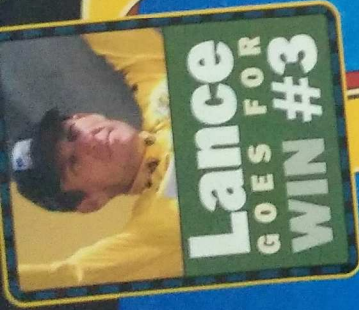


This Land Is MY Land — Now Get On!
Bill Vaughn Tells Us Why He Loves to Fear



Outside

JULY 2001 / WWW.OUTSIDEMAG.COM

Shark Wars

When the Planet's
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Predators Face Off,
Who Wins?

(Hint: Read This
One Before You Head
Out for a Swim)

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Footrace on Earth

Yuck, Y'all!

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Brave **101 miles** of rugged Rocky Mountain trail and scree, brutal cold, and the moist rattle of pulmonary edema. Endure **66,000 vertical feet** of elevation change, driving sleet, and a little **capillary leakage**.

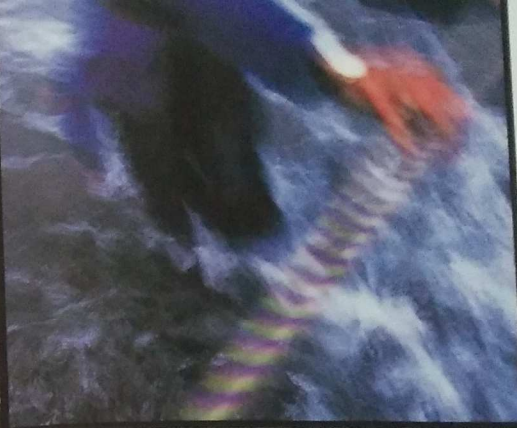
Do all this, **nonstop**, within **48 hours**, and you too can claim intimate knowledge of the **Hardrock 100**—Silverton, Colorado's idea of fun.

BY STEVE FRIEDMAN

85 MILES DOWN, 15 TO GO: Hardrocker Ken Jensen makes his way over Grant Swamp Pass after surviving the course's hardest climb, in the San Juan Mountains.



CLOSING IN: Randy Isler tops Grant Swamp Pass en route to a 12th place finish; an unidentified runner fords South Mineral Creek just two miles from the finish.



when a race official informs a racer that he or she is moving too slowly to finish within the prescribed 48 hours. Getting "timed out," whether at mile 75 or at the finish line itself, is a bitter experience. Just ask Todd Burgess, a 32-year-old newspaper-page designer from Colorado Springs. Five-foot-ten and 175 pounds, Burgess is cheerfully cognizant of his limitations and aspires only to finish and to enjoy himself along the way. So last year he snapped pictures, meandered in the wildflowers, gamboled through the old growth. But toward the end of the race, he saw that unless he hurried, he wasn't going to make it. He sprinted. He stumbled. He panicked. And when he crossed the line at 48 hours, three minutes, and 35 seconds—which means that, officially, he didn't finish at all—another racer told him, "It's gonna suck to be you for the next year."

among old-growth forest and fresh wildflowers.

It sounds cleansing. If you didn't know about the dozens of unusually fit people who every midsummer collapse into near-catatonic, weeping blobs of flesh, their faces and hands and feet swollen to grotesque balloons because entire clusters of the racers' capillaries are breaking down and leaking (more on that later), you might think the Hardrock was fun.

Apt unfolds his six-foot-one, 168-pound frame from the café's picnic bench. Broad-shouldered, long-legged, clear-eyed, and, above all, mellow, he strides out of the emptying restaurant. He won the Leadville 100 in 1995, and though he's completed six Hardrocks, he's never finished first. Maybe this will be the year. Maybe not.

Big, big smile.

"How lucky are we?" he says.

It was a cruel thing to say, but, as it turns out, somewhat prophetic. For Burgess, the last year has been one filled with doubts, fears, and horrific training sessions—12-hour runs and 50-mile practice races and Sunday-morning sleep-deprivation workouts. While it *has* sucked to be him, it would suck more to be timed out again this year.

It's been said that recovering alcoholics and bulimics and drug addicts are disproportionately represented among Hardrockers, which is tough to confirm, but it makes sense if you consider that addictive tendencies and compulsive behavior would come in handy with the training regimen. It's also been said that full-time Silvertonians tend toward the same kind of ornery optimism and obsessive, clannish, and sometimes perversely mellow brand of masochism exhibited by many of the racers. That's equally difficult to nail down, but having spent the better part of two winters here, I can vouch for the general soundness of the theory. It's no surprise that Silvertonians and Hardrockers tend to get along.

