

Runner's Getaways

## Breathtaking

Four days, 42 miles, 8,000 feet of climbing, six seasoned guides, 300-count sheets, and one really clutch hot tub.

By Michael Lanza

Image by Embry Rucker

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### Day 3: Running Down A Fault Line

After the brutal hills of the past two days, my third morning features a long, gentle descent. The Bolinas Ridge Trail makes an 11-mile straight shot along a rounded ridge bisecting rural north Marin. And my partners deliver a welcome jolt of energy. Kelly Dunleavy, a petite 23-year-old blogger and runner who competes in regional triathlons and trail races, will go seven miles out, and then double back to her car. Matching her stride is sports nutritionist **Sunny Blende**, 58, who does ultramarathons and ran 45 miles from one rim of the Grand Canyon to the other and back one month earlier. She plans to run 10 miles with me before turning around. They both say they're looking for an easy pace today, which I assure them fits into my travel plans.

Kelly and Sunny keep up a lively conversation—talking running, races, nutrition, training, ultras—that distracts me from the twitching muscles in my quads. We pass through a few miles of cool, quiet woods, then emerge onto grassy meadows above the bucolic Olema Valley where a forested ridge obstructs our view of the Pacific. The valley appears peaceful enough, but looks deceive: It straddles the San Andreas Fault, where the Earth's North American and Pacific plates grind against one another, gradually sawing off the ice axe-shaped horn of land called the Point Reyes peninsula. So someday this trail we're on could have an ocean view.

About 90 minutes into our run, after Kelly has turned back, the horizon ahead retreats to reveal Tomales Bay, a blue finger of sea giving California a 12-mile-long prostate exam. Rearing up above the bay is tomorrow's objective: the green wall of Inverness Ridge—big, steep hills that, I'm thinking, exist to swallow overconfident and overfatigued runners whole. It looks daunting, and three days of hard running has daunted my ability to conjugate properly.

Surrounded by cows in a field, Sunny and I shake hands. Then I slowly jog the last mile down to Olema, a handful of lodges and restaurants at a sleepy T intersection where 19th-century loggers supported a bustling economy based on saloons and a certain age-old profession. Seeking a more restorative R&R, I sink deep into the hot tub in my spacious room at the Point Reyes Seashore Lodge, nearly falling asleep. In the evening, I hobble across the street to the Olema Inn to meet my wife's 28-year-old niece and her boyfriend, who drove over from Oakland for a couple of beers and a dinner of locally caught mussels, scallops, ahi, and oysters prepared eight ways (with champagne, horseradish and cracked pepper, spicy tomato water and seeds, and four other ways that slip from my memory as quickly as I digest them). It helps me forget—for a little while—the sloshing reservoirs of lactic acid in my quads.

Later, with the cool night air slipping through my room's open French doors, the cumulative effect of the run, hot tub, and feast hits me like I'm one of those actors in an Ambien commercial. But just before nose-diving into a rejuvenating coma of running dreams, my thoughts wander toward the precipice of anxiety over tomorrow's itinerary: running 12 miles across Point Reyes National Seashore, over two mountains, with 2,100 feet of up and down. And right now every synapse in my brain is calling out, "Control tower to Mike: You're cleared for a rest day."

Sheesh, what was I thinking? Tomorrow, the hardest day of the hardest adventure of my running career may bring on my hardest-ever bonk.