

Jane's TNF50 Report – You Just Never Know...!

Training Plan - 10 weeks to The North Face 50km (TNF50)

As with the 6 Foot Track marathon, I sought Hanny Allston's guidance for my TNF50 training program. We started with her program from the event website (Hanny, who is sponsored by TNF, published programs for both the 50km and 100km and also coached a number of event training camps) and tailored it. In addition to the Bikram yoga and BODYPUMP classes that I try to do twice a week, this time we included some swimming. I finally got back into the pool the day after 6 Foot Track having avoided doing laps for at least two years and, surprisingly, I did not find it boring as feared (though my swims are only 20-30 minutes). I was also keen to participate in the Australian Running Festival (AFR) 6 weeks before TNF just to be part of it. I had a few friends doing the marathon event and was keen to cheer them on so we incorporated the AFR half marathon into my program.

I was on a high after the 6 Foot Track and excited about this next challenge. The first two weeks were mostly recovery with easy runs, walking, road bike riding and Bikram yoga. My training effort started again the second weekend with a trip to the Blue Mountains to check out the event course. The plan was to cover the most runnable section of the course (the second half) on Saturday and the remainder, excluding the first 5.6km on road, on Sunday. However, things did not go to plan...

Lead Up - Lessons Learned

At 7am on Saturday 29 March I started my long training run from the Fairmont Hotel (approx. 17km course mark) with friends. After the Queen Victoria Hospital (Checkpoint501, 28km course mark) I decided to run hard down Kedumba Valley Rd, going ahead of my running buddies and straight past the junction with Sublime Point Ridge Rd where I should have turned right – well, actually should have waited *or* turned around and slowly jogged back to meet my buddies (this was my big mistake). I ended up spending 10 hours on my feet, covered over 70kms and descended 2,000m plus (my Garmin died before 60km) that day. The plan was to cover 30km of the course (and approx. 1,200m elevation gain/loss) from the Fairmont Resort to Scenic World (start and finish line) in around 4 hours. At 5pm I finally called it quits with my new running buddy (Andrew Pettica, also lost - at least I wasn't alone) and called 000 for a police rescue - I was very thankful for the reception at Medlow Gap (yes, we really stuffed up). Two smiling policemen (Dallas and Douggie) arrived around 1.5 hours later in a 4WD greeting us with "are you our damsels in distress?" Obviously we looked ok, however I was not in a laughing mood and couldn't climb onto that back seat fast enough.

The reason for my misadventure, embarrassingly I was lazy and did not study the map properly beforehand. I was on a running high having pulled up well from 6 Foot Track and used to running in my familiar local bushlands. So the thought of winging it in the Blue Mountains, with patchy mobile reception, now makes me cringe! I back tracked a number of times along Kedumba Valley Rd and then started to panic, losing track of my kms. I also stopped reading the course notes properly and skimmed over a critical point (I learnt this later much to my horror). I met two other lost runners training for the event at different times along Kedumba Valley Rd and stayed with the second runner (Andrew) when in hindsight I should have called it quits and headed back to Queen Victoria Hospital. We took a wrong right turn... I usually pride myself as someone who copes well under pressure – boy did I learn from this. Luckily I had double the amount of food needed and all the mandatory gear, plus more (slightly freaky).

So from the high of my running life two weeks earlier I found myself feeling pretty low. I beat myself up for a number of days afterwards, however knew that I had to forget about it and focus on recovering. Frustratingly I wrote off the next week's training, visited the AIS cold plunge pool for the

first time twice (the novelty wore off after the first visit, I left chattering both times), and resumed training the next week. I also went back to my physio (Cathy Hogg at PhysioSport) to find out what damage I had done.

Cathy confirmed that I had damaged my quad tendons (again) and my right hip alignment had worsened however had not wrecked anything. I had to revert to the previous glute strengthening exercises which was disappointing having only just progressed to the next stage after being so diligent. However, now comes the amazing part for me – I then went on to run a PB in the AFR half marathon that weekend (and still smile about it!).

This rollercoaster experience taught me many lessons, most importantly to keep it real when you make a mistake, learn from it and stay positive.

