills were prime sledding opportunities. Scott, Tom, Jon and Uwe were all faster riding their sleds than me. My sled was slow and didn't corner well, it was a lot of work to keep it going but better than walking downhill. Had a couple nice breaks with the guys, and Scott made my day by handing me a Hershey's chocolate bar to snack on. OH SUGAR! So good. I failed myself on the sugary treats this year. Deer jerky and cheese were good, nutritious energy that lasted, but I was craving the sugar rush and chocolate tastes, so Scott boosted my mood greatly with that gesture. Uwe crashed into me on a downhill section, pushing me into the powder and my mood became a bit darker. He didn't mean for that to happen, but I was still a bit pissed off and let him go ahead to avoid it happening again. I didn't see any of them until the CP after this encounter. I did see the camera crew and snowmobile guys. Had a nice chat/interview with Yann, and Glenn and Spencer informed me Indian River CP was about 11km away. It was only about 3pm, so I was happy to know I'd arrive in the daylight to a CP after such a long day. I was tired but impressed with myself and my body for making it that far in one go. I had flashbacks of the 65km day to McCabe, and suddenly it didn't seem so far. Maybe in the next race my mindset will be different, as I pushed myself farther this year on a daily basis than I expected I would and could.

Arriving at Indian River was like all others, the last few km were tough going, and since the CP was in a new location I had that heart sinking feeling I had missed the CP when it didn't arrive when I thought it would. I had caught up to Uwe and still didn't trust that it was coming up, wondering if we had both missed it. Just as I was feeling the welling up of emotion and tears Uwe said "checkpoint!" My mood dramatically changed to joy and relief, forgetting my dark mood swing instantly as thoughts of food, sleep, warmth and people filled my mind. Stuart, Yann, Adam and guide Robert were all there, as well as the Brits, plus Scott and Uwe. We were now the back of the pack. Jim Binks had scratched out of Pelly Farms due to Achilles issues, unfortunately. I was determined not to be last, as a minor but secret goal. At the CP I was able to dry my shoes and socks out, and dry a couple of my damp items and outer layers. Tobogganing the downhills was fast and fun, but gave way to wet gloves, shoes and socks, plus the warm temps contributed. Dinner was something I would have never normally eaten, Mac and cheese/potato mash with bacon and sausage bits. I don't eat pork, purely because of taste, and have never eaten bacon in my life (cue astonished gasps and exclamations of 'that can't be!' from the bacon lovers). I ate it, along with the bits of bacon I couldn't avoid, and four pieces



of bread. I was so hungry for a hot meal it didn't matter anymore. Once dinner was done and some socializing was had, Adam checked my feet which were fine. No blisters at all this race! I had preventative physio tape over my heels which worked well, and changed my socks enough to keep my feet dry enough. My shoes were all pairs I had worn in the previous two YAU's, so my system of footwear and care was working well. I found a spot to sleep outside and was fast asleep by 8pm and slept like a rock once again, with my alarm set for 3am.

#### Day Eleven-Indian River to Dawson-82.5km/49miles

I woke up at 540am. Darn it! Once again, I turned my alarm off in my sleep. I sat up and saw Uwe's bivvy still there, oh good, I thought selfishly, I'm not last to wake up. The other guys had left already, apparently around 230/3am. Well, I wasn't catching up with them today-but I could still manage to stay ahead of Uwe and place second last if I was fast enough. I felt really good, and packed up fast, waking Stuart up with much difficulty. Volunteers must sleep less than we do at times, and I felt bad waking him up but put more effort into it and eventually he woke with a start and got right to boiling water and making coffee. I was on the trail by about 7am I think, with thoughts of Dawson becoming louder and louder. I was going to make it, I wasn't going to sleep again before the finish, I was going to see King Solomon's Dome in the daylight, I was happy.

The morning came quickly after starting out in the dark, and a short bathroom break to get rid of the Mac and cheese and bacon from the night before was in order. After that I felt lighter and ready to put some miles in and kept a good pace for the morning, enjoying the sun and warm temps. I stopped for a mid morning coffee break on my sled and found my toothbrush! Oh yay! It had been since Pelly Farms for the last teeth brushing. I sat on my sled and brushed my teeth thoroughly and happily after my coffee. I set off again feeling fresh! Finally, the Dome came into view, but it wasn't until hours and hours later than I found myself at the base of the climb.

