

Oxfam is a Team game that can deliver great personal satisfaction, and quoting a certain great Miler “the opportunity to genuinely be part of a team doesn't come around too often in our sport”. If you haven't done one, find 3 other like-minded souls and give it a go – it's awesome! I'll apologise now to the rest of Team #600 “The Greys”, as this report is from my perspective, and not necessarily how they saw or felt about it.

1. Why do it again?

In Oxfam 2014, as a late call up into the MMer's Beta team with a great bunch of blokes (even Racer), we achieved a great result and I thought my tangle with OXFAM racing was put to bed. I did it way back in 2003, and thought never again, but maybe in the deep recesses I always wanted another crack to try for something a little better time wise, age permitting.

I had no real thoughts about doing this event again in 2015. Then Captain-Coach Steve Whitehead approached me at the Tan in September and said he was putting a 'new band together' in 2015, with the tantalising aim of knocking off the 'world Oxfam' record for a team of 4 people over 50; somewhere under 15 hours. Having cracked that time last year, being involved in WR was a big tease to the ego! I told him to ask me again after the marathon, and in the mean time had to come up with a strategy on how to suggest this was a good idea to my wife who was threatening divorce on health grounds (not sure whether it was my health or hers) due to my 2014 Oxfam plus 2014 marathon outings.

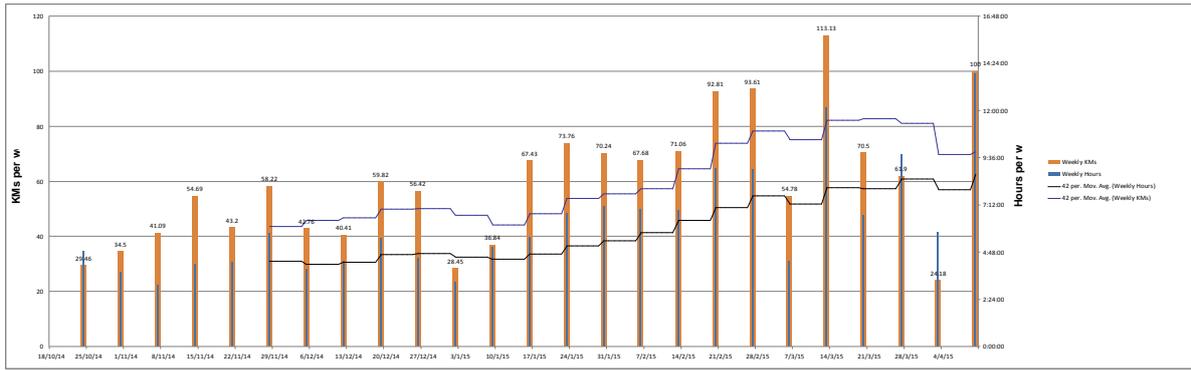
Obviously by mid October I got back to Steve with a resounding “yes”, and even stated I was hoping to do some training for this one! I mentioned it to my wife in passing at some stage....

2. Training - tick

The marathon in October was solid without being exciting. A 'sensible' run that got what it deserved; still managed to under-train despite good intentions - 2 training runs just over 30km doesn't cut it.

So between mid-January and mid-March, there were 6 runs over 30km, including a 45 and a 55 in the hills. A couple of warm days, and no sign of any cramps or dehydration!!! Had also qualified for the AV championships early Feb where I ran a solid 1500m on the track, so knew I was running ok. 5Ms in there somewhere as well!

RFTK on 22nd March – ran quicker than last year on a 2 minute longer course on the back of a hard training week and no speed work for 4 weeks. I felt good – bring on OXFAM, and let's start a taper.



The last 6 months looked ok, although no mega miles for old buggers

3. The wheels got wobbly

Couple of light runs, then the golf weekend at Tocumwal where I walked for 5+hours (12km) both days. Happy with the golf (did I mention the 10th hole on Saturday...).

Monday night, a steady jog home of about 13km – the left calf tightened right up, and even the left hammy felt tight. WTF? I had done a calf about 4-5 years ago, and could not believe that this could happen now. Complete rest until Easter Sunday (6 days) – surely this was just a light twinge and would settle down. Slow jog down the park – nope – could still feel it. Off for a walk to the chemist and buy some Voltaren.

Easter Monday – 4 days out! Rang Smoothy, as he’s supposed to know something about this crap, and there was no where open to see a Physio. His words were something like “calf’s are bad in old blokes”, and “no chance – can you find a replacement”. What about Lurch?

Lurch was in – he said yes! Then pointed out that he was only 49 – no good.

