

SERPENTIMES

SPRING 2011

THE VICTORIOUS ISSUE

INSIDE

Records and victories

Rachel Joyce and Ironman Hawaii

The injury survey

Plus

Winners of our Photo Competition



THE EDITOR SPEAKS

Welcome to the latest issue of Serpentimes

I've always wondered if I were prepared to dedicate as many hours in the day as possible to training, how much faster could I be? It's the old nature versus nurture debate. Serpie member, Alex Vero, made a documentary about it which was covered in these pages last year, in which he dedicated himself unreservedly to becoming an elite runner.

But I think there's a bit more to it than that. It can't just be a function of time and

commitment. For a start if you over-train, you get injured. Serpie doctor, Lisa Wray, has conducted a survey amongst members (see page 38), in which many stresses and strains are concluded to be as a result of over-use.

What's more, running coaches continually go on about rest. "Rest is the most important part of your weekly training plan", is the usual refrain. Resting the muscles is essential to avoiding injury and enabling better quality work-outs. Therein lies the paradox: I'm prepared (on occasions) to push my legs to the limit to up the mileage but I'm being told to rest. The truth probably lies somewhere in between and, going back to the nurture debate, not only are some people born faster than others, there are clearly those who are less susceptible to injury, with neutral biomechanics and better rates of recovery. C'est la vie!

In attempting to come up with a theme for this issue, we decided on calling this the victorious issue. Serpentine is now blessed with a number of extremely talented, elite athletes in its ranks, including Ian Sharman, Huw Lobb, Andy DuBois, Nick Torry and Rachel Joyce. We have included a variety of articles and interviews outlining their recent individual exploits. This last season also saw the women's cross-country team win the coveted Metropolitan League for the first time. Team captain, Natalie Kolodziej, provides her end of term report.

As ever, we are entirely reliant on members' contributions so please send us your articles and photos and do give us feedback on the current magazine. We are always on the lookout for new ideas.

The Serpentimes Team

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CONTENTS

SPRING 2011

FEATURES

Rachel Joyce	12
Training in Kenya	20
Races for new runners	22
Alternative race advice	23
A-Z of Welsh Castle Relay	26
Navigating on trails	34
Running online	36
Injury survey	38
Catkin Shelley	40
Barefoot running	41
Pilates	42
GPS	46

CLUB NEWS

J&HP Duathlon	3
News	4
Honorary Centurion	17
On tracks and fields	28
WNR leaders	32
Meal of the Month	35
Club relays calendar	43

RACE REPORTS

Women XC	6
Men XC	7
Sunday XC	8
Ironman Hawaii	9
Ljubljana Marathon	14
Hardmoors 110	16
7-up	17

REGULAR COLUMNS

Ask Dr Payne	24
Serpie crossword	25
Photo Competition	44
Club kit	48

Cover photos by Gavin Edmonds (Tiago Branco, Southern Men T&F league, 2 June 2010) & Stéphane Schneider (Relax before the Giro Lago di Resia, 15.3 km, 31 July 2010). Back cover photo by Gavin Edmonds (Irish Serpies, Jekyll and Hyde Park Duathlon, 31 October 2010).

Serpentine's Jekyll and Hyde Park Duathlon awarded British Triathlon Event Quality Mark Level One

Congratulations to Alex Elferink (2010 race director) and Jennifer Bradley (committee representative for race organisation and promotion) and everybody else involved.



Photos: Gavin Edmonds



Ian Hodge soon will be aiming at V50 silverware (Photo: Gavin Edmonds)

Life membership for Ian Hodge

Jolyon Attwooll

One of Serpentine's most active and involved members, Ian Hodge, was awarded with life membership at the club's annual general meeting last June.

The award, which was presented by Lisa Pettit, was in recognition of Ian's unstinting enthusiasm and commitment to the club, in particular his work over many years with the committee.

Ian, who first ran with Serpentine in the autumn of 2000 and joined almost 10 years ago in May 2001, started helping with club administration in July 2002. He was elected to the committee as joint men's club captain, working alongside Malcolm French.

Over the years, Ian has played a part in many aspects of the club. He brought in multi-sports championships as interest in triathlon boomed, and, as well as his role on the committee, he has been heavily involved in the Serpentine website, which he still helps administrate.

Currently responsible for Competition and Team Events, Ian says his focus remains on his long-term goal of making Serpentine Running Club into one of the top clubs in the country. He cites recent performances in the Welsh Castles Relays and cross country as among the highlights of his time in the club.

Of the award of life membership, Ian said: "I

was honoured and amazed to have been awarded it while still busy on the committee – when my work was only half done!"

At the same meeting, Paul Fromme was presented with the Secretary's Shield for his meticulous organising of the Serpentine teams for the Welsh Castles Relay, as well as for his leadership in the Wednesday night runs.

End of the year awards

Jolyon Attwooll

Several awards were presented at the Serpentine Christmas party in December for outstanding performances in the club.

In a year of excellent cross-country results, the women's team outshone them all with a convincing maiden victory in the Metropolitan



Nick Torry won national representation and top Serpentine award

League – and women's captain Natalie Kolodziej was presented with the John Stonham Farewell Cup for inspiring others.

Natalie was injured for much of the season but carried on enthusiastically with her captaincy duties – and recovered fitness to play a big part in the final races of the season, including a bronze medal in the team that placed third in the mud of the Alton Towers National Cross Country championships, which was the best National ranking in Serpentine history!

Honorary mentions should go to the other cross-country captains, including Eric Phillips, who galvanised the Serpentine men into their best ever showing, and Cheryl Sacks, who rallied serpies around the Sunday League.

Nick Torry was awarded the club's overall age-graded champion trophy, his average of 86.3 % pipping Karen Hancock by 0.9%.

The Sharmanator destroys a world-class field

James Adams

The Rocky Raccoon 100 is a relatively low key event in the extensive list of US 100 milers each year. This year was different. Just a few days before the start of the race at least four world class ultra trail runners signed up to run. Why exactly is anyone's guess but now the ultrarunning world got excited about watching these guys race against each other. The result was unexpected.

When Ian Sharman posted sub 2.30 times in each of his first two laps it prompted many to say that he had gone out too fast. In fact a conversation between two of the favourites Anton Kuprika and Hal Koerner (2nd and 3rd) went "Dude, we are not running slow are we?", "No, Ian is just killing it", "He has to blow up soon".

But he didn't. Keeping a pretty consistent pace around the three remaining laps Ian confounded expectations, destroyed a world class field, smashed a course record by half an hour and his time of 12.44 came close to breaking a world record for the distance on the trail. Take a look at the Bramley 20 results to see that a 5 man Serpie relay team would not be much quicker than that.



Ian Sharman still environmentally friendly after 92 miles at 7:38 min/miles.

Ian's next big challenges are improving on his 6.01 for the 55 mile Comrades Ultra and then in June competing in the Western States 100 in what is considered the "world championship" of 100 mile races. Last year Ian was 8th in his debut at the distance. This time the ultrarunning world will be watching him and expecting that position to be improved.

Lobb finds Davos to his liking

Dan de Belder

Huw Lobb, a former marathon runner for Great Britain, joined the massed ranks of Serpies last summer for the ritual invasion of the small town of Davos for the Swiss Alpine series of mountain races. Throughout the weekend, there is a choice of 11k, 21k, 31k, 42k (in the valley), 42k (up the mountain) and 78k races. Huw plumped for the hilly version of the 42k.

Huw, having hung up his GB vest some years ago, is no stranger to unusual challenges. In 2004 he was the first ever human to win the annual Man versus Horse challenge in Mid Wales, collecting a fairly useful £25,000 for his efforts. This time there would only be curious bell-ringing cows to contend with.

Huw's preparation for this race was, by his own accounts, fairly modest. Although he'd managed a few decent, long runs in June and July, his most recent race was a two mile win in Battersea Park. He'd done no altitude training and few hill sessions.

"The thing I remember most," said Huw, "was the hot sunshine and array of bright colours from the shades, shorts and shirts of assorted European club runners on the start line. A small group of us, a curious bunch, set off together at the front and soon became two and then one up the steep hill to halfway. From there it was downhill, through lovely mountain meadows and alongside trickling alpine streams."

Huw duly won the race in a fantastic time of 3.16, over two minutes ahead of his nearest challenger. Asked how pleased he was with the victory, Huw admitted to being not overly delighted. His overwhelming feeling is that the main event of the weekend is the 78k and that this is the race he is aiming to win this year. "Some better pre-race hydration, a more focused build-up race programme, and on the day, a steady 36k warm-up, and I'm more than confident this goal can be achieved."

Despite Huw's self-deprecating comments, it was nonetheless a fantastic achievement to win one of the most popular, Alpine races against seasoned mountain marathon runners with such limited experience and preparation. This was not the only Serpie success of the weekend: Teresa Gaillard de Laubenque also stormed to victory in the women's 31k event. We wish them both all the best for their goals in 2011.

The Handicap

Nyla Hussain

We saw an exhilarating end to the 2010 handicap competition when for the first time since the Tom Hogshead began in 1983 we had joint winners! Stéphane Schneider and James Mills both had a dazzling all-year round performance, scoring 200 points from their eight best races. The year's runner up, Alex Malzer, scored a respectable 185 points, significantly improving his performance throughout the year.

The Handicap Team were delighted that the 2010 Kinahan Challenge Cup for women 50 plus went to Jan Farmer on 110 points followed by Beate Vogt and Baiju McCubbins. We hope that the 2011 Women's V50 element of the Tom Hogshead might be even more hotly contested. The early lead is held by Eddie Brocklesby with Beate Vogt, Jan Farmer and Sue Lambert snapping at her heels but this is a wide open competition and could be anybody's. Do you know anyone in

the women V50 group? Do please encourage them to come along to try their hand at the Handicap.

This is not just an event for the experienced runner; in the last year there have been many runners from the beginners' group. With encouragement from Sid Wills, every month we see new faces arrive eager to run twice round the Serpentine Lake. For most, the handicap is their first race. Stephanie Wyman had an wonderful start to this year coming in 3rd place in January and 4th place in February. Cherry Wyn-Williams, Fiona Macrae and Victoria Sullivan also have been running remarkably in the last year.

We were delighted to welcome back Bob Davidson in February only a month after he was taken ill at the January handicap. Although this time he was there to support his fellow runners, it appears from his good form that it will not be long before he is back to racing.

This is also the end of the first year for the new organising team. After recovering from the shock of the early morning starts, the team has settled into a routine and now thoroughly enjoys working together to ensure that everyone has a great race every month. However, you may sometimes hear occasional nervous laughter from the team when some small mishap occurs unexpectedly! Registration can be unpredictable. On occasion, a few minutes before registration closes, as we are preparing to set up the start line and thinking that the runners are looking a bit thin on the ground, a sea of red is seen at a distance heading towards the bandstand, causing panic amongst the team.

Over the last year, we have had a few hairy moments. January 2011 was a disastrous month when everything that could go wrong did, the worst thing being Bob's fall. We have also had a few panicky moments when we could not get the registration computer to work in December; a few blonde moments, when we forgot the cups and medals; and a bizarre moment, when some runners turned up to register just as other runners were sprinting to the finish line.

We have come out on the other side unscathed and, as Bev rushes to the engravers to add both Stéphane and James's names to the trophy, we are wondering what lies in store for us in the coming months.

The handicap team are: Victoria Carrington, Anne Morris, Ann Kinahan and Nyla Hussain.

Cross-country: women's team report

Natalie Kolodziej

The Serpentine Ladies, or 'Serpettes', entered the 2010/2011 Cross Country season with not much in the way of pressure and expectation. The Serpentine Ladies in recent years had not been a force to be reckoned with.

But, this year was to be different. The success of the Serpettes at the Green Belt and Welsh Castles Relays meant that spirit in the Serpette camp was flying high. Our aim was to piggy-back off this success and carry it into the Cross Country season, where we had typically not had a strong showing in the past.

There are quite a few races that form part of the Cross Country season: the five Metropolitan League races plus the various London, Surrey, Southern, Inter-county and National XC Champs.

Even though we had never before won a single Met League match, we set out with the aim of winning the Met League. It was going to be all or nothing! We had numbers and we had talent – there was no reason why it could not be done! It was important that we had as many girls running as possible; every Serpette that ran would make a difference to the final points total as it meant we would push down the scores of the other clubs.

The 2010/11 season kicked off with the first Met League match at Claybury. There was a record turn-out for the Serpettes. The women's team manager, Stephanie Vaatz, ran out of numbers before the start and I ran out of red and yellow hair ribbons (essential kit!). We figured this was a good omen. The start line was a sea of red and yellow with a mix of our more experienced XC runners along with first-timers. We had 39 ladies that ran – our highest number in any Met League to date.

The Serpettes finished this first race top of the table, winning their first EVER Met League race. We didn't know it at the time, but it was a sign of things to come. Each time in the remaining races the start line was a sea of red and yellow thanks to Serpette ribbons and vests!

Highlights of the season

- The Serpentine men who arrived early for each race to cheer the girls on and for others that came along to support and wave pom poms.
- Seeing Rachel Whittaker run at Claybury whilst heavily pregnant. This was definitely an inspiration to us all!
- The two double Serpie victories, at Claybury and Ally Pally, where the women and men teams both won their matches.
- The huge number of first-timers, some running in trainers when most of us weren't contemplating anything less than 15mm spikes! And our ultra-runners that gave XC a stab!
- Seeing the ladies returning from injury – Laura Denison, Lisa Petit and Amy Cope – back in their Serpie vests!
- The continual yo-yo battle between Becky Glover and Sylvie Lloyd throughout the season.
- Some of the most amazing baking ever seen. Brownies, cupcakes, flapjacks, cookies and cakes galore!

We had a showing of 34 ladies at the second Met League at the muddy, hilly and tough course that was Trent Park, 36 Serpettes braving the windy and very muddy conditions to run 6km (controversially, 3 laps of a "flat-ish" 2km course as the race organisers decided to leave the steep uphill and downhill – that the boys had to run 3 times – out of the ladies course) around the grounds of the fourth Met League at Alexandra Palace, and 25 Serpettes who trotted on over to Horsenden ('Horsey') Hill for the last Met League in Perivale. The third Met League race was originally scheduled for Stevenage but was cancelled due to the nasty weather conditions.

The Serpettes won every single Met League match, finishing the season undefeated and never straying from our position at the top of the table. Considering that before this season we had never actually won a single Met League match, this was an amazing achievement and something that each of the

69 girls that ran throughout the season should be very proud of. Congratulations and well done to all.

In fact, the Serpettes have featured on the podium at every major championship race this season. This is a first in Serpentine history! The Serpettes are raking in the silverware and we are really starting to make our mark and establish ourselves as a force to be reckoned with.

Thanks must go to the ever-present women's team manager Stephanie Vaatz for all her organisation and administration throughout the season, making sure we were all entered for our races and distributing numbers before the start of each race.

This season has really showed us what Serpettes are made of and we are excited to see where it takes us! Onwards and upwards! See you all again next year! As always,
SERPETTE POWER TO THE MAX!

(Photo: Natalie Kolodziej)



Cross Country: men's team report

Eric Phillips

Keenest cheer-leaders: To the consternation of other teams (and also some people in our own team), Sam Ludlow and Andy Taylor had red and yellow pom-poms on display at the Metropolitan league at Claybury. Perhaps they helped as we did end up winning that race convincingly. The pom-poms didn't end up being a permanent feature of our season: who can imagine what happened to them?

Best recruit: Our cross country team is bigger and faster and more co-ordinated than it has ever been! Some new recruits this season have been crucial to our team's success, in particular Will Jones, David Millar, Fernando del Valle, Pau Herrero, Neil Donovan, Duncan Hancox, Tony Bourne, Alistair Maher, Joe Thompson, Phil Dickens, everyone else I can't think of right now and Will Green have run well for us all season. Will Green having been super-consistent has probably been the pick of the bunch so far. The recruitment process for next season has already begun: spread the word!

Worst example: Team captain Eric Phillips had the mother of all hang-overs at Trent Park and got his worst ever result in a Metropolitan League race. Five months later and the hang-over is still going strong.

Most annoying result: The London championships came down to the wire with our team led home by Nick Torry just being edged out by the Highgate Harriers on Parliament Hill. We will win it next time!

Most important team member: Too often we focus on the runners and especially those at the front end of the field. We would be nowhere without all the many volunteers and helpers on whom we rely, the bakers, the marshalls, the officials, the course-organisers, the coaches and in particular Malcolm French, our team-manager, who has flawlessly looked after all our race entries and also made sure we've had numbers on the day. Stephanie Vaatz has also stepped in valiantly when Malcolm hasn't been able to attend.

Best out-fit: Richard Phillips wore compression arm-warmers, compression socks and a "snood" at the Ellis Trophy in



(Photo: Ian Hodge)

December. He may be fast but is such a fashion faux-pas really worth it? Serpentine easily ended up winning the cup.

Near-chav experience: We were due to return to the legendary flat-roofed chavtastic Twin Foxes pub in Stevenage at the end of December but it wasn't to be. The race was cancelled by the Snowpocalypse. We went to a pub in town instead.

Worst excuse: Road specialist Darren McNeely has famously never been keen on cross-country and is known for doing anything rather than running in the red and gold in the mud. We did manage to get him to run for us at Ally Pally however in the Metropolitan League in January where he almost made the scoring 12! We hope more road specialists can be persuaded to run for us next season!

Best internet icon: Woodford team manager, the infamous TerryMcC of the Eightlane message boards, stalked us to the pub after the Ally Pally race and gave us all too many drinks and tried to recruit half our team. We did manage in the end to get the better of him: none of us have become Woodies while we welcome Woodie Harold Wyber as a new second-claimer.

Scandal! The scandal of the season was the Southern Championships at Parliament Hill at the end of January in which the South of England Athletics Association started the race while half of the runners were still queueing up to get through the tent to get to the start-line. Some of our own runners, like Hugh Torry, were caught out. We hope the SEAA sort things out by next year.

Saddest faces: We easily beat Highgate and

Shaftesbury but Woodford just pipped us to the post in the Metropolitan League. We beat them in three races out of four, but they scored more points than us in total and so for the third season in a row we had to watch them collect the trophy after the final league race at Horsenden Hill. As a consolation prize we did win the Howard Wilson senior trophy. In retrospect, though, there is no shame in being beaten given that we did do our very best over the season. We can be proud of that.

Toughest course: It is hard to describe just how muddy the National cross country course at Alton Towers was: the ambulance sirens were constant and the officials tried to cancel the race at one stage. It didn't stop Aodh O'Neil getting in one of the best runs by a Serpie all season and finishing in about 60th place, only to forget to wear his chip and not get included in the official results.

Brightest bling: Each season a trophy is given out to the member of the team who has in his own way captured the spirit of what it is to be a Serpentine cross country runner. This year the trophy was awarded to Tiago Branco who was prepared to run for us at Ally Pally even when his achilles was more or less preventing him walking. We decided to let him rest on the day, but we always appreciate commitment to the team.

Biggest consolation: Cross country is practically the most fun that a human being can have and we had a lot of it this season. The season may be over, but a new one will begin before we know it and of course we want to be prepared for it. Get in touch with Eric Phillips for any ideas. Most of all though - train hard and be fast.

Sunday Cross Country

A tale of mud, sweat and cheers

Cheryl Sacks



Cheryl training for the Sunday League (Photo: Gavin Edmonds)

The Sunday League offers you five opportunities to escape to the country and participate in some real cross-country running. These races are supposedly less competitive than our other races. However each is at least five miles, and features its unique landscape and challenges.

The open country

The Sunday League season commenced in late October, at Cheshunt Country Park, Hertfordshire. The course mainly comprised open fields. The weather was still mild and sunny at this time of year, and the grass long and wavy. It was a good warm-up, as its inclines were gentle compared to later races. Quirks of this course were the bottleneck stops, where we all waited patiently to pass through small gaps between hedges.

The spooky forest

In November, we headed north to Bedfordshire. The race was hosted on Forestry Commission land at Rowney Warren, Chicksands. Arriving early in this dense pine forest, humans were scarce and thousands of high trees loomed over us. Only the host club's luminous team hats penetrated the gloom. The place felt eerie to me, but maybe I was barely awake.

The entire run took place among the pine trees. Not that we had time to admire them; the course twisted and turned, as did the tree roots, so we had to watch our feet. Our route also featured frequent sharp troughs, offering many opportunities for changes in pace (and running companions).

The vegetable fields

December's race was two large circuits of a set of fields, between Digswell and Tewin in Hertfordshire. The race started with a steep, stony descent. Then we began the long slow climb along the edges of the fields. We had several brief respites while waiting our turn at the kissing gates between fields. I didn't fancy kissing any of the nearby sweaty men. Instead, I copied other racers, pushing each gate behind me to increase my forward momentum and enable a swift get-away before my closest follower could spit on me.

When you've run a few cross-countries, you become discerning about classes of mud. The earth was heavy and clogging, and resulted in my feet expanding threefold. Additionally, I pronged a long-forgotten potato on one spike on my first lap of the fields. On my second long ascent, I speared a cabbage from another field. If I'd been offered a (clay) pigeon by the shooters we could hear in the distance, my Sunday roast would have been complete.

