

Tips for competing in the 24 Hours of Horseshoe Hell

After 12 years of competing in the 24HHH, Nat and I have learned a lot. We progressed from 36 routes our first year to 60 the next, then 91, then over 100 and finally Nat did 206 in 2016. I will try to give you some hints and tips to make your experience maybe a little easier.

Note that the 24HHH is supposed to be totally self supported. This has been modified a bit in recent years to allow you to have a scorekeeper. You can't ask your friend or your dad or anyone else to go get the coat you forgot in the campground or to go get you more water or order you some pizza from the Ozark Café. If you need it, you need to go get it. So, if you can't carry all your water and food and clothing, you need to make a trip to the places you expect to climb and stash some food and water and maybe clothes BEFORE the competition starts. Starting a few years ago, water has been made available at some places like the North Forty so it isn't as important as it was in the past. But, if you have anything special you need/want, have it in place before the comp begins. The same goes for gear. If you only plan to climb one or two trad routes, stash the gear you need near those routes. It can get chilly at night and you may think about either carrying or stashing some extra layers. If you plan on climbing on the East side, some teams keep a full set of ropes and draws on the other side so they don't have to lug their stuff all the way over there. It does cause you to have to go get all your crap after the comp is over, which is a royal pain. But, at that point you can recruit your friends!!

Hydration: It is vitally important to stay hydrated. We use water, Gatorade, and green smoothies (spinach, bananas, pineapple, chia seeds, and ginger). You must drink early and drink often because if you get behind, you won't be able to catch up. There have been some pretty scary instances of totally incapacitating cramping from those that did not stay hydrated.

Food: We eat light and often with emphasis on bars, trail mix, tuna, bagel with peanut butter, and last year some goo packs. Don't forget to eat or you will bonk. We have never had a big meal, just many small ones. Sitting down to eat takes time and will make you sluggish afterward! We try to keep the pure energy boosters in reserve until we really need them. At about 2am you will wonder why you are doing this comp. A 5 hr energy or some coffee or energy drink may help you get through this tough period. When the sun starts to come up, you won't need any stimulant because, if you are like us, you will get PSYCHED! You know the end is near and you get a renewed energy.

Tape: When you get to the ranch your fingers and hands should already be toughened. You need a lot of time on rock, hang boards, or in the gym before the comp to toughen your tips. This is often the limiting factor for success. More than a few teams have slowed down or stopped because their tips were shredded or too painful to use any more. Taping is very important for the major joints of your fingers. We don't tape our tips but we do tape the other two sections of our fingers, including the pinky. I use a simply two wraps around the top finger section (not the tip), angle down inside the joint to the lower section, two wraps, then another angle back up to the top section and finish with the end of the tape on top. Be sure not to tape too tight or you will affect circulation. This method puts a nice X on the inside of the big knuckle of each finger. There are so many chicken heads and big holds at HCR that the all parts of your fingers will take a beating. Some climbers also put super glue on their tips.

Gloves: 2014 was our first time using fingerless Black Diamond gloves. We wore them the entire time and climbed up to 5.10c. They were amazing! Our tips still got beat up but our hands and fingers from the big knuckle down were pristine at the end of the 24.

Climbing: Practice your transitions. When the second climber cleans the draws, be sure you have the process down to get the draws back to the first climber! Get your safety checks dialed in during practice. Get in the habit of using your partner's name for all commands. "off belay, Nat", "take, Nat", "slack, Nat", etc. This is CRITICAL when there are many teams working routes side by side. There are certain routes where it makes sense for the taller climber to go first and set the draws because there is a reach issue to some bolts. Crimp Scampi is an example where the second climber will find it easier to clip the 4th draw if it has already been placed. Trad routes - note your exact gear for each route you practice and the order you use them. Then, look at all this gear beta for all the trad routes you plan on doing and finalize your rack based on that. You don't need doubles of everything when on some routes you will only put in three or four pieces. Just take those pieces. On Groove Tube, three or four big pieces is all you need but you better have a #6 if you want any gear in the first 25 feet or so.