A few dozen townspeople have awakened early this morning to see the racers off, partly because three Silvertonians are entered, including one of the Hardrock's most popular hard-luck cases, 52-year-old Carolyn Erdman, who has tried and failed three times to finish. Also at the starting line is the only Silvertonian ever to complete a Hardrock, Chris Nute. Nute, 33, will be pacing Erdman the second half of the race. He is not entered this year largely because of his wife, Jodi, 30, who is with him for the start and whom no one has ever accused of being mellow, especially when it comes to the Hardrock.

The year Chris Nute ran the Hardrock "was the only time I ever thought we might get a divorce," Jodi says. "I couldn't understand wanting to do that. The training time sucked. And it made me feel out of shape. It totally gave me a fat complex. I had a [terrifying] vision of

FIVE MINUTES BEFORE SIX, the sun still not up, the competitors are turning in small circles on the gravel road outside Silverton Public School, taking in the surrounding peaks, scanning the distance for answers to questions most people never even consider. "Will I be hospitalized before sunset?" for example. They will spend the next day and at least one sleepless night in the deepest backcountry, almost constantly above 10,000 feet, climbing, sliding, wading, hiking, staggering, limping, and occasionally running. (Unlike other 100-mile racers, the fastest and most fit of the Hardrockers will jog no more than 60 percent of the course.) They will face five mountain passes of at least 13,000 feet and one 14,000-foot peak. Those who complete the loop will climb and descend 66,000 feet (more than would be involved in climbing and descending Mount Everest from sea level, as the race

organizers like to point out). A large number of racers will vomit at least once. One or two might turn white and pass out. The slower runners will almost certainly hallucinate.

One of the most horrifying Hardrock visions is often all too real. It occurs

THE FIRST TIME HE TRIED IT, the vomiting started after 67 miles, and it didn't stop until six hours later. The last time, his quadriceps cramped at mile 75, so he hobbled the last quarter of the course. But Kirk Apt is a resilient, optimistic, obsessive—some might say weird—man who describes experiences like being trapped on an exposed peak during a lightning storm as "interesting," and that is why he's here, in Silverton, Colorado, cheerfully tucking in to a plate of pancakes, eggs, and bacon at 4 AM, discoursing on the nature of fun while he prepares to take on, yet again, the most punishing 100-mile footrace in the world.

It's called the Hardrock Hundred Endurance Run, even though it's actually 101.7 miles long, and is known to the small and strange band of people who have attempted it as the Hardrock 100. Or, simply, the Hardrock. In 1992, the first year of the race, just 18 of 42 entrants finished. Today, nearly half of the 118 men and women who set off into the mountains will quit or be told to stop. Based on medical opinion, history, and statistical probabilities, death for one or two of them is not out of the question.

Apt could not look more pleased. "Enjoy yourself," he says to a fellow racer, a man staring fearfully at a strip of bacon. "Have fun," he blithely exhorts another, a pale woman clutching a cup of coffee, clenching and unclenching her jaw. Apt says "have fun" frequently enough to sound creepy. Even among other Hardrockers—many of them sinewy scientists from New Mexico's Los Alamos

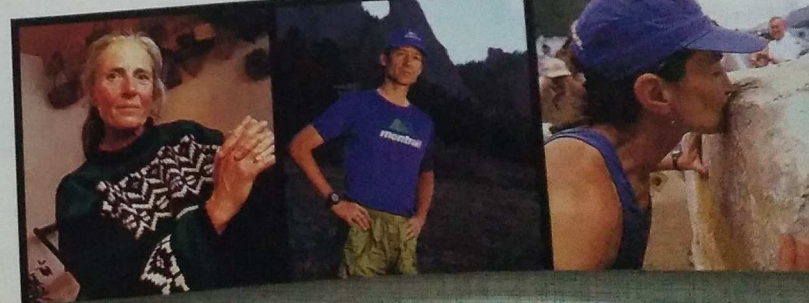
National Laboratory who tend to describe themselves with staggering inaccuracy as "mellow"—the 39-year-old massage therapist from Crested Butte, Colorado, is known as Mr. Mellow.

