

ROAD, TRACK & TRAIL MULTIDAY

& ULTRA DISTANCE NEWS

// Issue 39

# ULTRARUNNING WORLD

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*This edition's Guest Editor is Sarah Cameron, an ultra-running vegan who lives on a vineyard in the south of France with her husband, two children and far too many pets. Sarah is a British International ultrarunner, coach and was a crew member at the recent European 24 hour Championships in Verona, Italy.*

What a rich and diverse issue we have for you this month, with reports from across the spectrum of ultrarunning. Reading about our contributors' experiences made me ponder the diversity of our extraordinary sport; under the one umbrella of 'anything longer than a marathon' we have road, trail, desert, glacier, mountainous and pancake flat. Each has its own challenges. As athletes who have tackled a canal race, like Dawn Biden at the Warwickshire Ring, know that running on the flat is in no way easier than competing in a hilly race because of the relentlessness of maintaining the same gait throughout. My own preference is for a 'Goldilocks' course such as the Angelus Trail as described by Emma Morton and Sophie Bennett. I completed this race in 2019 and found it to have the perfect blend of moderate climbs that were enough to justify using my hiking legs, runnable descents to cover the ground quickly and some technical interest thrown in.

One race report that didn't immediately have me looking online to see when I could sign up for the next edition was Badwater 135 by Laura Watts. While I can see the appeal of wanting to push the limits in every way by adding the most extreme climatic conditions to an already gruelling distance, I think I'll just continue applauding those who even make it to the start line from the ambient temperature of my living room.

Comrades however has always had an appeal. One of the athletes I coach gained a Bill Rowan medal this year and I was so emotionally invested in his experience that I had to keep a packet of tissues on hand all day as he got closer and closer to his dream goal. In this edition you'll read the lessons Dawn Nunes learned from Comrades, which are sound advice to take forward into any ultra race. I particularly agree with the wisdom of her statement: 'change the plan if needs be'. For me this is the fundamental principle of successfully running a very long distance. You can't possibly anticipate everything that might happen, so one of the skills you need to develop is the ability to problem-solve on the fly. It's something I talk to my athletes about when they're preparing for a race and I get them to visualise unseen events occurring and imagine how they're going to deal with them. It could be as simple as a nutrition plan that works perfectly for a six hour training run but falls apart at higher intensity, in hotter conditions or at night when our circadian rhythms mean we're less used to digesting food. I witnessed many examples of this while crewing for team GB and NI at the 24 hour European Championships last weekend. Even at this top level, with athletes who had scrupulously practiced their nutrition and were under the guidance of the team experts, some were unable to stick to their plans because there are too many variables and it's impossible to train for every eventuality.

I hope you take inspiration from the stories you'll read in this issue and maybe you'll fancy signing up for one of the events yourself. If so then I hope it turns out to be your Goldilocks race.

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- Frank Van der Endt © PT Bumi Trekka Nusantara / Telkomsel Bali Ultra Trail. Photo by Vikas Pananjaya, IG @vikaspananjaya (See Race report on p36).

##### • Back cover

- Sarah Perry looking determined on her way to victory at the King Offas Dyke Race 2022. Photo by Luke Kennedy.

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Send inquiries, original and previously unpublished race reports/articles to the email address below. Last dates for article submissions: October 14<sup>th</sup> and November 14<sup>th</sup>. Please include some accompanying photos (if you have any) with articles/race reports, a 40-50 word bio, and a headshot for the contributors page. More details for submissions on request. Thank you.

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# News

The 31st IAU 100 km World Championships took place in Bernau-Berlin, Germany with 42 Federations taking part, 198 athletes (89 women and 109 men). **Floriane Hot** from France and **Haruki Okayama** from Japan are the 2022 IAU 100 km World Champions. Both athletes completed 100 km in impressive times, Floriane in 7:04:03 and Haruki in 6:12:10. In the women's individual competition, **Camille Chaigneau** from France (7:06:32) was second and **Caitriona Jennings** from Ireland (7:07:16) took third place. In the men's individual competition **Junpei Yamaguchi** from Japan (6:17:19) was second and **Piet Wiersma** from The Netherlands (6:18:47) took third place.

Photo by Sebastian Białobrzęski



The team events were won by the USA and Japan.

#### Women's Team

1. USA 22:14:46
2. France 22:16:46
3. Japan 22:26:59

#### Men's Team

1. Japan 18:51:12
2. France 19:55:10
3. South Africa 20:05:58



The IAU 24 Hour European Championships 2022 took place at the 28th edition of Lupatotissima 24 hour ultramarathon race in Verona, Italy. (See **Wendy Whearity's** article on p.8) The 2019 European women's ultrarunning champion, **Patrycja Bereznowska** (POL) won gold for the second time while Lithuanian World record holder **Aleksandr Sorokin** broke his own record of 309.399 km (192.251 miles) to an amazing 319.614 km (198.599 miles). **Andrzej Piotrowski** (POL) became the third ultrarunner to break 300km with 301.859km and **Marco Visintini** (ITA) added 25 km to his personal best for third place and a new Italian national record of 288.438km.

**Stephanie Gicquel** (FRA) who led for most of the race set a new French women's national record with 253.581 km and in third place with 251.806 was **Malgorzata Pazda-Pozorska** (POL) helping secure women's Team Gold for Poland. [Results on the DUV](#). Visit the [IAU website](#).

The inaugural GOMU 48 Hour World Championships took place as part of the Hainesport 100 Endurance event hosted by Beast Coast Productions on September 3rd. A modest field of 47 saw **Budjargal Byambaa** (MGL) take the win with 335.021 km and GOMU VP **Viktoria Brown** (CAN) take the women's crown with 314.282 km. Results can be found on the [DUV](#).

#### In other recent races

##### **20.08.2022 40th Leadville Trail 100 Mile 100 miles (USA)**

One of the iconic American 100 milers that has evolved over the years, the Leadville Trail 100, saw Adrian MacDonald (USA) win for the second year in a row with a time of 16:05:44. By the halfway point Macdonald had a 15 minute lead which he continued to extend and his finish time is the third fastest in history. Paul Gibling (SCO) was second in 18:07:50. In the women's race Annie Hughes battled with Addie Bracy until she took the lead around the 60 mile mark finishing 2 hours ahead of second placed Alisyn Hummelberg in 21:06:58. [Full results](#).

##### **22.08.2022 Sink Or Survive (S.O.S.) 500k Stage Race 500km/7 stages (AUS)**

6 day/500 km stage race along stunning coastline on a point to point trail that skirts the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia. 10 starters, six finishers and first among the 3 women was Julie Sager in 88:55:42 while Kay Bretz was first man in 61:31:27. [Results on race website](#).





### 25.08.2022 Great Naseby Water 200 Mile Race 200 miles NZL

The event takes place near Naseby - the highest town in New Zealand at 2000ft. The course is set around a 10km loop - the one half along a gravel road and the other half on a forest track beside the water race that gives the event its name. Originally the water race was built for gold mining around 1860 and now it provides the water supply to the town of Naseby. Being on a loop the event has a variety of distances from 50km up to 200 miles and a 60 km teams event.

The 200 mile event was won by John Bayne in 43:28:18 and the first woman was Jean Beaumont in 58:29:01. Full results on [webscorer.com](https://www.webscorer.com).

### 26.08.2022 Grand Raid des Pyrénées - Ultra Tour 160 162 km (FRA)

Features 6 events taking place in Vielle-Aure, France, with over 6,000 participants the Ultra Tour 160 km, Tour des Cirques 120 km, Tour des Lacs 80 km, Tour du Moudang 60 km, Tour de la Gela 40 km, Tour du Néouvielle 40 km. The Ultra Tour 160 has over 10,100m of loss and gain. With 276 finishers this is a competitive event which saw Robin Coinus (FRA) first home in 26:30:20 and the first woman was Carole Duhart (FRA) 32:15:51. Former contributor Karen Nash (GBR) was the 5th woman. [Full results](#).

### 26.08.2022 19th Ultra Trail Tour du Mont Blanc (UTMB) 170 km(FRA)

The UTMB® now features a series of 8 races of varying distance with the main event being the 171km loop from Chamonix to Courmayeur to Champex and back to the finish in Chamonix. This year saw Killian Jornet (ESP) set a new course record of 19:49:30 and the women's winner was Katie Schide (USA) in 23:15:12. Results on the [UTMB website](#).

### 27.8.2022 King Offas Dyke Race/Mercian Challenge 27/8/202 (GBR)

Finishing the race in a pristine condition was Sarah Perry, featured on the back cover, taking the overall win and setting a new women's record of 60:30:00. First man was Mike Abel in 73:29:00 and Jon Rowles won the 100 miler in 32:24:00.

Luke Kennedy writes: "After a busy year and a less than ideal race at Lakeland 100 one month earlier, everything went to plan at the Offa's Dyke race. Having recce'd most the route, Sarah (Perry) knew the Offas Dyke well and was looking forward to a couple of days out on the course. It was however, not in the game plan to win, let alone win overall and beat the female course record in doing so.

[Kingoffasdyke.co.uk](https://kingoffasdyke.co.uk)

### 27.08.2022 Summer Green Man Ultra 30/45 GBR

Ultrarunning Ltd's popular Green Man Ultra follows a loop around the city of Bristol in two versions. The 30 mile route was won by Graham Wright in 4:16 and first woman was Gaby Haywood in 5:29. In the

45 miler Jack Chitty was first across the line in 6:23. Women's winner was Zoe Woodward finishing in 8:32. Results on the race website.

### 27.08.2022 8th Leeds & Liverpool Canal Race 130 mile (LLCR) GBR

The Leeds & Liverpool Canal Race starts at Old Hall Street Liverpool and finishes at Office Lock Leeds. The 130 mile towpath course follows the original Leeds & Liverpool Canal – Britain's longest man-made waterway. This year's race was won by Ian Hammett in 21:03:00 and women's winner was the prolific Laura Watts (read [Laura's Badwater report](#) on p44) finishing in 28:35:00, 5th overall. Full results on the Leeds to Liverpool website.

### Upcoming Races

The Adelaide 6 Day is on from Sunday (2 October), the 72 hour from Wednesday (5 Oct); the 48 hour from Thursday (6<sup>th</sup> Oct); and the 24 hour from Fri (7 Oct). Also coming up soon will be the 1<sup>st</sup> IAU 50 km European Championships. The event will be held in Sotillo de Adrada, Avila, Spain on October 8<sup>th</sup> 2022. There are 90 athletes (30 women and 60 men) entered to the Championships from 19 European Federations.

2022 Backyard Satellite National Championships take place on October 15<sup>th</sup> 1pm start and will be Livestreamed around the world. Races currently underway are the [Italian UMF 6 day race](#) in Policoro and the Self-Transcendence 3100 Mile Race in New York currently led by Andrea Marcato (ITA) ahead of Ashprihanal Aalto (FIN) and Susan Marshall (NZL) leads the women with Nina Huang Lan in second place. Checkout the race website everyday to follow the runners at:

[3100.srichinmoyraces.org](https://3100.srichinmoyraces.org)

This years Spartathlon took place September 30<sup>th</sup> starting in Athens and both events were won by last years winners again. Fotios Zisimopoulos in 21:00:59 and Diana Dzaviza, first woman, in 25:03:41. Full results on the [Spartathlon race website](#)





# EUROPEAN CHAMPS 2022

By Wendy Whearity

After 3 years of cancellations due to Covid, 17-18 September 2022 saw the return of the IAU 24hr European Championships, in Verona, Italy.

Great Britain and Northern Ireland had gathered strong teams of 6 male and female athletes with additional travelling reserve athletes. With a good mix of experience and fresh new faces we felt we were starting in a strong position.

Arriving in Italy on the Wednesday prior to the race we were greeted with sunny skies and temperatures up to 30 degrees. The weather forecast showed a cooler change coming through, but this didn't arrive until the morning of race day, unfortunately arriving as very heavy rain for the start of the race as everyone layered up in water-proofs and huddled waiting for the start of the race.

The course itself consisted of a 400m loop of the Adolfo Consolini athletic track which then led out into a larger tarmac loop of the roads surrounding the stadium, totalling just over 1500m. Immediately as you left the track you had a short incline but otherwise the route was mostly flat. The course contained a couple of sharp 90-degree bends and one complete 180 degree turn around point that some found refreshing and others started to struggle with as the fatigue built up in tired legs.

The race was started on the track with a gun start, warning shot first then the proper start, although you couldn't really tell where the start line was, or which was the starting gun as everyone was huddled around. I can only assume World Record holder, Aleksan-



dr Sorokin was toeing the actual start line as it wasn't long before he had lapped me for the first time. Joasia Zakrzewski and Jen Coleman led the GB women out putting in strong early laps, whilst Dan Lawson set a fast early pace for the men closely followed by a comfortable looking men's team of Danny Hawkins, Alex Whearity, Paul Maskell, Damian Carr, James Stewart, and Rob Payne. The format of the course allowed for lots of opportunities to see teammates passing in the opposite direction and a bit of warning that Aleksandr Sorokin was about to lap you for the umpteenth time. The rain stopped by around the third lap, the puddles were swept away by diligent marshals, and the race continued uneventfully for the hours that followed. Eat, drink, run repeat.

For the benefit of those who haven't seen one of these events, each country also brings an entourage of crew. Although restricted in numbers (1 crew per two athletes) these guys and girls are as important as the runners. Our crew were based on the top bend as we re-entered the track from the big loop, as we tried to manage our fuelling and hydration the crew were there to hand out food, drink and ice, swap clothes, give moral support, issue speeding tickets and an encouraging boot when required.

My race unfolded about 15hours

in as night fell when I couldn't maintain my body temperature, probably due to the virus that has played havoc with my system since, I left the track and warmed up sipping hot tea whilst wrapped in towels and spare clothes, the rest of the GB squad continued to make great progress throughout the night. Joasia and Jen were showing no signs of slowing, Ellie was running consistently well, Cat and Jo N had a few issues overnight but managed to keep on pushing ahead just maybe not as fast as they would have liked. Paul Maskell and Danny Hawkins bud-died up and chatted the hours away, they definitely brought their fun side as runners started to fatigue they seemed to get faster and louder. Alex and Damian kept on pushing through the night despite enduring some dark spells at times, just before I called it a day, I bumped into Alex projectile vomiting on 'portaloo lane'.

I resurfaced in the morning when the sun had warmed the air a little and completed a few laps of the track helping to cheer everyone on. Unlike low key local races where the morning reflects an image of a zombie apocalypse, the standard of an international field means the track is still very much alive with 2 hours to go, Danny and Paul were still jolly and making good progress, Alex had been struggling but with a little tough love managed to pull out some impressive final miles.



In the role of team captain, James kept his teammates focussed and moving forwards with words of encouragement and support, even when he wasn't feeling great himself. There was a hub of British cheering, singing, and shouting from the stands to help keep everyone uplifted when heading out on their next laps.

Dan Lawson was first Brit home (5<sup>th</sup> in the individual event) with 273km, Pbs all round for Danny Hawkins, Paul Maskell (joint 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>) 265.302km and, Alex Whearity (14<sup>th</sup>) 261km, top 3-point scorers for Great Britain bringing the men's team into fourth position. Damian Carr was close behind as 4<sup>th</sup> Brit with (260.367km). James Stewart and Rob Payne bowed out early in the men's team race and didn't have the day they were hoping for, but Gareth Pritchard ran a new pb (246.969km) as a team reserve along with Nathan Flear (227.413).

Joasia finished in 5<sup>th</sup> position in the ladies' race with a new British record of 247.985km, breaking Lizzy Hawkers' 11 years old record of 247.076km, Eloise Eccles ran a great race in her first GB vest, finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> British female with 222.557km, unfortunately a glute

issue meant Jen Coleman had to back off her incredible race earlier than hoped, finishing as 3<sup>rd</sup> point scorer on 221.390km. This brought the women's team also into fourth position.

Despite solid performances from both the male and female teams that would have in previous years seen medals going home, this time we had to settle for fourth. The fact that all three men ran pbs and Joasia broke the British record demonstrates the quality of the British athletes and the tough competition on the day.

A successful 24hr race requires all the stars to align, something World Record holders like Aleksandr Sorokin (319.614km (WR)) make look easy, but it's not always the case on the day, my stars fell out of the sky and went to the pub. To witness such a high-quality performance from so many athletes at the first international competition since covid was incredible to be a part of and to see my own coached athletes run such phenomenal pbs was inspiring.

For me personally, the return to racing after having my baby not quite 18 months ago has been a long and patiently waiting one, the

disappointment when things don't go to plan can be as difficult to digest as jam sandwich at 15 hours in. For me there were lots of things that could have gone wrong, but I was not expecting my race to end due to a virus. But that is the nature of 24hr racing, you need to be able to dig deep into your soul to finish strong, and this time my soul and body had nothing to give. It was incredible to have my family and friends trackside though, it is the first time my children have been out to watch such a race. Hopefully they will catch the bug, like so many do, and we will see them running laps of Crawley or Battersea in years to come.

So now we watch and wait for the 24hr World Championships on 2-3 December 2023, in Chinese Taipei. The World Record holders Aleksandr Sorokin and Camille Herron are very likely to be on the starting line, the Great Britain and Northern Island squad will need to bring their 'A' game to line up and show them how we can make our stars align but with such quality performances from our newcomers last weekend, we are in a stronger place than we've ever been before.



# Podcast Corner



Checkout Ultrarunning Sam podcast by Samuel Hill. Recent episodes include talks with Jody Raynsford - Bad Boy Running and How To Start A Cult!, Damian Hall

and Nutritionist Paul Booth.

The Director of the movie **3100 Run And Become** @mrsanjayr sat down with Australian Podcaster and endurance athletic specialist Jennah Louise on her **To be Human** podcast recently. Jennah is a longtime friend of Stephen Redfern @shaggy072 from Australia currently running in the Self-Transcendence 3100 mile race taking place in Queens, New York until October 25th.

**IAU Podcast** - Nadeem Khan the IAU President in conversation with Jacek Bedkowski - IAU Director of Communication.

**Ultrarunning News** podcast host Daniel Westergren talks to Aleksandr Sorokin after his incredible new 24-hour world record, at the European Championship in Verona, Italy. 319.614 km, or 198.599 miles.

Davy Crockett's History of Ultrarunning – the **Stranger Things** series

Coach Jason Koop speaks with Dr. Justin Ross on **mental skills for ultrarunners**. How can ultrarunners use awareness, focus and concentration to improve your performance?



**Zach Bitter: Ultramarathon Running | Lex Fridman Podcast #205**

One of my favourite people on the planet at the moment is Lex Fridman and wow, I've just discovered he's done an interview with Zach Bitter.

Zach Bitter's **Human Performance Outliers Podcast**

The Inspirational Runner Podcast **Latest guest is Andrea Larson** who became the first female to podium in the Barkley Fall Classic this year, retaining her title from the 2021 event.

## Video

Jacob Zocherman wrote "Ultrarunning can be defined in many ways. But one can argue that the 6-day race is its purest form. Not going towards anything, no extraordinary changing scenery, instead a repetitive motion just for the sake of it.

I had the opportunity to attend the Viadal 6-day Ultra in Sweden a couple of weeks ago as an observer. 37 people started their journey on a 675 metre loop on a Sunday noon in order to do as many loops as possible until the following Saturday noon." **Virtue: a documentary by Jacob Zocherman.**

**A Badwater 135 Film - Thanks for the Journey** follows New York Times best-selling author of Finding Gobi, Dion Leonard, as he attempts to run one of the hardest ultramarathons in the world – the 135 mile Badwater race through Death Valley to Mt. Whitney.

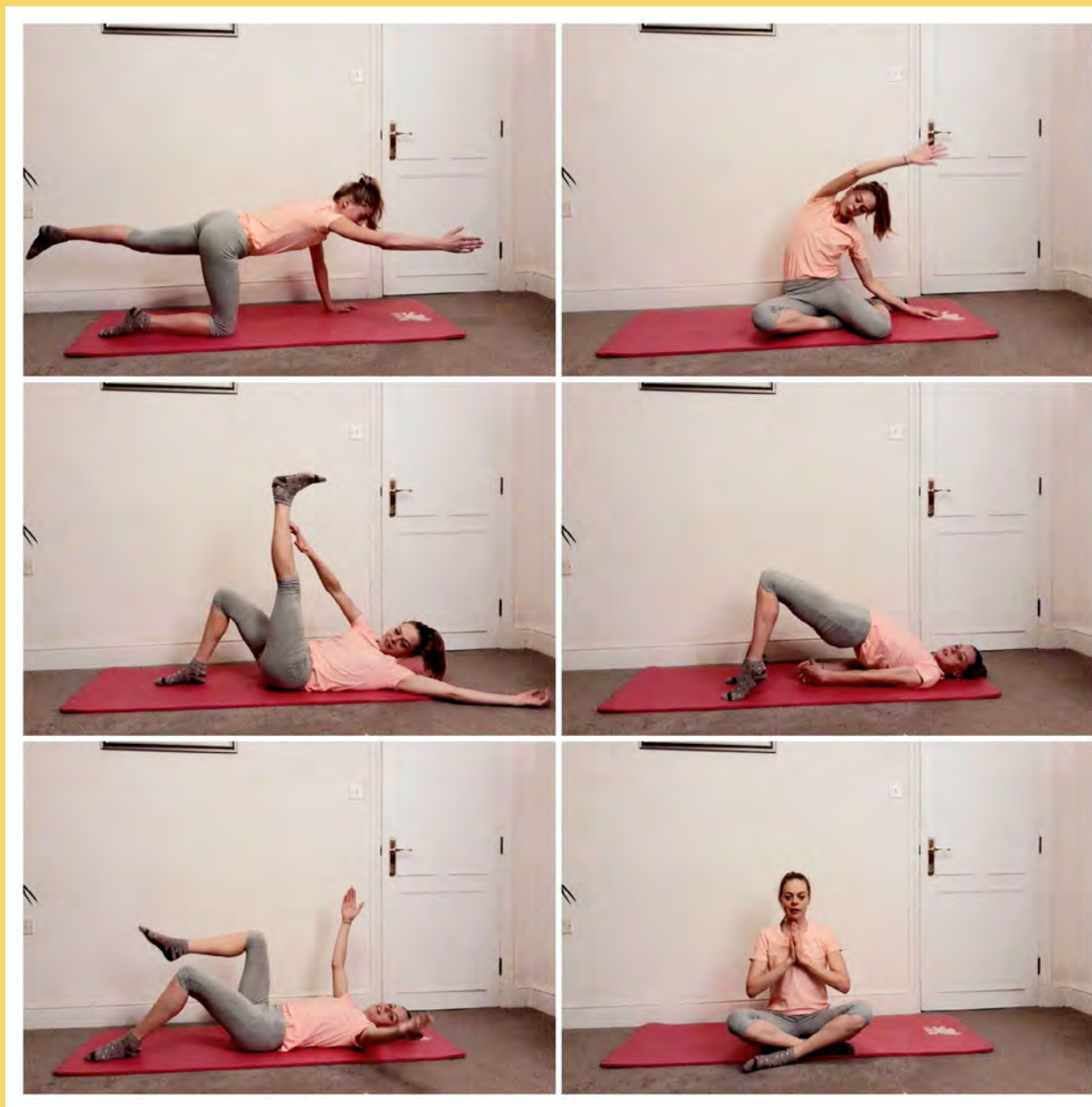
## Blog links

Lorna Cullen is continuing her 1100 mile journey from John O'Groats to Land's End. Lorna runs 3 Peaks JOGLE is her Facebook page and she was recently **interviewed on BBC Northwest.**



**Catharine Crossley** (pictured above) set a new FKT on the Peak District Boundary Walk in the UK on August 26th in 3:11:21:42. Catharine has an article about the run on **fastestknowntime.com.**

Mario Hipleh set a new FKT of 15:15:19:31 on the Alpine Passes Trail in Switzerland on September 7th. You can read his story on the **FKT website.**



# PILATES

By Kate Maltby



I have been teaching Pilates for about 8 years alongside my running career where I have represented Great Britain in mountain running and running for England for the 10k, half marathon and cross country. I first turned to Pilates after a series of knee injuries in my twenties and a chronic hamstring problem, both of which I wanted to learn more about than what the physios and chiropractors were telling me. I wanted to not only know how to rehab myself, but understand the chain of events leading into the injury and ultimately take responsibility for it. I managed to rehab my knees twice and a consistent Pilates practice was the way out of the chronic hamstring problem. I went on to teach Pilates at a leisure centre and also Pilates for spinal rehab at a chiropractic clinic. I now teach Pilates online and provide free videos via YouTube on my channel 'Stretch Mountain Pilates and Yoga'. I also teach a class at my local village hall in West Cumbria.

