



SERPENTINES

AUTUMN 2010

THE INTERNATIONAL EDITION

INSIDE

Races far far away

Avoid injury

Coaching pathway

Plus

Winners of our Photo Competition



THE EDITOR SPEAKS

Welcome to the latest issue of Serpentimes

This issue of Serpentimes has, by accident rather than design, a distinctly international flavour. It seems ironic that in the year of the 'staycation', our club's runners have scoured the globe in search of new experiences. We have reports from Brazil, South Africa, USA, Uzbekistan and the North Pole. Furthermore, these aren't your bog-standard race reports; these intrepid Serpies have taken on whip-wielding bandits and curious polar bears!

Since they have been covered in these pages

before, we have not included race reports from the increasingly popular Mont Blanc marathon and Davos Swiss Alpine races, where the Serpie invasion is akin to The Wargrave Arms on a Wednesday evening. I hope you find these international adventures both entertaining and inspiring.

Of course, we acknowledge that for the majority of club members our challenges are more prosaic, like shaving a few seconds off our PB, maintaining even splits or avoiding hitting the wall. For us, our interest lies in far greater numbers in UK road and trail races, club championship events and local leagues. This Serpentimes has a good representation of the bread and butter too.

We are also keen to leverage the knowledge and experience of our professional members. With this in mind, we are fortunate to have

articles on certain aspects of training and technique from qualified physios and personal trainers on hot topics such as barefoot running, core strength and swimming-related exercises.

This issue also coincides with a slight changing of the guard. Serpentine Running Club now has a new chairman, John Cullinane, and on page 46 we introduce John and the new committee. Thanks as ever for all readers' contributions and to the editorial and layout team for their efforts in pulling everything together.

The Serpentimes Team

Editor – Dan de Belder

Assistant Editor – Lula Rosso

Jolyon Attwooll, Catherine DuBois, Angela Green, Martin Gaunt, Ian Payne, Claire Shelley, Rob Westaway, and Gyongyi Vegh.

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Cover photos by Marathon-Photos (Jennifer Bradley, Zermatt marathon 2010) & Gavin Edmonds (Bob Davidson, marshalling at the LFOTM 5K in 2009). Back cover photo by Robert Westaway (Summer league runners, Battersea park 2010).

Serpies get to the church on time

Sally Hodge

It's probably fair to say that running and Serpentine have played a significant role in the lives of all of the Serpie couples who chose 2010 for their weddings. Some met their partners at the club and all of the marriage celebrations were certainly teeming with Serpies, a few looking more comfortable than others in wedding finery instead of running shoes.

Arthur Garrison, the creator of Serpentine, married Ruth Jackson at a small ceremony in rural Lancashire in March. Ruth and Arthur invited many of their Serpie friends to celebrate their marriage at a party back in London – a wonderful reunion of Serpies old and new, including at least 10 life members of the club.



A pre-wedding run for Arthur, Ruth and Serpie guests



Alternative wedding footwear adorned Angie and Charles' wedding cake

Serpentine's ex honorary secretary, Charles Lescott, began his wedding day in May with a run, reputedly to settle the pre-wedding nerves. While his bride-to-be, ex-committee member and cross country captain, Angie Palin, spent the morning in the more usual pre-wedding company of brides maids and hairdresser, Charles sped through some of Tatton Park's 1,000 acres, followed by several Serpie guests. "It was a bit like running with a sheepdog," said one weary runner when they returned.

Amy Balchin and Ben Cope's wedding took place in June at Holy Trinity Church, South Kensington, only a few minutes' jog from the three parks route. There was little evidence of running gear at the wedding ceremony, but the evening celebrations were notable for the large number of Serpies, including the groom, who changed into the red & gold vests of their second claim club, Slurpin Time, which reportedly came into being during Ben's stag celebrations.



A PB for Amy on the way to the church



Langdale Gala fell race survivors

The Lake District in July was the setting for the marriage of Rachel Brough and Lanzarote organiser, Justin Lock. Justin and Rachel's chosen date gave their Serpie guests a wealth of racing opportunities in the beautiful Lakeland scenery, with the inaugural Windermere Olympic distance triathlon and the short, very steep Langdale Gala fell race both scheduled for the day before the wedding. The gruff northern charm of the Gala's announcer almost broke at the realisation that over half the runners in the fell race were Londoners.

In August, it was back to London for the wedding of Nick Copas and Dianne Haywood in St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield, one of London's oldest churches. The Reverend Mark Young left the congregation in no doubt about the importance of running to the bride and groom, with a witty analogy between marathon training and marriage.



Nick and Di cracked London marathon training, now for married life

Rumour has it that there are yet more Serpie weddings scheduled for later this year and next, so potential guests will need to plan their 2011 race calendars a little more carefully than usual. However, if this year's weddings set a precedent, there will be plenty of opportunity for running as well as celebrating.

Photos, from the top: Ruth Jackson, Neil Redfern, Flair Wedding Photography, Nancy Labiner, Jonathan Hoo.

The Torry story

Jolyon Attwooll

Nick Torry's rich streak of form has continued unabated since the last issue of Serpentines with a series of impressive performances. After starting the year with victory in the Serpentine New Year 10k, Nick has represented England, and dipped under the 30-minute barrier for 10k.

The international vest came in Denmark in May, when England Athletics sent three runners to compete in a match against a Danish trio in the Lillebælt half-marathon, held in the small town of Middlefart. Nick, who was selected along with Matt Bond of Sale Harriers and Kairn Stone of Newham and Essex Beagles, finished the race in fourth place, easily breaking his PB in the process with a time of 66mins 01.

Later that month Nick took his 10k performance to a new level with a time of 29.51 in the BUPA London 10,000, where he finished seventh in a highly competitive field including Mo Farah, Chris Thompson and England marathon stalwart Dan Robinson.

Of his year so far, Nick said: "To do a sub-30 10k was actually my main aim for the year, so it was good to do that.

"The England call-up came out of the blue, but it was great to wear the vest – I got a lot of people congratulating me, and it's quite motivating to think I have run for my country!"

The latter part of the summer has proved more frustrating, with Nick forced to take time out for injured ankles – although victories came in the two Serpentine Grand Prix races (the 5,000 and the mile) in which he competed.

With the sore ankles in mind, Nick will wait and see how his running goes this autumn before he picks any specific aims – although he plans on taking part in the road relays, the all-important Met League cross country fixtures, and perhaps a couple of other road races. Watch this space.

Masterful performances

Jolyon Attwooll

The British Masters Championships, held in July in Cardiff, proved a golden occasion for two Serpentine athletes.

Neil Tunstall, an experienced international competitor at veteran level, was a double gold medal winner, taking to the top of the podium in both the 110m hurdles and the 400m hurdles in the V45 category.

He won the shorter race in a season's best time of 16.53seconds, and, later the same day, won the 400m hurdles in 57.34 seconds, his fastest time in five years (surpassing the 57.71 seconds that took him to a World

Masters Championships win back in 2007).

Pauline Rich was the other winning Serpentine, taking the gold medal for her run in the V65 5,000m.

Both athletes went on to compete in the European Masters Championships in Nyiregyhaza Hungary in July, Neil in the V45 400m hurdles, and Pauline in the V65 5000m – and both came away with silver medals.



Golden Serpies join the 2012 countdown

Golden girls and boys turn up in force at Two2Go

Rachel Clare

East London's Hackney Marshes turned from its usual green to red and yellow as Serpentine's Golden Girls (and boys!) took part in the Two2Go sport event launch at the weekend, run by Serpentine member Eddie Brocklesby. Coming from as far afield as Devon and Wiltshire, the Serpentine over 50s runners took control of the 3k race, claiming 1st place (only beaten by a racing dog!). 69 year old Serpie Sue Lambert added the 3k to her list of achievements, perhaps overshadowed slightly by her 66 completed marathons! In a bid to promote and encourage exercise and fitness for Over 50s throughout Hackney and the communities surrounding the growing Olympic Park, the red and yellow vests were also spotted taking part in Bhangra aerobics and Tai Chi, showing that it's never too late to take up a new sporting activity. Eddie's Fit@50+ project continued at the main Two2Go Sport Festival on Hackney Marshes on Sept 11th,



Neil Tunstall at the Men Southern league match in Battersea (Photo: Gavin Edmonds)

with many over 50s taking part in the Two2Go Lee Valley Trail Marathon, Novice Triathlon, 10k, 5k and 3k races. For more information about Two2Go Sport Festival go to www.two2go.org.uk

Road racing milestones

Jolyon Attwooll

Aside from notable individual achievements, several best and fastest milestones have been passed by Serpentine teams in the road racing calendar this year.

Continuing from their strong performance in the six-stage relays in the autumn, the men reproduced the same form in the 12-stage event, held at Sutton Coldfield in Birmingham in April. They notched their fastest ever time, completing the 12 stage in 4 hours 31:29, finishing in 24th place overall – although a highly competitive field meant this did not quite match their best ever place.

The women, however, achieved both their fastest time and their highest ever position – their overall time of 1 hour 51:35 took them to 13th place, tantalisingly close to their first ever top 10 finish.

The men and women's B-teams also performed creditably on the same occasion, finishing 44th and 27th respectively.

Also in April, Serpentine women followed up on their team success of last year in the London Marathon, with the three fastest club members, Elizabeth Wynn, Tanya Shaw and Candice McDonald, taking an England Athletics bronze medal. Reading Runners and St Albans striders took the gold and silver team prizes.

Congratulations to all concerned.

Track & field news

Nicola Barberis Negra

The Southern T&F League season is over for another year. The men's teams put in a great effort, with solid performances at middle distance, and some good individual results in

sprints and throws throughout the season. However, the chronic lack of sprinters, jumpers and throwers resulted in the div 2 team being demoted and the div 3 team possibly only avoiding it by a few points.

Our women managed some better overall results at the beginning of the season, even breaking a few club records for sprinting and horizontal jumps, but some injuries and a similar shortage of athletes for the team has put them in the relegation zone (see report on page 8). It's not all bad news however, as the vet women kept up the Serpies' honour by dominating their league and qualifying for the final against the winners of the other leagues. Working out a strategy for T&F competition is a high priority for 2010-11.

Tom Hogshead trophy closest for years

Ann Kinahan

With just two races to go, the 2010 Tom Hogshead (the year long competition for the monthly Handicap race) appears to be heading for something of a nail biting finish. The October Handicap result leave only 17 points between the top five runners. James Mills is still in the lead on 173 points, but only the best eight scores of the year count towards the Trophy and Stéphane Schneider on 171 has one race in hand and Robert Crangle on 156 has two. First woman is Catherine Higgs in sixth place on 142.

This year has also seen the introduction of a second Challenge Cup for women over 50. This too has become a close competition and now sees Jan Farmer (eight races) in the lead with 104 points; Beat Vogt (five races) second with 73; and Baiju McCubbins (also five races) in third with 66 points. We wish them well in their training and the final races.

The Tom Hogshead aside, this year's Handicaps have featured a new course record (22:24), set by Huw Lobb; many volunteer helpers (thank you so much); a new all female Handicap Team (who are sorry they don't always get it right but do try to keep smiling); a newly introduced discount for Handicappers at the Serpentine Bar; and the abolition

of the £1 entry fee.

If you haven't tried this race before, do please come along to Hyde Park on the first Saturday of the month to watch or take part.

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

Summer League

Jolyon Attwooll

Serpies enjoyed free running – and some delicious homemade cakes – as another successful Summer League took place at various venues across London.

In the family-friendly series, contested on five dates from June to August, Serpentine runners took advantage of a new, completely subsidised race fee at the 10k and 5-mile events. There was also all the usual fun of the tenderfoot races for London's aspiring young athletes, the mad sprinting of the team relays as a finale – and a fantastic food spread put on by each host club at the end of every fixture.

Notable performances over the series came from Eric Vamben (first man overall) and Victoria Carter (first woman) – and everyone who contributed to the groaning food table at the final, home race at Battersea Park. Mornington Chasers won the league with Serpentine in fourth place.

On a final note, a big thank you to Siobhan Reddy and Trish Moody who have organised a very fun, sociable Summer League for Serpentine over the past two years. For the 2011 series, they are handing over responsibilities to Claire Shelley and Gemma Greenwood, who will be backed up by a few able assistants.



Family fun at the Summer league. (Photo: Rob Westaway)

Welsh Castles Relay – here we go again!

Paul Fromme

June was coming up, so it was time to get organised for the Welsh Castles Relay. We had a few titles to defend after all. Shame we couldn't have a Vets team this year, but the event was massively over-subscribed due to its popularity. So we needed to make sure our men's and ladies' teams were up there to try and defend the four titles they amassed between them last year (overall, ladies, kings and queens of the mountains). Having only two teams, the even higher than expected drop-out rate from the girls' team, some injury worries, and lack of drivers saw a bit of readjustments (i.e. last minute panic), but in the end we had enough runners, drivers and accommodation to set the basis for a great weekend.

Jane Fanning, having again volunteered to captain, had more than the usual nightmare of putting the ladies team together. How she managed to keep her cool I'll never know. Record number of drop-outs, replacing almost half the team in the last two weeks, and injury worries from a lot of our regular mountain girls necessitated quite a number of stage reshuffles, but the team still looked strong going into the weekend. This happened minus their team captain, who was whisked away to Paris by her husband for a weekend of food, vin rouge and music. Teresa Gaillard de Laubenque got them off to a great start though, coming 7th overall on the 1st stage and almost catching our men's runner, before heading off to run a half marathon the next day. Sarah Edmunds and Liz Wynn nicely extended the lead, before Becky Glover, back from three months off running due to injury ("I'm not allowed to run faster than 8 minutes per mile"), won stage 4 and passed the baton on to Claire Levermore, who never let the Winchester girl out of sight on stage 5. Karen Hancock, another last minute replacement on a day trip up from London, added another stage win on 6 and complained about the lack of competition.

Catherine Higgs won the second mountain stage despite just having been moved onto it on Wednesday and sported a big grin and her



well deserved yellow sweater afterwards. Kate Laforet's knee kept her from running too hard on stage 8, so second place only, before Victoria Carter, another injury worry, won stage 9. Mariah McConnaughey, having been told only on Wednesday it would be 13 miles instead of a shorter stage, was in a bit of a rush to catch the USA game, followed Michaela McCallum from Winchester home, defending a huge lead in the Queens of the Mountains.

After the match, dinner and a very short night, Claire Imrie was wide awake and reasonably well recovered from injury to make it 3rd lady on the early mountain stage out of Newtown and to widen the gap to Winchester even further. Birthday girl Ella Palmer got a nice 2nd place on stage 12 before Claire Shelley won stage 13. Natalie Kolodziej, Lou Ruderman and Catherine Wilding had strong and solid runs up and down the steepest mountain sections and easily held off Winchester's slightly belated resurgence to seal the defence of the Queens of the Mountains title. Sylvie Lloyd then stormed down from Beacons reservoir to take 6th place overall and the 7th stage win for the ladies team, an impressive feat. Hannah Cunningham, Penny Thorn and Fiona Alexander brought the overall win home with almost an hour and a half to spare over Winchester in a time of 24:14:35, the fastest time ever for a ladies team at WCR. Well done!

Andy Davies again captained the men's team, but much to his dislike there were exactly zero drop-outs and the stiff competition for

team places between the boys meant he didn't even get to run himself, which says something about the strength of the team. Not getting off to the best start with a slight wobble from John Nugus in 5th place on stage 1, the men put in very solid performances with Martin Gaunt 4th, Eric Phillips 3rd in his mountains debut, and Caspar Prestridge, Jol Attwooll and Duncan Hancox all 2nd behind THH (who seemed to concentrate on individual stage wins), but had to wait until stage 8 for a win. Then it came in style with an impressive run from Steve Watterson to start clawing back some of the lead THH had built.

Andy Taylor made up a bit more time coming second on stage 9 and then it was time for the big show-down on stage 10. Nick Torry, having finally received his England vest and just back from 7th place and a sub 30 minute finish at the BUPA London 10000, probably concentrated a bit too much on the opposition from Sale and not enough on the stage record, but brought home a convincing first ever mountain stage win for Serpentine and got us into the overall lead overnight, just 3 minutes ahead of Thames. Which meant that Eric Vamben's time trial up stage 11 was only the second mountain stage win, but an impressive one nonetheless, holding off the Winchester runner quite easily. Paul Hayman and Miguel Branco continued to extend the lead with a 4th and 2nd place, before it was time for the Drivers leg. History repeating itself, Richard Phillips twisted his ankle the Wednesday before WCR, but declared himself fit enough to run, the slightly dodgy ankle preventing him from adding to the mountain stage wins, but still an impressive 2nd place behind Sale.

Robin Tuddenham managed to get down stage 15 without falling over and once realising the Sale guy in front of him was not the international athlete he thought, took off the brakes and sprinted to win the stage. Then it was a mountain time trial again, Hendrik Zietsman in his WCR debut looking very much in control, taking the third mountain stage for Serpentine this weekend and securing the Kings of the Mountains title. A few more 2nd places by Andy Robbins on stage 17, Simon Barrett on 19, and Andy Reeves on the final stage were punctuated by the stage win of Tiago Branco on stage 18 with a new stage record. The very solid team performance with 6 stage wins, 9 second places and no placing outside of the top 5 saw the men's team win with over an hour to

spare and inching ever closer to the 20 hour mark.

By the time we got to Cardiff castle you started feeling left out if you didn't have a yellow sweater, even if it only said veteran stage winner on it, and having retained all 4 titles there were many more prizes and sweaters to pick up. The presentation suffered a bit from the rain, but a good opportunity to thank Les Croupiers for the great event they put on year after year. Many thanks to Alan Thomas for his perfect organisation of the Castles over the years; we appreciate how much hard work goes into the ever perfect organisation of such a fabulous race and love coming back, so will be looking forward to hearing from Richard Brewer next year.

On our side thanks must go to our drivers (Richard, Hugh, Andy D., Fiona, Andy T., Claire S., Nick, David, Jane H., Jol, Paul), who let me twist their arms to drive and got us round safely and to Lisa for sorting out accommodation in her ever efficient way, never getting stressed, even when the umpteenth stage change came through. Guess we should buy them and the team captains a drink next time we meet them, great job everyone.

Same procedure for WCR 2011? Keep the weekend of June 11th/12th free.

(Photo: Hugh Torry)

National Club Triathlon Relays

Jon Rae



Only four teams this year but there were some solid performances on a rather wet day.

Due to late registration, we only managed to secure four team entries



for the National Club Triathlon Relays at Nottingham this year but we made the most of them with 16 intrepid triathletes (actually 14 + 2 Jonny Raes) braving early autumn showers to put in some solid performances on Saturday. For those who are uninitiated in the formalities of the event, it involves teams of four each completing a 400m swim in turn, followed by a 15km cycle each finishing with a 5km run each (in a baffling array of mixed, male, female, age group, BTF, non-BTF competitions - but I'll try and keep it straightforward).

The morning races saw a team of Christine Lutsch, Paul Jenkinson, Zoe Birkenough and Jon Rae notch 21st place out of 237 teams corresponding to 16th place out of a strong field of 80 teams in the mixed competition with a time of 3hrs 32mins 48secs. To put that time in context, the morning race was won by a team from Loughborough University comprising some members of the BTF youth training squad in a time of 3hrs 10mins. The team's individual performances were consistently strong but Christine Lutsch's 5km run of 19:48 was the stand out result.

Also competing in the morning were a men's open (i.e. non-BTF) team of Mark Kell, David Miles, David Morgan and Roger Reid finishing in 6th in the open category and 30th overall for the morning race in a time of 3hrs 36mins 5secs. The team lost time on the swim and bike against their mixed Serpie counterparts but made up some ground on the run with the Daves both going sub 19 minutes.

The afternoon's racing saw the self-proclaimed 'A' team of Jon Rae, Angus Beaumont, Chris Hill and Graeme Blair up against a team assembled by Martin Gaunt comprising some pacy runners who reckoned

they could "swim and cycle a bit too" (Martin Gaunt, Andrew Greenleaf, Matt Kilpin and Leon Foster). As it turned out, the plan didn't quite come together for the 'A' team who demonstrated just why triathlon is a sport for individuals by showing some reluctance to engage with each other to facilitate the handover of the

baton in transition on a number of occasions.

