

Current News



Pictured near Kirknewton photo by Marilyn Sibbald.

Sharon Gayter's **JOGLE** record attempt is still on target as she reaches the 12th day. Sharon set off on her journey from John O'Groats to Land's End on 21st July in an attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the 822 miles route. Her goal is to break 12 days 15 hrs 46 mins averaging 70 miles a day. Currently has around 100 miles to go. Follow Sharon's at: Live.opentracking.co.uk/joglesharon.

Having lost several friends to mental health issues, Sharon is raising money for MIND to help prevent more lives being lost.

Contents

01: Current News

02: [More News](#)

05: [Amy Mower's Spartathlon Quest](#)

07: [Rose of The Shires – Helen Etherington](#)

08: [The Running Granny](#)

09: [Leila Majewska - McWilliams Round](#)

14: [Andre du Toit - Ultra Trail Drakensburg](#)



The **Holland Ultra Tour** is taking place for the first time this year and has reached Day 10 of the 14 stages. Runners average

about 64 km a day covering a total of about 900 km altogether. The race started and finishes in Amsterdam on August 3rd after looping the entire country. Current leader is Alex Swenson (USA) and leading woman is Jannet Lange (NLD). [Results](#).

Now in its seventh week, the **Self-Transcendence 3100 Mile Race**, the longest certified footrace in the world, saw the race leader Ashprihanal Aalto (FIN) reach 3000 miles yesterday. Seven of the eight runners are expected to finish by the end of the final day on August 6th. (Photo by srichinmoyultraphoto.com) Follow these intrepid warriors performing at the limits of human endurance. [Sri ChinmoyRaces.org](http://SriChinmoyRaces.org)

Recent Races

The Last Annual Vol-State Run, a 314/500 km road race from Dorena Landing Missouri to Castle Rock, Georgia across Tennessee was won by Greg Armstrong (USA) in 3:14:11:31 a new screwed course record, plus its Gregs fourth win. First woman to

reach the Rock was Canadian Beverly Anderson-Abbs, third place overall in 4:07:17:55, also a new women's screwed course record despite it being her debut at the race. 121 finishers. [Website](#).



Badwater® 135 one of the most iconic ultras in the world was won this year by Yoshihiko Ishikawa (JPN) in 21:33:01. First woman was

Patrycja Bereznowska (POL), second overall by 2 hours, in 24:13:24. 79 finishers. [Full results](#). [Website](#).

The oldest 24 hour race currently taking place falls under the auspices of the **Sri Chinmoy Ultras** in Ottawa which features 24 Hour, 50k, 50mi, 100k, 100mi, 200k and 12/6 Hour races. The event takes place at the Asticou Centre in Gatineau, Quebec, on a 1.8 km Loop. Full results were not available at the time of writing but first man in the 24 hour was Rainer Predl (AUT) with 219.8 km and first woman was Lydia Ouellette (CAN) with 150.3 km. [Website](#).



The **Skövde Ultra Festival** takes place on a 400m tartan track in Skövde, Sweden. The Festival includes 48/24/12/6/1 hour races plus a Backyard ultra and 100k.

In the 24 hour first man was Martin Scharp in 232.753 km. First woman was Kristina Paltén in 171.123 km. [Full results](#).

The 250 km 6 day **Gobi March (Mongolia)** stage race started on 28 July in the Karakorum region of Mongolia. Stage 3 of the 2019 saw Stefan Zuber (SUI)

leading the men and Amanda De Kock (RSA) leading the women. [Breaking news](#).

More News From Ultras Around The World.

26.07.2019 BIH Jahorina Ultra Trail

The winner of the Bosnian 101 km Jahorina Ultra Trail in the men's category was Charlie Sharpe from the UK in 12:38:11. First woman was Francesca Canape in 14:07:08. [Website](#).



27.07.2019 AUS 100/50 km The Guzzler Ultra

The inaugural Guzzler took place in Brisbane, Australia this weekend, providing a challenging, 100km race from the heart of Brisbane and out past three reservoirs and also featured a Glass Half Full 50km option.

