

# Ultrarunning World

ROAD, TRACK & TRAIL MULTIDAY & ULTRA DISTANCE NEWS  
ISSUE 23



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The editorial is the last thing that gets written in this magazine. It allows me to reflect on the articles and reports we have and to bring in late or breaking news.

This morning, April 1st, it was announced that the Belfast 24 Hour International Road Race, due to be held on Saturday/Sunday 20th & 21st June 2020 has been cancelled, another on a list that will no doubt grow longer over the next few weeks.

The British 24 hour team was announced yesterday for the IAU 24 Hour European Championships in Verona, Italy, scheduled for the 19th and 20th September 2020. Three of our contributors have been selected for the 24 hour team, Ali Young, Wendy Whearity and Sarah Cameron and we would like to congratulate them as well as the other members of the team on their achievement and we wish them all the best for September.

We hope you will be able to store the enthusiasm and inspiration manifest in this issue as we kick off our race reports with the Gower Ultra (where else) from God's own country by Adam Rykala. It's been a while since that event and Adam has more recently finished the Brecon to Cardiff Ultra.

Late last year, just across the water from Cardiff, Ian Morris took on the 62 miles of the East Devon Round and was very impressed with what he discovered.

Our hearts go out to the people of Spain at this time, the daily figures are tragic. Hopefully when this has passed many people will flock back and soothe their souls on the Camino De Santiago de Compostela. Matthew Jones had a quick look and shares his experience.

Physical Therapist Naomi Moss ran the Lakes In A Day and was just brilliant. Steven Battle went to Gloucester for the latest incarnation of the 24 hour race and which this year will feature a 48 hour option on the 30th of October, all being well. We follow this with the second part of Menna Evans record setting run across New Zealand.

Our second trans-national article, by Jon Ward who ran GB Ultra's Race Across Scotland, is a classic race report that reminds us that we can experience a lifetime in an ultra. Karen Nash, Chairwoman of the RunFurther race series, took part in perhaps the toughest trail multiday, the Tor de Geants in Italy and wants to go back as a V60 and do it all over again...

Another Welshman at another iconic event, Llion Iwan discovered what the Dragon's Back is all about and it's good. All good.

US multiday runner Mark Dorion ventured South to the Florida Icarus Ultra Festival 6 day race and sprinkled his story with a healthy dose of Americana.

Our final article is an interview with the cover star explorer, ultrarunner and alpinist Peter van Geit by our staff writer Helen Hayes and we have another story by Peter in next month's issue.

Many thanks to all our contributors. I say it about every magazine, but it's absolutely true that each issue really is the best so far. It makes looking forward really exciting.

We would also like to offer free advertising space to every race organiser who has had to reschedule an ultra during this lockdown or due to the virus. Please drop us a line at the email below for more details.

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### • Photos

- Front cover: Photo by Peter van Geit - [Ultrajourneys.org](http://Ultrajourneys.org)
- Back cover: Annabel Hepworth on her way to victory at the Across The Year's 10 day race. Photo by Jubilee Paige [photos.aravaiparunning.com](http://photos.aravaiparunning.com)

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Send inquiries, original and previously unpublished race reports/articles to the above email address. Last dates for article submissions: April 19th, May 18th, June 22nd. Adverts received will go in the next available issue. Please include a 40-50 word bio, some accompanying photos (if you have any) and a headshot for the contributors page along with your articles. More details on request. Thank you.

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# News Round-Up



The 2019 winners of the IAU Athlete of the Year were **Camille Herron (USA)** and **Aleksandr Sorokin (LTH)**.

Camille is perhaps the greatest ultra-distance runner at this time winning the IAU Athlete of the Year Award in 2015, 2018, 2019 and voted second in 2017. She improved World Best Performances in 3 categories including 12 hours with 149.130 km (92.665 miles), 100 miles with 12:42:40 and in 2019 during the IAU 24 World Championship she set a new World Best Performance for 24 hours with 270.116 km (167.842 miles), pending ratification.

Aleksandr has been performing at international level since 2014 when he participated in the IAU 100 km World Championship in Qatar. In 2017 he won Spartathlon, followed by bronze at the 2018 IAU 24H European Championships in Romania and finally won gold at the 2019 IAU 24H World championship in France. He improved his personal best for 24 hours from 260.491 km (in 2016), 260.991 km (2018), 272.708 km at Basle in 2019 and finally 278.972 km at the IAU World Championship in Albi.



The IAU reports the **24 Hour Americas Championships 2020** is being postponed to a later date and the 2nd 6 Hour Nordic Challenge is also being rescheduled for the autumn.

The **2020 IAU 24H Asia and Oceania Championships** scheduled to take place on the 18th – 19th July 2020 in Bengaluru, India has been cancelled as has the **IAU 100 km World Championships** that was planned for September 12th 2020 in Winschoten, The Netherlands..

## In other news

As of the 29th of March most events on the DUV calendar have been cancelled or postponed up until the last weekend of May when quite a few events are still scheduled.

USATF 50K Road National Championships was the **Caumsett at Heckscher State Park 50K**. Race winners automatically earned a spot on the U.S. team that will compete at the IAU 50k World Championships on November 27th in Jordan. Kallin Khan won in 2:57. Camille Herron who recently won the Black Canyon 100k, was first in 3:25.

USATF 50-Mile Trail National Championships were held at **Pioneer Spirit 50M** (USA) and were won by Tim Tollefson in 6:22:31. Women's champion is Ashley Hawks who won in 8:31:30.

In the UK the **Anglo Celtic Plate 100km** Home International Team Race taking place at Boddington in Gloucestershire has a rearranged date of 26th Sept 2020. Details on the event website: [Beyond The Limitations](#)

Currently the world's longest annual footrace, the **Self-Transcendence 3100 mile race** is still scheduled for the 14th of June however the organisers will make a final decision about a month before the start date.

Of 2,411 registered participants, Mike Wardian (USA) was the Last One Standing in the **Quarantine Backyard Ultra**, the world's first virtual BYU running 63 laps, some 262 miles (422km) on April 4th. Anna Carlsson (SWE) was the last woman standing finishing 46 laps. Wardian and Radek Brunner (CZE) ran together for 16 hours until shortly after 11 p.m. on Monday night, when Brunner was disqualified controversially after failing to start the 63rd loop on the hour. [Website](#).

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# Upcoming Events

Whilst Backyard Ultras caught a lot of people's attention over the last year, today the attention has shifted to virtual running as all races are cancelled in the UK until at least the end of May. They are very simple to take part in if you have a Garmin or similar piece of hardware and online access through Strava or the like, you can sign up for an event and run at home or wherever is convenient and get a medal/award for your efforts.

Companies like [Virtual Runner UK](#) make it easy. All you have to do is enter a race and provide evidence that you have done it. [Awesome virtual running.com](#), and [Phoenix Virtual Running](#) offer events online and [We-Run.co.uk](#) offer a [Virtual Running Club](#), White Star Running has a virtual race option that benefits Bournemouth foodbank and [Human Potential Running](#) have a **Virtual Pandemic Series** with 24/12/6 hour options on the weekend of April 18th.

In keeping with this new reality the **Quarantine Backyard Ultra** was a success and many runners have been inspired to run in their own gardens or houses even.

The **Virtual RAT Race Series 6/12/24/48/72 Hour** is taking

place over the Easter weekend to help keep ultrarunners sane while our group timed events are cancelled.

Listed events include 6 hour, 12 hour, 24 hour, 48 hour, and 72 hour. You can however run as long as you like. You may start your event at any time from Thursday through Sunday. This event may be repeated on the weekend of April 25th. [More details.](#)

**Aravaipa Strong Virtual Race** is in direct response to the COVID-19. The website says "The widespread pandemic has resulted in multiple cancellations and postponements of our events that have weighed heavy on our small company."

The Aravaipa Strong Virtual Race is a way for the Aravaipa Community around the world to come together as one. Join a community of runners and experience an adventure made possible through online social sharing. Take photos, make videos, conquer mountains, and share your stories with us and with each other during a time of social distancing. You can track your run by using a variety of apps on your smartphone like Strava or MapMyRun. You can also use a GPS watch, or take a photo of a treadmill monitor. The event takes place between April 17-26, 2020" [More details.](#)



# Recent Races

## 06/12/2019 170km The Exodus 100 mile Ultra Marathon (GBR)

The Exodus is a 100 mile Ultra across the Brecon Beacons following the full length of the Beacons Way footpath. With a total ascent of just over 23,000ft (7100m), the route travels west to east across the Brecon Beacons National Park, starting in Llangadog and finishing in Abergavenny. First woman was Anna Troup (GBR) finishing second overall in 28:20:15. First man was Otto Karhunen (GBR) in 25:30:34. 27 finishers. [Full results](#).



## 06/12/2019 100mi Panoramic Ultra Trail - 100 Miles (THA)

The Panoramic Ultra Trail traces a northerly loop through the Thai highlands near the Myanmar border, starting and finishing in Pai. First man was John Ellis (AUS) in 20:18:04 and first woman was Christine Loh Woon-Chze (MAS) finishing in 24:03:51, 6th overall. John Ellis wrote a [blog post](#) about the win. 94 finishers. [Full results](#).

## 07/12/2019 135km Prazska Stovka - Prager Ultratrail 135km (CZE)

The Prager Ultratrail starts in Myto finishes in Prague on challenging hilly and rocky terrain, mainly along forest roads, trails and paths. First man was Petr Henek (CZE) in 13:47:26 and first woman was Lenka Berrouche (CZE) in 17:45:03. 190 finishers. [Full results](#).

## 07/12/2019 200km Santo Ultra Maranic - Santo Course (JPN)

The longest option of several events, the inaugural 200 km looped road race started and finished in Osaka. First woman was the contemporary artist Wakaki Kurumi (JPN) in 27:55:00 and the first man was Kouji Imamura (JPN) with a time of 29:56:00. 25 finishers. [Results on D.U.V.](#)

## 07/12/2019 24h Les 24 heures de Ploeren (FRA)

The 17th edition of the Les 24 heures de Ploeren, (Brittany championship) and the 12th edition of the 12h and 6h took place on a certified 1000-meter loop course running and walking around the Pierre-Le Douarin football stadium. The course consists of 200 m of stabilized terrain, 750 m of bitumen and a passage inside the great hall of the SPI. Race winner was Fabrice Puaud (FRA) with 218.076 km and first woman was Annie Paringaux (FRA) with 216.587 km. 97 finishers. [Full results](#).

## 07/12/2019 24h Perpetual Motion 24 Hour Race (USA)

First held in 2017 the Perpetual Motion 24 hour also features 6 and 12 hour options. The course is a .51 mile

paved asphalt loop at Lake Grapevine in Texas. First man was Jay Teinert (USA) 169.616 km and first woman was Juli Aistars (USA) third overall, with 151.681 km. [Full results](#).

## 07/12/2019 100mi Brazos Bend 100 Mile (USA)

The final event in the USA Track & Field's national championship series was the Brazos Bend 100 organized by Trail Racing Over Texas. Patrick Reagan (USA) set a new course record finishing in 12:21:43. Julie Kheyfets (USA) became the women's champion finishing in 12:21:43. The event saw 900 participants across four races – 100 mile, 50 mile, 26.2 miles and 13.1 miles. [Trailrunner.com](#) has a race report. Results on [Ultrasignup](#).

## 07/12/2019 100mi Devil Dog Ultra 100 Miles (USA)

Devil Dog Ultra, 100 miles and 100 km, takes place in Triangle, VA in the Prince William Forest. The loop course is primarily on single-track trails and short technical sections. The first loop for both races is 23 miles, and subsequent loops are 19.5 miles and the event has a 32 hour time limit. Event winners were Karl Meltzer (USA) in 19:21:08 and women's winner was Colleen Jay (USA) in 24:56:24. Results on [Ultrasignup](#).

## 12/12/2019 200km La Misión XL 200/160 Kms (ARG)

Starting in San Martin de Los Andes, La Misión trail race has three options: 200/160/110 km. For the 200 km event there is 7690 m of climb/descent with 80 hours to complete the distance. First man was Sebastian Bachella (ARG) who finished in 33:30:00 and first woman was Sofia Cantilo (ARG) covering the distance in 46:10:00. 40 starters in the 200 km event. [Results](#).

## 12/12/2019 20 Day Running Festival Wychwood December (RSA)

Running Festival Wychwood December 2019 took place at Wychwood Primary School, Germiston, Gauteng, South Africa starting on the 12th December 2019 and finishing on January 1st 2020. The 20 day time frame provided something for everyone as it included 6/12/24/48/72 hour/6 day/10 day/1000 km/1000 miles as well. The 20 day was won by Kobi Oren (ISR) with 2180 km. First woman, second overall was Sarah Barnett (AUS) with 1449.5 km. The 10 day race was won by Reganald Crowster (RSA) with 700 km. Mireille Cormier (FRA) was the first woman with 660 km. The 6 day was won by Mike Nel (RSA) with 553 km and first woman was Hettie Fourie (RSA) with 161 km. There was also a 100 miler won by Johan van de Merve (RSA) in 18:34:52. First woman was Cornel Metcalf (RSA) in 24:20:46. [Full results](#).

## 12/12/2019 268mi Montane Spine Race (GBR)

The longest annual race in the UK which comes in winter and summer versions starts in Edale and follows the 268

mile Pennine Way ending at Kirk Yetholm, just inside the Scottish border. Described as 'one of the most demanding National Trails' in the UK, runners have 156 hours to complete the distance. Sabrina Verjee (GBR) was the first woman in 108:07:17. First man was John Kelly (USA) finishing in 87:53:57. 63 finishers. [Full results](#).

Starting a day earlier on the 11th was the 108 mile Spine Challenger which starts in Edale and finishes at Hawes. The men's winner was Douglas Zinis (GBR) in 29:00:32 and women's winner was Elaine Bisson (GBR) 34:19:04. 52 finishers. [Results](#).



## 14/12/2019 24h Personliga Rekordens Tävling 24 hour (SWE)

Personliga Rekordens Tävling (PRT) is a 24/12/6 hour event taking place at Tipshallen, Växjö on a 373 metre indoor tartan track around a football pitch. The 24 hour was won by Martin Scharp (SWE) with 247.898 km and first woman was Petra Hurtig (SWE), fifth overall, with 203.317km. [Full results](#).

## 14/12/2019 24h 24 hores d'ultrafons en pista de Barcelona (ESP)

The 24 Hores D'ultrafons En Pista De Barcelona, the Barcelona 24 Hour, is a track event in Spain with the 24 hour taking place in the outer lanes of the track measured at 437,70m. The event also features 12 and 6 hour marathon, half marathon and shorter events and relays. The 24 hour was won by Fernando Soriano Rubio (ESP) with 226.591km and first woman, Barbara Campos Vizoso (ESP) 208.662km was fourth overall. [Results](#). The 12 hour race was won by Evaldas Nauseda (LTU) 147.830 km and the first woman was Krisztina Ruscsak (HUN) 137.966 km. [Results](#)

## 14/12/2019 24h Soochow/Taipei 24h Ultramarathon (TPE)

The event takes place at Soochow University Waishuanghsi Campus (SCU) in the Shihlin District of Taipei City on a 400m track. Some of the top Japanese performances, including the national record set by Yoshikazu Hara in 2014 when he covered 285.366 km have taken place at this event. In keeping with the tradition of excellent performances Yoshihiko Ishikawa (JPN) ran 279.427km won this year's race and women's winner was Yi-Hua (Fanny) Wu (CHN) with 215.262km.

## 14/12/2019 24h Desert Solstice 24 Hour Run (USA)

The Desert Solstice Track Invitational is an elite level event for record setting and acts as an ideal qualifier for the US National 24 Hour team based at Central High School in Phoenix. Marisa Lizak won the race outright with 238.32 km also setting an American 40-44 age group record for the fastest North American 100 mile finish for a female in 2019 in 14:50:44. First man was Rolfe Schmidt with 234.65 km (145.80 miles). [Results](#).

## 14/12/2019 100mi Loup Garou 100 Mile Trail Run (USA)

Loup Garou takes place on a single track 20 mile loop trail around the lake at Chicot State Park, Ville Platte in Louisiana. The race was won for the second year running by Michael Asmus in 18:03:20 and the first woman was Helen Summerford in 24:43:15. 30 finishers. Results on [UltraSignup](#).

## 14/12/2019 100mi The Hitchcock Experience 100 Miles (USA)

This race in Iowa also has 101 km and 50 mile options and takes place on single track/fire road trail and maintenance road along the ridges of Hitchcock Nature Center, Honey Creek. The 100 miler has a cut-off of 34 hours and was won by Jacob Gallagher in 19:54:46. First woman was Jodi Semonell in 23:02:09. 28 finishers. Results on [UltraSignup](#).

## 14/12/2019 24h 24 Ore Città di Lavello (ITA)

The 4th edition of the 24 hours for Telethon in Lavello was the last race of the 17th IUTA 2019 Ultramarathon Grand Prix. The course is a closed loop of the Lavello cycle path, completely flat, 1,060 km long. In addition there were 6 hour/100 k/ marathon and shorter options. The 24 hour was won by Pablo Angel Nicolas Barnes with 232.517km and first woman was Luisa Zecchino with 173.594km. 44 starters.

## 14/12/2019 100mi The Bello Gallico Trail 100mi (BEL)

The idea behind this event was to put a long distance trail running race on relatively easy terrain on the map in North-Belgium. The race starts in Oud-Heverlee and runners have 36 hours to complete the distance. The first man home was Ivo Steyaert in 16:21 and first woman was Irene Kinnegim 16:31. 118 finishers. [Results](#).

## 15/12/2019 100mi The Border 100 - 100 Miles Race (IND)

21 finishers took on the 2nd run starting from the Golden City of Jaisalmer and ending at the battlefield of Longewala, via Ramgarh. Also featured a 100km and shorter events. The race was won by Binay Kumar Sah in 18:44:28 and the only female participant was Yamini Kothari finishing in 28:18:52. [Results on the DUV](#).

# Recent Races

## 15/12/2019 300km Rovaniemi 300 km Polar Circle Winter Race (FIN)

Rovaniemi is a trio of Polar Circle Winter Races in Lapland first held in 2012. Human powered, on foot, by FatBike and with skis there are three distances - 66/150/300 km through the Finnish landscape around Lapland's main city,



Rovaniemi. The 300 km event saw three finishers, Jovica Spajic, (SRB) in 75:38:00, Hans Coolen (BEL) in 108:30:00 and Magdalena Paschke (GER), finishing in 109:13:00. 10 starters and 3 finishers. [Results](#).

## 20/12/2019 164mi Baguio to Luneta 164-Mile Endurance Run (PHI)

With over 80 events taking place in 2019, the Philippines has embraced the ultrarunning revolution with the 8th All Women Ultra Marathon 50k (AWUM) drawing a field of 335 women. There's also a handful of multadays including this event which runs from Baguio City Hall to Kilometer Zero in Luneta Park, Manila with a 56 hour cut-off. 12 finishers, first of whom was Jose Tindog (PHI) in 44:55:00 and the only woman finisher was Jennifer Aimee Tan Uy, second overall, in 45:00:00. [Results on the DUV](#).

## 21/12/2019 100mi Ancient Oaks 100 Mile Run (USA)

Organised by Mike Melton of [mcmtiming.com](http://mcmtiming.com), Ancient Oaks is an invitation only event. The course consists of 29 loops of a 3.495 mile loop consisting mostly of single track and narrow double track trail run through the Enchanted Forest, Titusville, FL. The race was won by Grant Maughan in 18:22:08 and the first woman was Lisa Devona in 20:58:54. 19 finishers. [Results](#).

## 27/12/2019 160mi Tuscobia Winter 160 Mile Ultramarathon (USA)

The Tuscobia Winter Ultra is a self-supported human powered run, bike or ski event held on the Tuscobia and Wild Rivers State Trails in Northern Wisconsin starting at the Chequamegon Canoe Club (CCC) in Park Falls. There are two options: an 80-mile one-way route or a 160-mile out and back. The 160 mile race was won by Brian Corgard in 44:50 and the first woman was Faye Norby Lopez finishing in 58:17.

## 27/12/2019 100mi Golden 100 Hong Kong - 100 Mile Run (HKG)

Starting at Po Leung Kuk Jockey Club Tai Tong Holiday

Camp 100 mile and with a 100 km option, this trail race has a 43 hour time limit. The 100 miler was won by Wong Ho-Chung in 21:41:07 and the first woman was Yuen Kit-Shan in 35:39:43. 55 finishers. [Results](#).

## 27/12/2019 135mi Arrowhead Winter Ultra (USA)

The Arrowhead Ultra is a human-powered 135-mile (217- km) race by runners, skiers and bicyclists starting at International Falls MN, one of the coldest locations in Winter in the US. Scott Hoberg 30:45:00. Pamela Reed 44:40:00. There were 68 runners who started and 46 finishers. [Results](#).

## 27/12/2019 100mi Charleston 100 Race (USA)

This trail race follows an out and back loop that starts at the Peyton Johnson Moore Track and Field at Park West in Mount Pleasant. This year was the second running of the event which was won by Rebecca Joyner in 19:38:00 and first man was Chris Varnadoe finishing in 21:35:00. 28 finishers. [Results on UltraSignup](#)

## 28/12/2019 Across The Years, 10 day/6d/72/48/24 hour (USA)

Across the Years is a fixed-time multi-day running event celebrating the New Year which first took place in 1986. Since then the event has had several incarnations and is now based at Camelback Ranch in Phoenix, AZ. The race route is a 1.05 mile loop consisting of 90% dirt paths and 10% asphalt. The track averages ten feet in width, with a minimum width of 6 feet. Gaiters are recommended. This year for the first time a 10 day race was introduced and will also take place again in 2020, assuming everything has been resolved by then.

