



This is my tale of an adventure of endurance that ultimately challenged me both physically and mentally. Along with Robert, my partner who supported me as my one and only crew, I embarked on the mammoth task of completing the entire length of the 440km Hume and Hovell Walking Track solo.

Beginning at Cooma Cottage in Yass, the track follows the trails discovered by explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell in the south east of NSW, Australia. It traverses both rugged and beautiful countryside while following a mix of public roads, fire trails, purpose built single track and over 100 footbridges and finishes at the Hovell Tree at Albury.

The track is without a doubt one of New South Wales' best kept secrets. After 18 months of planning, my dream of completing the track was realized when I finished the entire journey at the Hovell Tree in Albury at around 8:30pm on October 2.

The diversity of the track is mind blowing and ensured that my adventure was everything I expected and more. From the beauty and the sometimes roaring waterfalls, the rivers, the bridges, the forest roads, the feeling of desolation in the logged pine forests, the plants and wildflowers, the sheer enormity of the trees, to the open farmland and rolling hills.

The sound of branches creaking has you fearing for your life while under the watchful eye of the wildlife including brumbies, snakes, kangaroos and wombats sneaking around their holes.

The steep climbs and descents of mountains that the explorers climbed up, over and through rivers kept my mind asking why? Are you fecking kidding... why didn't you just go around, and how? How did they manage to keep going as far as they did? Especially with all the horses, bullocks and men, not to mention the load of supplies they would have needed for such a long and treacherous journey!

My only explanation is... "With the Spirit of Discovery and Adventure!"





About 18 months before I was on my way home from Canberra from a specialist and called in to see Maree Doyle at her home in Yass and we got talking about goals and personal achievements. I said that I wanted to do something that was big... something so epic that wasn't an actual event; something that would challenge me both physically and mentally that would be just for me. Not a structured event that had time limits and restrictions. Nothing came to me until I was driving home and then it hit me. I wonder if anyone has ever done the entire Hume and Hovell Track and how long is it? I rang Maree to ask her if she knew so she started searching the net while we spoke. Wow... 440km is a long way I thought, but it's possible! My mind was racing with the anticipation of such an exciting adventure. I couldn't wait to set about doing some planning but I needed some maps first!

After some google research I learned that 3 men had finished the entire track back in 2010 in 4 days and 21 hours. They had a detailed blog of their journey giving a really good insight into some of the logistics and their approach. I set about getting some maps from the Yass tourist office thanks to Deanna McEvoy who was visiting at the time and picked them up for me and shared in my excitement at the time.

It wasn't until much later that I realised that there was a website called Fastest Known Times which recorded such adventures all over the world but as much as I could tweak the daily planning I couldn't see how we would be able to beat the men's time but ultimately, it was all about the adventure!

Maree was keen to join me at this stage so I set about planning each day in a rough format that was really tough with some 100km days over terrain that I had absolutely no idea just how rugged and brutal it could be. At this stage the plan was to complete the track in approximately 6 days. We revealed our little secret to coach Dan Benton after run drills over dinner at McDonalds (salad of course ha ha) and he was super excited but firmly put us in place about planning and logistics.

The planned date was for October 2018 which would have been a similar time to the original expedition. Unfortunately Maree couldn't commit to the entire journey but still wanted to be a part of the adventure in any way shape or form and has been such a valuable friend and incredible support.

I had been in touch with the Race Director of the Hume and Hovell Ultra, Peter Fitzpatrick who informed me that he was trying to plan a low key organised event for the whole track at the end of April 2018! So then I had to make up my mind as to whether I wanted to join with the group or do it by myself which would mean doing it before that date, so I decided to do it on my own before the group in early April ... So there it was... my Big Hairy Audacious Goal, or my Big Hairy Arsed Goal as I prefer to call it - Can I really do this?

Once Coach Dan knew that Maree wasn't in for the whole adventure anymore, I don't think he thought I was still going to go ahead on my own but I wasted no time in letting him know that, yes indeed I was and when I confirmed this, he insisted on a more detailed itinerary.

## **Training**

I had a great build from June 2017 and my training was going so well with my fitness levels at an all time high. I entered a few events in succession including the Wagga Trail Half Marathon, the Tomaree Trail Half at Fingal Bay and the Forbes Half. Forbes is a fast flat course with a double lap around the lake but unfortunately all on concrete, so my left glute and hip were unhappy by about 17km but I still finished well. Then My body responded well after running the Hume and Hovell Ultra 50km course in October with a really quick recovery and no hip or glute pain during or after. So it was with some confidence from those runs that I signed up for the Tarawera Ultra 100km event in February as part of my build and everything was going so well.

I backed up only 2 weeks after Hume and Hovell with another hilly Half Marathon at Carcoar where I came within seconds of my PB on the course and ran the local 10km Cherry Chase in November. Peter Fitzpatrick showed me around some trails in Wagga and a section of the track at Buddong Falls to the Pines in January over two days where I think we covered nearly 40km which was also a good confidence boost... Some good running afterwards with a couple of weeks of back to back runs had me feeling very confident... until it all fell apart 3-4 weeks prior with ITB friction, plantar fasciitis and left hip problems.. I was so stubborn and determined to still go... I had flights and

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accommodation sorted so I was going regardless. I convinced myself that I could run through it. I took my poles and a positive outlook but to no avail, I had to stop at the 50km mark with my whole left leg refusing to go on even after an on course physio had taped it (but oh so wrongly). It just wasn't going to comply with what my brain wanted it to do and was eventually being way too painful, especially with the slippery conditions of the trails – yes it rained for the entire event and although it wasn't cold, I really wasn't enjoying myself. I was devastated that my first overseas run and in a World Ultra Tour Trail Event no less, was thwarted by injury with my first ever DNF. However, this DNF gave me a good lesson in humility and how to deal with failure while moving forward to bigger and better things.

Anyway, this injury wasn't going away in a hurry so I changed my start date to the 24<sup>th</sup> of September with the aim of finishing under 10 days and not worrying about the FKT, just have an adventure and some time away with Robert if nothing else. Even with this in mind, the fear of failure and the imposter syndrome was ever present... can I really do this? Who am I to think that I can complete such an epic adventure. I've only been running for 6 years, and can't get onto trails regularly so training is predominately the highway and dirt roads. Who so I think I am? I'm just an average, ordinary person!

I sat down and re-planned my days with an itinerary and an average of 50km per day some shorter, some above with an allowance for possible rest days and still the hope of finishing under 10 days all while trying to coordinate campsites along the way as we were planning to camp for the entirety apart from a cabin the very first night at Burrinjuck Dam. The absolute maximum time we could spend away was 12 days, so it was either finish in that time or stop and go back another time to finish but I never imagined only doing it in part and going back.

Coach Dan was in approval of the new more measured itinerary so we set about planning my training around a couple of events in the lead up which included the Mt Arthur 9km trail event and the Wagga Trail Festival weekend with the 10km event and backed up with the hilly Half Marathon the next day. I travelled to Wagga with Kylie Bloor and Rhoda Hopwood on the Saturday morning for the 10k and drove back the next day picking up Cherie Wilson at Junee to tackle the hilly half marathon.

The beautiful Kylie Bloor had been providing me with some super massage sessions as she did before Big Red Run and was excited to try and come out to the track at some stage to massage or help in any way.

This was a more realistic outlook so the excitement really started to build. The ever present bursitis in my hip was continually causing me stress about how I was going to back up each day. With the prospect of Kylie coming to give me a massage within the first few days I was more hopeful that I would be able to overcome the rigors from first section on the road.

Very few people knew of what I was planning. I had sent a text message to my four siblings about my plans in the hope that I could share this epic adventure with them but none of them responded with any enthusiasm whatsoever! The boat at Burrinjuck Dam only ran at certain times which were proving difficult to co-ordinate so with D-day looming, Jade Cowled ("Chong" as he is affectionately known as to us) offered to organise a boat and skipper the journey. I hadn't told Mum because, well just because... and I didn't tell anyone else much because well, it was really none of their business. I wasn't raising money for charity or doing it for anyone else but me and the more people that knew, the more pressure there would be. I needed to be able to focus on rest and recovery as much as I could, especially in the weeks prior.

*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*



## Itinerary

### Day 1 - Cooma Cottage, Yass to Burrinjuck Waters State Park

- Starting at Cooma Cottage in Yass, the first 4km follows along the right hand side of the road and crosses at the Information Centre
  - 3.4km through the streets of Yass
  - 2.2km along road to left hand turn on where sign posted to road to Wee Jasper
  - 12.8km to Chown Reserve rest area
  - 9.4km to Captains Campsite **31.8km ... 15km bitumen; 2km dirt; 4km tar & dirt**
  - 3.7 dirt and tar roads
  - 5.2km on road to "Waterview"
  - 4.7km off road/firetrail to Nature Reserve entry
  - 5.4km through reserve to Carrols Creek Natural Crossing
  - 2.2km along Lake Burrinjuck to Burrinjuck Waters State Park **Total – 51.5km**
- Boat to next point – Chong to arrive with boat on Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning

### Day 2 – Burrinjuck Waters State Park to Barrois Campsite

- Boat to Cathedral Rock
- 4-6km off-road trails to Barbers Bay, Cover Creek (depending on water levels)
- 3.4km to Carey's Reserve campsite
- 3.6km following unsealed road to Fitzpatrick Trackhead campsite
- 1.3km to where day trek/hike loop starts
- 3.7km to waterfall
- 2.8km along trails to Mt Wee Jasper - 112m elevation
- 4.8km to Log Bridge Creek Campsite (trail)
- 5.9km to Pompey Pillar following the creek
- 7.2km to Micalong Creek campsite (trail)
- 7km to Logbook Barrois Campsite **Total – 51.8km**

### Day 3 – Barrois Campsite to Blowering Campsite

- 5km along dirt road through Micalong Swamp to Harold Robinson Boardwalk
- 4.1km to Boundary
- 9.1km in Kosciusko National Park along Waterfall Creek to the Hole Logbook
- 6.4km to Thomas Boyd Trackhead (across Norm Harris Bridge) and the Goobagandra River
- 4.1km to Jack Cribb Bridge along the river NOTE: Both SWING BRIDGES
- 1km to Buckleys Bridge
- 6km to next \*
- 7.9km to next \*
- 1km to Snowy Mountains Highway
- 6.4km on road to Blowering Campsite **Total - 50.5km**