First woman - Naomi Mitchell in 15:22:12

First man - Yun Phua in 11:49:01 [Full results](#)

26.07.2019 AUT 110/75 km Grossglockner Trail

Grossglockner ULTRA-TRAIL® (GGUT) mainly follows the trails of the so-called "Glocknerrunde" around Austria's highest mountain, the Großglockner (3798 m). Through the scenic landscape of the National Park Hohe Tauern, the race crosses 3 provinces, 7 valleys, 6 municipalities. Runners cross the Alps twice, running along 14 glaciers, surrounded by around 300 mountains higher than 3000m. Start and finish is in Kaprun.

First woman was Eva Sperger in 16:03:14

First man was Grasel Florian 14:40:14. [Full results](#)

26.07.2019 CZE 48 hours Self-Transcendence Race 48h Kladno

The Self-Transcendence 48/24 hour races take place near the municipal stadium at the Kladno Aquapark. The course is a flat, shaded 1 km loop. Very strong performances by Vladimir Stavrev (BUL) with the 4th best 24 hour performance of the year for the men and the best women's performance of the year by Radka Churaňová (CZE) with 251.498 km.

48 Hour

First woman Vinati Docziová (SVK) 268,129 km

First man Daniel Trusca (FIN) 370,121 km

24 Hour

Radka Churaňová (CZE) 251,498 km

Vladimir Stavrev (BUL) 253,099 km

[Full results](#)

26.07.2019 GBR 145 m Kennet & Avon Canal Race 145 mile (KACR)

This 145 mile race starts at Temple Meads

Railway Station in Bristol and follows the way-

marked Kennet & Avon Canal towpath, Thames Path National Trail and Grand Union Canal towpath to Paddington Railway Station in London. First across the finish line for his second Canal win this year was Alex Whearity in 26:15. First woman was Laura Watts in 36:13, 8th overall. 66 starters and 24 finishers. [Full](#)

[results](#)



26.07.2019 GBR 100/50 m Lakeland 100/50 Mile

The Lakeland 100 'the Ultra Tour of the Lake District' is perhaps the most spectacular long distance trail race in the UK. The circular route encompasses the whole of the lakeland fells, with approximately

6300m of ascent and follows public bridleways and footpaths. The route starts and finishes in Coniston.

100 miles

First woman was Anna Troup in 26:20:06. First man was Rory Harris in 21:28:28.

50 miles

First woman was Bethan Male 9:26:55. First man was Jayson Cavill 7:58:38. [Final results](#)



27.07.2019 ITA 80 km Trans d'Havet

Taking place on the same trail that in 2013 saw Kilian Jornet and Louis Alberto Hernando break down the nine-hour wall. Starts at midnight from Piovene Rocchette and finishes in Valdagno in piazza Municipio. Length about 80 km with positive height difference about 5500 m. The race this year was the Italian long trail championships.

First woman was Francesca Pretto 11:16:40

First man was Giovanni Tacchini 9:58:55

[Full results](#)

27.07.2019 MAS 100/55 km Cameron 100 Km Ultra Trail

The 100km and shorter events start at Cameron Highlands, Pahang, Malaysia. The 100 km has 4480m of elevation.

First woman Shindy Patricia Elisabeth (IDN) 19:02:49

First man Ryo Murata (JPN) 12:52:41

[Full results](#)

26.07.2019 USA 100 m High Lonesome 100 Mile

The High Lonesome 100 starts and finishes at the base of Mount Princeton in the Sawatch range of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Features 22,500' of vertical gain and reaches an elevation of 13,150'. The race runs in a loop and takes runners on the Continental Divide and Colorado Trail.

First woman was Silke Koester in 25:28:20

First man was Luke Jay in 22:22:43

125 starters, 86 finishers. [Full results.](#)

27.07.2019 USA 24 Hour Tally in the Valley Trail Race

A 7k loop on primarily groomed trails in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area, Hamilton, Ontario.

