

How much do the last
5 years mean to you?



By Kirrily Dear 2013



“Every morning you have two choices. To continue your sleep with dreams or wake up and chase your dreams.” *(unknown)*

0km Twofolds Bay, Eden
5:25am

For the last 3 years this was the time when I would say my last best wishes to the runners and walk off to take my place behind the barriers. It was at that moment the penny dropped. This year was different. This year I stayed put. It was time to step up and reckon myself in the company of Australia's top ultra runners. Surreal excitement. Dogged determination.

My target time was 42–43 hours. It focused me on a conservative early pace and also gave me a bit of breathing room inside the 46 hour cut-off should something go wrong.

My mind was clear, my nerves settled. I was ready. My running of C2K 2013 was going to be a celebration of all the effort so many people have put in over the last 5 years to make my dream a reality.



Jill Saker

Sue Horsfield

Luke Doyle

42km Last Place 11:20am

The morning had been completely relaxed, humour was high and Marina and I putted happily long sharing juicy stories from the past. I noticed about 15km in that a stabbing pain (ITBS) had started at the side of both knees. Not good but I was fairly sure if I did a proper job of ignoring it then the nasty uninvited guest would find something else to do. The bush was stunning, the weather perfect and there was a lovely sweeping downhill ahead. On I shuffled undeterred, sweeping left bend, sweeping right bend then... STAB!!

I was instantly hobbling, my right knee felt like it was under knife attack with every step a new wound. I stopped, stretched and started to walk gently down the hill and managed to raise a comfortable shuffle on the flats. No worries, I was still able to move and crew rendezvous was just ahead. I found a comfortable place where my knees groaned less but with every kilometre I was noticing the knock-on effects; hip pain, glutes tightening, pace slowing.

At around 40km I could no longer hide it from my crew. It was at that time race

medic Andy Hewat turned up and we drew on his experience to make a smart, tactical decision. I was going to 'pit' for a roadside grease and oil change.

Within 1km I was laying on the ground involuntarily yelping in pain as Luke and Andy pushed their elbows into my protesting muscles. Meanwhile Jill and Sue The Glue (so named for her ability to keep the wheels on and the show on the road) slathered me in sunscreen and with their best 'don't argue' faces directed me to consume food and drinks. It was just like a day spa... from hell. In any other sport it would be called abuse. In ultra it's called teamwork. Meanwhile I lay helpless, trying to find the funny side as I watch all the other runners pass me by with looks of concern that perhaps I was down for the count.

Twenty minutes later I was back on my feet and walking. I was going to walk for a while to let my muscles settle in. For some reason I felt the need to turn to my crew and ask; 'Am I in last place now?'



With the look on Jill's face I knew she was going to lie. 'No, Andy (the medic) will still be behind you. And we're behind you.' Nice try. The biggest race of my life and within a few short hours I had found myself dead last. I knew my current pace would have me struggle to beat the cut-offs. The enormous challenge that is the C2K had just got that much bigger.

I was just starting to put those thoughts out of my mind and focus on the road ahead when Paul and Diane (Race Directors) pulled up in their car and Paul jumped out. There are certain words you never want to hear out of a Race Director's mouth among those being, "I want to share some information with you so you can make an informed decision". My heart sunk. Really? This early?

50km The Man from Snowy River 12:30pm

Onward the travelling circus moved.

Fortunately the piece of information Paul shared was not my imminent failure but that the White Knight was ahead of his usual pace.

The White Knight is an ultramarathon god; Thor in walking boots. His aura renders ultra newbies like me speechless. He is the only being to ever start all 10 C2K events and has completed 8. His spiritual command of the universe empowers him to manipulate time so he is always just inside the cut-offs and anyone who finds themselves in his wake risks becoming a C2K casualty.

When I was on the ground, I was helpless to do anything other than watch the boots of the White Knight glide past. My mission now was to regain the lost ground but that's no simple feat. It was going to require cunning and patience. Too hard a surge and I would pay for it later. Only nerves of steel and a steady mind would get me through.

When I first started ultra-running I developed my 'man from snowy river' strategy. Too slow to worry about being at the pointy end, I would hold back and then my consistency would move me up through the pack. It's an image that helps me find that calm place and run my own race rather than push beyond my abilities. At that moment I reflected on those days, how much my running and strength had changed and

then realities collided.

