Twitter Thread by Jamil Coury



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In an effort to keep myself accountable and to “build in public” as many do on Twitter, I’m going to share my training and thoughts in my build up to running the 2021 Barkley Marathons.

A thread:

1/ I’m out of shape right now.

That needs to chance quickly as the race is approximately 3 months away. If you don’t know what the Barkley Marathons is, there are some great documentaries on Amazon & YouTube you can search for.

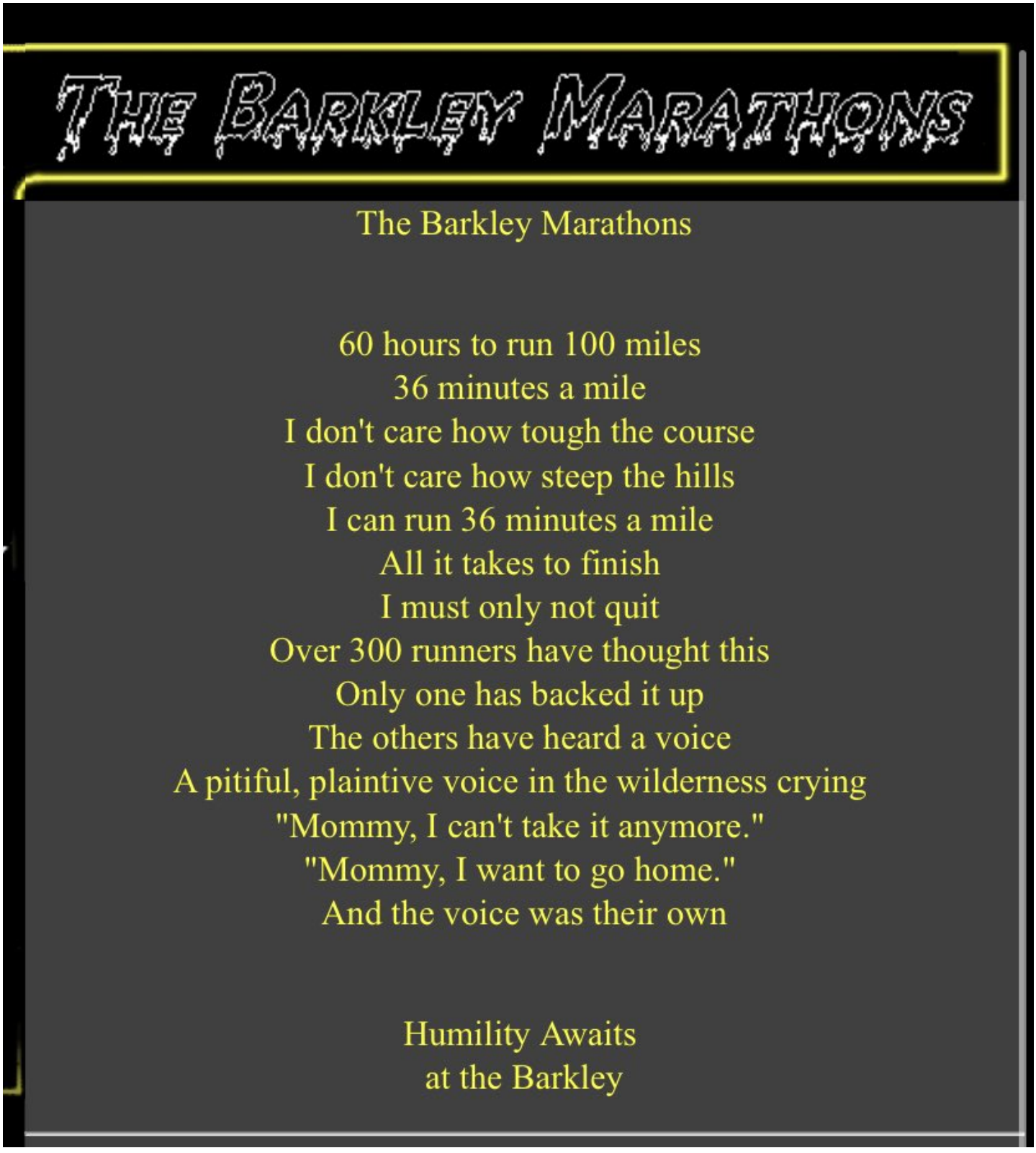
2/ Essentially it’s a 100+ mile ultra marathon held in Frozen Head State Park in TN. It is a 5 identical looped course of unmarked trails and cross country scrambles over steep terrain.

Each loop is over 25 miles in length with +14,000 feet of climb.

3/ Just 15 people have finished the full five loops in the event’s 35 year history. You have 60 hours to finish and no one has finished under 52 hours.

Most years there are no finishers.

4/ I first toed the line at the Barkley in 2014, but I first read about it in 2005 or 2006 just as I was getting into running ultras. I found the website, read this poem and immediately added the event to my bucket list:



5/ In 2007 I made my first pilgrimage to the @hardrock100 in Silverton, CO. I wasn't in the race. I just joined for course marking, trail work & hung out with the real "Hardrockers". We'd do a big day on the course then hang at course director Charlie Thorn's house.

6/ One afternoon, a group was gathered after a day on the trails chatting about Barkley. Every other person in the room had been but me. I felt it was an honor to just hear the stories - a fly on the wall to the great stories of the "Barkers".

I knew then I was destined to run.

7/ The @hardrock100 was already my dream race and is one of the toughest 100 mile ultra marathons on the planet. It climbs over 33,000 feet in total and the high point is atop the14,058 foot Handies Peak.

8/ It took years to fill out my ultra and thru hiking resume but I was finally in for the 2014 edition. The field is typically 1/2 newbies (virgins) and 1/2 veterans. Basic virgin strategy to learn the course is pick a veteran you think can't drop you and hang on for dear life.

9/ I chose @bevlikeabbs & @alanabbs which turned out to be a good choice. They had several "Fun Runs" (3 laps of the course) under their belt and knew the course well. It was horrendous rain for close to 24 hours through the first two loops.

10/ It was the hardest thing I had ever done up til that point. I was hooked. I tried to pay attention to "learn the course" but the veterans move quick and don't wait to play tour guide. The Barkley doesn't hand hold. Reality sets in quick.

11/ I'm good at navigation. At studying maps. At remembering the lay of the land. By loop 3 I was leading some of the climbs ahead of Alan. I worked alongside Alan and 5 loop finisher @lakewoodhiker to complete a 39h55m fun run - 5 minutes under cutoff.

12/ I've gone on to attempt the Barkley four more times. The next year in 2015 I was "last standing" but completed my fourth loop way over the 48 hour cutoff to start loop 5. Last year I finished my 3rd fun run.

13/ The interesting thing about the Barkley is that it evolves. The course I ran back in 2014 is easier than the most recent route. There is more cross county, more quad busting climb and more knee smashing descent now.

14/ That's what I love about the Barkley. When you finish it, it will be the hardest course there has ever been. And it's why I'm going back until I get those 5 loops.

15/ With close to 15 loops completed during the race, many more training days in the park and countless hours studying past routes, my biggest factor for success is training.

Let's go get some.

16/ You can follow my training on @Strava and I will ask share some more here periodically as well as other things I'm doing to prep for the upcoming edition.

https://t.co/4EMPjN7OrI