

SERPENTIMES

SPRING 2010

INSIDE

Relay races

London Marathon preview

Interview with UKA Ed Warner

Behind the NYD10K

Plus

Best triathlons for novices

Results of the Serpie survey

Race reports and features



Welcome to the latest issue of Serpentimes

Perhaps the most attractive characteristic of Serpentine Running Club is its diversity; it mirrors the cultural diversity of our city, our country and our sport. Running is a sport that is accessible to anyone – young, old, fast or slow – and it is with this in mind we have produced a magazine that showcases a cornucopia of Serpentine achievements at various disciplines and at varying standards.

We have news of the record-breaking achievements of Nick Torry, ultra and adventure events, profiles of a cross-section

of London marathon runners, a beginners' guide to triathlons and reports, covering a vast array of events that Serpentine members have taken part in.

We also decided to run a survey. Amongst other things, we wanted to know what motivated people to run and their reasons for joining the club. The results were never intended to prove any philosophical rights and wrongs but we had some great feedback, which at the very least underlined what a cosmopolitan bunch we are.

Given that the club so successfully caters for runners and triathletes at both ends of the spectrum, I am always amazed to see how well members mix. There is a friendliness and a strong, social scene throughout the club. It goes to show we can be high-fliers at the business of end of competitions, leagues

and relays whilst maintaining an entirely welcoming and accessible ethos. Premiership footballers take note!

I am also thrilled to include an interview with the chairman of UK Athletics, Ed Warner – a man after my own heart, a highly determined club runner, completely in love with the sport.

Huge thanks also to the rest of the editorial team, whose time and help have been invaluable.

The Serpentimes Team

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Cover photos by Andy Cox (Veera Partanen, TurboX series 2009) & Gavin Edmonds (Tom Fry at the foot of the Zig Zag road up Box Hill, Ballbuster Duathlon 2009). Back cover photo by Emma Strong (stretching at the Summer League, Battersea park 2009)

Serpie Christmas Party

2009 Prize winners

Ron Hagell - John Stonham Farewell Cup (pictured below left with Beate Vogt)
Greg Stevens - Age Graded Club Champion (pictured below centre with John Cullinane)
Angus Beaumont - Multi-Sport Champion (pictured below right with James Adams)



Ron Hagell award

Jolyon Attwooll

Ron Hagell, a familiar figure to many in the club, had been in training for a Big Cow Duathlon event when he spoke to Serpentines. Not such a big deal, you think – until you hear that, just a short while ago, medics told Ron he might never run again.

His inspiring story, for which he was awarded the 2009 John Stonham Memorial Prize, began toward the end of 2005 when he started to feel some strange pains in his left leg. Despite treatment at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, the symptoms got progressively more severe – at times his entire leg would go completely numb.

“It got worse and worse and I had to stop running,” Ron recalled. “After quite a lot of various types of treatment, they more or less told me I would never be able to run again.”

The bleak prognosis would have deterred many, but Ron, a veteran of 16 marathons, had other ideas. In January 2008, he underwent an operation to remove bone in three different places. “It was quite invasive,” he said. “An NHS surgeon told me the problem was perhaps the result of an earlier injury – possibly a skiing incident I had when I was 21 that was more serious than we realised at the time.”

Little by little, his rehabilitation progressed until, in January last year, he tried to do what he loved again – run.

“The realisation I would eventually be able to run again was exhilarating,” he said.

Still gradually – carefully – raising the intensity of his training since then, Ron has



Charles Lescott awards the John Stonham Memorial prize 2009 to Ron Hagell (left)

paid particular attention to core strengthening and conditioning, which he emphasises as an excellent method of preventing injury.

And, as he prepares for the Big Cow Duathlon, with his 65th birthday around the corner, Ron hopes his experience will inspire others when they hit the injury doldrums.

“The main thing is that, no matter how serious someone tells you that you’re injured, don’t give up the struggle.

“As much as medical people know – and they know a lot – they don’t know everything. I would just encourage people to take advice from people who have been successful about treating their injuries – and to keep trying to find a solution to their problem.”

New team for the handicap

Jolyon Attwooll

From the Proclaimers to the Spice Girls: a new all-women team has taken over handicap duties this year as the formidable bespectacled duo of Mark Braley and Jon Knox had their swansong role in charge of the long-running club event.

The replacement team is a four-strong squad of Anne Morris, Ann Kinahan (see her story on page 9), Nyla Hussain and Victoria Carrington, who have been starting club members in their traditional two laps around the Serpentine Lake in Hyde Park since January.

Mark, with a reputation for issuing commanding summons to the start-line, and Jon, known for his word-playing emails, had overseen the event for the past three years.

Serpentine race organiser Lisa Pettit, said: “I am delighted to welcome the new team to carry on this great club tradition, although we’re sad to see Mark and Jon go. They have done a brilliant job – and of course we’ll all miss Jon’s race reports!”

• The Serpentine handicap takes place on the first Saturday of each month. For more information, see www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_handicap.html. Congratulations to Simon Coles who won the 2009 Tom Hogshead trophy, the highly competitive annual handicap award.



Filming Alex Vero (right)

Running to the limits

Jolyon Attwooll

After more than two and a half years in the making, Alex Vero’s ‘Running to the Limits’ documentary was finally aired on terrestrial television this winter.

The film-maker and Serpentine, who put himself through a punishing training regime for the documentary, had his project shown on Channel 4 in December. It was repeated in January, with another possible re-showing scheduled for just before this year’s London Marathon.

He now calculates that about 800,000 viewers have seen the film. “Getting it out to that many people was great,” he said. “Trying to get anything broadcast as an independent filmmaker is a massive struggle and doing the documentary was even harder than the training.”

And the training, as anyone who watches the film will testify, was gruelling enough, with Alex setting out to understand what it takes to be an international marathon runner – and why Britain’s male long-distance running has suffered such a downturn. He put in mileage of up to 100 miles a week, transforming himself from a 16-stone heavy drinker (marathon PB 4 hrs 21) into a highly tuned athlete, running the Amsterdam half marathon in 1 hr 13.

The project took Alex on a journey that brought him face to face with some of the greatest names in endurance running, including Haile Gebrselassie, and also explored the ‘nature versus nurture’ theme. As well as pushing his own personal running limits, Alex broadened the scope of the film to

include two runners from very diverse backgrounds – Mengsitu Abebe, an Ethiopian bellboy, and Ben Moreau, an Oxford graduate and one of Britain's brightest endurance running hopes.

The documentary brought him to Serpentine in early 2006 as he set out to discover how far he could go with his own running (see Jane Harris's *Serpentines* feature in Spring 2007). Alex, who is still pounding the pavement regularly, mostly in training for triathlons, believes belonging to the club played an important role in the project.

"Malcolm French offered some great advice, and I'd like to mention Abdi [Dhuhulow], who I have become good friends with. He's someone I've been incredibly inspired by with what he's been able to achieve without that much help."

He was able to push himself in some of the club's workouts, taking part in Thursday track at Battersea as well as Karen Hancock's hill sessions. "Being a part of Serpentine – and using that bit of competitiveness – was a huge help," he said.

• The 'Running to the Limits' DVD is now available for purchase. For more information e-mail Alex at alex@alexvero.co.uk or visit alexvero.co.uk.

Breaking the three-hour barrier

Jolyon Attwooll

It had been a while since any Serpentine women had dipped below the formidable three-hour mark for the marathon – but towards the end of last year, two Serpie runners did it in rapid succession.

Jane Fanning was the first to break through the barrier. After disappointment in London earlier in the year when illness forced her retirement, Jane quietly and diligently prepared for the Florence Marathon in November. And, in ideal running conditions, she broke her personal best with a time of 2hrs 59.

Claire Imrie's performance followed quickly after. After narrowly missing out on a sub-three time on a number of occasions (see her account of the London Marathon in the

October 2009 issue of *Serpentines*), she took a substantial chunk from her personal best in the Calvia Marathon in Spain in December, clocking 2hrs 58. Congratulations to them both.

Sue Lambert's winning streak

Jolyon Attwooll

The superlative form of Serpentine stalwart Sue Lambert goes from strength to strength as she strung together a series of impressive victories over the last few months.

In November, Sue was overall winner in the over-60s category in the Cyprus International 4-day Challenge, where runners participate in four different events, a 6k-time trial, a multi-terrain half marathon, an 11k mountain trail run and a 10k city race.

She was also the V65 champion at the Serpentine New Year's Day 10k, racking up a 89.5 per cent age-graded performance, and followed this up with victory in the V60 category in the Gloucester Marathon, with a time of 4hrs 1 minute.

Vic-Torry at the New Year's 10k

Jolyon Attwooll

Nick Torry got 2010 off to the best of starts by breaking the club record in the Serpentine New Year's Day 10k race in Hyde Park.

After a series of blistering performances in the summer and autumn, Nick gave the home crowd something to warm their spirits on a cold but beautifully crisp January morning. Taking the race by the scruff of the neck from the start, Nick led the almost 500-strong field early on. From there, the only real competition was against the clock.

Despite a flat and fast course, there were still potential obstacles, including a cyclist who got in his way toward the end of the race.

However, Nick still managed to clip almost 30 seconds off his previous best, stopping the clock at 30mins 23 and beating Huw Lobb's overall club record (achieved as a second claim runner).

"The support was excellent," Nick said. "Because a lot of Serpies weren't running, they were actually there watching and that definitely makes a difference."

• See page 20 for a report on the preparation and work that is put into the 10k race.



Oliver Sinclair won the men's Pilgrims Challenge, the North Downs Way Multistage Ultra (66 miles in two days) and Claire Imrie won the women's event (Photo: Toby Melville)

The Metropolitan cross country league

Eric Phillips reports on a hard-fought campaign with a nail-biting finish

The Serpies, fresh from winning the Welsh Castles Relay for the first time in 2009 (and indeed, the Serpettes, fresh from winning the Welsh Castles Relay for however many years) back in October needed to focus on a new, tougher challenge. And where better to look than our own Metropolitan cross country league, arguably one of the most historic, prestigious and competitive local leagues in the nation. We'd never won it before. Some of the other London clubs, especially some of the better ones, take it very, very seriously. We even wondered if it was perhaps a bit beyond us. But, really, that's what running is about: putting oneself, on occasion, outside one's comfort zone. So spikes were sharpened, diaries were cleared, vests were washed and a war-cabinet was convened.

Right on the start-line of the first race we knew this year was going to be somehow different. A unique combination of threats and bribes meant that most of our faster runners were present, but the lean, mean look of rival clubs indicated that they'd stepped up their game too. And the eyes of the world's media (or at the very least, EightLane, the internet running forum) seemed to be scrutinising our every move. Yet we responded well to that pressure, with Becky Glover destroying the field and winning the women's race (with the women's team as a whole coming third on the day) while the men, led home by Nick Torry, finished second behind Shaftesbury Barnet, but ahead of favourites and reigning champions, Woodford Green.

And in that vein 2009 continued. On the men's side in particular we thought we were running well and fielding our best teams and certainly mixing it up with the heavy-hitters. In the shadows of Wormwood Scrubs prison, the year ended on a high. Not only did Nick win the individual race, but the A team as a whole won the fixture, demonstrating speed at the sharp end, but crucially strength in depth in the middle of the field. This left us second in the table, only just behind Woodford Green, but well ahead of the likes of Shaftesbury and Highgate and for the first time a league victory started to look like a reality rather than a dream.

The women were doing their bit too. With Mariah McConnaughey leading the team home (Becky's poor joints having taken another battering), the Serpettes finished 2009 in fourth place behind Woodford, Highgate and Heathside – clubs that we're sure we can upset if all our faster women toe the line.

Tragedy, in the form of heavy snow, hit us hard from mid-December through to January and, unbelievably, the fourth fixture was cancelled. We psyched ourselves up for the final race in the middle of February, for the bogs and marshes of Horsenden Hill, trying not to get distracted by rumours that Woodford Green were shipping in athletes from all over the globe. The Serpettes ran first, and although already out of the running for the title, they ran their best to finish fourth in the race and moved up to third in the league. The men gave it everything they had, but the green and white stripes of Woodford Green clustered ominously to the front of the field. Nick Torry again won the individual race, but behind him the team gave battle in vain, to finish second on the day and second in the season, with its dignity still intact and a new-found respect amongst rivals. After the race the Woodford Green manager showed us the trophy – next year we will take it home with us.

Congratulations to the 50 hardy Serpies who travelled to Leeds to run in the National XC Championships. The men's team finished an unprecedented 10th. Nick Torry finished 27th overall. The women's team, under-strength due to injury, still finished a creditable 19th.



Start of the last MET league race (Photo: Nicola Barberis Negra)

The Summer League

The Summer League Team, Siobhan Reddy and Trish Moody, put forward ten good reasons to pen the dates in your diary



Victoria Carter and Jennifer Marzullo, Battersea Park

The cross country season has come to an end but don't panic - the Summer League season will be starting soon. This series of five races on Sundays during the summer is a fun and sociable way to keep yourself fit and challenged over the summer months. In addition to the main 5 mile or 10K events, race days also involve a kids' fun run, a 1.5K tenderfoot race and 400m relays. Why participate?

1. **Race entry is free** - for the first year ever the races will be free for Serpies.
2. **All welcome** - beginners, regulars, fast, slow, old and young.
3. **No pre-entry required or entry forms to fill in** - just turn up on the day in your Serpie vest and run.

4. **Race venues are easily accessible by public transport** - and often take place in London's greener pastures.
5. **Great medals/trophies for age categories** - a high chance of earning yourself some silverware.
6. **Sociable atmosphere** - a chance to meet people from six other London clubs and of course we hope Dobbin the horse will put in another appearance.
7. **Good weather** - well hopefully anyway!
8. **Relays** - a chance to relive your youth and run in the 400m relays – hilarious, well-supported, a lot of fun and tough on the legs after running in the 5 mile or 10K main race.
9. **A chance to involve the kids** - children, depending on their age, can run in a 400m fun run, a 1.5km tenderfoot race and/or the relays.
10. **Delicious homemade cakes** - the host club always provides a fantastic post race spread.



Summer League dates

- Sunday 6 June – Dulwich Park 10 km (+ 2009 prize-giving)
 - Sunday 20 June – Headstone Manor Recreation Ground, Harrow 10K
 - Sunday 4 July – Perivale Park 5 miles
 - Sunday 25 July – Regent's Park 10K
 - Sunday 15 August – Battersea Park 5 miles (home race – volunteers required!)
- For any questions please email summerleague@serpentine.org.uk

and don't forget the Assembly league!

A monthly series of six short Thursday evening interclub races: two in Beckenham, two in Greenwich and two in Victoria Park. All details in the Serpie planner. Starts on April 8th, free.

Photos courtesy of Emma Strong

Incremental training for 10k

Frank Horwill, level 4 performance coach and honorary Serpentine member, on 10k training

A year ago, at Battersea track on a Monday night, three women from different clubs were brought together for specialist 10K pace sessions. Two of them had times of 41 minutes for the distance and one had recorded 37:30. After eight months the two 41 minute runners ran 36:30 and the third athlete ran 33:05 which got her an England vest.

The methodology for the Monday evening sessions was called incremental training. This is where a minute segment of the 10K distance is run at a much faster pace than the athlete's best time for the distance with only 30 seconds rest after each run. The target is to run 10K distance in total in every session.

The target time chosen was 33:20 for 10K and the starting distance was 200m in 40 seconds with 30 seconds rest. Some may choose to run 100m in 20 seconds to start with. In order to achieve 10K distance in total it will be noted that 50 x 200 in 40 seconds with 30 seconds rest is the target.

When the 200s could be run on time with the fixed rest for 10K distance, the next step was to run 300s in 60 seconds still with 30 seconds rest and then on to 25 x 400 in 80 seconds again with 30 seconds rest.

Incremental training is the exact opposite of orthodox repetition running where the athlete starts slow at a distance and hopes to get faster. For instance, a 41 minute/10K runner might tackle 6 x 1600 in six minutes with 100m jog/45 seconds recovery. This is 37:30/10K pace. The problem with this method is that the athlete is not experiencing a much faster pace until many months later. With incremental training you start fast and gradually get longer. Two of the three athletes during their eight months on this regime both improved their marathon times by 30 minutes in their second attempt at the distance recording 2:50:38 and 2:50:51 and improved their half marathon times to 81 minutes and 82 minutes. The third athlete recorded personal best times from 800m through to 10K which included a 15:50/5K, a 9:05/3K and 4:16/1500m.