We use a trace-back bowline to tie in but many use the figure eight trace-back. Our method does not lock up the know and does not leave a knot in the rope when you untie. For those that use the figure eight, they have found it very hard to untie after lowering and there is the occasional accident where the rope is pulled without untying the knot so it gets trapped at the anchors. The solution for some is to tie the figure eight to an auto-locking special carabiner that is designed not to cross-load. This method allows the team to simply change partners by moving the biner with the rope attached back and forth between climbers. There are two downsides however. One is that you must pull the rope through each time even on very short routes since you always climb on the same end of the rope. The second is that you can't unclip higher draws to keep the rope clipped to the first or second draw. There are tricks to still be able to do that but you should research those on your own if you are interested. Most manufacturers would not recommend leading with a carabiner as you connection to the rope so I will leave that up to you as to whether you should use that method in the 24.



Magratron GridLock carabiner designed to auto-lock and to prevent cross-loading. It is critical to NOT JUST use a locking biner or an auto-locking biner. It needs to be one designed not to cross-load.

If you get training trips to HCR, climb some of your harder selected routes at night. You don't always have a choice as to when you do your hard routes and having the confidence to do them at night will open up a lot of alternatives if the lines get bad in your area. If your hardest route is 5.10d, be sure you can send at least some of your 5.10a routes at night. You need to know if it's possible! At the end of a training session, try to make it a point to climb one of your harder target routes. In 2008, Nat and I both sent Crimp Scampi after 20 hours of climbing and with 80 routes under our belt. We were amazed! That one send changed our entire attitude toward the 2009 comp. You might surprise yourself.

Planning: Now is a good time to think about your start area and starting route(s). You need to be sure you have a plan B alternative so don't go to an area with very limited choices. Several years ago a Rec team came to Prophecy Wall for their first route but there is only one Rec route on the entire wall and there are not alternatives anywhere nearby. So they got in line while others used their route as a warm up. Then, they went to Titanic for another area with only one Rec route. Not everyone is trying to optimize their route count but if you are, you need to have other routes nearby if your target route is taken.

If you climb traditional routes, they can often offer you a way to avoid lines or to fill some time while waiting for a route to become available. But, be careful since some trad routes do not have anchors or convenient trees at the top.

Scorecards: We highly recommend using the phone app since it will save you time and save the scorers time. It will also let you know your route count at any time and is very easy to use. You will be turning in your scorecard at 10pm if you are not using the phone app. If you are like me, you will keep a separate list of the routes you have done so you can know your route count and validate the routes when the results are posted. It is easiest to simply take a picture of the sheet(s) you are turning in.

Honesty/Rules:

The rules state that if you are not tied in, with your shoes on when the route you are waiting for becomes available, another team can get on it if they are ready. So, BE READY TO CLIMB. Start getting your shoes on and tying in as the team on the route is on their final lap. If you don't and someone gets on it before you, don't complain. IT'S YOUR FAULT, not theirs. If you are doing the event for fun and have some pretty modest goals, the climbers with aggressive goals will appreciate it if you let them jump ahead of you on a route they are waiting for and will love you if you let them use your draws. Also, be sure to take care of the old climbers since they need all the help they can get.

IMPORTANT RULE: Anyone observed endangering themselves or others by climbing like an idiot will be disqualified. Simply put - climb in a way that respects others, and protect yourself from the unknown broken holds, protection failure, or purposeful runouts.

There has been some pretty blatant sandbagging in years past (12c climbers winning intermediate, 5.11 climbers winning Rec, and others). Google is an amazing tool to find out how hard a climber can really climb and I use it when the event is over to help keep the event honest. This competition is based on trust and is for fun and almost everyone treats it that way. Since the amazing swag is no longer given for winning divisions, the motivation for sandbagging may be gone. If you want to cheat, you can simply claim routes you didn't do. But, I have personally witnessed some tactics that some people seem to think are OK. The most blatant is getting help from your belayer. There are a couple of routes with high first bolts that require stick clipping. Where I have seen obvious belayer help is on "Zeke's Digidance" (the most ascents of any 10b in the comp!) and "Newton County Mentality". If you are a belayer and you feel your climber's weight at all, it's time to feed some slack. At no point in the event should the belayer feel the weight of the climber that is leading.

Remember this is FUN. When Alex Honnold and Hans Florine were training for the El Cap speed record, Hans emphasized: First – Safety, Second – Have fun, Third – Speed. On the record run, Alex mentioned he didn't mind moving Speed up in the order! For this competition, their original order is correct: Safety, Fun, Speed. Remember, some people's idea of fun is to push themselves to exhaustion while other's idea is to cruise through and enjoy the camaraderie and atmosphere. Please respect each other's idea of fun and make this a great 24