Partially due to several nice trails chats with crew. I saw Gary and Julie, then Glenn and Spencer, and had long chats with both sets. I was worried Uwe would be catching up, and was surprised when he didn't, I was sure dallying this morning. Some overflows were between me



and the Dome, and one required the Neo overboots to cross, with the water coming up to my ankles. The long climb began up the Dome, in the sunlight and hot temps that had to be above zero. The trail was softer now, and I wore my spikes to keep from slipping and it made a big difference in my climbing speed and effort. I stopped partway up for a sunny break in my

long johns and didn't even have to put a layer on for the whole 15 minute stop. The climb was long. I remember it in the darkness which was very very tough mentally, and to do it in the daylight was much better. I could at least see the trail ahead and be prepared for another uphill section, or the long traverses across the slope before another climb. Yann and Thilo were waiting at one of the switchbacks before the tower summit, and we did an interview and they filmed the switchback as well. At the top I was greeted by the two of them, and Joe. I had a coffee break in the sun and enjoyed the amazing views from the top, and the company. As I departed the guys filmed with the drone, and I funnily had to unhook myself from my sled and run back to the break spot for my lucky charm Owl, who had fallen off my sled after I took him out for a photo, and my glasses which I had also removed for a photo. My mind disappears when I get distracted by people or a change in my routine, so thankfully I realized what happened quickly enough to go back for them.

The trail then follows the long long ridge line of the dome. The hills aren't over and you can see the trail go on for miles. The late afternoon sun was making for beautiful views and colors, and



Joe followed and waited at many spots to get some great sunset and shadow photos. I enjoyed this day very much in the daylight, although had some low moments of wondering when the downhill would begin on the other side.

As the sun was setting I found the downhill! Finally. Just before it got dark I stopped and boiled some water on my stove, to eat a freeze dried meal of quinoa and rice to keep my energy levels up and get some calories and fluids in before the final push to Dawson. It was a great decision,

as I also changed my shoes to my favorite and most comfortable pair I was saving for this moment when I hit 50km for the day. They were dry and comfortably fresh and gave me the mental boost I needed to make the final 32km. I packed up my stove, drank some water, and ate/drank my meal as I walked. Joe passed by me on his skidoo on his way down after enjoying the sunset by himself up higher. As the daylight faded into darkness I turned my headlamp on and prepared myself for the long road into Dawson.

I managed to ride my sled for a couple km, but the road wasn't so steep and I found myself frustrated with trying to pole myself downhill. I ended up just fast walking. There were several sections of frozen overflow which didn't require overboots. It also got cold, very very cold. It felt in the low 20's, so after the above zero temps it sure felt like a shock! I was wearing my down vest and had my neckwarmer over my face, and hand warmers to attempt to stay warm enough. The thought of sleeping outside sent my mind into panic, it's amazing how just 10 days earlier I was warm and happy in my bivvy at -35C and now the thought of that was not pleasant, and only because my mind was now in full-on finish mode. Get to Dawson, sleep inside in a bed. No other choice. I was wondering how far to Dawson now, I had passed the Dredge #4 and couldn't remember what km it was at on the Dominion Road. 20? 14? 10? I really couldn't remember. I went with 20km to keep my mind happy. And it wasn't long after that headlights were glaring at me and I knew it was the YAU luxury sedan with hopefully Julie inside! It was! Along with Diane and Lucy and Jim Binks.

All night since the sun set were the most glorious northern lights I have ever seen. I wish it wasn't so cold and I would have stopped to admire them more. They were literally pointing towards Dawson, seemingly a rainbow of dancing green from Whitehorse direction up and over to Dawson. It was the most beautiful and inspiring way to walk into Dawson, a full 6 hours of northern lights. Jim had come out to see them, as he never had before even on all of his previous races. Julie hopped out of the SUV and we hugged, so excited to be on the home stretch and walking together once again. I was jealous of her lack of sled! Diane left us alone to drive up the road to view the northern lights and see where Uwe was.