### Day 4 – Blowering Campsite to Benjamin Smith Campsite

- 9.4km in Bago State Forrest to Browns Creek campsite along Blowering Dam shores on foottrack (steep pinches to climb)
- 12.1km to Browns Creek campsite to Blowering Holiday Camp
- 10.1km along foreshore to Yellowin Forest Park
- 5.3km to Sandy Creek Crossing or \*
- 10.3km over Gurkeroo Ridge, crossing Yellowin Forest Road to Benjamin Smith campsite **Total – 44.8km**

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### Day 5 – Benjamin Smith Campsite to Henry Angel Trackhead

- 9.5km along Jounama Pondage past the Tumut Power Station to Logbook \*
- 3.5km to Budong Falls Picnic Area
- 3.5km to Bundong Hut
- 8.8km following Buddong and White Horse Creeks
- 3.5km on forest road to Paddy's River Dam Campsite
- 18.7km passing 'The Island' and 'Coffee Pot' and the next logbook along Middle Ridge \*
- 3.5km to Junction Campsite (Private pine plantation)
- 6.5km to Henry Angel Trackhead along Burra Creek

**Total – 52.7km**

### Day 6 – Henry Angel Trackhead to Munderoo Campsite

- 5.5km to next Logbook \*
- .5km to Big Hill
- 11km up and over Mt Garland (BITCH) to Manus Lake Campsite
- 5.5km along forest and public roads to Mannus Campsite
- 2.3km to Glenroy Mannus Road
- 5.3km through Munderoo State Forest \*
- 4.8km following some of Doctors Creek to Munderoo Campsite

**Total – 34km**

### Day 7 – Munderoo Campsite to Tin Mines Campsite

- 1.5km to cross Munderoo Road
- 3.9km unsealed road to Fascoe's Dam
- 7km still in Munderoo State Forest stopping at Logbook near Carboon Gap \*
- 4.9km through some hilly sections
- 6.37km along Lankey's Creek near road \*
- 3.23km to Lankey's Creek Campsite (bitumen road)
- .4km bitumen road
- 6.3km Firetrail along Tipperary Creek \* to Wantagong Road
- 14.4km on tin Mines Road to Tin Mines Campsite

**Total – 47.2km**

### Day 8 – Tin Mines Campsite to Great Aussie Holiday Park

- 9.7km to Mount Jergyle with a view to Battery Mountain
- 10.6km with a view to Victorian Alps and Hume Weir across Home Flat Creek through Pine Plantation to Samuel Bollard Campsite
- 1.6km to Tunnel Road
- 7.7km in Woomargama National Park \* Logbook
- 8.4km (some climbs) to Bowna Wyma Road
- 7.3km along Bowna Wyma Road to Wyma Valley Resort (shops, cabins) Lake Hume!!!
- Great Aussie Holiday Park

**Total – 45km**

### Day 9 – Great Aussie Holiday Park to Hovell Tree

- 7.3km through Ten Chain Stock Reserve to \* Campsite (following parallel to Bowna Road to Hume Highway and Burma Road passed "Judges Mount" picnic area.
- 4km to Tabletop Park (unsealed road in parts)
- 5.2km to Kywanna Road (sealed road)
- 21.2km along Nine Mile Creek crossing Bowna Road through Thurgoona to the Riverina Highway near the Murray River through Albury to the Hovell Tree!
- **FINISH!**

**Total – 48.9km**

**426.4km or 440km - the total is debatable!**

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## **HUME & HOVELL TRACK** RECONNAISSANCE RUNS



### **Reccy #1 - A tale of misadventure**

The first of my reccy runs was in June two days before my birthday and turned out to be one of the most stressful and scary adventures of my life. Robert and I decided that we would try the section from Fitzpatrick Trackhead with the hope of reaching Micalong Campsite and either camp there or back at Fitzpatrick Trackhead. Due to the logging in the area, there was a detour still in place that meant that the first 15 odd km's followed a dirt road that wound up to the top of a hill but was still good running. Without any signage of where to return to the track from the detour, we turned off a road that we thought would lead us back onto the track. The roads boggy from recent rain and some ice still in puddles and snow in parts, I set off with the 2-way radio just in case the phones didn't work with the intention of meeting again at Micalong Campsite or somewhere in between. It wasn't until much later that Robert contacted me on the radio and asked where I was that I realised I was indeed running back in the direction on the road and section that was actually detoured towards Mt Wee Jasper.

We were using the SPOT Gen satellite tracker for the first time but didn't realise that you needed mobile reception to actually use the app associated with the tracker. All of the modern technology that we were relying on was failing us and was deemed useless so Robert couldn't find me. Lucky I had the 2-way radio so we had some form of contact as long as we were in range but as it was, I was sitting on top of a hill in an exposed logging area with no shelter, no torch, no thermals or mandatory gear, to speak of. We had been staying so close together, I was carrying as little as possible because everything I needed was in the ute. There was another person on the radio that could hear me. I was so frightened but unsure of when I should use the emergency SOS button on the SPOT in fear of crying wolf and being a nuisance. With 1% battery remaining on my phone I called 000 and quickly stated my name as clearly as I could through the shivering with my speech starting to slur, and both Roberts and my mobile numbers and where I was.

The track ahead led into dense bushland and so without a torch I was best to stay put. The search and rescue told me to press the SOS button which sent my location to an emergency response centre in America who quickly sent my coordinates to Robert. It seemed like an eternity but wasn't long before I seen the lights on the top of the hill behind me and damn it if I had of needed to run 100km to that light I would have! I was so glad to see him! He came to meet me with a beanie and warm coat... but wait, the ute was bogged! Before we could do anything, Robert had to quickly notify Search and Rescue that I was found as they were about to send a Rescue Chopper from Canberra - images of a young Gary Sweet dropping out of a rescue chopper to save me were racing through! . Search and rescue insisted that I go to the Yass Hospital to be checked out for Hypothermia and even after being under the warmth of a dooner with the heater blasting for 45 minutes on the way to the hospital, my temperature was still just 36 degrees. So the doctor said no camping was to be had and to get in bed fully clothed with electric blanket, beanie and scarf with hot soup and drinks... having a shower should be with care if I did so as not to get cold. So there was no camping as we planned and ironically, we ended up staying at The Hamilton Hume Motor Inn in Yass.

### **Reccy Run #2 - The final decision**

Our next reccy adventure was in August just one month away from D-day starting from Barrois (or Bossowa) Campsite with the hope of finishing at Blowering Dam. The two main objectives of the day was to get in about 50km on the track in two parts as well as making sure we knew how long the SPOT gen batteries lasted for and when to replace them. It was important that we get familiar with the overall use of the technology. I was also a little wary of whether or not Robert was really prepared for what was required of him as far as navigation and support as there were regular debates about safety, vehicle access and the overall logistics of the track. I sent Felicity the Track Advisor, a message beforehand to find out that the first section here was well marked along a forest road so there would also be vehicle access for much of the first 10km.

What an eye opener and reality check that was... We arrived at Barrois campsite around 9am where a bunch of teenage boys had set up camp. They were accompanied by two men who asked if I was training for the upcoming Ultra in October. I replied with "yep, something like that" and hoped I wouldn't get lost this time... they said the that the track was well marked right through to Thomas Boyd campsite and it was a nice part of the track. The terrain ranged from easy single trails, forest roads to technical rugged terrain and open farmland with some really steep climbs and descents. A quick lunch was had at Thomas Boyd Trackhead before I set out again. In the last section from Jack Cribb Swinging bridge (near shit myself but just had to get over it... literally!) where I thought I had just 10km of dirt roads through farmland to go, I came across an old timer standing in front of his shed who said

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emphatically, “You won’t make it before dark”... As I ran passed I told him “nah, I’ll be ok, I’ve only got 10k to go!” It wasn’t until I got to the bottom of a dirty great mountain that I realised the old bugger indeed knew something that I didn’t. I questioned the paths that the two crazy feckers of explorers had chosen with such brutal landscapes and couldn’t imagine traversing through these mountains with so many supplies and animals and cursed them so many times!

The 10km soon turned into 15km to the Snowy Mountains highway with some open farmland of hills like you wouldn’t believe right at the end, with a ruthless magpie hovering and swooping for about 500 meters while trying to climb a dirty great hill. Robert ran in the last 5km from to meet me and we made it to the highway just on sunset. So now it was up to me to decide if I was actually going to attempt the whole track still... the sense of accomplishment and the lure of adventure was too much. The thought of getting out into nature and having a ‘holiday’ was enticing in itself. So I was hooked and the date was confirmed for September 24!

If I plan and prepare carefully I can do it... I’m never going to know unless I try - Shit just got real!

### Planning

I wrote lists upon lists of mandatory gear, first aid, self massage tools and creams, camping gear etc and finally enlisted my sister Sue who is an experienced camper to come and help me write yet another list of all the things we needed to camp for this amount of time without forgetting anything. Her skills proved to be priceless with so many things I would have forgotten had I just left it up to the list accumulating in my head. We ended up getting another tent to use instead of the rooftop as it just didn’t suit the purpose... so after much deliberation we decided upon the Oztent RV4. I began the dreaded task of packing using storage containers in the hope of keeping things easy to find with labels like FIRST AID, MANDATORY GEAR, TAPES & CREAMS etc. This strategy was a good concept but I wonder how something so organised can also be so unorganised?

I revealed my dirty little secret when I created a facebook group called Female FKT Hume & Hovell Adventure, (originally Female FKT Hume & Hovell Attempt) with the hope of enlisting support by way of moral, emotional and physical support and kept it as a closed group with the emphasis on keeping it quiet as I had told mum that we were going camping for 2 weeks with a little running involved.

After seeing a few facebook posts about FKT’s (Fastest Known Times) I was curious as to whether they had separate records for males or females. Peter Bawkin was quick to reply that there were in fact separate times recorded for males and females and there was no recorded journey for a female on the Hume and Hovell Track... The goal posts were then moved to focus on finishing regardless of how long it took. If I finished I would be the first female to record the fastest known time for the Hume and Hovell Track. Wow! But that would just be a bonus... but the aim was still to simply finish!

Who knows? I may only last a few days or I might make it to the end, but I’m never going to know unless I try... no one ever got anything done by sitting at home asking “what if?” Although not once did I ever imagine or visualise the day I would quit or walk away from the challenge.

During the next three weeks I was able to focus on good nutrition and taking care of my body with regular stretching, massage as well as adequate rest and recovery after training runs. Two weeks prior I was meant to do some long back to back runs, but after the first one which was a great run at Mt Ulandra, at Bethungra, the bursitis flared up and my left hip wasn’t happy. I walked the next day around the farm instead for about an hour.

