



**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019**

The Surf Coast Century has been on my bucket list for the past 12 months and when Karen suggested we sign up for it earlier in the year, I jumped at the chance. Little did I know all the surprises this event would bestow upon me, turning into one of the most rewarding ultras I have participated in. It is also going to be a rather difficult challenge for me to cull the ridiculous number of photos that were taken over the course of the day – but I'll do my best.

This year we had the wonderful hospitality of Tim helping Nick and Greg as part of our support crew but also providing us with bunking facilities at the families' holiday house which was less than five minutes from the finish line. Tim and I studied together at Ballarat Uni and his youngest is my Godson. Tim and I have done many long day hikes together, and this was going to be the first time he got to see firsthand what was involved in an ultra-marathon. I was really excited he was able to share some of this with us.



Let's wind the clock back to Friday afternoon and race registration and briefing. Karen and I had walked down to the river and the Anglesea bridge so we would have to crawl under during the event. The water was extremely high - I had been anxious about having to get under this bridge for the past four weeks. To our delight, a few other participants walking past told us they had heard that the race director had made the decision to allow us to cross the road because the river was unusually high and there was no room to even keep your head above water under the bridge – thank goodness – my body felt total relief in that instance. Sam Maffet, the Race Director, received a crowd cheer when it was confirmed going under the bridge was a no-go zone. He also reminded us that in the first section we were going to get wet, very wet, potentially chest deep water crossings. This is the adventure and challenge we all signed up for. We collected our goodie bags and race numbers and headed back to the house for some carb loading pasta dinner and an early night.

To the unfamiliar, there is a fair amount of planning and preparation required the night before you run an ultra. Making up drop bags with things you might need during the day, hydration, packing all required mandatory gear and attaching your race bib to your running top. I decided to go through my goodie bag to see what we had received and pin my race bib. The event T-shirt and soft flask were nice commemorative items for the event. It was at this point that horror struck as I looked at my race bib – it said my category was 'Vintage Female' and Tim took immense pleasure in reminding me I was an 'old chick'. This would be a joke that would keep on giving throughout the course of the weekend.



*Karen and I at start line*

On Saturday morning at 7:15am over 400 runners gathered anxiously at the Anglesea River mouth on the beach in anticipation of the 100kms they would all attempt to conquer over the day ahead.

At 7:30am the start gun sent us off running a short 4km out and back loop along the beach to spread out the field. The start gantry was lined either side with supporters and spectators for the first 50 metres to give us a wonderful send off in preparation for the rest of the day.

In providing you with a brief description of the race course, it is split into four major sections varying in distance from 21kms to 28kms but also varying in terrain and diverse landscapes.

The first 21kms was beach running – so lots and lots of sand. I had not given it much thought until this very moment and realised how much it might take out of the legs before we got to the muddy red clay and gnarly tracks full of elevation in the third section.

What would distract me from thinking too much more about it was the incredible cliffs we were running below and being mesmerised by the sheer height, contours and colours against the sand and sky backdrop. I was also excited about the water crossings to see just how deep they were going to be and how wet we would get.

The short loop turn-around point was at Point Roadknight before we headed back along the beach running under the start gantry again and being cheered on by what felt like the entire township of Anglesea.



*Anglesea River Mouth*



Since there is little to describe here, all we had to do was follow the contours of the Anglesea beach, keep the ocean to our right and the towering 70 metre Anglesea cliffs to our left. All you could see for what seemed like miles were the high cliffs and the anticipation built as I waited for our first water wade.

I was not disappointed as we made our way around a small headland in knee deep water, protected by some volunteers so we weren't pushed into the cliffs from the waves. The water was incredibly refreshing since the temperature was around 13 degrees and quite humid from what had been very warm the previous day.

Apologies because I go slightly nuts here sharing some of the magical landscape I got to experience during the day. Even though it was grey cloud cover it is still extremely eye catching to behold.









There was however, some slippery rock hopping around Red Rocks Point which caused quite a bit of congestion with the runners all queuing to get over them as you can see from the picture.



The runners were given a choice here to take either the left or right track – right took you rock climbing around the point and gave you the best views whilst left allowed you to follow a runnable track inland and down onto the beach. I didn't really give Karen the option to choose and opted to take the tougher rock-climbing section – I reminded her of the adventure we signed up for.