Having amassed a delicate lead of just over 6 minutes after the swim and bike, the more seasoned triathletes saw it eroded away (brutally annihilated) by some top-drawer running by "Martin's Team" with Andrew Greenleaf registering a 15:51 split for the 5k (2nd fastest run of the day out of about 2,000 competitors including many sponsored and age-group athletes), reinforced by a 17:23 from Leon Foster.

At the final handover, "Martin's Team" had reversed the positions and carried a 36 second lead for a tense finale. Jon Rae could only replicate his 18 minute(ish) 5k split from the morning to keep the competition in sight but was unable to make up any ground and "Martin's Team" took victory by a margin of 42 seconds after almost 3hrs 20mins of racing.

The official times and placings were:

Martin's Team - 3hrs 17mins 30secs, 33rd Mens under 40 team out of 109 teams (winning time 2hrs 51mins 09secs)

The 'A' team - 3hrs 18mins 12secs, 35th Mens under 40 team.

After all that, I'm glad there weren't more team results to write up but hopefully we'll have a full contingent representing Serpentine again next year - and maybe even push to leave some footprints on a podium in one class or other. Despite it being a bit moist on the day, the event is certainly a uniquely fun and engaging format on a very fast course so watch out for notifications about entry next year and we'll be quicker on the draw to get a full complement of team slots.

(Photos: Angus Beaumont)



It's Hammer time!

Pam Rutherford

Far away from the glitz and glamour of the Diamond League, the Southern Women's League rolled into town at the Bannister stadium at the end of April, the day before the London Marathon. The TV cameras weren't there but more fool them, as athletes, supporters and officials gathered for a heady mix of 18 events and glorious weather that would be matched nearly every month for the rest of Summer 2010.

The first event of the first meeting was heralded by some of our best athletes being called to swing into action in an event which involves a 4kg ball, a great bit of spin, a big cage, much skill and lots of oomph. Nothing to do with Alex Reid (or Katie Price). From hammer to 400m relay, the day's match sped by.

Even Mr Whippy was no fool; he knew where the action would be as his familiar jingle preluded the start to the competition and he did a roaring trade on a scorching day as recovering athletes and spectators alike kept themselves nourished. Sports drinks? Don't waste my time!

In summary SWL 2010 involved guaranteed sunshine (for all meetings except those at home: Battersea), club records and personal bests broken aplenty as the Serpie Track and Field ladies ran, jumped and threw furiously. We had a great turnout, lots of enthusiasm and some brilliant performances but somehow managed to come 3rd in all our matches!

This could be something to do with there being very few Pole Vaulters in the club and each match needed two of them. Lots of clubs have a similar lack of PVs so in nearly all our meetings a clearance of any height at all could have gained maximum points at A and B string. In our first match this would have secured us a much deserved 2nd place.

Free drinks* in the Wargrave over the winter months** to any Serpie women pole vaulters who can be persuaded/strong-armed to put themselves into pole position next season!

This year's SWL has just ended but we're keen to recruit people for next year so prepare to have your enthusiasm fired up by a balanced combination of sunbathing, running and a mixture of jumps or throws. No fewer than six club records were smashed this year and many of this year's season's bests were either milliseconds or centimetres away from a coveted club record.

Team work and great performances

The whole season saw some brilliant performances - a mixture of record-breaking but much more importantly the kind of team work which meant lots of people participated in different events, some more familiar than others. This year Sarah Duffield smashed our Triple Jump, Long Jump, 400m and 100m club records. The 100m club record ended up being annihilated three times. Sarah and May Evans jointly broke it in May only for demon sprinter, Rosalie Prout to take half a second off it in August.

There were too many personal bests to mention individually but far and away more important than club records was great team character and participation. The SWL was full of people happy to do the events they were familiar with and loads of people showed great team spirit to do events they'd never competed in (e.g. Grainne Devery in the 100m hurdles in the torrential rain in Battersea).

All these people (too many to mention) scored the club incredibly valuable points. Just taking part in an event can put us up the rankings as we get points for 1st (4), 2nd (3), 3rd (2), and 4th place (1). So if our competitors don't field people we can often get 2 or 3 points just by taking part.

So for any women reading this who might be thinking about Track and Field for next year - please come along. All areas of expertise are welcome and it really is participation that counts because we have 18 events to fill at each meeting. And A and B string for all events (apart from the relays).

Slapstick moment of the season was when having acknowledged the signal of the discus thrower about to throw, one marshal turned his back to chat to someone to be hit moments later full on the knee with the discus. No harm was done but chortles of laughter from some onlookers temporarily halted proceedings. Luckily it wasn't the javelin.

Our host match at Battersea was superbly marshalled and organised by the standing army of Serpie volunteers who braved the heavy rain showers to ensure a slick event was staged. Many thanks to Lisa Pettit for co-ordinating the well-received event.

There was one athlete who deserves a special mention. Mary Davies turned up for all meetings, scored the most points overall and even stepped in for captaining duties at one meeting. Congratulations to Mary, winner of this year's women's T&F trophy for the most deserving athlete in the ladies team.

September's meeting, the last of the season, was the only meeting where we struggled to fill events. A big thanks to all the women who stretched themselves to cover as many as seven events each, and

many of those were competing in the Vets' final the following day. A massive well done to Marielle Vestlund, Sarah Knox, Mary Davies and Stephanie Vaatz who, between the four of them, competed in 38 events over two days!

Numbers were depleted partly because some regular attendees couldn't come, and the Club Championship 10K was the next day. But hopefully an even bigger group of athletes next year will ease the problems that a busy Summer events calendar can pose.

Sadly a season of coming 3rd in the face of very stiff competition means we are likely to be relegated next season but all to play for to get us back up the rankings to Division 2. Roll on 2011.

I would like to say a huge thank you to all the supporters, volunteers, time keepers, judges, track officials and everyone else who gave their valuable time to help in our meetings. Your efforts are massively appreciated!

*Any drink of choice whichever

**except for months with a 'r' in

Cross country plan!

Eric Phillips

Cross-country is probably by far the most fun thing a runner can do and everyone, of whatever standard, is welcome. I hope lots of people who don't generally run cross country show up this season, as well as the die-hards. The main focus this season (esp. for the men's team who narrowly lost to Woodford Green in the MET league last season) will be the races set out below:

1. Metropolitan League

This league competition (www.metleague.co.uk), in which the men run approximately 8km and the women 6km, has gone from strength to strength in recent years and will be our main focus this season. Our A-team were third from 2006 to 2008 and then second in 2009 and 2010. This season we're determined to win and if we do it will be one of our greatest ever successes. Our main competition is likely to be from Woodford Green but we shouldn't underestimate Shaftesbury Barnet or Highgate Harriers either. Our B-team has in recent years been the strongest B-team in the league and it would be great to have our B team remain in the top division again this season. Last year we had between 45 and 55 Serpies showing up at each match: ideally as many or more will be present this year. **Please put the metropolitan league dates in your diary: 13/11, 18/12, 15/1, 12/2!**

2. English National Cross Country Championships

We had our best ever performance in this race last year (www.englishcrosscountry.co.uk) with our 6-to-score team coming tenth out of 107 teams and our 9 to score team coming eighth out of 45 teams, with 30 Serpies running. This hugely historic 12km race is the highlight of most of the team's season: **this year the race returns to the 2008 venue, at Alton Towers in the Midlands on 19 February.** It

would be great to do as well this year as we did last year.

3. South of England Championships

With 15km on Parliament Hill (www.seaa.org.uk) this race is infamously the toughest on the calendar: expect infernal conditions! Last year we underperformed slightly in this race, with our 6-to-score A team coming 12th out of 81 teams (and our B, C, D, E and F teams coming 35th, 40th, 48th, 63rd and 72nd respectively) and our 12-to-score A team coming seventh out of 21 teams, with a total of 38 Serpies running. **This year the race will be on 29 January.**

4. London Championships

This race which also takes place on Parliament Hill whets our appetite for the South of England Championships. From memory the main competition is 4-to-score and we were second last year and third the year before. **This year the race is on 20 November.**

5. English National Cross Country Relays

Due to clashes we've not in recent years participated in this relay competition which takes place annually in Mansfield (www.englishcrosscountry.co.uk). **This year it will be on 6 November** and doesn't clash with other cross country races. If anyone is keen to take part, please let me know and I will organise a team.

6. County Champs / Intercounty Champs

Some Serpies are Surrey resident, others are Middlesex resident while others are based elsewhere, meaning that our team presence in the County champs is a little diluted, but many individuals will no doubt focus on these. In the Intercounty Champs, which is a selection-only race and also serves as a trials race for world XC champs, runners wear county vests rather than club vests, but given the prestige of the event it is good for the club for our runners to participate. Last year Serpie runners included Nick Torry, Richard Phillips, Hugh Torry, Mariah McConnaughey and Catherine Higgs.

7. Sunday League and other races

For the keen there is this season as always an embarrassment of choice: please see info about other races on the website. Many of these races are less serious but as much fun as the other races I have highlighted above! But if you only have limited time to dedicate to cross country and are keen to support the team, then please do prioritise the other races I have set out above.

Men's Contacts: Malcolm French (manager), Eric Phillips (captain)

Ladies' Contacts: Steph Vaatz (manager), Natalie Kolodziej (captain)



Natalie Kolodziej at the 2010 Nationals in Leeds (Photo: Nicola Barberis Negra)

Brand new Inov8s and a book of poetry - Serpie Trail running in Wales

Gyongyi Vegh

All set for the Saturday morning early start from Paddington. The new trail shoes I bought online are the last of my essential purchases to arrive on Friday afternoon. I am painfully aware of the high risk of new shoes from earlier hill-walking experiences. But I am not deterred. I give the shoes their debut run by jogging down to the nearest Waterstone's to get a nearly forgotten essential: an OS map of Abergavenny and the surrounding hills.

Alan Hall, volunteer organiser of this Serpie social trail run, kindly supplied me with all the basic information a novice self-supporting trail runner would need, and showed genuine concern on hearing my nearly 5-hour marathon pace. 'You might end up running on your own. If that's fine, you will definitely need a map.' A slow-pace group was almost formed but shortly before the day some people had to cancel. I am still determined to go.

The plan is just too good to give up: 'take an early train from London to Abergavenny; climb the three peaks of Blorenge, Sugar Loaf and Skirrid Hill (20 miles with 5,000 feet of ascent); catch a return train and be back in London the same night. It is not a race or an organised event, just a group of friends out to enjoy testing their hill legs on a long social run in the surroundings of three beautiful mountains.' (From Alan's email call for participants.)



Serpies at the start in Abergavenny. (Photo: Rob Westaway)



Alan Hall leads the way to the first peak. (Photo: Rob Westaway)

The personal attraction for me is the actual place of the run: Abergavenny, hometown of a Welsh writer friend, Owen Sheers, who used to run up and down those hills as a child, and as a grown-up he called his second book of poems 'Skirrid Hill' (Seren, 2005) - the third peak on our route.

Saturday morning arrives. I have closely followed Alan's email advice about food and clothing. 'There is indeed a fine balance to be struck between adequate preparation for the weather and keeping a comfortably light pack. For food and water, I will take lots to eat and drink on the train when the weight doesn't matter, so as to start well energised and hydrated. On the actual run I will only take maybe 300g of food and one litre of water.'

'Clothing is the other potentially heavy item. There could be quite a range of conditions from mild and springlike in the valleys to windy and wintry on the tops, so having several thin layers you can adjust is the name of the game. It depends a bit how warm you get when you run so the following isn't meant to be a definitive list, but to give you some idea I will be wearing or carrying: 2 thin thermal tops, microfleece pullover, lycra shorts, long tights over the shorts, Paclite jacket and overtrousers, a thin hat and gloves. If the forecast is definitely dry you can get away with a very light showerproof jacket as it is the windproofing that is important. If rain is a risk then you need a decent waterproof even if it is heavier.'

I arrive at Paddington well in time to find my group - fellow Serpies I have not met before with the exception of Rob Westaway. I notice some people wandering around and, strangely, wearing very similar gear to mine. No one is wearing Serpie colours but we find each other easily using these other clues: trail shoes, light rucksack, windbreaker. Eventually, six of us gather around Alan: Jennifer Bradley, Gillian Kilroy, Claire Strong, Gareth Anderson, Robert Westaway and myself.

The train journey is pleasant. We chat, consult the map and get to know each other. We change to a local train in Hereford and while waiting on the platform I savour the Welsh accent coming through the loudspeaker announcements. Abergavenny is easy to spot from the train. Or rather, it is one of the surrounding peaks that makes the

sprawling town easy to locate in a dish of a valley.

On arrival Alan leads the team across town with the confidence of a local and after crossing the River Usk we are soon making our way towards Bloreng. We can't see our destination yet as we are running in a wooded area but we can definitely feel its proximity.

The trail becomes steeper with every step and we duly strip ourselves of the extra layers of clothing. Suddenly the trees fall behind and we have a clear view of the peak. It shows its bulky steep green face. I gasp. There is no way we can run up here! Climbing, yes - possibly on all fours! I carefully find my footholds and at times hold on to knots of grass for support. I am slower than the others but it feels good to stretch my legs and fill my lungs to the limit.

The 360-degree view from the top is spectacular. Abergavenny lies at our feet, behind it in the distance we can see Skirrid Hill and to the left Sugar Loaf appears. The top of Bloreng is wide and flat. I am surprised to be running in a wet marshy area, ankle-deep in water and mud. My brand new Inov8s quickly assume the look of well-worn trail shoes caked in mud.

We run downhill on a less steep side of Bloreng. Still, it requires a lot of concentration as you have little time to find your foothold amongst

Will I be able to run that far? Up and down that hill?

the knots of grass and the often loose rocks. On towards our second peak. We run along a canal where we stop for a short lunch. Just in time to re-energise and lighten our rucksacks.

We keep running on undulating terrain where the difference in pace within the group becomes obvious and tiresome. Shortly before reaching Sugar Loaf we hold a brief discussion and decide to split in two groups. Four fast-pace runners sprint ahead while three of us slower ones follow on. We soon get a good view of the hill and a long line of people snaking up on its side. They are the participants of an organised LDWA Three Peaks event. As we keep overtaking the hikers I feel as if I have suddenly become a fast-paced runner.

It is sunny and windy on the top. We briefly admire the view then quickly find a spot sheltered from the wind to have a light snack of energy bars and fruit. I still feel tired when we get up to run down the side of Sugar Loaf with a clear view of Skirrid Hill in front of us. I am beginning to have my doubts. Will I be able to run that far? Up and down that hill? I tell myself that it is fine if I just walk it. I can definitely do that. Even if it means that my two companions run ahead of me. But my companions, Claire and Gareth, stick with me. We encourage each other on.

A bustling cheerful pub on our way proves to be the perfect place for a brief stop. They serve the best tap water in the world! It revives me and dispels my doubts. When we get going again our path leads us across fields and farms, over fences and gates, down roads and lanes. And suddenly there it is: Skirrid Hill looming large right in front of us. This side is steep and the narrow path is winding uphill serpentine-like. Once we reach the top we see the back of the hill stretching out and the view opening up on its two sides. I take out Owen Sheer's book of poems and read 'Skirrid Fawr' to Claire and Gareth.

'Skirrid Fawr'

Just like the farmers who once came to scoop
handfuls of soil from her holy scar,

so I am still drawn to her back for the answers
to every question I have never known.

To the sentence of her slopes,
the blunt wind glancing from her withers,

to the split view she reveals
with every step along her broken spine.

This edge of her cleft palate,
part hill, part field,

rising from a low mist, a lonely hulk
adrift through Wales.

Her east-west flanks, one dark, one sunlit,
her vernacular of borders.

Her weight, the unspoken words
of an unlearned tongue.

After a little contemplation we run along the 'broken spine' and start our descent by the head of the hill. Our steps are light, our spirits elevated. Not long to go before we reach Abergavenny in the light of the setting sun, catch our train and head back to London. We all agree the day has been a success - full of inspiring challenges and rewarding experiences.

Luckily it is not a one-off event. Alan Hall is unstoppable! He regularly organises and leads trail runs outside London with fellow Serpentine runners. It is well worth checking out the club website for similar events and signing up for the Serpie trail newsletter.



First summit, Bloreng. (Photo: Rob Westaway)

Triathlon – lessons learned

Angus Beaumont

As the 2010 triathlon season draws to a close, and before thinking too much about setting goals for next year, it is a good time to reflect on the year's achievements, challenges and lessons learnt. My personal highlights this year include a few running PBs, 10th place at the Etape Caledonia, and competing in the European Age Group Sprint Triathlon Championships in Athlone. However, the season wasn't without disappointments; pulling out of two races due to punctures and a relentless, frustrating battle with swimming.

Reflecting on the season's progress, I have identified some key lessons that I'd like to share with you.

Swimming

I'm not sure what I was doing when everyone else at school was learning to swim, but somehow I made it to adulthood with only a tenuous grasp of doggy paddle. If, like me, you've come to triathlon from a running or cycling background the chances are your swimming isn't great and it's the discipline that fills you with the most fear. Two years ago I couldn't swim a width of front crawl and my swim coach Terry might argue that two years on not a lot has changed. Whilst I've a way to go before mastering front crawl, I have however learnt one very important point; you will never become a good swimmer by just hammering out 2k in the pool three times a week.

Swimming is all about technique; get that right before anything else. Though expensive, private lessons, in particular video analysis in an endless pool, is money well spent. When cycling and running you can see yourself and are aware of where and what your limbs are doing. However, in the pool whilst you might think you look like Phelps, the video analysis might tell a very different story. Confronted with the visual evidence of, for example, a dodgy catch, lack of rotation or a lazy kick, it is so much easier to begin to correct these faults and to start to move through the water in an efficient and streamline manner. Of course there are cheaper options such as getting a friend to video you from the poolside which will at least show you what's going on above the water. Alternatively, sign up for group technique lessons such as those run by Terry, which I and many other Serpie triathletes have found invaluable.

Transitions

If you're already a reasonable runner you'll know how hard it is to knock 30 seconds off the run. There is, however, easy time to be made in transitions with a few simple techniques and a bit of practice. Firstly, try to wear in the swim what you're going to wear on the bike and run. That lovely Serpie tri top that is so easy to get on and off when you are dry very quickly becomes a tangled mess around your torso when you're wet (something I learnt the hard way - if you look very carefully at the Lanzarote video on youtube you'll see me leaving T1 wearing what can only be described as a crop top).

Another great technique to save precious seconds in T1 is to pre-

attach your shoes to the pedals. Ensure that you secure them with elastic bands and practise hopping on and slipping your feet in as you speed away from the mount line. Likewise with the dismount, practise getting your feet out of your shoes and hopping off as you approach the dismount line. There are some good examples of this on the Lanzarote video or on youtube.

Consistency is key

Consistent, quality training through the winter months helps develop a good strong aerobic base which you can build on as the tri season approaches. I found that I was getting considerably more benefit from doing 4 x 30 minute runs a week than I was from doing one massive run and then trying to do a fast session. Likewise on the bike, I found a greater benefit from reducing the mileage, focusing on quality rather than quantity. By eliminating junk mileage and easing back a bit I was able to do more quality sessions, was less fatigued and not so injury prone, enabling me to gradually chip away at my running PBs.

London league

Participating in the London League Series is a great way to prepare for your A races. These events benefit from being cheaper than the bigger races, conveniently located and provide a great opportunity to hone your race technique. Furthermore, they are fun, sociable occasions and by taking part you will be supporting your club. The series comprises duathlons, aquathlons and sprint triathlons, each staged by a different London-based triathlon club.

There is a race that will suit everyone, from the experienced long distance triathlete looking for a little sharpener before their A race to the novice entering their first multisport event. The Thames Turbo sprint tri at the beginning of the year is particularly suited to beginners with its 400m pool swim and friendly vibe.

GBR Age Group qualification

It's easier than you might think to represent your country in triathlon or duathlon. Every year there is a World and European age group championship held over Sprint, Olympic and Long Distance as well as a duathlon. If you are a half decent athlete and normally finish in the top half of your age group there is a good chance that you may qualify. Every year a handful of Serpies gather at these prestigious events, wearing the GB kit and racing against some of the best Age Group athletes in the world.

In addition to competing in a qualifying race, you must also be a BTF member and register your intent to qualify on their website. There are normally between one and four places available per age group so it's all about how many people finish in front of you that have registered their intent to qualify. The recent European triathlon championships in Ireland had eight Serpies racing for their country with Anna Priestly being the highest finisher missing out on a medal by just one place and even more recently in Edinburgh Richard Phillips walked away with a silver medal in his age group (one of the most competitive of all of them).

