

# MELBOURNE MIDDAY MILERS — 2018 OXFAM RACE REPORT

(with Courts as narrator)

## The build-up

Late in 2017, Fitter and I (Courts) put the feelers out for a 11:00-12:00 hour team. Marty Edwards and Matt Woods (Woodsy) answered the call.

Each of the team members came well-recommended. All had sub-3 hour marathons, most by a fair margin. In addition, Fitter, Marty and I had done Oxfam before (Fitter and I, together in 2016) and Fitter and Marty both had done at least one individual 100km event (Marty many more than that, including a 100 mile race in 2017).

Each of the team put in a good training block, with Fitter Marty and Woodsy doing Two Bays 56km in January 2018 as a warm up. There was only a single joint training run “on course” (which was a 30km run doing all of Stage 3 and part of Stage 4 — out and back). The team had jogged a lot together at lunch and had done some pretty in-depth organising.

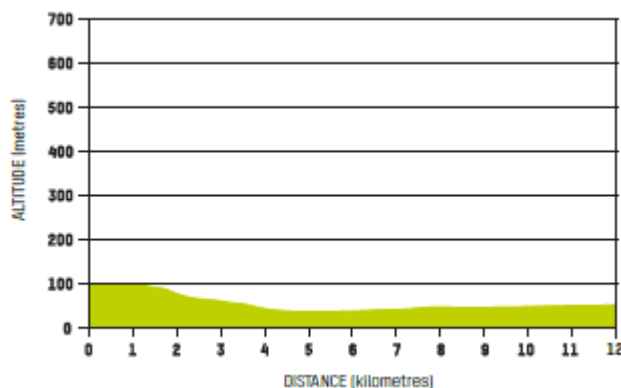
The support team would be Tony Woods (Woodsy’s dad) for the whole day, Mrs Fitter (aka Kirsty Turner) and Sahan (the latter, as team photographer). As it turned out, new Miler Matt Flynn was also an impromptu, but valued, support team member for our team (and for a separate Miler team).

The goal was to try to get close to 11 hours. Unfortunately, the weather report was predicting temperatures in the high 20’s, including for the exposed stages (most of stage 4 and all of stages 6 and 7) so this was going to be a serious ask.

*Pre-race picture (Fitter, Marty, Woodsy, Courts).*



## Stage 1 – Jells Park to Churchill National Park (12km, basically flat)



Race start was a 6:30am. Due to it still be daylight savings, this meant starting with head torches. We ran this entire stage with Team 456, the Oxfam winners for the last 8 years or more.

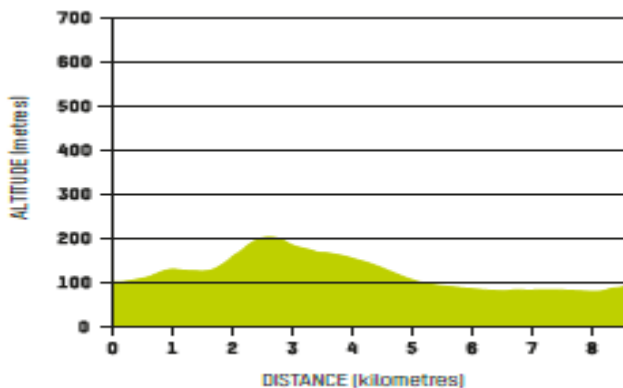
Team 456's membership changes from year to year, but includes some core members, including Miler Dan Langelaan. This stage was flat and

easy. A slightly overexcited me (Courts) trotted out the front with Dan Langelaan at sub-5:00min/km for the first 3-4km which was faster than the roughly 5:20 average that had been agreed. Maybe those Team 456 people were trying to bleed us out.

Woodsy was unusually quiet for the whole time. I wondered whether Woodsy was in love again. I think Marty wondered what I was wondering. Fitter just ran.

Stage 1 concluded a non-supported checkpoint which we all sailed through and kept on running. The average pace was about 5:04min/km for Stage 1, excluding the time in the checkpoint. 12km done.

## Stage 2 - Churchill National Park to Lysterfield Lake (8.5km, undulating)



Stage 2 was a lovely undulating run. The team managed to avoid getting lost as the 2016 Miler team did in this stage.

