

Thursday, February 12, 2009

2009 Cradle Mountain Run - Feb 7th

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I first read about The Cradle Mountain Run in late 2007 when I became interested in going beyond a marathon, as they had become somewhat routine for me and I was after more of a challenge. It just sounded like such an awesome run and the things that made it sound attractive included the brilliant scenery, completing The Overland Track in one day and that the run is fully self sufficient. Also, there is no vehicular access to the track meaning that there is no easy bail out until you reach Narcissus, where you can opt to jump on the ferry for the last 20km if you don't have enough in the tank to finish, are injured or if you miss the cut off time. It sounded like such an adventure and after the completion of the 2008 Cradle Mountain Run, I made my mind up that the 2009 run would be my goal.

The Cradle Mountain Run is known for having one of the most stringent selection criteria of almost all other trail ultras around. I had a number of good marathon times that met the entry criteria, but I needed to gain some experience out on the trails as that was something that I didn't have. Luckily, about 2 weeks after I decided that 2009 would be my goal, the South Australian Road Runners Club (SARRC) announced that they were putting on a 56km ultra along the Yurrebilla trail in the Adelaide Hills. Brilliant, I now had a local trail ultra that I could use as my short term goal! I pretty much completely stopped my long weekend road runs and did all of my long runs out on the trails. Not only was I gaining valuable experience out on the trails but I began to love running trails much more than running on the road. The other trail event that I focused on was the SA 50k Trailblazer, and running with a more accomplished runner and on a very hot day it taught me many valuable lessons about what can happen out on the trails.

Whilst I trained hard I eagerly waited months for the 2009 Cradle Mountain Run entries to open, and I was so keen to make sure I got a spot on the run that I entered at the first available opportunity. I had just a bit over a week of waiting and thinking whether or not I had done enough to have my application accepted, when I received a call for Alec Hove the run director letting me know that I had. I was in. I pretty much booked flights and

accommodation the next day and finalised what my training program would be for the next 3 months.

Eventually the time had come to head over to Tassie for the run. I was fortunate enough to ride in Dale and Keith Lancaster's car up to Cradle Mountain on the Friday afternoon. Dale has completed the run 12 times and Keith twice, so it was extremely valuable getting 90 minutes of question time from two runners with a wealth of experience.



We soon arrived at the Cradle Mountain Lodge ready for the pre run briefing, which all went smoothly apart from when the ranger gave us a forecast for Saturday as being hot and approximately 32 degrees. This resulted in a lot of sighs amongst the group; this was not the weather that we wanted for an 80km run. I had my mandatory gear checked, had some dinner and then we were off to the cabins at Waldheim.

I was slightly concerned about how good the Waldheim cabins would be and what it was going to be like sleeping in a cabin with 6 other runners, all most likely having their own pre run routines. The cabins were very tidy, having a gas stove, kettle, running water/ sink and a fridge. The running water was untreated and boiling was recommended. I had my own bottled water and didn't need to worry about that.

I met all of my cabin mates, everyone did some race preparations, there was a little bit of chatter and before I knew it people were heading off to bed and it was only 8:50pm. I had nothing left to do and figured I may as well hit the sack too. At least I was going to get a good chance of getting a few hours of sleep before my 4:15am rise time. It wasn't long after I went to bed that it started raining and at times there was some very heavy rainfall indeed, and this continued throughout the night. I'm a light sleeper at the best of times but in between the heavy rain I managed to get some good sleep amongst my tossing and turning.

I woke up at about 4am and just lay in bed waiting for my alarm to go off. My alarm went off and I figured that the others in my group heard it so I got up and started getting ready. I didn't turn on the light and I assumed the others would start getting up soon but they didn't. I thought I was making more than enough noise to wake them up and I was surprised that no one else had set an alarm. Eventually it got to 4:45am and I thought I better make sure the others all woke up as the 5:15am roll call was fast approaching. Everyone was up in a flash when they realized what the time was.

Before we knew it, it was time for the first roll call and to have our race numbers written on us. It was raining quite heavily and at this stage the rangers forecast seemed to be rather incorrect. 6am approached and we all headed down to the start of the track where there was another roll call and not long after the countdown to the start of the run. The run had started. It was quite an uneventful start with the faster runners disappearing into the morning darkness and the slower runners fitting in behind them. I made sure that I was near the back as I didn't

want to get stuck running with guys faster than me. I needed to pace myself as this was my first attempt at running 80km.

It really didn't seem like we had been running for long at all when the track started to head up for the climb up to Marions Lookout. I let a few faster guys pass me and it seemed like there weren't a lot of runners behind me. I found myself running with some guys around my pace as we headed up to Marions Lookout, and the weather seemed to turn for the worst. It was getting very windy, quite cool and also started raining. As bad as the weather was it was still quite spectacular running on the top of Marions Lookout.

Kitchen Hut was passed and now we were running around the base of Cradle Mountain which was an awesome sight. The terrain so far was quite rocky and some sections required rock hopping. I think the term "track" has been quite loosely used here!

We then headed down past the Waterfall Valley but not down to the campsite. I almost got the map out here until I saw a runner on the other trail. I followed them.

The running through to Lake Holmes, Lake Windermere and Windermere Hut was quite straightforward with a mix of trails, including a good amount of duck boarding and board walk.

