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We now have **two** styles of Serpie vest available for racing in. The new style Serpie vests have no seams and are made from technical wicking fabric and cost £20 each. You can still buy an "original" Serpie vest for £16.

T-shirts	Club colours	£12	S/M/L/XL
Kids T-shirts	Club colours	£10	7-8/9-11/12-13
Original vests	Club colours	£16	XS/S/M/L/XL/XXL
New vests	Club colours	£20	XS/S/M/L/XL (XXL men's)
Caps		£5	
Winter beanies		£6	
"Spider" kit bags		£4	

Full details (including photographs) and an order form are on the website at <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/club/kit/>

To order by post, send a cheque (made out to Serpentine Running Club) to Lynne and Simon Maughan, 5 Skelgill Road, London, SW15 2EF, phone 020 8870 7797. Club kit ordered in advance can also be picked up on Wednesday nights or at the Handicap.

SERPENTIMES

The magazine of the Serpentine Running Club
December 2004



Inside

The Best (and Worst) Running Cities

Interview with Nadya Labib

Serpie Duathlon

plus:
Getting your marathon training right, Ironman Hawaii, Round Norfolk Relay





My first Chairman's message to you coincides with the end of an eventful and successful year for the club. I have been a member of Serpentine for 22 years (from the founding of the club), and have been on the committee for 19 of them. I'm honoured to have taken over as club Chairman from Ros Young in July this year. Ros was the third Serpentine Chairman after James Godber and Hilary Walker. I have got some big boots to fill but feel that with the support of the new committee I can do this.

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We have also had a major change in the committee line-up this year, with five committee members in addition to Ros standing down and six new members elected. I would like to thank Raul Kharbanda, Tony Gould, Lynne Maughan, Grethe Petersen and Phil McCubbins for all their work. The committee members who were newly elected in July were Ron Hagell, Neil Melville, David Knight, Justin Lock, Sid Wills and Lars Menken.

Rather like club members, Serpentine's committee doesn't stand still for long though. Swenja Surminski has recently decided to step down from her position with responsibility for volunteerism due to other commitments. I would like to thank Swenja very much for all of the hard work she has put in for the club. I am pleased to announce that Nadya Labib has agreed to join the committee in Swenja's place. The balance of 10 male committee members to 2 female is not exactly a ratio which is representative of the membership, but it is certainly better than 11 to 1, so thank you Nadya and we all look forward to working with you.

Last but certainly not least, I mustn't forget to say that Serpentine has its first President, Hilary Walker, who was appointed in July. Hilary is a past Chairman of Serpentine and has held five ultra-distance world records.

It was with great sadness that I heard about the death of Derek Johnson on 31 August this year. Derek had been a member of Serpentine since very early on in the club's history and was especially active in track and field. Many of you who came across Derek in his capacity as a coach or at T&F events may not have known about his many triumphs in athletics in earlier years. In fact Derek was the Olympic 800m silver medal winner in Melbourne in 1956.

A story told by David Bedford says much about Derek. "Derek was in his late 50s, yet he agreed to travel to the European Championships in Split on the back of my motorbike," says Bedford. By the end of the first day's travelling, windswept and uncomfortable, Johnson's constant complaining was annoying Bedford. "I warned him, one more whinge, and he'd be off," Bedford recalls, "but first thing the next morning, Derek said, 'This is just like being in the army.'" "That's it," I said. "Off you get," Derek simply replied "But Dave, you misunderstand me, I really loved the army..." Derek was an old friend of mine and I will miss him.

John Walker

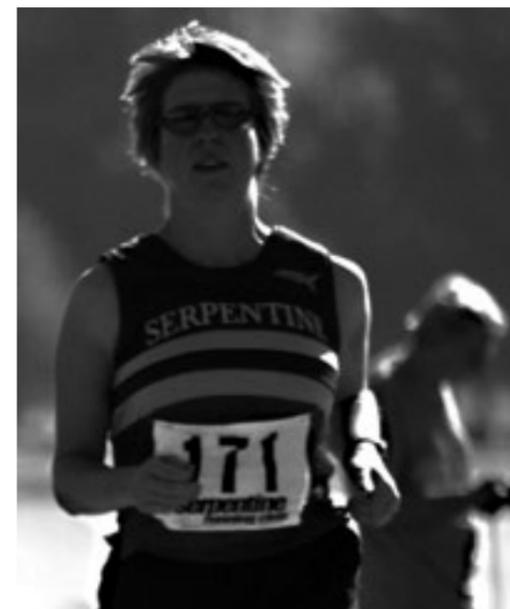
It's the end of another action-packed Serpie year and here I am writing another editor's message. I feel quite worn out just reading about some of the exploits of the club this year, especially Adrian Jones and Margaret Sills at Ironman Hawaii.

With so many members from other countries and many others who travel extensively for work and/or pleasure, I am sure that Jamie's article on the best and worst cities to run in will strike a chord with lots of you. I'm also sure that many of you have favourite places to run you could share with others. Perhaps we should look at developing this into a mini series, or set up an area on the website for good running routes outside London/the UK – your suggestions are welcome.

As usual you have shown that there's a lot of writing talent out there and I would like to thank all the people who have contributed to this issue. Special thanks are due to those who had (foolishly) offered to help out in the past, only to be reminded of this by yours truly with a pleading email along the lines of 'PLEASE can you write me something on xxx, and by the way I need it by the day after tomorrow.' Those I picked on in particular and who uncomplainingly said yes are Juliet Allan, Sharon Lindores, Jane Harris and Gowan Clews. I would also like to single out Mike Knell who became a Serpie in mid October, offered to write an article in early November and agreed to be interviewed for the feature on new members. I think we may be reading more from him in future issues (no pressure Mike!)

Serpentines would look very different without the help of two people. Firstly, Richard Melik, who seems to have become the unofficial Serpie graphic designer; and secondly, David Knight, for his great photos. The two of them, with Louise Harrison and Lynne Maughan, were the team behind the excellent 2005 Serpie calendar. If you haven't bought a copy yet, it's not too late.

As most of you are aware, the club just keeps on growing. As with many things in life, this growth brings both opportunities and challenges. In Serpentines land, the sheer numbers mean that production and mailing of the magazine has had to change from the cottage industry it once was (Wed night Larrick-goers sticking labels and stamps onto envelopes then taking a few envelopes with them to post) to a commercial operation (ie we have to pay for it!) To help to pay for Serpentine, you'll see that we have started to include a small amount of commercial advertising in this issue of the magazine.



I would be interested to hear your views on this change, or in fact on any aspect of the magazine. Which sections do you like? What do you want more or less of? Please let me know at serpentines@serpentine.org.uk.

Sally Hodge

Are You Ready for E-Serpentines?

If you received this copy of Serpentine in the post, you may be interested to know that you can choose to download Serpentine from the website.

If you'd prefer an electronic version of Serpentine (maybe two or more Serpies at the same address would like to share one printed copy), you can log onto SerpieBase, choose "Edit my personal details" then untick the box beside "Serpentine by post?" This lets the Serpentine team know not to post any future issues to you.

Don't worry though! If you don't make this change on SerpieBase you will continue to receive your copy of Serpentine in the post.

The Only Way is Up

by Juliet Allan



This has been the year of Nadya Labib. In the 14 months that she's been in the club she's played a major part in organising the annual health weekend and the Round Norfolk Relay, marshalled and helped out at numerous other events and, most recently, crowned her achievements by winning the Tom Hogshead trophy for 2004. And if there had been an award for positivity, that would, I think, have had to go to her too. A well-known and deservedly popular figure on the Serpentine scene, it's hard to believe that only a year ago she didn't go to the Christmas party because she "didn't really know anyone".

Nadya took up running in August 2003. I ask what inspired her to start. "It was my big mouth" she says, laughing. "I just opened my mouth one day and said 'You know, I think I'm going to start running'. I told a friend, who promptly laughed at me and then, of course, I had to run". She'd just got back from travelling (a round the world trip, taking in South America, New Zealand, Australia and South East Asia) and didn't have enough money to join a gym, so running seemed ideal. Like so many of us, she

found out about the club from its award-winning website, but it was, she says, probably a feature in Time Out which was the ultimate trigger. She began with the starter group on Saturdays, under the tutelage of Sue McGinlay, before moving "gingerly" up into running two parks. The rest, as they say, is history.

Nadya, an only child, grew up travelling. Born in the US, she has a US passport and has spent a fair amount of time there, but she wouldn't say that she really "comes from" any one country. Her Egyptian father means that she also has an Egyptian passport and lots of family in Egypt. "They're great people", she says, lamenting that she doesn't get to go there as often as she'd like; maybe every two years. There's something of a language barrier. They don't speak English and Nadya says that her Arabic is rather rusty at the moment.

Until this last, life-changing year, sport hadn't occupied a big place in Nadya's schedule. True, she played lacrosse and soccer for one season each in high school, but "I was terrible" she confesses, rolling her eyes and shaking her head, "I was never athletic at all." So taking up running was a whole new departure. Her parents, she says, "live in shock these days".

She originally came to London, from the Washington DC area, when her work moved over here. When the company went bankrupt two years later, Nadya made the best of the situation and decided to travel. After a year on the road she returned to London to look for another job. She now works in the human resources department of a large American bank – a far cry from her degree in environmental studies and geography, and something she says she doesn't see herself doing for the rest of her life.

Nadya lives in Hampstead, wonderfully situated for running on the heath and can see herself staying here in London indefinitely. She should be able to apply for permanent residency in two years' time. When she gets that, she'll feel "even more settled". She enjoys the variety she finds in London, with its vast cultural life and opportunities for travel. Even without the enormous contribution that the club makes to her social life, there's "just so much going on here". When she's not running she reads a fair amount and enjoys cooking. She's currently reading

"Feet in the Clouds" a book about a fell runner [Ed Note: see Rachel's book review elsewhere in this issue]. She's "pretty much in awe" of people who do that kind of running. Tempted to take it up herself? "Definitely not!"

It's hard to say what her favourite experiences with the club have been. The relays and trips are, she says, fantastic (though she admits that she was initially "absolutely terrified" when she heard that she'd been selected to run in the Green Belt Relay). And she really enjoyed helping out with men's track and field over the summer. She'd never been near a track before and she did everything, from retrieving shots to recording results. She says she's been enjoying the cross country season this year and yes, she's got the spikes. "Oh, any excuse to buy shoes" she says, laughing, before confessing that she's already bought a pair specially for the Meon Valley Plod next year. Sarah Jessica Parker, eat your heart out.

I ask what she feels she's gained from the club. She says she doesn't want to sound goofy, but it really is like a family. She's found inspiration, good friends, self-confidence and lots of support. It's great when people wait for you at the end of a race to cheer you in, though it's a shame, she says, that she never has enough energy left to acknowledge them. People like Sue and Bev in the starter group had a huge impact on her and made starting out so un intimidating. And Sid's been fantastic; a real inspiration, he's given her endless little pointers and been a very supportive friend all round.

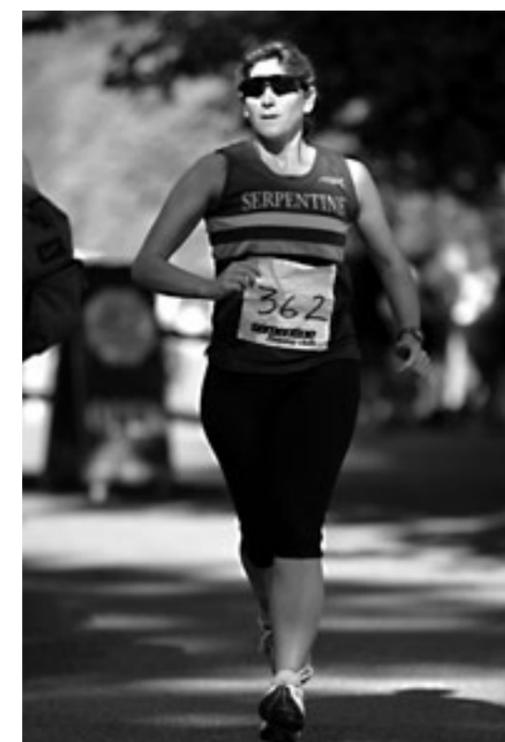
We joke that the interview's in danger of turning into an Oscar acceptance speech, so I steer it back down to earth – a rather apt expression, as it turns out – by asking whether she's had any embarrassing running experiences. Well, she did fall flat on her face once near Lancaster Gate, she admits. That was, fortunately, not on a club run, or she'd have been a good deal more embarrassed.

I ask Nadya what her goals are now. She says she prefers running longer distances, like 10 miles and half marathons. She finds shorter distances, such as 5k, too short and too fast. "I don't get into it until it's over". So she's hoping to run the London marathon in the spring and really wants to get her half marathon time down. She's done 2:01, so a sub-two hour time is within easy reach. "It's funny", she says with very likeable frankness, "but my big ambition is not to come last, or at least not to be the last Serpie". As a fellow frequenter of the back of the pack, I'm beginning to feel distinctly nervous. "Oh yes, Juliet", she says, fixing me with an arch look and wagging her finger. "You'd better watch out: I've got your number".

I remark that people are always commenting on what phenomenal progress Nadya's made over the last year, and venture that she must feel pretty pleased. "I'm actually kind of in shock", she admits. "I'm very pleased. It's been a lot of hard work, but it's so rewarding." Regular races such as the handicap have helped her to see how she's improving and what she needs to work on and track and hill sessions have, she says, both boosted her enormously. Recently, she brought her half marathon time down from 2:09 to 2:01 in six weeks.

Until this last, life-changing year, sport hasn't occupied a big place in Nadya's schedule.

I suppose it's really little surprise that Nadya seems to be so invariably upbeat, but I ask her, nonetheless (and not without a touch of envy), how she manages it. "I guess there's no point in being grumpy." She claims that she does actually feel grumpy sometimes, but just doesn't feel as if she should inflict it on other people. I say that I find that hard to imagine, but she insists that I should ask her father. "The thing is that there are so many positive things going on for me" she says, "Why not be positive? I mean, I just try to take the best out of every situation". Few would argue against that, though most of us would give a lot to be able to bottle up just a little of Nadya's positive attitude to draw on when the going gets tough. Well, in spite of the icy temperatures, I'm off to pull on my running shoes and fit in a bit of sneaky training. And you might just want to think about doing the same: you see, Nadya's got your number too, and it's only a matter of time.



First Race

by Mike Knell

Mike lines up with the lycra-clad young things in Croydon

It had been only a couple of weeks since I'd first staggered out of my front door in shorts and travelled two miles in an alarming mixture of about one quarter jogging, half walking and one quarter mental triangulation of the distance to the nearest defibrillator. With reasonably diligent and almost daily runs I was getting to the point where I could actually "run" a few kilometres, so I decided to get way ahead of myself by entering a race. After all, if I was happy to make a fool of myself in front of the bright young skinny-latte-toting things who owned the mean streets of Surbiton then it wasn't much more of a leap to make a fool of myself in front of the scary lycra-clad young things who skip fleet-footedly around race starting areas. At the same time we mere humans cower at the back of the start, worrying if we're likely to get trampled in the stampede and wondering if the safest place to start from might actually be the bar of the nearest pub.

The key to this, I decided, was to find the right race. There are certainly plenty of hardcore races out there. Finish any race and someone's bound to hand you a flyer saying that the Gnarly Serious RC would love it if you entered the 147th running of the Bob Smith Memorial 100km Hill Trial. This is probably not the kind of race to start out with, I thought. Something with a fun run component was probably more appropriate. A 10k, maybe. Or a 5k. Or maybe just once round the block.

It would also be a bad idea to go to the opposite extreme and do something excessively fun – after all, if you're already happily running 10k in one go, then the Droitwich 3k Family Fun Run might not be the thing with which to kick-start your racing career. Any number of irritating people like John Bingham will tell you that everyone's a winner and it's the taking part that counts, but even a woolly liberal such as myself is going to admit that what I was really after was something with a fun run component so there would hopefully be lots of people who would finish after me, but also with at least a smidgen of competitiveness and an accurately measured course.

I settled on the Croydon 10k simply because (a) 10k was a distance I knew I could run, and (b) Croydon's just down the road from Surbiton and easy to get to. It

was also about a month away, which gave me a convenient few weeks to make sure I could actually run the distance. I trained diligently, first on alternate days then moving up to five days a week, and gradually increased my distance to one where 10k didn't seem too bad at all. Before I knew it, it was time for the race and I was going to actually have to make use of the number which I'd been casually leaving around my flat for a few weeks for visitors to notice. (Not that I get many visitors. I work in computing, after all.)

Race day arrived. I'd decided to aim for 50 minutes as a nice middle-of-the-pack finishing time with plenty of leeway to do a bit better or a lot worse if the situation arose. I got up; casually pinned my number (420) to my stretchiest running t-shirt, put my frankly frightening lycra shorts on, headed for Croydon, staggered across town to Lloyd Park and found the start. Here I hung around trying to look nonchalant and "sure, I've done this a hundred times before" confident, whereas inside I had no idea whatsoever what to expect. All I knew for sure was that at some point someone would say "go!" and fire a gun or honk a horn or something and then I'd have to, well, run. Some nice people from the local scout troop took my bag for safekeeping, and, having obeyed the first rule of racing ("Go before the start!"), warmed up and stretched in what I hoped was a confident-looking way, I realised I'd completely missed the race briefing (I thought it was some kind of aerobics class) and headed for the start with everyone else.

The most important thing in your first race is to choose the right place to be in the start. A handy way to gauge the right place is to look at peoples' clothes. The greater the proportion of club vests around you, the more likely you are to be too far forward. If there are international vests you're definitely too far forward. If everyone seems to be wearing fleece jackets and tracksuit bottoms, you're too far back. If they're pushing buggies and talking about breastfeeding, scream and run away. I settled on "just back from the middle" as a good starting position, far enough back that I wouldn't get trampled into the ground by the scary speedy types but not so far back that I'd get roped into discussions about baby formula. We all hung around looking embarrassed until there was some kind of a commotion at the front and everyone realised that oh, we'd started. Though we actually hadn't started, since it was taking a while for everybody to get moving.

Pretty soon there was a space in front of me – and one step, two steps, and I was running, kind of. It involved a lot of almost stopping and a lot of slowing to a crawl while the pack in front tried to figure out what running was, but after not more than a kilometre there was clear pavement in front of me for at least a couple of metres and I remembered what I was there to do – run 10k. "Aha!" I thought, "I can do that. I've run 10k before. No problem." So I did what I usually do on runs – kept one foot moving in front of the other at a reasonably sensible pace. It seemed to work, and before I knew it I was surprising myself by passing people as the pack thinned out to the point where there was room to manoeuvre.

The course went up and down rather unexpectedly. Being a newbie I hadn't thought to check out the course profile in advance, so while it was always a nice surprise to find a downhill stretch in front of me there was also always a point where a helpful marshal waved us off down a side road and oh, up another mountain. Along we plodded. I tried to place myself behind people who seemed to be going at about the right pace for me, but being easily bored, spent a lot of the run looking for other people to stalk instead. I kept passing people steadily throughout the race, which was a big advantage of having started a bit too far back – this proved to be a major psychological boost as I didn't feel the need to run any faster than I was already. "Just get round" was looking like an easily achievable target. That said, there was a certain amount of "Right, another 25 minutes and it'll all be over" stuff as my brain frantically extrapolated the time on my watch with the number of kilometre markers passed. Various knots of supporters cheered on passing runners. Various other knots of supporters ignored most of the passing runners as they waited for their mates to pass by. The marshals occasionally shouted helpful things, the most heartening of which was the news at the brow of yet another hill that "it's all downhill from here!"

And so it was – the last kilometre and a half were down, down and down a bit more until we were back on the main road. By this point everyone was charged up, and we pounded along the pavement using up all the energy we'd stored up during the long downhill stretch. As I passed the sign bearing the blessed words "400M TO GO" I was feeling pretty lousy with a strong urge to throw up, but figured that if I was going to throw up I should at least wait until the finish. After all, a check of my HRM told me that although my heart was hammering at a rate which would make a hardcore jungle DJ look alarmed, I only had 46 minutes on the clock, so 50 minutes was easily achievable and my mission was now to see how far under 50 I could finish. Vomiting would not have been conducive to achieving my target time. So I kept running hard,

and as we made the left turn back into the park and the finish appeared I decided to waste my remaining energy on a sprint for the line. As someone decided they were going to overtake me at that point this gave me a little incentive not to let them, and I barrelled up to the line, noted the time as I crossed it, then suddenly screeched to a halt as I nearly ran into the back of the nearly-full finishing chute.

I ambled stiff-leggedly down the chute, faintly registered the number caller saying "Four two zero", then someone who was apparently the mayor of Croydon handed me my medal while someone else handed me a bottle of water and a chewy bar with the texture of a Pritt stick. And that was it – it was all over. After a bit more stretching I picked up my bag and hopped on the Tramlink to head home, guzzling Lucozade and eating a banana in flagrant violation of the no-food-and-drink policy, feeling quietly superior to all the other people on the tram who hadn't just run 10k. All there was left was the rather long wait for the final results to appear online. When these eventually came out I found that I'd been placed 280th having finished in 47:53 – not bad for my first race, and hey, in your first race you're always guaranteed a PB.

"At some point someone would say go and I'd have to, well, run"

So how would I summarise my first race? Well, it wasn't nearly as scary as I'd expected – there's plenty of room in the middle of the pack to exchange a few cheery words with your fellow runners, and there's always vocal support from marshals and spectators to help (or harass) you round. Finishing feels intensely satisfying and for some time afterwards you get to walk around knowing that you've just done something which most of the people around you couldn't do.

The most important thing is mental preparation, especially if you're already running the race distance comfortably anyway. Don't set unrealistic targets for your first race, and do remember that it's pretty certain that there will always be people slower than you, so the risk of coming DFL is pretty low. Set easily achievable targets, and then aim to beat them. Oh yeah, and one more thing – it's a cheesy thing to say, but don't forget that (unless your first race is a marathon and you're Paula Radcliffe) your primary aim in your first race is to enjoy the run! I certainly did, and as a result I'm looking forward to standing at a good few more start lines in the future.

Good luck.

What Secrets Does Your House Hold?

by James Godber

When Kelly Holmes won her two gold medals in Athens she became the first British woman to do this, but the SECOND Briton. The first was Albert Hill. The following is an article which I wrote for the Serpie newsletter in July 1993 and which refers to my old house at Wood End Gardens in Northolt.

Recently, while I was at home teaching, I had a couple of visitors who turned out to be Canadians, traveling around Britain looking up all the places where their grandparents had lived. They asked for permission to photograph the outside of the house, and particularly our back garden, because they had a photo of their grandmother in the Andersen shelter from the war years.