Woodsy was still quiet. Was it a question of what "look" to adopt over the finish line? Was his heart as true to Taylor Swift as his Taylor Swift Sunnies TM were clean?

We ran this stage largely with Team 456. We beat them into the checkpoint by a very small margin, but they sailed straight through, leaving us in their dust. That may be "bush-league, psych-out bullshit" (for the avoidance of doubt, this is simply a gratuitous quote from *The Big Lebowski*) but it was well-executed!

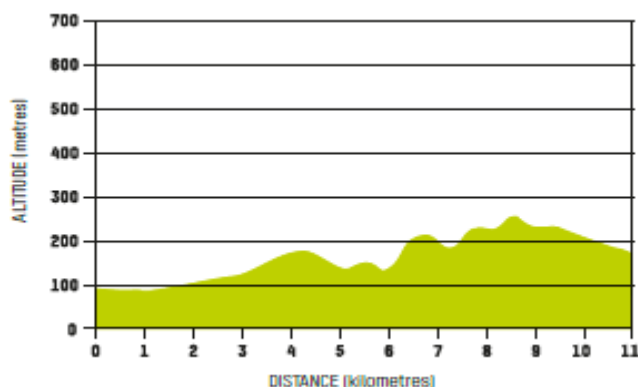
Tony, Sahan and Flynny were at the aid station and did a great job. Milers Grunter and Dozer were also there for the other Miler team and cheered us through.

The average pace was about 5:43min/km for Stage 2, excluding the time in the checkpoint. About 20km done.

*Woodsy, Fitter and Courts (some of Team 456 in the background).*



### **Stage 3 - Lysterfield Lake – Ferntree Gully Picnic Ground (11km, undulating and some sharper hills)**



Stage 3 involved some sharper hills and a bit of urban running to get the link-up between national parks.

We ran some of this with Team 456. For the latter half, we ran it with one of Team 456 (Steve Rennick), the others having dropped back a bit. Miler GMC joined us for most of this stage and was looking fit, as ever —

it is always great to have a familiar face on course.

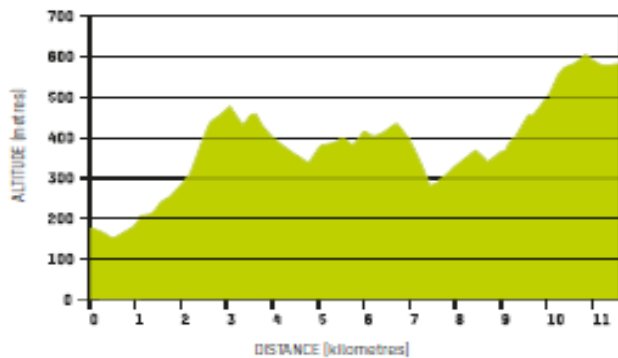
Woodsy evidently resolved his inner turmoil (TayTay, like all true love, could wait). A resurgent conversationalist, Woodsy started peppering the team with original content, to good effect.

Kirsty, Tony, Sahan and Flynny were on hand at the checkpoint. This was to be a deliberately quick transition because much of the next (Stage 4) was almost un-runably steep, including the first quarter of that stage. We were also trying to give

Team 456 a bit of a taste of “uber-quick transition” treatment. As we left, the remaining members of Team 456 arrived at the checkpoint.

The average pace was about 6:03min/km for Stage 3, excluding the time in the checkpoint. About 32km done.

### Stage 4 - Ferntree Gully Picnic Ground to Olinda (11.5km, very steep hills, both up and down)



The first part of Stage 4 is up the Lyrebird Track which is about 2km long but about 300m of vertical height. It then has a very steep down followed by about 7km of steep or very steep climbing.

This stage was more eventful than we had expected. Something was not agreeing with Fitter’s stomach. There was a large amount of retching and then a bit of *bone fide* actual vomiting. Despite this interlude, we stuck to the intended min/km rate. Fitter was not looking great and there were a few worried looks between the other team members. We even worried that Team 456 would hear the fireworks! As it turned out, Fitter had no issues whatsoever, bar this explosive display. After this literal display of his guts, he put on a metaphorical display of guts and just kept going.