It's race day, the first Friday after the Fourth of July (the 2001 Hardrock will start on July 13), and Mr. Mellow is working over his pancakes at a worn wooden picnic table inside a café hunkered at the northern end of the only paved road in town. Silverton, population 440, is encircled by peaks, nestled at 9,305 feet in a lush mountain valley in the southern San Juans, at least an hour by way of the most avalanche-prone highway in North America from fresh vegetables, a movie theater, or a working cell phone. If you didn't know about the 15 feet of snow that falls here every winter, or the unemployment rate that's four times the state average, or the knots of bitter, beery ex-miners who gather at The Miner's Tavern toward the southern end of the paved road most every night to slurrily curse the environmentalists they blame for shutting down the mines and trying to ban snowmobiles downtown, you might think that Silverton was quaint.

Outside, the sky is a riot of stars, the air clean and cold and so thin it makes you gasp. Inside the café, it's warm and cozy, a perfect place for Mellow to break bread with Terrified.

"The most important thing about the race," Apt says, "is to remember to make sure to enjoy yourself." Yes, there can be crippling cramps and hair-raising lightning bolts—big smile—but there are also remote, deserted vistas, long and lonely treks up mountains and across ridgelines, precious hours spent alone

PAIN IS THEIR FRIEND: Carolyn Erdman, left, tried the race for a fourth time in 2000; Kirk Apt completed six Hardrock 100s prior to 2000 but had never won; Sue Johnston kisses the rock (a tradition) after finishing first among women.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ANDREW COUGILL/AUROORA; WHIT RICHARDSON; JEFF STINE (2); WHIT RICHARDSON

the future: that I was going to be married to an ultrarunner."

Dawn. Race director Dale Garland yells, "Go!" and about 50 Hardrock volunteers and spouses and Silvertonians watch as Apt, Burgess, Erdman, and their fellow racers jog and walk down a gravel road, turn southeast, and then head into the mountains—and toward the cold and dark and pain.

SOME 100-MILE RACES ARE more famous. Many are more popular. Most have more corporate sponsors. None approach the Hardrock's brutality.

"This is a dangerous course!" warns the Hardrock manual, a fantastic compendium of arcane statistics, numbingly detailed course descriptions, grave warnings, and chilling understatement. When it comes to the temptation to scale peaks during storms, for instance, the manual advises, "You can hunker down in a valley for 2 to 4 hours and still finish; but if you get fried by lightning your running career may end on the spot."

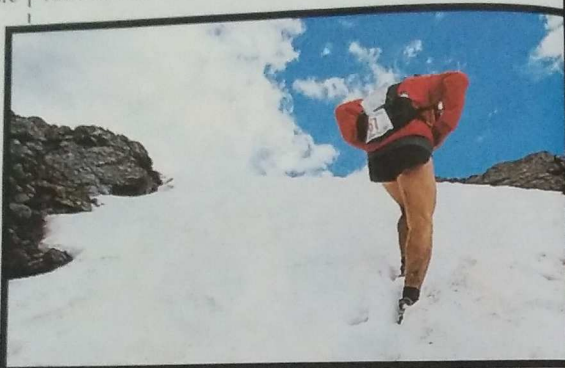
Though a 44-year-old runner with a history of high blood pressure, Joel Zucker, died of a brain aneurysm on his way to the airport after completing the race in 1998, no one has perished during a Hardrock. But, according to the manual, "It is our general opinion that the first fatality... will be either from hypothermia or lightning!" (A Hardrock-manual exclamation point is rare as a Sasquatch sighting; one suspects typographical error, grim subject matter notwithstanding.)

"There's a reasonable chance somebody could die," says Tyler Curiel, 45, a Dallas-based doctor specializing in infectious disease and oncology who's run eleven 100-milers and "50 or 60" ultras (any race longer than 26.2 miles). "I've fallen into ice-cold water, almost been swept away by a waterfall, walked six hours alone at high elevations in boulder fields," he says of his Hardrock experiences. "Had I sprained an ankle then, I might have been dead. I almost walked off a 2,000-foot cliff in the middle of the night once. Two more steps, and I would have been dead for sure. And I'm fairly competent. So, yeah, there's a reasonable chance."

By late afternoon, after ten hours of climbing and sliding and "EXPOSURE" (the manual lists dehydration, fatigue and vomiting as "minor problems," so racers tend to take capitalized nouns seriously), the fittest and most fit of participants are a good five hours from being halfway finished. At this juncture—the fifth of 13 aid stations, Grouse Gulch, mile 42.4—one would expect the

appropriate emotion to be grim determination. So it comes as something of a shock to onlookers when a slender young man named Jonathan Worswick skips through a light rain, down a narrow, switchbacking trail, and across a stream into Grouse Gulch at 4:27 PM. He is smiling. The 38-year-old runner from England is on pace for a course record.

