

## Six Foot Track Marathon

Saturday, 11th March 2006  
by Kevin Tiller, Race Director

Firmly anchored at the end of the Sydney Summer is a rather quirky event, The Six Foot Track Marathon. It's now 100% off-road, starting near the NSW Blue Mountains town of Katoomba and following the mountainous, rock strewn, dusty, route that is the Six Foot Track walking path. Jenolan Caves, the finishing point, is situated in approximately the middle of nowhere – the bush surrounds are most splendid as befitting a World Heritage area and the town itself has been boiled down to probably the only essential part of any rural Australian town – a pub with a huge outdoor seating area. The race finishes right outside the pub and everyone is held captive until after the awards ceremony. This means that as progressively more runners finish, the waiting crowd becomes louder and louder, cheering on their mates as they come staggering into view at the top of the valley about a km away and proceed to weave their way down.

**T**HE START area is an impossibly small clearing in the bush that fits about 800 people standing up, so when you fit in 800 runners, 150 spectators, a brigade of Rural fire-fighters and a canteen truck offering everything from Tea and Damper to Bacon & Eggs free to runners and their guests, it is a touch crowded. The closeness adds to the friendly atmosphere and makes for an exciting start as the runners charge off the cliff top, lemming fashion, when the gun goes off.

The finish line resembles a MASH Unit with runners finishing the race seemingly with their last breath as they crash over the line into the arms of loved ones, unable to stop themselves after the steepest 4km of downhill they have run in a long while or even forever. Although March can see cooler weather in the Blue Mountains, race day is historically hot each year - great for watching, but mid-20Cs is quite hot to be running that far.

There was a lot of blood, sweat and tears on view at the finish this year as the 757 starters were whittled down to 718 that finished and 699 that finished within the race's 7hour 00mins cut-off time. All of these numbers were a record high for the race – making it the 5th largest marathon in the country. The race is by far the largest Ultramarathon in Australia. In fact most years see a record field compete, since the race started in 1984 when the Six Foot Track was officially opened by the Mayor of the Blue Mountains. That first year saw 7 runners start the race – all of whom finished, even though there were no aid stations or directions. The pioneering spirit of the race saw the runners drinking from puddles to sustain them that year.

Now there are more than 15 fully stocked aid stations manned by fire crews from the Rural Fire Service, the events official beneficiary and this year raised more than \$30,000 for the organisation.

For a race that has no major sponsors and seems to survive on its website and word of mouth, it seems amazing that elite runners are attracted not just from every state in Australia but also Japan, the USA, the UK and a scattering of other nations.

This year a great field had assembled with six of the top seven runners of all time being

### RESULTS

#### Men

1. Kaspar Sollberger	3:26:49
2. Daniel Green	3:34:57
3. Jonathan Blake	3:37:02
4. Trevor Jacobs	3:38:26
5. David Singleton	3:43:14
6. Hiroki Ishikawa	3:43:42
7. Tony Fattorini	3:44:26
8. Jeremy Cox	3:44:49
9. Don Wallace	3:46:43
10. Tim Sloan	3:51:08

#### Women

1. Emma Murray	3:37:27
2. Suzanne Kelly	4:19:45
3. Dearne Fulcher	4:23:28
4. Heather Logie	4:30:29
5. Verity Tolhurst	4:43:27
6. Jenny Henville	4:45:53
7. Siri Terjesen	4:46:21
8. Jan Hales	4:47:29
9. Sharon Harrison	4:55:07
10. Susan Sprague	4:55:36



Dearne Fulcher



The phenomenal Emma Murray



Race Winner Switzerland's Kaspar Sollberger



Ultra Legend Trevor 'Gramps' Jacobs

Each year the race provides three official "sweepers" – one to pace people for the 7hour cut-off and two bringing up the rear to withdraw runners who will not make the finish in the time allowed. This year the three sweeps were Six Foot fans from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane with a quarter of a century worth of Six Foot experience between them. Usually the sweeps carry brooms and whistles, with instructions to bury the dead six feet off the track. They are widely booed by all the runners.

had an hour of really gritting my teeth, I was now much slower up any uphill and started to doubt if I could continue on at all. By 34km this feeling had increased and I was really struggling to continue on". When Kasper came motoring past him he knew that the race was lost. Daniel claims that the race is definitely the hardest race that he has done – no mean statement from a previous Australian Marathon Champion. Jonathan Blake from NSW's Sutherland Shire was third male home in 3h 37m before a quick procession that saw a record 22 runners home in under 4hrs (approx 2h 45m marathon standard).

Taking everyone's breath away was a superb race by Emma Murray who not only blitzed her own course record to finish in 3:37, but finished an outstanding fourth overall. Most staggering of all was her look of total composure as she was interviewed only a couple of minutes later in front of the gathered crowd. Emma and her partner David Osmond took out the inaugural "partners prize" by 1h 28m as his time of 3h 57m was good enough for 18th overall. Sydney Strider, Suzanne Kelly was clearly disappointed to finish 4 mins slower than 2005, 4h 19m this year, second female again. However she cheered up when told that it was a new age over-40 female group record. Local Runner from Katoomba, Dearne Fulcher again finished third in 4h 23m although about 15 secs slower than in 2005.

The ACT-Run group from Canberra, managed by over 50 male course record holder Trevor "Gramps" Jacobs managed to persuade Canberra's



finest to race – they took out 6 of the top 7 places outright – a huge depth of talent from unquestionably Australia's Mountain Running epicentre. The Sydney Striders Running Club took out the Mob Run for the "most fastest" runners, but with about 15% of the starting field they have been long-time winners by sheer numbers.

Additional age group records were set by Suncha Raaschou (female over 60 – 6:45) and Ludwig Herpich (male over 70 – 6:16).

Few races attract such a loyal following – more than half the field have competed before, and over 30 received their official pewter race buckle for completing 6 events under the 7hr time limit. You have to run 12 to receive the rest of the belt. Bob Fickel, a previous Sydney to Melbourne racer was the sole 18 year finisher and received a quality embroidered race jacket for his persistence. Only one runner has finished all 23 Six Foot races under the cut-off - Max Bogenhuber, a 63 year old runner from Sutherland Shire. He claims the race is the best one of its kind around but he dreads each year coming around as he has a dodgy knee and doesn't want to stop his streak.

Full results are available on the race website [www.sixfoot.com](http://www.sixfoot.com) in a bewildering array of categories – outright, age group, Mob run (Clubs), fire-fighters, partners, King of the Mountain (fastest from the river crossing to the highest point), Age and Gender adjusted..

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