

Why I should be allowed to run the Barkley

The reason why I should be allowed to run the Barkley is an easy one and many others have probably told you the very same reason. Simply because I am stupid enough to think that I can finish it.

As I am sure that you heard this a lot of times before, let's elaborate this a bit more. First of all I started to question what would make the Barkley so hard to finish. If you start to look around you find every time the same reasons: steep slopes and impassable things-that-are-meant-to-be-trails. Now that we know the problem we can try to solve it. I will start with the impassibility and the sawbriers that try to keep all of your skin spread along the course. Why do I think that I can handle that? In fact I know how it feels to loose major parts of your skin during a race. By example, during a race in the snow in Font-Romeu that passed through waist-deep snow fields, I learned that when the snow is covered with an icy crust is is not a good idea to run in shorts. If the crust breaks as you step on it (and it does) the shin gets hit by the sharp edge of the ice crust with every single step. It leaves a nice trace of red spots in the snow, and what's more, I loved that race. This winter I will be back toeing that start line. Unfortunately the organization does since my experience no longer allow runners to run in shorts.



My shins after running in the snow

On another occasion, during another race, I got off course in the dunes (please ignore that this is a reason why not allow me to run the Barkley). In an attempt to get back on the course I decided to run a few hundred yards straight through the bushes that turned out to be rather thorny.

Unfortunately I ran into a five yards high thorny wall which stopped my progress. As I tried to retrace my steps I got completely lost in the thorns and it took me almost an hour to get back on a trail. Even covered with scratches I managed to finish the race in second place. Two weeks afterward I was still removing a quarter inch long thorns from somewhere under my skin.

Here in Belgium we do not have sawbriers, but we do have blackberries to cut in the skin. I used to have some nice scarfs caused by running through them, but as they start to fade I was hoping to get some fresh ones in Tennessee.

Now that I hopefully convinced you that I can manage being thorn in parts, let me elaborate on the slopes. This is a slightly more tricky problem for me. As the highest point where I live is about 100 feet above sea level, training for the slopes is somewhat non-trivial. I am able to find an elevation gain of about 50 feet, so running that up and down a thousand times would give me the elevation gain and loss of Barkley. The boringness of such an attempt would make a great sleep deprivation training at the same time. However the lack of elevation at home has this far not hindered me to finish the Hardrock or to run from near sea level up a 13000' high live volcano and back during the Mount Cameroun Race or to finish the PTL with its 60000' of elevation gain and loss over 150 miles.



After running through thorny bushes

As you can read, I feel confident that I can run the Barkley. Of course it is always possible that I would have overlooked something. But there is only one way to find that out: experimental verification. Yes, that means allowing me to run the Barkley. And if this whole explanation did not convince you, I have left the probably most convincing argument to the end: allowing me to run the Barkley is the easiest way for you to get a Belgian license plate.

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