

### June blog update – *why?*

When I last shared my thoughts we were only a week or two out from UTA, which is now over and done with for another year! It was a magic weekend; I finished feeling strong in the 22k with a time of 3:20, but the highlight of the weekend was both volunteering and seeing off all my amazing friends competing in the 50 & 100K races. I also got to meet Sam and Anna from Rapid Ascent at the UTA expo which was awesome! Everyone loves a good race report so if you are keen you can read my [full race report here](#).

So, now that I've started training for 100KM in earnest, it's beginning to come up in conversation with a few people, both runners and non-runners. The typical response from my non running friends is a combination of wow, what?! and why???. Of course my running friends invariably get it, and their response is more like where, when and woohoo! :)

Numerous times I've found myself unable to answer that 'why' question concisely. Why travel 100 kilometres on foot, in a world of cars and technology and automated everything? My 'why' seems like such a personal thing; a thing I wouldn't often share unless pressed to do so, and if I'm in a face to face conversation I mostly shrug it off, saying, 'Oh, I just want to see if I can do it... I can't run fast so I run far instead. Ha ha.' Change subject.

But this is an overly simplistic reply; the truest answer is one that many endurance athletes would identify with intrinsically: I want to find my breaking point. I want to know where my edges are. How far can I go? How deep is my well of strength and determination? How relentless can I be?

I might be off in the trees a bit with this post but this is such an important part of running for me, and an explanation of how the lessons you learn from running translate so perfectly into other parts of your life, and vice versa. My Why is to be a lifelong student of running. I will need to remember my Why when it's cold and dark at kilometre 87; the coastal views that have distracted me having faded with the sunset, and I just want to go home and cry.

They say ultra running is 90% mental and developing a gritty mindset is something that I try and build into every day. These kind of thoughts also conveniently serve to occupy my overactive brain on long runs.

In accomplished ultra runner Nikki Kimball's documentary about her FKT attempt on a 273 mile trail in Vermont, she talks about her chequered history with mental health; and describes her experiences with depression as her strength. When I first watched this movie a while back, this concept struck me like a lightning bolt. Pain, loss, anxiety, addiction, mental health struggles and all the other things so common amongst ultrarunners are the very things that give us the mental strength and tenacity to succeed and flourish in our sport. They give us grittiness. We have been through so much and so much has happened to us, things often beyond our control. Hard things; things that controlled us. With long distance running however, we Choose Our Hard. We push back and stare down the Hard.

The Hard can of course be physical too. Slightly off topic, but last year I spent two painful months with an undiagnosed sinus infection that presented as acute nerve pain in my teeth. The pain would hit me suddenly like an ice pick in the mouth, taking my breath away and bringing me to tears at work. It sucked. But every time a wave of pain gripped my nerves I thought to myself, just sit with it as long as you can, this is great mental training. And this was well before I read Travis Macy's *The Ultra Mindset*, where he notes the mantra his father often used when presented with tough stuff outside of running - 'It's all good mental training'. Snap.



Little things like this; perhaps not as painful but still distracting or frustrating, are a gold mine for me in building my mental tenacity. That rock in your shoe that's bugging you - don't shake it out, leave it there. How long can you leave it there? Longer than yesterday?

As I said my thoughts are a bit random and existential this month, but there has also been some actual running going on so let's stop navel-gazing and lighten the tone a bit shall we.

I've set a date for a 5 - 6 hour run along the Royal National Park's coast track; a route that looks like a good amalgam for the surf coast trail. Other than that I'm staying pretty local, getting my head around doing some long and relatively boring grinds, which are again more of a mental challenge than anything. I feel our local Woodford to Glenbrook fire trail is going to get a workout in the coming months. Another local trail at Faulconbridge is a little sandy underfoot too so I'll try and get there as much as possible.

I'm concentrating on running happy, staying relaxed, and practicing my mental tricks in training while I still feel good, so that come race day, if everything turns to shit, I'll have a well-practiced mental bag of tricks that I can hopefully use to pull myself out of the dark patches without too many issues. These include smiling broadly to myself like a crazy person, and acknowledging that all progress is important, no matter how small. I count to 10 over and over in my head a lot (incidentally this helps get my kids up hills on bush walks too), and imagine I'm an ant... (stay with me here...) see how fast those little buggers move on their tiny legs? Small quick steps; high cadence. Lots of little steps add up in the end! All progress is good progress.

The bulk of my training is going to be focussed on low heart rate, relatively 'easy' efforts, with the aim of building endurance and getting comfortable with consistent pacing. I've always been crap at pacing, tending to have spurts of energy interspersed with hiking. I know this works well for some and of course the Galloway method is very popular, but personally I want to get better at keeping it slow and consistent and just getting into a good rhythm.

I'm also stockpiling all the SCC race reports I can find and reading them voraciously, and have spent a good hour flicking between the detailed 'maps.me' course map and the course description; imagining what the terrain might be like, getting a feel for the hard parts, and learning more about the area. I'm looking longingly at the fantastic training runs on the course that Rapid Ascent have scheduled for the next few months but will have to just be an armchair traveller at the moment, instead I will look forward to exploring an exciting, totally new place to run on race day!

Catch you next time!

