

Cradle Mountain Run 2026 - The Last Entrant

By Matthew Hubbard – Runner No. 60

Run all 80km of the Overland track? No worries.

I'm back at my desk, reflecting on the Cradle Mountain Run. Here is my story, and what it was for me.

First let's return to February 2025, where it all began.

My partner Robina and I were sitting at Cradle Mountain Lodge preparing to walk the Overland Track, when a noisy bunch were releasing their energy over a "briefing" led by some chap named Keith. Keith was talking about a run heading off the next day. We listened intently and became awfully keen. We said, *"We'll do that run one day."*

If only we knew about the pain, the blood, the agony, the tears and Keith's lecturing. And that's just the entry process and subsequent waitlist!

We're both new to the running scene, having started in mid '23. All of this was new to us.

Entering the race was the first hurdle. We thought we were prepared because of the advice we'd received *"It's tough to get in," "Be prepared," "It closes immediately," "Don't be worried about pulling out."* At 8pm exactly we logged in to try to make it into the first 60 participants. I made the waitlist at about 20-ish. At 8:03 Robina missed out completely.

In the months and weeks leading up to the event, we watched the website constantly. From number 20 there was no movement for a long, long time. Then after 3 months of waiting my place on the waitlist jumped into single figures. 1 week before the event I was number 4 on the list. Two days before the event I was number 2. However, with only 48 hours until the event I felt that my chance of an entry had well and truly gone — or so I thought. I was okay with that. That's the process, and the people were right: *it's tough to get in.*

Late in the day, just 36 hours before the event I got a call. *"It's Christine from CMR. Are you able to run on Saturday? ... I hope you're prepared."*

I could not let that possibility pass.

Preparation was suddenly in full swing, albeit late. Cradle Mountain Run had a bed available. Robina was happy staying in the car. A couple of mates had some of the extra gear I might need.

Here we come.

I replayed the track over and over in my head — distance, hydration, nutrition, the psychological effort. All based on our walk last year and other events. I run marathons, the odd trail, but at the end of the day I'm nothing special and wouldn't put myself in the same category as *these* guys.

Keith's Friday afternoon pre-race brief was just as I remembered from last year — what started this journey. No-nonsense, his black book, no issues with pulling out, crawl if you need to.

We went over my gear again, re-checked nutrition, and went for a relaxing walk. There was nothing more I could do.

At the start line there was a heavy mist. Some had jackets on and spoke of worse conditions on the other side. I risked it — if it got worse, I'd add layers later. I started in long sleeves, a legionnaires hat, and short shorts.

A mate summed it up perfectly: *"You can tell if it's a true ultra by the number of T8 shorts at the start line."* They were certainly on display.



After the roll call and Keith's final race briefing, we were off. Runners to the front, the rest behind. The self-seeding seemed to work — who really knows anyway? I was in a small bunch and followed along, doing what they did. At Kitchen Hut they pushed on and I slowed slightly. Then a female athlete flew past, I didn't see her again.

I had no real plan — no times, no pace. The goal was simple: finish; Stay strong and finish. I knew the cut-offs at Pelion Hut and for the ferry, but I fell into the trap of checking my watch. That habit stayed with me until the end. Lesson learnt; Splits didn't matter — just keep moving.

I felt pretty good, moving well. Hydration and eating aren't my strengths, but it was working. Gel on the hour, a bite as I went. At 30km I recorded a short video for later — things still looked okay. I'd been running alone for a while, refilling at creeks — some dry, some flowing — and wetting my hat, which was incredibly comforting as it dripped over my head and shoulders.

I caught up to a guy at Pelion Hut, the 35km mark of the 80km race. We refilled, thanked the wonderful volunteers, and pushed on. I overheard one of them say, *"That's a third of them done."* Pleasantly surprising — but also meaningless in the bigger picture.

Crikey, there was still a long way to go.



Credit – Ben Wells

Not long after, between Pelion Gap and Du Cane Gap, I kicked a piece of timber — simply not paying attention. The pain that followed meant I was walking. The frustration was high. Lifting my legs became difficult and cramping set in.

I reached Bert Nichols Hut, the 53km mark, and sat at the tank for water and painkillers. The volunteer clearly noticed something wasn't right and offered help, support, and encouragement. I'm certain that her help alone got me to the finish.

I debated taking my CrampFix but decided against it, telling myself I might need it later... even though I was cramping *now*. I guess that is what your brain does when you are exhausted.

I thanked the volunteers and set off again, thinking about the elevation chart. Bert Nichols Hut to Narcissus Hut is about 10km of mostly flat or downhill. Once the pain eased, surely, I could manage a decent 10km. My plan being to run the flats and power hike the rest.

I arrived at Narcissus Hut with renewed energy, though the soreness returned quickly. Christine who'd called me was there and we chatted about the late call-up. A chuckle, my last painkiller — then I moved on. I had to keep going. Only the Lake to go. My support network — and many others — had said the last 20km *is* the event!

Not long after leaving Narcissus Hut I heard the ferry. The sound of civilisation was an incredible boost. It made me think the finish must be close. Then Echo Point came into view. I deliberately looked away and pushed on, trying not to let it mess with my head.

Three guys flew past looking like they'd been running for only 30 minutes. Their pacing clearly suited the terrain better than mine. Experienced operators. I fell back into watching my watch. What felt like 3km was only 300metres. A counterproductive habit I just couldn't break.

I saw my first snake of the day and told myself there were probably more. I was determined that if one bit me now, I'd crawl out bandaged. I was finishing no matter what.



Credit – Benjamin Sveen (not the offender)

Soon after, I heard distant sounds and the track widened into more of a road; then a creek crossing. The pain was still there, but the pull of the finish was stronger.

One final turn — and there it was. Robina cheering and finished competitors applauding. What a community.

I swiped my card for a finish time of 11:51 A feeling of pure relief and joy overcame me.

It will always be difficult to explain this event to those who haven't walked the Overland Track, which is normally a 6-day hike. Let alone to run it in one day.

Thank you to all the entrants for making Cradle Mountain Run what it is. To the committee, volunteers, and sweepers for keeping us safe and moving.

There are many people who offered guidance, support, and friendship that deserve mention: Robina, of course. Our children — Miller (good luck with your run thing), Will & Brian (hope you don't die). Previous and current entrants Darryn, Rhianna, and Jesse. Our local support legend Sarah. And to my family Brady, Elise, and Mark for their ongoing love and somewhat questionable remarks.

The Cradle Mountain Run is an amazing event; it is a surreal experience to push yourself through some of the most rugged terrain and beautiful scenery in the world. It is an event I look forward to completing again in the future.



Credit – John Cannell