

The Kepler Challenge, 60 km., at Te Anau, New Zealand. December 6, 2008

The Kepler Track is a footpath made for backpackers and walkers. It takes the form of a 60 km circular track, in the most breath taking scenery I have ever seen. Along the track there are several huts used to shelter over night, as well as toilets (unbelievable!).

6 am start and a fine morning for running. From the start there is a flat 5.6 km through the forest to Brod Bay and the first check point and water/food station. From here a steady climb zig zags up the steeper sections.

The trees start to thin out as we near the rocky out-crops. Then a wooden stairway bolted to the side of 40 foot high rock face appears. Up we go, only two thirds of the way, switch to a wooden walkway around the corner, then more stairs to the top. Open moor now to Luxmore Hut, the second checkpoint/water/food station. Everybody's kit is properly checked here.

Now we face a 14.5km section, undulating along the mountain tops to a height of 1400m - the ground white with frost (remember it's mid-summer in NZ). The descent included more wooden stairs, some very steep. As I reached the tree line the air starting to warm up. Nearing the Iris Burn hut check point, disaster struck as I slipped, landing on my chest on a small tree stump. Staggered to the check point, to be told I had two cracked ribs and the only ways out are on foot, or by helicopter. I took some painkillers and carried on; only 32.6 km to go! Running in the Iris Burn valley now, the temperature rising, not really enjoying the scenery. Made the next check point but a fantastic race is turning into a nightmare. Something in my shoe but couldn't undo my laces. Never mind, fasten them again. There's drink and food in my bum bag, if only I could get into it. Couldn't tighten it again.

Don't really remember a lot of the race from here, apart from a long suspension bridge that wobbled and looked like it belonged in Indiana Jones. The route, the scenery and the enthusiasm of all the marshals and officials really made the Kepler Challenge a race to do again - next time without cracked ribs.

Running time, 7hours 9mins, position 84 out of 400, second UK finisher.

For more than just these few words about the race, here is a link:

<http://www.keplerchallenge.co.nz>. Hope it works.

Happy running.

Tim Makin.

(Chairman's note: Is there an astronomical link?)