Julie and I walked 20km together into Dawson City. It was the most wonderful way to end my race. I felt proud of myself and so happy to share some old and new memories with Julie as we walked. We were both freezing! I had to stop and layer up into my down jacket to continue on, and Julie in her down as well. Stopping brought on mild panic as I needed the body heat to stay warm enough as I tried to keep my hands warm inside my mitts with warmers. Magdalena passed by us enroute to meet up with Uwe behind me, not wearing enough clothes in my opinion! We didn't stop to converse because it was too cold, just waved. The lights of the highway into Dawson could be seen for a long time before we hit the intersection of the highway and Dominion road. The trail took a different route this year, following the Klondike River and onto the Yukon River, paralleling the dike trail into Dawson where the trail normally goes. It was a tough last mental push-but knowing it was almost over kept my mind from being angry about the change. I knew this section well as I spent a week of December training in Dawson on this part of the trail. It was going to end. Julie and I hugged again just before the finish, and I was so grateful for her support and presence this year, and all the km she spent walking with me, and with others on their way into CP's. It's such a welcome break from one's own mind to have that one on one time with a friend before the CP business.

The finish line in sight after climbing the bank onto land was a moment of relief and happiness and pride. Julie peeled off and let me walk in alone and I did a little jog and fist pump as I



arrived at the finish line, with Robert there to congratulate me and put the medal around my neck. Cameras, volunteers and racers were there as well, and the finish line victory felt sweet!



As always, I instantly feel a bit of a 'what now?' emotion, but tried to put that aside and enjoy the fact I could take my harness off for good, and feel the pride in myself for having finished a long, tough, cold race. A cup of hot tea sitting inside waiting for Uwe to come in gave some time to visit with the people who stayed awake for my finish. Aussie Joel was there with his mom, as well as the German medical team, Mathias and Adriane. I hope Joel returns to try it again. Uwe came in with Magdalena by his side and received his red lantern prize with his medal as a traditional last place finisher trophy. He came inside and sat down to a cold beer, looking happy and proud.



It was now 2am, I had finished at 1am and it was time to go to the hotel and sleep. The bed looked amazing and instead of a shower I just crawled in and slept the sleep I deserved.

### The Days After Finishing

I slept until 830am, then had a hot shower/bath, and went to do my final medical measurements. I started and ended with almost the same weight, a loss of only a couple pounds. This meant I either had a build up of water weight-as I looked a bit leaner in the mirror, or I managed my energy output and input perfectly for the 11 day duration. A little bit of both, as I weighed myself a few days later and was down a couple more pounds even after the meals and rest in the days after the race.

Dawson City was beautiful the day after finishing, and this day was spent by volunteers taking down the race banners and closing up the final CP and loading all the

finishers gear into the trailer. I packed up my gear and loaded it into the trailer, had breakfast with Julie and saw other finishers including Jon and Tom (who made their flight!) and Scott, and then walked my pulk to my sister's house in town to leave it there for her to use for the rest of the winter. After a little visit with her dog, Blue, I walked back to the hotel and found out we would be leaving for Whitehorse that day. Yay! Earlier than planned and with Robert driving I would get to hear more about his story and ask some of the questions I always had about the race beginnings and his personal life history. Pat Cooke-Rogers would also be in the vehicle, and Julie. After a delicious lunch at The Arena cafe, we all loaded up in the vehicle and started



the long drive back to Whitehorse. I loved talking to Pat about her experiences, as we had never chatted prior to this car ride, as well as chatting with Robert and spending more time with Julie.

After Braeburn I feel asleep hard and woke up in Whitehorse. Robert kindly dropped me off at my Dad's house, where I lugged my gear to the back deck and left it there to go inside and immediately go to bed, which felt like a second night in heaven.

The days following were busy, drying my gear, re packing, laundry, visiting family and friends, attending the post race dinner at the High Country and saying good bye to everyone. I flew out of Whitehorse on Sunday, Feb 19, to Kelowna, BC, and spent a night at my mum's house, then the following day she drove me to Kamloops, BC, a two hour drive. It was amazing to be home, see my dog and some family, with a visit to see my husband planned as he was now back at work for two weeks, a four hour drive from our house. The race felt like a dream now, an incredible accomplishment that felt harder than it had in 2015. It's been almost two weeks since the finish and I feel mostly recovered and have been running and walking again, although going to bed at 8pm almost every night! I'm already dreaming of future races, currently following the ITI which just started, and still checking the MYAU FB page for reports and post race discussions, suffering from withdrawal!

If you made it through my report, thanks for reading it. I'm happy to talk to anyone about the race if there's any questions about my food, gear, shoes, strategies, etc.!