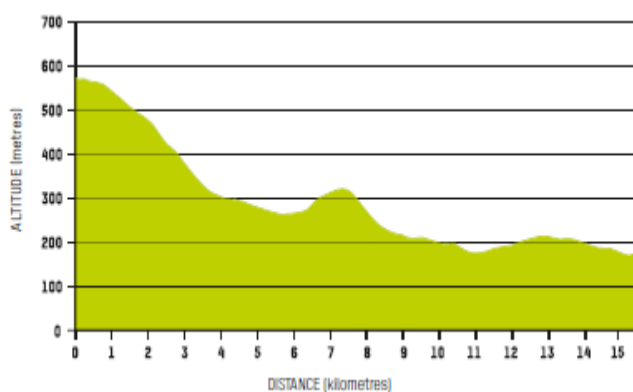
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Much of Stage 5 was occupied by Marty asking (very difficult) questions about music groups, members, albums etc. The guy knows some heavy-duty stuff about music. Woodsy pleaded “youth” (he is well under 30 years of age) on several occasions. Absent Woodsy, the mean age of the team was over 40, so this was a fair plea.

We arrived at Olinda oval. Fitter took a dry, white roll and started eating it, channelling Elwood Blues, although Fitter has, unbelievably, still not seen *The Blues Brothers* (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVLZy5UwKUs>). At least Fitter did not eat dry Wheat-Bix (his other means of channelling Elwood Blues and also his standard pre-marathon food) as that could not have ended well. This was another smooth transition and we headed out, we did not see Team 456 at all in Stage 4 and, as it turned out, did not see them until after the run was over. Things were looking on track.

The average pace was about 8:35min/km for Stage 4, excluding the time in the checkpoint. About 44km done.

### Stage 5 - Olinda to Mount Evelyn (15.5km, mainly downhill or undulating)



This is one of the prettiest stages of the entire course. Some long, mainly downhill tracks, including single-track, with soft but firm

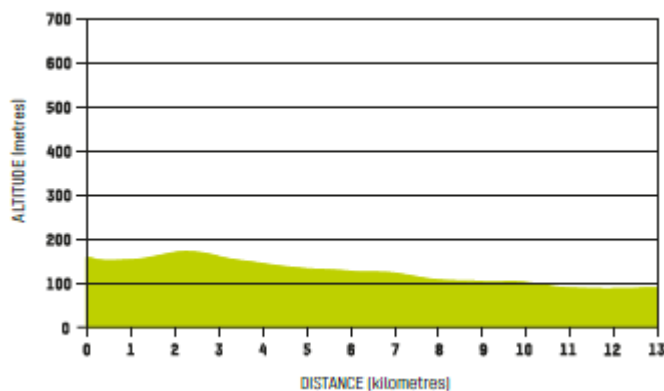


surfaces. Ferns and dense, green bush everywhere. A real pleasure to run.

The beauty gives way to some road crossings and the start of the Lilydale-Warburton rail trail. The checkpoint seemed to be just around the corner for ages (as it did in 2016). We arrived in there in good time and everyone was in pretty good shape. Kirsty was first to greet us on the trail and she ran us into the checkpoint. The temperature was heating up and I think all of us were trying to do some serious hydrating.

The average pace was about 6:09min/km for Stage 5. About 60km done.

### **Stage 6 - Mount Evelyn to Woori Yallock Primary School (13km, flat and hot in the sun)**



This was to be the middle part of the rail trail — a flat run which we could bank some time on. The plan actually worked for this stage, but was to overshadow the next stage somewhat... More on that later.

We made good time on this stage. Some km were run at or under 5:00min/km. I gave a grumble or

two about this, hoping for a slightly slower pace, though everyone was firing on all cylinders... My enthusiastic start in Stage 1 robbed me of all credibility.

Marty's band questions were becoming controversial — did we know nothing or was he just making it up..? Was there too much, or too little, "cock rock" in there?

Just as we ran into the checkpoint some serious cramps triggered in what I now know to be the adductors in my groin on both sides (think: "where the seams run on the inside of the crotch of your trousers"). The cramps came on with no warning at all. I literally limped the last 50m into the checkpoint, hardly even walking.