First woman was Charlotte Vasarhelyi with 171 km

First man was Coffee Umanetz with 175 km. 46

Starters. [Results.](#)



Start of Day 37 of the Self-Transcendence 3100 Mile Race 2019 New York Photo by www.srichinmoyultraphoto.com

Spartathlon Quest

Amy Mower (aka Cake Bandit)

Spartathlon countdown: 84 days (12 weeks from today). Four months have passed since I learned I was selected for the team. Since my last update, a lot has happened from a training perspective. I've continued to put in my big mileage weeks. In fact, the mileage has increased. My typical morning run before work has increased to 18 miles up from last year's 14, and my last 4 training weeks ending with TGNV 100 were 144, 150, 150, and 184 respectively (one including a 100 mile race). There are those that say the bigger miles detract from my goal of becoming faster for Spartathlon, but so far I'm not sure I buy that. (We will, certainly, soon find out). I've found that as I've increased the miles and built in some hills, interval runs, and moderate intensity runs with my fast (and young!) pal Katie, the speed has increased. How do I know?

At the end of April, I ran the C&O canal race. I PR'd my 50 mile split by 30 minutes at 8:41, and both PR'd my 100 mile time by 40 minutes or so, and won the women's field with a finish time of 20:31. This is huge for me as a confidence booster for the tough early cutoffs at Spartathlon. I have to hit 50 miles by 9 hours. So... I know I can do that. The bad news? At C&O after 50 miles, my performance deteriorated quite a bit due to some major stomach issues – either caused by going out too fast (bad news for a race with tough early cutoffs), or by too much Tailwind early on (this is a problem I can fix). I had been on pace for a 19 hour finish and ended with 20:31 – a pretty significant slowdown. I typically perform best when I start out super slow and easy. A fast start is, in my mind, the best way to kill a race. Still... I now know I can hit the 50 mile cutoff. A few weeks later, I got another confidence booster at my 48 hour race at

3 Days at the Fair, where I finished with 202 miles – 113 on day 1 and 89 on day 2. More significantly, I hit 153 miles in 34 hours or so, and the cutoff for the Spartathlon 153.4 miles is 36 hours. So, I know I can do

the distance in the time required. Now we just need to add some heat and hills.

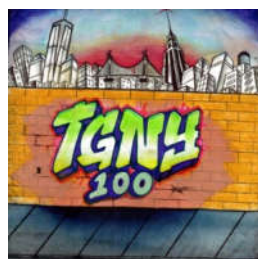
Throw in... my current training. I'm fortunate to live in DC – AKA “the Swamp”. My run this morning at 3:30 am started out in the mid-70's with what I would guess was about 90% humidity. It was like a steam bath. Today I followed yesterday's trail adventure with the Virginia Happy Trails Running Club in Shenandoah Park where I got in close to 4,000 feet of elevation in 21 miles (and saw a bear!!) My next push at speed will occur at the Ethan Allen 12 hour race next Saturday in Bennington, Vermont, courtesy of RD's extraordinaire Adam Schalit and Eliza Hamm (timing provided by Melton & company – so I'll get to throw in some dancing). I intend to push as hard as I can for 12 hours and treat it like a long speed workout. We will see how that goes.

Finally – I've been searching for (and finding) joy in my runs. With 18 miles a day generally on the same route day after day, it has been easy to get a little bored and get into a rut. I've started to combat that



by injecting diversity into my training. Sundays have become trail day for this road girl. I've always been incredibly intimidated by trails (I hate falling). But after all my big paved miles, my Sunday run, often with my buddy Larry Huffman – a trail guy – have become a breath of fresh air, and a vacation in my week of pavement pounding. I take Sundays easy – still generally putting in 13-16, but stopping to take pictures of the beauty, and walking whenever we hit a hill. It is lovely. After the run vacation, I come home and I bake my bread and I know that life is good.

