



Tom, Costas, Peter & Sheryl's Excellent Adventure!

We did it. Team Feels Like Team Spirit completed the Oxfam Trailwalker in Taupo, and we nailed it!

We arrived at the finish line well within our target time range, with all four of us together, but it almost wasn't so.

Thanks to our donors, we raised a decent sum for Oxfam and all the good work they do in the Pacific.

So, this is how it went...

Saturday 28 March 2015 dawned fine and mild. We had actually already been up for two hours before dawn arrived. Our alarms went off at 4:15 am, so we could get ready and set off to the 6am start in good time.

There had been a slight hiccup the previous evening, when at 8 pm in Taupo it was discovered that a bag with all of a team member's gear in it was left in Auckland. Thankfully a godson stepped up willingly to answer the emergency call, and was able to provide a late courier service. He collected the bag and headed south and a couple of us headed north to meet in Cambridge where the bag was handed over. It was a close call and we were very grateful for the short notice 3½ hour dash on a Friday evening.

On the Saturday morning at about 5:00 am we headed to the Trailwalker start line, on an airstrip on Whangamata Road. It was very busy with almost 500 other walkers and their support crews assembled at the same time (with the same number starting an hour later too). Lots of movement and bustle, and an air of excited expectation.

We were so, so lucky - the weather was perfect, clear but mild, and so it continued through the day. Rain did arrive 24 hours later, but we were fortunately in bed by then ...

At the start line Feels Like Team Spirit edged its way towards the front, and come the countdown at 6:00 am we set off in the van of the throng.

It was a busy trail, and took a while to settle.

Tom and Sheryl together initially, Pete and Costas each making new friends a little further back as we followed a well-formed trail down towards the Lake shore at Kawakawa Bay. We were all re-united as a team by the first checkpoint, where we arrived at 7:45 am right on our target schedule. No support crew at this checkpoint, we tarried only briefly and kept going, heading on towards Kinloch.

The trail to Kinloch took us through bush up and over the bluff between the bays. By now most of the teams had settled into their paces, and were stretched out along the trail. The most interesting part of this leg, was that we were overtaken by the first few teams that had started an hour later!! These teams were heading for times of between 12½ hours and 16 hours.

Kinloch was great. Bathed in sunshine, but not too hot. Our support crew was a welcome sight, and we took the opportunity to top up on fluids and have something to eat to keep fuel levels up for later in the day. A 15 minute stop, and we were off again...

... up and over the next bluff heading for Whakaipo Bay. Sun shining, but on the bush trail we were well shaded. Sheryl took charge as pacemaker at the front of the team and she set a cracking pace to keep the km's ticking over. We arrived at Whakaipo ½ hour ahead of target time with the team feeling strong! At this point we were tracking along at under 9 minutes/km.

Our support crew had a marvellous spread for us at Whakaipo - gourmet food, so welcome, though a couple of the team paid on the next leg for a sandwich or three too many!

The outward trail led from the Lake heading north to the highest point on the trail, a trig station behind Acacia Bay. A long slog, mostly across farmland initially, some pine bush, and then the downward trail into Taupo through a working quarry and on to the main road into town.



A significant moment on this leg was passing the 50 km mark - halfway there! Team still travelling fairly comfortably, and at a decent clip, but starting to feel a few aches. The climb up from the Lake to the trig was demanding. We averaged nearly 10 minutes/km on this leg. By this time there are only a few other teams around us.

Into Taupo to Riverside Park, and our great support crew was again a welcome sight. 25 minutes for re-hydrating and re-fuelling, and some running repairs on one or two hot spots and blisters on feet. At this stage we are almost an hour ahead of the schedule which had a target finish of just under 19 hours ... but feeling the pace a bit.

We set off along the Waikato River right bank trail heading for Huka Falls. No time for sightseeing, we cross the river at the Falls, and on to CP5, and a great welcome (and hot chips) from the T&T volunteer team staffing the checkpoint. The trail headed off for a loop around Wairakei Golf Course, through the pine forest, and back to Wairakei Resort, with supporters Lexy, Talia, Jo and Jill meeting us on the trail in. On this leg however a bad blister strikes the team, running repairs needed on the side of the trail. Abruptly, the going is slow, painful, and very tough. Pace is up to 14 minutes/km and our projected finish time extending out to the early hours of Sunday morning. Spirits are low, and even doubt creeps in about the ability to complete the walk... Until the drugs kick in!! A testament to the analgesic power of Voltaren and Paracetamol, suddenly we are back into it with a vengeance.

15 minutes at Wairakei Resort, CP6, and we strike out along the Waikato left bank towards Aratiatia Dam, at about 6:30 pm, still with some daylight. The team is feeling good now 70 km along the trail.

Some split times under 9 minutes/km, we are going for it. Across the river, at Aratiatia, it's back along the right bank heading upstream towards town. Darkness falls as the trail becomes harder - uphill and less even underfoot. Now we slow down and there are one or two stumbles on ankles.

This is rated by Oxfam as the hardest leg, and we feel it towards the end, but we do manage to arrive at CP7 at the Gliding Club aerodrome to the east of town nearly 50 minutes ahead of schedule, at 9:50 pm. We're all doing it hard but we can taste the finish, and resolve to strike on quickly. After a stop with our Crew of less than ten minutes, we set off on the last leg to the finish line.

The last leg, our hardest leg. The 12 km take us 2½ hours. Initially very tough for weary minds, tired bodies and hurting feet - over open farmland, up and down with no formed trail, and of course in the dark. Very happy to hit the Lake shore at Two Mile Bay close to midnight, and turn to head back into town along the Lake front.

If there is a highlight on this leg (apart from finishing, but we haven't got there yet...) it is at 90 km.

For three of us our 55 km training walk has been our longest walk to date. But Costas, a veteran of 13 Comrades marathons (Pietermaritzburg >< Durban) has been further.

So, after 18 h 27 m we cross the line in Tongariro Domain in the centre of town. We are half an hour ahead of target time - we find out later that we are the 12th fastest team, and tenth out of those who finished with all four team members.

At the finish, so pleased. So happy to stop. We are all hurting, feet are sore, blisters starting to become a real issue, we have made it just in time, with probably not much left in the tank or physical capacity to walk many more kilometres.

We arrive to a terrific welcome from our support crew, and thankfully it is only half past midnight - early to bed!

Well ... there were some bubbles and a few beers to re-hydrate first! And of course a leg massage.

At 7 am in the morning, woken by the rain on the roof, and so grateful to not still be walking. Having packed up we visit the finish line on the way out of town - it is half past noon, we finished twelve



hours ago, and there are nearly 40 teams out on the Trail, still trudging to the finish!

We had a great day. There were low moments for all of us, but our great Support Crew kept us going at the checkpoints. They were fantastic. BIG thanks to Linda, Jill, Anna, Jo, Lexy and Talia.

Also thanks to Oxfam, for the assistance from the staff beforehand and on the day itself, and to the volunteers along the Trail and at the checkpoints. The whole day had such a good feeling about it, lots of excitement, and positivity for the event - a sense of fun throughout the day! A special event to have been part of.

To our donors, HUGE thanks. We have now raised over \$ 10,000. We are just so grateful on behalf of Oxfam for their generosity. Their support was huge motivation, and inspiration, along the Trail.

Where does the money go? See the Oxfam website at <http://www.oxfam.org.nz/about-us/faqs>.

Heartfelt thanks from all of us...

**Feels Like Team Spirit: Sheryl,
Costas, Peter and Tom**

That's us! All done