If I were to pinpoint some of the key Pilates exercises for runners I would encourage exercises that activate glutes such as 'swimming' (prone or on all fours) and a standing high knee, any exercises that develop Glute Med strength such as side planks and clams; exercises that encourage you to balance either in standing position or challenge your core to hold your stability in a position. I recommend exercises that develop core strength and pelvic stability such as front leg pull (the plank), any of the table-top core exercises; ensuring the lower back is imprinting and the core (the pelvic floor - you pull in when you need a wee, and transversus abdominis - you hollow this down towards the hips) engaging, slow roll downs to release hamstrings and lower back and of course any kind of hamstring stretching when these muscles are tight. Roll ups to engage rectus abdominis; and any of the posture exercises such as the swan dive or a scapula set. Try transitions between moves that encourage twists to open chest muscles whilst the core is engaged, and moves which encourage a mindful flow from one plane/position to another. This might seem like quite a lot to take in, but a Pilates class that flows should cover most of this within 60 minutes. And 60 minutes a week would help you prevent injuries and bring awareness towards alignment, control, precision, balance and the breath.

Pilates was developed from Joseph Pilates' lifetime's teaching and book 'Return to Life through Contrology'. It is based around 34 exercises and different teachers will all have creative ways of explaining the core engagement, exercise and patterns for the breath. The best option is to find a Pilates teacher that you like and understand, maybe they have a good sense of humour or maybe they explain things well and layer the exercises so when you're tired or recovering from a long race you can still tap into Pilates for your recovery. Take your time, the slower you concentrate on the exercises, the more you will gain from it in terms of control, precision and centering. It will always translate into your running as you need balance in running and you need to engage the pelvic floor and transversus abdominis about 10-30% to ensure the pelvis is tucked under and the hips don't tilt or rotate in the running action. You need to ensure the glutes are activating for ultimate strength and power within your stride and your shoulders are relaxed down away from the ears and the chest is able to take in full inhalations opening the rib cage.

Check out my YouTube channel – [Stretch Mountain Pilates and Yoga](#) – for over 100 free videos! Please select 'like' the video and subscribe to the channel to support me with my teaching journey.







# Chalkland Way Ultra

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**Event: Adelaide 6 Day 2022**

**Dates:**

**6 Day October 2nd**

**72 Hour October 5th**

**48 Hour October 6th**

**24 Hour October 7th**

**Location: Thorndon Park, Adelaide, SA.**

[www.adelaide6day.com.au](http://www.adelaide6day.com.au)



# WRCR111

By Dawn Biden



I ran my first canal race in 2017. I'd got lucky on my second year of applying, my name had been drawn from the hat for a place on the start line of the iconic Grand Union Canal Race. The 145 mile journey from Birmingham to London was relentless and took everything I had to finish, but the memories from that day will last a lifetime. Fast forward to 2019 and I toed the line once more, but this time I was also entered for the other two canal races in the series, the 145 mile Kennet and Avon Canal Race and the 130 mile Leeds and Liverpool Canal Race. I was going to attempt the Canal Slam. My heart had been set on these races for the last two years, but as I stood on that start

line there was something far more important on my mind.

The beauty of distance running is the headspace it gives you, life is so hectic you rarely get a chance to think but that day (and night) I had hours and hours alone with my thoughts. It was here things became clear, this wasn't my year for the slam. So with almost 130 miles in my legs, I walked away. I'd been vomiting the last 50 miles which gave me an excuse, but I knew in my heart this wasn't my time. It was without doubt the best decision I've ever made, as the following year in October 2020 I was blessed with my gorgeous boy Freddie.

These days running is much lower on my list of priorities but I still have so much I want to achieve as a runner, and yes, that still includes the Canal Slam. I just need to figure out how I'm going to manage it now I'm a mum and build myself back up. A couple of weeks after Freddie turned one I completed the Centurion 50 mile grand slam, four 50 mile events between April and November. It was quite a challenge but I'd been on maternity leave for the majority of that. Would I be able to step back up to the 100+ mile distance whilst being a working mum of a toddler? This year I planned to find out.

When a new, one-off canal race







was announced at the end of last year, I immediately knew this was the race for me to try. At 111 miles, the Warwickshire Ring Canal Race was a bit shorter than the rest but perfect for me to build back up. The race starts and finishes at the Coventry canal basin and is an anticlockwise loop comprising sections on the Birmingham and Fazeley, Grand Union and Oxford canal towpaths. The canal races always have pretty generous cut offs and with 33 hours to complete this one I felt it was achievable even if I had to do a lot of walking.

Covid threw a bit of a spanner in the works but I managed a couple of solid months of training, peaking with a few 50-60 mile weeks and a longest run of 42 miles. It wasn't a lot compared to what I used to manage, but I'll happily accept whatever I can fit in these days. I arrived at the start line on the 25th June feeling fairly fit, although tired and with a sore throat. It's impossible to start a race feeling rested when you're looking after a toddler up until the minute you start a race, there's never five minutes to just sit and relax.

It was a beautiful warm and sunny morning as I arrived at the start. I knew plenty of people on the start line, I hadn't seen a lot of them for almost three years. As we chatted away I forgot about the task ahead and the nerves melted away. Before I knew it, it was 8am and we were heading down the Coventry canal towards the start of the ring. I tried not to get swept along too quickly but still ended up clocking a couple of quick miles as I chatted with other runners. I made sure to rein it in though as I knew I'd end up paying for it later.

I never have a set in stone race plan, I just take the highs and the lows as they come and adjust my running accordingly. I was lucky enough to have an amazing support crew though, so I did try and give them some rough idea of

where I'd likely be and when. Having not covered this distance for a very long time it was tricky, but I felt I was in shape for roughly a 24-26 hour finish, if I was able to make it that far!

After roughly five miles we reached the Hawkesbury junction, here we would take a left after the footbridge as we started our journey around the ring. Sometimes it takes a while to find my groove, but I settled into this race easily, running for 28 minutes then walking for two as I took on nutrition. Flat races aren't everyone's cup of tea, but I love to just zone out and soak up the relaxed way of life of the canal folk and enjoy the beautiful countryside.

The first half of the race went much better than I expected, I was feeling great and had nailed the nutrition and hydration. The aid stations were 25 miles apart so I met with my crew several times en route to top up snacks and drinks. I was running faster than anticipated and they missed me at one point, but I used my maps to find a tap for water so it wasn't a problem. I cruised through 50 miles in 9hrs 40mins, ahead of my calculations for sub 24 hours but I definitely wasn't about to start counting my chickens, there was still a very long way to go and in a race this length anything can and does go wrong.

I can recount the exact moment where it all started falling apart in this race, it was grabbing that soft flask of coke from my crew at mile 56. It was around 7pm and I'd started flagging so thought I'd start taking on caffeine to fight off the inevitable sleep demons. I'd never had a problem with coke before, yet soon after I took that soft flask I could feel the nausea brewing in the pit of my stomach. I tried the usual tricks to try and nip it in the bud, indigestion tablets, walking it out, I switched to water only but it only seemed to intensify until I'd reached my last resort, it

was fingers down the throat time. It seemed to help initially but relief was short lived, as soon as I tried to eat or drink I felt sick again. It's not ideal to have over 50 miles left and to not be able to take on any calories so I did start to feel slightly concerned at this point.

As I trotted along the canal to my next crew stop, a Lidl car park somewhere in Warwick another issue became apparent. I'd been vaguely aware of my feet swelling the last twenty or so miles but up until now it was just mildly uncomfortable, now they were starting to hurt. As I peeled my socks off I was shocked to find huge blisters on several toes, with a couple of nails lifting already. I would've dealt with it sooner but I didn't realise just how bad they were. I never normally have this problem so I only had two pairs of shoes in the same size with me which wasn't particularly helpful. I drained and taped the blisters before painfully squeezing my feet back into a fresh pair of shoes. Aware I'd lost at least another half an hour I rushed to grab my night gear but ended up forgetting my gloves. This was a big mistake as I wouldn't be seeing my crew again for more than 20 miles and I'd end up very cold.

Night fell as I trudged on slowly, the pain from the blisters now bothering me more than the nausea. I focused on making it to the aid station at 75 miles where my buddy runner Craig would be joining me. Breaking down the race into small chunks helped mentally as the remaining distance was overwhelming when I felt so battered already. I wasn't overly chatty as I ran with Craig but it was good to have him by my side as things started to get really tough. I couldn't move fast enough to keep warm and my eyes started rolling as the sleep demons took hold, I beat myself up for forgetting my gloves, why didn't I have any caffeine tablets with me? Why didn't I pack bigger shoes? You were doing so well,



you're such an idiot, Dawn. Eventually it got too much so I turned off my torch and curled up at the side of the canal for five minutes. I was in far too much pain to nap but the break helped silence the negativity in my mind.

I managed to refocus for a short while, but soon another issue. As the miles passed conditions underfoot deteriorated, the smooth towpath became rutted, uneven and overgrown. Was I hallucinating or had I been transported to a jungle? I'd never used the word gnarly to describe a towpath before but with every step I was slipping, tripping, toe stubbing and ankle twisting. My poor feet already had close to 90 miles in them and were already severely blistered, it felt like someone was hitting them with a hammer with every single step. It was excruciating. Eventually I could take no more, it was time for another five minutes curled up at the side of the canal. I remember a lady overtaking me at this point, but I really

didn't care, by now all hopes of doing well were long gone, it was just a case of getting it done.

Getting up five minutes later I was cold, so cold I considered getting my foil blanket out of my pack, but I couldn't muster up the energy to reach around and find it. The sun will rise soon I told myself, you just need to run faster, so I gritted my teeth and dug that bit deeper. I've heard people say you come back stronger after having a baby, and whilst I'm not sure if I am in the physical sense, on that night I was mentally stronger than ever. To get myself fit enough to stand on that start line had required sacrifice, commitment and dedication like no other race before. The 4:30am starts when you're already tired from looking after a teething toddler, the 20-30 mile runs done by 10am every Saturday and then a full day of mum duties after that was the hard bit. Those months leading up to the race were utterly exhausting, there was no way I'd put myself through that for nothing.

I was suffering badly with pain, nausea and tiredness but I think even if both legs had fallen off I'd have dragged myself to the finish line somehow.

Onwards I push and am rewarded by the most beautiful sunrise, I'm relieved to no longer feel the cold and am able to start peeling off the layers. Shortly after I reach the last aid station and I'm told I'm 10 minutes behind the second lady. After an absolutely shocking night I can't quite believe it. A little while later my Garmin clocks 100 miles, it's taken 22 hours and 40 minutes. I'd slowed down a lot overnight but that was not a bad time for the old (pre baby) me. The body is still battered but mentally I am in a really good place. To finish 3rd lady would be amazing, I had 11 miles left, I was going to fight to hold on to it.

Arriving back at the Hawkesbury junction was such a relief, the ring was now complete, but which way do I go to get back to Cov-



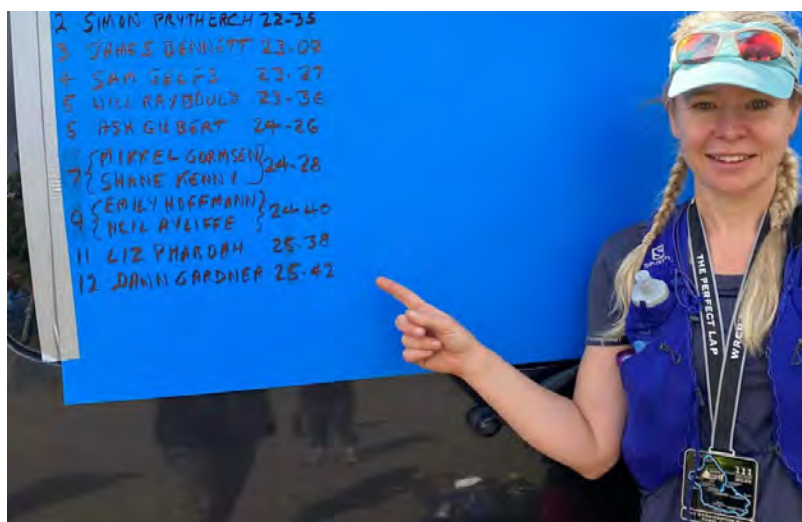
entry? Staring at the maps my brain just wouldn't cooperate so asked a passer by for directions. Standing at the top of the bridge I could see my support crew and Freddie at the other side. It was only my second night away from him so I did feel quite emotional. A quick hug but no time to hang around, I was on a mission to get this done. My buddy runner Nicky checked over her shoulder regularly, no one else was in sight. Half a mile to go she called ahead to the finish, the second lady still wasn't in. It was going to be close.

That final bridge felt like climbing a mountain, my pickled brain couldn't work out which way the finish line was as I hobbled down the other side, I'd given it my all. For months I'd dreamed of this moment, it was finally here. Freddie runs everywhere so I'd imagined him running across the finish with me, but no. In true toddler style he flat out refused so I scooped him up with my last remaining bit of energy and carried him across the line. I didn't quite catch the 2nd lady, she was four minutes ahead in the end, I was however over the moon to place 3rd lady and 12th overall in a time of 25:42. My first 100+ mile race as a mum of a toddler, done. It wasn't easy, but the sense of achievement when I received that medal made it all worthwhile.

When I walked away from GUCR in 2019 I didn't know what the future held, would I ever become a mum? and if I did, would I ever get back to running? To have finished a canal race with my little boy three years later was a very special moment indeed. I was wise not to jump straight back in with one of the longer races, I would've been too tired to manage a full second day of running, but 111 miles was achievable at this

stage of my life. I will definitely be back for the Canal Slam in a couple of years when I'm a bit less sleep deprived.

My race was painful and awful at times, but I loved every second. It was everything you'd expect from the guys at Canal Race C.I.C, a beautiful route, easy to navigate with detailed maps sent out way in advance. Canal races are always low key but have such a great atmosphere, the volunteers are fantastic. It was a great stepping stone for the longer events and I'm so glad I got to take part in the inaugural event. This leads me to the good news, this isn't going to be a one off event after all, it will be back in 2024. Although whether it will be part of the Canal Slam or not remains to be seen.







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# 95<sup>TH</sup> COMRADES ULTRA MARATHON PIETERMARITZBURG TO DURBAN

By Dawn Nunes



Even more for ultrarunning, we need to prepare ourselves specifically for our chosen race. There is the training, actual running whether road or trail, nutrition, recovery and testing out the gear. However, what I discovered on the 28<sup>th</sup> August, was that my training prepared me most for my mind.

These 5 words, changed my race:

Now.

You have to FIGHT.

And fight I did!

The Comrades Ultra Marathon

is an annual and the oldest ultra-marathon in the world which runs alternate years between the cities of Pietermaritzburg and Durban in South Africa. This year was a "down" run so we finished in the magnificent Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban, 90 km later. This was my third Comrades.

I trained really hard for this race. Yes, my 100 miler, Ultra Trail Cape Town, at the end of November is my main race, but I still committed and trained really hard for Comrades. I really thought I'd have a decent race.

At 1 am I woke up refreshed and readied myself to catch the bus

from Durban to the start. It was a pleasant day and I arrived at the start to absorb the amazing vibe. We entered our batches (you have to qualify with a standard marathon and depending on your time, you get placed into batches from A to H. I started in C) and waited for the "chariots of fire" song, the cock crow and then the gun set us off.

It's a huge bustle of people for the start with over 15 000 runners participating in this incredible event. I kept an eye on my pace and ensured that I kept a comfy pace, but from early on my body was



just not responding. I felt sluggish and had no energy. Then I felt really unsettled in my stomach. Not nauseous but uncomfortable. I tried to go to the toilet twice, nothing. The feeling continued. Then I developed a stitch for 15km. I felt that I ate and drank enough but my body was just not responding well at all.

Then the cramps. First my calves then my right quadricep (thigh). Thankfully the cramps were mild but it was awkward and uncomfortable running. Despite it being a "down" run the first part up to 60 km has a lot of hill climbing. Once you get past Botha's hill and roll into Hillcrest, if you are able to, there is a lot of downhill running. I really struggled in this middle sec-

tion, but of course I persevered. Then I was working out times for possible medal options, as you get different medals for the various finishing times, then I wasn't too bothered anymore.

But, nothing can compare to the support out on the road! It was out of this world and I could not have done what I did without every single person who shouted, waved, offered oranges and walked with me at various times. With 15 kms to go I was walking quite a bit despite it being a gentle downhill. I bumped into a fellow runner, Tracey, who gave me these precious words of advice:

Now, you have to fight for it!

It made sense. I was in pain, but

I could still move. How badly did I want to finish and know that I gave my best? I'd put all the training in, now I needed to show that when it gets really hard, I can push through and keep on persevering. I started to run. I continued to run all the downhills and then walked the hills. It was just pain. I started to find my groove.

The absolute best part of the whole morning...was with 2 km to go I saw my training partner and incredible friend, Rox, just in front of me. I literally put on a spring – who even knew I had that in me – to yell out her name and she turned and we ran the last kilometre into the stadium together. This was Roxy's first Comrades and we had done the whole training journey together. What a special and memorable moment. The crowd was just incredible as we entered the stadium. The feeling of knowing that I had given my everything out on the road made the medal that much sweeter. I learnt that...

You have to REALLY want it.

It may not go as planned.

Deal with it.

Just keep moving forward

Change the plan if needs be...

And FIGHT for it!!!







	Event	Location	Miles	S/M/L
Sat 5 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Pendle Way in a Day	Pennines	45	M
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Holcombe Howler	Pennines	33	S
Sat 12 <sup>th</sup> March	Haworth Hobble	South Pennines	32	S
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup> April	Calderdale Hike	South Pennines	36	M
Sat 30 <sup>th</sup> April	The Fellsman	Yorkshire Dales	61	L
Sat 14 <sup>th</sup> May	Spire Ultra	Derbyshire	34	S
Sat 25 <sup>th</sup> June	Lakeland 5 Passes	Lake District	32	S
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup> July	Hallow 12 Parishes	Worcestershire	40	M
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup> July	Pennine 39	North Pennines	39	M
Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup> September	Bullock Smithy Hike	Peak District	56	L
Sat October (tbc)	Round Rotherham	South Yorkshire	50	L
Sat 22 <sup>nd</sup> October	Yorkshire Trod	Yorkshire Dales	62	L



1 race from each distance category plus one other to count in the series championship. Lots more information at [www.runfurther.com](http://www.runfurther.com)



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# THE GREAT GLEN ULTRA

By David Tolmie

I woke with a start at 7:06am on Friday 1 July: the day of the Great Glen Ultra. My fidgeting dachshund, Frankie, dashed any hope I had of a restful sleep and a long lie. I woke to find her pushing her way up the bed, after being allowed to share it with me and my wife overnight. This wasn't a regular sleeping arrangement, but was the result of her having had an operation the day before to remove her dew claw (the nail on the upper, inner part of her foot). If there's one thing an ultra runner can sympathise with, it's the lack of a toenail.

*'Not to worry, I'll sleep on the journey up to Inverness,' I thought.*

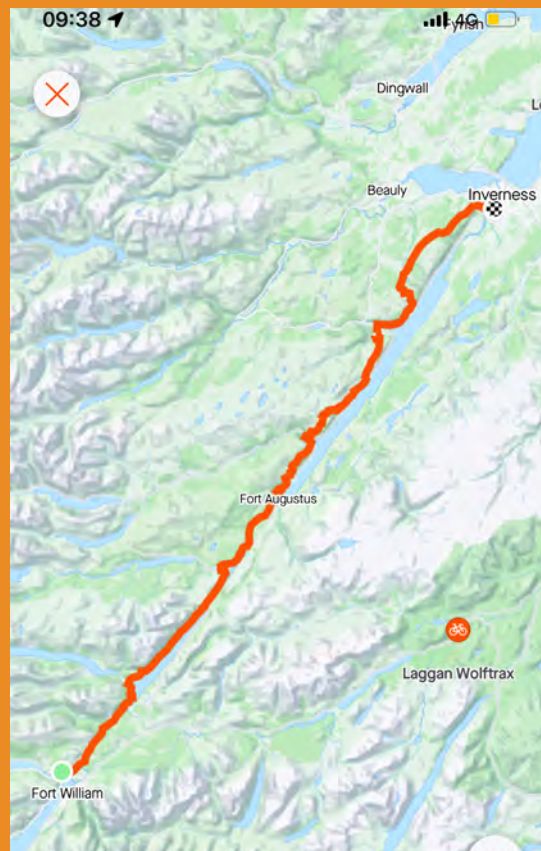
For breakfast I reheated some leftover mac and cheese. Not my typical first meal of the day, but I needed the carbs. It was also time-efficient, enabling me to check my drop bags one final time. I had six in total; five for checkpoints 2 through to 6 and one for the finish. Each bag contained a small can of Coke, nuts, Ritz Crackers, an energy bar, an energy gel, and my all-time favourite go-to running snack, Haribo Tangfastics. For me, these are essential for ultra-running nutrition (I use the term 'nutrition' lightly!).



Haribo somehow has the ability to lift me out of any funk that I'm in, no matter the pain I endure or the distance I cover. I couldn't complete a run without them!