I also found more joy than I've found in just about any race by running The Greater New York Running Exhibition (TGNY) 100 – 2 weeks ago in New York City. Race Directed by Phil



McCarthy and Trishul Cherns, this race to me was a 24 hour vacation journey through parts of NY City I had never seen before – even as someone who grew up in the NY burbs and spend a few years living in Brooklyn out of college. I got to dance on the Rockaway Beach boardwalk and run over the Brooklyn Bridge, among other treats, and saw friend after friend at the incredible aid stations. (Anyone interested in the full write-up can check out my blog post at

<https://amyvkrunningaddiction.blogspot.com/2019/06/tgny-100.html>)

So, there is that. Finally, I have just started injecting run commuting into my training schedule. It has both given me variety in my running sights – crossing over the Key Bridge into Georgetown at dawn, as well as allowing me up to 45 minutes more sleep in the mornings as I'm able to avoid the metro in to work. Oh – and my neighborhood hill runs – there are those too. Each of those offers variety and discovery.

All in all, it's been a pretty special couple of months.

So – 12 weeks before the race, I know that there is still a decent chance I will not be able to make the cut-offs – but I'd say I'm feeling good about the work I'm doing, and at the very least, if I'm going to DNF a race (which, believe me, I hope I will not be doing), there will at least be the consolation that I will be getting a 10 day Grecian vacation out of the deal, along with some amazing memories. BJ has his passport, we have our plane tickets in order, and I have a bib number.

Onward...

Amy Mower (aka Cake Bandit)

I started running at age 29, after I quit a 2-pack-a-day smoking habit. I was worried about gaining weight and so I committed to 30 minutes of regular exercise 3 days out of 4. I began running longer distances in 2008, when I joined my brother David and his wife Cindy in training for the Army 10-miler. I learned something pretty amazing - which is, to learn to run longer, you have to... run longer. Wow. What a concept. The 10 mile training was so exhilarating that I wanted to keep going, so I signed up for a February marathon. My sister-in-law had told me about the Jeff Galloway run-walk method, and I thought I might be able to finish a marathon if I followed that sort of a plan. It worked for me - and I used it to complete another 5 marathons over the next several years. I ran my first full marathon without walk breaks in June of 2014. I completed my first "ultra" marathon at the CanLakes 50 miler in scenic upstate NY in October of 2015. Since that time I've completed 29 ultras, including 3 100 mile races, 5 24 hour's, several 12 hours, 48 and 49 hours respectively at ARFTA, two 72 hour races, and a 6-day. I was notified last week of my acceptance on to the 2019 Spartathlon team, which is my "A" goal for this year. Presently I'm running 100-130 miles a week and setting my sights on more and possibly longer multi-day events.

<http://amyvkrunningaddiction.blogspot.com/>

Rose of the Shires

Helen Etherington

On 6th April 2019, Go Beyond presented the first 'Rose of the Shires' ultra marathon at Brixworth Country Park. Covering 54 miles, the course takes in the beautiful countryside and villages that Northamptonshire is renowned for. On this cold, sunny morning, 80 participants eagerly (or nervously) waited on the start line, curious to see what the course had to offer.

First impressions were very good – there was ample parking for everyone and the start line was right next to it, ensuring that people didn't have to travel far to collect their numbers, t-shirts and complete any last minute preparations. As every runner knows, good toilets are a runner's friend and thankfully there was access to plenty of these as well! Registration was simple and well organised so that queues were kept to a minimum. The atmosphere was friendly and the race was well supported by local clubs, giving it a 'family' feel rather than undertaking a huge feat of human endurance (as some races advertise and scare the living daylights out of people!). It was also lovely to see a competitive edge to each of the aid stations provided by individual running clubs, with cake, sandwiches and even prosecco provided at some! The stations were well spaced out between 5 and 8 miles, so there was never too long between refuelling stops.

