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President's Patch

Welcome to the winter edition of the FIT Newsletter. There are some great articles on personal and team achievements in this edition. Perhaps one of those articles will inspire you to take on a challenge that you who had never given any thought to previously and that would make a great newsletter article too!

As I have mentioned before being a member of FIT brings many benefits. One of the other 'benefits' or privileges of being with FIT is the opportunity to put our love of swimming, riding or running to use for a cause, such as fundraising for a charity.

FITs who fundraise

Recently our own FIT team of swimmers raised over \$5,000 for the MS 24 Hour Mega swim (see page xxx). This was not only an opportunity to get our swim fitness up a notch or two but a chance to use our swimming talent to raise funds for research into treatment for multiple sclerosis. The Mega Swim is not the only fund raiser event FIT takes part in. We also have runners who participate in the Mother's Day Classic Fun Run, raising funds and awareness for breast cancer. In fact, our participation in that event this year was so strong we won first place for largest community group represented on the day! We have riders who take part in the Hartley Lifecare Challenge each year. They ride and raise money to support children in the ACT with disabilities.

The rewards for keeping fit with FIT are many: friendships, better health and lifestyle, a sense of accomplishment, and the thrill of crossing finish lines. But if you can add the increased motivator of knowing you are running, riding or swimming to help someone have a better life or help find a cure for a life threatening illness, the experience and the reward can be even richer.

Congratulations mega swimmers

Thank you to Angela and Julia, our FIT Mega Swim team organisers. Great job girls and congratulations to all the swimmers. Perhaps next year FIT will have so many interested members we will enter two teams for the Mega Swim.

President's Tip

If you are finding it hard to stay motivated to train now the mornings are cold and getting colder, put the dates of spring races in your calendar. It won't be too long before those races are just a week or two away!

My winter quote

Girls playing sports is not about winning gold medals. It's about self-esteem, learning to compete and learning how hard you have to work in order to achieve your goals.*

**Jackie Joyner-Kersey, member of the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame and three-time Olympic gold medalist in track and field.*

FITs running analysis

By Nerida Clarke

Runners can unwittingly create injuries through poor hip stability, core strength and posture. That was the message 22 FIT women (many of whom were new to running) discovered when leading sports scientists/coaches Brad Hiskins and Ben Wisbey analysed their gait in April. Most had never observed their running style and all benefited from having their technique professionally assessed to improve their running and, most importantly, prevent injury.

Both Brad and Ben have observed, coached and treated elite athletes particularly runners and triathletes. The sessions were in two stages:

Firstly Each runner was filmed front-on and side-on at the AIS running track doing a series of short runs at varying speeds from a slow jog to maximum sprint.

Secondly An appointment with Brad at Clinic88 for a half hour gait analysis where they viewed the video and discussed technique, any issues and suggested ways to improve.

Most runners had issues with hip stability, core strength and posture. He has offered to give FIT a session on strengthening exercises. Brad and Ben will run more sessions for interested FIT members later in the year. Here's some feedback:

Amanda The analysis was really useful. What was really interesting was that Brad explained that because of the way I was extending my left leg I was prone to ITB problems. Brad mentioned that my ITB problem will probably happen at the same time

every time I run... for me I think it is at about 10 km. It was a bit strange hearing Brad say that this is what will happen.. as that is exactly what has been happening. I now have a series of exercises to do which should strengthen my hip stability.

Linda I had a fantastic experience with both Ben and Brad. They were supportive at both the videoing and the analysis sessions. While I have had similar comments about my hips/pelvis from other physios, I felt very reassured by Brad's comments because it confirmed previous static assessments. It was the first time my issues were observed while running. Brad's advice to run with a better posture and style has helped enormously and I have been getting training and race PBs since. I feel a lot more relaxed and stronger while running now, and I enjoy running more too. I can't recommend Ben and Brad enough to anyone from a rookie to the seasoned runner.

Nerida It was great to see the video and to clearly see the cause of issues I have had with my right hip – weak glut muscles, poor core strength and issues with posture.