To the woods

Our January race was closer to home for many Serpies, held at Cassiobury Park, Watford. This may be remembered as our 'Coffee and cake morning'. We had an excellent turnout, and happily everyone participated both in the run and the cake eating.

This course starts with a brief trot through the park, then crosses the canal and golf course, and enters the woodland section. We ran two loops of the woods. This part was difficult, with one significant climb on each lap. I don't recall many flat sections, and I'll admit I was relieved to retrace my steps through the golf course and park.

Over the hills and far away

Lastly, in February, we rose to the challenges of Therfield Heath, Royston. We rose (and dipped) numerous times during this 5.5 mile race. If you believe Cambridgeshire to be flat, then think again. This was an amazing cross-country experience, and definitely best saved until last as it was the most strenuous.

The course comprised unrelenting hills, and the wind was against us on every climb. What goes up has to come down; I won't deny that I enjoyed the relief of the downhill rides, being careful to watch my footing on some exceptionally steep descents. Both laps had a brief passage through some woods, including a treacherous, winding drop, with gnarled tree roots. The remainder was open heath, so with the wind it was chilly. The bonus (to my mind) was the firm, chalky ground and lack of mud.

The combination of landscapes varies each year, depending on the season's host clubs. You are assured five distinctive and relatively tough races. Their commonality this season was that for us, every race was immediately preceded by a Saturday race.

I won't repeat my reports of each race performance. We had two team highlights; our women comfortably won the first race, and our men won the last race. Four of us won individual end of season trophies in our respective categories.

I could say it's unfortunate that Sunday League races are relatively distant from Central London. However, their careful selection ensures their distinct characteristics. While some races may fade into one long mud-bath, I can be sure that I will remember each Sunday race for its individuality.



(Photo: Bakke-Svensson/Ironman)

Ironman World Championships, Kona 2010

Serpentine was well represented at last year's Ironman World Championships in Hawaii, with a 5th place in the elite category (see Rachel Joyce's interview next) and some impressive age groupers too. Two of them, Martin Muldoon and Eddie Brocklesby, shared with Serpentines their contrasting reflections on the race.

Martin Muldoon (M35-39)



I arrived almost 2 weeks before the race to acclimatise to the heat and 11hr time zone change. The flights out from London and LA had quite a few triathletes on them, obvious from the bike boxes and skinny physiques. The atmosphere had started already and I wasn't even on Hawaiian soil yet.

Race day arrived and I'd slept very well, almost 7hrs straight which is the most I had had in the previous two weeks. I woke at 4.30 for a 7.00am start, had a

quick breakfast and headed for number marking and swim check in around 5.00. I was nervous but not overly so, I worried slightly that I was a bit too relaxed!

I got down to the beach start area just before the pros set off, where they had the starting ceremony with traditional drums and dance. It created a really nice atmosphere, but nothing could take our minds from the huge task ahead. The very powerful cannon from the pro start was the first time when I really felt a touch of nerves, it was the realisation that this was it, show time...

Just after the pros left shore I swam out to the floating car, warming up a bit and hanging on to the buoy. I knew they wouldn't count us down so I was ready from about 2 minutes to go, the loud cannon boomed and we were off.

I started fairly aggressively to find a bit of space but I didn't waste energy by fighting anyone, trying to avoid too much kicking and seeking a pair of feet to draft. I did get caught a few times at the start thinking, wow I can't believe I'm here - in the crazy start of Kona, I shouldn't have been thinking about this but it just seemed a bit surreal. I never really suffered too much in the water, I enjoyed the swim and felt as if I was moving along nicely. I was surprised and disappointed with the time of 1:15 but thought I had a long day ahead to make up some time. I exited and had a fairly uneventful T1, although my neck was cut up from the swim suit. I was out on the bike in around 3mins.

The start of the bike was a bit awkward with people all over the road



and lots of corners and the non-overtaking Palani Road before the turn around and back in to town. I took it fairly easy at the start of the bike and was keen to find a good rhythm, but the headwinds started out pretty soon and I was working at 140-145 early on the Queen K. The road to Hawi was long and the headwinds never ceased. What lifted my mind from the effort was when the pros passed in the opposite direction. I probably shouldn't have been paying so much attention to the other side of the road but I'm such a huge fan of the sport that I couldn't help getting excited to see all the big names fly past in the opposite direction.

The last 10k or so towards Hawi was all uphill and the wind although sometimes from the side was strong and I had to work a high HR to get any decent speed at all. I recognised a few guys coming the other way and I realised then how far I was behind from the swim, I tried to ignore this and keep pushing. By the turn around in Hawi I was feeling the work and my stomach started to play up.

Regardless of the dodgy stomach the road down from Hawi was good fun, I love downhill and the extra challenge of the powerful back to side wind was quite a rush. At one stage I was doing over 45mph but the bike was at a huge angle as I fought the side winds.

I overtook a lot of people on the way down from Hawi but as soon as it evened out again I was disappointed to feel the notorious headwinds in the other direction again. As I continued to work against this my stomach was stirred up and I was sick a few times, the high 5 extreme didn't appeal anymore so I stuck with water and coke from the aid stations. My average speed came and went and my HR was always a little higher than I wanted, but I got back in to Kailua with an average of around 21.5mph for a split of 5:11.

T2 was again pretty clean, not very fast but without mistakes and I was on the run in around 3mins feeling relaxed and immediately trying to get to my target HR of 140. I had planned to keep it here for most of the run until the latter stages where if possible I would step it up for a strong finish. In the first section out to the turnaround point I had to stop at an aid station cubicle, felt like the longest pee of my life but then I was in a rather big race!

I kept my policy of water, ice, cola, sponge through all aid stations and felt comfortable at 140, never allowing myself to sneak above that. Things were heating up a bit with reports of ground temperatures of 120F, and as a precaution I was putting 2 lots of ice down my front and back at each station. This was becoming 2nd nature now and I didn't really slow down at the aid stations at all. I was still focused on keeping my HR at 140 in case the heat or humidity started to play with me but it never really felt that difficult, I had lost weight before the

race to help handle the heat and this seemed to be working. I decided that when I reached the energy lab I would step it up to a more aggressive pace if I hadn't started suffering too much at that point.

It seemed like a long old way out there but I reached it feeling fine and ready to step things up. As I reached the energy lab I felt good so I put the hammer down and moved my HR up to 145, this felt like a considerable step up in pace as I started passing a lot of people but I was comfortable and knew I could hold it there without trouble. I found out afterwards that my pace from entering the energy lab with 9miles to go changed to 6:36 per mile, I held this pace till the end but wished then I had stepped up the pace earlier because I never really suffered on the run.

On the way back in on the QueenK I passed a lot of people and some that I knew, some of them had blown but I encouraged them to hold it as they were so close to the finish. Most of these guys held on for a sub 10. My calves were so tight as I turned off the Queen K on to Palani but I was thinking as this was my last race for a while I would keep sprinting for the line. Running down Palani was fun, I let go and ran like a child with no control arms wailing all over the place, the crowd was amazing.

As I turned on to Ali'i drive the atmosphere was incredible and for the sake of 30 seconds I wish I had slowed down to soak it up a bit. Coming over the line in Kona is a fantastic thrill and one that I hope to do again many times. The clock read 9:48 and for the tough course of Kona things could have been worse for me.

As a triathlete I'm very self-critical and I was disappointed that I didn't hurt myself more in the first ½ of the run, a 3:15 run is not fast and it's frustrating to have finished so fresh and reflect on how I could have done it differently. It's wise to respect Kona as many big people have fallen apart in the heat, but I gave it too much respect and left my surge too late. I think the heat plays with HR and next time I will use a GPS system to monitor pace and avoid following HR so closely. My HR for Switzerland was similar but the pace was completely different. I know I can go a lot faster, I'll have to wait a year but I'm positive and look forward to getting out there and doing some damage.

My usual post-race nausea soon set in and it was an hour or so before I could eat or drink properly. A nice mellow atmosphere surrounded the finish area with pros and age groupers mixing and chatting about the race as the sun went down.

Eddie Brocklesby (F65-69)



At the risk of being crowned as the jaundiced old woman of Serpentine, I am still asking myself why I didn't enjoy Hawaii anything like as much as Lanzarote Ironman of 2010 and 2009. Was it because I was jaded and older, and considerably slower than the 54% of the 1800 competitors, who made it in under 11 hours, or was it because Ironman (WTC) is now owned by a private equity firm, Providence Equity Partners, for whom I felt that we triathletes are a commodity, and Hawaii Ironman is their main sales pitch.



To a large extent I think I went because I could and should! I know all too well the benefits of the positive discrimination. As a woman, at my age, Lanzarote Ironman had to create a new old female category, with its own Hawaii slot – then I just had to finish to qualify! I know I can hear you all; it just isn't fair when such brilliant athletes amongst you can only dream of going to Hawaii. I vividly recall Laurence Harding's pained reaction back at Arrecife Airport when I told him I had decided not to take up my 2009 slot. So less than 12 hours after finishing the 2010 Lanzarote Ironman, I had to attend the Hawaii roll down, and pay my \$550 entry fee IN CASH! No credit card payments! Interesting??

The annual event is a huge one on the big Island and it brings mega bucks in to the local community. One well known coffee house makes enough money in that week to cover their rent for a year. Hotel costs are hiked up big time. It's not a cheap holiday. The listed cost of 7 nights in one of the central hotels was £1500. I don't think, with hindsight, that was long enough to acclimatise - it would have been better to go for the ten night deal, but that would have been £2000+. I settled for a cheaper hotel some 1.5 miles out of town - another mistake!

But the atmosphere downtown was unique – I have never seen so many fit, toned bodies in my life, all looking stressed as they posed, rode, ran or swam the courses. The early morning practice swims were fun, and it's true, the water was warm and salty. Even I was buoyant without a wetsuit! But the other side of the discrimination coin began to hit home; the standard was oh so high. I could only respect the skill, dedication and determination that so many had brought to the event, and I was out of my depth!

Overall it was a tense few days pre-race, not many smiles around, my own peace of mind destroyed by the fact that I had lost my passport.

Nutrition in Kona was being taken very seriously, and I felt an alien having the odd glass of wine with an evening meal. The launch evening event was buffet style catering for the masses; the elites and business partners were corralled into a separate area in front of the stage. But it was up on the stage that the real marketing thrust lay. The glitz, the presentation, the speeches and the videos, the awe-inspiring tales of courage and determination that maketh an Ironman. We were Ironmen, we all deserved admiration, all ages, all disabilities... Wow, could they play that one well!

And so, finally to the race. Nerves apart, the swim was fun – the pack was way, way out ahead of me and once round the halfway turning point I found I had a surf boarder, and later two of them all to myself. It was weird – they were lying down and paddling, in parallel, with me crawling slowly in the middle. But it was so frustrating – I breathed to

the right and there was a face less than two feet from mine, breathe to the left and another fabulous smiling guy – and I couldn't talk to either of them. How frustrating was that! It took me a while to realise I could forget the need for sight! They must surely be going in a straight line. And a swim PB for me – though none of you will be impressed that it still took me over two hours!

So on to the bike. There are no steep hills, just long, long steady climbs, 1000m less climbing than Lanzarote. The wind too was less hard, but still relentless. The road was long and so straight. Maybe we are spoilt by Lanzarote, but the route lacked the drama and spectacular beauty of those lava fields, the tough ups and glorious downs, the white stone villages and the views from Mirador. Instead we were on the main Queen K Highway – a straight out and back route, mostly closed to traffic. Coming back for the last ten miles or so of the bike, and all those sub 11-hour Ironmen were by now out on the last few miles of their run. It was 35°C, and they were suffering. But for me, the final bike feed stations had run out of all but water or energy drinks and they were packing up. Just at the point I needed to carb load there were no bars, fruit, or gels left - a consequence of being marginally under 8 hours on the bike, but not the last.

By the time I got out on the run, it had cooled down, and darkness fell very quickly. There had been a few spectators out on the first 10k optimistically calling out 'way to go' or 'good job' - just what you need when you still have 35k left, but then you are up that steep hill and back onto the by now pitch black Queen K Highway for 15k out, and 15k back. Fortunately I had sucked in the beauty of our October handicap a week earlier so that I could practise my visualisation skills along that dark, desolate, bleak, isolated but cooler highway. The run feed stations were great, enthusiastically manned, with a wide range of drinks including chicken soup and bread, and a brief exposure to some lively music. Then back into the black, lonely silence again, overtaking the odd walker and the 80 year old guy who had said from the stage that he figured he had 20 years after his last Ironman, so he just kept on doing them!

Then finally, as exhaustion kicked in, back onto the last mile in the town, the crowds building up all the way to that fantastic end funnel, huge TV screens, music, brilliant commentator, 'you are a 67 year old social worker Ironman'! It was fabulous internet coverage; many of you have said you went to bed relieved I just beat the swim cut-off – and my family celebrated in London and Singapore as 'mad granny' came over the line.

But once over the line two volunteers wrap you in a towel, then move you away from the spotlight, away from the cameras, to get a medal, and show you where to find your kit. And then they dump you! I looked for the range of food and refreshments I had come to expect in Lanzarote but there was nothing. I finally found one small tent when a volunteer thought she had a bit of pizza left, but, sorry, only one flavour. That was all the food I got offered after 15 hours 41 minutes and 22 seconds – one miserable slice of pizza! I declined the ice-cream at 11.00pm though guess it would have tasted good five hours earlier! Struggling to walk, I asked if there was any drink anywhere and got directed to limp another 50m to a table where there were two barrels and a volunteer just packing up, asking 'water or energy drink'? And that was it! No bar, no celebrations, and oh, you must get your bike out of transition within the hour, you can't leave it downtown, so you have to get it that 1.5k home.

After the wild scenes as the last guy was allowed over the line at

midnight, then Polynesian fire eating warriors performed under the finishing gantry, we stopped off at one of the few bars still open. At 1.30am one of the staff came up to me: "Well done, we saw you come over the finish line – and we thought... we've got your passport in our drawer!" Maybe dropping my passport the night I arrived after the 20 hour journey was a punishment for letting alcohol touch my lips pre The Big Race?

The finisher medal was huge, but the T-shirt the worst I have ever had. Maybe that is why the Ironman store was so packed the following morning that I queued 20 minutes to get in! All 1800 competitors were buying up the exorbitantly priced 'finishers' range of really stylish kit. Few seemed to exit the store having spent less than \$200 – look out for my \$57 trendy purple number on a Wednesday night, and admire the quality!

And so, finally to the celebratory dinner – identical mass catering and menu, trestle tables out in the open in the warm night, plus coke, lemonade or water. I looked in vain for the fabulous starters, puddings and wines we had had in Lanzarote – only the elites in their fenced off area manned by security staff had wine, though one guy on our table managed to smuggle a bottle out for us. There was free beer, if you were prepared to queue for 15 minutes for a plastic glassful at one of only three serving stations – rationing by supply? And you won't be surprised to know there was a fantastic film, lavish presentations – top five in every age group, I came sixth!! – tear-jerking examples of adversities overcome, recognition of the huge amounts of sponsorship raised for charities, and a brilliant technical show. It was win, win, win. We were all Ironmen and Providence Equity Partners were marketing their latest product. Personally, I'm signing up for Ocean Lava in Lanzarote in 2011 – you guys may not have missed as much as you think!

Rachel Joyce interview

Ian Payne

You became a full time pro some time ago now, how did you go about making that step, how difficult was it (or not) and how have you found the lifestyle since?

At the end of 2006 I won my age group at the World 70.3 World Champs in Clearwater and that result was really the catalyst to my thinking of turning pro. I had had a good season, winning quite a few races and in Clearwater I saw that my times hadn't been too far off the top pro women. This made me wonder whether, if I trained more, I might be able to hold my own racing as a pro. After some umming and erring I took the view that it was now or never so decided to go for it.

In terms of changes to my lifestyle, this really happened in increments. At first, I continued to work at Taylor Wessing (where I was a construction solicitor) on a part time basis as I still needed to earn some money but in May 2008 I resigned completely. I did have my doubts, especially as I spent much of 2007 and 2008 injured, but I thought that even if it didn't go to plan it wouldn't be a wasted year since I love training and racing in triathlon. I did have to make some changes to my lifestyle: I moved out of my flat and rented it out as I could no longer afford the mortgage and I don't think I went clothes shopping for about 2 years!! The decision was also made easier due to



Rachel at the end of a coffee shop ride

the support I got from my boyfriend, John (also a Serpie) and my family.

My lifestyle now is incredibly different to my life as a city solicitor. For a start I spend most of my days in sports kit and not a suit! I do really love the lifestyle and can honestly say that there are very few days where I struggle to get out the door to do my training. I guess the main changes are that no day is exactly the same, and my life now involves much more travel and with that comes the opportunity to meet a lot of new people.

For all the things I enjoy about my life now though, there are definitely things I miss from my previous life: my days can sometimes be pretty solitary, so I do miss the office banter. I know I'm in need of a coffee date with friends when I start chewing the ear off the person behind the till in Tesco's! I also worry that my brain is turning to mush so I've recently signed up for an Open University course so hopefully that will keep the grey matter ticking over! Also, as much as I do love the travel aspect being away from home and my boyfriend, John is tough and requires sacrifices from him as well as me.

The Serpentine club is proud to name you as one of our most illustrious members. What first made you join the club and how have you been involved with it over the years?

I joined Serpentine at the beginning of 2006. In 2005 I had raced in a couple of triathlons and realised that my bike needed some work. I think that was brought home at Half Ironman UK during the bike leg when I was struggling so much I was looking longingly at hedgerows, wondering if anyone would notice if I had a nap by one! I thought that if I joined a club, and had people to meet every Sunday morning to ride with that would make me get out on the bike – before that I would say my bike training was a little haphazard! I started riding with a really nice group of guys, including my now boyfriend John Lund. I think I was probably a bit annoying in those early days as I put myself in the fast group and spent Sunday mornings trying to hang on to the back of the group!

I guess I've been quite a quiet member really but I have raced in a few

cross country races for the club, and did one of the road relay races a couple of years ago. My trouble was I was frequently injured which stopped me from racing for a good two years but I've made some good friends through Serpentine. I love seeing fellow Serpies out on the race course and always do my best to give them a shout or wave!

What does an average week of training look like for you at this time of year and where does it take place (favourite places to travel to, favourite London routes for running/cycling etc)?

At the moment my training hours are pretty high as I am away on a training camp in Lanzarote. I guess while I am away I will train up to 30 hours a week which includes 2 or 3 long rides (4-5 hours and usually with some race pace in there), I also will do one threshold session on the bike (1-2 hours in total), and one race pace ride (2-3 hours) and then my favourite, a coffee shop ride! Running wise: each week I will do one long run (anything from 90 mins to just over 2 hours), a brick run (after a long ride), an interval or hill run and then a steady run. At the moment I am swimming 5 or 6 times a week too. As well as the training there is all the general maintenance work – stretching, core work, massage. I know when you are working it's these things that get dropped but I don't have that excuse anymore!

When I'm in London my hours are more likely to hover around the 22-25 hour mark, but some weeks are much lower. One thing I have learnt in the last couple of years is the importance of listening to my body. If I am feeling very fatigued, or have a niggle it's best to reduce or skip a session rather than let it drift into something more serious. My favourite sessions at home include runs by the river, and around Richmond Park. At this time of year my cycling will be on the turbo trainer or, if there's no ice, I will head down to Surrey or to Windsor.

You had quite a rollercoaster season in 2010, how would you sum up the main ups and downs?

It certainly did have some highs and lows.

I think the low has to be when I was sat on the kerb at Abu Dhabi International Triathlon watching the race go past...looking at my foot, which was looking a bit bloody. At first I was in denial and asked for a plaster so I could carry on but once at the hospital the doctors told me the chainring of my bike had sliced through 3 tendons in my foot. It was all pretty gutting as I knew that I had been in good shape going into the race, and after a breakthrough race in Hawaii 2009 I was full of high hopes. But, as well as that, it was also the first race I was doing for Abu Dhabi Triathlon Team so I was keen to make a good first impression, and felt bad that I was now going to be out of racing for 3 months.

However, after the initial shock I tried to make the most of the extra time I had, and got on with rehab once I was out of the cast. Somehow, spending 6 weeks in a cast seemed to make my running much better and when I did return to racing at Antwerp 70.3 I recorded my fastest half marathon off the bike of 1:22 so I like to think every cloud has a silver lining!

The biggest high though has to be coming 5th at the Ironman World Championships in October. In the 6 weeks before Hawaii I'd had a bit of a crash in confidence as my training hadn't been going well and I was seriously wondering whether I could make it through an Ironman, let alone compete. Luckily the people around me had a bit more confidence than I did, and so as well as being pleased for myself it was nice to succeed for those people around me....who had had to put

up with my grumbles!