The course wasn't marked (as you would expect for such a distance) but the route was fairly easy to navigate with both map and watch, making it an ideal first 50 miler for anyone wishing to dip their toe in the 'ultra marathon' water. The map was also provided at the start, meaning that there was one less thing to think about! There was perhaps more road on the route than some runners were expecting and due the conditions (we were lucky with sunshine most of the day), it would have suited a lighter trail shoe or even road. There were enough hills to make the course interesting and to break up the continual running that a flatter race lends itself to (and we all know that hills mean walking and

walking means eating!). The route was also marshaled at the major road crossing points, which provided additional safety for tired runners.

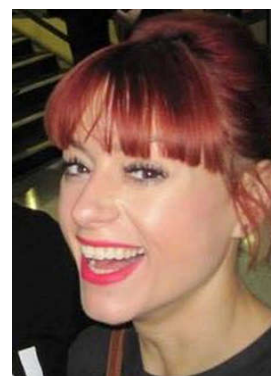
There was a good opportunity on the course to support runners and friends and family had access to plenty of stops where they could park up and wait for their runner. Although there was no live tracking in the race, it was very easy to find out who had come through each checkpoint by simply giving the number to the marshals. All of the marshals were very supportive and I particularly enjoyed the one dressed as a horse at checkpoint 2! (However nothing beats the rose that I was given at checkpoint 1!).

Simon Hollis, Race Director of Go Beyond, was there at the finish to congratulate and hand medals to all of the finishers and there were also good prizes for those who placed. The atmosphere amongst the participants was friendly and not overly competitive, which gave the race a relaxed feel.

I chose to run 'Rose of the Shires' because the race is local to me and it gave me the opportunity to explore some trails that I hadn't run before. I have also run other Go Beyond races and from experience, they are always friendly, well organised and good value for money, and this race didn't disappoint.

I would recommend this race to anyone wishing to run their first 50 who would like less challenging terrain, but be prepared for the battering that your feet may take on the roads!

Helen Etherington is an amateur runner who likes to run lots of miles for the sheer hell of it! She's run over 70 marathons and ultras and her next big challenge is the Race Across Scotland. Her favourite thing about ultra running is the sense of community and the new people that you meet - each event is an adventure and it's a great way of exploring the world!



An Iconic Challenge For The Running Granny



Ten years ago, if anyone had suggested that I would be planning to run 840 miles, it would have been laughable – by me and anyone who knew me. I was overworking, overweight, unfit and increasingly unhappy. My physical and my mental health were suffering and I knew something had to change. I resolved to make time and energy for me and started taking small steps to a healthier and happier place.

Amongst those steps, in 2012, I offered to support a friend; an inspirational lady aged 66, who was training for the [Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge](#), a mountain classic - I joined her on recce days and, at the age of 53 myself, I discovered ultrarunning, although it's more ultra-shuffling and plodding in my case.

My newfound passion necessitated acquiring technical kit,

maps and navigation skills: it also had me attending events exploring different parts of our beautiful country I'd not previously visited. I have been humbled by inspirational stories from fellow runners on our respective journeys. We've sweltered together through the heat of the day; climbed into the inky blackness of mountains in torrential rain during the night; encouraged each other through the pain of blisters or unremitting cramp, and shared the combined disbelief, relief and joy at completing challenges we'd never imagined possible. Running with others has produced enduring friendships. I now plan to attempt to set a new world record as the oldest female to travel on foot from John O' Groats to Land's End, starting 10th Sept 2019.

Why? Through a career in the NHS alongside time spent as a Trustee with a charity serving older people, I know how poor quality of life can be for those with long-term health conditions.

Many of these conditions are largely preventable: by adopting healthier lifestyle choices, we can give ourselves the chance of the best possible quality of life as we age. I want to use my experience to encourage others to do this. As The Running Granny, I will be using my JOGLE to raise awareness of health and ageing issues. I have also set up a new social enterprise to take this aim forward.

"You're never too old to set a new goal or dream a new dream".

