

Documenting the spirit, The pursuit for self actualization on the trails of Costa Rica

Some of us find the need to put ourselves in situations that test our spirit, in a way that we cannot say no. No matter how hard we try. In Costa Rica it was no different.

In the Spring of 2010, almost a year prior to the Rainforest Run in Costa Rica, Crockett had taken out friend Jen Segger to run the Scorched Soul Ultra in Kelowna, of which he was co-race director along with Shirlee Ross. Segger, a well known endurance athlete, had wanted to run the Scorched Soul for some time. But she, who has run many ultras herself, also had another motive, she was recruiting. Segger was assembling a team to compete in the Rainforest Run. Crockett seemed to be a good fit. And for the Kelowna local it would be a great opportunity to be part of a unique team dynamic.

Segger, an accomplished adventure athlete is one of those people that have a bubbly yet mysteriously commanding demeanour, when she says something you listen – experience holds a lot of credibility in the adventure and endurance world. “Dan took me out for a run in the Kelowna area several months pre Costa Rica. After spending some time with him on the trails, learning of his past accomplishments as a runner, I just knew that this staged race would be a great new goal for him to undertake. That is when I asked him to join us for the race. He had the fire and intensity in his eyes and he is just one of those guys that you feel good when you are around... a great addition to Team Canada for Costa Rica,” mentioned Segger when asked about her desire to include Crockett on the team that would be making the trip south. Ultra runs are as much mental as they are a physical challenge. A multi day ultra is a whole different beast, so personality and inner strength have a lot to do with who will end up crossing the line.

Crockett has run a pile of marathons including the Midnight Sun Marathon in Tromso Norway, 600 miles north of the Arctic Circle and has competed in Raid the North Extreme in Kelowna two years back. So he knows the endurance world well. And like many goal driven individuals, once the understanding is there, the desire to start branching out and helping others becomes a driving force.

“Passion with Purpose” came out of my desire to use my ultra running as a Way to help kids,” mentions Crockett, explaining his simple yet focussed ‘tag-line’. “I am very passionate about trail running and it has been a very positive influence in my life.” Crockett and Ross started a not-for-profit group, RUNbyRUN, as a vehicle for raising funds for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation and organizations like Impossible2Possible.

Toeing the line in Costa Rica would be an entirely different experience. Being that this would be a first for Crockett, it would be an experiment in affirmation, of which up to then in his short running career, the question of “could I do it,” had never really been verbalized. So Crockett decided to document this first, not on paper, not as a recap, but real-time. Crockett recorded every stage of the race, through his highs and lows, affirmations and realizations. And so, armed with his Go Pro Hero HD, water bottle and runners he and his wife made the trip to Costa Rica.

If there is one thing anyone remembers about Costa Rica it’s how green the country is. The countryside is a glow with lush green vegetation segmented by bright red clay roads that snake up and over a multitude of ridges and down to crystal clear streams and rivers. Howler monkeys and toucans are easy to spot in the jungles and cattle are a familiar site on the pastures. You can lose yourself in a cloud forest or find yourself on an active volcano.

The sluggish pace of life in Costa Rica juxtaposed with the concept for the Rainforest Run which covers almost every possible terrain type, make the event truly unique. For six days, competitors would climb, descend, climb, descend, climb, descend through clay foot paths, over swollen rivers and across farm land, from Quepos to the Corcovado Rainforest. Some days would be more than 50 kilometres of running, and some would be lighter, in the range of 30 kilometres. Every day would be hot and humid. And that was true. When Crockett and his wife arrived in San Jose, the pale, cold faring Canadians were confronted with a wall of 30 degree Celsius heat and humidity. Sauna training was not going to cut it.