During our conversation, the man mentioned that his grandfather had been an athlete. "In fact," he said, "he represented Great Britain in the 1920 Olympic Games." Almost as an afterthought he continued, "He won the 800 metres and 1500 metres."

I could not believe it. A double Olympic Champion who used to live in OUR house! "What was his name?" I asked. "Albert Hill," came the reply. No, I had never heard of him either. They asked if I had heard of Sam Mussabini. "Yes," I said, "I remember

him from the film 'Chariots of Fire'. He was Harold Abraham's coach." "That's right," they said, "but he was also Albert Hill's coach! What about Sydney Wooderson? Have you heard of him?" "Yes, indeed," I said, "he was one of our greatest ever athletes." "Well, Grandfather was HIS coach," they said almost casually.

They did not have much more information, but they said they had a lot of photos back in Canada. In fact, the man said that they had been doing some research into their grandfather and had discovered that someone had written a biography of him, and they were going to see him the next day. They promised to send more information upon their return to Canada. But, much to my delight, it arrived quicker than that. Two days later, a slim book came through the post. "Albert Hill – a proper perspective." And it makes fascinating reading. As the foreword to the book says, "Today Albert Hill is almost totally forgotten, yet in many respects his achievements on the track, and later as a coach, surpass anyone before or since. He is one of only two British athletes to win two Olympic gold medals at one Games and then, after his retirement, he went on to advise, amongst others the incomparable multiple world record holder, Sydney Wooderson."

When I saw Derek Johnson the following Saturday I asked him, "Have you heard of Albert Hill?" "Are you kidding," he replied, "he was my hero – the greatest ever! Why do you ask?" "Oh, he lived in our house from the 1933 to 1947." "That's incredible," Derek said, "We'll have to get you a blue plaque!" And he was serious!

It really is strange. Had these people called on another day, I may well have been out. Or, had they called at any other house in Northolt, would it have meant as much to those people as to us, who are keen on athletics? I wonder what the odds are of such a thing happening. Just fancy, not just an Olympic Champion, but a DOUBLE Olympic Champion!

And that was what set me thinking, does anyone really know the secrets that their house must hold?

Postscript: I made enquiries with Ealing Council about a blue plaque but unfortunately nothing came of it.

I would love to do the Etape but...

by Maria David

Following the recent organisational changes which will make it very difficult for overseas residents to enter L'Etape du Tour (de France) individually next year, shrieks and gasps of "Oh my word what do we do now?" have been heard from keen cyclists up and down the country. But never fear – although this organised ride of one stage of the Tour de France is by far the most popular overseas endurance bike ride enjoyed by UK based cyclists, there are other rides which are just as good, or arguably better, and growing in popularity. Such endurance rides can be done as a cycloportive in France, Gran Fondo in Italy, or a marcha cicloturista in Spain.

They generally take place almost every weekend from March to October. Like the Etape you can aim for a particular standard (gold, silver or bronze medal). Unlike the Etape they take place on circular routes, so logistics are fairly easy. In addition, these events are run over a choice of distances and you don't need to decide which distance to ride until race day itself. Incidentally, entry deadlines are often the day before the race.

In September of this year I did a cycloportive in the Southern Alps of France. The Alpigap, as can be guessed from the title, started and finished in Gap. When I alighted from the train with my bicycle the day before the race, it was over 30 degrees and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. An uphill route to my hotel lay before me, and I was still wrapped in my warm English longs! With trousers and sleeves rolled up and heavy rucksack on back, I tackled the three km climb. At the top I needed a good warm down before I could even think of checking in! My hotel was the event HQ, so there was a real buzz about the place. Dinner had the feel of a big cycling club gathering, with people exchanging stories about various rides on the cycloportive circuit – Les Bosses du Treize, Le Serre-Luc Alphand, La Marmotte and L'Ardechoise to name just a few, though funnily enough people did not mention L'Etape.

The next morning 700+ riders assembled in the town car park to begin L'Alpigap. Although a small event by French standards, there was a surprising amount of fanfare in the town. Enthusiastic local residents even came out to watch us at 7am on a Sunday morning. After various bids of "Bonne Route, Bon Courage" we were away at 8am and with all the zeal and the suction of the peloton we were quickly speeding along quite effortlessly. It wasn't long before we hit the first challenge of the day – the Col de la Sentinelle. From this point onwards we were strung out along the route.

As with many of the cycling events I've done, there were very few women taking part, however, among the few we still managed to build some camaraderie,

chatting and taking it in turns to slipstream each other. As the ride progressed, the Alpine climbs came thicker and harder as the mercury rose and the sun beat down. As well as locals cheering us on from the side of the road, race supporters drove by in their cars and checked that we had plenty of water. The feed stations (five in total) were well stocked and the marshals were only too happy to chat about the region and describe the cols that lay ahead.

I cycled the medium-length course – 114km including 2,800m of climbing. There were also long and short courses: 162km and 75km respectively. Even though the distances were not great, the route had a lot of climbing with little recovery in between each climb and I, unfortunately, had left my climbing legs at home. There was a generous cut-off time though and no broom wagon to avoid. The best part of the ride was definitely the descent from the Col de Manse back into Gap – 10km of not having to brake or pedal with great views of the mountains ahead and the town below.

Once past the horrible sting in the tail, in the shape of the 15% climb in the last 400m, I was glad to see the finish line. My trusty steed had rolled me round safely, and even in time for the post-race, hot, three-course meal offered free by the hotel to all competitors. I had enjoyed my ride and felt very satisfied as I relaxed in the hotel garden with other cyclists, enjoying a beer. There was a particularly human and homely feel to this event. Even though the ride was challenging there was more to it than just bashing away at the pedals chasing a medal. So if the Etape is not longer an option for you, just remember that there are other organised rides to try. The Alpigap is just one event – there are plenty of others.

A few taking place in 2005 are

Tour of Flanders, Ninove (Belgium) – 2 April
 Gran Fondo dei Nove Colli, Cesenatico (Italy) – 22 May
 Le Ventoux, Beaumes de Venise (France) – 4 June
 L'Ardechoise, St Felicien, (France) – 16-18 June
 Quebrantahuesos, Sabinanigo (Spain) – 18 June
 Gran Fondo di Campagnolo, Feltre (Italy) – 19 June
 L'Ariegeoise, Tarascon sur Ariege (France) – 25 June
 Le Vaujany, Vaujany (France) – 3 July
 Maratona des Dolomites, Corvara (Italy) – 3 July
 La Marmotte, Alpe d'Huez (France) – 9 July
 La Ronde Picarde, Eaucourt (France) – 10 September
 The Rideman, Bad Duerrheim (Germany) – 23-25 September

Useful websites to check out for more information are www.sportcommunication.com, www.cycloport.com and www.audax.uk.net

Invisible Members

Are you one of our invisible members? One of the many who haven't ticked 'Share this info?' in SerpieBase and are therefore totally invisible to any other Serpies logging in?

If you're one of these mysterious people, why not login to <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/serpiebase> and click 'Edit my personal details' to share your mobile number, email address or other contact details?

While you're logged in, why not check that your other details are correct: especially your emergency contact and medical details? The club needs these to be up to date for obvious reasons.

Ironman Hawaii

by Adrian Jones

Hawaii... to most it conjures up images of glazy surf, rumbling volcanoes, coconut groves, raffia hula skirts and the like. Mention the place to a triathlete and I guarantee their immediate reaction will be very different – The Ironman World Championships. To many of our long-minded tri community Hawaii is a single word that speaks volumes. It was the birthplace of our sport over 26 years ago when a retired Navy Commander, John Collins, put together an endurance challenge unlike any other. Collins combined the 2.4 mile Waikiki Roughwater Swim, the 112 mile Around-Oahu Bike Race and the 26.2 mile Honolulu Marathon. It was also to be completed in a single day with no rest between each event. He proclaimed that the winner would simply be called the “Ironman”.

A lot can happen in a quarter of a century. From that first event in 1978 with its 15 pioneers on an empty Waikiki beach to today's 1,700 field treading water at The Pier in Kailua-Kona Hawaii's growth has been phenomenal. In the early days you pretty much just had to show up; today you have to ‘qualify’ for the honour of being tortured by the islands goddess of Fire – Madame Pele.



The lure of Hawaii is very powerful to any long distant triathlete. Once it's in your head, it's hard to get it out. I fell victim to this huge carrot five years ago after finishing a couple of domestic IM races. It didn't take me long to appreciate that a huge number of people out there had the same idea. Qualifying was going to be a major challenge in itself.

My own dream campaign started back in 2000 with IM Austria. After missing the start, crashing on the bike and enduring a very painful run, I missed a slot by about an hour – it was a rude awakening. 2001 and it was IMUSA in Lake Placid – 49 minutes off the pace this time with major foot discomfort on the bike sabotaging the day. 2002 and I figured with a smaller field Lanzarote would give me a good chance. Little did I appreciate the monstrous climbs and crazy winds in the saddle and the searing heat on the run. I prepared well but obviously not well enough, missing out again, this time by 40 minutes. 2003 and as much as I enjoyed the Life of an International Ironman, the qualification idea was getting a tad wearing (not to mention expensive!) I seemed to be getting 10 minutes closer each time but at this rate it would still take another four or five attempts – I needed a big jump. A PB at the hilly IM Switzerland still came 17 minutes short. I was getting closer but my patience was being tested.

Just prior to Switzerland I had stumbled across www.serpentine.org.uk and joined online. Pre-Switzerland I met a small crew of “Serpies” for dinner. During the Swiss race I knew that fellow Serpies were out there and for the first time I had something (or someone) else to race besides myself and the Hawaii dream. This newfound competition was to become the edge I needed to elevate my game to that of a Hawaii qualifier. After Switzerland, I met some pretty decent people at this Serpentine Club of ours. Before I knew it, a group of us had entered IM Lanzarote for May 2004. In the interim and as a pleasant surprise to myself I got closest to a slot in August 2003 at Half Ironman UK. Missing out by a few minutes on one of the three slots in my age group it served as a good affirmation that I was at least in the right ball park.

May 2004 clicked around and it was Serpie War in Lanzarote. Michael Hanreck had knocked out a pretty

handy 9hr 47min at Austria '03 in his IM debut. As much as you have to self-pace in IM, we were still each others' targets. There was also the little issue of an IM rookie & 2:50 marathoner, Steve Hilton, and 20 time marathoner, Richard Melik, in the mix. Being part of something bigger than myself gave me the drive to outperform my own expectations. I got a clean slot, meaning I didn't even have to wait for the nail biting ‘roll down’, where the slots get passed to the next person in the list should someone decide not to take their slot. Flights were booked and the training ramped up come late July – the dream was to become a reality. PATIENCE DEFINITELY IS A VIRTUE!

As 16 October moved closer, I read horror stories about ‘The Big Show’; tales from triathletes who had gone to play out their dream only to live a nightmare. How could it be? The so-called fittest of the fit – these people are meant to be the strongest form of Iron? After further investigation I could see why. A non-wetsuit sea swim; the hot, windy and deceptively hilly bike and the hot and humid run combined with the sheer inescapable exposure to the unpredictable conditions had a terrible habit of reducing even the strongest to a limp, failing mess. Whilst Lanzarote looks tougher on paper, DNF or missed target times seem to be more common at Hawaii. Surely after years of simply trying to get to the start line I couldn't go out there and have a negative experience? I resolved that my key target come race day would be to “relish it”... a good time or place would simply be a bonus. “Make light of it”, “enjoy the journey” and other such phrases replaced the usual “give it everything” and “push the limits”. I'd endured five IM races for this privilege. No-one was going to stop me from enjoying the day and experiencing the Holy Grail of long distance triathlon – crossing the finish line at Alii Drive.

I arrived in Hawaii a week before race day. According to science, a week is not enough time to acclimatise but I'd been hitting my twice weekly ‘sweat’ training sessions and felt at home with the heat from day one. Whether at the Wal-Mart checkout or a remote beach, all the locals seemed to be enthusiastic and welcoming to any Ironman. Most were involved at some level. Our condo caretaker told us with pride “Hey, I'm a helper at the swim to bike transition”. To me this is fundamental to Hawaii's success – the friendly community thrives off it. I felt like a guest of honour.

Pre-race week in Kona is something else, it's a triathlon Mecca. Throughout the day there's always someone ‘Swimming at the Pier’, ‘Biking the Queen K’ or ‘Running on Alii Drive’. Many a past performance has been spent by overcooking it on these fantastic training spots. Bundle this in with the expo, parade of

nations, seminars, briefings, pasta party and more and you can see how so many are burnt out come 7am on race day. Whilst I selectively tapped into all this, I made a point of sticking to my plan and, where possible, conserved energy for the big day.



After my usual 4am race day breakfast, the support crew of wife and parents arose, greeting me in their custom made ADRIAN JONES SUPPORT CREW t-shirts. It was to be a big day for all of us. The few hours before an IM start are unique. You can cut the tense atmosphere with a knife. My “relish it” philosophy kept the nerves at bay. This year, for the first time, the pros started 15 minutes before the rest of the field. Hearing their cannon go off really got my heart going – this was it – 15 minutes and counting.

Swimming has never been my strongest discipline and, without a wetsuit, today was to be no exception. I had predicted 1 hour 15 minutes for the 2.4 miles; 10 minutes slower than my normal prediction. This took account of the slower pace due to the loss of neoprene buoyancy. As preparation, I had dumped the pull buoy and purposely not used my wetsuit since Lanzarote in May. Hawaii has a deep water start, this means treading water as you wait for the cannon to sound. A minute or so before the start, I dipped my head under to check my goggles weren't leaking only to be amazed that the guy next to me had a prosthetic leg! As I pondered what sort of day he was in for – BOOM – we were off. Anyone who has seen an IM mass start will know about the carnage involved. A broken jaw is not unheard of. As I wasn't taking a very aggressive approach to the day, I took a more cautious start position. My reward was a fairly low contact swim, but my payback was not getting a particularly good draft. A thousand or so fish sightings later and I was vertical again – 1:15 on the nose.

Once back on terra firma, the magnitude of Hawaii soon kicked in. After reading over a decade of Hawaii magazine reports it felt surreal to be part of it. A quick hello to the condo caretaker then it was onto my saddle for the mother of all bike rides. There's a little out and back in town but it's only a pre-cursor for the main event; 50 miles or so out to the Hawi turnaround then 50 miles or so back the same way. It's so very easy to overcook the first half of an IM bike. I pace with heart rate and if there's any single hour of an IM where I think it's most valuable it's the first hour of the bike. After being psyched by the busy swim to bike transition and the supporters in town it could have been so easy to go off red lining. My most memorable case of this was Lanzarote '02, where a guy went flying past me with a breathing pattern of a 10 mile time trialist. A few hours later I saw him alternating freewheeling with a few lame turns of the pedals. Using that as a reminder, I set about the task at hand with a firm eye on my intensity.



I had segmented the bike course into more manageable chunks and only thought about getting to the end of the current segment. This was a great tool to keep me sane. In a masochistic kind of way I was hoping that the legendary winds would come out to play, after all what's the point of doing Hawaii without the wind? The gods didn't disappoint and the wind played havoc, with pros dropping out left, right and centre. My light hearted "relish it" soon became a pretty handy couple of words. Dropping out was not an option, I managed to make light of the conditions and even laugh at the ridiculousness of it all. The toughest segment of the race is a long climb up to the

turnaround at Hawi. The gradient is no problem; it's the powerful head and cross winds that just don't go away. At times they gust in such a way you have to really focus on not being thrown into a ditch or into the middle of the road towards the high speed descenders on the other side. Personally I loved every minute of it. It was here I had my first sighting of 'the pros' on the other side. I'm a big fan of IM racing and it was like having a front row seat at a Wimbledon final. Sad to say, I didn't see our very own Simon Lessing burning the road up but sitting under a tree catching some shade with ex-champion Luc van Lierde.

The descent back down is also something else; this time the challenge is handling 'surprise' cross wind gusts whilst motoring at 40 mph. I was glad to have my drop bars to get stable and pedal through the craziness of it all. Passing a pretty handy Brit from Team Cherwell gave my confidence a bit of a nudge. Once at the bottom and after a quick thank you God for the fact I was still alive, it was onto the aero bars and out through the lava fields again. This is where I started to understand why Hawaii has such a reputation. I'd survived the Hawi winds and now it was the home run – wishful thinking! The winds didn't let up for the rest of the ride and I started to realise how hot it had been the last few hours. My low point was about 20 miles before the bike finish. I had been looking for the end of my next segment, the airport, for what seemed like a few days and it just went on and on. No reprieve, the wind, the heat, the heavy sweating, no visual break, less competitors around – it was grinding but I just did what I knew needed doing and kept moving forward. Never mind relish it, I think I was reduced to "don't give up" at this point. I swear I saw a few mirages of the airport before I finally sighted it – talk about a long time coming. A few miles after the airport you hit the run course and I had the new stimulus of seeing how the pros were positioned. The same guy, all in white, who was miles ahead on the bike at Hawi was still miles ahead on the run. All the way back to town I could entertain myself by trying to identify the pros. Just as the early bike miles are easy to over-pace so are the final few. It's strange but the agony I was feeling 20 miles ago seemed to subside as I got closer to my running shoes. Descending into town towards the transition I did a quick head to toe body check and it was good news. I knew I would be able to start the run in relatively good shape.

I had two old-time tri friends in the race and out of the thousands racing, one of them happened to sit next to me whilst I put my running shoes on. As much as I was relishing it I wasn't going to hang around for a chat though, so proceeded to leave him to put his shoes on without me. I have a tradition of getting through T2 (Transition 2) as fast as possible

and managed a 2:11 split, beating the man in white and overall winner, Normann Stadler, by 7 seconds; pretty irrelevant but it's a nice feeling to beat a world champion at something.

Compared to the loneliness of the bike, the first out and back of the run along Alii Drive is like a street carnival. I felt pretty good and just as you have to pace correctly early on the bike the same holds for the run, after all it's still a full marathon. I took the time to say a brief hello and High 5 the ADRIAN JONES SUPPORT CREW at the big spectators' spot appropriately named 'Hot Corner'. They were amazed with my socialising since I'm usually in my zone when racing – it was refreshing to be light hearted about it. The weeks prior to Hawaii I had had hamstring niggles, which were evident on the run but I chose to pretend they weren't there. I survived the Alii Drive out and back, then, after another social call with my support crew, it was time to hit the lava fields again. You leave town up the steep Palini Hill then it's onto the Queen K Highway and out to the turnaround at the notorious Energy Lab. This is where the challenge really got laid down. Zero shade and hot as hell, the only noises were running feet and the occasional grunt – it was time to meet my inner soul again. After surviving the Energy Lab section I was met by a new challenge. My drink of choice for these latter miles is Coke, yet the World Championships had run out at most aid stations. Gels weren't even an option at this stage and after litres and litres of Gatorade it gets a bit tough to stomach. I opted to sip some Gatorade when there was no Coke and take on as much Coke as I could when it was on offer. I think this bit me, as I developed stomach cramps at about mile 22. They got worse and worse and I was eventually reduced to a walk-run. After a couple of miles of this frustration it finally subsided and I managed to blast the last couple of miles.

Margaret Sills also competed in IM Hawaii. Her plan was to finish standing and smiling. Margaret started well, completing the swim in 1hr 18mins. She had a relatively quick first transition, only stopping to put sun block on, and set off optimistically on the bike. Although acclimatised, the fierce heat and the strong winds in the lava fields got the better of her and even the downhill were no respite as the strong headwinds demanded a gear usually used for climbing up Cheddar Gorge.

Eating and drinking on the bike kept her going but eventually little was being

absorbed so, having run the first 10 miles of the marathon, the light faded and the last 16 miles were completed walking or using Scout's Pace in complete darkness. Light sticks and aid stations every mile were helpful and finally a mile or so from home the finish could be heard and then seen. With floodlights and so many spectators still cheering the athletes home, Margaret managed to run past another woman in her age group and smile as she crossed the line at 11.30pm, finishing in 16 hours, 30 minutes and 22 seconds, to be greeted with a Lei and a much coveted finisher's medal.



Ironman racing is such a journey of emotions and Hawaii was no exception. Coming into town was simply overwhelming, crossing the finish line was a single moment I've got crisp and clear in my memory banks – very special!

After the usual gorging on post-race soup and pizza, we spent the rest of the night on Alii Drive watching every finisher live their golden moment. I was especially excited at the prospect of seeing Dick and Ricky Hoyt, a father and son team that are famous in IM circles. Ricky has cerebral palsy, Dick drags his son in a dingy then rides with him on his bike, and finally pushes him through the marathon. It is an unbelievable story that has inspired me for years and seeing them finish was a must. To put the day's conditions into perspective, the Hoyt's didn't make it, they had to drop out. This was the first time they had a DNF against their name in the 500 or so races they'd endured together. It was a tough day out there but I think that's what defines Hawaii. If you have it in your head to do it one day then it comes highly recommended, just remember to enjoy it.

Eating and drinking on the bike kept her going but eventually little was being

The Best Running Cities

by Jamie Felix

For Serpies, running in urban terrain comes naturally. We're used to dodging cars, mopeds and London's mind-bogglingly clueless pedestrians. (A recent poll by Runners World magazine ranked 'people' as the number-one threat to running in the capital.) Our craving for variety and distance have made us masters at carving windy routes through unusual places – ducking through subway underpasses, jumping over rail tracks, criss-crossing construction zones. Indeed, many of us have actually come to prefer the hustle and bustle of city running, where the fast-paced environment goes hand-in-hand with our own fast-footed pursuits.

But things change when we don our running sneakers in unfamiliar cities. City guidebooks and other tourist resources are often of little use to time-pressed distance runners. Faced with the options of navigating traffic-clogged roads for some distant green spot on a tourist map or running eight times around the same 1km loop at a local park, many of us instead head for the boring monotony of a treadmill, or worse, simply abandon our running altogether.

But running in foreign cities need not be frustrating. With the helpful advice of several well-travelled Serpies, I've amassed the club's picks of the most runner-friendly cities in the world as well as insider tips on how to make the most of your runs whilst travelling there. In this edition, we'll be reviewing the popular destinations of Sydney, Australia and New York City, which both offer plenty of fabulous running spots – as long as you don't mind dodging a few potholes or the odd wild kangaroo along the way...

Before that, here are some handy general tips for running in any city you might travel to:

- Go online and check for local running websites that have information on routes, events and group runs. The incredibly comprehensive website, Run the Planet, is chock-full of personal accounts from real runners about where to run in pretty much every city across the globe. The advice is generally very good, but since anyone can contribute, it can at times be confusing and irrelevant to your needs. Always double-check with a map or other source.