	Female	Km	Male	Km
6 Hour	Katherine Nierva	59.01	Jordan Camastro	72.5
12 Hour	Chrissy Parks	97.79	James Nalley	99.48
100 miles	Amy Mower	21:10:38	Ryan Kaiser	15:23:33
200 miles	Jodi Semonell	61:23:27	Geoffrey Foote	67:32:48
24 Hour	Chavet Breslin	188.85	Chris Pope	227.63
48 Hour	Juli Aistars	254.61	Thomas Jackson	281.59
72 Hour	Dennene Huntley	379.39	Steve Walters	355.78
6 Day	Marcia Rasmussen	551.38	Pete Kostelnick	714.94
10 Day	Annabel Hepworth	1192.14	Philip Eberts	1062.3

[Website](#). [Results](#).

## 31.12.2019 USA New Years One Day 24 Hour Run (USA)

It's customary, in some circles, to end the year with a run. The New Years One Day run at Crissy Field in San Francisco provides that opportunity. First held in 2010 this event at East Beach offers views of the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz and Angel Island and the latest edition drew 58 runners. First place went to Asuka Eguchi (JPN) who finished with 194.408km and first man was Dylan Gallagher (USA )with 168.820km, third overall. [Full results](#)

## 9/01/2020 24 Hours Spartanion 24-Hour Race (ISR)

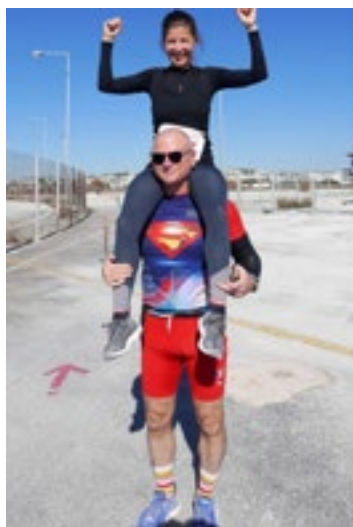
The Spartanion took place at Ganei Yehoshua Park, Tel Aviv

on a 1,460.23 meters circular, paved course. The categories – 100 km, 100 miles and 24 hours. In the 24 hour event Ariel Rosenfeld (ISR) was first man with 227.650 km and first woman was Liz Malka (ISR), third overall with 213.940 km. [Results.](#)

## 10/01/2020 Athens International Ultramarathon Festival (GRC)

Athens International Ultramarathon Festival grew from an event that first took place in 2005 with a 24 hour race and this year featured 24/48/72/6day/1000m/1000k/2000k/5000k options. This is the world's first 5000km race and we have included the all-time list of 5000k times in the next issue.

The course is a 1 km loop on the site of the ex-Olympic games Athens 2004 installations at Hellinikon (basketball arena). The 5000km event had a time limit of 60 days. These were the top results in each of the events. [Results.](#)



Women		
<b>24 hour</b>	Aoife Karen Mundow (IRL)	231.376km
<b>48 Hour</b>	Stine Rex (DEN)	276.000km
<b>72 Hour</b>	-	
<b>6 Day</b>	Rachel Pierce (USA)	486.000km
<b>1000m</b>	Mara-Alexander Guler Cionca (ROU)	15:21:26:00
<b>2000km</b>	Edda Bauer (GER)	28:04:32:36:967
<b>5000km</b>	-	
Men		
<b>24 hour</b>	Eduardo Cebrian Martinez de Lagos (ESP)	241.219km
<b>48 Hour</b>	Andrzej Wereszczak (POL)	385.000km
<b>72 Hour</b>	Cristian-Laurentiu Borcan (ROU)	372.000km
<b>6 Day</b>	Athanasios Stimoniari (GRC)	782.000km
<b>1000m</b>	Jaroslav Prückner (split) (CZE)	24:02:30:23
<b>2000km</b>	-	47:19:08:43.8
<b>5000km</b>	Nicolae Buceanu (ROU)	

Alan Young writes “Mara Guler is a lovely Romanian lady (very talented with more to come) whose intention was an attempt to break the Romanian 48 hour, 72 hour, 6 day and 1000 km records. Only after she had achieved this did they manage to persuade her to continue on to 1,000miles.”



## 18/01/2020 100km Vibram Hong Kong 100 Ultra Trail Race (HKG)

Much of the route is on the famous MacLehose Trail, but it also takes in a significant part of the Sai Kung peninsula with a final descent from Tai Mo Shan, the highest peak in Hong Kong. Time Limit: 30 hours. This is not a flat race with 5300m gain and 4770m of descent yet still had 1462 finishers. First man was Pei-Quan You (CHN), finishing in 10:00:17. First woman was Fu-Zhao Xiang in 11:28:21. [Results.](#)

## 25/01/2020 100/50km SA Track 100 Championship (AUS)

Taking place at the South Australian Athletics Stadium in Adelaide on a 400m track. 100 km race winners were Darren Linney in 7:44:00 and Sonja Jansen in 9:31:13. The 50 km was won by Tim Green in 3:44:51 and first woman was Sammy-J Jeffery in 4:56:25. [Results.](#)

## 31/01/2020 120mi Wild Florida 120 Mile Race (USA)

The Wild Florida 120 uses approximately 107 miles of the Florida Trail and has a time limit of 40 hours. Starting at Micco Landing Trailhead and finishing at St. Cloud the course purports to reveal a Florida most people don't usually get to see using single track, double track, dirt roads and about 2 miles of paved roads. The inaugural race was won by Eric Kienle (USA) in 23:21:14 and the first woman was Christine Tokarz (USA) 27:08:24. 51 starters. [Full results.](#)

## 31/01/2020 246km Trans Scania Winter (SWE)

Trans Scania Winter is an unsupported 246 km trail run (with some road sections) in southern Sweden. The race begins at the Långa bryggan jetty in Bjärred, Sweden, and ends at Hotel Lundia in Lund. This year was the first winter edition and there were two male finishers, first of whom was Pål Andersson (SWE) in 38:28:38 and second was Tommy Carlsson (SWE) in 45:25:17. [Results.](#)

## 31/01/2020 300mi Yukon Arctic Ultra 300mi (CAN)

Three options (430, 300 and 100 miles) in this human powered race on foot, bike or skis from Whitehorse in the Yukon Territories following the Yukon Quest trail, the trail of the world's toughest Sled Dog Race to Dawson City. The 430 mile option will take place in 2021. This year the 300 mile race saw two finishers in the run category, Fabian Imfeld (SUI) in 162:43:00 and Tiberiu Useriu (ROU) in 169:21:00. [Results.](#)



# Recent Races

## 03/02/2020 6 Day/72/48/24 Hour Race South Carolina Ultra Running Festival (USA)

The inaugural edition of the South Carolina Ultra Running Festival was held at the Burton Wells Park which features a .584 Mile USATF certified loop with facilities at each end of the loop and an indoor kitchen. First man was Witt Wisebram (USA) 652.260 km and Liz Bauer (USA) was first woman with 250.941 km. The 72 hour was won by David Wilkerson with 322.370 km and first woman was Karen Jackson with 277.257 km. In the 48 hour Wendy Murray was first woman with 227.445km and Jim Barnes was first man, third overall, with 183.008km. The 100 mile race was won by Bob Hearn in 14:44:21 and the first woman was Stephanie Carter in 25:55:11. The 24 hour saw Jacob Moss cover 217.261km and Heather McComb was the first woman with 161.655km. [Results on UltraSignup.](#)

## 07/02/2020 48/24/12/6 hour/100 m/km Taipei 48 Hour Ultra Marathon (TPE)

Taking place at the Dream exhibition hall, Xin-shan Park, Taipei on a 663 meter one lap, flat, asphalt traffic free surface. With multiple distance options, the 48 hour was won by Kenji Takeda (JPN) with 356.386 km. First woman was Yuri Matsumoto (JPN) fourth overall with 331.810 km

## 08/02/2020 118m Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail Run (LOST) (USA)

The race is a circumnavigation of Lake Okeechobee using the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST), a mostly paved and flat pathway that encircles the lake and runs along the top of the Herbert Hoover Dike. The actual course is a mixture of dual track, macadam, and crushed stone surfaces and the route varies due to closure of sections of the dike that are undergoing maintenance and repair. There are 50 mile and relay options. The 118 mile event has a 32 hour cut-off. The winners this year were Grant Maughan (AUS) in 19:54:00 and Lisa Devona (USA) in 22:10:48. 10 finishers. [Results on the DUV.](#)

## 08/02/2020 24/12 hour Ultramaratona Brasil 24 Horas (BRA)

Located at the 400m track at the Estádio Municipal Carlos Ferracine in Caieiras, São Paulo, the 24 hour was won by Marcio Batista de Oliveira with 234.621 km. First woman was Rosivania Soares da Silva with 183.138 km. 62 finishers. [Results.](#)

## 08/02/2020 50 km Tarawera 50 km Ultramarathon (NZL)

One of the most popular ultras in New Zealand the Tarawera Ultra is a point-to-point footrace from Rotorua through to Kawerau on singletrack trails through native bush. First man home was Michael Voss (NZL) in 3:41:27 and Caitlin Fielder (NZL) was first woman in 4:11:58. 1071 finishers. [Results.](#)

## 14/02/2020 48/24/12 hour races Jackpot Ultra Running Festival (USA)

The 8th Annual Jackpot Ultra Running Festival took place at one of Southern Nevada's newest and largest amenity-filled parks located minutes from the Las Vegas strip and just 10 miles from Las Vegas Airport. The 100 acre Cornerstone Park is nestled amongst the desert landscape and is anchored by a 31 acre bird sanctuary lake. The



course is a 2.5 mile horseshoe loop with 80 feet of gentle elevation ascend/descend per loop, 45% groomed crushed gravel trails, 45% wide asphalt paths, 5% grass and just 5% bridge and concrete surfaces. The 48 Hour was won by Amy Mower (USA) with 305.775 km. First man was Brian Schreiber (USA) with 268.760 km. In the 24 hour Ryan Cotton (USA) prevailed with 201.168 km and first woman was Rachel Entrekin (USA) with 178.637 km. [Results.](#)

## 19/02/2020 350km Delirious W.E.S.T. 200 Miler (AUS)

The Delirious W.E.S.T. takes place almost entirely on the Bibbulmun Track in the South West and Great Southern regions of Western Australia from the old logging settlement of Northcliffe, to the historic port city of Albany. The start is opposite the Northcliffe Visitors Centre and the runners have 104 hours to complete the distance. First man was Jonathon Pendse (AUS) in 70:13:08 and first woman was Sarah Foster (AUS) in 71:18:10. 43 finishers. [Results on the DUV.](#)



## 20/02/2020 72/48/24/12/6 hour Jackalope Jam (USA)

Taking place at 711 Ranch, Cat Spring, Texas, the course is a gravel based, unshaded 1.5 mile loop. The 72 hour was won by Matt Zmolek with 337.962 km and first woman, second overall was Dena Jean Carr with 335.548 km. The 48 hour was won by Luis Aceves with 226.917 km. Jean Hofschulte and Jay Teinert tied for second place with 219.675 km. In the 24 hour Chris Koerner was first with 183.465 km and Melanie Yarzy was first woman with 161.739 km

## 21/02/2020 250km Legends Trail 500/250 (BEL)

The Legends Trail 250 (LT250) is a non-stop race of more than 250 kilometers/155 miles with 7000D+ during winter time through the Ardennes, in the hilly south of Belgium. 60 hour cut-off. This year there was a one-off double distance option of 500 km and seven days to complete the distance.

First man in the 500 km race was Teun Geurts-Schoenmakers (NLD) in 108:40:00. Claire Ferguson (GBR) & Daphne Derouch (FRA) tied for first place in 146:37:00. [Results.](#)

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# Books, Pods & Mags

**T**he Running For Real podcast by Tina Muir

Becoming Ultra Scott Jones

Billy Yang Podcast Billy Yang Podcast

Trail Running Women Hilary Spires

Humans of Ultrarunning Candice Burt

The Science of Ultra Dr. Shawn Bearden

Running Divine Stephanie Bales

Ginger Runner LIVE Ethan Newberry

Training For Ultra Rob Steger

iRunFar Bryon Powell, Meghan Hicks et al



Books

Across America on Foot Brian Stark et al

Milton Miller 100 Days Of Madness

Beyond Limits – 12 Jun 2020 by

Lowri Morgan



# ULTRARUNNING

## MAGAZINE

LIVE LONG.

When I (Abichal) first started running ultras in the mid 90's I got totally hooked on Ultrarunning Magazine and it inspired me tremendously. On March 17th the publishers made a generous offer:

"With many of us being restricted to the confines of our homes, we thought we'd help you pass the time by offering all of our 2019 issues as a free download. If you enjoy the content, please consider making a donation to a local charity." <https://subscriber.ultrarunning.com/2019-issues>

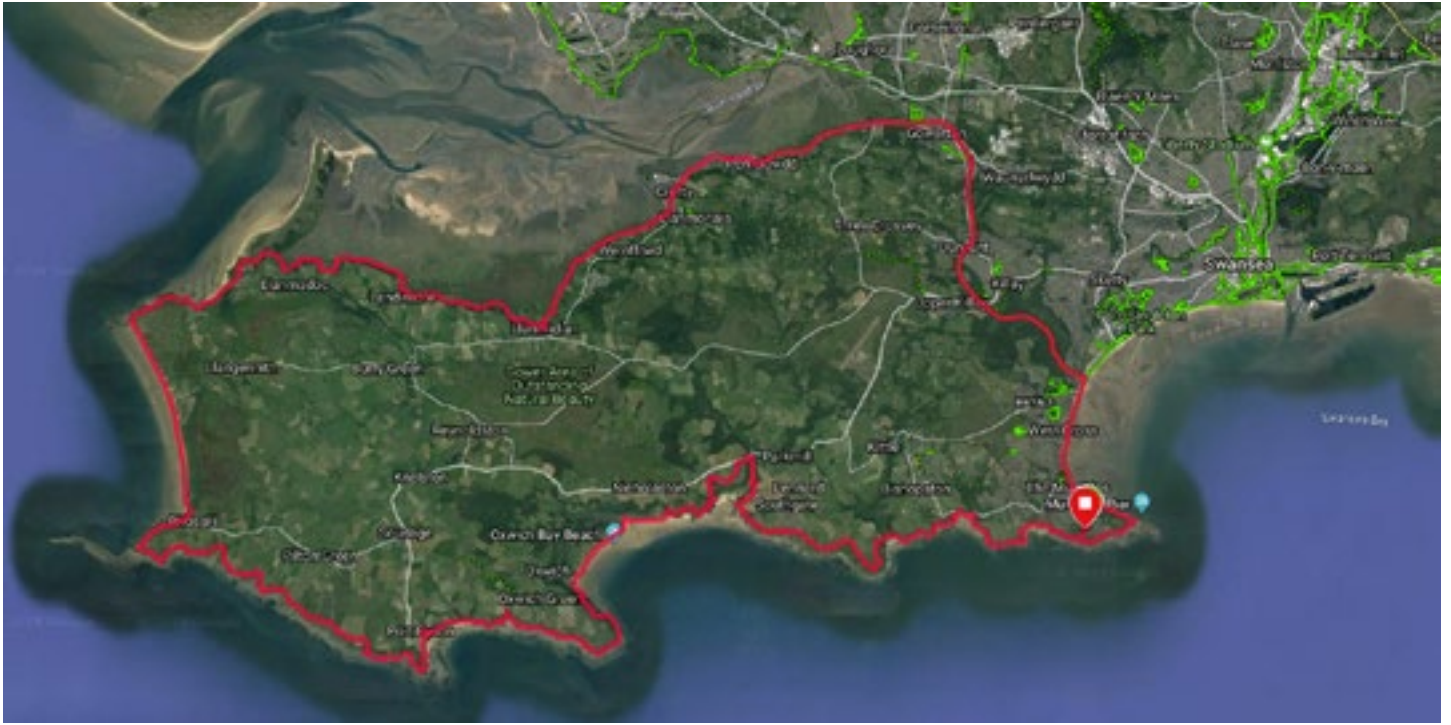


# Gower Ultra 12 October 2019

Text by Adam Rykala

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,"*

Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities



2019 was my year of firsts. My first Ultra (Vale Coastal Ultra) springs to mind, and then I did the VOGUM and the Bath Two Tunnels. My target is to do either a 100K or a 24 hour by 2020, so I was looking to up the mileage from 50/60K and cautiously signed up for the 50 mile Gower Ultra.

After upgrading my gear, going for Saucony Peregrine ISO's and a 15L Kalenji backpack amongst others, I signed on the dotted line, paid my dues and found myself driving to the Gower, with my wife (who uses an electric wheelchair) to be at the Mumbles Cricket Club for the start. Loaded up with Tailwind in a 2L bladder and a bunch of Clif bars, I felt like I nearly belonged there.

After registering, and hanging around nervously wondering if I was doing the right thing. The race started and I soon found myself on the easy bit.

The first 30K-ish was road based, at the Llanrhidian checkpoint we were to change over to trail shoes. This section was surprisingly quick. Deceptively so in fact, and I harboured dreams of a really good time. Not that my other ultra times were bad (I'd managed 8:13 for the VOGUM) but I wanted to pull out the stops for this.

So for the first 16.5 miles I got to CP2 in just over 3 hours. The day was damp, a little drizzly, not particularly welcoming and as a result this changeover was very welcome. So far the weather was a typical damp South Wales Autumn and I had blasted through CP1 meaning to get a good time. Cursing my damp feet (solely from road puddles at this point) I stopped at CP2 to change over to fresh socks and shoes. This bliss lasted only minutes as within 500 yards I hit knee high mud. That wonderful dry feet

feeling...gone and never to return that day.

Compounded by some route confusion that even the maps on my watch didn't help, the pace slowed as we headed into a group searching for a path in the long grass and mud. I'd been chatting to a few people for a few kilometers, so we worked out where we were going and soldiered on.

My dreams of a sub 10 hour died from that moment on as at that point the paths were either deep mud, wet slippery grass or damp sand. Occasionally all three. Fortunately I had been training in the southern Beacons so although the mud wasn't welcome the elevation and climbs weren't unexpected. I shocked even myself that with the first 40K under my belt, I felt strong. All my fears that this would be a DNF and I'd overreached myself faded.



Rhosilli Bay was a definite highlight, even with the sand. The views are utterly spectacular and the weather was warm enough to make the run enjoyable. I actually saw my first live jellyfish there, although I think I was doing better than he was even after the 45K. This enjoyment died at Oxwich Bay but we'll get to that.

The first compulsory clip point at Port Eynon was at a distinct memorial type statue, and the clip was broken. Now in a bit of a panic, I decided to take a selfie at the memorial as it had a distinct "Cofiwch Dryweryn" logo. I then phoned the organisers to check that was OK. It was.

Turns out there was a problem with the last one at Pwlldu Head as well, so the CP staff told us to ignore it and go on. That was definitely welcome as that section was in wide open grassland on muddy paths and most of this time was spent dodging the worst of the mud baths.

The cup of tea at CP5 came from heaven itself, I was starting to see the sub 10 hour definitely fade away. This got worse at Oxwich, with a sandy ascent that came from hell itself and was genuinely the only time I considered giving up. Some

of the descents were on very muddy slippery, rocky paths that required total concentration and commitment. Even now I am shocked I did not take a single tumble. The terrain grew a little more varied and the light was dimming. Still fun but less time for sightseeing.

The track from Caswell Bay got a little confusing and I found myself in a group of 10-20 runners looking for the path. Turns out we should have taken the high tide diversion but we spent a good time looking for this with marginal success searching for small sign markers in the dim light.

Following a final push that found us back on the correct route, I joined up with 4 other runners and at Langland, we decided that finish lines were far more important than finish times and we made our way in together. Pitch black cycle paths leading back to Mumbles, high winds and the sea below focussed the mind. I think that if I'd been more awake (as by this time I was pretty wiped) I'd have remembered to check the CP notes I'd made and taken the high tide diversion rather than slavishly following my watch. Hindsight is 20/20 and all that. Hey, at least I found out my head torch was good.

The final time was just shy of 13 hours. Not what I had targeted, the fact that I managed a 50 mile run in the mud was a win enough for me. Finishing my first 50 miler was a real blast, I was still running on air at the finish line even if my legs were killing me softly with their siren song of cramp.

I took a Samsung Gear360 camera with me and got some amazing 360 videos. The included pictures are from them. As I run for fundraising for my wife, I uploaded the videos on FB in real time to document my progress.

Actually got my phone to 5% only 1K from the end so I was impressed with that. I've learnt from this though and bought a wireless charging power bank that fits perfectly in the pocket behind the phone pocket. Testing this on later runs it charges my phone on the go perfectly and the powerbank allegedly has twice the capacity of the phone. Occasionally I have some good ideas after all.

In fact, I'd say Gower definitely felt like two ultras. The first 40K was completely different from the last 40K. It started as flattish roads and paths, some great cycle paths and lulled you into a false sense of security. This was largely inland and took you through



the sort of urban meets rural small town feel of South Wales. Grey from drizzle and endless tarmac, although the one cycle path through Dunvant is pretty, it still is more 'road' than 'trail'.

But the next 40K...

What wasn't mud was sand. Damp sand. Some of the descents were that wet, slidey, gel-like mud that needs 6 inch nail spikes to give you a grip. I think I may have actually mud-surfed down the one steep hill, grabbing bracken to control my speed. Probably looked a lot more impressive than it felt at the time. The Saucony definitely earned their stripes here. The views were spectacular. Rhossili Bay and Oxwich, Langland and Caswell Bay.

Even through the fading light, the increasing drizzle and the growing weariness these were enough to lift the spirit.

I mentioned my wife came with me. She looked around Mumbles and then went to the Cricket Club to watch my finish. Apart from her slight panic as her phone signal was pretty crap towards the end, the staff at the Cricket Club treated her like a princess and I cannot thank them enough. There is nothing more uplifting than her face as I pull myself across that final 100m stretch to cross the line and end the agony.