I’d been listening to a few different podcasts to prepare my mindset and I came across an episode of Lisa Tamati’s podcast on “How to take on a massive expedition and survive to tell the tale” ... it couldn’t have been more timely! I insisted that Robert listen to it as well.

Coach Dan thought it best to focus now on resting my body and making sure I was fresh rather than pushing for extra mileage just for the sake of it and my body responded well - I also managed to drop a couple of kilograms and was the lightest I had been for over a year... what a bonus!

*“The body achieves what the mind believes!”*



**September 24, 2018 – “In the spirit of Discovery, the adventure begins”**

**Cooma Cottage to Burrinjuck Dam – 54.4km...876m elevation**



Finally the day arrived to start this monstrosity of an adventure and I was super excited... this was really happening! Everything was packed and all we had to do was get up, get dressed, have breakfast with the hope of leaving by 6:30am and arrive at Cooma Cottage in Yass to start running by 7:30am... yep, no! The Cottage isn't open on Mondays so by the time we climbed over the gate and walked down to the cottage and took a few quick photos it was almost 8:15am by the time I got on the road. The weather was fine but windy... I hate wind! Although, it wasn't too bad once I got started especially with the shelter of buildings through the streets of Yass.

The Yass Road is quite busy so it was nice to have Jen Saul start out with me for the first 5km dodging school and work traffic to the other side of town to the bridge. Robert returned her to her vehicle at Cooma Cottage so she didn't have to run back. I lost count of how many times I'd been swooped by magpies even before I even reached the turn-off onto Black Range Road. My friend Janelle rang me and we chatted for about 10 minutes while I shuffled along the road. I was being really conscious about being conservative and was pacing myself for the long haul. I set about a run walk strategy of run for 8-10 minutes and walk for 1 minute... after all, it wasn't a race and the main goal was to finish!

The countryside was pretty enough with it being spring and all. The wattle was blooming and all the paddocks and hills were covered with fresh green grass. It was nice to get off the bitumen for a while and onto the dirt roads where I spotted some Rams having a tassel in a paddock and passed by Washpen Corner rest area that was bordered by an electric fence, so I wasn't stopping there. Further down the road Robert was waiting to top up water and fuel. It wasn't until after he drove away that I had left my phone either on the tailgate or in the passenger side of the ute... lucky he seen it on the seat and turned around!

There was quite a bit of water over the road in a lot of the creek crossings but thankfully there was always somewhere to cross without getting my feet wet. We stopped at Captains campsite for lunch of a Vegemite sandwich, a cup of tea and a bit of a stretch, oh and a pee of course! I always need to pee!

I seen my first wombat, albeit a dead; one on the side of the road and what I thought was a memorial under a sign... My curiosity peaked so I went back to have a look and found that it was actually a few teddy bears on a chair, one even wearing a hat and sunglasses!



The signs for Burrinjuck Waters were a welcome relief as it meant the end of the bitumen and Waterview Road was near. Before I got there, I passed a heap of dead wild dogs and feral pigs hanging on the fence apparently from the Burrinjuck State Park.

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## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



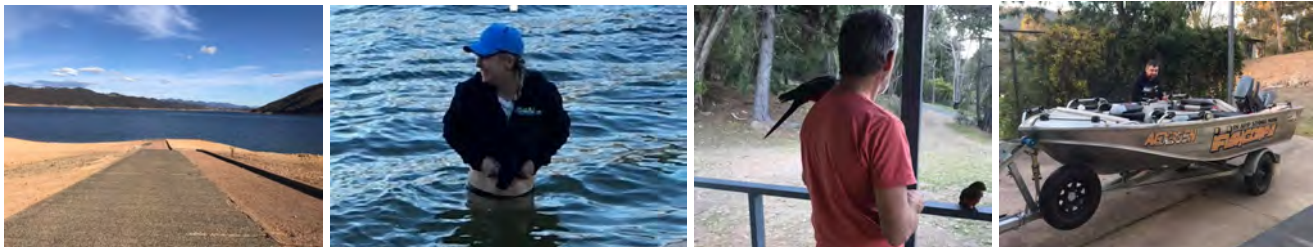
The road running was turning out to be just as taxing as I thought it would be on my body and I was starting to develop a little twinge in my right knee and my left hip was starting to niggle. I finally reached Waterview Road and the end of the bitumen and taped my knee before continuing on to where I finally



got onto the track proper. Robert left me here with the words, “if you get to the water, you have gone too far”! So off I trotted and it wasn't too long after running along a the rough forest road that my legs felt much better. Taking a photo along the way and not watching where I was going I rolled my ankle – look where you're going you idjit! Luckily it was all good and I enjoyed some great downhill running and before too long I could see the water. It looked so beautiful and blue so I was drawn to it like a magnet and before I knew it I was at the waters edge and had “gone too far” and missed the turn onto the trails around the foreshore which was about 500m back uphill.



Once I found the marker I returned to running on some cool bush single track. It was soft underfoot with some random wallaby sightings along the way and lots of fallen trees - Carrolls Creek was definitely the highlight of the day... It was magical - like something out of a fairy tale with small waterfalls running through lots of rock under a canopy of bush that was magnificent. Robert ran out a few km's to meet me and before I knew it I was at my destination for the day at the boat ramp of Burrinjuck Dam.



It was about 4.30pm in the afternoon so I quickly set about some recovery with a Tailwind Recovery shake – how good are those things? Then headed down to the dam for some cryotherapy for my legs and hips and stood in the freezing cold water up to my stomach for as long as I could! Oh my it was cold, especially when the wind blew on the water and it lapped further up my back... but it was oh so good for my legs!

Robert was flirting with the parrots and cooking dinner on the bbq while I stretched and rolled. An early dinner along with my favourite juice that I'd concocted in the weeks before of beetroot, celery, ginger, ice, orange, and spinach. Chong arrived with the boat he had borrowed from Daniel Patterson and not long after, I was ready for an early night with the hope of getting a good nights sleep before an early start of 6:30am... I had organised for Maree to meet us so she could come with us on the boat and stay with me until Fitzpatrick's Trackhead.

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## HUME & HOVELL TRACK Day 2 – Burrinjuck to Micalong Campsite – 54.1km (including 11km boat trip) ... 1807m elevation



Although the excitement and the cool night resulted in a restless nights sleep for both of us we, were still up early and eager to start the day. Maree arrived on time and we all headed down to the boat ramp where Chong was waiting with the boat. The boat wouldn't start and we joked and giggled about whether he had any oars while both he and Robert fiddled around with the motor and finally got it going, albeit with a bit of a chug. Our early start had been foiled but at least we finally got going a bit after 7am. The wind on the water was freezing, especially when we had to double back around an island to get find a place to disembark safely. The ride around the island turned out to be so spectacular with such still, calm clear waters. Once we reached our departure point, we said our goodbyes, thanked Chong and wished him a safe return.



The water level was quite low and the land was scattered with deadwood. It looked so desolate it made me think of the Desolation of Smaug, like in the Lord of the Rings. It was easy to find the track that followed a road within farmland until we reached the signs for Carey's Caves and then under the watchful eye of a few curious but cautious Alpacas guarding their flock, I questioned if we were going the right way and looked up our whereabouts on Avenza Maps which confirmed that we were off the track. We turned around to retrace our steps for about 500 meters and were back on the track in no time at all. Unfortunately from here to Fitzpatricks Trackhead, the road was all bitumen and it got quite hot in the exposed areas.

Peter Fitzpatrick had offered to run with me from there and was waiting patiently for our arrival with his wife Val. We knew this because Val had come out on the road to see where we were as Robert hadn't made it back around there yet from Burrinjuck. When we did arrive, Maree's husband Matt hadn't hadn't arrived to pick her up so we waited until Robert came so I could refuel. I hated leaving Maree there but she insisted she would be ok so we said our goodbyes and Peter and I headed out towards Mt Wee Jasper (after a quick pee of course, a toilet opportunity should never be wasted).



By this stage it was mid-morning and quite warm. We pressed onwards and after only a couple of kilometers we met Val and Robert who were waiting near the base of Mt Wee Jasper for what would be the last time for a few hours. The elevation was quite steep on the first incline where we passed an empty vehicle with a H&H logo noting that there were workers out on the track. The track was pretty rugged with lots of fallen trees and it wasn't too long before we came across the workers putting some warning signs up near a damaged footbridge (some of which were inmates from Manus prison) and Peter, chatted to them about their movements and the Henry Angel section as the Ultra event was coming up in October. I had my headphones in my ears listening to some music and as we crossed a bridge while climbing up the side of a gorge, the INXS song "Falling down the mountain" had me being even more careful about my foot placement as I looked down at the steep descent to where we had been only a few minutes before. How ironic!

It was a fair climb to the summit of the mountain where we stopped for some photos and made our entries into the log book before moving on again through some more rugged but pretty bush. We met Robert and Val again at the edge of the bush and the previously logged pine forest where they had been sharing stories about supporting runners and a joke was made about how precise the measurements should be for the tailwind mixture.

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## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



All jokes aside, the next section saw us enter the recently logged area where I had been lost back in June.

It was a weird feeling as I ran back through there and I re-told my story of misadventure to Peter who had heard it numerous times before, but still listened and reacted like he was hearing it for the first time... he's good like that! Ha ha... he says he's not a good listener, but if he's not, he pretends well!

We then passed through Millers and Pheasants Creek before reaching Logbook campsite where Peter was surprised with the damage to the picnic area by a fallen tree (it was like this when I was there last). A hiker had left a drop bucket of supplies and curiosity seen us having a cheeky peek to see what they had left for themselves. We thought the combination of a mars bar, a bag of dried peas and a

gas burner would be somewhat disappointing any hiker who was to come along later, but who were we to judge?



On the way to Pompeii's Pillar we stopped to have a snack and admired the water falling down the other side of the valley and a wallaby hopping out of sight. We came across quite a bit of water running out of the side of the hill and didn't fancy getting our feet wet so while I found some rocks to create some stepping stones, I no sooner turned around and Peter was half way up the hill grabbing this enormous piece of deadwood to use as a plank across the water. We heard a roar from what we assumed was a vehicle and thought a road mustn't be too far away.

The snack had renewed my energy levels so when I heard some creaking branches from above, I started to look around and Peter asked if anything was falling, I said I didn't know and I wasn't stopping to find out and proceeded to run with a purpose, much to Peters amusement!

