

Races+Places



BUZZ FROM THE PACK, ELITE NEWS AND OUR RACE CALENDAR



YOU YANG GANG:
Setting the pace in the You Yangs 50K ultra.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE TAYLOR AND BRETT SAXON

Trail and Error

In her maiden ultra race one runner discovers what it takes to step across the line – first By Stephanie Gaskell

MY DESIRE TO ATTEMPT an ultra trail race started after a short stint at Lornah Kiplagat's training camp in Iten, Kenya. Mixing it with top trail runners who were extremely dedicated to pushing themselves, both physically and mentally was, and remains one of the most inspiring times in my life. I continued to train with some of these runners in Boulder, Colorado and Annecy in France and it was there that I was introduced to respected ultra running coach, Ian Torrence (mcmillanrunning.com). Ian and I corresponded via email to

set my first ultra goal. First things first, I needed a race. That was the easy part. The You Yangs 50K, in Werribee, 50 kilometres south west of Melbourne, Victoria. Why the You Yangs? All trails – no roads! Secondly I needed to maximise my training program with a good nutrition plan.

Although I am a sports dietitian I needed someone to answer to, so I contacted Louise Bourke, the head of Sports Nutrition at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). Louise and her team developed strategies to help maximise my carbohydrate intake and fluid needs. A tough ask for a runner who

is iron deficient and suffers irritable bowel syndrome. Louise and I practiced with a range of supplements such as gels, lollies, drinks and bars, until we eventually got the mix right.

A GOOD PLAN

Leading into race-day, good preparation had given me an enormous confidence boost and I was determined to ensure it stayed that way right up to the start line.

After a 4:40am brekkie, I packed the car for the 20 minute drive to the You Yangs. Race start wasn't until 7.15 but I was keen to allow plenty of time for a pre-race porta-loo stop, or two!

The event hosts four distances (15/30/50/80K) with 215 participants. Sixty-five of whom would be taking off with me. This meant a good clean start or so I thought. One minute in and I lose a gel from my pouch pocket. Fully aware that



SPECTACULAR: Participants enjoy perfect trail running conditions.

a bunch of runners were about to swarm from behind I decided reluctantly to leave it. One kind runner swooped down to pick it up for me and that's when I thought this is going to be a great day.

I'd done my course homework. It would be relatively flat most of the way with two ascents at Flinder's Peak, at the 15 and 30 kilometre marks. This meant I could hold a fairly solid pace throughout, pulling back on the steps up to the Peak and again on the downs.

Early on I stuck with the lead pack. I felt strong. As we hit the 15 kilometre mark, a race marshal directed us. We were about to hit our first ascent up Flinder's Peak. About one-and-a-half kilometres along we still hadn't spotted the coloured flags directing us to the foot of our ascent. That's when we

realised we had been sent off-course and turned back.

The error left me edgy which in turn caused me to miss a planned fuel stop at the 18 kilometre aid station. A mistake, which could have cost me dearly, had I not had extra gels in my jacket pocket. While an obvious upside, the downside was that I was low on fluid.

My legs felt heavy. It was early signs of dehydration. Another competitor, Pete Wijngaarden, who would go on to win the 80K event (7:42) offered me some of his water. As much as I craved it, I politely refused. I thought he might need it later on.

I would wait another 10 kilometres before topping up gulping down a cup of water as a race marshal topped up my

empty water bottle. Water had never tasted so good.

Reaching the 40 kilometre mark my legs began to fatigue and my motivation started to wane. I had 10 kilometres to go and worked through it by dedicating one kilometre to all of those who had helped me reach this point in my running career. My mum and step-dad, work colleagues, sister, the team at the AIS, training partners and two kilometres for my coach, Ian. The last three kilometres I ran for me!

Coming into the final stretch I caught up with Pete and managed to pick up my pace, crossing as first female finisher. My initial thought was, *Damn, I'm glad I'm not Pete. He still had another 30 kilometres to go!* – trailsplus.org 



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