

Part 1 - The idea

Ever since hearing of the exploits of Nigel Aylott doing and winning Oxfam, then having a MMM/ANZ team of Metronome, GG, Denti & Jim Grellis compete a few years back, and more recently guys like Handman, Biggers & James A tackle the 100kms, I have been fascinated by the event and had it on my to do list 1 day. Then I crewed for Kylie's (ie Mrs AL) team last year and was inspired not only by the competitors but the event in general. The logistics, organisation, fund raising efforts etc are enormous. I decided that I wanted a crack at it in 2009.

Part 2 – Getting a team together

Around mid last year I heard that House was sniffing around for a team to have a go at the Oxfam record. Knowing that House would not be in it just to make up the numbers, I approached him to see if there were any spots available. A few days later I was in a team with House, Handman and Damien Angus. Entries hadn't opened as yet and so we were only a team in spirit.

Entries opened and House had us in there quick smart as teams spots can fill up very fast for this event. Turn the clock forward a few weeks and Damien had a clash with the Port Macquarie in a few weeks and Handman went and got himself injured and then suffered a bad case of goodpaddockitis. We were down to 2 team members and things were looking grim. You would think giving the hype of the event now that we would be bowled over with offers, but we had to do some smooth talking to fill the last 2 spots.

Smoothy was the first to be persuaded. Confident enough now that his hammy had become strong enough to tackle the event. I then approached Dozer with the offer, and although not saying no, he was about 20% convinced and wanted some time to think about it. The 2 issues were the time away from his family on the long training days and, fear that the event might be very painful. Around a week later he gave me the nod that he was in, but warned me that he was coming after me if this turned into a hellish affair. I said no worries, how much can jogging 100kms hurt anyway!!!!!! ;-)

So we now had our new team of 4 with Luke Yeatman kindly offering his services as our back up emergency.

Part 3 – The Training Plan

How the hell do you train for an event like this?

I was unconvinced that doing lots and lots and lots of slow miles was NOT the way to train for one of these things. Also being 4 months out I didn't think we could train our bodies to become hard nut Ultra types. Surely we were better using our general strength as runners and building an adequate amount of endurance strength through a few dedicated long runs whilst continuing to do some speed sessions and race as required. Well it was a theory that about to be tested.

There was nothing very scientific about what we did. Train just as you would for a marathon but intermingled with the long runs, do 4 dedicated Oxfam type long

training sessions. Our Monday to Saturday training for the most part remained the same and our Sunday training from the 21 Dec 2008 followed the following pattern:

Week 1 – Long group Oxfam session. Mixture of walk/run on tough terrain.

Week 2 – Shortened long run – 80 – 100 minutes

Week 3 – Marathon type long training run – 2 to 2.5 hours

Our Long group Oxfam sessions have been written up on our team page but here is a summary

21/12/08 – Jells to Grants with some circle work in Churchill Park. This is the one where our support crew got lost and we were waiting around in Churchill Park for an hour. Dozer and I covered 38.5kms and House did around 42. Big learnings from this day.

1. We had a lot of work to do
2. We need to drink early and drink often. I underestimated just how much you need to drink. After this run I decided that I will need to carry some drinks in a backpack.

11/1/09 – Lysterfield Lake to half way up the Warby Trail. We covered 51kms and it was a confidence booster. Mentally great to get over the 50kms and although tired could have gone on.

1/2/09 – Olinda to the finish – 53.6kms. It reached 35 degrees this day and so this run was super tough. Dozer rolled his ankle about 10kms into the run and continued on until about 45kms. The heat was a killer and I actually found the last stage tougher that day than last Friday.

22/2/09 – With a lot of the trail under fire threat we hit the Dandenongs and did a series of loops. Joined by GG and Luke Y for part of the trip, we covered 55.5kms all in the hills. This was a tough hit out but at least we had over a month to get over it.

Part 4 – The race plan

Our Cinderella plan was to grab a win, smash the record and get under 10 hours. House and I even had fantasy notions early on that sub 9 was even possible. Any thoughts of sub 9 however were quickly squashed when we started training on the trail. The last section and large parts of the Dandenongs demand that you walk many sections so this really eats into your pace average.

