

Monday, February 8, 2010

[2010 Cradle Mountain Run - Feb 6th](#)

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I had such a great time at last years Cradle Mountain Run that I had already decided soon after the finish that I'd have another crack this year. Having completed the run last year there is no question that The Overland Track wasn't a complete mystery but how well did I manage to take in what I learnt last year? One thing for sure was that the weather conditions were going to be completely different. According to some of the locals last year was one of the wettest Cradle Runs but this year was to be very dry. I was little concerned during the rangers briefing on the Friday night when he said that there wasn't much water out on the track, but I was reasonably confident that given the cool conditions I should be able to get by using the water tanks at the huts. At least this year I knew exactly what to expect at the huts.

I had a reasonable sleep Friday night and woke up at my standard 2 hours before run start on Saturday morning, thus I was up at 4am. I went through my usual ritual of having a strong coffee, breakfast, putting on the running attire and loading up my pack with food. Next I had to wake up my wife and mate Cliff as they were my ride to the start. With 20 marathons and a couple of ultras under his belt, Cliff has dodgy ankles that wouldn't quite be up for a full Cradle Run (they squeak...seriously they do!). So this year he wanted to check out a part of The Overland Track by catching the ferry from Cynthia Bay to Narcissus, walking out towards the Windy Ridge Hut until he met me and then running with me to the finish.

I arrived at Waldheim a bit before 5:30am but there really didn't seem to be much activity considering the first roll call was supposed to happen at 5:30am. As it turned out we didn't end up having the early roll call, rather we simply did it at the start of the track only a few minutes before the run start. It was cool to cold for the start and with only a few clouds in the sky it was shaping up to be a brilliant day weather wise.

Like last year, on announcement of the start the fast guys took off lightening fast. I reckon that the lead runner was at least 300 - 400m ahead of me before I even started running on the duck boarding.



Photo courtesy of Cameron Gillies

This year my goal was to run 13 hours so I definitely ran harder in the earlier stages. I knew what the climb up Marions Lookout was like and I wanted to get up to the top in good time. The climb to the top starts out steady but eventually turns into clambering up over boulders whilst hanging onto a chain. There was a light breeze and it was a touch cold but the view was sensational. Light cloud covered the peak of Cradle Mountain and the sun was just sneaking up over the horizon. Thanks to the fantastic conditions there were views as far as the eye could see.

There really is some tough running up the top and it seemed every bit as difficult as last year. I feel that there may have been some more board walk this year but overall the rock hopping that was required made for some very slow going.

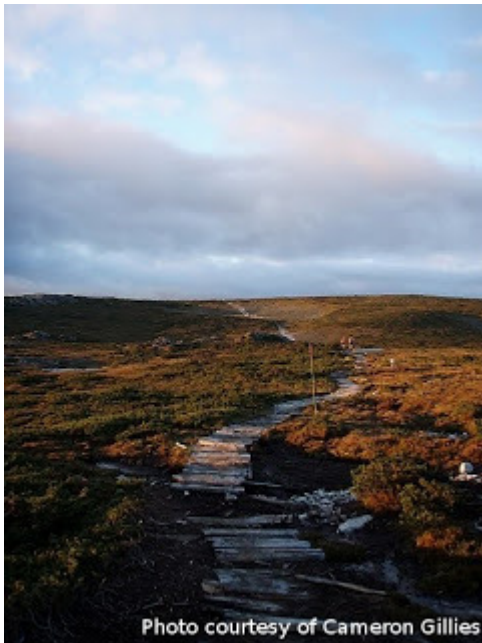


Photo courtesy of Cameron Gillies

Kitchen Hut was passed and I then started running with Liz who is an accomplished marathoner and was struggling a bit on the rough terrain. Whenever we got to the good sections she would leave me for dead but I would catch up in the rough stuff.

I had some relatively uneventful running through Waterfall Valley (10km), past Lake Holmes and through to Windemere Hut (17.4km). I absolutely love the highlands of the Cradle Mountain area which in my opinion are easily the most spectacular sections of the Overland Track. I love the openness, the sense of seclusion and the uninterrupted views.