All three athletes did a 5K pace session in addition to the 10K one, eg
 4 x 1600m with 200m jog/90 seconds recovery; or
 8 x 800m with 100m jog/45 seconds recovery; or
 16 x 400m with 30 seconds stationary rest.

Four days of the week they did steady runs ranging from 35 minutes to 2 hours 45 minutes in duration.

Here is a table for incremental training. The athlete only moves on to a longer distance when the lesser distance is accomplished fully.

Remember the old Chinese proverb: "A 10,000 mile walk starts with the first step."

Also remember Kipling's advice: "Keep on, keep on, until a little something inside you says, 'KEEP ON'."

In the next issue: test your running knowledge by Frank Horwill.

TARGET TIME	STARTING SESSION	PROGRESSION
30 mins/10K	50 x 200 in 36" with 30" rest	33 x 300 in 54"
35 mins/10K	50 x 200 in 42" with 30" rest	33 x 300 in 63"
40 mins/10K	50 x 200 in 47.5" with 30" rest	33 x 300 in 71"

Track and field is upon us!

The 2010 season starts on 24th April with the first Southern Women's League match! Meetings are every couple of weeks or so in one league or another right through to 4th September for the final women's league match. Match dates and venues are on the Event Planner. All abilities welcome and we always need officials to help run the matches!

Southern Women's League: for all women, Saturday afternoons

Southern Men's League Division 2: the men's A team, Saturday afternoons

Southern Men's League Division 3: the men's B team, Saturday afternoons

Rosenheim League: open to men and women, Wednesday evenings. Excellent if you want to give it a go, but not quite sure.

Southern Counties Vets League : for men and women aged 35+, Monday evenings

TOM HOGSHEAD HANDICAP PROVES A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR BEGINNERS – EVEN OLDER ONES

Ann Kinahan, aged 57, who finished fourth overall and was the highest placed woman in this year's Handicap competition, talks about climbing this particular mountain and the new Challenge Cup for women vets 50 +

While I would still not call myself a runner, like anyone I like a challenge. And so, from the moment I was persuaded to jog a few strides with the Saturday morning beginners and found that if I went as slowly as Sue Walker insisted, I could keep going for a few yards. It was a bit like having a new toy to try out – a body that could run.

Having sat in the Dell café on a couple of Saturday mornings while my son, Peter, ran the Handicap and noticed that people generally survived the race and even appeared cheerful, it eventually seemed to me it might be more interesting to take part than to watch. I hobbled round a couple of times as a scratch runner – without, I must say, having much idea of what was going on, and then took stock more carefully.

I have always thought that sport must be inclusive and the Handicap is, of course, as inclusive as you can get, with all times and handicaps adjusted to your age and ability. Once I started to look at the Tom



The new handicap team at registration, Ann is the woman in red. (Photo: Lula Rosso)



Inspiring ladies: Ros Young (left) and Jan Farmer complete their 100th handicap in February 2010 (Photo: Ron Hagell)

Hogshead table on the club website I could see that in theory it should be possible for me to score as many marks as anyone else. I wondered if it could be a realistic target to finish the 2009 competition in the top ten.

To do well overall, you need eight good scores to count. Simply by turning up and running a consistent time you are likely to score 14 points per race (three for taking part and completing; 11 for achieving a time fairly close to your PB); in most years this will get you close to finishing in the top 20; if you are able to manage an actual PB this will give you an extra point and with six PBs you would definitely be among the top 20. You can score extra points for finishing a race in the top 17. Also noticeable was that if you can take part in the summer races while many Serpies are on holiday, you stand a much better chance of being placed and achieving a high score. This changes significantly in October when everyone returns with a frightening enthusiasm to the race track. However, my overall strategy had been working and by November I found that I was fifth in the overall competition.

I realised I needed to do a bit of work in preparing for the December race because there were still several people who could knock me out of the top 10 if they achieved a good final score. For this I called on the help of a combination of Serpie training sessions, even going up to Willesden stadium on a couple of Tuesday evenings; and the Saturday morning two and three parks with a bit of a diversion thrown in to ensure a practice sprint down the length of the Serpentine. Training specifically for the distance over a short period paid off and I was able to finish with a PB and a fantastic score of 26 points to give me fourth place overall. When we went to the Dell café to celebrate, this time I felt it was a true celebration – job done and “Wow! What a sense of achievement!”

Now I am pleased to join the team of organisers for 2010 and to support others who would like to have a go. To this end, we are also introducing a cup and annual medal for the 2010 Tom Hogshead League which will go to the highest scoring woman vet 50 plus, with the aim of encouraging more women vets to join in for 2010. As they seem to keep saying in the adverts, “Come on girls, let’s show the men what we can do because, as you know...we’re worth it!”

ITU Triathlon Championships

August 2009 saw the world's elite triathletes competing in our very own Hyde Park for the London stage of the new ITU World Triathlon Championships series

Not only was this an exciting opportunity to see our top stars, such as Alistair Brownlee and Helen Jenkins, performing (and winning medals) in our own back yard, but there was also an age-graded event open to all on the following day giving the general public the chance to run on the course which is earmarked for the Olympic event in 2012.

There was an impressive showing from Serpentine, with around 30 of our triathletes competing over either the sprint or Olympic distances that were on offer, and age group wins from Becky Glover, Ros Young, Hilary Walker, Jan Farmer and Eddie Brocklesby.

Angus Beaumont – Sprint distance



Despite the hefty entry fee of £75, which I wouldn't have normally paid, the opportunity to race in central London on the 2012 Olympic triathlon circuit was too much of a pull and so I gladly handed over my money for the opportunity.

Having only just completed Ironman Switzerland four weeks prior to the Dextro sprint distance triathlon in Hyde Park my motivation and training had been lacking somewhat. However a fantastic summer's day in August and the inspiration from watching the elites the day before fixed the motivation issue and I was raring to go come race morning.

I'd only started learning to swim the previous year and despite having done a few open water tri's including the Ironman, the swim still

held a certain anxiety not helped by the fact that the water in the Serpentine is black. My one and only sprint tri before this had seen me almost come last in the swim in a time over 19mins so if I could do something around 15 or 16 I'd be pretty happy. I got onto the heels of



Elite ladies dive into the Serpentine (photos: Richard Melik)

the mid pack and held on for what felt fairly comfortable and was surprised when I came out of the water and there were still people behind me. There is then a long run of about 400m to T1, which meant it took some time before I got my heart rate under control.

The bike is normally my stronger of the three and I'm much more suited to a super technical course with some hills in it. The course was as flat as you could probably get in London with the smallest of inclines as you come into the Hyde Park corner end of the park which meant you could easily get up to 50km/hr, be it only for a short distance.

The three lap course was relatively technical with some lovely bends in the middle that if you got the line right could be taken flat out with the cheering crowds en masse in that area, making you feel like you were in the prologue of the Tour de France. Get it right and you should only need to use your brakes seven times for the whole course, the turnarounds and the dismount. The second turnaround was a long slow drawn out affair as you had to come down to walking pace to get round and then pump the legs to get back up to speed which sapped the energy. I was feeling the lack of recent training and the post Ironman fatigue and knew I was well off my usual pace on the bike.

The run went by in a blur of pain as any sprint tri run does, with any small incline feeling like it's knocking you back to a crawl. I was picking competitors off on the run which kept my motivation high (one of the advantages of being a rubbish swimmer) and 1km from the finish I'd set my sights on passing Serpie colleague, JT, who'd started in the wave before me. Coming through the finish chute I managed to hold back being sick despite my body's best attempts.

All in all, it was a superbly organised event in a fantastic location and despite not being at my best managed to finish seventh in my age group which was won by James Cracknell. I've already signed up for next year in the hope of performing considerably better and qualifying for the world championships. Without a doubt it's an expensive race but how much would a Sunday league footballer pay to play at Wembley. With that in mind I think it was well worth the £75 entry.

Next event: 24-25 July 2010
<http://london.triathlon.org/>

“I’m thinking about doing a triathlon.... Which races are good for novices?”

Neil Melville



The good news is that all triathlons are suitable for first-timers, and with huge growth in the sport you can expect to find novices at any event. They can be hard to spot if you are feeling nervous and only have eyes for skinny folks in tights with time trial bikes but a closer look will reveal many less impressive machines and it is definitely worth remembering that skinny + fancy bike does not equal ability to swim then bike and then get off it and run well.

For the next edition of Serpentines, I'll offer some thoughts to dispel those first race-day fears but for now, let me reassure you that triathletes are evangelical by nature and you will be able to go to any race and ask anyone for advice or help. So choose your race according to location and distance and get started by checking out the following online resources: www.tri247.com and www.britishtriathlon.org. Both sites have comprehensive lists of UK events. I prefer Tri247's search tool but BritishTriathlon provides additional information such as how many laps the bike course is and whether it is flat or not. Our own website has a good list of all the races most relevant to our club. Not just local ones but other races that Serpies have had added in order to take advantage of planner features such as hooking up with others going to that race.

“Suitable for novices” means different things to different people: small low key events might seem more “friendly”, massive events give you the chance to hide in the crowd. So what exactly are you looking for?

I want a race where I don't have to invest in a load of kit that I might not use again

If you are considering triathlon you probably have a bike or know where to borrow one. You don't need a specialist triathlon bike and nor will you be the only person without one. To avoid buying a wetsuit you possibly want to be using Tri247's advanced search to look for events containing “pool”. The Thames Turbo (www.thamesturbo.com) series of sprint races is particularly worth a mention as they are based out of Hampton pool – local, outdoor and heated. Races where the swim is in a swimming pool do tend to be shorter distance so if your ambition is the Olympic distance or longer, you will have to swim open water but you can hire a wetsuit for a single race or an entire season. Check out the specialist triathlon stores (Tri & Run, Bike & Run, TriUK, SBR) or the back pages of the triathlon magazines.

Another way to avoid shelling out for kit is to cut your teeth on a duathlon (run/bike/run) or aquathlon (swim/run). The Dragon Slayer Duathlon (East London) or one of the many Hillingdon duathlons (West

London) are good fun, low key events, conveniently located.

I want a race that is small and low key

There are many of these because it is so much easier to put on a small triathlon than a big one. I'm going to recommend the London League Events (www.triathlonlondon.org). They are local and you can be certain of seeing other Serpies at them, plus, just by finishing you can contribute points to our mob match score in the league.

I want a race where I won't be the only Serpie

Apart from the London League and the Serpie event planner, I'd also mention the club championship races. (www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_clubchamps_tri.html) - races we have chosen to be focus races for the club, as much for beginners as those battling it out for trophies.

The Nottingham relays are another club focus and every year many tri first-timers join us for a great race and social weekend (www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_tri_club_relays.html). Watch for news announcements in July.

I want a big race where I can hide in crowds of beginners!

Yes, it is true that the mega races like the London Triathlon and the Windsor Triathlon will have a high quota of novices. They have a high quota of everything! They have the atmosphere of the big event and for some it may be reassuring to see many mountain bikes on the racking. Both these need to be entered almost a year in advance but the Hyde Park Triathlon is a new race that is easier to get into. Big races have big entry fees and the courses can be crowded. London in particular has a rough swim because of the number of turns in the course, so to get the most out of these races I recommend getting some experience at a smaller event before the “big one”.

Other events with many novices are the South Coast Tri (www.fun2tri.co.uk) and the Blenheim triathlon – organised by the London Triathlon people, another big race on closed roads in the grounds of the castle. Human race (www.humanrace.co.uk) also run many events from the rowing lake at Eton which are targeted at new triathletes. Check out their website and you'll see what I mean. South Coast is the only sea swim I have mentioned here. A lot of novices are scared of the sea swim but you really shouldn't be; yes a mouthful of sea water isn't pleasant but you are so much more buoyant and why are you drinking it anyway?

I want a scenic race

These are my preference. Search for races in rural parts of the country with a bike and run courses with no more than two laps – that usually means there is plenty of space and not a lot of traffic. The Big Cow events (www.big-cow.com) based around Milton Keynes area are well organised events with good atmosphere. The Bedford Triathlon is one of my favourites: a fast, scenic course with a river swim that makes following the right line easier than when the field spreads out in a lake swim. The Race New Forest (www.racenewforest.co.uk) events are also excellent races organised by friendly people and of course the New Forest makes a great weekend away.

As I said at the beginning, novices should pick a race using the same criteria as anyone else. Get out there and enjoy!

Round Norfolk Relay

A report in pictures

Alex Elferink, Mark Bell and Graham Simister took 15 Serpies to the annual Round Norfolk Relay in September 2009.

Circumnavigating the county of Norfolk, as close to the county border as possible, and starting and finishing in King's Lynn, this is about the only traditional (baton-passing) long distance relay left on the race calendar. It's a total distance of 193 miles and 55 teams took part this year.

This is not just an event for elite runners because the race is organised a bit like our handicap: each team predicts its race time and adjusts the start appropriately so that they finish at roughly 09:30 on Sunday morning. We started at 08:30, with a predicted race time of 25:09. A mere 25:40 later we were finished, only 31 minutes off our prediction!



(ABOVE) The team at the temporary headquarters in Suffolk



(ABOVE) We started fast. Alan Hall passes the baton to James Edgar in a sleepy Hunstanton



(RIGHT) Burnham-on-sea. Change-over from James Edgar to James Skinner, who placed 9th in stage 3, our highest individual ranking

(BELOW) The sun came out for Maggie Purr



(BELOW) Spectacular views and climbs were in store for Sioned Morgan and Steve Cook





(LEFT) Liu White stretches before stage 7



(ABOVE) Marielle Vestlund late Saturday afternoon. Consistently delivering for Serpentine teams, she was the fastest female of her stage and 14th overall



(LEFT) Anthony Baldwin happy at the prospect of running through Thetford forest at 3am on Sunday



(ABOVE) After shuttling people back and forth three times through the night, Graham Simister flies in Norfolk

(BELOW) **The End!** Mike Garvin crosses the finishing line in King's Lynn. We came 6th in the club category, from 16 teams and 30th overall, from 55 teams. Incidentally, it was a fantastic and superbly organised weekend!



Round Norfolk Relay Facts

The relay consists of 17 unequal stages ranging from 5 to 20 miles
There are stages for all abilities, everybody is welcome
Each runner is supported, drivers and cyclists particularly needed
You won't get a full night's sleep, but plenty of Serpie camaraderie
Next event is on 18/19 September 2010

Send an email to roundnorfolk@serpentine.org.uk if you are interested in taking part in 2010!

Report by A. Elferink. Photos by M. Vestlund, M. Pryke, M. Purr, L. Rosso.

Fantastic result for Fanning at Eridge Park

Rory McFarlane reports on a tough 10 miler in the Kent countryside

When I arrived at Eridge Park I was yet to discover the surprises that lay in store. England's oldest deer park is privately owned but is opened every year for this event, which is now in its eleventh year. The course has many obstacles along the way including Cheeky's bog (after the race director), a fence to jump and a succession of challenging hills. As I wasn't running I had to depend upon word of mouth but the general impression was that the course was "extremely tough but beautiful all the same."

The race's professionally designed website whetted my appetite for a Sunday morning cross-country race. I couldn't wait to get pictures of athletes ankle-deep in the mud that had been promised. Unfortunately, after a somewhat dry week leading up to the race, this was not to be. The ground was rock solid and the runners had to trample over very awkward chalky ground, which most of the Serpies compared to the equally brilliant North Downs race.

The organisation of the race was all thanks to the wonders of Race Director, Allan Cheek. The course was incredibly well marshalled by the happy, smiley people from Tunbridge Wells Harriers, the local club, who also provided us with some very scrumptious cakes afterwards.

Before the race I asked Allan where the athletes would be running, as there was no map on the website, to which he replied, "It's going to be left as a surprise for this year."

During this conversation, a small and rather familiar looking lady appeared to my left and said to Allan, "Hello, I'm Hayley Higham." Being an athletics fanatic I knew that I was in the presence of a true champion athlete. The former European Cross-Country champion (better known as Hayley Yelling) was going to start and run the 10 mile cross-country race. So at the start of the race she sounded the hooter, dropped it and then ran off. I had a quick chat with Hayley after the race and she said that one of her friends had convinced her to run it. She also said, "I really enjoyed today, it was tough and the hills were brutal!" After she had finished, ever smiling Hayley ran back down the course to support some of the slightly slower runners who were very grateful. Hayley is very charming and made a lasting impression on everyone at the race.