The first 28kms are pretty flat except for one challenging hill in Churchill Park. From 28 – 60 it is up and over the Dandenongs on hilly sections that in parts have very difficult footing. 60 – 93 is pretty much flat to gently undulating. 93-100 is steep up and down on what can only be described as a goat track.

How to go sub 10

Even if we were feeling fantastic at the last stage we would need a serious buffer as this section was going to take between 75-80 minutes. This puts us about 20 or so minutes behind 6min pace.

Our plan was to tackle the first 28 kms at 5min average and then track close to 6 min pace over the hills. This would get us to the 60km mark in around 5:30 to 5:40.

If we had some legs left we could track along the Warby at 5:40ish average and come into the last checkpoint in around 8:30 and have a buffer.

Surely this plan was foolproof. I suppose however there is that little nagging thing called fatigue that can strike, plus apparently this was a longish race and they say things can go wrong occasionally.

The other very vital piece of our plan was not to waste any time at checkpoints. We weren't here to sightsee so there was no reason to stop moving. This is where your support crew are vital. We had a planning session 8 days out from the race and worked out all of the logistics. We did not want to waste a single minute so our guys were to have stuff ready to as we approached them. We did a quick stock up of drinks/food and then we would go. 1 minute lost per checkpoint over 6 checkpoints could turn a 2 minute lead into a 4 minute deficit. How important this would prove to be.

Part 5 – Pre-race

Arrived at Jells Park and it was still dark. We planned to meet at 6am to give ourselves plenty of time to check in, pin our numbers on, take a few pre-race pics, relax and then get a good spot on the start line. House was there early, I arrived a few minutes later with Dozer just after. Smoothy was doing a last minute ice run and was so was 10 or so minutes behind. Once we had all arrived we were required to join a long queue to hand in some crew contact info and health questionnaire forms. 15 minutes later we were out of there with race numbers in hand. It was 6:35 and it was still dark.

I was toey as a Roman Sandal and you could see the fear in Dozer's eyes. Smoothy looked on edge and not quite his smooth self. House was cool as ever chowing down on a packet of Sakatas. At 6:50 we made the move down to the start line to work our way into a good position. The general throng self seeded themselves pretty well and we had no trouble getting a spot near the front. It was now about 7am, it was still dark.

The main threats to us being 'Running Upstream' and 'Team Muttley' were positioned right along side us. It's nearly showtime.

7:03 and we are off. What a massive build up and finally we are in the race.

Part 6 – The battle is on – Stage 1

The start gate and the barriers for the first 200m were only around 5 m wide so it was quite a frenetic start. We didn't want to get stuck behind anyone so we worked our way into the front packs by 400m. Within a km we had hit the front in a pack including our 2 main rivals. By 3kms we were in a good rythm of 4:50's and the four of us were running alongside Kelvin Marshall (from team upstream) who had

temporarily gone ahead of his team. He dropped the pace to 4:20 pace and after going with him for 200m metres we pulled things back as we didn't want to get sucked into any early racing. Once he was out on his own he slowed down the pace and rejoined our group. It was about the 7km mark when the Milers were first out in front on our own. We had a built a nice gap and stayed out in front until CP1 at 12.5kms.

There was no support crew access at CP1 so we checked in/out grabbed a banana from the food tent and set off. The Muttleys were only just behind but we were out of there before they arrived. We did not know how close they were.

Part 7 – Knuckling down

3kms into the 2nd stage we hit the first of the big hills for the day in Churchill Park. As per our plan to walk any tough hills, we walked up the 2nd part to save energy for the rest of the race. We noticed as we were walking the Muttleys were jogging up the hill and were gaining on us. The gap had narrowed to 100m but to our credit we stuck to our plan and didn't panic. They actually walked the final part of the hill as well and never got in front of us.

We got away from them again on the flat section and came into CP2 at Lysterfield Lake in first place. A very slick changeover with our support crew and we were out of there before Muttley arrived.

