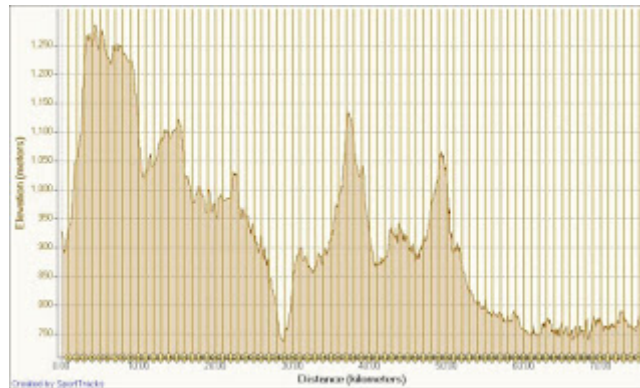


Cradle Mountain 2011 Beth Cardelli

<http://bethcardelli.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/cradle-mountain-2011.html>



This was my first time to Tasmania and I was quite excited to see what it had on offer. My husband (Brian who had been to Tassie a few times previously) and I flew into Launceston on the Wednesday before the run to have a bit of a holiday beforehand. We landed early in the morning, picked up our hire car and headed south away from Launceston. It wasn't our inability to navigate, just that we allowed our curiosity choose which road to go down. After exploring some of the quaint country townships on the outskirts of Launceston we eventually made our way into the city. Brian was keen to show me Launceston's Gorge so we made a bee line over to its entrance. As we neared the gorge itself, there were a few teenage boys dressed in boardies geeing each other up. As we got closer Brian told me to slow down and to watch what they were about to do. We slowly walked past and as we did it finally occurred to me what they were doing. The boys walked out into the middle of the old iron bridge and then proceeded to climb over the railing. Standing on the outside of the bridge they held their boyhood in one hand before letting go of the railing and plunging the 10 or so metres into the silty waters below. It looked pretty cool, but there is no way that I was going to give it a go. As we continued up the gorge it became apparent that the teenagers of Launceston were intent on throwing themselves off any platform they could find, whether it be rock, tree or bridge.

Our return journey out of the Gorge took us up and over the Zig Zag Trail. As we were climbing up we were passed by a fit looking bloke (presumably local) running up over the hillside. As we continued on he returned to pass us yet again, however this time he slowed down, looked around and then stopped. Looking at Brian's TNF100 T-shirt he asked if he was doing Cradle. No he wasn't but he pointed out that I was. It turned out that the guy we met was Clarence who was putting in some last minute hill reps before lining up for this year's run also. I am not sure what sort of first impression I made upon Clarence as he checked me up and down and asked if I was going to wear 'those shoes?' and was I going to strap my ankles. To which I replied "probably" and 'I don't normally, but should I?'. After a bit more banter Clarence offered to catch up before heading over to Cradle Mtn Lodge to give me some insight into the course. If we had a bit more time then I definitely would have taken him up on his offer. What a nice guy. Is everyone this nice in Tassie?

On Thursday morning we travelled to Cradle Mtn Lodge where we met up with Brian's parents and his sister. We arrived around lunch time and got to enjoy our meal on the back deck of our cabin while watching the wallabies go about their business just meters away from us. So I could familiaris myself with some of the trail and enjoy the views before the race, Brian and I decided to run up Cradle Mtn. It was lots of fun clambering over the debris field. The day was clear and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Apparently we were pretty lucky. We savoured the view from the top then brought out the camera. I went to turn it on and nothing. Tried again and still nothing. Take the batteries out, warm them up, swap them over, put them back again, then still nothing. Bugger! We turned around and headed back down to the carpark. We returned back to the Lodge just in time to get cleaned up and attend dinner. At dinner with Brian's family we were discussing how we went up Cradle Mtn with a camera that had flat batteries, and to make amends Brian convinced his sister to join him on a return journey to get the photos that we failed to get.

I spent the day before the race just relaxing around the lodge reading my book and exploring some of the local trails. The day passed slowly and at 5pm I gathered my race pack and made my way down to briefing. I joined my fellow runners at the briefing and saw a lot of unfamiliar faces and a lot of very lean looking bodies. The standout comment at briefing was 'stay on the track'. Apparently this was going to be gauged by how muddy runners were as they traversed the track. This made me a bit nervous as to how bad the trail really was. Talking to friends prior to the run I had heard all sorts of stories. Some were brutally honest while others seemed fanciful in their description of how technical the trail could be. Was I supposed to finish the event as I had at Mud Run? After briefing I had my weight measure and a sample of blood taken before dinner and then it was off to the cabin and bed.