Monday night was not much sleep. I didn’t want to start and then pull out early and let my team mates down, but where the hell do you find a 50+ runner on 3 days notice who is available and can go sub 14 hours? I booked in for a Physio with Gordon at Melbourne Sports on Tuesday, but my own logic said no way would my leg hold up for a 100km. Dr Google talked about calf tears, and a type 3 would mean surgery and long term damage!!

Another idea – Licka was in town and apparently back running. If he could step in and do the run; I felt a tremendous relief – a quality replacement that would chew up 14 hours. But no, his hips are still dodgy and he is only doing some short jogs – shit.

Gordon checked me out, listened to the sob-story, did some stretches, a massage, dry-needling and stated that he didn’t know what to say. It was very unlikely that I would do any real damage as the muscle wasn’t torn, but it could get painful and may not go the distance. I took that as a chance and grabbed it!! Booked in for Thursday for another massage and needling, and any last minute advice. I had to proceed as if I was running!

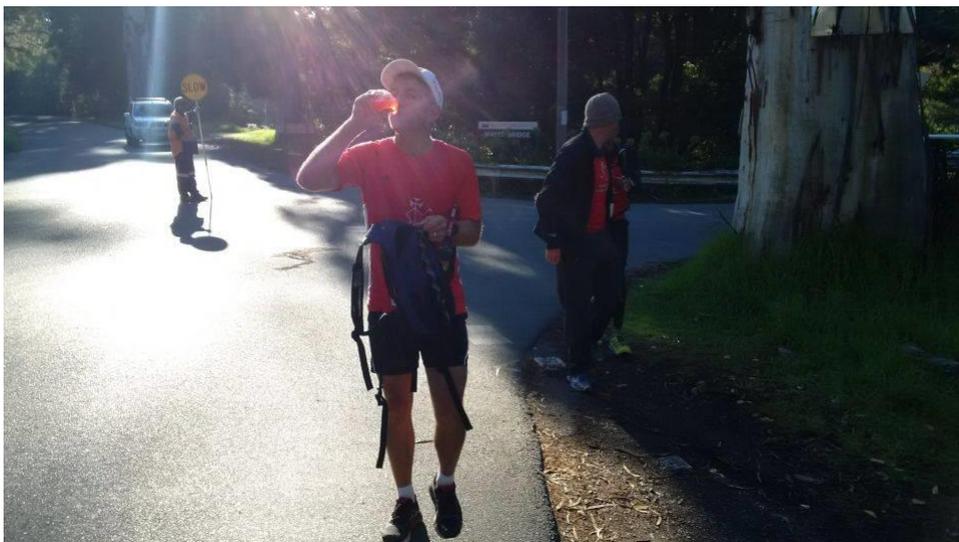
But it wasn't fair for me to make this call without telling the team. I was fully prepared to step aside if they had a better option. Lunch time Tuesday I made the dreaded call to Coach/Captain Steve and gave him the facts. We had a dinner planned Tuesday night to plan logistics, and I had to throw it to them to see which way they wanted to go. I suspect they would have preferred to have had a fit replacement as they had done a lot of work for this event, and my bad news was a real dampener. Very big of them to let me run and give it a try, and I really do owe them big time for rolling the dice.

4. Race Day

Here we were at Wesburn, and I hadn't run in earnest for 12 days. Smurf is on the phone at 6.00am out the front of Lurch's place, but can't raise him on the phone, and no lights on! He slept in! Good start, but fortunately another friend (Sebastian) had offered to drive me out. A non-runner, he looked at all these people and thought what a bunch of lunatics! Bundled my gear into someone's car – Smurf will be here soon! Dozer had made the start, and looked like a kid in a lolly shop – he loves OXFAM. I was well hydrated and fed – no beer all week, and plenty of anti-flamm's on board. I was forced under good advice to break the MMMers unwritten rule of 'no poles' for the hilly legs. Fantastic feeling to get under way, and the adrenaline is way up. Let's go – what can possibly go wrong!

Set off at 7.30 up front, as Coach Steve still wanted to hit the hills with the runners, and not get caught up with the riff-raff walker types! 600m in, and we go up the first mother of a hill, then down a big one, then up another big one! About 4km in by the Garmin, and the left calf tightens up – here we go; but not going to lie down yet so didn't say anything to the team, preferring to stick with the motto of "don't mention the C word".

First saw the support guys on the road at Warburton – lots of excitement and a few camera shots.



Note – I'm drinking!

Up onto the Aquaduct – the hill wasn't good, but after running on the soft surface the calf settled down and we were making good pace. Met the support team for the first time properly at Dees Rd; food and drink on board and then thru the 1st Checkpoint. And then the Warby trail – what can you say – it goes for a long way and it was getting warm.