Once over the rocky point we were on slightly softer sand of Red Rocks beach and on our way to the next headland of Point Addis. Man, these cliffs just went on for miles and miles and we had only completed 10kms as we climbed up the stairs of the Point Addis carpark. Nick and Tim were there to greet us with cheers as we made our way down onto Point Addis Beach and continued to follow the crescent shaped beaches lined by cliffs. Sometimes it can be said far more easily with pictures than me harping on with paragraphs of words, so enjoy the photos of the next 10kms.









As you can see the terrain became rocky and technical from Bells Beach onwards. The luxury of runnable sand had now been replaced by sections of coastal rock and reef platforms with rock pools that required more concentration not to slip and fall in them. There were also lots of small caves under the cliffs that would have been awesome to explore if we had the time.







And then that sneaky photographer hiding in the rocks, capturing you just at that wrong moment.





As we approached the headland at Bird Rock, runners had backed up again and I could see we had another deep section of water to wade through – this time it was waist deep. Runners tried to hug the cliff to preserve their feet but to no avail. It was just easier to take it full on, wade through and try not to fall under. Jan Juc Beach gave us back some hard sand for a short run before we rounded the Torquay Point to be greeted by Tim standing on the beach directing us up to the first checkpoint, with Nick standing at the top cheering us on. 21kms done and dusted and we blasted through the checkpoint in a record time of 35 seconds, winning me the accolade of fastest person through the aid station – it was the first and last time I would hold that title. Out of the checkpoint Karen and I took the time to take in some solid food as we crossed the boardwalk through Torquay and of course got caught by the event photographer.



Section 2 of the course was 28kms in distance and took us off the firm sandy beaches onto gravel paths and single trail tracks through the bush. We basically follow the Surf Coast Walk from Torquay back to Anglesea.



The gravel path follows along the cliff top providing awesome views in both directions and again hiding in the bushes was an event photographer, the expression says it all.

You'll notice Maureen in these photos with me – keep that in the vault for later. She was also in the vintage female category. We continue along this track until we reach the car park of Bells Beach and watch on as several surfers perfect their craft.

We have now completed 27kms in a time of 3hrs and 11 mins and I am now happy to say, woohoo over 25% of the way to the finish line.

At the southern end of the beach, we descend the stairs to be greeted by another photo opportunity before joining the Jarosite trail and start the magnificent forest section of Ironbark Basin.



Although I wouldn't consider this section particularly hilly, I would describe it as undulating with some rough sections and technical descents. It was here that I started to pull away from Karen.

The terrain has changed dramatically here as we are now surrounded by woody tee tree, gum trees, spindle grasses and blossoming yellow wattle. I start searching for the perfect closeup photo opportunity to capture the vibrant yellow of the various wattle varieties but never seem to find just the right one.

At this point the heavens decided it was time to make good on the grey clouds that have hovered overhead all morning and the skies rewarded us with some rain. I wasn't too concerned but it did make for a harder transition at the 32km checkpoint in the picnic ground of Ironbark basin. Nick was ready with an avo and chicken bread roll and coconut water before he refilled my hydration pack for me.

I gave him a kiss goodbye, found Tim sheltering from the rain, ran over gave him a hug and continued through to the next section. I would see them next at the halfway mark at Anglesea.



The course took me in a different direction to the one I expected, guess I should have studied the course map a lot closer. Instead of heading back along the surf coast walk trail to Point Addis we headed up the Point Addis road for about 500 metres before turning off onto a very muddy single track that hugged the side of the main Anglesea road. I didn't enjoy this section very much but before long I reached the Eumeralla forest playground and found myself on this incredible journey through a myriad of mountain bike trails. There were also little hidden gems such as a letter box with a carved possum head peering through it which initially startled me but was quickly followed by a twisting rollercoaster mountain bike course that had a rock garden planted firmly half way down it. That bit was fun to navigate and run down. I was even more thrilled to see the 40km distance marker as the Garmin registered 4hrs and 52 mins.



It was just a further 9kms to the halfway point in Anglesea but Sam had challenged us with some 2wd and 4wd tracks that continued to wind back onto each other, it was infuriating because I couldn't wrap my head around what direction I was running in as others could be seen running across tracks less than 20 metres from the track you were on.