I think I should probably have ended my year there in retrospect, but I actually continued training for Ironman Arizona at the end of November. The race was going well until I found myself skidding across the tarmac, having been knocked by another competitor. I learnt that adrenaline is a great pain killer! I continued racing and completed the bike course and even ran 7 miles of the run but by then the adrenaline rush had worn off and my shoulder was pretty painful. It transpires that I'd torn a couple of ligaments in my shoulder. Luckily, I had a fantastic homestay in AZ called Debbie, and when I got back to the house, she fed me a shot of tequila, cleaned up my road rash and then ordered pizza in!

The 5th place in Kona was certainly an amazing achievement; can you talk through how the race unfolded for you?

Yes, I was really over the moon with my race in Kona. My race got off to a fantastic start when I exited the water as first woman, with a 90 second lead over the next woman, Julie Dibens. I won't lie – I hadn't expected that. On the bike I certainly didn't feel like I was having a dream race, and it was more a question of toughing it out and hoping that my run would feel a bit better. Even when I was on the run I wasn't feeling great but luckily I was running faster than last year, and seeing friends and John at various places around the course lifted me when the going got tough. When I got to the turn around point at the Energy Lab (this is about 30km into the marathon) I saw that there were 3 of us all quite close together and I'd have to work to maintain my position. At one point I moved into 4th place, but then I had to dive into the lavatory as a dodgy stomach set in and I was overtaken by the Spaniard, Virginia Berasategui. However, once I was on that homestretch thoughts of the finishing chute and pizza at the finish line kept me going!!

Looking ahead to 2011, what goals have you set for the season and how is your race schedule shaping up? (And how's the shoulder?)

I think my number one goal is to stay healthy and uninjured! Hawaii will be a big goal again – I would love to continue to move up the placings there but I'll also be targeting a couple of Ironman races before then: Ironman South Africa and Ironman Austria. I'd love to win an Ironman so that's a goal for the next year or two and also record a fast time – it'd be fantastic to break the 9 hour mark!

My first race though will be Abu Dhabi International Triathlon so starting AND finishing that race is my first goal! Luckily my shoulder is all mended and I have been notching up some serious metres in the pool trying to get my swimming form back. I was out of the water for 8 weeks and my first few sessions back weren't pretty as I focused more on staying above water, rather than going forward!

Rachel's career highlights

Hawaii Ironman World Championships –

5th place (2010), 6th place (2009)

Puhajarne Half Ironman, Estonia – **Winner (2009)**

Ironman Lanzarote – **2nd place (2009)**

Ironman South Africa – **3rd place (2009)**

Ironman Florida – **5th place (2008)**

UK Ironman 70.3 – **6th place (2008)**

Heavenly pace

Peter Holberton finds marathon bliss thanks to his Serpie pacers.

London marathon 2010 was fantastic for me in every way but one. Despite wonderful support from numerous friends, especially the very vocal self-styled "Team Pete", I missed my goal of finishing in less than four hours (hardly a blistering pace, and one that had seemed a realistic target). Seeing the joy on Nick Copas's face at finally going sub-3 (after three consecutive 3:01s) almost made up for it. Almost. Even as I joined Team Pete and the rest of the Serpie regulars for a well-earned post-race pint, getting congratulated for a forty minute PB, I strongly suspected I'd have to have another crack.

So, apparently, did most of Team Pete. What I remember as a theoretical conversation with Jany Tsai:

Jany: So what would your criteria be for choosing a marathon then?

Me: It'd have to be flat [why add hills to an already draining undertaking], cool [I'm one of the few Aussies who hates the heat], and not too crowded [I'd lost a good five minutes in London being caught up behind slower runners]

resulted in an email from Jany less than four days after London entitled "Ljubljana Marathon & Half Marathon 24 Oct 2010". After a few weak protests from me (and a quick Google search to work out where the hell Ljubljana was - it's in Slovenia), it was agreed. Brent Plump and Mariana Ivantsoff would forgo a race in Majorca to join us. A few weeks later Anja Eichen agreed to come, and our touring party was set.

So it was I found myself at the start of my third marathon. My butterflies were incredible. I was still affected by the cold I'd been suffering the previous two weeks. The girls (Brent had wisely opted for the half) tried to lift my spirits by acting as cheerleaders, confusing our fellow runners for the first (though not last) time that day. I looked down at the wristband Team Pete's Nicola Webb had given me before London and thought of the many Serpies who'd wished me luck. If I couldn't do this it wouldn't be for lack of support. I tried not to think of Brent, Mariana and Jany missing their flight if I ran slower than I did in London. Think positive.

We shuffled over the starting line without me realising it (the start mats were several metres before the arch over the roadway that I'd assumed was the start) and were underway. My legs felt heavy; I told myself that was down to carbo loading and not having run much with my cold, but it didn't instil confidence. Nor did the fact our early splits were a little slow, despite the fact we were tucked in behind the 3:45 pace runners. Add in the psychological impact of seeing the kilometre markers for the second lap reminding me how far I still had to go, and staying positive wasn't easy.

The girls, on the other hand, all seemed to be running effortlessly. Only afterwards did I find out the truth. Anja hadn't run for about five weeks due to injury, so wasn't running with her usual ease. Both Mariana and Jany had worrying aches and twinges in the first few miles. None of them let on - they just kept serenading me and telling me how well I was running. I didn't dare tell them what was going on in my head; I just requested (and failed to get) some Ben Harper



Pete's Angels (Photo: Brent Plump)

instead of the cheesy 80s pop they were singing.

10 miles in and one of my main fears was realised: I needed the dunny. Nearly two precious minutes were lost in one of the most unpleasant portaloos I've ever seen. The woman next in line took one look and decided her need wasn't that great after all. Her next look showed she'd clearly assigned me the blame. I didn't waste time correcting her misapprehension, so apologies to all Serpies if I've inadvertently given the club a bad name in Slovenia.

Another 5k of markers reminding me I still had further to go than I'd done. Finally passed the halfway point, not without giving the finishing half-marathoners an envious look. Another kilometre and Brent bellowed a welcome, briefly dropping in beside me to ask how I was doing. I made sure the girls couldn't hear me before I admitted "I'm really feeling it mate". This wasn't how this was supposed to go.

Anja was planning to drop out at the half, due to her lack of preparation. I can't say I was shocked when I sidled over and she told me she was going to continue. Having watched her do an iron-distance triathlon in August had left me in no doubt about her drive. She later told me she felt as tired then as she had when she started the run on her triathlon, but only had half the distance to go, so it felt doable. Incredible.

Something changed. I was counting down instead of up, and the kilometre markers seemed to tick by more frequently, with less effort. It had taken over two hours, but I finally felt good. Jany dropped back to tell me how well I was running, and how pleased she was she

hadn't had to bring out Mean Jany to keep me going. Finishing well seemed inevitable. Was a negative split on the cards?

More 80s cheese from the girls. "Wake me up before you go-go" drew strange looks from most of our fellow runners, and participation from one old bloke with broken English. I'm not surprised Jany and Mariana have been snapped at for talking and laughing too much during races - the girls' energy and enthusiasm was in sharp contrast to most of their fellow runners. Past 30k. Only 3 parks to go. Brent again. Luckily we were past him before he could give the girls the Lady Gaga lyrics they were after.

3:59 something. Digits as beautiful to me as they were to Bannister, if less significant to the world at large.

Last 5k. At this stage in London I'd been walking on and off for a couple of kilometres. We were running into a slight headwind; finishing well no longer felt inevitable. The gist of Greg Stevens' advice for London marathoners kept popping into my head: "Of course it's hard. It's what you signed up for. Deal with it." The girls seemed very focused on my pace - Mean Jany came out - but we were overtaking a lot of people and while I was slowing a little my splits seemed ok. I figured I had a couple of minutes up my sleeve. The girls obviously knew better, though the reason for their urgency didn't penetrate my skull. In hindsight, Blackadder's General Melchett springs to mind: "That's the spirit, George! If nothing else works, a total pigheaded unwillingness to look facts in the face will see us through."

Last mile. How the hell does anyone run an ultra? I looked over at Jany, and thought of Claire "Tigger" Shelley, James "Adams" Adams, and other ultra-running mates, and realised I wouldn't be able to look



Digging deep (Photo: Anja Eichen)

them in the face if I couldn't run one measly marathon (I'd walked on both my previous attempts). I looked at Anja, still going on no training, even managing to run ahead to take photos. Mariana turns to me to remind me I'd told her I wanted to do this because I wanted to push myself. Touché. She's right. Stop being a wuss. One last push.

A final bellow from Brent and the finish line is in sight. The photos show the girls clapping and cheering (and 'chicking', but I can't complain about that) me as we finish, but I barely register. It's 3:59 something. Digits as beautiful to me as they were to Bannister, if less significant to the world at large. A few hugs from the girls. A few tears from me. Great race. Greater friends. It's the start of my last week working in London, and I can't think of a better way to end my time there.

Club races

John Cullinane

Summer league

WHAT? A road running league, consisting of seven clubs, held on Sundays throughout the summer. Races are 10K or 5 miles.

WHEN AND WHERE? Dates for this year are 5 June (Dulwich), 26 June (Headstone Park), 10 July (Perivale Park), 24 July (Regent's Park) and 14 August (Battersea Park, our home fixture). Start times vary, so check on the planner.

WHO? The competing clubs include our sister club, Sudbury Court, as well as Dulwich Park Runners, Ealing, Southall and Middlesex, Metros, Mornington Chasers and Queens Park Harriers. The road race is for everyone, there is a great range of abilities and all are welcome. The Summer League is also for children and families, as there is also a "tenderfoot" race of 1.5/2K, suitable for children, and the meeting finishes with a series of fun relays (each leg is about 400m).

WHY? Good racing, a chance to show off your speed in the relays and fantastic food at the finish - each meeting, the host club provides food for everyone. Undoubtedly, this is one of the friendliest and sociable leagues in the country.

Assembly league

WHAT? A long established road race league, now entering its 36th season. Each race is in the region of 5K (see below!)

WHEN? First Thursday of every month between April and September. Races start at 19.15, except for April, when it starts at 19.00.

WHERE? The first and last races are at Beckenham Cricket Club, which is easily reached from Central London. In May and July, the races are at the O2, North Greenwich (not inside it though) and June and August are held at Victoria Park.

WHO? These races are great for all runners, as there is a good level of competition at the front of the field but runners of all standards, including beginners, compete. The other clubs are mostly from East and South East London, but also include the Stock Exchange (the Assembly League was originally a league for companies and business houses) and Ravensbourne School!

WHY? The races are short (Beckenham is usually 2.8 miles, the O2 5K and Victoria Park 3.5 miles), so good for sharpening your speed. Visiting each course twice gives you a chance to measure your progress throughout the season. The races are competitive throughout the field and provide an excellent introduction for those new to club running. And - each venue has a great pub at the end, so the socialising is great too!

Hardmoors 110

Andy DuBois

One hundred and fourteen miles, the equivalent of almost four and a half marathons, is a long way to run. Add in 6,000 metres of ascent and descent and put a time limit of 36 hours on it and it becomes even more difficult. This is the challenge of the Hardmoors 110, probably the UK's toughest ultra.

The weather conditions that myself and the other 28 competitors faced would make a tough race even tougher: rain, single digit temperatures and wind blowing at 40 miles an hour gusting up to 70 miles an hour would prove as tough an obstacle to overcome as the enormous distance.

The race is run over the Cleveland Way which runs 110 miles from Helmsley in North Yorkshire through the North York Moors to Saltburn-by-the-Sea and then follows the coast south through Whitby and Scarborough to the finish at Filey. The extra four miles come about due to the extra distance to run from the start to the beginning of the trail and then the end of the trail to the finish line. The trail is well marked but as the race begins at 5pm the first section over the moors is covered in darkness which means navigation can be tricky.

Most competitors need to provide their own support crew. Competitors who have proven themselves in other 100 plus mile races have the option of running unsupported which means they have access to water at a number of checkpoints and are able to drop off two bags with spare clothes and food at the two indoor checkpoints. Everything else has to be carried. Having completed three other 100 mile races I entered in the unsupported category. I was hoping for a time of under 24 hours but a lot can happen in a race this long so finishing was my primary goal.

The physical preparation for a race like this is obviously important but I think the mental preparation is even more important. My longest training run was 53 miles so 114 miles is a big jump up in distance, yet you have to be able to believe it is possible otherwise there is no point in entering. Previous experience in races like this makes me believe that physical preparation gets you through the first 60-70 miles, mental preparation and strength gets you to the finish.

The route has everything from very runnable paths to steep ascents and descents on technical tracks and everything in between. The views from the hills over Yorkshire are beautiful and looking south along the coastal cliff tops you can see for miles. You run through forests in the middle of the night, over the moors lit by the moon, along a beach swept by waves, through tiny fishing villages, along the Scarborough promenade packed with people until the relief and ecstasy of the finish at Filey – for those that make it that far.

The best way to approach a race like this is one mile at a time. A lot can happen in 114 miles and there are usually periods of real lows but also periods of real highs, you need to get through the former and savour the latter.

I had both, in large doses. I started well, setting the pace at the front of the pack for the first 24 miles before getting lost and losing 20 minutes, and the lead. Crossing the moors and Cleveland Hills it was very cold, the wind was howling and rain pelted horizontally into me



Due to horrible weather, no views greeted the Hardmoor competitors in 2010

making it an eerie place to run across at night, but my legs felt good and I pushed as hard as I could. The next section through Guisborough forest in the depths of the night was some of the best running I have ever done and I made up a lot of time on the lead arriving at Saltburn only 4 minutes down. A pain in my left knee tempered the joy of finally hitting the coast after 58 miles and I started to question my ability to finish the race let alone win but shortly after I regained the lead, which boosted my morale and took my mind away from the pain for a while.

The race then took an unexpected turn with me sitting in the marshall's car for over an hour and 30 minutes. The route goes along a beach for around half a mile before climbing a staircase cut into a gully between the cliffs. Unfortunately a combination of wind and tides meant the beach was being swept by waves that in the opinion of the marshall made it unsafe to continue until the tide receded.

Now you may be thinking that 90 minutes rest would do me the world of good. Nothing could be further from the truth. Once the tide receded and I set off again my right knee seized up, which along with the pain in my left knee made running very uncomfortable. I was in real danger of not being able to finish. After a very disconcerting two hours, some pain killers and kind words from the Race Director gave me the mental strength to block the pain from my mind and continue running. I reached Scarborough at the 100 mile mark in just over 20 hours which meant I still had almost 4 hours to reach the finish to achieve my goal of under 24 hours. The next 12 miles seemed to take forever and the winds were so strong that it was hard to stay upright.

Finally Filey came into view and during the last few miles my emotions started to get the better of me as I realised what I had achieved and there were a few tears in my eyes when I saw my wife at the finish line. I crossed the line in 22 hours and 38 minutes. To say I was happy is a massive understatement!

At the presentation the next day I learnt what effect the conditions had on the other competitors. Last year in idyllic conditions 21 out of 23 competitors finished, this year 11 out of 29 made it to the end.

If you are looking for a challenge, next year's race is in June so will hopefully be warmer and will have the benefit of a lot more daylight. It's destined to become one of the classic challenges on the UK ultra circuit.

For those of you wondering why anyone would want to do a race like this, there are so many reasons: to have an adventure where you don't know what the outcome will be, to enjoy being out in nature and overcoming the challenge of what mother nature throws at you, to see the sun set and rise knowing that you've run the whole time in between, the total application of your mind to one all-consuming goal, moments of blissful meditative running where you feel like you could run forever, the feeling of control over your body when you can rise above physical pain and continue to push yourself, of course the indescribable joy and emotion of crossing the finish line and so many other reasons that only an ultra runner can understand.

Serpie Claire Shelley, in her first race longer than 100km, arrived second woman in 30:59.

To read Andy's full account of the race go to www.andydubois.blogspot.com.

Those of you interested in running this year's race and for Andy's ultra advice have a look at <http://www.hardmoors110.org.uk>.

7-up (A summer of alpine adventure)

Rob Westaway

The aim of this article is to introduce people to the joy that can be found in Alpine running and how it can be done relatively inexpensively even when these kind of events are generally held in out of the way places in countries that can be very pricey. There are now a significant number of Serpie and Serpette alpine runners in the club, many significantly better at it and more successful than I. Several of the events listed below (Swissalpine, Marathon du Mont Blanc & UTMB) have been as social as they are challenging which adds to the enjoyment.

Some of these races could be considered 'aspirational' but don't let this deter you. If you think the distances below are a bit daunting and that only elite athletes can attempt these kind of races be assured this is not the case. Most of the events below have shorter distance races available as well and even the races outlined in this article are successfully completed by competitors with a wide range of abilities.

In 2009 I ran my first alpine marathon, the Marathon du Mont Blanc. I

Honorary Centurion

Ian Payne

Congratulations are in order for Serpentine's Honorary Secretary, James Adams, who has completed his 100th marathon at the tender age of 30. This achievement is made all the more impressive by the fact that a large proportion of those marathons have been ultra races in excess of the official 26.2 mile benchmark. Several well in excess.

A large group of Serpies were in attendance at the Country to Capital Ultra in January to celebrate James reaching this impressive milestone, although there was some confusion as to whether that race was actually his 100th or 101st. It turned out not to be a case of James being bad at counting, but that he'd "accidentally" done an extra marathon a week or so before "because he was bored", which bumped up the total.

Despite his shy and retiring demeanour, James' unique approach to running mind-boggling distances fuelled by a diet of beer and meaty snacks is widely hailed in the Serpentine community. His willingness to share his experiences has helped give advice and inspiration to many, and he can claim a considerable share of credit for the ever-expanding contingent of Serpies exploring the delights of going to the toilet outdoors. Or "ultra running" as it is more commonly known.

Having conquered the likes of Badwater, the 145-mile Grand Union Canal Run (twice), 153-mile Spartathlon (twice), Marathon des Sables and many other epic races around the world, James' next awe-inspiring challenge is to run across the entire United States this summer, Forrest Gump style, from LA to New York. Serpentine would like to wish him the very best of luck, and of course remind him that stupid is as stupid does.

knew it was going to be tough but how tough I wasn't quite prepared for. In the end I finished just under 6 hours, almost twice my marathon PB of the time. It was, by far, the toughest thing I'd ever attempted in my life but also one of the most rewarding. By now I was hooked, road marathons paled in comparison to the challenge and vistas offered by these races. So, in 2010 I had 7 alpine events in the calendar, below is a summary of each race and some information on travel and accommodation logistics.

1- LGT Marathon, 12/06/2010

Liechtenstein, <http://www.lgt-alpin-marathon.li/>

Distance: 42.4 km, Vertical Ascent: 1,870 m, Highest point: ~1,800 m

The LGT Marathon is a big deal in Liechtenstein. Then again almost anything would be a big deal in a country this small; it has a land area of only 160 square kilometres and a total population of just over 35,000. If you think those stats are amazing that's just the start, it holds numerous other international records too numerous to mention here but handy to know for later pub quiz glory. On race day the weather was heavily overcast with low cloud which blanketed most of the course. The first half of the race is on road and on easy trail and continues with some long climbs passing Vaduz Castle the (only?) tourist draw-card in the country. The second half hosts some good hilly trail running but the ascent pales in comparison to most other alpine races. In summary it's a friendly, well organised race but one which is not high on my list to repeat.

Liechtenstein is only a short drive but an annoyingly long train trip from Zurich (guess which option we took). Accommodation is thin on the ground (and expensive) in Liechtenstein itself so we ended up staying just over the border in the pretty Austrian town of Feldkirch, catching a bus to the start of the race. Feldkirch was quite a find, it straddles a fast running river and is steeped in history. It has a pretty castle which overlooks the town and was a great place to spend a couple of days.

2- Zermatt Marathon, 10/07/2010

Zermatt, Switzerland, <http://www.zermattmarathon.ch/>

Distance: 42.4 km, Vertical Ascent: 1,944 m, Highest point: 2,582 m



Zermatt is a stunning little village high in the Swiss Alps. It is picture postcard perfect and because of this is a mecca for tourists from all over the world particularly, for some reason, Japan. The race starts from further down the valley in St. Niklaus with Zermatt itself as the halfway point for the marathon and finish line for the half. The first half of the race is relatively flat (compared to the rest) with only around 500 metres of climb. From Zermatt however the course climbs steeply out of the valley up past Sunnegga to Riffelalp then up an insanely steep climb which eventually meets and follows a funicular railway to the finish at Riffelburg. At many stages during the race the Matterhorn is clearly visible making this one of the most dramatic alpine marathons anywhere in the world.

Zermatt itself is quite remote so it does take quite some getting to; a flight to Geneva is followed by a significant train journey. Alternatively you could drive from either Geneva or Milan (both roughly equidistant) but don't make the mistake I did and assume you can drive to the town itself, you can't as only miniature electric vehicles and horse carts are allowed in the village. Instead there is a large parking facility down the valley in Täsch where you can leave your car and catch the train up the valley to Zermatt proper. Eating in Zermatt is expensive, there is a supermarket but the prices at restaurants can be frightening. After much searching we finally settled on a restaurant called Grampi's on the high street which we thought we'd take a chance on. We were glad we did as the food was fantastic and reasonably priced in comparison.