It's now time to hang up the race belt till next year and do all those things I've been putting off for the last six months. My coach Richard's advice for the winter is, try not to think too much about next year's goals until the beginning of the year and just enjoy the training - that is after all why we do it.

Can runners learn from swimmers?

Charles Doxat

When I joined the Serpies 20 years ago from a competitive swimming background I remember how truly shocked I was that so many members (and indeed runners generally) were tired and more worryingly carried injuries. I'd already heard about elite runners getting injured and sometimes missing whole seasons after pushing their bodies to the limit and beyond. But club athletes doing likewise, surely not.

In the sport I came from injury was almost unheard of. This despite the huge training volumes that many swimmers undertook. A middle distance swimmer, out of season, can cover 100 kilometres a week – that's an awful lot of swimming. "Ah, ha" I hear you mutter, "that's because running is a high impact activity as compared to swimming". True, but I think there are other more interesting and fundamental reasons.

One striking difference I found between, say, a club runner versus a club swimmer was the emphasis on interval training. For the runner maybe one or two sessions in a week, maybe. For the swimmer every session has interval training as the main set.

Example of club swim training session

Aim of Session: To improve aerobic capacity inc speed work.

Additional information: Nationals in 11 weeks.

Principles of training applied to this session MVO + HVO

Ability of swimmers: Elite Masters, Triathletes

Total meters 5100. Duration 120min.

Warm up (1400)

400m FS (catch-up)

4 x 100m MS kick with board

4 x 100m FS pull (single arm – alt 25m)

4 x 50m HVO into turns on 1:30min

Main Set (3100) Lactate Production

10 x 50m Fly on 2:00min (AP)

200m FS recovery on 7:00min

10 x 50m BK on 2:00min (AP)

200m FS recovery on 7:00min

10 x 50m BR on 2:00min (AP)

200m FS recovery on 7:00min

20x 50m FS on 1:00min (AP)

Swim Down (600)

400m FS easy

200m easy choice

Key:

MS: main stroke; FS: freestyle;
Fly: butterfly; Bk: backstroke;
Br: breaststroke
MVO: Maximum oxygen uptake; HVO: high velocity overload (short bursts);
AP: aerobic power (10 beats per minute below max).

Many runners seem to believe that significant mileage (sometimes known as "miles in the bank") is the main requirement for success. So LSD (Long, Slow, Distance) was, and often still is for many, the dominant training motif. Even without entering into the emerging controversy about heel-to-toe running (thank you Nike!) versus a more natural gait, it's almost inevitable that LSD will lead to repetitive motion injury. Frankly if swimmers' idea of training was to dive in and swim freestyle for two hours five times a week, not only would their swimming not improve and they'd get tired and stale, but they would also develop injuries (mainly shoulder). So they don't train like that.

So that's the first (double) nub of the difference between the basic training regimes adopted by the two sports: running, relatively high impact and lots of LSD; swimming, low impact and interval training being a significant part of every session. Of course running intervals (even with a reduced weekly mileage overall) can still cause injury. But, there is another fundamental difference. Swimming is technique driven. Therefore a significant proportion of the training period is given over to drills. Drills also double up as a valuable part of the essential warming-up process prior to the main set (intervals).

How many club runners include substantive drills at the start of their training sessions? Also because there are four main swimming strokes many sessions will embrace the three strokes that are not the swimmers' main stroke, in varying proportions. This spreads the load across different muscle groups, as well as adding variety to a session. The chart in the box shows a typical club session, and every session across a training cycle will be different. This variety is not just stimulating interest and negating staleness, it avoids the over-use of any given muscle group that causes the musculoskeletal disorders so common in the running fraternity.

Swimmers also recognise the need for whole body fitness. Although, say, a front crawl specialist knows his upper body strength is the main driver he will still do plenty of work to enhance his leg-performance. How many members recognise the obverse of this: that runners should include significant work on their upper body strength?

So my answer to the headline question is: yes, I think they can. For your programme next year think about the following: avoid at all costs a "one-dimensional" training regime – there are better routes to improve your running and elude injury; I'm certainly not suggesting a need to increase the time given to training but you should, in my view, allocate a significant part to drills, and another part to upper body and core strength; and include at least one other sporting activity within your training regime.

I think it's fair to say that in recent years with more runners taking intelligent advice (from good coaches like Frank Horwill), and especially with the emerging popularity of cross-training for all multi-sports (eg triathlon, duathlon etc), which have moved from minority activities to mass participation, many runners have already been weaned off just running and the consequent focus on a limited group of muscles. That's good news. But now is the time I suggest for everyone else to adopt a new regime: add variety and spread the load to eradicate the injuries. And you'll run faster too!

Charles Doxat won many National age-group swimming championships and records, and 10 National age-group triathlon titles (inc V50 GB bests at Olympic distance 2:09:37, Royal Windsor 1994 and half Ironman 5:16.13, Ironbridge 1995)

Core Training for runners

Andy DuBois

Is a strong core essential for runners?

Having a strong core is considered by many to be essential for running. Without it, your technique and efficiency will suffer and you will place strain on other parts of your body leading to possible lower back, hip and knee problems.

What the research says

The majority of the research on the effects of core training on runners shows that traditional core strengthening exercises using exercise balls or stabilisation exercises lying on your back or in a plank position have no benefit to a runner in terms of improving speed, efficiency, reducing risk of injury or helping recover from injury any quicker.

Why don't current core training exercises have any effect?

The fundamental reason is that they are not specific to running. They don't follow the rule of specific adaptations to imposed demands (SAID). What this means is that the body's response to exercise is specific to the demand placed on it. The closer the exercise is to the activity you are training for, the greater the benefit. For example if you want to improve your ability to jump then exercises like jumping, hopping and skipping would be more effective than doing squats and leg presses in the gym and bike riding would have even less of an effect. All three work your legs but in very different ways. Training the core in a horizontal position (plank or lying on your back) with exercises designed to keep your spine stable does not even remotely resemble the role of your core when you run. In running you are vertical, both your arms and your legs are moving rapidly and the spine is moving in three different directions. The two positions could not be more dissimilar if you tried. No wonder traditional core exercises have no effect.

Why do we continue to use these kinds of exercises when the research suggests it simply doesn't work?

Traditional core exercises are based on our knowledge of how the core worked over ten years ago. Our understanding of the role of the core has increased enormously since then and new methods of training have evolved. At the Annual summit of the American College of Sports Medicine this year "vertical core exercises" were recommended as a far more effective way of training the core for athletic performance. Unfortunately most of the exercise recommendations by the experts in the media are still based on outdated knowledge and prescribe traditional (horizontal) core training exercises. This article will show you how to train your core effectively for running using vertical core exercises.

What is the core?

The core is more than just the abdominal muscles. It is made up of all muscles that attach to the pelvis: the abdominals, spinal muscles, pelvic floor muscles, deep hip muscles, scapula and shoulder girdle muscles. These muscles are not one big group of muscles that all activate as "the core". They act interdependently depending on the load placed on them.

What does the core do?

The role of the core is specific to whatever activity is being performed so let's look at what happens when we run. As our right leg hits the ground our right arm is behind us and our left foot is in the air trailing behind us. This places a diagonal load through our body from our right shoulder to our left hip. There is also a lateral load through the body as gravity pulls our left hip down whereas our right foot being on the ground prevents our right hip from dropping. A third load is created as our left leg tilts our pelvis down placing a stretch from our sternum to our pelvis. The core controls these three loads and how effectively it does this determines how much force your hips and legs can generate. Any weakness will mean either a reduction in force generated by the hips or legs or an overload of any muscles that attempt to take on the role the core muscles should be doing.

How do you switch your core on and why has yours switched off?

Muscles are "switched on" when the resting tension in a muscle increases. Effective muscle function involves a loading action just as you would load a rubber band by stretching it before releasing it. The more force put through the muscle in the loading phase the more force the muscles can produce. Think of what happens when you want to jump. Your first action is to squat down to load the muscles before you spring back up. The higher you wanted to jump the lower you would go and the faster your movement would be. Core muscles work the same way. If they are put under load they will switch on. If there is no change in tension then there is no reason for them to activate. No movement equals no demand on the core, so sitting at a desk all day is a great way to switch off our core muscles!

How can we train our core effectively for running?

We discussed earlier the three different loads placed on the core during running. By training these specific movements in positions similar to running we can strengthen the core specifically for running. Opposite are three simple exercises that will develop your core specifically for running.

To make these as specific as possible to running we need to target the same movement speed and load as running. For this reason the exercises are performed at a quick pace and with small weights. To increase the load on our muscles, simply increase the speed. Initially the focus for most people should be on increasing range of movement. However, if you are very flexible then the focus should be on strength. To increase range of movement simply try and swing your arms around, up or over as far as possible, to increase strength simply speed the movement up.

These are three general exercises designed for runners; they will work for any runner without any major biomechanical imbalances. Those with any injury concerns should try them without any weight at all and proceed with caution.

What if I don't feel my abdominal muscles burning?

Traditional core exercises isolate the abdominal muscles which means you feel a strong sensation of muscles working. Vertical core exercises don't isolate the core muscles, they teach the core muscles to work in conjunction with the other muscles of the foot, knee, hip, spine and shoulder in the same way that these muscles are used when running.

For more information contact andydubois@hotmail.co.uk or see www.andydubois.blogspot.com

Andy is a qualified personal trainer with over 13 years experience. He has also completed Level 1 Triathlon Coaching Course and Level 1 Strength and Conditioning Coaching course. A Certificate in Advanced Rehabilitation, a Diploma of Functional Therapy and Functional Performance put him at the forefront of exercise prescription for athletes and rehabilitation in London.



Lunge position lateral reach



Lunge position overhead reach





(Photo: Gavin Edmonds)

Bare your feet

Garrett Turbett questions an assumed truth about cushioned running shoes

Imagine threading a needle while wearing a thick pair of mittens. It's probably next to impossible to do because we rely so heavily on both our hand-eye coordination and the sensory feedback from our hands when performing complex tasks. Now imagine running while wearing a thick soled running shoe, possibly even running over uneven ground. Most runners don't need to imagine that as it's what they do every time they go out for a run.

By the way we recoil at the threat of our feet being tickled, we know how sensitive our feet are. Our feet are full of tactile receptors and this is for a good reason: to acquire sensory feedback when walking, running, jumping, etc. Putting on a thick soled running shoe is like turning down the volume on those receptors. Robbins and Hanna, 1987, found that a sense of leg location in humans is exact when barefoot, but is changed by athletic footwear. Later, the same researchers found significant differences in individuals' perceptions of foot location when barefoot or in athletic footwear; position error when walking was 1.55° when barefoot and 5.99° when wearing athletic shoes. So, the thicker and softer your shoe, the more your foot will do what shoe companies like to call 'over-pronate' and then you can be sold a pair of shoes that will try to correct this!

Foot positioning aside, doesn't wearing a thick soled running shoe reduce impact? Robbins and Waked (1997) found that costly athletic footwear accounted for double the number of lower extremity injuries as lower cost footwear. Bergmann et al. (1995) discovered that the forces on the hip were smaller for barefoot jogging than for jogging in diverse types of shoe. Yessis (2000) noted, "They may help some persons with base pathologies, but their advantage is unsure for runners with healthy feet."

I could continue citing research that spans decades showing that

athletic footwear does little to reduce injury in healthy populations. By contrast, Dr Craig Richards, Dr Parker Magin and Associate Professor Robin Callister (2009) wrote in *The British Journal of Sports Medicine*, "there is no scientific evidence that 'Pronation Control, Elevated Cushioned Heel' shoes provide any benefit to distance runners." Anyone that's read "Born to Run" will know that Dr Richards challenged the major manufacturers to come up with evidence to show their shoes reduced injury; none could do so.

Some of my own research found that conditions that changed the athletes' kinaesthetic awareness resulted in a reduced and more unnatural range of movement. During jump trials, elite hockey players significantly changed their jumping technique by reducing the angle at the hip by 40°, thus reducing their jump height. This showed that confidence in any dynamic movement requires familiarity as well as exceptional awareness of the athletes' body in relation to their physical environment.

So what should we do? Throw out all our running shoes and go out running in Tarahumara-esque sandals? No! Going from shoes to barefoot, or minimalist footwear such as low-profile flats or Vibram Five Fingers, requires a process of adaptation. Your feet will require a significant amount of strengthening and therefore any change in footwear (or lack of) should be done progressively over a long period of time, which will vary for every runner. Starting off by walking in thinner shoes is a good start and it will give your feet more strength and flexibility. Before progressing to running it's a good idea to talk to a coach or other professional with an up-to-date knowledge of biomechanics.

The benefits of doing this, though, could be reduced chance of injury, increased performance and a saving on buying the latest model every few weeks!

Garrett is a sports scientist, endurance coach and personal trainer who has worked in this area for over 12 years. He's spent most of his life practising martial arts, competed in almost every discipline of cycle racing, raced triathlon for several years, has run in national track competitions and now focuses on ultra-marathons. He can be contacted at www.enduracoach.co.uk

Q & A

Serpentines confessed to being somewhat baffled by the barefoot phenomenon, so put some questions to Garrett. His responses are below.

It must be stressed that these answers only partly answer each question as each question is a research project in itself. In truth, there is still much that is unknown about gait mechanics, as with most areas of science, and as such there are always going to be questions left unanswered... for the time being anyway.

Q: If barefoot running is better than using well-cushioned trainers, why don't more people do it?

The majority of people are not aware that there is no scientific evidence to support the efficacy of running shoes. When the modern running shoe was first thought up, it was no doubt done in good faith, with the intent being to improve performance. However recent research has shown that there is no benefit to the structured, cushioned shoes that most people run in.

There is a growing awareness of the need for foot strengthening. The big players in sports footwear now understand the benefits of running barefoot and are trying to sell us shoes that make us feel as though we're barefoot. I can see a cheaper way of 'exposing my feet'.

There is of course a lot to be said for the in-between. Using minimalist footwear such as Nike Free or the various racing flats available are a good way to protect your feet from sharp injuries whilst still getting many of the benefits of being barefoot. Throwing off our shoes and socks and running through London streets is not really a viable option!

Q: Is there a difference between men and women?

Female runners have been found in some studies to have higher rates of stress-related injuries. Women do have different gait mechanics to men due to different physical structures. However, there is no research to suggest that they are any more or less likely to suffer injury by incorporating barefoot running into their programme.

Q: Are heavier runners more likely to pick up injuries from barefoot running?

Heavier runners do create greater force upon impact and although their absolute strength may be greater, their relative strength is not always so. Every runner requires a different training programme that is specific to their goals, physical attributes, health/injury history, etc. Moving from shod to barefoot requires the same individualised approach to programme setting. I would suggest that a heavier runner, as a general rule, would require a more cautious transfer.

Q: With a gradual conversion, do you recommend this technique for all standard of runner or does it only really apply to elite runners?

I do not feel that only elite runners should gradually convert. I also do not believe that all runners should be converting to barefoot nor will every runner be able to run all or even the majority of their mileage barefoot; it will depend on injury history and their mechanics.

Most elite runners, or faster club runners for that matter, will be mid or forefoot strikers. This means that they are already running with an action that is more akin to that of being barefoot. For a runner that is habitually a heel-striker, there will be a longer period of adaptation as

the muscles in the lower leg, ankle and foot will require more strengthening.

Q: Do you recommend this form of running for all surfaces (both on and off road)?

I recommend a minimum amount of road running in any form of footwear! As much as our bodies are perfectly designed for running, they are designed to do so on natural surfaces. Tarmac and concrete are not surfaces found in the natural world. They result in increased peak force upon impact and repetitive actions due to the unchanging nature of the surface.

As pointed out with the above question, barefoot running should be done as part of the overall training programme and initially only on softer surfaces. It is well known that too much mileage on hard surfaces will dramatically increase your chances of suffering from an overuse injury.

Q: What evidence is there that, long-term, barefoot running doesn't provoke injury in the midfoot/forefoot?

Researchers have found that where barefoot and shod populations co-exist, as in much of the African continent, musculo-skeletal injury rates are considerably higher in the shod community. Furthermore, running-related chronic injuries in the legs are uncommon in developing nations, where most people are habitually barefoot. However, there are issues around access to health services and thus collecting information on injury rates in barefoot population.

Due to both the rarity of barefoot runners in the developed world and the relative infancy of the recent interest in barefoot running, there are not yet any long-term studies on habitual barefoot runners. Studies so far have looked at, amongst other things, impact forces and foot strike patterns, which are understood to be a key contributor to injury and efficiency. At the moment, the science can say with certainty that the natural mechanics of a healthy foot/leg will provide better shock absorption and greater efficiency than 'Pronation Control, Elevated Cushioned Heel' shoes.

Q: Cushioned shoes may not avoid injuries, but are they the only/main cause of injury?

It is not possible to blame any one thing for causing injury, least of all running shoes. Although a shod foot is going to be weaker than that of a habitual barefoot individual, the use of shoes alone cannot be cited as the only or even main cause of injuries.

Injuries are caused by a number of factors, and can include:

- Increase in training intensity or duration
- Change in running surface
- Change in running footwear (or moving to barefoot!)
- Cumulative stress and/or fatigue
- Running technique (biomechanics)
- Dietary factors

These are just a few of the possible causes of injury and unfortunately it makes our sport sound extremely hazardous. But this need not be the case. Our bodies are perfectly designed for running and providing that we take caution, listen to our bodies and take advice from coaches and other experienced professionals, we can run healthy for longer.

Seven benefits of assisted stretching for swim/cycle/run/tri

Laura Kelly

Are you a regular swimmer, cyclist, runner or triathlete? Looking for ways to prevent injury and enhance performance? Want to get more out of your stretching routine? How about incorporating assisted stretching into your training regime?

As an active soul who exercises or trains regularly you will have no doubt already bought into the benefits of flexibility work and appreciate the many benefits it can bring - even if you don't do it as much as you should!

Assisted stretching involves you working with a partner to carry out the stretch, where one person performs or 'assists' in the stretch on the other person who is passively receiving and feeling the stretch.

The benefits of effective stretching are many including decreased muscle stiffness, increased range of motion creating more energy efficient movements and increased blood supply to muscles and joints, all of which contribute to injury prevention and enhanced performance.

Additional benefits that assisted stretching offers are:

A deeper stretch

A deeper stretch and increased range of motion can be achieved than by self stretch. These flexibility gains mean that muscles will work more efficiently as they will use less energy to produce force - a muscle that can generate a contraction through the full stretch length is more powerful. This will help improve your performance both in training and competition. Functionally, the body performs better when able to carry out physical activity with agility and speed.

Increased range of stretched muscles

You are able to effectively stretch a greater number of muscles as there are many muscles that are difficult to self stretch effectively, if at all. The benefits of this are twofold - if you detect an area of tightness and are able to perform assisted stretch on the target area to relieve tension, you are helping prevent a potential injury before it occurs. Secondly, if you have an injury, you can use assisted stretching on related muscles to help you manage your recovery and prevent further injury.

Valuable skill

Once you have learnt correct assisted stretching techniques from a qualified professional, you can then teach a training partner and carry out the stretching on each other. No need to rely on a coach or trainer to do this for you. By carrying out and receiving assisted stretching, you will learn more about your own body and may be able to identify

imbalances and misalignments and do something about them before they become an injury.

Greater relaxation

Assisted stretching induces significantly greater relaxation in the person being stretched. Self stretch requires effort in the form of muscle contractions in order to achieve its opposite muscle lengthening. Assisted stretching requires no effort on behalf of the person receiving the stretch, allowing them to fully relax and focus on feeling, positioning and depth of the stretch, provide feedback to their partner and deep breathing, making the stretch more effective.

Social and interactive

An effective assisted stretch takes little time and will ensure you avoid the temptation to rush through those last five minutes of training, only paying lip service to flexibility. This allows more time for cooling down slowly, an important factor in quick recovery. It also offers a chance to catch up with a training partner or club members. A great way to end a training session or race!

Anywhere, anytime

Once stretch methods are learned, they can be applied anywhere, anytime - in the clubrooms after running club training sessions, after a long cycle with a training partner or poolside with a coach after a race, for example. Depending on the muscle being targeted, some assisted stretches lend themselves to the use of equipment such as a massage couch or swissball and are better done in the gym or clinic.