They made us both a cup of tea to fuel us for the journey home, this

reminded me of the Wales I truly love. Chatting with people who didn't know us yet welcomed us. Putting the world to right and then packing up, preparing for the long drive back to the Valleys.

Looking back, I think I could have done 11-ish hours if I'd been more strict on following my notes. I'd transcribed all the important ones from the map on separate note files for each CP. But towards the end I was so tired I just wanted to go home.

Next up is the Winter Brecon to Cardiff, and then the South CANUM. I think I'm addicted!

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# Ultrarunning World

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# East Devon Round

Text by Ian Morris



*I had been on the move for sixteen and a half hours, a magical dusk where I ran towards the sunset high above the Otter Valley had been and gone; but now, in a particular low moment it felt extremely dark and I felt properly lost. The barbed wire to the left had met the fence to the right to create the perfect triangular trap. This dead end was all the evidence I needed to reluctantly admit that I did indeed need to go back to my last known marker.*

My previous nocturnal running expeditions had taught me that navigation in the dark wasn't my best attribute. It's hard to pick out features on even the best maps when you can't see further than the 250 lumen head torch complete with what a diminishing set of batteries affords you. Given that I had just ran 58 particularly hilly miles of all the best East Devon has to offer, my previous longest run ever was 42 miles. I was loathe to engage in any bonus 'fun' miles. Getting back to my previous known marker didn't take a navigational masterclass, as neither an assault on the barbed wire fence, or a climb up the hill that disappeared at an alarming angle to my left were too appealing on my list of present options. When I finally made my way back to the

race route with ticker tape evident, I was to curse myself as really there had only been one option all along. If the East Devon Round had taught me anything, it was, when faced with 2 hills ahead you were in all likelihood to go up the steeper one.

The East Devon Round was held for the first time on May 4th, 2019, and had been organised by local runner and all-round good guy Alasdair Moffett. Starting from the village of Offwell, around 20 miles east of Exeter, the route carved its way to Lyme Regis via grass centred roads, fields of clover and the first of a number of bluebell and wild garlic carpeted woods, before weaving between confused dog walkers down the riverside paths all the way to the sea. Lyme Regis came full of inviting chip shops and perfectly serviceable pubs that were all sadly (but probably thankfully) shut. The race cut-off of 24 hours was generous, but still didn't allow for a swift half in the local hosteleries. From here we followed the South West footpath, hitting the technically challenging Undercliffs section (only 6 miles in length but worryingly a sign advised walkers to allow 3-4 hours for this particular section). Cutting inland



after Seaton (home to the Grizzly race) the route headed through equally amazing, and increasingly steep, scenery as you made your way to the course's most northern point of Luppitt common. This was all done via a steady stream of picture postcard villages and the most English of countryside, before carving its way back through Honiton and onto to Offwell village hall where competitors and supporters were met with a very welcome beer, pizza and most other things a weary soul could want. (Think WI cake stall). Without doubt East Devon is an amazing place to run and this course showcases the very best of what it has to offer. However, this comes with a warning, East Devon is not flat. With 8,000 feet of elevation and at 100kms in distance this is a route your legs and lungs will remember, and sitting here a week later knackered after walking half a mile to the shops, I have somewhat reversed my previously oft-stated fact that the recovery from ultras is far quicker than road marathons.

My interest in entering the EDR took some time to generate momentum. When I first saw the route I wasn't entirely sure I even wanted to run 62 miles. The wheels of fate started turning once I entered a few further than a marathon events. I got an appetite for tackling something longer and to become a proper 'ultra runner'. A brief non-committal email to Alasdair led to him inviting me to give him a ring to discuss the event, from then on I was committed. On top of this I discovered I had some family who lived in Luppitt and they were hosting an aid station, they offered me accommodation. Even more so when the East Devon Round Facebook page announced another club member was entering. How could I not? The die was cast.

And so it was that I found myself, months later, after some hysterical (in both senses of the word) training runs with maps, compass and a knowledge of both last used in the scouts (too long ago to remember or be of any use), getting into Alasdair's car for a lift, the short distance to the start from the village hall. This wasn't an act of favouritism, I was running late, and was the last to join a strong looking pack of 50 or so fellow runners. Most seemed to have opted

for the full 'round' and a small handful doing the 'still an ultra' half. With a short good luck speech and words of motivation from the Race Director we set off along the first of many Devon lanes.

I often find the early miles of training runs the hardest to get my body in tune, the longer ones, I find much easier. I had no idea what would happen to me after 40 miles so decided the best option was to just get those out of the way with minimal fuss and worry about the last twenty-two miles when I got to them. Previous recce's had left me free to not worry myself too much with directions and although some of the course had changed (remember that tapering barbed wire?), I was free to enjoy my running and concentrate on looking at the scenery and where my feet were going rather getting a sore neck looking at my map too often. Luckily the scenery was such that there was no chance of that. 'Green and pleasant land' could be the motto for Devon and what surprised me on the day and throughout the recce's that I had done was that not only was there fantastic single track with hidden valleys and tight woodland paths but the open vistas we were continually presented with were jaw dropping. In a culture where travelling to far flung locations has almost become the norm, it is sometimes easy to get blasé about what we have in our very own backyard. If the East Devon Round showed us anything, it is that what we have, is pretty damn sensational.

It is somewhat of an underestimation to say I had lined up on that quiet country lane in Devon at 6am on a Saturday in May expecting to win. Given that this was the case I only had to fulfil my quietly held personal goals (ignoring the notion that I might finish in something like 15 hours, that I had managed to let out like an embarrassing fart at a dinner party the night before at the event briefing) and one of my goals was to make the top of Dumpdon hill, an Iron Age fort sitting high above the Otter Valley, before sundown. As I sit and reflect writing this on the fact that not only did I do this, but that I managed to get to the top as the sun touched the horizon, I feel truly blessed. There are many



# Race Reports



reasons I might not have made it up there at that exact time; the comfort of the chair in Sidbury hall and they may have produced the finest cup of tea ever, or the wood fired pizza delivered to the aid station at Luppitt which could all have kept me in those places until way after dark. I had resisted temptation and so there I was staring at the near perfect sunset at the business end of a perfect day.

Relieving my feet from my shoes at checkpoint seven had seemed sensible as I was sure I had picked up grit and other detritus that was making anything other than very careful foot placement relatively uncomfortable. When I tipped my shoe up and nothing came out, closer inspection of my feet revealed that the soles of my feet had been replaced with lumpy brain matter and skin resembling the colour of pickled radish, whilst the rest of my feet dispelled my long held belief that my feet were far to gnarly and brutalised to ever get something as pedestrian as a blister. It was my rookie error to simply slip on a pair of fresh socks to mask the deteriorating feet situation without further attention, conveniently ignoring the fact I still had 30kms, and several thousand feet of climbing to go. Foot care is certainly something I should look at for future events.

Back at my previous last known marker the darkness hid the summit of the hill I was ascending, but my legs were showing me every inch of its bite. Almost inevitably



on a day where very little went wrong, there was soon a telegraph pole with some tape on it and beyond that a gate which offered a way out. From somewhere on the flat road I managed to get my legs working and I started, for the first time really, to think about the end. What struck me was there was so much I was going to miss, memories fade and I am no photographer but I hope the sights I saw, the people I met and experiences I had of the East Devon Round weekend stay with me till I grow old and grey. Standing listening to the pre-race briefing the night before in Offwell,





I had been struck at just how normal this all seemed to be, normal people coming together on a normal Friday night eating curry and sticky toffee pudding all with the goal of quietly achieving something extraordinary.

One of the greatest gifts the day gave me came at around the halfway point and my watch beeped to let me know it was on low power. My legs had also started to let me know they knew what I was doing and were sending rebellious messages to my nervous system telling my brain that they objected. I was starting to really understand number one on the Ultra Marathon bingo sheet of 'it's the downhill that really hurt.' You'll recognise it because it's next to the 'it's just a mobile buffet' square. For once, I was prepared and as I get a sore neck from looking at my watch every ten seconds (especially at the later stages of most road events) I had a spare backup battery charger but didn't realise that attaching this to the watch whilst it was running would



cause it to wipe all my times and zero the distance. I am addicted to tech and distances, this would usually be a disaster. Except, for some reason, today it wasn't. I realise now this is because I didn't really care how far there was to go or how long I had taken, I wanted this to go on forever. Not because it didn't hurt, not because it was a triumph of spirit over adversity or anything ethereal, it was just fun, pure, exhilarating, friendly fun and if my body would allow it I would do it again now, and tomorrow and probably the day after that. It probably helped that the weather was perfect and the views so damned sating, boredom was inconceivable. Alasdair the event organiser had said that he wanted to put on an event that was run by runners for runners and this shone through all his volunteers. I would go further and say what I found was a love for the act of running. I read somewhere that running is a privilege and not a right and that day the privilege was all mine.

Crossing the finish line, I saw Alasdair advancing on me with two glasses of beer. I am still not sure if they were meant for me, but they were gratefully swiped from him anyway! I'd earned them. And the pizza, and the cake. And the left over sticky toffee pudding...I had friends still out on the course but a full tummy, and one heck of a day in my legs completed, bed was calling.

UW



# Camino De Santiago de Compostela

Text by Matthew Jones



*"You can just drop me here actually."*

We're approaching a bus stop on the outskirts of St Lys, a satellite town outside Toulouse. The simple concrete shell of a stop, deserted, by the side of the road, is the beginning of a journey.

My sister pulls the car over, whilst my two young nieces alternate between occasional animation and fractious tedium of children overcooked in a car. They've given up asking where I'm going and why. I have to keep reminding myself.

Santiago de Compostela.

Because it's there.

The hardest part of a journey is usually the start. I have a winding journey ahead, and I buy a little time for myself at the side of the road, fussing with the straps of my running backpack. It's 10am and the temperature is starting to climb. A few more moments won't hurt, lingering at the threshold.

I check my watch. It shows me a

simple line first, then a map, on which I am placed at the far edge. Then a distance. I'm 970km as the crow flies from the end of my journey.

The doubts that I felt the night before when I thought this through for the first time fully and comprehensively, doubts that were amplified by the comfort and embrace of my sister's loving family home, they're far from my mind now. Strangely, with a few blips, the doubts don't return during the next 21 days of 54km a day, on average, running steadily at 5 minutes a kilometre.

I set off, running, from that bus stop, a brief look back to the car as it moves in the opposite direction, I am soon to turn off the main road onto quiet country roads where I will stay for some days, alone, apart, yet somehow never more certain. The path less travelled.

What is a pilgrimage if not a hiatus from doubt, a brief intimacy with peace, and a departure from those

everyday anxieties and worries? For a 1000 years, souls have plodded through the misty Pyrenees, the dry and dusty Spanish interior and along the undulating Galician ground, seeking something. Something of a god, something of forgiveness, something of meaning.

There is something mediaeval in the sight of hobbling pilgrims, carrying staff and crook, even when placed alongside heavy traffic and captured by smartphone and camera. It's still remains a moment of suffering and salvation, no matter the comforts modernity tries to offer.

What does running gain and what does running lose in the age of GPS watches, closely monitored rankings and personal bests, sensible training plans and heavily marketed events and products?

I have no answer because it has always been my way. Destination over journey, data over joy. If I run in a wood, but don't record it, did



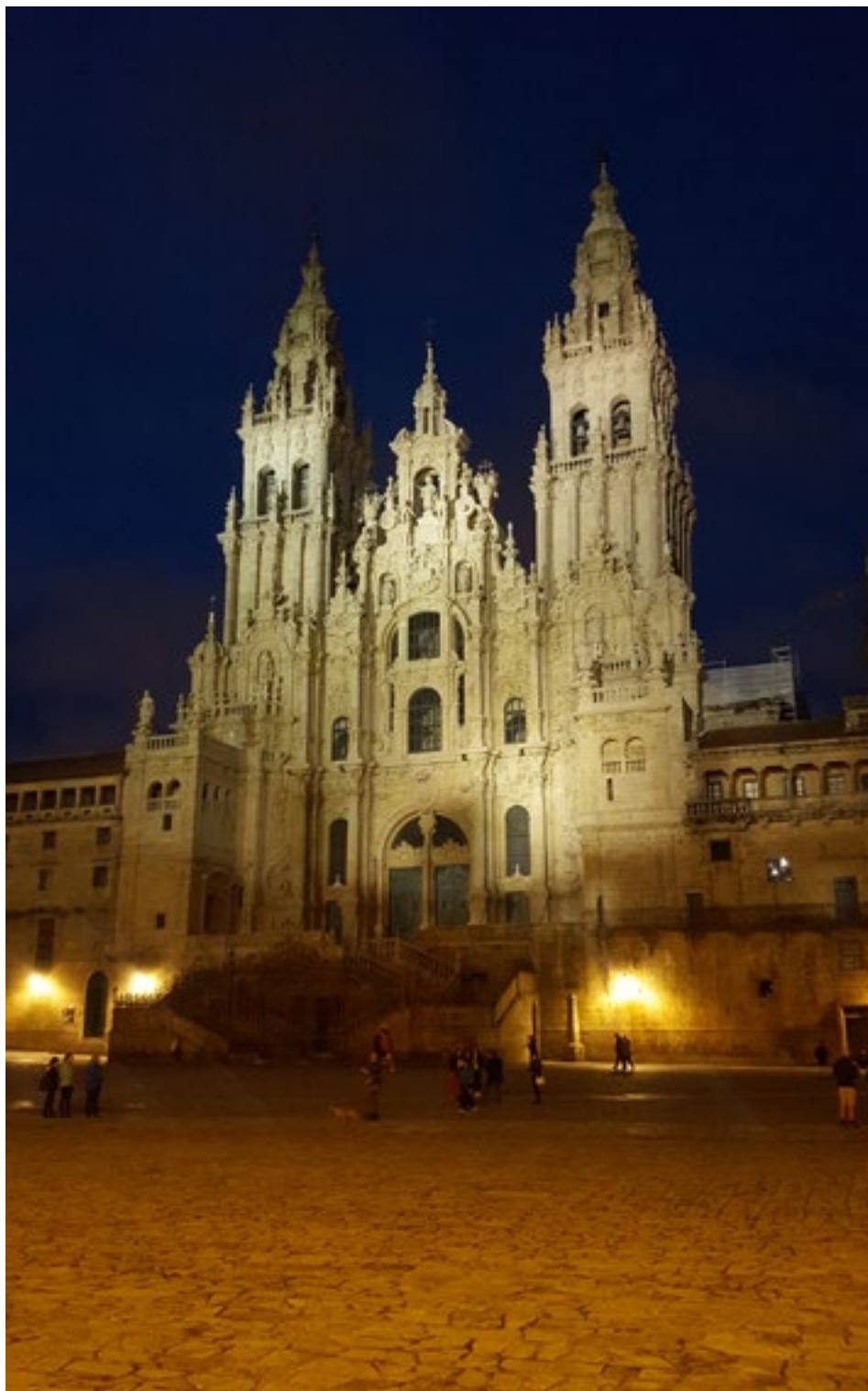
it happen? On my journey through France and Spain, no matter that I meticulously recorded every one of the 1140km, the process of data was slowly replaced by the joy of survival.

The dash into a supermarket for necessary sustenance, the discovery of abundant plums and blackberries and apples by the roadside; successfully taped blisters, hastily washed running clothes drying in the early evening sun, the delight of new friends in crowded dormitories. The uncountable times one wishes and is wished a 'buen camino', good journey.

I am asked many times what event I am taking part in, and each time, I reply, it's just me, on my own. My own adventure, an unbranded, unmarketed, rough edged diamond of a journey. There's no running t-shirt at the end, nor medal, people rarely grasp the improbable mathematics that have me doing a marathon and more every day for 3 weeks. If I told them I was doing Marathon des Sables, they might applaud. Instead, I'm running 4 times further, on my own, unsupported.

I was never on my own. The Italian cyclist who called me 'Rambo' every time he saw me, offering me fruit and water without stopping. The reiki foot massage one evening that seemed to





miraculously heal or begin to heal a sprained ankle. The bandages, the tape, the snacks, the fair wishes, a journey shared, a journey together.

At the end of every day, days which tended to start before daylight at 7 and end by midday or early afternoon, I attend to the repairs of my body and bag, hunger appeased and a simple shower. Once I have changed into the lightest of spare clothes, I can clamber onto a simple bed and once more tick

off a day. 18 hours or less to hitting the road once more, but that briefest pause, with the rock balanced at the top of the hill, before it tumbles down, me in pursuit.

It is a little of Sisyphus, condemned to forever roll a rock to the top of a hill for some slight against the gods, and a little of Savonarola, ascetic, self-abasing journey of the soul. 2kg of possessions for 3 weeks, blistered skin around midriff where my bag chafes

and grinds through the kilometres. Pulled forwards by the thought of the restful end, held back by the same thought, restless sleep and uncertainty once more.

On the final day of my pilgrimage, I took a detour from the path and when I rejoined it in contemplation and concentration of running through pain and fatigue, I ran a kilometre the wrong way. I waved to pilgrims, only dimly wondering why they were heading backwards. There was something joyfully ridiculous in that kilometre, as if deep down I was trying to go back, to find something lost a final time.

For a moment, I might have considered the possibility of running back, reclaiming the lost cities of Burgos, Leon, Astorga, Pamplona, cities and towns I flew through the first time, cathedrals I barely glanced at but they'd passed and the tide would carry me forward. I turned and, laughing and cursing, began my final approach to Fisterra, the coastal town, which translates literally as the end of the world.

For whatever else the Camino is, whatever personal meaning one seeks and one finds, it is above all an unending tide of humanity, a tide that has come in now for a 1000 years, washing up along the shore the shells that are its emblem. Shells of all shapes and sizes, on the shores at the end of the world. Each shell a universe with a multitude of meaning, each a world entire, each a story.

I laughed and wept a moment as I ran up the gentle slope to the lighthouse, for there were no more roads to conquer. Through the mist and the cliffs, the land ended, as it does, as does every journey. Did a small part of me wish to run on, into the frothy Atlantic, in search of peace and meaning and something beyond reality? Maybe.

I turned and ran back down the hill, to life and to food, warmth, to friendship, to material, to love. **UW**



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# Lakes In A Day

Text by Naomi Moss

Photographs by Paul Mitchel



After a few trips to the Lake District over the last 18 months I had a desire to run a mountain race there. In Nov 2018 I committed to and entered the highly recommended Lakes in a Day Race organised by Open Adventure. I wanted to do this race well and be able to complete it strongly knowing I had done all I could in the lead up to it, it was quietly my A race.

Talking to runners who had completed this race in 2018/17 I knew it deserved respect and with help from my coach we set a plan of action in place to get to the Lakes every 8 weeks or so

to train on the elevation I would encounter on race day, whether it be walking or running.

The race organisers for LIAD also provided 3 guided recce runs, 2 of which I did, Caldbeck to Threlkeld and Threlkeld to Ambleside and I can honestly say they were invaluable. It also gave me a chance to practice my map reading skills and meet fellow runners who had taken on this Lakes beast. I recced Ambleside to Cartmel on my own with Hubby following me around in his van providing banter and food en route. These recces made me

feel more confident about my navigation, the kit I would wear and a chance to practice my fuelling strategies.

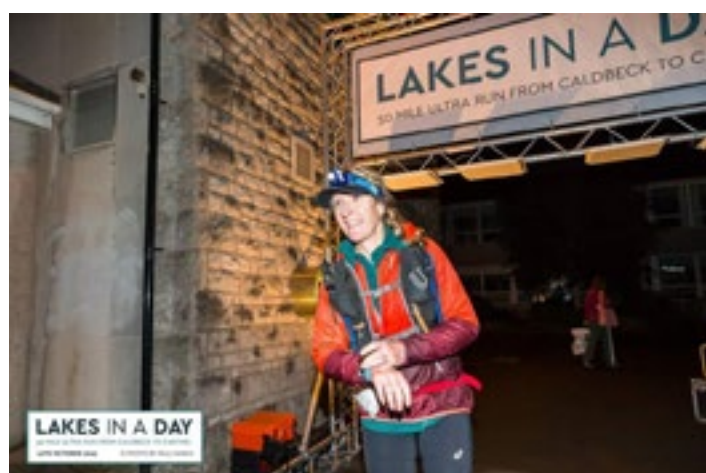
I'm a bit of a goal driven soul and needed a focus or two leading up to the race. I've always wanted to run a Sky Race and at 40km with 3500m ascent, Scafell Sky Race was the race I entered. It was a mix of technical, single-track trails from start to finish, perfect for an aspiring mountain runner like myself. Once completed I needed another race with a fist full of ascent so decided on Mud Crews, The Roseland August Trail (RAT) which runs from Porthpean in St Austell Bay to St Anthony Head and back on the Roseland Peninsula. My distance of

choice was the The Plague, 100k with 5000m of ascent, starting just after midnight and involving several hours of night running. All good mental training for LIAD I thought.

Both races went well and I picked up 3rd in my age category at the Scafell Race and was 6th lady at The RAT... I was feeling stronger.

On Friday the 11th October myself and hubby left the flats of Essex and made our 5 hour journey to the Lakes. I chose the option to register on the Friday night at 7pm at Cartmel Priory School. Here I bumped into two friends I knew who were running the race and a few runners from the recce days. The hall was a buzz of keen and nervous runners





collecting maps, bib numbers, trackers and drop bags for our trainers which would be transported to the halfway CP at Ambleside.

As an unsupported event (a first for me), no crew assistance was allowed apart from a wave, a smile and some encouraging words

like the ones my hubby used, "Can you hurry up, I want to get back to the pub for last orders." That didn't happen. Any extra kit I needed would have to be carried. The weight of my backpack was 8lb, not sure I could have made it any lighter as I wanted the extra fleece, hats, gloves, socks,

food and foot care kit (I never race without this).

