

# The Motatapu:

The Motatapu event is one of New Zealand's most iconic off road sporting events. 5 events traverse the Motatapu, Soho and Glencoe Stations between Wanaka and Queenstown on the same day, covering some of the South Islands most spectacular high country.

March 7 2015 saw the 11th year of the event, and full time professional mountain runner Jason Schlarb from Colorado, took on the challenge of the Motatapu 52km Ultra Run (then Adventure Run). In a year where the weather was less than desirable Schlarb still rated the race "as one of the top 3 most fun races I've ever done". His full report follows.





PREVIOUS PAGE: The Motatapu Trail in all its glory - Image by Nathan Seeke

ABOVE: The scenery is spectacular as Jason Schlarb discovers while competing in the Motatapu Challenge - Images by Jim Pollard

"Grant Guisse, who lives in Wanaka, New Zealand, first recommended the Motatapu Adventure Run when I told him I was looking for a race while in New Zealand filming for this year's Schlarb-Wolf film project "Kiwi Tracks". After looking into the details of the Motatapu and also getting Anna Frost's recommendation for the race, I was sold. The impressively remote point-to-point course features what some claim to be New Zealand's toughest and most technical trail race. The mandatory gear for the Motatapu race is the most extensive I know of. In addition to a Spot beacon and an emergency locator beacon, mini-crampons, full waterproof gear, thermal wear, headlamp, emergency bivy, compass, first aid kit, etc... are required. The Motatapu Adventure run has 3,000 meters of total climbing over 52 kilometres. The night before the race the rain began and at the 6am dark start it was pouring. Everyone quickly warmed up on the 3k run up the gravel road to the trail. The Motatapu Trail is fairly new and very

two other runners at this point. The first descent was quite steep, just as all of the four big descents were and my quads were not feeling great. Back home in Durango Colorado, the mountains are still too snowy for running much vertical and my legs were telling that story well. I wasn't sure at all how my legs would fair over the long day and certainly wasn't sure where I would place at the end. Running up hill was where I felt more comfortable and after getting to the bottom of the first climb and starting up together on the second climb with the other 3 guys, I decided to push the pace a bit in hopes that I could gain a little buffer on the second descent so I wouldn't be left behind. The Motatapu was quickly proving to be one of the most fun trail races I've done. The technical trail was amazingly challenging and the remote location and stunning wide open tussock clad mountains made for a genuinely stunning experience. On the second descent my legs were actually feeling a bit more spry and I gained some confidence that

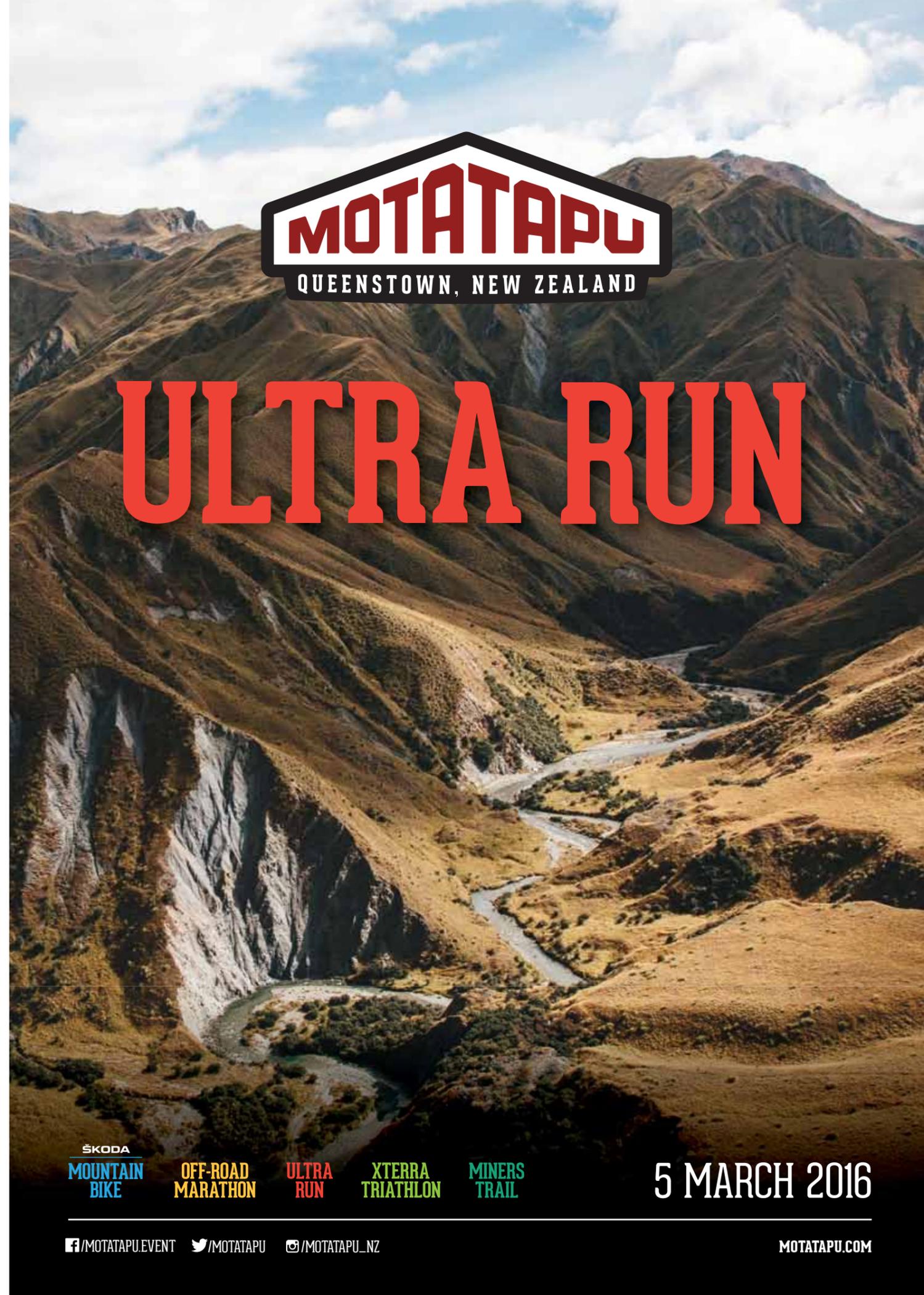
I might not be reduced to walking down the steep descents in the latter part of the race. Sneaking a look back on the third climb I didn't see Grant behind me so I pushed on at a good pace but not too aggressively. Looking down from the top of the third climb I could see where I would cross the only access point on the course, a small dirt farm road where loads of mountain bikers were racing across in another race. Down and across the road to a small hut for more water and to start the last and one of the longer climbs, I saw no sign of Grant or anyone else for at least 15 minutes back. The first half of the last climb was at a frustratingly difficult grade where it wasn't quite steep enough to warrant power hiking, but running was taking up to much energy. I was greatly relieved to hit the steeper last half of the climb and power up hiking. I still wore my UD waterproof shell as it would sprinkle from time to time and it was a bit cold and breezy in this wide open mountain environment. I felt good and was happy to have gotten through 10,000ft of climbing in under 30 kilometres. My Vitargo was keeping my energy levels up and I had no specific ache or pains either. Down the last climb I was a bit nervous for the numerous river