Here I was shuffling my way toward snowy river country in the biggest race of my life, and lessons from the very beginning were going to renew my focus and inspiration. Rocky Hall appeared from around the bend, my crew, Paul and Diane all awaiting my arrival so they could pack up and move on.

I ran up to Diane and gave her a big hug. "I'm going to use my man from snowy river strategy", I whispered in her ear (ok it may have been more of a yell my ears were a bit blocked). We smiled. How prophetic those words would prove to be.

80km The White Knight Recaptured 4:40pm

In what seemed like moments I was at the base of Big Jack champing at the bit for the climb. It is the first long climb of the run and my legs wanted to stretch out.

At the base I powered past the crews and runners tending niggles and other needs before committing to the ascent. I could see other runners ahead and I used them as motivation to keep my momentum while at the same time constantly checking my own vitals to make sure I wasn't pushing too hard.

At the top of the climb I was back on the ground with more elbows in painful places but the muscle releases were coming quickly. Soon I was on the road again with a gentle downhill and then flat all the way into Cathcart. It was easier than easy running. The headwind was keeping the flies and sweat at bay. I couldn't believe our luck with the running conditions.

I caught up with Billy and enjoyed his company for a while. Cathcart came and went quickly, there was no stopping my legs. They were in the zone and I was happy to

make some ground while everything was working.

It was so much nicer being back with the pack. Crews were scattered along the road methodically attending to their runners' every need. One crewie came running back down the road with a Magnum icecream. Nice! Darn he just kept running past. All good reasons for more jokes and fun.

Turning onto Black Lake Rd my buoyant mood suddenly got an even bigger boost. There he was. The giant among giants. The White Knight was cresting the horizon. He was still a while ahead but that sighting gave hope.

Onward we plunged. The kilometres melting under our feet. On the downhills I would creep ever closer to the White Knight then the climbs would have him slip from my grasp. And so the battle wore on (I believe the White Knight was actually listening to Madonna and sucking on jubes for the

duration of this unbeknownst-to-him battle) until fortune favoured my persistence and the universe (via the RTA) delivered me a long, runnable downhill. I overtook the White Knight like an annoying little mosquito and celebrated with a cheer. My reward was a god-sized smile from the White Knight and heart-felt well done. I was back in the cut-off safety zone. Now I had to keep it.



Even the locals pay homage to the White Knight to ensure safe passage.
Photo: Kieron Blackmore

81km Eat Your Peas 4:50pm

Blessed be the downhill. It was lovely moment. It was late afternoon and the White Knight was now behind me. A moment at last to relax. My legs comfortably turned over and in that moment all was well with the world. I'm quite specific about it being a moment, aren't I? There's a reason for that.

It started out feeling a bit like a stitch in my stomach. A stitch that quickly became a cramp. A cramp that within a few steps became a full blown ache and my stomach was closed for business. I was breathing deeply and stretching my diaphragm in the hope that it was just my tired brain exaggerating a bit of lactic build-up. I have DNF'd two races this year because of stomach issues.

I knew I was going to be confronting this demon at some stage. May as well be now, right?



My crew were not far away so I would grab some ginger and give my stomach a break for a while. My crew had other ideas.

They had been doing some calculations and they had worked out I was way down on my calorie count. In the moment I reached them I was passionately imparting a rapid volley of expletives to describe how my stomach was feeling and they were hitting the panic button and telling me to eat. I ran off. It was like negotiating with a five year old to eat her peas.

We agreed I would try something when I got to the cattle grid a few kilometres ahead. Tough chance! Nothing had improved and Luke loomed on the horizon holding 2-minutes noodles and insisting I eat them. He almost got them thrown at him such was the state of the pain in my stomach. I managed to drink the fluid as a compromise.

We agreed to keep the crew car nearby until we got the issue sorted out. Five hundred metres at a time, four brains working away at a solution. I was approaching the car on one of these stretches when at last I was greeted with smiling faces, and in that very moment the same thing occurred to me.

As soon as I was in earshot we all said the same word; "Tailwind". I had been lucky enough to get some samples from

Tailwind Nutrition Australia. It is a powder you add to water and it covers all your nutrition / hydration requirements. I took the first few sips and my stomach settled straight away.

I comfortably got 500ml in and the crew was starting to relax that my calories were back where they needed to be. Miracle juice!

Life was good. Again. I couldn't believe how lucky we were. All the issues were getting sorted and the early evening air was crisp and invigorating and the farmlands of the Monaro stretched around us in all its vast glory.

