



# RUNNING FOR THE HILLS



**Trail running is growing in popularity, with people of all ages taking part in events in national and regional parks in and around Perth. For DBCA's Lauren Cabrera, a Perth Trail Series event in Serpentine National Park provided the perfect opportunity to head off-road and see what attracts new and seasoned competitors to the trails.**

**BY LAUREN CABRERA**

**W**hile most people were enjoying a weekend sleep in, I joined some spirited folk for a run through the bush; jumping over logs and clambering up hills as part of an organised trail running event in Serpentine National Park on a sunny Sunday morning.

As an admittedly averagely paced runner, I've participated in almost all the major road running events in Perth over the years and was curious to try trail running because I'd heard it's softer on the body; attracts a smaller, less competitive crowd; and is less focussed on time and pace.

For the uninitiated, trail running involves running distances of 10, 25 and 50 kilometres, even up to 100 kilometres, on established trails in national and regional parks. Also known as 'fell running' in the United Kingdom, trail running is different from cross-country running, which involves running over shorter off-road distances (five to 10 kilometres) and not necessarily always on marked trails.

The entry-level distance of 10 kilometres with a generous cut-off time was an easy



sell, although the most popular distance for events like the one I embarked on is 25 kilometres.

### IT'S ALL IN THE PREPARATION

Under strict instructions from the organisers, I arrived at the event with my newly purchased hydration backpack, which I had filled with the minimum required 750ml of water, to join a group of adventurous individuals who clearly enjoyed exercising off the beaten track in nature.

Conversation flowed easily with those around me as we waited for the starting horn. Some were new to trail running; while others were regular off-road runners and generous with their advice, especially about the impending hills.

Any pre-race nerves I had were allayed by speaking to Wicus Du Pleases, a mature trail runner who travels from his rural home in the south-west to attend every event in the Perth Trail Series. Admirably, he focuses on enjoying the events, rather than being overwhelmed by the physical challenge.



“We do a fair bit of walking up hills. My motto is, ‘see a hill, walk a hill’. I’m here to enjoy myself.”

### AND THEY'RE OFF ...

As my wave set off, I left my ego at the starting line and set off into the bush in no particular hurry. I passed the serious runners who were looping back on their second lap of an intimidating 50-kilometre course and paid homage to the variety of competitors, who represented every shape, size and age you can imagine, each with a commendable amount of



Discover more about trail running in WA

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.



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**Main** Trail running tests the physical and mental endurance of competitors.

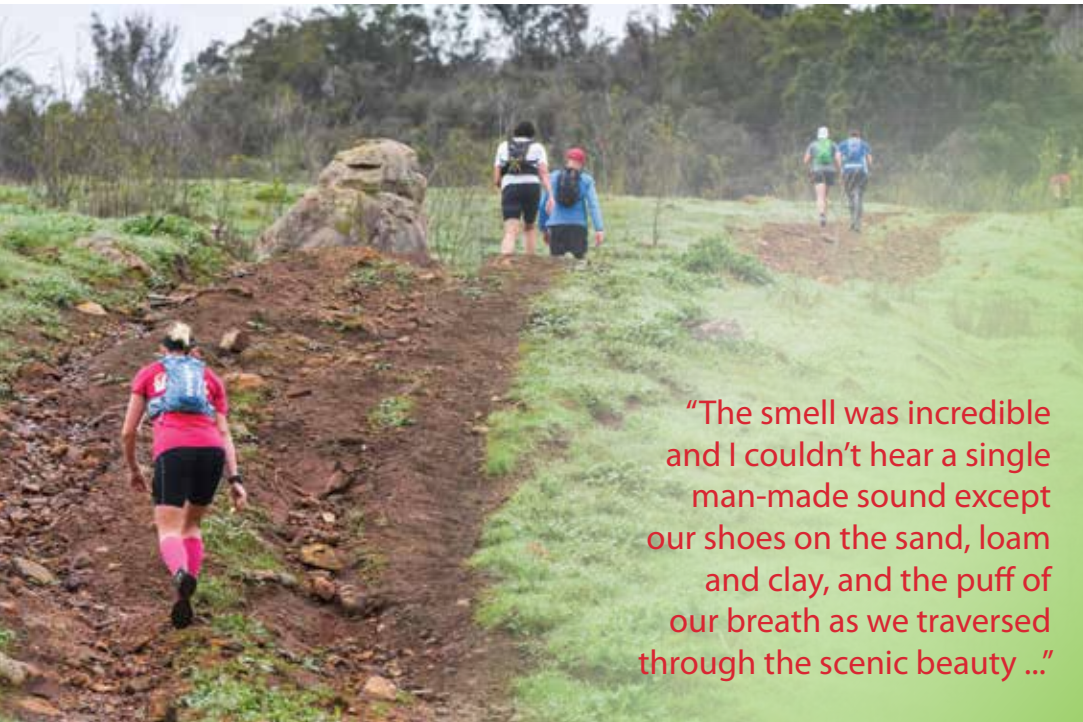
**Inset left** Volunteers are an important part of the event.