3- Marathon du Mont Blanc, 27/06/2010

Chamonix, France, <http://www.montblancmarathon.fr/>

Distance: 42.4 km, Vertical Ascent: 2,511 m, Highest point: 2,201 m

This event is absolutely mind blowing. It is one of the toughest marathons in the world not only for the fact it has over 2.5 kms of vertical ascent over two huge climbs or that the temperature can reach an excess of 25°C but also that it only has 6 water stations (including the one at the finish) which, in a race that generally takes up to twice your flat marathon time to complete, means that if you don't carry your own hydration you are likely to expire well before the finish. It is however one of the most beautiful races I've ever had the pleasure of running; the Chamonix valley is stunning and the brutal uphill finish (at 2,000 metres) is one of the most amazing things I've ever experienced; as you struggle toward the finish line fighting heat, dust, dehydration and exhaustion Mont Blanc looms ahead as a backdrop inspiring you on to completion (and the free beer).

Getting to Chamonix is cheap and easy; an inexpensive easyjet flight to Geneva followed by an hour's shuttle ride (around €25 per person each way) from the airport to your hotel / hostel in Chamonix. A word to the wise; make sure you book the shuttle before you leave London as, in peak times these book up and if you can't find one with capacity on arrival you are looking at a €200+ taxi ride. Accommodation is plentiful but expensive in central Chamonix unless you shop around and/or share with others.



4- Swiss Alpine, 31/07/2010

Davos, Switzerland, <http://www.swissalpine.ch/>

Distance: 78 km, Vertical Ascent: 2,370 m, Highest point: 2,606 m

Many Serpies can now claim to have conquered at least one of the races in this festival of alpine running with some club members winning their race in 2010. The organisers offer everything from a 500 metre kids race up through 10, 21 & 30 kilometre courses, two different marathons (one without the inconvenience of a mountain in the middle) and the main event; the K78, a 50-ish mile alpine ultra, starting and finishing in Davos, which is as tough as it is beautiful. The mountain route followed by the competitors on the K42 and K78 routes in recent years summit at both Keschhütte and then Scarletta Pass before dropping steeply off the mountain and down a pretty grassy valley back to Davos. The races are seamlessly organised which is no mean feat with so many competitors and races on offer. Around 60 Serpies ran one or other of the races in 2010, a total that I predict will be exceeded this year.

The Swiss Alpine races can be done relatively inexpensively if you are a bit canny and book well ahead. The not insignificant race fee includes (for some of the races) your train fare from most points in

Switzerland to Davos, the ticket also includes unlimited use of the alpine trains for around a week meaning that if you wanted to spend some time in the Alps before and/or after your race you can continue to use the alpine railway for no additional cost. Accommodation and food can be exceedingly expensive with most hotels starting at around £100 per night (without breakfast) but if you don't mind sharing with others the local YHA (the charmingly named Youth Palace) will set you back around £40 per night and includes half-board, a bargain!



5- TDS, 27/08/2010

Courmayeur, Italy to Chamonix, France, <http://www.ultra-trail-mb.com/>

Distance: 110 km, Vertical Ascent: 7,100 m, Highest point: 2,661 m

This race was 'the one that got away' this year. This was to be my longest race to date, a significant alpine challenge and one that would net me 3 points which would allow me to qualify for the full (100 mile) version of the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc (UTMB) race in 2011. Alpine races however, due to their very nature, are always at risk of cancellation due to the elements and this is what happened this time. All the races were significantly affected by bad weather with several of the races being cancelled for safety reasons. Repatriation of the several thousand runners that were scattered all over the mountain and in three countries (including club-mates James Adams, Oli Sinclair & Dan de Belder) was the highest priority of the race organisers but even while they were doing this they still managed to reconstitute a 57 mile race the following day as a consolation for competitors like myself whose races were curtailed or cancelled altogether.

The UTMB event is not just one race, it's not even the longest. There are actually four races held over a period of around four days. The shortest, the CCC, starts in Courmayeur, Italy and follows an anti clockwise route around the north of the Mont Blanc range passing through Champex, Switzerland and finishing in Chamonix. The TDS (sur les Traces des Ducs de Savoie) starts and finishes at the same points but follows a slightly longer distance around the south of the mountain. The title event is 166 kms and circumnavigates the entire mountain. The final race, named with a certain hint of French humour, is La Petite Trotte à Léon, a mammoth 240 km slog (attempted by Jany Tsai in 2010) around the mountain for teams of three competitors, most of whom take around three days to finish the event.

Transport and accommodation are the same as for the Marathon du Mont Blanc above, the only thing to consider is that Chamonix is busier during this period so advanced booking is an absolute must.

Once you have booked be sure to bring the confirmation with you as last year the hostel lost our booking and in the end had to accommodate the four of us in an infinitely nicer self-catering apartment for no extra charge.

6- Jungfrau Marathon, 11/09/2010

Interlaken, Switzerland, <http://www.jungfrau-marathon.ch/>

Distance: 42.4 km, Vertical Ascent: 1,829 m, Highest point: 2,205 m

Billed dubiously as "The world's most beautiful marathon", this race follows a similar format to many other alpine marathons, i.e. a relatively flat first half followed by a seriously steep climb to the finish. This race has by far the largest field of any alpine marathon (4,000 competitors) which for me is at least 2,000 too many and felt in some ways like the London Marathon of alpine events. Even with a significant section of road at the start of the race to help the field to spread out competitors were still too tightly bunched by the time we got to the trails causing congestion and a less than enjoyable experience. Visually it is a very pretty race but their claim about being the most beautiful is highly subjective as both Zermatt and Mont Blanc are both as attractive if not more so.

The race starts from the town of Interlaken (a two hour train ride from Zurich) where affordable accommodation is reasonably easy to find. Interlaken is a peculiar place; nestled between the lakes Thunersee & Brienersee it is a moderately attractive alpine town but without the charm of somewhere smaller such as Zermatt. It is a reasonable size and in some ways similar to Chamonix in that it caters for both summer and winter outdoor activities. Surprisingly for a Swiss alpine town it sports a large Hooters(!) bar.

7- Kaisermarathon, 19/10/2010

Söll, Austria, <http://www.tourdetirol.com/>

Distance: 42.4 km, Vertical Ascent: 2,160 m, Highest point: 1,829 m

A low-key race with a very local flavour. The Kaisermarathon is actually part of a three race series grandly titled "Tour de Tirol". The other two races aren't much to get excited about however the marathon is good fun. The course is attractive and due to the small amount of competitors very enjoyable. The tough part comes at 39 kms where the route climbs from a gondola station at the bottom of the mountain to its destination at the top. That makes for 3.4 kms of hard slog uphill to the finish which is positioned on the steepest part of the hill. I got the feeling the Austrians were a sadistic bunch...

Söll, where the race starts from, is a pretty village in the Austrian Alps, a 90 minute drive from Munich Airport. There is affordable accommodation available but if you're going to go make sure you book early as it's not a big town and capacity is limited. As it's Austria and not Switzerland eating out is affordable but there aren't a lot of restaurants there and they close relatively early as we found to our dismay one night.

So in total, 7 races, 381 kilometres (236 miles), and around 18,000 meters of vertical ascent. This year I've decided to attempt the same number of races but replace both the Jungfrau and LGT marathons in favour of two other Swiss races; the 80 km Mountainman (www.themountainman.ch) and the 110km Trail Verbier St. Bernard (www.trailvsb.com).

In addition to these, this year I'm going for the big one: The full 100 miles of the UTMB... wish me luck, I will need it!

(Photos, L-R: Marathon-Photos, Kevan Wilkinson, Rob Westaway)

Training in Kenya

Gy Harness

The highlands of Kenya have been producing world class runners since the 60's, so what better place to go running than the country that now proudly dominates middle and long distance races around the world. The town of Iten is the current favourite destination for the world running elite, hosting thousands of European and African athletes throughout the winter training period. The settlement's greatest draw is its height above sea-level; 2400m, high enough to give a performance benefit on return to sea-level, low enough to allow a quick acclimatisation for visiting runners.

So here was I, a young Serpie who, restless for adventure and mileage, googled 'African Running Camp' and promptly found myself skidding to a halt on a Nairobi runway, secretly wishing I'd gone back to Thailand like the year before and drank pink gin. I wasn't fazed by rumours of lions or malaria, being born and raised in the wild mountains and savage plains of Lincolnshire meant I could survive anything that Africa had in store. After Nairobi, the journey heads West on an internal flight to the town of Eldoret, gateway to the Rift Valley area of Kenya and home to Kip Keino's athletic track and running camp.

Iten is finally reached by an hour's taxi ride from the airport, the local taxis (mututus) are Toyota minibuses of questionable vintage and road worthiness, driving standards were incredibly poor and therefore on a

par with the best of London's minicab operators. My final destination was the High Altitude Training Centre (HATC) on Iten's outskirts, more commonly known as Lornah's, after its owner and creator, Lornah Kiplagat. Lornah was born and raised in Iten and currently holds the World Record for Half-Marathon and 5k road. The HATC was built with the prize money she earned, with the mission to fund and train Kenyan women to be able to compete around the globe. In order to be self sufficient, the training camp allows up to forty foreign athletes to visit for as long as they wish on a full board basis, there was even room for a delusional Wembley resident!

After dumping the luggage and slipping on my running brogues, it was time to do what I came here for. Now, before I left the UK I could run eight miles comfortably in an hour, but here I was after 10 minutes dripping with sweat and swaying with exhaustion, filled with a realisation that I really wasn't on the grand union canal path anymore. However, I persevered with a walk/run approach until the tenth day of my visit, when I found I could comfortably run for an hour, albeit at a slower pace than the UK. The Kenyan terrain makes it difficult to relax into a comfortable pace, at all times one is either going up or down a steep hill on rough, broken ground.

Care must be taken as to when in the day you get your miles in. Three in the afternoon is to be avoided as the schools empty on to the streets, bringing gangs of Kenyan children who love to chase white runners whilst shouting 'Mzungu' (White Man). This problem can be avoided in the second week by picking up the pace, but in the first few days you're stuck because you can't out-run an eight year old. Early mornings, 6-7.30, is the best part of the day for running, all the hills



Kenyan hills, early morning in Iten

and clean air without the heat, likewise in the evenings after 6pm the equatorial sun has lost its strength and a burn-free run is guaranteed.

The camp has its own gym available to residents and paying customers, there is a good provision of free weight equipment, squat rack with Olympic bars, as well as the usual cable assisted filth. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights a local Dutch physio puts on an evil 2 hour core class, pilates based. This is the only time you will see Kenyan runners struggle in your presence. Anyone wanting to find out more about the camp can go to www.lornah.com to see all the camp facilities, prices start at 36 euros per night all in, but this can be negotiated for long stays. Also available in Iten is the Kerio View Hotel which offers the highest standard of accommodation in this area of the Rift Valley. The owner, a Belgian national, can be contacted through the website and will be haggled down to around 40 euros a night including meals. For those wanting western comforts and a large

Primrose Hill sessions will never be the same again after Kenya

choice of different foods, I would recommend Kerio View.

Primrose Hill sessions will never be the same again after Kenya. A small East African child hanging on to each arm was not a planned part of the session but became unavoidable when I was spotted by a gang of kids, who then made it their mission to try and hang on to me as I ran up and down the hill. I'm pleased to say that I finished the reps and was entirely unharmed, although there were a few grazed knees on the opposing side. The absence of smoked salmon and scrambled eggs in the café after the session was also noted, comments were made to the camp chef but to no avail.

Iten boasts an outdoor mud track (pictured) which is free for anyone to use. No one is quite sure how long the track is, although none of the Kenyans care if it's a few metres either way. The strength of the sun makes track work difficult, my first speed session turned me into a big red dripping thing hallucinating around the in-field. Couple the sun with the lack of oxygen and this could be considered hardcore resistance training.



For all your running needs



Track training at high altitude

It struck me during my time out in Kenya that the superiority of Kenyan runners comes not from a physical advantage, but from the mental belief they have from an early age that they are great runners. This belief not only drives the top athletes, but creates a large base of young recreational runners, and from there the young athletes emerge. Compare this to the UK, where there are very few of the general public who hold the belief that Brits are born athletes and, in my opinion, this might to start to explain why, as a nation, we stopped being good at running.

Running as a career is one of the few ways in rural Kenya to escape poverty. Local 10k and cross countries are regularly held to find new talent, with first prize often being an entry into a larger race where there is more chance of being noticed by running coaches and corporate sponsors. Competition for places in the Kenyan team is fierce, marathon runners need a sub 2.08 to be considered to run for their country. Children in Kenya often go barefoot until their mid-teens, and while western do-gooders find this abhorrent, it really does endear them with a cracking running posture. A lack of rubber beneath the heel forces the runner to shorten their stride in order to land more comfortably mid-foot, speed then has to come from a more rapid turn-over.

Would I recommend it to fellow Serpies? No, unless you're planning to visit for at least three weeks. The altitude is too much of a hindrance for any shorter length of time, runners would be better off staying at sea-level, somewhere like Nerja or Lanzarote. It is a cheap holiday, £1300 took me there and back for 21 days, little spending money is needed as there's nowhere to spend it, just bottled water and the odd meal out. Although returning to Wembley High Street from Kenya's Rift Valley was something of a depressing journey, the first week at sea-level was a pleasure, no effort was required to do anything. I only wish I had organised to return a few days before the Serpentine Handicap, although I don't want to set a precedent for going to extraordinary lengths to win the Tom Hogshead trophy.

If anyone has any questions or wants advice on going themselves, feel free to e-mail me on gharness@hotmail.com.

Races for New Runners

Lula Rosso provides a selection of popular, atmospheric and beginner-friendly races with the help of Angela Green and Kemi Yusuph

So, you took up running, joined the Club and trained with other runners of similar abilities... well, perhaps now is the time to start looking around for a 'proper' race!

The following are all well organised, all-inclusive races that are easy to reach from London, popular with Serpies, with no hills to climb – and, best of all, they are all large enough that you won't be lonely at the back. That's a promise.

Simply choose the distance that most suits you/your level of fitness and don't forget to add it to 'My Events' using the online Serpie planner so that your friends/arch-rivals can enter the same race too!

5K

- Any Park Run (<http://parkrun.com>): Well attended, friendly races that take place for free (!) every Saturday at 9am in Bushy Park, Richmond Park, Wimbledon Common and Finsbury Park.
- Our own Brooks Last Friday of the Month 5K, every last Friday of every month at 12:30 in Hyde Park (www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/lfotm5k.html). The top end is quite fast, but if you wear a Serpie top you'll be supported like in no other race. Sign up quickly though as it always fills up well in advance.
- Sri Chinmoy (<http://uk.srichinmoyraces.org/races/london>): Organised by the running store Run and Become, these are short races (max 5K) held in Battersea Park on Monday evenings between May and August. Longer races (up to 10 Miles) are on Saturday mornings from March to October. All standards are welcome.

6.975K

- First Saturday of every month at 8:55am: the Serpentine Handicap, of course! Addictive race series; brilliant for beginners, improvers and the super fast. Socialise afterwards over drinks and cakes at the Serpentine Bar and Kitchen in Hyde Park. (www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_handicap.html)

10K

- Any Summer League 10K (www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_summer.html).
- Regent's Park Winter/Summer Series (www.chaser.me.uk): A mixed ability race throughout the year, set in Regent's Park; first Sunday of the month, starting at 9am.
- May - Sudbury Court 10K (www.sudburycourt.org.uk/10k/index.php): Our North London sister club signature race, plenty of Serpie marshals.
- May - The BUPA London 10,000: (www.london10000.co.uk) Large but extremely beginner friendly race.

- June - Ranelagh Richmond 10K*. Fast course along the Thames path.
- July - Asics British 10K (www.thebritish10klondon.co.uk): Very large event in central London - but start near the front or you could face waiting for over an hour to even cross the start line!
- July - Elmbridge 10K: A loop course on road and along a pretty section of the Thames path.
- September - Middlesex & Open 10K: Fast road course, three laps of Victoria Park.

The Serpentines' choice: 10 miles

- October - Cabbage Patch 10* (www.cabbagepatch10.com). Extremely popular and very beginner friendly 10 miler around Twickenham, Kingston and Richmond, mostly along the river. Flat, fast and a must for all London clubs!

Half marathon

- February - Wokingham (www.wokinghamhalfmarathon.co.uk): A moderately fast course in pretty countryside.
- October - Royal Parks Foundation (www.royalparkshalf.com): The half marathon that stole the Wednesday routes; large event, good atmosphere.
- November - St Neots (www.half.riverside-runners.com): An Autumn Serpie favourite.

* These are Club Championship 2011 races: plenty of red and yellow!
http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_clubchamps_road.html

The negative split

Lula Rosso

It takes time and experience to learn how best to pace a race, but if you do the second half faster than the first half (i.e. a "negative split"), you are guaranteed to cross the line feeling like Usain Bolt.

When I ran the St Neots Half Marathon three years ago I really wanted to go under two hours. It was an improvement of four minutes on my second ever half earlier in the year but since then I had been able to handle for the first time three "quality" sessions per week and I desperately wanted something to show for it.

I started in a bad mood as previous races had not been going very well and freezing cold rain was soaking us. But when I passed half way in 1:02, I was shocked to see how far I was from the target. Then I said to myself "Go faster now" and strangely I did go faster, reeling in people and running in larger groups.

Breathing was hard but legs were fine, so I said to myself, "You can run faster still" and flew towards St Albans even sprinting to the finish after a nice girl next to me said, well, "Let's sprint to the finish". I closed it in 1:59:05, feeling dizzy but also very strong, if this makes sense; an exalting experience thanks to the slow first half.

Afterwards I was told that the last 5 km are downhill and we had a strong tail wind. Don't forget to put luck in your pre race check list!

If you are travelling further afield:

- Book your transport and accommodation well in advance. Runners flocking to popular races tend to take over entire cities (see Newcastle during the Great North Run).
- Put your running kit, including shoes, in your hand luggage.
- Plan where you are going to eat in the evening - nothing too strange for your digestive system!
- Make sure you know how to get to the start line: for large races buses may be diverted and roads closed.

Useful links:

http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/beginners_races.html
http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/advice_beginners.html
http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/advice_london.html

Alternative race guide

Wondering about the right race for you? Rob Crangle offers some practical advice based on his own experiences.

Serpentine Handicap

A race in which you are continually overtaken by blonde-haired pony-tailed women. You must run it at least six times before the organisers grudgingly accept that you're not an Olympic gold medallist in disguise.

London marathon

A race where you are not allowed to start until 10 minutes after the starting gun has gone off and are compelled to run the entire distance at the same pace as the 100 people immediately surrounding you.

Wolverhampton marathon

A race in its 20th year which is still awaiting its first entrant. Better to try the half marathon as it means you don't have to stay quite so long in Wolverhampton.

Edinburgh marathon

A summer race where the organisers are taken by surprise by the very hot and sunny weather, not having expected this to be the case during that time of year. Bring lots of sunscreen protection.

100m

A race for those intent on pulling a hamstring.

200m

A race for those intent on pulling both hamstrings.

400m

The human body is deficient in the number of hamstrings required to

deal with this one.

5K

Quite a silly race which is neither long enough to make it worthwhile, nor short enough to fit into a busy schedule (unless you're Nick Torry). For people who don't know what they really want out of life.

400m hurdles

A very silly race which you should never, ever enter; unless you have had your wrists and collarbones surgically reinforced to soften the impact when you complete your descent towards the running track.

3,000m steeplechase

An exceptionally silly race where the safest way of getting over the hurdles is to vault or climb. Has the compensation of removing the need for runners to have a shower afterwards on account of the free bathing facilities on the course, otherwise known as the water jump.

Green Belt relay

A race where the aim is to get as many runners as possible lost around the London borders, which is particularly cruel on those running the Essex stages. Those who finish without mishap are shunned for not entering into the spirit of things at all.

The Barrathon

A half marathon race on a small Scottish island at the most westerly point of the UK (next door to northern Canada). Unique for its force 8 gales and horizontal sleet throughout the entire route. Assuming you complete the first 11 miles without troubling the emergency services, you then scale a 383m hill before crawling through the sleet towards the finish line.

Wednesday evening 3 Parks

A Serpie organised run rather than a race, but the point appears to be that the leaders of the pace groups must steadfastly refuse to limit themselves to the agreed pace; e.g. the two 6:30 pace group runners do 6:10 instead; the five 7:00 pace runners do 6:45; the seven 7:30 runners come in at 7:15, the ten 8:00 runners catch up with the 7:30 runners and the 29,381 runners in the 8:30 group run at whatever the hell pace they like.

Triathlon

Oh make up your mind for goodness sake! Do you want to swim, cycle or run? I mean, it's not as if you can prepare by undertaking a training session at a swimming pool which happens to be beside both a running track and a safe place where your bike won't get nicked by the local urchins.

Ultra races

Oh for goodness sake! A marathon is already twice the distance any sensible person should ever run. People who experiment with ultra-culcha think they can handle it. Then they try just a little more, then a bit further, and before they know it, it takes over their lives and their bodies racked with pain. Kids - just say 'no'!