*Coming into Checkpoint 4 – half way*



I finally reached the dirt road of the Eumeralla Scout Camp before running past the lookout over Anglesea and traversing behind the caravan park then back up the river mouth to the 4<sup>th</sup> checkpoint and main aid station.

I had been moving for 6hrs and 16 mins by now and the welcome site of the volunteers at the race kitchen and Nick to look after me was very much appreciated. Another sneaky moment was captured as I kissed Nick on my way out for leg 3.

Leg 3 is a distance of 28kms and has the greatest amount of elevation over the duration of the 100kms. We will finish this section at the Tallawalla Guide Camp in Moggs Creek but before then the course will utilise 2WD, 4WD and single tracks through some remote coastal bushland.

I wasn't too keen about this section as previous training had taken us on some steep 4wd tracks that were laden with slippery red clay.

Leaving the safety of the tents at Anglesea, a dark grey storm cloud moved in turning the colours of the river incredible hues of green.



The official course requires you to crawl on your hands and knees under the Anglesea bridge but due to the water level of the river, we were given a reprieve and allowed to cross the road, it was simply too high and dangerous.





Just as we crossed the foot bridges through Coogoorah Park, the skies opened, and we were hit with a heavy downpour that forced me to take out the rain jacket. It could not have come at a worse time with a leg busting climb up what is Anglesea's version of 'Heartbreak Hill' to the top of Mt Ingoldsby – it was the first of the big climbs we were going to tackle through the next 28kms. I just kept focusing on the runners ahead of me to make it to the top before it levelled out and we turned onto the gravel road of Gilbert Street for even more of the same.



A car pulled up alongside me and it was the green machine with Nick yelling out he was checking out my toosh. No Tim with him and I found out later that after following me for 6 hours poor Tim was tired and needed an afternoon Nanna nap - it made me laugh.

Gilbert Street is a red clay 4WD track providing views across the bushland of the Anglesea area before a steep and somewhat slippery muddy descent. It was slow going to the bottom before it forced a steep climb up this epic hill through even more red clay that seemed to stick to the bottom of your shoes and added undue weight to already tired legs.

Half way up the climb my Garmin buzzed 55kms in 7hrs and 20mins. The rain had now disappeared without a trace and was replaced with the sun beating down on me with no shade or way of escaping it. But that mud just kept caking on to the bottom of my shoes with no way to remove it.

Once I had reached the top, there was a hidden right turn onto Teds Ridge and a dramatic change in the terrain again to wild flowers of yellows, purples and pinks in blossom hugging both sides of the trail. It was at this point I realised I still had not taken a photo of the yellow wattle – I was still looking for that perfect shot. At the trig of Ted's Ridge, the track descends to Distillery Creek Road and as I turned the corner the 60km marker was on the ground letting all runners know what they had accomplished, along with a few supporters clapping me through to the next section. The Garmin indicated I had done this in a bit under 8hrs and I was on track to better a 15hr 100km if I could maintain a steady pace.

I sent a short SMS to Nick telling him I had passed 60kms and he quickly responded with *'I am at next checkpoint. Distillery Creek picnic. You are about one km away'*. I promptly responded with *'No I'm not. We have a 10km loop to complete first.'* And I got back *'Oh OK'*. We were in very remote wilderness now as we followed a single track that climbed gradually up the valley and past Currawong Falls. I was bitterly disappointed as there wasn't even a trickle of water to be seen. It was here that I met a runner (I am sorry I don't remember his name) who was doing a 30km support run with his mate who was running his first hundred. So, he wasn't accused of pacing he decided to come with me, and we chattered about our ultra-accomplishments as we made our way to Trig Point on Love's Track – indicating the 67km point. We got our first view of the Lighthouse, but it was still not within reach as we still had about 20kms to complete before I would be standing at the base of it in the dark.



From this point we descended the Ironbark Gorge for the next 3.5kms. My quads were now causing me a bit of pain as they had compensated for my left hamstring for most of the run and I was beginning to struggle with any downhill movement, but my fellow runner was keeping me motivated to move forward. Before I knew it, I was emerging into the car park at Distillery Creek Picnic Ground – 70kms now completed in approximately 9hrs 20 mins. Nick and Greg tended to my every whim and as I left the checkpoint, they indicated that Karen was only about 5 minutes behind me – that was awesome, and I was so happy she was having a great run. I expected her to catch me in no time.