Complements sports massage therapy

Using assisted stretching in between sports massage therapy sessions can help prolong the positive effects of a deep tissue massage and is a useful way for you to keep soft tissue tension at bay until your next session. Assisted stretching may also be carried out by your therapist as part of your sessions.

Assisted stretching is an excellent tool to use as part of injury prevention and performance enhancement as well as adding variety to your training routine. If you'd like more information or to sign up for my monthly Pilates for Injury Prevention email, contact me on the details below. Email: laura@secondnaturefitness.co.uk

Help out at the club races

31 October 2010

Jekyll and Hyde Park Duathlon, Hyde Park

13 November 2010

MET League home match, Trent Park

1 January 2011

New Year's Day 10K, Hyde Park

Email participation@serpentine.org.uk or sign up as volunteer in the Serpie planner

Jump on the coaching bandwagon

Lula Rosso spoke with some of the coaches who recently passed a UKA coaching qualification to learn about their experiences with training and volunteering for the club.

You may have noticed that every day of the week, every week of the year, Serpentine Running Club offers a wide range of coaching sessions for the benefit of its members. These sessions would not happen without the handful of senior coaches that volunteer their time, energy and, ultimately, their invaluable lessons.

For these sessions to work smoothly without unnecessarily burdening the already overworked coaches, it is necessary to have a continuous flow of regular members interested in coaching and willing to help out. Committing as little as once per month where needed makes a huge difference for the coaches in charge.

For this reason, the club is supporting any individual that decides to obtain an official qualification from UK Athletics/British Triathlon Association and help out at the various coaching sessions.

A great summary of the new pathway and what your options are if you already hold a UKA licence and want to progress in the new pathway, is at <http://coaching.uka.org.uk/qualifications/coach-education-and-pathway/>. Or check the Serpie website: http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/volunteer_coach.html and http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/volunteer_tricoach.html for triathlon coaching advice.

Alternatively, you can speak to any of the club's regular coaches about their experiences and see if you can help out in their sessions before you go on the relevant coaching course.

Nicola Barberis Negra, UKA level 1 coach, member since September 2008, coaching at Battersea track since November 2009

What was your involvement with the club before becoming a coach?

I was running on Wednesday nights, occasionally attending the track sessions on Thursday at Battersea, and doing many more club races than I should have!

How did you learn about training to become a coach?

During a track session at Battersea I heard that one of the coaches was looking for someone to replace him and I thought "Why not?".

What training course did you do, why and what did you think of it?

I did the level 1 course [equivalent to Leader/Assistant Coach in the new pathway] because it was the one specifically aimed at track sessions. It lasted a day and was quite generic but I needed it to be

insured during the sessions and move on to the next level.

What are your club duties now?

I am helping at the Thursday track sessions, normally leading the warm up and sometimes the stretching. Together with the other coaches, we plan the training programme.

Likes and dislikes of being a volunteer coach for the club?

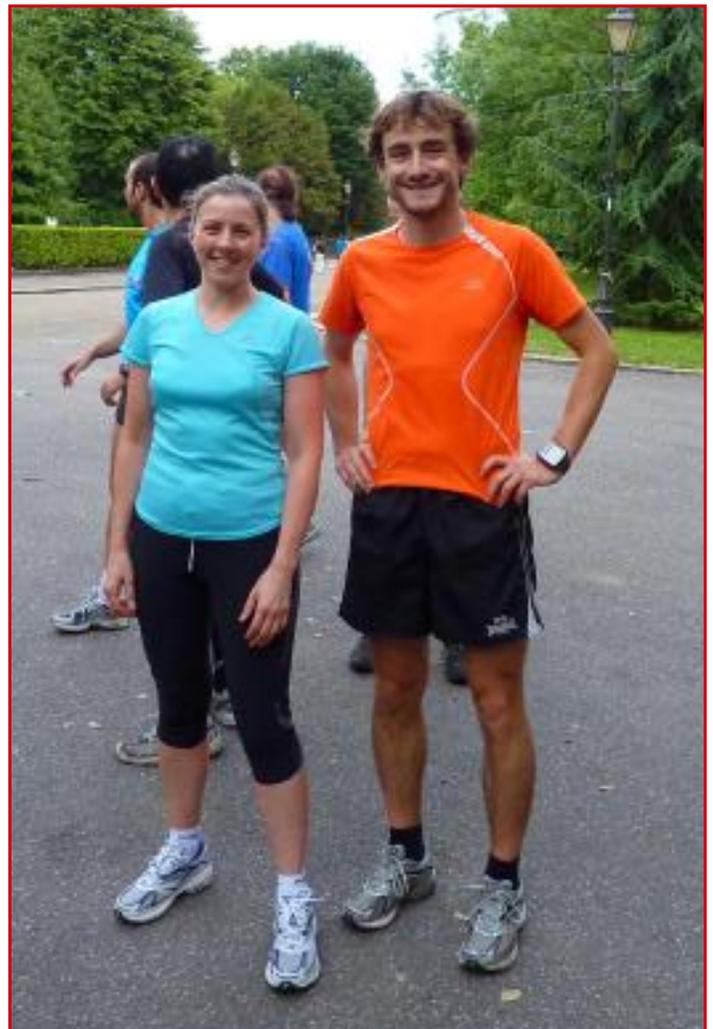
I like to help the club and give something back. I am also very happy when somebody achieves their target. Dislikes? Being out in the winter nights and in the rain.

Did your attitude towards running change as a result of your coaching training/practice?

Yes, definitely. I started to become more aware of the physiological principles behind running and now I structure my training more. I've also realised how many people mix things up.

Who would you recommend the coaching training to and why?

I think everybody can do it and it feels good to help people with their running. At the end of the day, it's just a couple of hours per week and it's a useful contribution to the club and the other coaches.



Claire Strong and Nicola Barberis Negra coaching on Thursday Battersea track sessions (Photo: Lula Rosso)

Claire Strong, leader in Running Fitness, member since November 2008, coaching at Battersea track since November 2009

What was your involvement with the club before becoming a coach?

At the beginning I was doing only a little with the club, I went on Wednesday nights but not regularly. Then, during summer 2009, I started to do the Thursday track sessions to train for my second marathon that year and I found that it really helped me to get faster.

How did you learn about training as a coach?

At the end of that summer, one of the coaches was moving on and Beate Vogt needed someone to help out.

What training course did you do, why and what did you think of it?

I did the leadership in running fitness course because it was the one closest to get to! It is a standalone course that covers all things relevant to taking group sessions. Most of it is common sense but useful.

What are your duties now?

I help out on Thursdays normally leading the stretching. Occasionally I help with the beginners' courses, leading a small group.

Likes and dislikes of being a volunteer coach for the club?

I like encouraging other people to run and help the club. I also like to tell people what to do! No dislikes really.

Did your attitude towards running change as a result of your coaching training?

I appreciate even more the people that lead sessions for us.

Who would you recommend the coaching training to and why?

I think the qualities that make a good coach are empathy, patience and being able to engage with people. Coaching is good for building confidence, for becoming more outgoing, and for meeting lots of different people.

Urban Bettag, UKA Level 3 Endurance coach (Performance), member since 2005, coaching at Battersea track since 2006.

What was your involvement with the club before becoming a coach?

From time to time I used to attend Malcolm's and Beate's session. Beate is always looking for new ideas and ways to improve the session. One day she asked me if I would be interested in leading the 'tempo run' in the park.

How did you learn about training as a coach?

Initially it was a bit hard to find information about what is involved in becoming a coach. I struggled to understand who in England is responsible for the coaching education. My former running club was quite reluctant to send people on a training course - can you believe it? I spoke to Dave Chalfen who was our club coach at the time and he



Urban Bettag (right) hands out some racing tips.

explained the structure to me. Eventually, I made it on a coaching course where I took the opportunity to speak to the tutors to find out a bit more about the 'bigger' picture and how to become a coach.

What training courses did you do, why and what did you think of it?

The UKA Level 1 course is an introduction about coaching, you learn about the process of coaching and the role of the coach. It was a one day course. I really enjoyed it, because I learnt something new and started to see athletics from a different perspective. The UKA Level 2 course requires a bit more work and I had to complete a couple of modules. Part of this course was mentored practice, ie I had to lead parts of a session and had to get feedback from Level 2 coaches in the club. The UKA Level 3 course is a long course and quite time consuming. In parts it is reasonably detailed and you learn about strength and conditioning, developing personalised training plans, mentoring, anatomy etc. At the end of the process I had to complete a log book (100+ pages), a case study and the quality of my coaching was assessed. The module I enjoyed most was the mentoring module. Overall it was worthwhile going through the process.

What are your duties now?

Planning the annual programme, detailed planning of the Tuesday session, leading the session, networking with other coaches, coaching athletes on a 1:1 basis, championing coaching with the committee.

Likes and dislikes of being a volunteer coach for the club?

I really like all the people in my group; everybody has something to add. I think they are fantastic and we laugh a lot every week. The energy of the groups keeps me going and wanting to become a better coach. It's hard to point out specifics, like the random SMS message from an athlete who has done a PB etc. Unfortunately, I can only look after so many athletes and sometimes I have to turn athletes away. It is not a situation I am very happy about. I am hoping to get some more coaching support in the future so that we can accommodate a couple of ability groups and that more people can benefit from coaching. In

order to achieve that we need your help; we need more coaching assistants and more athletics leaders.

Did your attitude towards running change as a result of your coaching training?

Definitely. Before I started coaching my training was random at best. I wish I had worked right from the start with a coach.

Who would you recommend the coaching training to and why?

Anybody who wants to make a difference and thinks they can have an impact on athletes and the club. Ideally I would send every athlete of my group on a coaching course so that many more people can benefit from coaching.

David Chalfen, UKA level 4 coach, coaching Tuesday at New River track since April 2008

What motivates me? I like the creative elements in coaching. I am passionate about helping committed people run faster, and raising standards. A club like Serpentine offers a lot for a coach. It is huge and very diverse. Unique, really.

The demographic of the club could only happen in London and even in London you could only have one like it. It is very well organised, the level of communication is excellent and it is managed by very talented, successful people.

To a coach, the club offers plenty of support and a large number of 20-30 year olds without many running years in the bank and with some years of improvement before the ageing factor starts to kick in slightly. UK running clubs are increasingly populated by V40s or those close to that age category, and I see that Serpentine is increasingly picking up the smaller pool of 20-something runners in London.

The club is very well endowed with smart people who understand what needs to be done and are prepared to do it. I get a lot out of the sparky personalities of the runners! There is a high turnover as well, but there is scope for long term coaching, which is what I'm more interested in.

Two things are important for a coach: achieving a balance in life (and it is a personal choice where that balance lies), and technical training.

My advice to someone that wants to start a coaching career is first to make sure you understand how the event you are coaching works. Ideally, do it yourself, not necessarily at the same level that you aspire to coach at, but you need credibility, to understand the physiology and the mental challenges.

Secondly, back off if you have the feeling that people are wasting your time and are less committed than you to the training. A lot of people like the idea of becoming faster and the idea of running very hard, but it doesn't mean they are prepared to do what it takes. Talented people can be quite lazy or expect short term miracles!

Finally, don't get discouraged if things are slow at the beginning. When I started coaching at New River on Tuesdays, for a couple of months just a few people showed up (and on a bad night that includes 'one' being liberally defined as 'a few'). But if you like coaching and believe in the advice and sessions you are offering, people will start to come.

The new UKA coaching pathway

David Chalfen

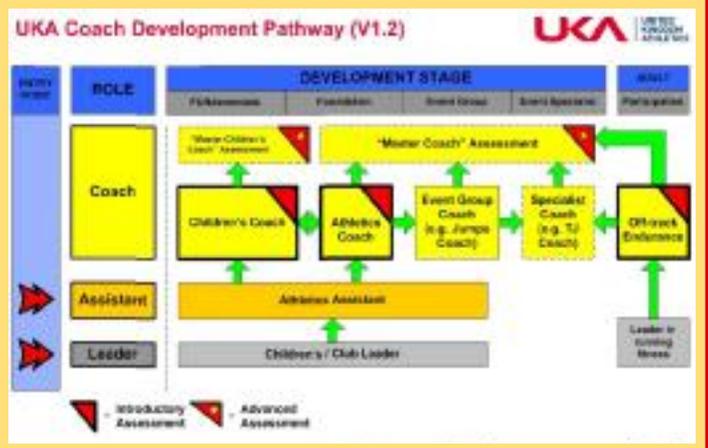
This year, England Athletics kicked off a new coaching pathway which is structured more sensibly; it reflects better where the sport is going and what clubs need in practice.

The programme consists partly of assessments, partly of training courses, but mostly of individuals planning and leading their own development, verified as required by a coach at the next level of experience. In terms of resources, there is a national and area mentor scheme for coaching support. I am one of 11 area mentors in England for endurance; all the coaches in the scheme are part time but very committed, very receptive and fully engaged.

At the start, there are two choices: Leader or Leader in running fitness. Both courses last one day, but the first is aimed at preparing Leaders to set up and monitor a group during standard athletics sessions and it is the recommended award for people interested in track and field. The second is aimed at people interested at leading road running groups of adults of any standard, encourage participation, offer guidance to new runners and improvers. These are not coaching qualifications but provide entry to the coaching pathway, namely to the Assistant Coach award or the Off-track Endurance coach respectively, as illustrated in the picture below.

The Assistant Coach award is the the first step for those that are committed to being a coach. It can be taken without having to take a Leader award first. This is a two day course on preparing for a coaching role working under the supervision of a Coach (existing Level 2 or higher). The Coach award, both in Athletics or in Off-track Endurance, takes three days to complete and requires one day's formal assessment. This prepares one to make independent coaching decisions.

At the Event Specialist and then Master Coach level, the module will be something like 20% formal obligatory coursework and 80% an individual coaching portfolio, the biggest piece of work that you'll have to produce. They will ask you to write a challenging four year plan for an athlete you are coaching and a very detailed one year plan for that athlete. It will need to be very content-rich, precise and everything has to be justified.



Interview with Sid Wills

Claire Shelley



We all know Sid as the ever-present leader of the club's two parks runs, the convivial organiser of the Last Wednesday of the Month wine and cheese evenings and the man behind the inspirational beginners' courses...but what do we really know about him?

When did you first join Serpentine Running Club? I was just about to turn 60 years of age. It was the millennium year and I decided it was time to join a club. It was an inspired New Year's resolution.

Had you always run prior to joining Serpentine Running Club? I actually didn't run for more than 30 years from about 1967 to 2000; gap years I suppose. I grew up in Newcastle and did a lot of track running: 220, 440 yard runs, no metres in those days. I also ran cross country. I ran for Gosforth Harriers but having to run on Saturdays meant I would miss the football. Later on, I was usually hung over from a big Friday night, so I stopped running altogether. I actually announced my retirement! I suppose I have always had a mild narcissistic trait in my personality!

Why did you start running again? In 1997 I had a few health issues. I was visiting a friend in Oxford and I took ill whilst on a walk along the river. I recovered but then became ill again: I had a stroke. Between these times I felt a little low. After I started to feel better, Alison and I went to Lyon and I ran around the park there which is similar to 2 Parks in size (about five miles). It made me feel good again. The Parc de la Tête d'Or in Lyon is my spiritual running home.

Have you always been active with sports? I was captain of the school football team in Newcastle, not a mean feat. I was a fast left winger. I am still a left winger. I have practised Yoga for the past 24 years and feel that it really helps with my running. People have often said to me that I seem to have a habit of being in the right place at the right time. Living with a yoga teacher is certainly one of those.

Seriously I only run because of yoga. I was born with scoliosis and my stroke makes me have a slight drag on the left leg. I wish more Serpies would take up Yoga and Pilates. It does not 100% prevent injury, but it helps. Practised correctly, relaxation strengthens the spirit to dream. Relaxation is not slouching; it is active. Of course you sleep well after yoga but it takes a little time for the other physical benefits to be felt. It is interesting that the Iyengar yoga I do is practised by Manchester United, the Metropolitan Police Territorial Support group, Bath rugby club and the Indian cricket team.

Yoga can sometimes seem very challenging and even boring to a beginner. My concentration levels have certainly improved over the years and I think concentration is important in running. When injured I found that my yoga knowledge helped me use the natural intelligence of my body. I call it "intuitive" yoga. I then discuss what seems to have worked with Alison. I have certainly cured a really bad quad

injury this way. Yoga exercises every muscle, nerve and gland in the body. The result develops agility, balance, endurance and great vitality.

How did you get involved with the beginners' courses? Well, I've always loved volunteering. However, I only do things because I like doing them. On my first 2 parks I started running with a woman called Leah who was very quick and supportive. I then met other runners who were also very supportive and with whom I have become really good friends, such as Ron Hagell, David Lipscomb and Bev Thomas. The example of the support they gave taught me how to become a good Serpie I suppose. Bev worked with the beginners and after six months I offered to help. It's been nine years working with beginners this year.

And how have the beginners' courses progressed? There are roughly three a year and the last one, which is the tenth, just started in September. Many of the helpers are actually ex beginners who are happy to give something back. Each course lasts for eight weeks. We usually start with a talk in the club room about technique or more motivational aspects of running, and then we walk to the park and head out for a run. We normally split into three pace groups. We always have a Graduation tea and a Yoga/Running workshop, run by Alison.

The main goal is to give people the confidence and provide the right environment for that to happen. We try and encourage the course members to network with each other. One of my favourite sayings is, "If it's not fun, better left undone" from The Zen of Running. I am supported by some great leaders. For example on the September course we have Traicey Dwyer, George Allan, Sarah Knox, Paula Lueshing, Claire Strong, Kemi Yusuph, Donna Clinker and Teresa Griffith. Past course members are also going to train to lead groups.

You are the main person behind the Last Wednesday of the Month wine and cheese night. How did you come up with the idea? Actually it wasn't my idea originally. John Walker did it before me. When I joined the committee I was asked to take it on, so I asked for a budget. I felt it would be a nice gesture for all newcomers and regulars to meet in the club room after a run on the last Wednesday of every month for a glass of wine and some food. Lots of people contribute a bottle of wine or some snacks. It has taken off really well. We have a wide cultural diversity of members in the club so I decided I had to make a statement of support for those who do not drink alcohol. That is why I make North African mint tea. It was pointed out that the glasses had messages in Arabic which said 'welcome' on them.

And finally Sid, where does your trademark saying "Running is Magic" come from? I suppose I saw the term magical related to running first of all by Olympic marathon silver medallist Frank Shorter who said that magical means, "Creating a realistic, mental image of yourself and integrating it into your physical training programme." So I suddenly said to myself one Monday morning running the 2 parks alone, "Running is Magic". It's exactly what it says. Running is magic. I believe running is a great healer. People can be really stressed or have a lot on their mind but once you put your trainers on and head out the door, no matter how tired or stressed you are feeling, it always feels so much better after a run.

Make running simple: "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop" (Lewis Carroll-Alice in Wonderland).

(Photo: Chiara Ceolin)

Reflections on Running

David Smart

Part 3 - Running and Competitiveness

The way we run has psychological as well as physical aspects. The maverick '60s psychiatrist R.D. Laing told how as a student runner he always flagged during the third lap of the mile. He attributed this to an unconscious reluctance to be born. This doesn't particularly resonate for me, but I do run hard and tend to speed up as I go along, especially once the end is in sight. Perhaps I'm demonstrating to myself that I can survive extremes of physical and mental stress; I associate this with being a small baby fed on a four-hour cycle.

A psychoanalyst might say that I was repeating a traumatic experience as a way of mastering what was intolerable at the time. From this perspective I would be running away from the experience of being small and helpless, seeking to overlay it with a sense of being strong and resilient.

I think my running is also motivated by having a much older brother who, like my Dad, was always better than me at cricket, tennis and swimming. Not that my brother was a great athlete: in his first games lesson at secondary school, the Head of PE asked if anyone had played for their primary school. "I was in the chess team, sir!" my brother piped up. "Yes," came the dry reply, "You're about the right build for it!"

Forty-odd years on I like to have other runners to chase and pass, one reason why I so enjoy the Serpentine Handicap. In one sense I'm still trying to overtake the big brother of my childhood, and beyond him the father I will never be able to get in front of.

Supportiveness and inclusivity are distinctive features of the Serpentine culture, expressed, for example, in the use of age grading to establish a level playing field in races. Paradoxically, this frees us to compete with each other – there's no need to hold back for fear of age or gender giving us an unfair advantage.

