

SCRATCHPAD

Take that, race doubters

By ERICK BENGEL
COAST WEEKEND

A friend asked me: You're *running* the race? Like, *running* it?

We had bumped into each other less than an hour before we were scheduled to participate in the Great Columbia Crossing last Sunday morning.

Running, she knows, is not something I am widely known for. A brisk jaunt to the nearest bakery, sure. The

occasional jog up my street, perhaps. But long-distance running? Not so much. This would be a first for me.

Yep, I told her.

It was the fourth time in three days I had revealed my quixotic, possibly delusional plan to run the full 10K (6.2 miles): from Dismal Nitch Rest Area in Washington, over the Astoria Bridge, followed by a last loop near the Astoria Riverwalk en route to the finish line at the foot of Basin Street.

And it was the fourth time someone had looked at me as if I had misplaced my meds.

A colleague, unable to hide her incredulity, asked: Have you ever done that before? (As if that's something I should have considered.) It'll shock your system, she warned.

Even my running mate, a seasoned marathoner, automatically assumed we would be walking.

The doubters had spoken, and what they said didn't

exactly add up to a vote of confidence. As race day approached, I began to wonder what on earth I had gotten myself into.

Let it therefore be known that on the fifteenth of October, in the year of our Lord 2017, I ran the Great Columbia Crossing from start to finish. (Well, alternated, really, between running and jogging, followed by an exasperated sprint near the end to get it over with.)

It occurred to me that

I've never fully appreciated the grandeur of the bridge or the stunning panorama of the Columbia River while merely driving over it.

But on Sunday, as the Oregon landmass got closer, I took a few moments to behold our little port town, tucked into the hillside and sprawled along the riverfront, a site of historic rendezvous among Native people, explorers and empires.

The Crossing, truth be told, wasn't something I wanted to do, but something I wanted to have done. That changed as I reached the peak of the bridge; I was actively enjoying myself, no


longer worried about eating pavement. I had made it that far without stopping, and by then I knew I could finish without stopping.

Total time: One hour, 9 minutes, several seconds. Roughly 11-ish minutes per mile.

"Shock my system"?

Haughty laugh. True, my knees feel like they're going to buckle — I will be limping for a few days — but no shattered shins, no internal bleeding, no hallucinations, no chafing. Win.

"I did believe in you, sort of," my running mate texted me afterward.

Will I run next year? Do doubters doubt? 

coast weekend

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