Race Report: Imogene Pass Run 2022

Race Information

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The Imogene Pass Run is a 17.1 mile mountain race between the Colorado towns of Ouray and Telluride by way of a 13,134 foot pass (climbing over 5,000 feet in the first ten miles). The first time I ran it was in 2018. I was already in training for my hometown marathon that fall, so I was in good shape and finished it in about 3h20m. I ran it again in 2019; I'd done less running since my marathon and my little sister beat me to the top of the pass that year. I had to race her all the to the finish. 3h30m. The 2020 race was canceled for Covid and I skipped 2021 because I was even further out of shape (though my sisters ran it!). I came back this September to try to beat my 2018 time.

[Imogene Pass Run Course Profile] | *profil1.gif*

Figure 1. The race with only one hill

Pre-race

The weather forecast was looking good early in the week, but by the night before the race it was calling for possible snow in the morning at the pass and thunderstorms wall afternoon. I brought a handheld water bottle, one birthday cake flavor Gu packet, a jacket, a hat, and gloves in a running vest; I did put my gloves on near the top when my hands got cold (and kept them on all the way down to protect my hands if I fell), but we ended up having another year with clear weather for the entire race! Except there was some smoke (from fires in Wyoming?) which I didn't notice but was bothering some of the runners.

I don't know my splits for my previous runs, so I wasn't sure what my strategy should be, but for whatever reason I had in mind "60 minutes to Lower Camp Bird, 90 minutes to Upper Camp Bird, 1h15m to the pass." If I managed that pace, I thought a 3h05m finish might be possible — though my real goal was just to beat my 3h20m PR.

Start to Lower Camp Bird aid station (mile 5)

I thought I started more toward the front of the crowd this year, but I got stuck in standstill traffic at the first offroad shortcut. My chip time was 18 seconds after the gun time at the start. Next time I will start even closer to the front.

But otherwise I felt great to the Lower Camp Bird aid station at about 8km. I got there in about 53 minutes; I'm sure that must

be much faster than previous years (and 7 minutes ahead of my mental schedule). I was constantly being surprised by how much *downhill* there is in the first 10K. (I think I wrote that same thing in my 2018 race report — apparently I forgot.) I grabbed a cookie at the aid station and kept going.

Beyond the aid station there was a ranger warning us that a moose kept crossing the road just ahead and told us not to yell at it. I never saw the moose, but my sister's boyfriend (who was already several minutes ahead of me) did! He said it was a huge bull; when he saw it, it was looking down at the road wanting to cross but unsure of all the runners.

Lower Camp Bird to Upper Camp Bird aid station (mile 7.6)

With the steeper sections up to Upper Camp Bird I quickly went from feeling good to feeling like my legs were very heavy. I walked much more than I wanted to, but I couldn't get myself to run even on some of the shallower grades when I thought I would be able to.

This section was a little bit discouraging; I had done more mountain running this year than in any of my previous Imogene Pass Runs, but my legs were evidently not ready for the steep hills after running hard for the first 10K. But I still made it to Upper Camp Bird in 91 minutes, still about on schedule! (I think about the same time I got there in 2018, so I already lost all my gains by running the first 10k faster.)

I got some m&ms from the food table and kept going to see how quickly I could get to the pass.

Upper Camp Bird to Imogene Pass Summit (mile 10.0)

From Upper Camp Bird to the summit was purely a hike, except at the few downhill bits. I didn't even pretend to be on a run. My lungs felt surprisingly good — the whole hike felt much easier than previous years (yay for actually training at altitude this year!). But my legs were so tired that it still took me 52 minutes to get to the pass (only a minute faster than my slow 2019 year and probably a couple of minutes slower than my 2018 run). If I was going to beat my 2018 time it would have to be by beating my previous downhill time.

At the pass I drank some electrolyte drink, ate my gu (which was not easy with my cold hands), then headed down the hill.

The Descent: Summit to Finish Line (mile 17.1)

The downhill felt much faster than I expected. In previous years I had to brake most of the first few miles; this year I just ran over the rocks. My legs felt tired, and I'm sure my form wasn't great, but I never felt like I had to slow down to avoid falling. Maybe another benefit of doing several mountain runs in preparation this year?

Unfortunately it didn't last. After about 5k I could feel my quadriceps, especially my right leg, twitch a few times and threaten to cramp. It got progressively worse. With 5k to go my right calf was also on the verge of cramping. I slowed way down in an attempt to prevent cramping and being forced to walk. I

did some calculations and knew if I could hold my current pace I would be close to my PR.

By the time I hit the streets of Telluride I tried to speed up for a final sprint and my right calf and quads immediately started to cramp. I slowed to a jog to the finish line. If it had been a few hundred meters further I might not have made it.

Disappointing because of how well the descent started. I definitely pushed my legs to the limits of what I had trained them for (and probably didn't eat enough — it's only 17 miles, but I forget that it is over 3 hours so I should treat it more like a marathon), but I still finished in 3:19:29… a new PR by a few seconds!