

2024 Cradle Mountain Run Report - Joseph Nunn

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Journey to Cradle

Cradle Mountain Run is a wholesome experience that extends far beyond just a run. The journey begins with a bus ride from Hobart to Launceston then another bus to Cradle Mountain. The whole day is spent hanging out with other runners in a state of excited anticipation.

It's a long day travelling from Hobart to Cradle. We finally arrive in the afternoon and drop off our bags at Waldheim. Then we are on the bus again headed to Cradle Lodge for the race briefing. A whole day gone in a blur of transit and preparations but it is an enjoyable time spent with good people.

I am particularly excited for this year's event due to the group of good friends entered. My friend and housemate Ziggy is along for his first run. Dan and Justin, regular characters on this blog are also signed up. Then there is a whole raft of Hobart Trail runners filling the ranks of the limited 60 entry slots. It's a legend convention.

The forecast for the following day looks glorious and if anything a little too hot. I am happy for the chance to see some of the spectacular views I missed out on the last [two times I ran the Overland Track](#). After the briefing and helping Ziggy dispose of half a pizza and some chips we decide to walk the 6km back to Waldheim rather than catching the bus.



The view back to Cradle

We chat as we walk and enjoy the beautiful evening. It is a great way to unwind after a long day of travel. The grassy plains around Waldheim are covered with Wombats and has a mystical aura. We walk past Gustav Weindorfer's grave and I wonder what he would think if he saw the place these days and whether he would approve of our run.

With all preparations in order and everyone in my cabin either already sleeping or staring at their ereaders, I have little to do but go to bed. I sleep well knowing I have a great day to look forward to with excellent conditions and minimal performance expectations. I say minimal expectations but I do still have a **9 hour goal** in my head. The same goal I set myself the previous year and didn't achieve (9:30 last year). I decide to aim for the goal time but I'm not going to destroy myself in doing so. My main goal is to have a good day out on the trails to redeem myself after the suffering I endured on the [Western Arthurs](#) over new years.

Cradle Run Day

Role Call

Keith the veteran race organiser does the rounds in the morning ensuring everyone is up and awake. We assemble at the trailhead ready for the role call. Keith is not happy if you are not present when he calls your name. The morning is cool, clear and still. I opt to be bold and start cold knowing that I will warm up as soon as I start climbing up Marions lookout. There is a sense of excitement amongst us as we wait for the final role call.



Myself, Ziggy, Justin and Dan at the startline



Awaiting the role call

Keith runs through the names for a final time. All are present and reporting for duty. I move myself close to the start to get in a good position to go fast but not too fast. The first section is on skinny duck board so overtaking options are limited. When the clock strikes 6am the run begins with Keith saying 'off you go'.

Waldheim to Pelion – Cruising Along

I position myself as the fifth or sixth person onto the board walk and fly along. I let the excitement take hold knowing the that imminent hill will slow me back to a sensible pace. Climbing up to Marion's lookout I chat with another runner called Chris who also ran the [GPT100](#) last year. Our pace is slowed by the amount of photo stops required to capture the sunrise. Chris is stopping for more photos than me so I overtake.



Looking towards Cradle at sunrise

I am now behind Damon Whish-Wilson who I know from previous results as a fast runner. I wonder whether it's wise to keep up with him. Later, I found out he hasn't been training much and is running to maintain qualification for future events. Justin is hot on my heels and soon catches up to me and we run together. We are both loving life, moving well and feeling stoked. Justin says 'This feels a lot easier than last year, I guess training for a 100 mile race helps'.

I'm out ahead and moving at a reasonable pace along technical rocky trails. The pace causes me to roll my ankle and reminds me to pay attention to my footing. It hurts enough to make me concerned but I hope to run it off. I distract myself by taking in the views. For the first time I can see Cradle and Barn bluff and I now understand what all the fuss is about.



My first time seeing Barn Bluff

As we approach Waterfall Valley hut we spot another runner out ahead, it's Dave Lennon. As we reach the hut we catch up with him. We are now a gang of three, christening ourselves the "9-Hour Train" with our shared ambitious goal. The train, for now, is running right on schedule.



Justin and Dave leading the way

We are all cruising along having a great time. Chatting about running and the day ahead. Dave tells of having a mate coach him to help in prepare for the run. Justin talks of his homemade energy gels and how they are his only fuel for the day. I recount the Western Arthurs with Covid epic and how plan to have a good day of running to rekindle my love of the sport. In little to no time we are approaching Windermere Hut. Dave and I plan a water refill but Justin is a man on a mission and soldiers on ahead.

It's an efficient water stop, we estimate it takes about 40 seconds. So we are surprised when we get back out on the trail and see how far ahead Justin is. We think he must have sprinted off on us. In hindsight he was staying aboard the "9 Hour Train" and Dave and I fell off the back of it.



Dave and I, no more Justin

This is the last we see of Justin till the end of the run. He put the pedal down and we weren't willing or able to catch him. We continue on towards Pelion Hut, the first major milestone. I know that to achieve the 9 hour goal we need to pass through in about 3:30. Last year I fell for the trap of racing to Pelion hoping to achieve that time and ruined myself. A silly thing to do when Pelion is only one third of the total distance. This year I am willing to fall behind the target time if it means I have greater longevity to push later in the run.