Distances between CP would be 11.2m, 17.8., 13.3m and 7.5m and those feed stations were the best I have ever seen. Hand sanitizer dispensers were at the entrances (great idea), all dietary requirements were catered for, friendly

upbeat helpers that truly made this dining experience ACE.

Race morning was as expected... WET. A short 20 minute drive from our hotel in Mungrisdale gave me an opportunity to reconfirm my reasons for taking on this race and to mentally check in with my Ultra self.

The Oddfellows Arms in Caldbeck was the start line and 435 runners, including runners from 13 countries, 14 Type 1 Diabetic runners who were given free entry and a few professional speed merchants like Damian Hall and Ricky Lightfoot. The village was alive with excited, keen and revved up runners all shuffling inside and outside the pub eating breakfast sandwiches, drinking tea and coffee in



# Race Reports



their attempt to top up their reserves before our start at 8am. Race director James Thurlow addressed us all, wished us well and let us go.

I merrily trotted off with a friend I had made at the recce runs and we chatted about personal expectations, self-preservation, the weather and the fact that all those months of training were about to be put to the test.

My plan was to use my poles knowing that High Pike was the first climb at 658m then Blencathra 868m and I wanted to conserve

myself as much as possible. The weather was a mixture of rain showers, sun and fairly light winds, perfect running conditions and this gave rise to multiple amazing views over the never-ending landscape... it was just perfect. CP1 came and went and hubby gave me a smile and a wave just after Threlkeld.

The next challenges would come thick and fast in the form of Clough Head 726m, followed by Helvellyn 949m and a water stop up at Grisedale Tarn which was much needed. Next was Fairfield 873m which had a stinging effect on my adductors and iliopsoas muscles, they needed a little reminder on how to lengthen so a short stretch was necessary. Yet again the rain and the wind made itself known by nearly taking me off my feet, thankfully my poles saved me from a full-on SPLAT moment.

This place was fast becoming special to me and made me feel alive yet I occasionally cursed how the climbs made me feel my age plus 10 years. Had I overestimated my running ability? No, I told myself, I hadn't, this feeling will pass, just keep moving, I told myself.

I ran well off Fairfield and into Cp2 Ambleside where I knew a fresh, dry pair of socks and trainers awaited me. Footcare can make or break a race especially when your feet are going to be wet for 50 miles. Two blisters to pop and new zinc oxide tape applied made me feel fresh again plus two pieces of pizza, two pieces





Hubby was there to greet me and feed me. I received my medal from James Thurlow and it was time to sit, stretch and see where I came.

16th lady out of 93 in a time of 15 hours 7 minutes.

My trips to the Lakes and Wales over the last year have definitely made my legs stronger. I felt good 85% of the race which is a huge improvement. There is always more I can do to improve and I will do more but family, work and life has to fit in too. Life is a balance.

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of ginger cake some salted nuts washed down with water and a little pep talk from hubby... what more could a girl want ;)

The next few miles contained a fair bit of road and ankle deep wading along the rooty shoreline of Windermere. To my surprise I consumed 1500ml of water over the next 9 miles and was feeling great, running all the downs and marching, albeit slowly, the ups. Then the energy ran out... I was thirsty and knew I had to eat but had no fluid to wash the food down with. I had underestimated how much I was sweating, I now needed to knuckle the hell down and get to CP3 Finsthwaite. Here I changed the batteries in my head torch, attempted to drink soup which came back up so I went with my Mountain Fuel Extreme Energy drink and their Feel Good Bars washed down with flat coke and water. I had a stern talking to myself, topped up my

water took a mint caffeine chew and got on the move again... only 7 miles to go.

I moved pretty conservatively over the next few miles and began to visualise the finish line which I find helps me to focus in the later stages of a race. The air felt mild and the moonlight was bright. A few trees down in the woods called for a bit of belly scrambling but I was nearly done.

Running the last few miles I suddenly thought I had gone wrong. I doubled back for a few 100 metres only to thankfully meet a runner who said I was right. This was my tiredness kicking in and my self-doubt ruling.

As I ran alongside Cartmel Racecourse, runners who had finished clapped and encouraged me. They were walking back to the campsite and I was pleased that I was going to be in bed tonight.

Running across that finish line was just brilliant.



# The Gloucester 24 hour Track Race 2019

Text by Steven Battle



On the 30th October 2019 the Gloucester 24 hour race took place at Blackbridge Jubilee track which was refurbished in 2013 and was reopened by Princess Anne. The Blackbridge track is where the British record was set and still stands to this very day. Dave Dowdle covered 170 miles and 974 yards in May 1982.

All runners this year would receive a silver buckle if they reached the 100 mile target. The silver buckle has Gloucester Cathedral on it stating 100 miles in one day, 56 runners lined up for the start. Included in the entry fee were two evening meals, breakfast, lunch, pizza and drinks of water, cola, tea and coffee.

The winner was Simon Holvik of Sweden GTI Friidrett with a distance of 253.139 km. 2nd was Danny Hawkins, Newbury AC 210.384 km and 3rd was Ian Thomas, Norfolk Gazelles 203.22 k in the 60- 69 category. 1st lady was Rebecca Janelle, Climb South West 172.386, 2nd was Rachel

Ball, Sunderland Strollers 167.222 and was 3rd Stefania Gabriela 165.239. I must admit that I was happy to be back and taking part.

I managed to get my buckle and reached a 100 miles with 15 minutes remaining on the clock. Finishing 14th with 163.755/ 101.6 miles. Next year's event takes place from the 30th October to 1st November. Not only a 24 hour track race but a new 48 hour track race!

A well organised event with room for campervans and tents on the site around the track. Changing rooms and hot showers available.

[Gloucester 24 hour race results](#)



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at the  
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# The Story from The Other Side

Menna Evans was running the length of New Zealand for the world record attempt

UW correspondent Helen Hayes followed Menna's progress

Photos courtesy Menna Evans



Last time we checked in with Menna it was on the 16th day of her Guinness World Record attempt to run from Cape Regina at the top of New Zealand, to Bluff on the tip of the Southern Island, a distance of 1,280 miles. Since then Menna has encountered endless traffic, heart stopping lorries, thunder and lightning, heat, wind, torrential rain, floods, roadworks, diversions and a police intervention. Here's some of the highlights from Menna's epic run.

**Day 17 (17th January)** The current record for a female runner is 52 days and 15 hours, at Menna's persistent average of 35 miles a day indicates

she is on track to break that record. If she can keep up the relentless pace. During the first half of this day Menna was enjoying the countryside, the afternoon was intense, as so often on this challenge, the traffic on the highway was fast and with no hard shoulder, running into a headwind. Menna's only option was to squeeze into the bushes, brambles or what little there was on the side of the road, "I feel like I've had 10 rounds with Tyson!!"

A video positive message from Jake Quninton spurred Menna on as did all the messages of support, "You are showing us that no matter how down

you get or how broken you are, you can complete the task at hand. Thank you for these lessons."

Menna also made the front cover of the NZ Herald, "Whanganui visit for Welsh runner attempting to break record and raise funds for charity."

**Mangamahu to Turakina, 35.5 miles done.**

**The last 3 days on North Island, 18th to 20th January.** 700 miles/ 1127km completed as Menna cruised into Wellington. Video messages from two Welsh sporting legends, Ryan Jones, the international rugby captain and Jamie Baulch the sprint athlete

energized Menna's stride knowing they were following her progress. "Mammy has some work to do now." A mum on a mission. Although Menna was still on target for the record, saying goodbye to her son Lew and her supportive mum did disrupt a careful routine of elevating and icing her feet and legs after 35 miles. Routine is key to a challenge like this.

Menna crossed over to the other side, taking the ferry from Wellington to Picton on South Island. Here the blood, sweat and tears began. On the first day Menna encountered stunning scenery in the wine country, detracting from the heat and traffic on the highway. Starting slowly by walking and jogging the stiffness out of her un-iced legs. Arriving in Blenheim, "New Zealand's sunniest place" Menna messaged, *"Thank you for all your amazing words of support, encouragement and love! Be assured that I read every single message. I appreciate all your lovely words, especially as the road is so long ahead of me."* 8 hours later, another day and **34 miles done.**

**Day 22** was a peach of a day, **Seddon to Clarence, 40 miles**, *"Everything is spot on today, heavenly, slight wind behind me, the first time that has happened in 21 days."*

Menna springing along at a 9 minute mile pace for most of the day. Everything felt right and in harmony, body, mind and road conditions, light traffic and perfect weather conditions. Menna made the most of it, feeling fresh, *"At this point I don't want it to end!"* At harmony in the now, the remembrance of these moments keeps every runner motivated during the tough times.

**Day 23 Clarence to Goose Bay 36.3 miles**

Menna had a fitful night due to worrying about roadworks on this stretch of highway. A mention to John who drove the support vehicle and safeguarded Menna all the way on this run, ensuring she was



protected on the highways and narrow bridges by reviewing the route and driving behind her. As it turned out the road operators cheered Menna on by clapping, offering words of encouragement and juice drinks. The traffic was light with an acclimatising temperature of 30 degrees. Menna was rewarded with the vision of hundreds of seals with their pups as she arrived at Goose Bay.

**Day 24 Goose Bay to Domett 36.5 miles** a long eight and a half hour day. This was a draining running day, *"My body felt good today but my head wasn't really in it, no particular reason, I struggled to find consistency."* This was the 24th day of this epic adventure, the mental drain on Menna precipitated another battle to remain focussed. There was more walking up three hills, the heavy traffic saw Menna

scrambling over the road barriers to safety everytime an articulated lorry wooshed past. Spotting the charming post box solutions helped to keep her spirits up, this time a microwave asque on a pole.

**Days 25 to 26 Domett to Leithfield on to Christchurch.** Humid and Menna is adapting to the heat, feeling fitter and stronger since she began. Menna is running past the vineyards, *"I do like a drink of wine."* Thank you to DJ Wynne Evans for a motivational video message to Menna as he walked around the local park back home.

**Day 27 Rolleston to Ashburton 39.6 miles**

The longest pedestrian unfriendly bridge in NZ awaits Menna and her

# Record Attempt

crew, John. An anxious Menna was up early at 4am and embarked for the infamous bridge at 5.30am. At 30 degrees forecast it was going to be one of the hottest days of the challenge so far. As Menna approached Rakaia Bridge, it became apparent there was no pedestrian footpath, the plan was dependent on John driving behind Menna in the support vehicle, before this could happen, the police arrived. Apparently a motorist had reported Menna for running over a shorter distance bridge earlier in the day. As the police and Menna were pondering on how to safely cross the bridge a huge articulated lorry turned up and the driver kindly offered to assist. Running behind the lorry with a fire rescue vehicle behind her in a Menna sandwich. Menna had to employ her inner Usain Bolt as the lorry driver put his foot down. That was the fastest run to the other side, a 6.20 minute mile.

## Day 28 Ashburton to Temuka 37 miles

For a month Menna's body has endured 35-40 miles a day without a break. Menna posted a motivational video message to her followers, *"With every hard day I have, it takes its toll, today has been about recovery. It's all about getting the job done. If I can finish smiling, then it's a bonus! It's all about the positives to help keep me focussed and motivated."*

Roz and Mel from Wales came out to see Menna as did many other people along the route. This support helps so much. John did a sterling job finding witnesses to sign the paperwork for the record attempt. A long straight road today, three bridges with no pedestrian footpath. On the last two bridges Menna was able to pick her way through the stones underneath on the dried out river beds. Finding amusing things on the route helps to keep Menna engaged, this time it was an automated dog wash and a lorry gliding along the railway track.



## Day 29 Temuka to studholme, 36.5 miles 1,033 miles completed

It has become the norm for Menna to run these 35 mile distances everyday. Today she is feeling balanced after a stressful few days. The beautiful

landscape of wheat fields and haystacks like an idyllic 19th century painting with the haywains. A happy day filled with fun, laughter and the sparks in Menna's feet, tooting cars, trucks and a free ice lolly.

## Day 30 Studholme to Kakanui 37 miles

Running by a blue penguin colony. Another bridge crossing, this one has a shelf for pedestrians, Waitaki bridge, Menna resorted to crawling along the shelf at side of road. Heights are not Menna's favourite pastime and it's heart stopping when a lorry goes by. Another lovely day, her legs are feeling fresh and she's heading back to the coast for a change of scenery from heavy traffic on the highways, it's beautifully peaceful looking out onto the blue sea.

## Day 31 Kakanui to Waikouaiti 37.5 miles

Today was tough for Menna, hills and high winds all day, Menna was struggling to breathe, *"I feel like a puppet, my legs are going up and down like a puppet, it feels like I am not going forwards."* Menna cried for the first 15 miles into the wind because it was a tough slog with painfully slow going accompanied by constant wind resistance. She called her boyfriend Jason waking him up in that moment of despair, traffic, heat exhaustion and now the wind.

Menna's motivational self talk,

*"Everyday is a challenge  
Everyday is unique  
Always think of the positives"*

Talking of which....A new pair of running shoes turned up from @frontrunner, thank you Callum and Kathy for personally delivering them to Menna.

## Day 32 Waikouaiti to Allanton 40 miles

Menna is accompanied by runners Dan, Steve, Merillee, Charlotte, Leia, Jen and cyclists Haley and Johnny for a diversion off the highway into a lumpy back country route down to the south.

## Day 33 Allanton to Balclutha 36.5 miles 4 days left

Menna is in a reflective mood today

having donned her rain gear as it rained continuously all day long. In sight of the record she allowed herself to look back on how far she had travelled. The rain is reminiscent of her home back in Wales interspersed with memories of her John o'groats to Landsend run. Menna gives herself permission to reflect now she is so close to finishing and the emotions well up. Clutha bridge is a stunning, steel construction of half semi circle curves, Menna posts a photo of the bridge and a pile of jumbled shoes hanging from a fence. Amazing memories of people, places and experiences. Menna met Mo, 67 years young, cycling around South Island. A video of Menna's village back in Wales, Llansadwrn, a sponsored walk to raise money for Mind charity organised by Lisa and the villagers. They all sang in unison, "See you on the other side!"

## Day 34 Balclutha to Invercargill 37.5 miles 57 miles left

The news came through that the run had raised the 3k target for Mind. This spurs Menna forwards, *"Rain and cold are my kryptonite, I won't let it stop me."* In winter gear ploughing through constant rain as thunder and lightning are thrown at Menna. She was going to have to fight for this, to overcome her tendency to succumb to the cold very easily, this is a test, near the end now and she's very tired. Dripping wet as a lorry goes past, it's like a bucket of water being thrown over Menna's face. A contrast in drought weather conditions and dried up riverbeds a few days ago to flooding now. Head down, crack on.

## Day 35 Invercargill to 37 miles

One last slog, nearly there. Menna's feet, legs and brain are tired and want to stop.

Another day of torrential rain, she is delayed by half an hour in the morning due to the flooding. Trees are carried down the river and drains are exploding over the roads as Menna wades through as she turned into an

ice cube. On the punishing highway it was akin to being in a washing machine, every tyre whips water across her legs and face and pushes Menna out to the side, it's difficult to keep running. Menna walked most of the day and was so cold she could hardly speak. A video message arrives from her son's school back in Wales, **"Go mum! Go!"** was all Menna needed that day for encouragement.

## Day 36 Invercargill to Bluff 19 miles

Menna invited us to join her live on the last half mile as he ran, holding her phone, to the end of her journey and the otherside of blood, sweat and tears with more tears of joy and relief. A beautiful calm day with blue skies, the rain and wind were banished as Menna jogged by the cluster of cottages and pretty gardens, talking to us and documenting her fast approaching record. Menna bounced up to the viewing point on the southern tip of South Island, holding the Welsh flag aloft a female world record holder, **36 days, 1,280 miles. Done.**

The other side of everything. This record is for all of us who want to do something, whatever it is, be it running or anything in your life. Menna Evans, despite or even because of the events in her life and the lives of those closest to her has shown all of us what is possible.

The wisdom from the other side is Menna's, *"If you have thought about doing something, look into it and do it. Just try, it brings something into your life, new challenges, friends, dream big, reach out and get it"*

This baptism of fire has raised £3,000 for Mind and \$1,350 donated for Save the Brave

Check out issue 22 for Menna's run up to the 16<sup>th</sup> January.

Menna's Facebook  
[Menna's Marathon Challenges](#)

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# GB ULTRAS Race Across Scotland - A Battle Of The Mind

Text by Jon Ward

Photos courtesy: GB Ultras



### Pre-race

Having successfully completed my challenge to run a 100 official marathons to coincide with the RAF centenary in April 2018, I needed a new challenge. In 2018 GB Ultras changed their race across Britain from the Trans Pennine trail in England to the Southern Upland Way (SUW) in Scotland. As a resident in Scotland, I saw this as a perfect challenge.

The 2018 race was upon me before I knew it. 135 people were on the start line, 63 would go on to complete the race, I was one of them. Crossing the finish line in just over 99 hours, I was the last person to finish the race, narrowly coming under the 100 hour cut-off time. The race pushed me physically and mentally to my limits. I was broken, I was naive, I had underestimated the challenge of running over 216 miles across the rugged Scottish terrain. Poor foot admin led to the beginnings of trench foot and several blisters on each foot. It was painful to run let alone walk. It was an experience I will never forget.

I always remember as I neared the finish line, I was asked two questions, "How did you find the race?" and "Would you do the race again?" My answer was, "I absolutely hated it, who the f\*\*\* would want to hike across the SUW. Absolutely no chance in hell I would do this race again, I'm broken."

Four weeks post-race, I find myself parting with my hard earned cash as a deposit for my entry in the Race across Scotland 2019. Why? I'm driven by challenging myself, being out of my comfort zone, seeing how far I can push myself physically and mentally. Two hours after the 2018 race, I'm telling myself, "you finished but you know you can do better."

My goals for the race were to get a gold buckle and potentially finish on the podium. I felt a lot better prepared for the race this year. I had been running strong in all fields of running. I ran 40 – 80 miles a week on average, occasionally doing 50 mile training runs. In June this year I became the first person to run the North East 250 a driving

route through the Cairngorms, malt whisky country and the Moray coast line. In total I covered 260 miles, 15000ft elevation gain in 6 days.

I really felt in the best condition I ever had been.

### Getting to the race

Participants were responsible for sorting out how they got to the start of race. I'm based in North East Scotland and I was running unsupported, so I had to make my own way. Fortunately I had family friends in Glasgow, I drove down to them the night before the race and was able to leave my car with them. On race day I got a train from Glasgow Central to Stranraer, I managed to get a cheap ticket for £8.90. There were several other runners on the same train, so it was great to chat with them.

Upon arriving in Stranraer it is a 10 minute walk to the bus stop to get bus 367 to Portpatrick which was about



£2.10. The bus takes about 20 minutes and stops at the village post office a 5 minute walk to the village hall where registration is.

Accommodation, I had booked early on with [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) with a free cancellation option. A week before the race another runner had a spare bed in their room up for grabs. So I went halves with them and cancelled my room. It worked out perfect, as the hotel I was staying in was just above the village hall and the harbour where the start is.

Registration was really easy and swift. I got my number followed by a mandatory kit check then a pre-race photo. I handed in my drop bags for the first 3 drop bag checkpoints, I kept hold of my final bag for Cocksburnspath. All I had to do was pick up my tracker, hand in my last bag in the morning, registration was complete.

A group of us had pre-arranged a meal. It was also my birthday. So I celebrated by stacking up the calories and opting for a starter, burger and chips, side of veg, onion rings and a pint of local ale. I certainly got my carbs and protein in. Well and truly stuffed, I made way back to the



hotel for an early night. Before up though, I went to the hotel bar and got myself a birthday whisky.

I did my final preparation of my kit before lights out at 2200 hours, alarm was set 0430 hours. I had an uneasy sleep, waking up regularly. I think I woke up around 0400 at the sound of clinking, it was the race team putting up the startline standing. For breakfast I had two pots of porridge, a protein smoothie and a cup of coffee. Then Rhys (my roommate) and I checked out at 0500 and headed down to registration. It was a little damp outside but overall it was a fairly calm morning. At registration I collected my race tracker and handed my final drop bag in. At 0540 hours Wayne the race director held a race brief. We then made our way to the start line for a 0600 hours start.

The field was a lot smaller than last year's race, I think this year about 69 starters. This was it now, I was on the start. All the training I had done for the last 12 months was all for this moment.



# Race Reports



## The race

I set the pace quite early along with another runner Mo. We ran together for about the first 40 miles before we split and then I pretty much ran on my own up to St John's the first drop bag point 67 miles into the race. About 50 miles in my Garmin watch froze on me which meant I had to reset the watch. By resting the watch, I lost all my data including the race gpx. Fortunately the route at this point I remembered quite well. It was also well marked with Southern Upland Way posts, so I was able to make my way to St John's with no issues apart from at 63 miles there were cows in the road and I got chased by one, I never crapped myself so much.

I was feeling great by the time I got to St John's, I was 3 hours ahead of last year's time. Unfortunately I lost two hours at the CP, as there was no Wi-Fi, which meant I was unable to upload the race gpx back onto my watch. I had a race map along with compass but I wasn't confident trying to navigate and run in the dark. So I held on until some more runners headed out. I ended up teaming up with Rosie Bell and another runner for the night.

The leg between St Johns and Sanquhar was just over marathon distance and the terrain was very challenging. This part of the race broke a lot of people last year, me being nearly one of them. It was a tough night and at 17 miles into the leg we reached a bothy. It had just started pouring with rain, I decided to rest for an hour. Rosie and the other runner had 15 minutes before heading off. It was light again by the time I set off to Sanquhar, there were 9 miles to go. About 3 miles down the road there was a farmhouse, which did bacon butties and brews. I took the opportunity to replenish before heading back off.