- Search the web for local running clubs which organise weekly runs and workout sessions. Or, try contacting a club member for advice on local routes.
- Whether you're travelling for business or pleasure, staying in a 'runner-friendly' hotel with gym facilities and easy access to parks is a good way to ensure you won't have trouble squeezing in a workout. For advice on hotels, check out the website www.fitforbusiness.com, which offers a search facility for hotels with great gym facilities.
- Were the Olympics ever held in the city you're visiting? If so, you can probably download the official marathon route. Also, nearly every major city (and most minor ones, too) hosts an annual marathon, and most have posted their course routes on the web.
- If you're travelling west, take advantage of jet lag and hit the streets really early. You'll probably be up anyway, and there will be less traffic and pollution in the earliest hours.
- Pack a small, zippered pouch (I've picked them up for about a £1 at the Portobello Road market) to hold all the bits and pieces you wind up carrying when running in a foreign location, namely: a few small coins, a credit card, your room key, and a mobile phone (assuming it works abroad). If you aren't sure of your route, you will also want to take along a local area map. It's a lot to handle, and you'll be glad when you have something to carry it all.
- Speaking of routes, the new Pocket Routes website (www.pocketroutes.com) offers maps and GPS files of recommended running routes around the globe. The routes, which are contributed by local runners, can be downloaded for £3 each. If you offer a route to the site, you get to download two other routes for free.

SYDNEY

If Serpies have anything to say about it, Sydney is a veritable runner's paradise.

"If work or travel takes you to Sydney you're in for a fabulous running treat," says Sue-Ellen Horrocks, a native Aussie who used to live in Sydney. "It's a brilliant place to run," agrees James Waller, another former Sydney denizen. For those staying at hotels in the centre of town, the most familiar (and often most convenient) run is a circular route of the harbourside. The run, which follows the water's edge past the famous opera house into the Botanic Gardens over the bridge and through the square-shaped Domain Park, is around 8k (5 miles) long, and you "wouldn't have been to Sydney unless you've done this run at least once," said one Serpie visitor. Avoid running during rush hour times (7:00–9:00am and 5:00–6:30pm) when the walkways are chock-full of pedestrians.

For those in need of a longer run or who just want to get away from the tourist crowd, the eastern suburbs are a great place for runners. From Bondi beach eastwards, this stretch of coastline is a popular running destination that offers spectacular views of the Pacific as well as various terrain. "This is one of my favourite routes in Sydney," says Sue-Ellen. The route, which follows a hilly and winding path along the seaside cliffs, is ideal for unfamiliar runners because it just follows the coastline. "If you get wet you've taken a wrong turn," explains Sue-Ellen. The best place to start the run is at the south end of Bondi beach (not Bondi Junction), heading into the beaches of Tamarama and Bronte and onto the bays of Clovelly, Gordons and Coogee. The return route totals approximately 12k. Running with a water bottle is a necessity in Sydney, especially for Londoners unfamiliar with the heat, although there are water and toilet facilities along the beachfront paths. No worries about working up a sweat, though – you can always just jump into the sea en route or after you finish. Sue-Ellen suggests bringing a towel and asking one of the many local cafés if you can leave it there while you run.

If you want to go even longer, Sue-Ellen suggests starting and finishing from Centennial Park. Do a loop of the park itself, before heading to Bondi Beach (via Bondi Junction), and continuing on as before. The extension brings the return route up to 15–20k. Sue-Ellen strongly advises bringing along a map for this route.

If you'd like companionship on your run, Glenda Anderson suggests contacting the Sydney Striders, a local club that organises weekend runs on alternating routes of up to 30k. "As a way of seeing the city the Striders can't be beat," says David Pitts, who also

hooked up with the Striders when he was in Sydney. The downside, perhaps, is the club's 6:30am start on Sundays. David also suggests the Bondi Run and Tri Club, which hosts regular coastal runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings and hosts regular handicap races.

Sydney is a great place for healthy-minded people, with the city's fresh fish restaurants among the best on offer. Sue-Ellen says there are two absolute lunch-time musts for seafood lovers: the Fish Markets on Blackwattle Bay and Doyle's (near Watson's Bay), known for their super-fresh oysters. Don't confuse Doyle's bar with the very posh Doyle's Restaurant next-door: instead, head for the beer garden overlooking the harbour and enjoy the view whilst sipping one of Australia's smooth lagers.

For more information on the beachfront routes and many other trails, 'Anthony A' suggests the following helpful weblink, provided by the National Park Service: <http://tinyurl.com/6ed23>. Check out the following for useful information on local events and clubs: www.coolrunning.com.au.

NEW YORK

New York's Central Park is an urban mecca for runners, and ranks as one of the most popular running spots in the world. The park, which is planted right in the middle of Manhattan, stretches from midtown (55th Street) in the south all the way up to Harlem (110th Street) in the north. There is a basic park 'loop' – a 6.1-mile paved route that follows the park's perimeter, and offers runners some of the most expansive cityscapes anywhere in the Big Apple. In fact, the original course for the New York City marathon consisted of four repetitions around the loop (but has since been moved to the current 'five borough' course).

New York is the city that never sleeps, and that goes for runners, too: you'll be sure to find runners and cyclists circling the park at all hours of the day, although weekends and evenings are the most popular times, when the main loop is closed to traffic.

Although Central Park is often the most convenient place to run when visiting Manhattan, there are plenty of less conventional routes for those looking for a change. Riverside Park, on the upper west side, is 'the best kept secret running site in New York City', according to one resident runner. The park, which offers waterside views along the Hudson River from 72nd Street up to 120th Street, is small in comparison to Central Park, but a new pedestrianised path that runs all the way from Riverside Park down to the southernmost tip of Manhattan has the city's running

community rejoicing. It's a real blessing for distance runners, who can now easily clock up 12 or more miles on a return trip, whilst taking in views of the Statue of Liberty, the World Financial Centre, and midtown Manhattan's skyscraper panorama.

For those looking for a track workout, there is a free public facility on the Lower East Side (East 6th Street and the FDR Drive). The Central Park Track Club meets there on Tuesday nights. There are several other clubs that meet regularly in both the morning and evenings for distance runs as well: check out the New York Road Runners, the Central Park Track Club and the Warren Street Runners for schedules.

Finally, an early run on a Sunday morning is a real treat in Manhattan, when the chaos and traffic are all but absent. It's a great time to do a run in Central Park – you're likely to be up anyway due to the time difference – and make sure to treat yourself to a real New York bagel 'with a shmear' of cream cheese afterwards!

Helpful websites on New York are www.warrenstreet.org, www.nyrr.org and www.centralparktc.org

...And The Worst

No city was designed with the distance runner in mind, but there are those abominable few that test even the most resilient of urban harriers. For Serpines, Asia is home to some of the least runner-friendly metropolises in the world, with Tokyo, Beijing and Mumbai among the hit list. "Japan might produce some truly great long distance runners," muses Charles Doxat, "but Tokyo is not too bright for runners."

When running in Beijing, James Ledger warns of "being assaulted not only by the noxious fumes belching out of cars in the endless traffic jams but also by dust and other pollutants floating gently away from many of the city's building sites." James instead recommends cycling, "although you have to have eyes in the back of your head since the taxi drivers are lunatics," and swimming in the city's many excellent pool facilities.

"Never try to run in Mumbai," writes Eric Kihlstrom. "The streets are congested with people, cars, cows and elephants to the point of no hope...If you happen to find yourself along one of the beaches, it is usually too short for any real exercise and likely to be used as a loo by dogs, elephants and homeless locals." Cows and rickshaws are also a nuisance for Raul Kharbanda, who warns against running in New Delhi.

Suddenly London's short-sighted pedestrians don't seem quite the terror they used to...

An Inspiring Run

Sarajevo is the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, surrounded by mountains. I left my hotel, heading east. The sun had not yet risen over the nearest mountain, and the air was clear, still and crisp: a hint of the alpine autumn and winter to come.

The city was only beginning to wake, and I was able to keep up a good pace along the main city streets, passing at first between buildings dating from the Austro-Hungarian period, before passing suddenly into the much older Turkish section. Here the buildings are much lower, organised into a maze of narrow streets paved with large flat cobbles, polished by millions of feet over the last 700 years. Then, leaving the city centre I started to climb, pausing briefly at one of the city's many cemeteries, filled with white headstones. Most date from 1992 – 1995, a sad reminder of the many men, women and children who died in the brutal siege of Sarajevo during the Bosnian civil war.

Now I started a more serious climb: not one I could attack – the hills are too long and too steep for that. Instead, I found a rhythm and worked my way steadily upwards, trying not to think about how far there was to go. I finally left the city altogether, the road winding around the mountain, before passing through a village, and circling back to overlook the city. For the last mile or so the gradient eased, and I was able to pick up speed before reaching a spot where I could see the city far below, now basking in the morning sunlight.

I turned around and started back down, passing another runner – possibly an Ethiopian or Kenyan, judging from his appearance, and wrapped up much more warmly than I was. We waved to one another, and I picked up speed as I headed back towards the city.

A bit more care was needed on the return journey – since the streets were busier with people going to work and children walking to school. Some of them giggled at my appearance, as children are wont to do, but there was no malice in their tone – and others I passed called out words of encouragement (or so it sounded, my Bosnian is nearly non-existent).

After a little more than 70 minutes, I was back at my hotel. About 8 or 9 miles for my training diary, but a run to remember, and a perfect start to the day!

Daniel O'Donoghue

A view from the Paralympic Village

by Peta McSharry

For a moment I thought I was on the set for Terminator, as two hydraulic-style legs walked past. But this was no movie set, I was standing outside the dining hall in the Paralympic village, humbled by what I saw and curious as to what the next 21 days of games would hold for me.

I had been fortunate enough to be selected as part of an international sports massage team who volunteered their time during the Paralympics in Athens. This was the first time I had been to the Paralympics and moreover the first time I would be working on disabled athletes. While I realise that the games have come and gone some time ago, I wanted to share some of the experiences I had with you.

The first day of work started and my first client rolled into the room, the whirl of the motor on his wheelchair breaking the silence of the room. He was born with no arms or legs. I offered to help him up onto the couch, but he declined and with amazing dexterity, hopped up and asked me if I could work through his pecs as he had been weight lifting in the gym. That was just the start. I worked with lead cyclists who had given up their own time and honour to help others win medals. I watched athletes come within seconds of the Olympic times while other athletes were way off the lead runners but the crowds still cheered them on to the finish. I saw more tears shed than at the end of Schindler's List.

I watched the finish of the marathon in the historic Panathinaiko Stadium, with guides leading the blind runners to the finish and then dropping back to allow the blind athletes to finish ahead of them. It made me think about what these guides had given up personally to work with disabled athletes and more-over what they gained from this. I was inspired to want to do something similar, but knowing that I can just make a 4-hour marathon time, the sweeper bus would have picked us up long before the finish. So I leave you with something said by a BBC commentator which summed up the experience for me: "Watching the Olympics changes the way you feel, watching the Paralympics changes the way you think". Working there changed both for me.

Some facts from the Paralympics:

- 3,969 athletes (2,763 men and 1,206 women) from 136 countries participated in the Athen 2004 Paralympic Games.
- China won the most medals: 141 in all (63 gold, 46 silver and 32 bronze). Second in the medals table is Great Britain with 94 (35 gold medals) and third, Canada (28 gold medals).

For more information go to: <http://www.athens2004.com/en/ParalympicGames/parahome>.

Book Review

"Feet in the clouds: A tale of fell-running and obsession"

"...the one immutable rule when men and mountains meet is this: that either man or mountain must be in charge. They cannot both be master.

By the time I reach the bottom, half an hour later, the mountain has pretty much wrestled back control. My rhythmic jog has slowed again to an agonised shuffle, and the tosses of my head smack less of aggression than desperation. Never mind, I am down now, and have only to limp a few hundred yards along the tarmac to reach the car.... This, I should add, is what I do for fun".

Runners are tough, but fell-runners, well, they are hard. In his first book, Richard Askwith, Associate Editor of The Independent, takes the reader with him up fell and down scree, sharing every agonising step of the journey to becoming a fell-runner. A "13 stone southerner" with weak ankles and a fear of heights, he describes his incredible transformation from London runner to mountain runner, despite his self-professed unsuitability for the role.

Obsession is the overriding theme of the book, and in particular Askwith's desire to complete the Bob Graham Round. (For the uninitiated, the BGR, as it is commonly known, is a 24-hour challenge in which runners aim to cover an off-road route that takes in 42 of the Lake District's highest peaks). From the initial stages of studying

the OS maps pasted onto his bathroom wall in an attempt to commit every twist and turn of the route to memory whilst cleaning his teeth, to every agonising training run and twisted ankle, and each failed attempt, Askwith's brilliantly portrayed obsession draws the reader in until the idea of the BGR actually begins to appeal.

Cleverly interwoven into the tales of his own experiences, Askwith also introduces the reader to the chequered history of fell-running as well as the current, but sadly diminishing, fell-running scene. He brings the characters and races to life in such a way that by the end of the book, The Wasdale and The Borrowdale feel like races one has run; Joss Naylor and Lou Sharpe feel like old friends.

If you are looking for some inspiration for your running, then this is definitely a book to add to your Christmas list. Either it will inspire you, as it has me, and tempt you to sign up for your first fell race, or it will leave you with the feeling that trying to improve on your handicap time on a cold damp Saturday morning isn't perhaps so painful after all.

Rachel Powell

Feet in the clouds: A tale of fell-running and obsession
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Who Are All These New Serpies?

by Jane Harris

According to the website, the Serpentine Running Club now has an incredible 1,643 members – here are the experiences of a few of the newer members...

How long have you been a member of the SRC?

Mike Knell: A couple of months.

Lisa Latoni: About three months.

Mads Harding Sorensen: Since July 2004.

Margaret Newman: Since July 2004.

Simon Barrett: Since the end of July.

How did you find out about the club?

MK: Blame the good old web – I think I Googled for running clubs in London. As I used to work in central London and enjoy any excuse for a trip into town (I live in a deprived inner-city area called Surbiton), I thought the Serpies would fit the bill just fine. Oh, and the club website's excellent – substantially more useful than a lot of the more commercially run runners' sites.

LL: I belong to the Flyers in NY and some of them had been in London and spent time with the Serpies and they provided a high recommendation.

MHS: From a colleague.

MN: Via Newspad (website covering Paddington, Bayswater, Hyde Park and Maida Vale).

SB: I did the Last Friday of the Month 5k a few times after someone at work introduced me to it, and found the club's website as a result.

What was your motivation for joining?

MK: I'd not been running very long – I started at the end of August – and was looking to bring a bit more organisation into my running. I decided that joining a club would probably help me stick with running in the medium-to-long term. My deepest darkest secret (up until now) is that I'd wanted to come along to a Wednesday club run before joining, and had actually got as far as the Seymour Centre before finding myself intimidated by all the scarily fit-looking people going in to the extent that I slunk away and decided to try again another week. A few weeks later I tried again with more success.

LL: I run marathons and am in London two weeks a month with work. I find I tend to get more runs in when I belong to a club. I also like running races and thought the club would be a great way to get in both.

MHS: I've always run a lot by myself, but with no clear goals to do races or to become better. I thought moving to a new town would be a good time to finally do something about it.

MN: I gave up smoking in February and wanted to take up a more positive pastime as a result.

SB: I'd been doing most of my running on my own since I returned from a three-month non-running, beer-drinking, pie-eating, up-the-wall-driving injury layoff in February. Having set about converting my '70 a week' from units into miles I decided I really ought to see what a running club was about. Since the Seymour Centre is close to where I work, the Serpentine seemed like the obvious choice.

Are you (were you) training for a specific race?

MK: My first race, the Croydon 10k, was in October [Ed Note: see Mike's article elsewhere in this issue]. I was pretty nervous about it beforehand, but in reality there wasn't any need to be – it's a friendly race and I finished in just under 48 minutes. I've rather caught the racing bug as a result – I'm entered for the Hog's Back in December and the New Years Day 10k.

LL: I trained for the New York marathon. The heat was a bit more than I was able to handle at such a long distance so I didn't do as well as I was hoping, but I will try again with the London marathon in April 2005.

MHS: [Due to injury, Mads hasn't run since the end of September, so these are his pre-injury answers]. Yes, I've participated in two 10k races so far, and was planning loads more races during the winter season prior to being injured.

MN: No.

SB: At the time I joined I'd recently entered the Berlin marathon. I finished in 2:40:34 – exactly 35 seconds slower than planned. Afterwards I kept getting told off for saying I was very slightly disappointed with it, so I'd better not say that now! It was great to run a nice big fat negative split, however, and the event and weekend as a whole were fantastic.

Did you know anyone in the SRC before you joined?

MK: I did discover that my brother Rob is also a member, but as he's a far scarier runner than I am we haven't done any running together yet. The other club members I've met have been pleasant.

LL: I didn't know anyone before I joined. Since joining I have met quite a few people and they've all been friendly and helpful. In addition to making me feel welcome, people have slowed down to run with me to make sure I wasn't on my own on a Wednesday night run and I've had lifts arranged for me so that I could run in places like Richmond Park, Maidstone for a half marathon and Margate for my first cross country race.

MHS: Only my colleague, but in general I've found people to be very friendly.

MN: I came along with Katherine Williams, my stop smoking buddy. We didn't know anyone else in the club but have found other members to be very welcoming and friendly. Bev, who takes the beginners group, has been really supportive as well as passing on so much information about the parks, and Gowan has rewarded us with the most amazing cakes!

SB: I knew one or two people who were members already, and I've found most people to be extremely friendly!

Which club events do you usually take part in?

MK: To my annoyance, I've only made it to one Wednesday run and October's Last Friday of the Month so far. I've spent the last month basically not running at all due to an injury I think was caused by my own impetuosity in pushing too hard too soon, despite trying not to. However, I'm on the way to recovery now and will be trying to get to more Wednesday night runs. I really enjoyed the one I've been on, despite not paying attention and finding myself on the Three Parks instead of the Two!

LL: So far I have gone to Wednesday night runs and taken part in two races.

MHS: Pre-injury I was doing Tuesday track sessions at Paddington, Wednesday night runs and Saturday hill sessions in Greenwich with Karen.

MN: I usually do the Wednesday night runs and the occasional Saturday morning.

SB: I occasionally do the Last Friday of the Month. I'm usually at the Larrick on Wednesday nights, if not one of the runs as well, the handicap if I arrive on time, cross country whenever possible, and Tuesday night intervals at the Warrington without fail.

Do you think your running has improved as a result of being a member of the club?

MK: I think so, but it's hard to tell as I haven't done much club running yet. It's certainly true that running the Three Parks rather than the Two by mistake made me realise that I could run longer distances than I'd run up until then with some confidence.

LL: I haven't seen an improvement yet, but I am sure if I made it to some of the speed and hill sessions I would. I hope to get to some of those in the coming months.

MHS: My running improved a lot – I was aiming to do a 10k in 40 minutes and I was getting very close to that.

MN: Definitely!

SB: A good question, and one that I don't think I can answer. Yes, my running has improved, but it would have done so anyway. I've not changed the majority of the running I've been doing since I joined, and I don't think my rate of improvement has changed much. Were I not a member I would be drinking a fair bit less than I am now, but then I wouldn't have the opportunity to do things like cross country and track and field. So it's swings and roundabouts really!

What are your running goals for the future?

MK: Firstly, to get myself back into shape after this irritating injury finally goes away. Ultimately, I'd like to run some longer races around the 10-mile and half-marathon mark and improve on my current 5k and 10k times. While I guess I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to run a full marathon eventually, I do think that people who take up running to focus solely on getting round the FLM are missing out on the enormous amount of fun that can be had at shorter distances.

LL: At some point I would like to complete a marathon fast enough to qualify for Boston. For now, I am scheduled to run London and NY in 2005, then Disney in Florida in January 2006.

MHS: To get rid of this damn injury! After that, I want to run as much as possible focusing on long distances but also lots of 10k races.

MN: To be a regular runner and improve on my PBs.

SB: My immediate aim is to go under 2:30 in London next year, and then we'll see!

Do you have any comments for the club?

MK: The only comment I can think of is that it would be helpful for newbies if people could be encouraged to shut up for a minute during the briefing at the Seymour Centre and while groups are being sorted out at Hyde Park Corner. I couldn't hear what was being said, which was how I ended up on the wrong run. I just heard, 'Eight minutes!' at HPC and off I went.

LL: I think the club is well run, well organised and has some good social events to help make it easier to meet people and build friendships in addition to improving running skills. I'm enjoying my time with the club and like how friendly everyone is.

MHS: Can we have free massages (just kidding!) and advice on injuries?

MN: Just that I'm very pleased that the Serpentine Running Club encourages beginners.

SB: No, nothing that I can say without risking an e-group meltdown!

Is there anything else you want to say?

MK: I'd just like to pass on my compliments and thanks to all the volunteers who make the club and its various activities work. There are a lot of happy runners in London as a result of all your efforts.

MH: Keep up the good work – it's appreciated, thanks!

SB: Just thanks to everyone for welcoming me into the fold. And sort your bitter out please Mr Larrick Landlord!

Do We Really Need a Welfare Officer?

Despite the fact that I pen this from the other side of the world, about to set off along the Gt Ocean Rd with 6000 other cyclists, I can hear your groans and expletives about 'welfare'. More political correctness, more bureaucracy, more committee top-down stuff, and a do-gooding, soft mentality! We're all mad anyway; otherwise we wouldn't be pushing our bodies in such a stupid way.....

Well sorry, but yes, we do need a welfare officer, who for the time being is me! This all began in about 2000 when, as a club, we weren't permitted to affiliate with the British Triathlon Association (BTA) unless we had a designated welfare officer. I was 'selected', because I was the only one known to the committee at that time who had child protection experience – without which another newly-identified welfare officer would have needed intensive training. With some surprise about this newfound and ill-explained role within the club, which didn't appear to be mirrored by the running equivalent body, UK Athletics, we inserted a sentence in our bye-laws – paragraph IX for the more obsessional amongst you:

"The club shall not tolerate the physical or mental abuse and harassment nor discrimination or defamation of any of its members during or subsequent to Club events. The committee shall appoint a Welfare Officer who may be contacted by a member to bring matters arising to the attention of the Honorary Officers. The Welfare Officer may also provide specific guidance regarding the Club's junior members."