Dave and I coming into Pelion

Pelion to Narcissus – Heating Up

We arrive at Pelion 9 minutes behind schedule. While we're refilling our flasks Chris arrives. He comments about how rough the trails are. Dave responds saying "you're not from Tassie are you? I thought the trails were in good condition". It seems that he has been blind sighted by an event that looks easy on paper but is far from it. We tell him the worst is yet to come.

Chris joins us as we head back out, a group of three again. We climb up to Pelion Gap together with me leading the charge. The climb feels a lot easier this year than last. In what feels like no time we are at Pelion Gap, a location I consider to be the halfway mark. I continue to lead and increase the pace on the downhill duck board.



Me, Dave and Chris at Pelion Gap

I hear a 'woah' shortly followed by another louder 'WOAH' from behind me. Dave says to me "did you not see that enormous tiger snake you just ran over?". I ran straight over it without even seeing it. Thankfully we all got past fine and rode a short energy boost from the snake fright.

At Kia Ora hut we all stop to refill flasks. The day is heating up and we're all drinking huge amounts of fluids. Running towards Du Cane hut Chris becomes more talkative. This is a sign of a resurgence of energy in him and he soon leaves us and pushes on ahead. Dave and I soldier on up the climb to Du Cane Gap. We are slowing on the climb feeling the fatigue of the many kilometres already ran and the drain of the heat.

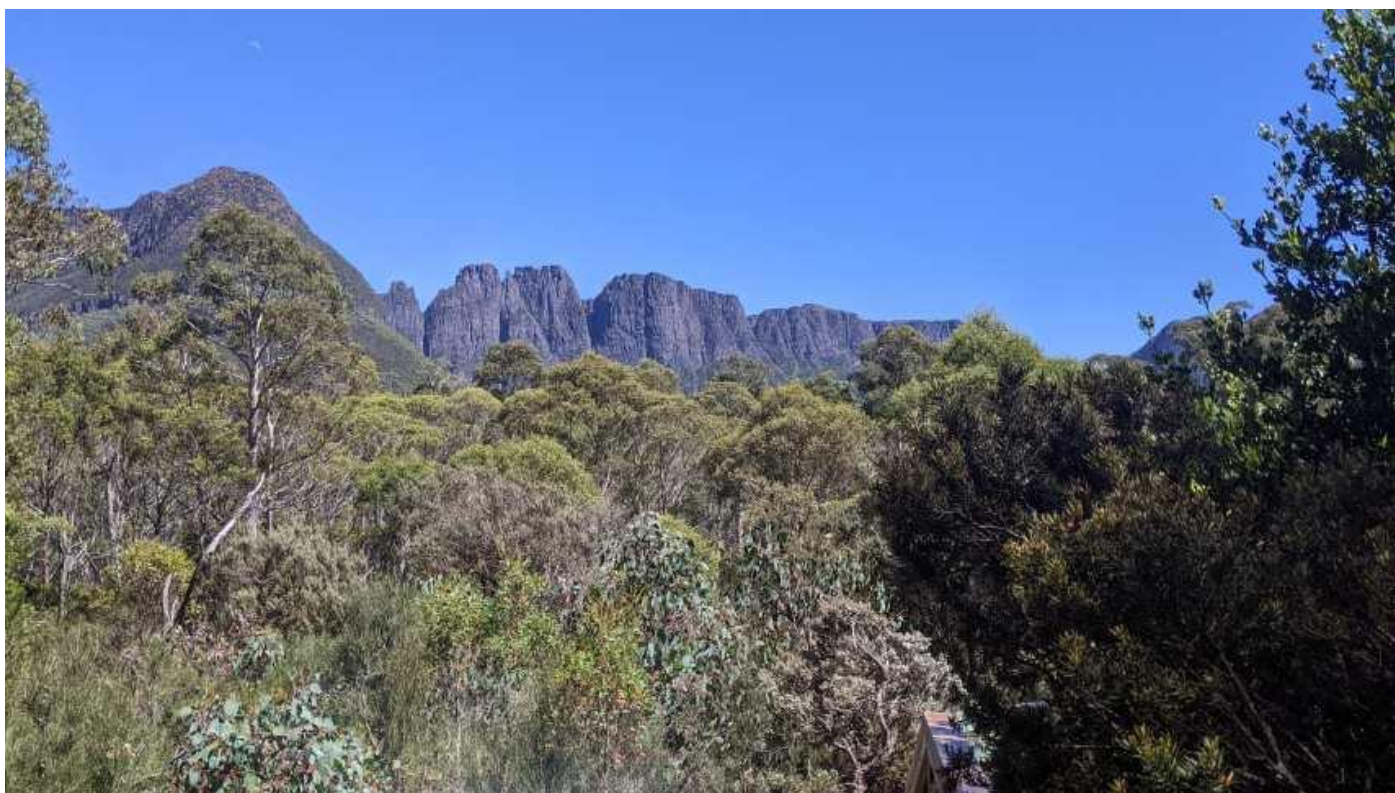
The climb is long and arduous but we finally make it to the top. I hope for a fast descent down the other side but we are still moving slowly. When the trails become more runnable I jump ahead feeling a surge of energy. Dave keeps up and we push the pace to Windy Ridge hut.