Originally my plan was to get to Wenlohead (102 miles) within 24 hours, however I think I got there in 30 hours. I had started to slow down as I was experiencing pain and swelling at the bottom of my left leg above my ankle. Fortunately this checkpoint had Wi-Fi which enabled me to sort my watch out.

This was a turning point in the race for me as I was starting to suffer with my injury, the route was about to get more challenging with double the elevation gain compared to the first half and tiredness in general.

I got to the second drop bag, Beattock (123 miles) before dark. I teamed up with Rosie Bell as we made our way to the next checkpoint. This part of the leg had changed, there was now a new high trail route instead of the original low route. The weather had taken a turn for the worst, the trackers had hit a black spot in the high area. Along with Rosie and I, two others runners had already done the high route when the RD decided for safety reasons to revert back to the low route. I wish I hadn't of done the high route, It really took its toll on me, my injury had got even more aggravated. I remember falling asleep walking the last few miles to the CP. On reaching the CP I had now completed

140 miles, 76 miles to go, the last third of the race.

The last third of the race for me was really mentally testing; grit my teeth, head down, one foot in front of the other moment. The injury on my left leg had reduced my average pace to less than 3mph, most of the time I was tabbing with the short bursts of running. That was pretty much how the rest of the race went for me.

I remember getting to Lauder (182 miles) at around 2230 hours. I was in 5th place overall at this point but from 2nd-4th weren't that far ahead of me. I had a quick turnaround at the CP before heading on my way to try and catch them. My hopes of catching 2nd-4th collapsed as I ended up in the wasteland as the path out to Lauder through a field was blocked by cows, I tried to skirt around them, I was off course, falling off a bank in to a small river. I had to cross the river to get back on to the path as well as scale some trees. I lost about 45 minutes, injured myself further and mentally I was damaged.

However, I had come so far and time was still on my side. I could only walk now, it was very frustrating as the paths were ideal to run on. It took me nearly 6 hours to cover 13 miles to the last CP at Watch Water Reservoir. Getting to this CP was a massive relief and to boost my morale the guys cooked me up a breakfast. It was heaven, how many races can you say you've a full cooked breakfast made for you. Appetite satisfied, I had a 45 minute sleep before the CP guys woke me up.

As I left the last checkpoint, the view was amazing. Rolling hills in the distance with a red sky, it was so peaceful, it was a thing of beauty that brought a tear to my eye. Now there was only 21 miles to go until I would complete the race across Scotland for a second time.

With about 10 miles to go I caught up with Rosie Bell. We had spent large sections of the race running together. So we decided that we would run the last 10 miles and cross the line together. They were 10 very slow miles, the miles slowly descended down. I remember getting on to the coastal path outside Cocksburnspath, a mile and half to go. It seemed like the longest mile and half ever, I was hurting bad now, struggling to walk. Was so close but yet seemed so far, with just under a mile to go, I was given an ice cold beer which I kept on me right to the finish. On crossing the line, the feeling was unreal. High jubilation, downing a can of beer but also I was in a lot of pain.

Overall, I finished joint 4th with Rosie, who finished as the 1st female in just under 80 hours. I had achieved my goal, I got a gold buckle and beat my previous time by 20 hours. Unlike last year, my foot admin was key to my success. Regularly applying Vaseline and Sudocrem to my feet, prevented me from getting blisters. I used 7 pairs of socks all Gortex and 4 pairs of trainers during the race, this was also key to keeping my feet in good nick.

I could not recommend this race enough. It will throw



everything at you but if you give everything back, then you'll have an unforgettable experience.

The race is extremely well organised, checkpoints well distributed with great facilities and well stocked. You can do the race supported, which I recommend if available to you.

## Post-Race

I didn't really give myself time to recover, 10 days after finishing in the Race Across Scotland I competed in the another ultra, the Ring O fire, 135 miles around the coast of Anglesey. Since then, I've been nearly sidelined for 4 weeks and I have not been able to run.

Despite achieving my goal of getting a gold buckle, I want to do the race again within the next two years. I believe if I could get a support team next time, I could smash my time of 79 hours and challenge for pole position.

Even though the race pushes me physically and mentally to my limits, I'd rather be out there in the Scottish hills any day of the week than be in work. It's what I love about ultra-running, the freedom of being in the middle of nowhere, no communication with the outside world. It's just you and nature, peace of mind.

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# The Tor des Geants

By Karen Nash

For those who do not know this is a tough race around the mountains of the Aosta valley. It is long, has huge climbs and descents. I knew I wanted a new challenge and I have never done a stage race as even on the Northern Traverse I barely slept. The TOR is not a stage race as such but the only way to get my head round almost 340km and what would prove to be almost 30,000m of climb was to break it into stages at each Life Base. I didn't necessarily plan to sleep at each one or even to be at each one at night but it gave me manageable chunks. I had looked at the times of friends who had run in previous years just to get some sort of idea of what might be possible. This enabled me to come up with my 3 targets. Bronze to finish and to have had fun most of the time; Silver to beat 130 hours and Gold to beat 120 hours. You will notice that the last two had no mention of fun, I guess I thought that to go faster would have involved some type 2 fun and suffering.



Just follow the yellow line

We spent the month before the race driving round France from crag to crag and climbing as hard as we could. It was hot but we scaled rock in Vergison, Remigny, Orpierre, the Dentelles and more. My legs got one short run near Autun but my core strength should have been good. Our sat nav is not specific to a van so the route chosen was interesting for a large vehicle and made for a memorable day driving out of our 'special single night' on a campsite with a pool, showers and real toilets in Briancon. It was only a 210km drive, but took most of the day and I was going to run more than half as far again.

From Briancon over the pass to Sestriere and Susa before turning north over the Cenis area and down to the far eastern end of the Maurienne valley, turn east up the Bonneval valley, over the Col d' Iseran, down almost to Bourg St Maurice and then over the Petit St Bernard to Courmayeur.



So many amazing views and so many memories, family holidays in Briancon, skiing and walking through deep snow drifts at Cenis, nordic skiing in a blizzard at Bessans, Via Feratta with the boys in Val d'Iserre. So many ski holidays in Bourg and cycling down a piste on the Petit St Bernard before the boys were even born. It took all day, not the 5 hours that the sat nav suggested.

We arrived to find that there were still plenty of parking spaces at the event centre leaving plenty of time to explore, get used to the cold (it was almost 15C cooler than we had been used to) and to meet other runners. I got itchy feet and explored the first section of the route to Col Arp, 2571m and it snowed on me!

Most of the rest of the time was spent faffing and getting more and more nervous about what I had taken on. The website said we needed GPS and so I bought one, only to find the official file was so huge I couldn't work out how to upload it. I am generally happier with a map and a compass.



Glad I wore tights given the snow and cold nights



In the end the little yellow flags were enough (except where the cows had eaten them) and the GPS never left my drop bag throughout the race. By Saturday I was registered and my drop bag packed and deposited. Having at least one bag that would follow me round meant I didn't have to worry about what to put in each bag like at the Grand Raid de Pyrenees.

Race day was cool and sunny, but warmer than previous days. I met up with Matt N and another Matt, plus Andy H and a few more. I had seen Nicky, Jenn, Lee Kemp, Zoe and others earlier too.

We seemed to be in the pen for ages before the countdown and the cheering began. It was a slow start through the restricted streets of the old town and then after crossing the river a gradual climb to the forest path. As we neared the

Col Arp to La Thuile (from Andy H)



edge of town the rain started and then what began as a few drops quickly became heavy. Time to dive into a shelter and dig out a waterproof. Up through the forest was slow and with very limited chances to overtake but with over 330km what was the hurry at this stage?

Once we left the forest the snow started, just as it had when I explored there a few days earlier but much more heavily. By the Col Arp the snow was heavy enough to cover the trail and it looked like a scene from the Tour de Helvellyn back home.

The descent to La Thuile was brilliant and the fellside off the path was very runnable. We were soon out of the snow but my mind was in a panic, the next col was even higher and I had put my micro spikes in my drop bag. What if I couldn't get over the col and complete the route to the first Life Base? It messed with my head and so by the CP in La Thuile I was convinced I needed to carry my spikes. I spoke to the only fireman in the town who had a broad Yorkshire accent and discovered where I could buy some. It was a 30 minute detour but my mind was put to rest. I got some strange looks as I ran through the town and back searching for the shop. I knew to eat little and often and early but somehow in the snow, the fast descent and then the worry I had not done so. I tried to eat now and managed some pasta, bread, chocolate and coke.



Climbing to Col Arp (from Andy H)

The rest of the afternoon passed in a blur. I can remember passing and chatting to Jenn. I think she was struggling with a knee problem. I knew my race plan had to be flexible and so when I got to Valgrisenche in the dark and not having eaten enough I knew I should rest. In the dark over the col with the fixed ropes I had escaped a close call with a big falling rock dislodged by a runner above and then at the perspex box CP at the top I had thrown up after a small amount of food and drink. The three cols of 2571m, 2875m and 2829m plus 50km had taken their toll at several hours a piece. The beds were great and the dorm quiet but I barely slept. I did though have chance to take stock, use the loo, drink chocolate milk and then go into the very crowded food hall. It was packed and I was not feeling like what they had on offer. I craved milk based stuff and did manage two yogurts plus a few other bits and pieces. I set off out again alone at about 00.30am.

# Race Reports

Somewhere in the next section I hooked up with Matt N, we had agreed in advance, “no pact but company would be good” and we knew we could run together after hours on the NT. It was a good day, not too hot and with some amazing scenery. There were three enormous climbs with cols at 2840m, 3002m and 3279m. Each climb took well over two hours and closer to three. My memories are muddled but I remember big climbs for hours, big drops for hours and it being warm once the sun was up. On the way to the third col, Loson, I was suffering a little and let Matt go on. We had already seen the other Matthew but he was struggling badly with heat and altitude. Up and up I climbed until I could see lots of compacted snow. I escaped without the need for spikes but those coming later once the sun dropped would struggle. After the perspex box CP at the top I got a second wind and loved the narrow descent path. I ran down to Sella overtaking people and enjoying myself to find Matt had been cat-napping. It was good to see him again and after refuelling we set off together. Once we hit the valley I thought we were almost there but no, the trail continued along the valley and then across the spur and into another valley before at least another kilometre into the village.

We arrived at Cogne in the late afternoon with a plan for a couple of hours sleep or so. I envied Matt. He seemed to be able to arrive, eat, sleep and then after a few hours be ready to go. I arrived and struggled with food, got a doctor to inject me for nausea, had my feet taped and taped under my ribs where the pain on the left was becoming an issue and then tossed on my bed for 90 mins or so. I did feel the benefits of the injection and was able to manage a serious refuel before waiting for Matt to leave with me. We had been there almost 5 hours in all. I only really register this now and am appalled at how long everything seemed to take. Perhaps I should have let Bob support me after all. If I taped my own feet, let somebody else worry about recharging my torch and phone, refilling water bottles and snacks to carry, it must be possible to cut that time? We set off into the dark hoping to reach Donnas for breakfast. As we left the village a cafe was doing free coffee and biscuits which was nice. Despite the dark there were beautiful sections and I loved the rocky area where we met the Tor des Glaciers route and then the lovely alpine pasture paths. There was also a section of forest which had been damaged by a storm, the path and wooden railings were in a bad state. This section also had an amazing gorge with huge pools, massive rocks and some bouncy bridges. On the spreadsheet of altitudes it seemed we would be going downhill, the reality was the path crossed the gorge a couple of times and had some serious climbs. OK, not serious as in several hours up but bad enough when you expected downhill. Again I thought we were nearly there only to find the village with the level crossing was not quite Bard and we had to wait for two trains. Then there was the picturesque Bard with narrow streets and a fort but even

this was not quite Donnas until we had run along the old cobbled/rock Roman road and then through the town. At 8.43am we arrived, so not quite breakfast. Time for a serious refuel.

Matt then went off to a room to sleep but I did not feel tired and knew I would struggle to sleep in sunshine and heat. I left a note on his blanket and hoped he would catch me later. I set off as luck would have it with Andy H, a new friend made on the Tor. At Perloz we had the treat of home baked, sugared cakes/donuts before the photographer at Tour d’Hereraz. The climb was through interesting vineyards trained on roof like trellises and then more pastures. As we climbed the clouds thickened and the rain appeared. We waited but it was soon heavy enough to demand waterproofs. The next CP was in a tiny gazebo so offered no real shelter. Luckily the chalet had also put up a dome tent with real beds in it. We claimed one each and voted for two hours sleep. When we were woken the rain had just stopped, superb. We should have stopped to eat more. I felt good initially and even by Coda with the lovely mountain ridges and views down to the Turin Plain I was moving well. This little refuge had our food in the cramped basement. We ate but not much and thin soup with a few tiny bits of pasta was not really hitting the mark.

In the next section I felt ill and started to lack energy. We did pass a tiny unofficial food station and it had the best spread of the lot. Melon, home baked apricot tart and so much more. By Barma I was suffering and struggling to eat again. I was made a double shot of coffee here which I thought would help but on an empty stomach it seemed to have a very odd effect. The next section from Barma to Col Marmontana and Col Vecchia was in the dark with some big ups and downs, even some short bits of iron work. I felt very wobbly and almost not in my body. Each zig-zag turn on the descent seemed to take me longer to adjust and sort my balance. Andy was clearly worried. I did try to eat and the marshalls were roasting meat with melted cheese but after a few nibbles I was sick. We grabbed an hour of sleep in an overheated portacabin and it helped a little. We hoped that when we got to Niel Refugio we could have a proper rest and even sleep. Sadly we arrived to find only one bed which I let Andy take. I tried to sleep on the floor but failed. I moved into the dining room and found Matt also struggling and wanting to sleep. I managed a big bowl of what seemed like cottage pie and fell asleep at the table.

We left Niel as the sun was coming up and after one big climb and yes, another big drop we were in Gressoney. I think it was en route to here that we had the best CP food at a little chalet in the sun, ravioli, cheeses and even the offer of wine. Matt stuck to his routine in the Life Base and I managed to eat more, sleep a bit more (I think the glass of beer helped), eat again and also get my feet taped. It seemed a shame to waste daylight but it just had to be. We left together refuelled and in good spirits. Leaving the

Had to keep remembering to turn and check the views behind too



village we got an ice lolly which lifted our spirits further. The weather was sunny and so much warmer hence the 3/4 tights, T Shirt and all the photos. It's a shame I took no photos in the first 200km but the weather, the dark and being ill just meant it was never a priority.

The climb to Col Pinter was well over 1500m but seemed to pass quickly and we were treated to a herd of Ibex on the ridge as we arrived.

The drop to Champouluc was just as great but what a lovely little ski town. We left town at dusk and made our way through a wooded area of trails, BBQ pits and stunning views on Monta Rosa.

The biggest climb was in the dark over the Cols of Di Nana 2770m and Des Fontaines 2695m plus the height lost in between and then regained. Then it was mostly down and down some more to Valtourmenche. We ran lots of it but by the last path in the forest our brains were fried even if the legs were willing.

I let Matt pull ahead knowing I would see him soon in the Life Base. By now we were in a pattern and each stuck to our rituals including a couple of hours sleep. I was so pleased that I had packed chocolate milk and boxes of custard as when all else failed these slid down OK (As did

Big views to Mont Blanc and others- a huge descent again on leg 6



a few Mountain Fuel jellies). Giving back my drop bag I almost got 'retired' here when a guy misunderstood my, "finished with my Tor bag" for finished/stopping/out of race. I set off before Matt but guessed he would catch me later. At 3am I was on my own as I circled the town and climbed near what looked to be really interesting rock walls and then up to a huge reservoir dam. My stops at the next two Refugios were just long enough to sit, drink and eat and then as the sun was up and I was on my way to Fenetre Tzan Matt appeared again.



Spotting where we were heading was daunting



# Race Reports



We stayed together all day and although at times I was tempted to push on I quite liked his laid back 'lets enjoy this' approach. We had an ice cream at one CP in a lovely chalet, waited patiently behind a herd of cows being brought off the mountain and had a lie in the shade at a tiny Refugio. The scenery was stunning in all directions.



Descents were enormous and what you thought was the bottom wasn't



We had seen the whole Monta Rosa range, the Matterhorn, the Mont Blanc range and others that I could not name. The drop to Oyace seemed to go on forever and we were so pleased to see the village that we made a silly mistake and ran straight past the ice cream shop.



Cracked lips- take lip salve next time

It was now boiling hot and the CP although large just had more thin soup, plain pasta and nothing remotely chilled. We tried to rest but after a short time gave up and headed up to the last big climb of the day in the heat of the afternoon.

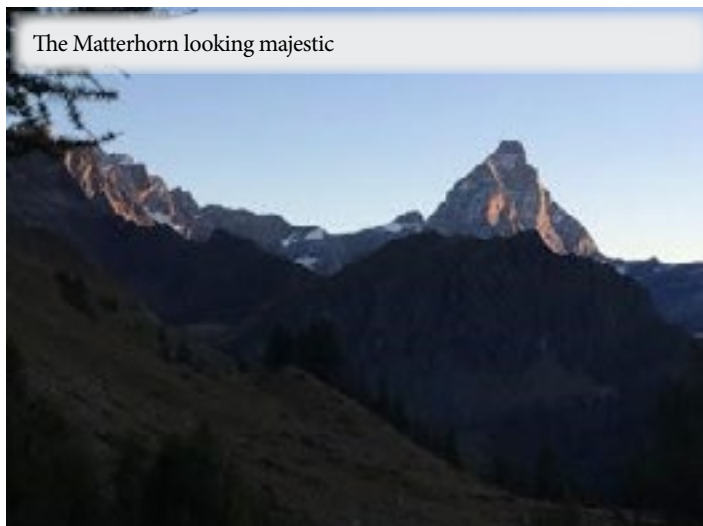
The climb soon passed and the descent on the other side was technical and interesting for a while. We shot past a Chinese couple that were very timid, we were amazed to find them in long tights, long sleeves, gloves etc. The descent went on and on and the track became a stony farm track that was not pleasant.

There was always a view, even at night



Worse still it dropped us down the valley and we then had to climb slowly back up along the road to the Life Base at Ollamont. We arrived at 8pm in the dark and I needed my bed. I was abrupt or rude to the poor marshal as he showed us to the changing room when all I wanted was a bed! I did apologise. As I was setting my torch to charge Keri appeared. She was upset, injured and retiring but wanted to chat. I just wanted to sleep. This was the worst sleeping at a Life Base. It was freezing in the big tent, noisy from the changing room and after a couple of hours I awoke feeling frozen. Matt sat up and spoke but has no recollection of

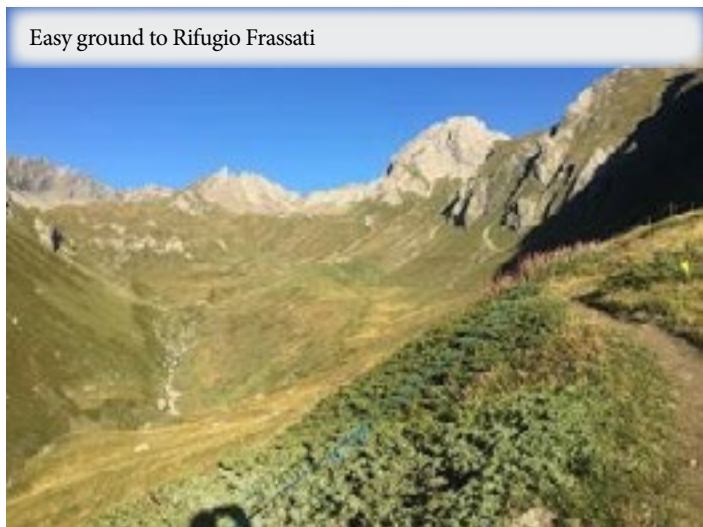
The Matterhorn looking majestic



this. I explained I was going and hoped he would catch me. I ate a bit before leaving and chatted to the lady who would become 1<sup>st</sup> V60, we had seen quite a bit of each other over the hours. The last leg started with you guessed it, a big climb to 2707m.

The views at the col were amazing as I looked down on the fairy lights of towns and then began another lovely descent. I even overtook a couple of guys. The second food station was tiny but three guys were comatose on the floor. I was feeling great now and had some 'real' soup and then beef and potatoes cooked in red wine! It was awesome and fuelled me along the next boring flat section. This went on and on until I dreamt I was on an Escher painting working hard but getting nowhere. Eventually Bosses and the St Bernard tunnel came into view. I ate but didn't stop long although a request for the toilet took me on an escorted tour of the town hall nearby.

Easy ground to Rifugio Frassati



The sun was up and it helped. True, I sat on a rock and fell asleep for a brief time but mostly I was moving well. A few other runners appeared and I used this to help pull me along. I promised myself an ice cream at the Rifugio Frassati but when I got there they had none. Disappointed I grabbed a few bites to eat and set off up the Malatra at a fast pace.



can you spot the path to the top?



Malatra window - the iconic shot

This bit was stunning and I now wish I had stopped to take more photos, especially of me in the gap (the iconic race photo shot) and of Mont Blanc.

I was on a mission and the end was in sight. I raced down from the col and then found at Aminaz we still had almost 14km to go.

I slowed a bit but then got excited when I misunderstood a tourist. I asked how far to Bertone and thought he said 4-5 minutes. It was 45, which in retrospect made more sense, but I was tired and had been on the go for almost 120 hours. Eventually Bertone appeared and there was support from more and more tourists and the runner's families.

# Race Reports

Mont Blanc



Great running down from Malatra



Only 6km or so to go. Initially the track was boulder strewn and fearing a trip I slowed here just in case. Bob had been texting me to make sure he was at the finish line and I was just so happy I was going to finish. I raced the last section downhill and all through the town. The support really gave me a lift and then there it was, the finish ramp and gantry. 121 hrs 21 mins, 20th female, 151st overall and 4th FV50.