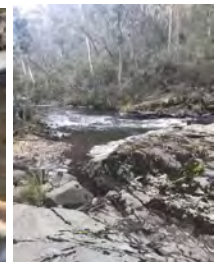
Pompey's Pillar is an amazing rock to behold so we stood and admired it for a few minutes and I took a couple of photos before we moved on. We were able to run for a bit after this and were no sooner at the bottom of the mountain where Val was waiting at the gates of Micalong Station. She said they were getting worried that we were taking so long, especially after hearing horror stories about the Pompeii Pillar section from the property owners, so Robert had gone to find mobile reception to get our location from the SPOT tracker. Hence the vehicle we heard earlier!



My little toes on both feet had been hurting so when Robert returned, I changed shoes and they felt much better. Unfortunately, this is where we said our goodbyes to Val and Peter as it was late and they wanted to start on their way home to Wagga. I was so grateful for Peters company and Val giving up her day to come and help me out so although I was sad to see them go, I continued on another 5km to the Micalong Campsite where Robert had already set up the tent – 7km short of my planned destination but a great day nonetheless.



Although the trees overhead were a bit of a worry as they can drop at any given time, it was a pretty campsite with the water from the creek sounding more like a river rushing by. I made my recovery shake and headed to the creek to immerse my legs into the freezing waters and it was so cold... colder than an ice bath! But I sat there for as long as I could so when I got out and my



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legs felt great for it. We thought the sound of the water would sound like rain and hoped to get a good nights sleep in what was our first night in the tent. It was warm and cozy with our minus 5 sleeping bags, as well as a dooner inside the swag.

### Day 3 – Micalong Campsite to near Jack Cribb Swing Bridge – 38.6km...906m elevation

All hopes of a good nights sleep were dashed with the water rushing in the creek sounding more like wind than rain... and I hate wind! But we were up and about for an early start just the same. I was nearly finished getting dressed and heard rain start to fall on the tent. Hopefully it was only light rain that would be just a few showers as there was none predicted until the weekend so I continued to get ready for the day ahead. Without wasting anymore time, I think I was on the road by about 7am and I'd only ran about 500m to 1km and there was a dirty great big tree that had fallen across the road. Robert wouldn't be able to get through. I continued knowing the chain saw he had with him wouldn't be big enough to clear a path and would have to drive around. The rain settled in and was drenching on the forest roads without the cover of the bush. I kept on going and enjoyed a section, as rugged as it was along the creek where I found the damaged Micalong Creek footbridge with detour signs either side but couldn't see any other way of crossing without getting caught up in the blackberry bushes so before I could think about it too much, I scurried over it as quick as I could.



Once I got out on the forest roads again, I came across Robert and the rain was still falling steadily but I pressed on to Barrois (Bossowa) Campsite where I changed from the saturated Hokas to the Saucony Peregrines because they are a little more waterproof. By this stage I was wishing I had gotten the pair of wet weather pants that I had on my list – the only thing I didn't bring!



After 9km and about one and half hours in the rain, I reached Brindabella Road. I was starting to get really cold and wet under my jacket with the water dripping inside from the hood around my neck. We made the call to stop and go into Tumut to find some wet weather pants before continuing on – no point getting sick at this point with so far still to go!



The closer we got to Tumut the bluer the skies and the sun was shining. We tried two different shops but the smallest waterproof pants they had were a mens small. We decided to grab a pair with the foresight of using gaffer tape to modify them to fit or at least stay up on my short little legs! By the time we returned to Brindabella Road the rain had all but cleared.



The day ended up turning out to be quite warm and humid so it wasn't too long before I was discarding t-shirts to swap with a singlet over the other side of the swamp where Robert was waiting for me to refuel. I'd been through this section before so knew what to expect of the terrain and enjoyed the afternoon. Clouds were building again by the time I came out of the bush onto Boundary Road where I had some lunch of a banana in a nutella coated wrap (don't knock it until you try it), a quick cup of tea and loaded up my vest with the wet weather pants, raincoat and some thermals just in case it started raining again.



I stopped at The Hole Logbook and made my entry before entering the bush again to Thomas Boyd Campsite. It was so much nicer this time around having an idea of the rugged terrain, fallen trees and how much further I had to go. On the steep approach to the campsite, I was half expecting Robert to come out and meet me and when he didn't appear I started singing at the top of my lungs to Shannon Noels version of What about Me! On my way down the steep descent I heard a voice calling out that turned out to be Jen Saul who had come out to see me and had found herself a beautiful lyrebird feather... Then Kylie, her mum and



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## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



the kids appeared with Cole enjoying the role as photographer. They all seemed just as happy to see me as I was them!



I was feeling great and there was still quite a lot of daylight left so I thought I'd make use of it to get another 5km in. I continued on down the track where Kylie, her mum and the kids followed for a bit then Jen and I continued on down to the Jack Cribb Swing Bridge over the Goobagandra River where Robert had driven Jen's ute down to the road and was waiting to meet us and return us back to the campsite. He came across the bridge to meet us and moved so much quicker than I did the first time I crossed it! It really swings and it's not much wider than your shoe!



Once we were all across the other side of the river we returned to the campsite where Kylie was waiting to give me a massage, on a proper massage table and all! After she was finished we said our goodbyes. Robert finished hanging out his washing and we settled down for the night with some more stretching for me and an early dinner... a little disappointed that I was already behind schedule after missing a good two hours running - I was about 25km behind the schedule in my itinerary.

### Day 4 – Jack Cribb Swing Bridge to Blowering Dam – 50.88km... 1164m elevation

I hadn't slept well again and was laying in the swag with the Forest Gump quote running through my mind, "I'm pretty tired, I think I'll go home now"... I turned to Robert and said "Whatever you do, don't let me quit!" and he asked why? I don't really know why, it was just how I felt. Maybe the fear of knowing what lay ahead of me as well as the fear of the unknown. The fear of being on my own for hours at a time in the bush and the fear of underestimating the terrain and being caught out with not enough food, water, supplies or the right equipment. Anyway, it was then we made the facebook group public in the hope that others may be able to come out and join me, even be it for short periods of time if they were in the area. I knew this was going to be a big ask, especially when it was mid week already let alone the logistics of the track itself.



The first section to the Snowy Mountains Highway seemed to fly by much quicker in comparison to the reccy run as I was so much better prepared for the terrain both physically and mentally, so I made it in reasonably good time even though it was quite a bit hotter than before. Being conservative was still a high priority as I hadn't even reached the halfway point yet. Robert came out to meet me in the farmland section before the highway where he had in the previous reccy run. I was feeling really good and enjoyed the downhill running back to the highway where we stopped



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# HUME & HOVELL TRACK

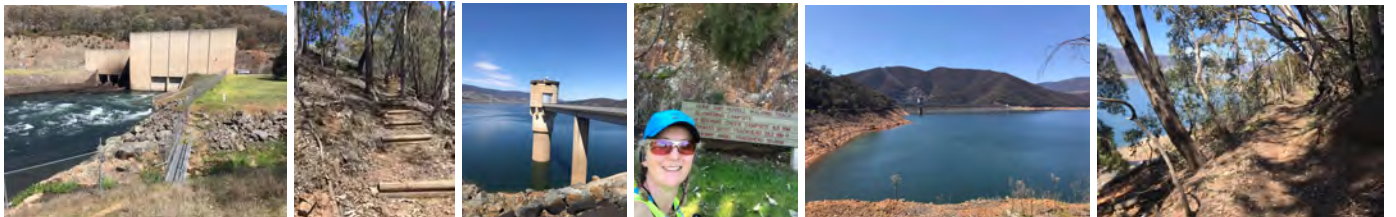


for a cup of tea and top up of fuel. A quick change of shoes from the Hokas to the Peregrines and I hit the road again and was on my way to Blowering Dam Campsite.

I didn't enjoy the bitumen section to the Dam Wall not only because of the fact that it was bitumen, but being exposed to the late morning sun was draining. Another swing bridge lifted my mood when I ran into a couple out sightseeing and the lady asked how far I'd come today. I beamed that I had started at Cooma Cottage in Yass on Monday... she was quite surprised and asked if I had someone following me with supplies. I answered yes as I ran passed not really stopping while I took a quick selfy on my way over the bridge... I love the bridges!



The run from there to the Dam wall was hot but nice running along the river, then past the trout farm and after a short steep climb to the top of the wall where I met Robert for a quick check of food and fuel again. I wouldn't see him for a



while because the gate to the Blowing Campsite was locked and he had to drive around so there was no vehicle access until I reached the forest road around the foreshore. It wasn't long before I missed another marker and found myself right on the shores of the dam and realised that the track was actually parallel but above me. So after climbing through some scrub of dead trees and bushes I re-joined the track. I later stopped to have a vegemite sandwich and check on a hotspot on my right big toe while I enjoyed the views of the dam... I already had fixamol on that spot as a preventative so I added another layer just in case. It was a beautiful clear day and I had a view of the water for hours as I followed the trails that snaked around the foreshores. Speaking of snakes, I still hadn't seen one... yet!



While remembering how many people had to leave their homes and farms in the valley to make way for the construction of the dam back in 1964, I was marvelling at the fact that I could see where I had been in the minutes and hours before while the track was ever changing from single trails that led over rolling hills, through infested blackberry areas to open fields and trails that had low covering bushes that were like tunnels to run through. The forest road was even nice to run on with it being so soft underfoot after lots of large machinery had been using the roads for recent logging operations.



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I was surprised to see some of the forest had been burnt still with smoking embers leaving a real feeling of desolation.

I came across a dead kangaroo that had met its peril and was blackened by the fire only a short time before.

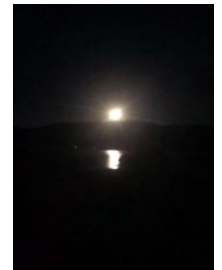


I then started to wonder if this was a controlled burn and maybe I shouldn't be here. Up ahead I could see a couple of forest and emergency vehicles with lights flashing and our ute on the other side where I found Robert talking to one of the men. There didn't seem to be a problem so Robert said he would drive ahead and have a cuppa made for me by the time I caught up. It was then that he told me that a camper had lit a fire and it got out of control... well shit... I could have been caught in the middle of it!

Anyway, after a top up of food and fuel we decided that I would press on until after 5 when we would start to lose light and to meet again where Robert was setting up camp around the 160km mark on the banks of the dam. When I took off my shoes my first blister was revealed on my right big toe but I would tend to it later. Tailwind recovery shake in hand, I replaced my shoes with thongs and made my way down to the dam and immersed my legs into the water. It wasn't as cold as the creek the previous afternoon but I could see bubbles appearing around me... were they from fish or something else that might bite or maybe something slimy? Needless to say I didn't stay in there for very long...