The Great Glen Ultra was to be my longest run to date. Up until now, the furthest I had run was 56 miles, which I had completed seven weeks previously at the CATERAN Trail Ultra, in Perth. The official route is only 54 miles, but another runner and I had gotten lost and inadvertently added an extra 1.6 miles to our journey. I finished with 55.6 miles on my watch, so I had no option but to embrace my OCD and run in circles around the car park to round up. This run would be going on Strava, after all.

In addition to the CATERAN Trail, which I'd completed once before in 2021, my ultra experience consisted of the Dunoon Ultra, the Deeside Way Ultra (D33), The Lochalsh Dirty 30, Run the Blades (twice), Glasgow to Edinburgh (twice), the Cairngorms Ultra (twice) and the Salomon Ben Nevis Ultra, which I had DNF'd at after missing the final cut-off by seven minutes. I was gutted at this, especially since I could easily have finished, given half a chance. I wasn't as gutted as one of the other runners, however, who had apparently missed the same cut-off by less than a minute and hadn't been allowed to continue. I considered this to be unnecessarily strict, but accepted that it's all part of 'the draw'. Before I'd even reached home that



weekend, I'd already decided that I'd be handing my money over to try again.

I figured the Great Glen Ultra would be the next step in my ultra-running journey and, with any luck, a precursor for a 100 miler. I felt confident that I'd finish the run, but I was apprehensive about the 1:00am start time. I'd never done anything like it before and had no idea what to expect. *I'll find out soon enough*, I thought.

My wife, Roisin, who usually joins me on my weekend running trips, was having a few days away with her mum. Thankfully, my parents offered to drive me to Inverness, where I would catch the official runners' bus to Fort William later that evening. They would stay overnight in the city, then the next morning would drive to Kyle of Lochalsh, where my sister, Lorraine, and her husband, Mark, own a coffee and bakeshop called 'All the Goodness'. The bakeshop is situated close to Eilean Donan Castle, and I can highly recommend it. The cinnamon buns are life changing (yet to be tested as 'ultra fuel').

Around an hour and a half into our drive to Inverness, my eyes began to get heavy. Heavier than usual, considering it was midday on a Friday and I'd already drank three cups of coffee. This wasn't a good sign. I closed my eyes, hoping to fit in a nap before reaching Inverness, but my brain had other ideas...

*'Did I definitely pack my trail shoes? What about a spare pair of socks? Did I charge my head torch? Was my planned pace too fast? Too slow? What should I*

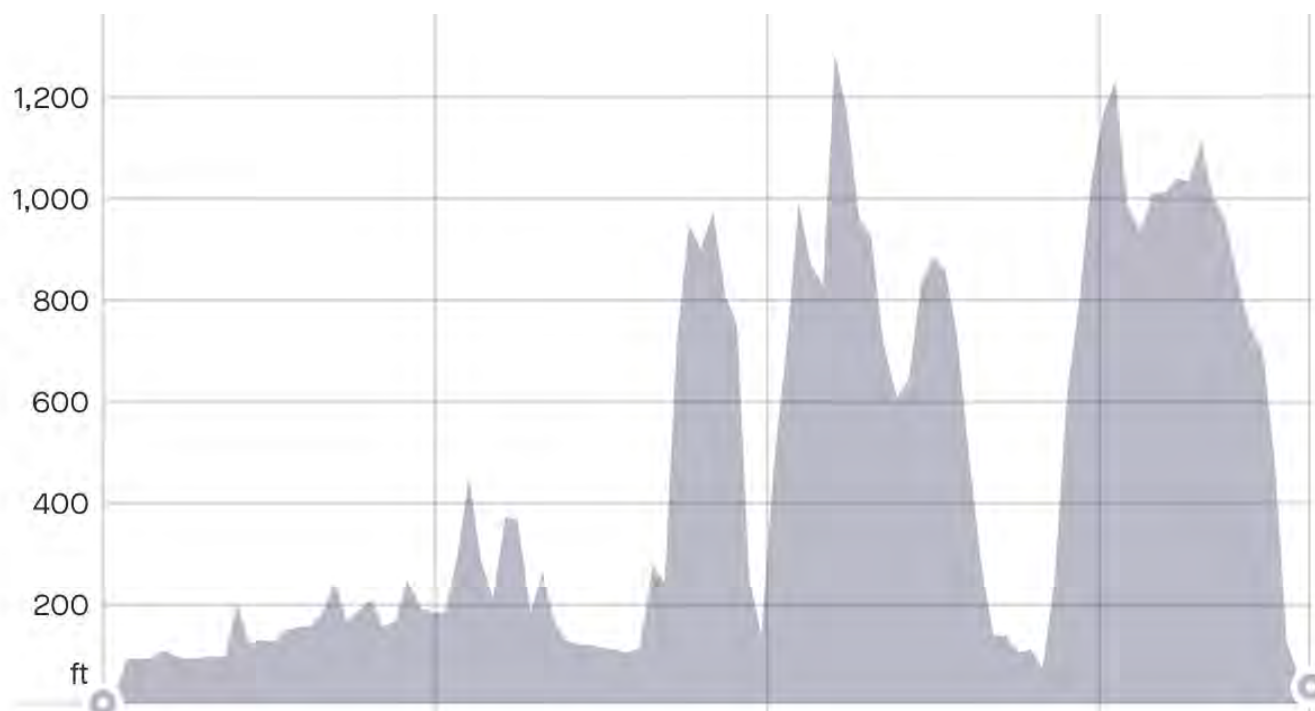
*eat? What time should I eat?'*

The list went on, and it quickly became clear that a nap wasn't on the agenda. A fourth cup of coffee and some sugary Haribo took its place. *'Not a problem,'* I thought, *'I'll have a nap in the hotel before dinner.'*

After checking in and leaving our bags in our rooms, we made our way to the hotel bar. I ordered a pint of beer, hoping it would help me sleep, and enjoyed the wobbly seat I was sitting on, knowing it would be one of the last that I'd get for a while. After finishing a second pint, I made my way to my room for a pre-dinner nap.

My brain was still in overdrive – probably a result of the coffee, sweets and beer – but after 40 minutes of trying, I finally managed to drift off. 20 short minutes later, however, my phone's alarm sounded. It was time to eat. *'Not a problem,'* I thought, *'I'll get some sleep on the runners' bus to Fort William.'*

After tucking into a cheese pizza in the bar, I returned to my room and changed into my running gear and completed some last-minute kit checks. At 8:45pm, my parents and I left the hotel and walked to the pick-up point at Inverness Sports Centre. In hindsight, the 1.5 mile walk from the hotel probably wasn't the smartest idea, but at the time it never crossed my mind to ask for a lift. When the bus arrived, I made my way to the back, looking for a seat that would give me maximum leg room. I sat, pulled my buff over my eyes, and lay back, ready to nod off. Unfortunately, I spent the next



hour and a half with my head rocking back and forth, bouncing off the bus window. 'Not a problem,' I thought, 'I'll sleep when we reach Kilmallie Community Centre.'

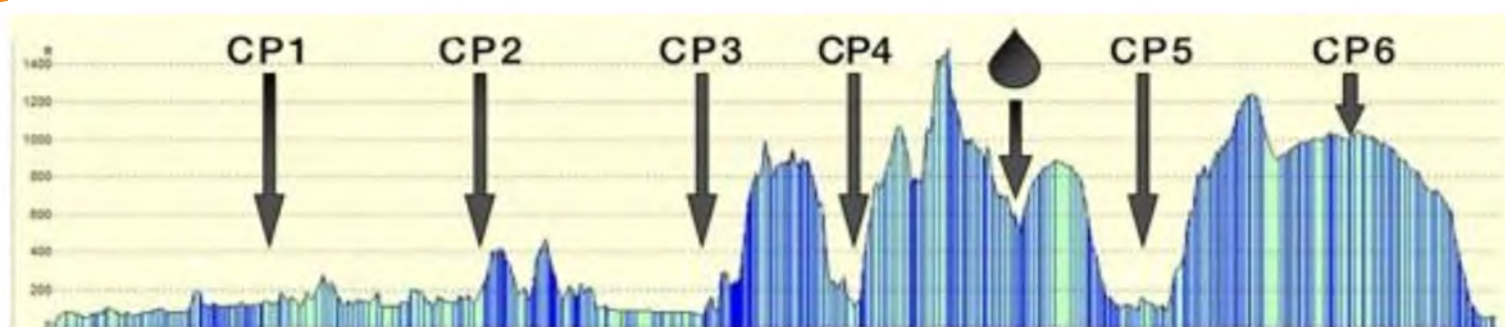
We arrived at our destination at 11:15pm and made our way to the main hall, where we would collect our race numbers and leave our drop bags for pick-up. It was well organised, and it wasn't long before I was sitting comfortably (ish) in a wooden chair ready to attempt some sleep. Once again, I pulled my buff over my head and closed my eyes. Of course, it didn't happen, and after 15 minutes of trying, I decided to head outside to stretch my legs.

At 12:45am, Bill, the race organiser, called everyone in for the briefing. He mentioned that the original race numbers had been close to 90, but that due to the current COVID spike and various other injuries, this had gradually dropped to

just 45. This was great news for anyone looking for a podium finish. Immediately after the briefing, we made our way to the canal starting point, preceded by one last dash to the toilets (although I probably should have reserved my energy). I managed to snap a couple of photos and set up my watch before Bill announced, "One minute to go".

This was it... 73 miles and 8,000 feet of elevation awaited me. Shit!

We ran the first few miles in darkness, and it felt oddly quiet. There were eight of us huddled together but we kept chat to a minimum. We followed the canal before heading off-road through a forest trail, which looked incredible being lit by our head torches. The route was mostly single track, and our group began to disperse. It wasn't long before I was running alone with only the distant head







torch of another runner in front of me confirming that I wasn't lost. I was keeping an easy pace of around a 10-minute mile, and although I was feeling good, I was looking forward to reaching CP1, for no other reason than to tick it off the list. By the time I reached it, around 2:40am, the sky was getting lighter, and by 4:00am I was able to switch off my head torch.

By the time I reached CP2, the midges were out in force. I sympathised with the marshals who had been standing in the open for a few hours and would have several more hours to go. Luckily, they seemed prepared and were wearing 'Highland hazmat suits' to keep the midges at bay. I, on the other hand, was being eaten alive, so I didn't hang around. After filling up my water bottles and grabbing my drop bag, I immediately hit the road, Haribo in my hand.

The journey between the starting line and CP3 was relatively flat, although it was, at times, steeper than I expected. After CP3, however, the effort ramped up. That was where the first big climb was, coming in at around 1,000 feet. It was there, halfway up, that I met another runner who had unfortunately got lost, adding an extra four miles to his journey. He looked exhausted, which was totally understandable. Getting lost on an ultra is demoralising, and it can really mess with your head. After a quick chat with him, I carried on, slowly making my way up the mountain ahead.

By the time I reached the peak it was almost 8:00am and the sun was rising high in the sky. I had been awake so long that it felt more like 8:00pm to me. I was feeling relatively good at that point, with my only issue being a small blister forming on the inside of one of my toes. That upbeat moment was short lived, though. The descent, which was unbelievably steep, wreaked havoc on my knees, and they quickly



became sore and twisted. I had no option but to stop running and walk. By mile 40, my walk was reduced to a shuffle.

Despite now being more than halfway through, my brain couldn't fathom having a further 33 miles still to run. It made sense, obviously, but it also didn't. I had to stop thinking about the 'bigger picture' and focus only on reaching the next checkpoint. Up until now, these had been equally placed, roughly 10 miles apart, but the distance between CP4 and CP5 was 14.5 miles. Still, telling myself that I had '14.5 miles to go' was much better than the alternative, so that shorter distance was what I focused on.

I struggled into CP5 with aching knees and was met by a smiling marshal who was waving a gun in my face. Thankfully, it was a toy gun that blew bubbles, not bullets. It was a small thing, but nice touches like that really helped to raise my spirits, and briefly took my mind off my fatigue and pain. The gun-wielding marshal joyfully told me about the 'Princess Chair' awaiting me at CP6. This is a time-honoured tradition of the Great Glen Ultra, where you get the opportunity to wear a sparkling tiara and have your photo taken while having some very brief respite. It sounded fun, but I considered that if I sat down I probably wouldn't get back up. After collecting my drop bag, I found a wall to sit on to apply a Compeed plaster to my now throbbing blister. I then changed into a dry pair of socks, which I almost hadn't packed, and set off again. I decided to walk at that point to give

my knees a rest. They were getting worse by the mile.

The weather up until that point had been good, but it took a sudden turn for the worse, and it wasn't long before I found myself in a torrential downpour. The rain didn't let up for at least an hour, which made the 1,300 feet climb much more difficult. My saturated shorts meant that I was beginning to chafe in places no man wants to chafe. Between the rain, knee pain, tiredness and chafing, I was starting to not enjoy myself. To make matters worse, and for the first time in my ultra-running career, my trusty Tangfastics weren't helping at all. I was stuck in a funk for the foreseeable future.

A lot of runners who were taking part in the shorter course (it's still 42 miles) passed me between CP5 and CP6. Everyone was super nice, offering words of support and encouragement as their fresher legs propelled them forward. One runner stopped to check that I had enough supplies, and we chatted about our ultra-running experiences as we ran. He told me he was considering running the full course next year, to which I positively replied, *'I'm not sure I'd recommend it'*.

I hobbled into CP6 at around 4:30pm, exhausted, sore and still chafing. I clocked the Princess Chair and considered how good the act of sitting on it might be. I was tempted, but the marshals appeared distracted by a runner who was shivering badly after the recent downpour. Should I? Shouldn't I? I couldn't decide. In the end, it didn't seem right to interrupt them just to ask for a tiara, so I grudgingly set off... just 11 miles to go.

On fresh legs, this section would have taken me less than an hour and a half to complete, but after completing 62 miles with only 20 minutes' sleep, I knew it would take me much, much longer. I was struggling, and although I had no intention of giving up, I knew it was an option. Thankfully, my wife, parents and sister were sending me supportive messages, and I'd even been sent a picture of Frankie who was bouncing around playing with a new toy, apparently making a quick recovery from her operation. These were a much needed boost as I shuffled forward, one step at a time. While I was replying to the messages, my phone battery suddenly died, and the power bank I'd packed wasn't working due to the rain. I was now on my own, and at one point I became obsessed with the pain on the soles of my feet. I found a fence to sit on briefly, and it was there that I realised I'd been on my feet for over 15 hours. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to relax for long. Having stopped moving, my body was beginning to cool rapidly. I began to shiver, and I couldn't get heated up. Then, when I thought things couldn't get any worse, I found myself amid yet another torrential downpour. At that point, I was having to dig deep. Really deep.

I was now focusing on going from mile to mile, no longer able to think about any distance longer than that. My brain was foggy, and I was looking at my watch every few seconds, checking the mileage. 0.1 of a mile passed. Then 0.2. Then 0.3. It was hell. I counted down the miles as if they were the numbers on a clock. When the 'hands' completed a single revolution, one







mile had passed, and it would start all over again. This 'system' that I had devised now sounds torturous – and it was – but it was the only thing I could think about, and so for eight, long, long miles, I continued counting.

Every. Single. Step.

I knew that if I could reach mile 70, I would be almost finished, and if I was almost finished, I could definitely complete the run. I expected reaching that point would be a triumphant, momentous occasion, but it came and went without any fanfare. Any last shred of positivity was now well and truly gone. My mind was also appearing to have checked out. At one point, I fell into a daze while walking, and when I suddenly came to, I found myself arguing with the grass verge, accusing it of stealing my sweet potato fries. I glanced at my watch; just two miles to go.

Despite walking, I must have been managing a *fairly* decent pace since I was passing people who were hiking the trail. A quick smile and nod was all I could muster as I slowly shuffled past them. The last section was all downhill, which should have made things easier, but it was anything but. It was probably the hardest part so far, at least mentally, and it appeared to be never-ending.

I was now shuffling across main roads and through housing estates, watching for the Inverness Sports Centre, and the finishing line, to appear. It never did. So I carried on past the golf course, through the swing parks, along the canal path and over a bridge. I cursed the race and its organisers. I turned a corner, went through an underpass, and there was the word 'Finish' spray painted in bright orange on the ground. 'Thank f@\*k!' was all I could think.

I knew that I had to complete a victory lap in Queens Stadium before approaching the finishing line, so I attempted to pick up my pace and started running again, as painful as it was. As I entered the stadium car park a car sounded its horn and the passengers cheered for me. Encouraged, I entered the stadium and immediately saw Bill, the organiser, who asked if I wanted a '*race to the finish*'. I know that I replied, and I'd like to think I said something witty, but I suspect my response was irrelevant and unintelligible. I slowly shuffled my way around the track, and as I turned the final corner, there, in the stand, were my parents, waving and cheering. It was great to see them. I summoned the energy to smile and wave, then focused on the finish line, which was now just a few feet ahead.

Exhausted and incredibly sore, I completed the Great Glen Ultra, 17 hours and 57 minutes after setting off. It was a relief to be finished, and seeing my parents at the end was exactly what I needed. Even more so that they had come armed with towels, a flask of coffee, and cakes that my sister, Lorraine, had baked





for me.

The run was a great experience, and I was glad to be finished, but having had only 20 minutes' sleep in the previous 36 hours, I wasn't fully aware of what was happening to me or what I'd just achieved. Even now, a week later, I find it difficult to comprehend the scale of the challenge that I participated in. Maybe I never will. I do, however, fully appreciate the epic and amazing people who helped me succeed: my wife and my family. So to them, a massive thank you.

I'd also like to thank the organisers and marshals for pulling such a great event together, and for giving up their free time to do so.

To anyone thinking of doing the Great Glen Ultra themselves, ignore my earlier comment: *'I'm not sure I'd recommend it'*. Those were the words of a broken man. I most definitely do recommend it. Do it. Sign up. You won't regret it. Well, you most definitely will, but only for 90% of the time you're doing it, and the other 10% will more than make up for it.

Now, fully recovered, I look forward to my next challenge.





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A photograph of two male runners in motion on a paved path. The runner on the left is wearing a blue Asics long-sleeved shirt and has a water bottle in his hand. The runner on the right is wearing a black t-shirt with a deer head graphic and a race bib that reads '55k ULTRA LONDON 5045'. Both runners are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows green trees and a clear sky.

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# INTERVIEW WITH:

# KARL BAXTER

## ONE MORE HOUR

**U**ltrarunning  
World When and  
how did you  
start running?

**Karl Baxter** I was quite naughty as a child. When I was 13 I used to run away from the police so they couldn't catch me. Eventually they did and I was expelled from school and sent to an approved school in the Lake District. That's how I started running, perhaps not the best way.

**UW** There was obviously something there that was working for you.

**KB** I used to love doing orienteering and the competitions on the weekends. There was canoeing, abseiling, caving and all the outdoor pursuits. Some weekends I stayed in the Lake District and didn't go home to Fleetwood, near Blackpool. I have been running ever since. I fell in love with that life at a young age.

**UW** It gave you an outlet.

**KB** That's right, I am a very energetic person. As soon as I am awake, I'm alive. When I went to that school it was a blessing in disguise, it served me a good purpose throughout my life. I was just on the arcade machines in Blackpool. If I had never been expelled from school, I would never have been open to that, it opened up a new and better world for me.

**UW** You joined the army?

**KB** Yes, I was just over 12 years in the army. I went to Germany first and got into a drinking crowd, drinking every night, I got really fat and I could only just pass the army fitness test. Only when I came back from Germany and went to the Arctic warfare unit in Salisbury did I get fit again. It was a more fitness-oriented environment. We had to be fit for the Arctic, the snow and the lakes. I enjoyed getting fit as it was something to do. I was also posted for two tours of Northern Ireland on bomb disposal in Derry. I do remember doing a lot of running up Kiwi hill which was shaped like the animal. In the early 1990s I went down to

the Falkland Islands for four months. Their gym facilities were second to none. I would often run from Port Stanley to Mount Pleasant airfield. Eventually, I was posted back to London to the transport squadron, which involved driving members of the Royal Family and Generals. I was keeping fit then. That was the first time I saw an advert in Camden Town about marathon running. I said to myself, "I'm going to do one of them." My friend was skeptical, he said, "You'll never do that." That was like a red rag to a bull so I signed up. In 1996 you could just apply because it isn't as big as it is now.

I did it in 4 hours and 15 minutes. I was smoking and drinking at the time. The following year I did it again, in 3 hours and 45 minutes. The night before I was at a stag party and was completely lathered, I collapsed at the Embankment. I had my first bottle of water at 21 miles. I did it two more times, in 1999 in 3 hours and 9 minutes. I had stopped smoking by then but I was still drinking.

**UW** I take it you are



**not drinking anymore?**

**KB** I haven't had a drink for six years and I haven't smoked since 1998. The drinking was mainly a result of army culture. When I did get out of the army I was still drinking but not as much as when I was in the army. It was about half eleven one Saturday morning and I went to the fridge to get a can of beer. I said to myself, "What are you doing?" I didn't have another drink again.

I did that with smoking as well, I was hungover on a train from Blackpool down to London. I went to have a fag out of the window and it knocked me sick. I threw the whole pack out of the window and said I would never smoke again, and I haven't.

**UW Amazing that you have that discipline.**

**KB** I think I have although I might come across as pig-headed.

**UW It sounds like it's something that works for you. It helps you build a structure and gives you a place to see yourself.**

**KB** I had ADHD and when I went to the school for naughty children I had a structure and things to do.

**UW Society has moved on and we recognise who these kids are today.**

**KB** It's who I am, who they are. There's a billion different categories and everyone can understand more.

**UW You did these marathons, did you see yourself becoming a runner?**

**KB** No, I was just going to run a marathon. When my son was born I used to go running with him in a buggy around the streets of Essex. My dad didn't do much with me so I decided not to be one of those fathers. When I started working nights, I stopped running for seven years but I still did a little bit as I was out with the dogs. Eventually I saw a sign for The Grim Reaper Ultra and I signed up for the 40-mile ultra. Which was four 10-mile loops round the estate. I trained for it and did it. The first 10 miles I completed in 1 hour and 20 minutes but at the 30-mile point I became really hot so I took off my backpack. This was a mistake because

I had no water and collapsed with four miles to go. After people gave me drinks I was able to complete it in 8 and a half hours. I started crying at the finish and said I would never do that again. Less than an hour later I had signed up for another ultra. I absolutely loved it and that's how I started doing ultra distances.

**UW You have a capacity for endurance, which ultra races did you do?**

**KB** I did the Positive Steps Events: Norfolk Coastal, St Edmunds 50k and Peddars Way. This was around 2017 and I took off then. I also did the Last One Standing, Spitfire Scramble and The Tunnel. The first time I did The Tunnel I didn't finish it. I got to 100 miles in new trainers, my achilles was killing me in them. I did go back and complete The Tunnel accompanied by hallucinations, seeing the Abominable Snowman and giant slugs. I thought I was climbing a mountain, I thought I was going uphill. It was a good experience. I had previously done some "Everesting" in Wales, I would pick a hill and run up and down it 48 times. I live in Norfolk so it's relatively flat in comparison.