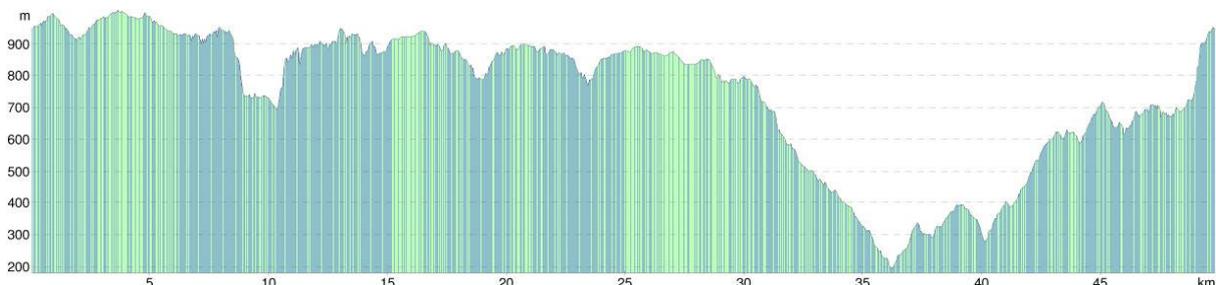
I returned to the Blue Mountains at Easter (the weekend after the ARF) with my friend Maria Donohue (also training for TNF50) for 'take two'. Putting the lessons learnt from my previous visit into practice, we had a great time running the trails in sunny conditions without any assistance 😊



Training success - Maria and me

TNF50 event (part of the Ultra-Trail World Tour, baby of the renowned 100km event)

The course has a bit of everything with bitumen and dirt roads, single track and lots of steps (metal, wooden and rock) - and an elevation gain and loss of 2,000m (see profile below).



See the course maps at: <http://www.thenorthface100.com.au/RaceInfo/50#Course>

Participants are also required to carry the following mandatory gear:

- long sleeve thermal
- waterproof and breathable jacket
- beanie, balaclava or buff
- headlamp
- mobile phone
- compass
- whistle
- emergency space blanket
- compression bandage (min. 7.5cm wide x 2.5cm long)
- lightweight dry sack to keep compulsory clothing dry (zip lock bag is ok)
- capacity to carry 2 litres of water
- 2 x food bars
- waterproof map case (zip lock bag is ok)
- set of maps, course description and participant emergency instructions
- race number (worn on front).

My Salmon S-Lab (Hydro 12) pack weighed 4kg with 2 litres of electrolytes/water.

Game Plan – Enjoy it

Why do the event? To enjoy the challenge and share the elation of finishing with other friends. A number of us signed up at the second Lake Crackenback Resort trail running camp with Hanny and Brendan Davies. This meant “running my own race”, not forgetting about posture, gravity and the path of least resistance, playing it safe with the tricky bits (i.e. walk the steep steps) and sticking to my nutrition plan (a gel every 40-45 minutes... this gets harder the longer you are on your feet, there is a limit and I think I found mine in this event).

What about a time? I had a look at the results from last year’s event (though the course had changed) and my training runs. I decided sub-6 hours should be achievable and if I had a good day hopefully around 5.5 hours, which might just be good enough to sneak onto the podium (little did I know!).

Pre-event massage? Of course! Similar to my 6 Foot Track preparation, I had a massage early that week with Faye Todd (ANU Pivotal Massage) and saw Cathy the day before to work her physio magic (this time my neck and the right side of my back were playing up, too many hours sitting).

Race Day – Saturday 17 May 2014

I slept terribly despite not feeling particularly anxious during the week leading up (work had been busy and a distraction). However, I also slept badly before 6 Foot Track so was not worried, it just made for a very long night.

Steve Hanley (my friend running the 100km who I was sharing a room with at the Katoomba YHA) and I got up 5:20am. I started with my usual coffee and a short hot shower (my neck and back were feeling better), before taping my knees and filling my water bottles and bladder with electrolytes (I almost forgot having double checked my bag was organised the night before – I laughed at myself thinking how wonderfully light my pack felt, not so).

I wished Steve good luck before he headed off for his 6:38am start group 3 wave (there were 6 TNF100 waves, the first at 6:30am and last at 6:51am). I then filled time with some stretching using

the foam roller before heading out the door at 6:30am. The 50km event briefing was at 6:55am and the 1st wave (my start group) left at 7:05am and last wave (4th) at 7:18am.

Scenic World, this year's new start and finish line, was 2km down the road from the YHA so I jogged slowly to the start line. There was an event bus I could have taken that stopped directly opposite the YHA (a non-stop 20 minute loop service along Katoomba St to Scenic World was provided during the event) however instead used the short jog to warm up/shake off some nerves.

The weather was perfect (~7-18 degrees) and the sun was already shining, awesome! I could feel myself smiling as I walked around the start area at **Scenic World**, taking off my arm warmers (didn't need them), chatting and having a few photos with other runners before the briefing.



Ready to go - Jo Brischetto, me and Richard Allan

I lined up towards the start of my group keen to settle into my own rhythm quickly. Tom Landon-Smith's (Race Director) **race briefing** in relation to Leave No Trace ("pooing") and those annoying small gel wrapper tops was the most candid I have heard and I laughed (though I'm sure I'll hear more like it as I do more trail events). Then it was straight to business, my wave was off and Jo Brischetto (tipped to win after Hanny's withdrawal) quickly took the lead for the women. I was in second place, running comfortably and enjoying the buzz from the cheering crowd during the **first 5.6km on road** (1.6km on dirt) loop section before following the footpath to Cliff Top Walk.