As the sun went down, campfires began to light up across the other side of the dam and the full moon rising over the water was a sight to behold. I did some stretching, rolling and self massage, popped my blister and dressed it with a "donut" made from layers of thin foam and covered with fixamol and would add a silicon gel sleeve to it in the morning. Robert got dinner organised and hung some washing to dry while I was busy and we had another early night. I was super happy with how my body was holding up – I was feeling great and had



made up about 5km of my deficit.

Again, not much sleep was had. Between something being killed in the gully nearby and crying out for ages to a bird that was singing some sort of mating call all night - sleep just didn't seem to come easy!

### Day 5 - Blowing foreshores to Paddy's River Dam – 48.52km ... 1164m elevation

Another early start and the weather was mild and fairly warm, so much so that I set off with just a singlet and arm sleeves enjoying the soft forest roads around the foreshore. The Bago State forest has some great views of the dam and the higher I climbed the better they got. I met Robert under some powerlines, ate, refuelled with food and water and was off again.... in the wrong direction. Lucky Robert stopped me before I went too far! Doh. I was thinking shit, why would the track go down here! Ha ha...



There was some really nice single track trails to run on before I reached Ben Smith campsite. Lucky we didn't plan on staying here because there was no vehicle access and lots of blackberry bushes. I sat and had a gel and topped up my flasks with water from the freshwater tank (after testing the water first) as I was getting a little low. It took me a little while to see where the track went from there as the blackberry bushes were so thick. It wasn't long before I found myself at Jounama Pondage near Talbingo in open farmland and even though it was really pretty, I didn't like it. It had been sewn with a crop and I was exposed to the sun in the middle of the day and it was quite warm. The magpies were also relentless and starting to get a little savage with more swoopings than I cared to count. The track followed the water for quite a while and Robert said he would meet me before Budong Falls so I could have some lunch and refuel before Budong Falls. With no bridge in sight, I wondered how he would get across the water and used the 2-way to find out if he knew a place we could meet.

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## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



He finally found access on an internal road, so I'm not sure if he was meant to use it or not, but I was sure glad to see him. I was a little anxious about the next section to Budong Falls and didn't want to waste too much time. After a quick lunch of some hot noodles I loaded up with enough food and water until I met Robert at the Budong Falls picnic area. From here I had to go through a fence and scratched the inside of my leg on the barbed wire. It stung and bled a fair bit but was really just superficial so onwards I went across more farmland, over a creek, a stile over another fence and another cropped field before I reached the national park to the falls.



So here I was in the Kosciuszko National Park... The ground was pretty rough here as there looked to have been some pretty heavy machinery not long before. I took so many photos once I started the climb to the falls – I was in awe of the gigantic trees, the sound of running water and just being in this beautiful place. I was walking a fair bit because of the terrain and so I could take it all in. I didn't really want to run here due to fallen trees as well as the fact that I was a little scared to run on the trail that sloped downward towards the deep gorge below and with me being able to trip over the smallest of sticks or rocks – it was a long way down!



I was really enjoying the diversity of the track and with so much to keep my mind occupied, I was happy to just keep going at whatever pace the track allowed, and running where I could. I stopped to eat a boiled potato and take in the serenity of the bush with the sound of the falls ever present.

A few challenging sections with some ropes to use as a guide tested the length and strength of my short legs as I had to stretch right out to get from one rock to another while holding onto the rope. All the while I was thinking of that piggy promise I made Kate O'Brien about the 100miler a few months before and imagining how I would do this in the dark should our plan come to fruition for the Ultra event next year!



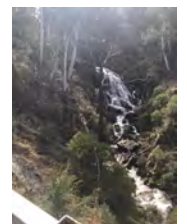
The first of the steel bridges was at Moffets' crossing before I came to the larger one at the Log Book... apparently they used a chopper to lower it into place because of the rugged terrain!. It was just as picturesque as I remembered from when Peter and I came here in January only a little more special this time because I'd made it here all by myself and from a different direction. I admired ferns and other plants while I made my entry and seen



that a few other names were entered only a few days before me with one of them also on the full journey to Albury. I wondered if I might catch up with him somewhere?

There was another technical section with ropes before I came to the sign for the Lower Budong Falls that was like a T-intersection and another track to the left. With no other track markers in sight I tried to remember if Peter and I had went that way before and while I didn't really think we did, I still thought I'd go down there and have a look... Who wouldn't like a closer look at a waterfall that made that much noise?

So off I trotted, consulting Avenza maps just to check that I wasn't actually going off the track but with the little campsite logo covering the line where my little blue dot was, my location wasn't really visible - although it wasn't far from the actual track and parallel to it as well. Anyway, I got to a point where I couldn't go any further, sat and admired the falls for a few minutes, took some photos and videos. then made my way back up to the "T-intersection" and rejoined the track proper.



Several more bridge crossings meant I was getting closer to the picnic area and thought it strange that Robert hadn't come out to meet me, if not but for the last km, so when I returned to the picnic area and the ute was there with no Robert I wondered where he might be. I used the 2-way to call him only to hear my own voice

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## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



broadcasting from the radio inside the ute. He had gone and didn't take the radio... and then I realised... he had gone to meet me and went passed the sign for the lower falls while I was down there! So off I went thinking that I was going to have to go all the way back down to find him - but how bloody far? I can't be going all the way back down there when I still have so far to go today! I started to worry and was cooee-ing and calling him for about a kilometer before I seen him on the track below. He had made it all the way down to the log book and seen my entry, so then knew that he missed me

somewhere and was on his way back up and because of the roar of the falls, couldn't hear which direction my voice was coming from or if indeed it was me and not some kids calling out. He finally saw me waving my poles around from above. He had been looking at buying a set of poles only a couple of days before and opted not to because they were expensive, so when I said he probably wished he bought those poles now, you can imagine the mouthful I got about how lucky I am that he'd thrown away the stick that he'd been using instead only minutes before and that I should NEVER leave the track! I quickly informed him that technically, I did not leave the track. By the time we made it back to the ute after an extra 30 minutes of backtracking to find him, I erred on the side of caution when I asked for a cup of tea before I entered the bush again to make my way to the Pines and Paddys River Dam.



After losing so much time, I hightailed it back into the bush and was running where I could and only stopped at the log book and the Hut for a quick sticky beak. I'd never been inside before and found it a little spooky with all the names written on the walls and a chinese book left on the table inside titled " Falling Leaves" – the story of an unwanted daughter! One of the trees outside next to the campfire was adorned with a memorial for a lost friend. I offered a moment of silence and was on my way.

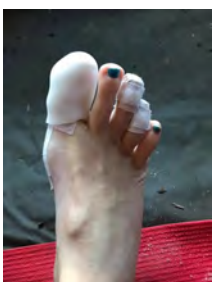
The next section was a lot clearer than it was in January as workers had been in and raked and blown the track in parts but it took a lot longer than I remembered to get back to the Pines where I was startled by 4 or 5 brumbies who were equally startled by my presence. I took some photos and videos but wasn't sure what they might do. Do they attack people and if they do, what is the best plan of escape? So I stood quietly for a little bit until they started moving away but then one on it's own had me a little more scared. It wasn't long after that, Robert appeared and there was only about 2km before we returned to the forest road at The Pines. He went ahead to Paddy's River Dam where we made camp for the night. After setting up camp and I had changed my clothes, we drove to the top of Mount Granite where there was meant to be mobile reception to check in with the kids. I also rang Peter as he wanted to know where I finished up that day. I told him I was tired and about my Forest Gump quote of "I'm pretty tired now...I think I'll go home now" from the day before. He said he and Val would help in any way to make sure I finished and he was coming to run with me from Paddy's River Dam to Mannus Lake the next day.



After getting back to camp we settled in for another sleepless night with the sound of the brumbies at the nearby crossing in the creek, the air mattress losing air for the second night in a row and me rolling into Robert all night, then it was raining.



### Day 6 – Paddys River Dam to Mannus Lake marker – 50.4km... 1626m elevation (Almost 30km behind)



I really didn't want to get out of bed... I was so tired. When I did there was a good frost with the water on the tent turning to ice within the blink of an eye! So far I'd only got one blister on my big right toe, but thanks to some dressing techniques learned on Big Red Run and the use of a gel sleeve given to me by Jen Saul when we first met, it was under control and not bothering me at all. Val and Peter arrived and we set off with a cold wind at our sides. Even though I had stretched, rolled and massaged my legs the afternoon before my calves



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## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



were tight until I started moving around and my legs were a little heavy to begin with. I had my arm sleeves on under my rain jacket and Peter a light jumper – I didn't remember to turn on my watch until after about a kilometer but we were on our way and planned to meet Robert and Val at Henry Angel Campsite. Jacqui Veal, whom I had known from a running group on facebook, had said she would meet us for a few km's before Henry Angel but I wasn't getting my hopes up.

Surprisingly, Peter was getting phone calls from Val who told me that Robert had gone and got some sausages to cook for us for lunch (I'd said earlier that morning that some sausages would be good today... I'd lost my appetite as nothing we had in our supplies was really appealing to me that much anymore. I was so tired of the gels and had to fill my mouth with water just to get them down. So with the thought of sausages on my mind and my belly, we forged ahead.



I think we had stopped for me to pee (again) and admire one of the many enormous gum trees and were just on our way again... we had started chatting away about nothing and broke into a shuffle on a bark littered track when I kicked at a shifting piece underfoot. Well that piece of bark started moving and it wasn't until I tried to flick it with my pole that I realise it was actually a snake! Before I knew it, I was levitating mid air and 'air running' backwards into the bush. I landed in the bush next to a tree and parallel to the track facing the opposite direction and here was Peter with his stick raised



above his shoulder at the snake who retreated into the bush where it seemed to collapse over a log in disbelief of what had just transpired. All we could do was laugh for what seemed like 5 minutes before I got up and took a photo of said snake, then leaned over to see the snake with its head looking back at me as if to say WTF just happened? Very funny!

Just after Junction Campsite, we came across Jacqui and her husband David, who I was meeting both for the first time. Once all the introductions were over, it wasn't long before Peter and Jacqui struck up a conversation and turns out their families are from the same area so they were reminiscing and chatting about where they grew up.