Lisa I found the experience to be really useful to improving my running. I was very impressed with Brad and his clinic. So much so, that I now go to Clinic 88 weekly or biweekly... in preparation for my first marathon in September.

Rebecca My running analysis session was very interesting. I received tips on posture and technique that I can put into practice to improve my running. I was shown the video to see my stride and given exercises to do to strengthen weaker muscles. I found it to be of great value.

Ange It was a really beneficial exercise. One of the great things about FIT is that they not only support and encourage you to be healthy and exercise, but they care to make sure that you're doing exercise in a way that will keep your body happy, and to work with and improve what you've got to be the best athlete and person YOU can be.

Do you like eating out?

By Amanda Power

FIT is known for its great activities.....running, swimming and cycling.... and now we have added "eating" to that list.

Recently the FIT Canberra half-marathon group began complementing their comprehensive training program with dinners out... one during the training and then again to celebrate our success... and then once more when one of our number completed the Sydney half-marathon (congrats to Oona Nielsen on a PB of 2.08!)

On each occasion we've had a wonderful night out and enjoyed the chatting without the puffing. We are now thinking of the next opportunity – possibly Christmas in July. Catch up with me at training if you want to add your details to my 'dinner training list'.

Is your membership due?

We have 398 members but this will drop if you forget to renew your membership. Watch the Newsflash and if you have changed address email your new details to:
fit_canberra@yahoo.com.

Like running in the cold?



If you've ever wanted to run the 'coolest' marathon in the world you could enter the North Pole Marathon which this year saw Australia's Richelle Turner, 37 take out the women's title in 6:03:06 - about three hours slower than her road marathon times.

The North Pole Marathon is run in temperatures that plummet to -32C in the high Arctic Ocean at a temporary Geographic North Pole camp floating between 89N and 90N latitudes.

Competitors wear layers of clothing and low cut hiking boots with gortex woven into the soles to run on ice and through snow.

Besides going through a door to get to the drinks station, other location challenges are being alert for frost damage, crevasses and polar bears.

Fastest time of the 27 finishers for the 2011 North Pole Marathon was 4.57. Next year's race is on 7 April. Any FITs who just love those cold Canberra mornings up for it?

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/breakfast/stories/2011/3201945.htm>

<http://www.npmarathon.com/html/press/200431.html>

‘Finding 30’ led to Andreea’s dragon boating medal bling

By Andreea Ardeleanu

For Andreea Ardeleanu her “Find 30” journey to the joy of fitness began when the other soccer mums encouraged her to learn to ride a bike. After signing on to FIT’s Tour de Femme cycle training program with chief coach and mentor Di Evans, she succumbed to the lure of dragon boating. Here’s her story.

I am someone who has never played in a team or single kind of sport EVER, so I was very doubtful that I would be able to ride a bike. Di coached us every Sunday morning. Impressed with the skills we learned we asked if we could bring our children to learn. The good thing was it was all for free and, surprisingly, we improved and I started to believe we could actually do this! At this time I thought I would like to give dragon boating a go. Di suggested the FIT ‘come & try’ dragon boating day. I loved it and soon I was hooked. I joined the Diamond Phoenix Club and several months I joined the club which entered three races in the dragon boating National Championships in Canberra earlier this year.

Maybe we could get the desired bling

We made it to the semi finals in each race, a significant achievement for the club and for each woman participating. While we were all happy with this, the icing on the cake came on day three when the master made it straight to the semi-finals without a ripper charge (an extra race for slower heat finalists). At that stage we were up there with the top 6 crews in Australia. One more race and with good timing, strategies and maybe the wind blowing behind us we could get the ever so desired “bling”. We had to wait for over 5 hours for the finals; time to recover and enjoy the races, time to prepare yourself mentally for what was a head,



Andreea and her DP team mates came third in their category at the Australian Dragon Boating Championships

Butterflies from belly to throat

one more race to give it all you have...I also knew that I needed to not hook into negative mind chatter as the more I thought about past races the more nervous I would get and that was going to impact on the final race. .. I was watching races, talking with fellow paddlers, seeing my mum and dad arrive to watch me paddle, a friend and then another, as the butterflies raced from my belly to my throat, I took a deep breath and focussed. This was going to be our race, a race we practiced and rehearsed, we talked and dreamed about.