All pretty impressive rhetoric, and I can even hear some of you saying: "it's that tri lot again; we runners don't need a welfare officer!" Well wrong again, UK Athletics, in what may have been a response to some rather nasty incidents of athletics coaches using their power to create vulnerability and establish the potential for abuse, then weighed in with even greater insistence. By 2003 they not only demanded identified and trained welfare officers, but they put this at the top of their list of priorities and requirements for club compliance. Grants and awards to clubs will depend on that compliance. They then produced an incredibly detailed and admirable paper on the Policy and Procedures.

"But this is all about child protection and it doesn't apply to us", you may be saying. However, in the eyes of UK Athletics welfare isn't restricted to child protection. They have drawn the roles and responsibilities in a much wider way than we did in our club bye-laws. Whilst these refer to child protection, they also stipulate the duties of all of us as members, both inside and outside club events.

So I and a (very) small group of willing partners are drawing up the club's welfare policy and codes of practice, which we aim to take to the 2005 AGM, but which will appear as a draft document on the website in the New Year. A proposal is that members should sign up to our ethical welfare principles when they join. We, as a club, have responsibilities to our members and a duty to report situations in which members have found, or may find themselves, at risk. Issues such as harassment, assaults or alleged assaults towards and from members, safe running, compulsive training, excessive weight loss and eating disorders will strike chords for many of us, who may be going through a particularly vulnerable life phase. What do we report, to whom, and what are the confidentiality and anonymity boundaries?

We don't, as yet, really have child protection issues to address, although our success on the social side as a dating agency is leading to an increasing number of Serpie babies. Uniquely, however, I often hear Serpentine being described as 'our family'. Maybe this is because we are an inner city London club, attracting some high-powered individuals, and many non-UK residents, deprived of the family structures and support networks back home. Given this, do we have a unique sort of responsibility for the welfare of our members?

Even within my four years in the club, we have had several incidents/concerns when, with hindsight, we could have offered members more appropriate advice, guidance and even protection. Individuals may be reluctant to 'say something' to a committee member, and yet certainly subsequent to one incident I learned that one member was not alone in the fears they experienced. Sometimes the 'cluster' factor – if only every fear had been reported to a welfare officer – may have been enough to lead to some action being taken to avert future problems.

So what are we doing about it? We are moving into uncharted territory, possibly with latent demand, so can only proceed cautiously. We won't get it all right – we are too diverse and large a membership for that – but we can try to pay more than lip service to the role of the welfare officer and:

1. Develop our own Serpentine Welfare Policy and ensure that it is on the website, with clearly stated procedures.

2. I confirm, as of 1 February 2005, my availability and that of a couple of others to offer a confidential point of reference, and base for 'referrals', initially by email or mobile phone. We could point members in the right direction for more appropriate help and advice, with a list of specialists tuned into the athlete's mindset, i.e. we don't need to be told we are at the obsessive end of the spectrum, abnormally pushing ourselves to the limit. We would not see it as our welfare officer's remit to provide in-depth counselling. Obviously if matters were serious enough to warrant police intervention, then we would have to discuss the limits of confidentiality. Our coaches too may appreciate the opportunity to explore any warning signs, and know where to turn with their anxieties.

3. Run some training sessions, hopefully in conjunction with other club events. I have some possibilities in mind, others have been suggested.

• Living with injuries, both temporary and longer term. We joined Serpies as runners – is it double jeopardy to lose our fitness and our social life?

• Nutrition and weight loss (the greatest number of hits on the website) and the other side of that coin: eating disorders and compulsive over-training.

• Safety factors – perhaps a lawyer and one of the senior members of the Belgravia Police Force to join us to talk about safety, vulnerability, recommended action in the event of an assault, and the new laws on harassment.

4. Ensure adequate links with our Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures (Rule 20). For example, when do we refuse or cease membership, or coaching status, on what basis, and what rights of appeal does that individual have?

So for the time being, my email is edwina@globalnet.co.uk and my mobile number, after 7 January 2005 is 07976 54771. For the majority of the 1,500+ membership who don't know me, I have been in child and family social work for more years than I choose to recall and when I am giving evidence in court, and as one of my kids used to say, 'nothing shocks my mum'. Sarah Newton is another long-qualified social worker. We also have an offer of help from a member who is a psychologist, with expertise in eating disorders. Another couple of volunteers in the appropriate trades, particularly male ones, would be very welcome.

Now I must get back to packing my stuff for tomorrow, and the big Australian adventure!

Eddie Brocklesby

Serpentine Health Weekend

**18-20 February 2005
Somewhere in Warwickshire**

We're in the midst of planning this year's Serpie health weekend, so we can't reveal the juicy details just yet but we can tell you that there will be a mix of lectures, panel discussions and practical sessions – all geared toward the Serpentine runner. This is a great opportunity for new members of the club to take the plunge and attend a famous (infamous?) weekend away. It's also the same weekend as the English National Cross Country Championships so if you're planning to run in this major fixture of the X/C season, then why not make a weekend of it? Transportation to the race is all part of the package and the schedule will be arranged so that you can take advantage of both events.

If you're interested and impatient to know more, you can check out Luke Marshall's article in the last issues of the Serpentine and the details from last year on the website (under Trips). You'll see that whether you're a new runner or an old hand the sessions will appeal to all.

Details will be circulated on the e-group and will be posted on the website shortly. You can also contact Nadya Labib at nlabib@serpentine.org.uk for additional information.

Serpie Success Continues

Serpies have been active and successful in the second half of 2004 and congratulations are due to many of you. There are too many achievements to list here and you can read about some of them elsewhere in this issue of Serpentine, but here are some you may not know about:

In the 2004 Assembly league, the Serpie women finished in sixth place with the men's A team coming eleventh and the B team, eighth.

In the British Miles Club's National road and track rankings for 2004, 18 Serpie men are listed as sub 3.00 marathon finishers and 18 Serpie women as sub 3.30 finishers.

Congratulations to Simon Barrett, Ian Druce and Andrew Davies who won the men's team prize at the St Neots Half Marathon, ahead of Bedford Harriers in second place.

At the Centenary running of the North London cross country championship, held at Trent Park, Lucy Brooks took silver in the women's race and Ben Paviour won bronze in the men's race. The Serpie women's team placed second and the men came third.

Less than two weeks after being first FV60 at the New York marathon, Sue Lambert represented her country in the Home International Cross Country at Lloyd Park. Sue was third individual FV60 and was part of the England gold medal winning FV60 team. The other teams competing were Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Fulda Challenge 2004

Ever fancied an all expenses paid trip of a lifetime to the Arctic?

The Fulda Challenge offers a chance for one male and one female to represent GB in a competition to win two gold nuggets worth £4000. This year's event comprises 13 different races over eight days. Activities include running, mountain biking, snow-shoeing, cross-country skiing, ice climbing, chasm crossing, 4x4 driving, and quad biking.

The Fulda organisation has been absolutely fantastic. The selection weekends in Devon and Sulden, Italy, were both well organised and fun and since I was selected they've been very helpful in organising specific training for me. This weekend they've arranged a free session ice climbing at Vertical Chill in Covent Garden and quad-bike/hovercraft driving tuition at Hoverdays

in Shropshire (hence the reason I won't be drinking too much at the Serpie Christmas party!) On Monday I'm going down to the Marine Commando training centre in Lymstone for a 4x4 driving lesson, wheel changing and chasm crossing practice.

Cross-country skiing looks so graceful and relatively easy to pick up but I changed my mind about how easy it was going to be after I joined the London Nordic Ski Club at one of their training days at Hillingdon Cycle Circuit last weekend. Seven days later, after many tears and much foot stamping, I think I'm started to get it, which is a great relief because I'll be taking part in a 30k race and I don't want to be hanging around too much at minus 30 degrees centigrade!

The Fulda Challenge hasn't even happened yet and I've already had a lot of fun preparing. They say 'a change is as good as a break'. I'm a firm believer in that. I also believe that cross-training can bring benefits mentally as well as physically, not just strengthening your body but renewing your enthusiasm ahead of the next racing season or the next challenge.

We have so many fit people within the club that I am quite sure we can get Serpie representation for next year's challenge too. Applications for the 2006 Fulda Challenge are already open at www.fulda.co.uk, so go on, have a break from running or triathlon training and try a bit of multi-sport adventure!

Emmie Gribble

Hill Sessions

Aims

If you find yourself being overtaken on hills in races, then these sessions are for you. Even if you never plan to race on hilly courses, hill sessions can be speedwork in disguise, since they yield similar improvements in anaerobic efficiency. Seb Coe – Olympic 1,500m champion and world middle-distance record holder – incorporated lots of hill-work in his training and Paula Radcliffe also does a fair amount of hill training.

Hill sessions build leg-strength, develop good hill-running technique, increase lactic acid tolerance and – not least – they increase your confidence on hills. You should begin to notice benefits after about 4 sessions.

The sessions are not recommended for new runners, those who have never attempted any speedwork before, and/or those with a tendency to suffer from plantar fasciitis (pain under the heel). If in doubt, ask me for advice.

We try to make the sessions both enjoyable (by providing plenty of variety) and taxing, and since the group is small, you get plenty of individual coaching attention.

Where and when?

We meet at the Bandstand in Greenwich Park at 10am on Saturday mornings. The Bandstand is near the Blackheath Gate to the Park, at the top of the hill if you enter through St. Mary's Gate near the Cutty Sark and walk or cycle straight up The Avenue. The Bandstand is clearly visible.

Greenwich Park makes a beautiful and inspiring setting for hill training: there are a huge variety of hills to choose from in terms of length, gradient, surface and views from the summit.

What to expect

The general plan for the session is as follows: Social warm-up of 2-3 miles jogging, stretching, strides. Change into spikes/fell shoes and take off warm-up gear. Then we do 3 sets of 4-6 hill efforts, with slower runners setting off first, regrouping at summit, then all jog down to the bottom. About 3-5 minutes jog recovery between sets.

We aim to mix and match the hills to give plenty of variety and reduce the risk of injury. Some hills are long (200m); others short and steep, but with a 60m sprint on the flat at the summit. We do them on grass as much as we can, so bring spikes or fell shoes if you

have them. If not, trainers are OK. Cool-down jog of 1-2 miles. Stretch. Finally, adjourn to the Tea House for refreshments (optional).

Because we vary the hills, there is no point in timing the hill efforts, so you will need to use your own

perceived effort as your guide. The aim is to get your heart working at its maximum on each effort. However, you may find a Heart Rate Monitor useful, if you have one.

We hold a time-trial up the main hill once every 6 weeks or so, to allow you to monitor your improvement.

Facilities

There are no showers in the park, but you can use the Arches Leisure Centre on Trafalgar Road. You pay £2.65 for a shower (and a swim) + 20p for lockers. However, there are ample clean public toilets and water fountains in the park. There is a good café for refreshments near the bandstand (the Tea House). Parking is available in Greenwich Park, but on Saturdays you need to approach through the Blackheath Gate. I take the family car and park near the Bandstand to lock possessions in during the session.

Transport

DLR: to Maritime Greenwich (Cutty Sark).

Car: Parking in Greenwich can be difficult, so suggest you approach through the Blackheath Gate, to the Pay and Display parking. Expect to need to park for 90 minutes or so.

Bike: If coming from north of the Thames, come through the Greenwich Foot Tunnel. You can cycle up to the Bandstand through the Park.

Bus: the 188 stops near the main entrance to the Park. Buses 53, 177, 180, 199, 286 and 386 also stop in Greenwich town centre.

Train: from London Bridge to Maze Hill on the Dartford via Greenwich Line.

Please let me know if you plan to join us or if you have any questions about the sessions.

Karen Hancock (Level 2 coach)

Tel: 07970 896440

e-mail: karenhancock@btopenworld.com

Serpie Sports Injury Clinic

Run by John Sullivan every Wednesday evening in the Serpie club room at the Seymour Centre from 6pm to 9pm

John offers

Pre and post run massage

Advice on injury prevention and treatment

Remedial therapy for existing injuries

Nutrition, flexibility and conditioning advice

Consultations are run on a first come, first served basis and although there is no charge, John asks for a charitable donation for Shelter, the charity for homeless people.

Make 2005 the Year You Start Writing

If you've found something to inspire you in this issue of Serpentine, why not contribute to the next issue? It's a great way to share events you've loved (or hated) with others; to give advice, ask for help or to let every Serpie know about something that's coming up. With over 1,600 members there is lots of hidden talent out there.

Email your contributions to the Serpentine team at serpentine@serpentine.org.uk

Club Championship 2004

A drama in 10 acts

The 2004 club championship season had an early start this year. "Barely escaping the ice-age" the race organisers declared the course of the **Watford Half Marathon** safe to run and the Serpies set off on some storming performances. The men's race was won by John Fairs, keeping David McGregor, the age-graded champion, off the overall championship top spot. The women's race was won by Barbara Yff, who not only won the Serpie club championship race but also the women's SEAA championship race. Serpentine won several other trophies at this event, including both team prizes and Graeme Young and Deborah Russo won the prize for the fastest married couple.

The next round of the club championships brought us to **Bramley**, the venue for the **20-mile** club championships. This time David McGregor got the better of John Fairs and defended his title while Barbara Yff won the women's title. Second claim Serpie, Huw Lobb, won the overall race but his second claim status means that he isn't eligible for the club champs.

The first big round of **marathons** took place in April, with the Paris and London marathons. Toby Radcliffe took the first lead by being fastest Serpie in Paris, but David McGregor once again ran close to 2:30 to clinch the age-graded and overall titles. Barbara Yff was our fastest woman and also led our women's team, which included Jamie Felix and Vicky Sercombe, to the team bronze medal.

The post-springtime marathon period is usually the time for shorter races and traditionally we start with the **Coombe Hill 5-mile** race. In the absence of David McGregor, the race was won by Ben Paviour, who led a strong Serpie team to win the team prize. Once again, Barbara Yff was fastest woman and Barbara also won the age-graded 5-mile title.

The summer Grand Prix of internal races started with the **5k** race in Battersea Park. David McGregor once again won the age-graded race and the outright title. Jenny Gowans won the women's race.

The **1-mile** race at Mile End followed in windy conditions. Andy Reeves won with a clear margin of about 100 metres and clinched the age-graded title as well. The women's race was won by Sarah Newton in front of Rachel Brough and "La Presidenta", Hilary Walker. After this, the 6th race in the 2004 club champs, the table was starting to look interesting – and at this stage we had the German double lead of Paul Fromme and Lars Menken.

The mile was followed by the **1k** club championship in Hyde Park. Grethe Petersen defended her 2003 title (and we hope to see her back from America in 2005 to defend it again) while Andy Reeves showed that this summer he clearly was the fastest Serpie over short distances. Eddie Brocklesby took the age-graded title and Andrew Davies moved into the lead in the overall championship at this point.

The last race in the Grand Prix series was the **3k** in Battersea Park. Once again, Andrew Reeves took the outright win and a returning Barbara Yff took both the women's title and the age-graded title. But Ian Druce was getting closer to Andy and it was looking very promising for a great 10k race. Ian also took the lead in the overall table. Andrew Reeves and Sarah Newton secured their victories in the overall Grand Prix series by accumulating the highest scores from all four races.

The **Middlesex 10k** in Victoria Park was the choice for the next race. On a stormy day Ian Druce finally won his race in front of Bhupender Singh and a returning David McGregor. Barbara Yff once again won the women's race outright and additionally the Middlesex championship. The men's team came third in the team category and the women's team came second, but Dave McGregor led the Serpie Vets team to victory. Barbara also took the lead in the overall table.

Autumn brought the next big round in the **marathon** championship, but even with great performances from Ben Beeson in Chicago, Simon Barrett in Berlin and Ian Druce in Amsterdam, no significant changes have happened to the marathon table so far. Of course, the marathon title will only be decided for definite after 31 December.

With one race to go in the championship the situation was more or less clear. David McGregor had to run the next race or Barbara Yff would win the overall title. So the **Cabbage Patch 10** would be the decider; and David did it in style. While he didn't beat Ben Paviour or Simon Barrett, he did finish in front of Barbara, something only 28 men out of 1,200 competitors managed to do. Ben led a strong Serpie team to a second place, while Barbara led the women's team to victory and this in under 58 minutes. Overall 99 Serpies ran the Cabbage Patch, making it the biggest single Serpie club championship race this season, except of course the London marathon.

So what does all this mean? After his win in 2003, David McGregor once again wrapped up the overall title in 2004 with an average score of 86.2%. Barbara Yff came second, also averaging over 80%. Barbara won seven titles; Andy Reeves and David won three each; Ben Paviour won two; and each of Jon Fairs, Ian Druce, Grethe Petersen, Sarah Newton and Jenny Gowans won one title.

So once the results are announced is that all? No, not really. The Serpentine Club Championship is more than the race at the front of the field. Races we pick are suitable for pretty much all standards, which is borne out by the great level of participation in them. 388 Serpies participated in the club championships in total, and 28 completed six or more races to

qualify for the overall title. Whether you score nearly 90% like David in the London marathon, or 38.7 % like Gordon Hutton at the New York marathon, you are always a part of the huge Serpie family at one of these races.

So why not take part in next year's club championship? The Watford half marathon and Worthing 20-mile race have already been announced as scoring races for next year. And even if you didn't get into the London marathon, there are plenty of others around to choose from. Keep an eye on the website and e-groups for advance notice of the other club championship races for 2005.

Lars Menken

Quiz Night

The quiz/supper in October was a hard fought affair enjoyed by 40 Serpies. Ian Hall's team won, beating Richard Melik's tri team on the final question. A rematch has been demanded!

The next quiz/supper is provisionally set for Sunday 30 January and tickets will be on sale in early January. Rounds include:

RNR

Theme music

Advanced Serpie aptitude test

and an Air guitar round

(Joe Satriani's "One big rush", so get practising!)

To dust off the grey cells, one of the rounds is below. It uses the American pronunciation of Van Gogh.

Vincent Van Gogh had many relatives including:

- his dizzy aunt (*Verti Gogh*)
- a hairdresser cousin (*Wash Anne Gogh*)
- another aunt who taught positive thinking (*Wayto Gogh*)
- and a Mexican cousin (*Amy Gogh*)

Can you name more of his extended family?

- Brother who ate prunes
- Red hot saucy nephew
- His short granddaughter who's a picture
- His other granddaughter who's a pudding
- Niece who travels the country in a van
- His snooker-lovin' brother twice removed
- His other snooker-lovin' brother thrice removed
- Nephew who drove a stage coach
- Magician uncle
- Little bouncy nephew
- The nephew psychoanalyst

- And his glorious one-night stand who said???

A Message from the Club Secretary

When I took on the role of Secretary I didn't really know what was involved. Aside from the telephone enquiries about the club, the paperwork, and the long committee meetings, how would I summarise what I've learnt? Well, there are two main things.

Firstly, I've heard the jokes about risk assessments like "how many members of the committee does it take to change a light bulb?" It does appear that R*SK might be the only four letter word that is little understood in the club and it's a great shame that some members don't realise what could happen if the club were to be sued.

Because of the nature of the organisation, members of the committee, and particularly the officers, could be held liable were some third party to be injured (or worse). So the committee needs to consider what could go wrong with any event, but especially our Wednesday night runs. Whether we like it or not, we live in a litigious society and scores of runners (or cyclists) charging around central London are inherently risky, both to themselves and to others. If athletes want to go off and do their own thing, that's fine (heck, it's great), but organisers have to be clear to participants that such events are without official club sanction. Responsibility then falls on the participants and the organisers: perhaps an easy load to bear if it's you and your mates, but it gets harder as the numbers swell. I'd hope that your committee has a role to help you though. We've spent a great deal of time thinking about risk and we can help Serpentine members dot "Is" and cross "Ts" to organise safer training and events that are more protected from litigation and covered by our insurance if the worst should happen.

But risk isn't just about avoiding injuries; other things can go wrong with event organisation. To give some recent examples: the less serious like running out of food, through cancellation due to poor weather, to first aid cover not turning up. Our races can only get a permit, insurance or the permission of the Royal Parks with a risk assessment in place. Despite the jokes, it's been pointed out to me by someone in the business that our risk assessments are very short, so perhaps we're getting the balance about right. But we know that without risk assessments, there would be no races, no use of Hyde Park, no Wednesday night runs, and, effectively, no club.

Secondly, there is so much good work going on in the club. But where are we going? We have a mission statement. You didn't know? Nor did I. Why not check out the website? I hate the term, which reminds me too much of large companies trying too

hard to be socially acceptable, but ours gives a clear indication of what previous committees thought we should be aiming at. However, we have not got a way of recording what you, the membership, want the club to do over the coming years. Are you content for the committee to take things forward themselves? Neil and I will be setting up meetings with groups of you in the near future to discuss these issues but feel free to email me at hon.secretary@serpentine.org.uk with your ideas.

What really matters is what you want, but here's an indication of the questions that could usefully be discussed

- We now have over 1600 members. At the current rate of growth we could have well over 2000 by next summer. Is this too big?
- We have a licence to use the Seymour Centre for the immediate future but no permanent home – do we want one?
- We have a large turnover of members each year, what do they want and how can we keep them?
- Our coaching capacity for all disciplines is coming on tremendously and our track and field officials are growing in number, but where are our road running officials?
- Our elite performance has been fantastic in the last few years, is this something we want to put more resources into?
- If London wins the bid for the 2012 Olympics, how should we position the club?
- Do we want a club sponsor?
- Do we want a bigger media profile?
- **In fact what sort of club do we want to be?**

So many questions, and I suspect so many answers too. I look forward to discussing them with you – look out for details on the website, e-group and in the Sentinel.

Have a lovely (and safe) new year

David Knight

PS In case you haven't worked out the joke, it's "all of them" – one to change it and the others to write the risk assessment. Here's my (slightly cynical) reply – How many accidents does it take to stop the club from running in Hyde Park? Answer: One.

Derek Johnson 1933-2004

Photo © Ed Lacey
www.sporting-heroes.net



It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of Serpentine RC's most distinguished member, Olympic 800m silver medalist, Derek Johnson.

Derek James Neville Johnson was born 5 January 1933 in London. He displayed his great talent at an early age, recording a British age-best time of 48:8sec to win the AAA Junior 440yd title in 1950 when aged only 17. He improved to an English native record of 47:9 in 1954 and to 47:7 in 1958. He also produced creditable performances over distances ranging from 100yd to 2 miles, as well as over hurdles and the 3000m steeplechase. However, his greatest achievements were over 800m and 880yds.

In August 1954 at the Empire (now Commonwealth) Games in Vancouver, Canada, he led England to a clean sweep of the medals, taking gold in the 880yds. His winning time was 1:50:7. Derek then took a second gold medal as his 46:9 final leg took the English 4x440yd team to victory.

