

Cradle Mountain Run 2021

22/02/2021

[Matt Crehan](#)



This February hosted the 41st edition of Australia's oldest ultra marathon, the Cradle Mountain Run: a running event that traverses the entire length of Tasmania's iconic Overland Track, from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair – approximately 80km.

As a group of around 60 runners gathered at the pre-dawn start line, a sense of nervous excitement hung in the air. Overall, I think people were relieved to be racing again after COVID put a spanner in the works of everyone's race calendar. But there was also a real apprehension of what lay ahead, with 90mm of rain falling the previous night. For the second year running, it was going to be a wet one!

This was my third time running in the event (although fourth time over the course, having hiked it a few years back). I remember thinking at the time that it seemed crazy that people could cover a week-long hike in a single day, but now I guess I am one of those crazy people.

I first ran it in 2019, treating it much more of a running adventure than a race. I took my time and soaked it all in, stopping for roughly one million photos. I had so much fun that I was back again in 2020, this time deciding to try and be a little more competitive with it. Still appreciating the landscapes and taking a few photos, but with a more focused mindset. A successful campaign then led to me lining up again in 2021, which really shows the pull that race has on those who have run it before. And, for good reason – the course is spectacular! I was a little wary of signing up for this year, not sure if interstate travel was going to be possible by February. This sentiment that was probably shared by many, as reflected in the largely Tasmanian cohort in this year's event. However, I do have to commend the Cradle Mountain Run Committee for having a very generous refund policy in the case of a withdrawal.

So, on a cool February morning we all lined up on the boardwalk outside Waldheim Cabins. A thin ribbon of boardwalk snaked through Button Grass plains; the Pandanis growing along the creek line reminding us how unique this landscape is. With no room to overtake in the first kilometres, participants self-seeded and I found myself up the front. This suited me because I was keen to run a quick time, and also keen to not get held up on the early climbs.



I had put down 8:15 as my predicted time, hoping to improve a little on last year. In the weeks leading into the race, I felt that training was going well. I was confident that I could hit that time, or at least give it a crack. But the weather forecast and the previous night's deluge certainly put a big chink in my armour. Regardless of this, I took off pretty quickly as dawn broke, with local runner Damon Whish-Wilson hot on my heels.

Last year, Damon and I ran together for the first 20 to 30km, and this year proved the same. We were running pretty much stride for stride up and over Marions Lookout – the first and biggest climb of the day. The boardwalk and rocky track towards the start teased us with the possibility we might keep our feet dry, but before long it was time to embrace the wet. Much of the track was basically a river bed.

As we reached the plateau and passed Cradle Mountain to our right, we were treated to a magnificent sunrise. The clouds parted enough to light up Barn Bluff to the west. Damon took the lead around here, and I was happy to tuck in behind him, stopping for the occasional photo but not letting him get too far out of sight. We stayed together all the way to Pelion Hut, the first cut off point, around 30km in.

Up to this point, I hadn't really been paying attention to my watch. I was just focused on keeping up with Damon, when he mentioned that we had run that section pretty quick. It turned out to be around 3 hours – quicker than I had anticipated. I was feeling good, so when Damon stopped to refill his bottle in a creek just after the checkpoint, I pushed on ahead.



I find the section after Pelion quite difficult. It is undulating and the tree roots makes getting into a rhythm rather difficult. However, running through the sections of cool, temperate rainforest really makes up for any low points physically. It feels a bit like you are running through a dream. The only downside of experiencing the course in this format is not being able to deviate on any of the side trips, which were highlights of my hike years earlier. But I told myself I'd come back again for that soon.

Dawn breaking against the iconic Barn

At around 40km, with the help of the descent down past Mt Pelion East, I started to feel good again. I decided to take advantage of this. I popped a caffeinated gel and came into the Windy Ridge campsite (52km) in a little over 5 hours.

One of the great things about the Overland Track is the diversity of terrain. When you're hiking, each day seems different. When you're running it, the landscape changes every couple of hours. As I

approached Narcissus Hut, on the top of Lake St Clair, the forest became drier, dominated by tall Eucalypts rather than southern rainforest species.

Still feeling good, I set myself the arbitrary goal of trying to get through that final checkpoint in under 6 hours. Anticipating it around every corner, I narrowly missed this target and went through in 6:01. Close enough, I thought. I went straight through without stopping for anything other than to swipe my timing card, despite this checkpoint being the only aid station on the course.

I'll admit, after being this far ahead of my original time goal, thoughts of Andy Kromar's incredible 1996 course record of 7:25 started floating through my head. Trying to do maths three quarters of the way through a technical ultra is never a good idea, and while I may have thought it was in reach for a split second, a couple of kilometres on the winding, technical terrain alongside the lake quickly threw that thought out the window. I tried moving as quickly as I could, but I find this section really hard to keep up momentum. There are lots of roots underfoot and the trail changing direction every few metres. My goals quickly changed to trying to duck in under 8 hours. This seemed a lot more feasible, although definitely not a given at the pace at which I was moving. I was also beginning to worry that others in the race might be moving better than I was and coming up on me any minute.



Matt and the first female Amy Lamprecht

After 17km of winding trail through the beautiful *Nothofagus* forest, I finally popped out onto the gravel paths leading to the Lake St Clair visitor centre. I could taste the finish! With a big grin on my face, I managed to come across the line first, in a time of 7:49. So stoked! Stoked as well to see my training partner Matt Dunn come across the line in second, on his first time on the Overland. Damon rounded out the men's podium, with Amy Lamprecht taking out the female race, followed by previous winner Emma Flittner and La Sportiva athlete Gill Fowler. Well done to everyone who completed the course on the day, in what were quite wet and trying

conditions. Thanks to the Cradle Mountain Run Committee for once again putting on such an amazing event, and thanks to Bogong Equipment and La Sportiva Australia for helping me get there. I look forward to lining up again next year!

For those interested, I wore La Sportiva Jackals (read my review of them [here](#)), an Ultimate Direction Mountain Vest and used a combination of Clif bars, gels and shot bloks for my nutrition.

Matthew Crehan is supported by Bogong Equipment and La Sportiva Australia.

Follow Matt on Instagram and Strava.