The Hardrock old hands are unimpressed. These are retired runners, longtime observers of ultrarunning, in demeanor and

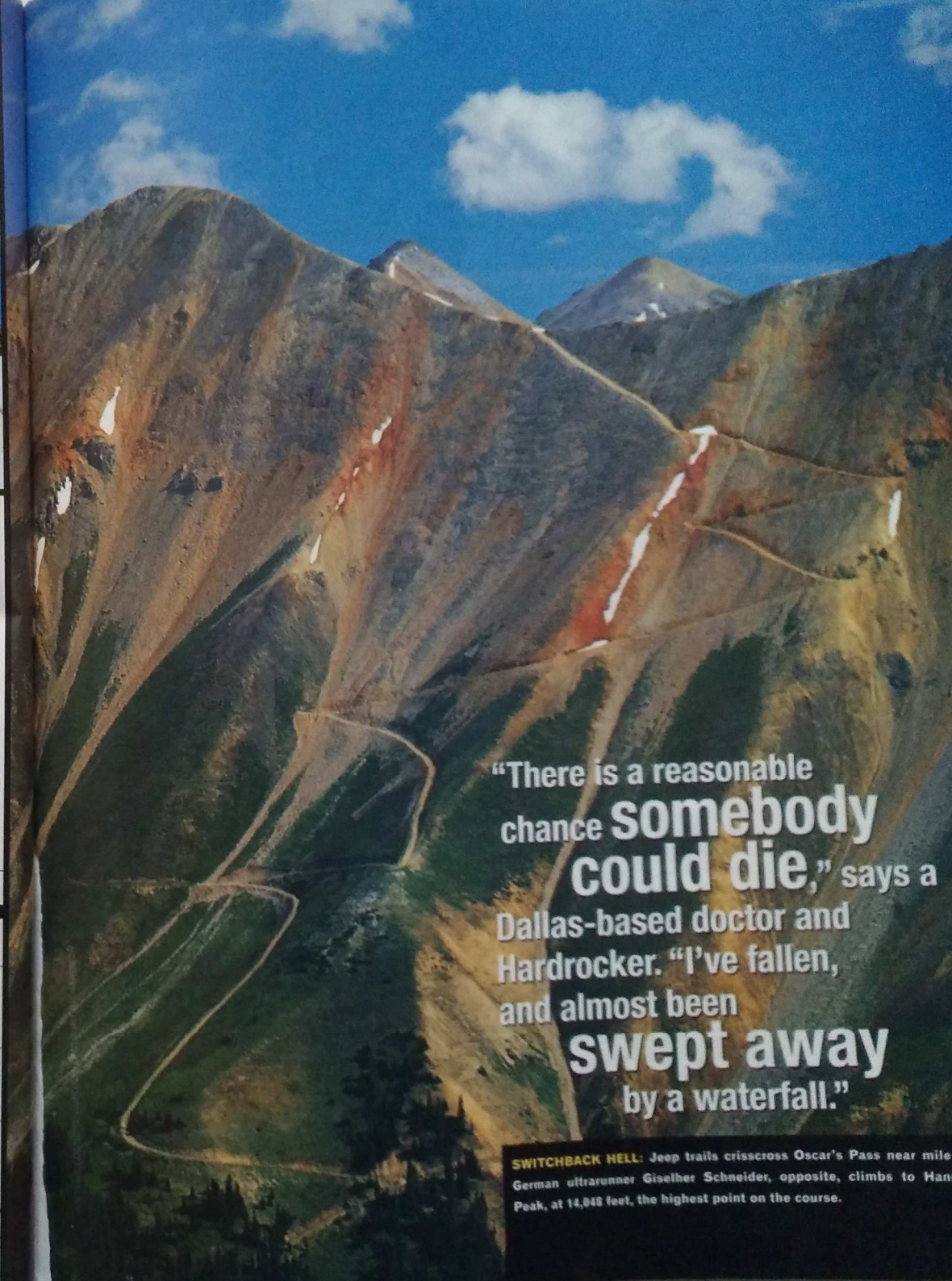
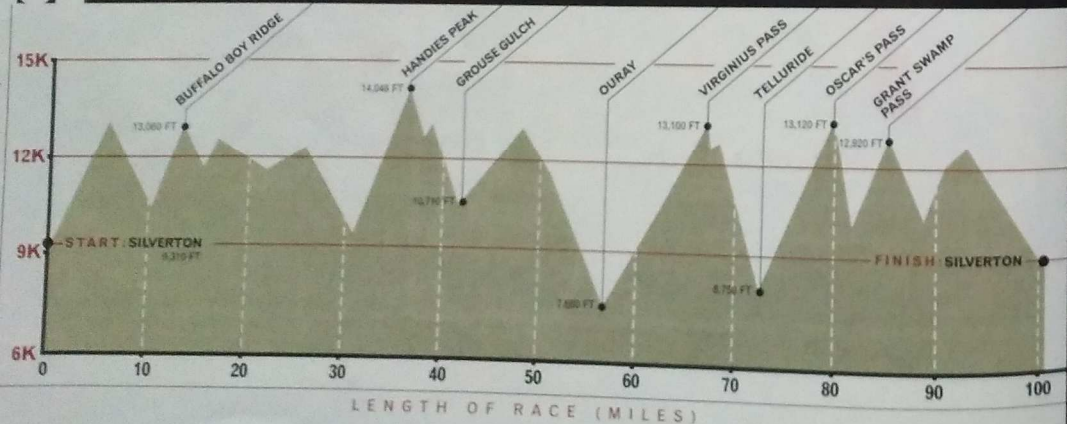