We saw a group of brumbies as we passed through a pine forest and it wasn't long before we were heading along the creek and Peter gave us a history lesson about the chinese mining days that was interesting... how hard they had worked with their bare hands was still obvious after all this time. Peter supposedly saw a fish in the creek – I didn't see it so was looking for fish the whole way back into Henry Angel but alas I still didn't see one. We came across some little notes stuck to the markers with my name on them left by Jane Sibley, all with messages of

support and lifted my spirits so much.

When we came over the last stile into Henry Angel I was surprised to see my grandson, little Lucas running toward me calling out "Ma!" with his arms stretched out! I knew my daughter Abbey and Chong were planning to come out at some stage over the weekend but wasn't sure when and I was so glad to see them... then Meli came running across the road (ran straight passed me, lol) and Bridget popped out from behind the BBQ area. They had been in NZ when we left so I hadn't seen her for almost a month! It was so nice to see them all plus they delivered some of my favourite organic chocolate and some Magnesium cream thanks to Bec Marchant... Robert had sausages cooked on the BBQ and the sandwiches hit the spot just nicely and washed down with a cup of tea.



We had a nice break before refuelling, this time with a boiled egg and potato in my pocket we sadly said our goodbyes. Off we trotted along the creek with Mt Garland in our sights. After running both the 50 and 100km Ultra events over the 2 previous years I knew what lay ahead and was eager to get to the top where Robert and Val would be waiting with the promise of some cold coke.



Peter took a photo for me on a bench seat near the falls then further on we had some quick selfies when we got closer to Mt Garland. Peter asked what he had to do for said selfy and I told him to just look into the phone and smile! Ha ha... not long after we came across a porcupine



*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



and waited while it crossed the trail and not long after we came to the swing bridge. This one wasn't as narrow as the Jack Cribb one but I packed up my poles so I could hang on with to the wires while I crossed. We stopped to write in the log book where we could see that the guy who was a few days ahead of me before, had been through earlier that day. So now I was keen to see if I could catch him.



After climbing big hill, we cursed Mt Garland as she punished our legs all the way up, even though I think I did find it a little easier than the two previous climbs during the ultras. Peter doesn't wear a watch and remarkably knew exactly how long it would take us to get to the top where Val and Robert were waiting. They told us the guy that was hiking in front of us had only been through about an hour before. We refilled our water and Robert gave me a small flask of fresh coke and sent us on our way. As soon as I started running I heard a loud pop... the lid popped on the small flask of coke and I had coke running all down the front of me!

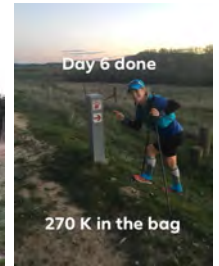


We enjoyed some good patches of trails to run on – the downhills were fun after so much climbing. I felt a little niggle on the outside of my right knee again like ITB friction but it came and went so I didn't think too much more about it.



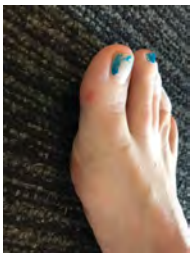
Mannus Lake was in sight and we made it just before sunset. Robert was quick to suggest I go another 2.5km down the road to the next marker to make up some kilometers. It was so nice to have Peters company for the day but unfortunately this is where we said our goodbyes as Peter and Val needed to start on their way back to Wagga - it was so late already.

So although I didn't really want to, I headed off down the road. Robert said he would drive down and make his way back on the track to meet me



half way. So here I am on the road because in the Ultra event that's where you go to the turnaround point, then I realised that he should have met me by now and started cursing him. I looked around and here he is down by the lakes edge... where I should have been! FFS, I had to turn around and go back over a kilometer to get back onto the track! Adding unnecessary kilometers at the end of a 50km day is less than ideal but the pelicans and other birdlife that we saw on the lake at sunset was an amazing sight to finish off the day.

Because I was so tired, Robert had organised for us to stay in a cabin in Tumbarumba for the night so I could have a shower and a real bed with the hope of a good nights sleep. In hindsight, I should have put my legs in the lake before we left that day.



It was so good to wash my hair after almost a week and the hot shower was fabulous. I was so happy to see that my blister had actually healed already as well. The usual stretching, rolling and self massage routine was followed by dinner and then into bed for hopefully an early start from the marker at Mannus Lake.

In my original itinerary I was meant to finish at Mannus Lake Campsite so I think by now I had made up about 10km's and was now only about 20km behind with 270km done!

### Day 7 – Mannus Lake to Lankey's Creek - 45.3km... 732m elevation



There was still a heavy frost on the ground when we arrived back at the marker around 7am at Mannus Lake where Jacqui was waiting with her bike and she rode alongside me while I shuffled along the road for a while.

We travelled along some dirt road for a while before we reached Mannus Campsite, a quick section of Bitumen then turning off onto forest roads.



*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

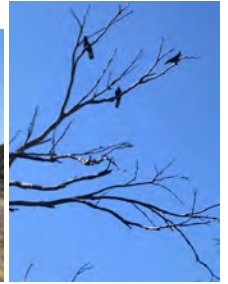
## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



A short section off into the bush led to another bitumen road where we got a glimpse of the snow-capped mountains in the distance and was a real highlight!

On a detour through a pine forest we spotted a flock of Yellow tailed black Cockatoos that were a spectacular sight although they made it quite clear that they didn't like us being there.

Just before Tin Mines Road, Jacqui turned around to take the bike back to the car and ended up coming a gutsa on a steep downhill, taking skin off her arm and leg but was more worried about the damage to the expensive 2xu tights than the damage to her body!



There was a lot of climbing on forest roads and some really steep descents... I had some messages from Coach Dan saying he was proud of me and was so happy, I was living my dream!! I did my best Killian Jornette impersonation while trying to dance down the steep descents remembering all the advice I was given on downhill running by members of the TAURA group (Trail and Ultra Running Australia) on facebook from a few weeks earlier and had some fun staying upright!



I had a quick stop at Mundaroo campsite and continued on, only to realise after about 1.5km that I was going the wrong way so had to turn around. The marker to point to go through the campsite to rejoin the track was either missing or non-existent so that made me cranky. This piece of track was pretty rough with fallen trees and littered with bark – I seen a wombat that looked like he had been literally flattened by a falling tree. No kidding! I have a photo! I was in a bad mood for a bit after the Mundaroo section and apologised to Jacqui that I would snap out of it soon.



Lots more desolation through the logged pine forest where I noticed rows of small pines all recently planted in amongst the blackened ground. We stopped in the middle of it to have an early lunch where I took off my shoes and rolled my feet on balls while I ate.



The track after Munderoo was a bit rough and Jacqui trudged along behind me pushing the bike... so at one stage she said she would meet me around the other end of the track when it reappeared on the forest road but when I came out she wasn't there. Apparently she had left the bike to follow me on foot with a note in the dirt on the road for poor David to pick up the bike but he didn't know where she was and thought she was lost. I wasn't stopping as I knew they would sort it out... as they did.

It wasn't long after I seen a live wombat - it had its nose in the hole thinking I couldn't see it because it couldn't see me but with the rest of its body left exposed. Silly wombat. I took a video while I got a closer look and it wasn't until it realised that I could indeed see it that it scurried into the hole.



The track alternated between some pretty trails through dense bush to steep forest roads until I got to the top of a section where I could see the snow-capped mountains again and was in awe, they looked so beautiful. When I went

to take some photos I realised I had service so I even did a live video in my facebook group to show everyone... I couldn't resist sharing the view!

The mountains were mesmerizing and the view ever-changing with the snow-capped alps re-appearing from time to time as I made my way toward the next log book and finally, what goes up... must



*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



come down right? Lots of downhill followed without the choice of whether to run or not because of the steep gradient but they were crazy fun to run down.

I could feel a couple of hotspots on my left foot so I stopped at the beginning of the open farmland to apply some fixamol and some powder on my big toe. Towards the end of the day I started to feel pain in my right inner quad (or VMO above my knee) and the top of my right foot. I sent Robert a text while I had service to meet me as soon as he could and bring some more fixamol along with a change of shoes.



After surviving his first snake encounter so far, he crossed the creek to meet me on the side of a hill. I was glad he also brought me a cup of tea and some water to top up my flasks. I re-dressed the hotspots, changed my shoes and kept going. This section just dragged on and on and on... my



right leg not enjoying the ride! (I think subconsciously I was using my right leg to bare the impact a little more to protect my left leg on the downhills but I never felt anything actually happen to it to make me think that it might get sore later. The longer grass and cow paddies made it a little tough on tired legs and the pain in the top of my right foot and knee got worse. So the last section of about 5km along Lankey's Creek to the road followed the creek seemed like an eternity to get through. For a few weeks before I had been having trouble with my shoe laces coming loose and moreso on the right so I seemed to be continually tightening my shoelaces - maybe the pain in my right foot was a result of that I thought.

Robert came in to meet me again about 1km off the road. Once we got back to the ute I tried massaging and taping my knee but it was so sore, almost like it was bruised. I walked the last few km's along the road to Lankey's Creek Campsite and wanted to put my legs in the creek but because of the blackberries and the steep slope down to the water, I couldn't bring myself to go down there and opted for ice packs instead. Jacqui and David were there with their caravan and gave us both tea and coffee – the offer of a warm shower in their van was too good to refuse.



After my daily ritual of my tailwind recovery shake along with stretching and rolling, we settled for noodles for dinner as I didn't have much of an appetite. I massaged my legs for as long as possible rubbing as much voltaren gel into my knee as possible before we went to bed hoping that it would be good to go in the morning. With very little service I managed to get a message to Peter to tell him that Lankey's Creek had broken me. He replied "What are you saying?" and I told him my knee was really sore but I wasn't quitting... I would walk the rest of the way if I had to - I was so close now with only 116km to go!

### Day 8 – Lankey's Creek to Woomargama National Park – 51km... 1634m elevation



We got a pretty good amount of sleep without using the inflatable mattress and were up reasonably early and my knee felt much better – I used some rock tape for support and headed out onto the bitumen road with Jacqui and it wasn't long before we turned off onto the forest roads and she retired in the hope of catching up with us again later. I was still running when I could but not long after turning off onto Tin Mines Road where



there was lots of good running to be had ahead, my knee started to get really painful again. I was stopping regularly to try different taping strategies including how my physio had taped the opposite knee for ITB

*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



friction with rigid tape back in February. That worked well for a little while but I didn't have it tight enough and the sweat caused it to come loose after a while.

