

# **Oxfam Trailwalker 2012**

## **The Momentary Lapse of Reason (AMLOR - 121) team:**

Grant – team captain, Legend signed up for his 7th Trailwalker, Commander in Chief of both Momentary Lapse of Reason teams (121 and 131).

Liz – our youngest team member signed up for her 4<sup>th</sup> Trailwalker, Energizer bunny and power walker extraordinaire

Jack – rookie, ageless (or at least very tight lipped about it), high spirited team morale booster

Ewen – rookie

## **The plan:**

Run ten minutes then walk for ten minutes. Walk all uphill, jog easy down hills. Rinse and repeat for 16 hours and 30 minutes.

## **Race day:**

If there's one thing I can do well is carbo-load, three large meals the day before topped me up ready for the adventure (including a Golden Syrup pudding – thanks Ma!). I stayed the night at my mum's since it was so much closer than home, and we rolled out the door at 5:30 to get to Jell's Park. Tape my feet in the car, hopefully it will stop the blisters?! Found both of our teams very easily, got our race numbers, chatted nervously with the teams and support crew before the kick off.

I hear the PA introduce Team Mutley and shortly after that the Melbourne Midday Milers. I head off to the stage to wish the MMM boys good luck. AL, House, Smoothy and Dozer all look very focussed on the extreme task at hand – they are gunning for a sub-10 hour time. I'm not sure if they registered that I was even there to cheer them on, but I was very happy to see them before they disappeared into the distance.

PA says the start is delayed, Jack decides to take a “nature break”. PA now says start is back on time, countdown begins. Jack is still AWOL, Grant decides to start anyway as the support crew will tell Jack to catch up. Not the best start to a 100km team event. Everyone is buzzing, great feeling as family and friends cheer all the entrants off.

Feels great to be on the trail finally, all around the teams are chatting and smiling. I look down about 300 meters in and realise I haven't turned on my Garmin GPS – I was trying to save the battery life. At the 1km mark I see Moo from MMM! A few KMs later and we are relieved to find Jack jogging up to us. Team is back together and feeling great. After 20-30 minutes we catch up to the second Momentary Lapse of Reason team (131 – going for 15hrs and 30 mins) and run with them for the next 10 kms or so. Rain kicks in before the first check point, nothing too heavy and we keep up a good pace. First checkpoint done in 90 minutes. Team is in good spirits. Grant gives me the marching orders as I take too long to grab some electrolyte drink and a muesli bar.

Next checkpoint is Lysterfield, there will be a 15 minute break there so we kick off again. The other AMLOR team has gone ahead of us now, we keep a good pace and all seems good. The other teams are thinning out a bit now as every team settles into their own rhythms. Coming down the descent to

Lysterfield Lake and Grant has fallen fractionally behind. He had a bad hamstring strain about 6 weeks out and has been battling tightness in his right leg ever since – it should be noted he also had a full right knee reconstruction a few decades ago. Grant is as tough as nails and an inspiration to us all, he says he feels fine and we take him at his word. Crossed the dam wall and see another friendly face. High five with Rafa from MMM and see Grant's daughter who guides us to the support crew. The other AMLOR team is just about to leave the rest point, they are looking good we cheer them off. Toni and Linda are busy organising the troops. Feel very pampered by the crew - chairs are ready for us, Rina hands out raspberry white choc chip muffins! Quick change of socks, more Vaseline on the feet and Grant tells us our 15 minutes is up so we get to the checkpoint and then continue on.

Off to our next stop at Belgrave station, Toni is there with our coffee orders and some Danishes and coffee scrolls! Liz's husband Gautam and good friend Helen join us and it's great to see more friendly faces. The team is looking very good and we kick off to Olinda on what I consider to be the hardest part of the whole course. Rain is still falling down, teams are thinning out even more and we are now in walk mode on all the hills. There's a very steep descent down Lipscombe Break, this was hard enough on a dry day during training but in the wet with all the mud it is downright dangerous. Grant and Jack have the hiking poles to help them, but I can't help thinking they could easily ski down the slick mud track. I almost fall over as my foot slides out and I hear a few other people behind me having near misses. Not particularly pleasant.

We plod along aptly named Hillclimb Trak – Liz and Jack move ahead chatting and Grant and I bring up the rear. My right knee (which blew up on this exact stretch of training) is hurting a fair bit and I hope I don't slow anyone down. Grant is a bit quiet and I start chatting to him to take our minds off the task. His says his right quad is not feeling good at all, since he is normally very upbeat and positive I hope he is ok. A bit further on he mentions that if he has to pull out it won't be the end of the world since he's done it so many times before. For him to contemplate this, he must be in agony. This is not a good sign and my heart goes out to him. We go through the Ferny Creek checkpoint, there's some downhill here so Grant says he'll see how he goes. Liz steals half a bag of mixed lollies from one of the volunteers and shares it with the team. A beautiful jog/walk through the Alfred Nichols Gardens – the downhill unfortunately is very painful for Grant. We encourage him along. A very treacherous but beautiful walk along side Sassafra Creek, the mud is very slippery and there are many slick roots and rocks to watch out for.