Higham, who retired at the end of last year, was the first woman to cross the line and finished just ahead of Serpie, Jane Fanning. Jane passed her husband, and fellow Serpie, Richard with one mile to go. After finishing he exclaimed, "I think she put something in my porridge this morning."

Jane, along with fellow Serpies Penny Thorn and Katie Crowe, also won the women's team prize, beating opposition from Paddock Wood AC and Beckenham Running Club. Then, Hayley Higham generously gifted her prize, of a £50 Cotswold voucher, to Jane as I'm sure she has many more prizes at home. So as a reward for being the best



Jane Fanning keeps husband Richard firmly in her sights
(Photo: Rory McFarlane)

female club winners at the Eridge 10 what do you get? A voucher, some money maybe or even a little trophy? No, you get one Garmin watch strap between three people!

Only a minute and a half behind Jane was Paddock Wood AC runner and five time previous winner of this event Tina Oldershaw, who finished as third lady. After talking to some of the locals I learnt that Tina is more used to coming out on top of these kind of races. Unfortunately for her she was outclassed by a former European Cross-Country champion and a Serpie who just keeps on improving.

Top finishing male Serpie, Andy Reeves, was pleased to have equalled his position from the previous year's event (and to have beaten Hayley Higham) but could do nothing about winner Will Levett. The Tunbridge AC runner led from the start and finished a cool 5 minutes ahead of Andy. Will finished in a time of 1:02:11, so the race organisers were right in predicting that nobody would go under the hour. I was interested to note that Andy had to run in racing flats as he didn't have a pair of the more desirable fell shoes, but it didn't seem to hold him back.

The Serpentine clan also picked up an age group prize in the shape of Karen Hancock who came third in the F45 category. At first she was very disappointed with her performance but after some reflection Karen realised that she was just having an off day.

This year's event included two very lengthy and steep hills, one after five miles and the other after eight. They involved hands on knees climbing, a style more associated with fell running. After those hills I'm sure that the athletes were very glad to pass a group of people who gave out handfuls of Jelly Babies. As well as Jelly Babies water was also being handed out but wasn't really necessary on a rather

chilly and sunless day, but these were perfect conditions for running.

The new course wasn't very accurately measured as the majority of Garmins recorded the distance as 10.3 miles. All the same, I'm sure the organisers were quickly forgiven when the athletes saw what was being handed out at the end. In a M.A.S.H tent real ale was being given out to all participants for free! As well as beer and cake an all but empty goody bag was given out, consisting of a fancy North Face lip balm and a magazine filled with running adverts. The facilities at the race were somewhat average, a few portaloos, a small field to park on, but nowhere to get changed.

This year's fantastic event saw a record number of entries and I hope to see that many more Serpies than this year's eight will be encouraged to participate in next year's competition. So in your diaries go to the 12th September 2010 and make sure you are free for this event because it is a must do.

Voted 1st in the Runner's World UK's Best 50 Races of 2009!



The Serpie contingent at Eridge Park (Photo: Rory McFarlane)



Hendrik Zietsman, half marathon male club champion. Third overall in Gosport 2009 with 1:10:44 (Photo: Ian Hodge)

Club Championship Races 2010

The Serpentine Club Championships are a list of races with club trophies awarded for the fastest male, fastest female and the runner with best age-graded score in each race. Held over the summer, the 1 mile (track), 3000m (track), 5k (road), 1km (road) also make up the Serpie Grand Prix competition which has its own trophies. The other races are open races and you must enter them yourself. For more detail check <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/racing.html>

Road Chamionship

Half Marathon: Wokingham Sun 21st February
 1 km*: (Grand Prix) Hyde Park TBC August
 5 km*: (Grand Prix) Battersea Park TBC August
 10 km: Middlesex & Open, Victoria Park 5th September
 10 miles: Cabbage Patch 10 TBC October
 Marathon: Any race during 2010 will count

Track Championship

100m: Any result during 2010
 400m: Any result during 2010
 800m: Any result during 2010
 1 mile*: (Grand Prix) Willesden track TBC August
 3000m*: (Grand Prix) Willesden track TBC August (NEW)

Triathlon Championship

Sprint triathlon: Crystal Palace, 23rd May (NEW DATE)
 Olympic triathlon: Dambuster, 19th June
 Half Ironman: New Forest, 19th September
 Duathlon: Steyning, 5th April
 Aquathlon: Morden 6n6, 9th May (TBC)

*no advance entry – you just turn up on the day

An Ethiopian Odyssey

Katy Levy describes a humbling, awe-inspiring Serpie trip to Ethiopia and rubs shoulders with Paula and Haile

On 12 November, 14 bewildered, adventurous, Serpies jettied off into the unknown. We were heading for the African skies of Ethiopia. My friends and family had looked at me in utter bewilderment at my choice of holiday destination. To be frank, my knowledge was limited to much publicised stories of a country ridden with famine and civil unrest. This adventure would give me the opportunity to see, learn and experience so much more than the media have long portrayed of this hidden gem.

First stop was Addis Ababa (Ethiopia's capital). Addis at first glimpse appeared to replicate all elements of a third world city with its pungent diesel fumes, underlying sewage aroma, young toddlers selling their wares by the roadside, the random sight of a highway running into a farmyard, where a herd of cattle interlocked the passing traffic, overhanging electricity wires..... However, it was not until I returned to the city, after eight days of touring the Northern Highlands did I start to view this magical city in such a different light. Before we had set off for our main adventure, we had carried several pairs of shoes with us and Richard Nerurkar and his wife Gail met us literally with open arms. The purpose of bringing shoes to Ethiopia was to aid a very large project: to provide as many Ethiopians as possible with the gift of covering their feet to prevent and hopefully even cure Mossy Foot.

Our second stop took us to Lalibela, a town famous for its impressive rock churches carved into the ground. We were met by local guides from the TESFA community and our group of 14 was quickly divided into two (not enough mud huts en route to accommodate all of us). Quick set of goodbyes and then off into the dust via a rickety van. With the exception of our mode of transport which would soon disappear, we were seemingly driving back through time to a place where TVs, radios, phones, computers, ipods, electricity, running water, roads and machinery did not exist and it felt great to be temporarily escaping mankind's modern inventions and submersing oneself in a faraway land.



The visiting Serpies were given a warm yet inquisitive welcome from the local children - particularly when Katy taught them how to hop

Having been rather unceremoniously dropped in what I could only assume was a typical Ethiopian village to pick up our donkeys (mode of transport for our bags), we were quickly surrounded by over 100 locals. The five minutes which followed descending from the van was virtually indescribable. I was feeling anxious as I tried to take in the sights of ragged children, the squatting flies and a thousand eyes upon us. Everything went silent apart from the squawking chickens being held upside down by a few children. The villagers stared at us in utter bewilderment, casting their smiling, open eyes upon us and we stared back in complete curiosity. To break the ice (we Serpies were all speechless), I thought it would be wise to 'high five' our villagers as a form of greeting. I do strange things when nervous! This random act thankfully brought about large smiles and giggles and soon enough my 'high fives' were echoed throughout the village and down towards the market.

In this land, to invite one to dance, you grunt at them, show your twinkling dentures and move your shoulders up and down at 100 miles per hour.

The market was one hell of a memorable experience. It was a feast for the eyes in terms of its vibrancy and array of chillies, potatoes, chickens, shoes, goat skins and it felt if our group of seven were the most famous people on earth. Our villages took delight in our guest appearance, smiles all round, and once we realised that we were not going to be harassed, we all began to relax and soak up this incredible atmospheric moment. The children made fantastic models for our photos and delighted in the fact that we could replay what we had captured on our digital cameras. Shrieks of joy amongst the children, donkeys wincing out in pain (our luggage should have been shared out amongst six donkeys and not three), our magical journey through the highlands had commenced in style (albeit a dusty one)!

And so our journey continued deep into the Ethiopian Highlands passing fields of sprouting crops, mud hut villages, young children tending to their herds comprising cows and sheep, groups of women carrying their food and babies. We trekked on average 12-18 miles a day and even though I let go of most of my princess-like traits, constipation was the only way to beat visiting the compounds of a highland toilet. I had severe panic attacks of falling into the deep dug out and never making it out alive.

Thankfully, our group was pretty fit but climbing at an altitude of over 3,000 metres was still incredibly tough. Thankfully, the children who were extremely perceptive picked up on my distaste for heights and offered themselves as walking sticks. I was quick to accept this favour. What a sight!

We stayed in four different villages and were warmly greeted by the local communes. Our sundown ritual involved a coffee ceremony and a post trek wash down. My question to the Highlanders, "why, oh why build a shower (bucket hut) on the edge of a cliff?" The views were spectacular but it really felt as if I was exposing myself to Africa. The community had its very own chefs spread out across the villages and we ate well on rice, omelettes, soup and the unforgettable enjera bread.

One night, the locals even picked a lamb for us and slaughtered it before our very own eyes. This was one thing I could do without and so I let the others watch as blunt knives broke the skin and neck of this innocent baby lamb (and I am not a vegetarian). One ritual I couldn't avoid, however, was being forced into shaking my shoulders, wiggling my bottom: Highlander dancing. In this land, to invite one to dance, you grunt at them, show your twinkling dentures and move your shoulders up and down at 100 miles per hour. I was the target and Grandfather made these gestures on his victim and I was forced to perform, to the great delight of the group and the butcher. We each took it in turn to bust a move but alas white men can't dance compared to our African brothers.

After the trek, our two groups were reunited again in the town of Lalibela, where we wondered in utter amazement at the statues of rock churches and then we went on to Bahadar, where we visited the markets and monasteries on the islands of Lake Tana. It was at this market where I was accosted by the most beautiful children I had ever seen. I somehow resembled a toy and became their fascination. To ensure that I didn't let them down, I taught three children to hop. Another personal top highlight for me.

Journeying back to the capital, the excitement amongst the group was contagious. We were all about to participate in the Great Ethiopian Run and the secret was out: we were going to meet Paula Radcliffe and Haile Gebrselassie at the pre-pasty party. The party attracted over 200 runners from Europe and the loudest and largest contingency was indeed the Irish who were out in Ethiopia to support a charity for trachoma. As we sat digging into our pasta, Haile and Paula walked in and it was completely surreal. Haile was a man of smiles and Paula scrubbed up great in her non-running attire carrying an air of nervous apprehension. Both made lovely welcoming speeches and I had to get our Serpie folk on stage for a



Serpie group photo with Haile

great shot. Was I really in the presence of two of the world's greatest marathon record holders who have all but inspired me to continue my endless running goals?

The morning of the race, Rob Walker and his cameraman followed us Serpies to the start line. All runners were wearing a green T-shirt and the city became a sea of green of 32,000 bodies. Dancing and singing filled the streets; locals on the corners wished us good luck, the more serious began to engage in their pre-race warm-ups. It was overwhelming. It was

At 3K in, a local became my Mr Motivator and ushered me to the finish. He even kept me cool by pouring his bottle of water over me. It would have been impolite to swear at him.

more like a carnival fiesta party than the beginning of a race. It was utter chaos and we all were soaking it up. How would an altitude of 2,500m and 30 degree heat affect us mere mortal Serpies? An assortment of trainers, flip flops, leather soled shoes were about to pound the streets across Addis and find out!

We were off. No matter how hard I tried, my lungs failed me and I couldn't get going. Locals were passing out in front of my eyes. At 3K in, a local became my Mr Motivator and ushered me to the finish. He even kept me cool by pouring his bottle of water over me. It would have been impolite to swear at him. At the 8K mark, 30 local runners began to chant my name, in harmony.

As a final token gift, our Serpie group had the pleasure of attending Haile's house for a post race celebration. A palace, a museum of trophies but above all, a home. Haile was all too happy to host and put on a tremendous feast. Thank you to a great group, a great club but mostly thank you to Beate and Ron for encouraging our eyes to open to such a fantastic country.

<http://www.ethiopianrun.org/>

Relay the News: Your Club needs You!

Lula Rosso

One of the best experiences you can have with the Club is taking part in one of the popular team club relays, often immersed in pretty countryside, and it's a great opportunity for newer Serpie members to get involved with the Club and meet other Serpies. They involve a weekend away, usually subsidised by the club, and on the Serpie website you can find all previous years' reports. Watch out for calls for entries in the Serpentine e-newsletter and register your interest on the Serpie planner to give the organisers an idea of numbers.



2009 High Peak Relay teams (Photo: Ian Brodrick)

May 22-23 Green Belt Relay. This race is a two day, multi-stage, multi-terrain relay around London's Greenbelt, and very popular with London clubs so old rivalries can get reignited. The route is divided into 22 sections (between 5.7 and 13.8 miles each), and runners must run at least twice, once on each day of the race. Some navigational skills may be required, especially if you are going to lead the stage, as occasionally someone gets lost, but it is great fun very close to home. In the past, up to four teams have been entered; the A teams will be out to win but there's plenty of room for everyone to have a go, whatever your standard.

June 12 Welsh Castles Relay. Highly prestigious, competitive 20s tage team relay on a legendary tough and spectacular route. We are only allowed one team for each category: men, women and vets. Both men and women are defending champions and will be highly competitive. Vets may be more flexible, depending on who applies. Entry is not guaranteed but highly sought after by the ones in the know.

September 18-19 Round Norfolk Relay. Iconic two days baton-passing relay in Norfolk, see page 12 for a full report.

November 14 High Peak Relay. Popular relay with short scenic stages of 2.5 to 5.5 miles, all off-road along the very well maintained High Peak Trail in Derbyshire. Most stages are flat and beginner-friendly. Plenty of possible activities to choose from on the Saturday followed by the race itself on the Sunday, see next page for Pat Roach's report. The Club enters three or four teams depending on demand.

Regional and National Road Relays:

- Sun 21st Mar :** SEAA 12 Stage Mens (Milton Keynes)
SEAA 6 Stage Womens (Milton Keynes)
- Sat 17th Apr :** ERRA 12 Stage Mens National (Sutton Coldfield)
ERRA 6 Stage Womens National (Sutton Coldfield)
- Sat 15th May :** BMAF Vets (Sutton Coldfield)
- Sat 25th Sep :** SEAA 6 Stage Mens & 4 Stage Vets (Aldershot)

Triathlon Relays

August 21 National Club Relay Championship, Nottingham. Don't be intimidated by the word National, this is a fun weekend away where the club enters several teams open to all abilities. Each person in the teams of four swims, bikes and runs using a tagging format. Excellent for people new to tri, and you'll come back with more advice you'll ever need or want!

Sun 26th Sep : SEAA 4 Stage Womens & Vets (Aldershot)

Sat 16th Oct : ERRA 6 Stage Mens National (Sutton Coldfield)
ERRA 4 Stage Womens National (Sutton Coldfield)

These key races on the athletics calendar are of a very high standards as there are usually professional athletes racing for some teams (Mo Farah and Paula Radcliffe currently hold Sutton Coldfield's best performances) and represent a great opportunity for our better runners to compete against the best.

Ian Hodge (Competition & Team Events representative on the Committee) says, "Realistically, you need to run 18:30 / 5k or better as a senior man and faster than 21:00 / 5k as a senior women to make the B teams and we'd be looking for quite a bit faster than that for the A teams. The Vets races we'll enter anyone who is interested! If there's enough interest, we'll also enter additional teams (at a slightly lower standard) in the SEAA events. The men's teams must finish in the top 20 or so places in the southern championships to qualify for the nationals".

Distances vary between around 5 km and 8 km for the men and 4 km and 6 km for women. They are also very exciting to watch and provide great 'sharpeners' for spring and autumn marathons. Read Natalie's report on the next page to understand what is involved in running in such an exalted field.

(SEAA, South of England Athletic Association; ERRA, English Road Running Association; BMAF, British Masters Athletic Federation)

High Peaks Relay

Pat Roach gives a personal insight into one of the popular Club relays

I'd never done a relay before or been on a Serpie weekend away but Alan Hall's email was so inviting...

