

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA50 - Kathy Thurling

Twelve months in the planning, it was a real thrill to be tackling my first Ultra Trail Australia 50.

I was very excited to be in Start Group 3 and at 7:30 am we were off! A short out and back to complete the first 6k before running past Scenic World again and past my cheering support crew. It was fantastic to be running past amazing natural icons such as Echo Point and the Three Sisters. Then the long, long journey down the Giant Stairway and on to Leura Cascades which was absolutely beautiful with all its rainforest wonders.

About 12k in it was a relief to get past all the steps and stairs and the legs were feeling a bit tired. Suddenly, I stubbed my left big toe hard on a rock which brought me crashing down like a sack of spuds onto the rocks with my right knee. Some swearing and crying followed and a few people stopped to see if I was OK. One runner who said he was a doctor offered to check out my injuries, but I said I'd be fine (even though it felt like I'd broken my toe). It was my first ever fall during a run and I was angry with myself for being so clumsy.

After a few minutes sitting in a heap on the side of the track I dragged myself up and set off again only to get 50 metres further along before I burst into tears. Everything was hurting, my knee was sore and bleeding, my toe was so painful and I had grazes on my arm and hand. Come on Kathy, pull yourself together.....

As I approached the Fairmont aid station, my hubby Harry and our kids Fiona and Rowan were waiting on the side of the road to cheer me on. They were a very welcome sight and I told them about my unfortunate whoops/splat. At the Fairmont I refueled with chips and lollies before heading off again.

I would have loved to take in the beautiful scenery along the way but was worried about stumbling again and concentrated fully on the path ahead. I arrived at the Queen Victoria Hospital checkpoint where Harry, Fiona, Rowan, and my running mates Nicole and Sharon cheered me in. Coke and chips were my refueling choice and I had a chat with the friendly volunteer about the advantages of hankies versus tissues while she topped up my water bottles. After a 25-minute breather I headed off for the final 22k. The long downhills of the next 18k were murder on my injured toe and knee, and the endless uphill were grueling.

During the last 4k two girls named Anne and Hayley from Newcastle caught up to me and decided to follow in my extremely slow slipstream. There was as much talking as there was walking/running in that last 4k and it helped take my mind off the pain and fatigue. After what seemed like forever, I reached the dreaded Furber Steps. I thought I was doing it tough until I came across other runners on the way up who had stopped because of severe cramping. When the boardwalk came into view, I started running and spotted Rowan, Scott (who had finished his 50k an hour earlier), Nicole and Sharon who high-fived me on the way through then I ran past Harry and Fiona along the finish chute and over the finish line. The atmosphere was amazing and the crowd was fabulous with their cowbells, clapping and cheering. My 50k was done!

A HUGE thank you to my main support crew, my family, Harry, Fiona and Rowan and my extended support crew, running mates and coach, Scott & Nicole Sawyer, Sharon Bayley, Phil & Nikki Ackland. I couldn't have done it without all of you! xx

Looking forward to running the UTA100 in 2017!