About 25 hours were part of major stops to sleep, eat and rest. This seems a huge amount in retrospect and I wonder





how much I could shave off this if I was more efficient and yet still enjoy it/not be too sleep deprived. We took the finish photos, signed the boards and then sat under the tented finish area in the main square. My feet were a bit mashed and sore but I only had one tiny blister that I should have stopped to deal with in the last hour. Matt wasn't far behind and we cheered him in.

My legs felt strangely fine, far better than after the H200 or NT. I was nowhere near as trashed. Perhaps this means I did not race hard enough? Who knows? It was an interesting challenge and a real effort keeping it together over so many hours, thinking, following flags, deciding what to eat, where to sleep, recharging phones and torches, repacking after a Life Base, restocking snack food and water, taping feet, changing socks .... Support would be good (Bob had offered, so that is my fault entirely). Would I do it again? Yes. I learnt a great deal and would love to do it as a V60 in two years time if I can get a place and I am still running OK.

The next days were mostly spent drinking beer and eating ice cream. We had a lovely celebration meal with Matt the next evening having watched the last people run in before the final cut-off and those doing the 30km race from Malatra sprint in. Running with Matt again was great and I now have a new friend in Andy. He took lots of video and has made a great post race video that he has shared on Youtube, fantastic scenery and memories. I was happy. I hadn't quite met my gold target but I feel there is no point in targets if they are too easily met.

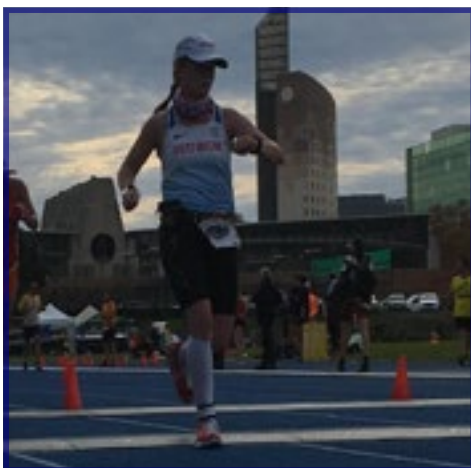
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*Helping ordinary people do extraordinary things*

# The Dragon's Back 2019

By Llion Iwan

Photos courtesy No Limits Photography



This is a story about how a bronze coloured baby Dragon came to be living on the wooden beam above my bed and how I was given half a packet of Rolo chocolates, indirectly, by Helene Whittaker, nee Diamantes, the joint winner of the original Dragons Back race. (She also was first lady in the 2012 edition.)

The five day race over the highest mountains in

Wales was first held in 1992 and runs from Conwy to Llandeilo. Simple figures of 195 miles and 15500 metres of climbing only tell a small part of the story. The rugged terrain, route finding, daily cut-off points and limited bag space for kit and food whilst facing accumulating fatigue result in approximately 40% not making it to the finishing line, and that is when the weather is good.

Everybody runs, at least when we are young. Gradually as we get older most people, for one reason or another simply stop running. Raised in Waunfawr, a village nestling between three mountains ( Eilio, Cefn Du and Mawr) behind one of which looms Snowdon, Yr Wyddfa in Welsh, we ran freely everywhere most days as children. When a fell running club was formed in 1976, Rhedwyr Eryri Harriers, it was natural to join a few years later with a number of friends. By the time of the first Dragon's Back in 1992 I was a fairly experienced fell runner, but

this five day race seemed out of reach to most except an elite few. It was next held in 2012 and watching the film of that race lit a fire that would smoulder for the next few years. I registered for race information but I didn't think it was ever a goal to run the race, although I was gradually tackling longer and longer distances over mountains. I still needed something to persuade me to take that final step to the start line of the Dragon's Back. The race itself finishes in 'Castell Carreg Cennen' a castle on a hill above the town of Llandeilo. There was a painting of this castle on



the wall by the front door in my mother's home. She, Marion, lived in the house, Afallon, (Avalon in Welsh) for 27 years. I must have looked at and passed the painting many thousands of times, but as with many other things in life I never saw it. She passed away suddenly in April 2018 less than a year after retiring as a teacher specializing in working with pupils with specific needs. I saw the painting for the first time as I looked around her living room on that night when everything changed. A day later as I sat on the sofa in the same room an email arrived from the race organisers announcing that entries for the 2019 Dragon's Back would open in four weeks. I registered as soon as I could.

Despite having been a fell runner for over thirty years I knew this would be the toughest race I had tackled, and I set about preparing as thoroughly as I could. I consulted an online coach, Nathan Flear, who transformed the way I ran and trained. My weekly mileage doubled and then tripled, whilst the vertical increased just as dramatically. Recces, map reading courses and even changing my diet meant I felt fitter and stronger than ever, even though I'm in my 50th year. Packing all your kit into a 60 litre bag and a 5 litre day bag was a challenge. Trying to balance food with kit was difficult, and on reflection I took too much food and not enough clothes, I underestimated the weather and how cold I would feel after running.

This would return to bite me hard later on.

The pre-race kit check began in brilliant sunshine on a Sunday afternoon in Conwy after a fish and chips meal with my hugely understanding and patient wife, Rhiannon. On entry to the field I remembered that I had not packed a form of photo ID. Great start and luckily I only live twenty miles away and so a quick call to Rhiannon enabled me to register for the race. The pre-race briefing with 405 runners in the large marquee introduced us to the race rules. All around on the walls were the names of those who had succeeded before us. This would surround us each day and night in the race marquee. That was a very clever motivating tool by the organisers. I vowed silently that my name would be added to these. The stark statistic that approximately 40% are not expected to finish hovered over everyone. I met an old friend, Dan Williams, whom I'd persuaded to sign up 12 months previously and who had been on a few recces with me. Looking around, as others did, I'm sure, made me ask, "who amongst us would not make it to Llandeilo and collect the little dragon?" An open air buffet followed with a bottle of Clogwyn gold (a local ale named after the spur below Snowdon where the path crosses under the steam train bridge.) Another pint in a bank converted into a pub as we sheltered from the cold whilst waiting for

a taxi to our lodging meant we were taking the race very seriously indeed.

I opened the curtains on race day to see clag enveloping the Carneddau range, but with the traditional and compulsory last minute kit faff to tackle and messing about meant we did not have too long to dwell on this. I realised I'd forgotten my sunglasses and my lip salve cream. That would affect me far more than I could have dreamed. Arriving by taxi at Conwy Castle there were runners everywhere, all looking cold and nervous in lightweight running gear and with backpacks bulging at the seams. I'd made a conscious decision months ago to carry as little as possible, and my bag (Salomon Aigle 6) carried emergency and mandatory kit, along with a little food. I never carried more than 1.5 litres of water at a time (but I did carry a water filter bottle which worked perfectly). Day food was packed in a 2 litre bum bag which nestled comfortably around my waist. Standing around in the castle with everyone else, the pre-race nerves were crippling and I tried to enjoy the occasion, which I'd thought about on and off for seven years, and seriously full time for 12 months. There was pre-race singing by a male voice choir and pep talks by previous winners, but I was only feeling increasingly cold and sick with nerves. It took a lot of effort to stay calm. I spotted a past winner, Jim Mann with his hood up and ear plugs in looking a picture

of calmness. I'd tried to help him on a leg of the Paddy Buckley back in 2015 when I saw first hand how good a runner he was and remembered that his race strategy was to start from the castle in last place.

The race began shortly after 7am and we slowly filtered out along the castle walls, where I managed to whack my head against a low arch, much to the amusement of all around. Finally the clock began ticking on our personal times when we left the town walls, the race proper began. I was running with a friend, Dylan Cole-Jones from Snowdonia who had been a member of Eryri for years, but was now living on the Sunshine coast to the north of Brisbane. We had always been pretty closely matched in races and soon were running together. The first section, nearly all the way to the first cut-off at Ogwen was in mist and quite chilly at times. With the narrow paths and runners bunched together, this was a case of long sections where there was no option but to walk, unless you knew the paths really well. We were moving smoothly and ticking off the checkpoints and from time to time the mist cleared and we could see the Carneddau range with pockets of runners dotted all around. Clusters would form and disperse whilst on the climbs it was fun to get to know other runners, some of whom we would see every day all the way through to the final day.

This was the first time that I traversed the whole range, they are a special place for



me. My mother's family hail from the Ogwen valley and as far back as we can trace were quarrymen, no surprise when the Penrhyn quarry employed over three thousand men at its peak. Two great grandfathers worked there and served in France together with the Quarrymen's platoon of the Royal Engineers. One, John Hughes was a keen amateur cyclist and I have a great photo of him in his army uniform on his racing bike. My great grandmother kept his trophies for decades after his death at the age of 56. I have vague memories of her as a short and thickset lady in an apron who kept milk under a slab of slate in a dark, narrow and cold pantry. His was a fate common to quarrymen who regularly died in their

40's and 50's. The other, Robert Thomas, or Bob Tom, as he was known, was barred from the Penrhyn quarry following the great strike of 1903-04 when thousands went on strike to fight for fair pay and safer working conditions. Whatever happened, this meant that he would walk over the Carneddau to work at the quarry in Llanfairfechan. Running over the same paths a century or so later made me feel proud and humble in equal measure. The cemetery where he is buried is where most of the family are, including my mother's remembrance stone. From there you can see directly down the Ogwen valley towards the jumble of rocks that adorn Tryfan's highest section, with the

Carneddau surrounding it. I'd dreamt of looking down on these scenes on that first morning, but all I saw was mist, runners and stony paths. I tried to focus on the race and not my dreams. Until we arrived at Pen yr Ole Wen, when the mist lifted and we could see down into the valley and across to the moorlands. Running over the stones I smiled. For a few seconds I stretched out my arms and ran carefree as when I was a boy playing on the gorse paths and small streams in the village of Mynydd Llandegai where we scattered my mother's ashes the previous summer.

The technical steep descent from Pen Ole Wen triggered some warning cramp signals in my calf muscles, and Dylan

confirmed he felt them too. We'd made the schoolboy error of not drinking enough because of the cold. I ran to a stream and filled my filter bottle, shook it, dropped an electrolyte tablet and drank the bottle during the descent on the tarmac to the checkpoint. This was the first cut-off of the race, and we arrived with a little over three hours to spare. The sun was now shining and had burnt off the clouds. I slapped on sun cream whilst the brilliant marshals filled my bottles and I changed my socks. (I'd decided that I would change them at least twice every day, and the insoles once to try and avoid blisters. As a result I only suffered one heat spot all week and had no other trouble with my feet. A

combination of long hours of training, walking in bare feet at every opportunity on the slate floor in our home and filing of nails regularly.) We had also been discussing our goals for the race, and whilst I began with a daily goal of finishing each stage in 10-12 hours, Dylan and I both agreed that our target was to complete. In the shadow of Tryfan I switched off my Suunto watch, and from then only made a note of the daily cut-off times.

We left the checkpoint, which also doubled as the bag drop, in just under ten minutes and began the steep slog up Tryfan, everyone in single file in boiling sunshine. The combination of having eaten also contributed to me feeling heavy legged and I really struggled here. I also fell into the trap of blindly following whoever was ahead instead of following my own instincts. From the summit of Tryfan we descended carefully towards the Glyderau and that loose scree scramble. I was conscious of taking this slowly, again keeping in mind that I did not want to race too hard with another four full days to follow. Dylan knew of a shortcut from Glyder Fawr and we descended quickly down a very steep slope towards a sheepfold and then over the boggy ground to Pen y Pass, which served as the second cut-off point of the day. We made this with over two and a half hours to spare and after filling up our water bottles began the ascent towards Crib Goch. I was still struggling here and

searched my bum bag for some food. An espresso gel and a couple of Rhiannon's homemade energy balls lifted my spirits and gave me a huge burst of energy which resulted in a very fast traverse of Crib Goch which I enjoyed hugely. The clouds stayed away and meant we could see for miles. Glorious running weather. We made good time to the summit of Snowdon, which felt very close to home, as it's only five miles as the crow flies and I could see it's location. From the summit we could also see into the valley where our campsite for the night was located. The descent to Lliwedd over rough ground and loose stone concentrated the mind in the hot sun. The path over Lliwedd, as with most of the sections of the race is not mandatory. You only need to get from one dibber to the next, although the race organisers have a recommended route. Having run Lliwedd a number of times Dylan and I decided to traverse it, choosing a line at roughly 650 metres of height which spared us running up and down. Although the route is on very rough ground and I would not recommend it to anyone but an experienced fell runner. We emerged on the other side onto a grassy track feeling pleased with ourselves and began the long steady descent to the wonderfully named Gallt y Wenallt before following an old path to a disused copper works and down onto the Watkin path and the final checkpoint of the day by a slate bridge.

That was one which many runners missed that day. The final descent to the campsite was enjoyable as we reflected on a successful first day and we finished at 11:05 hours feeling strong and having run within ourselves. (Neither of us had run a multi day stage race previously)

Camp life in sunshine was brilliant, as we changed, drank loads then ate in the marquee in great spirits. Mugs of coffee and an endless supply of sweet chocolate cakes and flapjacks were devoured gleefully. No worries about any middle-aged waistlines this week. The regularly updated television screens showed that a number of runners had missed the checkpoints, including our friend Dan. (Runners are allowed to continue although not 'officially.') There were eight runners in our tent and two had missed the cut-off that day, with one choosing, as many did, to return home. Dan chose to stay and stuck it out to the end, which took huge determination and I have huge respect for him and everyone else who did this.

We hung around, probably way too late on reflection, in the marquee, but it was a great atmosphere and the sense of camaraderie was incredible. I've never felt anything like this in my life. We retired to our tent to prepare our kit for the next day, and not surprisingly I was asleep in minutes. Despite the best efforts of a few choice snorers in the immediate neighbourhood shall we say.

The second day we awoke at 4.30am and soon were standing around in the glorious sunshine of the Nant Gwynant valley. Bags were packed and I ate my breakfast of porridge. Runners are allocated a time for breakfast according to their finishing time, but we wanted to start as soon as possible after the official start of 6am. Dylan and I had both packed breakfast ourselves as had Dan, although pasta carbonara for breakfast for me was a bridge too far. I soon discovered that camp life is about maximising and facilitating recovery time. Reducing time spent standing in queues for food and cleaning plates and mugs takes some practice. (Next time I would pack recyclable plates and cutlery.) We started shortly after 6.30am and walked then jogged the first mile and a half over tarmac until we turned off for the path towards Cnicht. It's a Welsh sounding name, but in fact is Anglo Saxon. Sailors in that period of a millennia ago used landmarks to aid navigation, and viewed from the sea the mountain does look strikingly similar to a Viking helmet. (Cnicht refers to the distinctive nose guard which is the north western ridge we would soon be climbing) We moved quickly and we were thankful we had started early as we were in the shade for the early section. We soon emerged onto the ridge and Dylan took the opportunity to call his family in Australia. From the summit, the view down the valley towards the

# Race Reports

small village of Croesor was stunning, this is the village from where Rhiannon's family hails and I knew that I was now entering unfamiliar territory as a runner. Then came the very steep descent towards two lakes which lead onto the Moelwynion. The terrain suited me perfectly and I flew down whilst still taking care not to hammer my legs. We passed early starters with words of encouragement, a feature of the race throughout. Again that feeling of a shared adventure pushing our limits as opposed to our generally sedentary lifestyles. Another feature for me personally was, apart from a phone call to Rhiannon and a few texts, was putting the smartphone to one side. It felt great and hugely liberating.

The climb towards Moelwyn Mawr (Mawr is large in Welsh) and then the descent towards it's lesser brother passed quickly and we stopped to refill water bottles (using our filter bottles) from the reservoir. We probably stopped too often on that morning to refill bottles, but after our scare with cramp the previous day, we erred on the side of caution. It was a hot day. Losing minutes as opposed to risking dropping out was a safer option. Again, completing was the goal, not the time. The second day is rightly regarded as tough, and probably in the context of the race the toughest stage. We ran the long section from Maentwrog to the checkpoint at Cwm Bychan.

This was one of the sections which I enjoyed the most. For the first time in my experience in any race, groups of runners would form and stick together for a while, before separating, with a few reforming. The only experience similar would be cycling in a peloton I think. Being amongst such a crowd of runners of such ability, technical skill over rough ground was incredibly enjoyable and one could not help but test oneself up the climbs against them. We made it to the checkpoint with a good two hours in hand, and refilled bottles, stocked up on food, changed socks and applied sun cream.

Then came the Roman steps, (which actually date from the middle ages) where race leaders Jim Galen and Jim Mann passed us with words of support. We fell into a small group and got talking, sharing experiences and hopes. The ascent of Rhinogydd which in Welsh literally means doorstep, but actually implies something far more comfortable and welcoming, they are not in reality. Observed from afar they certainly look like steps. I found this section, which I had never tackled previous to my recces, very desolate and in bad weather must be hugely intimidating. Another feature of the race is that it takes you to new places, and despite having lived in Wales most of my life and ran and walked extensively, there were new sections for me on every stage.

The descent from

Rhinogydd Mawr is very difficult, and treacherous. A bad navigation decision meant you could waste a lot of time amongst huge boulders. We got lucky and hit the direct route down which meant we were in the wonderful green meadow between the two mountains very quickly, and then ascending towards Rhinog Fach when it became colder. Another challenge was that streams which we had passed on a recce a few weeks earlier had long dried out, but we judged our water needs for the afternoon perfectly. A feature of the climbs that day were hugely steep slopes where you were scrambling for long sections, which sapped our already tired leg muscles. From the summit of Diffwys began the long descent to our campsite in Dolgellau. The runners who completed this section in darkness are amongst the toughest, most determined people it has been my pleasure to know. It was challenging in daylight and sunshine for us. It begins with a steep, technical descent over rocky ground before becoming a trail through woodlands and then single lane roads until you reach the path by the Mawddach. We passed the George tavern bathing in sunshine overlooking the estuary, I had to grit my teeth to keep going. We made it to the camp in 11.25, feeling strong and happy with a second day ticked off. Quick change and then some food. This was the only opportunity for a hot shower, and I spent a good hour waiting

for this, when I should have just grabbed a plate of chips and gone straight for a shower before eating my main meal. A shower, whilst refreshing, was not vital for the next day. Packing kit and preparing water bottles was.

We waited for Dan to finish, and he came in at 10.30pm a half hour before the cut-off time for the day. Great effort by him and the others completing in the darkness. We retired to our tents and I was sleeping even quicker than the previous night. The camp site is located next to the ruins of the Cymer Abbey, a wonderful location.

The third day began again with an alarm, and I was soon kicking myself for not spending more time preparing my kit and food the previous night. Standing around for nearly an hour for a shower did not result in me running any better. Cleaner possibly, but not stronger. I also had a bad stomach, which left me feeling weak and heavy legged. I managed porridge for breakfast and we set off at about 6.30am. I had bought trekking poles and chose to carry them for the first time, a wise choice as it turned out. The weather was colder and misty, we slowly made our way up to the summit of Cadair Idris, where I put my wind coat on as the wind was biting sharply. The next section was fabulous, with wonderful views towards the sea and the seaside town of Bermo which I often visit with my two sons, Eban and Mabon on the coastal train.

We made good time and again flew the descents feeling strong. We made it to the checkpoint in Machynlleth with a solid two hours to spare, after popping into the shops in the market town for some treats. (For a period during the revolt of Owain Glyndwr in the early 1400's this was the capital of Wales.) Shopping was an element of the race I had not thought through. I should have recced which shops were located where, chosen ahead what I would buy, and keep it simple and plain to save time. Coke and sandwiches with unusual fillings such as mustard and various sauces were probably not the best mix after eating

plain food for nearly three days. After the bag drop checkpoint, we ascended slowly in sunshine and formed a group of runners with whom we stayed with for a while. At some point early in the afternoon I remember feeling a sharp pain in the front section of my left ankle as I landed awkwardly, not having looked carefully at the ground for a second. What happened next might have occurred anyway, the result of long miles over hugely tough terrain. As the afternoon progressed the pain in my ankle increased, and Dylan was a great companion to have, playing music to lift my spirits and gently drawing me into conversations to

try and make me think of something apart from my injury. I was slowing down and becoming quite grumpy. His hopes of a quicker time was also disappearing, but he stayed by my side all day.

On the approach to Pumlumon we got in a tangle about crossing a river, which in hindsight we should have run straight through. Pausing to take off shoes and socks, stepping slowly over before drying and putting everything back on wasted valuable minutes and lost momentum which we had built up over the previous hours, despite my injury. It also meant blindly and dumbly, following other

runners wading through thick gorse and heavy undergrowth, as the sun faded and the temperatures dropped. There was a much easier path up to our right, which would have saved time and a lot of effort. Energy and effort was wasted on the climb to Pumlumon and I neglected the basics by not putting on an extra layer despite the cold. This all meant when we reached the camp at the end of day three I was done in after 12.30 hours. So different to the previous night. I was cold, really cold and struggled to get warm and I could not eat properly, after a few minutes of lying down I was throwing up. This happened again an hour later and

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# Race Reports

I struggled to the medic camp, hobbling on my injured ankle and shivering badly. The medical staff were brilliant, wrapping me in a thick sleeping bag, gave me hand warmers for my pockets (brilliant device) anti nausea tablets and rehydration drinks. After their kind words, I felt much better and went to bed, with a warning in my ears. If I did not manage to eat in the morning without being sick they could not allow me to continue. I genuinely felt that night as I hobbled through the dark field that it was over. As I snuggled into my sleeping bag, never have I felt so cold, sick, lonely and miserable. I had seriously underestimated how cold it would get, and how my body temperature would drop after running for 12 hours. I managed to sleep like a log thanks to three days of running.

