

RICHARD PICKUP

CRADLE ULTRA PIONEER

THE CRADLE MOUNTAIN RUN KICKED OFF IN 1981. It came about at Nick Goldie's place looking at a picture of Cradle Mountain on the wall. "I heard that some people walked through in a day. I reckon we could run through," he said. I wasn't so sure. But I was a better runner than Nick, so I said, "Oh, yes, course we can."

AS FAR AS I KNOW AT THE TIME THERE WAS NOTHING LIKE IT IN AUSTRALIA at the time, where you'd run for 82 kilometres over very, very rough country.

WE WERE EXPECTING ABOUT 18 people to front up, but in the end only nine did. I can remember every single one of them, because you can always remember the first more than any other. I recall starting off, I was running with Nick when he made a fantastic face plant right in the middle of the track. I think it rattled him a bit.

I ALWAYS FEEL FOR NICK IN THOSE FIRST RUNS. He pulled out first year, realising that he hadn't prepared well enough. I think everybody else finished. In the second year I couldn't run so I was acting as a relief party at Pelion. We needed somebody to pick up the dead bodies. I came down to the finish, and Nick had pulled again. He was the most despondent person I've seen. It's one of those things: the guy who was the main driver never actually finished it.

FOR A LONG TIME IT HELD THE REPUTATION OF THE TOUGHEST SINGLE DAY RUN. Of course, you can make any run tougher. You just have to find some impossible place to run. This is a reasonable run in the sense that there's a track, and there's a clear beginning and a clear end.

THE TRACK ITSELF HAS IMPROVED BUT THE SPEED WON'T. It's improved particularly for wet running, not so much for dry running. My time of 10 hours 20 minutes was pretty good when you think of it.

THE KEY TO RUNNING AND FINISHING IS NIMBLE FEET. The hardest bit is the combination of distance and rough footing. The duckboard sounds like it's easy, but often it just clips your toes all the time. The roots are the worst. When you're going through rainforest and they're always slightly wet, you slide very quickly off them.

NUMBERS ARE LIMITED. I like that about the Cradle run, because in the end it's a special run. It means that it can be a relatively personal experience for all. In 1982 (second edition) we only had five runners, but that actually proved difficult. Back then, when there were so few people who'd done it and so few people connected, it was quite hard to get enough people to start, plus others to ferry the gear round and provide relief.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST WOMAN TO EVER RUN: JEANETTE COLLIN. I think she lined up in '85. A male runner said, "We got to get away from that woman. She'll slow us down." Of course, she finished and he didn't. I rather enjoyed that.

THE MOST MEMORABLE PERFORMANCE I saw was Andy Kromar. He is brilliant. It is amazing to think that legend still holds the course record: 7 hours 25 minutes, run back in 1996. That's quite a long time ago.

PEOPLE WHO ARE HAVING A GO AT THE RECORD tend to taper off towards the end and can't actually hold on. It's a psychological thing. They can say, "I'm on the

record pace. I'll get the record." But can they continue the pace? The record books say no. Perhaps Andy's was just a phenomenal run.

CRADLE MOUNTAIN'S SPECIAL TO ME, because I've been involved for so long. In fact I was almost the sole organizer for almost all runs until 1995. That's 14 years.

ORIGINALLY THE EVENT WAS NEVER INSURED. We are now. Sometimes I'd have nightmares about taking the runners up to some obscure place which I'd never been before to start them off the run at the wrong time. It was quite a frightening thought. I don't get those nightmares anymore, thank God.

I'M NOT SURE WHETHER WE EVER MADE ANY MONEY OUT OF IT OR NOT. I don't know. I remember Craig Malot sending me extra money. He said, "I'm sure you couldn't have made any money out of that Richard. Here's another \$50." That was nice. I've no idea whether it was justified or not.

I'M NOT SURE WHETHER I CAN GIVE ANY WISE WORDS. I like trail running. On the other hand I'm also a track runner. I was a marathon runner of little note. I had the Tasmania steeplechase record for a short time in the 70s. My best time for the marathon was about 2:30. I was also a cross country runner. I knew how to go over hurdles, and obviously go over hurdles and fences. Rough country didn't worry me very much. **RUN**

A pioneer event in Australian trail running history, the Cradle Mountain Ultra will celebrate its 40th anniversary in February 2020.

www.cradlemtnrun.asn.au