For more information:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=4C_OKR_YAgU

You can follow my journey and my JOGLE on social media:

Facebook: [therunninggranny](#)

Instagram: [therunninggranny](#)

Twitter: [running_granny](#)

Website: <https://therunninggranny.co.uk/>

“McWilliams Round - unforgettable views, a test of will power and purification of the soul!”

Leila Majewska

It's been a while since I've written something, mainly because family and work took over my life big time and I haven't had much time to sit and gather my thoughts. Due to working weird, twisted hours and health issues I haven't really done any running apart from the odd short races. Last time I ran was on the 12th of May, the Durham 10 mile race where I got lost doing over 1.5 miles and 300ft more than others and... collapsed 30 m from the finish line with calf

cramp. So, I took the wise decision to pull out from races for a while, recover and rebuild some muscle and fitness which is long gone and clearly can't find its way back to me.

Since I couldn't run, I've done the second best thing a runner can do, I volunteered to Marshal races.

Among them was an amazing race in the beautiful Cheviots organised by a great runner and I am proud to say my friend, Glen McWilliams from Cheviot Trail Events. This story is not just about the enjoyment that Marshalling gives. It's about the mesmerising Cheviot hills and McWilliams Round, 32 miles (short version) and 47 miles (long version) a run which reveals both the beauty and the beast in Cheviot Hills. I haven't run it (yet), so I can't really comment

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on how difficult it is but it's in the Cheviots, so obviously it is not a slow jog up a bank. 😊

I thought that the best person to introduce some information about this inspiring, demanding, but full of breathtaking views challenge would be the founder of the race, Glen McWilliams. Since he happens to like me, I've managed to get an exclusive interview.

Leila: Let's start with some introduction basics. Can you tell me how old are you and how your running started?

Glen: I am 57 and I have been running since the age of 14. I have 5 brothers, we would frequently race each other over various distances and courses.



Leila: Lol, that means you have been running longer than I have been alive 😊

Glen: I actually came to running quite late. I played

football regularly up until my mid thirties. I ran mainly to get fit for football and didn't really think much about racing.

It wasn't until I was 40 that I really got hooked on running. Northumberland fell runners started with a few races and I enjoyed the local road running scene.

Leila: Road running, so how did you end up on top of Cheviot?

Glen: Well, I particularly enjoyed off road running. The sense of freedom and the sheer enjoyment of being closer to nature was a big draw for me.

Leila: I must admit, there is something purifying for the soul in the Cheviots, even though usually you finish a run covered in mud. I guess it's like a free spa for body and soul.

Glen: That's the beauty of it!



Leila: Definitely! Tell me when did the McWilliams Round come to life?

Glen: The first round I completed by myself was on 26th August 2016.

Leila: That is not that long ago, so how many completions since then?

Glen: Short round:
Under 7 hours- Gold certificate- 20 completions.
Under 8 hours- Silver certificate- 17 completions.

Over 8 hours- Bronze certificate-39 completions.

Leila: Who is the current record holder?

Glen: Ryan Gibson, 5hrs 28min on the 15th April 2017



Leila: Wow! That is quite an achievement! If I count right, less than 80 runners completed the short round, which means perhaps half only completed the long one?

Glen: Ha ha ha, so far only 3 completions.

Leila: 3 only 🤔 What's the time limit for long one then?

Glen: Long round must be completed in under 12 hours.

Leila: 47 miles under 12 hours, that seems very

challenging. Who is the record holder for that one?

Glen: Paul John Butters, in 8 hours 22 minutes on the 28th April 2019.

Leila: Cheviots aren't flat, can you tell me what the altitude gain is on both rounds?

Glen: Short is around 5000k, Long around 9000k

Leila: Do you run the route often?

Glen: I have been running parts of the round for 25 years.

Leila: I guess you don't even need to keep your eyes open, your legs just remember the way!
Are there any checkpoints or support on the way?

Glen: The Short round is quite remote. Only two support points, at miles 8 and at mile 28. Also access to water is very limited. The Long round has a lot more support opportunities, as the route drops into the Harthope valley 4 times. So plenty opportunity for support crew (which are permitted and encouraged).