Part 8 The real show begins

In reality the first 28kms are no reflection of the race day but do give you an opportunity to get some time up your sleeve. I felt us and the Muttleys had used this wisely without being overzealous.

Out of CP 2 there is a section of gradual up hill followed by a flattish section to Birdsland. This is around 28kms. You cross out of Birdsland and then start the quite steep climb up to Puffing Billy Station. A good opportunity to get some food and drink into yourself as you walk up the hills. A quick steep downhill bit (200m) to wake up the quads before crossing the Puffing Billy train line and another steep walking bit and then up Coles Ridge track into Grants Picnic Ground. This is the first real test of the day and we all came through it OK although were a little concerned when House and I had to wait at the checkpoint for around 3 minutes while the other 2 gave birth to a Number 2. Didn't the teacher always tell you to go at lunchtime. The splits again showed Muttley just behind but we were not aware of them at this stage.

Part 9 Hill mania

I named this hill mania because of the 12kms on this stage there would be lucky to be 2kms of flat, and there are 2 nasty hills.

Out of Grants and the first of the nasty hills appear. Steep but not too steep but not runnable as it is filled with tree roots and low hanging branches. It goes for about 1.5kms and is just a section to get through. No point worrying about speed because you travel around 15min pace. The next 5 or 6 kms were my favourite part of the course. You get to run through the familiar Sherbrooke forest before a really nice

down hill section where you can really stretch out.

No.2 nasty hill is Hacketts Rd. The hill is around 1 km long but the first 400m feel like they are almost vertical. Another one just to survive. Out of Hacketts Rd we took a slight wrong turn (GRRRRR!!!) and had to back track 100m. Not what you want. We felt we made steady progress into Olinda and everyone was feeling OK. Checked In/Out and as we were leaving we were greeted by the Muttleys. This is really the first time that we had seen them for a while and it really gave this a race feel. 46.5kms and we had tracked at the same pace.

Part 10 The Sleeping Dog

8km section with a 350m descent. Sounds like heaven.

This section is far from heaven. It is a quad and a toe buster, that in my opinion would contribute to a lot of teams getting into trouble later on the Warby Trail. One section is particularly steep and it was at this point I could feel some action underneath my big toenail. When I got the next checkpoint there was some red stuff in my shoe around it. It was sore but not too bad for the time being.

GG had promised an extra \$20 if we got there under 5:10. We were there in just over 5hrs so Oxfam got a little bit extra.

Part 11 Onward to the Warby

Leaving Silvan Dam we weaved our way through some up and down trails. Pretty uneventful until we get to Dozers Hill. It was at this point that the big fella started having some issues and coincided with the downhill section he rolled his ankle on last time. We all proceeded cautiously but Dozer provided some light entertainment as he tip toed his way down the hill. There was no way he was going to do anything this time. We got through it, got through Mt Evelyn and then we were on the trail. Running back on the flat was a relief and a few kms down the road we were at CP6.

Dozer had stated at the start of the race that he was planning a change of shoes and clothes at this point. He was not looking great and probably welcomed the short rest. I said to the guys that I was not changing anything and that I was at risk of seizing up if I stayed still. I basically had a rest walking and waited for the guys to catch up. I crossed paths with the Muttleys on the way out of CP6 and they seemed to be looking OK. I kept strolling expecting Dozer to be 5 minutes or more and fully expected to be in 2nd place when the boys caught up. No idea of how long he took but it must have been fairly slick because when they reached me we still had the lead.

Part 12 Warby Part 1 The test begins

It had been beer and skittles up to now with everything going to plan.

The walk did wonders for me personally and I was feeling pretty good. We got back into running at 5:10 pace but the call came down the line that the pace was a little hot and that Dozer was cramping up. We then let him set the agenda and after a few kms settled into running 2kms at 5:40 pace followed by 5 mins of walking. No idea what

was happening behind us but seemingly at the same time Team Muttley were having issues of their own.