**UW I watched some of your funny videos, you always seem to be having a good time and smiling.**

**KB** During the lockdown I ran 60 miles round my garden and 150 miles round my house when there was a 3-mile radius. With the Three Peaks Ultra I signed up for it and forgot about it. I treat the ultras as a holiday to enjoy and don't pressure myself. With the Three Peaks I just tried to get through the first four days, I'm nearly 51 and not the fastest but once I had lit the candle, I wasn't going to stop. Even when I was climbing and not running, I threw down my backpack in frustration. I told myself to calm down, had a coke and a chunky KitKat, it's not going to last forever and I carried on. Alan and I did it together, best thing I ever did, a very special event. In 2013 I ran unsupported from the north of Hull following the Greenwich Meridian line to finish at Peacehaven near Brighton, it appealed to my army background. I do it for my own sense of achievement. All

the runs are unique and different.

**UW Ultras appeal to people who want to challenge themselves.**

**KB** Doing ultras changed me as a person. I know what I am capable of. You never know what you can achieve until you try it and get out of your comfort zone. I went to Ireland and represented England in The Last One Standing. My ankle ballooned but a swollen ankle never killed anyone and I was able to accommodate it and carry on. My body adapted. Then my calf went at mile 29, I carried on and really damaged my calf. Took a while to recover.

**UW There are different types of pain. Only through experience can we differentiate between pain that is temporary and pain that is seriously going to damage us.**

**A sprained ankle is uncomfortable but one can potentially run through it by offsetting your gait but then you put pressure on other parts of your body. It's a fine line. If you give up, you never know if you could have gone on. It shows your limits. Even experienced ultrarunners continue to start out too fast, even after 25 or 30 years. You become in tune with what you really are, not what you think or feel.**

**KB** During The Three Peaks my right calf grew to three times its normal size with shooting pains. I had it heavily taped. It was a manageable pain and it wasn't going to stop me. I managed to bear it, I can only feel one pain at a time, one more step. Then when that pain goes, another pain could surface somewhere else.

**UW What races have you planned?**

**KB** I'm hoping to go to Sandringham in Norfolk and do 100 miles in 24 hours on a five-mile loop. The Viking Way is 147 miles and there are 40 hours to do it in. I'd also like to do The Tunnel again and Last One Standing in Suffolk. I will give Lon Las Ultra a go too. **UW** Do you have any dream races? **KB** I don't think I'm quick enough to do Spartathlon, perhaps if I did less faffing and got a qualifying time. Really I just want to see how far I can





go. I'm not in any running club, I'm a renegade runner. I'd probably give the track a go, it doesn't bore me running round, so Gloucester and Crawley.

**UW** If you can't deal with running laps you are running against yourself. The things that will stop you are yourself and your mental weaknesses. Once you realise that is what is going on it is a big step forward in understanding yourself. Self-understanding and personal growth help us to live a better life which inspires people.

**KB** I got a message that I was an inspiring person, an inspiration to others. I'm just Karl Baxter, a fuel tanker driver, who likes to run. I'm just myself.

**UW** Most people look outside themselves and watch other people, people see you for what you are and yet fail to see it in themselves. When we run we are not thinking about the world, paying a bill etc, we are focused on one thing, putting one foot in front of another. This clears the way for us to connect with everything and less distractions and attachments whilst running. What you are doing is very inspiring to other people.

**KB** You discover more about yourself through ultrarunning. When I was with other people on The Three Peaks I felt as one, we were all singing off the same hymn sheet. I felt at ease with these people, we were all going through the same process. We are all related to each other even though we came from different professions. You find out who you are as a person.

**UW** Did you feel that when you were in the army in Germany?

**KB** The army was like a brotherhood, a family, there were 30 of us and we still meet up every year. Ultrarunning is like that too, I see the same people at events, it is also like a family or a belonging.

**UW** You were raising money for charity?

**KB** A couple of my cousins had cancer, I raised £1,500 for Breast Cancer UK. People started donating just before the London Marathon and it snowballed. It was a big thing for me and I was worried that I wouldn't get donations. I was very pleased with the outcome. Dream races? The Last Annual Vol State sounds good.

**UW** Laz and his mates were putting on these races, it was like a fam-



## Interview

**ily, small events where everyone knew each other. Race Directors have their tribal following.**

**KB** A person who inspired me is Andy Persson, he's from Bristol and a wellness coach and an ultra runner. He has done the JOGLE, he's no fuss, just a small backpack. It's a mindset, you get mentally fit and are able to run for longer. I could take on something bigger like the JOGLE. It's mental strength in the longer races, one minute you are happy as Larry and the next minute you're crying into a bucket and then next minute you're off again. It's all character-building. I say to myself, "Give yourself one more hour." Lindley (Chambers) said to me once, "Keep moving forward, no matter how slow, you eventually get to the end". What else are you going to do? If you do stop, ten minutes later you wish you kept going. Don't give yourself that option unless you are injured. Give yourself another 60 minutes. It is surprising what goes on in your mind in 60 minutes.

**UW In The Tunnel it's a case of one foot in front of the other.**

**KB** Knowing that things change, being able to ride the horrible dip, it will change. The walk becomes a jog, the jog becomes a run.

**UW What do you use for fuelling?**

**KB** Happy food! Cakes and sugary stuff, Big Macs, sandwiches. At Sandringham, cheese and tomato, Pringles and caramel popcorn. Works a treat. I am not into gels, I am into proper food which I cut into bite-sized pieces, carbs and salt. On a 24-hour park run in Kings Lynn I ran 107 miles, I ate two Big Macs, big mistake! I do consume a bit of Tailwind, Vimto. Alan (Cormack) got me into ice cream, Magnums and strawberry milkshakes, anything really, they are nice things to eat.

**UW I was entertained by your videos on YouTube.**

**KB** I started laughing on the top of Ben Nevis. It's all about having fun as long as you don't hurt anyone. It breaks the monotony on a run.

**UW You are giving to people, it comes out, your authenticity.**

**KB** My first girlfriend asked me to help her lose weight. I got her to run 100 miles, she had never done that distance before. I pushed her to do it because I genuinely believe she could do it with a kick up the arse. I've always got to do my best, that's the way I am, with cooking, work, anything. I tell people, "Just get on and do it!" and "Move your arse". I dragged Kerry round and she did a PB and the Manchester Marathon faster than she anticipated. With effort, people can achieve, they just need encouragement.





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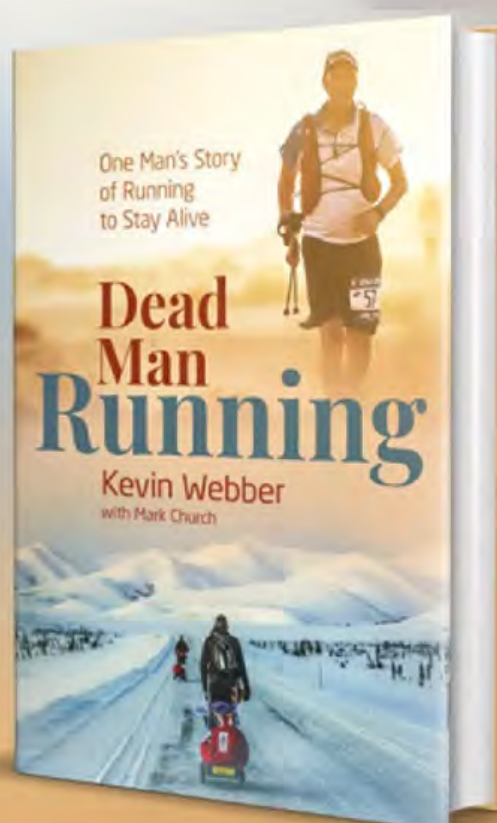
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One Man's Story of  
Running to Stay Alive

# Dead Man Running

Kevin Webber  
with Mark Church







# The Bali Ultra Trail

Written by Frank van der Endt

*In recent years I ran well-known marathons in European and American cities. This summer I have Asia in my sights. Previous runs I invariably ran with a loyal group of friends. Unfortunately, I will have to take on this Asian adventure without my regular running friends. Our vacation destinations are too far apart.*

The race of 53 km and 3,200 meters elevation gain will take place in Bali, in Kintamani, around the still active volcano Batur. Bali is one of the thousands of islands in the Emerald Belt. On this Indonesian island I have spent my summer vacations for more than fifteen years. Indonesia is and remains a fascinating country with which I have a special bond.

The Bali Ultra Trail, which has been postponed twice due to the corona pandemic, is the first ultra run to be organized in Bali. The route runs through the Batur UNESCO Geopark, an area characterized by biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural unity. My preparation for this tropical run is not optimal. Prior to the start on 6 August 2022, I did a few preparatory runs in Bali through sawas, past sacred temples and over mountains. I was promised an epic adventure by the organization of the Bali Ultra Trail. Well, that has been fully delivered.

## At home in Bali

I've worked very hard in the past year, but in my private life I've had a particularly difficult time. I am therefore very much in need of a vacation in my beloved Bali. Traditionally, we stay in our luxurious beachfront home Villa Senang ([www.villasenang.nl](http://www.villasenang.nl)), in the quiet, authentic north of Bali. Villa Senang is a comfortable house surrounded by a tropical garden with a wide variety of palm and fruit trees. During the day we swim in our pool or in the sea and at the end of the day the gardener harvests coconuts from his own garden, from which he draws refreshing coconut water that we drink in the bale benong (Balinese arbor) during sunset. Meanwhile, the cook prepares the most delicious Indian dishes. A few times a week we leave early in the morning for the pasar, the colorful local market. For us, the ideal vacation. Besides cultural and relaxing trips, I also do my final training for the Bali Ultra Trail.

## The cool Munduk

I get up at five o'clock. The sun is not up yet and it is relatively cool. After drinking and eating I leave with a headlamp towards the mountains of Munduk. This village lies on a ridge in the north of Bali. On the way I meet a walking school class. Today is a full moon and that is one of the many occasions here in Hindu Bali to organize a ceremony. The children have dressed traditionally in honour of the gods and carry offerings. Full of joy, they run along with me for a few dozen meters. This gives me a special feeling. The Balinese are cheerful, hospitable and approachable. I have already

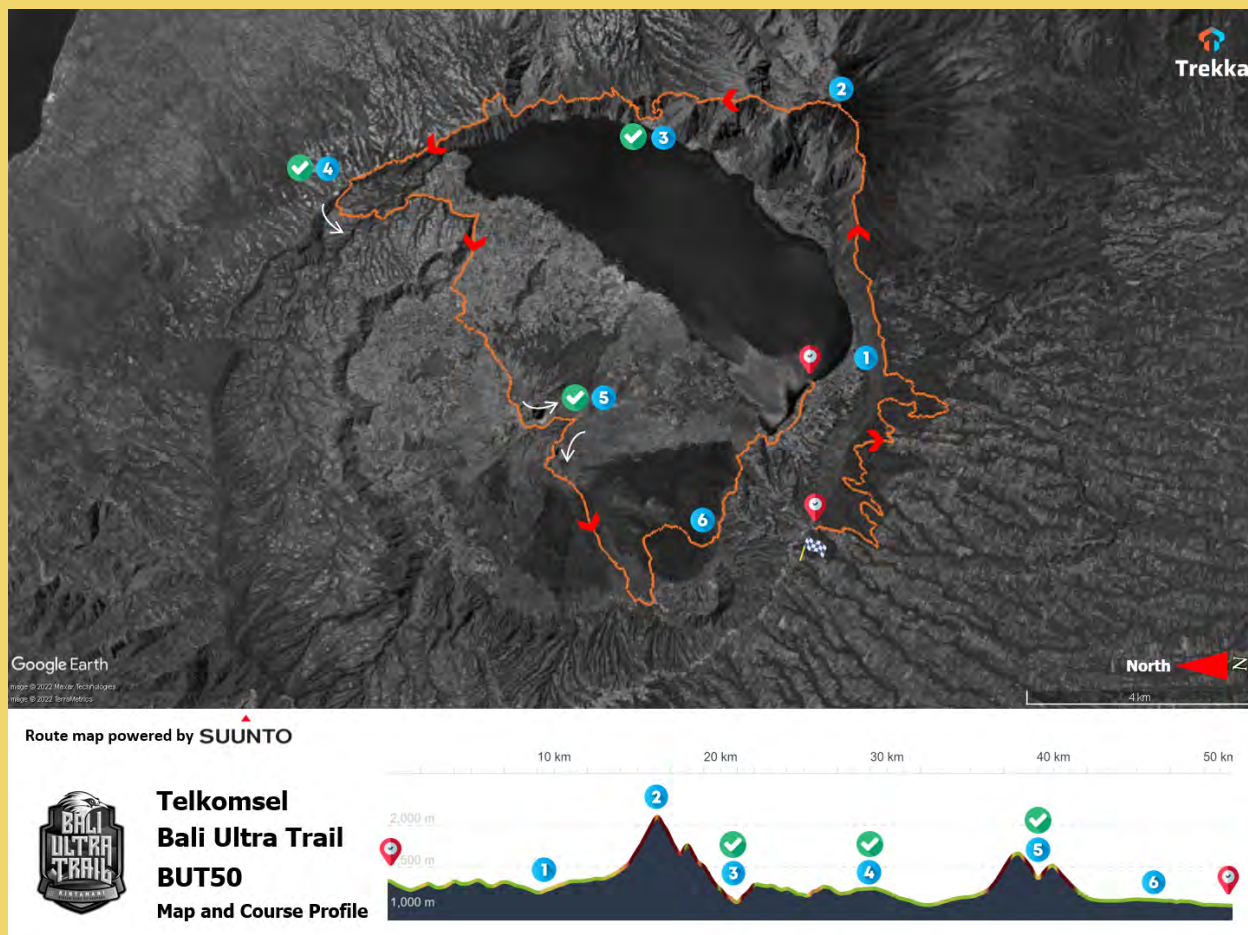
run ten kilometers so this distraction is very welcome. Then I run further through the green and cool hills around Munduk. Here you find rice, cocoa, coffee, vanilla and clove plantations. Munduk owes this rich variety of crops to its relatively high location at 1,400 meters. The Dutch built many of these plantations in previous centuries. Munduk was also a popular place for the Dutch to live because of its comfortable temperature. I run along a clove plantation, where local farmers have climbed long bamboo ladders to harvest the kretek (cloves). A Balinese person would not easily go running for fun in this heat and humidity. I do. Periodically I hear

laughter high from the tops of the kretek trees. Would they be laughing at me or with me?

Before reaching the highest point in Munduk, I walk past a waringin, a decorated sacred tree that represents the Indian belief in spirits and supernaturalism. A sacrificial place where prayers are offered at different times of the day. The trees are often centuries old and can reach a diameter of 10 meters. Such a tree sanctuary is also a place where, for example, justice is administered. At the highest point of Munduk I turn around. It has become warmer by now, but fortunately the second half of this run is mostly downhill. Back at Villa Senang, I am treated to fresh fruit juice of







mango, banana and papaya. I take off my completely sweat-soaked clothes and splash into the wonderfully cool pool. A vacation day can't get off to a better start.

## Samasaya Garden

During our vacation in Bali, Villa Senang is our 'base station'. From there we make trips to other parts of Bali or to Java. Less than an hour away from our house lives and works the famous TV chef and singer Lonny Gerungan. We decide to spend two days with him at Samasaya Garden ([www.samasayagarden.com](http://www.samasayagarden.com)). His garden, which offers a magnificent view of the surrounding rice fields, is full of various herbs and vegetables. My wife is taking a culinary workshop with Lonny. In the meantime, I go running to explore the area under the guidance of Madé, one of the gardeners. I run through the rice fields with Batukaru volcano in the background, a classic Tempo Doeloe setting. I jump over streams and run under waterfalls. The sound of the falling water from the sawa plateaus makes me happy and has a relaxing effect. I marvel at how many shades of green this beautiful island displays.

Upon returning to Samasaya Garden, my wife Wytzia, under the watchful eye of chef Lonny, has prepared a sophisticated Balinese meal using fresh ingredients from his garden. The evening falls quickly and we decide to go to bed early so that I can do another run the next morning in the fresh air.

## Run-shoot-run

It is still more than a week before the race flag will be waving at the start of the Bali Ultra Trail. I want to do another relaxed run purely for my own pleasure. After that, in the run-up to the big run, tapering. Ketut, the gardener at Villa Senang, wants to run with me. It's nice to run with him, and I expect there will be some photo-worthy moments. We leave early in the morning and start at the main temple of the village of Denarik. Because ceremonies will soon take place again, the temple is decorated with flags and white and yellow cloths; there is a hushed, sacred atmosphere. So special to be part of another culture in this way. Each time I check with Ketut whether what I do and where I walk is respectful according to the rituals. The Balinese are proud of their tangible and intangible heritage and consider it an honor if you are willing to participate in a ceremony with them.

We run through temple gates, towards Pujungan, a somewhat higher mountain village among the sawas. I walk on the narrow dikes between the water fields. Some parts of the sawas have just been planted. Other fields are guarded by a farmer who tries to chase away the rice grains pecking birds. Tourists never come here. Ketut explains to the farmer who I am and what I do. He starts laughing, runs a little with me and claps the scarecrow whip. Some parts of the sawas are being harvested and threshed. I am asked by the

villagers to help with the threshing. Of course, I don't let that request pass me by. I obediently follow the instructions of the farmer. When I'm done, they wave me off, while warmly calling "Selamat Jalan" (good journey). Fulfilled with running and with beautiful pictures as a souvenir I arrive later in the morning together with Ketut back at Villa Senang.

## Kintamani

We have arrived in Kintamani, both the start and finish of the Bali Ultra Trail. The field consists of 84 runners with 25 different nationalities. Most of the ultra runners are from Asia, of which a large number are from Singapore, Malaysia and Japan. But most of the runners are from Java and a little less also from Bali. There seems to be a small, fanatical and growing ultra run community in Indonesia.

## Tough course

It's 6 August just before 6 am. We are ready at the starting line in Kintamani. The Bupati, a sort of commissioner of the king, arrives to give the starting signal. Before that happens, we are welcomed, the national anthem is played and there is a traditional Balinese orchestra that knows how to 'excite' us with drums and gongs.

It is a special moment. I am standing here among many Indonesian riders, organizers and supporters. Indonesians, a people with whom we as the Netherlands historically have a close and, certainly from today's perspective, debatable relationship. My wife, myself and many of our friends have Indonesian roots. My grandfather Jan Cornelis Veenemans (1902–1942), as PTT Director in the former Dutch East Indies, ensured that in around 1935 a telephone cable was ex-

tended from Java to Bali so that telephony was possible there. Bali was already very attractive to foreigners. Pictures of the overwhelming nature, the many temples and the scantily clad women contributed to this. Stories about the friendly and at the same time proud attitude of the Balinese, their spirituality, the caste system, the kings and puries (palaces), the priests with their rituals, the meditative dance and other artistic expressions also determined the almost mythical image of the island and its inhabitants. From all over the world, artists, scientists and surfing hippies came to Bali to see 'the last paradise on earth'. Now, more than seventy years after the proclamation, I stand here with the grandchildren of those who still experienced the colonial period, on the eve of a joint run adventure.

The first part, with the sun rising, we run through a dense jungle. Reed and ferns are meters high. The light of the sun is breathtakingly beautiful. It is damp and foggy, there is a mysterious atmosphere. Because of the extreme humidity I am soaking wet within a few kilometers.







Then the ascent begins. A few times I miss the signposting of the route and walk the wrong way. During the first climb to the top of Mount Abang one of my very functional sticks breaks. I know how necessary these sticks will be further in the race. So after some concern, I come up with the idea of using tape from my first-aid bag to tie the whole thing together. Fortunately, that turns out to work. The path on the ridge of Mount Abang is frighteningly narrow. Left and right the abyss. Only looking straight ahead prevents me from getting vertigo. Once I stick my stick not right on the path but too much to the right. I lose grip and almost fall into the abyss.

The mountain itself looks green and soft. It looks like a velvet blanket has been laid over it. To the right there is a view of Gunung Agung with the caldera (volcano), which is now partly in the clouds. The Balinese see Agung as the 'navel of the world', the geographical and religious center of the earth. They sleep with their heads towards Agung and many believe that the gods made the mountain to behold life below from that height. The Gunung Agung volcano is active and major eruptions occurred here as recently as 1963 and 2017. To the left you have a view of the Batur, the other large, still active volcano. The Batur consists of two craters. Later in the trail I will have to climb and descend those as well. The Agung (the man) and the Batur (woman) belong together, between them is the large Lake Batur. The volcanic area is between 23,670 and 28,500 years old. On the one hand I feel privileged that I can enjoy this beautiful view. On the other hand, I realize that it will soon get warmer and that fatigue will start to play tricks on me. This prospect depresses me. I decide to take it easy for the time being. To enjoy and to prepare myself mentally and physically for the second half of this trip: the ascent and descent of Mount Ba-

tur. The descent of Mount Abang turns out to be no walk in the park. The path is extremely steep and narrow. Every hundred meters there is a professional climber waiting for you with a helmet and equipment. He guides you over the steepest parts with ropes attached to hooks on the rocks. You really have to hold on tightly to the ropes to avoid falling down. The speed is now off.

I arrive at post three of the total six reporting points. I am over halfway and feel hungry. I do notice that the problem I am used to with my stomach – lying still – has reappeared. My stomach feels tense and sensitive. Not eating anything at all is unwise, I still have a lot of kilometers and hours ahead of me. At the same time, I know that nausea is now lurking again. I take a boiled egg and some fresh pieces of watermelon and pineapple. I also drink some cola mixed with water. In good spirits I walk through the villages on the edge of Lake Batur. The lake lies in the middle of the 'ring of fire' of volcanic terrain. This fertile agricultural area, where leeks, strawberries and cauliflower are grown, is rightly called the vegetable garden of Bali. The water comes from the mountains and from hot springs. The trail now passes through villages with schools, past temples and fields of crops. I approach the foot of Mount Batur. From here the route is characterized by gravel and sand, interspersed with large solidified lava chunks. I notice that my limited remaining energy now gives way to nausea. I look up and in the distance I see some huts that seem to be stuck to the top of Batur. Between the huts and miles is an endless series of steep rock formations. My courage sinks into my shoulders. I know how hard and far it still is and already I can't go any further. I decide to rest regularly. But soon I have to throw up. It doesn't really help. Especially when there is nothing left in my stomach, while the vomiting continues. My whole body

contracts. The little energy I have left now becomes utilized to empty my stomach. I decide to do Jalan Meditation, walking meditation where you take steps of a few inches. It goes slowly, but forward and upward. My mantra becomes 'every step is one in the right direction'. I sometimes take more than an hour over one kilometer.

At the top of the crater there is a howling wind. I now have to run around a worn path on the crater rim. On both sides, again, there is an abyss. I walk in a stiff breeze, in the clouds, while gusts of warm sulphur vapour sweep against me. My cap blows off. I am all alone and certainly must not fall now. It is ominous. Who will find me if it goes wrong and when?