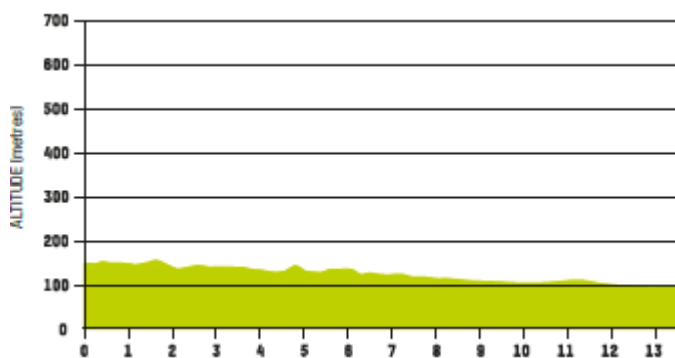
The average pace was about 5:50min/km for Stage 6, excluding the time in the checkpoint. About 73km done.

I had been using Sport in Science gels for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the gels that I ate prior to (and after) that point. The sodium levels in those gels is seriously low compared to other gels, hence me using  $\frac{1}{4}$  other gels. This is as near as I can guess as the cause for the cramps, apart from the heat. I have run Two Bays and other courses in much hotter conditions, but with saltier gels (and with no problems whatsoever with cramps). I was very worried (and hot) at the checkpoint, despite having an ice tube or two handed to me. I don't think I had a salt tablet at that point (I have never used them before so did not even think to have one — later, they became a godsend, thanks to Marty's ample stocks...).

*Who's having fun..?*



### **Stage 7 - Woori Yallock Primary School to Millwarra Primary School (13km, flat and hot in the sun)**



As we headed back out on course, I was having trouble running at all due to the cramping. There was some minimal running, but mainly walking at the start. Proper hurt locker stuff. In 2016, I had escaped basically unscathed in this regard.

I was feeling light-headed and cramp-ridden. I stopped. The other team members looked worried. A quick-thinking Woodsy saw a pub literally right next to the trail. He excused himself mysteriously and disappeared. A few minutes later, Woodsy returned with a plastic bag of ice, some of which got poured into my trail vest. The rest was applied to various parts of me (head etc). More walking ensued. I think the first salt tablet got thrown my way at about that time.

I was quite sure I could make it, one way or another, but was worried that I was going to blow the team's desired finish time and also blow first place. The last stage has some serious hills and I was sure that I was not going to slow the team on that section much, given that a lot of the trail was not runnable. It was the time lost on the rail trail before then that I was concerned about. I said this to the lads and said I would not object if they voted me off the island to allow them to keep trucking at fast rate. This was politely ignored by the lads. This was all happening at a walk.

After a bit, Marty then gently suggested that I run half of each km and then walk the remainder. I could see the guys waiting for a response. The cramps were still there but we just had to get moving. We proceeded for the next few km this way and then

I decided to run a bit further than a half km and walk less. The lads counted me in and out for the running segments. The counting in and out also became a ready means of avoiding music trivia questions, any new question setting off a “5, 4, 3, 2...” count-in.

My watch was starting to lose charge so I was trusting them for this and they were scrupulously honest (I think...). After a few km, it was looking like we were back in the game.

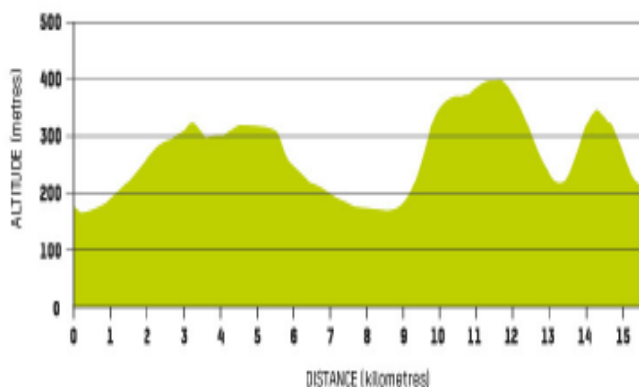
We arrived at the checkpoint. I think we all were relieved to be there. The support crew, as always, were great. Bottles were filled. Encouragement was applied with vigour. The event organisers had set up temporary taps to fill bottles which was fine. Some kind of uber-organiser wandered past and told us that “bottled water is going to be brought in in trucks shortly”. I was not sure if that was really necessary, but, more to the point, it was not clear how that was going to affect us, unless we looked like we were not going anywhere fast (I felt like a looked okay, by then...).

