

Ok, I think I'm ready now.

I was sitting in a Baden-Baden, mostly because someone told me to, trying to eat a plate of meatballs with potato salad (mainly for the same reasons as I was in the chair) and feeling very much a burden. It was mid-way into Gax 100 miles and I had been on the move for ten hours.

The day had started off well with a good night's sleep following the pre-race dinner, a decent breakfast and plenty of time to spare when I arrived at the start with my one drop bag. We were allowed three, but I can't handle all that planning so I packed one and sent it to Haväng, the 80k checkpoint.

After socializing and having a cup of coffee it was time to get ready. It was hot, sunny and what breeze there was did not do much as we left central Ystad. Time to have some fun!

Gax follows the Skåneleden SL4 (<https://www.skaneleden.se/delled/sl4-osterlen>) backwards. After we left the city we were almost immediately met with the beautiful open agricultural landscape and lush forests. Lots of views, little shade. An hour into the race I noticed that I could not keep my pulse down. It would, unless I walked, inevitably end up in zone 4. Not a sustainable situation. I started alternating jogging and walking and tried to drink more. I was alone and slow and not in a good place. A random person handing out popsicles at 33 km almost made me cry, and while enjoying the best pop of my life a kid following the race informed me that I was in 13:th place. My immediate thought was "that's not right, I've started off way too fast!" When CP1 showed up at kilometer 43 I felt an almost overwhelming relief.

The support team was absolute boss and after helping me refill water, energy and coke and stuffing me with water melon and nuts basically told me to stop loitering. So off I went.

It was 3 PM and still very hot. Sometimes there was a gust of wind, and if that happened in the shade it actually felt cool and nice. By now I also found a friend that I'd end up spending the next twelve hours with. We ran and chatted, then he'd be off in the distance; after a while I would catch up and pass him. Then we'd run together for a while. I started chafing on the inside of my thighs. Nothing catastrophic but it required application of my go-to ointment (Idomin) every now and then to stay that way. On this leg of the race the scenery is sometimes almost dreamlike. Running in a forest preserve, next to a creek with the clear water of Verkaån flowing and playing across rocks.

Up and down, up and down; one foot before the other. My pulse was high and my legs were sore, but nothing was worse than before. As the afternoon turned into night my pulse came down a bit and I was beginning to enjoy myself, even letting go and just sprinting downhill.

At eight o'clock we arrived at the halfway checkpoint at Haväng and the first thing the crew told me was "You're staying here for a while longer than everyone else. It's in your eyes."

So here I was, sitting in a Baden-Baden feeling my legs stiffen up as I ate and drank all I could while at the same time changing into long sleeves and tights. The humongous headlamp came on, fluids, gels and candy was refilled and off we went. It had taken 20 minutes but felt like half an eternity. It took 20 more for the legs to unstiffen and go back to low key complaining.

We ran on beaches now and a blood red full moon rose as darkness descended. It was very beautiful but sand is not easy to run in and it was high tide, so the choice was to either run in the water or walk on dry soft sand. I chose the former, figuring it'd be ok with sandals. It ...sort of worked, somehow. My feet dried pretty fast once we left the beach and I had no noticeable issues with sand sticking to the socks.

We ran and ran. Now two of us, now four of us. Through the beautiful town of Kivik, where all the apples are grown; up on Stenshuvud in the middle of the night with an amazing view of the coastline we were to follow.

Beaches and towns, sand and asphalt. Kilometer after kilometer of rather flat walking and jogging. 100k now, yay! Next CP at 131k. Random dude leaning on a streetlight like a drunk gave us Coke and candy bars. Only after the race did I learn that he was a fellow ultrarunner doing some spontaneous support. We kept jogging and walking, cursing sand and making up time on the asphalt.

At the end of the third leg there is an eight kilometer stretch of beach to run. We spent many chats discussing how we'd manage that hurdle. Neither wading through the loose sand or jogging down in the waves sounded like a recipe for enjoyment after over 16 hours and 120 kilometers. To our surprise and delight this beach had a wide zone of wet, packed sand above the waters edge. This gave me so much relief that I began running again. After this I never walked except when it was impossible not to do so.

Arriving at Sandhammaren I was surprised to find the leading woman sitting in a chair being miserable. I felt great! It was almost 4 AM and I had a burger for breakfast. After ten minutes everything was refilled and I left, alone. I would be alone for the final leg.

I ran and I ran. Through dark forests, open roads, into the sunrise. I walked and cursed what felt like an eternal beach of pebbles. Up the steep hills towards Ale stenar, past grazing cows and sheep. Up and down, up and down. Suddenly I saw two runners a few hills ahead. My tired mind and spent body found a purpose: The Chase!

I ran so fast! It was easy and crazy how soon I had caught up and passed those two. And then it was only 17k to go and a long stretch of road ahead. I ran and I ran, at a pace not seen since the first leg of the race. I was full of joy.

Eventually reality set in and my speed slowed down to a trot, then to a mix of trot and walks. I was in the woods, alone and sore and tired of this shit. My water was running low and I was getting nauseous from all the sweets.

With two kilometers to go something completely unthinkable happened. The two runners I left in the dust way back passed me. How the ...? I had been so fast! Like lightning! And now these two that I already had "beaten" were now back and beating me! NO. NOT TODAY. THIS WAS SUDDENLY THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN MY LIFE!

My sleep deprived mind forced my body to sprint. Actually sprint. Like a mad man I ran as fast as I could. The 161:th kilometer clocked in at 4:59. So with absolutely no dignity nor in the spirit of ultra running I finished 50 seconds ahead of the "competition." Yay me.

Once I stopped nothing could have made me run any more. My everything was sore, sitting down, standing up, laying down all hurt. Someone claimed I came in fifth place and I laughed at the ridiculous notion. After a while I asked them to look again and sure enough. Not only had I beaten every expectation I had regarding time, finishing in 21 hours and 46 minutes, but also top five?

A kind and skilled volunteer helped puncture a blister on my heel, and then I spent the rest of the day in the grass, cheering for finishers before boarding the train back home.

It's still unreal.

