

TrailRunner

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SPAIN'S COSTA BRAVA REGION

One Dirty Magazine

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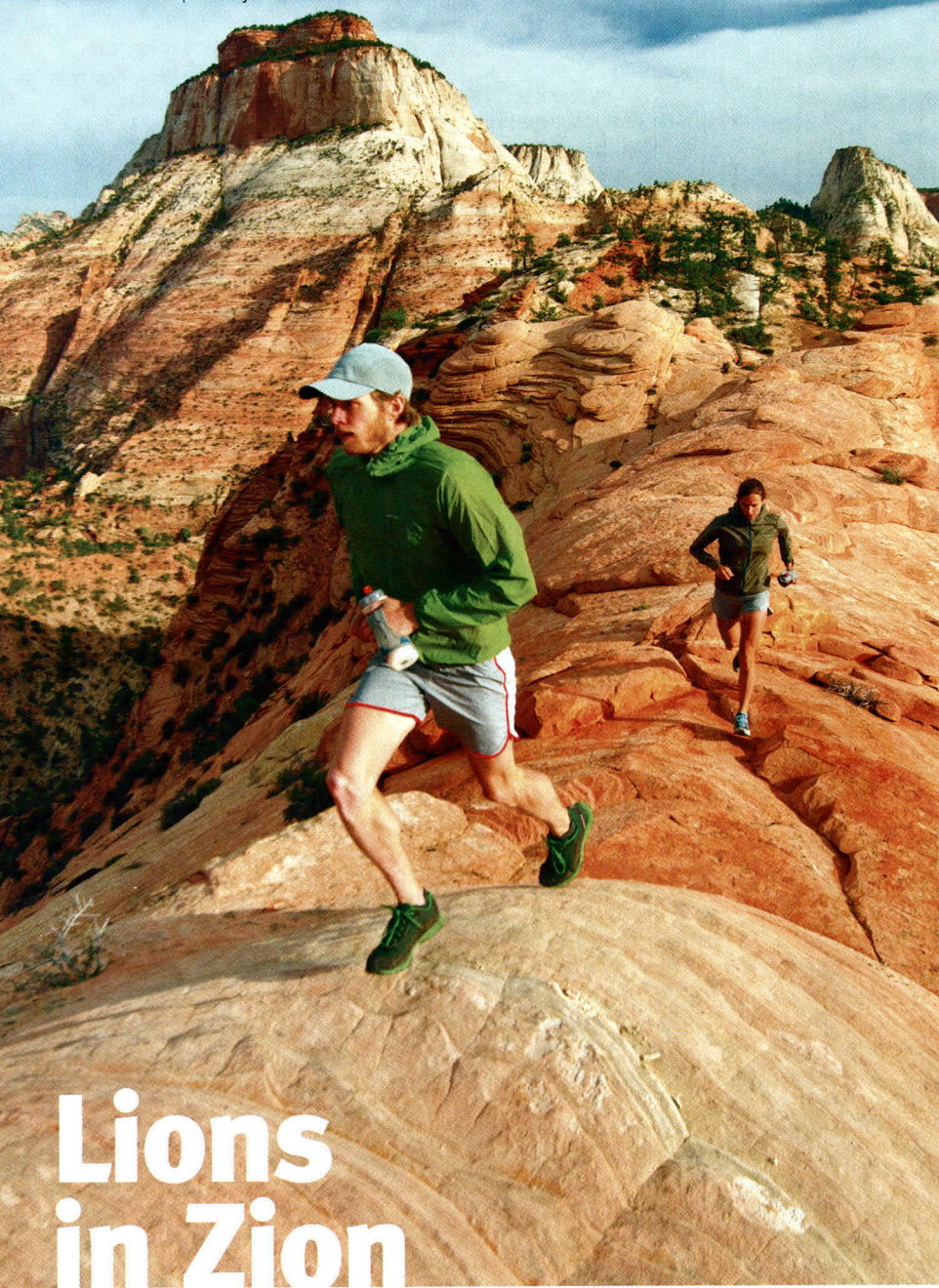
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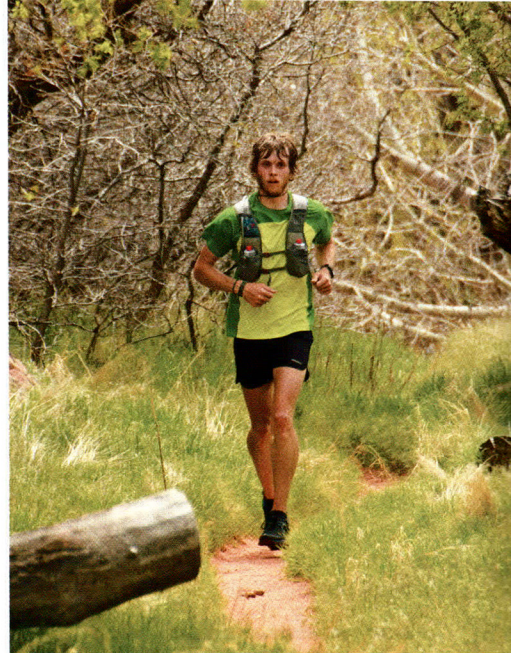
Lions in Zion

Krissy Moehl and Luke Nelson find adventure in attempting Trans-Zion National Park records.

