



“ later than everyone else and although it was nice to know that I was in the top 19 runners (along with only one other female), mentally it threw me. All I could think was that means missing two hours of the coolest part of the day and also two hours more in the dark at the end of the stage. Heat, light – every little element matters to your estimations of daily success on a magnificent scale.

The brief was for lots of running through loose, deep sand and over some massive dunes. Not only would it be long and tough but it would also be slow going. On top of that, the forecast was for rain and thunderstorms.

As promised they hit with a fury in the dark of night to give a spectacular light show but a scary one to be exposed to as they passed overhead.

After the storms we entered the Coral Pink Sand Dunes following little lights in the distance. The only way to tackle these beasts was on all fours, crawling forward two ‘steps’ and then sliding back one. At one point all I could do was laugh but somehow I managed to edge my way over and run down the other side. Again and again. I was lucky to have my two saviour runners with me, Ronnie and Peter, and it was great to have company. Instead of talking to myself someone would answer – even when

I didn’t make sense. I remember saying that all I wanted for Christmas was some long legs and raved about how we all must be crazy and when I grow up I want to be able to run down hills as fast as them. At other times I was silent, lost in my own headspace, thinking of nothing.

Finally we made it to the last few kilometres of the stage, but not before the course had us bush bashing through dense scrub searching in the dark for the pink flags that would lead us into camp. It was an incredible feeling when we could finally see camp, like a beacon lighting the distance, and it gave a burst of energy so that we could make the final push, all running in together. I found my tent and lay there, resting and thinking about the day, eventually drifting off into much-needed sleep.

As the days went on there were many DNFs. You feel for competitors that simply cannot go any further. Their pain becomes yours as you know the sacrifice it takes just get to the starting line. After all, every single competitor represented a range of Regular Joe’s – professors, students, surgeons or the local garbage collector – all trying to achieve something extraordinary. All would have foregone many things – nights out with friends, nights in with partners, time with kids – just to test themselves in a harsh desert.

The final day came, Stage Six, and I was happy that I had made it this far. I hadn’t dared to think about the finish line for so many days, but there I was so close, lined up at the final stage starting line. My pack finally felt light – I had eaten all my food. A shower, a real bed and good food awaited. I could feel the excitement that buzzed amongst us all.

Those demons in my head that I fought along the way, I had beaten. I had learned much about myself and more about others. In the desert, we shared stories, felt the pain of others, laughed, and often cried. As beaten up as my body was, I was on a high. The desert is a magical place that you want to capture and bottle up. As I approached the finish line I couldn’t stop smiling. Pain, what pain? The crowd cheered and screamed, I held back the tears but for the first time in six days, they were tears of bliss and so I was happy to spill them on the floor of the desert that had squeezed them from me. **RUN**

Sandy Suckling won the female category in the 2015 Grand to Grand and came 12th overall in a collated time of 42:15:16.

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