"These group weekends away are always a sociable way to do a race, and this one is a worthy destination amid the superb scenery of the White Peak" - I'd been to the Lakes, but never to the Peaks...so a good start!

"I would like to emphasise that whether fast or slow you will be welcome in this team..." - "slow" hmm, sounds like someone I know!

"Compared to some of the other relays we do, the HPR is relatively tame... with individual stages ranging from 2.5 to 5.5 miles..." - tame and only 2.5 miles; what could be better.

So with that in mind, the decision was taken and I was all set to find out what it really meant to run a "tame" relay in the Peaks with a bunch of people, for the most part, I'd never met before...

The journey up on the Friday evening went smoothly; all huddled into a mini-bus, just chatting or watching the world go by. The highlight though, I have to say, was the mint hot chocolate offered to me by a fellow Serpie at the midway-point food stop.

We arrived in pretty good time and bundled into the bunk house. I headed straight for the bedroom to baggy a top bunk. It was like being on a school trip again but with no-one there to tell you when to turn the lights out.

On the first day, there was the choice to be as active or inactive as we wanted. For me, this meant a lot of activity on the eating front: a full English breakfast, the famous Bakewell tart and custard and a hearty pub dinner to round off the day. It has to be said that most of the others opted for more strenuous activities - running, walking, cycling or "going ape" (on a muddy, wet assault course which was, by all accounts, great fun!)... and rumour has it there was karaoke too, post-dinner of course!

The following day was race day. The picking-up and dropping-off of the runners at the various stages of the race and the swapping of bags and car keys was as close to a military operation as you can get. It was a bit confusing for a first time relay runner, but all seemed to work perfectly well; no lost runners or bags!

So, finally it was time to run. I had been a little smug about getting one of the shortest distances in the relay; a distance I had never run competitively before. With my leg of the race fast approaching, I felt the pressure to run such a short distance was actually worse than running long distance! It dawned on me that this actually meant "fast"... but I could've sworn Alan's email had mentioned something about "slow"?! That said though, I did a better time than expected. But no more 2.5 mile races for me. Lesson learned for 2010, when I will head off to the Peaks again, to run a longer leg, but at a more relaxed pace...and eat a bit less!

SEAA Road Relays

Natalie Kolodziej recounts a successful outing for the ladies' teams in the prestigious SEAA road relays

On 26 September, eight Serpie ladies made their way to Aldershot for the South of England Athletic Association (SEAA) 4-stage road relays. Thanks to a sterling effort on the organisational front by Jane Fanning, especially with the flurry of last minute withdrawals and substitutions, Serpentine were able to enter two teams of four girls each.

The 4-stage relays require each team member to run 3.851km. Thankfully we didn't have to carry a baton the whole way although, with around only 15 minutes of running, the distance was a fair bit shorter to what most of us are used to.

It was a gorgeous day in Aldershot, and lying in the sunshine soaking up the rays held slightly more appeal than racing around the 3.851 kilometre course. However, we were there to race, and come start time we donned our red and yellow vests and warmed up both our muscles and vocal cords. The good thing about the stage relays is that when it's not your turn to be running, you can be there cheering on your fellow team mates. And cheer you must, as there is a lot at stake! The SEAA relays are the qualifier for the National 4-stage road relays, which were to be held at Sutton Coldfield in mid-October.

Given a few of the girls were fighting post-marathon and post-training-camp leg stiffness, we all seemingly still had our rocket packs on, with both teams qualifying for the National Championships. There were some truly impressive performances, with special mention to Mariah McConnaughey who ran 14:07, the fastest leg of the day.

Well done to Jane Fanning, Claire Imrie, Natalie Kolodziej, Mariah McConnaughey, Maggie Purr, Catkin Shelley, Marielle Vestlund and Rachel Whittaker.



SEAA 4 Stages Women (Photo: Ian Hodge)

The New Year's Day 10K: Anatomy of a Race

Lula Rosso describes this year's race and talks to the key players in the Club who make it all happen

On a glorious winter's day, 130 Serpies gathered around the Serpentine boat house to host our annual New Year's Day 10K road race and 3K fun run. This year for the first time, it was decided that only a small number of club members, who had been major contributors, were allowed to enter. Every year hundreds of Serpies run lots of excellent races and benefit from the hard work of other clubs (often with much less resources). This family friendly event is our most important opportunity to give something back to the road running community and organise a race for the enjoyment of others!

In fact, more than 100 people are needed to plan, organise, register, safeguard baggage, marshal, hand out water and process results. So, realistically, every Serpie that is in London and free on New Year's day is needed to help out. But this doesn't have to be a chore: it is quite fun to take part in a big event like this,



Val Metcalf (centre) debriefs the marshals



Lisa and Hilary eat an original Braley cake

mixing with fellow club members at the traditional pub lunch afterwards. Plus you get the race memento, which this year was a fantastic fleece hat.

Five hundred runners belonging to more than 100 clubs entered the race. The race winner and the new club 10K record holder in 30:23 was Serpie Nick Torry, who beat the previous club 10K record by seven seconds. Other prizes went to Karen Hancock who was the FV50 winner and Sue Lambert, the FV65 winner.

These are some of the Serpies that made it possible:

Lisa Pettit, race director

I started planning the NYD10K soon after the end of last year's race, although the real work of getting a licence from the Royal Parks Agency and having the course approved didn't start until July. As race director, I oversee every decision on the organisation and deal with all enquiries. The race sold out as usual in early December and then things got very busy liaising with suppliers, the Royal Parks, and the top team volunteers to make sure that each aspect of the race was well coordinated. This year we introduced chip timing and we decided to bar entry to most club members because we needed more people to be involved with helping with the race rather than running, so I had to kick out some rogue Serpies who entered without consulting me!

The NYD10K has a great reputation in the running community and I am very proud to be associated with it. I love the fact that it is a race organised by runners for runners and

has its own little traditions, like always giving out something useful as a race goody. Many people are needed to put on the race and without them the race could not happen.

Malcolm French, course director

My work starts nine months before the race when I get the competition licence from UK Athletics. On the day, I arrived early to deliver all club equipment and race packs. As Clerk of the Course, I am responsible for the proper marking of the course making sure the start, finish and kilometre points are correctly identified. It's important that the course marking is completed before the first runners arrive. The better runners will want to do a familiarisation run over parts of the course, particularly the start and finish, before they race.

I worked closely with Val Metcalf, the Chief Marshal, to ensure that the appropriate marshalling points are identified and well staffed, so that runners do not go off course. We try to double up marshals both for social reasons (I've done plenty of marshalling at other events where I've spent hours on my own and on New Year's Day that would be dreadfully dull!) and more importantly because if there is an incident, one marshal is not left isolated to deal with the problem. The runners certainly appreciate seeing plenty of supportive marshals around the course.

Hilary Walker, race referee

I have been involved with the organisation of the race without a break from when we took



Ian Hodge texted out results by 13.15, a record!

it over from the London Road Runners Club in the late 1980s so I have never run it since then! As Race Referee (I am one of the UKA Level 5 endurance officials in the club), I need to ensure that the 10K fulfils the UKA Licence that it has. I have to check that the race is safe to run, that the runners run the course as measured and that there are no unreasonable risk issues. Obviously I can disqualify any miscreants! I am also available after the event for any post race grievances or disputes.

Theoretically I should be independent of the race management. However, as I am also Serpie President, obviously I help out before the race, running around the course in the dark first thing to check on the ice situation, then talking to the Royal Parks about gritting the bad places, which they obligingly did. This year the race went like clockwork because we had enough volunteers. There really is substance to the saying the "more the merrier".

Jen Bradley, coordinator



Last year I ran the race and felt a bit guilty as I hadn't realised that so many Serpies were marshalling!

So I promised that I would help out this time and, given all I've got out of the club in the past year, it made sense. My role was to assign helpers

to different positions and make sure that every team was sufficiently staffed. My nightmare? A mass drop out of volunteers at the last minute! Luckily only a few people called off and contacted me beforehand so we were able to redirect some people to cover the most significant gaps. On the day everything went very well. I was actually surprised how chirpy and alive everybody looked, and the atmosphere was really nice, with helpers and runners shouting to each other "Happy New Year!". Yeah, I think I'll volunteer again for the role, we got such good feedback, and if you do it once, it is easier to do it again.

Nadya Labib, registration



We were up early to set up registration desks before the runners arrived. Using timing chips for the first time was a big responsibility but it is more professional and made it easier for the

results team. Helping at registration means that you get to see all the runners and put names to faces. Some are veterans that know exactly what they are doing; some are clearly new to racing and look a bit lost. I like to talk with the newcomers and help them out (even pinning the number on a very harried lady!), as I understand the atmosphere can be a bit intimidating for beginners.

Bev Thomas, water stations

I think that helping at the water stations is a bit underrated; they are an integral part of a good race! We had two water stations. They need to be well staffed because over a period of 20-30 minutes, work becomes very intense. We all know what we like in a water station as runners, so I encourage my team to spread out and be quick to respond to events as they happen. It pays also to be pro-active and interact with the runners. This year I got big thick rubber gloves for everybody to put on top of normal gloves, as you may get wet handling water. It is definitely not a boring job and all the helpers were brilliant!

Kemi Yusuph, baggage storage

I love the buzz of the baggage tent! I helped



Hydration is crucial



Organised chaos at the baggage tent

out the last two years and volunteered to take charge of it this year. Big thanks to Katarina Valkeinen who supplied all the stationery we needed. Because it was quite cold, runners kept their coats on until the very last minute and then came thick and fast to our tent within the space of 10 minutes! It would be nice to have a bigger tent next year as we ran out of space and were a bit short on helpers because of a couple of no shows. But it was great fun and a fantastic team. I am already looking forward to next year.

The helpers

Tina Rouse, marshal: I joined the Club two months ago and heard about volunteering for the race during a Wednesday night run. It was cold but fun and surely beat sitting in the house! And of course there was the pub afterwards, where it was nice to get to know more Serpies.



Alex Pearson, bags: Yes, it got quite chaotic as you can see in the picture! But it was fun and we soon warmed ourselves up stacking the deluge of bags - the team worked together brilliantly.

David Hinds, water: I helped at the water station close to the finish, therefore was able to catch the first runners streaking home before the crowds descended on us. The runners were very appreciative, commenting on how well organised the race was.

We hope to see you on 1 January 2011 to help with next year's race!

Reflections on Running

David Smart looks at how Serpentine can provide a sense of belonging

Joining a club like the Serpentine can be an attractive alternative to solitary runs round your neighbourhood. There's a good chance of encountering like-minded people. Lasting friendships as well as casual acquaintances have developed through the club – and indeed, some more intimate relationships. The expression 'running mate' doesn't only apply to presidential elections!

Making club runs and training sessions part of a weekly routine spares you all those existential decisions – Shall I go out tonight? It looks like rain and I'm feeling tired. Maybe I could go tomorrow instead?... At one time I'd get home completely cream-cracked after a long working day, change, bike up to Willesden and return an hour later glowing with energy after the track session.

I'm regularly struck how running with others lifts my performance. On training runs I need other people to drag me along until I find my pace. I like to fall in with a group who'll keep me going when the going gets tough, though for parts of the run the roles may be reversed. It's great when you're in a group that hits a good rhythm, with footfall and breathing all harmonising. Competitive aspirations merge into a feeling of collective achievement – what used to be called 'mutual emulation' in the Soviet Union – and pride keeps you hanging on even when you were desperately

hoping that you'd have to stop for the lights at Hyde Park Corner.

Some of my best Handicap times have come from trying to stay in sight of a fellow runner I hope to catch on the second lap. This seems to create a magic line that eventually reels me in – though all too often one that gets away! Sometimes you can be running at the same speed as someone five yards ahead feeling there's no way you can make up the gap; then, without you consciously doing anything, they're coming back towards you. It's perhaps like the way a small baby fixes its gaze on the mother's face, using her presence to hold itself together mentally.

Older runners like myself have to come to terms with getting slower, however gratifying the blips in our inevitable decline may feel. The Club's extensive use of age-grading softens the impact, so that we can compete virtually against our former selves as well as against younger companions. There is satisfaction in the effort it costs newer runners to keep up with us, as well as pleasure in seeing them leave us behind as they become more experienced. At the same time we can share and celebrate memories of our athletic heyday with other long-term members.

In a sense the Club is like a family. Its membership spans the generations and sustains a heritage of common but evolving values; and as in a family, the inevitable divergences, tensions and frustrations can be accommodated in a sense of belonging to something larger than oneself.

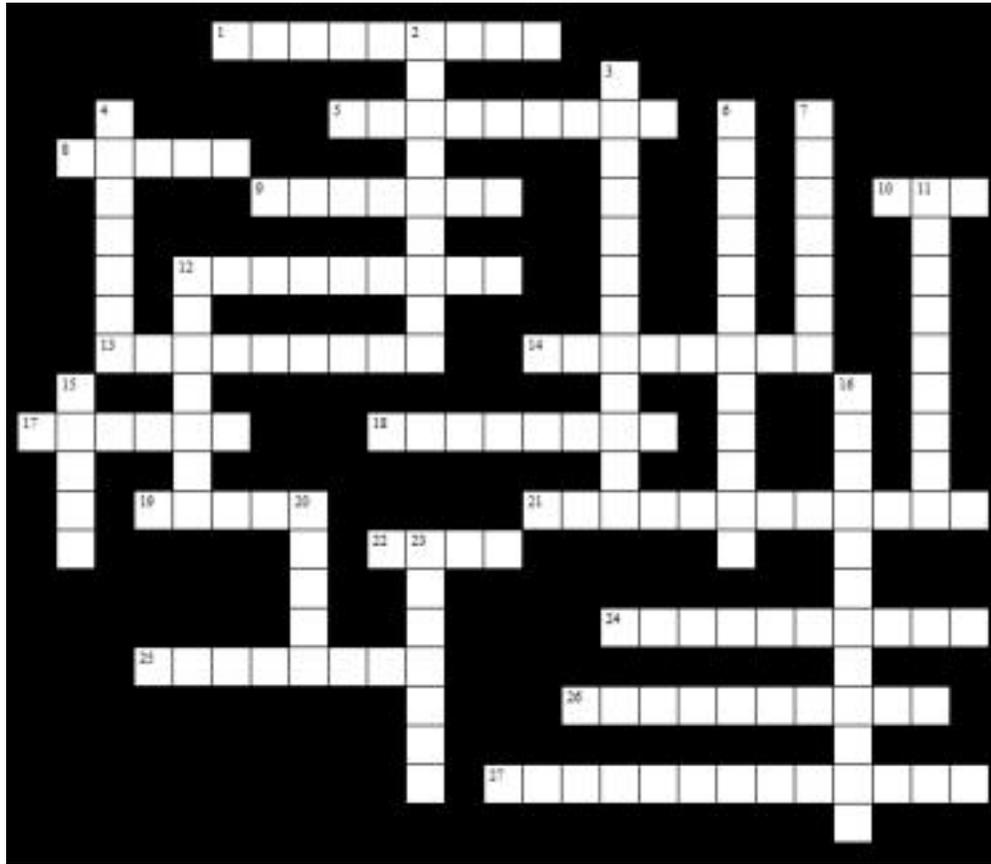
David works as a counsellor with teenagers and adults in public settings and in private practice. The first article of this four-part series appeared in the Autumn 2009 Serpentines.



Karen Hancock leads dynamic exercises in Greenwich Park (Photo: Rob Westaway)

The Serpie Crossword

by Dan de Beider



ACROSS

- 1 Limit (9)
- 5 Race against the clock (4,5)
- 8 Two-footer (5)
- 9 US hurdler unbeaten over 9 years (2,5)
- 10 Gloopy supplement (3)
- 12 Beijing Olympic Stadium (5,4)
- 13 2012 Olympics Centre (9)
- 14 Venue for Last Friday of the Month 5k (4,4)
- 17 Portable device for running (6)
- 18 Ability-adjusted race (8)

- 19 Speedy Serpie brothers (5)

- 21 Ancient messenger who ran from Marathon to Athens (12)
- 22 Absorb sweat (4)
- 24 Fastest Elvis in a marathon (3,7)
- 25 Storage of glucose (8)
- 26 Disgraced Canadian sprinter (3,7)
- 27 Serpie Chairman (7,6)

DOWN

- 2 Serpie summer long runs destination (9)
- 3 Energy-producing food group (12)

- 4 System of mind-body exercise (7)

- 6 British heptathlete (7,5)
- 7 Swedish speed play (7)
- 11 Stamina (9)
- 12 2009 World Athletics Championships mascot (7)
- 15 Ultra Serpies' favourite Alpine race (5)
- 16 Co-founder of London marathon (5,7)
- 20 US Coach renowned for 800m reps (5)
- 23 Triathlon's ultimate test (4,3)

[Solutions on page 39](#)

Who said what?