worldview much like the leathery old men who hang around ballparks in Florida and Arizona, sneering at the fuzzy-cheeked phenoms of spring and their March batting averages. The old hands have seen young studs like Worswick before. Seen them tear up the first half of the course, only to be seized later by fatigue, cramps, nausea, and a despair so profound they can't even name it. Besides, the promising dawn has turned into a chilly, wet afternoon. And this is Grouse Gulch. Dangerous things happen at Grouse Gulch.

It doesn't look dangerous: a wooden yurt 12 feet in diameter, a canvas elk-hunters' shelter with three cots and a propane heater, and a telephone-booth-size communications tent where a radio operator hunches over his sputtering equipment, all hugging the west bank of the fast-flowing Animas River.

But if you've just trekked more than 40 miles, climbed 14,000 feet and descended 10,000, confronted Up-Chuck Ridge ("ACROPHOBIA"), which is nearly three times as steep as the steepest part of the Pike's Peak marathon, tackled the 14,048-foot Handies Peak

101 Miles of Solitude



"There is a reasonable chance somebody could die," says a Dallas-based doctor and Hardrock. "I've fallen, and almost been swept away by a waterfall."

SWITCHBACK HELL: Jeep trails crisscross Oscar's Pass near mile German ultrarunner Giselher Schneider, opposite, climbs to Handies Peak, at 14,048 feet, the highest point on the course.

"is that one of the largest capillary networks is in your lungs, and when those capillaries start leaking, you have difficulty breathing. Pulmonary edema. In a really bad case, your lungs can fill up with water and you'll drown."

Digestive problems barely merit consideration. Jonathan Worswick left Ouray still in the lead but vomiting every few miles and suffering stomach cramps and diarrhea. Mr. Mellow stalked him during the climb, enjoying the view, confident in his uphill power, even more confident that Worswick had expended too much energy too early. Just before passing Worswick and crossing Virginius Pass, Apt recalled later, "a mental shift occurred for me. I knew I was in this race, and really had a good shot at winning."

Worswick overtook him on the downhill to Telluride, but Apt was having fun. Just after beginning the brutal assault on Oscar's, Apt told his pacer he wanted to "get after it." Minutes later they blew by Worswick, who was too sick to fight anymore. He bonked. But he continued.

Burgess hasn't puked since Ouray, and though by midafternoon he's suffering fatigue, muscle soreness, chills, and a slight loss of motor coordination, he's still in the race.

Erdman? She regained her sight near Telluride. But three miles later, she begins to gasp.

She turns to Nute. "I'm not going to make it," she says.

Nute knows she might well be speaking the truth. He's been monitoring his watch, worrying as Erdman has slowed to a 40-minute-mile stagger. He's been despairing that she'll never make it out of the next aid station, Chapman, at 83.1 miles, before the cutoff time. But Erdman is the one who inspired Nute to run his first and, depending on Jodi, possibly only Hardrock. Plenty of people have told Erdman to stop. Nute's not going to be one of them.