That beautiful moment of the glide

It is for now, not for past races; repeat the strategy and breathe. Lining up in the marshalling area it’s hard not to eye out the others, their bigger muscles, fitter bodies, better club uniform; they are younger, skinnier. Of course they have a better paddle and more grip on their shoes...oops that mind chatter again. Instead take a deep breath, focus on the water ripples, your breathing ... hop in the boat and from this point the race begins, the paddle to the pontoon an opportunity to focus, to time the stroke, to place your butt against the gunwale, to imprint the twist for the race, deep breathing to last you the race.

Aiming for perfect timing

I made a point of not paying attention at what line the boat is in (out of my control), how the wind blows (out of my control), the sweeps of other boats (not my sweep), focus on breathing, focus on the water.

The boats aligned, the calls to attention, are you ready...paddle dipped in the water, legs firmly in that boat, butt against the gunwale and lifted just such, beeeep...the rip in the water, the boat slightly lifting and lift and lift and that beautiful moment of the glide, aiming for perfect timing, keeping the pace, not rushing but powering.

Thank you FIT Find 30

Aggression in the water, slamming the paddle in and more and power and hut and timing, burst of energy and power and slamming where it counts.

The final beep. We have done it, not first not last ... most likely 4th. No bling but 4th in Australia. It was all over, we gave it our best...fourth is good. And as this was starting to sink in - the best result so far for the club - a woman appears with the official times. We came third. My first medal at a National Competition, the DP's first Cup at the Nationals. Thank you FIT Find Thirty for giving me the opportunity to shine!!!!

Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen, by Christopher McDougall

Book review by Jane Smith

Ever struggle to get out of bed for a Tuesday morning FIT session or wonder why you're pounding along some dirt track in the fog and frost, barely feeling your fingers, when everyone else is still asleepthen realise you don't regret it one bit because that run just felt so damn good?

If so then this is the book for you. It's also for those who don't get it, because it just might help them get into it. Born to Run (apart from being one of Bruce Springsteen's most iconic songs!) is a wonderful book about the sheer joy and magic of running. It's about the author's encounters with the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico who regularly run hundreds of kilometresbecause that's just what they do – they run for fun (not because a shoe company sponsors them) and because they're good at it – and they reckon men and women of all ages (some McDougall runs with are in their 90s) are designed that way – that we're all literally built and born to run and to run ultra distances at that. McDougall is a former journalist (war correspondent, *Ultrarunning* magazine – go figure!) who meets real, if sometimes crazy, characters and tells a great yarn, full of his own passion and delight at learning to run mega distances without injury.

Inspiring challenging & exhilarating

There are inspiring stories of gruelling races – many featuring the astounding women who are emerging as endurance superstars - and intriguing theories, backed by science, about why

we should ditch cushioned, supportive runners (we still all get injured in them, don't we??) in favour of those wacky barefoot-like shoes with toe compartments – and the secrets of Australia's latest nutritional fad, the chia seed, are revealed (maybe it's not a fad after all). It's an inspiring, challenging and exhilarating read – a bit like doing a five minute PB – that will leave you itching to get out for your next run and perhaps even rethinking your decision never to do (a)nother marathon. I've seen the book in local bookstores, though I bought my e-reader version from Amazon – and it's worth a visit there to read a terrific interview with the author.

And Oona Nielszen agrees ...

I've never read a book about running but it was pushed onto me by a friend so I dived in. Captivating from the first sentence, McDougall is a journalist who knows how to spin a yarn. I've regaled people at Saturday running with the latest instalment and Nerida and I were trading chapters as we found we were reading it at the same time.