PANG! (That was just my ITB, ignore it)

PING! (ignore it, really)



102km United Nations 7:45pm

Someone asked me recently; Why are women ultra runners always smiling?

I think this would be a good time to mention one of many women who inspire me. Katherine Switzer is an American runner and was one of the first women to ever run an official marathon. As women runners we owe Katherine and her contemporaries a lot. In 1967, Katherine Switzer defied racing authorities and ran the Boston marathon under the guise of a male entrant. Back then women weren't allowed to run marathons.

Apparently the reason women weren't allowed to run marathons is that doing so would cause our bodies to explode, our arms and legs would fall off and our teeth would drop out. Also we might not be able to cook and clean with the same efficiency for a few hours post-race and I am totally not even going to get started on the whole child-bearing thing. Thanks to Katherine and friends the 'authorities' gradually came to understand that maybe the sky wouldn't fall in and I mean gradually. It took until 1984 for the women's marathon event to be run at the Olympics. For many of us, the right to

run marathons is something that has emerged within our lifetime.

So why do we smile so much when we are running? We cherish our freedom, our strength and we love what we do.

We also have this little game we play.... That game is called 'chicking'.

It may seem a dreadfully offensive term to those outside the sport, but it's not. Ultramarathon is one of the few sports where men and women compete as equals. In our sport any genetic advantage is countered through the savvy use of one's brain and emotional brawn.

Chicking is a celebration of that fact. It's a celebration of the increasing freedom and recognition of the strength of women and quite frankly many of our male counterparts wear it as a badge of honour as it represents what is truly special about our sport. Fortune favours the brave and those who work their butts

off. Literally. A bloke has been 'chicked' when he has been decisively and permanently overtaken by a female.

So back to the race.

Stomach issues sorted, ITBs being duely ignored, it was time to start heading for the Dead Tree at 102km. Rumour has it that if you reach the Dead Tree by 17hrs you can walk from there and still make the cut-offs. I'm not sure that's actually true but it was satisfying to be on target for reaching the tree in 14 hours. We had worked so hard as a team to get my legs moving and to fight back from cut-off. Time to have some fun.



Then I remembered there were two male Americans still ahead of me. Well that just wouldn't do, there is national pride at stake here. When I gained sight of them they were running along nattering like it was some sort of tea party.

You may be happy to know I got them when they were at their most vulnerable. Showing all the politeness that we love about Americans they had pulled off the road to apply some lubricant to sensitive areas and were trying to do so discreetly. I felt it was important to repay their thoughtfulness in the best way I knew how so I cranked out the biggest wolf whistle I could muster. Two men with their hands down their pants looked up like startled roos.

Sepos chicked. Giggle factor extremely high. Nice downhill to celebrate.

I was having a right old party for one. My crew drove past and joined in the laugh with me and then headed off to await my arrival at the Dead Tree. Alone again I relaxed and enjoyed the early evening. I thought it impossible to be happier than I was in that moment.

TWANG! (oh shoosh up quads)

PING! (no I mean it, quit with all the attention seeking)

A short while later Paul and Diane pulled up in their car and jumped out – smiles all round. I was so happy to see them and also so happy I could show them I was running strong. I think those smiles on their faces had a bit of relief attached. Nearly 100kms under my belt and some good time up on those cut-offs.

When they drove off I felt a little bit flat. Nothing else to do but catch some more

runners to have some company. It didn't take long to spot Tomotaka the Japanese runner. He wore a very bright red tracksuit. I was watching him move along the road toward the Tree. There is a long ridge to climb in this section and as you summit the landscape becomes vast. Tomotaka was taking the time to soak up the view. It was fulfilling to see other people enjoying this beautiful country. We arrived at the Dead Tree together along with Pommie–Aussie Andy Sewell. A quick hug of the tree, my crew and everyone else's crew and I was on my way again.

A few minutes later Andy's crew car pulled up beside me and gave me the biggest laugh to top of a great day – "Well done back there", they said "You've just chicked the United Nations."

110km The Funniest Night Run in History 8:30pm

I think my crew had expected me to stop at the 106km checkpoint. Some of the best fun you can have at C2K is to do exactly what your crew don't expect and then watch them scramble. They were standing around having a right proper little chinwag so I sailed on

through and continued at pace on the downhill. It was dusk and the road undulating, perfect running conditions.

