

The North Face 100 Race Report – Hally Bolt

The night before the race Checked all my compulsory items were packed and went over my nutrition with Jocie – we laughed that I had enough food to last the two of us a whole month in the bush. My backpack was pretty heavy... I felt really nervous and anxious but also excited for it to just get started. I wrote several lists to help myself feel organised – I was scared I'd forget something crucial! Tossed, turned and tried to sleep...

At the start Kissed Dave goodbye several times (each time hoping it would take away my nerves). Overwhelmed. So many people. I looked at Jocie and saw her tearing up so of course I did too! Bang – we were off – albeit slowly!

Start to CP 1 (7.15am – 10am) Of course being freshly tapered I felt full of energy. The first few kms were through the streets to spread us out a bit, then we went into the bush and the first traffic jam slowed us down. It was frustrating but there was nothing you could do - it was a really narrow track. This happened on and off for the whole first section of 17.5kms, Jocie was really good at saying 'Excuse me can we get past' and we did this quite a few times to work our way up through all the runners. My nutrition plan was the same as I had done in training (evolved from my IM plan). I tried to eat every 20mins and drink approx a litre an hour. It was cold so sweating/dehydration wasn't much of an issue. Just before the first checkpoint you ascend 'The Golden Staircase' - once again we got stuck in the queue. Sooo frustrating! Still, maybe it was good as it stopped us from going too hard too soon - and we chatted to those around us. There was a lovely feeling of camaraderie. At the top we refilled our water, a camera crew tried to interview us (huh?!) - we smiled, made our excuses and ran off along 'Narrow Neck'.

CP1 to CP2 Narrow Neck is a spectacular ridge with stunning views off the edge both sides. Geoff had warned us it can be very windy but luckily it was okay this time. We could really open up a bit here on the wider track and we chatted to others along the way. Quite a few guys we passed told us we were 'too happy' and they wanted to know what drugs we were on – I was just loving it! My legs felt light and springy. Then we met 'White Socks' a guy running a similar speed to us and wearing long, white compression socks that matched Jocie's (he dubbed her 'Long Socks'). After a while we had to stop for a short queue to descend Taro's ladder. There were kind volunteers there to assist us but it was pretty straightforward and definitely not as extreme as it was in training. As we went on we chatted to a guy from Hobart – he was not your average looking ultra runner, when we came to a downhill he was out of control and SUPER FAST - he said "It's not easy stopping 100kg's once it gets started!" then when we caught him on the uphill he said "But then you've got to carry 100kg up again"... I couldn't imagine what it was like for him doing the race without having run any of the track in training.

After that it was more beautiful scenery, a quick stop to do some preventative patching on poor Jocie's foot, more food and drink, some technical, slippery downhill and yes – still, I was on such a high it was brilliant!

CP2 to CP3 We arrived at checkpoint 2 - Dunphy's Camp. 38k's done - YAY! Loo stop and drink refill - then off towards checkpoint 3. This next part of the course goes onto private land and was the only part we hadn't been allowed to train on - 'Ironpot Ridge'. We didn't really know what to expect but OMG, you go straight up a mountain ridge to the top and then straight down - it is REALLY steep with a loose surface and you virtually go from tree to tree to hold on and stop yourself falling. When I saw the 40k sign and the mountain before me, I got into a bit of a negative mental place and could feel hot spots on my feet, at the top there's a cruel 1km out and back that's really narrow and you see who's just ahead or behind you. We had to stop up here and patch a hot spot on my foot this time. I felt bad for holding Jocie up with this, but knew it was better now than if it got worse later on.

After that and as we came down the mountain I felt great again - I think I learnt here that I prefer to know what to expect in a race. Back down, then up another big hill (a 'walker') along Megalong Valley Rd. Jocie and I kept positive with each other the whole time and I think having each other made such an ENORMOUS difference in this race.

CP3 to CP4 We arrived at Checkpoint 3, Old Ford Reserve (54k's and 7hrs 58m) at 3:12pm just ahead of schedule. For the first time we could see our crew (they're not allowed at the earlier checkpoints) and it was wonderful to be able to be with them if only for a while, they fed us bolognaise and rice and re-wrapped our feet which weren't in the best shape. (It was a surprise because we'd never had any issues in training and we were in the same shoes.) We stopped here longer than we planned due to the feet (26mins). Off again and we had a long slow gradual hill towards 'Nellies Glen' and then up the stairs that went on forever. I was feeling bouncy and excited because I knew once we got to the top we weren't far from the next checkpoint and we'd see our crew again and get to eat soup, but Jocie appeared to be in a bit of a hole. I tried to offer her yummy apricots and cheer her up a bit but mainly left her alone to work through it. I knew she knew I was there for her. (I also knew she was a tough cookie!)

CP4 to CP5 Next stop was Katoomba Oval. (67k's and now 5:42pm - 10hrs 28mins on our feet) we changed clothes, ate soup and had to put on hi-vi's and head torches. My stomach was bloated but I was still able to have my soup and drink water. From then on my food intake was starting to go down. It was now extremely cold but we didn't notice it much. Our crew later told us that this was our best checkpoint - we were alert and positive apparently! I was actually quite excited about running in the dark! We headed off again and then descended the stairs near Echo Point - man I was still loving it, we passed heaps of people going down those stairs. I felt brand new, it was weird. We picked up our pace on the trail as we had some rare flat spots in between more (bloody) stairs but we continued to chat and laugh along the way like we had been doing all day. We had done quite a few night runs and our head torches are fantastic (Go Ay-Ups!) (Thanks Zoe).

