

Celebrating Australia Day with a bush run with a difference. Organised by Running Wild is a 5km loop course around Knapsack Park, Glenbrook, in rugged mountains. The course has a mixture of single track, fire trail, steep descents and steep climbs. You can run as a Solo runner, pairs relay or team's relays for 3 hours or 6 hours. This is a tough trail run, my current road 5k time is 22 minutes, on this trail my average time was 38 minutes per lap of 5.1k.

Prior to race start, runners gather for a briefing and to sing the Australian National Anthem, many runners have chosen to run in Australian colours. Solo runners and the first runner of each pair or team then run a lap of the oval to break up the field and past the timing mats for the first lap. When you finish each lap there is water, sports drink and fruit to re-fuel and for safety you carry 500mls of water with you. About half way there is water to refill your bottles. At registration you are given a collapsible cup to carry with you.

I start my first lap aiming to run 6 laps and wary of the hot weather and high humidity, the plan is to run the first 3 laps quick to allow for the eventual slowing down. The track is very narrow in places and I pass slower runners on the right where I can and move to the left to allow faster runners to pass me. The first uphill is gentle but then the downhill and twisting turns start. I stumble a few times on the exposed rocks and tree roots, but stay upright as my trail shoes take grip on the loose dirt. The steep downhill section, down rock face is soon over and a wide and flatter section allows me to stride out, I stumble again but stay upright. Then the very steep uphill, walking pace and a tough climb. The track weaves in and out of trees up then down, well-marked with ribbons to keep you on course. The elevation gain is 827 meters and the elevation loss is 832m.

Nearing the completion of lap 1, I am on time for my 6 laps. Lap 2 done then lap 3 almost completed when I take a heavy fall, thankfully the cycling gloves I am wearing cushion my fall, but slightly injury my knee. Lap 4, I am behind time and at the start of lap 5 I need to increase my pace to make the 3 hour cut off. Looks like I will make it, when my injured leg cramps, 300 metres from the timing mats, I stop, strap my leg and make the cut-off with 10 seconds to spare. If you reach the timing mats just under the 3 hours or 6 hours you can run another lap. I continue on, slowly, cramp again at 27k in both legs, loose a few minutes stretching, take an energy gel and run on.

Finish my 6<sup>th</sup> lap with a total time of 3:50:52 and covered 31.15k. This is not a race but an adventure that will always stay with you. Are you up for the Challenge?

Stephen Mifsud

P.S. Michael when I see the photos I will send one.