We were now tracking at around 6:40 pace avg on this stage and not looking likely to get any quicker. Of bigger concern however was whether we were going to finish or not. Dozer had cramped in both calves and his stride length was getting shorter by the minute, and his heart rate was climbing despite a run/walk strategy. Coupled with that, when I went to give him some encouragement he was having problems hearing me. He was in real trouble. I think this stage was probably his darkest point. To his massive credit he kept a competitive attitude and was still anxious for the win despite 10 hours now looking gone. That 13km section took us 85 minutes, which in hindsight was still pretty solid despite the shoe change and the run/walk.

Part 13 – Warby Part 2

97 mins for 14 kms. Now theres a pace that Grunter would be proud of for a Mikes Meander.

A long, flat, boring but very testing stage. I think all runners like to tick off milestones, whether it be the next hill, or the next km marker etc. but this stage gave us nothing. A great sign at CP7 however as Dozer asked his wife to call him when the Muttleys arrived to get an idea of the lead. Great because despite being in a world of pain, his mind was still in the game and he hadnt thrown in the towel.

Plenty of encouragement from all of us but he had retreated into his own world and was just ticking through the kms.

Personally I was damn pleased to get to CP8 as I was over the Warby Trail and just wanted to be on the home stretch. I was pretty confident that as we had now reached this point that Dozer would get to the end. Also with 1:57 up our sleeve a sub 11 looked likely, so despite falling off our targets there was still a lot to play for.

I was personally feeling pretty good at this point.

We all changed into our Red Miler singlets and miler caps at this point as planned.

Part 14 – The Run home

Everyone was now in team uniform. We got to the checkpoint and they had just set up their operation. On the way through the school we noticed an exit sign that lead out the back gate of the school rather than where we came in, which meant we had to do a lap of the school before we started the next lap. This didn't seem right so we quickly asked as we were checking in and they were none the wiser. Being cautious we did the extra lap but I suspect that we just added on extra distance. It was a bit disappointing not to have clear instructions.

Off we set again for the big run home over “Mt Goat Track”. We set off along the Warby trail again for about 2kms with some walking but mostly jogging. We then make a right hand turn into Dolly Grey Park. House asks me if I know who/what Dolly Grey is? I had no idea, but he informs me, rightly or wrongly, that the tune to

the Collingwood theme song is based on a song about Dolly Grey. Anyway that was our game of trivia at the 93km mark.

We then start climbing the Backstairs track. This is a climb up a dirt track of about 1500m in length and a rise of about 170m. House and I were out in front and feeling pretty good. At 1 stage there is a big rut in the track which when I negotiated it thought that Dozer was in for some strife. As it turned out he literally got stuck in a rut when he got to it.

The Backstairs Track although tough is quite manageable and is not the worst of this stage. I got to the top and could see House but Dozer and Smoothy were a few minutes back. I was in good spirits still at this stage but needed to keep moving. Although feeling unsociable I told House that I was going to keep walking and that if I stopped it would be a dangerous thing. I enjoyed the scenery for 5minutes, and then the group was approaching me on a gradual downhill section running. We kept ticking along nicely for the next km or so.

Next is a 1500m steep “ish” downhill section. That red stuff in my shoes had started to spread and my toes were starting to really hurt. Up until this point things were feeling really good but from this point my feet were becoming a big issue for me. They were never that bad to even think about stopping, particularly as the big fella had been to hell and back, but bad enough to be feeling every downhill step. As it turned out I had blisters under toenails on 5 toes. Every downhill step from this point was just banging those blisters against my runners. I kicked my toe on a rock during this section and felt like my toe had just been shot.

My Garmin had now snuck over into 100.0 kms and we still had nearly 2kms to go. My mood changed at this point and I was over Oxfam. We had one big mother of a hill to go, then back down the other side and we were at Wesburn Park.

This last hill is serious. Footing not great (loose gravel) and over 900m it rises 130m. In my book that is steep. No “ish” about it. In a twisted way it was good to climb again because now my toes were not being smashed. We got up the hill basically walking in a hunched over fashion with hands on knees. Tough work. Twice I thought we were near the top only to find we were not. The crest finally arrived and Dozer had done a great job as he was not that far back. He could smell the finish line now.

