

# ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA100 2016 - Stephen Bell

My friend Fred.

You guys will never meet Fred. He's a stumpy, little fella with a Scottish accent, a scabby singlet, and tiny shorts. Think Eric Liddell crossed with Tyrion Lannister. And he's constantly mouthing off about "ye only live once" and "nae challenge too great!". Fred's usually pretty cool, but can sometimes be a bit of a dick; especially when he's had a drink. Two pints and he thinks he can do anything; two pints and he registers me for an ultra..."It'll be fine", he said, "hills are your friends."

Over the months of training, Fred and I became quite friendly. We'd spend the days chatting about all sorts of run-related trivia: like what to do if I got cramp, or what to do if I got bitten by a snake. We never did decide what the best course of action would be if I got bitten by a snake halfway through a bush turd, though he did suggest using the snake bandage to wipe first!

I didn't hear anything from Fred in the couple of weeks before the race. When I spoke to him on Friday, he said he'd been holidaying in the Bahamas! Fred gets a bit nervous. He was in a panic since it was the night before the big day, so I gave him a beer. That's what we'd practised in our training together, "a beer before race day makes the day's pains go away", he used to say. He had his beer and went to bed, eager for an early start.

Fred's one of those people that tries to get up early but never quite manages, so I didn't hear from him until the top of Tarros Ladders: "That guy's eating a ham sandwich.", he said, "What's for breakfast?". Breakfast for Fred was a Carmans bar and a slice of watermelon at CP1, with more watermelon at CP2. "Hills are your friends." he said, noticing the horror on my face seeing Ironpot ridge for the first time. After a slow climb with a rest stop halfway up, we made it to the top, saw the didgeridoo concert, and were on our way to CP3.

"How dare they start without me!", he decried as we pulled into Six Foot and saw my support crew had already cracked open the beers. Clean socks, a fresh coat of sunblock, and a new top were his substitute for beer, I told him. He seemed happy with that, for now at least. As the sun climbed higher, so did we: up Nellies and a dash to CP4 kept Fred in good spirits, or maybe it was just the sugar. Cracks in Fred's "nae challenge too great" demeanour started to appear going down the giant staircase - he was starting to tire. He's also one of those people that goes from normal to hangry in the space of a few minutes, so by the time we reached the QVH, he was in a foul mood! "Noodles. Noodles, now.", he said. "After quad massage!" I told him, collapsing onto the table with cramps. Meanwhile, support crew were onto case number 2, and thoroughly soaking up the party atmosphere. "I told you hills are your friends." he said, as we sped down Kedumba. Pity then that the journey back up was just as hilly.

To the girl in the tent at the foot of Furber, Fred sends his appreciation. "Nearly there", you said, "keep going". On hands and knees, we climbed. One. Stair. At. A. Time. Fuelled not by the noise of the finish or the thought of glory, but by the realisation that I had 2% battery left and Fred says it doesn't count if it's not on Strava. "I always knew you could do it.", he said, as we crossed the finish line and got the buckle. See you next year?"

"Definitely!", I said.