Once I left the picnic ground and took a quick toilet break, I caught up with two runners who were walking and instead of passing them I asked if I could keep them company through the trail and the 2WD dirt road leading up to Painkalac Reservoir. They were happy to have the company and chat and we started with introductions. I asked why they did not have names on their race bibs, and I was told *'Gayle you can refer to us as runner 430 and runner 431.'* As it turned out they were Adrian and Garth. Adrian was doing SCC for the first time like I was, and Garth was an old hand doing his fourth. They had missed online registration and rocked up on Friday night to register for the event. They told me there had been about thirty runners who had registered the night before the event – wow.

Once we had passed Painkalac Reservoir Dam wall, the track turns skywards again with a long steady climb to Gentle Annie Track.

As I had trained this section of the run, I knew once I had reached the road crossing at Gentle Annie, it was downhill for the next 2kms all the way into the Guide Camp at Moggs Creek. I really struggled through this section because the quads no longer wanted to co-operate, and I was restricted to walking.



Coming into the cheers of support crews, volunteers and hot food was an awesome feeling. I had completed 77kms in a time 10hrs 33 mins – that sub 15hrs was within grasp now. Nick and Greg were awesome getting some food into me and doing one final fill of my hydration bladder. The hard yards had been done and I was about to start the final leg of 23kms to the finish line.



Karen was not far away and as I left the Guide Camp, I was hoping we would cross paths and as it happened, we did. I had to capture it with a selfie.

I left Moggs Creek with head torch in hand and the knowledge that in the next 23kms I was going to have completed the Surf Coast Century – it was so exciting. I disturbed a single camper in the Moggs Creek Picnic ground and apologised to him for all us runners disturbing his tranquillity.

Now you get to meet some amazing like-minded people on events such as this and there are multiple occasions where you seem to be playing the tortoise and hare race where you keep passing each other. Today was no exception. Maureen King, Nathan Stadling, Richard Willis, Sam Skinner and Wendy Jordon were all the new friends I made that kept me smiling throughout the day. You will also see that Maureen makes podium for vintage female.

The Ocean View track at the end of Moggs Creek Picnic ground was the start of more single trail through tall timber forest and a great look out point at the top just as dusk took hold. There were a handful of us running together and we all stopped on the platform above Moggs Creek to take some final photos before we were consumed by the darkness. We were about 100 metres above the water with panoramic views of Lorne to the south-west and the Airey's Inlet lighthouse to the north-east. It was also the spot that marked the turning point for runners as we finally head towards Anglesea and the finish line that had been evading us all day. I was running with Richard at this stage and both of us were struggling on any downhill. We made our way to the back streets of Moggs Creek and started shuffling along the roads as they levelled out.



The Ocean View track descends through the bush and into the outskirts of Moggs Creek village and a small footbridge over Moggs Creek where Greg and Nick were waiting to direct us all onto the wide gravel Old Coach Road. I had resisted putting on my head torch till the last possible moment but on the gravel road I knew I could do it in the dark and decided to enjoy the glistening stars as I walked the next 1.5kms in the dark. Richard pulled away from me at this point and I was happy to let him go but Wendy and I still were playing the tortoise and hare game through this section.

One more hill awaited us as we turned off onto a sandy 2WD track then followed the ridgeline along the outskirts of Fairhaven. It was here that I pulled away from Wendy and caught up with Nathan again. He was a youngster that had been the youngest competitor at the age of 20 when he first did SCC a couple of years ago. He had been great company throughout the day and was very patient with me when I had a slight panic attack at the GOR bridge.

Out of nowhere, the township water tanks appeared before we descended a steep sealed road and made our way to the walking track beside the Painkalac Creek. Then the fun stuff started again. There has been a lot of talk about the two bridges that each runner is meant to crawl under and even though we could not get under the first one, we had no choice but to crawl under the Great Ocean Road Bridge at Fairhaven. Let's just say I was rather verbally expressive and not a happy camper.

On hands and knees and a 45-degree rocky incline 3 foot above the water line, with the bridge barely above my head, I slowly made my way under it, scared I was going to slip and fall in. After completing 86kms, this was not an easy thing for the body to do. It was also at this point that Karen caught up to me, she was running a super race. Once we were under the bridge and back on the surf coast walk trail, we reached the last aid station at Airey's Inlet to the smiles of many support crews including our own very supportive husbands. It was now just about getting the job done with the final 14kms to the finish line.



