

# ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA951 - Tony Williams

I nearly wet my pants with excitement when I heard about the Furber Steps race being part of Ultra Trail Australia.

Furbers – my local stairs session in the Blueys. 4 reps from the traditional kiosk start to the bottom of the stairs in 1:20 is my usual medicine. I shun the extra distance the Iceberg Peptides Run junkies slip in to the Falls picnic table! I love the excitement of the descent and the burn on the way up. The STRAVA segment strokes the ego beating the speedier runners who kick my butt on anything less steep than a flight of stairs.

The route is from the bottom railway station to the UTA finish line. Thanks to Anne Mackie the amount of steps was counted as 951. It took Annie a few goes as she lost count a few times. The practice run early Sunday before the event, great fun! Time 11:40 with a bit of gas left in the tank. Sub 11 minutes would be good for me.

I'm a competitive old fart in the Over 50's. The old codgers I thought would be fast on the stairs were doing UTA100 and wouldn't risk themselves before such a demanding event. I was a bit worried about whether some Veteran French Alpine Vertical K Monster would show up and steal the glory!

Scotty Hawker and Locky Kennedy hold the record to the Kiosk in 8:05. I thought 9:00 to 9:15 would win the day with the extra little bit of 'flat' running from the railway to the stairs and the boardwalk/ UTA Finish would take an extra minute. The lure of a Garmin watch would push the elites that little bit harder, so, maybe even a Sub 9!

Race day arrived. Run coaching session in the morning, 7k of trails. Perfect warm up. I arrived early before the rego was even open and was so excited to smash out a fast rep! It was a quick trip down in the Scenic Railway to the start, I hadn't been on the railway for years and was surprised how steep it was. I remember how we walked up the railway line once returning from a Malaita Point night time abseiling trip to avoid the 'long way' up Furbers! The local police met us at the top!

The rep went well, I avoided getting lactic too early. I used the Matty Abel "hands and feet crawling" technique up the stone stairs but I was kind of running as I hadn't done 21k he did before it! Oxygen deficit hit! I don't remember the halfway point and was pleasantly surprised I was at the top of the stairs where you turn left towards Scenic World. I ran these stairs showing off to a crowd and the legs filled with concrete! The last few stairs with the awesome view of the 3 Sisters were a world of hurt. I recovered to put on a bit of a sprint to the finish line for a time of 10:49. I thought I was sprinting anyway!

Not long after I finished, Andy Alexander blitzed a time of 10.35. Beaten in the old blokes comp! Another 7k coaching session to flush the legs Friday morning, wondering whether I could go faster! I was pretty confident I could but didn't want to spoil my UTA50 run.

I bumped into Andy's wife the next day who mentioned he was working all weekend and wasn't racing Saturday. No wonder he blitzed the stairs! That was it – I was on a mission – "Live trying, not die wondering" blah blah blah!

Well the rest is history.... Crashed and burned on the Friday night rep. 4 seconds faster in 10:45 but absolutely cooked the legs before half way and crawled home in a world of lactic! Then lost the UTA50 Over 50's by 3 minutes the next day! Someone smack me when I get carried away next time please!

Well done Aaron Knight – 9:05 – ripper of a time!