A few minutes later, loaded up with all our needs, Jill appeared by my side ready to start pacing me through the night. Fantastic – I was going to have company from here on in. Double fantastic – I could dump my fuel belt that had started to chafe. I handed to Jill and

she off-loaded it to the crew car while I kept running.

Now a quick tip to new crewies. When you are pacing it is ok to get back in the car to catch up your runner. You don't need to run them down. It's only cheating if the runner gets into the car. For you it's perfectly fine.

The crew car went past and Jill wasn't in it. I turned to see Jill chasing me down the road with a full laden pack, unsecured straps flying. The sight brought a smile to my face and I decided that I needed to do what any crew-respecting runner would do...run faster.

I started gasping I was giggling that hard. Eventually I decided to grow up and eased so Jill could catch me. The dark was closing in quickly we needed to get ready for the night. The next step was to don our head torches.

I love running at night with Jill. She is so much fun and thrives on the experience. She was hand-picked for my crew not only because she is a top-shelf mate, she is an incredibly strong night runner. You could say at night she truly shines.

Jill handed over my AYUP (head torch) and it felt strange in my hand. I looked down and then handed it back to Jill, 'It's a bit light, isn't it?' It took a moment for her to realise what I was referring to; there was no battery attached. So while Jill shines at night my head torch would not. 'No problem', I said, 'we'll grab it out of the crew car in a few minutes.'...'They've driven ahead 10km for a sleep'. Silence. Fortunately Jill being super organised had a backup head torch in her

pack and we continued on our merry way.

The Monaro Plains offer up a big, big night sky and it was full of stars. All night we laughed and carried on like school girls at a slumber party. Our silliness only interrupted by the spotting of another shooting star. Seven in total.

From lots of practice I have worked out I can keep the sleep monsters at bay by ensuring I keep my calories and hydration up. Thanks to the Tailwind that was easy. I had the staggers for a few minutes around 10pm but then no more.

Jill is the queen of games to play when you're running. We started with A-Z of albums or artists. She smashed me. Revenge had. The temperature started to drop so a quick roadside stop and I was suddenly looking like Wham had dressed the Michelin man, accessorised with hot pink thermal pants and gloves. Revenge had. Again.

On toward we plummeted and soon Dalgety and the first cut-off point was just 25 km away.

Time for another game. This time Jill excelled herself. The rules were like this. Jill would think of a song and tell me the

artist / band. She would then start to sing the song in her head. No sound, no mouth movements, she would just think it. Then my job was to guess the song. If I guessed right we sung the song.

First round Jill said 'The Beatles'. I relaxed, got into the zone and first guess...'Yellow Submarine'. BAM! Right first time.

Second round, 'REM'... 'Orange Crush' BAM! Right first time again.

I think you get the idea. The most number of guesses was three and that was on only one song. Either Jill was being super nice and compromising the rules for my benefit (note to the casual observer – that doesn't happen!) or there was something freaky going on.

Onward we rolled and the temperature dropped to -3 degrees. A chilly night for a run but yelling songs as loud as our lungs could bear, and a Sex Pistols inspired version of Star Spangled Banner, seemed to stave off frostbite. Soon we found ourselves in the last 5km to Dalgety.

PING!
PANG!
TWANG!
Opps.

148km The Toughest 13km 3:00am

What gets you through a race like this? Pure determination and a whole heap of continuous hard work by your crew.

We arrived in Dalgety (148km), the first cut-off point, with 3.5 hours up our sleeve. That's a big fight back from where we were at 42km. It is also the first checkpoint over half way so it is a big psychological win.

But don't start thinking arrival into Dalgety is all smooth sailing for runners. In this quaint little town lurks a den of evil that can bring even the strongest runner undone. It's called the Dalgety Hall. Warmth glows from its doors. Within resides Kelly and Sue with their welcoming smiles. They ply tired and cold people with their soups, pies, lollies, tea...and chairs.

I was in pain as we arrived into Dalgety but I refused to be lured. I kept my head down, there would be no eye contact from me. I weighed in and just kept walking. My crew meanwhile had made the fatal mistake and spotted to warm glow. They were mesmerised. I could hear the garbled, confused conversation so I plunged into the darkness of the night

alone. They would eventually notice I wasn't there. It may be hours but there were other crews around that could help if I needed assistance.

I was crossing the Dalgety Bridge before I heard the words echo through the night, "Where's Kirrily?". The race marshal told them I had already gone. I was on the road to Jindabyne before the caught me.