**Inset below left** The trails are rich in plant life. Photos – Rory and Lauren Cabrera/DBCA

**Above** Hills are part of the challenge. Photo – Lauren Cabrera/DBCA

athleticism and fortitude to complete such a feat of endurance.

The competitors exchanged smiles and words of encouragement as we took a sharp left up the first long, gently sloped hill.



**“The smell was incredible and I couldn’t hear a single man-made sound except our shoes on the sand, loam and clay, and the puff of our breath as we traversed through the scenic beauty ...”**

I was pretty sure the kookaburras were laughing at me when I finally made it to the top of the hill but I was too distracted by the beauty of the bush. The smell was incredible and I couldn’t hear a single man-made sound except our shoes on the sand, loam and clay, and the puff of our breath as we traversed through the scenic beauty of the lush jarrah, marri and wandoo forest of the Darling Scarp, past the granite outcrops and along the water line that feeds Jarrahdale from the dam.

## NATURAL DRAWCARD

Perth Trail Series director Melina Mellino runs 12 events in national and regional parks near Perth each year, and says trail running gives participants a unique experience in nature and attracts those with a sense of adventure.

“We tend to attract an authentic bunch of individuals who are more about sharing the experience than actual competition,” Melina said.

“There’s so much support and encouragement along the way, especially when it comes to the big hills and obstacles that you typically don’t find on the roads.”

For Wicus, the wildlife en route and the spectacular views were the main drawcards.

“It makes you feel awesome. Tomorrow I’ll feel the pain but today I’m so happy.”

The majority of volunteers helping along the course are runners themselves.

Volunteer Aaron Mathers is a seasoned runner who got introduced to trail running by a friend.

“I find a real connection to nature when I run in the bush,” Aaron said.

“I used to run on the streets but once I hit the trails I didn’t look back.

“My favourite would be John Forrest National Park. I could run the Eagle View Trail with my eyes closed these days.”

## FORWARD MOTION

Trail running has recently been recognised as an official sport in WA with support from the departments of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, and Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

The events are run by a handful of specialised event companies and take place in most major national and regional parks within an hours’ drive from Perth and a small number of regional locations.

I finished the course, muddy and sweaty, but on top of the runner’s high you get from spending time in nature and with a steadfast commitment that I would be back on the trails again before long.

## Do it yourself

Trail running events in WA include:

### **Perth Trail Series**

[www.perthtrailseries.com.au](http://www.perthtrailseries.com.au)

- Yanchep, Walyunga, Serpentine, John Forrest and Lesmurdie Falls national parks
- Wungong, Mundy and Banyowla regional parks

### **Ultra-series**

[www.ultraserieswa.com.au](http://www.ultraserieswa.com.au)

- Bibbulmun Track, Australind/Leschenault Peninsula, Yellagonga Regional Park, Avon Valley, Neerabup National Park

### **Phat Runners**

[www.phatrunners.org](http://www.phatrunners.org)

- Perth Hills

### **Margaret River Trail Runners**

[www.mrtrailrunners.org.au](http://www.mrtrailrunners.org.au)

- Cape to Cape Track, Wharnccliffe Mill, Busselton to Dunsborough, Tom Cullity Trail

### **Waterous Trail on Foot (WTF) Ultra**

[www.wtfultra.com](http://www.wtfultra.com)

- Various parks from Jarrahdale to Dwellingup

### **6 inch trail marathon ultra**

[www.6inchtrailmarathon.com](http://www.6inchtrailmarathon.com)

- Munda Biddi Trail from North Dandalup to Dwellingup

**Above left** Trail running sees competitors traverse a range of terrains.

*Photo – Perth Trail Series*

**Below** Competitors come from all walks of life to enjoy exercising in nature.

*Photo – Lauren Cabrera/DBCA*



**Lauren Cabrera** is a DBCA project officer – editorial. She can be contacted on (08) 9219 9814 or by email ([lauren.cabrera@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:lauren.cabrera@dbca.wa.gov.au)).