

## **Brindabella 100 Race Report, 2012 - Paul Smith**

I am really worried. There has been a terrible pattern to my race program over the last year. There were only 4 races, starting with a 1500m on the track, followed by a 5km cross-country race, then a trail Marathon and now the Brindabella 100. Surely there is nowhere else to go now!

I have a background racing Ironman triathlons (too many to safely admit to in writing plus a heap of solo Sri Chinmoy Triple Tris) but up until 2 months ago had never even run a marathon without a nice warmup ride before it. And yet when I first saw the details of the Brindabella 100 it excited me and seemed to be too good to be true. Despite the big step up in distance, it was almost designed perfectly for me!

A year before I had started to really ramp up my running, after losing my love of swimming and riding, and had even on a bit of a whim done a 85km solo run from my house in Holder to Blue Waterholes in Kosciusko National Park, over a reasonable amount of the course. I also must have frustrated my triathlon coach over the years with my choice of regularly doing hill reps on the dirt on a cyclo-cross bike up Warks Rd, and sometimes doing my long rides on all the wonderful dirt trails west of the Murrumbidgee River. So I knew the trickier tail end of the course like the back of my hand, and had no fear of it (most of it anyway).

I had even been regularly running Bullen Range, the 'sting in the tail' of the race as described in the race notes. It is the range that follows the west bank of the Murrumbidgee, but unlike the rest of the course I DID fear it. I have never seen anyone else running on it. Even though it is easily accessible (via a pleasant swim or rock hop) and visible from Tuggeranong, it is easy to ignore as it seems to pale into significance to the Brindabella's behind it. But believe me, if you want one of the toughest runs in Canberra, just try traversing the whole thing!

Navigation was no problem after a couple of 5 and 6 hour refresher runs over the start of the course. I just needed now to fool myself in to thinking I could make the distance, so embarked on a series of runs in December over 7hrs/4/9/5/3/4/5hrs - all of them very hilly. The 9hr run was in extreme heat in the mountains of New Caledonia on a work trip with my beautiful wife Simone. She was the one in important meetings trying to focus and not worry whilst I went missing on what should have been a 5hr run, and hence I'm pretty sure I'll not be invited back next time to what is an awesome terrain for running and trekking.

For race day I had a crack team of helpers already honed from my many previous Triple Tri assaults. Thankfully I must be very delightful and pleasant and hygienic to deal with in endurance racing mode - as my helpers seem happy to come back for more. So I had Simone at most checkpoints, along with my dad Dennis and a good mate Reidy, who had also agreed to run the last 20km with me.

The race started in perfect conditions with 5 other keen runners. It was clear and a perfect temperature for just shorts and a t-shirt. It only really got uncomfortably hot for an hour or two mid-afternoon up high around Mt Ginini (peaking out at 1763m), when the ever present cool breeze was blocked occasionally. It also never got too fresh to need an extra layer, and the previous days of rain had also made all the fire trails nice and sticky and perfect for running on.

We started at 6am in the virgin daylight, heading straight up the beautiful single trail up Mt Tennant a tough 750m ascent in 7km (750m = 3.75 Black Mountains or Blackos and is my preferred unit of climb/pain measurement). I was following 2 very experienced ultra runners in Martin Fryer (using the 100k as a training run) and Julie Quinn (doing a shorter out-and-back), and taking their lead with an easy pace on the way up.

I really wanted to enjoy my first ultra race and not be too scared of coming back for more, so had a plan of taking it very easy on the really tough uphill and nearly all of the downhill through the first hilly 31km to Orroral Valley. I probably walked close to 80% of all the downhills, many of them backwards. I have had a number of bad bad race experiences where my quads have been shattered well before the end of events way shorter than this, and wanted to avoid that at all costs.

From Orroral Valley for the next 70km I ran very steady on the much friendlier terrain but which still had 2000m (10 Blackos!) of climbing in it. I took lots of short walking breaks up any relatively steep ascents/descents, always mindful of saving my legs, even sitting in the Cotter River for a few minutes to freshen the legs up. Unfortunately, it was not all peaches & cream (or the creamed rice & custard my helpers kept feeding me), as a couple of the stages really dragged on, with the amazing views almost not making up for the drudgery by the end.

I was right on 12 hours at the 100k mark at Bulls Head (CP10), about 45 minutes behind Martin who I was told had already grabbed a lift home from my mum. I rewarded myself with a long break in the chair with a bag of ice on my quads but actually didn't really need it, as I had babied my legs so much up to that point that they still felt good. I was just keen to keep going and bowl over the remaining 30km out-and-back section on the top of the range. The only drama in this section was the 300m climb (1.5 Blackos) up Mt Coree which I surprisingly managed to run a lot of the way up. I then enjoyed the magnificent sunset for 5 seconds (arguably the best view in the ACT), touched the fire tower, posed for a photo from Reidy who had driven up, and headed down again. The down was too rocky and steep to run in the fading light without my head torch which I picked up at the next checkpoint, so it was a long walk down.

This 30km took 4.5hrs due to the Mt Coree ascent/descent, but I was still moving well back at Bulls Head and ready to turn down the range towards Warks Rd and the last 38km of the race. Another 2 hours for the 17km downhill stage (too steep and rocky to run in the dark for the first 3km), and a couple of locked gates, wombats and wild blue heelers later I was met by my crew again (who were almost caught napping!), with Reidy ready to join me for the final 20km with 4 river crossings and still 650m of climbing (3+ Blackos) to do.

I started to tire on the next 10km (which took well over an hour), and I made the fatal mistake of changing the shoes and socks I was reasonably comfortable with up to then. That mixed in with the river crossings which I took my shoes off for (too much sand to then shake off my socks), really wrecked my feet in the final kilometres.

I was still feeling ok and running reasonably well at the last checkpoint at Murrays Corner (CP13 - 155.7km), and wanted to spend as little time as possible there as I knew what was coming up in the

last stage - the famous 'sting in the tail' up Bullen Range. No words can truly describe what happened up there. The last 9km took 1hr 40min! Something terrible happened to my brain which made all the downhills look twice as steep as they really were, and too scary to run.

When finally at the bottom of the last descent I was a bit unsteady and begged to hold my big tough mate Reidy's hand to get through the last river crossing, where race director Andrew was waiting and informed us if we ran the last kilometre we could break 22.5 hours. I felt like I was sprinting, in reality it was little more than a jog - but I managed to get there with 15 seconds to spare.

I flopped to the ground in relief and freed my screaming feet from my wet/sandy/bloody shoes.

In the end it was an awesome day. Awesome course. Awesome scenery. Awesome organisation. Truly a race that should inspire people.

For me the lift home in the car was very trippy. The reasonably steep hills up Cotter Rd seemed flat, and what are normally gentle downhills felt like we were plummeting down gullies. I got a bit panicky on a road I have driven/run/ridden a thousand times, and kept asking if we were going the wrong way. Perhaps I feared that I was being driven up (or down - who knows?) in to the Brindabella's to run some more.

Big big thanks to Andrew Johnson and helpers Ann/Peta/Belinda/Jackie, my wonderful helpers Simone/Dennis/Reidy, the other 100km runners, and all my friends and family that supported me out there. Big respect also to those that were overly optimistic and drove in to the mountains hours way too early to see me at a checkpoint, not catching me at all (it is a tough spectator sport).

**Paul**