After a brief stay and orientation to Costa Rica, competitors gathered at the early morning start line, among a sparse collection of intrepid spectators and family. Crockett's voice, with slight nervous emotion and a definite Canadian 'eh', could be heard on camera as he documented the beginning of the journey. They would be running from Quepos to Savegre Valley for approximately 33.5 kilometres. Race directors would not disappoint in giving competitors a taste of what Costa Rica was about. The first day would see a short run on road, followed by trail for the rest of the stage through deafening jungle sounds and a crossing of the Savegre River by cable. And so, packed into the start section, under the Rainforest Run banner and bright blue skies, the 2011 version of the Rainforest Run was set into motion.

Kilometres of ridge running on single track through the Savegre Valley toward Dominical Beach was bridged with frequent squeezes through slippery, narrow clay beds, chopped and rutted from cattle. Massive down hills whose sole purpose was to shred the quads and provide enough opportunity to face-plant in the mud, were met with long periods of running solitude, where only the odd pig, cow and series of trail markers gave company. But the beauty of the countryside, the sense of individual accomplishment and the excitement of running through an unfamiliar land kept Crockett energized.

"Getting the first stage out of the way was a big deal for me," mentions Crockett after stage three. "I'm hurting...quads and calves...like everybody else. I did very well on stage two, but today was a very tough day... felt like the elevation was never ending. The Canadians are really struggling with the heat."

Day three was the longest day of running, 52.5 kilometres would take competitors from Dominical Beach to Ventannas. There was and a few more psychological kilometres tacked on for the lead pack due to an early concern that they had meandered off trail. Crockett participated in this concern.

Although tough, day three had some of the most variety yet. Relentless climbs, fast down hills, red clay single track, hard packed dirt roads and curb side concrete culverts (for feet needing a rest from loose rock and gravel), and the occasional groaning cattle always near a farm house that seemed to pop up out of nowhere.

This stage would also challenge competitors discipline for hydrating. Luckily a small town grocery store was on course. Crockett stopped for a much needed Powerade. Despite the heat and the daunting stage distance Crockett finished day three in fourth place. "I had never done a multi day race, but thought I would give it a shot because I heal up really quick," he recounts.

Likely due the combination the long days of running, the humid furnace of the Costa Rican countryside and not hydrating as much as needed, day four was a hard one for Crockett. Shortly after he made it

across the finish for the day he began collapsing from exhaustion. The race doctor had a decision to make: Let him run or pull him from the race from concerns over his wellbeing.

"Dan runs with heart," affirms Segger. "He was so passionate about the race and giving 110%, no matter how tired, exhausted, beat up and drained he was. When I watched him deal with heat exhaustion on day four, he was so determined that he was going to finish the race no matter what. He did not want to let Team Canada down and affect our overall scoring. I knew that reasoning with him to "just rest" was purely out of the question. Dan would finish."

The doctor waited until the morning of day five to make the call.

"A lot of people like to look inside...I've read a lot of reports on it and that's exactly what you're forced to do," mentions Crockett. He had finished the fifth stage of the Rainforest Run, and somewhere through the sick and uneasy feelings that one is confronted with the day after suffering from heat exhaustion Crockett managed to look inside and pull through.

"At night in camp, he kept everyone's spirits up-lifted, always finding words of encouragement to pass along to everyone," remembered Segger. But when it really comes down to it, being challenged with the real possibility of not being able to carry on physically, there is only one person that can will you to go. Somewhere between stage four and five Crockett had a look inside, a glimpse at the spirit he was testing. Regardless that he secured himself a fourth place finish overall after stage six, he had completed what he set out to do. And no matter by what means this type of accomplishment is documented, there is always one piece that is missing that cannot be reproduced.

"I just found out that I am a finalist for Male Athlete of the Year in Kelowna's Civic Awards," admits a humble Crockett, hot off the heels of the six day expedition run in Costa Rica. He was in good company, Canadian National BMX Team rider Connor McCormack and Canadian National Track and Field Champion James Turner, were also named finalists. The difference, apart from the sports they compete in: Turner and McCormack are roughly 40 years Crockett's minor.

Pura Vida.