Then came KEDUMBA. This is a LONG and unforgiving uphill. Everybody is

trudging slowly up it. Jocie and I pulled out our secret weapon - dodgey singing! We wanted to stay positive and distract from the monotony of the uphill. I think the people around us once again thought we were on drugs but we were making it fun. We overtook a few but at walking pace so not too many. Some people were really struggling now. That hill was a killer but we did it and also managed to do it whilst 'singing' - well I use the term loosely. We couldn't breathe that well and it was a kind of a panting/spoken word/out of tune kind of song/noise! Seeing the 80km mark was awesome - Jocie and I cheered each other! (we cheered every distance marker all day actually!) We couldn't believe we were still able to move forwards AND we could still run! Our jokes got worse and worse too - I think we were delirious!

CP5 to FINISH (inc Finish) Not long after that we got to checkpoint 5, Queen Victoria Hospital. Arriving here was emotional - we had been able to hear clapping for a while before arriving as well as smelling the bbq and bonfire. The atmosphere was brilliant and I could see why many competitors don't make it past this point in the race, it was too inviting to stay. We had now done 89kms, it was 9:16pm and we'd been on our feet now for over 14 hours. At this point we didn't know it but we were the 9th and 10th women. Perhaps it would have been good if we knew because we ended up staying at this checkpoint rather a long time. But time wasn't the main goal on this day - survival was. We were thrilled and surprised to not only see our crew but Aunty K and Ice who'd driven all the way up from Sydney just to support us for a couple of hours! We couldn't believe it! We ate soup and put on new fresh warm clothes, both of our feet felt sore so we had to do more bandaging. I couldn't get my shoe back on after re-wrapping the first foot and I screamed in pain (bit embarrassing being such a baby but it REALLY hurt!). Decided not to look at the other foot after that. We spent a while there maybe half an hour which in hindsight might have been too long. As we left I was limping and not in a great mental place. I kept saying to myself - only 11kms to go! I couldn't believe we could still run and in fact after a while it didn't hurt any more to run than to walk. So we may as well run. I tucked in behind Jocie, put my head down and toughed it out. There was no way I was stopping but OMG it hurt, I couldn't put my left heel down at all. Jocie was so good and reminded me I had to put my heel down even if it hurt because otherwise I might do more damage somewhere else, I knew she was right so I gritted my teeth and did it. After a while I could block it out. The bush track is highly technical in this section and there were more damn stairs although I was quite pleased to see them because it meant I didn't have to put my heel all the way down. It felt like we went down into the depths of the earth, we crossed a few more creeks and then had to climb back out, I also needed to go to the toilet for AGES along this section. Talk about uncomfortable. Again I didn't eat anything - my stomach was too bloated but luckily I could still drink my water. I cheered up and laughed as we got photographed AGAIN - they took more photos than at my wedding!!! Then, in the middle of nowhere 2 people were cheering - just 3kms to go! Thank god, but I knew from our training runs, that those 3kms would be slow and could still take up to an hour - there were so many stairs. The fatigue was really setting in now, but I knew I'd get some adrenaline as soon as I saw the golf course and could smell home.

Finally there it was - the golf course! We ran along the edge towards the Fairmont Resort where the finish line awaited us. We could hear cheering and see lights, tears welled up, compared to IM it is a very quiet affair at the finish but it still felt huge to us, as we rounded the last corner with 100m's to go, Jocie and I held hands and ran in together, she screamed out 'We're coming in' and I was crying and screaming 'woo hoo!' we could hear our friends cheering us. We were so ecstatic and crossed the line together in 16:33. We hugged and cried and then hugged our husbands and cried some more. It was over at last. We had done it! We had run 100kms in a day. It was 11:46pm so we had made it before our best goal time of midnight and 17 hours. We couldn't believe that not only did we have a wonderful experience - but we smashed our ideal goal time!

Afterthoughts

Days later and I am still getting my head around it all. I am amazed we did it. 100kms in a day including about 4500-5000m elevation. The overarching feeling is that I LOVED IT. But it did REALLY HURT. I learnt a lot about myself, I think Jocie and I were a great team and we really understood each other and how to work together and support each other well. Without our husbands love, care and belief in us, we wouldn't and couldn't have gotten through it. Our other crew members Mike and Caroline were also very important assets and we really appreciate all the care they took of us at the checkpoints. They were AMAZING. Seeing Ice and AK was also a massive boost for me (us) and we were so happy and chuffed that they had made the trip. All our beautiful friends and family that gave us support during the race lead up and afterwards also made a massive difference and helped us to never feel 'alone' out there. Knowing people understand, support and care about you, and what you're doing is a really wonderful thing and I/we drew strength from it throughout the race. Just some examples are: Taking 'Happy Jacqui Steps', 'Helmet baby steps' (up the hills), imagining how happy Kingo and AK would be if they were running right there with us (after their joy on our night run), imagining my Grandma being proud that I wanted to be as tough as her, and there were many more...

- That race definitely warrants the term 'awesome'.
(Oh yeah and I can't walk very well right now!)