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Runner Steve Kilgallon tackles the inaugural Big 'O' Trail 17km event at Rotorua's Lake Okataina on Saturday.

## MacKay makes scorching finish

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By KATARINA WILLIAMS

The Minister of Conservation's directive which flanked the finish line said "Light No Fires".

Yet Rotorua firefighter Shane MacKay ignored his training and burned the final 3km of the 19km category in the inaugural Big "O" Trail Run at Lake Okataina on Saturday.

The first runner of the 120-strong field to cross the line, in 1hr 44min 21sec, MacKay waited until the final stages of the race to overtake Tauranga veteran 40-year-old Paul Davidson (1:47.37). "I knew it was going to happen," Davidson said. "My legs had just given up."

MacKay used the trail run, which included around 6km of previously inaccessible private farmland and a 500m bush bash (non-track section), as training for the upcoming Rotorua Marathon.

"The course was good. Hard. I wouldn't have wanted to be one of the people doing the 35km event," MacKay laughed. "I have never done an off-road race like that before. It was soft underfoot, but [it was] harder than running on the road. I almost twisted my ankle at one stage."

Because there are only a couple weeks until the South Island's notorious Southern Traverse adventure race, Whakatane's Chris Morrissey used the challenging O Trail terrain in the 35km event as a useful buildup race, finishing in 2:51.01.

"I went pretty hard on the first uphill and on the following downhill. The last climb up the hill was probably the toughest bit," said Morrissey.

A holidaying Irishwoman took line honours in the 19km event.

Based in Mount Maunganui for a six-month working holiday, 26-year-old Laura O'Driscoll explained the race was a significant departure from her usual triathlon training programme back in her homeland. "There aren't many hills back home. I am good on the flat but the hills here kill me," said O'Driscoll, who finished in 2:03.56.

The youngest finisher in the 19km event was 12-year-old Calvin Fairbairn of Auckland (2:13.48), who completed the challenging course with support from his running father, Richard (2:21.17).

After the race, Calvin told the Daily Post: "I am very, very tired. My whole body is aching."

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