



12 January 2014 - Race Report by Garth "Licka" Calder

I first heard about the Two Bays Trail run from a friend in the days when it was still a Fat Ass event before it became an official race in 2011. The notion of running from one body of water, Port Phillip Bay to another, the Bass Strait across the Mornington Peninsula was very appealing. It was always going to be an exciting run with Arthur's Seat to conquer, the stunning beauty of Bushranger's Bay and then turning around at Cape Schanck Lighthouse only to run back and do it all again!

As you can probably gather this has become one of my favourite trail runs since I first ran the 28km event in 2011 in its first year as an official event and I have it run every year ever since in some form. In 2012, I signed up for the full out and back journey to complete the 56km ultra for the first time, in 2013 I struggled with an ITB issue and could only managed the 28km route but came back for more in 2014 in much better shape for the full 56kms.

My training and racing in the lead up to the Two Bays event had gone very well in the last quarter of 2013, culminating in a solid run at the Marysville 50km Ultra in November, so I was very eager to get out on the course when I arrived early on Sunday morning, 12 January.

Meeting up with the rest of the Melbourne Midday Milers Ultra team of Anthony "Obama" George, Anthony "Mitho" Mithen and Dale "Rafa" Nardella at the start we all chatted and remarked at how kind the weather gods had been to us - we could not have asked for better! How was it possible to have a 24 degree max, coolish start and cloud cover until midday in the middle of an intensely hot Melbourne summer with the mercury pushing over 40 degrees in the weeks both before and after the event?

After a short briefing at 7:10am for the 56km start at the Cape Schanck Lighthouse about 230 ultra runners set off on a perfect morning through the undulating brush, enjoying nature's finest as we headed towards the beautiful cliffs and outlook of Bushranger's Bay.

On this early part of the course, it is relatively flat and you can settle into a bit of a rhythm. I was looking to see where my fellow Miler teammates had slotted in whilst also taking in the stunning scenery. Although this is not a technical part of the course was clearly not careful enough with my footing and in the blink of an eye managed to catch my toe on a small rock and take a fall.



With a bloodied knee, grazed shoulder and severely bruised ego, I managed to pick myself up out of the dirt and get back on course without losing any ground but this was certainly not part of the plan within only 2 kms of the start!

Suddenly, my attention was a lot more focused on the trail and my initial assessment was that there did not appear to be any significant damage but on the positive note I had the added benefit of an early adrenalin boost.

At the first aid station, 6kms into the race at Boneo Road, I managed a little clean up of my wounds losing probably only about a minute before pressing on and I was told at that point that I was placed somewhere in the top 25. Obama flashed passed me at the aid station and I slotted in not too far behind him keeping him trying to keep this speed machine within viewing distance.

We soon reached the new detour at about 8kms that steers the ultra runners onto a different trail to avoid running directly into the 28 km participants and I tried to settle into my race plan pace of about 5min/km while those in front of me seemed already to be picking up the pace and pulling away slightly.

While I felt comfortable and able to go quicker, I was trying to hold back as long as possible, knowing that both sides of Arthur's Seat were still ahead of us and had to be conquered in both directions.

At about 17kms we arrived at the Browns Road crossing and I was still placed in the top 25 with those in front of me opening up a bit of a gap over this mostly flat and downhill section. By this time I had also put the early fall behind me and was feeling in much better spirits seeing my backup crew waiting ahead of the aid station to refuel me with Gatorade, salted potatoes and heaps of encouragement.

Feeling revived and refuelled, I set out for McLarens Dam and then moved onto the first really tough section up the back side of Arthur's Seat towards Seawinds. At this mostly uphill stage of the course I was feeling really good and I slowly started reeling in a few places as some of the faster starters were now walking up the steeper sections of the hills. For me it must in part have been the potato power kicking in!

I caught and passed Obama near the top of the climb and pushed on taking at least 5 places by the time I reached Seawinds and the steep descent down Arthur's Seat to the turnaround at Dromana. As I made my way down, two of the front runners were walking up the section at steps near the steepest part of the Arthur's Seat and I took strength from the fact that even they were feeling the effects of the climb and had to walk this section, albeit now probably more than 20 minutes ahead of me!

It would have been easy to open up and fly downhill through the last few kms towards Dromana but I kept holding back as I knew that we were only just reaching halfway with the real race still to come and my race plan was to be strong for the second half.

