

My second Arrowhead DNF report.

It's Wednesday afternoon, almost 3pm. I should be finishing soon. Instead I'm in the hotel room I've been in since Monday night. The mixture of emotions is difficult to handle. Northern Minnesota calls to me every winter but it's a long and expensive trip to make just to fail repeatedly. Is it failure though? I've learned something every time.

You see, I finished the first time. Sometimes I think that was my greatest failure, because it came "easily" in hindsight. Although nothing comes easily on the Arrowhead Trail, that first year I came there was mild weather and a hard and fast trail. Last year was an unpredicted cold and a lack of training on my part. This year I was ready. Oh, except for that foot that's been bugging me for 6 months or so. Not enough to stop me, although some days have had me in tears of frustration and pain, but enough that

I haven't run since September in the hopes that I could arrive in International Falls with fitness and pain free. And I was for about 10 miles. The next 25 miles were spent with the mantra "not" on the left foot strike "real" on the right foot strike on repeat in my head and at times out loud. On flat ground I could almost convince myself that it was a pain I could take. One I could muscle through. But on even the slightest incline I found myself limping, the sensation of tearing and pulling all I could feel. "I can't limp through -40 wind chill with the hills just continuing to multiply and elongate" I thought.

As the lengthy northern Minnesota dusk turned to full dark I made my way into the Gateway checkpoint at 35 miles, not even bothering to bring my thermoses inside with me. The volunteers there, whom I've come to know well over the last 3 years (plus one spectating), all tried very hard to change my mind but part of the difficulty of winter ultras is being smart enough to know when your time's up. Some positive takeaways from this year are that my gear was pretty well dialed in finally.

I have to figure out a better pants system but of the 80% runner drops I was one of the few who didn't have moisture issues. This makes me think that I very well could have been successful as I had several more layers available to me to get through the night. Also, something new I did this year, hot soup in a thermos is an amazing way to get fluids, calories and salt in. Will definitely be doing that again.

## Ashley Hecla

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Some things I really need to work on are getting over my fear of carrying water on my person, either with a bladder or some soft flasks or something. Stopping to drink every hour is incredibly time consuming. Speaking of time, the next few months will need to be spent getting healthy so I am able to get fast enough to stay much further away from things like cutoffs. Although I got to Gateway with plenty of time to head back out I was definitely at my threshold as far as a maintainable pace for 3 days of effort. If I can get my walking pace closer to 15 min miles with a pulk, I'll be much happier.

All in all I'm always happy to be in Minnesota, regardless of the season or the outcome and really glad to see some of my favorite people again. The crazies in a room of crazies.