All the stops and checkpoints went to plan. A few more milers popped up, including the mighty flag!



Note – lots of food and drinking!

We went thru Graeme Collings Reserve (CP3) moving nicely. The calf was still there, but deteriorating. I felt we seemed to be working harder than I would have thought, but had confidence in the training we had done. Even Sandra thought it seemed tough!! We were actually looking forward to the hills for a bit of a change, and I was thinking a bit of walking would be good! Tony was settled into a steady pace out front, and I found myself jogging up towards him, then happy to wait for Sandra and Steve. BTW, Steve at this stage didn't look like he had even been running, and is definitely related to that damn bunny in the Duracell ads!

Mt Evelyn – refuel ready for the tough legs. Change of tyres, grabbed the pole again and set off up the hill all together. Ouch – that was hard. Dozer had the conspiratory whisper to see how was it going, but he called it right on FB – I was starting to struggle! 5-6 kms more round past Silvan dam, but I was struggling to run and could see Steve was getting a bit edgy – he's a tough task master. Finally started up the goat track into the back of the golf course – not good. I remember thinking to myself that by tonight I could go to bed, and I wasn't getting up until Monday.

½ way up the hill, the steps got shorter and I started to think something was wrong. My 500ml of fluid for that section were gone, and I was getting thirsty. Got to the golf

course, and I was getting a bit dizzy, and felt like I was stumbling. Steve checked on me as the others were about 100m in front, and I said this wasn't right, and I was starting to think my health isn't worth the risk. I had done plenty of races where I was in pain, but I hadn't been like this - not sober at least!!! Dozer's version here is probably better than mine:

"I was backtracking down the trail from Olinda CP figuring I'd keep going until I found the guys. I was maybe 300-400m along when my phone rings, and you can imagine my reaction when GG's name is showing up as the caller. Worse still when it was Steve on the other end saying GG was in trouble and desperately in need of some water. Maybe it was there I snuck in the 'uh oh' message.

So I sprinted back to the supplies, grabbed 3 bottles and set off to find 'em. Maybe 2km down the trail (around the back of the golf club) I found a very fragile looking GG. White as a ghost, slurring very slowly spoken words and pretty much ready to concede it wasn't his day. Got some fluids into him (sculled the 3 bottles – GG) as we diligently picked the easiest path to the CP. Anything more than a gentle breeze would have knocked him flat, and there were a few staggers along the way. Sat him down at Olinda but that just triggered some pretty severe cramps (both legs quads and calf's – GG). Took a few go's to get him back on his feet and tried to massage it out while he was standing before talking him into letting more qualified hands have a go at him. While the masseurs and later the medics had their time with him, we shoved every piece of food into him we could find - gels, sandwiches, lollies, 3 packets of tim tams, soup, sultanas, nuts, nothing was safe(I think he missed a few things – I was starving –GG). I was sure he'd throw it all back up at some point, but he seemed to get into the swing of it and even started talking about a hamburger!"



5. And on we go...

The rest of the team really had the option here of leaving me and going on. I must have looked terrible, and to think we had a marathon to go over hills was just stupid. Fortunately they decided to give me some time to see whether I could get back running. Either that, or these morbid soles were enjoying the train wreck and wanted to see what happened, but either way they got some food and drinks on board, and even a quick massage themselves (or Sandra did anyhow). Somehow Racer and Rafa appeared, no doubt to have a laugh at my expense, although they did seem

entranced by the wonderfully helpful and attractive young massage ladies and first aid ladies doing things to me which I presume were in my best interest?? Racer did seem to think I was faking to just to get a bit of sympathy, but I will never admit to that! At some stage I worked out that Rafa was a volunteer Marshall at the CP, and we did note with some laughter that he was covered in dirt where he had taken a fall putting out the markers. Dangerous lives we live!

With best wishes from all our support crews, Racer, Rafa, massage ladies, 'ambos', and whoever else was there that I have forgotten, we set off at a scintillating slow stumble towards One Tree Hill and the 1000 Steps, with a few more hills just for fun on the way.

But here's where the fun really begins. If the mind is clear and working ok, it's amazing what you can convince your body to do. Somehow we started to break into a few jogs on the flats and downhills. The left calf problem I had before the race – no longer an issue!!! Both legs were so sore from the cramps and the pounding, that I couldn't feel the sore calf from the days before. Gordon the Physio had sort of got it right, although I am not sure he would have recommended the sneaky solution we put into play.