A few kilometres further down the track I arrived at the River Fourth Lookout (19.7km). This is an area where you go from running in open country to a short section of dense bushland. For me this part of the track feels very eery as all of a sudden you are all closed in and the track is very indistinct and difficult to see.

You need to keep an eye out for the next trail marker before you move on. No other part of the track gives me that sensation. I caught up to Liz during this section and continued on through to Frogs Flats (27km).



Photo courtesy of Cameron Gillies

About 500 metres before arriving at Pelion Hut (31.5km) when I was casually eating a Mars Bar I managed to roll my ankle, feeling a bit of a pop as it rolled. I couldn't believe that I did it here as I rolled my ankle (same one) only a couple of kilometres earlier last year. It was quite sore but I could manage to run without too much of a limp. Just like last year I started to analyse how I'd make it another 46km or so to the end. I made it to Pelion 47 minutes before the cut off, which was faster than last year so I at least knew I had some time up my sleeve.

As I left Pelion I met Paul, a runner who I hadn't seen at all on the run so far. This was Paul's first run of this type and he was finding it much more difficult than he originally expected (as all first timers do I think). We ran together for a while but eventually I told him to venture off ahead as my ankle was slowing me down through the rough stuff. Another runner who I seemed to be running with quite a bit was Steve, but even he was running much faster than me at that stage. One thought that was in the back of my mind was that Cliff was going to meet me in between Windy Ridge and Narcissus so that motivated me to move along a bit quicker.

The kilometres kept on accumulating and my ankle seemed to be getting better the further I went, although it still slowed me down through the steep and rough terrain. I was soon taken by surprise when I came across a hut that seemed to be in the wrong place, but I realised that it was the Kia Ora Hut (40km). I had become so focussed on getting to Windy Ridge that I had completely forgotten about the Kia Ora Hut. How is that possible? Steve was here filling up his water bottles. I filled up mine and off we headed towards Windy Ridge.

The next 10km would turn out to be my most demoralising section of the whole run. I ran briefly with Paul, Steve and also a couple of girls (Karen & Karen I think were there names). Eventually they all out paced me and I was alone. I knew I only had to cover 10km to get to Windy Ridge but the kilometres seemed to be taking forever to pass. I could not remember this section from last year and I just didn't seem to be getting anywhere. At one stage I even had silly thoughts going through my head that I had taken a side track and had gone around the hut, even though I knew there weren't any side tracks. Eventually I arrived at Windy Ridge Hut (50km), but it sure did seem like 20km as opposed to the 10km that it was. Steve and the girls had already gone but Paul was at the hut filling up his Camelbak.

I left Windy Ridge before Paul and was now getting a bit excited because I was really looking forward to meeting Cliff somewhere between Windy Ridge and Narcissus. I wasn't sure when I would run into Cliff but it did give me some extra motivation to keep pushing on. This section of the track actually has some pretty good running and although it did seem to



take a while, eventually I met up with Cliff. We said a quick g'day and he then filed in behind me on our way to Narcissus. For the next few k's we made some reasonably good time and I must say that it made a difference to be running with a mate who you talk to on runs about anything and everything. Other than the fact I had run 55km it felt just like any other run that we do together.



Coke, tea/ coffee, ANZAC biscuits and fruit available. I sat down for a couple of minutes to rest, have some Coke, an ANZAC biscuit, Cliff filled my water bottles and then we were off.

