

## A Q&A WITH HANNY ALLSTON ON HER RECORD-BREAKING CRADLE MOUNTAIN ULTRA-RUNNING RACE

30/01/2019

Sourced from <https://www.hannyallston.com.au/blog/a-qa-with-hanny-allston-on-her-record-breaking-cradle-mountain-ultra-running-race>

An interview with Find Your Feet Australia

In 2013 you broke the women's record by around 75mins that year and finished 4th overall. Describe the run that you had – was it more mental, physical, strategical or all of the above?

To be honest, this was a hard year for me. In the leadup to the event, and even during it I had this real knowing discomfort in my knee. A month or so earlier I had been racing in China and tripped, knocking my knee on a rock. I found out weeks after the Overland event that I actually had a hairline fracture in my patellar. So, I guess I explain this because I don't think my best races come from physical. The UTA100km in 2017 was a classic example of this. In that circumstance, I was super physically prepared, but not there mentally or emotionally at all. It made it a very, very long day out. In the 2013 Overland Track event I was just so eager to be at the event and running down the trail which transects my favourite regions of Tasmania. I had been living in Canberra for years and really missed this pristine landscape. It is where I feel most at home. Where I feel my love of mountains and the intimacy of all the natural elements combines with the rhythm of running. So, toeing that start line I was filled with eagerness, albeit a little apprehension. I had no strategical plan other than to run by the feel of my body, to monitor it carefully and listening to it, just as I was listening to the landscape and its own rhythms as the day unfolded. As it turned out, I ended up continuing to bump into Matt Cooper who was one of Australia's top male ultra-runners at the time. He was having a tough day in the office but there was this quiet companionship and admiration at play. I didn't ever run with him for long, but it was like a yo-yo, his coming and going as he found energy and then lost it again. I found that emotionally keeping an eye out for him and wanting to help him gave me strength too, and I ended up feeling on cloud nine all day. I certainly didn't know anywhere near as much as I know now, such as about nutrition, hydration, equipment and strategical racing. I just ran with heart, spirit and tingling toes. I am so stoked still with that result. It was just a wonderful, long day outside.

(NB. Hanny finished 4th overall that year in a time of 8hrs13mins. In the last three years, no woman has come within fifty-five minutes of this time.

How did you focus your preparations in the last week before the event?

In the week before the event I was conscious of not overloading my body nor mind. I was doing a lot of coaching at the time so that made it quite tricky. I was also living in Canberra where it was really hot. Therefore, I did a little more swimming, early morning gentle jogs, tried to focus on consuming more electrolytes and simple foods, and generally just enjoying the excited nervousness that comes before a race. Sleep is critical and that should always be your number one priority pre-race. After travel, I like to also lie with my feet up a wall as it takes away a lot of my lethargy and is proven to help reduce cortisol levels.

What do you think is the optimal mindset for long distance races?

You need to be able to tune into your emotions, hear what they are saying, and then utilize this knowledge to your advantage. The importance of this is to be able to stay strong but still be human. I find that when I am too 'switched off' to what I am feeling when I am out there, it leads to not enjoying myself. I become robotic and unable to appreciate why I am out there and what I am seeing. On the other hand, when I am too vulnerable and ruled by my emotions I can find it hard to stay strong and lean into the discomforts. So, it is a very fine balance. I personally work a huge amount on understanding 'self' and 'my story'. I want to know what sits below the surface of me and to feel the vulnerability & strength that comes from this knowledge. I then find I am really able to tap into the adventures and missions that really are making my toes tingle... easily able to answer the question, 'Why am I doing this?' This is so important. Knowing you are out there for the right reasons will definitely give you the strength to lean into the discomforting moments, which are always prevalent when you are walking towards the edge! The other thing that is important is to understand what your definition of success is. And be warned, in Tasmania, this cannot be about time or places, or otherwise the raw wildness of the landscape will chew you up and spit you back out again!

What is different about racing & ultra-running in Tasmania?

I know we always use the word, but Tassie is definitely wilder. The trails are more remote, with many points of no return. The tracks are usually rougher too, with more roots, rocks, mud and sometimes, exposure. Therefore, I think you have to approach running in Tasmania with a slightly different mindset. You can't easily say, 'well, I'll start and see how it goes'. You have to be far more prepared for that. To know that when you toe the start of a trail you are 100% ready for that. I think this is why I became one of those athletes who never raced half-baked. I always needed to be 100% confident in all my process – from my training leading into the event or mission, to my nutrition, recovery, equipment and psychology. I guess this is where Find Your Feet has grown from – a really willingness to highlight the importance of preparation and preparedness with our community of eager trail enthusiasts.

What final tips or tricks would you have for anyone preparing for this year's Overland Track Ultra or another upcoming event?

I have come to learn that the half-way mark of an ultra-distance event is definitely not the half-way mark! I find that the game really begins sometime after the 2/3rds point of the event. Therefore, I like to determine a point that for me heralds this 'true ½ way mark'. In the Overland Track race, I had the half-way mark as when I reached the northern shores of Lake St Clair which comes at around 62km into the event. Even though I had run the event previously and really enjoyed this section, I knew that most participants mentally & physically struggle in this section. So I knew it was important to pace my race so that my energy tank was still more than ½ full for this remaining 20km of the race.