Every morning after reading about another insight into why we are made for running, I'd leap up and try a new gait or a new mantra, although I baulked at salad for breakfast. It's about fanatics but it's not fanatical and highly recommended.

FIT flourishing on Facebook

FITs Facebook presence is enjoying a modest but steady growth since it began over a year ago.

Since February there has been a marked spike in traffic and interaction driven by keeping the page active.

Fans of the page have increased from 78 to 133 but the usage has really spiked which says either lots more people are viewing the page for information than "like" it, or the same people are referring back to check details.

Most fans come via fitact.org.au which is a pleasing cross-referral.

The events section of the page has a diary of upcoming events and members can export an event to their electronic diary.

If you've got an event let us know.

www.facebook.com/pages/Females-in-Training-Canberra-Australia/233823364373

Water Running Mondays

By Nerida Clarke

As many of us know it's often difficult to drag ourselves out of bed for an early morning run in winter. However there's a fantastic alternative to pounding the streets in the cold air – water running with Di on Monday mornings. This means hopping out of bed into a warm trackie and heading to the beautifully heated civic pool at 6.30am for what a few of us have found to be a great workout but without any obvious soreness or stress on the body.

Equivalent to a body massage

Just to be clear - water running is NOT a heap of swimming. It is a set of exercises which simulate running. Running in the water is a total body exercise that works your legs, trunk, and arms, and positively stresses your cardiovascular system. Several studies have found water running is a great way to maintain aerobic fitness and is beneficial in the prevention of injuries. Personally, after the Saturday longer runs in the lead up to the half marathon, I found the Monday morning water running session the equivalent of a total body massage. Over the past months I have found it's helping to strengthen my core and glut muscles.

At the end of the Monday sessions (which last just on an hour in a reserved FIT lane) there is some stretching and a bit of chat before we all head off having done a real workout in a warm environment ready to start the week. Talk to Di or check these sites for more information:

<http://pfitzinger.com/labreports/water.shtml>

http://www.cleveland.com/healthfit/index.ssf/2010/04/water_running_offers_benefits.html



Di Evans with her Monday water babies

Find 30 Mothers' Day Classic

Christine trained a small group of women in the art of running. Each week they met at Lake Tuggeranong and then Wanniasa oval under the football field lights. They followed Jane Grey's fabulous walk to run program, building up to the 5km Mother's Day Classic.

One of those training was Christine's sister Rita. She had never run in her life and never imagined running 5km non stop.

The day arrived and we started. Christine stayed with Rita the whole way, encouraging her to slow up when she felt like stopping. The other girls who had already run 5km, sped off and did a PB. Rita finished the race, running the whole way and she hasn't stopped skating since. "I ran 5km"... "when I ran 5km..."

A great achievement for all the girls!

Can I just do two more laps?

That was the theme of this year's FIT Megaswim which was an amazing team effort and a great example of team spirit. Senator Kate Lundy's inspiring opening words launched the May event before FIT president Jenelle Emery nervously entered the pool aware of the pressure to get the 12-strong FIT team off to a good start. The team swam 55.1km and raised \$5000+ for MS Australia placing it 4th top team fund raiser out of 18. Here Megaswim co-coordinator Julia Mansour & friends tell how it was.

Jenelle swam a commendable 2.4km in an hour before handing over to Marina who instantly relaxed when she saw an overzealous father pushing along his children with their water wings on. By the end of her swim, with 20 seconds to go, Marina pleaded for two more laps to get an even 2km before I took over and managed 2.4km in an hour.

Growing Megaswim movement

Visits from the Multiple Sclerosis Association confirmed we are part of a growing Megaswim movement and that we are swimming for a good cause. From 5 events 10 years ago, Megaswims are now held around Australia enabling the organisation to offer up to 20 "Go for Gold" scholarships in each state. This year's Canberra Megaswim raised \$84,683. FIT has participated in two of the three MS Megaswims held in Canberra, so we need to confirm this fantastic tradition next year.