I lost sight of Jo on reaching the **Cliff Top Walk track** and thought I was unlikely to see her again. The course followed the track (with steps, all runnable) to the **Three Sisters** where we descended the **Giant Stairway**. I had been feeling anxious about descending the 900 steep steps, worried I would feel under pressure to go faster or would be continuously stopping to get out of the way of other more skilled runners. However, with some luck I had gained enough of a gap that only a few male runners passed me as I gingerly climbed down the stairway. I also enjoyed the company of another male runner (also taking it carefully) who I chatted with until the valley floor where we turned left onto **Dardanelles Pass**.

The course followed **Dardanelles Pass** for 1.2km to **Leura Forest**, the 10km mark and first time split point, which I reached in 52 minutes. After Leura Forest, it was straight up many flights of steep steps to the Amphitheatre Track turning left just before Bridal Veil Falls continuing up more steps to

Leura Cascades. From Leura Cascades the course followed Prince Henry Cliff Walk to Gordon Falls Reserve with a short detour onto Olympian Parade. **Gordon Falls Reserve (13.5km water point)** had a good crowd gathered and I appreciated Ewan Horsburgh's encouraging cheers (one of Brendan's running mates I met at the Lake Crackenback Resort camps) as I ran through the picnic area. I had not expected to see anyone I knew.

And so began more ups and downs, though not as steep as earlier, and more of steps... turning right at **Gordon Falls Reserve** the course followed the Pool of Siloam Track and then Grand Cliff Top Track before turning just before the Golf Links Lookout to reach Carleton Rd. From here it was left onto Willoughby Rd and left again onto to **Sublime Point Rd to the Fairmont Resort**. The course then returned to the **Grand Cliff Top Walking Track**, entering near the 14th tee of the Fairmont Resort golf course, following it to **Conversation Hut Cafe**. It was during this stretch I had a stumble. Upon seeing my friend Owen Gould appear down a side track it took me a few seconds to register that it was him at which point I tripped. I landed face down on fairly flat ground and immediately thought OMG! My left upper quad and shoulder took most of the hit and I quickly jumped up a bit horrified assessing that I was probably ok. Annoyed at myself for getting distracted I chatted with Owen for a short time while he ran behind providing encouragement. When we reached the cafe Owen stopped to cheer on other runners.

From the cafe, it was onto **Short Cut Track** which provided a mini break from steps before completing the section through **Wentworth Falls** to Kings Tableland Rd. Finally running on road again I happily farewelled the "half marathon of steps" with the male runner alongside me. I had reached the most runnable part of the course. We turned left onto **Hordern Rd** and then right onto **Coronation Rd** where again I was grateful for some more encouragement from Ewan cheering at the intersection. At the end of Coronation Rd the course went bush through private property along a track before reaching Tableland Rd. Turning right onto **Tableland Rd** the course followed this bitumen road for 2km before turning right again onto Kedumba Valley Rd (a dirt road) and arriving at **Checkpoint 501, Queen Victoria Hospital (28km mark)**. I had now been running for 2 hours and 57 minutes.

Despite having close to 750ml of electrolyte left in my bladder I wanted water. In hindsight I should have stuck to what I do in training (a basic rule) and only used my 500ml bottles for electrolyte. I had hoped by solely relying on electrolyte I would not need to stop for any refills. Running into the checkpoint I unscrewed one of my bottles and with assistance quickly refilled it with water, assured the helpful volunteers I did not need anything else and was out in 28 seconds (the second fastest split!).

Having run the next 5.5km downhill stretch before the right turn onto **Sublime Point Ridge Rd** a couple times when training, first hard and second time easy, I was aiming for a pace in-between to save my quads, tendons and knees. I felt good (though part of me wanted to go harder) and continued to enjoy the winding downhill after the turning onto Sublime Point Ridge Rd for another 3km to Jamison Creek (36.5km mark).

Not long after crossing **Jamison Creek** and I spotted Jo running uphill ahead – so I would see her again! I also then wondered if some of the women behind me might be getting closer, hard to know on the trails. I reminded myself to stick to my game plan and run my own race. Slowly I caught Jo on the uphill, we had a brief chat about the relentless toughness of the climb, Jo said she was not feeling great and I mentioned my earlier stumble. Then I found myself ahead and alone again by the time I reached **Leura Falls Creek**. The 1km climb from the creek to the Emergency Aid Station (41km mark) was tough and I wanted more water again despite still carrying enough electrolyte to see me to the end.