Quiz by Lula Rosso

Match the quote with the running personality!

- A) Herb Elliott
- B) Joan Benoit Samuelson
- C) Paul Tergat
- D) Jack Daniels
- E) Steve Prefontaine

- 1) The primary reason to have a coach is to have somebody who can look at you and say, "Man you're looking good today."
- 2) Ask yourself: "Can I give more?". The answer is usually: "Yes".
- 3) If I lose forcing the pace all the way, well, at least I can live with myself.
- 4) I'm not an aggressive personality and if I can remember any emotion I felt during a race it was fear.
- 5) I loved it when Grete [Waitz] was there. I knew I was going to give my best.

Answers: 1-D; 2-C; 3-E; 4-A; 5-B.

Ultra with a difference

Simon Coles reports on the inaugural Endurance Life Coastal Crossings Ultra

It is late summer. It is 5am. It is dark. A coach waits in a car park by the beach in Salcombe, South Devon. People converge and soon a journey is underway. This is no ordinary journey. These are no ordinary people. These men and women are being taken over 30 miles due West to Plymouth so they can, well, run back to where they started in Salcombe. Ok. To many these may appear to be the actions of a bunch of total nutters, but these are ultrarunners. Nutters? I am not qualified to draw any conclusions but the odd thing is they appear to be a pretty well balanced sensible lot, me excluded of course. What can drive people to acts of such apparent madness?

This is the first running of the Endurance Life Coastal Crossings Ultra. At 53kms (33 miles) it takes in some of Britain's finest coastline and the clincher for me looking for something unusual and memorable for my first ultra, three estuary crossings. A quick look at Google Earth soon revealed the reality – there are three chunky looking rivers to cross if the coastal path is to be followed from Plymouth to Salcombe, the Rivers' Yealm, Erme and Avon. There is a ferry service for walkers but we had to find an unsupported way; we had to swim.

It is daybreak as 100 or so of us walk to the end of the stone pier in Plymouth which marks the start. Bemused night fishermen packed their bags and looked on. Then following simple instructions for the day, "keep the sea on your right", we are away. Pretty much straight away we are high on the coastal path, the hill ascents and descents with spectacular views become a feature of the day with some 1,600m of ups and downs with start and finish both at sea level. There are some flat stretches, but not too many.

It is high tide as we approach the Yealm Estuary. It is a fine setting



Simon after the first crossing



Simon doing his best Baywatch impression

swimming kit goes in the dry bag. Taking steps into a river after an eight mile run is not something I have done before but once in and swimming it is just the best experience. After the most refreshing swim with the dry bag bobbing behind (attached in my case with a triathlon number belt) it was off running again over high headland and sheltered sandy coves with beautiful translucent waves rolling in.

The River Erme is quite different. The tide had turned and there was 300m of fast flowing water to negotiate. It was also shallow enough to wade and clear enough to see any rocks lying in the way on the sand beneath the torrent. There were kayakers in the water but they did not allay a nagging fear that with the force of the water any slip might send me on my helpless way towards the Azores. It was brilliant. I mean how often do you cross rivers like this and carry on with your journey on the other side?

Talking to the coach driver earlier in the day I knew Burgh Island had something of a reputation for unpredictable and dangerous currents with whirlpools and the like. This guy is a local so it was with some trepidation that I approached the spot where the River Avon swirled around Burgh Island. I followed a cliff path towards the beach and river but as the path steepens the cliff path itself becomes a cliff. Not a good omen I thought. There were some instructions on the map about heading out up a road. Hoping I was not adding unnecessary mileage to my race I pushed on for some time and then with relief spotted a sign pointing to the coastal path through a random farmyard.

The River Avon was different again from the two earlier crossings. This was deep, fast-flowing river water as low tide approached. The Endurance Life guys were great in pointing out the best line as they had done on the earlier crossings. It was a lovely swim while being whisked downstream at a rate of knots. The exit point was perfectly positioned by the race organisers so I was across and I had survived the massive whirlpools and pirates (ok, there were no pirates and I didn't actually see any whirlpools let alone massive ones).

I was now at 27 miles and heading into unknown territory – I had never run this far before so was not sure if my legs would continue to operate or even stay attached. At a rather slower pace I headed off over the big headlands of Bolt Tail and Bolt Head. "I think I can actually finish this one" I thought with mounting elation as I descended the final cliff path and at the finish they gave out the tastiest Cornish pasty imaginable.

Run Forrest-man Run

Ian Payne recounts taking part in The Forestman, an ironman-distance triathlon in the New Forest

After getting quite into lycra-wearing during 2008, I decided 2009 was the year to have a crack at an ironman. Since the IM-branded events seem a bit of a pain to enter, and I didn't really want to cart my bike and everything abroad anyway, I opted for The Forestman, a low-key "iron distance" race (ie not IM-branded) in the beautiful setting of the New Forest.

The Forestman's many virtues include a slightly longer swim than normal (a nice round 4k), a tough trail marathon at the end, a much lower entry fee than most "official" ironman events, and most importantly it has a silly name.

It rained lots the day before the race, but by morning it had cleared and it was quite pleasant wandering down to the nice tranquil lake with my fellow Forestmen-to-be. It was also pleasant to see the local vicar turning up at such an apparently ungodly hour in the morning to give the race an official blessing and encourage us to thank the Lord for the journey that lay before us – nice touch.



The lake didn't stay tranquil for long. There were soon 100ish green hats splashing their way round three big loops of it. I'm not the fastest swimmer, but was quite happy crawling my way round in the early morning sunlight, occasionally latching onto some feet, and at least not getting lapped.

The good thing about being a slow swimmer is that you mostly get to overtake people for the rest of the race, so once I climbed out of the water, strapped on my helmet and a bum-bag full of jelly babies



and got pedalling I was loving it. Three laps right the way round the forest, with some nice undulations but nothing too killer. The rain had washed flinty soil into the road in places, so a lot of people got punctures – I managed to avoid one until about 90 miles in, which I guess was a nice time to have a quick rest anyway (if wrestling with an inner tube counts as rest). Other highlights of the ride included dodging several New Forest ponies and donkeys obviously roaming the roads, watching a small pack of New Forest

horses running alongside me across the plain for about half a mile, and fighting off a brief bout of tummy-ache (probably caused by excessive jelly baby consumption).

My legs felt good as I cruised into T2 – the Sandy Balls Caravan Park – swapped my helmet for a lucky headband and set out on the run. The showers had cleared and the sun was blazing as I chugged into the forest for three laps of what must be the hilliest section of trail in the forest. The hills weren't very long or high, but they were short, sharp, steep and relentlessly energy-sapping all the way, especially by the third lap. Luckily my wife Lucy had the energy to run up a couple of hills beside me shouting some very loud encouragement and waving her home-made "Run Forrest-man Run" banner in my face, much to the amusement (and surely jealousy?) of other runners and spectators.

The last 10 miles hurt lots, but were great fun as I was still overtaking people, and once I'd climbed the final hill I knew it was barely one more mile to the finish. I'd wanted to complete the run in under four hours so was well chuffed to cross the line in 3h59 – and 11h43 overall – to the personalised soundtrack I'd arranged with the organisers beforehand ("Push it Reeeree Gooood!").

I was even more chuffed to see loads of family and friends at the finish line to help me pop the champagne, take some proud pics, show off my "tank-top" sunburn and generally bask in the moment. I'd thoroughly recommend this race to anyone who wants to try a more low-key ironman distance event that's friendly but tough, easy to get to from London and won't break the bank. But don't do it if you're after a fast time...

More tri? Triathlon London League!

The first race is the Thames Turbo Sprint Tri on 5th April. We need to score in at least FOUR of these races, including one triathlon, to be in with a chance of winning the League.

See http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_tri_league.html

Lumphini Park – Bangkok's runner friendly oasis

Rob Crangle advises on running in Bangkok – in the only running article ever written which mentions 'stegosaurus' twice



Imagine a scenario – and if you're addicted to running you'd better brace yourself for this one - that all running within a 30 mile radius of central London has been banned, except for the path around the Serpentine in Hyde Park.

The resulting chaos can only barely be imagined. A multitude of runners would descend upon the circuit around the lake. A vast sea of humanity would be forced to run heel to toe, elbow to chest in pursuit of their fitness and training goals. A perennial

pushing for place would permeate a permanently populated path. And that would just be the Serpies.

A running-restricted world may exist only in our darkest thoughts. Yet that is effectively the situation that prevails in South East Asia's 'city of Angels' - Bangkok.

I am not suggesting that Thailand's capital is a place where running, like criticism of the Thai monarchy, is strictly prohibited (see below). It is simply the fact that most Bangkok streets are a traffic-choked, carbon monoxide nightmare which imposes a de facto ban on street running. Add in some very high temperatures (the summer mercury regularly tops 40C), stifling humidity and pavements as packed with pedestrians as roads are jammed with vehicles, and it is no surprise that this city is found on very few race calendars.

Still – the enterprising runner-tourist can always find a place. And that place is Lumphini Park. Lumphini is not the only public park in Bangkok, but it is the only one of any of any notable size which is both easily reachable (Metro stop 'Lumphini') and accommodating to runners. The whole park area would comfortably fit inside Hyde Park, which shows up the deficiency of the Thai capital in terms of providing green space for leisure. Or perhaps we are particularly spoiled for parkland in London? Nevertheless, Lumphini provides a welcome respite from the surrounding traffic chaos – indeed vehicles are banned inside the park. It also incorporates a clearly set out running path of 1.25 miles in length around an artificial lake. Fitness-minded visitors also have the options to make use of the swimming pool, open-air weightlifting or join in the highly visible (and entertaining to

watch) mass participation aerobic classes. Yoga and Tai Chi adherents can also be found using the Park during daylight hours.

The occasional jogger can be found plodding around Lumphini at most times of the day. However, the running circuit only gets busy from 5pm onwards as people finish work and, crucially, the temperature drops to a (just about) tolerable level. By 5.30pm, a torrent of runners of all standards are pounding the Lumphini path and sweating profusely. It is clear that Lumphini Park is a runner-friendly oasis in an urban environment which is otherwise as prohibitive for street running as can be imagined.

I limited my own runs in the park to four laps, all but one of which took place after 5pm. My typical training pace at home tends to vary between 7min30 and 8min10 per mile, depending on the length and type of run. In Bangkok I felt anything faster than 8min15 to be something of a lung-buster. I did eventually acclimatise (a little) and even managed to get my average pace below 8 minutes per mile in one five mile session, after which I could not resist undertaking an endurance test by attempting a run the following day at the height of the midday sun.

Taking sensible precautions in the intense heat, I topped up on water and factor fortysomething sun cream before setting off, with further supplies of both close at hand. I was comfortable enough at an average pace of 9min15 for the first three laps. The only hazards to manifest themselves were temporary blindness due to sweat drenched eyes (I've since invested in a headband) and the risk of crashing into one of the resident giant lizards. These creatures tend to sunbathe quite discreetly in the shade provided by lakeside bushes, but they occasionally venture on to the grassy edge beside the path. I had not previously been aware that such creatures existed, never mind could be found in a city-centre park. So, when I found myself being observed by a sort of thing which looked like a stegosaurus, I began to wonder whether I was suffering from heat-induced hallucinations. This was soon dispelled a bit further round the circuit when I quite definitely observed a similar looking lizard, orangey-coloured with a long tail and tree-stump-thick little legs, scurry into the vegetation. This remains my most surreal running experience of the year so far.

Those still running in Lumphini Park at 7pm are required to interrupt their activities in order to stand for the anthem to King Bhumibol Adulyadej, probably the planet's most revered monarch. Thailand's lèse-majesté laws - i.e. don't diss the King - are not to be tested by anyone who values their freedom. A minimum prison sentence of 20 years is the mandatory punishment for a conviction - only a Royal Pardon can release you sooner. And whilst the King has in recent years regularly pardoned Westerners several months into their sentences, the typical crime has been defacing a public picture of His Majesty whilst under the influence, I would suggest it a wise move to temporarily interrupt your run and stand to attention. Whether you are likely to be arrested and end up enjoying an extended stay in Klong Prem prison (better known to Westerners as the 'Bangkok Hilton') for ignoring the siren and continuing with your run may well be debatable, but I will leave that to those of you who are bravely prepared to take on some of the more challenging endurance events - and I promise to visit you and bring food parcels every couple of years or so.

The Bangkok city marathon takes place in November each year. This is one race which will certainly be on my schedule for 2010. Running on Bangkok streets which are totally free of traffic? I think that might top the orange stegosaurus for surrealness.

Which way now, mate?

Dan de Belder combats fatigue and an inability to map-read to complete the London to Brighton trail race – with a lot of help from a friend

Having endured (and occasionally enjoyed) a summer of Alpine running with both the Mont Blanc marathon and Davos 78k boxes ticked, I was in need of a proper rest. The problem was, as I have discovered, ultra running is strangely addictive. I had now set my sights firmly on the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc (166k, 9400m of ascent, three countries) in 2010 for which the organisers required entrants to notch up a minimum of points to be amassed from a list of qualifying races.

So that was that. I duly entered London to Brighton to claim the requisite points. After Davos, this should be a cinch. Or so I thought.

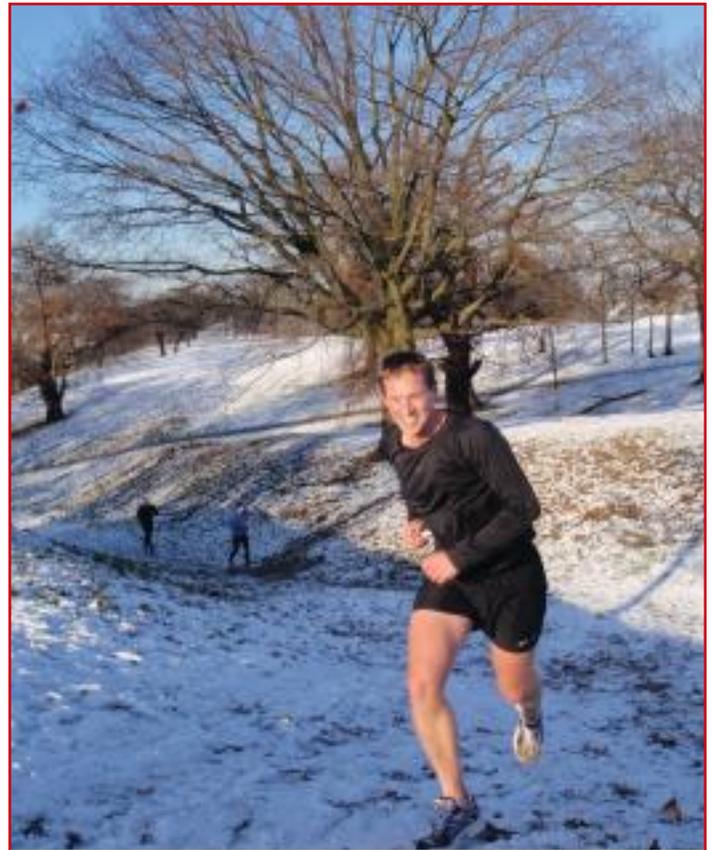
London to Brighton is a famous old race that used to be run on roads. It has been raced regularly since 1899. A year ago though, Endurance Running decided to organise a trail version – 56 miles through London, Kent, Surrey and Sussex. This struck me as being at the same time both inspiring and terrifying. Yes, I was pleased that I would be running through amazing countryside but I was also under no illusion that there would be a high likelihood of getting lost. My sense of direction is so embarrassingly disastrous I still get lost on Serpie Tower Bridge runs!