Sue and Linda ploughed through the country music hours. That didn't deter them from stellar performances. Teresa achieved her personal goal of swimming for 1.5 hrs, completing 2.5km. As Teresa says "after you've done 20 laps, you just keep going."



Kinley – the super swimmer who led the field with distance – an amazing 7.1kms in three hours.



Justifiably proud Marina and Jenelle

Di's megafood for megaswimmers

Di arrived with enough food to feed an army. The night shift swimmers would be well fuelled. Coach Andrea entered the pool to do her bit, not nearly as nervous as last year. Andrea and Di have been in training together for a week and a half. "We didn't want to be overcooked" they said. Given that Di doesn't swim, Andrea has to be congratulated for getting her into the pool let alone swim in the famous MS Megaswim.

Penny would have been proud

Penny Lovibond would be so proud, as is coach Lindy Dunn. Champion Cate Byrne who has just returned from a 4 month lay-off swimming and a 5 week overseas trip, was next. She hadn't lost her touch as she ploughed through the water to do 1.4km swim in 43 minutes. Great Work Nana Cate! Then Thorpedo Kinley Jarman turned up! She is lapping all the other swimmers in the lane with 2.6km in the first hour – Awesome!! Oh my god, she's amazing. The two Di's, Andrea and Verity are giving her a standing ovation – 7.1km in 3 hours.

11 – 12pm: Verity looking good in her red swimmers and relaxed style - might be able to swim until the early hours of the morning. Vanessa (swimming for Qbn Masters) pretending to support us, but is really only visiting to eat all the slices.

Midnight: Graveyard shift begins. The coffee cart is long gone, as are the masseurs, steak sandwiches and the country music singer. But the swimmers keep swimming, aly led off by Dianne completing a PB of 1.8km in one hour and Elysia powering through the water after a night out on the town.



Mel managed her goal of 5km in 2hrs



All smiles Theresa Julia Linda



Tired but happy at 6am Lindy Melissa & Megaswim co-coordinator Angela

At least the music was still inspiring in the speakers overhead, but unfortunately the last song you hear before dipping underwater is the one stuck in mental repeat for the next hour. At least U2's "A beautiful day" was on during Angela's swim – getting into the spirit of the event. Tingling Face! So peaceful..having finished ... sitting here reading the paper ... counting laps, listening to the music, splashed ... water washing.

A word from the swimmers

Elysia It's 1.30am and the party goes are heading home to their warm beds as I drag myself out of bed having eaten dinner at "kids hour"; forgone the ending of a great movie and grabbed a few hours fitful sleep before heading out to do my 2am shift at the Megaswim. Who would have thought the AIS pool would be disco city. Great music, Great food (thanks Di) and lots of activity. So into the water time to think – lengthen that stroke, kick those feet, what will we have for dinner? Next thing an hour is up and I'm on the way home to bed.

Lindy And to think I volunteered to swim!!! 4am slot for a night owl, oh bother! But the hour went quickly and I actually enjoyed it – especially the support from Angela as lap counter, chief organiser and the great food goodies supplied by our chef extraordinaire Di. Well done all and special well done to those super girls who swam for two hours.

Anne-Marie The Mt Ainslie run was a challenge and so the coffee after was to relax – UNTIL Julia and Angela needed an early morning swimmer for the one last spot. The excitement of it was nothing compared to getting that last spot in a busy car park. But FIT girls have supported me so here was a chance to pay forward. Driving from the south in a pea soup fog of -3 degrees and no idea of how to navigate the GDE meant I arrived at the pool in a frantic daze. Champion Lindy is ploughing up the pool... It is two years since swimming training and six months since my last swim? Dive in and paddle fast! The water was warm, the mind was soothed and the arms and legs remembered what to do. Then I thought that, having a had a few health problems myself in the past years, I

was so blessed and lucky to be able to swim. How would I feel if I had MS and couldn't do this? Paddle harder girl. This is for a good cause and I'm swimming for FIT. Thanks for the opportunity – the coffee after Mt Ainslie was a blessing in disguise. -