Round the equator run/swim duathlon

OK, so no idiot has tried it yet but it's only a matter of time.

Ask Doctor Payne

If you have running and triathlon questions, problems and dilemmas, send your letters to the new Serpentine Agony Uncle at drpayne@serpentine.org.uk. Be warned though, he's not quite your average doctor... any serious, medical complaints should be referred to your professionally trained GP or consultant!

Turbo issues

Dear Dr Payne

I am a time pressed triathlete so in order to get the best quality training possible I have invested in a turbo trainer. I am following all of the fantastically interesting workouts from the internet and I am very happy with my training.

But... There are two issues. The most immediate is that when sitting for prolonged periods on the turbo trainer I lose the feeling in "little Jimmey". This is starting to worry me.

As well as my numb Jimmey problem I am starting to develop some chaffing issues.....Down there. In fact you could judge how many hours I log on the turbo by the wear indicator line on my barse.*

Yours awkwardly

Racing snake

*In Scientific terms, 'The Perineum', the region of the body inferior to the pelvic diaphragm and between the legs.

Dear Racing Snake,

How long exactly are you spending on your turbo trainer to cause such disturbing effects? If we're talking up to 5 or 6 hours in one hit then some might consider that a little excessive. Perhaps you ought to ease off a little. Some might even consider more than 30 minutes to be excessive, as turbo training does not stimulate the mind much. Or "little Jimmey" for that matter.

In my experience the best way to solve cycling-related problems is usually to throw money at them. Have you considered investing in a more expensive ergonomic saddle to relieve the pressure points? Or new cycling shorts with more padding? Or a more expensive turbo trainer? New wheels perhaps? A new frame...?

To resolve the chaffing issues I would always recommend the generous application of Vaseline. If you run out of Vaseline, low fat yoghurt can do a similarly effective job. Make sure it's low fat though, as full fat is less healthy.

Finally, what are these "workouts" that you are following on the internet? Perhaps this internet material is what is causing the issue for "little Jimmey", so I'd suggest you block out unclean thoughts and just concentrate on pedalling.

Hope that helps!

Dr P

Tired of being chicked

Dear Dr Payne

I am writing in the hope that you can offer some advice, man to man, on a rather delicate matter.

I keep getting chicked.

At first this was just happening in local events by ladies some a decade older, but then the affliction spread to club runs and now appears to have spread out of control. I was recently tiggered by a very

bouncy ultra running tigger before being chicked on a major scale by a whole group of serpettes.

What should I do to rid myself of this problem?

Yours

Mr. Britannia

Dear Mr Britannia,

I'm afraid there is no easy way to say this: You need to man up.

There are three practical ways to solve your problem, which is by no means a unique one amongst the male running fraternity. I would suggest trying each of these solutions in order until you find one that works.

The first solution is to become incredibly fast. Ideally faster than Paula Radcliffe. This will ensure that no chick on the planet can beat you any longer.

The second solution is to embrace the chicks (not literally). Swallow your primitive masculine pride and accept that a very large number of chicks are incredibly awesome and fast. This is especially true for serpettes. Be a gentleman and allow them past you with a smile and a polite salutation. You may in time discover certain positive aspects to running behind the chicks rather than in front of them.

The third solution is to give up running.

Hope that helps!

Dr P

Hot body

Dear Dr Payne

I would like to ask your expert opinion. I am a relatively small girl, however, I do no exercise and have recently decided to take up running to tone up and get fit, also to lose any extra pounds. Although I have taken to running (having done it at school) quite well, I feel like my legs are beginning to look bulkier. As a girl I am looking for definition rather than to gain muscle and I wondered if you might be able to advise the best way of going about this?

Many thanks

Girl looking for a hot body!

Dear hot Girl looking for a body,

If you have any extra pounds to lose, running is a great way to lose them as it burns lots of calories. Running also stimulates lots of endorphins, adrenalin and other chemicals inside the body that make you feel good. So by starting to run regularly you are already becoming fitter, healthier, happier and more gorgeous by the day.

Your concerns about gaining a little extra muscle are understandable. However, you should bear in mind that scientific tests have shown most men prefer curvy figures to stick thin ones. The firm, shapely leg has been pioneered in recent times by a wide variety of famous hot girls, including Beyonce Knowles, Lily Allen, Kelly Brook, Maria Sharapova and Will's Mum from The Inbetweeners.

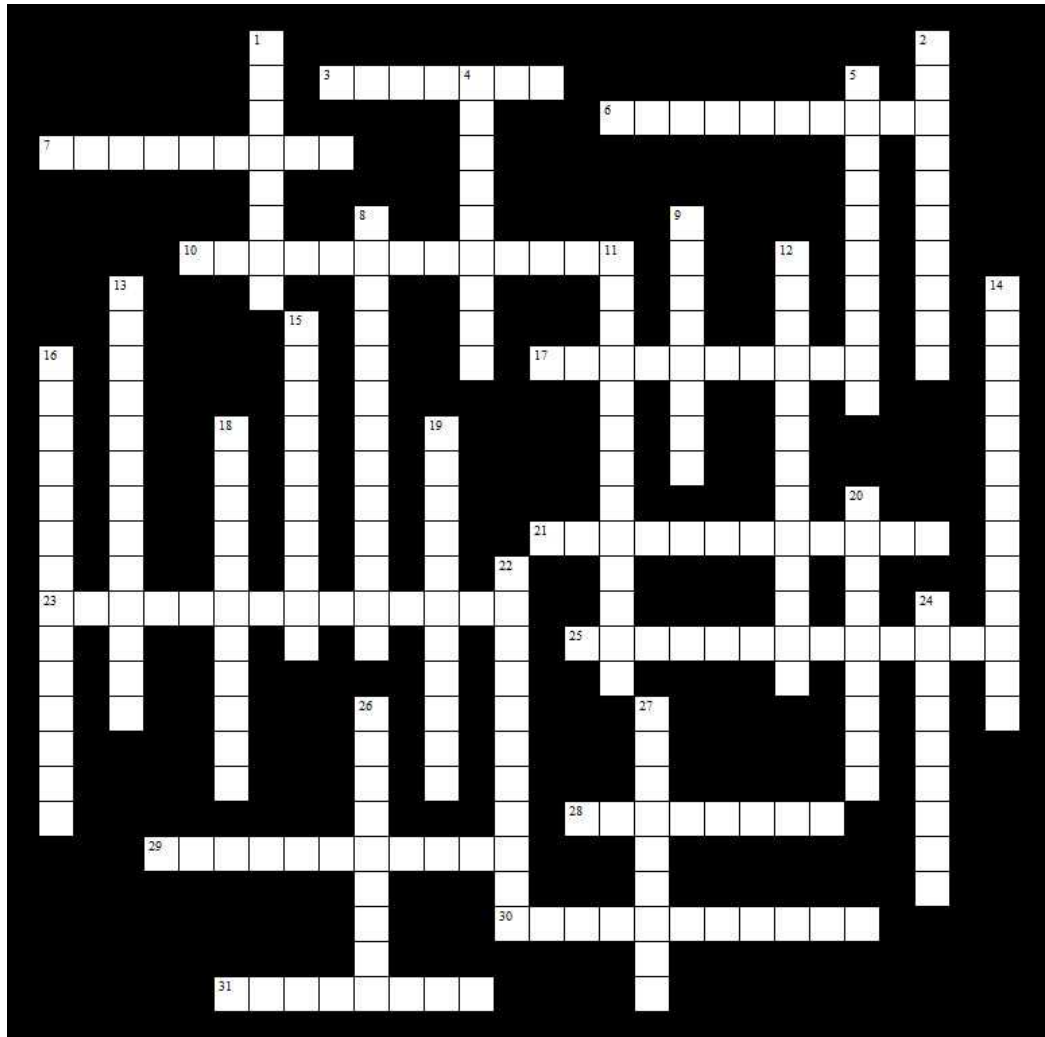
Beauty comes in all different shapes and sizes, but mostly it comes from within. The fitness and general sense of well-being you get from running should vastly outweigh any unwanted side effects, which may not even be as bad as you imagine. Just steer clear of the squat thrusts and you'll be fine.

Hope that helps!

Dr P

The Serpie Crossword

by Dan de Belder



Solution on page 46

ACROSS

- 3 Interval training derived in Sweden (7)
 6 Serpentine's very own Forest Gump (5,5)
 7 Leading British wheelchair athlete (5,4)
 10 Source of energy in food (13)
 17 Venue of 2011 World Athletics Championships (5,5)
 21 Women 800m World and European medallist (5,7)
 23 Serpie 2011 half marathon club championships venue (9,4)
 25 World's biggest half marathon (5,5,3)
 28 British Olympics triathlon medal hope (8)
 29 Serpie Battersea track coach (5,6)

- 30 Name of Serpentine's handicap trophy (3,8)
 31 Chariots of Fire composer (8)

DOWN

- 1 Location for the Olympic triathlon (4,4)
 2 Muscles needed for sprinting (4,6)
 4 Location for Spring training for Serpies every year (9)
 5 Serpie who found 100 miles of Rocky Raccoon to his liking (3,6)
 8 Flamboyant triple jumper (8,5)
 9 Serpentine's trail running group leader (4,4)
 11 Reigning Olympic marathon champion (6,7)
 12 Excessive inward rolling of the foot (13)

- 13 Gym used for Wednesday club runs (7,6)
 14 Women's World 800m champion subjected to gender test (6,7)
 15 Bendy exercise in a hot room (6,4)
 16 British heptathlete now focusing on 400m for the Olympics (5,9)
 18 Legendary Russian pole vaulter (6,5)
 19 Serpie triathlon pro (6,5)
 20 Book about ultra-running by Chris McDougall (4,2,3)
 22 Venue for South of England Fell Running championships (4,2,5)
 24 Inners for shoes (9)
 26 Serpentine's foremost XC competition (3,6)
 27 Indoor cycling track (9)

A to Z of the Welsh Castles Relay

The Welsh Castles Relay is a 20-stage, two-day team race over 211 miles from north to south Wales. Here is a Serpentine perspective on the weekend...

Martin Gaunt



A is for Accessories – ribbons, painted nails, banners, flags... (always yellow and red, naturally).

B is for Baking. You may already be familiar with the baking skills of fellow Serpies, but at the Welsh Castles Relay the standard of cakes reaches untold levels.



C is for Castles, 22 en route, plus 16 Forts (Roman or otherwise), 2 Mottes & Bailey and 5 Mottes. Wales has more castles per square mile than any other nation on earth...

D is for Drover's, the Alpe d'Huez of the Welsh Castles Relay. Stage 14 finishes at the top.

E is for Excel, as in spreadsheets. The Serpentine Welsh Castles operation has one for every possible eventuality, often two.

F is for Fromme, Paul, Chef De Mission.



G is for Gorillas – occasionally sighted; natural habitat seems to be the Neath AC team bus.

H is for Hills, or mountains, as they are known on the six toughest stages of the race.

I is for Ice Cream, recovery food of choice, particularly pleasant on Barmouth beach.

J is for Jelly legs, induced by a heady combination of hills and heat.

K is for King of the Mountains, the male winner of a Mountain Stage (usually a Serpie).

L is for Les Croupiers, race organisers, and our rivals each year for victory.

M is for Miner's lamp, the historic and sought-after prize for Mountain Stage winners.





N is for New Inn, Bettws Cedewain, a great spot to rehydrate while watching the Stage 10 runners go by.

O is for Organisation. Huge gratitude to all those who assist in a truly impressive logistical feat.

P is for Pub, of which there are a few en route, and typically well frequented.

Q is for Queen of the Mountains, the female winner of a Mountain Stage (usually a Serpette).



R is for Records. There are rumours that Serpentine have a few in their sights for WCR 2011.

S is for Squad number, which is called out at the start of every stage by the race organiser, who then proceeds to race the race to the next stage in a blue Fiat Coupé.

T is for Team Captains – Andy Davies, Becky Glover and Jane Fanning in 2010 – adept at finding fast Serpie replacements at the last minute.

U is for “Undulating” – which, it seems, is Welsh for really, bl**dy hilly.



V is for Victory, for so long elusive, but now a familiar feeling for Serpentine.

W is for Wales. Stage 18 aside, could there be a more beautiful setting for a long distance relay race?

X is for (e)Xtreme temperatures. All the way from Caernarfon to Cardiff, the sun never fails to shine.

Y is for Yellow Jerseys, presented to stage winners. The look in Wales, but a serious fashion faux pas if attempted outside of WCR weekend.



Z is for Zzzzz. There is occasional sleeping on the minibuses, but none more spectacular than John Nugus' fly catching attempts of 2010.

Interested? Welsh Castles Relay 2011 is on 11-12 June. If you're a fast Serpie, can drive a minibus, or both, put it in the diary now.

For more information, see http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/race_welsh_castles.html or <http://www.lescroupierswcr.org>

(Photos by Hugh Torry, Martin Gaunt, Ian Hodge and Ian Brodrick)

On tracks and fields



(Photos: Gavin Edmonds)

Lula Rosso

Over the years road running has become the largest participation sport in the field of athletics, while track and field's numbers have dwindled. Serpentine is a good mirror of this international phenomenon, with only a small percentage of the membership involved in the T&F leagues. Perhaps stadium athletics is thought elitist, overly competitive, or simply not accessible to people over 20. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although there are amazing performances and plenty of opportunities for those who want to compete at the top of the league,

our T&F teams are open to everyone who is willing to give it a try and stories of Serpies who found new passions and hidden talents on the tracks and fields of Greater London abound in the club. In 2011, Serpentine will take part in a new league (see John Cullinane's column in the next page), which will make things even more manageable and friendly. There is no reason why the record mass participation in the past MET league should not translate in T&F this summer. If this sparked your curiosity, read on, and learn why some of the T&F regulars are crazy about synthetic lanes and grassy fields.

2011 track and field fixtures:

Southern Athletics League – Sat 12.00pm start

April 30 – Battersea

(against Peterborough, Swindon and Winchester)

May 21 – Croydon

(Croydon Harriers, Cambridge Harriers and Chichester)

July 9 – Salisbury

(City of Salisbury, Andover and Vale of Aylesbury)

July 30 – Walthamstow

(Orion Harriers, London Heathside and Biggleswade)

August 20 – Battersea

(Havering Mayesbrook, Hillingdon and Eastbourne Rovers)

Southern Counties Vets League – Mon 6.30pm start

May 9 – Battersea

June 6 – Battersea

June 20 – Hillingdon

July 18 – St Mary's, Twickenham

Rosenheim League – Wed 6.45pm start

May 11 – Battersea

May 25 – Croydon

June 8 – Wimbledon Park

June 22 – Battersea

July 6 – Croydon

Contacts: (Men) Nicola Barberis Negra nicola.barberis@gmail.com; (Women) Pam Rutherford pamelarutherford215@hotmail.com

Go faster

JT Wong, current 100m and 400m Serpie champion

Remember being a kid and running as fast as you can? The wind racing past your face. It was exhilarating back then. It still is.

As a running club, Serpentine has often had a dearth of people to take on the shorter distances on the track. For most Wednesday night runners, the mileage of a sprint training session would not even count as a warm-up – and a sprint race on the track is probably shorter than getting from the changing room to the club room. However, in a club where the obsession is with longer and further, some of us find happiness in going short.

Eight easy tips on becoming a Serpie sprinter:

- 1) Warm up. It's really important to warm up if you're going to put your body through a concentrated burst of explosive effort. Hamstrings, groins and calves are highly susceptible to sprinting.
- 2) If you can't remember the last time you asked your body to go as fast as it can, then the time to start is not on race day. Sprinting requires you to output at 100% for a short duration, which is quite unlike long distance running. This means that if you're not used to it, there's a real chance of injuring yourself. So attend a training session and get used to running at 90%+ before you go all out in a 100m or 200m race.
- 3) Sprinting uses different muscle fibres. Slow twitch fibres are great for endurance running, but you need fast twitch for sprinting. Think about chickens – slow twitch is the dark meat and fast twitch is the white meat. To do well in a sprint race, you need to draw on your fast twitch fibres, which can produce a lot of energy, but will tire out quickly.
- 4) There's only one pace for a 100m. You have 10-15 seconds, there's no reason to hang about, you need to work as hard as you can to get up to top speed as quickly as possible. Ideally, the same applies to a 200m, but 400m is a whole different game at our level. Go out too fast and you'll suffer – a lot. One lap is surprisingly difficult when you try and run it as quickly as possible. Just remember, 400m always hurts.



New season, new format

John Cullinane

The forthcoming track and field season marks a huge change for athletics in the South of England region. After several years of debate at both leagues' AGMs, this winter has seen several like-minded clubs establish a new, mixed, league.

Serpentine, in the form of Ian Hodge, has been working closely with colleagues from Milton Keynes, Harrow and Enfield and Haringey Athletics Clubs to form the league. By the closing date for entries, 32 clubs had signed up, double the number which would have made the league viable, and a huge vote of confidence in the ethos of the new league. There will be two divisions of 16 clubs, and we will be in Division 2.

The major differences between the old and new are:

- **Men and women will compete as one team, which will hopefully produce a better atmosphere and team spirit at meetings. It will also reduce the number of meetings we need to provide officials for.**
- **A wider range of events – there will be a steeplechase for women for the first time, and the 3000m and 5000m will alternate.**
- **We will also score points for providing officials, so it is vital that we get a full team of officials out for each meeting.**

There will also be a lot less travelling, as we have two fixtures at Battersea Park (our home track), one at Croydon and another at Walthamstow, all an easy journey from Central London. The only long trip is on July 9th, to Salisbury, and hopefully we can make a day of it and get a large turnout.

Each match will have 72 different events, and we need to ensure we have enough athletes to cover each event. Please make sure you are available for as many of the matches as possible, and that you let the team captains know of your availability. We are always looking for sprinters, hurdlers, jumpers and throwers and if you have a hidden talent – or know or work with anyone who has – please let us know.

We also need officials to cover these matches. One of the best things about the new format is that we now need to cover 5 matches instead of 15, but we were already short of officials and urgently need to recruit and train some more. (In particular, we would like to train a starter, but also need timekeepers, and track and field judges). As we now get points for providing officials, you will be a true part of the team, so if you would like to give officiating a go please contact Katie Levy (participation@serpentine.org.uk) as soon as possible.

Other leagues

We continue to compete in the Rosenheim League, a very friendly midweek league with meetings across South London, and Sothorn Counties Veterans' League. And, while the women's Vets League remain the team to beat in their section, we urgently need more veteran men to compete on Monday evenings - vet means 35 or over, with three different age categories (V35, V50 and V60) to fill – we also need a men's vets captain, so if you are interested, please let myself or Ian Hodge know. **Details of both leagues are on the track and field pages of our website and at <http://www.southernathletics.org.uk/>**

If you aren't hurting on the home straight, you're not working hard enough.

5) Practise your starts. Reacting quickly to the gun can give you a big advantage in short races. You need to practise your starting position, but also your reaction times.

6) If you find you're good at it, spikes really do help. You're exerting a large amount of force on the track, so getting a good grip is useful.

7) Drive with the arms. This makes more difference than you think it will. Your legs do what your arms are doing, so when you get tired, focus on driving with the arms and your legs will keep ticking over. Strange, but it works.

8) Relax relax relax. You can't move fast if you're too tense. If you ever watch elite athletes race, you can see that their upper bodies and faces are very relaxed. Your arms have to work, but they have to move smoothly and without tension. The moment you start trying too hard, your body will start to tense up.

Anyone wanting to train for sprints should find themselves a training group or coach if they want to improve. Some Serpies train with a Belgrave group at Battersea Park on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

For more info, please contact JT at jt_wong@yahoo.com

Up your endurance

Urban Bettag, Performance Coach for Endurance

Considering the demographics of our club we quickly come to the conclusion that those competing in track & field events are a small minority. Amongst all of them event-wise the middle distance folk are as close as the club gets to the overwhelming majority of long distance runners, though it's fair to say us Serpies do not have a 'tradition' in middle distance running compared to other running clubs.

We have a small but fine number of people in the club working against that trend and enjoying middle distance training and racing. I have asked a few of them the question - what is it that motivates you to compete over 800m to the mile?

Mohammed Ismail, for example, usually competes over longer distances, though during the summer months he enjoys the mile race. Mohammed says, as a long distance runner, having run a fast mile gives him the confidence to convert his speed for longer distances.

Middle distance running requires the right mix of speed and endurance. Exercise physiologists debate about the physiological demands of the 800m and 1500m event. The conclusion is that both events have an even bigger aerobic element as initially anticipated. This means the training has to reflect the right mix of endurance and speed development.

Another example is Sandra Wilson, one of our fastest female athletes, who recently took part in the 1500m South of England Athletics indoor championships. Sandra says "I love the 1500m on the track owing to the sheer pace and the tactics involved as there is little room for error (and catching up!) if you lose focus."

Like no other track events the 800m/1500m require great tactical

understanding and spatial awareness. Perhaps some may remember the great rivalry between Sebastian Coe, Steve Ovett or Steve Cram. While the 800m race can be a high paced event, the 1500m can start with two slow laps which make the race more suitable for those with a kick.

