

Cradle Mountain Run

by [Buzz](https://adventurerun.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/cradle-mountain-run/) (published in <https://adventurerun.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/cradle-mountain-run/>)

12 years ago I flew into Tazzie (the “Aussies” like to use the diminutive whenever possible), rented a car, and thought I’d have a look around. After a day with some friends and two days left, I drove up to [Cradle Mountain National Park](#) in the central highlands. It was a wild alpine wilderness unlike anything I’d ever seen (I was on my way to New Zealand, after which I wouldn’t say that). The peaks were craggy, but not high; impressive were the bogs, the fog and clouds, the rivulets flowing everywhere, and plants I’d never seen before – nothing like the Rockies to say the least.



The premier route is the [Overland Track](#) – I ran out 10km and just loved it. This track (Aussie for “trail”) was 85 km long, went up and stayed high, with no road coming close the whole distance. I was dying to run the whole thing, but the other end was just as remote as the start, with uncertain services, no bus’s, and a patchwork of small country roads rendering a hitchhike back problematic. Dang. I reluctantly turned back, vowing to return.

Which I just did.

Researching my this trip at home, I discovered the Overland Track to be universally acclaimed as the premier trail in the country. Since Australia is the same size as the continental US, that’s saying a lot, and made my interest keener (I confess to paying attention to lists). Tasmania (for those who don’t know), is an island State off the South Coast of the continent, thus offering a completely different climate than the rest of the nation. It’s in the path of the Roaring 40’s and it’s west and south coasts stop a lot of weather.

The [Cradle Mountain Run](#) is a run/race held every February. If one lives here, a car shuttle or friendly spouse would make doing the Overland IAD reasonable, but for the visitor, entering the event is the best plan. The Run is limited to just 50 or so people, and because it’s so remote, all logistics are all organized for you – a unique situation. Thus, once I gained entry (qualifications are required), I was treated to:

- * A shuttle bus picked me up at the airport, stopped along the way for other runners, and then deposited us at pre-booked cabins inside the National Park.
- * The bus then took us to a lodge, where we had dinner, and went thru the mandatory gear check and other race details.
- * After the run, we took showers, all ate dinner in another grandiose lodge, and were taken to our accommodations.
- * In the morning the awards ceremony was during a hearty buffet breakfast, and then rides were all arranged back to Hobart.

What's there not to like?! Difficult logistics were fully covered w/o me lifting a finger (usually it takes me weeks to plan an activity like this), the race was run thru a wilderness area in a national park (try that in the States), but mostly not only could I enjoy ultra-runner-camaraderie, it was a built-in component of the event – we are basically spending 2 night all together. This was made even better by the fact when traveling – whether in SE Asia, the Himalaya, or off the beaten track anywhere – Aussies are always the fellow travelers you gravitate to. Always ready to tip a beer and have a good time. “No worries, Mate!” seems to be national motto.

My expectations were fulfilled on all accounts.

We roused ourselves at 4:45 AM Saturday and sorted gear – doing this while inside a cabin was much easier than my usual technique in the back seat of a rental car. It rained all night and still was, which made me fuss over my clothing choices even more than the usual. (The experienced Aussies and Kiwi's never use Gore-tex; they go with fully waterproof or fully breathable shells, knowing they'll get just as wet in Gore-tex but it will weigh more).



Then in the pre-dawn drizzle, we line up. The route starts out over two 2x8 planks, winding it's way across the heath, which obviously requires going single file (and not falling off). So everyone seeds themselves according to their expected speed – “All very civilized” one runner proudly jokes – then off we go. What a great start! There rarely is a need to pass anyone at this stage of an ultra race anyway, even though some gumbies do, and the boardwalk precluded that entirely.

The track climbed up into what resembled the Scottish Highlands – a plateau with long views across the heath and rocks, fog below, clouds above or around, and patches of water everywhere. I tried to take pictures, but the dense cloud cover made it too dark. My plan was for a very conservative start – in part because I had bad Patella Tendonitis this past 2 weeks, couldn't really run, and was just hoping that by pounding the Vitamin I could I get thru it (I took 600 mcg every 4 hours). The other reason is that I didn't travel to the exact opposite side of the globe to not finish this sucker – there was no way I was coming back. The last reason is that you sort of have to finish – there are NO aid stations, and no support of any kind – only 50 people are going in so 50 are going out under their own power (didn't I say this was a great race?)

I tried to pick up some mates to run with, as that is always easier. After I lost a strong-looking contingent by stupidly making a wrong turn, I picked up Gary and Gary, and we tooled methodically along. This was helpful, because the track was beyond gnarly – under the best conditions it has root and rock sections as tricky as I've seen, but under a steady rain, it was roots and rocks with a stream flowing over them. Everything was soaked and slippery, the water was often so deep you couldn't see the bottom, so one could either plow thru it and trust the ankles, or throttle way back. We chose the later, often walking flat and even some

downhills sections. Another fascinating aspect, is that while we had to schlep around a large pile of required gear – pants, jackets, hat, etc, etc – nobody ever wore any of it. It was shorts and t-shirt all the way. On the other hand, hydration was no problem – one small bottle was all that you needed to carry, and some people reportedly just brought a cup – lean over, dip it in, and off you go. This is true even during dryer conditions, and no sanitization treatment is necessary.

Finally the rain mostly stopped, the track started to drain, and we crossed the halfway point. The Vit I (Ibuprofen) was working, I had been making a point to eat and drink a lot during the slow tough sections, so it was time to open it up a bit. This felt good as it always does – in part because actually running feels better than jogging, and of course, passing people is way more fun than being passed. There are many wilderness huts along this track, in the US rather than Euro tradition (no services), and at the last one, which is accessible by boat, race personnel had brought in the only aid on the route (there is a strict cut-off here, and if you can't make the finish by dark, you're hauled out by boat). I snarfed some orange slices (Potassium) and filled my bottle with Coke (Caffeine) – perfect; 20 kms to go, time to get this done.

This entire finishing section followed a lake while in the forest, and thus appeared flat on the course profile, but isn't due to the continued gnarlyness of the terrain. No worries, I was on a roll now, the track was dryer, and I zipped past three more people mostly walking – it's too bad to expend one's energy on the tough sections, only to not have enough left to run the easier sections. On my Entry Qualifications form, I listed "12 hours" as my expected finish time (I like those round numbers), and didn't mean to be a liar, so as the track became quite runnable nearing the Visitor Center, I dropped below 8/min/miles, and cruised in in 11:52. Even splits. The winners knocked it off in 8:30, which means they are very adept on tricky terrain (the elevation gain/loss is relatively minor). That win over an hour off the CR – this year was considered the 2nd toughest year in the event's 29 year history. I was 24th out of 51.

Time for a beer. A slug fell out of my sock when I took it off to go to bed, landing in a bloody little pile. No worries Mate!

