



TWO BAYS TRAIL RUN 2017 – Race Report and Love Affair

Background

In my race report of 2014 I wrote about my love affair with the Two Bays Trail race and this certainly hasn't changed. If anything the race has grown even more on me and as my favourite trail run it continues to give me more each year in all respects. With a fantastic atmosphere, great race organisers and volunteers, friendly trail runners, stunning scenery and a great trail mix of hills, bush tracks, open roads and even some sand, what more could you want!

It must say something of this lengthy, passionate affair that that I have run 6 of the 7 official Two Bays events (since it changed from Fat Ass) only missing one in 2015 as I was too far away, seconded overseas. Even then I ran the Two Oceans 56k event in Cape Town as the closest substitute I could find, so I have certainly been a faithful partner.

Digging through my records shows an interesting pattern:

2011- 28k in 2:17:29 (first year out and went with safer, easier option)
2012 - 56k in 5:19:16 (first full trail ultra, 3rd Miler 2:33 out & 2:46 back, +13min split)
2013 - 28k in 2:24:29 (ITB issue saw me only manage the 28km route & result shows accordingly)
2014 - 56k in 5:00:09 (in much better shape, 1st Miler 2:23 out & 2:37 back, +14min split)
2015 - Two Oceans 56k, Cape Town in 4:20:27 (road race not trail but also really beautiful)
2016 - 28k in 2:16:19 (back to 28 again after a post Comrades groin injury)
2017 – 56k in 4:48:24 (in good shape, 1st Miler 2:17 out & 2:31 back, +14min split)

This clearly indicates that I should only run the 56k ultra every second year, I am very consistent out and back and lastly that it is possible to get faster as you get older, contrary to popular belief!

Lead up and Training

Following Comrades mid-2014 it was a long, slow comeback from a groin overuse injury. After slowly progressing back to complete the 28k in Jan 2016, I slowly stepped it up in training and racing during the year going harder and longer throughout 2016 including Maroondah Dam 30k, Wilson's Prom 44k, Wonderland 37k and Melbourne Marathon as 3:30 pacer as my main events.

By Melbourne Marathon I was feeling like I was building great endurance but was still worried about getting through the hills on 2 Bays at a decent pace so I roped in Tony George for an event that really turned my hill climbing around (and Obama's I believe), the 4 Peaks in Bright on Melbourne Cup weekend. Up until then I thought I was a pretty decent hill runner. 4 Peaks in 4 days with elevation gain of up to 1800m over 16k had us gobsmacked, often walking and amazed at those who were running up most of it. By the end of the weekend we had "run ourselves hill fit" and were even managing to run some of the steeper sections.

This was followed up with some really decent hills training every 2nd week up in the Dandenongs, Churchill Park and two awesome long training runs on the Two Bays trail with the likes of Obama, Fitter, Cheryl, Katie, TMD and others.

Obama and I even got a “speeding fine” from a police car coming down the tourist road in Mount Dandenong doing sub 3:30s downhill early on a Sunday morning. We were training for everything that Two Bays could throw at us including steep downhills!

Race Day

Stayed in Sorrento the night before with an easy drive into the Cape Schanck, getting in about 45 min before the start and decided to do a final toilet stop. Jogged from the car park down to the start line without my gear on only to find there already a long queue for the mens. After 15 mins the line had hardly moved much when I saw Obama and Courts about 10 places behind me.

Had a chat to them and we were all raving on about how great the weather was but also starting to worry if we were going to make the toilet in time. The line finally got some movement, pun intended, and I was out of there with only 10 mins before the gun. Dashed back to the car threw on the gear and got down just in time to run a hundred metre warmup with Obama and then jumped over the barrier at the front into the start line.

Not an ideal warm-up but the adrenalin was flowing, blood pumping and we were itching to go! We were released by the 7:10am gun, bursting forth like bush rabbits onto the beautiful trail, enjoying nature’s finest as we headed off 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 didn’t want to run too fast but it is also fairly narrow so you end up getting sucked along in Indian file snaking through the bush. A quick look around confirmed that Obama was just a few place ahead of me and I could see Fitter a few places behind me now and again on the twists and turns.

