

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

PACE UTA22 - Lesly Jones

In the week leading up to the race I started worrying about a number of things including “coming last”, “dying out there” (an unlikely scenario-fuelled by my mother who, every time I’d mention the run would advise me not to “kill myself”) or being blown away, or hit by debris being carried by the wild winds howling through the mountains –wuthering heights style-all through the week leading up to the race.

The day arrived and thankfully it was totally out of character –radiant, expansive blue skies and a “summery” kind of warmth in the air. Taking a bus filled with runners from Scenic World filled with excited chattering folk delivered us to the eerie old Hospital at Wentworth Falls where the race began...

As we descended into the Kedumba valley on those steep and generously proportioned fire trails. I found myself running with a group of men (my Uncle would have described them as “larrikins”) one of them asked if I wanted to go for a cup of coffee after the race... this was certainly one of the most unlikely scenarios in which I could have imagined being asked out! I ran on giggling as the men continued to talk about trail running being a way of pursuing women in an old fashioned way. “A true chase”. Later on down the fire trail I met a woman who had come in from Brisbane for the run. We chatted as we descended and I enjoyed the feeling of our joint experience and brief exchange.

Just before we reached the clearing in the Kedumba Valley I asked the man running beside me if he had been into the valley before. He said he had not and I told him it was like paradise. He said he thought it sounded like somewhere he wouldn’t want to leave, and it certainly delivered the eye -popping wow factor. The looming ancient rock formations set against the vast blue sky and the bright light were surreal. My senses were on high beam...I spoke briefly to another equally enthralled running woman and she agreed that this was her favourite part of the run too. As I left the magical clearing and squelched through the mud and onto the skinny light-dappled bush trails with the whimsical little pixie dells on either side.... hopping over the rushing water and eventually into the green light and mossy boulder- filled Leura forest.

The feeling that I was living on a perfect planet dominated my thoughts and I was encased in a cocoon of feeling that I was at one with the land, sky and all the runners around me...the endorphins were really kicking in by then! ...as I ascended the Furber steps my euphoria subsided to be replaced by strong urges to vomit and cramps in my calves that reminded me of being in labour –(just in a different body zone)..I stopped on each landing and let people pass and I breathed deeply and concentrated on not vomiting (I mastered this through 2 pregnancies replete with months of morning sickness).

When I did reach the top of that astoundingly steep staircase I could sense the ending was nigh. I ran as quickly as my cramping calves would allow and that’s when I saw and heard people clapping and cheering. I looked around thinking I was missing something and then the enthusiastic woman who was announcing the finishers ran up to me and asked me my name and I realised the applause and whooping was for me because I had finished!

I feel a marathon- sized amount of gratitude towards the gracious and generous people and the breathtakingly beautiful land for allowing me to have this unique and delightful experience !

Thank you.