

# ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA50 - Jessicah Hone

When I heard about UTA50 I was instantly hooked. I'd never considered an ultra before but knew I had to do this. I made it to the start line and the whole experience was surreal – was I really here at the expo? Was I actually at the official race briefing? Was it race day already?

The countdown started and my nerves faded away as we ticked down to the gun. We ran, and the view at the dirt of the out-and-back took my breath away. Just a few kilometres in, I was already hypnotized by the scale and majesty of the mountains: orange rock and green tree as far as the eye could see, with a giant bright blue sky stretched over it all. I was grinning and running well.

Next we snaked along the path to the Three Sisters. The clear day showed off the scenery brilliantly. We ran through the arch and soon reached stairs. I descended smoothly and we hit the trail for real. I hit it a bit more literally than the other runners. One moment I was watching the ground, next I was flying through the air. Of course I wasn't flying, but falling. I hit the dirt flat out, bringing my arm up and taking several layers of skin off from elbow to wrist. I also had a busted knee and grazed hip where my shirt lifted as I skidded. For a moment, my race was over. Two blokes pulled me to my feet and offered to send word back for medical help but I knew if I was to finish, I had to get moving. I took a few shaky paces and then managed to get a roll on again, bleeding freely but feeling happy to be still in the race.

The next 20km were tough. I saw the sweeping views and forest sections but couldn't take them in. I was entering The Cave, at a worryingly early stage of the race. The shock and pain from the fall was effecting me though I tried not to acknowledge it. Having trouble swallowing I resigned myself to the fact that I was going to have to let go of my 6.5hr goal and slog it out for most of the day. The sunny stretch leading to the CP1 was particularly hard, it was hot and when I tore my eyes away from the endless trees I saw my black shirt was crusted white with salt.

At the checkpoint I was immediately taken care of by some fantastic volunteers. The atmosphere was part field hospital, part party tent. When I got moving again after three cups of coke and a liberal dousing in cold water, I felt the best I had all day. The efforts of these guys (plus a surprise appearance by hubby) gave me a boost and I ran the second part of the race just one minute slower than the first.

The last 22kms were everything I'd imagined. I paced well and the beauty of the scenery plus some great company from a new friend pulled me along almost effortlessly. I felt stronger the longer I ran, while conserving strength for the final climb. Looking up about 44km in was terrifying – the mountain ridges were so high it was hard to see the top.

The Furber Stairs were intense but us runners supported each other. We ran the runnable parts, walked the steep, and swore when we spotted yet another climb approaching. The final up was a full body effort, legs pushing, arms pulling. At the top, an old bloke said "You've done it! That's it, now go!" I grinned, and I went. The shouts of the crowd filled me with adrenaline, the ringing of the cowbells renewed my strength. I started to really run, picking up speed as I sprinted towards the line, finishing strong and happy in a respectable 7.05.