After a restless sleep the alarm went off at 5am. A quick change of clothes and a choc chip muffin and I was set to go. At the starting area I quickly found the few familiar faces I knew of Julie Q and David B. I was unsure of where to put myself at the start as the first section of trail follows a narrow board walk and I didn't want to get trampled or hold anyone up. So I followed Julie and we found ourselves right at the pointy end of the starters. At 6am sharp we were off and flying down the board walk towards Marion's Lookout and the Overland Trail beyond. I pushed hard at the start so as to not frustrate people behind, but I knew that whoever overtook me now I had a pretty good chance of seeing them again before the end.

After Kitchen Hut people started to spread out and after Waterfall Valley I soon found myself alone taking in the beautiful surroundings until I started to literally disappear into the track. I had stayed on the trail as requested and subsequently run through the mud when it suddenly swallowed my whole leg. I was stunned and couldn't believe what had happened. It was a Beth sized trap. When I fell I ended up face down in what felt like a mud pit, in the process bruising my thigh and finger on a hidden rock. I pulled myself out and continued on my way feeling pretty beaten up. Things started to pick up after that (like it could have gotten much worse, right?) and made a conscious effort to be more vigilant.



Andy caught me near Pelion Hut check point so I decided to see how long I could stay with him before I was dropped. After Pelion Hut we ran together happily for quite some time and we caught John. He let us pass but didn't let us go so now we were three. We ran together for awhile till we spied a big puddle of water. We all stopped for a top up and a quick chat and John and I ran off leaving Andy to play in the puddle a little bit longer. I wondered if I would see him again.... Further on heading into Du Cane Gap, John said there was some good running coming up. Was he referring to good trail, or just better than what we had just been through? We passed Michael who I remember chatting to earlier on in the morning. After Windy Ridge Hut I lifted my pace slightly and meet up with John again at Narcissus Hut. I took advantage of the checkpoint and indulged in a delicious chocolate chip cookie that one of the volunteers baked for us and off I went to catch up with John, again. I was just getting into a rhythm, when nature decided to call. Damn it! So I continued on looking out for the perfect location. Girls will know the one I mean. No spikey shrubs that are going to make you uncomfortable. A nice young tree with smooth bark to help you with your balance. And privacy of course. You know. After finding a satisfactory spot I then focused on hunting down John again. When I found him we plodded along for awhile and he warned me how tedious the last part was around the lake. Getting closer towards the end I saw Chris up ahead who I was also running with long ago. As a distraction I introduced John to Chris and Chris to John. While they were distracted with introductions I quietly put some distance between me and them, then went off in pursuit of the finish.

As I approached Watersmeet I was surprised and relieved to meet up with Brian who said that I had about 1km of easy walking trail ahead of me before the finish. As he accompanied me to the finish he was telling me that I was in 5th place overall. As Brian said this Andy snuck up behind us and shot through. He must have put a fair bit in to catch up because he seemed to slow down and sat 10m in front until he caught up with his mum. This seemed to spur him on a little more and he opened the

gap even more. He later told me that when he saw Chris and John near Watersmeet and said he was spurred on and that when he saw me soon after that was the icing on the cake. What a great way for him to finish, taking out three people so close to the end.



It was good to cross the finish line and to have a good look at the bruise on my leg. Wow it was huge. It was the size of a saucer (which on my leg is pretty damn big) and it was already 15 different colours. Before I could start my recovery I was weighed again and the vampires took some more blood. I thought I heard them mention dinner when they were taking it, but I'm sure it was supposed to be for research?! I was pretty pleased with my weight loss for the event, 1.0kg. It gives me confidence that I won't have problems at Western States later in the year.

After a hot shower and a short nap, Brian, his family and I went to the Lake St Clare Visitors Centre where we sat down for dinner and watched the remaining runners cross the finish line who had made the cut at Narcissus Hut.

I'm really glad that I didn't listen to my friend's description of the Cradle Mtn run and that I went down to experience it for myself. I really enjoyed the run along with the people who make these boutique events so special. After spending a few days down in Hobart recovering I have decided that I'll try to get back to race next time.