Then comes the descent to the care station. My nausea is far from over. I go down on autopilot. This is another steep and technically difficult descent. Sometimes I sit on my buttocks to let myself slide down in a controlled manner. It is often and laboriously scrambling over the black sharp lava rocks. I fall regularly, but fortunately without injuring myself. In the valley I see the post at Pura Pasar Agung. It takes a long time before I actually get there. It is too steep to pace myself. I am ushered in cheering and jubilating by the sweet and caring people from the organization and the medical team. They immediately reach out to me for a chair, and want to offer me food and drink. Apart from some water I refuse everything. The doctor of the medical team offers me drink to fight my nausea. I allow myself to be fed. After a rest of about 15 minutes, I resume the trek and then the most difficult phase of the race begins. I feel bad, I have no energy at all. In addition, I have been panting for many hours and my throat now feels like sandpaper. I can hardly talk anymore and the sun is about to set. The Batur consists of two craters. The first one I've got behind me. But the second one I now have to climb in the dark and descend again. I walk up again according to the Jalan Meditation concept. I really need to rest from time to time and let other runners go ahead of me. I don't care anymore.



I allow the thought of stopping. After all, I know that helps in getting more relaxation. But if I'm honest, giving up is not really an option for me.

But then Wytz, my wife, calls. She is worried because it is getting dark. The rider tracking system isn't working. So she has absolutely no idea where I am at the moment in the course. Because I can barely speak, she understands me poorly. I try to convince her not to worry and that I really will stop when it becomes irresponsible. What I don't know by then is that I can no longer get my headlamp to work. Unfortunately, here I am walking high on the volcano in the clouds so the light from the moon and stars does not reach me. I have to walk by touch. At some point that doesn't work anymore either. I decide to wait for the next runners with light. I meet Rabin, a Javanese tax expert from Jakarta, to whom I ask if I can walk with him because my light doesn't work. He is kind enough to let me benefit from his light beam. I am stubborn and a faster runner than Rabin. In no time I have lost sight of Rabin and sink into the dark lava gravel. I really have no idea which direction to go. Fortunately, Rabin has remained loyal to me and seeks me out so that I can continue the trek in the glow of his lamp.

## The finish line

The moment we reached the second summit of Mount Batur, I feel an intense relief. I know that it is now a matter of perseverance. We must succeed in reaching the finish line within the cut-off limit. We walk down the solidified black lava flows to the edge of the lake. I am too tired to feel blissful. I do feel a surge of excitement at the sight of light from Kintamani. Yes, now I know I'm really going to make it and that gives me the last bit of



needed energy. The last two kilometers I manage to increase the pace considerably. With a triumphant jump I break through the finish line. I accept the medal, the questions the speaker asks me pass me by completely. The only thing that sticks in my mind is the reunion with my worried Wytz, whom I welcome with a kiss. I can hardly utter a word. I am constantly panting and my voice is as good as gone. I take off my blackened and worn shoes and socks and leave them behind. I thank my running friends, especially the runners who stood by me in the final stages and who pulled me through. I happily find a shower and get into the car freshly washed by the driver. With one stop to vomit I reach the hotel where I will spend the last days of my adventurous Bali vacation. I use this period mainly to recover. Except for a sore throat, which makes it impossible to swallow, and some blue toenails, I have no other complaints. I have, for example, no muscle pain at all. I particularly enjoyed the first half of the run, when I still managed to cope physically. My condition moved along with the transition from green rolling surroundings to the black ominous volcanic landscape. I sincerely missed my regular running friends. The mutual pleasure, the relativizing humor and the certainty of their closeness was not there now and that made everything a lot heavier. And lonelier, in a way. This run was tough and rugged. My preparation was not optimal and the conditions, such as the altitude, the technically complex course, the humidity and the sweltering heat made it extra tough. However, the organization had promised me an epic adventure and no word was a lie. Almost half of the 84 runners did not make it to the finish. I, an almost sixty-year-old and by far the oldest participant in this international ultra runner field, finished 34th. So I'm in the left-hand column. Now that my energy is back and the beautiful official photos from the organization are trickling in, I slowly feel a sense of satisfaction. And maybe that will turn into pride in due course. I am incredibly grateful to everyone in the organization, my new running friends and my loyal supporters.

My Bali will never be the same after this hard and intense running adventure.

More information see: [Baliultratrail.com](https://Baliultratrail.com)





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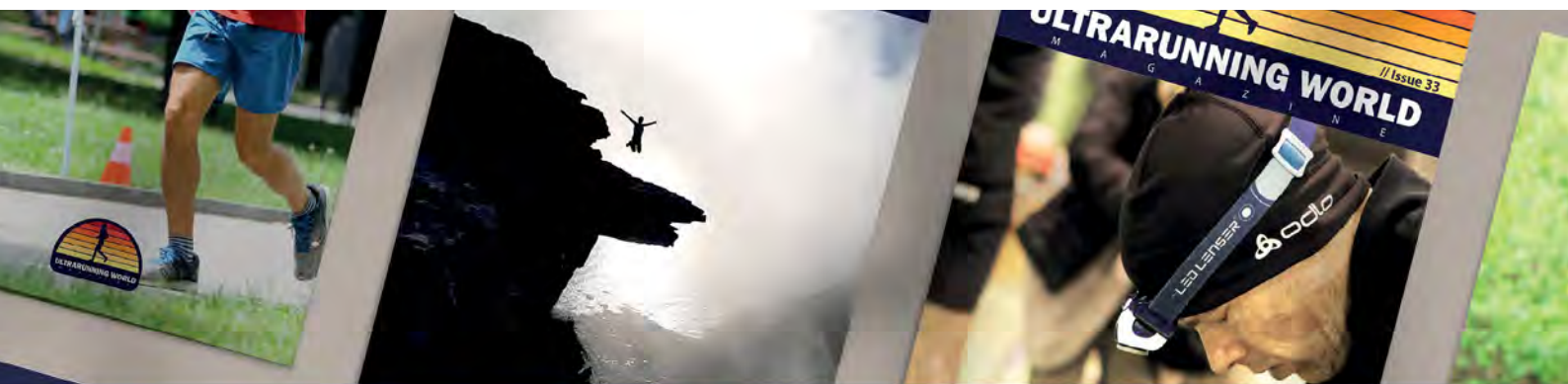
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# BADWATER 135

## THE RACE OF MY LIFE.

By Laura Watts

*Badwater 135 Race Day! It was like Christmas Day! I couldn't believe it was finally here. I was on the 8pm start.*



I was so excited by now and the hotel car park was full of crew vehicles all adorned with runners' names, numbers, flags, sponsors and 'Caution. Runners on road' signs. It was all getting very real. We went to the General Store for our first of many ice purchases and loaded up the coolers with ice ready for the first part of the race. We saw Bob Becker and his crew stocking up on ice too and said hello. Bob is the most inspirational man in ultra running. He is the race director of the Keys 100 that I ran on 21 May this year and at 77 years young he was going for his fifth Badwater finish and aiming to be the oldest person to finish Badwater. Bob is simply the nicest guy! Team Laura Watts are his number 1 fans!

It was about a 25 minute drive down to the start line. The sun was just starting to touch the mountains and the light was starting to fade. The temperature however was not going down! Badwater Basin, which is the lowest point in the United States at 282 ft below sea level, is a very hot place with minimal humidity sitting on dried up and cracked salt flats. On the way down we had songs including AC/DC's 'Highway to Hell', Tramps' 'Disco Inferno', 'Hot in Herre' by Nelly and 'The Heat is On' by Glenn Frey pumping out of the car stereo! I was feeling pumped! I had to be weighed by the chief medic.

8pm was here and I was now set-



ting off on the Badwater 135 start! The most iconic race of my running career. It was finally happening! It was so surreal. I started running and bizarrely I didn't feel hot! It was 45°C at Badwater Basin and yes it was warm, but I really, really wasn't hot. It was so bizarre. The first part of the race was so awesome.

My first focus was getting to Time Checkpoint 1 at Furnace Creek at 17 miles. I did this in three and a half hours. I still wasn't hot. I relayed this to Matthew who was delighted. That heat training was working! Next stop was Stovepipe Wells at mile 42. It was another 25 miles away. I broke this part down into four sections (as per the Zwitty Ultra Guide) 1: reaching the marathon mark. 2: until the big hill at mile 30. 3: until the bend to the left at mile 34.5 and 4: the final 10k into "the pipe" – and the miles flew by.

I was running on my own for most of this first part of the race and that was fine by me. My crew soon got into a great rhythm of changing my water bottles with either water or electrolytes, spraying me with water and putting a cold Mission cooling towel on my back and providing me with lip balm and whichever food and drinks I wanted. They aimed to stop every two miles and estimate that over the whole course of 135 miles they stopped 80 to 100 times.

For the first night I struggled to eat anything substantial due to feeling sick. Matthew was getting concerned that I wasn't eating enough calories to sustain myself for the whole race







without crashing and the rest of the team tried their best to help me to eat but I just couldn't. I had developed a horrid pain in my chest which was like indigestion but I couldn't clear it.

I was surprised at how slick my crew was from the beginning. The two crews would come across the road with the pressurised Hozelock water spray gun which was filled with ice-cold water and they would give me a complete spray down along with an ice-cold wet towel which went on my head or back and a bandana filled with ice. Water bottles were exchanged and off I went again.

I was initially worried (that's just me) that the crew wouldn't get on

together but I needn't have worried. Early on in the race none of them were out of the car at one point to greet me – I later found out they were too busy talking! This escalated to many private jokes amongst the support crew which I wasn't privy to! I was so happy that the support crew were getting on so well and having a great laugh together which I believe degenerated throughout the night to some quite unsavoury language but Team Laura Watts was a tight cohesive unit and this was just fantastic.

Mile 42: Stovepipe Wells is Time Checkpoint 2 and here I changed from my neon night colours to all white clothing to keep the sun off me. Jules applied my suntan lotion and she went over and above by applying my lip balm too (which she did continually along the course). The aim was to keep my clothes wet all the time – if you are dry, you die!

At mile 42, runners were allowed a pacer so Darin adorned the pacer's bib and started the 17-mile climb up to Towne Pass with me. This was where the walkie talkie came into play! As there is no mobile phone reception for the first 90 miles of the course, the walkie talkies were absolutely brilliant for the pacer to radio ahead to the Flying Lady with my demands for the next stop. We had Cobra ACXT645 Walkie Talkies and they were great!

After about six miles Darin switched with Scott and this was the start of a huge section for Scott in the hardest and hottest part of the course.

Another rule of the Badwater 135 is that you have to pass the 2,000' sign, which is at 50.8 miles, by 10am on Tuesday morning no matter what time you started the race. I reached this point at 8am and was delighted to have two hours in the bag as after this point the cuts off were a lot more achievable! I actually couldn't believe how well my race had started and I was feeling really good! As we had climbed to 4,000' the temperature had cooled down a little and the crew's cooling technique was so efficient I still wasn't too hot.

Now it was the 9-mile descent into the Panamint Valley, also named by us the 'Valley of Death'. Scott and I ran most of this section and the views are spectacular. As we descended into the valley the temperature started to get hotter and hotter and when we reached the valley floor the car thermometer read 51°C. This is where we all boiled alive.



The heat combined with the strong sun and the wind made it like being in a furnace. It was oppressive. I have never known heat like it, let alone being part way through running an ultra marathon in such heat. As we crossed the valley Scott carried the Hozelock water sprayer and literally sprayed me continually the whole way across the lake bed. This crossing took approximately four hours from Towne Pass to Panamint Springs and Scott was incredible keeping me as cool as possible despite himself being absolutely cooked. After the race I found out how heavy the water sprayer was and his arm was really aching (it weighed 2kgs when full!). This was a brutal part of the course. It also seemed to go on and on and on. We could see the Panamint Springs Resort mile 72 in the distance but it just never came!

Finally we checked in Time Checkpoint 4 at Panamint Springs and I needed to break from the blistering heat.

Next section – the Father Crowley Climb - mile 72 to 80. This is also the hardest section of the course. It was absurdly hot. Scott and I started power hiking up the climb but after about two miles I overheated and felt terrible. I got into the 'Flying Lady' for the first time and

sat for ten minutes in the air conditioning. Bliss. I tried to sleep and think I managed five minutes. We then decided to walk a lot more slowly up the climb, which was a lot better. Scott stayed with me for a couple more miles then his shift was done. As we were approaching the second night all the crew were feeling the sleep deprivation and this is where they all took turns at trying to have a power nap.

Going back to my eating... After the first night of not being able to eat much Jules suggested trying a Hawaiian roll which is a sweet bread roll. I managed to eat these and then she suggested adding a piece of cheese in it; I absolutely love cheese but have never eaten cheese in an ultra but OMG these little cheese rolls were divine and I was able to eat them quite easily! My electrolytes started to deplete quite quickly so Jules and Darin suggested I try theirs which is called 'Skratch'. This was another success. The Skratch drink was very inert and didn't have much taste and I was able to stomach this too.

The next section is quite a long one until Time Checkpoint 5 at Darwin, mile 90.6 with another 1,000' of climb. I ran/hiked this section on my own and saw the crew every 1-2 miles. Our support car was getting a lot of attention from other

crews and people told us that it was the envy of the other crews.

As the sun had gone and I was at 5,000' the temperature was now bearable again which was such a pleasure. I was now starting to feel really tired and as I ran along I started hallucinating – I thought rocks were moving and there were snakes on the road. I was really feeling the sleep deprivation. I asked the crew if I could try and have 20 minutes' sleep, so they deployed our fold-up sun lounger we had brought over from B&Q on the side of the road and gave me a towel for a pillow and I laid down on the side of the road. This was bliss, however I couldn't sleep so I got up and had a handful of chocolate-covered espresso beans and set off again.

I went through 100 miles in 29 and a half hours which bizarrely was exactly the same time that I ran the Keys 100 race in 6 weeks ago which was completely flat.

My memory is a bit of a blur now, I passed Keeler with a population of 50. The sun was starting to come up over my right hand side and I was bracing myself for the next savage furnace from the desert sun part two.

Some of the sections were very, very long straight roads and all





you could see was mile upon mile of flashing hazard lights of the crew support vehicles and runners' head torches. At some points I was literally alone in the desert. Other times the same support vehicles leapfrogged me and the same runners so it was always nice to share some conversations with them.

Once it was light Matthew joined me for a pacing section and it was lovely sharing some miles together. It was nice for him as he had been in the car for 33 hours crewing me and he kept calling me a hero which made me cry.

Matthew was with me for about five miles then Jules took over for a few miles too until just before Lone Pine, mile 122! I was getting there!! I could see the silhouette of the majestic Mount Whitney in front of me. I wasn't particularly looking forward to the last 13 miles and knew it was going to be a big slog up that mountain.

I turned right onto Highway 395, the main road into Lone Pine and my team were all out of the car clapping and cheering as well as some other people supporting the race. I was on a mission to finish and wanted to get this done.

Mile 122.8. Time Checkpoint 7. Here there was a big crowd of people all cheering and whooping me and again I was so emotional. I was getting this done. I ran up another block or two then turned left into Whitney Portal Road. This was it. I could see my route ahead up that mountain. The last mammoth climb of 4,750ft up to Mount Whitney Portal, the last 13 miles. I started power hiking up the first part of the climb and asked why no one had mentioned how hard this last climb was!

On and on it went, slowly counting down the miles, I was getting hotter and hotter and the crew kept stopping to tend to me and

take photos. I was on my way to victory. Mile 131, where there is the last climbing checkpoint (8), was at the start of a series of switchbacks very steep in gradient – this was never-ending. My legs were burning from the miles I had put on them and my body was burning from the intense heat.

I was now seriously crying. This was such a magical experience and I was feeling so proud although wishing it was over.

Finally I was nearly there – my crew had parked at the finish and come a few hundred yards down the course to bring me home. They had the Union Jack that Darin and Jules were holding behind me and we had a team run to the finish line in a V-for-victory formation. I stood on top of the finish line and through the Badwater banner to be greeted by a rapturous reception of cheering, cowbells and clapping. I felt like an ultra running rock star! I had done it! I was a finisher of the world's toughest footrace. It was emotional stuff. I turned round and hugged Matthew and then the rest of my wonderful team. Chris presented me with my finisher's buckle and three finisher's t-shirts (two from the two races I couldn't get to in 2020 and 2021) and we had some team photos. Then I felt really sick and vomited by a tree before we went to the Whitney Portal store for some champagne for me and beers for the crew.

We got back to the hotel and had a little sleep before dragging ourselves out of bed for the traditional Pizza Party Wednesday evening. Chris read out all the finishers' names and invited us all to the front of the room with everyone getting a great round of applause as we took our places. This was such a special thing to do. After this it was down to Jake's Saloon for a drink before we crashed out in bed for a power sleep.

Some race stats: I was the 11th fe-

male to ever finish Badwater 135 from the UK and fewer than 1,000 people have ever finished Badwater; more people have climbed Mount Everest! There were 94 starters on the start line 2022 and 78 people finished, I was 54th overall and 20th female.

I have left a piece of my heart in Death Valley and yes... I will be back!

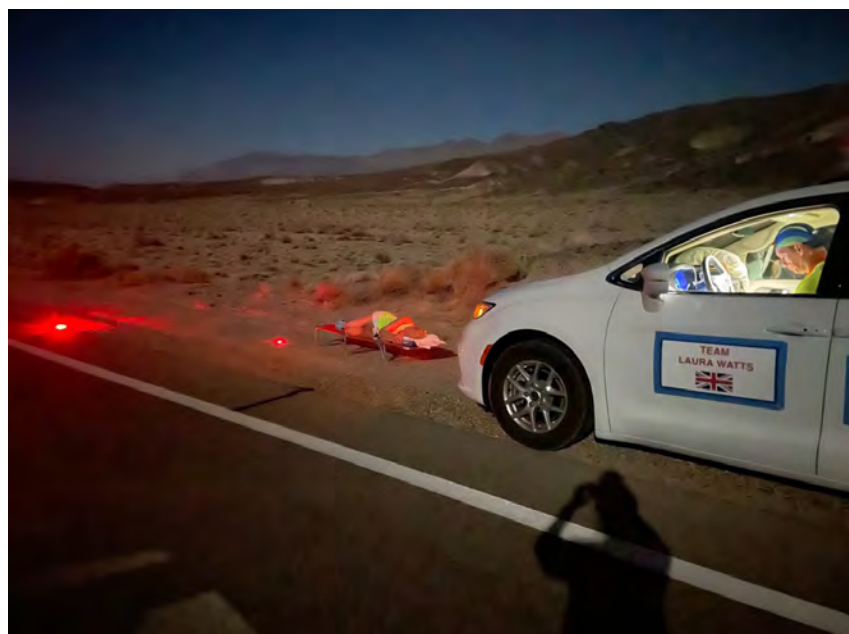
With special thanks to:

Chief Adventure Officer and Badwater Race Director Chris Kostman for hosting Badwater and allowing us to achieve life-changing things and for believing me in the first place and giving me a coveted place in the worlds toughest ultra marathon.

My support team – Matthew, Scott, Darin and Jules – the A Team.

My sponsors Mission Cooling and Nathan Sports Inc for providing me and the team with all the gear to help us on this journey.

And to my husband Matthew @matthewwattswindsurfer who has selflessly supported and crewed me on my journey to be the best runner I can be and has lived my Badwater dream for the last two years and is my Number 1 fan.







# The Bristol Running Show

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# YORKSHIRE WOLDS ULTRA

By Grant Smalley

**“If you want to really appreciate the Wolds, this is the way.”**

**T**hose are the words Mel, co-founder of Ultra Trails, said when we did a final recce of the course before publishing our brand new Ultra Trails event, the Yorkshire Wolds Ultra: a 50 km circular route starting and ending in the centre of Pocklington.

It is something we are really excited about. We’ve designed it ourselves and it goes through some of our favourite places to train. We never get bored by how incredibly beautiful the Wolds are. Unspoilt, remote and an opportunity to escape it all. You can go hours without seeing the outside world, except the occasional walker.

You can easily misunderstand the Wolds because most of the valleys, unique curvature and ruggedness is hidden from view whilst travelling through the area by road. It does feel like the best-kept secret, except for people local to the area.

The great thing about the course we’ve created is that it follows mostly trails that are less trodden and away from the national trails. Our favourite part is what we’ve called the “hidden valley”, where the entrance is tucked away in the corner of Bishop Wilton. It will probably come as a surprise even for those who run in the Wolds. And then there’s the wild grass meadows that lead you to Thixendale. In summer, you’ll be able to run through long grass awash with butterflies, accompanied with a backdrop of grasshoppers for acoustics.

You’ll visit picturesque villages, including our favourite, Kirby Underdale. It has a gorgeous churchyard

that you go through, followed by grassy fields that wind through the bottom of the valley. And then, you’ve got a large climb up a valley. That climb gives you absolute clarity that the Wolds are undulating. In all, the 50 km course is packed with 3,700 feet of ascent.

There’s plenty of variety, a perfect event if you are looking for something to complement your running diary. If you are a beginner or back-of-the-pack runner, we’ve made the cut-off extra generous with a 12-hour cut-off to complete it. We did that so that you don’t have the pressure of time on the day. Instead, you can just enjoy it and lose yourself in nature. We really think it is the perfect ultra. Something you’ll always remember.

## Who are Ultra Trails I hear you say?

Well, we are new to the world of ultra marathon events and we held our very first event earlier in the year. The new event makes it three ultras in our annual calendar to date. A spring, summer and autumn ultra; perfect.

At Ultra Trails we want to open up our events to as many people as possible. We want to strike the right balance and encourage everyone in equal measure. For example, all our checkpoint food and drink is vegan friendly and gluten free. We also want to actively encourage women and we have committed to follow [SheRACES](#) guidelines.

It is also important to us that our events support the local community. That’s why all our t-shirts, medals and trophies are locally made. We also make a donation per entry to support local charities.

We would love for you to join us. For more information please visit [www.ultratrails.co.uk](http://www.ultratrails.co.uk).



# ENDURANCELIFE

*Northumberland Coastal Ultra - Saturday 26 February 2022*

*By Sarah Booth*

**Wow!** The coast of Northumberland is beautiful! Having never been to this area before I was really looking forward to running the Endurancelife Northumberland coastal ultra, although I was a little worried about the lack of hills! I'm normally found running in the Peak District with lots and lots of elevation.

Thankfully, storms Eunice and Franklin from the weekend before had made way for beautiful clear blue skies for us to enjoy the views on race day.

A coach transfer from Bamburgh castle, where the race would finish in 36 miles' time, took us to Alnwick with the race start being set in the shadow of Alnwick Castle. The route initially made its way along roads, trails and also through some mud which I took a little unplanned sit down in!

Our first glimpse of the sea was at Alnmouth. We ran along the coast from here all the way to Craster where we could see Dunstanburgh Castle in the distance. Being used to running in the hills, that castle felt a long way away and just did not get any closer! Armed with my jam butties, salted pretzels and malt loaf, my choice of fuel for every race, we eventually passed Dunstanburgh Castle and continued up the coast to Beadnell.

