

MIND Alpine Challenge 100 Miles 20+21st March 2010

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Last weekend I completed what was undoubtedly the most epic run of my extreme sporting career... a 160km foot race over Mt Bogong, Mt Hotham, Mt Feathertop and up around Falls Creek. It took 34 hours 47 mins, no stops. I came home 6th overall and 1st female, taking nearly 2 hours off the course record. How? Why? Good questions. I guess I just wanted to see if I could. I feel at home in the high country, the scenery and the history fills me with an inspiring perspective on the world. I struggled to get the story of such a long journey in to a reasonable length report, so I have pulled together a summary of the good bits; I hope you enjoy the ride.



15km - Sunrise. It was 3 hours into the race; we crested Spion Kopje, just running, running towards the horizon which gradually bloomed into a big orange and red glowing sunrise.

45km - Bogong summit: By 10am we reached the top of Victoria's highest peak. 360 degree views out across nothing but mountains; layers of hills in pastel grey-blue as far as the eye can see.

50km - Big River: Water. I had been strategically carrying minimal water and took my shoes off, crossed the river, picked up 3 litres. Bliss. Cool feet, and you can drink it!

60km - Mt Nelse. After another 3 hour climb and a 10k trot to Langfords Gap I felt like I could do this for a week, except for my right knee. Devoured half a bag of salt and vinegar crisps, creamed rice, paracetamol. Hooray for real food - I was a bit sick of energy bars and hot cross buns by now.



75km. Dinner on the way past pole 333 was cold canned spaghetti sucked out of a zip loc bag with the corner bitten off; delicious! 333 is a legendary snow pole on the high plains where 4 trails intersect.



85km - Sunset. Bags of energy still, I was quite excited about night time because then I could stop watching out for snakes. We flew up Mt Hotham, about 2 hours ahead of schedule, and took 4 hours to descend the horrid rocky meandering never ending snake infested trail from hell. It took longer to get down from Hotham than it took us to get up, and it made my legs hurt. Neurofen was my new friend.

100km - 2am-5am Harrierville climb to Mt Feathertop. Your brain's job is to make sense of the things around you, but in these circumstances it can get a bit mixed up. Sometimes when I'm racing really tired I see doors or houses or vehicles; this time it was sleeping

people (wishful thinking, brain?) and wombats, which was highly unlikely given the awful singing that was keeping us awake. It was pretty slow walking by now but we just kept trucking on, knowing the hard time would pass. Mt Feathertop was a huge benchmark. I'd trained here several times thinking about what it would be like to get there in the race, practically the home straight, it was supposed to be sunrise (except we were too early) so I looked at the carpet of stars and the milky way until I got dizzy. The course record started to look achievable - if my knee could hold up?



6am - Sunrise brought a huge lift after a very hard descent on the "spur of deceit and disappointment". Diamantina "spur" is actually about 8 camel humps which slowly tease and torture you in your attempts to get back down to river level. By 8:30am a tree stump mutated in to a bear in a cloak with big pointy ears and flashing yellow eyes standing on the side of the track. It didn't talk back though.

10am - Back at 333: the race was on. Brumbies trotting around us, fabulous! I had 5 hours to get back in record time, and quite possibly in a record amount of pain. Running was replaced with fast walking. After passing through Tawonga huts with just 25km to go my hip flexors were pretty close to melt down and even knee agony seemed mild in comparison, so I took 2 Tramadol. I think it's what they give people who have broken a leg. I felt legitimately close.

The final 25km involved a lot of time looking at the ground picking the smoothest possible footholds. Thankfully two of my support crew came along for the ride and entertained us with about an hour of solid 80s karaoke; it was so good to laugh, though my tongue had swollen up and I was slurring my words, so it was pretty hard to sing. Around that time I saw a family picnicking on the side of the track. I was going to apologise about the dust we swished up as we walked past, but when I got there they were gone. An enduring memory is looking over at the view; in the distance Feathertop, Hotham, Falls Creek, Bogong looked like an incomprehensibly long way. It still is.



At the finish there was no euphoria. Truthfully I was a bit sad it was over. Travelling through such beautiful country is a privilege and I had just finished a truly indulgent weekend. 35 hours, achy legs, but a big smile. There are probably easier and less ironic ways to raise \$3250 for a mental health charity, but...

Thanks to everyone who supported and encouraged along the way.