



race report
my experience

Rhodes Run

UTI Rhodes Run, Border, 12 July

Done... with feelings of breathtaking breathlessness... and Dusted... with flakes of snow on race day. Once again, the Rhodes Marathon was much more than just an ultra trail run. – BY BILL COOP



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rom the moment my entry was confirmed, I felt my Rhodes journey had begun. Receiving regular e-mails from Darryl and Evie Raubenheimer welcoming me and offering plenty of advice or information I might need, including full race and route details, clothing, gear, accommodation, tips for driving in the snow, traditions and much more. It built my excitement and anticipation levels about visiting a part of our country I had never been to before, and of course, raised the aura, mystique and challenge of the race itself.

The route is very tough, but at the same time very doable. Along the 30-plus kilometres of dirt roads and tracks – mostly rough and rugged 4X4 routes – I was able to maintain a constant running pace. There are also paths with moderate inclines and declines where I settled to a slow jog. On the very steep sections and cross country parts, I found anything more than walking was extremely difficult, or just impossible. Also, I live in Joburg but I could still feel the effects of the altitude, so whenever I felt a little breathless, I purposefully eased up on my pace, even if that was already a slow walk. My mantra became "Breathtaking views, Bill, not breathtaking pace."

UPS AND DOWNS

The first 15km is along quite rough dirt roads and tracks. I concentrated on watching my step but also keeping an eye on the beauty. Panoramic views come at a price, so if you are paying for them you must at least enjoy them! (409m up, 229m down, 6:43/km)

The next 8km includes the iconic feature of the race, Mavis Bank, which is tackled in the last 3km of this section – and the final kilometre will take you anything between 10 and 30 minutes! Essentially, you go straight up the mountain alongside a fence, with only a hint of a path here and there. I had to concentrate on each foot placing, and with the blinding sun, it was not easy to glance ahead, so I chose to stop, look up and pick my line for the next few metres and go again. This also helped keep exertion levels and my breathing in check. (697m up, 161m down, 11:14/km)

I enjoyed running the 8km of road and walking/stumbling the 5km of pure cross country across the top of the mountain. There was no snow at the start of the race, despite the temperature of minus-8 degrees, but for those destined to finish in the last hour or two, a lot of snow came down along here. I just caught the first dusting of flakes before starting my descent, so sadly missed the full beauty... but gladly missed the added difficulty. (279m up, 257m down, 9:03/km)

NEARLY THERE

The last 16km is all dirt roads with some very steep quad-crunching sections. I had a lapse in concentration with about 10km to go and paid the price by tripping on a stone and going head over heels. Luckily, I only suffered a couple of grazes. Thanks to my conservative approach in the

first half, I was able to run 'enjoyably,' feeling strong all the way to the finish. (43m up, 778m down, 5:52/km)

I crossed the finish line in 6:44, feeling both exhausted and exhilarated, then headed straight to the Farmers Hall to change into dry, warm clothes, eat a hot meal and start sipping on various 'warming' beverages. I am so pleased to have had The Rhodes Trail Run on my bucket list... add it to yours now! (Total: 1428m up, 1428m down, 7:43/km) /K