Robert was able to get service enough to google 'how to' tape with rocktape so we tried that as well. In the end, I added a stretchy bandage, purely because it made it feel better.

We stopped for lunch at Samuel Bollard Campsite where there were a family were just leaving on a 4wd expedition. Robert cooked me some scrambled eggs with chicken and although the chicken didn't taste very good, the eggs were great. A quick cup of tea before I started out again and was running as much as I could when my



knee would allow. Still following a bush road, I heard motorbikes. I looked behind me to see Jacqui and David's car come into view with the sound of the motorbikes were getting closer from the opposite direction. I turned around again and Jacqui and David were out of sight so I let the riders know that there was a vehicle coming as well and thankfully they slowed down. So then I had Jacqui with me again for a good while. I was so over walking so much because of my knee especially while on roads where I could have been running so much more. By this time the top of my foot had tightened up as well and I tried changing shoes. After a while I tried to relax into the pain of my leg so that my knee could do what it wanted and it proved to work and I was able to run for longer periods at a time.

Still on Tin Mines Road, we stopped at Norths Lookout to admire the view and had some quick photos and passed the motorbike riders



once again. Not long after, "Phoebe" came for a quick visit while I was thinking about our friends Carol and Beth's marathon training and we laughed a lot (the Phoebe from the TV sitcom "Friends" who had a really 'unique' running style)... We passed the "Ball" on Ball Road – it looked like a bomb or something out of a war. Another long hill awaited through a pine plantation before Jacqui left us with the hope of catching up again the next day.



The next section was on bush trails that I wasn't sure how long it would take to get through so after grabbing my torch, a thermal and a top up of tailwind and food, I entered the bush where I ran along some nice single track – this part of the track looked well used as it was clear with lots of bush scenery to take in. However, the next section was awful. There were fallen trees that I had to climb over and rocks and sticks that had me almost rolling my ankles. I was cursing the alphas that I had changed into because the souls were not good in this terrain and didn't have enough ankle support. The sun was starting to disappear so I was



glad I had my head torch but I wondered how much more of this crap I had to endure before I hit the forest roads again and where I knew Robert would be waiting.



Finally I came to a steep gorge where Robert was waiting on the other side, but to get to him I had to traverse the steep descent and cross a small creek at the bottom. I was so thankful I had my poles as they had already paid for themselves over and over by now! There was another couple of km's before the log book and so many fallen trees... not recently fallen and Robert complained that no one had been in here for years to clear any of it. It was

dark before I got to the log book where I made my entry before hitting the road again to finally stop at the 360km mark where I would start from the next morning.

*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



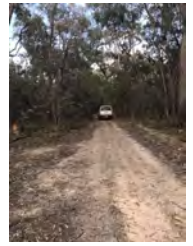
We made camp nearby in a gateway off the track but were a little wary of possible wild dogs and other animals so we were extra careful about leaving everything as we found it. Even though I'd been able to run a fair bit during the afternoon my knee was now really stiff and possibly swollen. It got to the point of squatting and balancing with only one leg to pee while I held the stiff leg straight out to the side... I know... visualisation of this image is necessary to feel my frustration at the time!

So, we had dinner, I massaged my legs, retaped my feet where needed, stretched a little and had my shake while Robert prepared a dinner of steak and salad – his cooking skills over the last week had improved so much and he made a point of telling me that this would not continue once we returned home!

### Day 9 – Woomargama National Park 360km mark to The Hovell Tree – 70.24km... 934m elevation



We didn't bother with the air mattress again and had a reasonably good nights rest apart from my hips feeling the ground... until we woke up to hear heavy footsteps outside the tent. What were they from I wondered... Brumbies, kangaroo or maybe a wombat? They were so heavy I could feel the ground vibrate! We waited a little while until we thought whatever it was had gone before we got up and quickly got ready for the day ahead.



I could finish today... 66 kms was all that was left and there was no way I was stopping with just 10 or 15km to go – I was so excited that I was really going to finish this thing! I rang my physio Deidre while I was getting ready as I'd sent her some photos of my knee and she said to call her. We chatted about which was the best way to tape and she confirmed the method I used the day before with the rigid tape was correct but tighter this time.



My knee was loosening up and felt pretty good with the rigid tape in place so after a few quick cheeky snaps inspired by Usain Bolt, I started my day with a nice easy shuffle with Robert driving ahead to where he would leave me until we met again at Bowna Wyma Road. This section started with a newly fenced area and a gate with a sign that said, NO ENTRY, Trespassers will be prosecuted! So I followed the fenceline right down until I came to a corner. The fence from here was also new and had huge trees scattered all over the ground from the gully up the steep hill on the other side with no markers in site, nor a style. On the opposite side of the fence there was an internal dirt road that would have been so much easier to run/hike along. All of a sudden I remembered Peter telling me that when I came to a gate saying NO ENTRY, to ignore that and go over the gate. So I rang Peter and asked if this was the same section he was talking about because I was in the gully where there was space for me to get under the fence at this point and he said yes, I was on the right track.

After another few km's of the same new fence, I could see a marker to my left but no way of getting over the fences as the style hadn't been put back at the fence and was there laying in scrub. I rang Peter again to see how he got over and he said he found a way further up. I couldn't see anywhere to get over or through so I picked up the style and partly leaned it on the fence so it pushed the top barb down enough for me to climb the style and jump to the next paddock from the barb.

The track followed fence lines through private property for about another 10km before Robert came out to meet me again for the last couple of km's to the road. Geez he's a good man! LOL ... Peter rang back just as I was approaching the road to make sure I found my way through that section without getting lost - I was glad as I thought my phone a friend option may have been wearing thin!

*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



My knee had been great for all this time with the tape holding well... until I got to the road. With all the downhill running again, it was starting to hurt again.

The day was pretty warm so when we returned to the ute, Robert topped up my tailwind and water and stayed just ahead while I ran along the roadside. By this stage, I had ditched the half and half mixture of naked and berry and was just going with straight berry as it contained caffeine.



My knee was getting stiffer again and nothing I tried made any difference. A hotspot on my heel was hurting again. I'd ignored it for too long thinking it was just the crease in my heel rubbing on the innersole. Finally I stopped to find a blister had formed, so I popped it to release the fluid and dressed it with one of my little layered foam donuts. I kept going but the pain was increasing in my knee so I was walking even more.



Finally, we had turned off the main road passed Hume Dam into a stock route and when we stopped for lunch of some hot noodles and I decided to try another way to tape my knee. A very unconventional method, but it worked fabulously. By starting at the outer base of my knee with rocktape, I wound the

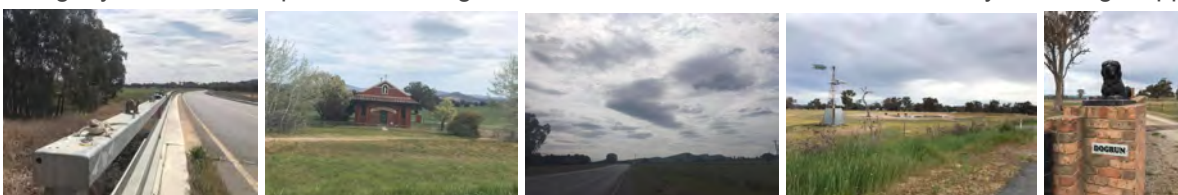
tape behind my knee to the inside and then bringing it up across the quad pulling up the VMO to take the tension off the tissue. I later reinforced it with an extra piece of tape right next to it to make it wider and bingo... I could run again in no time.



Jacqui and David appeared not long after, Jacqui had her trusty steed again and was going to follow along again in parts. They were often in contact with Robert about coming to join me but just in case it didn't work out, Robert didn't tell me as I didn't need a distraction of wondering when or if anyone was coming.

Anyway, after a couple of stops to add some fixamol to the ends of my unconventional rock-taping to stop it from peeling off from sweating and adding another piece right next to the other for reinforcement, I set off to run intervals from there on in.

We came across a bridge with a heap of little toys all stuck to the railings, a bit weird but anyway, then a church in the middle of nowhere... We turned off onto the old Highway which ran parallel to the Hume Highway and I was run/walking between the guideposts for quite a while. A left hand turn off seen us heading up a rural road where we came across a driveway with two big dog statues sitting on the brickwork. Stupid me thought it would be funny to have a photo with my finger stuck up one of the dogs noses and in the short time it took to take the photo I was covered in tiny black ants that were angry I had invaded their path and proceeded to bite me all over! I danced around hitting myself while Jacqui was brushing off the ones I couldn't see or feel until finally the biting stopped!



*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*



## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



I kept moving and counting down the km's and only stopped to restock my food and water. Robert went into town at one stage and got some coke – it was icy cold and so delicious I wanted to keep that feeling in my mouth for as long as I could. Jacqui hadn't had coke for so long and I felt bad for convincing her to try some... it was no sugar after all. LOL ... She asked for a refill even after I had drank straight from the bottle so she was hooked and it gave her a bit of a boost for a few hours.



At times I just needed to switch off and listen to my music so I had a good few kms of constant running/shuffling before I came to a sign that said Hume and Hovell Tree 28.7km... WTF... they just keep moving the goal post. I thought from what I had already done today that I had 26km to go? Bummer, but I was still chipping away at it and getting the job done regardless!



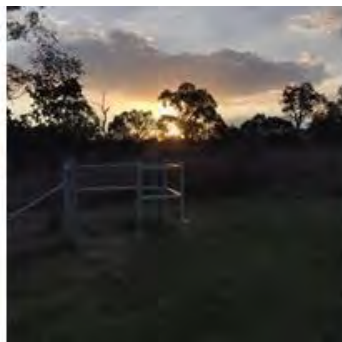
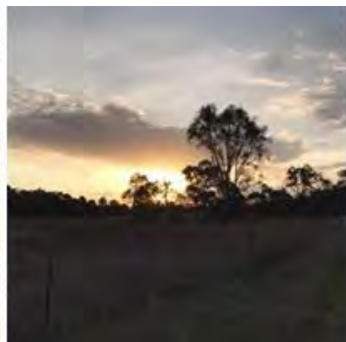
Getting closer to Albury we came across an old Hume and Hovell sign near the fence with a style that led to a picnic table in a paddock. We resolved that the track must have passed through there at some stage and may have been changed since unless it was just a rest area - which I now think could have been Judges Mount picnic area.

The blister on my heel was really hurting now as was the top of my right foot but I kept going along the road to Tabletop Park and along Kwanna Road which was all bitumen.