Coming down I had also been counting those ahead, figuring that I had moved up into the top 20 and this was confirmed as I reached the turnaround in 18<sup>th</sup> place. Very pleased with my progress, I crossed the 28km line, gave the bell a good ring and then turned around for the return journey. I stopped for a brief chat with my backup crew and to change over to my second camelback while grabbing a banana but losing a few places to two runners who had been close to me on the descent.

It wasn't far into the early part of the climb back up Arthur's Seat that I caught up and reclaimed these two places and then pushed on into the steepest part of the ascent, running all the way to the steps and then walking only the last bit to the summit. I was still feeling strong and managed to put in a bit of distance between myself and the last two runners that I passed.

I was now feeling really good with the big climb behind me but was still conscious of not going too hard too early and sticking to my race plan. As I stretched my legs and opened up a little down the back of Arthur's Seat towards McLarens Dam, I replayed the first half in my mind, pleased with the 2:23:09 at the turnaround that was pretty close to my planned 5min/km pace.

The plan was now just to keep it strong and steady, stay in the top 20 and try to finish as close to 5 hours as possible that would give me a solid PB on my previous 5:19:16 time of 2012. I spotted a runner ahead of me crossing the McLarens Dam wall and slowly reeled him to pass him along Goolgowie Road on the bitumen in the Urban section of the run.

Then it was back onto the trail section heading towards the Browns road crossing to meet up again with my slick support crew who were ready as always with Gatorade, salted potatoes, snakes and heaps of encouragement. Heading out of the aid station on a high and well refuelled, I realised with about 17kms to go that at my current solid pace that my dream of getting close to a 5 hour finish was not out of the question.

Spurred on by this now real possibility, I pushed on steadily at a solid 5:15min/km pace into the Greens bush section. To my surprise, I started to catch runners in front of me and managed to steadily pick off a few.

As I picked up another runner, Robert, with about 12 kms to go, I am not sure if I was distracted by the small toy cow tucked into the back of his belt, if I was following him too closely for too long or if I was just very fatigued but I managed to take my second fall of the day, hooking my foot on a wooden step.

It seems that it was my fate was to take one trip each way but at least this jolted me back to reality a focused my attention on the last 10kms. I started to feel a little surge in energy and settled back into a good rhythm on this slightly downhill section towards Bushranger's Bay.

I continued to pick up a few more runners in front me with the heat was now starting to get up and the sun breaking through the clouds. The trail was also now less treed as it opened up to the coast line and we were rewarded with the beautiful view out over Bass Strait.

I had tried to save enough to run the nasty hill at 2kms to go but that was not to be as the steps now felt like giant ones especially for a dwarf with tired legs. After walking up these steep steps all that was left to do was to run through an overgrown bush track (tunnel) with the aptly worded signboard next to it proclaiming that there is a "Lighthouse at the end of the tunnel" and onto the finish at the lighthouse.

Looking down at my watch I was pleasantly surprised and smiled as I saw 4:57 on the clock with less than 1 km to go. This became an even broader smile as I approach the finish line and saw that the official clock was still on 5:00. Although I was thoroughly spent by this stage, I could not help but celebrate with 3 heel click jumps to finish in 5:00:09 and a big PB to boot.

I was even more surprised when I was told that I had finished 12<sup>th</sup> overall, picking up 6 places on the return leg and posting the 8<sup>th</sup> quickest time for the last quarter of the run. Soaking in the atmosphere at the finish I waited for the rest of the MMM Ultra team to come in.



Special mention must be made of one of our newer Milers and “unofficial team member” Rob “ Ultraman” Dalton, who ran an excellent race to finish in 5:05:18, a whopping 40 minute PB!

Obama rolled in next looking fairly worn out but he still managed a big smile as he crossed the line in a very respectable time of 5:28:48 for his virgin trail ultra outing.

Our final two team members rolled in not long after Obama with Mitho next to cross the line in 5:41:50 closely followed by Rafa with a very solid and steady time of 5:43:35, shadowing his mentor and coach!

The times of our first three Milers home gave us a combined time of 16:10:47 and put us in 2<sup>nd</sup> place for the team event.

As a final word for anyone that has not yet completed this event, it extremely well organised and run by Rohan and his team. It has a really great holiday atmosphere with lots of variety and great trail sections to enjoy. If you are thinking of taking it on next year then I recommend that you get in early as it is always a sell out!