

Grand Canyon

July, 2006

My Mom's side of the family decided to have a reunion at the Grand Canyon, in July! Only folks born in Nevada would plan a gathering in Arizona during the heat of summer and plan a "competition" hike (I never said they were smart people)!

I was told my Uncle John (in his younger days) hiked down and up the Grand Canyon in 6 hours, I grew up on this story, my mom liked to brag about it. He's a smoker and has been since a kid. I was training for Kilimanjaro, so I decided to see if I could meet his record, I was never a smoker.

I actually didn't set out to meet his record (I had no intention of beating it, just doing what he did) but it was in the back of my mind as I quickly made my way down the canyon, leaving my family in my dust. As I trotted down the canyon, reading the warning signs not to hike down and up in one day, I seriously questioned if this was smart. But I kept going. I was at the Colorado River, refilling my Camelbak in well under 2 hours. Hmmm, this might actually be possible, but I knew the hard part was just beginning.

I created a little chant to keep me going that went something like "you can do this, just keep going, you can do this, quick-step, quick-step, you can do this..."

As I head up, I was now passing hikers that are hiking down the canyon that I already passed on my way down. I'm getting looks. I keep my head down and keep chanting to myself.

I see my family, they have already gone out to Angels Landing (their destination) and are starting to make their way back up. I am at the last major water stop before the top, I'm at 5.5 hours. I think I can seriously do this. My pace is MUCH slower now. I give my sis a few GUs (she wasn't looking so great) and asked if it was ok that I leave her and keep going, I shared I might actually make Uncle John's record. She waved her arm and simply said "Go." I went.

The last mile was not easy and although it felt like I was running, I don't think I was going much faster than a casual walk. And then I saw flip-flops. Whoo Hoooo! That means I'm getting super close to the top. The last stretch was a killer but I made it to the top is only 1 minute to spare! I was panting and smiling and wanting to give someone a very BIG hug! I was at the top, with only tourists not brave enough to venture down around me. They were probably wondering what the heck was wrong with me. But I didn't care.

The plan was to meet sis in the bar, so I slowly made my way there, buying post cars along the way. When I got to the bar, I ordered a bottle of sparkling wine in a bucket and waited for sis as I wrote postcards sharing my success.

Sis walked in, I noticed her first and called her name. She didn't hear me, although I was only about 10 feet away. She was white as a ghost and big eyed. I asked her what was wrong and she was so exhausted she could hardly speak. I asked her where the rest of the family was (I left her with several cousins and their spouses) and as she waved her arms she said "I left them, I had to leave them. It's bad." She paused and gasped for more air and added "Someone has to go for them, it's bad." I asked her to explain but she just sat down with what seemed like nothing left in her. The warning signs popped in my head. The thought of my family experiencing heat stoke and no one there to help, blasted my mind. I picked up my back, tightened my shoes and was off with a sudden burst of energy (gotta love adrenaline).

I started trotting down the trail in a very controlled way. My new chant was "safety first, safety first, don't get hurt, safety first." Before each switchback I help my breath for a moment hoping they were there and swore a bit

when I saw they were not. I was not passing the hikers that I passed going down and coming up. I'm now getting comments "Ok, now you're just showing off" one hiker puffed. I smiled and kept going without pausing a step.

I got to the first water stop (minor, not the big one I originally saw them at when I left to head up). My twin cousins and one of their spouses were huddled under a small tree for shade. I asked how they were doing, and they were surprised to see me but didn't say much and just pointed down the trail. My cousin's husband was down the trail by the water source, bent over like he was getting sick. They explained they didn't have any food for the hike, little water and someone took pity and gave him some cookies. He threw them up. He was on his way to heat stroke (my unprofessional medical opinion).

I walked over and asked him how he was doing, he gave me a bug-eyed look. I think he was surprised to see me. (Note: I think that I came back down gave me a little cred... the night before at the bar both of these husbands kept warning me how I needed to be careful in the canyon. They were talking a bit condescending considering they really didn't know my experience in the outdoors. But I let it go. I often get under-estimated and that's ok, it leaves me the element of surprise).

I got out a Gu and told him to slowly suck on it and eat all of it even if it grossed him out. He did as he was told. We spent the next hour plus slowly walking up the trail as I chatted to keep him distracted and coached him to slowly eat and drink. He obeyed diligently and when he got to the top and he was safely in someone else's care. I headed to the bar to meet sis.

She drank all of the sparkling wine. Go figure. We ordered more, nursed our sore muscles and recanted the insanely hard day.

Later that night at the reunion dinner I found out, from Uncle John himself, that he never went to the bottom of the canyon (Colorado river), just to Angles Point! He then chuckled and said that it was crazy to go to the bottom and up in one day. Hmmm, so that's how family legends are born, distorted memories.

Stats:

- 16.4 miles roundtrip
- 4,440 ft elevation gained
- 6 hours (5 hours and 59 minutes to be exact!)