Amanda Thank you to Jenelle for talking about the Megaswim at work one day! It is such a great event, raising awareness about MS – something which can be very debilitating. It made me really stop and think about how lucky I am just to be able to participate in the swim. It also made me pull my finger out in the last couple of minutes and try and do the Butterfly that Jenelle dobed me in for. I'm not quite sure I looked like a butterfly, in fact I probably looked more like a drowned moth – but it was a lot of fun and I could honestly say it was one of my favourite swims. So thank you FIT for organising the team.

Kristen I had wanted to do the MS swim for a couple of years and made sure I registered early. It seemed a good idea at the time until I had a car accident which put me out of training for anything. So as a temporary couch potato, I was a little worried on Friday when I realised that I had to swim for a whole hour (more than I would swim when training). But the swim is for such a good cause and the pool has a wonderful friendly easy going atmosphere that I decided to aim for 2km. And I made it!! Thanks to everyone for the encouragement and to Angela and Julia for organising. –

Megaswim Distances & Times

Jenelle Emery	2.4km	Marina Buchanan-Grey	2.0km
Julia Mansour	2.4km	Sue Rymer	2.6km
Linda Meyer	2.6km	Teresa Curtin	2.5km
Andrea	700m	Di Evans	500m
Cate Byrne	1.4km	Kinley Jarman	7.1km
Verity Alexandra	2.5km	Christine Zygadlo	2.0km
Kinley Jarman	7.1km	Dianne Bravo	1.8km
Elysia Goldie	2.4km	Angela Rymer	2.4km
Nerida Clarke	2.6km	Lindy Dunn	2.7km
AnneMarie White	2.5km	Amanda Howe	2.8km
Melissa Campbell	5km	Glenda Shelley	2.1km
Kristen Foster	2.1km		



Glenda gained her goal of 2.1km

The Colour Purple

There is nothing like doing an event, even if it is just a training run, and seeing a sea of purple in front of you - or even better behind you. That's why FIT has a range of sports gear with the familiar FIT purple logo. It has become very recognisable in Canberra and even beyond.

Wearing quality sports gear doesn't really make you go faster or harder, but it makes you look more like you know what you're doing and *that* is a confidence builder.

And it's not only how it makes you feel, it's practical too. Quick drying sports gear is so much better than cotton or other fabrics when you are training regularly, when you are travelling, or when you break into a sweat. So whether you are new to FIT, or whether you need some more gear because of a change of seasons, or maybe you've changed size, do your club a favour and buy something from the FIT range.

The new FIT winter running tops for example are still only \$60 and they are super comfortable. Contact Sue Rymer and see p 16 for clothing details.



AnnMarie chuffed with her effort



Champion supporters Andrea and Di

My Boston Marathon

By Chris Arnold

Well the day has finally arrived. I was a little nervous and sleep deprived as Alan was up and down all night with food poisoning. I was up at 5.30am to catch a bus to the start line 42.2k away. We all jumped on the yellow schools buses (like the ones you see in American movies) with a police escort all the way to the start at Hopkinson. My start time was 10:40am. We had to leave early (7a.m.) as there were over 27,000 starters. It was a very cold windy day with the sun shining, which was quite pleasant. The course started down hill and finished up hill. We were either running up or going down but the country side was beautiful which made up for all the undulations.

The run reminded me of the City2Surf, with bands and thousands and thousands of people along the route from the start to the finish. At about the 25k mark there was a girl's boarding school and they formed a line for about a 1k to cheer us on, which was really nice.

At the 10k I was feeling really great and enjoying myself. I heard someone call my name with an Aussie accent and there was Alan waving. I was really surprised and happy that he saw me running considering how he was feeling. He was a great support to me, he is my special BIT. I ran into a little bad luck at about the 19k mark where I hurt my hammy which meant that I was forced to walk and run the rest of the way. Before this happened, I was on track to meet my goal. I was very disappointed, but I crossed the finish line to get my finisher's medal for the 115th Boston Marathon 18th April 2011.



