

On the 13th October 2008, my partner and I set out to walk 'End to End' on the Bibbulmun Track. We were no athletes when we started in Kalamunda, but two months and 960 kilometres later we arrived in Albany feeling fitter, healthier, happier and sweatier.

The first week was TOUGH, physically and mentally. I spent many hours counting my steps. One count for every four steps: count to 500, then 500 more; are we there yet? Can we stop? Why are these hills so steep? And on it went, passing time in lots of 200 steps, pushing my body on. I felt like a fraud every time we passed people going the other way. "How far are you going?" they'd say, "All the way" we'd reply. I'd imagine them laughing at the mad prospect of this puffed, red faced woman making it to Albany.

I got a little fitter and the counting gave way to voices in my head. Every time I went up a hill imaginary trainers or past sporting coaches yelled at me: "Push it out Emily" "That's it, lift from the chest" "Harder, faster, keep going, that's it!!" I had plenty of fodder, having cumulatively spent at least a few hours on the couch watching the Biggest Loser.

As the weeks passed by the voices faded and I was left with just the sound of my breath. I moved more freely, I saw more around me, and I really got to know this body of mine that I had ignored for so long. I spent hours figuring out which muscles did what and I learned what people meant when they spoke of core strength. I began to look forward to each hill as a chance to push myself a bit more. Instead of collapsing in a pile at the end of a days walk I started going for cool down jogs and stretching.

The greatest day of the trip was one that included a long hard day's walk. After a rest and a snack we walked down to check out a beach and when we got there we started to play. The sort of play that kids are great at because their bodies and minds haven't been restricted by rules, work and office chairs. We leapt over streams; we cartwheeled, climbed and ran. I was fit and I LOVED it!

Not everyone gets to take two months away from their daily commitments and I feel blessed that I did. I realise now though that the main think that held me back from health and fitness wasn't time or money or any of those things I had used as excuses. It was fear. Worrying about what other people thought had led me to restrict my activity to only those things that I knew I could do. Worrying about failure ensured I would never succeed. And that's the lesson I'll keep with me for a lifetime: not to let fear stop me from living an active healthy life.

By Emily Pinkus