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## BEER RUNNER

# Blue Ridge Half Marathon report

I had no idea what to expect when my plane touched down on Thursday in Roanoke, Virginia. Who has preconceived notions about Roanoke? Not this Midwestern guy.

All I knew was that Roanoke hosted the [Blue Ridge Marathon](#), what's been labeled "the world's toughest road marathon." It was enough to scare me into trying out the half marathon before I committed to 26.2 miles of the course.

It turns out that Roanoke is an incredibly pleasant surprise. I was greeted by a city market with locally sourced foods, a downtown farmers market, a packet pick-up at an impressive museum of modern art, and an [outdoor store](#) where I tried on some Vibrams and bought running socks.

My pre-race meal consisted of shrimp and grits and fried gator bites with a [Heavy Seas Loose Cannon IPA](#) at a cajun restaurant called The Quarter. Then I grabbed another beer from local craft beer [Devil's Backbone](#) while listening to live music at a free festival called [Down by Downtown](#).

All of this was all within walking distance from each other. Well played, Roanoke.

I also didn't know what to expect from today's race. I heard that it took "an act of Congress" to host a race across the scenic byways of the [Blue Ridge Parkway](#), which is now in its third year. It was well worth it.

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I knew there was 1,600 feet of elevation gain in the half marathon — and double that for the full — but it was hard for me to conceive of that while training on the flatlands of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

It was as hard as it sounds. After the first mile, a steady ascent continued that didn't let up for three miles. Brutal.

But the payoff was not only gorgeous views, but a manic descent over the next two miles. I don't think I've ever let gravity carry me that far. Gravity was also largely responsible for a 5:40 mile downhill mile split.

After the quad-busting downhills, the course more or less leveled off for the rest of the way, including sections along the scenic greenway trails. I ran solo through most of these sections, but the enthusiastic army of volunteers kept me going with their cheers.

I've never felt so fired up at the end of the race. I sprinted the last half mile home and finished in 1:28, which was good for third place overall. I credit the pre-race beer carbo loading.

Overall, I couldn't have asked for a better race day. The weather was ideal, the field was not too big and not too small, I met fellow beer runners like David, they gave me a massage and a sausage biscuit at the finish, and afterward I could partake in the local craft beer scene.

My friend Rick and I celebrated with trips to Big Daddy Brewing Company for a sampling, and a  
 tour of the Roanoke Railhouse  
 Brewery.

I was especially impressed with Railhouse, which shares space with a tire shop and opened up in 2009 in an old Dr. Pepper bottling plant. We were treated to a small, intimate tour from brewer Jason Anderson, who moved to Roanoke with his wife from Seattle.



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JASON FROM RAILHOUSE BREWERY

When he's not brewing excellent beers like their Irish Stout and Loose Caboose imperial lager, Jason practice martial arts and rides his bike to work. He's definite beer runner material, and I hope to do an interview with him soon on this blog.

Tonight, the plan is to hang out with Starlight Bikes and watch a local criterium race, which will include beer from Devil's Backbone. I also want to check out Blue 5, which is rumored to have 47 taps of craft beer.

And now that I now what to expect from Roanoke, I plan to come back someday. I have 13.1 miles more of unfinished business at the world's toughest road marathon.

Posted on Saturday, April 21st, 2012

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## Beer Runner

Tim Cigelske is DRAFT's Beer Runner. Become a fan at <http://fb.me/thebeerrunner> and follow at <http://twitter.com/thebeerrunner> Beer Run•ner (noun): 1. Someone equally devoted to fine beer appreciation and an active, healthy lifestyle 2. A blog by Tim Cigelske on Draftmag.com. Ex. "John downed four microbrews at the triathlon finish line. He's a total beer runner."

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