After passing through Beadnell we hit the sand for some tough beach running and still no hills. If I'm honest, running along the beach was the worst bit for me; long flat stretches of getting nowhere fast. Mentally, those sections were hard. I'm fortunate enough to do these long-distance ultras with my running buddies though so if it gets tough we help each other through it, sometimes singing terribly to take our minds off it. We are usually the chatty bunch taking photos and having a good time.



After a couple of miles and many photos the beach took us all the way to Seahouses, which looks like a lovely place to visit, and gave us some respite from the sand. Although this meant we were off the beach for a short while it also meant some tarmac running, my other nemesis!

Following Seahouses we made our way towards Bamburgh along more beach. This is where I decided to trip over a rock and 'superman' to my knees in the sand; turns out sand is a soft landing! Then at 27 miles we got to endure the ultimate torture of the marathoners or the very fast ultra runners leaving the beach to head to the finish line. We however still had the small matter of another nine miles to run! These nine miles took the form of a lap around the roads and fields of Bamburgh.

By mile 28 the temperature was starting to drop, reminding us that despite the glorious sunshine we were still in late winter! We put on our coats and continued moving to the next checkpoint. The next checkpoint came at 30 miles and Bamburgh Castle still seemed like a very long way away. The Coca Cola I had here was the best tasting drink I've ever had and fuelled me with the carbs I needed to get to the finish. Obviously the gin that I enjoyed after finishing tasted even better!

When we hit the beach for the final time at 34 miles, the sand somehow didn't feel as bad, although we were run-walking at this point.

We had just over half a mile to go when we turned off the beach, there was a bit of wiggling through the sand dunes and before we knew it we could see the finish line. Crossing that finish line at 36 miles hand in hand with my friends just felt amazing.

Would I recommend this ultra - absolutely and I would also highly recommend EnduranceLife events; the communication, the course markings, the checkpoints and marshals were all fantastic.

Oh and would I recommend a visit to Northumberland - definitely.





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Let me introduce myself, I'm Tracy Waite, a personal trainer based in Cornwall. I specialise in fitness and wellness, feeling well through movement. I believe that by using our bodies well, we can truly feel happier.

During the waite escapes I will be focusing a lot on self-care and wellness. Life gets so busy, stress often takes over. We become so absorbed with what life throws at us that we often forget who we are. Let's use this time together to explore who we are again, to practice scheduled 'us times'. At the end of the day, if we cannot recharge and find strength in what's around and inside us, then how can we possibly pass this on to those close to us?

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# THE LISA WATSON INTERVIEW PART 2



*Why We Run* photographer Danielle Ledbury spoke with women's winner Lisa Watson after this year's 2022 SILVA Northern Traverse.

**DL.** Which things did you prepare for the Northern Traverse leading up to the race?

**LW.** After lockdown it was like relearning all of my kit, I did get a couple of new bits of kit that I had to practise with. A slightly bigger bag, I would need to carry a little bit more than I would have done on a normal stage race. So the kit requirements are basically the same, but for being overnight and being very tired, you're going to get a bit colder, wanting to carry more food. Especially when you might be moving slower and out for a bit longer. There's a 70k section, which I know is about the same distance as some of the days on Dragon's Back, but it was overnight for me and I'm relatively slow. I did actually end up wearing pretty much all the layers that I had in my bags, I was glad I had everything and having a bit more ease of access to everything. I approached it roughly in the same way, I tried to focus a little bit more on doing a few longer distance runs to get more comfortable. I'd found before that I'd got to 70k and found 70k reasonably comfortable. Anything beyond that was pretty hard. I always find that with the longest distance that you've run. You can't think about the 300 kilometre stint, you don't think of it like that. You think about it as the gap between sections, and then you hope that you can convince your body that you're starting again at each checkpoint. I put

into my watch how far it was to the next checkpoint rather than how far it was at the end. It's about tricking your body and your brain into not thinking about the whole thing in one go. I did find the Northern Traverse a lot harder to think about and harder to prepare for but it's nice having come out the other side, and it went so well. I've learned a lot about sleep and I've learned a lot about the mentality of a continuous race without having gone completely wrong. Often you learn more when it goes totally wrong. It was helpful to have that kind of learning about how a continuous race feels while it's still going really well.

**DL.** What do you feel that you have learnt from it?

**LW.** Mostly about sleep. I know that I can cope with two hours of sleep in 53 hours. I could probably have gotten away with sleeping a little bit earlier. I could have made it with that time back again, if it was a short nap. I might have enjoyed some of that middle section a little bit more. I'm really pleased to come away from that race, having mostly enjoyed it. There were sections where I just wanted to go to sleep, a real mental effort to keep running and to keep moving quickly and enjoying the scenery in the surroundings. The section from Reeth to Richmond, I felt like a zombie, all I wanted to do was go to sleep. I could have ran more of that. It's quite a runnable section. It's good to know that I can run after two hours of sleep, I could get to sleep really easily. I slept two hours really well. If I had slept before, maybe that wouldn't have been the case, but I woke up after two hours feeling okay and then that lasted for some length of time.

The second night was actually all right because the weather was quite bad, there was no option for trail



## Interview

naps. If there had been an option, maybe I would have taken it but it was too cold to lay down at the side of the trail. The same at the Lion Inn. I was thinking about sleeping there, 45k before the end. Again, it was cold and windy and not particularly pleasant at the checkpoint. I just thought it's better to get on with it then if I needed to, lie down on the grass somewhere. By that point, it wasn't that far to the end and the motivation of not being that far from the end kicked in and I was able just to push through it and pretend I wasn't tired.

### ***DL. It's all about tricking your body and your mind.***

LW. Reading some of the other race reports of people and what they did in terms of sleep, some people went through without any sleep whatsoever. I don't think I could have managed it. I could have got out of Richmond without sleep. That felt like two hours, the absolute minimum for me. I've not tried what less feels like and would I have been able to move faster for longer if I'd have slept for three hours there? I didn't hallucinate, I just struggled with the mental aspects and being able to enjoy myself in the moment. I always run better when I'm enjoying myself. When you can't convince yourself you're enjoying yourself, it's quite hard to move quickly.

### ***DL. That makes a lot of sense.***

### ***So did you go into the race with the course record in mind?***

LW. No, not at all, I wasn't 100% sure what it was, I thought it might have been 63 hours. Towards the end when I was thinking maybe I could do 53 hours. Oh, that'd be cool and that thought did spur me on, 10 hours less than 63 hours is pretty cool. I really went into it, wanting to know what a continuous race was like, I had no idea what was gonna happen. I had no idea if I was just gonna completely fall apart and need to sleep for eight hours at some point during the race. I'm not someone who skips sleep or stays up late and gets up early and functions like a normal person in a normal life. I need eight hours to function like a normal human. Otherwise, I'm quite grumpy. I thought I had a schedule in mind of 60 hours that I had written out but I really went into it not knowing if that was completely achievable, completely unachievable, completely ridiculous. I just wanted to see what I could do.

### ***DL. It sounds like it's a great challenge when you don't really know what to expect.***

LW. When a realistic challenge includes a chance of failure. I was quite nervous in the months leading up to it, not knowing how to prepare because I'm normally quite methodical. However, going into it and not knowing meant I wasn't nervous the day before, night or the morning before because I was figuring the first bit, it's just normal running, and I will keep running then it'll be night time and I'll just keep running, see what happens. I don't know what I'm nervous of because I don't know what's gonna happen so it

wasn't a tangible thing to be scared of.

### ***DL. So would you say that the race went according to plan?***

LW. Much better than the plan, it went pretty well. I couldn't have asked for anything more than that, only if I was slightly less grumpy in some sections. You can't expect to enjoy yourself for a full 60-hour period, there's always going to be highs and lows. The lows were lower than I've had in other races, lows from being tired, was what I expected would happen, but I hadn't really experienced that so much before. Having to dig deep to convince myself to carry on was hard, being too sleep deprived to think, the brain plays tricks on you.

### ***DL. Would you say that increases the level of challenge for you?***



LW. Totally, being sleep deprived, I think was definitely the challenge. Just convincing yourself not to lie down in a field and to keep running was hard, definitely one of the hardest parts. Presumably everybody experiences that. If they're gonna restrict sleep, I guess everybody goes through that at some level.

### ***DL. How did you handle those situations? How did you convince yourself to keep running?***

LW. Just by breaking it down, I'm just gonna get to the edge of this field, I'm just gonna get to this next checkpoint, or this next road, or this next village, then I'm going to have something to eat. Reminding yourself, what's actually the problem? Sometimes, you're not motivating yourself to run, so what hurts, does anything hurt? Do you need to eat? Do you need

to take something? Have a drink? Making sure that there's nothing actually wrong, and then it's a case of just get on with it. There's nothing wrong with you, you're fine. You need to get there faster, then you can sit down and you can have something to eat. It's only this far to this bit, breaking it down into small chunks, and knowing that you can manage that small chunk. You always have more in the tank than you think you do, it's just knowing that and not making any rash decisions, like don't get to a checkpoint and decide that you're going to drop out, that's not how it's gonna go. Your brains like, Oh, yeah, you've done this far. That's great. You will be really happy with this. It's no, you're gonna get there, you're gonna have something to eat, you're gonna have a sleep and then see how you feel and usually, you're fine.

**DL. So how did you keep yourself awake?**



LW. I wasn't really falling asleep on my feet although I could have sat down and fallen asleep. It was about not giving myself the opportunity to do that. I did do a little bit of walking with my eyes closed in places where it seemed appropriate. The second night was when it would have been a real challenge but it wasn't, the weather was keeping me awake at that point. It was telling myself that it's going to be better. At Richmond it would have been easy to sit down on a bench on that nice sunny day and fall asleep for 20 minutes. The combined benefit of having had something to eat first, being able to take my shoes off and dry my feet out properly then sleep for a reasonable chunk of time was a big enough pull; that seemed worthwhile. One of the guys that was with me, he kept wanting to lie down as well and we were kind of convincing each other, No, it'll be better at Richmond and sleeping in a tent in a sleeping bag

will be better. I'd always planned to get to Richmond unless there had been a real significant reason why I should sleep before, sticking with the plan.

**DL. Why did you plan to not sleep until you got to Richmond? What was your thought process there?**

LW. I would have probably wanted to sleep at Shap because that was the night but there wasn't the opportunity to go there with no tent setup, I didn't have my drop bag and you weren't supposed to sleep in checkpoint buildings, you're only supposed to sleep in the tents they set up for you. I could have slept in a bus shelter or something, but it was also really cold. It was only just getting dark at Patterdale and that was a bit too early. I thought that it was pretty light by the time I got to Kirkby Stephen. In hindsight, I probably would have tried a half an hour nap at Kirkby Stephen but I didn't at the time. I was with a group of people who weren't going to do that either and it was nice to sit together. I said to myself, if I get to a checkpoint, and it's dark, and I can sleep there, then I will, but that didn't happen. Actually I thought it'd be dark at Richmond but it wasn't. It was the middle of the afternoon. It was about half four till half six that I slept. Getting up and it being daylight is easier and I didn't have any trouble falling asleep. I think some of the other guys did but I was out like a light.

**DL. How important were the other people on the trail? You mentioned a little bit about bouncing off each other and supporting each other.**

LW. My brother-in-law, Pete, was doing the race, we hadn't planned to run together but we are quite similar and we figured that we probably would end up together at some point, we thought we'd see how it goes. We ended up running together from Patterdale until Lordstones Cafe which is just as you get into the North York Moors and that was really super nice. Then there was a couple of James's and a guy called Johan who were with us on and off.

**DL. How much did you sleep in total?**

LW. Two hours, that was the only sleep I had. I did sit down on one of the climbs on the North York Moors and close my eyes for five minutes, I didn't sleep but it was more of a break from the wind to be honest, there was a sheltered rock and I thought it'd be nice just sit down and close my eyes for a few minutes. I set a little alarm on my phone and had a micro rest. It was more of a getting out of the weather for a minute and regrouping, having something to eat and having a little bit of closed-eye time. I lay down on a bench at the Lion Inn for five minutes as well when I realised that it wasn't going to be, as I wasn't really organised enough at the Lion Inn. A sleep-addled brain couldn't quite be slick enough to think it was worthwhile getting everything out of my bag, getting everything into a tent, and getting everything back in again. I did spend quite a long time at the Lion Inn, I was just being really faffy, I lay down on a bench for five minutes and had a cup of coffee and then



thought: Right let's get on with it, two hours, at the end I felt alright.

The adrenaline of coming into Robin Hood's Bay, the tiredness just lifted, it was really weird. I'd been feeling pretty zombie-like for a little while and then it's 10 – 20k before the end, I stopped feeling tired and was able to run. It was really weird. I think the boost of knowing you were so close, and you're gonna have to stop soon, made it possible to push hard again. I ran reasonably quickly in that last section. Well not fast, fast, but more running than I had been doing.

### ***DL. Just that sudden boost of adrenaline!***

LW. Seeing the North Sea was really cool. When I'd reced that section it was windy and it wasn't windy in the race, it was actually a nice day. When we reced that section that comes back round into Robin Hood's Bay, we had this horrible headwind, and it was pissing it down with rain, we were completely soaked. Running along there in nice weather, it was just really good. You get that extra benefit of it if you've done it in bad weather. There are two ways, either you've done it in bad weather, and therefore it's nicer on the day, or you've done it in really nice weather and you like it, just think it's a really cool place.

### ***DL. Some parts you ran with people and some parts you ran alone, would you prefer running alone or with people?***

LW. I'm a pretty sociable person so I generally like running with people, but I think it has to work for when you're running together. I really valued being with Pete and James. Pete and I joined together at Patterdale and we had a really nice time running over Kidsty Pike. It was a beautiful evening. It was really clear skies. It was fantastic to share that. We had a really good chat all the way along there then joining it with James and James near Kirkby Stephen, when we all started to feel a bit tired, that was clubbing together and getting through those harder sections. We had a good pitstop at Reeth together. At Richmond, it was a bit harder, people go and do their own thing in terms of sleep. I was really pleased to wake up in time to catch Pete leaving, so I could catch up with him. We ran that section again with another guy called Johan and he joined us for that. The Vale of York sections are dull and I thought it was nicer to be with people to get through that section together. By the time we're entering the North York Moors I wasn't really keeping up with them and it was a bit stressful. I was more fatty, every time I got something out of my bag or went to the loo I was finding it quite hard to keep up with them. I didn't want to slow them down. So it was better for me to then let them go ahead and say, Oh, I'll catch you up if I can but if I don't, then don't wait. By that point, it was more effort to make conversation and it was just to be within your own company. We're all ready to be separated. I think Pete and Johan stayed together till the end. I saw people but I didn't run with anybody for any length of time again after that. I think someone caught me just before the Lion Inn and I

saw them again a little bit later. I'm quite happy in my own company for reasonable sections. I enjoy the camaraderie of these races and it's interesting to see who you see but towards the end it massively spreads out.

### ***DL. What was your nutrition strategy? Did you have one? What did you use?***

LW. I eat a lot of normal food like sandwiches, pasties, pizza, bars, I had a few gels. I don't like to eat loads of gels or sweets but towards the end it was mostly just chocolate that I was eating to be honest. It depends on what you can stomach or can be bothered to eat towards the end of these things. I had a big selection of stuff depending on the circumstances, I put more in my bag than I was going to need just so I had a bit more choice on the go.

In terms of a strategy, I tend to try and eat something at least every hour, probably more like every 45 minutes or if I feel like I can eat, I get as much in as possible because there might be a section where you don't feel like you can eat. Trying to get as much in and just stave off bonking because it's hard to come back when you let it go wrong. You need to be on top of it and make sure that you're constantly trying to get food in. I made up little bags of food for each section and I tried to figure out which sections were going to be overnight and then put more easy to digest food into the overnight sections. I thought that might be better so I had a few more gels for overnight and I had some Mountain Fuel powder to put in the water. So even if I wasn't eating I was getting some calories from drinking. I know I can always eat chocolate which is easy to eat and stuff that I tend to fancy even when I don't feel like it.

### ***DL. Comparing the Traverse to the Dragon's Back, how would you compare the two?***

LW. If the Dragon's back was a continuous race, the Dragon's Back would be harder because the terrain and the ascent is harder. If you get used to continuous races then the stage races become a different challenge because you've got to be doing it for so much longer. This I ran in 53 hours but that's only three days so the time spent at the event is less but then you're completely empty. It was way harder for me. I found it much harder dealing with the kind of continuous mess, sleep deprivation and making all those decisions. The Dragon's Back is hard for different reasons. Would be interesting, a continuous Dragon's Back. I don't know if I want to do it!

The Northern Traverse for some people, the cut offs is such that you could run it, that way you could sleep at all the checkpoints if you wanted to and do it in five sections. You've got to finish by Wednesday night, it gives you five days so you could do it.

### ***DL. What would you say were your highs and your low moments on the Northern Traverse?***

LW. I absolutely loved the first 100k, all of that was just

ace particularly as there was a golden hour as I came up to Grisedale Tarn; it was really pretty and then the first bit of the going up over Kidsty Pike with the stars and it was one of those beautiful cool, crisp clear evenings. The people that I met and ran with in the first section, I had a good chat with and I did enjoy the Dales contrary to what the people I was running with thought. I don't run in the Dales very often, but running down off Nine Standards Rigg I enjoyed that descent; a lot of people slammed it as being horrible and boggy but I like that sort of thing. I found the Dales hard work because I felt sleepy. I love running downhill so the descent through the smelting mines is really cool into Reeth. Low moments are after Reeth, like Reeth to Richmond, I needed to get to Richmond now, focused on the end. I had a couple of friends pop up on route that was really nice and they both popped up when I was feeling particularly crap. So that was really nice to see them, you know. My friend Lauren Davis popped up just after Reeth and another friend popped up in the North York Moors, on Monday morning which was also super nice.

A low moment was getting to the A19 having thought about that garage and thinking: Oh I'm gonna get coffee and we're gonna sit down in there and it's gonna be nice to have, like, a little mini break. Then not letting us in because it's night-time service only and just serving us coffee through the hatch, while telling us that we shouldn't be out running at this time of day and in this weather. In hindsight, it is another blessing in disguise, it might have been hard to get up again, had we sat down there, but having just a cup of coffee sat in the forecourt wasn't super inspiring to sit there for a long time. We just got on with it.

#### **DL. Looking forward to something like that for so long.**

LW. The doors don't open, you're like, Nooo.... So yeah it was a low moment at the time but in retrospect, it wasn't that big a deal. We just got what we needed and carried on. If you weren't expecting that, maybe that would be unpleasant.

A nice, soft bog just before the end, which I quite enjoyed running. My feet were quite sore. I did get some bad blisters, which I'm not used to. You just have to put up with it. The softness and the coolness of the soft bog water was quite nice, it made it easier to run. Then getting that motivation to run, oh, it's only 15k. I think I can do it in under 53 hours now. I hadn't really set myself a time but I knew I was ahead of my 60 hours. To motivate myself to run and get on with the last bit and not just trudge it in. I looked at my watch to calculate and thought that might be possible. Let's aim for it. Now let's use that as motivation to get there at this point. So that really motivated me to run that last section. The motivation and the adrenaline of knowing I was near the end stopped most things from hurting. It wasn't running fast, it was running and it was making progress to hit that target. I did a sprint down the hill to Robin Hood's Bay, Lord knows how I did that? Honestly, I could barely walk afterwards, but it didn't hurt at the time, I just did it. It was really weird.

#### **DL. How did it feel getting to that finish?**

LW. Earlier in the day I was feeling quite emotional, being tired and coming out of the Lion Inn, I actually texted my sister-in-law who had been around on the course, supporting me and Pete, and my husband who was coming up. I told her not to find me on the course because I thought I might just be a mess if I saw them. I said, don't come find me because I will probably just cry and try and get in your car or something. So I was expecting to be quite emotional at the end. But no, I was really happy, I felt fine. I was just psyched to be at the end and I was obviously happy that it was over. I'm not a very emotional, cry-happy person. I was just happy to be there. It was ace, it was super exciting running down. I really love running down hills, I really loved sprinting down the hill. I was really psyched that things didn't hurt anymore and I wasn't about to fall asleep on my feet. It was really cool to see people at the end. I know quite a lot of people who were marshaling so it's always nice to see the people that you know at the end. And yes, low key, low stress.

#### **DL. That sounds really nice. Was this the first course record you've got?**

LW. Yes, is the short answer. It's run twice before and I think it'd been a bigger field this year than it has been previously.

#### **DL. It's pretty amazing. What would you say that you learned most? About yourself?**

LW. That I can cope without sleep, mostly, and that you can push through that. I'd say that I've still got learning to do about what you can and can't be, like ways to cope with the more mental struggles of pushing through sleep, but I guess having done it before will be a massive thing for if I do it again.

#### **DL. What drives you to want to do these?**

LW. It's a pretty boring standard answer, but I just like running and pushing myself and seeing what I can do. I really genuinely enjoy most of it. So it's not all sadistic and seeing how much suffering you can put up with. It's nice to push the body and see where the edges are, to do stuff where there's a genuine risk that you might not be able to do it to find the limits of what you can push yourself to do.

#### **DL. That's a great answer. Is there anything that you would do differently if you were to run the race again?**

LW. I'd experiment with doing sleep differently. I'd try to sleep a little bit earlier on because I was already feeling quite sleepy by the time I got to Kirkby Stephen. I spoke to lots of people about what they thought about missing a whole night's sleep versus doing smaller chunks. People said, you can cope with pushing through one whole night and just sleeping the second night. So that's why I went for that strategy. Plus the logistics of it, I probably would have



## Interview

tried to sleep a bit earlier, had there been a bit more of an opportunity, in that I didn't really want to sleep in the daytime and waste daylight hours, because everything's harder at night. I probably would like to try and sleep a little earlier for a little bit of time, and then have my bigger sleep later on. It would be interesting to know, I'd like to experiment with can you sleep more and make up the time? I don't think it would make me faster overall but in terms of enjoyment levels, I think it could be, I think you could maybe make it up?

### ***DL. What have you got plans for what might be next?***

LW. I'm doing the Dragon's Back again in September, with the new route, because the course has changed and now goes all the way into Cardiff. It just looks ace, I've actually recced that last bit. So that's really cool. I'm going to try and squeeze in a Bob Graham at some point. I've not done a round before, just a chill one with a friend. I'm gonna do it not super fast and with support. We're just going to go around together and see how that goes because it'd be interesting to see what that's like. I've recced most of it. I've been trying to fit one in for ages, but never quite managed it. I do want to do continuous races but I haven't quite committed to anything. I would quite like to try a 100-miler, maybe because it's that long distance, but without having to think about sleep. You can do it all in one go, that would be cool to see. I haven't done a 100-miler before, to tick that box. So just picking one and going for it really, that's my plan.

### ***DL. There are so many races that you can do now, I often find looking at the calendar and working out that my body can't do all of that in a year.***

LW. Exactly. Planning a few years ahead just seems a bit stressful. I like to have one or two things to aim at. I'm always very conscious of trying to fit too many things in. I don't want to end up completely wrecking my body with chronic fatigue or something. That does worry me knowing what you can do and what

you can push to. Loads of people seem to manage it but I know there's lots of other things in life that you need to do.

