

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA50 - Freya Franklin

Music. Laughter. Cheers. Hearts racing. Nerves ticking. Faces smiling.

With the sun shining overhead, a big hurrah was shouted as the last wave for the 50km trail run began through the Blue Mountains. My smile was large and proud as I weaved my way around the Narrow Neck. I was here. I had made it to the start line. I had sacrificed many a late evening for an early run through local trails. My legs had pounded many a track and trail to be able to run through a part of Australia that I hadn't yet explored. The mountains glistened in the sunlight as the three sisters pointed upwards. We pointed downwards, steps and stops and many a chat down to the floor of the Leura Forest.

Hands on knees, using handrails and fences when appropriate, past many waterfalls with flowing water, I began the incline and unfortunately, so did the stomach cramps. Tree roots and foliage mixed in with the carved and steel steps, yet it did not deter the legs from cycling over and pushing up. Passing the golf club my smile had returned as I was able to enjoy the lookouts stretching over the canyons of the mountains and run through single trail. I provided aid to a fellow fallen runner with a gash, ensured medical attention was on the way, grateful for the break to rest my erupting stomach.

Wentworths Falls greeted me with a spectacular view; water cascading down rocks and a ledge disappearing into the abyss. Thankfully I remember these glorious moments as it took my thoughts away from my stomach. Roads and trails with cars full of cheering bodies led me to the Queen Victoria checkpoint, a very welcome sight. Many runners passed by and the leaders of the 100km run raced past as I lay curled in the foetal position. The critical time came for me to decide whether to press on or to give up graciously. Stubbornly, I decided to press on. It's only another 22km! It would have been a bigger challenge for me to withdraw from the event than as I kept reflecting back on all that I had achieved leading up to this point. I couldn't bear returning home to my family without having completed the event. Medically I was ok. My muscles and legs weren't sore or injured, so it was a matter of pushing through with my stomach cramps.

Fire trail winding through the Kedumba pass, looking out at the sun reflecting off the opposing ridges, I ran with a huge smile on my face and even let out a laugh from time to time. I passed many runners experiencing leg issues, however I felt amazing and loved flying down the trail like a child with no inhibitions. Skipping over the water crossings I ploughed on up the other side. Unfortunately that all came to a slow grinding halt as my cramps returned, and the uphill battle began. Mind over matter. With 7km to go I was fortunate to have some friends stay with me for the slow walk to the finish line. Despite the sun setting, our headlights shining and the chilly air settling in, I was able to witness the three sisters glowing in the night sky.

Pure relief. I had beaten the beast. I was back to civilisation where hot soup waited, warm clothes welcomed me and most importantly, friends there to support and congratulate me. I can't seem to remember everything that I passed along the day, but I do remember the internal struggle I had to push through, to get to the end and the massive sense of relief at finally crossing the finish line. Faces grimacing. Nerves calming. Hearts pounding. Cheers. Tears. Music. I had finished!