Usually there are two categories of middle distance athletes – speed endurance and strength endurance. The speed endurance athlete has the ability to convert his maximum 400m/800m pace to the 1500m event, while the strength endurance athlete has the ability to maintain a high pace for a prolonged time. The former has the ability to tolerate high levels of lactate while the later has a high aerobic capacity and great middle distance runners possess both – high lactate tolerance and endurance.

There's also something about the track which is far more exciting than road/cross-country running, says middle distance ace Christine Lutsch. "Maybe because it's spectator friendly (there are many different events to watch at the same time) and it's possible to run in front of a big crowd. Maybe also because the race is exactly the same every time, apart from track or weather conditions, so it makes it easier to notice progress (or not) in performance."



"I've always found it more exciting to be involved in races that are short and sharp, which require a combination of speed and endurance. The 800m is a great event - you go off at a suicidal pace and start feeling it at about 300m, before going through the bell only a bit slower than your best 400m time... then it's just about hanging on, damage limitation and trying to find a bit of a sprint in the home straight. Fortunately you know that the other people in the race are in the same boat!" says Ben Gilmore.

Regardless of which events athletes train for it has to be worthwhile to go through the hard training and make it a fulfilling experience. For Mary Egundebi it's a simple formula – middle distance running is competitive but cool and fits her personality.

Those of you who would like to train Middle Distance more seriously should get in touch (urban.bettag@gmail.com) or find a training group with like minded people who share the passion for middle distance running.

Get stronger

Chris Privett, Belgrave Harriers Coach for Throws

John Hillier, an ex commonwealth thrower in the 70's, now a very well respected coach, once appraised my best shot putt by shouting from his rain-dripping shelter words that I thought would be precise, full of praise and helpful: "Chris, I know exactly what's wrong with your throwing - the shot is landing too near your toes." With a burst of laughter from all athletes present including me we carried on. Now that's coaching - fun, humourous, well-meaning and encouraging camaraderie. John Hillier epitomises the throwers' spirit and I try my best to do the same but I cannot hold a candle to a throwing giant like John and his sharp wit.

Athletics matches are always won on points and it's the field events that seem to lack any credible athletes that can get those valuable points - "just throw to get a point" is often heard. Experienced runners know it is training, diet and technique that makes an ordinary club runner a winner. Field events are the same. If you want Serpentine to win athletics matches you need to encourage more athletes of all ages to take up the throwing and jumping events and get the maximum points and not the minimum points just for attendance.

In the men's matches I have often met runners (past their prime) from other clubs who turn up to a Southern League match hoping for a run but have been asked to 'fill in' the field events as they no longer make the grade (no longer fast enough). Those precious places are always given to running athletes who do have a chance to gain points for their club. This is exactly the right approach. These runners turn up at the throwing area and do their best. After watching their poor or non-existent throwing performance I usually take them to one side and give them a two minute guide on how to throw the discus, shot, hammer or javelin before they step forward to try again. Coaching during a match is against the rules and the spirit of the competition but I have never had anyone complain, quite the reverse, other throwers join in the 'on the spot' training session. This highlights the difference between the running and the throwing events. Camaraderie naturally occurs in throwing competitions. Of course it also develops amongst runners but in a running race you have to concentrate on beating the other competitors at that moment in time so chatting and having a laugh with them is out of the question. With throwing you are competing against yourself; it's you against the throwing implement. Throwers understand this and help each other all the time even in a competition. I have made many friends up and down the country just because we enjoy throwing and the fantastic humour and camaraderie that goes with it.

Back to the 'on the spot' training during a competition - I always explain to these male athletes that "you can't get faster but you can get stronger". They eventually get the message and some have converted from runner to thrower. Of course young people can do just as well as the older generation. The difference is that the younger you are, the quicker you pick up the technique. The older you are, the easier it is to get stronger as you are already muscularly developed. Sorry to mention only the men but Belgrave don't have many mixed competitions. Regarding the women, most of the athletes I train are women and they enjoy exactly the same social scene, humour and achievement during training and competitions. Look at Serpie Mary



Davies who has done remarkably well in 2010 and Mary is simply getting better and better at all the throwing events. Mary only took up throwing a couple of years ago.

I have been asked about providing training tips for people wanting to become throwers or who have just started. That's difficult to answer as everyone is built differently and will take to throwing at different progression rates. Currently I coach Belgrave and Serpentine athletes the four main throwing techniques. I simply require they spend time in the gym developing their upper bodies, arms, chest and core. There are many ways to achieve strength optimisation and specific strength development regimes are given to each athlete depending upon their needs. The rest is down to the coach (me) to gently train their minds (therefore their bodies) to automatically react in a certain way. The more brain washing they receive, the better throwers they become.

Combined with strength training I can begin to get a throwing athlete to win points in an athletics competition. It takes time but the rewards are many fold. The athlete feels that he or she is actually being noticed and talked about by winning points for their club and they get their names on the website and in the results sheet. The strength training develops and tones muscles and they feel great about that. They can visibly see the increase in performance. It's always important to create a social environment that everyone enjoys, humour is definitely part of training but so is reward. As my throwing athletes progress they get praise. It might sound a bit patronising but it's important that the novice thrower feels they are making progress even if the implement is still landing very near their toes!!

Everyone has the desire to try something different so please give it a go. Age is no excuse, I just turned 51 and have never felt stronger or fitter in my life. I am now trying the Highland Games as well as other exotic throwing events. Come on Serpies - throwing is great fun and very rewarding so give it a go.

If you are interested in learning to throw Chris is usually down at Battersea track Thursdays 6.30-8pm and Sundays 11am-12.30pm. Drop him a line at chrisprivett@talktalk.net.

"If you think you are too slow for the track, but too strong for the sofa, throwing is the perfect way to be involved in a great team atmosphere."
Mary Davies

Wednesday Night Runs Leaders

Helen Winsor and Lula Rosso

In the Serpentine survey last year, the Wednesday Evening Run from the Seymour Centre was elected the most popular Serpie training session.

Why? We can just hazard a guess, but we suppose that the mixture of socialising and a quality steady paced session, so hard to achieve on your own, must be the reason for its success.

Although the WNRs don't need leaders (you just show up, choose a route and naturally fall in the group running at your chosen speed), several club members stand out as key players, showing up week in and week out, leading runs to new and lesser known routes, and providing a safe regular group to test the challenging transition to longer routes/faster times.

Serpentine met some of the most active WNR leaders and asked why and how they do what they do.

Lars Olsen, Hampstead Heath

What do you do for the club and why?

On Wednesday night, I lead the 7:30 group 10+ miles, then organise Hampstead hill training on Saturday and a Hampstead long run on Sunday. I usually volunteer at track and field and other events too. I started to lead groups because it was easier to organise what I wanted myself rather than wait for someone to do it for me.

Are your favourite routes all around Hampstead Heath? Which one you love the best?

I like routes without cars. In London you can find a lot of places to run without traffic, it is much more "runnable" than other big cities, much more than I expected, as I found out when I joined Serpentine in 2004. But my favourite route is the one which is different from last one— I like to change. One of my favourites is 12 miles from Hampstead via Highgate and Parkland Walk to Finsbury Park, up to Alexandra Palace and back via Parkland Walk to Highgate Woods and then back to Hampstead Heath, which is almost all traffic free. For a very long one, I take the Union Canal, go through Victoria Park, and around Isle of Dogs. Or from little Venice to Kew Gardens, 22 miles 90% car free.

Any funny episodes/mishaps on your lead runs?

No, no one fell into the canal yet. Just the odd wrong turn.

Is it true that you change the route when someone in your group passes you?

[Laughs] No, who told you that? It is not true. I know Hampstead Heath very well, and I like to take seemingly random turns. I always come with a plan for the first 6-7 miles and when Garmin tell me it is time to head home I improvise a couple of miles to make the distance 11-13 miles. I rarely change direction just to annoy people, even if it may seem so. Plus if they know the route, they could lead their own group, no?



Lars is the Danish blondie on the left

What's the key to a good Wednesday night run for you?

When I joined the club, the groups I ran with would set off too fast and then blow up, or people would try to race each other and leave stragglers behind. I aim to maintain an even speed throughout the run and to not leave anybody behind. To be honest, I partly do it for selfish reasons (now I have always someone to run with!) and because it is not that demanding— it just requires taking the initiative and showing up on Wednesday nights consistently.

Serpentine is a very social club if you understand how to take advantage of it. Offer to lead, turn up to races and go to the pub afterwards— I guess you have heard that before. Also remember that the club is run by volunteers only, so please ask for things politely and say thanks to the Events and Results elves— I am one of them!

Garnet Walters, 2.5/3 Parks

Which groups or sessions do you lead for the club?

In the past, I've led slow 2.5 and 3 Park runs. There was a gap for people running 11 min/miles who wanted to go further than 2 Parks so I took the plunge. I'm currently recovering from injury/illness, but hope to be back running with the club in the Spring.

What's the key to a good Wednesday night run for you?

The key for me is having a few people to run 11 min/miles with. I get some company and hopefully the others get a run at a pace that's good for them. I aim to run at the back with the slowest person so some weeks this will be a comfortable run for me, while other weeks it's a bit faster and sometimes it can be a struggle to keep up! But I think the variety is good for me and it stops things getting stale. I send weekly emails to the e-group so everyone is reminded that the run exists and new people get to hear about it too. I don't think we've lost anyone yet but we have had to cut a run short due to monsoon-like conditions and there have been a few unscheduled toilet stops!

What do you like about running?

For me it's a great de-stresser and a cheap and easy way to keep fit.



Garnet running Paris

What is your favourite route?

My favourite route has got to be the 5-mile run between work and home. It includes a run through Green Park and Hyde Park and only takes me 15 minutes longer than getting the tube. I get home at a civilised time and it means I've already done my run.

What are your favourite races?

The Fred Hughes 10M no frills race comes top, but it was the first time I realised I could run further than I thought. I've done it 3 times and although it's not the most picturesque course, I always enjoy it. Also, the Paris Marathon – which has the best start in the world, running down the Champs Elysee!

If anyone is thinking about leading a pace group – I'd say 'Go For It!' It will motivate you to turn up more often and you'll get to meet loads more people. And you'll be giving something back to the club!

Ben Cope, Tower Bridge

When did you join Serpentine?

I have been a member since May 2005, originally joining to find others to run with in training for the Berlin marathon. Wednesday night long runs with the 'Tower Bridge group', led then by Clive, captured my interest and got me hooked.

Which groups do you lead or coach?

Previously (to start again soon), I led Wednesday night long runs of around 7 min/mile pacing. I'm also a L1 triathlon coach, working with Beate Vogt, Alex Elferink and Margaret Sills to coach 3 triathlon squads.

What is your favourite route?

Hampstead is my favourite route. And when not leading a group then I like following Lars around the Heath feeling very lost.

What do you like about running?

I run partly for the social side (both during the run and post-run in the

pub) and also for competing against myself to continually (hopefully) better my time.

What are your favourite races?

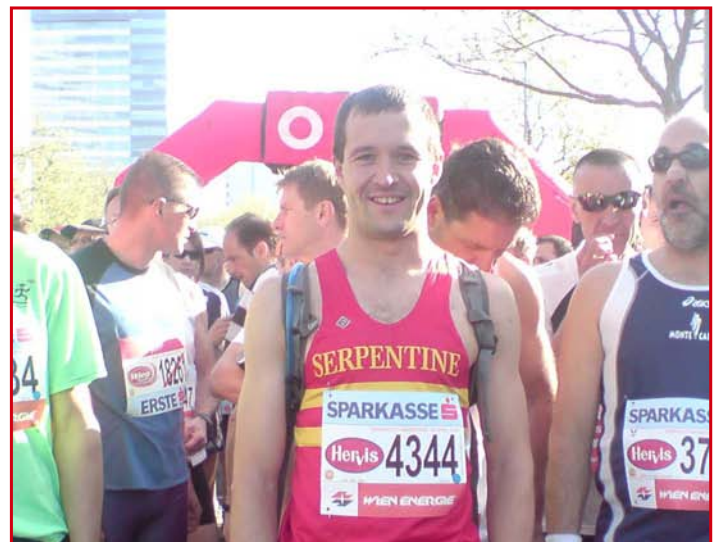
Davos k42 is probably the best (if most painful) running race I have ever taken part in. The best race I have run ever has got to be the Three Peaks Yacht Race, which covers the UK Three Peaks by only yacht, bicycle and foot. Vienna City Marathon and Wokingham also hold special places in my heart as they are my PB courses.

When do you like to run most?

Wednesday evenings are probably my favourite, with groups of like-minded people to run with. Leading sessions (although it has been a few months since I last did this) on these nights is rewarding and also gives you the chance to set the pace which is nice.

Tell me about some runs that haven't gone quite to plan.

It's hard to say. Not because there have been no mistakes, I'm just trying to remember the entertaining ones. I got caught out by the weather a few weeks back on a run and had to borrow 'tri-girl' hand warmers off a friend – much to everyone's amusement (I made sure I returned them before re-entering the Seymour Centre)!



Ben in Germany

WNR Leaders needed

The club wants to reinstate pace groups on Wednesday nights, but for this we need people to lead them! If you regularly run on Wednesdays, and know (more or less) what pace you run, please think about leading a group (for example, 3 Parks at 9 minute/miles, Tower 7.30 etc). Once a group coalesces, hopefully others will step forward to help out too. Wednesdays are often the first introduction for many new members, and the better we can make them, the better training will be and the more everyone will improve (it will help the social side too). Please speak to Katie Levy or John Cullinane if you are interested in leading a pace group, or send an email to the e-group.

Navigating on a trail run

Following the success of the first Serpie introductory trail runs, Catharine Sowerby explains the art of following route descriptions

For some, one of the joys of trail running is the challenge of route-finding. For others, navigation is a necessary evil which interrupts the rhythm of the run. However, the thought of getting lost shouldn't prevent you from trying out the trail run.

Trail runs don't always require any navigation at all. Some races are marked, and the High Peak relay on a disused railway track would be hard to get wrong. Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA) and many trail events provide detailed written instructions. Initially these are gobbledegook "after 200yds cross ST and BR on CBR 90", but a helpful key is included in the instructions, making this the more straightforward "after 200yds cross stile and bear right on compass bearing 900". This may still be a little complicated. For the non-English amongst us, 1 yard is about 1 metre and a stile (pronounced style) is a ladder-like crossing, typically over a fence or wall. As you become more familiar with the instructions, you will spot the more subtle differences between bear right and turn right (turn right is full corner, but bear right is half right); a handgate and a kissing gate.

These are my top tips:

1. Before the event, work out what sort of navigation is required – written instructions, a map or a marked route. If the route is available in advance (for example for the Green Belt relay), read all the details and have an idea of your route.
2. If there is a map with the instructions, use this to get an overview of the course. Is it a clockwise or anticlockwise circuit? Are there long stretches along a marked route?
3. Run only as fast as you can navigate.
4. Fold the instructions so that it's easy to track your position with your thumb.



Great Missenden "intro to trail" Serpie run (Photo: Keith Evans)

WINTER TANNERS 30 MILE ROUTE DESCRIPTION (Page 1 of 4)

9th January 2011

ABBREVIATIONS: R=right, L=left, T=turn, F=fork, B=bear, &=and, RD=road, FP=footpath, BW=bridleway, BY=byway, Y=yards, M=miles, ST=stile, KG=kissing gate, (X)-TK=(cross) track, junc=junction, FB=footbridge, W/M=waymark, cont=continue, immed=immediately, FiPo=fingerpost, opp=opposite, ahd=ahead, NT=National Trust.

Grid ref and approx mileage shown at start of paragraph.

PLEASE ENSURE YOUR TIME IS RECORDED by Dave or John BEFORE YOU START
If the river bank is flooded you will be told to replace para 2 with the appendix on Page 4**

00.0M 163566 Leave car park by vehicle exit & **TR**. Cross RD at traffic lights & **along WATERWAY ROAD**. 20Y after RD islands, **TL** to cross RD (you can use lighted crossing just under the bridge & come back if traffic is heavy). **Along RD** towards LEISURE CENTRE. When RD swings R keep ahd on tarmac FP to pass MOLE BARN.

****00.6M 164557** Ahd over X-TK, thru metal KG & **along L** edge of field. In 500Y, (40 yards after passing turquoise & green pipes going over river) **FL** thru wooden KG. **Under bridge, thru 2nd KG & across field**. Thru 3rd KG & ahd with fence posts on your L. At house (ahd) **TL** along drive. In 450Y join concrete drive from your L to pass NORBURY PARK FARM.

01.8M 168541 Drive turns to tarmac to pass MICKLEHAM PRIORY & 25Y later keep ahd. In 350Y, **over bridge then TL**. In 50Y, **TR** to cross busy (A24) dual carriageway & ahd along drive (by wall end). In 40Y, when tarmac swings L, **keep ahd** on encl FP. In 45Y, **ignore FP** on your L to **chicane L & R** (fence on your L). **Keep ahd** over tarmac drive & thru churchyard.

Route descriptions may seem gobbledegook at the beginning!

5. Don't follow the person in front of you. They may be running a different course (very common on events with different length routes) and may be worse at navigating than you are.
6. Whilst running, read through to the next decision point + 1, not just the next decision point. For example, if the instructions say "Turn Right at the next path T-junction. After 20metres, turn left over the stile", if you only focus on the first instruction, it is very easy to overshoot the 20metres in the excitement of getting the first element of the instructions correct.
7. Concentrate. At the beginning you will need to concentrate to familiarise yourself with the style of instructions, in the middle you may get complacent and at the end you are tired and there is the temptation to rush the instructions in the eagerness to finish.
8. If you are running with others, agree who is navigating (and swap around). It is difficult and time-consuming to take collective responsibility, and you run the risk of someone reading the instructions out of context.
9. If you are in doubt, stop, concentrate and confirm your decision. It's better to spend a few minutes making a good decision than dashing off in the wrong direction.
10. Remind yourself how to take a compass bearing. In general you can manage without a compass, but when bearings are provided this gives you additional confidence that you've taken the right route.
11. Don't panic if you get lost. After you've studied the instructions again, work out where you think you went wrong and re-trace your steps to that point. Then slowly progress through the course until you are confident you know where you are, at which point start running again.
12. Trust the instructions, they have been well researched. Hills never move, roads are not re-routed and the organisers aren't deliberately setting out to lose their competitors.
13. Don't take the instructions as gospel. They may have been written some years ago, the gate may have been changed, the sign-post broken or the house changed its name.

For advance information on self organised trail runs and off-road races, sign up for the Serpie Trail newsletter in your profile.



Photos, L-R: April MOTM at the Riverfront Cafe; Josie with her London Marathon medal; July MOTM pre dinner drinks at the Crown & Sceptre pub

Meal of the Month

Josie Wildrige

My name is Josie and I organise Meal of the Month. MOTM is always the last Friday of the month. A lot of people are involved with organising things for the club. I like organising social events which is why I became involved in this.

I joined Serpentine when I had been running for a just over a year. I ran the London marathon in 2009 and was at a stage in my life where my friends didn't understand my passion and interest for running. They thought it was very boring and even now never ask me about it. My friends didn't understand about training and how it impacts my life so I thought it would be great to meet some like-minded people. I absolutely made the right decision picking Serpentine. And I truly believe I have joined the best running club in London and I am proud to be part of it.

Actually coming to sessions was something I felt nervous of and I put it off and put it off... I knew I had to start participating. But it can feel very intimidating attending the sessions when you are new. It can be difficult when you try to start talking to people if they are all deep in conversation and all seem to know each other or really seem to know what they are doing. Especially if you're shy. It is difficult. And then I saw an email about Meal of the Month in November. Perfect. This would be my opportunity to break the ice with a small group. And the organiser had picked a Thai restaurant. My favourite.

That evening was lovely. We started in a great pub in Chiswick and it was a short walk to the restaurant. It was great to try out a pub in a new area, try a new restaurant and meet a variety of people. I wanted to go again.

By day I am a personal assistant. I have been called frighteningly organised. Part of my job involves organising events. My favourite magazine is Time Out and I read all the various London publications which advertise or recommend bars and restaurants. I do love a good recommendation. I have made some of my best discoveries for my contacts book by exploring and stumbling across a great find. As all us runners know, running or walking around your area is the best way to

discover and get to know it.

When I was offered the opportunity to organise a MOTM by the then Social Secretary I jumped at the chance. I was nervous and thought for a long time of the perfect venue. My criteria included somewhere that will take a large group; won't require a deposit; has an appropriate menu which will cater for all tastes, not too expensive and many other considerations. I picked The Riverfront Cafe at the BFI Southbank which has a gastro pub type menu and a great bar.

Some months there is a theme, like the time we went Belgian. We started off at Lowlander (they do that fabulous strawberry Fruuli beer on tap) in Covent Garden and then on to Belgos for dinner. It is a different cuisine every month.