I didn't feel like running a whole lot as we got closer to Narcissus. I knew I was going to be well inside the cut off time of 5pm, and I was content just to get to Narcissus where I could finally relax and not have to worry about missing the cut off. Not long before the suspension bridge over Narcissus River Paul had again caught up with us and we all ran into Narcissus Hut (59km) together. We were greeted by the support crew and a bunch of tired and broken down runners. Narcissus is a welcomed stop as there is



As we left Narcissus there were around 5 runners still there and 5 still out on the track who hadn't reached the hut yet. Cliff had been talking to the support guys at Narcissus and they were telling him how difficult the last 17km section is. I knew it was tough but the memories of last year had somewhat faded so my recollection wasn't great. I remember lots of roots, small undulations, dark conditions and log hopping. Cliff did ask me if I thought I could better last years time for the run but my mind was pretty much only

content to just let me do only what I needed to get to the finish, so I replied with "I don't care what time I finish in, I just want to get to the end".

I was really starting to have trouble eating. Anything I thought about eating seemed unappealing and anything I ate tasted like absolute rubbish. I would take a small bite of a bar and roll it around in my mouth like a little kid trying to get down a Brussel Sprout! A dash of water helped but I still found it really hard to eat. Bite by bite I managed to eat some food and get some calories in. Nutrition is something I definitely need to work more on.

I was now at the point of just maintaining forward motion. I did provide Cliff with some amusement as I would break into a run, and he would keep walking. Well I felt like I was moving fast! He also chuckled when I picked seemingly stupid places to run but I ran when I felt like it rather



than when it was appropriate. My mind was so one track that I didn't blink an eyelid when he rolled his ankle or got taken out by a tree branch and almost busted his sunnies. Sorry Cliff but I think you would have had to lose a limb for me to show sympathy at that stage! I also knew I was going silly when I had to ask him if Paul was behind or in front of us.

Echo Point Hut was the next milestone and it took forever to come up. Cliff didn't believe me when I told him "It's just up the trail a few k's". Other than the toughness of the terrain in this section, because the forest is so dense and the light is low it has a touch of a depressing feeling about it. You feel all closed in and at the time we were running through it, with the sun going down you feel even more depressed; kind of like you're losing the battle with the track. Occasionally we'd get some rays of sunshine in the few open parts and it was like a breath of fresh air.

Eventually we got to Echo Point Hut and I rewarded myself by sitting down for 60 seconds. The next milestone was 13 hours and I again rewarded myself with a 60 second sit down. Around about now the girls passed us as we left before they departed Narcissus. I saw a few horrendous splits on my GPS, with 15min k's and even one 18min k showing up. Yep, things were getting tough! Although strangely my ankle had completely stopped hurting so that was one positive. I got to a stage where I thought to myself "This is ridiculous, I'm never going to get to the finish." This spurred me on a bit and the pace lifted a fraction. We soon arrived at the end of the dense forest and entered the more open bushland. It made a massive difference to lose the claustrophobic depressing feeling and actually see some light again. I definitely remembered this section and knew that the end was near.



Even though we had made it to the road section of the track I couldn't be bothered running much, rather a power walk was mostly what we were doing, with the occasional 100m or so of running thrown in. We could now hear the cheers and I could soon see the finish line. It was such a relief to see the finish line and my wife waiting there for me to finish. My official time was 14:09:26, putting me 5th from last in 52nd position. It doesn't bother me finishing at the back of the

pack but I was a touch disappointed that I didn't do better last year's time.

I must thank Cliff for heading over to Tassie to run the last part with me. It definitely made a difference and did spur me on. It was great to have a good mate encouraging me to get through to the end.

So what did I learn about the Overland Track this year? Well here it goes:

1. It's NOT easier running it the second time.
2. Having run it before does NOT guarantee you'll run it faster.
3. Good weather does NOT mean that you'll easily take off time compared to running the track in the wet.

4. A dry track is a LOT tougher on the body. I was much sorer post race this year.
5. If you have dodgy ankles then TAPE THEM!!!
6. The Cradle Mountain Run is a brilliant, challenging and very rewarding run.
7. The run was just as well organised this year.
8. The Overland Track is even more spectacular in good weather; and
9. It reaffirms to me that the point to point secluded nature of this run really makes it what it is.

To sum up this years run, I do feel like the Overland Track got the better of me this year and that I have some unfinished business left out on the track. I guess that means I'll be back!

cheers

Glen (aka Wida on CR)

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