

Race Report: Blacksnake Trail Race, April 27th 2014

By Dave OBrien

Sunday, April 27th dawned a perfect day for running; cool and sunny with some cloud cover. A great day for the annual Blacksnake Trail Race.

Sixty four runners started in the three races on offer (10km, 21km, and the challenging 34km course) with a very creditable 61 competitors finishing.

All runners faced the same 2km plus slog up North Queensland's version of Sydney's "Heartbreak Hill" just after crossing the Copperlode Dam wall before continuing along the delightfully shady, rainforest lined Clohesy River Road.

The 10km competitors soon turned for home with Charlie Best first to cross the finish line in 54:55, nearly three minutes faster than last year. Brad Miller (1:01:53) and Paul Spray (1:09:03) followed soon after. Annie Schofield (1:10:42) was just over a minute behind Paul and first lady across the line. Charmaine Rogato (1:16:09) and Elva Metcalf (1:35:26) crossed in silver and bronze positions respectively.

The remaining runners continued along the undulating dirt road, running through several shallow streams until the Fig Tree Checkpoint and 21km turnaround point was reached. Here, competitors were captured on camera by volunteer SiQi and checked off, fed and watered by Robbo.

At this point, 21km runner Todd Rutherford (who thrives on trail runs) was far ahead of others in the Half Marathon distance, blitzing the field to finish in 1:53:50. Neil Harrison (2:11:08) ran strongly to finish second with Jarrah May third in 2:18:52. Susanne Houlihan was first lady home in 2:17:23 with a powerful run that brought her in ahead of young Emma Farkas (2:21:38) and the evergreen Stevie Johnston (2:26:37).

The 34km competitors, who had started earlier than other runners, continued on from the Fig Tree, emerging from the rainforest to face the rough, steep Viever's Track which wends its way through more than 6kms of open eucalypt woodland and occasional rainforest lined creeks. A welcome sight was the Bridle Creek Checkpoint where CRR volunteers Jo and Brenda offered food and drink and SES volunteers Sheila and Greg Sutton, security.

Previous 34km runners knew what was ahead: energy sapping steep ascents, quad crushing, knee jarring steep descents.....in abundance! Enough to reduce grown men to tears. Open country reverting back to rainforest. Finally the welcome sight of the concrete which signals that the dam...and the Finish, are near.

Amazingly, after 34kms of such varied terrain, the first four runners arrived within five minutes of one another. Jarrod Ausburn was stoked to win his first race, coming in with a time of 3:55:09. Jason Thomson arrived just two minutes later (3:37:02) and Bryan O'Mahony (3:37:54) less than a minute behind him. An incredible effort. During the race there were some notable "duels" including a close tussle between Michael Haseldine and Jeff Herbert, the former prevailing to cross ahead of his younger competitor.

Samantha Fifield (4:06:56) was first lady home, just ahead of ultra-runner Julie Sager (4:09:39). Sonya Alba-Miller took the bronze medal in 4:26:00. Medals were presented to the major placegetters in all races.

A barbeque was provided for runners and supporters and it was great to see so many people stay around to enjoy it and socialise after the racing.

A huge thank you to all the volunteers who helped to make this event so successful. Race Director Christine Bell endured plenty of stress pre race but ensured an excellent day, organising volunteers and doing many pre race chores herself. Thanks so much, Christine! She was ably assisted by shoppers Alan Wyness and Susanne Houlihan (both of whom also competed in the race); registration (Kathy Sinclair and Marjo Simpson who also competed). Thanks to Ian Kraska who stayed around all day assisting with timing and recording. Mel Akmentins organised the medals; Brenda OBrien organised and collected satellite phones and gate keys as well as being a checkpoint volunteer.

Jo van Gorp, Glenn Robinson and SiQi Kramer manned the two checkpoints as well as putting out water and signs, and we are very grateful for the presence of SES volunteers Greg and Sheila Sutton. Keith Fearon's friendly face was a welcome sight at the 10km turnaround.

Special thanks go to our two Sweeps, Col and Mario, for their patience and care in following along behind and with the runners to ensure they made it safely home. We thank Gareth Smith for his efforts in marking out the course, including navigating around the huge "bomb crater" and tree fall early on Viever's Track.

Thanks to those runners who helped set up and pull down before and after the race. We also thank Copperlode caretakers Jenny and Deitmar for their efforts.

We acknowledge and thank our sponsor It's Extreme. Roy's shop on Spence Street carries a comprehensive range of gear for runners and Roy offers a 20% discount to club members as well as helpful advice. Please support this business.

Finally, thank all of you for supporting us by turning up! We hope to see more of you at the next trail race which will be the 45km Mt Haig Marathon to be run on August 17th.