### ***DL. You seem to be really in tune and quite aware of your body and when you need to rest.***

LW. It's important if you want to get the best out of your body, you've got to look after it. I've got a busy job, and I've got friends who don't run and I've got all sorts of other things I need to do. It's quite selfish, always just focusing on running. I'm not saying that people are selfish when they want to do these things, but it is a personal pursuit. To have a balanced life you need to be able to fit everything in and I don't feel like I can only focus my life on running, I'd need to do some other stuff as well.

### ***DL. That's a great way of thinking about it. Aiming for a balanced life.***

LW. It's a hobby isn't it? So it's trying to be sensible.

### ***DL. You said loads of really interesting things.***

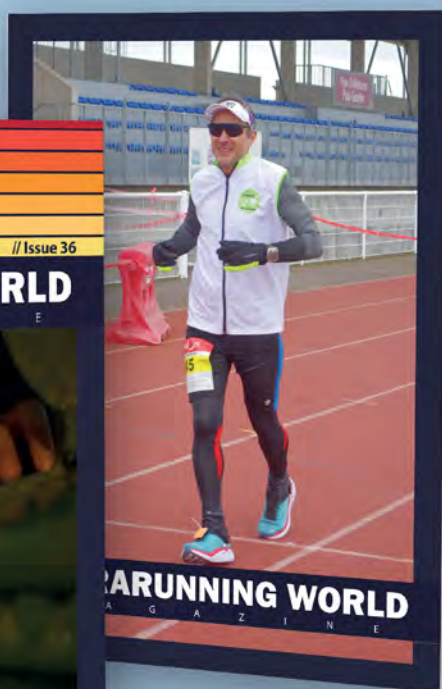
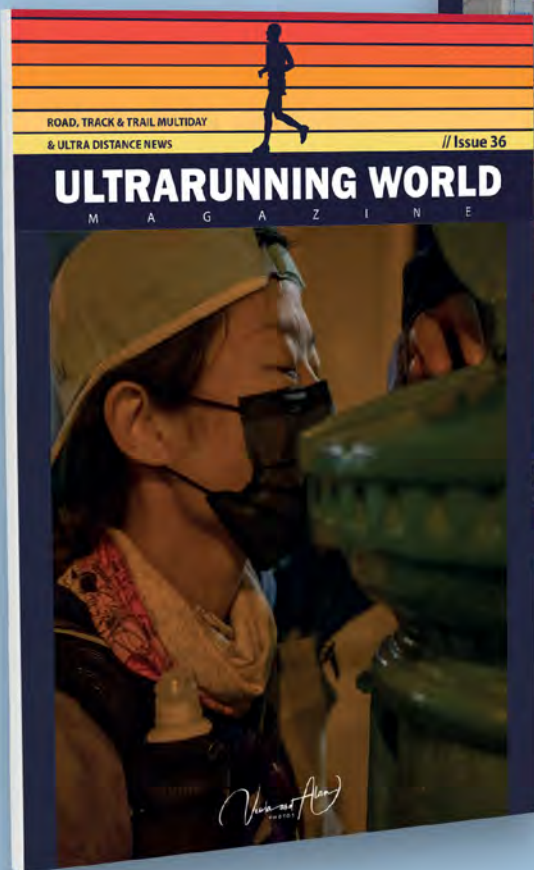
LW. Oh cool, It's always hard to know what people want to know about because for me it doesn't seem that interesting. I feel like my story is that I like running. So I go running, and then I get good at running because I go running.

### ***DL. It's great you're coming from that side of enjoyment, which is really the core of what we do.***

LW. The takeaway is, what I like doing is going out in the mountains with friends as much as I can and as much as possible, then I'm onto a winner. The events that are organised like the Dragon's Back and Northern Traverse, the way they are organised, it's so slick, they know what they're doing. It's great being part of those races because you know what you're going to expect and they're always organised excellently. Kudos to Ourea events and the volunteer team, who make it a really, really enjoyable experience.







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# ANGELUS TRAIL

By Sophie Bennett and Emma Morton



"Never try anything new on race day", so the old saying goes. I challenge that! Introduced by Ultrarunning's very own Sarah Cameron, Sophie and I were about to embark on an ultra together, having never met. We were both registered for the 80km option of the Angelus Trail. I was quite nervous about running so far with someone new – I was really worried I'd be slowing her down, and by the time she casually mentioned her participation in Dragon's Back this year, I'd convinced myself that we'd be running our own separate races and she'd be cheering my arrival hours after hers.

It's held at the end of May and starts in Rocamadour at 7am. It is called the Angelus Trail as the idea is to arrive at Cahors Cathedral before the Angelus bells ring at 19 hour that evening. The organiser is keen to point out that it's not a race - no timing chips or podiums. There are three distances in total along the same route - 50km and 18km. Just after the 50km start we caught up with participants who were hiking to Cahors.

But we are a breed of our own us trail runners, aren't we? Sophie and I hit it off straight away. We ran, chatted, giggled and trotted together the whole way along. I honestly don't know how I'd have got through those last scorching surprise extra kilometres without Sophie's support.

The start of the 80km takes place in the Sanctuaire of old Rocamadour. There are race bibs to collect, the number on your bib denotes which distance you are running. The offered coffee, croissants and chocolatines are very welcome at 6am. The priest of the Sanctuaire gave us a blessing before the 7am bells rang, to hear his words in such a setting is so moving, especially knowing the journey we ourselves were about to embark on.

The first 30 km are quite runnable and a lot flatter than what was to come, 2200 metres of positive climb along the 80km route. But the views are no less stunning, old chateaux rising out of forests, valleys with imposing cliffs and quaint olde worlde hamlets.

The atmosphere along the route is so joyful and fun. One group of supporters had brought along a cool box full of cherries to hand out to us runners. There are plenty of meeting places for accompanying supporters and these are communicated by the organisers with approximate times added. I was so happy to see my husband and son an extra couple of times along the way, especially knowing they had given up a day to follow me (and you know how keen a teen is, right?!) Little acts of kindness that mean so much and bring such a boost to tiring legs and minds.

As Sophie and I chatted merrily away in English, howling with laughter at our past (mis)adventures, we gradually became aware of our growing celebrity status. At the start of the other two distances Franck told (or warned?) participants to look out for us. One lady even asked to take a selfie with us, such was our fame.

There were several water points to refill bottles and they were much needed, the weather was so hot by mid-afternoon. Main aid stations were well stocked and one particular station was in someone's back garden. Their BBQ was going strong, they'd made a whole mountain of pancakes to hand out and we could wet our heads and caps under the garden tap.

There are cut off points, one being at Vers at 62km in. If you reach it by a certain time you are rewarded with one more huge hill to climb on the official route. After that time you're redirected around it. Despite our slowing pace and protesting legs, Sophie and I were well within the cut off time, and were heading

to be proud finishers of the full course.

One last water point at 73km took the wind completely out of our sails when the volunteers waved us on our way with a casual "only 10km to go now, not far". Wait, what??? By now Sophie and I were counting down into welcome single digits. That last bit along the river was a long, hard slog, not made easier by seeing three buildings that could have been Cahors Cathedral and two of them involved more climbing by the look of them. Divine, flat intervention appeared in the form of a volunteer directing us onto a packed street of applauding public and supporters, and a finish actually inside the cathedral itself. Which felt a bit odd to be honest because we wanted to cry and laugh and whoop at our adventure together, but that would have been disrespectful. Inside the courtyard there was the finisher's beer, plus another BBQ sizzling away. After the 7pm bells had rung we were invited back into the cathedral which, unwise-ly after 83 km, involved downing our hard-earned beers too quickly. We gave up and handed them to my husband, who'd worked equally as hard to earn them. We were yet again blessed, a wise decision after all our cussing and dark thoughts at 80km with no view of Cahors in sight.

Angelus Trail delivered on all fronts but most importantly finding a new friend and running partner in Sophie. Our trail "first date", as Sophie called it, was so much fun. We definitely went through the thick and thin of a lifetime's friendship in a day. At 3am when my jiffly legs wouldn't let me sleep, I found myself googling "Dragon's Back" race!!



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# A SHORT COURSE IN MIRACLES

By Gordon Cherr

Quenton Cassidy, author John Parker's protagonist in *Once A Runner* and then again in the more recent, but equally spellbinding, *Again To Carthage*, returns to north Florida to regain an old chapter in his running life and to begin anew. Returning to old but still familiar running haunts, Cassidy observes: "The trail went deep into the endless stand of blackjack pine and water oak and up by Otter Springs and then almost all the way down upon the Suwannee River, where in fact very few old folks stay. Four miles into the run at the bottom of a gentle rise that he called Blackberry Hill, he was startled to see his own ghostly footprints at the edge of the trail. He remembered the day he had made them long ago. It was rainy like this and he was skirting a big puddle, trying to keep his shoes dry as long as he could. Strange to think the evidence of his ephemeral passing would still be here hardened into the earth, partially hidden by encroaching weeds, like poor Lucy's footprints on that plain in Africa, still there after three million years. Taking the hill with big strides he thought: We really never know what will happen to the scratches we make in this thin dust." (John Parker, *Again To Carthage*, Breakaway Books, 2007).

I have likewise returned to Asheville and to my old running haunts, in a desperate effort to escape the early but brutal Tallahassee summer, to celebrate with Shari our 38th wedding anniversary in our favorite place in the world,

and to celebrate the fact that after nearly five years of one malady after another, I am running pain free (a miracle!). The mountains have been calling, I am helpless to resist and why bother? But the drive up is anything but regular. Although we have made this drive dozens of times, I somehow take a wrong turn somewhere in Georgia and the long and short of it (especially the long of it) is that I have turned a 7-8 hour drive into about 11 hours, and we arrive in Asheville at 2am. But we arrive (another miracle!).

My plan is to sleep in and schedules be damned, and then go run that seven miles up and down Reynolds Mountain later that morning. But the old internal alarm goes off at 5:30am. It is Asheville, man, get moving! Sleep is for the weak. Sleep is overrated. I make my way over to the old Central Avenue YMCA, where parking is free, and away I go. Stiff and tired at first, but as the morning unfolds, the run takes on a special aura all its own. The idea is to run uphill to the bottom of Patton Mountain Road, but then head down through the Grove Park section of north Asheville, and back to the parking lot, 3.5 miles up, 3.5 miles down. It is a tough run up, a fun, fast run down.

After about 40 minutes of laboring I reach Patton Mountain Road, but for reasons still inexplicable, I abandon my planned run and take a right, up the steep mountain trail. This will easily add another 20 minutes of hard and relentless uphill running, I do not know why I did it, I just did. The sun has risen by now, the road is steep but deeply shaded, it curves this way and that, but

always ascends. My mind and my pace have settled into this easy, peaceful place. OK, I'll be honest, I was thinking about bears. You always have to think about bears when you run the trails up here. I have smelled them but have never really seen one. A bear awakening after a few months of hibernation has a special but awful aroma unlike anything else you will ever smell. You do not want to smell that smell. I have run with groups of runners who have become very nervous when that smell appeared. We have changed routes when that smell appeared, we have sometimes even gone back the other way. Cans of mace and other concoctions have been produced in anticipation, even a gun once. I don't have anything with me except the shorts on my butt and the shoes on my feet. And a water bottle in my hand. But basically I am zoned out, dorphed out, on a terrific high as I make my way up the mountain.

Then something unexpected. All of what I am going to tell you took no more than 15 seconds to transpire. I am running with my head down and I am watching the trail.

I come around a sharp curve and a large, hairy black object fills my field of vision. My entire field of vision. I have suddenly come face to face with Smokey after all of these years. It is worse, he is not facing me but looking off to my left. I follow his gaze and see that there is a younger woman, another runner obviously coming down the same mountain trail, and he has cornered her against the high embankment on the left side of the trail. She is backed up to the



side of the mountain but she has nowhere to go, and he is about 15 feet from her and blocking her into the embankment. But she is standing her ground, standing tall and strong and trying to face him down. She is holding a stick over her head, but it is little more than a skinny switch and it probably won't do her much good.

I don't know how long they have been there like that, facing off, holding their ground, or whether he was attacking or simply curious. As I come around the curve, he wheels around to face me head on, we make some pretty good eye contact from maybe 50 feet away, I am still laboring up this mountain and have been for 55 minutes now, all uphill.

The adrenaline surges throughout my body and mind... I cannot say exactly from where the wild growl came from, but it was not from the bear. It came from deep within me. It was loud and angry, and now I am in full flight, racing towards them as fast as I can sprint. Waving my arms and yelling and he is staring deep into my eyes and I am staring deep into his dark eyes as well. I feel him reaching far into my soul. And I really have no idea as to what I am going to do if I get there and he is still holding his ground. In my core I know there is going to be a fight and I am not likely to fare all that well in such an encounter. I am running hard now, maybe the hardest I have ever run in my life and the distance between us is closing really fast, but after what seems like an eternity, he blinks, literally blinks and runs slowly off, up the steep embankment, effortlessly, gracefully, and unhurried. At his pace and really on his terms I guess. But gone.

The woman momentarily collapses back against the embankment, regains her composure, but she has started to cry. Just a little. In relief, no doubt, she was a tough lady. She starts down the hill towards me and I can see the tears welling up in her eyes. I am still running up the hill as we pass, she touches my shoulder and says "Thank you for being here". I don't know if I said anything or just shook my head in agreement. My

mind is spinning now. We continue on our separate ways. I wouldn't even know her if I ever saw her again. It is over, just like that.

The remainder of the run passes without incident but not without considerable thought. I tell Sharri what happened when I get back to our motel room. We discuss all of the coincidences that got me to that place at that time. A much-awaited vacation, a long drive, a wrong turn, an early run despite no sleep, the chance change of plans to lengthen the run and the decision to run up Patton Mountain Road. It is confusing to me, do we float in the wind helpless like a feather or are our lives somehow pre-ordained? As always, Sharri gets to the real heart of the matter: "You were meant to be there," she says, "You might have saved that woman today. It was one of life's little miracles."

The next night is nearly sleepless as I am thinking about all of the "what ifs" from yesterday and in all of our lives. But the sun rises and I know that I am here to run. I love to run here in this place. So I head out before day break, to the Mountains-To-Sea Trail for another 10 miles. And whatever comes next. Bears are, of course, paramount in my mind.

The trail between Highway 74 and Highway 25/25A is gnarly, rooty, rocky, hilly and secluded, but it is frequented by runners everyday, and while I have been unable to get up with any of my old running mates here, I do not feel like I will be running quite alone. This is an out-and-back route and I am listening intently to every sound that I hear around me. About three miles into the run I come upon a bad sign. There is an enormous pile of bear dung in the trail and then not too much further and right in the middle of the trail, the severed head of a tiny deer fawn is staring up at me, ears perked and eyes wide open but blank and lifeless. I shudder to a halt, transfixed. Just a head, small enough to fit into your hand, a very short life no doubt which met a violent end. Staring into my eyes, and just like the bear from yesterday, it is staring deep into me. I don't know, maybe it is

the dark magic of the Blue Ridge Mountains if such a thing exists. I think about turning back, but no, I need to keep on to the turnaround point. Which I do. But not before removing Bambi, or what was left of him, from the trail, and giving him a suitable burial. I say a few words over the makeshift grave; I know that is silly, but aren't we all weary fellow travelers on Space-ship Earth, inextricably bound together in some ephemeral way? I believe so.

On to the turnaround and then back, and as the day progresses there are runners appearing on the trail, some alone, some in groups, waving and nodding the universal greeting that all real runners share. Not the blank stare into space or into the ground, but hold your head high and acknowledge your brothers and sisters. And I am feeling better now as I reach the last mile of this run. I have been out for about two hours now and these hills and the altitude of about 3500 feet has started to take its toll on these old legs. I am running on a high exposed ridge when I catch my left foot on a rock and begin to stumble. You cannot tuck and roll here, you will seriously split your skull wide open, if not worse. Plus I have gone over the side of the trail and there is not much between me and a dry boulder strewn creek bed about 75 feet further down the steep side of the mountain. I am totally out of control, my body going down the hill much faster than my legs can ever keep up, leading with my head out front of course, and in an instant I know that I am going to fall and roll all the way down the side of the mountain and either crack my skull on a boulder or roll into the dry creek bed, dead or paralyzed forever. No one will ever see me down here, so rescue is out of the question as well. I wonder if plane crash victims don't have this same unfortunate clarity of thought when faced with their imminent demise? I once rolled a truck over four lanes of highway near Cross City, Florida, and watched from outside my body as the scene unfolded in slow motion, waiting to feel intense pain and then death, and I was shocked when I survived

with nary a scratch. I am thinking that perhaps I am out of lives now and this truly is it.

Coincidence or not, a dead tree on the side of the mountain had fallen over and was laying at about a 45 degree angle to the downhill slope. Was it another one of those life's little miracles that the tree was right there where I fell off the mountain? Or that it was laying crossways along my totally out-of-control path down the side of the mountain? Or that when I hit the tree full force under my left arm and on my rib cage I did not break a bone or collapse a lung? Or get punctured through and through had the tree been at a slightly different angle? Or rupture an internal organ and bleed to death down there? Or miss that tree completely? I don't know. I do know that I was out for a short time, but woke up looking up at a blue sky through green fern fronds. And wondering for an instant how I got here, but remembering quickly. I was eventually able to climb out once I caught my breath, and then run back a mile or so to the parking area. Being sore and bloody for several days being a rather fair trade-off for the experience of tripping and then of falling down the side of a mountain and surviving to tell about it. Thank you for whomever put that tree there so long ago, and having it die and fall over at that place, in that way. A coincidence? Pre-ordained? Another of life's little miracles?

Strange as it may seem, I would like to believe that crashing into that tree was a little reward for helping that woman the day before. I think about it, but I don't think about it too much. There are miracles, large and small, taking place around us everyday, all the time, everywhere. It is up to us to see them, recognize them, and appreciate them for what they are. Without the miracles in our lives, we would have no lives at all.



# KING OFFA'S DYKE RACE REPORT

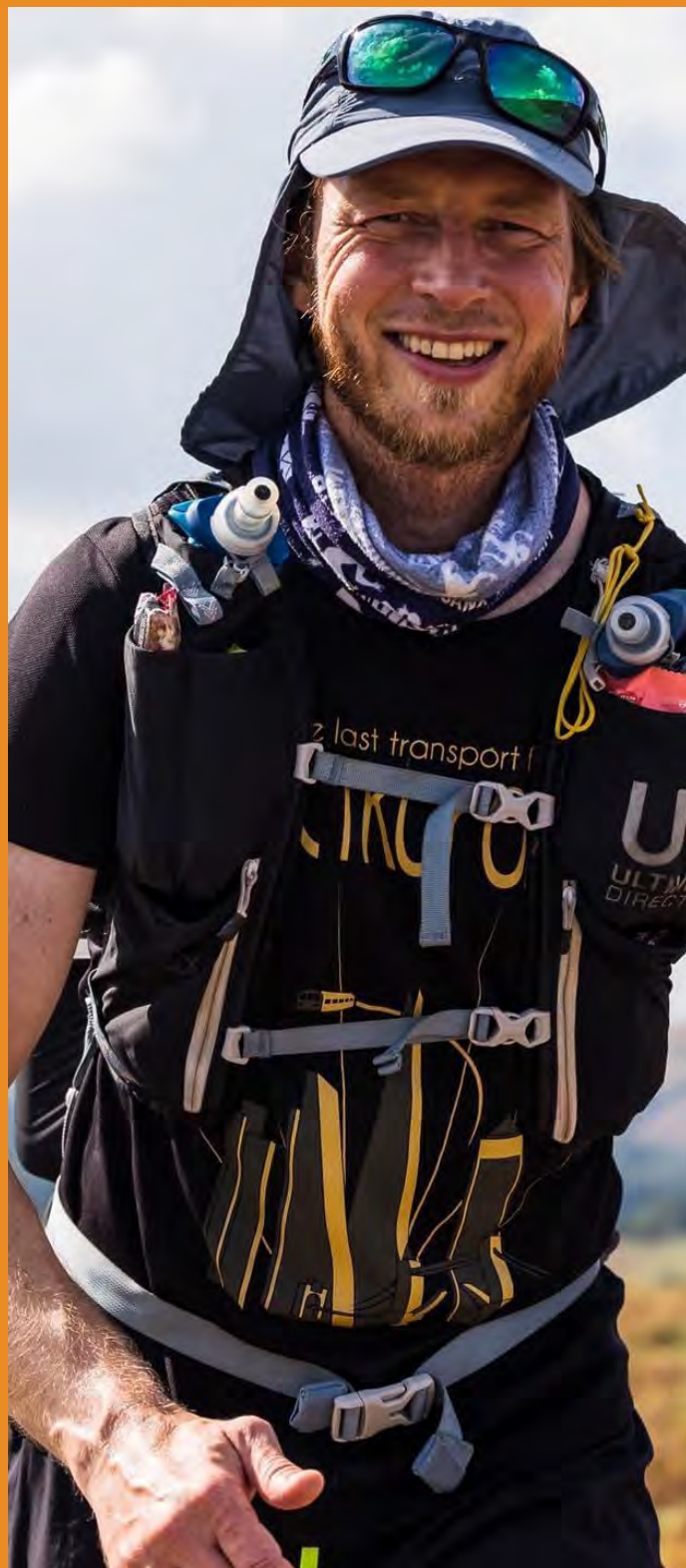
By Manuel Nicolaus

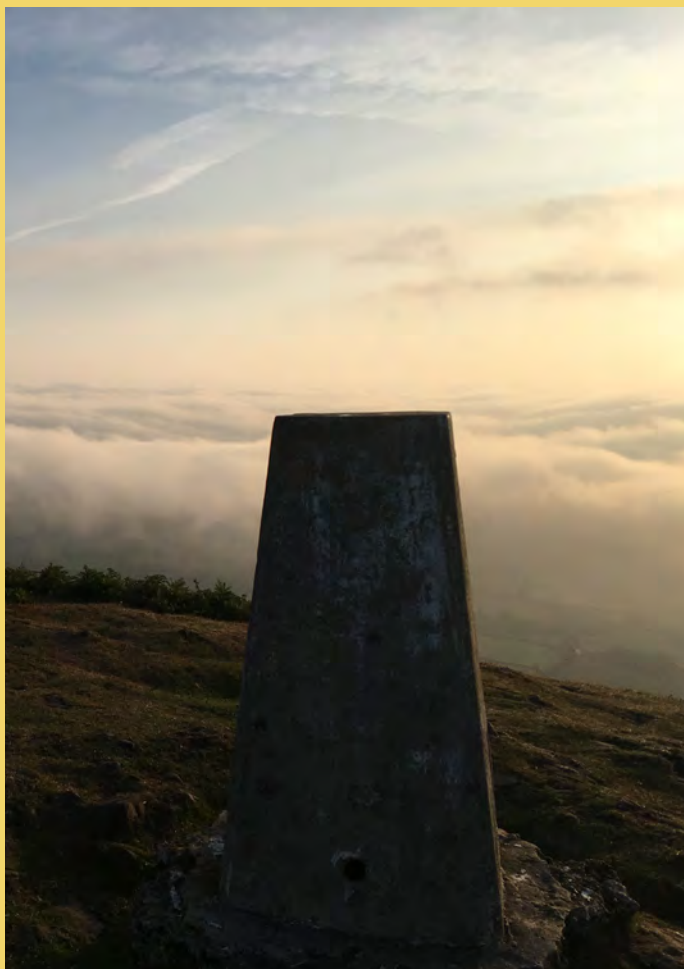
*185 miles King Offa's Dyke Race  
Friday 20:00 on the 26 August  
for up to 90 hours (Tuesday 30  
August 14:00)*

Twelve months of training went into this ultra. After having participated in the Dead Man's Ultra (DMU) in July 2021, I knew what I let myself into this time round. The aim was always to finish, but the worry was in which state I would finish. After the DMU, I wasn't in a good shape, but that's another story. Having an evening start allowed me to take the day easy, go for a walk around Chepstow and the castle, have some afternoon coffee and cake and watch a movie with Gary, who also let me stay at his place before and after the race. At 17:45, Gary dropped me off at registration and gear check. That all went very smoothly as I overpack all the time anyways. The one thing every ultra runner should pack, but not many do, is Sudocrem; so keep this in mind next time you go past 50 miles. At 18:30 was a race brief where Richard from Beyond Marathon described any last changes to the course and how to get to the 10 checkpoints. After this was complete, all the runners walked gently to the start line. It was a lovely evening. Still warm and the sun reflected nicely on the Severn Estuary, with the big Severn Bridge in the background. At 20:00, we started individually in 10-second intervals with a big cheer. Before we set off, we collected our King Offa coin (which we had to carry to the end to exchange it for our award). For everyone that DNF, they can keep the coin and it may burn a hole into their pocket to remind them that they still have not completed the challenge and can come back to do so.