Heading through Pine Forest Moor the track conditions started to become a lot more difficult and I soon discovered what people are talking about with regards to the tree roots and mud that the Cradle Run is famed for. The mud didn't "suck" any of my shoes off, but at times I could feel it having a good go as I tried to pull my foot out of mud deeper than ankle deep! "How much worse could this get" I thought to myself? If it wasn't muddy or tree rooted then there was so much water running along the track that it seemed like we were running down creeks. I was running off and on with a 68 year old veteran of the Cradle Run who has completed the run 11 times, and he said that the track conditions were on par with the worst that he has seen.

Frogs Flats was next and I stopped to adjust my sock that had slipped down a bit (I wear two socks). I also tried to fix what felt like lumps under the balls of my feet but I couldn't sort that out so I continued on.

Pelion Hut (31 km) was now not too far away and I could see that I was not going to meet the 13 hour split time, and I was actually getting a bit worried of missing the main cut off time. This kind of threw me a bit as I thought I would easily get there in time. Given that I didn't know how difficult the next 4km was it also added to my concern. Next I managed to twist my left ankle making things even worse. I'm known for having bad ankles so I hobbled on for a bit. Luckily my ankle seemed to loosen up but it did knock my confidence around and was probably a good wake up call, reminding me that I need to have 100% attention on where I'm placing my feet. I ended up making it to Pelion at 11:24am so I had 36 minutes up my sleeve, but I knew I had to run well and not lose much time over the next 30km. The furthest I had previously run was 56km so I was a little unsure how I'd fair getting to Narcissus (60km) considering what the track conditions were like.

I was stilling feeling like I was in good shape and the track conditions and scenery were changing that much that I didn't have any problems with my mind wandering. Some

intermediate goals that I had set were to get to the first check point, half way (40km), to have been running for the longest time I ever have, and to cover the marathon distance. I like motivational tools like this in conjunction with using my GPS.

Running through to Pelion Gap, along side Douglas Creek it was evident from the water falls about how much water was flowing as they were a raging torrent. The track continued with rocks, roots and more mud up to Pelion gap and through to Kia Ora Hut and the checkpoint at Windy Ridge Hut (49km), where I arrived at 2:58pm. This checkpoint had no cut off time associated with it. Alec Hove asked how I was feeling; I was in good shape but really starting to feel the pain come on a bit stronger. Alec told me that there was tea and other refreshments available at Narcissus so it was encouraging that he didn't seem concerned about me not getting to Narcissus in time. I had 2 hours to travel 10km so how hard could it be?

The track started to become a lot friendlier and it did seem like I was making good time, although I wasn't exactly moving fast. I started to have some rough patches along this section. Although it seemed like as long as I kept moving forward, eating and drinking then I'd eventually come good again. It seemed to get to a point where as much discomfort as I was in, it didn't get any worse and I could keep on pushing forward, albeit rather slow! Narcissus was approaching and although I could see I was going to make it under the cut off I wasn't going to have much time up my sleeve. I got to Narcissus (60km) at 4:38pm so I only had 22 minutes to spare, but it was a relief knowing that I could continue and couldn't be forced to take the ferry ride home. There was Coke, ANZAC biscuits and shortbread at this checkpoint and they all went down very nice indeed.

I set off on the last leg of the run and I split it up into manageable chunks to make it easier to handle mentally, and just focused on each section. I would aim for half way to the half way point, the halfway point, 10km to go and then single digits to go. If you look at the profile of this section on the map it looks flat but don't be fooled. Because the rises and falls aren't big enough to go over a contour line it looks flat but it isn't. The short ups and downs combined with having to jump over logs and deal with more roots and mud makes the final section quite tough.



I passed a runner going in the opposite direction to meet some else and he told me "about an hour to go". I was pretty much in a state of run, walk, run, walk but I didn't at all feel like I wasn't going to make it to the end. I pressed on, passing someone waiting for a runner to come through and they said "20 minute to go". I'm always weary of comments like this from bystanders, but sure enough I eventually arrived at the Hugel River bridge where I was told that there was only about a kilometer to go. I looked at my watch and noticed that 14 hours was

rapidly approaching so I pushed hard. At this stage due to the emotions and adrenaline flowing through my body resulting from knowing I was almost at the end of my biggest

challenge, it allowed me to run pretty much pain free. I'm not sure how fast I was running but it felt fast to me. It was definitely a bit more than a kilometer but eventually I could see the finish and hear the cheers. I crossed the line in 13 hours 58 minutes. The last 20km had taken me 3 hours 20 min which is pretty much what my marathon PB is! I finished 6th from last but I didn't really care, I was immensely proud of my effort.

To sum up this run I would say that it's really a great adventure. The scenery is brilliant (when you get a chance to look at it) and the track is just so diverse. There aren't really any overly challenging climbs, but the difficulty lies in the rocks, roots and mud. I think I am going to have nightmares for the rest of my life about tree roots! You can read all day long about the tree roots on this run, but I don't think it's possible to get an appreciation for what they are like until you run the track.

I would really like to thank the efforts of the Cradle Mountain Run committee. Everything over the weekend was just so well organised and there was such a friendly atmosphere.

I will be back!

([Here](#) are some photos that Buzz Burrell took on the day as well as his [run report](#).)

Posted by [Wida](#) at [6:56 PM](#)

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