Chris delighted to see her BIT at 10km

Now a word from the streets of London on 17 April 2011

Name: Lorraine Stevens
DOB: 17 April 1953
Runner No: 58479
Time: 4hrs:20min:12 seconds

What a marathon! Totally different atmosphere to Paris in 2007 (my first) yet the course was just as exciting and the spectator crowd enjoyable.

Di Evans and Jane (yes-we all get those damn awful niggles a month out that truly scare you - for which you go screaming to Jane to perform her physio magic) had prepared me very well.

Wish I had an excuse not to start

So I had no excuses come marathon day though there was a nervous moment when I wish I had any excuse so that I didn't have to turn up at the start line!

The day was warm for April– 26 degrees. Everyone in my start group (there are 3 start groups) was very relaxed and drinking lots of water in the hour before the start. There was free coffee, tea, water and lucozade while we sat on Greenwich green waiting for the final call up. It was all very relaxed and superbly organised. Lots of music (great and otherwise) played. I now know all about 'Florence and the Machine', 'Plan B' and a myriad others I had never heard before. Amazing how one song can stay in your mind for a whole marathon. Ask me about the song called "She said" by Plan B. That said, Di's 'ten green bottles' got a go at the 37km mark when the temp got turned up a bit and I entered the 'determined' phase where I asked myself – why didn't Pheiddipedes drop dead at 20 miles, not 26 miles!

In a trance like state

Back to the marathon- the crowd is phenomenal and combine that with water, lucozade and toilet stops every two miles (yes-a little mathematical conversion was required) I started looking forward to these 'knowns' and the time just flew. No cobblestones along the whole course now (they have prepared the roads for the Olympic marathon) and when I turned at Big Ben into the Birdcage walk and then at Buck palace into the Mall I was in a trance like state of thinking "this is it" - the finish line – a feeling I cannot describe. However you will know it when you are in that same scenario. Decision: a 'must do' whether you walk, run or crawl.

Travel FIT running/swimming/ cycling. Staying fit on holiday

In May Sandy Waters and Julianne Quaine trekked for 8 days to reach the summit of Africa's highest mountain, Kilimanjaro. This Maasai word means 'the White Mountain' because the summit is perpetually snow covered. The 5,895m Uhuru Peak is higher than Everest base camp. (Uhuru means freedom in Swahili, the national language of Tanzania). Here Julianne tells the story.

Every FIT adventure has to start with training. Ours started on Australia Day with a 20km walk in Namadgi National Park and was followed by successive Sunday walks at 6am around the very low peaks of Canberra. The highest peak we trained on was Mt Tennant at 1300m well below our final destination. We started walking for two hours and gradually built up to a final training walk about a week before we left of some six hours which covered Mt Majura, Majura Pines, Hackett Hill and Mt Ainslie.

Wazungu wazungu wazungu

We arrived in Arusha, Tanzania, via Nairobi, Kenya, to acclimatise for a day. We saw the local May Day, struggled to fight off the local touts exhorting us to visit their mothers', sisters', aunts' and grandmothers' shops. We visited the national museum for some local history. We tried out our limited Swahili, which we had practised on our long training walks. Walking down a steep gully through fields to escape the touts we were stared at by some very shy children who ran away calling 'wazungu' (white people) with peels of laughter as soon as we greeted them with 'habari'.

Maasai cattle watching style

The trekkers in our party of nine arrived that evening and we had a briefing from Charlie the head guide including the importance of staying behind him and walking 'pole pole' (slowly, slowly), a term not to be confused with 'pole' which means sorry. Next day we were off in our land cruisers for a bit of a game drive and stay in a permanent safari camp where the tents came complete with flushing toilets. We saw zebra, giraffe, wildebeast and monkeys as well as traditional Maasai men watching their cattle, wearing gorgeous red cloaks, elaborate jewellery, sandals (with soles made out of tyres) complemented by the latest wrist watches and mobile phones.