After Davos I had felt almost invincible. I'd become rather complacent and slacked off on the long training runs. Although London to Brighton was seven miles further than Davos, there would be no inconvenient mountains in the way. I had also formed a pact with Serpie mate Toby Melville: we would run it together and our only aim would be to finish inside the cut-off of 13 hours. Poor Toby – anyone who has ever run with me on a Wednesday evening knows I like to whine a lot so imagine what it would be like for him on a race lasting all day!

As race-day approached, the usual pre-marathon paranoia set in. Have I done enough training? What's this niggle I can feel? Why does the BBC 5 day weather forecast predict the hottest September on record? Toby took his preparation one extra step further: he took four days off work to walk sections of the course and to make detailed notes in his mapbook. Ah, the mapbook: 23 pages of Ordnance Survey maps printed on A5 paper neatly bound, with (un)helpful instructions like "Take care crossing the road" or, my personal favourite, "Trust your compass"! Personally, I'd have appreciated notes like "Take the first right after the post box" but no, such navigational tips are anathema to the purists. I, however, am an expert taperer and did precisely nothing all week leading up to the big day.

On Sunday 20 September at 3.30am, the alarm went off. Shower, breakfast, pack and off. At 4.45am, I'd arranged to meet Toby near the start but at 4.40am my phone rang. Panic. I'm sure he won't mind me saying but Toby has an unparalleled ability to sign up for races then bail at the last minute. My relief was palpable when I answered the phone to hear a fully-intending-to-participate Melville at the other end, describing his latest bowel movements.

After registering (including picking up a tracker so that friends and relatives could all have a laugh by following my progress online), 300



Dan enjoying off-road training in Greenwich Park (Photo: Rob Westaway)

odd runners lined up on Blackheath to be set off at 6.00am in pitch black darkness.

The race leaves the streetlit roads of South London and then, on trails, passes through the edge of North Kent on to the North Downs. From there it heads through spectacular countryside through fields and woodland (Winnie the Pooh country), over the famous Bluebell railway, up Black Cap by Ditchling Beacon, which is followed by a winding descent on to the Brighton seafront. This sounds like an idyllic journey. I cannot, however, find the words to describe how painful this was. I was already flagging at 18 miles (the second out of five checkpoints). The third section, ending at Forest Row, seemed to take an eternity. I was mightily relieved to find a supporter there laden with a stash of sports drinks and chocolate bars.

Our tactics had been to run everything slowly. This soon changed to: let's run the 'downs' and 'flats' and walk the 'ups', which then became let's just run the 'downs'. By the end, the rule was simply: let's just run the really steep 'downs'. After a smidgen over 12 hours we stumbled, bloodied, blistered and completely broken, over the line. Many didn't. The organisers were always going to enforce a strict cut-off of 13 hours so as far as we were concerned, mission accomplished!

As a footnote, I'd like to add the organisers and volunteers who drove from checkpoint to checkpoint were fantastic in their vocal encouragement. What a day. What a race. And I'd encourage anyone else who's done a marathon before to give it a go (just don't forget to do the prep on the map-reading first). Would I do it again? Yes – probably!

Trans RockiesRun

Toby Radcliffe's diary account of the multi-stage 2009 Trans RockiesRun

Days 1 and 2

Gasp! Unlike in London, where amongst the smog you can find oxygen as a vital component of air, it's hard to find in the mountainous air of the Rockies.

Despite coming out to Boulder (5,430ft) ten days before the start of our 6 day, 113m adventure through the Colorado Rockies, acclimatisation is proving difficult. But that's all part of the fun! And fun is definitely the word for this epic stage race.

The Trans RockiesRun is a two-man team race. Team Timex is Will Kelsay and myself. At this stage, Will, a triathlete and Colorado local, is dragging me across the Rockies while I wheeze like a winded moose hanging off the back of a tow rope as we ascend 3000 feet over the course of three miles of brutal uphill as part of a morning's work.

We drove up to the start at Buena Vista on Saturday. Three hours later we were around 7,400 ft and registering, and being given a lot of kit. I must admit to having become a little altitude obsessed, especially since the WS4s that Timex sent us last week have an altitude function. It came in very handy today to track how far up the ascent we were – moving from 9,600 ft to 12,600 ft in three miles, my lungs were at threshold just walking up Hope Pass. But it was worth it for the downhill. Unfortunately I stacked it chasing after Will to the finish (descending 3,400 ft in 30 minutes).

The 10 miler today was actually light relief after yesterday's scorching 20 miler over fairly undulating trail and road. I had a few low points yesterday as the combination of altitude and dehydration got to me. Out of the pair of us, I am definitely the pace-limiting factor.

Despite my altitude issues, we're still doing ok, finishing 8th in our division both days and sitting around 11th overall.

But this race is more than just a race each day. The camping and social side of the experience is amazing. The people and personalities here have been an eye opener.



Team Timex: Toby Radcliffe is on the left hand side

Day 3

The previous evening, in the aftermath of bouncing off the mountain descent from Hope Pass, my ankle started to swell up massively, and my ribs started to give me grief. By dinner time, walking was difficult and breathing was becoming painful. I had serious doubts as to whether I would be able to walk the next day's stage, let alone run it. The fun of the event evaporated within a matter of hours and I went to bed early, dosed up on anti-inflammatories and resigned to see what would happen in the morning.

Waking up on day 3, my ankle looked like an elephant's. We packed up the kit and tents ready for the 24 mile stage, and I went to the medical tent to get the ankle strapped up. The strapping was tight and the first couple of miles were slow going and the inflamed ankle and strapping needed to ease into the day. The gentle downhill on tarmac to start the stage from Leadville to Nova Guides was painful. But with just under 3,000 ft of climbing in the day, and a maximum altitude of only 11,000 ft, the main issue for the day was its length. Will was very patient and towed up the climbs, even getting in some sprint efforts to get enough momentum to pull me through short steep sections. For one early river crossing which we couldn't walk around, I got a piggy back over it to keep the strapping on my ankle dry.

Downhill was not pleasant. In the second half of the stage, the pain killers started to wear off, and the downhill stress on my ankle and constant jarring on my ribs meant that the pain factor was sky high. But make it through we did, albeit at a pedestrian pace. The final three miles into Nova Guides, Will towed me through the flat to the finish, which seemed to go on forever. As usual, the end of the run was quickly followed by a trip to the creek for icing – though today I was chest deep to get my ribs soaked too.

Day 4

Camp Hale to Red Cliff was another short stage with a massive climb. The top of this stage was a ridiculously steep forest trail, where the tow rope was redundant. I was borrowing a friend's Leki poles for the day – in the mid grade uphills I was unsure about their usefulness, especially given the added pressure on my ribs from the use of my arms, but on the steep climbs, they became invaluable, where a

forced march pace up the slopes was all that we could manage. The downhill was better today – the ankle was well strapped but less swollen, and a better pace was maintained. I was still frustrated from losing places on the downhill on day 3.

The best part of the stage was a lengthy section running down a small creek. It was icy cold and made your feet instantly numb, but only a few miles from the finish so not too bad in terms of blisters and chafing, though some people's feet did suffer in the stage.

Day 5

The quads are starting to feel a little sore and the ankle a little better, if not looking improved – darkening purple patches showed the bruising coming through around the heel. My ribs, however, seemed to be getting worse.

The stage was set to be nearly 24 miles, with 4,400 ft of climbing, basically straight uphill for 11 miles, three miles of undulating, and then 10 miles of descent. Several teams overtook us towards the top as my pace slowed our progress. But the pain really kicked in on the downhill. Between aid stations 2 and 3, I was nearly in tears thanks to the pain from my ribs and extra stresses through my right leg trying to keep my ankle out of trouble on the gravel downhill.

Arriving in Vale I was pleased to be done for the day. It was hot and lively, and with a beer and barbeque, the day's challenge was quickly forgotten.

Day 6

Final day. This hurt. At last though, the ankle and ribs were not the limiting factor. Today, muscular fatigue and lung function were the main issues – and I was pleased to have this situation. Will was feeling the long week and the additional strain of towing on days 2-5 but the



tow rope saw a little less action today as we just worked through the fatigue.

The final climb of the day ended up in a ski field in Beaver Creek before descending back into the town. That final hill is best described as a hike rather than a run, but we'd made enough time in the descents today to hold a good position.

The after party was something to behold. Things certainly loosened up and after a long week of work, celebration was the order of the day.

Post race thoughts: I really want to return to do it properly if I can fit it in. Yes to disappointment and relief, yes to over the moon, yes to 'oh my God it's time to party' and yes to 'maybe let's go to the medical tent and then get me in the creek before getting a beer'. I haven't had post race blues since my first ironman, but I got them bad post TRR.

Ideally I would get 10 weeks out in Boulder/Rockies pre-race to deal with the acclimatisation issue, and not stack it during the race! It was an awesome event with a complete mix of abilities, so think about it – I can't recommend the event highly enough.



Night falls as tents are pitched at the foot of the Rockies

Gatliff 50K

The mass Serpie bail-out!

James Adams

On 29 November, 25 or more Serpies tried their best to miss the start of a race that was unlike any other normally done by club members. No mile markers? No chip timing? No marked route? Mud? 50K??? Surely this is bad for the club's reputation to be seen here doing this kind of madness?

The event was the Gatliff 50K, a Long Distance Walkers event that runners are allowed to tag on to. Every year there is the promise of mud and cake, terrible rain and wobbly stiles. The small town of Edenbridge swelled with the arrival of hordes of Londoners. 24 made the 38-second-connecting train at Redhill, one missed it and got a taxi instead. We arrived to a general look of suspicion. "Serpentine? What are you all doing here? Can't you see it's raining? You should all be indoors, on a turbo trainer."

"How do you know we are from London?" we said. To be fair to the locals, we were easy to spot: 80% of us were wearing running shoes in pristine condition. "Those things have never been off the treadmill" they said. "Where we come from if you turn up to a run with shoes like that you are made to drink beer out of them, but I can see you are clearly more of a mojito man."

It started well. Knee high puddles in muddy fields meant we had to meander around to try and keep dry. One thing a Londoner should not have to tolerate is wet feet. However any suggestion that we were going to stay dry quickly evaporated, unlike the water on the path.

Paths turned to streams and streams turned to rivers as we struggled up and down hills. The grass turned to mud and the regular mud turned to that horrible clay mud that sticks to your feet and forces you to gather more mud. The water was icy and freezing our feet as we complained about the lack of tube coverage in the area.

The reason (I think) why so many turned out for this was the promise of huge amounts of cake. Siobhan Reddy was quick to complain in capital style, "Where is the cake? I've not even seen a Starbucks yet? How am I supposed to cope with this?" The first couple of checkpoints had little food, only juice and biscuits.

Onwards into the rain and mud and more Serpies showed their true



Serpies in good spirits (at this stage!) (Photo: Gemma Greenwood)

Southern Softy colours. Claire Levermore would let out a high pitched wail every time there was a puddle in typical London spirit. This noise would often attract several Rottweilers and she and Marianna Ivantsoff would freeze, huddle together and scream. Jany would then show her fellow city dwellers up by standing up to the canine aggressors and assertively shooing them away.

"Serpentine? What are you all doing here? Can't you see it's raining? You should all be indoors, on a turbo trainer."

It took four hours to cover 24K, less than half of the distance. A quick calculation meant that to finish we'd be running in the dark for about two hours. There were several more ahead of us, doing the club a disservice by making such quick progress along a surface that wasn't tarmac. However the 15 Serpies, while gorging on soup and sausage rolls, almost all decided that bailing was the best thing to do. The true heroes of the day and those that represent the club and city best were those who legged it for the taxis at half-way.

Jo Proudlove and Jany Tsai bucked the trend and brought shame on the club by carrying on in the rain and mud. What were they thinking? We should not suffer rain and mud, we are from London dammit. Leave those horrid peasants to slide around in fields and trails instead.

Six other Serpies were also keen to give a false impression of residents of the smoke and actually have a go at finishing the run. Nick Copas, Jon Hoo and Mark Braley were steaming through at a fast pace. Jono, to be fair tried to bring some credibility to the club by attempting to drown in a water-filled ditch. Nick did the proper London thing of noticing but not helping (while laughing). Mark deviated from his Zone 1 roots and cowardly pulled Jono from certain death.

Dan de Belder and Martin Cooper were also in poor form, having the audacity of preparing better and starting earlier. They both finished well under eight hours. Jono was the quickest Serpie in six hours, Nick managed 6:01 and Mark was a few minutes after. Jo and Jany struggled on into the dark and also brought shame to the female half of the club by finishing such a tough run. Serpie ladies exist to look nice, bake cakes for the boys and run the occasional 10K or half marathon. They certainly shouldn't be travelling outside the M25 and upstaging the men of the club. Alex Pearson was also intent on destroying our club's road running credentials by completing the 50K

Interested in off road running? - Sign up for Serpie Trail!

Send an email to Alan G. Hall (ahall.gm@googlemail.com) who manages the Serpie Trail email distribution list, with regular updates on trail events around London and the UK.

Typically, Alan posts a roundup of forthcoming trail runs every couple of months, with more details of individual events and how to get to them by public transport closer to the day. Mostly the mailing list covers LDWA style events (supported trail runs, non competitive, usually self navigating - an excellent way to do your long run in leafy surroundings) but also includes proper trail running races and, occasionally, self organised mountain challenges. They are all are fun, sociable events for people with running experience but not necessarily super fast.

mud slide. Rumour has it he did the entire thing grinning like a country simpleton. It's a disgrace.

So, hats off to the bailers: Mark Bell, Siobhan Reddy, Claire Levermore, Claire Imrie, Angus Searcy, Jen Bradley, Gemma Greenwood, Paula Redmond, Lula Rosso, Marianna Ivantsoff and Sam Ludlow. Also, a special mention to Rob Westaway who got everyone into this in the first place then failed to make the start line.

Commiserations (and derision) to Jon Hoo, Nick Copas, Mark Braley, Jany Tsai, Jo Proudlove, Dan de Belder, Martin Cooper and Alex Pearson for scandalously finishing such a pointless exercise. On leaving to catch our train back to civilisation we were greeted by some of the 50K finishers from the country. They all knew about the Serpentine capitulation and reassured us with some comforting words - "I hear there is a five mile run around some roads in Perivale next week, perhaps that is more your thing, I reckon more of you could finish that one."

Fell Running Championships

A popular three-race fell running weekend on the Isle of Wight

Next SEAA series:

Sept 18th (am)	The St. Boniface Fell	(3 Miles 775 feet ascent)
Sept 18th (pm)	The Ventnor Horseshoe	(7 Miles 1500 feet ascent)
Sept 19th (am)	The Wroxall Round	(13 Miles 1500 feet ascent)

More on the serpie website and <http://www.rydeharriers.co.uk/>



Race day nightmares

James Adams takes a philosophical view

There was a lot of disappointment at the Serpentine just after last year's spring marathons. Two hot days in London and Edinburgh damaged many people's plans for a PB. The aftermath saw a load of runners trying to pick apart where they went "wrong" and how they were going to fix it for next time. I heard many comments ranging from "I'm a rubbish runner - starting tomorrow I'm going to quit drinking, socialising and get on that track" to "I'm going to dump my boyfriend, sell my cat and that will give me the time to do three long runs a week" to the even more worrying "I'm going to buy a wetsuit".

Of course, it's important that we learn from our mistakes and use these experiences to make us better for the next time. However, there is a risk that we can over-analyse a race and come up with conclusions that are way off the mark. Sometimes there are no reasons. You don't want to respond to a disappointment by turning running into a thing that you hate. Great races and PBs are a fantastic motivation to run and a reward for all the hard work you put in, but don't get so obsessed with the numbers that you forget why you put your trainers on in the first place, because you actually enjoy running.

Everyone has a bad day; sometimes it coincides with the "big day". Remember Paula crying by the roadside in Greece? If it happens to the world record holders, chances are it will probably happen to you. Don't get too upset about it, here are some things that I found to work.

So, you are six miles into a marathon and your Garmin is already beeping at you for not keeping up with the little man on the screen. You feel dreadful and you don't know why, a friend who was aiming

for a time five minutes slower than you has just strolled past, almost as if he is mocking you. You start to think "My big day is ruined, that's three months wasted, my friends will laugh, I am a rubbish runner". None of these need to be true.

Firstly accept that this can happen for no apparent reason or for reasons beyond your control. Think of your training in the past six months. Say you did 100 runs in this time, how many of those went perfectly and how many didn't? You are going to suffer a certain percentage of runs that just don't go well. You wouldn't lose sleep if this happened on a Wednesday night in a 12 mile run on the heath.

