

Mac's Springtide West Coaster
42km marathon reccie report – Thursday 22 November
By Aaron Carter



After many years of trying to get this event up and running (I've lost count how many times the ARC have denied us a permit), we've finally got ourselves a full marathon course for the Mac's Springtide West Coaster adventure run.

We, at total sport, came up with what I thought looked to be on paper, a good old fashioned 'toughie'. With over 2100 metres of vertical climb, she was going to be a solid day at the office – so to speak. Certainly better than being at the office, that's for sure. While we're on vertical metres, the Gordon Walker school of thought on this is that for every 100 metres climbed is the equivalent of adding an extra 1km to your session, so keep that in mind – you've just added another half marathon to one of the toughest marathon courses around!

My reasoning behind doing the 42km course today was two-fold. I am somewhat stumbling toward the start line for the Kepler Challenge (Saturday 1 December), and I wanted a final long, tough run. It's fair to say that the training has been a little inconsistent, with the longest run prior to today's mission around 4 hours. I had, however, decided to implement the Arthur Lydiard theory that you do your longest and hardest session 10 days out from race day – according to the legend himself, the body gets its peak benefit around 9 – 10 days after this session. The second reason was that I could then talk with a little more authority to those mad enough to give the 42km course a crack on Saturday 1 December!

So, I decided to crack into it as early as I could manage, and started on my journey at around 7.30am. Allow an hour to get to Constable Rd, particularly if you're like me and fancy a pre run coffee and sandwich from one of the very good bakeries in Kumeu.

Given that the training in my build up to Kepler has not had a huge amount of structure, I set myself some pretty achievable goals for the day. Basically the plan was to run the flats, slight uphill and downs, then walk the slightly stiffer uphill (of which there are many), and the super technical bits (also of which there are plenty!). Given this game plan, and based on the previous running I'd done on these tracks, I figured I was in for a 6.5 – 7 hour day.

Below, I have split the course into the sections almost in the order which you will run on race day (the marathon course actually starts at the bottom of the first downhill on the Te Henga track). Also included is a 'section' description, the distance covered, plus how long each bit took me.

Constable Rd (to start of Te Henga track - from Goldie Bush entrance) – 500m

A slight uphill jaunt up gravel road, a nice little warm up!

5minutes

Te Henga track (from Constable Rd to Bethells) – 9km

We start with a steep down (this is where the marathon course starts on race day), then a couple of kilometres of winding, scruffy track towards the coast. Lots of gorse, very overgrown and flax bushes that you literally have to scramble your way through, it's very hard to see the track in parts. Once we hit the sea views, we are into the good stuff. This next 5 – 6km are some of the best, most enjoyable running on the Te Henga track, it is absolutely brilliant! Some of the tracks are still pretty overgrown and technical, but it's possible to get into some sort of a rhythm through this section.



Quality trails coupled with unbeatable views and I'm a very happy person. For those of you that haven't yet had a crack at the Te Henga track, almost all of it is cut into a headland that drops (very steeply in parts) into the ocean several hundred metres below – unlike the Waitakere Ranges trails, you are exposed to the conditions almost the entire time along the track. Proceeding with caution is certainly the ticket. About three quarters along the track, it drops sharply almost to sea level, before climbing again then finally dropping away and finishing at the car park on Bethells Rd.

1hour 40minutes

Te Henga track (from Bethells to Constable Rd) – 9km

Once you hit the Bethells car park, you basically turn around and head back exactly the same way you came. Impossible to get bored, however, it is just as good (but harder, with more climbing) on the way back. The reason there is more climbing on the way back (around an extra 200 metres of vertical climb), is that on the way from Constable Rd to Bethells, you have two big downhills, at the start from Constable Rd, then at the end to Bethells Rd, both of which you need to climb on the way back.



1hour 50minutes

Note: the out and back on the Te Henga track involves around 1100 vertical metres of climb – NICE!



Constable Rd (to start of Goldie Bush walkway) – 500m

After a stiff climb back to Constable Rd (the last section of the Te Henga is a bit of a killer), it's a nice easy down on gravel road towards the start of the Goldie Bush Mokoroa Falls track.