Many Club members generously encourage those passing them in races, but I'm ruthlessly single-minded about saving my breath to run with. I worry that I'm excessively competitive, doing fellow-runners down to make myself feel better. This is an uncomfortable feeling that most of us shrink from in ourselves and recoil from in others.

Few people like to think of themselves as aggressive or greedy and it is generally easier to recognise such traits in other people. One way of distancing oneself from them is to bend over backwards to do the opposite – being positive and supportive to a fault, say.

To some extent these are gendered traits. It is widely regarded as more acceptable and even appropriate for men to be aggressive and competitive, while many women feel constrained to put others' needs before their own. We may consciously challenge these stereotypes in practice as well as in theory; but the tension between our own needs and impulses and others' is one we have to negotiate on a daily basis.

David works as a counsellor with teenagers and adults in public settings and in private practice. This is the third article in a four-part series.

The Machine

Greg Stevens

We pulled the covers off the old machine about a month ago. And it's surprising what a few months of inactivity can do to the machine. Plus, there's a new dent in the back left MacPherson strut which obviously means it'll never ride the bumps as smoothly as it did. The first few outings were not auspicious. Grinding, bumping, complaining forays with odd bits going "zing" and "boing" it became clear that the layover lubricants and fuels had been a bad choice and what the beast should really have had was a daily garage session, and a much better diet.

But then, after a few weeks, as if by magic, and for once without the intervention of mechanics with lots of big (and small) needles, the old machine started to turn over as before. The MacPherson struts learn their place, as flugel horns subservient to the cornets of a brass band conducted by John Coltrane. It's a strange band, with little of Grimethorpe Colliery's elegance. Its intro is always an off tempo violent arrhythmic set of daggers, as if the rear differential had grit instead of oil.

And familiarity doesn't lead to contempt. More a wish for the days when we had Miles Davis at the baton, and the King of Cool would breeze through the miles, on road or off, flat or hilly, effortlessly gliding along. Some days John C just sticks to his overture and we wonder why we are doing this. There are easier ways to grind grit.

So we switch lubricants and fuel, back to "The Right Stuff", and we garage the machine many times each week. The Machine cross trains and helps polish a cricket ball as it remoulds the back end. The cricket ball is unimpressed. The back end is highly impressed.

John C does also have his milder moments, the daggers are sheathed and the bumping, thumping switches to a brook flowing through a glade and the machine is in harmonious balance. There are even odd stretches when he lets us put the machine to work and make the carburettors and superchargers rev up. They are fine and really need a machine about 20-30 years younger.

Actually, they are lazy and need stretching with a younger carbon fibre chassis and a modern high-revving hybrid engine with less miles and a Nitrox system (although that sounds very much like putting HGH in which would be cheating). The machine is as it is so they are stuck with John and the rear differential grit. This is not Fantasy Football; this is the real thing.

The Machine is running and at this time running smoother and stronger each day, despite the Intro and Struts. And the point of this restoration? The pure pleasure of being at one with the machine, running solo and with friends. Making new friends and helping others with their recovery from the odd bump in the road or advising the racers on their time trial strategies. Especially up to the steady state Zen Zone of the 42,200m standing start time trial for which the machine has earned a few engravings over the years.

Beyond this? Well the Mechanic is slowly learning to spell modulation although few of his friends are optimistic here. This is a long game and the joy is the journey.

Lucky Lad

David Rivington tells his inspiring tale

Hyde Park Corner, June 13th 2007. Warm sunny evening. Slight breeze. I'm halfway through a three parks run glaring through the roaring traffic at the red man on the Green Park side of the roundabout. Glance to heart rate monitor: low 150s. I want a 52 minute run. Panting around me, the 7 and a half minute mile group. Stick with them and I will run the 3 hour 30 minutes I need to qualify for Boston in 2008 in the 45 to 49 age group. That speed would not make me a Serpie star - not even close. Just a 65% age-graded runner. A determined plodder.

Finally the green man arrives, and I shoot off under the leaf canopy toward Buckingham Palace. When we arrive at the traffic lights on the Mall to cross to St James Park I see another red man but I also see long lines of stationary traffic clogging the Mall towards Admiralty Arch. I think, "Not moving so no problem. Red men aren't going to wreck my time. Six strides and I will be across." I had missed one detail: there was an empty lane, the left turn for traffic to Westminster. Two objects met on stride five, me with eyes on the red man and a cab roaring toward Buckingham Palace.

The cab thumps my left thigh and scoops me into the air, spinning me like a rag doll Frisbee. Then impact. My right shin hit a bollard, flesh ripped, bones sticking out. I was conscious, almost relaxed – and lucky. The bollard would have smashed my head like a pumpkin. Still, warm liquid spreads through my hair across my face. A tourist gives me his jean jacket as a pillow and bandage. I dictate two phone numbers to a passer-by: a best buddy and my ex. Told a Serpie how to find my bag in the equipment room. Uber logical.

Ambulance arrives. Spinal board comes out. They clamp me on and slide me into the back of the ambulance, like a dirty cafeteria tray going into the dish-washing rack, with the red man looking down smugly. The ambulance guys saw big blood loss, and feared two broken legs, and Internal bleeding. Quick trip to Whitechapel, where the 7/7 victims were taken, trauma central. I have no ID. I am checked in as John Doe. I want nothing more than a drink of water. Not before

The cab thumps my left thigh and scoops me into the air, spinning me like a rag doll

the surgery.

Good news. The cab-smacked thigh is not broken. No internal bleeding. Lots of stitches in the skull, but no fundamental damage to neck. Shin job was a clean horizontal break halfway up, knee and ankle intact. Lucky.

So Op # 1 is structural. Push kneecap to side, hammer 13 inch nail through hollow bit of tibia to ankle, screws side of ankle and knee. Forget the fibula. But front of leg is still an open wound where the 'shin' muscle used to be. Op # 2 is plastic surgery in a couple of days. They might strip out muscle from my thigh to build a new shin. In the end, they don't. I am thankful for that, and for friends bringing sushi, books and doughnuts – and a fan. Maybe even for a well-placed



From hospital bed to Marathon du Médoc

bollard. But especially Sid Wills for bringing me my phone, wallet and laptop.

Discover I am just a statistic, one of a thousand pedestrian knockdowns a year in London. Had I not been rushed so quickly, I would have lost my leg.

When 17 days later I am released, I run errands as usual: clip clean shirt hangers onto my backpack as I crutch about. My neighbour Richard, an extreme sports guy, told me "Major trauma. Give yourself three months for your body to recover". I smile and shrug. Go down tube staircases 3 at a time when the escalators aren't running. Can't find a cab one night so speed along on crutches from Hyde Park Corner to China Town, wishing window-shoppers away as if they were red men.

To Amy Winehouse concert in Somerset House on July 20th. The next it's England v India at Lords, upstairs to corporate hospitality. Long lunch and much Pimms. As I leave, I miss step and launch myself and backpack head first like a missile down the stairs, and use my head as brakes, slicing my forehead. Night at St Mary's Paddington. Right eye swollen closed and another 20 stitches. Amazing that I didn't shatter my eye socket they say.

I look like a World War 1 infantry casualty complete with head bandage. I meet with customers and tell a colleague I would have sworn that I had never met them before. He smiles: "if your memory is a mess, you need to keep better notes." Discover that I have a new nickname: "Lucky". Neighbour Richard calls me "Fight Club."

In September I ditch the crutches for a cane. I find that my right knee sometimes 'locks up'. I learn that my knee muscles are compensating for my withered quadriceps. Solution? Patience...and physiotherapy.

On Sept 7th my physio wrote, "David continues to have poor balance and poor biomechanics around his hip, pelvis and knee...He is currently walking with a marked Trendelenburg gait and foot drop...My outcome for him to return to running is guarded." The path back? Clam shells by the hundred for the pelvis. Twenty minutes on

the exercise bike at low resistance for the quad. I start each session I do with a runway walk like the Soccerette on Soccer AM, except for my limp. I start noticing other walking wounded in the streets.

One of the issues is my tibialis anterior – the shin splint muscle. A normal one is like a shock absorber in a piston-like sack, but I have no sack, just a muscle which flops about like a fish as I shift my weight from foot to foot. Little kids notice it. The physiotherapist says without a sack I will never get shin splints but I will never be able to generate much power.

We later discover the conception date was two years after the accident....to the day.

I buy a stationary bike so I can be a bike potato not a couch potato. By November I am within 5% of my pre-accident times and heart rates on the rowing machine. But running? No way. I learn that cycling load is half your body weight on your ankles, rowing about 80%, while running is up to 400%.

Back to the fracture clinic. Shocked to learn that all my physio work is not making my bone stronger, because the metal takes all the load. Disappointed. By Christmas, I dance at holiday parties. Can't blame accident for my lousy moves. Over holidays, I try to run a bit, but I "feel" the metal before and after. In January I ask my NHS doctor to have the metal out.

Over time, I see three different physios plus Lyndon Littlefair, the personal trainer I had been using since mid-2006. I trust him more than the physios. Lyndon doesn't focus on the leg, but rather on "joined up" bio-mechanics. By March 2008, I am doing single leg dips with legs strapped together on a "tippy" mat. Swiss ball and dumb bells join my exercise bike in my living room. In May I get metal out. Back to crutches. Eight additional inches of scars. Try to run my 1st two parks in August 2008. Can't do it. Stop at Hyde Park Corner. Decide to leave running aside. Set rowing target of 50km per month.

At Christmas 2008, tell new girlfriend Katy that I will run the Marathon du Médoc in September the following year. No target time, just completion.

Lots of work with Lyndon on stability. Single leg hops up and down stairs, side to side. Thousands of lunges with dumb bells, front to back, side to side. In March 2009, Lyndon shrugs and smiles, "Mate – your broken leg is now more stable than your 'good' leg." Still a lot of bruising around my scar tissue in ankle and knee. Surprised to find that the problem is soft surfaces and stability. I prefer concrete now.

In June 2009, I "sponsor" the Serpie social anonymously, a dozen bottles of wine, some comte cheese from La Fromagerie and a bottle of champagne for Sid as thanks and for good karma. Three Parks run takes me an hour. In July, Katy discovers she is pregnant. We later discover the conception date was two years after the accident....to the day.

I run Médoc in 33 degree heat, finish in top 12%, 858 of 7569. Yep, I beat a man in a wedding dress, the people running as vertebrae in the spinal column, the people who decided to take advantage of all 12 chateau wine stops...and arrive in 4 hours 10 minutes, wearing a cowboy hat and carrying a gun. Ate an oyster on kilometer 38, had my picture taken many times next to Chateau Le Crock. Had a heart drawn on my leg: "KH + DR + 1" for the unborn. Next day walked down stairs painlessly.

Back in London for 12 week baby scan, we see double. I smiled to Katy: we aren't having a baby, we're having a family. In March Noah John and Bailey Robert Rivington were born. Katy and I are partners in a different kind of marathon: exercise bike is dismantled, replaced by bunting and Baby Einstein gym.

Instead of Wednesday night Serpie "Three parks" runs these days, we can be seen pushing a double pram around St Johns Wood and Maida Vale with two beautiful happy boys, fully respecting the red men. Lucky.



David looks the happiest and luckiest man alive with twin baby boys

Serpie comes to the rescue!

Dan Bent has written a book on his travels and is hoping it will be published in 2011. Below is an extract with a Serpie flavour from his journals.

Hands up who's been helped out of a tricky spot by a Serpie or a Serpie contact? A flat tyre in Surrey. A lift to a race. Bonking on a French Col. A cheer at the most opportune moment.

Would I be able to rely on the Serpies when undertaking a 9,000mile cycle from London to Southern India? I was soon to find out.

I'd been warned against visiting Uzbekistan from the moment my journey began. I was repeatedly told "too many gangsters" and "very bad police" in pigeon English. The only English speaker in Atyrau, Kazakhstan, was summoned to tell me "You will be robbed or worse die in Uzbekistan" whilst in Russia I was taken to a gun shop to buy mace to protect against unsavoury Uzbeks.

Holding my breath and ignoring all these warnings I entered Uzbekistan on the 10th of September and within days met the gangsters. After likening me to Wayne Rooney, not the biggest compliment I've ever had, they took me out on the town. Being seen with these Gs meant people would bow in front of me. If only the kids in year 3 at my school would pay me the same respect.

We didn't have to pay for food or drinks, then they'd take me around town, proud to show me their local monuments. Then I met the Uzbek police who played my ukulele whilst I danced, or rode my bike whilst I played. After exchanging pleasantries they'd shout "Wayne Rooney" and cheer as I cycled away. What is it with these people?

Then I arrived in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, and I found myself in a precarious and delicate situation.

Uzbekistan requires that you register with a hotel within three days of arriving in a country and then every day from then onwards. Cycling through the Kyzylkum Desert I had been sleeping in my million star hotel, my tent, nearly every day since my arrival. When I arrived in the capital the officials soon picked up on this and I was facing a \$2,000 dollar fine, my whole budget to get me to my final destination. This was only the half of it. I'd also failed to notice that my visa was valid for 10 days and I was on day 19 in Uzbekistan. It was looking like I was going to be deported back to the UK.

I'd made it so far, I'd endured the wild dogs in Poland, the sand storms in Kazakhstan, the vodka drinking in Russia, the guns pointed at my head in the Ukraine. Surely I hadn't gone through this for nothing – to be thwarted by my lack of organisation and my failure to do any research on the countries I'd be visiting? I needed to get out of this city



to the country but the police knew me now and there is no way I could get out of Tashkent without payment.

Then I remember that Derek, a Serpie who had joined me from Richmond to Dover, had given me a contact in Tashkent. A brother of a friend. What harm could a phone call do? Maybe he could help?

Maksud drove straight over and picked me up. He knew a man who might be able to help. A member of the Russian Mafia. There was no time to lose.

We pulled into a darkened alley way. The door of a Tata Nano opened, a tiny two seater old Russian vehicle, and slowly our man unfolded himself out of the car. He was well over 6½ foot and almost the same wide. He opened the back door of our car and I felt the suspension sag under his weight. We drove away and the two men discussed the situation in Russian. Within a few minutes we pulled alongside a house that would have been big for English standards let alone Central Asia. Behind a tall fence the huge Russian proceeded to unlock the door to the house. It took six different keys to unlock the deadbolts and when he pulled it open I could see that the door itself was two inches thick. Behind this door was another that required the same attention before it would open.

Inside, the house looked like a palace. Statues lined the walls and antiques were intermingled with high tech gadgets and TVs. I was taken for a tour and then I heard the locks engaging as the two men left. I was locked in a Russian safe house.

Unable to leave I sat in front of the TV watching Russian soaps and dubbed Hollywood movies. I sat for two days before Maksud returned and told me to get my stuff. We were leaving.

I was whisked off and told to keep my head down as we drove through police checks. When we hit the open highway we pulled over and we extricated my bike from the boot and my Serpie saviour waved to me as I cycled into the mountains.

At every police check, of which there were many, I had to sign a crumpled book leaving passport and visa number but there was no

inking that I had been found out. Finally, after five days on the run, the border came into sight. I could almost taste freedom.

It's hard to remain invisible when you are the only white guy in the queue. Especially when all the locals were pushing me to the front whilst cheering and patting me on the back.

This wasn't your usual Uzbek security check. Computers, printers, TVs and film equipment were well organised in a fashion that filled me with fear. The border guard welcomed me, salom alaykum, I took a breath and returned his greeting, vaalaykum assalom, as I handed him my passport. He flipped through the pages, then typed my information into the computer. He looked at my passport then at the screen. Something wasn't adding up. Again he looked from one to the other. He turned to beckon over his supervisor.

I had to do something. The game was up. There was only one thing for it – I stroked my beard and pointed at myself whilst enunciating as precisely and clearly as I could two words "Wayne Rooney". His eyes turned back to me, and looked me straight in the face. A pause ensued which gave me enough time to consider what I was going to say to mum when I called her from Heathrow airport. Before I knew it a stamp slammed down on my passport and the entire staff had left their seats and were coming round to my side of the desk. S**T.

I put my hands up in sign of surrender. They were upon me but they were smiling. Others were holding their phones up to take pictures. My passport was thrust into my hand and each and every guard wanted his picture taken with me, before allowing me to cycle on my way.

Having been saved in Uzbekistan it wasn't long before I needed a Serpie's assistance again, as that night I was beaten to the floor by a gang in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, and then a few days later was attacked by a whip wielding bandit on horseback. Where the hell were you guys then?

Daniel pulled into Chembakoli, a village in South India on his 31st birthday after six months on his bike. The children had organised a carnival for his arrival. After dancing and singing, Daniel broke down and cried into his hands. He'd lived his dream.



Save the date

11 December 2010

Serpie Christmas Party

Hilton London Kensington

Danger Dan's facts

Bike: 1

Man: 1

Adventure of a lifetime: 1

Countries travelled: 14

(UK, France, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Pakistan, India)

Distance: 9000 miles

Money raised: £9000

Duration: 6 months and 2 days

Puncture: 1

Vodkas shots drunk: 174

Smiles: 5,723,599

Love: ∞



Race to the North Pole

Linda Pomeroy describes her epic Arctic expedition

On the 2nd May 2010, around midnight, the winds were raging at 90 mph and the temperatures were plummeting to -56°C , wind-chill contributing its fair share. The visibility despite the midnight sun could be best described as poor. Those beautiful crystals of snow on the frozen ocean, just moments ago, had now become millions of airborne tiny missiles. I felt the vastness of the Arctic closing around me making me feel smaller and lonelier than ever before. The train of thought was, as usual, broken by a not so glamorous fall off the skis, thankfully hidden from the other two team members who were 50m behind in a blizzard. I got off the snow briskly to avoid any snow-drift squeezing past the three layers of mittens, asking myself only one question, 'what the hell am I doing here?'

I was part of the team 'Global Village' racing to the North Pole in the footsteps of Robert Peary's team in 1909. The Magnetic North Pole holds a certain attraction for some people but I admit I wasn't one of them. A chance reading of a free Canary Wharf newspaper and the seeds of possibility were sown. It was not long before I had signed up, dragged others into it to form a team and I was utterly consumed by the dream of standing at the North Pole itself.

I was aware that people plan for years to undertake this type of race

but my life and timetable does not allow for such prolonged indulgence. The plan was simple: nine months to raise money, train, get skilled, chart a route over 1000km of frozen arctic, fly out and ski as quickly as possible to minimise the chances of a frozen death, reach the north pole and come back to celebrate. Simple!! What followed was nine months of intense juggling – it is difficult to balance a full time PhD, run a company, train, fund raise and importantly keep up-to-date/strategise with team mates on different continents.

We event-specific trained in Hjerking Norway for a week in January, which was a true wake-up call. The highlight of which was a training drill – skiing into a frozen lake and having to pull myself out, roll in the snow to dry and then pitch a tent and get warm. I had no feeling in my feet for three weeks after this, although I did find fame in Norway as my plunge was recorded in the headlines of the national press (sadly it was not a good photo as the horror of hitting the water was clearly etched on my face!). Away from the Norwegian snows I started dragging used tractor tyres in and around London, mainly around Greenwich Park in sessions of four to eight hours.

After further training sessions in Switzerland and Colorado, we were in the final stages of preparation. Panic was setting in, manifesting in the purchase of nine pairs of gloves and mittens! In April 2010 we found ourselves in Resolute, the last frontier at the edge of the Arctic in Nunavut, a province of Canada. It was a fascinating place with a few local Inuits chatting to us about our plans, frostbite and bear attacks, increasing the general tension amongst the competitors. We played with the kit, discussed strategy and marvelled at the unfolding beauty of the Arctic as we progressed further north on smaller and smaller planes. It gradually hit our team the extent of our abilities and that we

were truly novices in an environment that would not accept or give allowances for mistakes. My carefully tailored expedition CV of climbs in Africa and South America all suddenly seemed like child's play and I wished fervently that I had thought this through a bit more with the constant nagging awareness I had not trained enough.

To acclimatise the teams set out on a mini expedition, which resulted in a near disaster as the icy conditions around Resolute made it a challenge to stay on cross country skis in high winds. On Day One a rival team ended up wetting their toes after going through thin ice, which had a sobering effect on all of us. We were, after all, only a few days off being in the middle of a frozen ocean. I sincerely hoped this wasn't the time for global warming to come to fruition.

The gentle trek to the start line some 150 km away was when we began to appreciate the stunning beauty and daunting nature of the arctic region.