At Windy Ridge I am greeted by a friend, Zoe, who is either guiding or rangers on the track. Dave and I jump down to the water tank for another refill and we hear another runner has arrived. Dave says “I bet it’s Dan”. We get back to the track and see that it is in fact Dan who is surprised to have caught us. I say to Dan, “time to jump on the 9 hour train” when in actual fact we were all way off that target.

Dan leads us down the fast runnable trails. I am getting roasted in the exposed sunlight and heat. After a while I let Dave go ahead. Then I opt to drop back and Dave decides to keep up with Dan. And so after over 50ks together Dave and I part ways. He still has some fighting spirit left whereas I am reverting to survival mode.

I am relieved to be on my own, it allows me to moderate my pace and preserve myself. The heat and fatigue is draining my focus and I am kicking rocks. Each kick compounds the pain in my toes exponentially. I am getting blisters on both of my big toes, adding another layer of pain. Each kick brings with it a louder scream of profanities. Slowing down I decide to focus on my footing. With this newfound focus I am able to avoid the rocks and the pain in my toes begins to subside. I am disappointed to have slowed so much on a section I planned to run fast.

I’ve mentally given up on any time goals and have reverted to a goal of trying to enjoy the day rather than inflicting unnecessary suffering. I don’t have the willpower or drive to push through the pain to finish a few minutes quicker. I still maintain consistent movement and manage my nutrition and hydration even though nausea has set in. Relieving myself of performance goals is liberating. I have gratitude for the beautiful conditions rather than feeling frustrated about the heat.



One of the few photos I took at this stage of the day, Mt Geryon

Narcissus to Cynthia Bay – Struggle along the Lake

I arrive at Narcissus in 7:26, over half an hour behind the 9 hour target. Having thrown away my performance goals I take my time at the mini-aid station. I drink coke and grab a couple of ANZAC biscuits. I comment to the volunteers about how much I was looking forward to the ANZAC biscuits. Last year I only

grabbed one biscuit and ate it as I ran. It was so good that I contemplated turning around and going back for another. I was saying all the right things because Dave, the aid station volunteer baked them himself and was happy to hear the glowing feedback.

Grasping my biscuits I leave the aid station dreading the section to come. I focus on making it to Echo Point first and promise myself a caffeinated gel upon arrive. Something to look forward to. I plod along and manage to slowly eat both of my biscuits. The calories and the shade of the forest canopy revive me and I am able to move along with greater optimism.

The small undulations are a struggle after running 60 kilometres. The wind is up and the Lake is extremely choppy. It should be giving me a tailwind but the forest shelters me from the much needed assistance. I cave in early and eat my caffeine gel shortly before arriving at Echo Point. Only 10 more arduous kilometres to the finish line. I have now turned my watch face to just tell me battery percentage and sunset time. I don't want to know my race time anymore.

With caffeine coursing through my veins I push as hard as I am willing and move quicker with a finish line now in my sights. My momentum is suddenly halted with my foot centimetres away from a tiger snake who recoils. I step back and it slithers away from me along the track in the direction I want to head. Not ideal. So I politely ask it to move from the track which it ignores not understanding my English. I veer off the track and manage to overtake it.

I keep hearing noises behind me and am paranoid that another runner is right behind. I'm also hearing noises that sound like voices. Last year I had John Cannell chasing me along the lake and I did not want to be running in fear again. I'm not sure I have the energy to hold off an adversary at this stage. I later discover that these were phantom sounds, the nearest runner was 7 minutes behind me.

The trails gradually improve in quality. As they improve my pace increases. I know I am close now. When I finally see the Watersmeet Bridge I push myself to run a decent pace along the flat to the finish. Dan, Gareth, Chris, Dave and Justin are all around to see me finish. I look at my watch and see I've done it in 9:41, only 11 minutes slower than last year. I find out that Dan finished 2 minutes before me and that Justin really smashed it out and got in well under the 9 hour goal and coming third.

Finish Line

After finishing I am ushered over to a shelter for a mandatory gear check. I am in a daze but I hear that another runner is coming in and someone says it's Ziggy. I run out to see him finish. He is 7 minutes behind me. Dave, Dan, Myself then Ziggy finish [5th, 6th, 7th and 8th overall](#).

At the finish, Justin's parents have setup a makeshift kitchen to cook burgers. We sit around eating burgers and watching other runners finish all afternoon. We revel in the well earned feelings of cookedness.



Dan, me, Ziggy and Justin where we remained flopped for hours

Later on Dan and I wander down to Fergys Paddock to camp for the night. In the morning we get the buffet breakfast and hang around for the presentations. I end the weekend physically depleted but with my cup completely full. I had such a great day on the trails and such a wonderful weekend with friends old and new. I'll be back in years to come, I've got 9 hours of unfinished business.



Traditional group photo on Sunday morning