With plenty of curses at Hilton Track and it's nearby friends, we made it to One Tree Hill. Lurch and Smurf had come for a jog down the track a few KMs, probably to see if we were still moving. Dozer had had enough and gone home for his wife's birthday, and another support crew replacement (Paul) slid in wondering what the hell was happening. He went to the chemist, and they made me some Magnesium concoction that they forced into me that was supposed to help with cramps. It sat in the stomach very heavily! Great idea, but half way down the 1000 steps side track, I locked up in both calves and could not move. If Obama hadn't been beside me, I may have still been there!! A quick kick in the calves from him, and we gingerly snuck into CP5. My workmates from ANZ were manning this CP, all looking very relaxed and enjoying their paid volunteer day, no doubt wondering what was all the fuss – this is easy!

We had seen Dave Hartley (Duff) along the way quite a few times with the MMM colours flying, but we heard here that he had lost a team mate who had gone to hospital? Tough event this apparently.

Up to Nixon's road, and along comes Christmas (not the December one, rather the Glenn C one). He ran with us for a while, and I blurted out some of the sad tales quickly, but it was great to have a chat about a few other things for a few KMs. At the top of the hill James Atkinson showed up as well, and had a run with us thru until CP6. Despite walking a few hills, we were still making pretty good time on this section, and the old analysts brain started crunching some 'what if' options – we could still go sub 14 if we were able to run most of the last 20 kms!!

6. CP6 – Lysterfield Lake

A couple of highlights here – James had stopped to grab his trusty arthritis cream to rub on my legs (he swore it had saved him many times) – what the hell, it can't hurt. And Paul the relief support crew has done a chips and potato cake run (and there

may have been a beer for the support guys). Great idea! Ok – lets go and get this done!

Darkness had kicked in, and it actually helped as we plodded thru to CP7. They had changed the course a little bit, so that added to the excitement as we actually passed a team of 4 and ‘powered’ on towards our last drink stop with the support crew. The trusty team was all set up, including my purple chair which Steve frowned upon with contempt! Last drinks and food, summon up the last energy reserves – 9km to go. I figured we could walk it in 90 minutes and still beat 15 hours (the WR we had been advised), but again running seemed to be the teams preference. I also knew that if we averaged 7 minute KMs (63 minutes), we would go sub 14, but kept that to myself because it wasn’t a given that the legs could do that. Bigger me if we didn’t find another team in front of us, so naturally we had to try and get past them!! Tony got an attack of the “Dozer’s”, whereby he was going to run faster just to get this over with. The KMs floated by, and the discussion was down to how far to go to Jells Park. Wellington Rd meant 2km I estimated, but about 5 minutes later we found a sign that said 500m to go – boy did that get a curse of delight “you xxxxxx beauty”. 300m sign – lets regroup and hold hands to finish across the line!

Happy does not describe the feeling at that point. Some word stronger than elation is probably closer. 13 hours and 51 minutes. Amazing to think where we were (and where I was) a few hours before. I felt fantastic, but my legs were soooo sore. Then someone said we needed to check-in to officially finish, so we lost a couple of minutes, despite me running to the tent after grabbing the others (I think – a bit of blur). Lurch couldn’t believe we could run, but adrenaline can do big things.

We subsequently learnt that we had broken the OXFAM +50 record set in 2012 in Hong Kong by only 8 minutes, but heck who cares – we broke the WR!!





7. The Washup

As I said before, if you haven't done one, you should! A big thanks to the team for taking a risk on me for the start, and waiting for me at Olinda. The time was probably a little slower than we had collectively thought. 3 weeks ago, my expectations were quite a bit more ambitious, but in hindsight, I am just so pleased to finish in the time we did. Sandra mumbled something about next year to break 13 hours; Tony said he felt like I looked at Olinda; and I think Steve went for cool down jog!

I thought I had the drinks and food well planned and under control, but something about the sore leg in the lead up, and the dehydration on the day makes me suspicious that something wasn't quite right in the system. I'll never know for sure. The sore calf a week out just sucked!

A really big thanks to Smurf and Lurch for looking after me all day and supporting the rest of the team and support crew. Also to Sebastian for delivering me to the start, and to Paul for breezing in half way and stepping up to the plate to help out. All the Milers along the way for the comradeship (Racer, Rafa, Dave, Xmas, James and maybe others along the way?) – amazing. And to Dozer for masquerading as a superhero at Olinda; I think others would have just pulled the pin on me and sent the other 3 on their way. His experience to take a breath and see what we could do was fantastic, not that I recommend that experience to anyone. Thanks.

To my family and friends who came to celebrate the finish – something I will never forget. I have now been told (again) that there is no more!!!

My words of advice - being a little bit stubborn helps!!

Until next time – oh no, that's right...