Once the race started, all the teams were spread far apart from each other pursuing their own routes. Excitement, achievement and disappointment were all a daily occurrence and so were the polar bear encounters. The nature of our route took us over hills, frozen bays and the polar bear pass resulting in eleven polar bear incidents, all of which were friendly barring one where we had to use the 12-Bore Remington Steele to our advantage. Days and nights merged into one, the body clock went haywire as the rest intervals varied every 24 hours from none to four. Our longest stretch was 41 hours without rest but with 24 hour sunlight the structure of time and calendars meant nothing. It was somewhere close to Day 5 of the race when we started to notice the first hallucinations in a team member. All three of us later experienced them owing principally to sleep deprivation and a landscape so vast that the mind simply struggles to deal with it. There were times I swore there were flowers growing and mammals, never previously found out in the Arctic, coming toward us.

The race to the North Pole soon became a journey into ourselves. It was humbling to find our own limitations, of which there were many. At times the sole purpose of life was simply to keep the finger tips warm blocking out anxiety and fear. The needs of life were simple: melt snow to drink, eat 8,000 calories per day and stay alive. It was far



Linda (centre) and her team at the magnetic North Pole.

Serpie Grand Slam

Serpentines was recently sent a letter by Serpie member Frank Staples, attached to which was a press clipping from a local newspaper in which Frank was profiled as a 68-year old member of the esteemed Grand Slam Club, for having completed a marathon in every continent. The article went on to describe Frank's epic adventure to the South Pole. A car crash had prevented him from taking part in the full marathon but he was not to be dissuaded from the half marathon, notwithstanding gale force blizzards and temperatures of -30C. A remarkable achievement!

removed from the trivial aspects of life and truly humbling. We existed to make it to the next three-minute break. We shared occasional smiles and tears (though it was difficult to see them behind face masks) and they helped weave moments into days and weeks. On the 8th of May, team Global Village planted British, Pakistani and Jamaican flags on the North Pole, finishing 7th among the eight teams that reached the Pole, just ahead of the all-American team. At that time we had no idea of our overall position and we couldn't care less. We had lost five stones of weight amongst us and were just glad to be alive. We trekked for another day to reach the longitude and latitude where an airlift was pre-arranged. It was delayed for a few days and we found ourselves just heating our tent, cooking the powdery meals and sleeping. The silence fell upon us; we stopped talking about the expedition and silently applied Vaseline and duct-tape to shredded feet.

It has had the most profound effect on each of us and yet we struggle to talk about it, almost as if the magnitude of the undertaking is too much to convey or possibly it is still too painful. Time is passing and there are only physical scars to show for it now. However, I firmly believe the impact of it continues and quite where it will lead us all I do not know. The North Pole experience will remain unique – we are not elite or experienced athletes but we fulfilled a dream. Was it fun? No. Was it worth it? Yes. What is next? Who knows!?!

Race to the North Pole by numbers

Lowest temperature endured: - 56 degrees

Number of daylight hours at Pole: 24

Number of polar bears sighted: 11

Total days on ice: 25

Miles travelled: 400

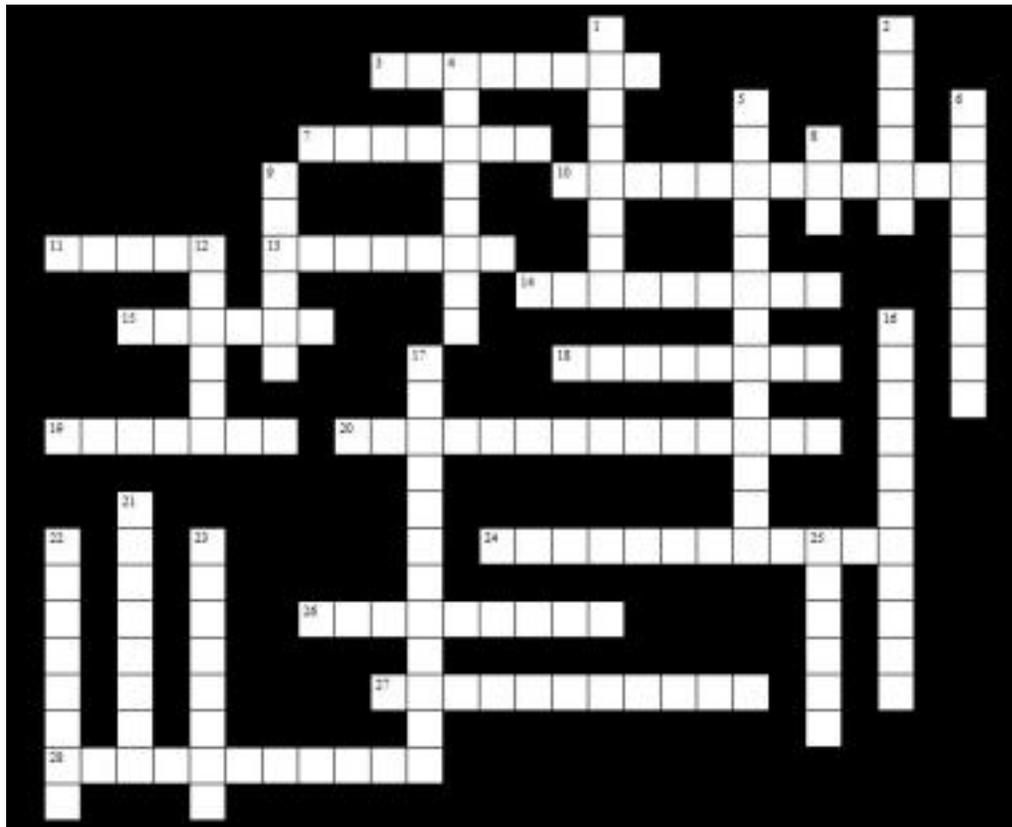
Weight lost: 5 stone

Number of calories consumed: 380,000



The Serpie Crossword

by Dan de Beider



Solution on page 32

ACROSS

- 3 World's fastest man in 2010 over 100m (5,3)
- 7 Serpie winner of the 2010 Davos 42k (3,4)
- 10 Serpie coach of hills and threshold training (5,7)
- 11 Telescopic equipment beloved by mountain marathoners (5)
- 13 European 5000m and 10,000m champion (2,5)
- 14 Paula Radcliffe's husband and former GB middle-distance runner (4,5)

- 15 Venue of UK Ironman (6)
- 18 Whose Serpie saying is 'Running is Magic'? (3,5)
- 19 800m World Record holder (7)
- 20 Meeting point for 3 Parks runs (8,6)
- 24 2010 Serpie Grand Prix age-graded winner (6,6)
- 26 Venue of the 2010 European Athletics Championships (9)
- 27 UK Athletics Head coach (3,8)
- 28 Salt supplement (11)

DOWN

- 1 135 mile race through Death Valley (8)
- 2 Marathon renowned for 'Heart-break hill' (6)
- 4 Host nation for 2014 Commonwealth Games (8)
- 5 New Serpie chairman (4,9)
- 6 Berkshire town, venue of the 2010 Club Championship Half Marathon (9)
- 8 Not the result an endurance runner is hoping for (1,1,1)
- 9 Winner of the lucrative 2010 Des

- Moines triathlon (3,3)
- 12 Lap times (6)
- 16 Type of socks designed to restrict lactic acid build-up (11)
- 17 Middle distance hurdle race (12)
- 21 First white man to run a sub-10 second 100m (8)
- 22 Greek warrior with a dodgy heel
- 23 2010 Olympics sailing venue
- 25 Barefoot running shoe manufacturer (6)

Who said what?

Quiz by Lula Rosso

Match the quote with the running personality!

- A) Roger Bannister B) Tim Twietmeyer C) Paula Radcliffe D) Lindford Christie E) Frank Sampfl

- 1) There are times when we're limited only by what our minds deem feasible, failing to realize what, through additional focus and effort, can actually be achieved.
- 2) I knew a bit of rain or wind would make no bloody difference because he was capable of a 3:56 or 3:58 mile.
- 3) From scratch [in a handicap race] it was depressing to see a crowd of runners of assorted ages and sizes stretched out in front.
- 4) I never run for the bus.
- 5) I am not going to let Athens affect the rest of my life.

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

Langdale Fell Race

Londoners get a pasting on the Lake District slopes...

Jolyon Attwooll

It was a man of the cloth who inspired me to greater – or slightly less mediocre – things in a Lake District fell race this summer. This was no rousing sermon from the pulpit, however; it was simply the sight of the local clergyman, grey button-up shirt un-tucked, scrambling up the Cumbrian hill-face several places in front.

"Must beat the vicar, must beat the vicar," I began to repeat. Not such a charitable race mantra on reflection – but then few things concentrate the mind as clearly as being beaten by a middle-aged clergyman.

At the bottom of the hill, it had all seemed much less serious. We arrived at the Langdale Gala, the village fete that included a fell race, during a blustery downpour. Huddling beneath a tree for shelter, we heard the announcer's voice through the drizzle: "If you've just got here and want to run the fell race, the registration tent has blown away."

It hadn't; it was merely the first sally of the event compere's sardonic wit, which he was still firing off an hour later when the race began.

After watching a bout of (painful) Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling, we found the real registration point in the village hall shortly before the start time. The woman taking entries greeted me cheerily: "Have you ever done this sort of race before?" she asked. "No? Oh, this will be interesting." As I was putting pins through my number, wondering what she meant, the vicar, a tanned, silver-haired man in his forties, came in to register. "Why is it those that live closest always arrive last?" her colleague grumbled as the vicar left.

On the start line a few moments later the clouds had lifted, revealing a



Serpies find a rare flat section for a team photo. (Photo: Nancy Labiner)

dazzling cluster of maroon and gold Serpie vests. The "Londoners" were singled out for a special welcome by the MC, who couldn't believe his luck: a whole gaggle of southerners to mock.

"Before we start, we just have to count you in," he said, the Langdale fell looming in front, "just so we know how many of you don't come back."

Then, as all 41 competitors set off up the hillside, he announced to spectators and stragglers: "Actually, the real reason was to prove to them Londoners that we could count".

I was still chuckling as the incline sharpened... and then I saw the vicar several places ahead. Stooping, I used my hands to help propel myself up the ferny banks and tried to step up a gear – in vain at first. Then, as the fell flattened into a ridge, I gathered enough momentum to dodge past him near the summit and head for the descent.

Any sense of triumph was brief. As the route veered back down the hillside, the sharper speed made my eyes swim with water. Bambi-like, I daintily negotiated the narrow track and slippery rocks, trying to work out where my trail shoes would hold firm. As I hesitated, footsteps hastened behind me, and I stood aside as two hardened men of the mountains sprang past, swiftly followed by a gazelle-like young girl.

I feared the vicar would shortly be next; but my fear of the treacherous Cumbrian slope was greater, so I kept picking my path with care.

Eventually the steep fell evened out, and we crossed a path into fields with an altogether gentler gradient towards the finish, which I strode through at a relieved canter.

Not one, but two junior girls were in front of me I soon learned, and the dishevelled vicar was not far behind. Perhaps not such a glorious afternoon's work – but I was happy to reward myself with a bottle of local Bluebird Bitter and home-made cakes to celebrate coming through unscathed. Others weren't so lucky – Brent Plump's bloody knees and elbows testified to a more painful descent.

The compere, meanwhile, was still finding us a rich source of amusement; "Oh, this one's popular – she must have the minibus keys," he quipped, as a Serpie received a loud cheer as she crossed the finishing line.

Eventually someone whispered in his ear that we were all up in the area for a wedding. "What a way to spend a stag-do," he said, before suddenly becoming serious.

"Thanks for braving the rain and coming out for the gala," he told us, warmly genuine for a moment, before asking the crowd to put their hands together for Justin Lock and Rachel Brough, the soon-to-be newly-wed Serpies.

"See all you Londoners up here again next year," he said, before pausing.

"Maybe for the christening."

Fell facts

The Langdale Gala normally takes place in July. For more information on fell races, both in the Lake District and the rest of the UK, see www.fellrunner.org.uk

Bath Half Marathon

Paula Lueshing describes her journey from taking up running on the Club's Beginners' course to fulfilling her ambitions in this year's Bath Half marathon

I started running with a Beginners' Course, led by John and Sue Walker, in April 2008. I really enjoyed the course and decided to stay in the club. People from the first two courses joined together and this is when I met several of my running friends.

Somehow last year we all decided to enter the Bath Half Marathon which was going to be held in March 2010. For many of us, it was going to be the longest distance we had ever run.

The winter of 2009/2010 was one of the coldest on record, but it didn't matter what the weather was like; we trained and we trained hard. Eventually the big day approached. Like any other race some of us got injured or ill and had to pull out. But Kate, Kirsty and Angela decided to come along on the day anyway and support us.

We were booked into the Hilton, and ten of us met for dinner in an Italian restaurant the night before. Then we went back to the hotel to get ready for the next day. I woke up at 8.30am. "Damn!" I thought, I'd never overslept for a race before. But everything was prepared and we only had to walk 10 minutes down the road for the start. We took some pre-race photos and then we split to go to the various pens.

Up until this point I had believed I was an orange start (the slowest) as there was a little strip of what I thought was orange at the bottom of my number where it said New Balance.

But I was wrong, it was a red strip and that was just advertising. So it turned out that I was a white start (sub 90mins/fastest start).

I remembered reading that you could go back a pen, so I decided to join the orange start. So I duly lined up and then all of a sudden some of us were sent in another direction so I followed the instructions. We



Paula finds out she is in the wrong pen. (Photo: Kirsty Mcphee).

were being guided into pens and then somehow I was at the back of the white start. The gun went off, I saw a puff of dust as all the white starters shot off, then I was overtaken by the green lot and finally by most of the orange starters as well.

Anyway "it's not the end of the world" I mumbled to myself as I began my 13 mile plod. My aim was to do the half in less than three hours.

Now I know what some of you Serpies are thinking "three hours, I can do a full marathon in that time". Well I'm very happy for you, but I started off running at 14 min/miles and after two years of being with the club I now run a sub 11 min/mile. I'm never going to be fast, but I'm happy to be with a club that supports me at my pace.

So back to the race: I tried not to start too fast; mile 1, checked my watch 11:18, I needed to slow down. Mile 2, 12:00, still too fast. Mile 3, 12:22, now I began to think I could do a really good time. Mile 5, I saw Abdi doing his second lap and it really cheered me up to see a fellow club mate doing so well.

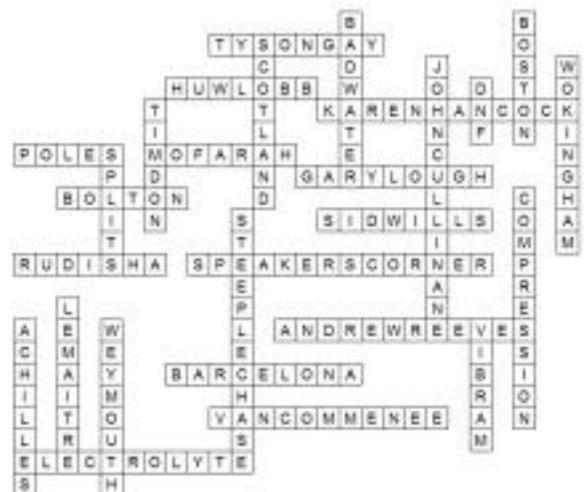
Mile 6, saw another friend, chatted for awhile and then he ran on ahead. I was on a scheduled walk break when I spotted cameras, and the 10K timing mat, so I decided to speed up.

Now I started eating a couple of jelly babies after every mile marker. It was going well until mile 8, and I needed a loo stop, which wasted about 5 minutes. Never mind I was still on schedule. Then I ran into Ros, we chatted for awhile and then she ran on ahead. Passed mile 12, I was on target for the time I wanted.

The last mile felt like ages and I didn't see a 13 mile marker, but then I turned the corner and saw the finish gantry. I looked at my watch and decided to go for sub 2:50. So I sprinted to the finish with loads of people shouting my name, and a serious grimace on my face. I crossed the line in 2:48:50. I had done it! I had finished.

Out of the 27 Serpies who have their results listed for the race, I came 27th. I may have been the slowest club runner that day, but it just may be possible that I was also the happiest.

Solution of the Serpie crossword





Life's a beach

Carrie Doyle lays down a marker for the world's most beautiful city marathon



In July, while on a weekend break to Rio de Janeiro, my boyfriend Carsten and I realised we had completely lost the plot. At 5.00 am, as the Cariocas (as the locals are known) were returning home from parties and nightclubs, we were boarding the bus to the start of the Rio marathon.

It had been a strange weekend from the start. Any thoughts of spending the day before admiring bikinis on Copacabana or venturing up to the statue of Christ the Redeemer were quickly dampened by rain and cool weather. Instead we diligently collected our numbers at the expo and returned to the hotel for a siesta in preparation for what was to come.

It's hard to name a more beautiful city marathon. The course starts 26 miles west of Rio and passes along each of the city's famous beaches to finish close to the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain. There are 23 miles of

golden sand, crashing waves and palm trees, with the occasional tunnel to remind you of the sea's splendour when it suddenly reappears.

As we reached the start, the rain was stopping and the cloud was maintaining a "cool" 20! Happily, I spotted a Serpie shirt through the crowd and was able to calm my nerves with Nermeen Latif, a club member currently working in Rio.

The first half is easy – 21 km in a perfectly straight, flat line, the sea on your right, a nature reserve on your left and a headwind helping to cool the 3,300 runners. Not a car in sight and the only people were a few surfers and bemused beach kiosk owners. The second section of the race is a series of tunnels and hills that run from 21-28 km and this is where the race really starts. While the 20m incline is hardly the Alps, the 95% humidity started to take its toll and regulating body temperature became the big challenge. By the time we got to the glamorous Ipanema and Copacabana beaches, we were all slowing down and stopping to take on extra fluids (the race winner even admitted he needed to drop the pace, I am so glad it wasn't just me!)

The strangest thing about the race was the indifference of the locals. While hundreds were out for their Sunday stroll, run or to play beach volleyball, they didn't seem to notice the marathon two metres to their side. I missed the cheers of "Go Serpie!", although a couple of Cariocas gave it a go – it just took me a while to decipher their shouts of "Serpencheenie".

The race organisation was excellent. There was plentiful water and sports drink throughout, and I met the friendliest bag check crew ever, who greeted ever finisher with a dozen handshakes and a big cheer or a song.

So if you fancy a small, scenic but challenging race, with the occasional bikini-clad lady runner, then Rio is for you. Alternatively, chill on the beach, drink the beer and forget all this silly running – either way, Rio is amazing.

And yes, the ice-cold Brahmas afterwards tasted delightful!

Comrades 2010

Nathalie Vendette rises to “The Challenge” of the Comrades Marathon

In search of a new running challenge after the disappointment of my two previous marathons, I decided to run further (with a new distance you can secure a PB!) After being recommended to me by a few Serpies, Comrades was certainly ticking all the boxes: long enough with 56 miles, challenging enough with the Valley of a Thousand Hills, different enough with the South African culture in the background and stressful enough with the dreadful cut-off.

By January 2010, I had done my homework. My book shelf was full of ultra running books: I had registered for many ultra races; I talked to other crazy ultra runners and I drafted a rigid training plan. From now on, I only had one subject of conversation: the mythical Comrades.

The training certainly wasn't smooth, what with the usual work and personal challenges that we all know well, but I was fully committed to being well trained for 30 May. My aim was to spend as much time as possible on my feet, running at a slow steady pace. For four weeks I ran over 70 miles each week, I got a marathon PB (finally), one long run of 45 miles in London and most of my Sunday runs were longer than a marathon. Thanks to many of my friends who came to pace me on those long hours of training, I clocked over 1,150 miles before the race. I also learned the spirit of long distance running, with less competition between runners and more talking along the way. On long runs I swapped my usual energy gel for a boiled potato and a bottle of coca cola. I'm just glad I thought to try that new diet out before the race – running with a potato stuck in your throat isn't nice!

At the end of May, I travelled to Durban four days before the race. Even at this stage, you could feel the anticipation of the race fast approaching. This year the race would be run 'downhill' from Pietermaritzberg to Durban. Comrades is hugely famous in South Africa and the hype beforehand can be compared to that of the London marathon. Three days before the race I took part in an organised bus tour of the course. It was very well organised and allowed me to meet other runners and familiarise myself with the milestones along the race, not to mention learning the characteristics of the big five: the famous hills.