5minutes

Mokoroa Falls track (to Horseman Rd) – 5km

Right, an instant change of scenery is upon us as soon as we head into the Goldie Bush / Mokoroa Falls track. You're almost instantly under a canopy of native bush and very clear and (in most places) firm single trail – excellent! A fast downhill to the stream (10 – 15 minutes), and we are presented with a fork in the road. At this point we head left and head along the Mokoroa Falls track, almost instantly I had my first fall slipping on mossy rock and into the cold but refreshing water of the Mokoroa stream. Now this piece is possibly the most technical on the entire course. The reason being that it includes several stream crossings (very pleasant for those tiring legs and sore feet). And when you're not in the drink, you're on skinny, root-ridden and very uneven and sometimes obscured trails. By all means it's all good fun, but it's slow – the slowest 5km on the course for me. Eventually we head away from the Mokoroa stream and head steadily uphill on a nice, wide track all the way to Horseman Rd. Another 250+ metres of climb in this section too.



1hour 10minutes

The 'road' section (out and back, plus loop) – 14km

Right, I was dreading this bit right from the start, and knew that it would mentally be the toughest bit on the course. It's not glamorous - the best way to describe it is 7km of more down than up, then a right hand turn onto Bethells Rd where it's pretty much all up, aside from the last 1 – 2km gravel road section back to Horseman Rd. Those of you that like spending your time on the road might like this section as you can probably stretch out a little. However, with nearly 500 metres of vertical climb (some short, sharp stuff, and some long winding climbs), it's still pretty tough stuff. I basically ran the first half (40 minutes) and walked the second (over an hour), and consequently took a long time to complete the road section.

1hour 45minutes

Goldie Bush walkway (to Constable Rd) – 4km

Right, even though it had been a long day to this point, I was almost fired up for the last trail section on the Goldie Bush walkway. We have definitely got the Goldie Bush / Mokoroa Falls track being run in the correct sequence, as this last piece from Horseman Rd to the Mokoroa stream is a little beauty. Even with tired legs I was able to stretch out and really enjoy the nice, wide, slightly downhill trails. At around the 15 minute mark we hit some stairs heading



steeply down, and they take us down to the Mokoroa stream. At this point, we have to head back up the same way we came down at the start of this trail, but not before soaking the legs for a few minutes in the rushing water feeding the Mokoroa stream – that was absolute bliss! OK, I'm not going to start lying to you now, the next 15 – 20 minutes is ALL uphill, and it's pretty tough. With just over 200 metres of climbing in this section (all in this last bit I think), she's a pretty ugly finish. The best thing about is that I knew I was getting damn close to "stop" time, which definitely made it more bearable. Eventually it was onto the last switchback and we popped out at the entrance to the Goldie Bush / Mokoroa Falls track. Game over!

40minutes

So my 6.5 – 7 hour estimate was slightly out, it took me 7hours 15minutes to conquer the mighty Macs Springtide West Coaster 42km course. I took the opportunity of asking myself some questions once I'd finished, read on...

Q: OK, after taking over 7 hours to complete the 42km course, it would seem fair to say that it's a fairly tough course then?

A: yep, it's tough, that course has absolutely everything – lots of climbing (over 2100 metres of vertical climb), very technical trails, river crossings, and of course, a very nasty, hilly road section

Q: what have you got it to compare to?

A: I did the Motutapu Icebreaker off-road marathon earlier in the year (March, Wanaka to Arrowtown) - this took me around 5 hours and was hell of a lot easier than this course

Q: what will the winning time for the marathon be then?

A: I always get these predictions wrong, but I would be absolutely flabbergasted if anyone knocked this course out in less than 4 hours. I'm going to predict the winning time being around 4h 15m. However, I wouldn't be too surprised if there was no one in at the 4h 30m mark

Q: so, after doing that, would you recommend this course to anyone that wanted to do a marathon?

A: no, I wouldn't – unless you really, really want to knock out a super tough marathon (not a good one for first time marathoners). I actually think the pick of the bunch is the 28km course, which is the combination of the Te Henga track (out and back) plus the Goldie Bush / Mokoroa Falls track. It's chocka block full of outstanding track / trail running and is equivalent to a full marathon anyway I think. It's definitely a step up in terms of difficulty from the Leppin off-road series

Q: how many Macs Springtide beers do you think you've earned?

A: well, based on a very scientific method of working this out (1 beer for every 6 kilometres covered), I would say a minimum of 7!

As my good mate Callum says, "you've got to take your hat off to your body, it's amazing what it's capable of"

It's all about the journey – enjoy what we are lucky enough to have on our back door step.