Oh shite. Now we have to go back down again. This was just as steep as the up hill bit. As I went down the hill all I could think of was ow, ow, ow, ow ,ow. My toes were being smashed but it was all still worth it.

A couple of twists and turns and we entered Wesburn Park to the cheers and relief of the support crew. About a 400m section on grass before entering the finishing chute. What a feeling. A real mixture of “yes we’ve done it” along with “thank god it’s over” and then the realisation of what we’ve just achieved.

We’d made it. One more thing to do however was to officially check in. We re-gathered and got our names officially ticked off as finishing. You bloody ripper!!!!!!!!!! This thing was over.

10 hours and 35 minutes on our feet.

Part 15 – The aftermath

Some man hugs and high 5's followed. All the boys then went to their support crew to acknowledge their efforts.

The Oxfam organisers gave us a bottle of champers to celebrate with. These were quickly opened and sprayed around in grand prix fashion, apart from House who couldn't get his cork out. Champagne was not the drink of choice at that stage but the big swig I took was like nectar.

Lots of photos and congratulations and that 10 or 15 minutes after the event make the previous 10:35 all worthwhile. I've had great moments after races before but doing it as a team magnifies the moment significantly. Will never forget the post race celebration.

I took my shoes off for the first time and it was a major relief. When I tried to put them back on to leave they refused. Everyone was just totally washed out but high as a kite. Even Dozer had really perked up.

We were still around when Team Muttley minus 1 crossed the line in 11:14. Like us they seemed relieved to be finished but were disappointed with the way things turned out by losing a team member.

Part 16 – The wash up and thanks

We didn't get our sub 10 hour time, but we snagged the win and got a record. Not something you get to do every day. I think when we look back at this day we will remember it fondly for the way the team dug itself out of a hole to finish to the best of their ability on the day. As I said to the guys on the day, it's all easy when things are going well, but it's how you react when things turn nasty that shapes your end result. Dozer gutsed it out as best he could and we could not have asked for any more. His ability to never give in was one of the reasons he was enlisted in the first place. On top of that, given that this was our first time, I thought as a team we showed a lot of poise to think ourselves through the situation when fatigued, and keep redefining goals and strategies to suit the situation we were in. With one of these now under the belt I think we would be better prepared next time. Having said that I'd say Dozer won't be back.

Huge thanks to our support crew. They did not miss a beat. They performed like seasoned professionals even though it was their first time. This is not an easy job and not getting it right can cost your team. They were slick and we did not lose a single second because of them. Fantastic job by Kylie, Jann, Stacey & Deb on the day and also to some of the crew that joined us on training runs as well.

Big thanks to James A. He decided to do his weekly long from CP7 to the finish. It was a privilege to have a guy of his quality run along side us and cheer us along.

Also to Gary O. He rode parts of the trail and provided updates of what was happening around us. He also walked the last section and his support invaluable.

Great experience from my end. Apart from the last few kms it was actually really enjoyable. Just like a long long training run with mates through the countryside but with some meaning to it at the end. My toes pulled up pretty bad. If you saw them the day after you would question how I got through the event. They did hurt but it's funny how in the heat of the battle you can cope with so much more. I'm so glad I did not change shoes at CP6 because the race may have been over when I couldn't get another pair back on.

House is a freak and when he goes on to do some fantastic things over the next few years I can say that I was in a team with him back in 2009. If he was in an equally matched team he would be capable of sub 9 hours. Not because he is the greatest runner going around but his resilience is amazing.

Smoothy was a mere shell of himself as a runner 2 years ago. After ripping his hamstring to bits in a stupid training incident 4+ years ago he was effectively out of action for 2 years. He is back now and is set for a massive 2009 AV season. When he was the MMM Alpha Male back in 2003 there is no way I would have picked that I would end up in an Oxfam team with him.

Dozer was running 14min+ tans 3 years ago. He can now run under 12mins when fully fit and has a 2:45 marathon under his belt. As Bacchus puts it he has more balls than Keno. Mighty effort.

What a great journey

THE END