"Let's sit down for a minute," Nute says. "Let's just process this. Let's do the math."

But what calculus of the spirit can take into account years of training, hours alone, broken bones, and the taunting of the devil's pudding? Has an equation yet been written so elegant that it can encompass impossible dreams?

They sit, and they sit some more. They peer upwards, above tree line, where the skies are black with monstrous storm clouds. Lightning crashes.

Erdman does the math. Instead of a number comes a word.

"All I can think," she says, "is why?"

She doesn't bonk, and she isn't timed out. But after 77 miles, Erdman drops out of her third and—she says—final Hardrock.

TEN MILES FROM the finish, Todd Burgess forgets how to walk a straight line. Counting, he decides, will solve the problem. If he can put eight steps together, one ahead of another, without wavering, and name the number of each step, he won't swerve into the wilderness and be lost forever. He is sure of this. He counts aloud for an hour.

When he steps onto the abandoned rail bed that will take him the last two miles to Silverton, Burgess can see the gentle, aspen-covered hill ahead. Once he climbs that, he'll be able to look down into the town. He'll be able to see the finish line below. He knows he's going to make it. Only one thing can stop him.

He knows it's a silly fear, most likely the result of exhaustion and chills. If he knew about leaking capillaries, he might ascribe his anxiety to that. But Burgess's attempts at rationality won't banish a dreadful notion, born of sleep deprivation, or cellular rioting, or the

desperate, fearsome need to finish under 48 hours:

"This would be a terrible time for a nuclear bomb to fall."

BURGESS ISN'T THE only one losing his mind. Gigantic June bugs wriggle from the soil and onto the damp and wobbly legs of Hardrockers unlucky enough to find themselves on the course after dusk on the second day of the race. Ghostly condominiums waver on top of mountain passes. Severed elk heads bob in the arms of grinning aid-station volunteers.

It's probably not capillary leakage. The visions seem to visit the slower runners, the ones who have been awake the longest.

"We know that people who have been sleep deprived have been noted to have visual, auditory, as well as tactile hallucinations," says Dr. Clete Kushida, director of the Stanford Center for Human Sleep Research. "They can also suffer irritability, as well as changes in memory, focus, and concentration. And psychomotor deficits."

That's one way of putting it.

After 40 hours, phantom Texans in ten-gallon hats walk beside the sleepest Hardrockers at 13,000 feet, drinking beer and laughing. Grass turns to snow, rocks morph into Chevy Suburbans, plants transmute into Gummy Bears and bows. Before he died, Joel Zucker saw Indians.

Burgess finishes at 47 hours, 41 minutes, and three seconds, the 58th of 60 finishers (none of them Silvertonians). Then he sits on the ground.

Race Director Dale Garland walks to Burgess and asks if he would mind turning off the digital clock when it hits 48 hours. "I think this is good therapy," Garland says.

Burgess sits next to the clock and stares at it. At 48 hours he pushes a button, but the clock keeps going. Burgess keeps sitting, staring at the running numbers.

Jonathan Worswick finishes sixth, at 30 hours, 46 minutes, 16 seconds.

Kirk Apt wins in 29 hours and 35 minutes—beating the course record by more than 35 minutes. His legs tremble, and he weeps. Some onlookers get teary, too, even a few of the old hands. They don't like to talk about it, but they know that some of the fastest finishers are the most patently competitive, the loudest, the least liked, and the most likely to quit when outright victory seems impossible. Then there's Apt, who bonked and walked the last 25 miles of the course last year, enjoying the scenic vistas and the lonely ridgelines. Cramped. Limping. Having fun.

Local newspaper reporters gather round the champion. It's almost noon, clear and sunny. Apt tells one note-taker that he consulted a nutritionist before this year's Hardrock and that his "homemade goos" (various combinations of blended hard-boiled egg, potato, tofu, avocado, rice, yogurt, salt, honey, and chicken liver) helped him stay the course. He tells another, "I'm really not that competitive, but I saw I had the opportunity to win, so I thought, Why not?" He mentions that he ran about 60 of the 100 miles—"the flats and downhill, and I ran a few uphills, too."

The reporter from Durango has one last question.

"What interesting things happened in the race?" she asks. "The flowers were just amazing."

Steve Friedman's profile of pro bowler Rudy Kasimkas was selected for the *Best American Sports Writing 2000* (Houghton Mifflin).