Leila: What advice you can give to future competitors?

Glen: Carry plenty of fluids (this seems to catch many people out). Get plenty of training in beforehand. Even the short round is 32 miles!!!
Positive attitude...

Leila: Ohh yes positive attitude can work miracles, especially when you struggle. What else?

Glen: Right gear. Change in altitude causes big variations in the temperature.

Leila: There is definitely a beauty and mystery in both rounds. The fact that so few have completed it, makes it even more desirable and challenging. Thank you very much for taking time to tell us about it.

Glen: Leila, I really enjoyed answering the questions. Obviously very briefly, but if anyone is interested to challenge the Cheviots and try themselves on the McWilliams Round I am more than happy to give more information.

Well, what can I say, I've been up Cheviot twice and I've been up Hedgehope twice, I've had a chance to marshal a few races in the glorious Cheviots and I do know why people fall in love with them.

I am nowhere near in shape to do the McWilliams round at the moment but knowing me, I am pretty sure I will try to push my limits and break the boundaries my weak, unfit body set sooner rather than later trying to conquer the McWilliams Round (short one of course 🍌).

For those who are fit already and fancy a challenge to their body and mind, please visit [Cheviot Trail Events](#) page on Facebook and just go for it!

=====

Photos: Top to bottom:

- 1 Looking back from the start of Hells Path (about 6 miles from the finish)
- 2 On SCW towards Hethpool and college Valley
- 3 Hedgehope & Langlee crags from Harthope valley
- 4 Looking back to the Cheviot and Hedgehope

=====

Leila only started running in 2018 participating in her first ultra just 5 months after her first mile. She has run Durham Dales and Rosedale Ultra among other events and will soon be launching her own blog.



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Ultra-Trail Drakensberg 2019

By André du Toit

The UTD events and in particular the UTD160 tick all the boxes when it comes to an ultra-trail run. Remote wilderness, massive vertical gain (5930m) and equally gruelling descent (7070m), epic sandstone cliffs, technical track and flowing ridgelines, the opportunity to tag the highest peak south of Kilimanjaro, 73km of high altitude running, Sani Pass, the highest pub in Africa, the iconic Giants Cup Trail and a host of valleys and passes in the Maloti Drakensberg World Heritage site that will test you to your core. Add to that extreme and prolonged exposure, isolation, guaranteed sleep deprivation, mental and physical fatigue. No wonder the prospect of taking on 100 miles over mountainous terrain is enough to scare off anyone, so the trick is just to enter, then work out how the hell you'll get the job done later!

No "Chariots of Fire" and crowds at the start of this adventure. A moody track from "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" and the metallic clanging of goat's bells signified the start and saw us spill off the deck of the highest pub in Africa, the only witnesses being support crews and a few amazed tourists swigging warm mugs of Glühwein or a refreshing Maluti Lager. The anxiety, nerves and pent up emotions are quickly replaced with a strange and perhaps misplaced sense of relief as we set off after months of training and preparation. This was our reward for sticking it out - the ultimate test for a trail runner...the 100miler!

But the "Ugly" was dished up first! The 73km high altitude section in Lesotho is brutal (almost entirely



above 3000m in altitude), but not without reward! It is a stunningly stark environment, with ribbons of refreshing pure mountain water to keep you hydrated and a vastness and isolation that can be your fuel or fuel your fear. It's a mind game from the beginning! At one point you run literally on the edge of the escarpment with hundreds of metres of vertical drop on your left and plateau to your right – truly exhilarating! We traversed below Hodgson's Peak (3256m), along goat tracks and into the Black

Mountain aid station to kit up before darkness fell, along with the temperature. Smiling faces, warm food, words of encouragement and often a hug are vital and I was lucky enough to have my training partner and wife, Danielle, at most of the aid stations to do just that! Ahead lay the gruelling ascent of Black Mountain and the potential of sub-zero temperatures. With zero light pollution the night is ink black and the sky above you an absolute spectacle. Good navigation is critical to ensure you stay on track and conserve energy. To tag the highest peak in Southern Africa, Thabana Ntlenyana (3482m) in the middle of the night was a moment we still speak about and proved a real milestone for most of us. Stars like you have never seen before and warm smiles (despite the -8 degrees Celsius on top) from the “superheros” manning the check point. A 1 min headlamps off moment to take in the stars, high fives all around and then a quick descent with the incentive of a warm fire, plate of food and some familiar faces at the Sani Mountain Lodge.