Later that month, at the European Championships held in Berne, he ran in what was considered the greatest 800m race up to that time. Derek finished fourth in 1:47:4, a full second under Sydney Wooderson's UK record. The first four men finished within three-tenths of a second of each other. In 1955 he won the AAA Championship over 880yds in a time of 1:51:4.

Undoubtedly, Derek's finest race occurred in the 1956 Olympic 800m final at the Melbourne Games. Here he was pitted against the powerful USA runner, Tom Courtney. Derek battled Courtney down the

final straight and with 20m to go had his chest just in front. But Courtney made a desperate lunge for the tape, just piping Derek for the gold medal. There was just one-tenth of second between them, the smallest time difference that at the date could be measured on a stopwatch. Derek was to take a further medal at the Games, bronze in the 4x400m relay.

Derek further improved his British 800m record to 1:46:9 and 1:46:6 in 1957. In July 1957, he also took the British 880yd record with 1:48:5.

In 1958 Derek won a silver medal on the English 4x400m team at the Empire Games, but after running 3:42:9 for 1500m to top the British rankings in 1959 he contracted tuberculosis and spent a year in a sanatorium. He displayed great tenacity in shaking off the illness and returned to the 800m to record 1:50:0 in 1963.

Other best times are; 1000m 2:20:4 (1956); 1 mile 4:05 (1957); 440yd hurdles 53:7 (1956); 3000m s/c 9:16:8 (1957).

A graduate of Oxford University, Derek was Secretary of Oxford University Athletic Club at the time Roger Bannister ran the first sub 4-minute mile at the University's Iffley Road track. Derek was responsible for directing the rolling of the cinder track prior to the race and is standing next to the timekeepers in the famous photo of Bannister crossing the finishing line.

After his competitive career had ended, Derek became involved as an athletics administrator. He was a leading figure in the International Athletes Club and for a time was Secretary of the South of England Athletic Association.

Derek was one of the earliest members of Serpentine Running Club and was actively involved with the club until illness struck earlier this year. He found a new lease of life competing as a "Supervet" in throwing and jumping events. He was also the starter for many of our home track and field matches and was the club's first coach. In June 2004, Derek accompanied the Olympic torch in a taxi on one of the relay legs through London.

I'm sure you will join me in extending sympathies to Derek's widow and family, especially his young daughter.

Malcolm French

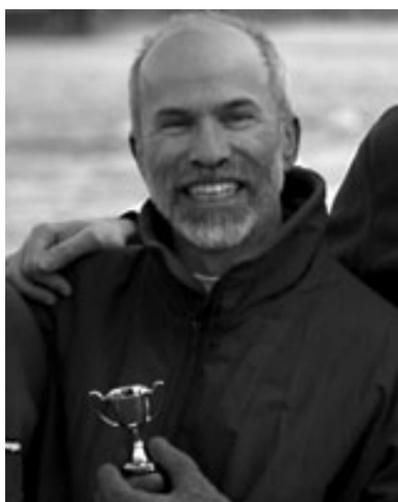
The New Faces on the Committee



Neil Melville is taking over the post of communications and he's keen to reach out to as many people as possible. 'I'd like to see people getting involved in a wider range of activities,' says Neil, who came to London from Scotland seven years ago. He's been a Serpie for about four years. In that time he's done cross-country, road racing and triathlons. He counts the Two Breweries 20-miler, Coniston and this summer's Enduroman as his favourite races.

The best tip he ever got was 'track training doesn't need to be uncomfortable – just going as fast as you want to run in racing or anything faster than your usual plod will do you good.' He probably went a little faster than his regular plod when he emerged from a dip in Mexico to find his clothes had disappeared from the beach. Apparently getting back into his hotel was tricky.

Neil, who is a big fan of Damien Hirst's artwork, says he admires a lot of athletes. 'I admire Serpentine's ironmen in all their forms – Mike Hanreck, Emmie Gribble and Adrian Jones for their grit and dedication that I could never get close to, and many others.'



Ron Hagell's been running for 25 years and for the past nine he's been a Serpie. A regular Wednesday-nighter Ron's done triathlons and swimming with the club. His favourite distance used to be the marathon (Boston ranking up there for this South Carolina native), but these days he prefers sprinting 200 and 400m on the track.

As a filmmaker Ron's got an eye for a scene and one of his more memorable experiences was when the van he was in ran out of petrol 30 miles outside of London when his group was returning from the Welsh Castles Relay. 'We were directed by the AA to leave the van and wait on the other side of the barrier fence,' Ron recalls. 'In the group was a Welshman named Leighton Grist who turned out to know all the words to the entire Motown back catalogue and so there we were, 10

Serpies, tired as hell watching the sun set on a rocky bank beside the M4 singing The Tracks of My Tears.'

If his music philosophy is the same as his sports philosophy then he'd say 'anyone can do it'. One of the things that Ron loves about the club is that it's so sociable, but this year's fundraiser director would like to see the administration improve and to have more people volunteering to help out.

If one person will make a real difference to membership this year it will be **Sid Wills**. This retired teacher and counsellor is out with the starter group every week – despite the fact that he himself started running with the Serpies five years ago.

'The best thing about the club is the great range of people with a huge range of running abilities,' Sid says. 'I would like to help new members integrate,' he says, noting that the 1,600 membership can make that difficult. Still some of the Serpie events attract smaller groups such as the handicap race, or the last Friday of every month race. Sid's done 33 handicaps and he says the best running tip he ever got was 'Never look back in the handicap'. The other words of wisdom that this coach (currently working on his level two certificate) likes come from Bobby McGee who helped numerous Olympians. He said, 'I believe it is not the training, but the spaces between the training that are the most critical.'

Sid fills his time off with his partner Alison, his grandchild, music and reading. The Newcastle native's sports philosophy is that running should be joyful and draw on the imagination.

Beware of Serpentine's new race director **Lars Menken**. He's packed in just about everything you possibly can during the two years he's been a member.

'I started with a Wednesday run, then the handicap, then Saturday runs and



track sessions,' he says, adding he's also done most club championship races since he joined the club, some relays, track and field, cross country, swimming, triathlons and marathons. 'One could say I get my value out of my £20 annual fee.' Or one could say he wants to see it go even further – this Bremen, Germany native thinks there's some space between May and July for another event.

What drives Lars to do so much? His philosophy is to have fun and not to do every event with a PB in mind. His top tip is to get advice from many different qualified people and to look for what will work best for you. His favourite races are cross country in the winter and 1,500m and 3,000m in the summer. He also likes the handicap all year round, some 110m hurdles and sometimes a marathon for a weekend away.

But the best thing about the Serpentine club is the social aspect, Lars says. 'After a Tuesday track session we go to the pub, after the Wednesday Parks run we go to the pub. This is also what we do after a cross country race or after a track and field meeting. We now have big turnouts at these events and this makes them even more fun.'

You may have seen him behind the lens of his camera, but **David Knight** wants to play a bigger role behind Serpie scenes as the Honorary Secretary. 'There seems to be a gulf between the committee and the rest of the club,' David says. 'But we're there to represent club members. I'd like to be more proactive and to think more strategically.'



That's why he wants to know what your vision of the club is and how you'd like to see it develop in the

future. (For more on this please see the article on page 26). David, originally from North London, has been with the Serpies since 2000. He's been a runner for 20 years and his favourite distance is 10 miles, which he once won in a Sri Chinmoy race in Battersea Park.

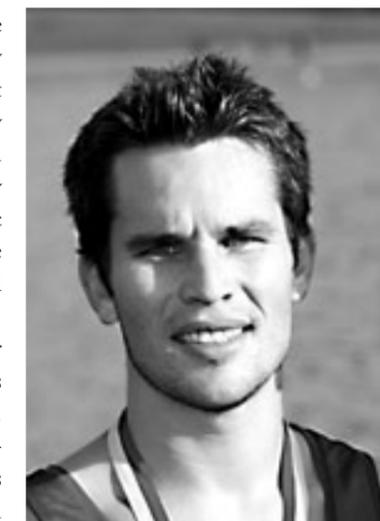
Around that time he was also doing ultra training of up to 35 miles. Unfortunately, he was injured and these days he only runs occasionally. But he says the

injury spurred him on to do more photography. 'I really enjoyed it and I've met so many more people doing that than racing,' he says of his hobby.

He's still a fan of running though and says, 'Running can be whatever you want it to be.' His sports philosophy is 'Always do a little more than you think you can.'

When **Justin Lock** moved to London from Adelaide, Australia in 1999 he thought he'd only stay for a couple of years but he took up running, joined the Serpies in 2002 and hooked up with his girlfriend.

'I could say joining the club is the reason I'm still here in London, but I might get into trouble with Rachel [Brough] for that,' he says. Since joining the Serpies, Justin's been busy – not just laughing at sleepy-head Robin Gray and karaoke master John Greene, but actually expanding his athletic prowess beyond the one half-marathon he did before joining the club. 'I've done my first ever track and field and cross country events,' he says. 'I've learnt to swim properly, had my first attempts at duathlon and triathlon and I've run races from 100m up to the marathon. I've travelled to Wales, Leeds, Norfolk and all around London. I'm even about to become a graded field official.'



As the facility and kit director Justin wants the Serpies to get a clubhouse and to look smart when competing. He suspects the latter may be a little easier to achieve, thanks to help from people like Lynne Maughan and Jenny Gowans.

Whatever comes his way, he's unlikely to be daunted. His sports philosophy is that 'taking part and enjoying yourself is most important. After that I always try and do the best I can do and try and encourage and help my friends to do the same.'

Sharon Lindores

Who Are You Running For?

When I started racing in January 2003, I mentioned the London marathon to another runner who promptly asked me “Who are you running for?” He was probably expecting me either to give him the name of a charity or to say that I was lucky enough to get a place in the ballot, but my answer was “Serpentine”. While this isn’t exactly true in an event like the London marathon, unless you are running in the elite field, running for my club was still what I was felt that I was doing.

Since then I have run in many races, and I have always run both for and with the club. You may be wondering what it means to run for a club and not just for yourself and towards your own goals. In my mind it’s basically the same as when you play football: in a football team, when you’re part of the team you wear the strip and play for your team; with Serpentine, you’ve joined the team by joining the club, so you wear the Serpie colours when you run to show you’re part of that team. Many of you may question whether running can truly be a team sport. I believe that it can. And within the Serpentine Running Club there are many of opportunities to join the team.

In the winter months we have several cross-country teams in different leagues. There’s the metropolitan league, where the club has entered two teams this season. We also have a team in the Sunday XC league. “Ok, so you’ve convinced me to have a go, but how do I join these teams?” I hear some of you asking right now. It’s really very easy: you turn up at the race and wear your kit – that’s all. Well, perhaps you have to run as well, but you probably guessed that was the catch. In the met league the first 24 Serpie finishers score for our two teams, and in the Sunday league the first eight Serpie finishers score points. So now you may be thinking “But what about the other runners – the Serpies who finish after the scorers?” Even though they don’t score race points, they are all part of our team and all take part in the fun which goes along with it. Plus, wherever they finish in the race they are taking finishing places, and therefore potential points, from other clubs. By taking part and being part of our team you are already scoring points for the club.

At the end of the XC season we have a mob match with Thames Hare & Hounds. This race is something very special because here every runner is definitely in the scoring team, meaning that the more people we have running for us the more points we score. There are also team events as part of the XC championship races. They are scored like the normal league events with the only difference that only complete teams can score. This means we need the minimum number of people to be run in the competition. Last XC season, Serpentine won several awards in different categories in the championship races.

So what if you don’t like XC but still like the idea of running as a team sport? Well, in the summer we have teams in several track and field leagues. Serpentine has two men’s teams, two veteran teams and one Rosenheim league team, and next season maybe we’ll even have a women’s team in the Rosenheim league as well. In these difference T&F leagues you can participate, running and throwing for your club.

While for the two men’s teams you have to be good to take part in the competition; in the other teams there are lots of spaces for people who just want to have a go and take part.

Right, so you don’t like cross country and don’t fancy track and field but you are basically a road runner. You may not think it, but we have team competitions for you as well. In the summer we enter the Sunday league, which is, in principal, like the Sunday XC league in a mob match mode. The more people who turn up at the four races, the more points we score. And vets score even more points. Children can take part and score for the club as well, in a shorter tenderfoot race and in relays. The more people we have in these races, the better for the club. If you are not in London at the weekend, you could still run for us in the Assembly league, which takes place on Thursday evenings. The same principal works here – the only difference is that cake and tea after the run gets swapped for a pint or two in the pub. In all the leagues I have talked about so far, your entry fee is paid by the club, except for the Summer league where you are asked to pay just £1 (but there are sandwiches, cakes and drinks provided after the race, so it’s pretty good value for money).

What if you like to enter races where you get a medal, a t-shirt or another memento? Even there, you can run for your club. If you enter a race that gives team prizes, make sure you enter your club name as Serpentine. If three or four members (depending on the race) have entered the race with the same team name, the club has effectively entered a team in that race and you could find yourself part of it.

This is exactly what happened to Christel Beukes, Marie Fontaine and Nadya Labib, who went to run the Blackpool half marathon as part of a fun weekend away and came home with medals as the British Masters Athletic Federation half marathon champions (W35/40) for 2004. If you have entered a race and would like to know if other Serpies are also taking part, you can post a message on the e-group. We are also hoping to enhance the Serpie Results database soon, so that members can add details of races they have entered and other Serpies can check out who else has entered. The club is targeting some races in particular and trying to get teams together for them. In 2004 Serpentine won team prizes at Watford, Bramley, Coombe Hill, Hackney and the Cabbage Patch. Maybe these seem familiar? Yes, they were club championship races.

But perhaps racing with other Serpies doesn’t make you feel enough like part of a team. You could try one of the relay events we take part in. There are different options available, from one-day relays, where three or four people share the load of a marathon to weekend relays, where teams of 10 or 20 Serpies share 200 miles between them.

You see, there really are many ways to make running a team sport and less lonely than many people believe it is. I very much hope to see you at some of our league events competing as part of the Serpie team.

Lars Menken

Multi-Sport Championship 2004

The 2004 Serpentine men’s multi-sport champion was decided at the very last event, the Monsterman duathlon on 11 December. A total of 12 Serpie men completed the off-road event in Hampshire in freezing fog. Despite leading the multi-sport table throughout the year, Richard Melik was pushed into third place overall by Andy Davies, with Andy Reeves taking first place by the narrowest of margins.

The women’s multi-sport champion had already been decided before Monsterman, but in true Serpie spirit Jenny Gowans still ran and biked through the Hampshire countryside, one of four Serpie women to complete the course. Second in the overall table was Rachel Brough, another Monsterman competitor, and third was Lynne Maughan.

The total points amassed by the top three were

Andy Reeves: 483.2
Andy Davies: 482
Richard Melik: 480.4

Jenny Gowans: 489.2
Rachel Brough: 446.3
Lynne Maughan: 428.3

The competition in the first Serpie multi-sport championship has been fierce and many of you have enjoyed taking part in events that were new to you. I hope many more Serpies will be inspired to have a go in 2005. Details of the qualifying events for next year’s championship will be published on the website soon.

Ian Hodge

100 Club

How does it work?

Just buy one or more numbers between 1 & 100, at a cost of £1 a week. Your numbers are then entered in a draw which is held after each month’s handicap. If your number is picked, you could win one of eight prizes of £100, £50, two prizes of £25 or four prizes of £10. You keep the same number as long as you keep paying, and the odds are good – much better than the lottery – and the tension at the draw is high.

What is the money used for?

The proceeds of the 100 Club are used to meet the costs of Serpentine.

How do I join?

To join the 100 Club, you need to decide which number to buy. You can reserve your number online but your number will not be entered in the draw until you have paid.

How do I pay?

You can pay by standing order (£26 every six months) or by cheque. There is an online standing order form on the website. Please send your completed standing order form, or your cheque, to Terry Smith, 127 Clive Road, West Dulwich, London, SE21 8DF. Please note that if you don’t pay by standing order, and you don’t make your payment, then you will not be eligible to claim a prize.

Who have the recent lucky winners been?

	Oct 2004	Nov 2004	Dec 2004
£100	Jeff Prestridge	Jeff Prestridge	Nelofar Syed
£50	Martin Garrett	Paul Flood	David Lipscomb
£25	Juliet Allen Ellen Kaldor	Malcolm French Ian Hodge	Manuel Moreno Phil Cuypers
£10	Zara Shadiou Gill McCabe Desmond Hampton Ena Urich	Phil Cuypers Lynne & Simon Maughan Phil Harris Jemima Johnstone	Ron Hagell Christine McNeill Tony Leppard Lesley Francis

Sunday Cycle Rides



Why do a Sunday ride?

- A long steady ride each week will bring many benefits to your general fitness and perhaps more importantly, your bike split in a triathlon, come the summer.
- Riding at a steady pace for 2 hours or more means you will be improving your cardio-vascular base fitness and developing your body's ability to burn fat.

But why ride with a group?

- Riding with others is sociable, the miles fly by and you are training at a pace where you are able to chat and get to know others in the club.
- Group riding improves your bike handling skills. By watching other people you soon realise that you can take a more efficient line round corners, climb a hill a little bit faster, descend comfortably and overall become more confident on your bike.

What to expect

- A group can be up to 10 riders; 8 is ideal, even numbers are best as it allows the whole group to ride 2 abreast.
- Each group will have a leader, this person is someone who knows the route and will take decisions on which way to turn at junctions and roundabouts, they will ride at the front of the pack. The leader is not necessarily a coach or a very good cyclist but simply someone to take responsibility for pace and direction.
- The idea of any group ride is for the group to work together to look after each other. Communication is key. Those at the front will signal clearly at junctions and point out any nasty potholes. Those behind the leaders will repeat these messages and so they filter down the group to those at the back.
- Shouts of "slowing", "stopping", "car back" or "car front" are fairly common and self explanatory.

- It may be helpful to think of yourself as a link in a chain – you are following the person in front, and are being followed by someone behind.

Tips on following a wheel

- Following the cyclist in front will reduce the wind resistance you have to cut through. The closer you get to the back wheel of the cyclist in front, the less effort you will have to make to keep a constant speed.
- Following a wheel is a skill that has to be learned. It can be quite frightening to trust someone you don't know not to jam their brakes on in front of you. Start off gently, try to ride about one bike's length away from the wheel, as your confidence and understanding grows you will begin to feel happier getting a bit closer.
- Don't look at the wheel; look at the person's back or shoulders. Look around you – if you fixate on the wheel you won't see if the bike is slowing down and sooner or later you might hit it.
- Don't overlap the wheel in front, ride behind it, or very slightly offset, but never let your front wheel go in front of that back wheel. If the rider in front decides to move to the side slightly you will both come off your bikes.

Other tips

- Make your rides more interesting by using a computer to give you some statistics on your ride. The most significant measure at this time of year is your cadence; that is how many times you turn your pedals a full revolution in one minute. You should be aiming for around 90 to 100.
- A high cadence means using an easy gear, that way you are not risking injury by putting strain on your muscles, you are also training your legs to turn over at high speed effortlessly. Add some strength to this equation and you will be flying this summer.
- Keep your upper body still, your hips should not be rocking from side to side, this is wasted energy. Let the legs turn over a high cadence, train them to do all the work for you, so all you have to do is enjoy the scenery.

For further details see the Serpie website: <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/tri/training/bikerides.php> or contact cycling@serpentine.org.uk.

Lucy Dove

Trailplus marathon training camps

It's 7am, pitch black, and a light misty rain is engulfing the Forest of Dean. We, some 30 runners from all over the country, stand huddled together, awaiting the arrival of our coach and inspiration for the weekend, Keith Anderson. A vision in Adidas blue appears and suddenly we're off, into the gloom of the forest, on our pre-breakfast run, the first of three runs that day.

So begins a Trailplus marathon training camp, an intense weekend of running held in the beautiful Forest of Dean. The camps are the brainchild of Anderson, a self-proclaimed heavy smoker and drinker until the age of 30, a Commonwealth Games marathon runner at 40. The concept is simple: bring together a group of runners and a number of top coaches in a stunning setting. Feed them well, train them hard, and everyone goes home with an immense sense of satisfaction as well as an improved understanding of what marathon running is all about.

Packed into two days, Anderson and his colleagues cover just about everything one could possibly want or need to know before attempting a marathon. Whilst the camp attracts many first and second-time marathoners, and a few runners at the "just thinking about it" stage, the weekend is suitable for every level of runner, such as Malcolm, a lively northerner who was looking for a new PB after 72 marathons. Much of the input is practical, with four runs being packed into the weekend; an easy, pre-breakfast run, interval training, a hill session, and a cleverly organised long run that enables the group to stick together yet run a range of distances. The coaches run alongside, supporting, challenging, and, most importantly, offering advice on technique. Most of the running is off road, sticking to well-maintained trails; depending on the weather, there is also some serious mud to contend with. The runs are interspersed with a wide variety of theory sessions, covering everything from nutrition and hydration to massage and stretching, from kit and shoes to how to cope with the big day itself. In addition, every participant is entitled to a 20 minute one-to-one session with one of the coaches to create a personal marathon training plan.

For many, the highlight of the weekend is the food! A field studies centre provides a warm and comfortable base, and Anderson employs a chef to feed the hungry runners. Both the quality and quantity of food are superb, with plenty of much-needed carbs on offer at each meal. There is running kit on sale throughout the weekend, and Adidas foot scanning technology available.

I attended a Trailplus weekend whilst training for my first marathon; I had been unwell and not run for two weeks, and was on the verge of abandoning the idea of a marathon altogether. Two days of encouragement and advice from Anderson and his colleagues in such a beautiful part of the country was enough to put me back on track. In fact, on the train home, I felt I was Paula Radcliffe! The advice I had been given proved invaluable in the rest of my training and enabled me to complete, and even enjoy, my run in London.

If you are tempted, find out more at www.trailplus.com. The 2005 weekends cost £175 and will run on 7-9 January, 28-30 January, 4-6 February, 11-13 February and 25-27 February. The Forest of Dean is easily reached by car via the M4, or by train from Paddington (Anderson will collect you from the station at the other end). Book early – once the London ballot results are out, the camps fill up quickly.

Rachel Powell

Serpentine Calendar 2005

Serpie days hath September is now true for the whole year as the launch of the 2005 Serpie calendar proves. It includes photos of Serpies in action, popular club events including Club Championship races, cross country, duathlons, triathlons and marathons to help you plan your racing schedule for the New Year. The calendar raises money to go towards events and activities in your club, so your support of this project is much appreciated.

It's still not too late to get a copy of this fabulous calendar. You can get all the details and see a sample of some of the great photos on the Serpie website at <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/club/calendar/index.php>.