We get to the base of the infamous Hacketts Road – there's a road sign saying 30% gradient. Jack and I start up the climb, Grant and Liz have been chatting behind us. About half way up Liz catches up and tells us that Grant is going to pull out - we offer to abandon the team plan and walk the remainder of the race. He says he doesn't want to slow us down and he wouldn't be happy with a slow walk time. This is obviously devastating news to hear at the 42km mark - our leader, organiser and soul of the team has made a very brave and selfless decision. Linda picks Grant up at the top of Hacketts and drives past us to Olinda. The mood between the remaining three is obviously subdued after this as we contemplate the news. We get to Olinda checkpoint, hugs and condolences with Grant. Crew again spoils us with chairs, sandwiches, muffins. First change of clothes here for me. The rain has stopped and it's nice to be dry again.

Two time Oxfam AMLOR team member Helen is going to run with us for a while. This is a nice and welcome addition and a bit of a boost for morale after Grant's withdrawal. We head off to Mt Evelyn. We're a bit behind schedule so we decide to run as much as we can on the next sector. We make great time and reel in a few teams as we descend from Olinda and pass through the Dandenong Ranges National Park. The pace and rhythm is very good, Jack and I run a bit more knowing that Helen and

Liz will power walk past us during the walk periods. The next stop is the dinner break which we are looking forward to. We call ahead to have the pasta prepared and I reach Rach on the phone. She and the kids are at the Cog Café getting us a coffee and will be there for the dinner break! We make it on to the Warburton Trail and head to the dinner checkpoint. Turn off the trail and walk up the hill I hear cries of “Daddy! Daddy!” – awesome! The kids give me a huge hug and Lily tells me she finished 8<sup>th</sup> in cross country that morning. I am thrilled and proud as punch with her effort and she is very happy with her result.

We check in and I see two friendly faces – GG and Arthur/Bruce from the Milers. Have a quick chat, MMM team were leading by 2mins at the last official time check but Mutley have gone through ahead at the next one. Head off for dinner. Whole family is there and John has arrived to help. Some ex-AMLOR team members are there and give us a short massage. Elizabeth and Jeremy work their magic and Elizabeth does some sport taping for my right knee and relieves some pressure on the ITB and quads. Amazing. We wolf down a nice hot dinner and before we know it the 30 minute break is done and Liz is giving us marching orders. I jog over to say goodbye to GG and get another update on the Milers. Looks like something must have gone awry as they have finally gone through the last check point well behind Team Mutley. It’s mind boggling that they have 7km to go and we have 40km left. They are truly super human and an inspiration to keep going.

On the Warburton Trail. This feels like home turf after all our family cycling weekends. I also have run this out and back on a weekend of training (45km Sat and 42km Sun) so it feels like an old friend. Helen is again running with us which is fantastic. A long gentle downhill to Woori Yallock check point, we all take a while to warm up after dinner but then the pace is back on track. I’m feeling good at this point, I ask if anyone wants to do more running while it is still light. Jack tells me that more running might be the end of his day, so we stick to the original 10/10 plan. Our run periods are good, I tell Jack our KM splits which helps his morale I think. We’re clocking up 6:15 per KM when running and 10-11 mins when walking. A great effort at this stage I keep telling Jack. Liz and Helen keep power walking past us during all the walk periods and we continue to pass teams ahead of us. As good as our run legs are, I keep thinking that Milers and Mutley teams are averaging this for the entire 100km – again I am reminded of what amazing athletes these guys are!

The sun sets as we hit Woori Yallock. My Camelback has been leaking on my back and shorts since the last check point so I change to dry clothes and ditch it in disgust. Liberal chafing prevention applied and I think I’ll be ok. Kids and Rach are there again. Crew and support are a huge morale boost. The kids are blowing bubbles for Elizabeth and Jeremy’s young daughter – very cute and uplifting. Too soon the 15 min break is up and we all don head lamps and get back on the trail. 11 hours and 75km down but there are still some very tough sectors to go. There’s enough twilight to see so I convince the team to run in the dark for a while. We overtake other bobbing headlamps, I’m not sure what they think of us with no lights but it makes for a different experience. I’m starting to lag now – especially on the walking sections, Liz and Jack are looking strong and I hope I am not the one to blow up.

We hit Don Rd and the trek up to the Aqueduct trail. I see a traffic sign saying “Caution – Walkers Ahead” and I start looking out for zombies (been watching too much of “The Walking Dead”). We know that the crew is waiting for us just before the Aqueduct with hot chips and potato cakes. I’m feeling very bad at this stage, Jack and Liz keep disappearing ahead. Liz keeps waiting for us. Still 20km to go and when I sit down in the back of the car my legs are shaking and the thought of a potato cake makes me feel ill. I try one hot chip – this is bloody good. I eat a couple of small handfuls and feel a bit better. Top up on fluids and head off again. We pass some locals having a bonfire and

downing beers – looks very tempting. The goat track up to the Aqueduct is very steep, rocky with bad camber. Another team overtakes me, so I take a few deep breaths and follow their pace. Finally get to the Aqueduct which is thankfully smooth and flat. The chips and drink start to kick in and I feel ok again – possibly I was going food flat? Walking feels terrible at this stage so I see if anyone wants to try running, thankfully they agree and we trot off for 5 minutes. I feel far better running – no real surprise since I haven't done as much walk training as the other two. We go another 5 minutes and knock out some 6 min KMs again.