The average pace was about 8:28/km for Stage 7, excluding the time in the checkpoint. About 85km done.

This was a quick transition because most of the stage, including just out of the checkpoint, was a very steep uphill (ie done at a walk).

We had not seen Team 456 at all since the end of Stage 3. We had heard they were 15 minutes or so behind at the previous checkpoint (Stage 7 checkpoint), but their magic (read “bush-league”) transitions made it hard to know how long they spent at the checkpoint as their transitions were all out of the checkpoint. We saw their support crew person as we left the checkpoint (she was super nice) and tried to make sure we trotted past in a mainly “gainly” (versus “ungainly”) fashion in case she was filing condition reports...

### **Stage 8 - Millwarra Primary School to Wesburn Park (15.5km, very steep hills, up and down)**



Stage 8 was a great stage for us. I was basically back in business for the ups and the downs and for most of the very limited flats. The ups were walked, the downs were jogged and the flats were mainly run.

Funnily enough, compared to 2016 when I had no cramps (etc), I think we ran Stage 8 better than

Fitter and I ran it then, though we had to run it in 2016 with head torches. I was pumping in salt tablets every 30 minutes or so, though the cramps only came on when on the flats, not on the other gradients, and abated quickly.

The last 7km of Stage 8 are seriously steep (up and down). We started to worry that Team 456 might steamroll us in this section. We were worried that if they got within spitting distance of us and then heard thus, they might reel us in. Those guys are fit and a sniff of the leaders could do wonders for their pace...

On account of this, we ran this last part in almost total silence. The last 4km is about a 200m drop (over 2km), at which you can see the finish line but then turn away up a hill for a 120m ascent over about a 1km. The last 1km is a 110m descent with a bit of flat before the finish line. Tough gradients in any conditions, but particularly at the end of 100km.

The average pace was about 8:30/km for Stage 8.

At the finish line, Tony got high-fived on the way in (in the background of the picture below on the left), as did Marty's son. We had done it. First over the line (for a time of 12:13), and first place! While our 2016 team got lost a few times and this time we did not, it seemed unbelievable that we had come in only 4 minutes slower (the weather in 2016 being way cooler). The organisers handed us champagne bottles to spray at each other which was duly immortalised in pictures and video. Dozer and Ms Dozer arrived shortly after we came in and copped some pretty sweaty hugs.



Team 456 came in about 30 minutes after us. The ninja-silent running had been unnecessary, though it did actually focus us really well and keep us moving, for the record. As I say, this stage, despite the cramps, was better this time than in 2016.



Fitter, Woodsy and Marty had been amazing in supporting me. Jointly and individually, some generous (and good) decisions had been made in the course of the day. Dropping me may have led to a faster overall time (though potentially a blow-out for someone else and more delay, though all three of them ran amazingly all day). I seriously would not have minded sacrificing my own finish for the others to have a shot at something better. When I offered this to the guys, the offer was roundly rejected. As it turned out, dropping me would have meant that Team 456 would have been overall winners (completing with a full team), regardless of whether they came in after Woodsy, Marty and Fitter.

Legend has it that no Miler team has *ever failed to finish* at all and each such Miler team has *finished as a full team*. It felt good to both further that tradition, but to also demonstrate that keeping this tradition also meant that we still got both first over the line and the win. While not all morality plays have happy endings, this one did precisely because of the morals (and morale).

Lastly, the support team were fantastic. Flynny had cold beer for us at the finish line. A mixture of Tony Woods giving me a lift to Fitter's house and then Kirsty giving me a lift to my home mean that I could actually drink that beer (I was otherwise going to have to drive back myself). The beer this time was amazing (in 2016, despite being in better condition, I could hardly start, let alone finish, a beer). I am looking forward to running support for a Miler team soon ([you can quote me on this](#)).

*The team, complete with our awesome support crew  
(from left — Flynny, Kirsty, Sahan, sweaty posers (x4) and Tony).*