You can order your copy online, by mail or in person and the cost is the same: £10 per copy. Please add £1 for postage (regardless of how many copies you require) for delivery in the UK. If you require delivery outside the UK please email Lynne Maughan for a price.

To order your calendars by mail you can send a cheque for £10 made payable to Serpentine Running Club, adding £1 for postage (regardless of how many copies you require). Post your cheque including your name and postal address printed clearly to:

Serpie Calendar 2005, 5 Skelgill Road, London SW15 2EF.

Green Belt Relay

The 2005 Green Belt Relay is a little later than usual, on 21 & 22 May 2005. For those who don't know what it's all about, the race is a circumnavigation of London over two days, following the surrounding Greenbelt countryside and towns, with the start and finish in Twickenham. The route is divided into 20 sections (between 8 and 14 miles each); each team has 10 runners and all runners must run at least twice, once on each day of the race.

The race is a lot harder than it might sound, with racing on two consecutive days. Many sections are off road and some navigation is required to keep on the correct route. It's traditional for at least one Serpie to get lost each year (although only temporarily!) Don't be put off though, the GBR weekend is always one of the highlights of the Serpie year and it's guaranteed to be good fun.

Serpentine will be entering several teams. If you would like to take part, you should have a good solid background in distance running or be prepared for some tough training between now and then.

As well as runners, the event cannot take place without plenty of people who would like to help with the organisation of the Serpie teams by providing a useful skill such as minibus driving, first aid, map reading, physio etc.

If you would like to find out more about the event, check out the GBR website at <http://www.greenbel-relay.org.uk/>

If you would like to help with pre-event organisation or take part in the event, contact Ian Hodge: ihodge@serpentine.org.uk.

Swapping Race Numbers

Repeatedly we get asked whether an athlete can swap a race number with someone else. The answer is no – unless you have the explicit permission of the race organiser, and if you do, it's best to get this in writing.

Why?

- You might compromise the prize-giving, eg a male with a female's number comes above a legitimate category winner – this has actually happened to a Serpie woman.
- If you had an accident you might not get the right treatment and your relatives might not be informed – and someone else's will!

Many races have a clear rule about not allowing number swapping but you shouldn't assume that others allow it. Our governing bodies take this matter very seriously and you may get banned from racing anywhere. The Club itself will look at each case on its merits and may take its own sanctions, which can include exclusion from the Club and reporting the issue to the appropriate governing body.

Do not post messages on the e-group or elsewhere offering or seeking race numbers unless you have cleared it with the race organiser.

New Years Day 10k

We are still looking for more helpers at the annual Serpie 10k race on New Years Day. Don't forget, without volunteers this race can't take place.

Many of you have signed up to help, but we need a total of about 70 – 80 helpers to be able to put the event on. On the day we will need people to marshal the course, give out water, record numbers, manage the finishing funnel, provide first aid, give out goody bags and watch runner bags, to name just a few activities.

The race has an 11am start so you don't have to miss out on your New Year celebrations and you can continue them with your fellow Serpies after the race. If you are going to be in London on New Years Day and are willing to help, please sign up on the web page at www.serpentine.org.uk/events/nyd10k/register_help.php. Please log into the Serpie database before you register so your details will come through automatically.

If you don't have access to the website but would like to help, please call me on 07984 084152.

I look forward to seeing lots of you in Hyde Park on 1 January.

Lars Menken

Last Half of the London Marathon

What is it?

Every year Serpies do a training run along the last half of the route of the London marathon so that runners can get familiar with the route: it helps to know that you have run this part before when you are there during the marathon. You should be aware that this is not a race, not even a tempo run. It is recommended to run 30 to 60 seconds a mile slower than marathon race pace. After all, this is an event to familiarise yourself with the route in pleasant company.

When is it?

It will be on Sunday 3 April. This is too close to run if you are running Paris or Rotterdam. We would like as many people as possible who are running these marathons to volunteer as helpers.

Where is it?

We start the run at Tower Hill tube station – at about mile 13 of the marathon. From there, we run onto the Isle of Dogs and follow the route of the

London marathon through Docklands, along the Embankment and finish on the Mall, just like in the marathon.

What's special about it?

We will have cyclists supporting each group. There will be people who know the route to lead each group. We will have 3 or 4 water stations along the route; and after the run we plan to have a nice brunch for all runners and helpers. We will also transport your bags from the start to the finish (bags do not include bicycles!)

Do you need helpers?

Yes, organising a 13 mile run for 200 people needs a lot of helpers. We need people to support with cycling, running water stations, marshalling, transporting bags and more.

How can I sign up to run or help?

Keep an eye on the e-groups, website and Sentinel. We will keep you informed.

Help Required

Can you spare a little time to help Serpentine (and me)? I have two positions which need filling:

SerpieMail Administrator

Our email system, hosting all the serpentine.org.uk addresses was setup by Owen Barder and Ian Priddle and it allows us to have a much more flexible system than is available from high street ISPs. Ian Priddle has recently made major upgrades and changes to it to greatly simplify the day-to-day running and provide lots more capacity. However, Owen is now in California and Ian is now in Australia so we need someone to do the day to day admin. (Ian still intends to do the system administration for the foreseeable future).

The work would probably take about 1 hour per week and mostly involves using a web browser interface to add Serpies to the system or update mailing lists. There are a few email enquiries to answer plus a small number of slightly more technical enquiries. A limited understanding of email software like Outlook would help but is not necessary.

Trophy Secretary

We have an increasing number of trophies (club championships, triathlon championships, multi-sport, cross-country, relays, track & field) and when combined with a large and relatively mobile membership, the trophies are getting hard to keep track of. Can you spare an hour or so a month to manage them all? The basic tasks would include ordering new trophies each year, maintaining a spreadsheet database of all the trophies (who currently has them, where are they, when are they needed back to be awarded to the next winner etc.) and liaising with Bev to ensure they are all engraved appropriately. A regular Wednesday or Saturday runner would be ideal as we plan to get a trophy cabinet for the clubroom. It would help if you also attend club championship races regularly but this is not essential.

If you think you can help with either position, please contact me, Ian Hodge:
Mobile: 077 6876 5670
Email: ihodge@serpentine.org.uk

Serpentine Quiz

Compiled by Malcolm French

- 2004 sees the 50th Anniversary of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year. Who was the first winner in 1954?
 - Roger Bannister, who broke the 4-minute mile barrier
 - Lester Piggott, who became the youngest winner of the Derby
 - Chris Chatteray, who broke the 5000m world record
- The BBC has been a long-standing supporter of British athletics. How many UK Indoor and Outdoor athletics meetings are due to be shown in 2005?
 - 3
 - 10
 - 19
- 197 nations took part in the Track & Field programme at the Athens Olympics. How many nations produced a medallist?
 - 22
 - 40
 - 57
- How many Masters athletes (that's women 35+ and men 40+) took part in the Athens Olympics Track & Field programme?
 - 14
 - 29
 - 47
- In Athens the women's marathon had the greatest number of Masters. How many?
 - 12
 - 7
 - 22
- Who is the oldest person to win an Olympic 800m or 1500m title?
 - Kelly Holmes (Athens, 2004)
 - Dave Wottle (Mexico, 1972)
 - Fermin Cacho (Barcelona, 1992)
- Who was the first British woman to win any Olympics athletics title?
 - Mary Rand
 - Ann Packer
 - Dorothy Hyman
- Who is the only British woman to win an Olympic throwing title?
 - Fatima Whitbread
 - Tessa Sanderson
 - Mary Peters
- Who is the oldest man to win the Olympic 100m title?
 - Alan Wells
 - Linford Christie
 - Carl Lewis
- Where were the 2004 World Half-Marathon Championships held?
 - Veracruz
 - Kumagaya
 - New Delhi

Answers on page 38

Serpentine Handicap

Review of 2004

New course

The most significant development this year has been the extension of the handicap course to include a start/finish line adjacent to the Bandstand. Although it was disappointing to have to move the start of the race from its historic location at the Lido café after more than 20 years, I think most people now agree that our new 'home' has some distinct advantages, especially in that it facilitates a long and wide finishing straight, along which runners can clearly see and chase down those ahead of them. The new end to the race has been at least partly responsible for producing some of the closest and most exciting finishes in recent times.

Grethe Petersen and Owen Barder

Grethe and Owen left us in August for the sunnier climes of California. As I am sure many of you will know, Grethe was the handicapper for three years and, together with Owen, they oversaw the 'computerisation' of the handicap and the creation of electronic handicap records going back to August 1982. But out of sight is not out of mind. Both of them continue to maintain a keen interest in the handicap and Owen has recently been heavily involved in making the necessary adjustments to the handicap records following the extension of the handicap course. On behalf of the club, I would like to thank them both for their tremendous efforts.



Tom Hogshead

Nadya Labib was the most improved runner of the year, taking the Tom Hogshead trophy by a clear margin with 195 points. She started the year relatively slowly,

finishing no higher than 26th in the first three months. But in April she finished ninth, and went on to claim a further five top-10 finishes during the rest of the year. Nadya's highest finishing place came in September when she was third. She improved her PB an incredible seven times and took off more than three and a half minutes from her (adjusted) best time of 2003.

Second place in the Tom Hogshead went to Gordon Robertson with 165 points. Gordon had four top-10 finishes, with a best placing of second in July. He improved his adjusted/old course PB by 1 minute 47 seconds. Gordon's high finishing position is just reward for having attended 11 of the 12 handicap races this year.

David Smart narrowly edged out Rob Maslen for third place with a points total of 156. David was the only one of the Tom Hogshead winners to record race victories during the year, in March and August, and he had two other top-six finishes. David improved his (adjusted) best time of 2003 by exactly 4 minutes.

Monthly Winners

Congratulations to the following runners who scored monthly race victories this year: Robert Maslen (January); Chris Cameron-Doe (February); David Smart (March and August); Rosie Ingram (April); Owen Barder (May); Julian Bell (June); Chantal Markey (July); David Wong (September); Wai Sem Lee (October); Ros Young (November); and Lars Menken (December). It is a testament to the success of the handicapping system that 11 different runners have enjoyed victories this year.

Numbers

The handicap goes from strength to strength both in terms of the numbers of runners taking part on a regular basis and the number of new runners joining in. This year's series of 12 races attracted a total of 983 runners, the most ever, of which there were 162 scratch runners. I look forward to many more club members taking part next year.

Volunteers

My closing words go to the countless volunteers who have helped to put on the race this year – by marshalling, time keeping, or briefing scratch runners. We could not put on the race without you and I am extremely grateful. Special thanks go to the regular members of the handicap organising team – David Knight, John Walker, Beate Vogt and Ron Hagell.

Simon Maughan

Cross Country Review

As we come up to the mid-season break, we'd like to reflect on a very successful start to the season. To date 132 Serpie men and women have turned out for the club, which is the highest level of participation the club has ever seen. So I would like to say thank you to every one of you for your support.

There have been so many highlights that it's hard to know where to start. But I think that pride of place must go to Sue Lambert, who was selected to represent England in the Masters Home International staged at Lloyd Park, Croydon during November. Sue was competing against the best runners from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and she came away with a team gold medal in the W60 age group. Congratulations, Sue.

After our season opening, the Horsenden Hill Relays, at an unseasonably cold and wet Perivale, we moved on to matches in the Metropolitan and Sunday Leagues. The opening Metropolitan League race in Ruislip Woods saw excellent runs from Chris Blackburn and Barbara Yff, who finished second and third respectively. Chris' placing was the highest so far achieved by a first claim Serpie. After the first three matches, our men are in fourth place in the League with the women in sixth place. In the vets' competition, the Serpie women had a good win at Wormwood Scrubs, which has moved them up to fourth in this section of the competition.

The opening Sunday League match saw us teaming up with London Heathside AC to host the fixture at Grovelands Park, Southgate. It was the first time we'd hosted a cross country race for many years. We thought it went off very well and it was great that plenty of Serpies gave up their time to help with the timekeeping, marshalling, laying out the course and all the other jobs that have to be done to stage a race.

As we moved into November, we had a number of cup and championship races. The first of these was the SEAA Veterans (Masters) Championship, where Theresa Brady won bronze in the W40 age group.

The North London Championship was celebrating its centenary this year. This milestone was marked by a race in Trent Park, Cockfosters. The Serpie women's team went home with bronze medals. Lucy Brooks was second woman overall and also the winning veteran. In the veterans' competition, the Serpie ladies came second. In the men's competition, Ben Paviour took bronze as did the men's team. All-in-all, a highly successful afternoon.

The London championship is always one of our most popular cross country competitions and this year was no exception. This year the standing of the race was boosted by its inclusion in the nationwide Reebok series and it was also used as the trial race for the British team for the European Cross Country Championship. The men's A team of Chris Blackburn, Andy Greenway, Ben Paviour and Simon Barrett ran superbly to win silver medals. The B team also placed prominently, finishing thirteenth, and second in the B team competition. The Serpie ladies' A team finished in fifth place.

Our final competitions for 2004 were for the Ellis and Dysart Cups. The races took place in Richmond Park. It was great to see Lucy Brooks and Vikki Sercombe coming home in first and second places. They were backed up by Sarah Edmunds, Lynne Maughan and Nancy Labiner and were convincing winners of the Dysart Cup. So could the men match this and win the Ellis Cup? Yes! Headed by Simon Barrett in second place and Steve Hilton in fifth, the rest of the cup-winning team were Andy Davies, Paul Fromme, Brian Stramer, Charles Lescott, Ruairi Maciver, Kenny Clarke, Ben Brown and Tom Wood.

Looking forward to the rest of the season, there are still plenty of events for you to take part in. The more people we have taking part, the more fun the races are. So why don't you give it a go? Please note that if you want to take part in the Middlesex, Middlesex Veterans or the English National Championships and haven't already told Angie or Malcolm, sorry but you're too late as entries have already closed.

Contacts:

Angie Palin

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angiepalin@hotmail.com

Malcolm French

H: 020 8422 3900 / MalcolmFrench@aol.com

Quiz Answers: 1. c; 2. b; 3. b; 4. c;
5. a; 6. a; 7. a; 8. b; 9. b; 10. c

Cross Country Fixtures 2005

Date	Event	Location	Comments
Sat, 8 January	Metropolitan League	St Albans	Women 4k, 1.55pm Men 8k, 2.15pm
Sat, 15 January	Middlesex Championship	Wormwood Scrubs	Women 8k, 1.50pm Men 12k, 2.45pm Entries closed
Sun, 23 January	Sunday League	Disgwell, North Welwyn	Women 3 miles Men 5 miles Combined start
Sat, 29 January	South of England Championship	Parliament Hill Fields, Hampstead Heath	Women 8k, 1.50pm Men 15k, 2.50pm Entries Closed
Sat, 5 February	Middlesex Veterans Championship	Mad Bess Woods, Ruislip	Combined race. 8k. Entries closed
Sat, 12 February	Metropolitan League	Horsenden Hill	As for 8 January
Sun, 13 February	Sunday League	Royston	As for 23 January
Sat, 19 February	English National Championship	Cofton Park, Birmingham	Women 8k, 2.15pm Men 12k, 3.00pm Entries closed
Sat, 26 February	North of the Thames inter-team race	t.b.a	Women 6k, 1.45pm Men 8k, 2.30pm Advance entry req'd.
Sat, 26 March	Mob Match v Thames Hare and Hounds	Wimbledon Common	Combined race. 5 miles. 2.30pm



Serpie Cross Country

It rained and it rained and rained and rained
The average fall was well maintained
And when the tracks were simply bogs
It started raining cats and dogs

After a drought of half an hour
We had a most refreshing shower
And then the most curious thing of all
A gentle rain began to fall

Next race was also fairly dry
Save for the deluge from the sky
Which wetted the Serpies to the skin
And after that the rain set in

Anon.

Clarendon Way Marathon Relays

The seventh annual Clarendon Way Marathon took place on Sunday 3 October and, after their great performance in 2003 in glorious sunshine, the Serpentine RC had come again, this time with five teams, to run the four stage relay. The route runs from Winchester over picturesque downs to Salisbury but as we gathered at the start conditions were rather different from last year. It was dull and grey but wasn't raining (yet) when Graeme Young, Andrew Maynard, Ian Hodge, Hilary Walker and Rachel Jarvis set off from the playing fields of Winchester College.

The first leg is mainly uphill and (Golden) Graeme (a late addition to Serpie team 1) established an early lead ahead of a group including Andrew Maynard and, astonishingly, a handful of others who were running the full marathon distance! Ian, Hilary and Rachel followed in that order to complete solid first legs for their teams. Hilary handed over to Pierre Gouin but then continued to run the whole distance.

After the first changeover, Theresa Brady and Mike Morris fought it out at the front on the longest leg of the course with a runner from Portsmouth. Theresa assisted the other two by stopping for a while and all three reached the second changeover within seconds of each other. However, the lead marathoners had passed several minutes before. Aaron Palmer, Pierre and Ron Hagell put in creditable runs on this challenging leg.

Meanwhile, a few hundred yards away, Jamie Felix was starting the half marathon. The third relay leg started with me, from Serpie team 1, trying to build a lead over Deborah Young, from Serpie team 2, and a young lady from Portsmouth. In doing so I overtook several marathoners and had a protracted tussle with another who was really getting into his stride for the second half. The rain started halfway into this stage and added to already slippery conditions. The lead cyclist was struggling and certainly wasn't managing to stay in the lead. In fact he fell off his bike just in front of me requiring evasive action.

I handed over to Gary Dench over five minutes ahead of the next team. This team helped Gary to pull away further by failing to find their final runner for a few frustrating minutes. Another team went through before Deborah handed over to Ian Lorrigo. Dan Hooton, Beate Vogt and Rachel Powell managed relatively smooth changeovers, now amongst the half-marathoners. In the half marathon, Jamie was in the lead in the women's' race.

Leg four proved to be the most treacherous, made more so by the continuing downpour. Gary D(r)ench(ed) maintained the lead but couldn't catch the lead marathoner who finished this, his first marathon, in 2 hours 47! Ian overtook the team in front but conditions restricted his charge and he brought team 2 home in third. Cathy Benson crossed the finish in fourth for team 3 and Sharon Lindores and Sally Hodge came in still smiling. *[Ed Note – still smiling but very, very wet!]*

Jamie Felix won the half marathon and Hilary Walker won her category in the full marathon. A very good performance all round. I am certainly looking forward to going back next year to help try to defend the Serpie title.

Charles Lescott

Last Friday of the Month 5k

The race has settled down following the changes that had to be made to the course from May onward, though whether the new route is quicker than the old one continues to be a matter for debate. Both routes have their fans! What is certain is that the series has attracted a growing number of runners and the October and November races both sold out: so if you want to run you'll need to enter early in future to avoid disappointment!

We have been pleased to welcome new sponsors for the series, namely the footwear and clothing companies Etonic and InSport. Their support for the races is very much appreciated.

The good news is that the Royal Parks Agency has given its provisional agreement to our continuing the series into 2005, a year in which the series will celebrate its 150th race.

We have continued to see good quality racing in 2004. The March race was of a particularly high standard and many of the times detailed in the last edition of Serpentine have yet to be bettered this year. However, they have been improved on in the following age groups: -

Best Performances since May 2004

Female

Age Group	Date	Name	Club	Time
WU17/20	29 October	Emily Pidgeon	Gloucester AC	16:53
W70	26 November	Joyce Smith	Wimbledon Windmilers	31:54

Male

Age Group	Date	Name	Club	Time
SM	30 July	David Gitau	North York Moors AC	15:02
M60	24 September	Peter Brown	West 4 Harriers	18:18
M65	26 November	Les Presland	Aldershot Farnham & District	19:08
M70	26 November	Tom Everitt	Eton Manor AC	21:32
M75	24 September	Ronald Hale	Kent AC	27:16

Emily's run was particularly outstanding (she is 15 years old) and she became only the third woman ever to finish in less than 17 minutes since the race was first staged in October 1992. The other two ladies, Annie Emmerson and Julia Bleasdale, are now both full Great Britain Internationals. Emily's age-graded time of 87.9% hasn't yet been bettered in 2004 by any man. However, two other ladies have achieved a better mark, Jane Laws with 91.0% and Ena Urich with 90.9%.

For the men, the 15-minute mark is something of a barrier. David Gitau has twice come close with clockings of 15:02 and 15:06, while Paskar Ongar from Uganda ran 15:03 in November. One of UK Athletics' High Performance Managers brought a group of his athletes to the November race and he said they'll be back in March or April next year to have an attack on the course record. It would also be good to see someone have a crack at the ultimate series record that has stood at 14:35 to Andy Arand (Army) since January 1999.

None of the races could be staged without our loyal and hard-working band of Serpie marshals, helpers and officials. Lots of the runners comment on how friendly and supportive you are and they really appreciate you giving up your time to make sure that the races can continue. Every month we need 24 people to help put on the race and John Walker and I are very grateful to everyone who has assisted this year. If you've not helped in the past, why not give it a go? It's a lot of fun.

Malcolm French

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Southern Men's League Division 4S

An old saying goes that 'A champion team will beat a team of champions'. This applies perfectly to the Div 4 Men's T&F team. We don't have too many T&F stars, but as a team we work hard, make sure we cover all the events (though 110m hurdles sometimes requires some persuasion!), and as a result, we compete well and defeat teams containing athletes several levels above us in ability, which is something we can all be very proud of.

The 2004 season was a very successful one for us. The team had a slow start with only eight competitors turning out for the first event, but Herculean efforts from Ruairi Maciver, Paul Fromme, Lars Menken and Tony McGahan, who between them competed in 28 events, ensured a third placing. A stronger team was assembled for the second event, however the competition was strong and we finished in fourth (last) place. From that point on, the performances and the season really picked up, with the final three meetings yielding a superb meeting victory (by just a single point) and two second placings, finishing the year in sixth place out of 16 teams. By the year end though, we were defeating teams above us on the ladder, and as a team we are confident that we can do even better next season. One area we may find difficult to improve on was the post-meeting celebrations. The team always heads straight for the nearest pub after an event, and on most occasions some sort of panic is required in order to get the last train back to London!

While it was a great team effort this year, there were of course many great individual performances. Tony McGahan and Derek Paterson, our T&F stalwarts, managed to make all five meetings, and got us off to a great start each time. They picked up an amazing 45 out of a possible 50 points in the pole vault this season. Lars, Paul, Andy Davies and David Lipscomb made it along to most events and provided great support to the team, scoring plenty of points (and pbs) and always being willing to fill in for extra events when the team needed them.