Surreal and beautiful are words that spring to mind as we run the Aqueduct trail. A wall of trees either side of us, pitch black in front but a clear and crisp view of the stars above. There's no light pollution up here to dim the view of the Milky Way and it's a lovely sight to take my mind of the remaining Ks. It's very quiet with just the sound of feet striking the ground and our breath passing through the headlamps. Occasionally we see some reflective tape or a bobbing light ahead of us, it's a bit of motivation and we pass a few more teams on the trail. We arrive at the checkpoint where the friendly volunteers offer me a strong coffee, I'm not sure how many teaspoons of coffee went into my cup but it certainly had a big kick. Liz sees a familiar face, unfortunately it's Chris Allan from the other AMLOR team (131). He has pulled the plug and looks very tired and spent. This is not surprising as he did the Melbourne Ironman the previous month and had not planned on doing Oxfam, someone on that team pulled out at the last minute and he said he'd come along. We say goodbye and finish off the rest of the Aqueduct trail. At last we reach the street back down to Warburton and we start walking down the hill – I think Liz has finally started to slow down and a few teams jog past us.

Penultimate checkpoint – the Warburton Golf Club is busy and loud with locals and Oxfam crew. Again our support team has everything laid out and we take on the last of the food and drink we need for the 7km push to the end. Jack is a bit slow and Liz lets him know that we need to get this done. At this point I'm in the same boat and just want to see the finish.

Liz leads us up the incredibly steep Backstairs Trak, it's the second last climb of the day and she makes great time on what is a very tricky and technical hill. There are fluorescent green glow sticks either dangling from trees or stuck into tree stumps. They mark the path and are a friendly reminder you aren't lost! We hit the top of the climb and start along the flattish track. I ask if anyone wants to run – for the first time Liz says no, looks like her reserves are spent. We walk together to get to the end. We chat to take our minds off things and Jack does a little dance when the Garmin says we've done 100km. My world is reduced to the ball of light in front of me, making sure I don't fall over on the tricky descent down to the last hill of the day. We hear someone catching up on the descent, it turns out it is just one person who can no longer walk downhill and has to jog at his own pace. It's his ninth Oxfam and he too has lost a team member on the way. We hit the base of Mt Little Joe climb and talk on the way up through the deep breaths. Another person is catching us and I can hear Liz chatting with them behind Jack, Mr Ninetimes and myself. Finally we hit the top and call back down to Liz to let her know she's almost there. The relief is evident as she summits and we all agree to just keep pushing to the end now!

We can see the flood lights of the finish and hear the PA system blaring as a team finishes. A steep and dangerous descent and we're down to the safety of the flatland. The other teams who were with us at the top haven't caught us and we regroup and then start out as a team towards the line. Friends, family and volunteers are ahead yelling and cheering as we "sprint" the last 300 meters home. Huge smiles and high fives and hugs all round as we celebrate the finish.

The other AMLOR team is there waiting for us too, they've done an amazing job too finishing in 15:28 (22<sup>nd</sup>/745)! Dave is giddy and happily drinking a celebratory beer. I politely decline as I don't think I'd be able to stand up after one beer. Quick team photo with our team then combined photo with the other AMLOR team. Within five minutes of finishing Gautam asks me if I'll do it again, I say to ask again in six months. My feet feel like they've been phone booked, my quads are quite tired but overall I feel surprisingly good.

What a relief to finally finish, we are all very happy and proud of what we have accomplished. We worked really well as a team, making sure we never pushed each other out of our comfort zones. At some point in the last 40 KMs each of us had a bad patch, but we were able to recover and work off each other to reach the finish. It's bitter sweet that Grant couldn't finish with us, but he played a massive role in getting us to the finish and stayed on to support us to the end!

Finally huge thanks must be given to our support crew, donors and families. Toni, Linda, Sarah, John, Lindsay, Guatam, Helen, Rina, Scott, Joe, Elizabeth, Jeremy, the Oxfam and [MMM volunteers. Toni deserves a special mention as she was with us from the start to the end providing food, coffee, hugs and coordinating all the other helpers! Rach, Lily and Hamish thanks for putting up with the training and for all the cheering on the day. Without your help, encouragement and support we would not have made it.

Liz, Jack and Grant - I'll never forget this amazing day out. Well done team!

As of this writing the team raised \$4209! Thanks to all who donated!

Results and Stats (Garmin link here <http://connect.garmin.com/activity/170040710>) :

Overall: 35/745 (Top 4.6% of teams)

Mixed (Gender): 16/397 (Top 4% of teams)

Elevation Gain: 2400 meters (7874 feet)

Total Time: 16:45

Moving Time: 13:55

Average Pace (including rest stops etc.): 9:37 min/km

Average Moving Pace: 7:59 min/km