When I think about my venues, I always think about budget first and foremost. MOTM is not to exclude. It is to include especially in this time of austerity. I want everyone to be able to join in regardless of their budget and so we don't split the bill. Each person just pays for what they have. I then think about location. We are a central London club and attract members from all over the Capital. I like to keep a zone one venue where possible to make it easy for everyone to get home. Examples of locations are South Bank, Covent Garden, Soho. And never too far from a tube station. We always meet in a pub from

It can feel very intimidating attending the sessions when you are new but the MOTM would be my opportunity to break the ice with a small group.

6pm (I never work overtime on a Friday) and then dinner around 7.30pm. The venues will always be quite close together; otherwise you lose people in transit. Take it from one who knows...

MOTM is a relaxed way to meet people in the club and to visit bars and restaurants you may not have been to before. It is a nice way to discover the city. There is always great chat. I meet new people every month; people I would never normally meet and talk to. And I love that. You will always find something in common. I am very inquisitive person and I love talking to people. Everyone is interesting. Everyone has a story to tell.

Running into the digital world

Jolyon Attwooll

According to painstaking research (Google phrase: “internet”, “time”, “amount” “average”), adults in Britain spend almost a full waking day online each week. So where does the average Serpentine spend their internet hours?

Using a high-powered combination of web-spiders, instant messages, wall posts, tweets, and that dusty old form of communication, email (remember that?), we looked into the running-related ways our members like to spend their time online.

The upshot of this highly unscientific study is that Serpentines pinpointed the following online trends among club members – as well as perhaps a few websites that may be of use or interest.

Social networking

Social networking is the phenomenon of the internet era that tech-savvy folk like to call Web 2.0. Whatever that means. Anyway, people are doing a lot of it – around 45 per cent of mobile internet time is supposedly spent on Facebook – and Serpies are no exception. Hundreds of club members have news feeds clogged with mud-spattered pictures of themselves, diligently tagged by club-mates after the latest cross-country encounter or trail race. Events are organised, injuries sympathised with, trips reported, and life's ups and downs are relayed. For those taking part in or following big club events such as the Round Norfolk Relay, Welsh Castles and Green Belt, there are often live as-it-happens updates when the events take place.

There's also an official presence too for those who don't already know. Serpentine Running Club has its own page (see www.facebook.com/serpies) – “liked” by 678 people at the time of writing – keeping members informed about the big club events and news.

Twitter

One area in this brave new social networking world where Serpies are less vocal is on the micro-blogging website, Twitter – although several members do ‘tweet’ about running, and many more may do so for work. But what is the point of an editorial system where you have all of 140 characters to express yourself, you may ask? After all, Twitter is supposed to be the domain of people suffering from high levels of existential anxiety, according to a recent University College London study. But wait a moment. It seems that elite athletes are more vulnerable than most to this angst – perhaps the majority of them are now Twitter regulars, a trend that Matthew Fraser Moat, the former publisher of Athletics Weekly, calls “enthralled”. Essentially, what it means is this: if you're an athletics nut you could well get the inside scoop on your favourite athletes before you read it in any newspaper.

Want the latest on Paula Radcliffe's London 2012 training, her recovery from dog bites: it's all out there on Twitter.com/paulajradcliffe. And what about Haile Gebrselassie? Retiring? Not retiring? He'll tell you himself at Twitter.com/HaileGebr. Of course, you may also find just as many athletes commenting on X-factor or their

football team's latest goal drought – you'll just have to work a little for your insider information. You don't even have to tweet yourself, just follow. But then you may find an outlet for any latent existential angst...

Local running gossip

Away from the Olympic sharp-end of Paula and Haile, there is a surprising amount of online speculation, predictions, gossip, rumours – and yes, name-calling (this is the internet after all) – for more local competitions. Perhaps the most keenly commented upon topic involving Serpies is the Metropolitan League. And yes, it appears that several Serpentines have been playing their part in these online forums (although obviously not the abuse!). So where should you go to place your own thoughts and predictions into the wider online world?

At the moment, the website du jour is Eightlane.com, nominally a “news aggregator” set up by Loughborough University students, but also with a lively commenting forum. Who contributes? Surprisingly few Serpentines would openly admit to using it – sheepishness perhaps, or as one coach puts it, “perhaps the 8laners just take it as a given that any male ‘enduro’ will have it in his favourites list for quiet moments during the working day.” And largely a male thing it appears to be, too. All names of contributors leaked to Serpentines were conspicuous by their non-femaleness. One person with whom I discussed this trend speculated that perhaps women's “higher levels of emotional intelligence flag that 8lane is not optimum use of an adult's time.”

One of the faster Serpentine members defended his Eightlane habit thus: “Once you sift through the ‘crap’ posts, there are some interesting discussions. It has also proven to be a great way to share information, results, race cancellations and potential race fields. It also points to some other interesting articles on the web. Eightlane certainly gets my thumbs up!”

If having your say is important to you, there are several other places you can go, including letsrun.com (whose “world famous message boards” the elite athletes at the 2006 European Championships in Gothenburg were checking regularly, Serpentines has on good authority); the BBC's 606 message boards; and the new forums at Athletics Weekly (www.athleticsweekly.com/messageboard), to name a few of the more popular ones.

Race research

Active members also spend plenty of online time planning race and training schedules. There are few better starting points than the Serpentine events planner, which shows the many different races, from trail ultra-marathons to triathlons, that other Serpies are taking part in. Otherwise, perhaps the most useful is Runner's World website (www.runnersworld.co.uk), which has an excellent race search and the most comprehensive race reviews out there. It is the TripAdvisor of the running world, only slightly more measured and reliable. It is free to use, although you need to register.

Running retail

Clearly retail is a huge part of the internet revolution, and running products are often available at a fraction of the price online. Serpentines will maintain a dignified BBC-style impartial silence on the matter, apart from to mention one amusingly mistyped recommended website that was suggested to us:

topic: Official London City Runner Met CC League thread in the forum: Running, Track And Field
 ► Cod Liver Oil 2010-10-09, 10:33 #18
 In reply to post ID 76038

On the **women's** side there are only really four teams worth commenting on:

Heathside - (fourth last year) just like their men they are getting older and older, but remain pretty well organised. I think around fourth this year.

Serpentine - (third last year) a huge squad last year, but pretty unreliable at the front and a bit disorganised, differently from their men. I think if they get their better marathon runners to concentrate on this and are as organised as their men they could win it and I suspect they will.

Highgate Harriers - (second last year, but previously champions for 7 or so years) for the last couple of seasons they have been complacent until the final fixture and last season it wasn't enough. They have four or five very strong runners who could finish in the top 8 or so regularly, but they are a collection of individuals rather than a team (differently from Heathside, Frontrunners, **Serpentine**, Police etc). Still, it will be fun to watch Abel, Evans and Penty et al. I think they'll be runners up.

WGEL - (champions last year) they suffer a little bit from being too talented. Milton I think is now based in USA; the Sparkes twins and Gundersen oscillate from being injured to being too elite from this competition, the team will probably be relying on Jackson. A bit like **Serpentine**, they are way less disciplined than their men. I expect they'll be down in third.

The relegation battle will be between ESM, St Albans, **Serpentine** B and WGEL B. I think ESM and St Albans will go down. From the second division two of Hillingdon, Frontrunners and GCR will go up.

This disparaging post on 8lane.com is rumoured to have sparked the largest ever serpette participation in the MET league

www.compressyourself.com. The online revolution has not been so good for small, semi-divine creatures it seems...

Running statistics

Let's admit it: we're runners, often chasing PBs, and most of us like our running statistics. Our own website, of course, has plenty of material. But if the age-graded rankings on serpentine.org.uk leave your thirst for stats unquenched, or the graph that plots your line of improvement is not enough, never fear – there are alternatives out there (without resorting to Garmin-related technology). First and probably foremost is the Powerof10 (www.thepowerof10.info), a UK Athletics-supported results website designed to push runners to higher standards. If you want to check on rivals from other clubs or find out about that person who just pipped you in the Last Friday of the Month 5k, then this is the place to go. Here's what one Serpentine member says: "The PowerOf10 is awesome! OK, I like stats, but I find it is so easy to look at page after page of results and burn a lot of time doing it. It's interesting how results all the way back to the 60s and 70s are being placed on the website. I'm not aware of any other country anything similar website."

For broader information on elite international athletes, see the official IAAF web site (www.iaaf.org/statistics), which has all-time lists for every Olympic event.

Blogs

If you spend a lot of your time running, training, going to events, or thinking about running and training and going to events, it is only natural you will want to share this with other people. Several Serpies – particularly ultra-runners – do this in the running blogosphere including:

James Adams

www.runningandstuff.com Serpentine's honorary secretary, whose enthusiasm for ultra-running knows few bounds. James's blog includes race reports from across the country and beyond. Watch this space for updates on his latest venture – a plan to run right across the USA later this year.

Andy DuBois

<http://andydubois.blogspot.com> Once a triathlete, with several ironmans to his name, Andy now concentrates on ultramarathons. He is also a personal trainer, and his blog includes reports on ultramarathons all around the world as well as tips on running technique, rehabilitation and performance.

Ian Sharman

<http://sharmanian.blogspot.com> Another ultra-runner, Ian is a Serpentine now living in the United States. In fact, he's getting quite a lot of attention over there, as you may have seen elsewhere in the magazine. His blog includes in-depth accounts of his latest epic runs.

Sarah Dudgeon

www.realbuzz.com Sarah is using the Real Buzz website, affiliated with the London Marathon, to chart her training for the 2011 race.

James Edgar

<http://runthelakes.blog.co.uk> James is planning to complete the Bob Graham Round, the semi-legendary feat of covering about 70 miles, including 42 Lake District peaks, within 24 hours. This is his account of the ups and downs, physical and metaphorical, of his ongoing attempt.

Triathlon

Try as we might, we did not find any other Serpentine triathletes who blogged. In Alex Elferink's words: "We are far too busy measuring our heart rates to blog :)" However, great blogs from intercontinental bike rides are not uncommon, for example: Ben Rowlands' www.crazyguyonabike.com/doc/benvoyage and Dan Bent's <http://dannybent.com>.

Other honorary mentions

Not that this article can be in any way comprehensive, but here are a few more running-related websites not mentioned so far that could be of interest.

Spikes Magazine

www.spikesmag.com A very creditable attempt to sex up the image of athletics, with a fresh, eye-catching design, upbeat news articles and some good features. You can subscribe to the quarterly magazine for free.

Parkrun

www.parkrun.com These free local 5k runs are perhaps the most successful grassroots running phenomenon since the London Marathon started in the early 1980s. It's free to sign up if you haven't already. Just take your bar-code along to the nearest event – usually fun and low-key – and off you go.

UKA

www.uka.org.uk The official UK Athletics web site. It is mostly of limited interest to the average club runner, but worth checking for news of Britain's top athletes.

Long Distance Walking Association

www.ldwa.org.uk Comprehensive route suggestions and details for those who like to do their walks – and runs – out of the city.

Runners Life

www.runnerslife.co.uk Blogs from serious runners, many of whom balance full-time jobs with training.

And that completes our rapid surf around the online habits of Serpies – hopefully leaving you with a few ideas for how to spend your future Internet time. Most of you will read this on the traditional magazine format – all very old school for an article about new media. Soon, perhaps, this could be on an iPad 'app' near you. It's probably only a matter of time.

Serpentine Injury Survey

Lisa Wray, GP and Serpie

It seems we make a hazardous occupation, or pastime, of running. We surveyed the club in the Autumn of 2010 to get a feel for the prevalence and nature of injuries and recurring problems.

What are we suffering with?

The commonest complaint is knee injury, both for runners in the preceding month (19.5%), and over the duration of their running careers (69.2%). Next is Iliotibial Band Syndrome and then Shin Splints. Achilles tendonitis has been experienced by 36% at some stage. Table 1 shows prevalence in the last month and incidence in runners to date.

With regard to recurrent problems or niggles, calf pain or tightness is top of the list. Table 2 shows the results. We have to be careful about these niggles. A systematic review looking at studies of long distance runners showed that one of the most consistent risk factors for future injury is previous injury; and full rehabilitation is protective. I realise my phrasing of 'niggle' covers a spectrum. To some it may be muscle tightness; others may be running on stress fractures (yes you have been seen); but these niggles are important clues to inflammation and underlying problems and may be improved by intervention.

In terms of causative factors I have come across two good review articles that have looked at data from large studies of runners. Van Mechelen writes that 'Aetiological (i.e. causative) factors associated with running injuries include previous injury, lack of running experience, running to compete and excessive weekly running distance.

The association between running injuries and factors such as warm-up and stretching exercises, body height, malalignment, muscular imbalance, restricted range of motion, running frequency, level of performance, stability of running pattern, shoes and inshoe orthoses

TABLE 1	% of runners affected in last month	% of runners affected over running career
Condition		
General knee pain	19.5%	69.2%
Iliotibial band syndrome	7.6%	58.4%
'Shin splints'	3.2%	42.7%
General hip pain	13.0%	40.0%
Achilles tendonitis	6.5%	35.7%
Plantar fasciitis	3.2%	29.7%
Stress fracture	1.6%	20.5%
Piriformis syndrome	5.4%	18.4%
Other injury	9.2%	47.0%

Survey respondents:

183 replied;
59% were male; 41% female
41% were in the 35-45 year age group, 38% 25-35; 10% 45-55
Weekly mileage is for 53% 20-40m, with 14% running 40-60m per week and 3.2% running greater than 60m
26% have been running for over 10 years, 27% 5-10 years, 45% 1-5 years.

and running on one side of the road remains unclear or is backed by contradicting or scarce research findings. Health education on running injuries should primarily focus on the importance of complete rehabilitation and the early recognition of symptoms of overuse, and on the provision of training guidelines¹. In terms of building up a training regime, the guidance seems to be to build up 10% per week and no more. Interestingly for knee pain, an increase in mileage seems protective against injury².

So what has worked for us in treating our troubles?

For Achilles Tendonitis, rest and stretching scored as the most effective strategy. Strengthening was next; and this should involve regular eccentric strengthening exercises³. Cross training was the next most useful. Steroid injection was tried by two runners and I would urge caution as there is evidence that it can cause long term weakening of the tendon so should be avoided. Changing shoes did not seem to be a particularly effective strategy. Interestingly 50% of you with this have reported you have not tried strengthening; given that it is a no cost treatment I urge any sufferers to give it a go.

For Iliotibial Band Syndrome, of a group of 98 runners, 89.3% found stretching very or partly effective. Rest, anti-inflammatories, ice and strengthening were partly effective A foam roller⁴ is an excellent way of stretching the ITB and your comments confirmed this. Cross training helped 40%, but 50% have not tried this method.

The Piriformis syndrome seems to be treated most effectively by stretching and strengthening. Rest and cross training both scored as

TABLE 2	% of runners affected in last month	% of runners affected over running career
Site of recurrent niggle		
Lower back	24.3%	22.2%
Buttocks	14.1%	9.7%
Groin/hip flexors	22.2%	10.8%
Shins	14.1%	17.8%
Calves	24.9%	18.4%
Achilles tendon	16.2%	12.4%
Heel	5.4%	8.1%
Midfoot	8.6%	10.3%
Other area	18.9%	5.9%

I've come to accept that the life of a frontrunner is a hard one, that he will suffer more injuries than most men and that many of these injuries will not be accidental (Pele)

partly effective for 40% of the sample but the latter was once again not tried by almost half of the sample. It does make sense to build up strength in other muscle groups to avoid the repetitive loading from solely running.

In terms of overall preventing injury, stretching and core strengthening came top of the table as the most effective means of staying on track, road or trail. For core strengthening, 83% of you found it very or partly effective. 64% felt that varying your running surface helped. Table 3 shows the percentage overall success of injury prevention measures for our 185 runners.

Why do we carry on despite the pain?

Reasons to run were scored on a 1-6 scale of importance. Top ranking answers were cardiovascular health benefit, overall well-being and stress management I am pleased to report. The competitive aspect is a driving force for many. We are, however, a little vain; improving body image was given a score of 4-6 by 65%. A selection of other responses include:

- 'The challenge of races',
- 'The bling',
- 'Thrill from competition, using my body to the max'
- 'Get outdoors and see the sunshine'
- 'Personal achievement'
- 'To be a role model for the children I teach'

This is clearly a summary and is simplistic in places. I hope, however, that it can give some ideas about what might help and provoke discussion about what why and how we are running healthy. Have a good season.

Three simple things you can do at home or out with a fellow runner are:

1. Look at the arch of your foot in the mirror and if it is flat, ie your foot collapses towards the midline, you are over pronating. This may have developed over time with years of running or wearing flat shoes; and can lead to several mechanical problems; in the feet knee and hip, as you do not recruit your gluteus muscles in the way you should. There are simple ways of correcting this.
2. Measure your leg length from hip to ankle. This is especially important if you have a recurring problem on one side. This can be addressed with a cork heel raise.
3. Video yourself, eg with a phone or ipod video recorder. Run for a few strides until relaxed; record yourself from front side and behind. Look at arm swing; pelvis, and feet movement to look for asymmetry, and compare with examples of good running technique online or discuss with others.

References:

- 1 van Mechelen W 'Running injuries: A review of the epidemiological literature' Sports Med. 1992 Nov; 14(5):320-35
- 2 RN van Gent et al 'Incidence and determinants of lower extremity running injuries in long distance runners: a systematic review' BJSM 2007 <http://bjssportmed.com/content/41/8/469.full.pdf>
- 3 <http://www.cfas-uk.com/pdf/eccentric-stretching-programme.pdf>
- 4 http://sportsmedicine.about.com/od/flexibilityandstretching/ss/FoamRoller_5.htm

TABLE 3

Strategy	Not effective	Partly effective	Very effective	Not tried
Stretching	55.9%	48.6%	43.2%	1.6%
Core strengthening	2.7%	40.5%	42.2%	14.6%
Orthotics	9.7%	17.8%	10.8%	61.6%
Varying run surface	5.4%	43.2%	21.1%	29.2%
Reduce mileage	5.9%	50.3%	30.8%	13.0%
Gait analysis	8.1%	34.1%	10.3%	47.0%
Change technique	5.4%	21.6%	13.5%	59.5%
Cross training	5.9%	41.1%	33.0%	18.4%

Catkin Shelley's remarkable recovery

Claire Shelley



"I'd always been an active person and into sports when I was younger... but I could never run very far without getting breathless". Catherine Shelley (aka Catkin to all her friends), a 46 year old, who took up running in 1993 when she started training for her first half marathon in Australia, finishing in 2 hours and 5 minutes. Now an active Serpentine runner and an employee at Barclays in Canary Wharf, Catkin at the very young age of 42, suffered a stroke whilst out running when visiting her mother in Staffordshire back in 2006.

Here she tells us a little more about herself, her hobbies, how she found out she had had a hole in her heart all her life and her road to recovery.

It was just four days before the 15th September 2006 that Catkin and her partner, Nick were due to climb Mont Blanc but due to adverse weather conditions they were not able to go ahead with the climb. Some may say this was fate as it was just a few days later whilst out for a run and, only 7km in, that Catkin started to feel a little strange. "I didn't think anything of it at the time. I'd lost the feeling in my right arm but put it down to tiredness and possibly returning from altitude after climbing. Then I remember collapsing to the floor. I managed to pull myself up and got myself home. It was only then I realised that I'd actually dragged myself home as I had scraped the whole of one side coming through an alley, trying to keep myself upright". Over the next few hours other symptoms seemed to develop. "I tried to eat my breakfast but I couldn't hold the spoon properly and really struggled to put my contact lenses in. I started to talk rubbish, my sister later told me, but in my mind I was speaking complete sense."

Catkin's sister started to get worried by this stage and had a conversation with her husband who said the symptoms sounded similar to those of a person who had had a stroke. This caused alarm amongst the family and they drove her to hospital where a brain scan confirmed that Catkin had indeed had a stroke although it baffled the doctors as Catkin was a young, fit, healthy individual. Further tests revealed that she had a tiny hole in the heart, which she had had all her life. Later on that week they operated using a catheter to close the hole in the heart and, although it was a simple operation, it required plenty of rest and rehabilitation.

For six weeks after the operation Catkin was taken care of by her sisters, but for the next three months she was not allowed to exercise,

something that she wasn't used to at all. When she returned to Singapore she started physiotherapy which helped her get back on track both mentally and physically, as well as with the help of her partner, Nick, family, friends and colleagues. Over the following months she did the stretches religiously and walked on the treadmill gradually building up to finally walking outside and then back to running.

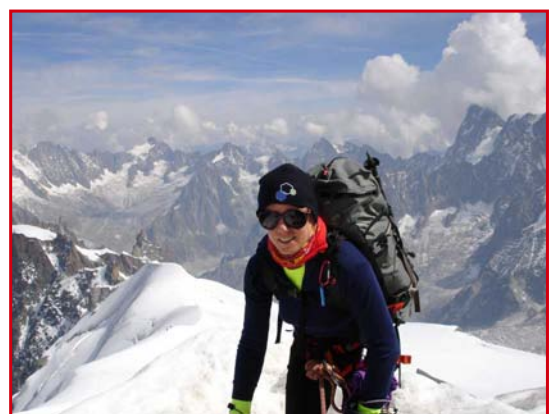
The determined person that she is, Catkin set herself small goals to help push herself further, one of which was to run the 11km around the circuit of McRitchie reservoir in Singapore through the rainforest which she completed in April 2007. Over the next year she gradually increased her fitness and as of today is back to where she was before the stroke in 2006. "I am doing everything I did before, but better".