The most impressive debut of the year came from Andy Reeves, who won seven track events in the last three meetings, all in the most competitive 'A' string, and his willingness to give new events a try led his discovery as a superb 400m hurdler. He came under seri-

ous consideration for a new award this year, as did the guys mentioned previously. We named the new trophy, given to the team's most valuable member based on their effort and attitude in helping out the team, after Tony McGahan, who I believe this year maintained his amazing record of competing in every Saturday league event since Serpentine first joined the league many years ago. As well as competing in many of the more technical events for us, Tony is invaluable in helping the rest of us T&F novices in learning new events and improving our technique. I know Tony helped me an enormous amount personally this year, as I took up some of the field events. Tony himself came close to picking up the award this year, but in the end it was deservedly presented to Ruairi Maciver.

Roos is a bit of a madman at the track. In the four meetings he competed at this year, he completed an amazing 31 events, and picked up 104 points for the team. Not only that, but most of those were in the 'A' string, allowing the rest of us to come in and pick up the easy points in the 'B' string. And his value to the team is even greater when you consider that Ruairi competes in the technical events like the 110m hurdles, triple jump and high jump, making him almost impossible to replace. A great example of Ruairi's team spirit was evidenced in the last meeting. Nursing an injury, Ruairi still turned up to compete in the hurdles knowing how much we needed him. When two athletes failed to show up at the last minute, Ruairi agreed to take on extra events, and ended up doing eight – two more than any of the rest of us! We came second to the competition winners in that event, and beat the team previously placed third in the table, in a great example of the enormous spirit shown throughout the team. Congratulations to Ruairi on winning this award. In addition to all those already mentioned, another seven guys competed for us in one or two events this year. Thanks to Brad, Brian, Sir Charles, Gary, Kofi, Neil and Big Bob for your efforts too.

It's been a pleasure captaining the team this year, and this has been made so much easier thanks to the great help I receive. Thanks are due to our tireless team manager, John Walker, who also found time to compete in seven events for us this year and our officials and supporters Angie, Nadya, Rachel, Richard, Rosemary and Sue, without whom we couldn't compete, and wouldn't have nearly as much fun. Thanks

also go to those who helped out at our home meeting at Battersea and to Derek for doing the results.

In other T&F competitions there was more Serpie success this year, with our Division 2 team securing promotion to Division 1. The Rosenheim league attracted record numbers of Serpie participants, mostly thanks to the great promotional work done by Lars, in fact so many Serpie ladies (Serpettes?) turned up that there are plans to have a women's competition in the league next year, well done girls. We also made the interdivision final in this competition, and placed a very creditable fifth. In the vets league the ladies once again competed very strongly this year, though I hear that the vet men need a few more recruits for next season.

In total six trophies in T&F were awarded this year. Five of the trophies are new this year, and to honour athletes who have provided great service to the teams involved, in most cases over many years, and whose activities have been in the spirit in which these awards are intended, the new trophies are named after them. We decided to award the trophies according to these guidelines:

'These trophies are intended to be awarded to athletes who make the greatest contribution to the team. All areas should be considered, and activities outside of actual event performance which assist the team should be given more weight than actual performance. Such activities could include making themselves available for all meetings, filling in in non-preferred events or taking on difficult events, providing coaching to fellow team members and supporting team mates, and assisting the team captain or manager. The team captain shall decide the recipient of the award at the end of each season.'

The full list of trophy winners for 2004 is:

SML Div 2 – Robin Kindersley Trophy

Andrew Greenway

SML Div 4 – Tony McGahan Trophy

Ruairi Maciver

Vet Men – Derek Paterson Trophy

Derek Paterson

Vet Ladies – Jan Farmer Trophy

Claire Browse

Men's Rosenheim – Lars Menken Trophy

Justin Lock

Ladies T&F trophy

Rosie Ingram

I hope to see many new faces out at T&F next year. It's great fun and everyone is welcome at the Rosenheim league, which caters for all standards, so no excuses! Bring on 2005, which is likely to kick off with a Serpie decathlon in late April, where newcomers to T&F will be especially welcome.

Justin Lock



Serpies online

The award-winning Serpie website at www.serpentine.org.uk has information for all runners and triathletes.

New on the website

www.serpentine.org.uk/events/planner.php

Interactive race and event planner: search by date, race or sport.

www.serpentine.org.uk

homepage shows latest results

www.serpentine.org.uk/club/howdoesitwork.php

how the Club works

www.serpentine.org.uk/tri/advice

Bike buying guide, big week training advice

www.serpentine.org.uk/tri/racing

Details of all club championship races, a new race search.

www.serpentine.org.uk/tri/training/swimplans.php

Weekly swim schedule

www.serpentine.org.uk/tri/training/bikerides.php

This weeks rides: find out who else is biking this weekend or find people to go out with by volunteering to lead a ride.

Results database

Results for many of the club races are online in the results database: www.serpentine.org.uk/rdb. All the club championship road races, handicaps and "last Friday of the month 5km" races are there, as well as many marathons and other open races. You can also add any of your own results to make your own personalised 'results' page.

Serpie Egroups

Our email chat-lines are the best way to keep in touch with other Serpies. All members should join the main Serpentine list, which now has around 725 members and is the best way to keep up to date with events and join in with lively debate on running-related subjects. If you are interested in triathlons or multi-sport, there is another list for those too. To join the email groups, send a blank email to:

Serpentine main list serpentine-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Multi-sport list serpietri-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Slow-Serpie Marathon Insanity

Davos 2004



If ever there was an event in the Serpie calendar for the mentally insane runner, this is it. Davos has the lot, magnificent scenery, fantastic trail running, superb walking, and awesome races, a truly superb retreat for runners and non-runners alike. The week of sociable running culminates in the multi-thousand-strong Swiss Alpine Marathon, a choice of a 30K, two 42Ks or a 78K trail race along the beautiful Dischma Valley and for the longer races, up to the glacier-lined Keschtutte and Scaletta Pass.

In keeping with my reputation as a complete fruitcake, I decided to run the 42K, the marathon distance, but with a difference, climbing to 2,700m up to the Keschtutte Refuge and over the Scaletta Pass. The trip to Davos can be enjoyed at many levels; you don't have to race, but can just enjoy an active holiday with a mix of training runs and walks with great company, maybe hire a mountain bike or go swimming in the lake. The K30, on the final Saturday offers a beautiful run if you don't want the stress of a full-on marathon and is always very popular amongst the Serpie contingent. (See Kirsten's race report from 2003 on the Serpie website)

Insane race preparation? You tell me!

The marathon route was described to me as Europe's highest-lying marathon, a high alpine jewel with extraordinary flora, and snow. According to the experts most people run about 1 hr slower than their road time. The time limit is 8.5 hrs so I was hopeful of making it.

So, how does one train for this event? I didn't believe that Hampstead Heath, Ally Pally or Holland Park hills would prepare me properly for running at altitude. I even asked a certain Serpie who has run Davos before if he had any tips. His only tip was "Don't Do It!" To make matters worse, I had lost all motivation for training

after completing the London Marathon, this, topped off with a long-term knee injury and copious amounts of liquid poetry in the Larrick on Wednesday evenings was certainly not ideal for what I was about to encounter. I did manage a few training runs (2 x 16 milers), a dire effort at Welsh Castles, an appearance at the Green Belt Relay and a respectable run in the Blackpool half marathon but in the wider scheme of things, this didn't seem adequate for an alpine marathon. Hopefully there would be plenty of Serpie support along the route to spur me on; the ever-present Lars and Rosie had already decided to participate in the other 42k, starting in the morning, so they would be well finished by the time I started hitting the wall.

After spending a night in Zurich, in the Zic-Zac Rock Hotel, with every room decorated in the style of a different rock band from the previous few decades (I had the Elton John room!) I met Lars and Rosie at the station and we took the train to Davos. The journey offered stunning views, almost like travelling through a postcard. We arrived in Davos in the late afternoon to a clear blue sky with fresh alpine air. We managed to find a restaurant offering a Davos marathon special where I had a huge plate of pasta. We then took a walk up to a viewing platform above the town which offered excellent views of the area. The fact that I was out of breath just walking up this short incline made me worry about how I was going to cope during Saturday's run.

Race-day

Saturday's weather was fantastic but the cloudless sky was not exactly ideal for running a hard marathon. I was up early at 5am, feeling slightly apprehensive about what the day had in store. Since I had 6.5 hours before my race was due to start, I had a huge breakfast, this probably being one of my better decisions of the day. The other Serpies appeared one by one. Most of their races (the K30 or C42 marathon) began at 8am at the sports stadium, close to the hotel. Lars and Rosie were to take on the C42 marathon; Mike Gavin, Ian Hodge, Sue Hammer, Tim Hablin, Chris Saunders, Ian Druce, Vincent Cipollone, Alex Lord and Marie-Aline Perrier were to take on the K30. Pierre Gouin was to join me in the K42.

As the K30 and C42 races set off I cheered my fellow Serpies before making my way back to the hotel to prepare for my race. I packed my camelback with stuff I really didn't need, like a running jacket (I

thought it could be cold on top of the mountain), and forgot the stuff I did need such as sun-cream and alcohol (to numb the pain!) and set off for Bergun.

The Race

Bergun is a very pretty Alpine village with steep mountains surrounding it in all directions. We watched the leading K78 runners pass through; the rollerbladers, who were doing their leg of the team relay, were finishing; and the winner of the C42 marathon came in in around 2:44 as we fuelled up with bananas energy drinks.

15 mins before the race was due to start, a group of people jumped up onto a stage and started some warm-up gymnastics that would certainly put Eamonn's Saturday morning Serrentine foot tapping to shame. Then everyone lined up at the start: a crackle of fireworks, a huge roar, and we were off, immediately up an incline. After a loop of a field and through some woods, we appeared on the main street running through Bergun where we were joined by the K78 runners. The route left Bergun and headed up a very picturesque valley. The incline was not too steep at this point so it was very runnable for at least the first 10k. At 5k, a lot of people had already started to walk, but I felt good. However, this was soon to change.

After 10k, the path rose very steeply to the top of the first mountain pass, called Keschtutte. This was impossible for me to run, so I had to walk. We were now above 8,000ft and I could feel the effects of altitude and the heat (in the high 20s) didn't help either. I wasn't the only one suffering – one poor chap was receiving oxygen at the side of the path and was later airlifted off the mountain.

After the Keschtutte pass, the races split, with the K78 taking the Panorama trail and the K42 descending to Alp Funtauna before ascending again to the high point of the marathon where the races re-join at the Scaletta pass. I tried to run the downhill section with little success as my heart kept racing and I felt sick. I had forgotten that the route was due to ascend again, but after Alp Funtauna it certainly ascended very rapidly. I also didn't expect to suffer so much with the altitude, coming from a mountaineering family, but I did and was pretty sick. By the time I had crossed the snow fields and reached the top of the Scaletta pass, I was on the point of collapse and didn't think I could go any further. I decided to rest for a while and took full advantage of the free massage on offer by the race organisers. After suffering a slow-Serpie mental breakdown, weeping like a big baby, I managed to pull myself together and set off again with a new determination. This was soon to be dashed when I realised that, after being on my feet for 4.5 hours, I was only at the half-way point of the marathon.

From the Scaletta Pass, the route descends into the never-ending Dischma valley, which leads back to Davos through the pretty Alpine villages of

Durrboden and Teufi. Apparently the TV series Heidi was filmed around this area, but I was now past caring about my surroundings. The downhill sections were playing havoc, not only with my knees, but also my feet. I was in pain and just wanted to finish. In fact I was hurting in places I have never hurt before. The remaining kms passed very slowly and many 100s of runners passed me. At the end of the valley, the route suddenly started to rise again through some woods and then into Davos itself.

Knowing the finish was close by I managed a slow jog and turning into Davos, I saw Rosie waiting. She was a very welcome sight since it had been a very long time since I had seen another Serpie. I told her that I have done some stupid things in my life but this was without doubt the most stupid. But she gave me the encouragement to keep going and even ran with me as far as the bar where the Serpie contingent had been waiting all afternoon for me to come past. I tried my best to look good but, to be honest, I felt pretty bad. Ian Hodge handed me a beer, which soon sorted me out. Realising I still hadn't finished the race; I set off with beer in hand accompanied by Ian Druce and Chris Saunders to the finish line. The finish was one lap of the standard size running track, which I managed holding my pint like it was the Olympic torch, much to the amusement of the watching crowd. The cheers I got must have nearly been as loud as those for the winners, quite some time before.

I had never been on my feet for 7.5 hours before, let alone even thought about run/walking/suffering/crying for this length of time, and I hope never to be again. Next time, I will definitely do some training – either this or take up golf!

It's over

After receiving my medal, I walked back to the bar where all the Serpies were, enjoyed another beer with them and reminisced about how awful (but also how great) a run the K42 is. We headed off for dinner, washed down with a couple of ales. Bearing in mind that I hadn't eaten since 5am, I wasn't feeling too great, with the heat of the pizza oven radiating in the direction of my sunburnt face and decided to give the clubbing a miss to return to the hotel for some sleep.

Back in England and back to a normal life, if I learned anything from the Davos experience, it has to be that you only get from running what you are prepared to put in. Running is actually quite hard, and can give you great pain and discomfort, but despite that, you quickly start to look forward to, and even fantasise about, your next run as though it's some great treat. I'm not sure I can work out why. And as for Davos – will you be there next year?

Robin Gray

24 Hours in Norfolk



The Serpentine Running Club has a thing about relays: whether it's the relays after summer league 10k races, Green Belt or Welsh Castles, or even the drinks round relays at The Larrik. But the Round Norfolk Relay (RNR) is something else. It's a 190-mile course with 17 stages, where teams start early on Saturday and keep running through the night till they finish some time on Sunday morning. But even that's not all. Each Serpie runner has another Serpie providing cycle support, and at night there's a third Serpie driving behind the runner and cyclist for the duration of the stage. Plus the fact that most of the cyclists and drivers also run their own stage as well.

This year we had two teams. The logistics for ensuring the runners were ready at the right stage with cyclists in place were handled by Ian Hodge and Nadya Labib who also organised transport and accommodation. And yes, they too ran the odd stage and did some cycling!

Having read this far, maybe you're thinking that you'd like to take part next year. This will give you a flavour of the event.

Getting There

Some people made their own arrangements, but for most of us the club hired people carriers. It was pot luck as to who you shared with. Robin's cup of joy overflowed when he found himself in close proximity with "five beautiful women". My people carrier had three ladies – a case of less is more, or so they said!

Food

Seasoned Serpies are aware how low food is on the list of priorities – yeah, right! Each vehicle had enough food for the occupants, seconds, thirds and sufficient left over for Wednesday night club runners. Our vehicle was tasked (I hate that word but the editor's husband did the tasking and I'm scared of both of them) with providing the Saturday evening meal. Each one of us brought enough pasta and sauce for everyone, causing regional shortages of penne pasta throughout the south east. Not to mention the few dozen scones. Jules did her level best to eat them in advance but a few escaped her mitts.

Cycling

This introduced a few challenges. Road cycling is one thing, but sandy tracks (or beaches) are another matter. More than one intrepid cyclist was left behind by more nimble runners. The night can confuse runners about the pace they are running and the distance left to run. The cyclists helped with advice on distance and provided a welcome diversion from the darkness, chatting to the runners. As one of the drivers I blessed the inventor of automatic gears. Driving behind a runner for 20 miles with a manual clutch would have been painful!

Calls of Nature

(Dis)Comfort breaks are a major part of being a Serpie. For some, it's the consequences of serial quarts of best bitter in The Larrik on Wednesday nights, though of course male Serpies tend to limit their intake to halves of shandy. But come runs in the

countryside and the Serpie townies learn why hedges were invented. Some Serpies learn the hard way that there's more to a hedge than a bit of privet-cy. When Mel had a close encounter with a nettle, she discovered that dock leaves are more than nature's loo paper. Andy realised, with hindsight, the versatility of multi-section broadsheet newspapers early on a Sunday morning. And during his 20-mile midnight run, Chris was blessed with Jules keeping his mind on the road.

Time-keeping

It's said that if you're on time for a meeting, then you are late, hence the importance that Serpies attach to being early: most of them that is. Richard and his team took this to heart for their post-midnight run. They forsook the pleasure of an Over 30s Disco at their hotel and a chance glance to enhance romance perchance at a dance (not in France). Mentally fit and having honed their bodies to a state of physical perfection, they were ready in the early hours of Sunday morning. Mission Control rang: "You're not needed yet". They stood down their state of alertness, rested for an hour and then repeated their mental and physical tuning techniques. Ready and poised like springs once more, Mission Control was back on the bat phone: "You can relax a while yet". Premier athletes' performance can be affected by this stop/start activity. A further hour on and Richard knew his team were hungry to get the road underfoot. This was it. Locking the hotel door and leaving the keys behind them, they set off for the changeover point in Thetford (where Dad's Army was filmed). But Mission Control was back on the blower... and a few cold hours later, Richard's team finally began their stage.

Spare a thought for a runner from another club. After a superb run she arrived at the changeover, and waited... and waited... and waited, for at least half an hour, before she could hand the baton over to her team's next runner.

Accommodation

Eskimos keep warm in the time honoured way, but lighting a fire in the ice box that was our caravan may well have affected our deposit. As a self-confessed snorer I was despatched to the remaining bedroom – the others were already filled with sleeping Serpies. This left Chris with Mel and Jules, two unchaperoned lady Serpies. Clearly club standards are slipping. Chris did what anyone would have done following the elation of a 20-mile midnight run and promptly fell asleep. After a suitable pause, he joined me in synchronised snoring. I don't know about the earth moving, but come the morning the caravan had shifted into a different postal zone.

Three hours later and, partially rested, Chris and I were woken from our slumbers by Jules and Mel. They looked shattered. Presumably they had been to that Over 30s Disco.

Was it worth it?

During the night stage we lost Susannah with Mel on cycle support. Thankfully we found them soon afterwards, but it was the worst part of the weekend for us. For the runners there was the exhilaration of the Serpie "wall of sound" en route and when they finished a stage, and glorious scenery tempered with night running. My abiding memories are of a gorgeous sunset over bales of hay in the fields (which our resident photographer missed!); and a chip shop in the middle of nowhere, but without the facilities to make a cup of tea.

Also of Nadya, a one-woman running club: running, organising, cycling, checking times, cycling (again!), unflappable since the start of the race, eating crab sandwiches – her magic potion. Crab scones anyone?

Most importantly, I remember the relentless stamina, patience, humour and goodwill of too many Serpies to mention.

Finally, the Norfolk runner who summed it all up with "I likes running, I do".

Gowan Clews

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Jekyll and Hyde Duathlon

Whose crazy idea was this anyway?



The idea to stage a duathlon started as a project for a course that I embarked on in November 2003. The focus of the project had to involve at least 20 people and this was a new opportunity for me to try a different venture outside the usual boundaries of life.

My recent background in sport is mainly in rowing. I was involved for 15 years with rowing, culminating in a seat in the British rowing team in 1994. On retiring from rowing in 1997, I looked around for alternative sports to keep my mind and body occupied. After trying rugby again, having a brief flirtation with bobsleigh and latterly motor racing, I kept myself fit by regular runs on the towpath near where I live in Barnes. My journey with Serpentine began in 2002 when I came down to one of the Wednesday night runs, met several Serpies and my impression was that this was a club that has a direction.

A stipulation of the duathlon project was that it had to be completed by early March. In December I decided to take on the mantle of being the first person to organise a duathlon in Hyde Park. I was lucky enough to be able to draw on the experience of several members who had contact with the Parks Authority, the body who have jurisdiction over the Park. However, I was told that previous efforts had not met with a particularly favourable response. I also took solace from fellow member Eric Mills, who organised and ran a 10k race last autumn, and raised a significant amount of money for charity. I decided that the approach had to be right, so I did my homework, put the word around to see if the club thought it would be a desirable event to organise and received a guardedly positive response.

The first plan was to run the event on North and South Carriage Drives with the Broad Walk as the link between the two and transition at Speakers Corner. After submitting the proposal I duly arranged a meeting, but the meeting was postponed until the beginning of January. At this first meeting I was faced with the top three Parks employees: the manager, assistant manager and his assistant – this was going to be tough! They grilled me for over an hour, and I really had to think ahead of myself as each question was fired at me almost before I had answered the previous one. My plans were shot down as being too dangerous for other park users. The main difficulty for them was the safety issue of the bike race. They were conscious of the fact that a pedestrian had been fatally injured by a bike on the Broad Walk in the last year, and the last thing they needed was cyclists enveloped in red mist bearing down on a little old lady with Jack Russell in tow.

So, it was apparent that the course would have to be changed dramatically and several options were put forward. I decided that the cycle route had to be on the roads, so asked them cheekily if we could have the North, West and South Carriage Drives! The response was 'yes', but you'll have to pay us £10,000! Looking at an anticipated turnover of £3,000, I thought this would have to wait for another year. The only answer was to keep it simple and utilise only South Carriage Drive, which helpfully is closed to road traffic on Sundays. But, they said, you have a problem. The Army Lifeguards leave their barracks on South Carriage Drive at 9.30am on Sunday, travelling on horseback to Buckingham Palace to change the guard. A letter was duly despatched after some insider help from SerpieTri member Captain Mark Hanby, who helpfully made the connection to his similar ranking officer.

Neil Melville and his 'technical' team co-ordinated the website, offering new possibilities for a paperless entry system, and a page went up on the site, which led to 10 e/mail enquiries without us even trying to promote the event!

By February it became clear that I would not be able to complete the project in the allotted time, so I ran a small brick session (transition) in the Park instead, by way of compensation, although I was disappoint-

ed not to be running the full event. But I wasn't going to give up on this one! I decided that we would run it in the autumn instead.

Permission from the army took some time to come through, and we were then well into July. With some of the initial tide of enthusiasm dying down, I felt that if this was going to happen we had to spread the net wider. All along I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm of members who wanted to both assist and take part. In my old sport of rowing, oarsmen are given so much – equipment, coaching, time – that there is a culture of receiving, which can make people feel they are owed it as a right, and they are reluctant to assist others. This happiness to help was a welcome change.

But I had to be realistic. After all, I run my own business and I knew that this event would not happen unless I delegated the race direction to an able person. After putting the word around that I was looking for a Race Director, Anthony Alexander stepped into the breach. My initial reaction to this was to feel a bit of a sense of loss of power, but I remembered that it was all about the event taking place and getting the right people for the job, and if there's one thing about our club, it's the wide range of skills which its members can offer.

Anthony's attention to detail and methodology certainly made the event run smoothly on the day. He impressed me greatly and showed that we each can bring different skills to the table. On race day, after a



5.30am start for us, everything was set up by 7.30am for an 8.15 event start. The hard work had paid off.