When we reached the Parklands 4.2km from Kinross Pub, I stopped to check on the blister on my heel. It was getting so big, so I stuck it a few times with a splinter needle to release the fluid, dressed it, changed my shoes and was on my way again. It stung like crazy for a few hundred meters before it settled down.



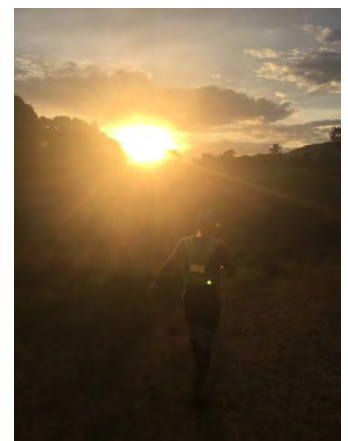
Then my right big toe felt pressure, so I stopped to take the silicon hoody off – getting the long compression socks off and back on again was a challenge in itself but felt so much better for it as that blister had actually healed during the last few days.



The track was nice through here with quite a few small bridges scattered along the way and it wasn't long before we hit the surrounding roads and streets of Thurgoona on the way into Albury. The sun was going down and Robert thought I would need my long sleeves to run in so I had a quick change of top and put on the safety vest. As it turned out, it was really quite warm and it wasn't long before I was wishing I still had my singlet on. Jacqui was starting to get a few niggles so she stopped to find David and catch up again later with her trusty steed.

Robert was waiting in a side street where I changed back into the singlet - it was too hot running in long sleeves. I decided to continue again without my head torch because I thought the street lights would be ample light... how wrong was I? It wasn't long before I was lost already. When talking to Robert on the phone, I crossed a road where I could clearly see a marker that pointed to the left but for some reason I went straight ahead into a reserve behind a heap of houses before realising I had gone the wrong way. Robert found me and I was soon back on the track but with my torch this time...

It was now dark and Jacqui reappeared on her steed equipped with lights, a safety vest and a headlamp so we were all lit up along the streets of Albury. I was now just so



*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

## HUME & HOVELL TRACK

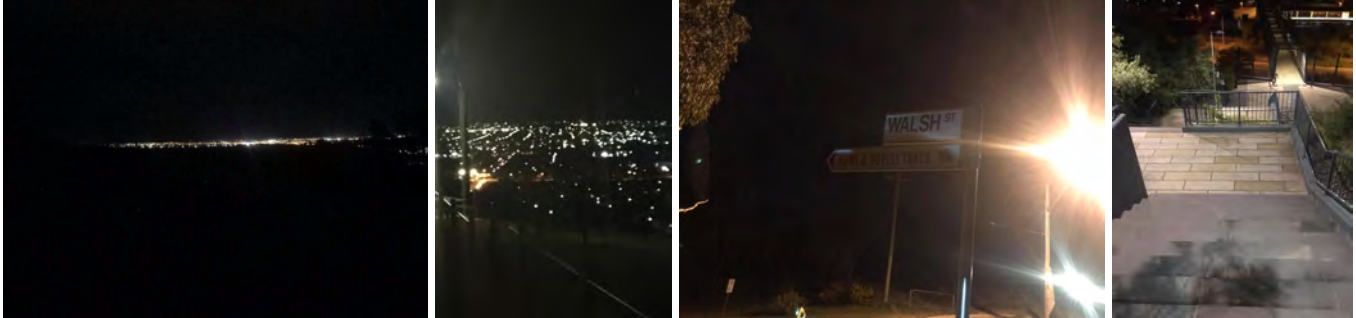


focussed to finish I didn't want anything but water and Robert kept popping up at random places to take empty bottles only to reappear not long after with full ones.

The track took a turn off the streets and along the Murray River where we got lost again by missing a marker that pointed up this dirty great hill to a lookout. Robert came to meet us halfway down the hill and I told him to take the bike from poor Jacqui because it would have taken her forever to get to the top along the single little trail otherwise. Finally we were at the top of the lookout where we had a spectacular view of the lights of Albury below.



All the track markers from here were on sign posts and light posts through the streets so it was a little different than looking for the usual markers. My garmin was almost out of battery as well as my phone and headphones. I grabbed a charger from Robert and gave my watch a bit of a charge before I switched it over to my phone (while running as now there was no stopping me), the headphones would have to last!



They said I only had 5km to go, but they had told me that before damn it... the goal posts had moved again!

There were a few people out riding bikes and we were cruising down a hill with a rider coming towards us climbing the hill with ease... Jacqui and I called him a show-off but I don't think he heard.

The track made a few turns before finally coming to a fairly long and high concrete enclosed bridge crossing the railway tracks which was pretty cool to run over before we hit more concrete paths that eventually lead to the Hovell Tree.

Robert appeared for one last time asking what I needed. All I wanted was more water so handed him the empty which he returned with in what seemed like no time at all.



I had relaxed into a cruisy pace and was so focussed on finishing I hadn't felt any pain from anything for so long now... just run! I crossed a few more bridges before one final bridge with the very last of the track markers on the other side of the park before I finally found Robert and David waiting near a tree that I ran around thinking I would do a lap of honour only to hear him say it was the wrong tree, you idiot!

After a quick victory lap of the actual Hovell Tree, I couldn't believe I had finally done it! "We" had done it!

After all that planning, training and thinking about nothing else but this epic adventurous expedition, I had done it! I was so overwhelmed with the emotion and the finality of the whole adventure that I couldn't even cry when I thought I would be a blubbering mess, especially after 70km on the last day.



*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



It wasn't until I watched the video of myself afterwards that I actually shed a few tears! Still on a high, we headed to the Bended Elbow for just one celebratory beer with David and Jacqui before heading to the Hovell Tree Inn (of course) where Robert had booked us a room for the night that even had a spa! I couldn't drink all the beer but it was good to chat to them and thank them before saying goodbye. I had weighed myself before I started and was interested to see what had happened after everything my body had done - I jumped on the scales in the motel and was surprised to see that I had only lost around 800 grams during the whole adventure!



So even though I didn't stick to my original itinerary, I was so happy to have still finished on October 2, within the 9 days I had originally planned – 8 days, 12 hours and 39 minutes to be exact and a total of over 450km on foot plus 11km by boat and 10,843m of elevation gained.

For the next week or two, I had stomach issues and couldn't eat very much at a time... I think it shrunk from eating just small amounts for the duration.



This was undoubtedly THE biggest challenge of adventure and endurance that I have ever undertaken and will always be one of my greatest achievements. I learnt so much about myself and about Robert. TEAM CAHILL worked really well for the most part with 'hardly' a cross word in 9 days and hope that we can do it all again one day!

So its with many thanks to my tribe of supporters including Kylie Bloor who has always had time to listen and has worked her magic on my aging body; Jen Saul for the great company; Jacqui and David Veal who gave up their holidays to be a small part of this adventure; coach Dan Benton for believing in me even when I thought he didn't; Maree Doyle for sharing the adventure from its conception, putting up with me chewing her ear off and talking about nothing else for over 12 months and joining me for the memorable boat ride and the first part of day two; and Chong (Jade Cowled) for organising a boat and bringing it down after he'd been at work all day and for persisting when it wouldn't start in the morning to get us safely across the dam. Thanks to Daniel Patterson for the loan of the boat as well!



I will be forever grateful of the support, knowledge, guidance, belief and faith of the lovely Peter and Val Fitzpatrick. Peter's knowledge of the track as well as his selflessness was nothing short of incredible, to give up his time to come and run with me for two days while we made some pretty special memories as I'm sure Robert and Val did while waiting around for us at different locations ... memories and friendships that will no doubt last us a lifetime!

And last but really not least... thank you to Robert for going above and beyond the role of husband and bestie as my one and only crew – your love, dedication, support, navigation skills, general knowledge and overall organisation to keep me on track was nothing short of amazing.

So there you have it... I am the first female to complete the entire track solo from end to end and in doing so, I have recorded a Fastest Known Time (FKT) of 8 days, 12 hours and 39 minutes! I'm still pinching myself that I actually did it!



*Wow... what an incredible adventure!*

## DREAM, BELIEVE, ACHIEVE 2018

*"The body achieves what the mind believes!"*

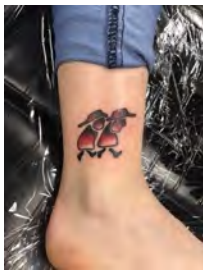
## HUME & HOVELL TRACK



The next day we revisited Hovell Tree Park and I gave The Hovell Tree the mighty big hug that it so deserved, well I did anyway, after everything I went through to meet it.



We spent the next two days in Albury playing tourists and went looking for a momento with the little feckers on it but found nothing, not even in the Albury tourist information centre. The next day we went out to the Hume Weir on our way to Wodonga where I got a tattoo of the little feckers on my ankle.



For the next two weeks on was on a high like no other... the Hume and Hovell Ultra event was coming up in Tumbarumba on October 13 and Peter had asked if I would speak to the runners about my adventure after race briefing after the dinner on the Friday night.

I was so nervous about speaking publicly but took on the challenge. I'd had a few stomach issues for a little while and was glad to be able to keep a couple of beers down for a little bit of dutch courage. Peter introduced me and presented me with a track marker proving that he was indeed listening to my dribble on top of Mt Garland. Surprisingly, I enjoyed giving a brief description of my experience albeit with a shaky voice reading from my phone and even found it a little exhilarating and made me realise that I will never get tired of talking about it.



I had fallen in love with the area and the next day we went for a drive to Paddy's River Falls - it is such an amazing place that I asked Robert why can't we just live here?... and then we volunteered at The Pines checkpoint for a few hours. I was so envious of all the runners and loved being able to help them as they came in after running 70km - the 100km runners with 30km to go and the Milers with almost 100km to the finish. One was a bit cheeky and asked why I wasn't running, had I gone soft?

Fast forward to a few weeks later and my body is recovering, blisters have all but healed, toenails are still falling off but mentally, I know the experience has definitely changed me. I can't explain how... but I feel different. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I now know that I am capable of so much more than I ever anticipated or dreamed? The struggle of settling back into a daily routine with no real goals for the future is real especially when you start coming down from the high after being focussed on such an audacious goal for so long. However, I have an overwhelming sense of pride and happiness that I have been able to fulfil such a fantastic dream and the personal growth that has been realised is really quite profound.

If you've made it to this point, you have shown tremendous endurance skills on another level... thanks for coming along for the ride on my epic adventure!

Cheers... xxx

Tania... aka Eagleangel

***"The body achieves what the mind believes!"***