The results are there for everyone to see. When work brought her back to the UK she joined the Serpentine Running Club where she has ran many races including a 5k Resolution Run for the Stroke Association, finishing 1st female out of 219 runners as well as club championships, where her current time for a 5km is 19:27 and graded 82.9% for her age group and participating in many cross country races for the club. In 2010 she ran the London Marathon for the Stroke Association in an amazing 3 hours and 25 minutes. "I'm inspired by people such as Sue Lambert who continue to race and achieve age grades between 80-90%. I enjoy shorter races such as 100 metres to 5k and especially races such as the Summer League Grand Prix. They are so friendly and a good distance for me".

We started to chat more about other activities and achievements other than running which Catkin enjoys and I wasn't surprised to hear that she has climbed mountains such as Mont Blanc and has reached the summit of Monch in Switzerland, to name just a couple and her other hobbies include mountaineering, skiing, golf and going to the theatre. "I like to keep active, taking on challenges and enjoying myself".

When asked what her greatest running achievement is to date, Catkin replied "2009 was my best year for running – I was particularly pleased and overwhelmed at coming second in the club championships! Highlights of the championships were the 1k and the mile".

Catkin is without doubt a truly inspirational person within the Club who has proven by sheer will-power and self-belief that it is possible to overcome severe adversity.



Catkin summiting Mont Blanc

Barefoot Running – passing fad, valuable training tool or the only way to run?

Andy DuBois

Barefoot running was relatively unheard of until Chris McDougall's book "Born to Run" was published. Since then there has been an exponential increase in the number of runners shedding their shoes and experiencing running without the cushioning and support of shoes. Claims of miraculous cures of long term injuries, regaining the love of running and improved performance have been made from its converts.

The barefoot community is not without its critics though. Shoe companies and podiatrists particularly have been quick to advise that it is not the cure for everything and must be approached with caution.

Understanding a few basic principles will help you decide whether ditching your shoes is a good idea for you.

What does the foot do?

The action of your foot arch collapsing is called pronation, lifting your foot arch back up again is supination. When we land, our foot is meant to pronate. It does this to absorb the shock of landing and store energy in the structures of the arch of the foot and Achilles tendon. As we move towards pushing off, our arch springs back up (supinating) using the energy it has stored and locks into a stable joint which gives our Achilles tendon and calf muscles a stable base from which to work as we push off the ground. The action of pronating and then supinating is critical to the function of the foot. Problems occur when we do either too much or not enough.

Your feet are also very dense with nerve endings and provide the brain with a large amount of information about what is happening to it when it hits the ground. This then allows the brain to give precise instructions to the other muscles in the body optimising movement. Think about how it feels walking in ski boots – your feet get very little feedback through the boot and therefore you are much less stable as the brain is unsure what is happening. What happens in your feet greatly affects what happens in your knees, hips and even lower back. Many knee and hip problems have their origin in the foot.

What controls how much pronation and supination occurs at the foot?

There is an ideal structure to the foot. With this foot type the muscles supporting the foot have the optimal lengths and positions to control the pronation and supination of the foot. Some of us are lucky enough to have an ideal foot, unfortunately many of us aren't.

Those that aren't fall into two categories: feet with a bony structural abnormality and feet that are affected by weak or tight muscles. Since

you can't change your bone structure those with this problem will always have to compensate for that. Those with muscular problems may be able to train their muscles to restore proper foot function over time.

How does this relate to running barefoot?

If you have a normal foot then running barefoot will come relatively easily for you and as long as you slowly increase your mileage you should be able to handle it with few problems. Those with muscular problems should be able to run barefoot but will take a lot longer to adapt to it as the body needs time to strengthen the necessary muscles to cope with increased demand on them. Those with bony abnormalities will struggle to run barefoot but, given time, may be able to partially adapt.

How well your feet can adapt depends on how big the abnormality is and how much demand you place on your feet. If you have a small abnormality and you run 20 miles a week you may adapt quite well. If you have a large abnormality and run 100 miles a week you may never develop sufficient strength to compensate.

What are the benefits of barefoot running?

Barefoot means the foot gains more feedback from the ground which gives the brain more information from which it can determine the muscle activation at the knee and hip joints. This can improve performance and reduce injuries.

Barefoot runners gravitate to a mid to forefoot landing with the foot landing under the pelvis. Whilst there is debate over whether a mid to forefoot or heel strike landing is more effective there is no debate on the fact the foot should land under your pelvis.

Barefoot running improves the flexibility and strength of the foot and ankle muscles. With no support or heel lift from a shoe the muscles of the foot have to go through more of a stretch every time the foot lands and have to work harder to stabilise the foot.

The question is does any of this improve performance or decrease the risk of injury? In the next few years we should start to see some detailed research to confirm or deny this but at the moment we don't know. The initial studies are far from conclusive and both the barefoot and the running shoe groups are claiming it helps support their case.

What are the potential dangers in running barefoot?

If you change anything about the way you run without giving your body time to adapt you run a high risk of suffering an injury. Most of us need to wear in a new pair of shoes, this applies even more so with barefoot, if you do too much too soon you will become injured often trading one set of injuries with another.

The obvious dangers of running barefoot on broken glass etc. can be overcome by wearing vibram five fingers. Many people are concerned with running on concrete and you are likely to cause yourself an injury unless you give your body time to build up the natural cushioning in your feet first. Your body has fat pads under your feet specifically designed to cushion the blow of landing but when we wear shoes these pads reduce so you need to give it time to build back up first. Running on dirt paths or grass first before trying concrete gives the foot a chance to adapt.

If you have a bony abnormality it will take a long time for your foot to adapt and it may not be able to adapt well enough to run the mileages you want to run.

Why should I bother at all if there's no conclusive evidence to support barefoot running?

If you are running such that your foot lands under your pelvis, you rarely suffer injuries and you can wear lightweight racing shoes then you probably don't have that much to gain. Most of us don't fall into that category. If by adding one barefoot run a week or doing your warm ups in barefoot you can gain greater foot stability and strength which may allow you to race in lightweight shoes then it could make a big difference. Normal shoes weigh around 350g so if you run for an hour taking 90 strides per minute it means each leg ends up lifting 1890kg! If you can wear a lightweight racing shoe that weighs 250g then you'll end up carrying 500kg less.

If running barefoot changes you from a heel striker that lands with your foot forward of your pelvis to someone who lands with foot under your pelvis then you will certainly see an improvement in your times.

How do I know if I have a normal foot, a weak foot or one with a bony abnormality?

If you have a moderate foot arch, wear neutral shoes and suffer very few injuries then your foot structure is probably pretty good. If you have very low arches or high arches then your body has to compensate which can cause injuries. Determining if it is a bony abnormality or a muscle weakness is not easy and involves a detailed foot assessment but in either case you will need to approach barefoot running with caution and slowly build the mileage up.

Andy is a qualified personal trainer with over 13 years of experience. A Certificate in Advanced Rehabilitation, a Diploma of Functional Therapy and Functional Performance put him at the forefront of exercise prescription for athletes and rehabilitation.

The Pilates Method

Penny Thorn

A famous Pilates quote (Pilates and Miller, 1945) says that a person is as young as their spine. 'If your spine is inflexibly stiff at 30, you are old; if it is completely flexible at 60, you are young.' This suggests that as we mature from childhood to adulthood, the way we move changes. In our early childhood we learn to move: freely, easily and without restriction. Typically, children don't have tight muscles; they have bodies that work well, because they are constantly on the move. Now, imagine a group of adults. As adults, we move less, and repeat the same movements day in, day out. In the workplace the chances are we sit at a desk, we sit in a car, we then go home and sit down to relax. Over our lifetime, the net effect is that we lose available joint and muscle range, and the neuro-muscular pathways to request such movement of our bodies. Over time, our movements become habituated and by old age, we become almost completely sedentary. This disuse changes muscle function, particularly affecting the anti-gravity postural muscles that lie deep within the body to support the spine and other joints. When these muscles weaken, the larger mobilizing muscles (e.g. hamstrings) take on their role as stabilizers and in a vicious circle, muscle imbalances occur, causing these mobilizers to do even more.

Now, think of your own lifestyle, work environment and movement patterns. It's no wonder that when you put on your running shoes, you may already have tight hamstrings, tight hip flexors and tension in the upper body. Coupled with the repetitive nature and high impact of running, it may mean that some of your bigger muscles get an even harder workout, while others get left behind, leading you into a cycle of recurring pain and injury.

There are many movement therapies and disciplines such as Tai Chi, Feldenkrais, Yoga, as well as Pilates, which can keep you moving in unaccustomed and different ways. They keep the mind-body connections intact and the movement control centres of the brain

active, which helps to keep us young, and able to keep working all of our muscles groups in the correct way. Many top-level athletes have also turned towards Pilates as a training tool to help them tap into their deeper layers of muscles and maximize their performance. These include the athletes from the Australian Sport Institute, The All Blacks, US football team, 40% of the US Golf tour, Elena Baltacha the British tennis player, Kelly Sotherton and Andrew Flintoff the former England cricketer, amongst many others.

How Pilates works

Pilates embodies core strength, while addressing motor control, endurance, balance and flexibility. It focuses on mobility and flexibility, which is particularly important for runners who commonly develop tightness through the glutes, hips and legs.

Key Pilates principles include the development of good breathing patterns, and body alignment so that joints are held in the best position to stop them wearing out. There is also a focus on a strong muscular centre, described by Joseph Pilates as "a girdle of strength" from which all movement must flow. One of the aims is to strengthen the stabilizing muscles leaving the bigger muscles to move with greater energy and to recruit the muscles in the most efficient order for maximum energy return. While many core-conditioning programmes use high-load, high-repetition exercises with little proprioceptive feedback, Pilates focuses on fewer reps of precisely controlled movements. If you have ever been to a Pilates class you may notice that when you are doing the exercises correctly they often feel a lot harder!

Furthermore, Pilates provides an enormous sense of well-being and relieves unwanted stress and tension that creeps into the body. It's common to see people entering a class feeling tense and frustrated, with their minds elsewhere, but by the end they leave as a different person, feeling calmer and relaxed. When clients concentrate on breathing, correct muscle movement and good posture, all thoughts of what happened at work, what jobs need doing at home vanish from their mind, as intense focus is required to perform each exercise. Once mastered in the classroom, these movements and breathing techniques should become second nature during athletic performance.

Weekly Serpentine Pilates Classes

Where:

The Club Room at the Seymour Centre.

When:

Monday: 6.15-7.15pm Beginners

Monday: 7.30-8.30pm Intermediate/Advanced Level

Booking is required as class sizes are restricted.

Getting Started: Pilates Workshop

Date: 11.30am – 1.30pm Saturday 7th May 2011

Cost: £20

Venue: Studio 3, Seymour Leisure Centre

The workshop will cover the principles of Pilates and give you the chance to discover the basics so that you have an understanding of the alignment required for each movement. You will get to practice exercises that are useful for developing strength, stability and flexibility specifically for runners. The session will be a little slower than a usual class so that you have a chance to ask any questions and gain a thorough understanding of the set-up and sequence of each exercise, enabling you to perform them in your own time.

To register and more info pennythorn@serpentine.org.uk

What to expect from a class

Regular classes typically last for 1 hour and focus on full body movement. During the start of a class, you perform a range of exercises that enables the teacher to observe your posture, sequencing, flow, any tightness, rotations of the torso, asymmetries. This enables the teacher to evaluate which exercises are the most appropriate for the individual.

Exercises tend to encourage the recruitment of local stabilizers such as the multifidus, transversus abdominis, diaphragm and pelvic floor. Once the deepest core musculature is functioning properly, intermediate exercises challenge endurance of these local stabilizers while layering on more global muscles, such as the internal/external obliques, gluteals and quadratus lumborum. Less supported positions require increased core stability, endurance and coordination. Exercises are then progressed towards functional core stabilization by increasing the lever arm, moving to open-chain, and altering speed, velocity or breath patterns incorporating prime movers, such as the rectus abdominis, psoas major, latissimus dorsi, trapezius and superficial gluteal fibers using the full body. Total body integration challenges dynamic stability throughout the range of motion.

Teachers use clear and precise explanations and use a hands-on approach to make corrections, ensuring that exercises are understood and each move is performed correctly to gain the maximum benefit. Small equipment may also be used, which adds variety, challenge and assists with exercise modifications.

It's recommended that you do Pilates two to three times per week for 30-60 minutes to get maximum benefit. Even if you can only fit Pilates in once a week, it will still work, since people tend to apply what they learn in Pilates to how they move outside in the world.

References

- Decision making in Pilates: Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies, Volume 15, Issue 1, January 2011, Pages 103-107, Warrick McNeill
- How Pilates Can Help Runners Improve Performance And Prevent Injury, Penny Thorn, July 2009
- Pilates and the Elite Athlete: Finding that Extra Competitive Edge, Ken Endelman

Club Team relays

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

May 8 *NEW* 1066 Relay: five stage off-road team relay.

May 21-22 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.

June 11-12 Welsh Castles Relay. Highly prestigious, competitive 20 stage team relay on a legendary tough and spectacular route. We are only allowed one team for category: men, women and vets. Both men and women are defending champions and will be highly competitive. Vets selection may be more flexible, depending on who applies. Entry is not guaranteed but highly sought after by the ones in the know.

August 27 National Triathlon 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!

November 13 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.

Regional and National Road Relays:

Sat 9th Apr : ERRA Mens/Womens National (Sutton Coldfield)

Sat 24-25th Sep : SEAA Mens/Womens/Vets (Aldershot)

Sat 15th Oct : ERRA Mens/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. 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.

(SEAA, South of England Athletic Association; ERRA, English Road Running Association)



The winner(s) of the photo competition

Many thanks for giving me photo judging honour for the third Serpentine competition.
A larger entry field this time and with a quality bar set even higher meant judging was even tougher than for the last edition! All five winners reveal a strong compositional photographic eye which, combined with a passion for their sporting pursuits, results in a great set of pictures.
Congratulations to all and to many strong entrants that just missed the top five slot!
Keep on snapping, spinning, swimming and running!
Toby Melville



JOINT WINNERS - I couldn't decide between awarding the winner's slot to Lars' colourful winter cross country landscape of women speeding over the snow covered trail and Gavin's deep down and dirty frame of Andy Reeves charging through cross country mud, so have sat on the proverbial fence and given a joint first place.
Congratulations to both snappers for finely composed and evocative photos from the heart of the winter running season!

Photos: Lars Menken (above) and Gavin Edmonds (right)

Our thanks go to the new sponsor of the photo competition



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Please call 0207 744 0234 for a complimentary guide to Wealth Management.



THIRD PLACE (right)- Gavin's finely executed panning cycling photo gets him third place too - a sure sign of consistency after he won the last Serpentine's photo competition.

Photo: Gavin Edmonds



FOURTH PLACE (above)- Another cycling frame - placing two wheels into an awe-inspiring environmental picture - gets Ben Rowlands fourth spot.

Photo: Ben Rowlands

FIFTH PLACE (right)- David Morgan's cross-country start gains him fifth place.

Photo: David Morgan



Global positioning

James Adams provides the case against

It was a cold winter this year. You almost felt sorry for those poor people stood outside doorways in pubs shivering as they got their fix. Now they were killing themselves in more ways than one since they were forced to smoke outside. However I saw the exact same thing outside the Seymour Centre every Wednesday night. However these Serpies were not smoking, they had their arms raised like they were asking teacher if they can go to the toilet. But they didn't need the toilet; they were in fact asking for permission to run. Permission from some orbiting satellite to tell them they could start. Icicles would form around their frozen faces as the "signal" bar crawled up to 100% and then suddenly "Beeeeeep" and these ice sculptures would splutter into life.

I bought one of the first GPS devices back in the days where I thought the key to running happiness was to have every inch of it graphable. It was fairly poor by today's standards. It would often lose signal and would switch itself off after 5 minutes if there was no contact with the Starship Enterprise which meant I had to look at it constantly. In doing so I would run into people and for the first 10 runnings of the "Tower Bridge" run I completely missed this amazing bridge in London that has towers on it. It got better though. Future models would hold the signal better so that you only had to look at them when it beeps at you, declaring that you have run another mile and causing a funny reflex where you involuntarily elbow the person on your left in the face.

The best bit was not the running though, it was the things you could do on a computer with your run afterwards. Plug your watch into your PC and all of a sudden your run becomes interesting. Pounding the trails or roads is boring and futile at the best of times but now your effort has a purpose, you can draw charts and graphs and analyse data. Brilliant. You can also be part of the scintillating conversations at the end of a run where you spew out numbers at the end to each other. "Yeah, mine was 7.32, 7.35, 7.21, 7.45 bugger, 7.32, 7.31". Splendid.

One day as I stared at a funny slug like object on my screen that resembled the path of my run and questioned why mile 7 seemed slower even though the HR and elevation suggested it should be quicker I wondered whether I had missed the point of this sport. I remembered the days where I'd just go out and run because it feels nice. Now I can't seem to leave the house without something tracking my ever step, as if I need proof that I went outside. I had to ask myself "do I run for fun or do I run as a means to collect data?" If it's the latter then surely there are better ways? I could just stand outside and pretend to be a Family Fortunes researcher. I asked 100 people "what should I do with my life instead of collecting pointless data?"

The watch went into the drawer and I decided to run whenever I liked and not when some beeping device told me to. It was risky, I mean how could I prove that I even went for a run? If I was audited how could I ever have the evidence that I didn't just sit on my backside watching TV? My own testimony would not stand up in court like a good pace graph would. I was treading dangerously.

However on relieving myself of the slavery of the wrist computer I felt like I has been released from prison (those things look remarkably

similar to ASBO tags). My arm felt so much lighter having ditched the voluntary electronic tagging device. No longer did I have to let some virtual man beat me around some route, beeping with derision should I fall behind. I could just run as far and as fast as I felt like and could even look at things along the way. My mind could wander onto things so much more important than whether my heart-rate was staying within 80% while I ascended a 6% incline at 7.10 minute miles on mile 7 of my 15 mile circuit. Oh look, a squirrel.

I have not worn a watch in a run or race since. I can occasionally guess the miles in a race by the deafening crescendo of beeping from those all around me and the jerking of elbows swinging up to the left. I can run when I want, stop when I want and no longer get wound up if a 5 foot detour threatens the shape of a graph in a few hours time. I was in a race in the summer where I had no idea how long I had been running, how far or even what country I was in. It was a magical feeling that I will remember forever and not one that I will re-live by looking at a bunch of numbers. I'd hate to think what I might have missed in the Alps or the deserts or the English countryside because I was too busy staring at liquid crystals. I don't need my computer to tell me whether I've had a good run or not, I decide that for myself.

I don't think I'll ever go back to that kind of captivity. I'm enjoying the running too much. I do love to ask users of such devices "what's the time?". It's hilarious how they frantically press buttons on their watch only to tell me that they don't know, but that I have just raised their cholesterol level.

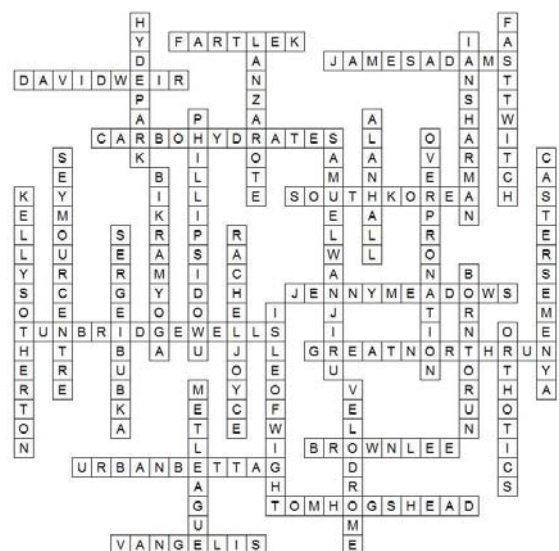
And I giggled (perhaps harshly) at a friend who, trying to avoid the situation in the first paragraph, had his £300 device stolen from his garden wall while leaving it to gain signal.

"But can't you track where he is? I thought that was the point of those things".

"Only if he plugs it into his computer and uploads the stats."

"Well then, you just have to sit back and wait. With that kind of speedy running he is sure to upload it. The graph will be awesome".

Solution of Serpie Crossword



Serpie London Marathon places

The winners of the London Marathon club places for 2011 are:

**Rob Ingoldsby, Gemma Greenwood, Hilary Walker,
Keira Davidson, and Rob Crangle**

Congratulations and best wishes to all!

The guaranteed 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 several months to accrue all the points, but people with partial 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 call for applications in early December 2011.

SERPENTINE

CONTACT DETAILS

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Serpentines back issues:
[http://www.serpentine.org.uk/
pages/serpentines.html](http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/serpentines.html)

www.serpentine.org.uk



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
Gilets	£25
Cycle shorts	£20