Dropping down the Sani Pass at sunrise with 16hrs and 73km under your belt (in my case) is an exhilarating experience. Oxygen literally pumps through your body revitalising your muscles and giving you an immediate mental boost. The sense that you have broken the back of the race is real as one passes the 100km runners as they power walk up the Pass, everyone shouting words of encouragement - you feel invincible.

Having done the UTD100km the year before I had fond memories of the traverse below the iconic Twelve Apostles as the sun splashed across the sandstone cliffs and then a fast, flowing ridge rundown to the Premier Resort Sani Pass. Memories were very quickly replaced by the reality of sore feet and searing quads! I was NOT on fresh legs this time and we still had 80km's to go! The exposure was taking its toll, I was sun-burnt, a little de-hydrated

and not in a good space. This was meant to be the fun part... time to stop, refresh and reset mentally!

But tough times never last... tough people do... suck it up sunshine! Mentally I had to arrive at Premier Resort Sani Pass fresh and ready to start again. I knew this section well as it is the start of the GCU 62km as well as the final stretch for the UTD100km. I had planned a 15-minute power nap but twitching muscles and the rush of getting to a vibey aid station with Danielle and some good trail friends all sharing the hype, made it impossible. We'd hit the 102km mark, had managed the long 25km to 30km stretches without aid stations (some are just check points) and had 62km's to go on fantastic well marked single track with evenly spaced aid stations every 12km to 15km. It could now be broken up into 5 stages each with a decent climb followed by a drop into the next valley.

Those tackling the GCU 62km have the “luxury” of soaking it all up while the legs are strong. The beautiful Gxalingenwa Gorge leads you into Cobham Nature Reserve and aid station. A quick stop at Mzimkhulwana and onto Castleburn, followed by a tough climb out of Black Eagle Pass.

The lower altitudes have a far gentler scenery with lush forested gorges, gushing mountain streams and a never-ending canvas of sandstone cliffs and



majestic peaks that you traverse beneath. It's easy to stay positive when you are surrounded by this, but the fatigue is inescapable and the exhaustion overwhelming.

You are now into your second night of running. Mentally this is huge! You drop in and out of positive space, you are mentally drained, sleep deprived and a bit scatty at this point. I found it essential to decide before entering an aid station what you were going to do. I wasn't going to sleep and mentioned the same to Danielle and she took over from there... must eat, fresh socks, shoes... whatever it was, but don't be indecisive, get it done and get going! There was no room for options. Finishing was a non-negotiable and the only person to stop me finishing would be a doctor and Danielle knew that. Thankfully it all came together and although I walked the last 20km in the moonlit shadow of Rhino Peak and over Langalibalele Pass on a rebellious ankle I had very little else to moan about.

I thrive on being in the outdoors and especially the mountains. The peace, the quiet, the solitude at times and the contour chit-chat, the sense of community, being part of a tribe who love and respect nature, the common experience of playing outside of our comfort zones, challenging our mental resilience and physical endurance and having to draw on nature to pull you through because you have nothing left but the spirit you share with it.

UTD dishes it all up – the Good, the Bad and the Ugly!

Andre du Toit, 47, born KwaZulu Natal, South Africa married to Danielle. Has two sons Luc (13) and Dom (11). A career in tourism and risk management has meant working and traveling in remote wilderness areas. Loves trails, fun times, cooking on an open fire, sleeping under stars, wine, laughter and being a Dad. Strives to fill his life with purpose, adventure and romance.

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