At about 4ks in the trail heads up a section of incline and already here a few of the TV sprinters had started to back off the pace with a resulting concertina effect. Obama began to pick them off very politely and I followed suit in his slipstream so by the time we got to Boneo Road we had passed

them. Tony continued at a fairly quick pace and I was worried that we were going a bit quick this early at close to 4:40min/k average having run the 1st 7ks in under 33min.

We soon reached the deviation at 8kms that shifts the ultra-runners onto a different trail to avoid running directly into the 28 km runners and with a bit more incline on this section, Obama's pace eased off a little and I caught up to him. I ran just behind telling him it was a narrow trail and I would stick close behind but tactically I thought that this was a great idea for him to flush out any snakes up ahead. I rationalised that although I can jump high, Tony is quicker over shorter distances! The next section through to the end of the deviation was awesome bush trail that opened up into a FWD track after a few ks so that we could run side by side and get into a steady Sunday pace. Not long after that we did a short double back thinking we had taken a wrong turn but it was all good and here Fitter, along with a small pack, joined up with us to grow into a Merry Band of Milers.

Soon we were chattering away on a running high with the endorphins kicking in which just made the ks tick by as we admired the scenery, the weather and one rather quick chick that passed us all by surprise, but more about her later.



Pics – cruising the trail and enjoying the ride!

A few of the TV sprinters repassed us along here and we let them go as I knew they would yoyo back to us later on in the day.

It was great to have 3 Milers together leading this pack and before long we hit the Hyslops Road aid station, joining the main trail and the throng of 28k runners heading the other way to Cape Schanck. We put in some quicker 4:20/30ish ks along here slowing only so that Fitter could pash Kirsty his wife on the way past and to grab a handful of salted potatoes from my seconding crew at the Brown's Road crossing. So far so good but I was still worried that we were going a bit too quick and that we were going to pay for it on the way back as I know this race can be a cruel mistress!

Not long after the crossing we wound through the bush and down the first of a few little sharp, tricky downhills almost crashing into the fast chick. She was writhing around in obvious pain bleeding at the knee and ankle while trying to call her seconds on the mobile. We slowed down, stopped briefly and I offered my help but she insisted she would hobble back to Brown's Road that was fortunately

not far away. Things can change quickly and seeing her predicament got me sharply back in focus on the trail.

The Merry Band of Milers pushed on together still in high spirits past McClarens Dam and then on to the dreaded climb up the back of Arthur's seat. For me I had always planned to run up this section and I had timed it for the potatoes to kick in, so I pushed on and left Obama and Fitter walking parts of it. Even at a very slow run up this climb it wasn't long before I passed the TV sprinters again and had 2 other runners ahead in my sights.

It was through onto Seawinds and then steep descent down Arthur's Seat to Dromana trying hard to back off the pace a little to minimise the impact on the legs downhill. As a result I didn't gain much on the 2 runners in front of me. Did the customary bell ring at half way turnaround and met up with my awesome seconds who fed me more potatoes and kept me cool with some ice cold water. I was pleased to see that Fitter was only about 30 seconds behind me and Obama another 30 behind him. I thought that The Merry Band of Milers might even get together again for the return trip!

But that was where the Merry bit ended and it is amazing how quickly a race can turn!!! It wasn't far into the early part of the climb back up Arthur's Seat that I start feeling very flat and weak in my legs. I had planned to run all the way back up and could only manage it to the first set of steps but trudging up the steepest part all I could think was that my race was falling apart. Was the sub 5 hour definitely out of the picture, had I gone out too fast, what was wrong? Walking to the summit, gave my legs some respite and my mind some time to work out that by some miscalculation I mistimed my gel intake with my first race gel about 1 hour 15 mins after my pre-race gel instead of 45 mins. The penny finally dropped that my gel refuelling strategy was out by 30 mins.