Coming into Dalgety my legs had decided to seize up so I flagged to my crew I would need another session of leg pulverising. If you start moving too slowly at this time of night it brings with it a bag full of complications; hypothermia, sleep monsters, boredom. Time gets vapourised.

The crew drove ahead to get organised. I wondered if perhaps I had done something to upset them when I arrived and the mat on the ground was conveniently located in the path of any ongoing trucks. Ok so that might be a bit of an exaggeration, but it was much closer to the side of the road than was comfortable. So a quick move and I was back in the scream factory.

We were a slick machine by now. I laid down, blankets thrown over the top of me, food in one end, pain out the other (you thought I was

going to say something else didn't you?!?). Unfortunately the cold was taking no prisoners and within a few short minutes I was uncontrollably shaking. With no more blankets easy at hand, Sue and Jill jumped on top of me to use their body warmth. What a sight it must have been. Yelps breaking the silence of the night and these two hot pink thermal clad legs stick out from a pile of blankets and bodies.

They don't call him 'Lucky Luke' for any old reason. If I had half a cell of humour left in me when I laid down, by the time I got up I was in 100% grumpy cow mode and Lucky Luke had just acquired the job of pacing me. Released from the body pancake stack I stood up and walked off. I really didn't give a hoot (stronger expletive used at time) about anything but getting one foot in front of the other. Luke and crew scrambled to clear up, get gear sorted and catch me.

By the time Luke reached me I was shivering badly. I was walking and shuffling as fast as my brain would let me but my body thermostat refused to hit the reset button. Luke didn't have any more warm clothes in the pack so he stripped off his jacket and gave it to me. It was about zero degrees. His thanks was a muffled grunt until I looked at how I was dressed. My hot pink thermal tights had now been beautifully complemented with a fluorescent orange puffer jacket. It made me smile and I went on to form a whole sentence which surprisingly only contained one expletive. Things were looking up.

Pacing during the witching hours is possibly one of the worst jobs on earth. As they say it's always darkest before the dawn. Everyone has been on the move for nearly 24 hours and while that time of day is beautiful, as a runner your brain just wants to punish you for being so stupid as to run through the night. Lucky Luke had a lot of energy and seemed to be quite chirpy (how dare he!). As a thoughtful attempt at encouragement he pointed out that when we get a few kilometres down the road I would be over the 100 mile mark and less than 100km to go! I indicated to him that piece of information was "un-(expletive)-useful, the numbers are too big, how about we manage to get to there" I pointed a few hundred metres up the road.

Without boring you with all the detail that is pretty much how the next few hours unfolded. Lucky Luke would do or say something upbeat and I would drown it out with a thought bubble of brain excrement. I have come to learn

those thought bubbles are a result of the brute force determination within. My rational brain (the bit that would think kind thoughts and be delighted by Luke's enthusiasm) is at its lowest ebb and it seems to trigger the fight or flight response. That primal part of my brain was choosing to fight.

So when I say that it takes determination and a whole heap of hard work by the crew I'm probably understating the reality. The crew need to be a lot more determined than me. They've got the really messy, complicated, physically and emotionally exhausting job. Relatively speaking, for me the job is easy. I only have to keep putting one foot in front of the other.



View from the top of the Beloka Ranges. Photo: Brad Smithers

166km The Dawn of Reality

6:30am

*But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his
power to stay,
And the old man said, "That horse will never do
For a long a tiring gallop – lad, you'd better stop
away,
Those hills are far too rough for such as you."
So he waited sad and wistful – only Clancy stood his
friend –
"I think we ought to let him come," he said;
"I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the
end,
For both his horse and he are mountain bred.
AB Paterson*

I can't really even claim that C2K has been a long held dream. To have something as a dream suggests part of your brain thinks it is possible. That part of my brain was missing.

Unlike the man from snowy river, my skeptics and nay-sayers were not other runners. My biggest critics existed within; the demons of self-doubt. From the dawn of time they have been putting up some very persuasive arguments. I'm around 12 kgs heavier than the average female ultra runner and therefore speed was always going to be a

struggle. I have dinky hips and found it painful to run more than a few kilometres on road. I have a sensitive stomach that wants to constantly reject anything I put into it. I'm as tough as a slab of freshly-made marshmallow.

When I took up running five, probably more like six, years ago I wondered how the heck anyone got fit enough to run a half marathon. Running 21.1km was my shoot for the stars, dream big dreams target. The only ultramarathon I knew about had Cliff Young on the entrant list.