On approaching the **Emergency Aid Station**, after a quick hesitation thinking I should not stop, I yelled out to check if this station had water to which came “yes”. Yet again with help I quickly refilled one bottle and received some more encouragement (thank you again). I set off with another male runner who walked the start of the next pinch while refuelling as I ran (shuffled) up the hill.

However, my dreams of running all the way to Furber Steps soon fell apart. Having not completed all sections of the course together previously I found myself struggling with this climb and decided to walk - or “power walk” as the woman (a Summit Sister I think or a supporter) cheered and gave me a high five (thank you). I spent the next 4km, which included the walking track from the end of the road to Federal Pass (45km mark), power walking the steeper uphill sections and running everything else. I was now anxious I might lose my position and again told myself to focus on the run your own race mantra. If you get passed, so be it, most important is to finish without taking risks – you are racing for fun.

I had been on my feet for 4 hours and 46 minutes when I reached the **Federal Pass junction with Leura Forest** (where I had been some 3 hours and 54 minutes earlier). It was time for my Shutz Cola Vanilla (with 80mg of caffeine) gel, which I forced myself to have feeling a bit nauseous and over gels (I used a mix of High 5 Plus and Shutz energy gels). And so I continued walking the uphill pinches and running the rest of the track, including steps again, until Furber Steps. It was along this section that I encountered my first tourists having been lucky enough to miss them earlier. I yelled out “runner coming through!” and most moved quickly to the side making it easy for me to pass.

I had arrived at **Furber Steps**, only 933 steps until the finish... Now this part I had planned to walk, and jog the few flatter short reprieves between steps. However (another however), the lactic in my legs hit quickly (my admiration to the 100km runners at this point). This was going to hurt more than I thought and I found myself pleading not to cramp now. I focused on getting my shoulders back and chest forward to open my lungs and climbed. As I climbed higher I felt my calves starting to cramp when jogging between steps so reverted to walking strides. Again I asked tourists to move out of the way so I could pass as I made my way to the top of Furber Steps. I walked a few more strides before running onto the ramp to Scenic World and smiled when I saw the sign ‘last five steps’. I ran up these and proudly along the short finishing straight, crossing the finish line in 5 hours and 31 minutes – I did it! Also, this was my first big win!



Crossing the finish line! (Ultra168 photo)

I received congratulation kisses and hugs from Tom Landon-Smith and Matt Cooper (who won the men's event *one hour* earlier) before speaking on the microphone with the race finish line announcer. Jo crossed the finish line only 2 minutes later and Vanessa Garlick followed in 5 hours 36 minutes – not much between us!

Official Splits (results available at: <http://tiktok.biz/northface100/2014>)

split point	split time	s/rank	race time	r/rank	activity	distance	pace	speed
Start to Leura Forest (0k to 10k)	00:52:28	9	00:52:28	9	RUN	10.00	05:14	11.43
Leura Forest to CP501 (10k to 28k)	02:04:15	7	02:56:44	18	RUN	18.00	06:54	8.69
Time at CP501	00:00:28	2	02:57:13	17	RUN	0.10	04:48	12.50
CP501 to Leura Forest (28k to 45.3k)	01:48:47	8	04:46:00	13	RUN	17.30	06:17	9.54
CP502 to Finish (45.3k to 50k)	00:44:51	21	05:30:52	13	RUN	4.70	09:32	6.29

Prizes

- Magnum of Fox Creek McLaren Vale Reserve Shiraz 2006 (beautifully boxed – not sure when I will drink this)
- Petzl Nao Headlamp (perfect prize as I needed a good headlamp – time to start running trails in the dark, however this does not mean 100km events...)
- The North Face Flight Series Race Vest (smaller than my Salmon pack so it will be a handy alternative)
- The North Face 2014 Winner Banner (special prize - they forgot to hold it up for me when I crossed the finish line!)

For a bit of fun, the winners also got to stand on the finish line and spray each other, and anyone else, with champagne (aka inexpensive sparkling wine in this case). I was hopeless at spraying my bottle, but had a good laugh with Jo and the others trying before drinking what was left!



TNF50 winners – Matt Cooper, me, Jo, Anthony Evans and Marty Keyes (Vanessa Garlick absent)

Last Word

I am so pleased to have found a sport I truly enjoy and all the friendships I have made and great people I continue to meet through this awesome community. It was wonderful seeing other runners' smiles as they crossed the finish line, some visibly in more pain than others – the comradery was incredible.

The North Face 100 Australia Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/TheNorthFace100>) provides links to many inspiring stories.

Now, time to start thinking about events for the second half of 2014 ☺

Btw, Ultra168 had mentioned me as a podium contender in their race preview. A friend found the article and sent me the link after the event: <http://ultra168.com/2014/05/14/tnf-50km-race-preview/>