So what about the future? We intend to run another bigger event next autumn and an aquathlon in the summer, culminating in holding a triathlon in 2006. We encourage as many of you as possible to join in!

Sam Allpass

Organising a Duathlon in Short Notice for Dummies

What's a duathlon? It's a crazy event involving some running and cycling. We chose a run-bike-run format, with a shorter second run to test the legs just one last time when they feel most like jelly.

Why a duathlon rather than a triathlon? For five simple reasons: they're just as fun as a triathlon; you don't have to get wet; the Royal Parks authority had denied triathlons in the past; a duathlon is quite compatible with a running club as most runners like to cycle a little; and it sounds logistically simpler to organise and run.

The race started for me two months before the gun fired. Sam had done a superb job delicately negotiating with the authorities, but we were still faced with both the Royal Parks and Serpie committee not committing to the event. This was an inauspicious start. The club had never organised such a complex event, especially in this short notice. And neither had I ever project managed, but there's nothing like a challenge!

I quickly realised two things: that the organisation would have to be very slick and professional (not

something I would have normally associated with a volunteer-organised event) and that there was too much work for one person to do. Luckily we were able to quickly generate enthusiasm within the club and externally in the London triathlon community to attract the perfect team to run the duathlon. At one stage I felt as though I was inundated with offers of very experienced support and advice, and all the equipment I'd need for free. Everyone made my job easy!

The first month was spent identifying and closing all the loose ends that remained before we could officially open the race for entries: thorough risk assessment, marshalling plan, Parks and Committee approval, BTA sanctioning, insurance (headache), first aid, course measurement, equipment and more equipment, safety plan, website and online entry form, communications, sponsorship, t-shirts...

With the key team in place and approvals finally gained, we were able to open the race to entries about one month before Halloween, and it sold out in just four days. I'm sure we could have taken 1,000 entries with no worries.



The next month was spent determining the logistics for the event, paying all the fees, handling the entries (a task I grossly underestimated), finding a referee (and being introduced to BTA politics), and calling for volunteers. All the pieces of the jigsaw fell into place as if by magic, and with a week to go, we all found ourselves with very little left to do.

So what are my secrets to smooth project management? No rocket science, just simply: regular communication; identify work then delegate; have clear roles and responsibilities; a thorough plan; and empower your enthusiastic team.

And did it all go to plan? Well, it was almost perfect. A beautiful autumn morning in Hyde Park greeted the 100 competitors as they headed to the Bandstand for registration. Earlier, scores of eager volunteers had constructed the course which looked like producing a fascinating spectacle. We even saw a glint of a smile

of approval from the Royal Parks manager who had been sceptical during the lead-up.

The gun fired and I suddenly realised the first aid support including ambulance hadn't arrived. This proved to be the only major worry for the day, and luckily we didn't need them in the end.

The parks, army and police obviously had not communicated with one-another, so the police were very confused about what was going on. They even tried to bring their horse parade escort onto our course. It was all very amusing.

As the race entered the bike leg, I was able to take a breather to observe the event (and take a long overdue cup of hot coffee). It looked spectacular with runners and cyclists going in, past and out of transition, against a stunning backdrop of amber leaves, enthusiastic spectators and colourful marshals. The athletes made the race look easy, as the majority, from first to last, cruised across the finish with a smile. Note to self: make it harder next time!

Sure there were many things we could have done slightly better and we'll take these into account for the next event we organise. The most important thing is that everyone, both volunteers and competitors, commented on how much fun they had. Next year we would like the event to be bigger and brighter.

Thanks to the 60+ Serpie volunteers who turned out to help (slightly too many to name individually). We definitely could not have done it without you!

Anthony Alexander

We would like to thank the Duathlon sponsors, who helped make this an exciting event and keep the entry fee low.



Michael Hanreck's company **Hanes & Clickatee** generously donated the race T-shirts. They supply and print a wide range of both technical and non-technical clothing.



Fuel Sport provided post race energy drinks.
<http://www.fuelsport.co.uk>



Swim for Tri donated prize vouchers for places on their swimming courses. Swim for Tri are regular supporters of racing in London and provide Serpentine with a weekly online swim set.
<http://www.swimfortri.com>



Thames Turbo Triathlon Club lent us all their race equipment, which allowed us to keep our costs (and hence race entry fees) low. We are very grateful for the support that they and other members of the London Tri community have given us.
<http://www.thamesturbo.co.uk>

Tri by Numbers

It may be a divine coincidence that the number of Serpentine triathletes this season, **220**, is one of triathlon's magical numbers. Here is the rest of the year in numbers:

We took part in **104** races throughout the world with **140** of you completing more than one race.

With **616** competitive finishes – **227** Olympic, **214** sprint, **77** duathlon, **51** middle, **34** Long/IM and **8** aquathons – that's an average of **2.8** races each, but keen first season racers Candice McDonald and Helen Morgan pushed up the average with **12** apiece. The most popular events were London, **64** (+**21** sprinters), Windsor, **39** and Milton Keynes, **32**.

So who are Serpentine's triathletes? Well, among **151** men and **67** women there are **25** IronMen. Tri seems to be a big 30-something sport and we don't buck the trend: **194** of us are in our 20s and **333** in our 30s. Do life and family catch up with all but **58** in their 40s, **4** x 50-year olds and **8** x 60-year olds? But then again this latter group does include Haydyn Turner, who only took up the sport this year.

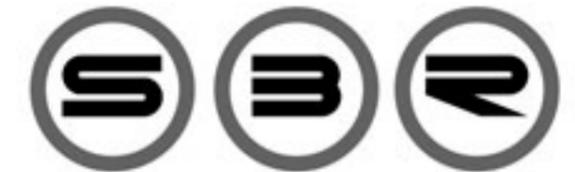
Our ability is more diverse though. Our fastest Olympic time was a world class **1:59** by Eoin O'Connell. If you race faster than **2:35** you can consider yourself above average but the spread continues for a whole hour behind that. In Ironman too, Michael Hanreck's **9:31** beat Bella Comerford but did it beat the **16:30** feat of endurance by Margaret Sills in Hawaii?

We had our successes last year: **11** firsts, **26** top 3 placings and **74** top 10s. Representing GB (mostly!) were:

- At the Euro Duathlon Champs: Elinor Rest, Darren Hincks, Margaret Sills and Eddie Brocklesby (**1st**)
- Margaret Sills and Richard Melik at the ITU Long Distance World Champs
- Jenny Gowans, Emmie Gribble and Piet Schram at the Worlds
- At the duo Worlds: Elinor Rest, Eddie Brocklesby (**2nd**), Darren Hincks and Phil McCubbins
- At the Long Distance Duathlon Worlds: Nia Parry (**3rd**), Eddie Brocklesby (**1st**)

Last but not least, Adrian Jones and Margaret Sills made it to the big **1** on the hallowed sands and asphalt of Kona, Hawaii IM.

Neil Melville



swim bike run

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Advice from the Serpie Coaching Team

Getting your marathon training priorities right

This advice is for those who may be underperforming at the marathon, in the middle ground between the elite and the plodders. In my view, there is no physical reason why anyone under 50, healthy, not overweight and not competing in a rhino costume, shouldn't easily be capable of comfortably under 4 hours. If you don't achieve at least this, it's highly likely that your training priorities are wrong. Another underperforming group who can benefit from this advice is those of you who can run decent 10ks, but achieve below your predicted time in the marathon. For example, if you can run a 10k in under 44 minutes, you should be able to break 3:30 comfortably for the marathon; a sub-39 minute 10k means you should be capable of sub 3 hours. What may be stopping you is imbalanced training on the evidence I've seen. I see a lot of potential for improvement among Serpies at next year's FLM and I hope this article helps.

Setting your training priorities

As amateur athletes, our training time is particularly limited: we have to earn a living and honour family and social commitments. We also want to reduce the risk of over-training injuries. These pressures are especially great for marathon runners because of the heavy training workload. So, getting your priorities right is critical. You'll need to exercise your time-management skills to fit your training in. I've found training first thing in the morning guarantees I'll do my planned session; Tracey Morris did the same prior to her stunning debut in London. It takes a while to get used to running in the mornings, and it's not for everyone, but it's worth at least giving it a fair trial.

Whenever you do it, here in descending order of importance, is what I think you should put into your plan. If you have to sacrifice elements occasionally, then choose your sacrifices from the bottom of the list, but don't forgo numbers 1 and 2.

1. The weekly long run: without question, the single most important component of a marathon runner's training. There is no substitute: these are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for success. I've seen a committed runner (my partner) go out for a 22-mile training run a few hours after disembarking from an 8-hour overnight flight, or heading out at 5:30 am and getting a 20-miler in before a day at work (I can't vouch for his productivity that day!) You can run these at an easy pace – anything up to 1 minute per mile slower than your intended marathon race pace. As your endurance improves, you should be able to achieve a faster pace. Work up in incre-

ments of no more than 2 miles per fortnight to a longest run of 23-24 miles at least 3 weeks before your marathon. Run in company if it helps, or with a cyclist for support, but running alone is character-building. Don't think that working up to one run of 20 miles is enough to prevent you hitting the fabled wall: it might, but if you can run 23-24 miles in training, you'll feel much more confident when you get to the 20-mile point in your race and start to overtake those who have slowed to a humbling walk. Ideally, your 5 longest runs should add up to at least 100 miles – a rule of thumb of Ron Hill's.

2. A weekly semi-long run at marathon pace or slightly faster: in my experience, this is the crucial element, often neglected. Wednesday night club runs are a good vehicle for accomplishing this. Start with the 3 parks route (7.2 miles), joining in with a group running around 30-60 seconds per mile faster than your long run pace. (The group will quite often in practice run faster than its advertised pace, especially if it is predominantly male!) As the weeks progress, join in the 11-12 mile runs with the same pace group. Build up to 14 or 15 miles if you can, though Frank Horwill recommends taking these runs up to 18 miles. Certainly, my partner's weekly marathon-paced run peaked at 18 miles before his 2:42 pb, so it's worth attempting. They should be run at a "comfortably hard" pace. If you can chat in sentences whilst running, you're in too slow a group. This session is vital for building your speed-endurance, and in my view it is the toughest session of the week. I have spoken to too many people who are hoping to run a good marathon without including this component in their plan, and yet they may be doing 1 or 2 track sessions a week. Without lengthening the marathon-pace run to double digits, their chances of achieving their goals are slim. Entering some half-marathon races is another good way of getting this session in, plus they'll give you a reasonable predictor of your marathon race pace (use Owen Barder's race time predictor for this at: www.runningforfitness.org/calc/rp.php)

3. One speed-building session per week of interval training. These sessions improve your speed and strength, but they're a lower priority than your long runs and semi-long runs. They tax your heart, lungs and oxygen transport systems in different ways from your other runs and you'll recover quickly. They build your confidence, improve your running efficiency and help develop pace judgement. You don't have to do them at a track or with a group, so don't let absence of access to either deter you! There are 2

relevant types of intervals for marathon runners: Lactate threshold-raising and VO2 max-raising. I have explained more about both of these in my coaching articles on the Serpentine website – <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/advice/karen/index.php>. Lactate threshold efforts are run at comfortably hard pace, with relatively short recoveries (eg 4x 1 mile in 6:45 with 1-1:30 minute recoveries). VO2 max sessions are run at a hardly comfortable pace with longer recoveries (eg 4 x 1 mile in 6:00 with 4-5 minute recoveries). You should be aiming for more lactate threshold type training for the marathon, but you could also usefully swap it for a VO2 max session say every third week.

So that gives you 3 quality sessions a week. If your body can cope with the punishment, you can add another run or 2 and probably benefit further. Make one of them an easy-paced recovery run, and the other a steady-paced run, where you have to concentrate a bit to keep up your pace. But these 2 runs are fillers, and if you have to skip them now and again, don't worry.

Rest

Don't neglect it. You don't have to be completely idle. If taking a day off from running makes you anxious, then work on neglected aspects of your fitness. Go to the gym and lift weights, swim, cycle, or go to Pilates or yoga classes. Don't be too worried about taking an extra day's rest now and again if your body is feeling particularly fatigued, or injury threatens. So long as you have put in the most important 3 sessions that week, your marathon training will be fine.

Results

I recently ran the best age-graded marathon of my life – 78.2% – using this approach. After several run-free months owing to injury, I averaged 35 miles per week for 16 weeks (which included a 3-week taper), running 3 or 4 times a week. I kept injury at bay and got fit enough to stand on the start line with confidence that I would run well. The secret was that I got my training priorities right: I never just went to "go out for a run", and I never skimped on my long and marathon pace runs. Many weeks – but not always – I managed a speed session. Try this approach, and maybe even give the track a miss. You might be pleasantly surprised by the results! Let me know how you get on.

Karen Hancock
Level 2 Endurance Coach

In Olden Times

Putting together *In Olden Times* is always fascinating but some years are more fruitful than others. This time, with the help of Derek Paterson's Serpie archive, I'm looking back 15 years to the autumn of 1989 and what a momentous time it was.

US troops invaded Panama and after failing to find General Noriega, they put a \$1m bounty on his head. In the UK, the proceedings of the House of Commons were televised for the first time. Margaret Thatcher remained Prime Minister but with UK interest rates at 15%, her Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, resigned and she had to fend off a challenge for the Conservative Party leadership from a virtually unknown MP called Sir Anthony Meyer. She won, but 60 Tory MPs didn't support her and for Mrs Thatcher, the writing was on the wall.

In London, the remains of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre were uncovered on Bankside, while on the River Thames, the pleasure boat, Marchioness, was sunk close to Blackfriars Bridge. As many as 60 people were feared dead.

In continental Europe momentous changes were taking place. The summer had seen unrest in the Soviet Union and President Gorbachev had been heckled at one of the big Red Square parades. Hungary's government began a reform programme and in Czechoslovakia, a popular uprising forced the country's Communist leadership quit, with the playwright Vaclav Havel taking office as President. Another uprising, this time with military involvement, saw the Communist party thrown out in Romania and the dictator, Nicolae Ceasescu and his wife Elena, executed by army firing squad.

Then in November the Berlin Wall fell. Symbolically, Helmut Khol, the West German Chancellor, and East Germany's new Prime Minister, Hans Modrow, walked side by side through the Brandenburg Gate. At the end of the year, Presidents Gorbachev and Bush met on a ship off Malta and declared an end to the Cold War.

So what were Serpies doing while all this was going on? Needless to say, the cross-country season was in full swing with races in Harrow, Richmond, Ruislip, Royston and St Albans. On the roads, the "gruelling" Hogs Back race, near Guildford, was a club favourite. There were autumn weekend club trips to Eastbourne for the Seven Sisters Marathon and to the Isle of Wight, where Ryde Harriers challenged us to road and cross-country races.

Even 15 years ago Serpies were racing abroad and there was an interesting report from Bill Laws who had run 2:41:07 in the Bulawayo Marathon in Zimbabwe, held at an altitude of 4450 feet. The press reported that Hilary Walker "was one of the world's top 24 ultra-runners invited to run in the Great Wall Race in China in 1990".

John Ralph won Tom Hogshead trophy with 185 points from Derek Paterson, who had 176 points. Jan Farmer was the highest placed lady in 14th place. Alan Woodward won the coveted Serpentine Egg, awarded to the runner with the lowest number of points in the eight qualifying handicap races, although he still scored a very respectable 52 points. I was interested to see that eight Serpies who ran in the October 1989 race also competed in the corresponding race in 2004: Alan Woodward was one of them. In a fast-changing world, some things don't alter. Alan came last on both occasions and on each occasion I came fifth from last. Come on Mr Handicapper – give us a break. After 15 years we deserve it!

Mike Maddison compiled the weekly Serpie newsletter. He ran an interesting series of Serpie profiles and among snippets from people who remain members are Bob Davidson, who said he'd "been a page boy at the Dorchester Hotel when I was a lad"; Phill Harris who enjoyed water-skiing; Alan Woodward's favourite food was cauliflower cheese and his best London Marathon time was 3:17:51; Caroline Yarnell "had been organising the Miss Barbados Beauty Contest – in Barbados"; and Leighton Grist, who'd had a job as a grass cutter in Treorchy Cemetery. The final word should go to our then Secretary, James Godber. In his profile, James said his ambition was "to see a first claim Serpie running in an international vest either on TV or at Crystal Palace." Well said, James.

Malcolm French

Sudbury Court Report

What's happening in our sister club?

Sometimes, as the saying goes, "A man's got to do what a man's got to do", and I'm afraid this is one of those times! As ever I've put off composing my latest report from Serpentine's 'little sister up North' for as long as possible, but now, faced with the dubious choice of "I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here!", another Steven Seagal 'acting master class' on Channel 5, or finally putting pen to paper, I'm settling for the least painful option.

I can safely say things have not been dull for us since I wrote last. As I think most of us had anticipated, belated proposals put to the Council to extricate the club from the financial morass into which it was sinking failed to earn a stay of execution. Feelers had already been put out to several sports clubs in the area in the meantime to see if another suitable venue could be found before Sudbury court finally closed its doors at the end of June. Consequently, through the good offices of Gavin Imrie, a member who, as a result of being entrusted with the keys gained a regular job as barman on Tuesday evenings, we found ourselves taking up summer residence at Wembley Cricket Club.

That, however, proved to be just the beginning of our adventures. To be diplomatic, although we were extremely grateful for their hospitality, some of the facilities at the cricket club were, shall we say, a little Spartan. It was acknowledged at an early stage that our search for a permanent base would have to continue if we were not to see membership falling. Ongoing enquiries to other venues saw our options dwindling rapidly. Vale Farm Sports Centre, from where we had run previously, no longer had a bar (so that was out for a start!); weekly parking charges saw Northwick Park Hospital Social Club crossed off the list; whilst other clubs quoted fees which would have necessitated an untenable rise in our own membership charges. One viable option, previously investigated by Chris Stagg, remained - Wembley and Sudbury Lawn Tennis & Squash Club. Facilities were good and initial overtures had elicited a positive response, however the matter had to be put to a meeting of the club committee, and, given the summer holidays, it was some time before this took place. Finally, in September, we got the 'green light', and, having come to a reasonable financial arrangement, had our first run from our new HQ at the end of the month. Membership fees have had to be raised substantially, but I think everyone realised we'd been getting our sport 'on the cheap' previously, and fingers-crossed that with our future now more secure, the club can progress. Gowan has already sampled our new amenities and any Serpies in the area, or who fancy a change from a Tuesday night track session, are more than welcome to give us a try for the princely sum of £1 per week for 'guest' membership.

Whilst I don't like to tempt fate, things seem to be going pretty well so far, and it was duly (and appreciatively) noted that after bar takings had dipped in September they soared dramatically in October. In addition to keeping the till ringing on Tuesdays, we

also put a team out for the club's fund-raising quiz evening in mid-October, finishing a 'tactical' second. A point and a half ahead going into the final round, we were rather stymied by our by a failure to identify a childhood photograph of the question master's 'other half', or correctly guess the amount of beer that he had consumed during the proceedings. However, I have to admit it was only our Treasurer Louis' young daughter Molly's extensive knowledge of the various colours of the Teletubbies, and the characters in "Neighbours", that had got us into contention in the first place.

And so, after that extended introduction, what of our actual athletic endeavours this summer?

Well, I'm glad to say, numbers for this year's summer league were up. Having raised a sparse nine competitors last year, we were up to 15 this year, with a bumper turnout for our local fixture in Harrow, and going into the final fixture in Hyde Park, were holding onto fourth place, only to be overtaken by Metros. Looking at the final table, seems the league has much in common with Soccer's Premiership, with three clubs (Dulwich Park Runners, Mornington Chasers and Serpentine) vying for the 'title' and the rest having their own battle for the minor places, a considerable distance in arrears. Tempted to think we've found our "natural level", however, glancing at previous records, I notice Chasers occupied bottom spot in both 2001 and 2002 so you never know. Roll on next year!

Membership continues to hover around the mid-thirties, though with an influx of new 'enthusiasts' our active "hard core" seems to be growing, with consistently larger numbers on Tuesday evenings and more people entering events. Teams were raised for the Ricky 9 (where Ian Brixey upheld the club's honour and prevented us being "whitewashed" by the Serpies, gamely holding off the late challenge of Messrs. Smith and French), and the Lynda Jackson 10k at Moor Park. However, the paucity of our resources was shown up when illnesses to Ruth Jackson and Russell Elder left us one short for the Watford Joggers Autumn Challenge and Herberts Hole (Chesham) races respectively. One or two more new members could see us more competitive in 2005: as ever I live in hope!

On the 'domestic' front, Gavin Imrie became, I believe, the third person to win our summer handicap series for a second time, thus getting his hands back on the Docherty Shield which he'd temporarily 'loaned out' to Louis Smyth (2002) and Mark Mulvenna and Gerry Stonehouse (2003). Thanks are due to Mark who, assisted by his daughter Ellen, ably stepped into the shoes of Ken Lynn in running the series. Meanwhile, initial planning for the sixth running of our annual 10k next May is already underway. Details are a little sketchy at present, but rest assured that Bev, Chris and I will keep you all updated as matters progress.

Martin Garrett

Starter Pack

You get an injury and the physio tells you to slow right down or you'll be permanently crippled. You catch a nasty virus from work that sends your heart rate through the roof. You are convinced that everyone runs better than you do, and that despite all your hard training your running is going nowhere. Or you're bored hanging out with Lars, Justin and Huw in the pub every Wednesday. Would you believe that that running with the Wednesday or Saturday Starter Group would fix your troubles?

Amongst our helpers have been trophy winners and sub-seven minute regulars, as well as recently "graduated" runners and ten-plus minute milers. They help Bev and Sid (on Wednesday) or Sue McGinlay (on Saturday) as the success of the Serpentine Running Club swells our numbers!

There are a few "insider secrets" that you might not know about if you have never run with the Starter Group. For instance, do you know about Sid's fartlek session that won him the Tom Hogshead Trophy? Have you seen the look on a runner's face when s/he finishes the 2 parks route without stopping for the first time? Step aside Kelly Holmes! Or have you talked so much to new runners that you are in more oxygen debt than during your usual run? And do you know that some people who can run sub nine-minute miles call themselves "Beginners"?

Every week, Bev, Sid and Sue lead the Starter Group which sometimes swells to 50 new runners. If you are tapering or coming back from a marathon, injured, or just want to try something new, lending a hand with the Starter Group is an ideal way to get that warm inner glow as well as good outer glow from a decent run!

Melissa Cheung with contributions from Karen Hancock, Lynda Isaac, Charles Lescott, Andy Reeves, Gowan Clews and Nadya Labib

www.sporting-heroes.net

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