By this stage Fitter was closing in on me and it looked like for me the damage was already done but at least we were both over the big climb of Arthur's Seat. I rationalised that if I could conserve some energy on the downhill and try and get the gel intake back on track the situation could improve. Went down back of Arthur's seat with Fitter right behind me and then he passed me not long after McClarens Dam along Goolgowie Road on the bitumen in the urban section of the run.

Once we hit the uphill dust road out the back of the urban section, I was surprised that Fitter started to walk on the steeper part of it and I knew now that at least I wasn't suffering alone. I figured if I could hold Fitter in sight and keep it together through the trail section heading towards the Brown's road crossing, my support crew awaited. With much relief I reached my awesome support crew who were ready as ever with ice cold water, salted potatoes, snakes and heaps of encouragement. Just ahead of me Fitter grabbed a handful of potatoes and took off down Hyslop Road while I stayed back a short while to refuel and talk to my seconds. I told them I still had my doubts that I could finish this off well but it gave me enough of a lift to push on with hope although I didn't feel like I was out of the woods yet.

Fitter was 200 metres down Hyslop Road when I pushed on and taking stock I realised that we had still been travelling at a pretty solid pace not much over 5 min/k and that if I could maintain that pace for the next 5ks that would leave me with 1 hour to cover the final 12ks. With the fuel gauge back up at full and a nice, undulating straight section things were starting to look a little better and somehow by the end of Hyslop Road I had managed to reel Fitter in and at least 2 of the Merry Band of Milers were back together, although only slightly merry!

Feeling more positive and getting a little stronger, I pushed on ahead through my favourite Greens bush section steadily at a solid sub 5:15min/km pace and before I knew it I was at 12ks to go with

more than 1 hour in hand. I was starting to cruise on a high again, Fitter had drifted off behind me and a sub 5 was back again as a real possibility. It was looking much better and I just had to hold things together.....and then suddenly without warning the big “C” word and resultant panic! My mind was now racing, flooded with doubt and questions. “How can I cramp now having taken gels, refuelled with salty potatoes and downed magnesium tabs?” It is like the trail is teasing and tantalising me holding the sub 5 in front of my eyes and then pulling it away! Talk about ups and downs, this is a really rocky love affair and I am not sure I like her anymore!!!



The downhill is where I was really feeling it but I want this so bad I was ready to try anything. So I slowed down my pace, changed my cadence, my gait, pointed my toes inwards and then outwards, took some more magnesium and some electrolyte. It seemed to work for a while when I run uphill and it feels like it goes away but then I go downhill and it is back again. I was feeling like a madman, crazy and tormented but I somehow made it past 8ks to go and can't believe I was still on track and Fitter hadn't passed me! Was I just hallucinating and was that all just part of a bad dream?

Pic – gritting my teeth through the cramps!

I made it to the next crossing at Boneo Road and am lifted out of my foggy haze by my seconds, who were as always ready and on point. Awesome work but I only managed a smile, one measly snake and a bit of water. Still, I lit up inside as it I knew that the next time I see them it will be at the finish.

Cramps seemed to ease a bit or at least I was managing to live with them, so I was starting to feel like my challenges were under control with only 6ks to go but it seems that this trail was not done with me yet as she caught me off guard, shooting out one of her many roots to grab my tired foot. Before I knew it I was head over heels down in the dirt but at least it was a landing into a soft sandy section. I dusted myself off, regaining some composure and settled the heart rate down over the next few ks, hoping that she was done with for the day.

Then the trail opened as I headed down towards the coast line and I was rewarded with the beautiful view out over Bass Strait. My spirits were lifted and I knew now that I was still on for sub 5 hours even if it meant walking the steep steps in the last 3ks.



Pics – fighting through the last few ks covered in sand but knowing that the finish is not far off!

The cramps were still coming and going in the background but suddenly they didn't matter anymore and I became comfortable in the knowledge that I am once again at peace with this trail that I love!

The last 2ks floated by as I am again on a high. As I came into the finish funnel at Cape Schanck my smile got even broader as I realised the clock was ticking over onto 4:48, my journey was over with the trail for this year and she had rewarded me again!