When constantly comparing your progress to another race you did recently it is easy to say things like "I'm a much worse runner than I was three months ago". This is unlikely to be true if you have put the training in. Don't compare the few hours of now with the few hours of three months ago. Instead compare the last three months with the same three months last year, two years and five years ago. Focus on how much you have improved over longer periods, even if today seems so much harder than yesterday.

You may want to call it a bad race but you could rename it as a training run. The experience of battling through 26 miles when not feeling on top form will make you better next time. You may even have a "back up" race a few weeks after this one, in which case don't push too hard and have another go in your next race.

Ignore the voices of other people in your head asking you for an explanation of why you finished slower than expected. You don't need to explain anything to anyone else.

And if those fail just think of this: in a year's time when you are in the pub retelling running stories (yes it sounds dull but we all do it constantly), remember that noone wants to hear about a race that went really well. That's just boring.



Serpies both celebrating and drowning sorrows at the traditional London Marathon post-mortem (Photo: Ian Hodge)

A totally awesome, gnarly, US running sabbatical

Ian Sharman, the club's most prolific ultrarunner, enjoying a career-break in the US, decides it is time to take his running seriously!

So what would you do if you found yourself in the situation of having a year off work in one of the best places to run trails in the world? Not a question most people would generally ask themselves, but I'm sure plenty of you (especially the ones with a ferocious competitive streak) have dreamed of being able to train and run without the bother of having to hold down a job.

Well, circumstances surrounding my move to the north west of the US to get married have meant I have to wait a while to get the necessary visa to be allowed to work. So I'm currently having a crack at improving my running and doing events without the constraint of limited holiday time. It's certainly a great situation to be in and one I'm making the most of. My savings will be depleted by the end of the year, but it is a recession after all.

I started by backpacking around with my fiancée, Amy, in August. It was also timed as a taper for going for a PB at the Reykjavik marathon and to recover from the Davos K78 ultra, where I'd run with a lot of other Serpies (Amy's very understanding about my addiction). So even in that month I sneaked in two marathons (the other was Quebec City) and got my PB.

Not wishing to settle down too quickly into everyday life as a temporary full-time distance runner, I went straight to the Gore-Tex Transalpine race from Germany to Italy through the Alps. It's a team race and I ran it with fellow Serpie and recovering triathlete, Oli Sinclair (he'll be cured of his horrible affliction soon and the alpine running helped). One of my favourite events ever, it was like running a mountain marathon every day with 9,800m of ascent over 145 miles and eight stages. Shame it's a bit far away from my new base, but all the Davos runners next year should give it a look as the scenery is even more spectacular and it's a seriously hard challenge just to finish.

After such a great start, normal life had a lot to live up to. But I've been over in Bend, Oregon, since September and have had enough cool events and training that I'm not sure how I ever fitted a job in anyway. I have slightly cut down on racing to be more focused on improving, but you need a lot of marathon+ runs to train for racing ultras and I'd rather do them in organised events than just around town. Prize money is also an incentive.

Although the small city isn't well known outside the States, Bend has significant running pedigree and some incredible trails in the shadow of mountains. For example, two of the 2010 US National trail running championship races will be here, the half marathon and 50k events. Given the size of the country and number of possible venues, it shows

how important running is around here. Many other major races are also in Oregon or the neighbouring States, particularly ultras. Bend is also home to the current World Champions for the men's trail half marathon and the women's road 100k so I have plenty of stupidly quick people around to keep me on my toes.

Many people reading this will have experienced races over in the States and will be familiar with a few common differences. Firstly, the races cost more for an equivalent service, usually \$80-275 (£50-170) for a marathon. Secondly, the national anthem is played before any larger race – something which has grown on me, but can seem a little odd to foreigners. Oh and the races are full of Americans, but you kind of expect that. In general the races follow a similar rule to those in Europe, that the longer the race is, the friendlier the participants. Even elite competitors in longer races have time to chat along the way due to the comfortable pace, so I've already met some interesting people mid-race, even bumping into the UK 100 Marathon Club President at the start of the Lake Tahoe triple marathon.

One noticeable change to running life here is that they don't generally have running clubs, so no Serpentine-equivalent to help me on my way. Instead, I met runners through the downtown running store, Footzone. It organises (note I haven't forgotten how to spell yet) weekly runs and plenty of races, so I was able to get involved with the running community easily. I quickly met several good training buddies who could smoke me in anything up to a marathon (I've got this lingo down too).

My main problem is that there's only so much training you can do before you break yourself. I'd love to switch to hard 120-mile weeks but the universal law of having to build up the training gradually means that's not an option. Instead, it's good to have the freedom to run whenever I want as long as it doesn't interfere with evening plans and it really helps to not have to fit it round variable work hours.

This part of the US is particularly beautiful with mountains, forests and volcanoes so I can't wait for all the races coming up. My most anticipated is the Western States Endurance Run, a 100-miler over mountains which is insanely hard to get into (via lottery or winning a few select races) and is the original 100-miler which started a huge trend. I know several Serpies have this on their 'to do' list so I hope to see some untanned British faces on the start line at some point.



Ian Sharman: blazing a trail state-side

London Marathon 2010 Preview

Ahead of this year's London Marathon, Serpentimes caught up with three entrants in January to see how their preparations were going

Novice: Ashley Howe

Motivation

I first started running because I'd entered the ballot for the London Marathon and was terrified that I might actually get in. I've been to watch London for a few years now (to watch my dad run) and always secretly thought I'd like to do it before I was 25 – I'm currently 24 with time not on my side. I finally decided last year it was time to bite the bullet and panicked when I found out I had a place, but training beforehand meant that my body was already used to running by the time I found out. In order to keep my motivation high I'm running for charity and when it starts to hurt or I lack motivation I remind myself there is a reason for me doing it despite how I'm feeling. If it gets really tough I get my friends to talk me into going for a run!

Goals

My main goal is to get around London in one piece. I'm not worried about the time. It's more about saying I have taken part in it and crossed the finish line. I also aim to get as much sponsorship for it as possible as it isn't every day you run a marathon!



Ashley enjoying her marathon training

Training schedule

My training schedule is mapped out very concisely but it involves two rest days every week. I found an article in an old newspaper supplement about training for marathons which I used as a guide and tried to map it around my life so it was do-able. Most of my long runs are on a Sunday and then Monday is a really easy run so I don't end up with an injury. I've scheduled in some races as well so I have something to aim for when I'm training. I don't have a preference about when I run but I do seem to have more energy in the evenings, though I always wait to see how I feel on the day before deciding what time to run.

Progress to date

Progress has been slow and sporadic - the weather and a very busy Christmas have made it quite difficult to train. The longest distance I've done is eight miles (which I know isn't enough and the panic has returned). But as soon as the snow defrosts I'll be back out there with bags of motivation.

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

Intermediate: Ros Butterfield

Motivation

London will be my second marathon within a year. This is hard for me to believe as running a marathon had never been my intention when I first started running. Running really found me, and as with most people it has helped me with the day-to-day stresses life throws at you. I suppose it has become a natural progression: a friend challenges you to a half marathon, get that under your belt, and before you know it you've signed up for 26.2 miles in Berlin.

I'm really looking forward to London; there is something about running through your own city with friends and family supporting you, which is something I haven't had in previous races. I'm also organising a group of nine charity runners for the City and East London Bereavement service, which may be as challenging as the run itself!

Goals

I'm really looking to get under 3:45. I know I have set myself a tall order, as my time in Berlin was 4:05.

Training schedule

My training schedule is never by the book. I just do what I can and listen to what my body is telling me. I keep being told speed work will help me raise my game, so my first track session was at Willesden last week (mid January). I can report from a first timer's perspective that the session was gruelling but at the same time strangely enjoyable!

Progress to date

I hadn't banked on how hard it would be to train through the winter, and the snowy weather at the beginning of January has been a frustrating set-back. Last year I was so grateful to fellow Serpies for taking me under their wing for the longer runs and I hope the same happens this year. The hard work has started!

<http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/RosButterfield>



Ros proud of another race medal

Old hand: Martin Gaunt

Motivation

This year will be my eighth consecutive London Marathon. It is an event that has come to define my year – it is always the first date in my diary, it splits my running year between what can loosely be referred to as work (January-April) and play (May-December), and my result, good or bad, is often reflective of my year.

2010 is slightly different in that it represents a prelude to my Ironman debut in June. But this won't change things much. The focus has always been London, and probably always will be.

Goals

A PB (sub-2.35) is the aim, and I'd love to break into the top 100 finishers. I also want to run the second half as fast as the first. I have only managed this once before, so I guess the odds are against me, but I'm certain it's the way to run your best possible time. Running your fastest miles down the Embankment approaching the finish is an incredible feeling and one I want to recapture.



Martin Gaunt (left) ahead of Robin Tuddenham and David McGregor, London Marathon 2008

Looking longer term, I want to keep my London streak going. Ideally, I'd rather not hang up my trainers until I've done more London Marathons than anyone else.

Training schedule

I don't have a fixed schedule as such, but I do have my races through to April mapped out, and I know that every weekend when I'm not racing (and many when I am), I need to be doing a long run of at least two hours. Much of my mileage comes from running to work (Greenwich – Westminster) several times a week. I then normally find myself caught up in an unnecessarily competitive Wednesday night "Three Parks", perhaps some mile reps around St James' Park on a Thursday, then Greenwich Hills or a cross country race on Saturdays.

Progress to date

Today I ran to Germany, which sounds like excellent progress, until you consider that I started only just over the French border. Like many, progress has been hampered so far by the snow - I was forced into doing my first long run on a treadmill, but I managed only 6 km before I gave up through boredom. But I realise that January snowfall will seem like a distant and flimsy excuse if things don't go right in April. So, as of late January, I'm stepping up the training, with a view to half marathon progress checks at Wokingham and Brentwood.

Good luck to all the Serpies running the London Marathon on April 25th!

Want to run London in 2011? Apply for a club place!

Every year, the club has some guaranteed entries for the London Marathon.

The places are assigned to club members using a points system explained here:

http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_london_clubplaces.html

You can get points by volunteering and by running in the monthly club handicap, summer league, assembly league, all cross country and track and field matches, and club championship races. Fast or slow doesn't matter!

Typically it takes many months to accumulate all the required points, but people with fewer than the full number of points have been known to get a place, depending on who else applies, so collect as much as you can and give it a try.

Watch out for the Hon Secretary call for applications in November 2010.

John Walker's story

A personal account of our former chairman's ideas and training to break 2:40 in a marathon at the age of 42

I was asked to write this article after hearing that I used a book to help me run sub 2.40. The book was "The Competitive Runner's Handbook" published in 1983 and still available on Amazon. This was long before all the aids available to runners today were thought about. All we had was a stopwatch and even those were not readily available which is why this book was so valuable a training aid for the novice marathon runner.

A bit of further background may help to explain why I succeeded in this goal I set myself. I spent 22 plus years in the Army and always had an interest in sport of all types. I ran cross country in the winter and track in the summer but these were a means of keeping fit for rugby and football which were my main sports. I had already acted as a trainer for two separate courses for beginners organised and sponsored by the "Sunday Times" so along with my Army background I felt confident in helping other runners and also in self-coaching.

At the beginning of 1985, as well as working for the International Athletics Club with David Bedford and the late and great Derek Johnson I started working for London Road Runners Club on a project called "The Great British Fun Run" sponsored by the then Health Education Council. This was to be a 2,200 mile run round Great Britain taking place from May 27th to June 23rd. People could run the whole event or just certain parts. My job along with two other people and one part time sub was to signpost the route ahead of the race so I went round the whole route twice beforehand with the Transport manager and saw parts of Great Britain that I had never seen before and will never see again.

I raced over five hundred miles and two girls both raced over two hundred and fifty miles. At the end we were exhausted but elated. Anyone out there who took part will no doubt feel the same and the same event will never be able to take place again due to the Health and Safety issues/police.

It was during a well earned holiday at the start of July that the idea of trying to break 2.40 and so qualify for the Championship start of London Marathon 1986 was conceived and the Harrow Marathon was chosen, as though the course was not easy, being fairly hilly, it was well organised and a fairly small field.

A training schedule was prepared and as I was not in full time employment but still doing odd work for LRRRC and IAC and working part time I could train when I wanted and as we had moved to a flat in Teddington, one minute from Bushy Park and 10 minutes from Richmond Park I had the ideal training area. Three months' hard training followed with long runs, hill training, track training and Serpie runs, which on a

Serpie runs, which on a Saturday could now be described as a Tempo run but back then was a hard session followed by another hard session in the pub.



John Walker at the pub after London 2005 (Photo: Ian Hodge)

Saturday could now be described as a Tempo run but back then was a hard session followed by another hard session in the pub.

Race day dawned with a bitterly cold day but dry and no wind so I felt confident that I would do it. The first lap went fine as there were a lot of people around, most of them doing the half marathon. Having done the race a couple of times I knew that the second lap could be lonely but as most of my long runs had been solo efforts this was not a problem.

At the last 800 metres my then girlfriend was running alongside me fully dressed screaming in my ear and I was going slower than her. I finished in 2.40.08.

Disaster struck not long into the second lap when I went off course, a combination of my stupidity and marshal incompetence, and turned left and ran 80 metres down the wrong road only to be shouted back by a fellow runner. Of course I ran back as hard as I could and continued in this vein to the top of Honeypot Lane before sense set in that I still had a way to go and settled back into my pace and up to 25 miles I was still on target but the last mile and a bit I was almost dead on my feet. At the last 800 metres my then girlfriend was running alongside me fully dressed screaming in my ear and I was going slower than her. I finished in 2.40.08.

I sent off my Championship form with a covering letter with my half marathon times for the previous two years including my 1.12.40 from

Bath hoping that I would be accepted but no, rules are rules and I was not in the Championship race.

I was devastated and to be frank fed up with running which I went back to in a very desultory manner until the end of February when I was given a kick up the backside and told to get a few long runs under my belt and give it a go in London which from the mass start was a tall order and in this I was proved right as I only managed 2.44.

Again after a short rest back to training and for this I must say that being a Serpie and having to go along on Saturday and Wednesday helped a great deal and having a girlfriend who was now training for a triathlon helped also.

I had only managed a few long runs so one August morning I set off to do about 22 miles. I bowled along round the streets of South London at a good pace feeling great and when I stopped for a drink in Clapham Common and looked at my watch I realised that I had been out for two hours and still had to get home to Teddington which could be another 50/60 minutes and no mobile so I had to make a reverse charge call home to explain that I was OK and would be home in a while.

I probably covered around 30 miles that day but felt great at the end. I had entered the Richmond Marathon and Harrow again with the express intention of breaking 2.40. Just before Richmond we moved to Colliers Wood but as I had been a Richmond resident at the time of entry I was eligible for the resident's prize which was a dinner for two in a posh Richmond restaurant. I hoped to win this even though I intended to use this as a hard training run at around 2.50 pace.

I went through halfway at just under 1.20 and thought that I was leading and was shocked to be told by a Serpie marshal that someone had gone through over five minutes in front of me (ex GB international it proved to be, making a comeback after a couple of years off). Still I was second and in line for the prize so pushed on at my own pace and felt OK until around 23 miles when I hit the Thames Towpath very uneven underfoot.

At around 24 miles I was passed by two Collingwood AC runners, whom I knew and who were a lot younger so there was a bit of banter as they went past. Once off the towpath, at just over 25 I saw that one of the runners was on his own and not looking happy so this spurred me on and I

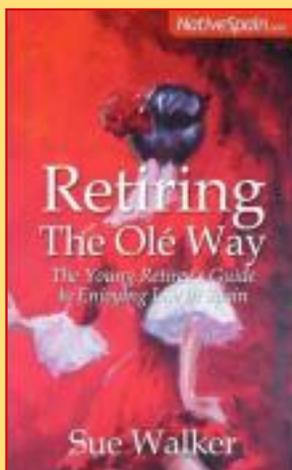
chased him down and ended up finishing third in 2.48 and winning the prize.