Our skin sunburnt by the desert sun and legs torched from scaling slickrock over the past few days' recon, Luke Nelson and I sat on the tailgate of his truck at 6 a.m. on May 3, 2012, poring over the map for the last time before setting off across Utah's Zion National Park. We were about to attempt to set individual records for the Trans-Zion traverse. Lacing up our trail runners, we made final bathroom

stops and stripped down to T-shirts and shorts before making our way over to the trailhead, our start line.

I met Luke Nelson on the trail three years ago at the inaugural Pocatello 50-Mile Trail Run in Pocatello, Idaho. Around mile 30 I had left the aid station before him and on the next climb he caught up, explaining his massive bonk and decision to hang with me till the finish if I didn't mind. We chattered away,



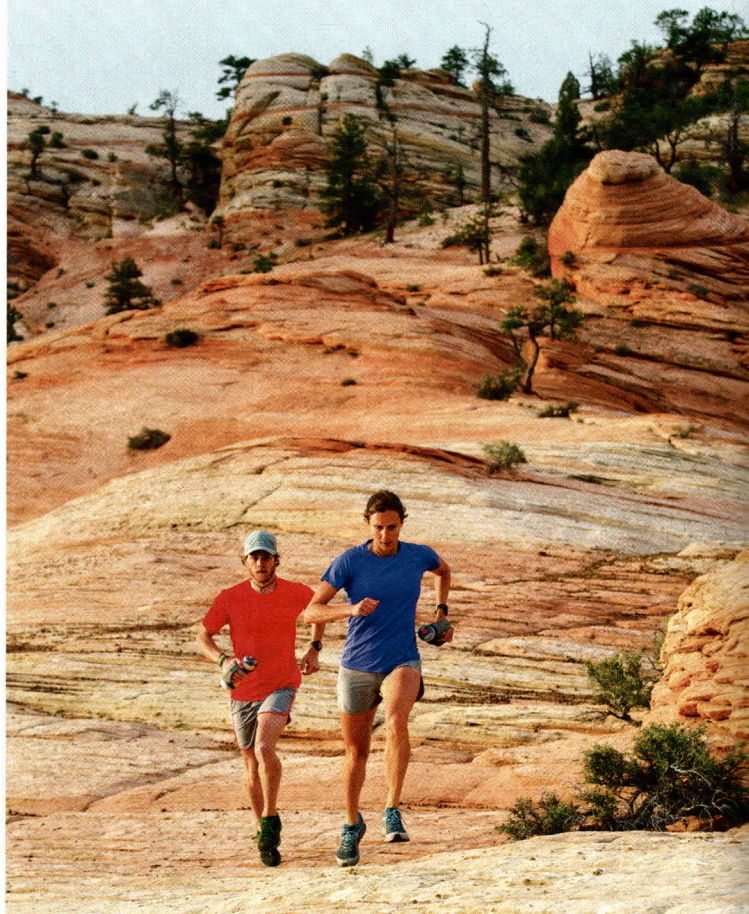
Luke Nelson and Krissy Moehl running a slickrock ridgeline in eastern Zion before their Trans-Zion attempts (left); and Nelson digs deep just before the last steep climb out of the canyon en route to his Trans-Zion speed record.

likely I more than he, and soon found ourselves quickly closing on the finish line, tying for second place overall. Luke, now 30, was then finishing up his schooling to become a Physician Assistant. He is now married with two kids, is an amazing ski-mountaineering racer and has bragging rights to countless other can-dos.

In the spring of 2011, Luke and I began scheming about Trans-Zion records. The point-to-point route connects from rim-to-rim. Starting from the east, you drop into the canyon from Observation Point and the Weeping Rock Trail. Once in the canyon, you must pound the pavement about two miles to The Grotto before heading up Walter's Wiggles towards Angels Landing and making the bend to finish the climb to the West Rim Trail. That trail takes you into Potato Hollow, Wildcat Canyon and Hop Valley, where you start to feel the pull of the finish, but must first crisscross La Verkin Creek countless times then climb the final 800 feet in about four miles to tag the sign at Lee's Pass Trailhead, the finish.

➔ **Luke and I stayed stride for stride** for the first half mile and exulted in how cool it was to finally be attempting our goal. We wished each other well and Luke picked up his pace and I settled into mine.

At The Grotto, 12 miles into the run, we each accepted aid from UltraAspire's Cherie Santiago (Luke about 15 minutes ahead of me at this point), swapping bottles for hydration vests as it would be another 20 miles before the possibility of a water refill.