Daylight brings hope in the shape of a new day, the sun creeping over the mountains to warm the campsite and my body. Runners were emerging from their tents, everyone smiling nervously having survived the first three days, the toughest of the race by all accounts. But it is not over. I go to the marquee for breakfast for the first time, and eat toast, a couple of slices with coffee. I feel ok. Listening to the chipper voices of others runners, some of whom I've followed online via blogs before the race makes me smile. I remind myself where I am, what I have done so far. We were over halfway, with two days

to go. Dylan and I dawdle too long over breakfast and various camp admin, before I go to meet the medics. They pass me to continue and give me a big hug. Their kindness and support was fantastic and a major factor in me surviving that night.

It's way after seven when we start, our latest time all week, and it would come back to bite us. I forgot a basic rule I had given myself, start as early as possible each day to try and finish in daylight each time. It's a hot day and the first section is through trees and then onto open moorland and wide forest tracks. The heat builds up and I'm struggling from the start. My foot and ankle feel ok, but it's the heat and lack of food from last night which hits me. Dylan is fantastic. He is encouraging and pushing me along in equal measure. Other runners fly past, their smiles and encouraging words made me realise how much slower I am today. After an hour or so I start to run, and I am soon catching up with a few runners. I'm eating regularly and feel ok. We pass a runner sitting, in tears. She has a stress fracture, and we've been meeting her every day. She is another strong, experienced runner. After a while she gets up and joins us on our slow trot. We catch up to a few runners who have taken a wrong turn and I'm soon climbing open moorland, which stretches for miles in every direction. This is new territory for me, even though we are in Wales this

is a part of the country I've never been, not even in a car passing through.

For the first time we realise that we are behind the cut-off times, we've taken too long on the first sections and now need to pick up our speed. We hit tarmac and see a medic car up ahead. A female runner sitting down, she's been pulled out. She was second overall among the ladies and performing very strongly. We had run with her for a section on the Rhinogydd and I remember marvelling at how fluently she moved over rough terrain. At only 26 years old she is going to be a name to watch out for in future. Dylan commiserates with her and we plug on up the hill. I'm managing to run the downhill, and the flat sections now. We are making up time under a clear blue sky. A Hercules aircraft flies low overhead, I guess they must schedule these for the race. I don't bother looking up, having been raised in Snowdonia low flying aircraft, even a Hercules, are not a rarity. During one run an Apache helicopter was so low I could see the sunglasses on the pilots face.

At every checkpoint now we are making up time, building a buffer. The leaders, Galen and Jim run smoothly past again, with cheery greetings of encouragement. Both stars and great characters. Then we meet those runners showing huge determination and guts. On a hilltop we meet another runner, who has been fighting the clock since

Tuesday, he made the cut-off at Cwm Bychan with seconds to spare. Showing great determination and character. He's taping his feet, suffering badly from blisters. We meet Dan, who set off earlier than us, and run with him for a while before pushing on. Then Tim who has been suffering from a badly injured ankle, soft tissue damage, since Tuesday, absolutely not giving up. As we approach Cwm Elan reservoir we pass a hotel and the owners are outside with a small stand selling burgers, hot dogs and coke. For some reason I cannot stomach food, and politely refuse, within a few miles I'm regretting my decision.

We reach the checkpoint, it's boiling now under the sun and we seek shade, then a medic. I feel scared when I take off my left shoe. My ankle has swollen beyond recognition, I can barely put the shoes back on. The medic confirms it is tendonitis, and tapes me up, it's going to be a long day. For a while I can run on the flats, but soon even that is beyond me. The miles tick by slowly, as we climb towards the summit of Drugarn Fawr, and the terrain is difficult but not as I expected. Being able to see for miles over a landscape that undulates gradually makes it crystal clear how slow I'm moving. Dylan to his huge credit sticks with me. I'm mentally ticking off each checkpoint, working out constantly where we are and how much time we have in hand. Our time for the fourth day would be 14 hours and 30 minutes.



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# Race Reports

As we climb out of the valley with reservoirs, the sun drops behind the mountains on the horizon, a chill falls and the wind strengthens. I put on my coat, I don't want a repeat of the previous night when I was chilled to the bone. We reach the last cut-off checkpoint still in daylight, and press on. It's dark when we finally arrive at the campsite and I'm bone tired. Our dream of that pint in the nearby pub is quickly shelved, we are cold and hungry. The mess tent is nearly empty of food, all that remains is rice and chocolate cake. Dan arrives and we stuff down some food and trudge back to the tent. I know I should prepare for the next day, but I'm too tired and cold as is everyone else. I climb into my sleeping bag knowing tomorrow will be difficult, and even harder if I don't prepare but I just go to sleep.

Friday dawns and the six survivors in our tent start packing knowing it's the final day. I'm so tired I wear the same shorts as the previous day, but use a fresh t-shirt and socks. I stuff food into my bag, fill my water bottles and take my bowl of porridge with me as Dan and I leave the camp shortly after 6:15am. Everyone is cheerful and as we tackle the first climb runners stream past. We are watching the time carefully and begin to gain time at each checkpoint. Today Dylan started after me and soon caught up, and I told him to push on and we would meet up at the halfway cut-off. He says he's

not feeling great as he trots off.

We reach the village of Llanymddyfri and pile into a bakery where we buy a chorizo slice of pizza and a pot of yoghurt. The former keeps me delightful company for a few miles, the flavours so intense even after only a few days of a repetitive diet. The pizza I save for lunch, and on the run over the reservoir I eat it as I check my watch, and smile. By now I've built up a steady time buffer, I now have 55 minutes in hand. It's on one of these sections that a wave of emotion flows over me, I think of my mother and I'm nearly in tears, I fight to control it. Not now. Not here. It's too soon. The challenge is not over yet. I need to reach the finish line before 11pm.


I eat quickly and re-pack my bag for the final time at the cut-off point. I check the floor to ensure I've not left any litter. Peter who has been sharing our tent says that Dylan is waiting for me, and that he is taking a nap. I'm trying to decipher this as I also mentally prepare for the afternoon and decide that I must have misheard. Surely Dylan would not be sleeping? I spot a runner I recognise from previous days, and having followed him on Strava building up to the race. Our training patterns were very similar, both in mileage (which tipped 100 miles a week) and altitude climbed, (approx. 20,000 feet a week) and I can see from his kit and his technique that he is another highly experienced runner. He sets off before me.

I leave the checkpoint with warm words of encouragement from the staff, who have been fantastic all week, supporting, helping and encouraging everyone. Words cannot express my gratitude towards them all. The trail leads from tarmac to a wide forest path to an unmarked line over moorland towards the black mountain. I've never been here either and I am enjoying the day, feeling good and moving fairly well, although other runners are still going past. I'm acutely aware that I am right at the back of the pack. I see a fellow runner walking towards me, head hanging down, shoulders slumped. He has been feeling sick, throwing up and as the weather closes in, he's called race HQ who have advised him to pull out. He's returning to the checkpoint, nothing left in the tank he said. So close yet so far. I feel for him and press on. I can see the steep climb towards the Black Mountain as another runner passes, Remi from France. Both knees strapped heavily but climbing stronger and quicker than I am. I must be slowing down.

I reach the summit and the weather changes quickly, for the first time since the Carneddau the mist swirls around, and the temperature drops noticeably. I put on my light windproof and tighten the buffs around my head and neck. Put on my gloves. The trekking poles are priceless again today. I'm not sure of my bearings here, and take

a few minutes to take stock. That is when my phone app crashes, first time in the week. I've been carrying my map and compass around my neck strapped to my chest all week and now the lessons and practice I did before start paying off. I quickly check my bearings and head off towards the next summit and spot another runner. I join Tim and we journey together for a while. The mist and cold makes it very confusing and I'm really glad of the company. I'm feeling slightly scared, seeing the other runner turn back made me realise how close, yet how far we still are.

The terrain over the summit consists of broken rocks in all sizes, similar to the Glyderau on a smaller scale. It begins to rain, big heavy drops of rain which promise more will follow. Tim and I both put on our waterproof coats and raise our hoods. I notice through the mist that a figure in a red coat seems to be walking back and forth. He is not drawing away from us, and we are gaining rapidly as he seems to be walking in circles. Another runner in blue joins him. They must be lost I think. We reach them, and the rocks covered with lichen are greasy and treacherous. One false step could easily result in a bad injury. This is not the place to dawdle. I recognise Rob, the runner who left the checkpoint before me. His face is white and he is sweating. Max with his colourful strapped knees tells me that Rob is not feeling well. I try talking to Rob, but



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# Race Reports

he is not able to always reply. Max and I talk and are rapidly becoming very concerned for our fellow runner, who looks to be in a bad way and asking for the nearest road. Rob marshalls his strength and walking between Max and I, manages to trek off the summit and down onto a saddle. He shows great determination and strength in navigating off that summit, and courage. The easiest thing in the world then would have been to lie down.

We reach a shallow dip which affords some shelter, and Rob is sick. He climbs into his survival bag and lies on the ground. As I talk to him Max calls race HQ, we are not yet at the stage where we feel we have to push the button for immediate evacuation, but are very worried about him. Race HQ says that the medic team is on the way. We stay with him, checking he is ok, eating and drinking and checking the time. It is approximately 90 minutes from the call to when the medic team arrive, we are in the worst possible place, high up on the Black mountains.

Runners who are at the back of the race are going by, asking if we need help but we tell them to push on. The cut-offs are getting very tight now. Through the mist, walking together my friends Dan and Dylan appear. Dan has been struggling from lunchtime, but true to character is showing huge determination to carry on. Dylan tells me he has been throwing up, and had

to kip at the lunchtime checkpoint. I feel guilty for having not searched for him, but he pushes on with Dan. Dylan would finish well within the cut-off, a great performance. Staying with me cost him hours on Thursday, and then on Friday when sickness struck him, he managed to push on. Huge respect to them both.

The medics arrived and quickly set up a tent for Rob. We paused to wish him well and he thanked us. We only did what he and any other runner in the DB would have done for us. Rob recovered and managed to walk off the mountain later that afternoon.

Max and I walk on and continue talking. Despite a 20 year age difference, and being from different countries, our shared love of the outdoors and running events is an instant bridge and we find we have far more in common than differences. We vow to stick together come what may. We reach the last cut-off with 7 minutes to spare. To be fair, the staff have waited for us and gave us a fantastic reception. It's moving and encouraging. We set off up the last climb shortly after 7pm. We then kind of get lost despite the good visibility and the sun shining as it drops down to the horizon. We are both tired, injured and moving slowly. Everything hurts. As we drop down off the mountain onto a tarmac road, Carreg Cennen Castle looms into view. It's on a ridge and we are approaching from the

south. It's the same vantage point that the artist must have been on when he made the painting which my mother had in her living room. The sunset meant the colours are the same, shades of orange and red bleeding down the hillside. It occurs to me that if I had not met Rob and Max then I would have been going through this area a good two hours earlier, which would have looked completely different in the bright sunlight. I smile and I know, truly know, everything will be alright. Night falls and both my watch and phone die from the lack of battery power, a common failing of modern gadgets. Luckily Max has power in his GPS and we press on, silently cursing but also applauding the course designer for creating a little sting in the tail. We hit the final tarmac section, Max is much stronger and pushing on, and then from the dark a light appears. A DB staff urging us to start running. Max encourages me also, and with shouts of 'Allez, Allez' ringing in my ears, how could I not run? We run that last mile or so despite the pain and fatigue and the closer we get to the finishing line more staff appear with torch lights and shouting and encouraging us to push on. It's a truly amazing feeling and my chest is fit to burst, we turn the last corner, I nearly stumble then it's a straight sprint (more Del Boy three wheeler than Usain Bolt) to the finish line. Max and I jump, embrace and our partners rush to join us. DB Staff are shouting

and congratulating us. A childhood friend, Mat Ward, with whom I used to run (but usually watching his vest disappear over the horizon) is the MC at the finish line. He shows me his watch, 10:58pm, I'm speechless. Max and I made the cut-off. I finished the Dragon's Back within the time limit. That last section thinking of my mother and then making the finish line despite the odds? The injury and time limit? It makes me smile every time I see that painting today in my living room. (The Rolo chocolate was awarded to both Max and I by Sean. Only the race director for 'an act of kindness')

I did not win the race. I completed. 'Diolch iti mam.' (That was for you mum.)

## Post race

My lower lip was infected and required antibiotics, and my left ankle was badly swollen for two weeks and it did not return to normal for a further four weeks. Mentally I was fatigued and it took a few months to sort myself out and regain my love of running and focus. The DB took a lot out of me, but it was worth every ounce. I'd love to do it again, although naturally on the finish line I swore that I would not!

What have I learnt?

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By Mark Dorion

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They call the Rising Sun  
And it's been the ruin of many a poor boy  
And God I know I'm one ..."*

*(Eric Burdon and The Animals)*



Was it just a coincidence that this haunting, classic tune from THE ANIMALS popped into my head as I shuffled through the jungle in Snyder Park on the outskirts of Fort Lauderdale, Florida? REAL monkeys howled from the trees, fighting amongst themselves. The biggest, fattest coyotes I have ever seen walked back and forth on our asphalt path (scrawny, Wild West coyotes amble through my backyard in El Paso, TX). Scarily tame large raccoons sauntered amongst our cars

and tents, climbing into garbage cans not 3 feet from where runners dozed, there were the colorful, giant Iguanas, easily 1.5 feet from nose to tip of tail.

Walking with Bryon Solberg, an energetic, enthusiastic athlete from San Diego made me more aware of all the wildlife and unique vegetation and even architecture (there was a real "Hobbit Hut," a remote picnic table next to a raised boardwalk Nature trail, etc.). Bryon is a recovering quadrapalegic coming

back from a devastating accident, yet he actually walked faster and more efficiently than some of the faster runners. He inspired us all. YET our little 6 day band of 11 starters were all inspiring, friendly, fun ... one of the pleasantest groups I have shared a multi-day event with over the past 15 years. Everyone encouraged each other, working together to complete another 1.05 Km lap.

I am sometimes surprised when other ULTRA RUNNERS, folks who



have run for 24 hours and 100 miles or more, ask, “what on earth do you think about while going around and around a small loop??” My full answer would go on for pages ... suffice it to say there is no shortage of topics crossing one’s mind. Physical maladies are always of concern, it seemed each day I had a new and different pain or illness to transcend. There is so much detail in the scenery surrounding us, mountain bike paths entering and crossing our paved loop, swamp waters that press in closely on both sides on the north side of the course, eager dogs on their way to and from “Doggy Lake,” a pretty beach area reserved just for canines, SNAILS that appear in the grass next

to us, Tarzan-like vines hanging over our heads. Paraphrasing Sherlock Holmes, I believe that many runners SEE, but do not OBSERVE.

At 3 a.m. on night #2, I was snapped out of my mindfulness by two rock-and-roll singers playing guitar and singing,

“If you start me up  
If you start me up I’ll never stop  
You can start me up  
You can start me up I’ll never stop ...”

Getting closer to the timing mats and cone we had to spin around (direction switched every 6 hours, which I kind of liked), as sleepy as I was I realized these were NOT Mick

Jagger and Keith Richards, but rather Mike Melton and Bill Schultz, our timing crew, their “guitars” were actually measuring wheels. Little bits of comic relief and entertainment like this can help any runner out of the doldrums.

Each day started at 9 a.m. Wednesday morning (start of Day 3) by 10 a.m. my goose was cooked, and the extreme humidity (my records show 78F with 90% humidity) was making even a slow walk tough. I could not seem to get enough ice or cold water for my head, in despair I dropped to my knees and stuck my head in some of the brackish water that lined the loop. An old trick I learned from the legendary Wolfgang Schwert (627+ miles/ 6 Days, 41 Days for 3100 miles, etc.) decades ago, throwing cold water on my face while slapping myself hard in the face and neck woke me up more than any caffeinated product seemed able to do. At night the warm, steamy weather helped me stay awake and moving, in the heat of the day I just wanted to curl up in the shade of a giant oak tree and its overhanging Spanish moss.

Runners who have not tried a multi-day have asked me to elaborate on what I ate, what supplements I took, how much I slept, how much weight I lost, etc. I have had so many things go WRONG in long races, I am flexible and always ready to change things if something is not working. I was nauseous for about a 24 hour period between days 2 and 3, and simply stopped eating. I drank ginger beer, Orangina, coke, water, juices, tea, (always like coffee but that is another story, see below) all without problems, but could barely stomach saltine crackers. Amazingly I survived and even recovered! My friend Mark McCaslin from Michigan had similar stomach issues on Day 4 and he too simply stopped eating.

Even at home during regular training (where I rarely run over 12 miles or do killer interval workouts) I

# Race Reports

have a sensitive stomach and have to watch what I eat. Grilled cheese, rice, yogurt, fruit are daily staples in training and at races. I grate many things up in a blender and take them in liquid form. I am a vegetarian and avoid heavy foods as much as possible. WE are all “experiments of 1,” yet I have heard several of the very best multi-day women and men in history concur with me that it is easy to overeat, or eat the wrong things, in a super long race. AS my friend Dipali Cunningham explained to me decades ago, “you have to REALLY listen to your body, you have to really THINK about what it is you want to eat.”

I am generally mild-mannered and polite with race volunteers (I am a longtime RD myself) and believe they have thankless jobs. BUT there were several nights at the race where I would ask politely if there was any coffee. Sometimes an hour or so later I would get a cup of bitter instant coffee, sometimes not. Having a microwave available for the 6 day runners would have helped. BUT I am also of the philosophy that, “we need to help ourselves, not complain!” I handed some cash to a very friendly race volunteer named Scott and asked him to bring me a BOX of Dunkin’ Donuts coffee (there was a Dunkin’ shoppe not .4 of a mile from the Park), which he did! This helped so much that the next day I asked Claire (RD) to bring real coffee and fresh donuts for ALL the 6 day runners. There is a back-story here, for decades at the famous New York Sri Chinmoy 6 and 10 Day event, night time RD Rupantar LaRusso takes orders from Graveyard shift workers and graveyard runners for coffee/ hot chocolate/ donuts/ bagels/ etc. Race founder Sri Chinmoy himself started this tradition, often arriving at the race and unloading boxes and boxes of fresh donuts from his car for a special PRASAD (“food offering of peace” in India and Asia).

So the arrival of all these bright

donuts and boxes of coffee on days 5 and 6, “put a little fuel in my tank AND in my mind!” In the same way, I had two new pairs of Adidas Boost shoes (my go-to-shoe on hard surfaces, also the preferred shoe of two of the all-time greatest multi-day runners, Ashprihanal Aalto and Wolfgang Schwerk) hidden away under the seat of the car. Taking off my totally trashed shoes and socks and putting on fresh, SOFT shoes gave my feet and legs new life. Time and again it is uncanny how much little things like these can bolster the spirits of a sleep-deprived, staggering runner. I remain miffed that after so many years and races I still make silly mistakes, such as bringing lightweight racing shoes which might be fine for 50 miles or shorter to a multi-day race. I dearly love my New Balance Beacons and Zantes, but combined they lasted me about 55 miles before ripping up at the heel and making my feet feel like Mike Trout or Hank Aaron (very strong baseball hitters) were taking batting practice on my soles. As other runners have remarked, I do scuff and shuffle and I am hard on shoes but the style works for me, I have not as of yet suffered shin/ knee/ ankle problems like some runners with beautiful, high-stepping (yet pounding!) strides often do.

Armchair experts have told me I “should have” done more miles in this race, or that I should have kicked it in more on Day 6 as Lorna Michael and others cruised up behind me. Most of these armchair experts have never actually done a multi-day race, and certainly not after 50 years of competitive, high level running. Multi-day races make it easy for “critics” to look at numbers on paper or computer screens and make bold assumptions. IF they are not there in person, day-in/ day-out AT the race, then they have no clue as to what is really going on. I tried to sleep every night of the race, but in the end accumulated less total sleep than in any 6 day or longer event in my life. I

averaged not even 1 hour of sleep per night, with perhaps a 5 to 10 minute nap in the heat of the day. Even with AC blasting in the car, it was hard to get comfortable.

The lack of sleep caused the most serious hallucinations I have ever had. Bushes would “jump” out at me, some bushes even morphed into BEARS. At around 3 a.m. on the last night I was having some vertigo and just trying to make it to the nearest bathroom (we had excellent Park restrooms at the east end of our loop). The next thing I knew I was rolling over in the grass and dirt. I am sure I passed out for a minute or two, it could not have been much longer or another runner would surely have come along and seen me collapsed. Surprisingly, I got up, drank lots of water and soaked my head, then took off walking again. I can only think of one other time in my whole life that I actually passed out, and that was in record hot weather in the Catskill high peaks.

Hallucinating and passing out are NOT fun for me, and I think it will be a long time before I try a 6 day (or anything longer than 24 hours) again. I also have TOO many other goals (hiking the Northville-Placid Trail 140 miles, running the Hawaii Volcanoes, British fell races, various local mountains and races that I have not done) on my “bucket list,” and at age 60 I do not have all the time in the world. The Florida jungle heat was actually welcome many days when we had cloud cover or a slight breeze, it made showering and changing a piece of cake. For me there are few things more frustrating than taking a good shower only to emerge into cool wet weather. Heavy shivering does not make putting on layers of fresh clothes easy. It was WONDERFUL in Florida to throw on a t-shirt and shorts and get back out on the smooth, scenic course. For anyone who thinks 1.05km is “too short” of a loop, well, ... go see just how long 1 mile or 2 Km can be when

you are really sore, staggering and sleep-deprived.

I thank the Florida Icarus Race Directors Andrei and Claire (Andrei, your home-made shower was the BEST shower I have ever seen at ANY race 24 hours or longer! You are a plumbing genius!) for organizing this event. I know their family has faced its share of serious challenges in the past year, and am appreciative of how they pulled this whole race off. I fell in love with Snyder Park and Fort Lauderdale (any of their many beaches are wonderful to visit after the race). MOST importantly, the friendliness and encouragement of all

my fellow 6 day runners helped boost my faith in humanity. Bryon, Bob, Tom, Jim, George, Will, Lorna (The Legend), Pablo (<El Maximo Jefe>), Mark M., Betty, thank you and see you on down the road.