49 guides, porters, cooks for 9 people

Next day it was off to the Londorosi Gate of Kilimanjaro National Park. We took the Lemosho route - less popular because it's longer but allows altitude acclimatisation by walking for a 2-3 days at around 4000m. We and our 49 guides, porters, cooks and chief bottle washers left the land cruisers and truck which got bogged around midday. The vegetation at the beginning of the walk was rainforest - it was a very green green and thick with some beautiful flowers including *Protea kilimanjari* and impatiens of every colour. We had to contend with fire ants and quite a few muddy, boggy and slippery spots and it was a constant up and down. It rained very heavily that first day and we were very glad to get into camp as the sun went down, as it became suddenly quite cold as fog and mist settled around us. The porters, who had arrived well before us, had set up our tents, turned choir, and greeted us with local songs - beautiful voices were lead by 'Bossy' the choir master and we all had a bit of dance along to the infectious rhythm the singing provided.

Walked at least 8-10 hours a day

Next day shone beautifully and there was no sign of rain and that was the weather pattern of the rest of the trip - lovely sunny mornings with mist setting in mid afternoon. The nights were very cold and clear, where the stars were so bright that there was not even one small spot in the sky without starlight. It was hard going each day. While we gradually were climbing upwards there was plenty of going down as well. We scrambled up the Baranco Wall, including reaching around the kissing rock, trying not to look down. We walked from early in the morning to late in the afternoon - at least 8-10 hours a day. We had a couple of days before the summit which were half days and we really needed the rest. We were sleeping 10 hours or so every night and because we were taking diuretics to prevent altitude sickness, we were getting up to pee in the night (as well as many times during the day) which is when we saw the great views of the cosmos.

Dark & cold with 5 layers of clothes

Finally we reached 4600m - the last camp sight. We had walked through a changing landscape and vegetations from rainforest, heath land and alpine succulents to reach a small plateau below the main volcanic peak which was rock strewn and looked a bit like an imagined moonscape. We went to bed early to rest before the call at 3am for the final 1300m or so climb to Uhuru Peak. It was dark and cold - with 5 layers of clothing on top and three on the bottom we really felt like Michelin men. The group of 9 was accompanied by nine guides and porters. We were well looked after by Peter, our personal tent man and Godfrey Reagan, both of whom carried our water and extra clothes that day and kept close for encouragement.

Majesty of Mt Kilimanjaro



Bossy and his choir



Sandy and Julianne smiling at the top

Soup and a little lie down

As we progressed higher I was sick with a throbbing headache and wanted to lie down and die on the side of the path. Sandy was looking extremely fit and offered words of encouragement. Finally we got there, had the photo and then we were heading back down. I made a miraculous recovery thanks to the lower altitude and the beautiful Bariki, a 23 year old angel who brought me soup in my tent about 3pm where I had a little lie down. At 4pm we were off again for a further descent to the last camp at about 4000m. We had walked for 15 hours on that second last day and we were glad we had done the long training walks.

No one had ever sung to them before

Last day and we had a little plan that we had been hatching as a surprise for Charles, Moses, Solomon, Robert again, Briki, John, Peter and Bossy and the rest of the crew/choir. After the men had sung their farewell songs for us we told them we had a few songs to sing for them and we launched (reluctantly on the part of some) into Waltzing Matilda (one line of which we couldn't remember despite many nights of practice much to the annoyance of our fellow campers), rounds of Kookaburra sits on the old gum tree and Old MacDonald who had a kangaroo and emu on his farm, complete with hopping and some emu-like movements. The men were taken by this – no-one had ever sung to them before! This account is very short and can't really communicate all the wonderful experience we both had. All we can say is go and try it for yourself. There's the triumph of reaching the top but it was also a very special experience to meet and get to know a little bit of the lives and experiences of all the wonderful guides and porters we had to help us along the way.

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