Saturday 27 August

The jog to the first CP at Monmouth was 19 miles away and a delight. It took me 4 hours and 45 minutes, which was a good 2 hours before the cut off. I did not hang around much and carried on quite briskly to get to the next CP in Pandy, another 17 miles away. I do not recall much as it was just running through the night, apart from "where is the moon", and this seems to have become my catchphrase for the following three nights to come as well. I arrived in Pandy at





5:49, almost 10 hours after the start and 3 hours before the cut off. At this point I felt strong and looked forward to the day. The next section to Hay-on-Wye was beautiful as I was running along here a few hours after sunrise and I was up in the hills with the clouds below me in the valleys and the sun at level with me. I took a picture and sent it to my children saying that I am running above the clouds, which they liked. This section felt like it lasted forever as it was all uphill, but also meant that I left the highest point of the race behind me. I reached CP3 (52 miles) at 11:10. It was a major checkpoint where the runners could access their drop bag. I do not recall getting anything out apart from some sun cream. I had some nice food (egg on toast with bacon and a cheeky veggie sausage) before carrying on. I set off again after finishing a lovely cup of tea. During the next section to CP4 at Kington, it became clearer which runners I would spend most of the time with until the end, and we became more familiar with one another, chatting a little bit here and there. The day turned out to be quite warm and sunny, so keeping up with drinking was important. The mandatory kit list required to be able to carry at least 2 litres of fluids. For this section, I had 3 litres on me as I knew I would need more. This 15-mile stint took me 5 hours 30 minutes, arriving just before 17:00 and 6 hours before the CP would close. This was a healthy window I thought. As this CP did not allow any sleeping, I just had some nice food and a cup of tea. I felt quite parched now from the heat and refilled all my flasks and drank as much as I could. Off I went again to the next CP5 at Knighton 15 miles away. The plan was to have a good rest when I got there. Just before sunset, a dragon/crocodile appeared in the sky. We all had a little giggle about it. During the shuffle there, we formed a large group of roughly 10 runners or so all in single file. It was nice being in front, so I could control the pace to my liking. At some point I remember shouting behind me, 'If you want to overtake, just say'. But Adam directly behind me just said back, 'I am fine here,' so I carried on. As it is dark, there aren't many distractions, apart from a firework sound going off, but not seeing any pretty sparkles anywhere. We arrived at Knighton just before 22:30. Feeding the masses would start. We all had some nice food. I had a couple of cheese and ham toasties, before having a lay down in my sleeping bag inside the checkpoint. I stayed at the CP for a total of 2 hours and 35 minutes, so probably slept for 60 minutes.

#### Sunday 28 August

Before setting off again I asked Jay and Danny to join them until at least dawn, as it is easier to work together through the night. Off we went just after 1am. The night was lovely, but we got a bit lost along the way and were surrounded by 7-feet-high ferns and no way back or forward. We tried to make our way down the hill, where the path would be, along the barbed-wire fence. Jay, who did very well as the main scout, realised that on the other side of the fence was an open field, so we climbed across it and were free again from ferns and nettles. At this point we also heard a gate lock shut and there was Mark. The four of us have found each other at this point and carried on together on and off during the day, but always together during the night. At 05:30 we reached the



halfway point of the Offa Dyke trail. Shortly after, we reached CP6 Montgomery at 10:16. The first 100 miles in the bag. It was a major stop again and also the end of the 100-mile race. I stayed at this CP for roughly an hour. I got one of my blisters treated. During the treatment, I rested my left foot on my right knee and while doing so, I sillily twisted my left knee somehow. Not thinking much of it, I put some Voltarol cream on it and carried on. During the day, I got quite close to different livestock in the fields including cows, sheep and horses. Mark and I set off again together through the beautiful countryside including meadows, forests and hills. It was just a perfect day, apart from my knee. I had to refocus myself and let Mark disappear in the distance. They were the roughest 20 miles for me. I reached CP7 (Llanymynech) at 19:04. I tried to get some sleep here, but every time I turned I felt the worst and sharpest pain going through my knee and leg. I had a good chat with myself and told my nerve receptors, not today. I got up, had another portion of pasta and asked the lead volunteer if she had an apple by any chance. Apples are my go-to fruit to wake myself up and calm my nerves down. Luckily she had one in her car, which was freshly picked. The mixture of the apple and an ibuprofen has settled the pain for now.

Monday 29 August

We set off again through the night. There is not much to say about this section apart from that we ploughed through the night. We reached the 15-mile-away CP8 (Froncysyllte) at 04:30. 135 miles done and only 50 miles to go. That's what was on everyone's mind. The plan was to rest here for two hours in total. I had a lovely bowl of pea soup with a hot dog sausage in it. It just felt like the best feast ever. I also used the time to give my feet a good clean and to tend my blisters. My knee had sorted itself out by now, as long as I kept it straight. As there was quite a bit of snoring going on, I slept in the kitchen area with the gentle fridge humming sending me to sleep. I asked the CP host to wake me up after 40 minutes. I woke up fully rested, and had another cup of tea and procrastinated a little bit, hoping the others would wake up. At 6:20am I thought, I really have to get going, so I set off alone. I took the scenic route via the aqueduct, which was a bit nerving, but beautiful. Another beautiful day and breathtaking views ahead. Danny, Mark and Jay overtook me around 8am. I felt happy to plod on, on my own and let them go ahead. I knew I would have this one in the bag, as long as my knee would hold up. I just had to do it on my terms and speed. I reached CP9 Llandegla (150 miles) at 11:27. This was the only outside CP. Luckily it was a cracking day again. Rachel, the medic, treated my blisters one more time. Draining all the fluids and taping it all up. I had a lovely beef stew, which warmed me up nicely and gave me the energy I needed to get to the end. I stayed here for roughly an hour. I felt really good now and thought the chase is on to catch up with Jay, Mark and Danny. Another beautiful section through woodlands and beautiful trails along steep hill trails and all the way to the top of an old fort. At mile 155, I felt reborn, all the shackles and pains had disappeared. I was actually able to run, which surprised myself. Just having the mental picture in mind that there was only a marathon ahead of me gave me so much headroom. This section was also the bus-





iest of getting in contact with the public, so I had to balance the chatting and getting on with the task in hand sorted. I think I managed it quite well. Every so often I checked on the tracker how far Danny, Mark and Jay were ahead of me. It was only 3 km most of the time, which I thought I could make up with the amount of sleep I would need. I reached the final CP10 Bodfari (169 miles) at 20:01. I had a lovely bowl of soup, washed my feet and drank another lovely cup of tea. I asked the host to wake me up again after 40 minutes of rest as this was coinciding with the time that the other three would get up. It was nice to be reunited again and we decided to stick together to the end now. I think we left around 23:00 to tackle the last 12 miles.

Tuesday 30 August

We climbed up and down the last few hills and reached Prestatyn at 02:44. The last half hour before we finished just felt so epic and special. Walking/jogging through the quiet streets into the town centre felt like we just conquered the world. 400m before the finish we started to jog it home listening to 'Eye of the Tiger'. We all touched the twin rock together at 03:11 at the Prestatyn (181 miles) seafront. I tried to feel happy at this point, but was just so tired. I was happy to get hold of my crutches now to take the bodyweight off my left knee. Writing these lines really brings out the memories and emotions of what we have done. I can only say thank you Mark Gibson, Jason McCardle and Danny for making it such a memorable adventure. This thank you is extended to Richard and Beyond Marathon, every fellow runner, volunteer, Natasha Breen, and Rachel the medic who ensured I did not have to worry about my blisters. Also a massive thank you to Gary, who looked after me after the race, Mandy Foyster and the NUTS group for all their advice and support. P.S. At some point I also had a standoff with a swan, which was quite nerveing, but we came to a mutual understanding.





# KING OFFA'S DYKE 2022

By Alistair Potter

The Race takes place every two years and is organised by Richard and the team at Beyond Marathon.

It's 185 miles (plus a few more for navigation errors), starting at Sedbury just outside Chepstow and ending at Prestatyn.

The allotted time for the event is 90 hours, which is generous but there is an awful lot of ascent and descent as the route roughly follows the English/Welsh border.

Offa's Dyke is still visible in places, around 80km I believe, and this was an event I'd signed up for as soon as it was advertised, primarily as the route passed within a mile of my home in North Wales and because I love getting into quieter places, be it canals or hills.

I travelled down by train on the Friday afternoon with friends also taking part, quietly confident that I was as prepared as I could be for an event that was going to test me physically and mentally. I'd signed up with a coach (Warren Renkel) in January, felt strong and well prepared on the back of both Brighton Marathon and WRCR (Warwickshire Ring Canal Race) earlier in the year.

Registration and kit check went smoothly although I did notice that my pack seemed bigger than others, had I packed too much or had they packed too little? As there were checkpoints every 20 or so miles and access to drop bags at 50, 100 and 150 miles I removed one of the extra bags of food from my pack just prior to Richard's comprehensive race briefing.

Just before 20:00 we all made our way to the start point on cliffs overlooking the Severn Estuary where there is a rock with a plaque to mark the start point.

Richard gave everyone an Offa's coin that we had to keep safe until we got to Prestatyn where we would exchange it for our finisher's trophy. Runners were set off at 15-second intervals from 20:00. If runners retired, the coin would be a reminder to us that we had unfinished business with Offa's Dyke. We also had the option of exchanging it for a Mercian Challenge medal if we were able to get to Montgomery which was the 100-mile point. The Mercian Challenge ran alongside the Offa's race.

I had planned to try and keep my pace somewhere between three and four miles per hour for the first 40





to 50 miles as I didn't want to repeat previous errors of going off too quickly.

The field spread out fairly quickly and I was enjoying running with friends, Vic and Gavin.

The route through the first night took in some road sections, woods and open countryside with the weather remaining warm all night. After about 6 miles I had a fall on a tree root; luckily nothing was damaged other than pride at the fall being witnessed, but it knocked my confidence a little so I decided to be a little more cautious and slow down especially through wooded areas. I advised Vic and Gavin to push on hoping that I'd see them again soon.

Navigation wasn't too difficult as Offa's is signposted regularly (albeit with some lurking in hedges), we all had maps and Richard had provided a GPX file of the route which I'd added to both my watch and the Footpath app on my phone. This may seem like overdoing it a bit but I'd rather have too much rather than too little means of finding my way and I found it easier to follow the route on my phone than on my watch. This means using my glasses which is a bit of a bind when also using running poles.

After 20 miles I reached the first CP at Monmouth, had a bite to eat, filled up my bottles and headed out of the door fairly quickly just ahead of three runners who had got there just before me. This is where I made my first big navigation error in presuming that I knew where I was going rather than checking at the road junction. It was only ten minutes but with the benefit of hindsight it was a godsend as it put me in the company of the three runners (Martin, Craig and Allan) for the majority of the remainder of the night. We settled into a steady routine at a nice steady pace of short runs and fast walking with Martin mainly leading on the navigation. Somewhere in the middle of the night, Craig started to slow and Martin wanted to push on, so Allan and I told him to push as none of us could keep up with his walking pace!

I think we all had low points during the night but aside from a few minor nav errors we pushed on towards Pandy and CP2. The dawn broke a few miles from Pandy and gave us all a lift in spirits.

Craig had dropped a few minutes behind us but joined Allan and I at the CP where we had planned to spend around 30 minutes. I grabbed porridge, coffee and a few savoury treats from what was on offer and managed 10 minutes of shut eye. I don't think I actually slept but it certainly helped my brain to reset.

Allan and I then set off with Craig planning to come out a few minutes later. Sadly this was the last we saw of Craig as he retired a short while later.

We now faced the biggest continuous climb of the race up onto the black mountains. We took this at a steady pace as even though it was fairly early in the morning, it was soon quite warm. Once on the top





it was fairly flat (well, flat for the area) but the mist descended and it wasn't until we started to descend that we got some of the fantastic views.

Allan and I kept on walking at a good pace aiming to get to Hay-on-Wye CP3 in the early afternoon. By this time it was getting warmer so we took a slightly longer break and were joined by Akgun so two became three.

The next leg to Kington was the hardest of the day so far as it was now rather warm and the hills kept coming. I'd got a bit ahead of Allan and Akgun as I knew that Allan wanted to take a break.

Somewhere ahead of the next CP I visited a pub for a pint of coke and a pint of water much to the amusement of the locals enjoying a beer festival.

I got to Kington in the late evening and never has a Pot Noodle tasted so good, Akgun arrived shortly after me and we agreed to stick together to the next CP at Knighton. This was where I also found out that Allan had retired.

This leg we found tough both in terms of navigation, which was compounded by sleep deprivation, and a drop in spirits that I certainly experience when racing at night.

For me, this was when the hallucinations also started. I saw flying cats, lizards, snakes and dragons. The first few occasions it was quite discombobulating but aside from a few minor jump scares I was able to rationalise that it was just my tired mind not interpreting the information my eyes were sending it, correctly.

We finally arrived at Knighton at around 03:30 I think and after food, kit change, putting phone on charge etc. I settled down to have some rest until 06:00.

Akgun had decided to head out shortly before me, but I was feeling okay as I trundled through the town. I was then met by, perhaps not the longest climb, but certainly amongst the sharpest climbs of the race out of Knighton. It just seemed to go on and on with only a short flat or gentle slope before the next climb.

At the top of these first few climbs I was able to get some fantastic views of the surrounding countryside which lifted my flagging spirits somewhat.

It was then that my race changed, as I came around a corner I could see Akgun just ahead of me. He told me he was struggling to maintain more than a slow walking pace and needed to take regular breaks. As he didn't seem well I said I'd stick with him for a while and after some discussion I contacted Richard for advice. He arranged for the race medic to meet Akgun at the next road point (all hail What3words) to check Akgun out. After some consideration Akgun made the decision to retire as we were both concerned about what might have happened had the situation become more serious when away from a road, and he sent me on my way with good wishes.





I was now on my own and knew that I needed to keep moving at a fair pace to reach Montgomery ahead of the cut-off time. This is where my race changed as I was hot, very tired and starting to struggle with the weight of my pack (I realised later that the straps to adjust it had slipped) causing pain across my shoulders. Richard, the race director, rang me to advise that I was to be given extra time to get to the CP for helping another runner and I also spoke with my partner, Victoria, and a friend, Sally, who was volunteering at a checkpoint further along the course, but I knew deep down that Offa's had broken me.

I arrived at Montgomery in the mid afternoon and confirmed that I wished to retire. I exchanged my coin for a Mercian Challenge medal and headed home with Victoria.

After a good night's sleep I was, and still am, happy with my decision to retire when I did. It's natural to ponder on whether I would have completed the race. I still had 80 miles to go and over 40 hours to do it but as my spirit and drive had gone AWOL on the hills somewhere back along the course, I think it's doubtful I'd have made it. I'm okay with this as I don't enter races of this nature knowing that I will complete it and this is never my primary goal which for me is "can I complete it?".

In the words of the bard Arnie, "I'll be back".

For anyone considering taking part in King Offa's in 2024 when it's next run, my advice would be, pack light and smart, buddy up with other runners where possible, go steady from the start and soak up the views.









# PAC 4 MEN

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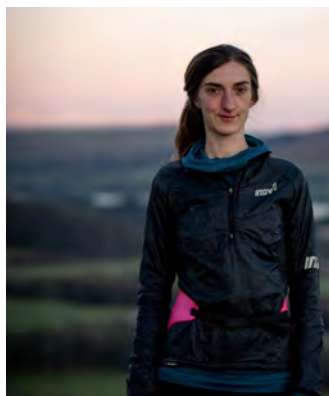
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**Alistair Potter** 54 year old runner living in North Wales. Perpetually confused but positivist who came to ultras in his 40's via parkrun, marathons etc. Much more interested in enjoying the journey, the "can I do this" and the cake than times etc., as his collection of DNF's demonstrates.



**Danielle Ledbury** I work as a freelance educator, encouraging curiosity of the world around us through photography and art. Originally from the south west but my interest in the outdoors and all things nature based drew me to relocate to the Lake District, where I quickly fell in love with fell running, being out in the fells and the community here.



**David Tolmie** is a Glasgow-based art director working in film and design. He started running nine years ago as a way to lose weight but it quickly became his passion. On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, he decided to run every day for a year – he's hasn't stopped yet.

His next race is The Loch Ness 24, where he hopes to achieve 100 miles.



### **Sophie Bennet**

I have recently moved to the South of France from Bath and am spending my time exploring the Pyrenees. I am a huge sports fan and played rugby and football all my life before discovering running in circa 2006, running the Cardiff Half and then the London Marathon and getting hooked! I moved to Ultra's in 2017, with the Cotswold Way and I have never looked back. I am still an avid Crossfitter (race dependant!), and I have finally just completed the Dragonsback Race on my second attempt. Snowdonia has my heart!



**Dawn Gardner** is a Biomedical Scientist from Bristol. She's been running ultra marathons for over 10 years and loves races 100 miles and beyond. Since having her little boy almost two years ago she's been working out how to juggle mum life and running, and has been building herself back up to the longer events.



**Dawn Nunes** is an experienced sports physiotherapist with a Masters degree in Sports Physiotherapy. Dawn is an extremely dedicated runner, both on trail and on road, and has completed two Comrades Ultra Marathons (90km) as well as Ultra-Trail Cape Town, Two Oceans and a number of ultra trails. Dawn's passion is to help runners of all abilities to thrive.



**Emma Morton** I live in the south of France, close to the Pyrénées mountains. I discovered trail running seven years ago, aged 41. As mid-life crisis' go, I can't think of a better one! I'm an active member of our village running club, and I love to encourage more women into our sport.



**Karl Baxter** Funny guy who lives every day as if it's his last. Always smiling, big into fitness and ultra distance running. Kind, caring soft natured and totally chilled out. With half a dozen Backyard Ultras to his credit and the 200 mile Tunnel this year saw Karl take on his biggest challenge to date, Mark Cockbain's National 3 Peaks Ultra with Alan Cormack and both finished in 9:01:33:00.



Gordon Cherr has been running and racing since 1964. He grew up in northern New Jersey and ran high school track and cross country, as well as one season in college in Boston, Massachusetts (an incredible running town). He lives in Tallahassee, Florida and in Asheville, North Carolina, both renowned for their extensive trail running systems. He raced extensively for many years although rarely now (thank God for age group competition), and you will often find him directing local races in Tallahassee and frequently volunteering. He is a member of the Gulf Winds Track Club and of the Asheville Track Club. He has been writing about running and related matters (to him) extensively since 2001 and many of his published columns can be found in the Publications section at <https://www.gulfwinds.org/>. Professionally he was a biologist and oceanographer, then later an active trial lawyer and eventually was appointed judge/magistrate/hearing officer, retiring from the bench and the practice of law in 2015. Husband for 51 years, father of two (both children were/are runners) and grandfather of 8 (several are also runners!). Still running nearly every day at 73, and finding out, sadly, that you and your ego cannot outrun aging and genetics. Guesstimating that he has run somewhere between 125,000-135,000 miles all over the USA, in Canada and Mexico and elsewhere, and awfully glad that he can and does run nearly every day, either alone, with friends and/or family.

He tries to not give advice about running except: "Get out on the roads and trails and you will find your own truths!"



**Kate Maltby** lives in a yurt in West Cumbria with her partner and dogs. She is a qualified Pilates and Yoga teacher. Check out her YouTube channel - Stretch Mountain Pilates and Yoga. Her background as a runner begun aged 15, where she ran for England in cross country and then went on to run for Great Britain in mountain running. Currently studying a PhD in sport at Stirling University focusing on elite athlete's transition to retirement with attention to coping, addictive behavior and intervention, built upon previous studies in sport psychology and coaching. Kate also loves cycling for fun, growing vegetables, swimming, reading short stories and living a balanced life full of all things creative! Kate now teaches Pilates online and provides free videos via her YouTube channel, [Stretch Mountain Pilates and Yoga](#).



**Manuel Nicolaus** currently in my second season of running ultramarathons. As a single father, I got into long distance running to fill the void of not having my kids around at some of the weekends. I am so blessed having found such an open community that is full of support for one another.



**Frank van der Endt**, owner of the consultancy firm [CORDES](#). He and his family live in the Netherlands, but spend summers in their Balinese beach-house. Since 2011, Frank has run several city marathons. In recent years, he successfully completed ultra runs like Marathon des Sables, Transalpine Run and Ultra Tour Monte Rosa.



**Laura Watts** is an ultra runner who lives near Bognor Regis in the UK. 2019 Laura was first woman in the 145 mile Kennet & Avon Canal Race and set an FKT on the 62.6 km Fox Way in February 2022. Recently Laura finished 20<sup>th</sup> lady in the 2022 Badwater 135. Follow Laura on Instagram: [@laura\\_runninggirl](#)



**Sarah Booth** - I can usually be found running in the hills of the Peak District with my running buddies, husband or my chocolate labrador Rolo. When I'm not running I'm teaching Pilates at our Pilates and Yoga Studio in Macclesfield. I recently qualified as a Ultra running coach with UESCA. <https://www.macclesfieldpilatesandyogastudio.co.uk/>





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