crossings and how my leg turnover would be for the faster, flatter finishing section of the course. I knew there was a high water route and low water route, but Grant had told me the high water trail was brutal, longer and borderline un-runnable. When I arrived at the river I took the low water route and began crossing the knee deep river back and forth on the unmarked "trail". After 5 or 6 crossings there was less and less time out of the river, the river banks were getting steeper, the water deeper and my stress higher. I was alone and starting to worry a bit about hurting myself in the river. Up above the river earlier I saw a backpacker on the high water route and at a particularly narrow canyon section of the river which would have been at least 200 meters of walking down the near whitewater, I decided to scramble out of the canyon. The slope was almost too steep to safely climb and full of thorny bushes that tore me and my legs up pretty good. Slowly I literally climbed out of the canyon for 15 minutes. At the beginning of the creek I later found out Grant was 5 minutes faster than his near course record split last year which had put me in a good position for a course record and shot at the \$3,000 pot for course records. Finally on the high water route I felt much safer, but the trail was as Grant described and the going was pretty slow. I kept looking for Grant down below to come blazing by because after the narrow section of the creek the valley really opened up and travel would have been easy and fast. Finally at the aid station where some people had taken a jeep up the canyon I was ready to be able to do some faster running to the finish of the jeep road. I was still in first, but the course record was no longer in reach. The jeep road section was quite beautiful as it descended down the tight, meandering canyon crossing the thigh deep river another half dozen times. I soon met up with bikers and then the leaders of the shorter trail race for the finish. Unfortunately the finish sensors had been moved 4k up the canyon because of high water, but the runners still ran down the trail while the bikers had to walk the narrow trail instead of taking the lower river crossing which caused some real traffic. 7:13 is what it took me to run this crazy 52k course. This race was amazing and now tops the list as one of the top 3 most fun races I've ever done." - Jason Schlarb (www.jasonsclarb.com)

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much direct in ascending and descending. Most of the time the trail was very narrow, technical and existed only through the wear of passing hikers and runners. This style of trail, as long as it isn't covered in brush, is my favourite. Soon after entering the thick beech forest adjacent to the small creek, Grant Guisse and I were leading the train of headlamps up the creek's drainage. There was quite a bit of mud on this section of the race and a lot of tricky terrain. Out of the forest on a steep muddy slope down to a hut and water fill up, I had my first fall and subsequent slide down the muddy trail. For the day I averaged about 120 calories of Vitargo mixed in my water bottle for this race and I ran in Ultra Paradigms. Up the first climb in the light rain we ascended to the first of 4 passes. Grant and I were accompanied by

For more information on the Ultra Run visit [www.motatapu.com](http://www.motatapu.com)



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QUEENSTOWN, NEW ZEALAND

# ULTRA RUN

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