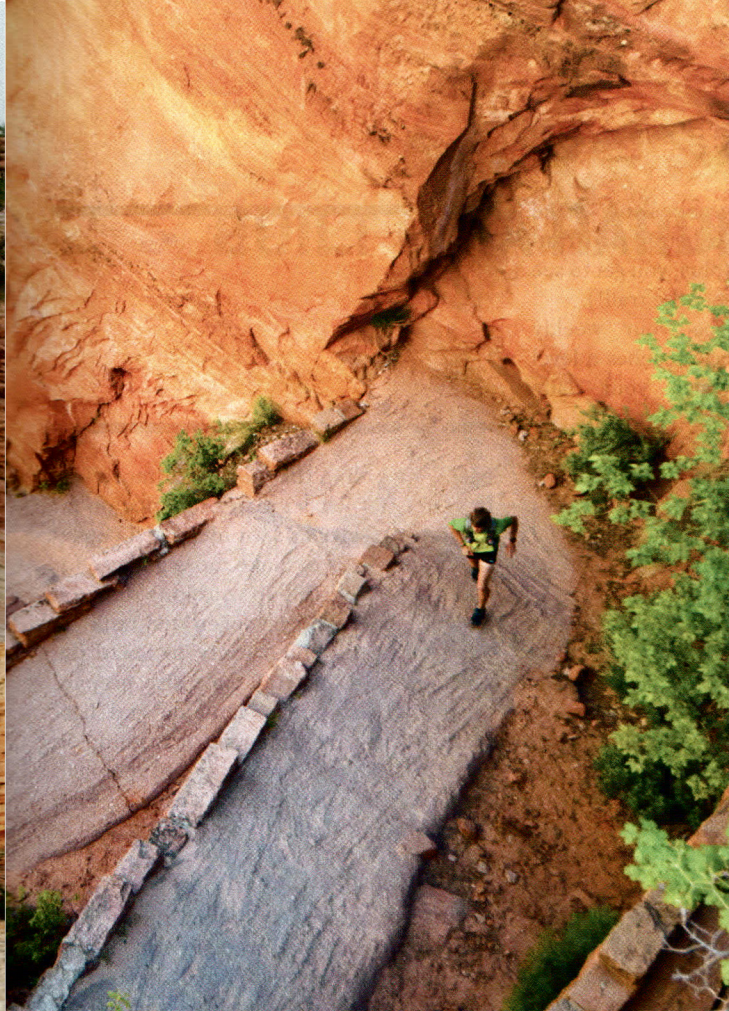
Moehl and Nelson train on eastern Zion's endless runnable slickrock.

Climbing out of the canyon at sunrise was spectacular. It was the biggest ascent of the day, and zigzagging through Zion's slickrock spits you out at a breathtaking overlook. Photographer Fred Marmsater and video guru Jeff Johnson met me just past Angels Landing, running alongside and taking shots. They told me that Luke looked strong and was moving well.

As I crested the climb and started rolling along the sweltering west rim, I was thankful I had gotten in some hot, humid road miles on a recent family vacation in Florida. My leg turnover was quick, and, with the help of music shuffling through my iPod, I enjoyed the section and its views of soaring red-rock formations, before dropping into Potato Hollow.

My 70 ounces of water was disappearing quickly, though, and I started to ration. I still ran dry, and found out later from our crew that Luke had done the same. This section became about body-management, not running too fast to cause cramping or a bonk, but quickly enough to cover the ground and make it to our water resupply in Hop Valley. The running was just technical enough to keep my attention, but smooth and descending enough to allow quick movement.

Temps were in the high 80s and a constant breeze felt cooling, but I was becoming dehydrated. At the Hop Valley Trailhead, I guzzled at least four pints of icy water while friends Jim Speth, Adriane Frehner, Bryce Thatcher and Santiago cheered me on and refilled bottles. Leaving revitalized but with a jostling belly, I trudged through the next few miles, trying to absorb the fluids and get my legs back under me. The terrain changed from the high rim running and cruise-y descents through the canyons to an open grassy meadow and down in to a sandy wash.



Nelson switchbacks up Walter's Wiggles on his way to the west rim.

Admittedly, though, I never felt great again, but did have a nice laugh when crossing the sandy wash for the final time. I caught my toe on a stick in the mud and did a fabulous sideways dive into several inches of wet sand—probably the softest landing I have ever had.

I took the opportunity to clean up and cool off while crisscrossing La Verkin Creek bed. I saw Fred poised behind his camera halfway up the final ascent. He spurred me on with the news that Luke had dug deep to set a new men's record.

The running was just technical enough to keep my attention, but smooth and descending enough to allow quick movement.

In my dehydrated state, I progressed at more of a stumble than a run. Fred prompted me along and as I got closer to the rim he dropped back and I listened for the chatter of our friends, finding one last bit of energy to jog to the Lee's Pass Trailhead sign to hit my watch at 9:09.

First, I congratulated Luke on his impressive 7:48, 10 minutes faster than the previous record set by Matt Hart of Park City, Utah, in 2010. Candice Burt of Bellingham, Washington, had posted an unsupported time (meaning she carried all of her supplies and water) of 11:47 on November 16, 2011 to the FKT proboards (<http://fastestknowntime.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=west&action=display&thread=14>). My 9:09, apparently the FKT for a women's supported run, was a happy ending to the day. ■