On 30 May in Pietermaritzburg at 5.30am I lined up alongside 14,500 runners. Despite the cold dark morning, the start was a very festive occasion, with music ('Chariots of Fire' no less!), incessant chattering, and finally the cock crow and the cannon shot. And there I was, pounding the ground with all the other runners, thinking about all the hours of training I'd been through. It was going to be a long day so I knew that pacing was essential to be sure I kept my energy up through to the end.

Five, ten, then fifteen miles passed by. There were supporters along most of the route, even cheering us along in the cold and dark at the early start. We were expecting much warmer weather later in the day, so staying cool and running steadily was the most important thing. Some people adopted a fast walk for the uphill stretches, but I preferred to stick to my steady pace throughout. At mile 20 I had to stop and stretch and to put a plaster on a blister. The half-way mark

was a big relief; I had already finished a marathon. I was feeling good but I knew the longest hills were still to come. I started to swap energy drinks with my trusted coke and potatoes. As the miles passed by, I knew I was in a good position to make the cut-off point. I flew down the long downhill (well, that's what it felt like!). With just five miles to go I got extremely tired and every bridge felt like a mountain, but in the far distance I could see Durban and all that it symbolised - the finish line. Before I knew it I could see the stadium and then I heard people cheering.

The end in the stadium is nothing less than spectacular. With thousands of people cheering you, you feel like a star as you make your way round the track. I finished in 9 hours 58 minutes, whilst more than 60% of the runners were still out there, battling against the heat and the clock. Runners who don't make the cut off receive no medal and there is no mention of their name. The first person to cross the line after 12 hours becomes famous for failing “the Challenge”, but that wasn't going to be me this year! Nor was it going to be any of the Serpies who took part, all of whom ran a brilliant Comrades this year, with a special mention to Ian Sharman who ranked 24th overall in an incredible time of 6 hours and 1 minute. Whilst I'm still walking like a penguin and feeling the pain in all my muscles, I've already marked the date in my diary for Comrades 2011 with hopefully many more Serpies starting with me.



Nathalie celebrates crossing the finishing line

Serpies do Roth

Alex Elferink

They say Roth is the best old race (they have been racing long distance there since 1987) and it did not disappoint.

The alarm went off of 3.15, for most the middle of the night. A quick bite to eat followed by a drive to the start meant we were there well before day break. The excitement began to build immediately on arrival as the racers arrived and the hot air balloons were fired up. With the start in waves it meant we were able to watch the Pro wave go off at 6am by which time the crowds lining the banks of the canal were huge.

I was in wave 5 which set off at 6.40. Once in the water it was about a 70m swim to the start line. It was a pretty aggressive wave and it took far longer to spread out and get clear water than I expected. The swim down the second turn buoy seemed to take forever though I could hear the crowd cheers and the announcer in T1 which took my mind off the swim. The last 300m seemed to drag and I was tiring at the end. Once out though I could begin to really enjoy myself for the rest of the day.

Out on the bike, the road down to Greding passes through a number of small pretty villages and is undulating and fast with only one small climb. At each village it seemed as if the whole village was out supporting the race and I saw many people cheering, shaking cow bells and drinking beer as I raced by.

The turn at Greding brings the only major climb on the course but even this is only 5km to the top. I passed loads on the climb and thought I might be overdoing it but continued anyway. The next 20km was the most challenging part of the course on each lap due to the undulations and exposed nature of the course with the wind picking up as the day progressed.

As I approached Hipoltstein the crowd began to increase and turning the corner onto the Solar Berg climb is like nothing I have experienced before. The crowd is several people deep and so close to you in the road you can almost touch people. The noise going up the climb is

deafening and you really do feel like a pro cyclist for a short time. Just before the start of lap two I went past the Serpie flag being waved by our supporters. The second time round on the Solar Berg was still awesome though the crowd had noticeably thinned out. The last 25km was my fastest section of the day and once I hit Eckersmühlen for the third time I knew it wouldn't be long before I'd be off the bike.

I quickly found my run legs as I set off out of T2 and a few hundred metres down the road was the second Serpie support of the day cheering me on. As I passed I said this is going to hurt.

Around 6 km in I passed Rasmus Henning going the other way, on his way to winning the race. Shortly after this I got to the canal where most of the run takes place. There were decent crowds despite it being far from anywhere. I saw several Serpies on this section, Paul Jenkinson, Phil Sloss and Christine Sipidias, which gave me a boost. I walked the section uphill back to the canal. At around this point I began to feel the effects of the cycle, my quads were sore, my left knee began to hurt and I could feel my Achilles though it wasn't painful. How often I felt like jumping in the canal to cool off I forget.

The section from the bottom of the canal up through the forest from around 25 to 31km was perhaps the toughest section for me. It was quite undulating and I walked a lot of it even the downhill sections. I continued to run walk until 36km when my knee finally became too painful to run. By this time I had calculated that I could walk to the end and still get a PB so I wasn't too concerned about trying to run though the crowds in Roth old town desperately tried to get me running again. Coming through Roth old town was great: the crowd were in high spirits and so was I. As I got to the final 400m, I broke into a jog crossing the finish line in 10.41 a PB by 17 minutes.

I was just so happy in the end to finish given the Achilles problems I'd had in the last 7 weeks. A great week was rounded off knowing that all 11 Serpies got round, no one ended up in the medical tent (except me to have a couple of blisters popped and how silly did I feel doing that when there were 50 people on drips in there) and everyone had a great story to tell from Paul (1 hour PB and awesome run) to Chris (I'm a rubbish cyclist yet did 6.20 on a road bike with no TT bars) to Phil (most even splits 5.31 bike 5.29 run).

They say Roth is the best old race and it did not disappoint.



Serpies take a break from the free finish line food for a photo. (Photo: Alex Elferink)

Robin Hood, Robin Hood, riding swimming and running through the glen...

Several brave Serpies were out in force to give a brand new iron distance triathlon in the environs of Nottingham a try. Ian Payne caught up with some of them and here's what they had to say.

Joanne "Maid Marian" Irving



Experience: First ironman

Training: Working with a Personal Trainer in the gym to work on Core/Conditioning/SBR Technique, plus lots of sportives, triathlon races and reccy weekends in Nottingham.

Pre-race goals: Just to finish! Also to enjoy it, soak up the atmosphere and feel that the hard work over the past six months has paid off. So how did my race go...?

Swim: Got clobbered, got used to it, got swimming, got it done!

Bike: Love being on two wheels and it all went exactly to plan.

Run: It was hot and long and hot and long and hot and long... well you get my drift! Amazing Serpie support from all corners of the course helped me on my way to the finish line to hear the words 'You are an Outlaw!' This is a FANTASTIC long distance event on home soil so watch out IMUK! I have been asked already would I do it again? The answer is: hell yeah!!

Nathan "The Sherrif" Jones



Experience: First ironman. I've always wanted to go long and was drawn to The Outlaw after I did the Vitruvian last year, which was very well organised and run by the same people. The fact that it's over £100 cheaper than IMUK helps too!

Training: No training plan whatsoever, but I swim once a week with the Serpies, and have done a few 100 mile rides here and there. No brick sessions though, as I've had a few injuries including my ITB and a broken toe which I picked up attempting a drunken handstand last

month. I'm hardly the model athlete! I didn't intend to be quite like this when I entered; for my first year of triathlon three years ago I wouldn't drink leading up to a race and trained a lot harder, and that was just for sprint distances! I'm actually now the least fit I've been for about three years but no regrets as I've been having plenty of fun this summer!

Pre-race goals: Originally it was to go under 12 hours, however after the above 'training regime' now it's just to finish and have a good run, and of course to just enjoy the race and the atmosphere.

How it went: Awesome day! Great atmosphere and a very well run event! Loved every minute of it and was smiling the whole way round. I chilled out far too much on the run so should really have gone well under 12 hours but am very happy, will be back again!

Amelia Ashton-"Little" Jones



Experience: Having done UK IM for the last couple of years I sort of fell into doing a third. I heard of the new event in Nottingham and entered slightly on a 'why not' whim.

Training: Usual story – could have done more. Having ridden 1,000 miles across Britain four weeks ago I'm more confident of the bike leg but the swim is going to be a big challenge.

Pre-race goals: Beating my previous time of 13.30. Shouldn't all be about time but this is the main goal and I know how good it felt to take an hour off my PB last year.

How it went: Overall a fantastic event and I'd certainly recommend it to other Serpies. My favourite things were...

The volunteers: loads of them, all very helpful and knowledgeable, many from local clubs.

The atmosphere created by OneStepBeyond: a great balance of well organised and relaxed. Without the ironman brand the event had the flexibility to make sensible and athlete-friendly decisions.

The venue: the Holme Pierrepont watersports centre was a great location, fantastic for spectators and triathletes alike. Worked much better than Ironman UK which has start and finish in different locations and the watersports centre has everything on tap (including a proper campsite which was so close - to the point where I forgot my waterbottles in the morning and with 25 minutes to start was able to go back to tent and get them without any stress).

The feed stations: loads of them along the way - all well stocked and, linked to this, fines for dropping of litter. The bike route was notably better for not having gel packets strewn around the countryside.

The spectators: GREAT support from fellow Serpies and from others who knew the Serpie name.

Cliff Richard-themed recovery: after a great bike, I never got going on the run and felt like I was running through peanut butter in stillettos. As a result I ended up somewhat flat after the race and may now have to do another one, but on the positive side, Monday was my birthday and the kind people at work gave me an all singing all dancing Cliff Richard card... Bopping along to that was great recovery for sore legs (may not have been so much appreciated by people who had to listen to it 20+ times).

Steph "RobYn Hood" Cannon



Experience: First ironman

Training: Went really well, except one occasion when I found myself briefly in A&E..

Pre-race goals: Without wanting to jinx it - 1.10 swim, 6.30hr cycle, 4 - 4 1/2hr run.

How it went: The start was terrifying - like a frenzy of crazy fish all swimming on top of each other trying to get ahead, and at times had to navigate through the thick weeds which dragged you down. At one point I had to take a breather and kick on my back, but by about 1000m gaps started to appear so I quickly took my chances and weaved my way through. At the turning point it opened up but I still got the occasional punch in the head or face. When I came out of the water and saw my time (1hr 06) and support crew shouting my name, I was really happy!

Onto the bike, which I enjoyed the most. Not a hilly course but with a few drags which took it out of you. I especially liked the accommodating drink stations with their comical mini-football goals to aim your empties at. Coming into T2 just under 6 hours was a real boost to my confidence.

The marathon next and I started ok. At one point I was 5th female overall and my name was on the giant score board. From about half way, the fatigue set in big time and I hadn't a clue what pace or time I was doing, just wanted to keep shuffling and get it over with. When I learned my run time (4hr18) I was really pleased, because it felt more like 5 hours! Finishing 3rd in my age group with a total time of 11hrs 29min, I was high on life and very proud of my achievement.

Anja "Will Scarlet" Eichen



Experience: First ironman - I wanted to do an iron distance event, and knew some other Serpies doing The Outlaw so it seemed an obvious choice. I liked the idea of not having to travel abroad for the event.

Training: I had a lot of good advice from fellow Serpies, but unfortunately didn't follow it as much as I wanted and my training was quite unstructured. I was meant to get a coach for ages but just never got around to it. However, I made sure that I had a lot of really enjoyable training sessions such as cycling sportives with fellow Serpies.

Pre-race goals: To finish.

As the designated modern day Will Scarlet, it was only fitting that Anja Eichen should spin a slightly more lyrical tale about the event...

Wetsuit zipped up. Check. Goggles on tight. Check. Three minutes to go. Into the water. Here we go - the starter horn.

Find your rhythm. Find someone to draft behind. Try and get this over and done with in 90 minutes. That's what you've done in training, you know you can do it. I can't see a thing but the course is so easy that it doesn't matter. This swim isn't as bad as I expected. Nice morning for it. The weeds are a bit cumbersome. Damn, a cramp. Stretch, wiggle and relax that foot. All ok again, pushing on. First buoy, second buoy, finally on the way back. Hang on, what are these people doing, on their bikes, coming out of Transition 1? I've only just done a bit more than half the swim! Anger. Disappointment. Why do I bother?? Breathe, get over it, get on with it, this is about you, not about them. Finally at the exit ramp, strong hands are pulling me out of the water. Feeling shaky. Kind hands grab the bits and pieces I don't know what to do with, like goggles and hat, and offer me help with getting out of my wetsuit. I've finished the swim, even in the time I wanted, I can't believe it, what a relief. Get dry and changed, slap the sun tan lotion on, hasten to the bike. There are only a handful of bikes left in T1, same old story, at least I always find my bike easily.

Hop on the bike, and relax. Hey, this is actually quite fun. There's an absolutely brilliant crowd on the bike loop. Pete and Lucy are the "support dream team", they're angels. Yippee, my first aid station. Grab water bottle, decant into aero bar bottle, add high concentrate drink mix, blow air in through straw to mix it all up - oh no, what a mess, it's all over my face, I should have practised that, really... Nice bike route, a lap has three parts: first it's undulating, with pretty villages. Then a long drag that's ever so slightly uphill. Followed by an easy part, mostly downhill, a time to pick up the speed a bit, and recover at the same time. Second lap. It's getting harder. Keep going, keep an eye on the speed, pace yourself. I know I'm slowing down. Half way round bike lap #3, and the muscles are hurting and the back's aching. Starting to get seriously worried, and fed up. How am I going to run a marathon after this? Why am I doing this? What a stupid idea. I can't understand why anyone would put themselves through this more than once in their lifetime. I never want to do this again! End of third loop, on the way back now, which is a relief. I'm quite knackered. Just before the end, the bike route takes us past a lovely building - Holme Pierrepont Hall - and I wish I had a camera with me. This reminds me that I'm just a tourist, really, and only a triathlete for the day.

T3. Running shoes and terra firma, finally. Entering Ironman territory. All I've done so far was quite a long swim, followed by quite a long bike ride. Now comes the tough bit. Legs are feeling pretty dreadful. Remember: it's a run. The plan: only walk through aid stations, at least jog everything else. Start with hobbling, then try running. It's hot and it's a long way to go. It hurts quite a bit. Nobody told me the run would be this uncomfortable. Actually, lots of people tried to tell me that, but I didn't want to hear. Great course, though, with out and back loops. I can't wait to go past the scoreboard, where Pete and Lucy are cheering, they'll carry me along for a while, with their enthusiasm. I'm looking forward to hearing their cheers. It makes me so happy to see them, every time. Second lap. Not much left in the tank. What's my run

time, what marathon time can I do, where am I, how many miles still to go? I have no idea. Brain's stopped working. It's time to finally get some caffeine into my system. The first caffeine gel is not doing much for me, except I can't breathe very well for a while, which slows me right down.

Last run lap. I have another gel, a different brand. At the last turning point, it feels like the end is in sight. Pick up the pace. Past the scoreboard for the last time, the last sip of water at an aid station. I know it's about 2.5 miles to go from here. The caffeine kicks in and I want to get home. I've had enough of this. I decide that I want to cross the line in sub 12h 45m. With two miles to go, this is the first time I'm chasing a finish time. It's a little wake-up call. Someone's pressed the booster button. I start to run properly, this almost feels like what running should feel like. This is like a dream. I overtake a few people. I can do this. At this point, I think I can do anything. I can't feel the pain, I'm enjoying every step. The cheers are getting louder as I get closer to the finishing chute. I cross the line, running. I'll remember those last two miles for a very long time, especially the moment when I crossed that line at 12 hours, 43 minutes and was called an Outlaw.

World Championships

Jolyon Attwooll

There was a strong contingent of Serpies at both the world Duathlon and World Triathlon Championships in September - including one podium finish.

A total of nine Serpies represented their country at the World Duathlon Championships held in early September on a spectacular but hilly course around Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh.

In fine conditions, Richard Phillips had the strongest showing, finishing in 2:07:23 and taking a silver medal in the men's 35-39 category, having used his extra speed in the 10k and 5k runs to excellent effect.

Meanwhile Rory Maguire followed up his recent strong performances with 11th place in the 25-29 category; Liz Wynn finished 20th in the 30-34 category, Jon Rae and Iain Robinson were 12th and 15th in the men's 30-34 category, while Chris Priestley finished 33rd in the men's 55-59 age-group. The most represented age-group was the women's 55-59 category with Jan Farmer, Hilary Walker and Anna Priestley all taking part, finishing 7th, 9th and 11th respectively. Jan was second Brit overall.

Hilary then also made it to the World Triathlon Championships in Budapest the following weekend (the scheduling of the two events one week after another was described by one Serpie as "great bad timing"). She finished 16th in the Olympic distance, which was completed in much better conditions than the sprint event the previous day. Also performing in the same event were Beate Vogt (49th, 55-59 age group) and Chris Graham (36th, 30-34 age group), the latter rounding off his honeymoon with an appearance in the event.

* With thanks to Jon Rae for his Duathlon race report.

* If you want to attempt at GB qualification for any of the World or European Championship duathlon or triathlon teams next year then check out how to apply at www.britishtriathlon.org/age - it may not be as remote a possibility as you think.

Badwater

James Adams

This was more than just a race for me. This was the culmination of a four year obsession. This was the reason I turned my back on all that track and fast marathon stuff and decided to go long. Every ultra I have run I have thought about being here. Every hard time I've endured I've had to push myself along thinking "well it will be much harder at 50+ degrees". Every time my legs have wanted to give up I've reminded myself about the 18 mile long hills I'll have to climb in the desert.

The start in Badwater Basin is 282ft below sea level. I am to run 135 miles to almost the highest point in the States. All this in the hottest place on Earth, in summer. A look around at the salt flats and miles of barren rock showed that nature had forsaken this place. Nothing was alive here, nothing can live here. Humans don't belong here. They certainly shouldn't be running here.

The first few miles are quite literally the "warm up". From morning till lunch the temperature will rise from a stifling 40C to a hellish 50C. We all remain in good spirits as we chat and get to know each other. There are only 80 starters in this race. It's not easy to get in to. It's not easy to get out of either.

Furnace Creek (yep they don't muck about with the names of these places) was the first checkpoint at 17 miles. They are just there to check you in (and remove you from the race if needed). For support you must recruit a crew of people who will drive near you at all times to feed you and give you water.

The roads through Death Valley are deceptive. It's hard to tell whether you are going uphill or down. Looking ahead gives you no idea and looking behind makes everything look like uphill. I'd sometimes be aware that I was working a lot harder for some reason but it was hard to separate whether it was an incline or a sudden increase in my body temperature. Whenever I saw the crew I would be sprayed with water and given more to drink. My temperature would have been up and down all the time. Adjusting your own pace is so difficult when you don't know what kind of slope (if any) you are running on. If I do this again I'm bringing a spirit level.

Just put one foot in front of the other. And don't die.

Early afternoon and I really started to feel the heat. A few hours into the race I was starting to receive ice-bandas to rest against my neck. I could not even feel the ice against my skin, it was too hot. Every three miles or so I would remove my top and dunk it in ice cold water and put it back on. If I did this in the UK I'd probably pass out with shock but here it felt so nice for my skin to be so cold, for about 10 seconds. Half a mile later it was dry again.

There are a lot of stories surrounding Badwater such as the melting shoes (false) and the snakes (rare). I was told about the "Hairdryer" wind of Townes Pass, an 18 mile slog up 5,000ft of climb. This was no lie; this was the hardest thing I have ever done. The wind was hot and would fill my lungs and throat to burning. No amount of water would quench the burning inside me. I tried to look away, or go backwards but nothing worked. When I got to the top it was dark, but at least there was some downhill, back to sea level. I could run again.



Around halfway I start climbing again. It's cool now (around 30C) and I feel like moving faster but the incline is draining. The view is amazing. I could not see anything but stars. It felt so real that I thought that if I strayed from the road I would fall out into space. I was tired and I'm not at the top again till sunrise.

Miles 90-122 are flat/downhill but the sun comes back out to finish what it started the day before. I am exhausted, blistered and still feeling the internal burning from the wind. I start hallucinating badly, watching the white line weave from side to side and thinking the mountains are going to fall down on me. I can't stand up, let alone run straight. I had to lie down and get covered in ice.

Lone Pine (122 miles) took an age to come but it did eventually. All that stood between me and the buckle I have craved for four years was 13 miles of climbing. The sun was setting and I was glad. I did not want to see it again.