For me it was a tad claustrophobic to share the course with so many fresh 12 and 24 hour runners as we pushed through our final day, but most of these “sprinters” were friendly and encouraging. The good-natured joking and patter of local DJ Lucien, “Chocolate Thunder” (who was an entrant in the 24 hour) had plenty of us laughing as we tried to increase our paces and get in “just one more

lap.” I don’t listen to much music in long races (in the JUNGLE we had all sorts of WILD music courtesy of Mother Nature) as the race wound down I again heard the great Newcastle (UK) vocalist Eric Burdon and the HUMAN Animals,

“We’ve gotta get out of this place  
If it’s the last thing we ever do  
Girl there’s a better life for me and you”  
(and I know it too ...)

Photo of Mark Dorion by  
Mark McCaslin  
@ <https://www.majicphotos.com/>

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# Peter Van Geit: A modern, minimalist nomad



**P**eter Van Geit was born in Belgium and has been settled in India for the past two decades. He loves spending time in nature through endurance journeys in remote locations. He is a unique intersection of explorer, minimalist ultra runner and alpinist.

In 2018 he ran 2000km solo through the remote mountains of Northeast Vietnam near the border with China.

During the summer of 2019 he ran 3000km in the Indian Himalayas. The journey was executed without any support, it was self planned and managed, making his way through virgin jungles, alpine meadows, moraines, glaciers, snow, streams and 120 passes. For twelve hours a day, Peter ran and power hiked, carrying minimal gear in a 5kg pack.

Our correspondent had an opportunity to catch up with Peter as he rested after a day of running in another breathtaking location.

Peter Van Geit bounced into his friend's house on 15th of November 2019 for our interview after completing his first 50 hill forts in a 200 fort ultra run from Pune to Mahabaleshwar in the south west of India. Still dripping from his swim across Krishna lake with a glowing countenance, a bead of holy water sliding down

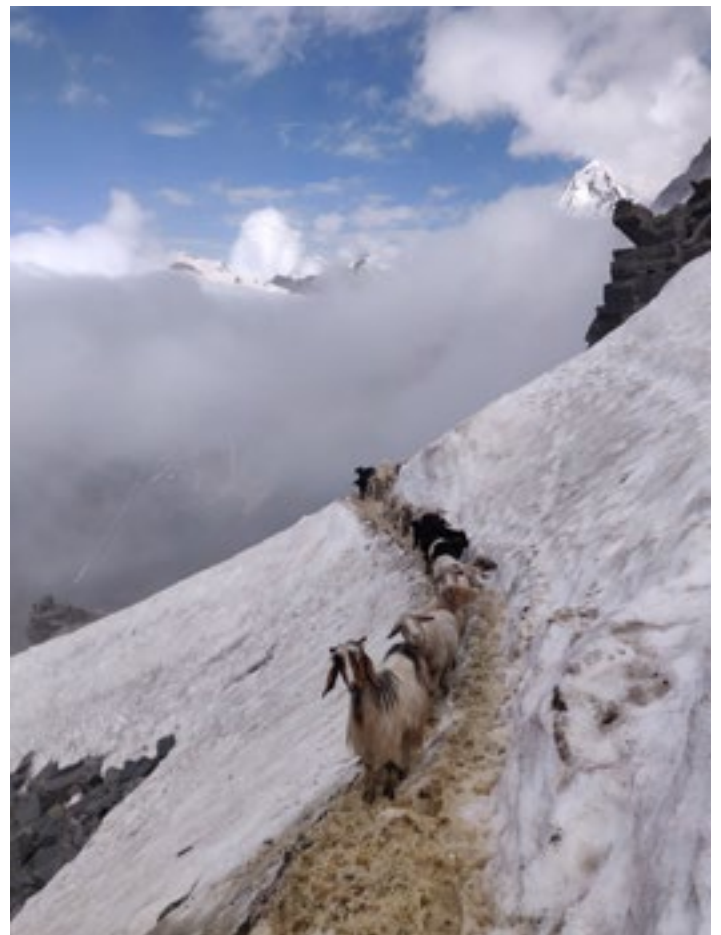
his ruddy cheek, a happy viking. Always smiling in the ecstatic presence he accessed. Sitting on the floor crossed legged in his favourite worn pink T-shirt and dri-fit shorts, no adornments, the torn running shoes askew in a whitewashed room, unusual to see him in a room. This man, this nomad, has found a way to live in the ever present moment in ultra running heaven on earth today. Here's what this inspirational runner, cyclist, hiker and swimmer has to convey to all of us ultra runners.

**Helen Hayes.** Hi, Peter, your daily posts are very inspiring, it's great to get to talk to you during your rest time.

Peter van Geit. Hi Helen, I am glad I can inspire people because this is one of the reasons I gave up my job two years ago and began to run pretty much full-time.

**H.** Is there an environmental impact if people follow in your footsteps?

P. Not many ultra runners are doing what I am doing, using maps/GPS. It is difficult terrain, it constantly changes,

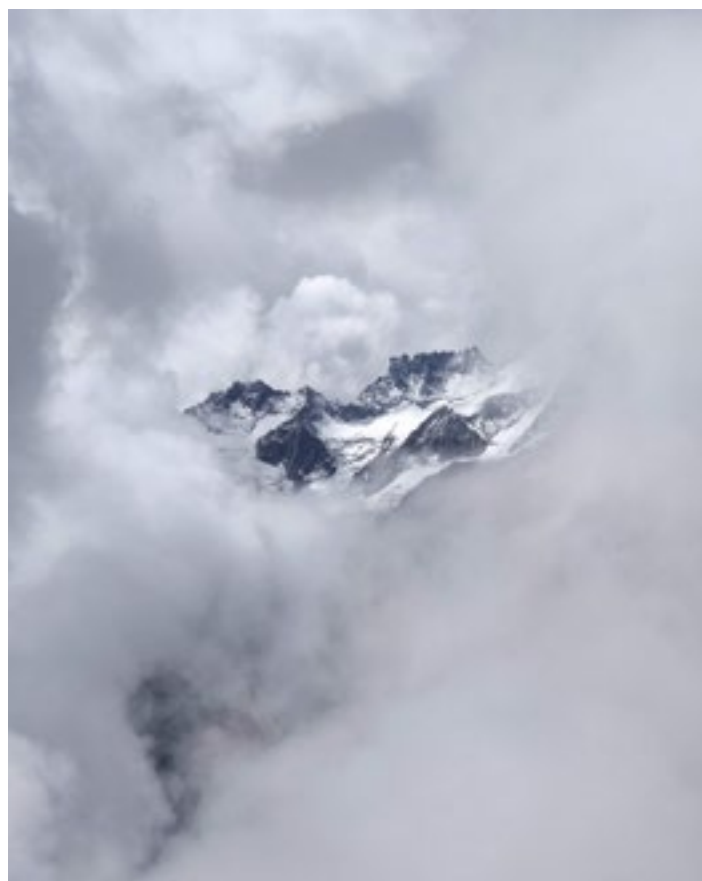


trails are often washed away in the monsoons and thick vegetation obscures my progress due to the rains. It's difficult to navigate and it's not everyone's cup of tea, you could easily get lost without the map and navigational skills. I love finding new routes and running on paths that no tourists have ever encountered.

Peter uses off-line contour maps on his phone to navigate. A base layer uses Open Street Maps (OSM) which has numerous trails, paths, villages, hamlets and places to camp. He overlays OSM with his own GPS routes, especially over lesser known mountain passes. He takes them from Himalayan hiking blogs and they are self marked using satellite maps. On his Himalayan journey the exact location of all 120 passes and 241 hamlets were marked in OSM and documented using geo-tagged photos, daily blogs and maps which can be found on Peter's blog, [ultrajourneys.org](http://ultrajourneys.org)

Peter carries a power bank giving him 5 - 6 days before necessitating a recharge.

I do not create a major impact on the environment, neither would a few more ultra runners. My type of minimalist running is not for everyone because I do self sufficient journeys. 6,000 to 8,000 calories per day, I eat local food, no supplementary bars, energy drinks, etc. Mainly vegetarian, rice and dhal, all organic. I carry no water preferring to drink from lakes and streams. In the Himalaya, if I am going over a pass I carry some food for one or two days. If I miss an evening meal, no big deal.



Minimal gear, just enough. One pair of shoes, one T shirt (pink), one pair of dri fit shorts. 6Kg bag containing a bivvy, a puff jacket and some essential items.

## H. Shoes?

P. I only have one pair, the one's I run in. It would be too heavy to carry a spare pair. I did think about barefoot running but there's too much shale and sharp rock underfoot to make this viable. I would have to run barefoot if my shoes give up.

No one particular brand is best, they all tear and wear out, the mesh always breaks on the uppers. They especially rip on the sides when I'm sliding sideways on my feet down scree slopes. The hiking boots I used as a child in Belgium are far too heavy. Wearing running shoes instead of hiking boots means I can travel faster and lighter. I see these people hiking with all this gear, If you are running, there is no need for all of it. Running shoes last about two to three months max, then I need a new pair with a good abrasive sole. My running shoes need to be breathable for stream crossings, enduring wet shoes for a week causes sore feet.

## H. If you had an accident whilst running in remote regions what are your chances of survival or even being rescued?

P. I was given a GPS tracker on my last Himalayan journey but I lost it after one month. I forgot to pack it up again after the night camp.

"...one wrong step, certain death."

# Interview

The climate is an issue, if I am injured, no one can survive long in an extreme climate. The rescue service in India isn't like in Europe, your time is limited if you are not moving. Even if I did have a GPS tracker, that was working, people could see where I was but would not necessarily get to me in time. So yes, I could die.

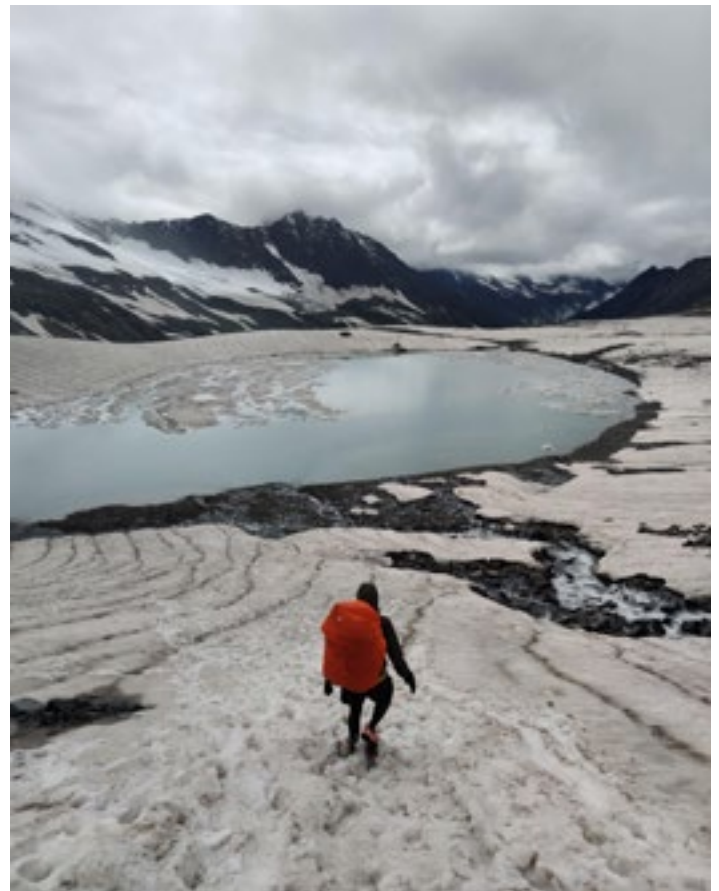
My advice for other ultra runners who may want to run in the Himalaya or other remote regions; go in small groups for a better chance of survival.

There was a fear of falling and dying. I have overcome that fear, I do not feel that fear anymore, I am at one with nature.

## H. Have you an animistic relationship with your environment?

P. Yes, in 2017 I ran solo in the mountains of Vietnam. This was a difficult journey until I overcame my mental fears there.

I used to run with other people, sometimes 20 or 30 people with the Chennai trekking club. Over the last two years I am more running on my own. I have developed a deep sense of peace, a meditative demeanor through running in remote environments. It is a much more intense experience than running with other people. No chit chat, it's a running retreat. I am on an inner journey. I disconnect from the network, literally the mobile phone, WhatsApp, Facebook and the internet etc. I don't have that communication.



When I rest, I am in the shepherd's hut with the shepherds in silence, eating our food, sleeping. My fear, my thoughts, my demeanor are at one with nature, I feel connected with the rocks, the plants, the sky with the basic humanity of the people I encounter.

Although I am never alone, I am with the birds, dragonflies, snake, goats. The water rushing, I have a deep and peaceful feeling, reconnecting with the deep primal energy. I want to keep topping that up, maintaining it.

Running is only a way to propel myself, it could also be by bicycle, swimming or hiking.

## H. Journey or destination?

P. The journey, always the journey.

I don't have a destination, if I don't make the destination for the day, no problem, I sleep where I stop in my bivvy bag with a local family or shepherds. No checkpoints, no cut-offs, no aid stations.

It's the not knowing where I will rest in the evening, that is magical. Sure I have a map and a plan but the journey on the actual terrain may turn out differently. I can accept that. I am lying there looking up at the vast night's sky. There is nothing like it.

## H. You may cause no pollution in the environment, do you see evidence of western capitalist pollution in the remote regions of India?



P. I see it in the source of the rivers. Even there, at a source high up in the Himalaya, small plastic packets are in the stream. This is a problem, the multinational, capitalist corporations produce products like shampoo, crisps and other items in cost sensitive plastic packets which sell for a few rupees. The local people can afford these and consume these products throwing the wrapper away or burning the packets, wind blows them all over the landscape. The plastic ends up in the water. Coke and Sprite bottles are in every shop shack, it's a treat for a kid to have a bottle of Sprite, sugar is addictive. They are poor, they have nothing and want these things, it is not their fault.

The remote regions of India are facing an uncertain future, Peter encountered many deserted settlements which were once vibrant farming communities. Younger generations gravitate towards the allure of the cities instead of the hardship of subsistence farming. The cities create pollution and it penetrates the climate even in remote areas. Changing weather patterns melt the glaciers leaving desolate and unearthly landscapes. The recent frequent rainfall in Ladakh have created bushy green eco systems in previous deserts. Ancient trails are destroyed by landslides and crossing turbulent streams is a challenge. It is a fast changing high altitude world.

## H. Are you post capitalism?

P. I gave up my job 2 years ago, I rented out my house in Chennai to fund my journeys . I try to run minimally and live minimally, I don't have many expenses.

It is cheap to live in India, 2 to 3 Euros a day for food, some days there is no need to spend money because most local people are happy to give food to a traveller and share their fire with warmth and hospitality.

I am a minimalist, modern day nomad.

## H. There are about 60 languages in India, do you speak Hindi?

P. I get by, I speak some Hindi but where I was living in Chennai they speak Tamil which is the local language. I actually find that a smile and a friendly disposition go a long way when meeting the local people in remote areas. I show them photos of my journey and they respect you as a traveller. This is how I communicate.

## H. I get the impression that Indians are reluctant ultra runners? Living in India for 20 years, have you any insight as to why this might be?

P. It's cultural. When I used to take some talented runners out with me in Chennai, they were very dedicated and enthusiastic. As soon as they got married, they stopped running. There lingers this cultural expectation that to go running would be irresponsible. They are expected to stay at home and fulfil the role of dutiful husband/wife. Running would be irresponsible, they should be earning money and providing for their family. That is their role now. It was a shame because these guys had potential and now that part of their life is missing.





It could still take a couple of generations to change this perception. In many ways, out of the home, Indians are global in their outlook but in the home they are still very traditional.

India is, in some respects, a conservative society.

The weather may be another factor as to why Indian people don't run more. It can be extreme, the monsoon and heat etc. There are very few ultra races in India. The world 'ultra' in India is open to interpretation, it can mean anything from 10km.

## **H. Are there issues for Women who may want to run alone in India?**

P Indians are friendly towards foreigners, more so in remote, rural regions. There's an innocence about rural people. I never heard of anyone being attacked but I understand your question, and yes, it may be easier, as a man, to travel alone.

Perhaps it would be better for women to run in groups if they are concerned about their safety.

## **H. Who are you trying to inspire? You have a prolific profile on social media platforms.**

P. There are some city marathons in India. I am trying to give inspiration to Indians and anyone else in the world who runs, to step away from the aid stations, the

checkpoints, the support, and step out into the wild. India has so many opportunities.

I did the film, 'Running the High Himalaya' with Neil D'Souza to try and inspire people to connect with nature, to have my experience too. I want to share that connection.

It is a challenge to write a blog everyday, post photos, especially after running for 12 hours in the mountains and feeling tired, hungry and I just want to get into my sleeping bag. I write my blog because I want to reach and inspire other people to run, cycle, walk and swim. The few who have the mental and physical mindset to do what I do.

I want to share my passion with other like-minded souls.

I also want to give them the routes through the maps I have developed. The undocumented places. Some places I go to are dense jungle or have trails have changed due to the impact of the weather, it's important to have correct directions or you could fall off a cliff or not get out and become lost.

## **H. Would you consider other countries which have unspoilt, remote regions? Such as the Urals or New Zealand?**

P. Yes, I would like to do the Stans, Uzbekistan has similar mountains, terrain and remote villages like India. Villages where people would be welcoming and I could re-supply with local food.

Nepal has become very touristic and people see you as a consumer not a guest.



**H. When you grow old and are unable to run anymore, what will you do? How will you maintain your contact with nature?**

P. At the moment I have this internal energy to keep running, cycling and swimming in the nomadic environment. I met an American guy over one of the highest passes in the Himalaya earlier this year, he was 78 and still out there, doing it. He was an inspiration. I intend to carry on running for the next three decades.

If I had to stop, I would not return to live in a city but I would live on a small farm in a remote area, with clean air and a clean mountain stream. So I can still experience peace and nature.

**H. Thank you Peter for your inspirational documentation and communication. I will be following you on your blog, Facebook and instagram etc in all that you do for the next 30 years.**

P. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my journey with a wider audience and if anyone out there would like to find out more, please contact me, I would be so happy to share my experiences.

Peter's journeys are documented through photos, videos, daily blog posts and maps on [ultrajourneys.org](http://ultrajourneys.org)

More on: [Instagram.com/petervangeit](https://www.instagram.com/petervangeit)

[Facebook.com/petervangeit](https://www.facebook.com/petervangeit)

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# Contributors



**Adam Rykala** is a relatively new ultra runner. As well as for personal health benefits, he runs to raise funds for disabled adaptations for his wife at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/in-the-long-run-ultra>. In 2019 he ran his first 50K, and then his first 50 miles. He is looking to do a 100K in 2020, and still can't believe he told his wife in early 2018, "I think a half marathon will be the furthest I can ever manage." Adam spends weeks on the road and weekends in the Beacons. Strava profile is [https://www.strava.com/athletes/adam\\_rykala](https://www.strava.com/athletes/adam_rykala)



Professor **Mark Dorion** is a lecturer at El Paso Community College in Texas and a race director in the area around El Paso. Among many things, he has been running ultras since the beginning of time and has had many articles published in other famous American Ultrarunning magazines and still competes in multadays and spends a lot of time on [Facebook](#).



**Ian Morris** is a sometimes runner sometimes real ale enthusiast based in the South West of England who spent most of 2018 and 2019 trying to fit in enough training to convince himself that he qualified as a 'real' Ultra runner.



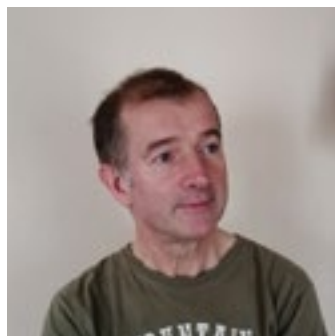
**Llion Iwan** A life-long fell runner raised in Eryri, Snowdonia, and a keen mountain biker, who cycled across Tibetan plateau on a 5 week unofficial trip. A late comer to Ultras, Keswick 50km, RTTS, Eryri 50, Pen Llyn & Dragon's Back.



**Matthew Jones** is a qualified doctor from the Brecon Beacons. He is also a keen photographer and runner, with a marathon personal best of 2.26. He ran the Marathon des Sables in 2016 and is hoping to qualify for the UTMB in 2020.



My name is **Jon Ward**, I am a serving member of the Royal Air Force and an avid marathon/ultra-runner, completing over 135 marathons/ultras to date. Primarily I've been a marathon runner until 2018 when I started to make the transition to ultra-running.



**Steven Battle**, 56, born in Sheffield and now living in Worksop, Nottinghamshire with a wife and two children. Began ultra running in 2007. Races to date include. Trans-Gaule, Trans-Alpine, Moab 240 Lakeland 100 plus several 6 day races to name a few. Steve was inspired by George Littlewood, who also lived in Sheffield 9. George held the 6 day record for 96 years with a total of 625 miles.



**Karen Nash** I have always run but I really found my love when I discovered off road ultras. I have just celebrated 100 ultras in a decade and have now started on the next 100; I am not giving up yet. In 2013 I set myself a challenge of 52in52@52 (52 ultras in 52 weeks age 52). I actually did 62 although not all were races. My longest race so far is 200 miles. I help organise an ultra race series called Runfurther.



**Naomi Moss** I have been running ultras over the last 9 years to a monthly training plan with my two dogs as my run buddies and I have a keen interest in nutrition, strength and conditioning. Ultra-runners blogs and write ups continue to inspire me and give me a huge incentive to want to push myself to achieve more and run further. I am NOT the fastest or the slowest runner but I am probably one of the most stubborn Instagram-naomimossruns

# 3 DIAS TRAIL IBIZA

## ULTRA IBIZA

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Ajuntament d'Eivissa

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