How it all happened I'm still not sure. I guess I was lucky enough to have my own 'Clancy's. My 'Clancy' came in the form of other ultra-runners. They stood strong when the demons of self-doubt said I couldn't.

All the years of facing my fears had led to this morning. The day I never thought possible. We had already been moving for 25 hours and still another 80 kilometres to go. Those last 80km are notoriously difficult with changing weather conditions, fatigue and lots

of climbing. But regardless of what the day brought I would be resting in my bed tonight knowing something that I will be able to carry with me for the rest of my life. I made it possible.

All the support in the world cannot make the impossible happen. You alone have to choose to keep putting one foot in front of the other in pursuit of a goal. That is the choice I have made and it is the choice I will continue to make until I can choose no more.

The morning was breathtaking. We were on top of the Beloka range and the valley was a lake of mist. Gradually our descent took us below the cloud line and we were running through farmland soaked in a pea soup fog. The sun was trying to break through and instead was forming rainbows in the fog. The grazing cattle occasionally lifted their head to acknowledge our presence but had obviously grown bored of the strange fluorescent people running by.

As the morning got into full swing moods lifted and we were moving well. The smiles and laughs returned. Jindabyne arrived

quickly and Thredbo River was crossed 4 hours ahead of cut-off. Even with the challenges of the witching hours we have still managed to get more space between us and the dreaded cut-off. I was feeling strong. My legs ached but what the heck you get that on the big jobs. The important thing was I had good energy and my mind was up for the game.

Further on Luke asked me what I wanted to focus on today, go for a particular time? Chase down some more runners? I thought about my reply.

What I wanted to do was enjoy it and really cherish the journey with my crew. It was a perfect day. Warm with a gentle breeze. It had taken so much hard work to get here. Not just the last 30 hours but the years of training and persistence. I really wanted to enjoy it and for the crew to enjoy it. We would keep pushing but not so hard that we risked the wheels falling off. So onward we went with determination and a smile.

212km Perisher

3:45pm

I talked earlier about determination and how you need bucket loads of it to put yourself through something like Coast to Kosci. Not just the race itself but the years of training needed to get to the start-line. Determination isn't something that just exists you have to create it. If you are being chased by a lion then creating the determination to get away from it is pretty easy. But how do you create that same determination to achieve something like Coast to Kosci that's not essential to survival or even really that significant in the scale of life? The short answer is; I don't know. For some reason I woke up one day and it became something I had to do. Since then I have been visualising what it would be like to be sitting on that monument on top of Kosci. I have been living the feeling of the new Akubra on my head with a shiny new hat pin. Through all the pain

and exhaustion of training when I thought I had nothing left it was those little specks of light at the end of the tunnel that kept me going.

The climb from Jindabyne to Perisher was tough but as that summit got closer, those specks of light got bigger and I found the motivation to dig deeper. I knew this road well and we just kept ticking off and celebrating the milestones. A big cheer went up at the first sighting of snow. We came upon other runners and had a chat and a cheer—everyone had achieved so much.

Jill was pacing and by the time Perisher came into sight we were 7 hours ahead of cut-off.

Our minds started to shift to the summit and getting ready for the climb. I wanted to make sure I had plenty of energy so I took the opportunity to top up my calories. My legs were feeling particularly angry for some reason so I popped a Panadol and then we worked



through the other logistics of the trail beyond Charlotte Pass. We mentally double checked the gear requirements (head touch battery attached—check) and made sure we were staying focused on the job, taking one kilometre at a time.

At Perisher village, Rhian (Medic) came driving past from having been up at Charlotte Pass, flashed his headlights and kept on going. Some time later Luke appeared by my side.

That's when the bombshell was dropped.

Luke: 'Hello lovely ladies, I'm about to tell you something you don't want to hear.'

I thought he was about to tell me another bad joke. Jill just walked away.

Luke: 'Rhian has just told me they are closing the trail to the mountain at 4:30pm because of bad weather.'

No trail. No summit. No dream realised.

Me: 'Don't be (expletive) stupid. Who the (expletive) decided that?'

I looked at my watch it was 3:45pm.

Luke: 'As I see it there's about maybe 7km and you've got to run it in 45 minutes. It was suggested there might be some fudge time for strong runners but I don't know'.

With fresh legs I would do it easy. 213km in my legs? Reality cut deep and fast.

