

# North Face Endurance Championship, Dec 5th 2009 Marin Headlands, San Francisco, 50 miles.

Race report by Verity Tolhurst

\* The race is held within and over the visually stunning Marin Headlands. Terrain is both fire roads and single track with some hectic/technical descent sections.

- \* Total elevation gain 10,731 feet
- \* Lowest elevation point 40 feet.
- \* Total elevation change 21,462 feet.
- \* Highest elevation point 1,822 feet.

I had thrown myself in the deep end of the pool entering this event after being inspired by the strength and power of Kami Semick at the World 50km Road Championships in Gibraltar.

Fortune favours the brave! they say so off I went in to the darkness, headlamp firmly affixed knowing the longest adventure of my lifetime had commenced.

Running in the dark was new?...surreal, Oh NO! a bad direction by an aid station attendant and at least ten of us got a bum steer, we quickly turned around 1km down the wrong track cussing amongst ourselves. Unfortunately the blind leading the blind we did it again, but this time far further and far higher....

A wrong turn up a solid ascent! the peak reached it dawned upon all of us, the Japanese woman ahead had stopped bewildered stating "I not now which way?" Damn!!! I mumbled, "bloody hell" I stated out loud followed quickly by "you're kidding me".

I had extended myself by simply signing up for 80km of hard core running, I had just run an extra 4 or so km's that I possibly could not afford.

I have always lived by the rule of focusing on next steps, the power of choosing my response to difficult and or frustrating scenarios and challenges. Immediately I deleted my angst regarding this, noted it was a lesson and I had to choose to press forward regardless and believe in myself and my legs...

From here it was ascent after descent after ascent, every mix of stunning scenery imaginable. At one point I found myself wondering if I had landed in heaven or Narnia perhaps. A dense heavily wooded section, mossy, green, dark but beautiful given the sunlight had been thwarted by the intensity of the woods.

At some point I was amazed at the views, the Pacific Ocean far far away down the steep sides of the climbs. A technical section had me thinking I may accidently slip over a massive tree branch as I skipped across or under them and be swallowed up in to Alice in Wonderland's playground. It was so damn beautiful. The imagination runs wild...

My mental mud map of the course slowly emerged at each aid station, I continually felt compelled to dig deep, ignore the quads yelling at me on the descents and move on to the next one. I was full of commitment to finish and place top ten in spite of the mistakes early on.

One thing occurred to me? I noticed some women I had been tracking down were dawdling at the aid stations! these opportunities I snatched and in true Aussie spirit grabbed exactly what I needed fast and kept on trucking.

My wing man, fiancée and awesome crew man Randy was as planned waiting to run the last 10km with me. I was thrilled to see him, I focused on this knowing I had him beside me for the last haul.

He was patient as I walked, ran, jogged and grimaced at times over the last hard sections. Once we hit the flat and I sniffed that finish line I found exactly what I hoped I had saved, my last little breath of wind!

We were pumped, I spotted a woman 400m away and without speaking we knew it was another 50 miler and I just had to try to take one more scalp.

She looked as we came upon her and was so gracious and lovely, giving me a hurrah as we flew by. Where did I find this wind? it still makes me wonder but I can not express enough how much it ROCKED crossing that line.

So there tis...

Final stats! 50 miles tick, 8th female, 54th of 208, 8th female of 43 finisher and a total run time of 9 hours and 40 minutes...12 seconds.

To all my fellow ultra runners! You must come and do this excellent adventure.

Verity