Together Karen and I continued to follow the gravel footpath up the hill to the majestic Airey's Inlet Lighthouse which looked rather eerie in the dark as we stood at the bottom of it, highlighted only by the light of our head torches. The next 3kms was along the cliff tops of some stunning sections of the surf coast walk but since we could see nothing, it was left to our imagination from the sound of the waves crashing against the sandy beaches and rocky pinnacles.

The rocky stairs down to Sunnymeade Beach saw us reach the 90km point where we did a short soft sand section and were directed back up and out of the beach with flashing disco lights – it looked totally cool. From here it was a short distance to the carpark of Urquharts Beach and the famous Urquhart Bluff. This would be our final sandy beach run for the next 4kms and under the light of the stars it was a pretty special way to experience it – not something a person would ever usually ever do. The end of the beach had another set of dancing disco light's directing us up the last set of timber stairs we would have to climb for the day. We now had about 3kms to the finish line and Karen was on a PB for a solo 100kms – it was going to be awesome crossing the finish line together as we did one final beach section on Anglesea Main beach and continued back up the river mouth. At 1km to go, I sent Nick a quick SMS telling him we were very close to the finish and as we turned that last corner into the parkland, head torches now turned off we ran under the finish gantry in an official time of 14:33:35 with the emcee completely shocking me as he announced I had a podium finish of third place for my age group.





My favourite photo from the day captures the moment perfectly.







*Our Amazing support crew Greg, Nick and Tim*

Now I had mentioned earlier a couple of surprises for this event and to finish on the podium certainly was one of them. The next morning, as we attended the official presentations, I not only got to take podium for my age category – vintage female, but I was also inducted into the Rapid Ascent Hall of Fame Triple Crown. Not too shabby for an ‘old chick’. This honour is bestowed on a competitor who has completed all three long ultras held by Rapid Ascent - The Larapinta 4-day stage race in the NT, Margaret River Cape to Cape in WA and the Surf Coast Century in VIC. Let’s just say I was completely chuffed by the accomplishment even though I never managed to get that perfect shot of the yellow wattle in blossom, just means I’ll need to go back next year.



*Maureen King, Hazel Harrison, Me*



*Triple Crown Inductees*



# 2019 RACE RESULTS



Gayle COWLING

**343**

Surfcoast Century

Gender: Female

Category: 50-59

Status: Finished

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Finish Time

**14:33:35**

OVERALL  
209/351

CATEGORY  
3/21

GENDER  
46/110

## LEGS

	OVERALL	CATEGORY	GENDER	TIME
Surf Coast Shire Leg 1, 21km	309	12	76	2:34:24
Hammer Nutrition Leg 2, 28km	201	2	44	3:41:52
La Sportiva Leg 3, 28km	177	3	40	4:15:26
Black Diamond Leg 4 77km – 100km	224	5	54	4:01:52

## All Splits

Name	Time (Time of Day)	Split Time	Pos (C/Pos)	G/Pos
CP1, 10km-Pt Addis	01:12:56 (08:42:56)	01:12:56	259 (10)	57
Surf Coast Shire Leg 1, 21km	02:34:24 (10:04:24)	01:21:28	309 (12)	76
CP2, 21km-Torquay departure	02:35:00 (10:05:00)	00:00:35	4 (1)	1
CP3, 32km-Ironbark Basin	03:49:21 (11:19:21)	01:14:21	289 (6)	61
Hammer Nutrition Leg 2, 28km	06:16:16 (13:46:16)	02:26:55	201 (2)	44
CP4, 49km-Anglesea departure	06:20:14 (13:50:14)	00:03:58	82 (2)	25
CP5, 70km-Distillery Creek	09:10:44 (16:49:44)	02:59:29	189 (3)	44
La Sportiva Leg 3, 28km	10:31:42 (18:01:42)	01:11:58	177 (3)	40
CP6, 77km-Moggs Creek departure	10:34:10 (18:04:10)	00:02:27	50 (1)	16
CP7, 86km-Aireys Inlet	12:08:00 (19:38:00)	01:33:50	256 (9)	64
Black Diamond Leg 4 77km – 100km	14:33:35 (22:03:35)	02:25:34	224 (5)	54