Me: 'Do you know much (expletive) pain I'm in? My legs are (expletive). I am (expletive) tired. This is (expletive, expletive, expletive).'

They don't call him Lucky Luke for nothing.

Luke: 'Well there's only one question to ask yourself; How much do the last five years mean to you? How much does that summit and hat pin mean to you?'

I bit back. Hard.

Me: 'That a (expletive) disgusting thing to say to someone. That's a really bad call. How dare you threaten my (expletive) hat pin.'

Sounds quite comical now. The messenger was not just shot, he was drawn and quartered and strung up by his guts. But it worked.

Luke: 'How about you put some of that anger into the road and run.'

Me: 'No (expletive expletive) Sherlock.'

I started to run. I mean really run. Everything dropped out of existence except that white line on the edge of the road. An intense image appeared in my head of the five kilometre time trials we do at training. That was my new reality, just five kilometres of hard graft. I checked my form. My knees and body were high I could feel the flow coming. The pain disappearing. I could feel the drive in my legs. I astounded myself.

The sweeping downhill added some momentum and I knew I could gain time. I accelerated even more to take full advantage. I looked at my watch and was roughly judging my pace. I still had the figure of 7km in my head and figured I would have roughly covered 3km.

Something wasn't right. I knew how many bends and climbs we still had to go to Charlotte Pass and it was more than 4km. The thought just spurred me on more. Luke was right on my heels with water bottle at the ready. I could hear him stop, backpack dropped, I assume to lighten the load. I kept powering.

Soon we were upon Marina and her pacer. I didn't stop and relied on Luke to make sure she knew what was going on. Marina called out 'You go girl!'. There was something in those words that had part of my brain recognise the futility of what I was doing but the dominant part of my brain was just saying—don't die wondering.

Moments later a distance marker came into sight. It was 4:10pm. The distance to Charlotte Pass was 5km. My PB for 5km? 21min 14sec and that's without 217km already done and a lot of uphill to be confronted. I knew it was game over for the cut-off but I hung onto hope. The closer I got to the cut-off the better chance I had of persuading the powers that be to let me up that hill. If they want a strong runner I'll give them a (expletive) strong runner.

The hill climbs started. I heard Luke call from behind; 'Will we walk 30 seconds, run 30 seconds?'. 'NO!' I screamed back at him. Apparently that was the answer he wanted to hear. I got angry at the hill. It was a pathetic hill. We're running to the top of Australia and this is all that was on offer. No wonder the Kiwi's laugh at us.

I started to see the cars parked at Charlotte Pass. Like shiny icons of hope they grew larger on the horizon with every step. The weather was perfect. Everything quite and serene except for the raging battle inside my head. My legs chewed up that hill and we turned the last bend.

I looked at my watch, 4:40pm. We were now 7.5 hours ahead of cut-off with 222km bagged in 35 hours 10 minutes. We had covered last 9km in 55 minutes and according to later calculations, and dodgy rumours, we had just 'chicked' the course record holder on that section.

The first face I saw was Sue. She was meant to be already heading up the trail. Why was she here? Then I saw Jill. She had the pack on ready to go. Good sign, clearly she knew they would let us through. I knew I had to weigh in before heading up the mountain. My mind was completely focused on getting that done. I was going to keep my head down and just run through the checkpoint refusing eye contact. Diane called me over to the scales. I jumped on and looked at her and asked 'You're going to let me through aren't you?' I took the look on her face as a yes. I think I would have taken any look as a yes.

I turned and started to run. I could see the trail that we were heading along. I focused on those few metres of ground ahead and just kept moving.

Paul stepped in front of me.

I looked into his eyes. Then he spoke.

'I'm sorry but this is your finish line.'

'No!' I screamed back at him. 'It's only 10 (expletive) minutes.'

I really don't remember much of what happened after that. I argued a bit but respected every word that was coming out of Paul's mouth.

I looked into his eyes to see if he was joking or going to waiver. All I saw was sadness. It was breaking his heart as much as mine.

The tears were building, I was feeling giddy.

I turned to walk away and my legs wouldn't go any further. I felt them give away and found myself crouched on the ground crying uncontrollably. The effects of the adrenaline were in full flight and there was nothing I could do but let them go their course. My crew were cuddled around me sharing the pain. I felt so disappointed for them and that I had let them down.

I deeply respect the decision that was made and the actions that were taken that day but in that moment my soul was ripped apart.

I was completely and utterly devastated.