An expletive-full shout came from the kitchen that it was 7.15 and I had forgotten to change the time on the alarm clock when the clocks went forward

Six weeks to Race Day so another couple of long runs were done and then tapering down so that a week before the race I was in good condition and hoping for good weather, which on the first weekend in November could not be guaranteed. Marathon weekend arrived, 6.15am Sunday I was lying in the bath, before having my porridge and coffee, my marathon ritual, when an expletive-full shout came from the kitchen that it was 7.15 and I had forgotten to change the time on the alarm clock the previous weekend when the clocks went forward. A frantic phone call for a taxi and off we went. Luckily no traffic and a cabby who knew where he was going and I got to Harrow at around the time I had aimed for but not a great omen.

The race started and I felt fine now my heart had settled down. Halfway was at around 1.17 so I was well on schedule. Onto the second lap and past last year's debacle point and felt fine. I got all the climbs out of the way and was still feeling good 25 miles in at 2.30, so 10 minutes in hand. Quick sprint and stop the clock at 2.37.25. Aim achieved and no problems so my prize winning dinner that night would be a celebration after a few beers with the Wembley crowd including James Godber, Wendy Wood and Peter and Maureen Forster.

So that is my personal tale of running sub 2.40 and in no way reflects on any matters provided by Serpentine Running Club for present or past members. Any comments please feel free to email me at johnmcnabwalker@gmail.com



"Retiring types? - Not us!"

When Sue and John Walker decided to retire in Spain, they wanted to do more than simply lounge by a pool.

That's why Serpie Sue Walker, better known to many of you as Sue McGinlay, decided to share her story of how she and John moved their lives overseas in 2008 in a book called "Retiring The Olé Way", available on Amazon.

What makes this book extra special is that Sue Walker landed her publishing contract by Native Spain winning a writing contest with her enthusiasm, writing skills and unique story.

Her book, a real story of what's involved in retiring to Spain when you're still keen to walk, run and enjoy everything the country has to offer, also features fellow Serpie John Jarvis, describing his experiences of living and running in Spain.

Serpentine survey: the results

Ian Payne

We had a great response to the recent survey posted on the egroup, with a total of 322 respondents, so thanks go to all who gave their feedback. As most respondents will have gathered, the questions were intended to cover a real mix of topics, some highly relevant to the club, others just for fun, and none of it particularly scientific. Not least among our motives was that we thought it might make an interesting article, so here goes...

Q1: What is the main reason you run?

- 34% - To keep fit
- 27% - Because I just love running
- 13% - To compete
- 9% - To feel better about myself
- 6% - To lose weight
- 3% - To train for a marathon
- 8% - Other

The obvious answer we missed off here was "to train for triathlon". Not quite sure how that happened given that the options were compiled by a triathlete, but needless to say the lycra lovers accounted for the majority of those who answered "other".

Q2: What is the main reason you joined the Serpentine Running Club?

- 32% - For motivation
- 20% - For the coaching and other benefits
- 20% - To help train for a marathon or triathlon
- 19% - To meet new people
- 9% - Some other reason

Some of the more imaginative reasons included to help gain a Duke of Edinburgh Award and to train for a trek to Everest Base Camp. And several said they joined for all of the above reasons.

Q3: What is your favourite running surface?

- 52% - Road
- 37% - Trail
- 5% - Cross country
- 5% - Track
- 1% - Treadmill

The majority of us like to get outdoors, but not necessarily out of town.

Q4: How do you prefer to train?

- 49% - In a group

30% - Alone

21% - With a partner

We're mostly a sociable bunch, although a surprisingly high number (of club members, let's not forget) prefer training solo.

Q5: What is your favourite race?

Very difficult to collate the results for this one as there were just so many, and only 65% of respondents actually had a favourite race, but those who did give an answer broke down (very roughly) as follows:

- 22% - A marathon (about a third of which said London Marathon)
- 20% - A half marathon
- 12% - A cross country race of one sort or another
- 11% - A 10K
- 11% - A triathlon (of which 26% Ironman, 22% Middle Distance, 17% Olympic, 13% Sprint, 4% Duathlon and the rest just any triathlon)
- 7% - The Serpentine Handicap
- 4% - A 10m (half of which said the Cabbage Patch 10)
- 4% - A track race of one sort or another (100m / 400m / 800m / 1500m / 1k / 1 mile / 3k)
- 3% - A 5K (of which over two thirds said the LFOTM 5k)
- 2% - An ultra (most of which said Davos)
- 1% - Kingston 16 mile breakfast run
- 3% - Some other random race that doesn't fit any of these categories

And full marks for open-mindedness to the person who answered "the next one!"

Q6: Do you wear Serpentine colours when you are in a race?

- 36% - Always
- 28% - Most of the time
- 16% - Sometimes
- 6% - Hardly ever
- 14% - Never

Nice to see most of us representing the club when we can, but perhaps a little unfair to heap too much shame on those in the lower categories, as of course some of you may be lucky enough to be sponsored, or represent your country, or have joint membership with other clubs, or perhaps just not be inclined towards racing very much. Red and gold stripes still rule though.

Q7: What is your favourite Serpie training session?

A bit of an apology due here for one or two regular sessions that were missed off the list of options, as there are just so many that we must confess to losing count and giving up after reaching double figures. Which, whilst making us look slightly red-faced, does also illustrate the huge choice of sessions on offer to our lucky members, thanks to those who volunteer to coach and lead them. Rather than making it a popularity contest, let's just suffice to say that by far the most popular session was the Wednesday night club run, with 46% of the vote. That aside, there was a very good spread of voting and plenty of fans for all

the sessions we listed, as well as those we missed out (seriously, we're sorry about that)

Q8: Does wearing a heart rate monitor improve your performance?

- 43% - Don't know
- 16% - Yes
- 16% - No
- 15% - Maybe
- 10% - Don't care

So that clears up that debate. Fairly conclusive wouldn't you agree?

Q9: Does listening to music on solo training runs help improve your performance?

- 34% - Don't know
- 32% - Yes
- 18% - Maybe
- 16% - No

Again, nice to at least see the spread of opinions on an issue of much debate, and reassuring to see that a good proportion of our members are as safety-conscious outside of the club as they are, undoubtedly, on official Serpie runs.

Q10: What's your favourite post race snack?

- 19% - Fruit
- 17% - Beer
- 14% - Cereal bar
- 13% - Cake
- 10% - Pasta
- 6% - Chocolate
- 3% - Chips
- 18% - Something else

A very wide range of choices in the "other" category as you might expect, with plenty of shouts for milkshake (we forgot that one), protein shake and jaffa cakes, and even a couple for wine, kebabs and cheese & salami sandwiches.

Q11: Do you believe more in nature or nurture when it comes to running fast?

- 45% - It's an equal measure of both natural talent and how hard you train
- 25% - It's mostly down to how hard you train
- 17% - It's mostly down to natural talent
- 5% - I don't care
- 4% - I don't know
- 3% - It's all down to how hard you train
- 1% - It's all down to natural talent

So nurture marginally gets the edge over nature, most people maintaining a balanced view.

Q12: What is the most significant thing you think the club could do to improve?

Again far too many suggestions to list here, but it was great to see so many of you saying the club is perfect just the way it is. Likewise great to see lots of very helpful suggestions (and thankfully not too many moans) which will of course all be passed on to the committee for rumination and debate.

One thing we are glad to have proved beyond doubt is that at least 9 out of 10 serpies do care.

New and confused? Volunteer!

The best way to get to know other members and learn all the club's best tips is to help running its many activities: marshal at a serpie race, help organise social events, sell kit or help produce the Serpentine (check the back issues at <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/serpentine.html>).

Contact volunteers@serpentine.org.uk or watch out for calls for helpers in the serpie e-mailing group.

More info at <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/volunteer.html>

Track & field home matches

All at Battersea Track, help needed!

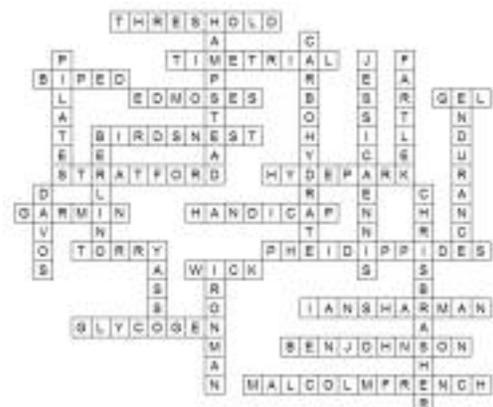
Southern Men's League - 5 June and 31 July. Both Saturday

Southern Women's League - Saturday, 7 August

Rosenheim League - Wednesday, 12 May

Masters League - Monday, 12 July

Solution of the Serpie crossword



The winner of the photo competition



Thank you to all those who entered the Serpentine photo competition. On this occasion, we asked Serpie member Toby Melville, 2010 Reuters photographer of the year, to judge the entries. Toby's verdict is as follows...

runners such as James Adams and Rob Westaway tucking a decent compact camera into their backpack/ belt when running so as not to miss an opportunity! I am sure that cyclists too can squeeze a light camera into their jersey pocket when training to capture fantastic views in stunning countryside, as well as all you helpers/ friends/ relatives/ supporters watching Serpies compete. So don't forget your camera with your gels and Garmins!

Judging is a very personal preference as individual tastes and criteria differ so wildly but even though the Serpie Red and Gold kit were not in evidence until the fourth place photo, the top three for me were fairly clear and the winning frame from Kevan Wilkinson jumped out immediately. So congratulations to Kevan, also scoring two more frames in the top five!

I know track and cross-country runners and PB roadies aren't likely to carry a camera on their races, but I am always impressed to see Ultra

WINNER - Kevan Wilkinson's frame of hardy souls running through the snow....lovely composition, atmospheric, candid - and inspiration for all of us that winter weather doesn't mean sheltering in the gym on the treadmill!



Run and Become
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Our thanks go to Run and Become in Victoria for sponsoring the competition and supplying vouchers to the winners.

www.runandbecome.com

42 Palmer St, London, SW1H 0PH, 020 7222 1314

... and the runner-ups!



SECOND PLACE - Ian Payne's view of competitors on the Dorset coast ultra. Evocative, nice use of a panoramic composition: makes me want to get straight down to the beautiful Jurassic coastal footpath now! Might have been even closer to winning if the horizon was straighter!

THIRD PLACE - Kevan's drawn to snow again. I don't mind the fact that we see the back of the runner not the front, with him both feet off the ground, pounding through the adverse conditions, and a touch of humour injected with the sign....



FOURTH PLACE (left)- Gavin Edmond's frame of gritted teeth and effort encapsulated in a Hyde Park run...easy to empathise with the state-of-mind of the runner, digging deep. I much prefer the candidness of this type of 'straight' running image, than a runner / cyclist reacting to the camera....but this is of course a personal choice!

FIFTH PLACE (right)- Kevan again with a nicely executed 'panning' image of a young runner and (slightly!) older running mate, giving a sense of movement and motion with his photo technique.



Ed Warner interview

In 2007, Ed Warner was appointed chairman of UK Athletics. Dan de Belder met up with him to discuss the current state of British athletics, the grassroots of the sport, running clubs as well as his own personal running highlights

How would you describe your first three years in your role as chairman of UK Athletics? How many adjectives am I allowed? At turns great fun, frustrating, exhilarating, tortuous. Of course, the trick has been to cling onto the great bits - especially proximity to elite athletes and their coaches - to sustain me through the difficult deeply political times. On balance the former far outweighs the latter I'm pleased to report.

What are UKA's priorities? Is it at the elite end of the spectrum or is grassroots athletics equally important? While we are the National Governing Body for the whole sport, much of the day-to-day work with the grassroots is undertaken by England Athletics and their counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. By extension, this means that the elite Great Britain & Northern Ireland team absorbs a considerable part of UKA's own time.

Touching on the elite performance, what are your hopes and goals for London 2012? We aspire to winning as many or more medals as in any recent Olympics or World Championships, aside from the boycotted games of the early '80s. This would mean eight or more medals, compared to the four we won in Beijing. We also hope to see a British finalist in the majority of events, itself a tough target given our weakness in a number of disciplines in recent years. It's important for the atmosphere in the Olympic Stadium that the home crowd has local heroes to follow throughout the competition.

What is being done to improve elite performance of UK Athletics? So many of our systems and personnel have been changed in the past couple of years it's difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps most importantly, we hired a number of globally renowned coaches to work with our athletes, led by Dutchman Charles van Commenee in the Olympics programme and Swede Peter Eriksson for the Paralympics.

Do you think we will ever see a return of GB's domination on the track and the glory years of Coe, Cram, Ovett and Thompson? Short answer? No. But no nation can hope to be dominant, just as Britain was not dominant then, merely more successful than now. Ours is a diverse sport with 47 Olympic events. You have African distance runners, European throwers, American and Caribbean sprinters. Our objective must be to do as well as we can on as broad a front as possible. Comparisons with a sport with a narrow competitive base such as rowing or sailing simply aren't valid.

How did you get into running? I ran to get fit for a skiing holiday in 2001 and enjoyed it so much that I entered the 2002 London Marathon, completed it in 3:26 and found I was hooked.

What is your marathon/half marathon/10K PB? 3:17 (Belfast 2009), 88 mins (Gosport 2007), 39.59 (Hove 2009).

Who are your running heroes? Steve Ovett (but please don't tell Seb if

you see him!) and Haile [Gebrselassie] obviously.

How did you get on in the Serpentine New Year's Day 10K? From memory, just under 42 mins, but you'll need to check the records. As with most, the snow had limited my training, so I was not too unhappy, although I didn't do justice to such a flat course.

What is your running goal? Always to run more smartly and hopefully faster. This year my Spring goal is the Three Forts on the South Downs, a very hilly 27 miler, and I'll probably enter an autumn marathon- maybe Abingdon which I've enjoyed before.

How involved are you with the Fittleworth Flyers? As much as I can be. Most Saturdays I join the early morning off road run on the Downs and I run as many of the local league races as my diary allows. I used to edit the newsletter, but felt I had to hand on the baton when I joined UKA.

Would you say running clubs in the UK are in the ascendancy or in decline? It's difficult to generalise. Statistics say membership is static to slightly growing. The challenge for all clubs is to constantly regenerate the base of volunteers prepared to do the necessary work for them to thrive.

What does UKA do to support running clubs? England Athletics are encouraging groups of clubs to co-operate as Athletics Networks, sharing resources and enjoying support in, for example, coaching. We've also made it cheaper and easier for clubs to organise officially licenced road races.

What do you think the main purpose of clubs such as Serpentine should be? Providing a social running environment for runners of all ages and abilities.

What changes would you like to see in clubs in general/at Serpentine? I'd encourage all clubs to think about the burden they place on those individuals who sustain their activities and whether there are ways they can alleviate and/or reward it.

What else could the Government do to support running at grassroots level? Bureaucracy is the killer: non-transferable CRB checks, road closure difficulties etc. A war on red tape please!



Ed Warner: competing in the Tilgate 5 for the Fittleworth Flyers

Dates for your diary

Sunday 11 April - Last Half of the London Marathon training run

Sign up online and if you can help contact trainingrep@serpentine.org.uk

Sunday 25 April - Post London Marathon drinks and food

At the Buckingham Arms, near St. James park tube

Wednesday 30 June - Serpentine AGM

At the Victory Services Club, TBC. Find out what is happening in your club

Friday 9 July - Summer Party

The boat party is back!

SERPENTINE

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CLUBKIT

We have a fantastic selection of high quality running, tri, cycle, and casual kit available at great value, in a range of sizes to suit all.

Kit can be purchased from the kit room in the Seymour Leisure Centre.

The kit room is open:

- Most Wednesdays, usually between 6:15 and 6:40pm, except the last Wednesday of each month, when it is open after the run (around 8:30pm).
- On Saturday mornings after the run (except the first Saturday of the month which is the Club Handicap).

If you are a new member, please bring your new member letter with the kit voucher intact to claim your free club t-shirt or vest.

Please note we do not provide a mail order service for kit.

If you have any questions please email: club-kit@serpentine.org.uk

Vests	£20
Coolmax T-shirts	
– short sleeves	£20
– long sleeves	£23
Stormtech jackets	£35
Tri suits	£50
Tri shorts	£30
Tri tops (sleeveless)	£30
Cycle jackets	£40
Cycle jerseys (summer weight)	
– short sleeves	£25
– long sleeves	£30
Gillets	£25
Cycle shorts	£20