Just over a mile to go and I am winding through the switchbacks looking for the red blinking lights of my support crew. This is where I was going to take off the sun baked white top I'd been wearing all day and put on my nice cool fresh Serpie top. I was looking forward to

"You're not my crew". I was staring in the face of a complete stranger.

doing this, it meant the end.

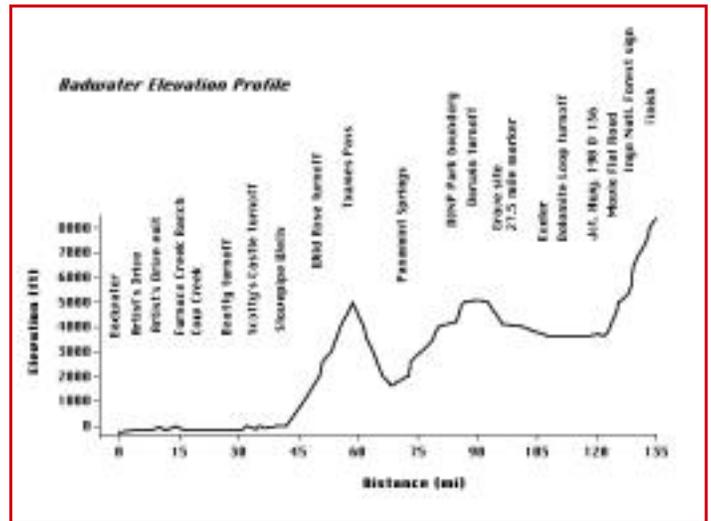
I saw the car in the distance and yelled "pull the ice chest down, I'm going to sit for a minute". They responded "would you not prefer the chair?" and I snapped, "no - the ice chest, I won't get out of the chair". I had told my crew clearly that if I needed to sit they were to get the ice chest so that I did not get too comfortable. They struggled to pull the ice chest out of the back of the car and I sat myself down and thrust my water bottle at them. They filled it as I said it's only a mile to go. "Yes, just over a mile," they responded. I was a little annoyed at the "just over" bit but didn't let on, I just asked for my Serpie top. This was not forthcoming. I was tired and wanted to hurry up. I looked up and said:

"You're not my crew". I was staring into the face of a complete

stranger. I had sat down and barked orders at the crew of another runner. I apologised profusely and they were just in hysterics about the whole thing. I made my excuses and sheepishly left their van and staggered on to where I could see my support crew. The other guys stopped and chatted for a minute and all I heard was laughing. I slowed as I made sure they were indeed my support crew. They had everything for me, the ice chest to sit on, another water and most importantly the vest with the number 30 on it. It was time to get it done.

I have watched lots and lots of videos of people finishing Badwater and thought I'd know exactly what the finish would look like but I had not seen it from this side before, from the side of someone running through it. I ran through it, 39 hours and 24 minutes after I started.

More information about Badwater: <http://www.adventurecorps.com/> and James's blog <http://www.runningandstuff.com/> Elevation profile by Lynne Werner.



Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc

Dan de Belder

August Bank Holiday weekend saw the 8th edition of the mythical Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc: a 166k race over 9,500m of ascent, through three countries around the base of Mont Blanc. For a few Serpies – James Adams, Dan de Belder and Oliver Sinclair (and Rob Westaway and Martin Cooper who'd entered a similarly brutal, though slightly shorter



Chamonix, UTMB mass start.

race, over the same weekend) – this was a major rite of passage in the ultra world.

What followed was a surreal course of events. We were assembled in Chamonix at 6.30pm on Friday night for the off, to the haunting sound of Vangelis' Conquest of Paradise. We were warned at the start by race director, Catherine Poletti, that the weather would be awful: cold and wet but 'courage' all the same and 'allez'.

However, three hours in and descending into the town of St Gervais, the race was abandoned. Adverse weather and a landslide on the Col de la Seigne, we heard. Disaster. I was shell-shocked; around me I saw tears. People had trained all year and travelled from all over the world for this event.

Eventually, the organisers managed to shuttle us back to the start in Chamonix. I joined my wife, Linda, for a consolatory pizza and copious amounts of wine. But we hadn't heard the last of it. At 1.30am runners received a text message from the race officials saying that buses were leaving Chamonix at 6.30am for a re-start, a shortened 90k race, starting at 10am at Cormayeur. Sacré Bleu!

When the alarm went off a few hours later, both mind and body said no thanks, but Linda gave me an almighty kick up the backside and told me I'd regret it if I didn't get my derriere in gear, so somehow I found myself at the start.

Well, suffice to say, it was still one hell of a race. The achievement of finishing was palpable but the overriding emotion was that of a race unfulfilled. Unfinished business, demons to slay etc., bring on UTMB 2011.

<http://www.ultratrailmb.com/>

The Heart of Scotland

100 miles

Lula Rosso

Every Spring Bank holiday weekend, the Long Distance Walkers Association organises a non-stop 100 mile self-navigating challenge in a different location around the UK. The first runners and very fast walkers can typically finish within 30 hours but the event has a cut-off time of 48 hours. In 2010, the 100 was held in Scotland for the first time since the start of the LDWA in 1972 and attracted 495 participants from all over the UK, the USA and continental Europe. It was an extremely beautiful route of 104.44 miles (a bonus from the organisers) with more than 13,000ft of ascent across difficult terrain and remote locations in Perthshire. This is the story of how Ruth Jackson and I went on to round off our first ultra-running season with this classic event.

Six months earlier, it had not been very difficult to convince Ruth to enter the Dorset Giant, a 100km challenge with a total of 8,500ft of ascent, at the end of April 2010, even though she was getting married in March. We had run together in shorter Serpie trail events, and we were both very fond of trail challenges, especially the ones organised by the LDWA, where you are given a route description and asked to pass a certain number of checkpoints with food and drinks, thereby reducing the amount of stuff you need to carry with you. I can't help but think of them as treasure hunts and the routes are always beautiful and original, as they need to satisfy very experienced and demanding walkers.

We had never run more than a marathon so we decided to train together during the winter, focusing on completing as many 26+ milers as possible in order to get the body used to time on the feet and refuelling on the go, following the advice of Serpie trail mastermind Alan Hall. The rest of my training was patchy at best, ranging from jogging, cycling, walking or, on the good days, hill training, depending on how quickly I had recovered from the long run.

The Dorset Giant, on a glorious spring day, took us more than 20 hours but it taught us how to run through the night and how to deal with all sorts of new ultra problems. We were able to run to the end (although it was more of a shuffle by that point) across coastal cliffs and beautiful grassy valleys and we placed in the first third of the field, which was mainly made up of people training for the LDWA 100 in a month's time. This naturally was encouraging and Ruth, who just a month earlier had frankly told me I was crazy to even consider the 100 miles, entered as well. Thinking about the pain of the last 10 miles (more downhill training would have helped the quads, said Serpie ultra guru Andy duBois), I nearly pulled out but I coped with my fears by not thinking about the 100 at all, until we arrived in the beautiful medieval market town of Dunkeld on the Saturday of the May Bank Holiday weekend.

For practical reasons, we started two hours after the main walkers' start, with fellow Serpies Alan Hall and Jennifer Bradley, who were much faster than us, so we spent the first 20 miles mostly alone. We enjoyed the scenery very much, running easily and smoothly along the

undulating Clunie Moors and soon the nice manicured trails were replaced by long stretches of heathery bogs, and off-path sections. After 38 miles, at the end of a long steep descent on tarmac, my knee started to hurt badly and I decided to stop running, as there was still a long way to go and if something happened to the knee, I would not have been able to finish. In any case, it was now quite dark and we needed to be vigilant in following the route, which was snaking around woods and waterfalls, before arriving at a cycle path, which we followed for six miles.

We enjoyed the scenery very much, running easily and smoothly along the undulating Clunie Moors

Towards the end of this long boring stretch, with the checkpoint at 49 miles in sight, Ruth turned to me and said "I don't think I can continue anymore". It came so unexpectedly that I forgot to be diplomatic. How could I have missed that she was in trouble? We were walking side by side, in the steady rain, and earlier, in the worst of the downpour, when it was really dark, it was she that had pointed out a tricky left turn into the deep forest. "But you are doing so well", I said. Only one person had passed us in the night, even though we had left scores of people at the previous "dinner" checkpoint. We could still see lots of headlights floating behind us.

We had not been very confident about being able to finish 100 miles and we had agreed that if we didn't complete this time we would give it a proper try next year. I suddenly felt very tired. With perfect logic, I said, "but then you'll have to do it next year, you know. I won't be coming". I knew I had done too little to say I could go no further, but too much to pretend that I never meant to finish. Ruth wavered. She had suffered in the night, falling asleep on her feet and suddenly jerking herself awake, panicking about stepping on the frogs that were looking boldly at us from the numerous puddles. We agreed to continue, forgetting about time targets and spending as much time as we needed to take care of any problems, and to reconsider the situation at the breakfast checkpoint at 61 miles, where we had access to our bags and retiring would have been easier.

We don't chat much on route, Ruth and I. We are mostly focused on



Lula Rosso, towards Loch Ordie, mile 6. (Photo: Ruth Jackson)

the task, on navigation and how we feel. We can say a lot with very few words. But now, with navigation still easy as we had to follow the only road visible for miles, I started to talk, regaling Ruth with my interpretation of things so far. First, this was very difficult, the most difficult thing we had ever done, except perhaps our first magical 30 miler, which we did alone and unsupported in the snow along the route of the Tanners in the footprints of faster Serpie trailers. But even that lasted only 10 hours; this was going to take much longer. Sure, the route was beautiful, exactly as I had imagined, no disappointment there, but even so the terrain was not what I had trained for, and the sense of grim isolation, even if it was what I had been looking forward to, was terribly draining emotionally. Secondly, we were doing very well. We had caught up with the first walkers earlier than expected, and even if it was disappointing not to be running, we were still keeping up a good pace, passing more people than were passing us.

So we went on, arriving at the edge of Loch Errochty at the first light of day, where the route was again turning into wild moorland. At the checkpoint we had been warned this was a difficult section that should not be attempted half heartedly. The sun was rising across the loch, it was going to be a beautiful day; we folded away our waterproofs and a new spring was in our step. The route was now following the waterlogged edge of the loch, and keeping the feet dry was again becoming impossible. After a slow slog across rough boggy terrain, we reached a steep trackless climb next to a deer fence (1,000ft ascent on a 20% slope), which had become slippery from the night rain and all the walkers who had passed before us. A miserable task.

After reaching the col and descending precipitously towards Kinloch Rannoch, we arrived at the breakfast checkpoint, at 10am on Sunday. This was a perfect example of how the LDWA caters for its members: an infirmary, foot baths, efficient baggage claim and a pantagruelian spread of haggis, sausages, bacon, eggs, beans, yoghurt, and hot porridge, offered with whisky and honey.

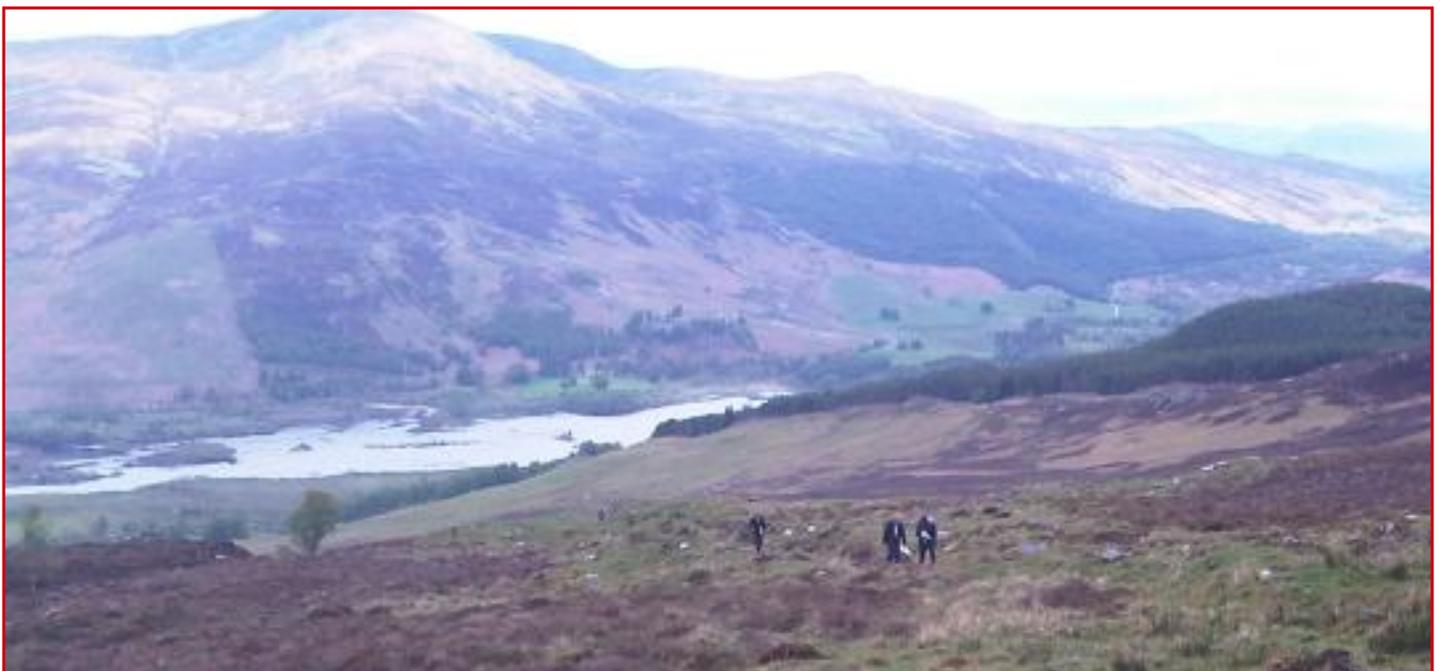
After the mean fence climb, there was no more talk of pulling out,

therefore we left at a brisk pace and started the section that had been called the most difficult one, with two steep climbs for a total of 2,050ft. First, we went 1,500ft up Schiehallion, then proceeded along its wild flank, finally descending, madly bouncing off the heather, and wading across a river manned by the mountain rescue. After following its boggy bank, we were supposed to find a way to reach a wide track clearly visible above us. There was no easy line of ascent so we ended up with a group of similarly fed up people climbing on all fours a vertical wall of 550ft crisscrossed with deep ditches and bogs.

We went 1,500ft up Schiehallion, then proceeded along its wild flank, finally descending, madly bouncing off the heather, and wading across a river

The wide track took us to Pheiginn Bothy, 70miles out, a cute wooden room lit by candles in empty scotch bottles. Amazingly, the first runners had passed here at 4am, doing the previous two sections in the dark and heavy rain. Coming down from the bothy, I started to feel lighthearted again. The sun was already high and pleasantly warm. The worst was over, surely, as from now on we had only forestry tracks, river paths and even (such a guilty pleasure) tarmac roads. Suddenly, I realised that I had gone further than ever before and my muscles felt much better than at the end of the Giant. Happy news, the body does adapt after all and adventures that would have been completely impossible just a few months ago had become more accessible!

That was the beginning of the end instead. It took 10 hours to do the last 20 miles. I was prepared for blisters, even gigantic ones, but my feet, which had been wet since the day before and had been soaking for hours in the bogs, had developed trench foot. When they dried in



Looking back from Schiehallion, mile 66. (Photo: Ruth Jackson)



Ruth Jackson, Loch Errochty, mile 56. (Photo: Lula Rosso)

the last third of the route, they became waxy and tense like drum skins and one suddenly split open developing deep cracks on the forefoot. I wrapped my feet as well as I could, with the edges of the adhesive dressing chafing on the raw skin.

Then I started to hallucinate, in the afternoon, in broad daylight. First I saw Alan Hall in the woods above (he was instead close to finishing the event), then a white van where I expected the next checkpoint. With light failing every bush became something curious: witches praying, wolves preying and, at the start of a steep climb of 1,400ft at 87 miles, I looked up and saw in a tall gorse bush two Disney bears merrily dancing the tango.

I had not planned to be out a second night and, when darkness fell, I become morose. I was angry at my feet which hurt terribly, angry at the route that was never ending, and at my pace that made it even longer. But most of all I was sick and tired of hearing myself think and endlessly calculating. Nothing worked, no positive thoughts, no pep talks, I didn't get a second wind, and I didn't learn anything about myself I didn't know before. I only kept going because I wanted to, not for a certificate or for anybody else but for me. A fundamental drive to reach the destination and a curiosity to see what lay ahead. I promised myself I would go until I could not walk anymore and then I would stop. I know, not very impressive, but, at the time, it made a lot of sense to me.

And so we continued along this endless uphill forestry track, freezing in the clear cold night, even though we were wearing all we could (I had two winter tops, a goretex jacket, woolly hat and gloves, tights and overalls). Considering how much I was getting on my nerves, I started to worry that I was getting on Ruth's nerves too. She had been constantly two steps ahead of me and I started wondering if I was holding her back. When I asked if she wanted to go ahead, she answered with her only complete sentence of the night "I am not going to leave ya". Therefore I had to put up some sort of performance, or at least the best I could, and keep the screams to very special occasions, like when my right foot split open too. I had been waiting for that for 10 miles, it was a sort of relief to finally touch rock bottom now.

It is an old ultra saying, but it is true, generally the pain doesn't get any worse than the worst one can stand. The route had to finish at some point and it did, when the sun rose and we finally left the forest and reached the outskirts of Dunkeld, on a needlessly undulating tarmac

road. Three miles to the end. One hour? That was the shortest unit of time I could think of, now the finish was really in sight. I can't say I felt revived but surely I got a bit more lucid, just in time as instructions had become complicated again and I had become a slow reader.

When we finally entered the village hall to register our arrival, the door was opened for us, a bell rang and the room packed full of participants erupted in loud cheers and applause - a 100 tradition, we learned afterwards, which was repeated for each and every one of the finishers. After 43 hours, my most emotional finish in any race.

Apparently, this was one of the toughest LDWA 100 routes. The first man finished in 24:37, the first woman in 30:13. Of the 495 people that took part, 109 were women and 175 had not completed a 100 miler before. Finishing rate was 70% both for first timers and for the whole field. 4.5% of starters arrived within 30 hours, 20% within 34 hours and 55% within 43 hours.

The aftermath of the 100 was not as dire as I had feared, although for a while it was very hard to sustain a faster pace, as Hilary Walker (Serpie president and ultra champion) had warned us. Overall I think that my feet would have fared better if I had been a more experienced walker, if I had more protective shoes and if it had not been my first time off track in Scotland. I still think that a 30-36 hour finish is possible for someone with my level of fitness, with a marathon PB of just around 4 hrs.

Wow, two nights out! Twice the challenge, twice the adventure, twice the stillness and mysterious peace

However, to think of these ultra challenges only in terms of time would be to miss out on what they can offer. Ten hours is a long time to feel that you are being driven insane and I honestly thought I would always think about this 100 with the bitterness and disappointment of road races that have gone wrong.

On the contrary, after recovering my sense of humour and complete function in my lower limbs, the only memories I have of the second night are of the huge red moon that floated over tall pine trees, the breathlessly beautiful loch that opened unexpectedly in front of me and the luxurious hot chocolate that was gently forced upon me at the last checkpoint, when I could not stand any more watery coffee, milky tea and vegetable soup. And I can't help thinking, "Wow, two nights out! Twice the challenge, twice the adventure, twice the stillness and mysterious peace".

Selective memory surely, but this is why people do these things I suppose. The highs you feel when you find yourself free, self sufficient, your mind alert at the edge of your capabilities, immersed in nature and fully in tune with it, are so high, that all the other feelings, pain, despair, disappointment, self-pity, anger, just dwarf in comparison.

"As far as determination is concerned, any human being, however meek and unambitious they may think themselves, can develop and nurture a single-minded desire to fulfil a particular goal".

Sir Ranulph Fiennes

The winner of the photo competition

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



"Thanks for asking me to judge this edition of the Serpentines photo competition. Again, a hard and very subjective process of decision making!

I opted for the five illustrated here, keep on shooting (as well as spinning, swimming and pounding the streets and trails this winter!)"

WINNER - Action and gritty determination encapsulated - and wet feet too!

Photo: Gavin Edmonds



Our thanks go to Runners Need for sponsoring the competition and supplying vouchers to the winners

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Present your Serpentine membership card in store to receive
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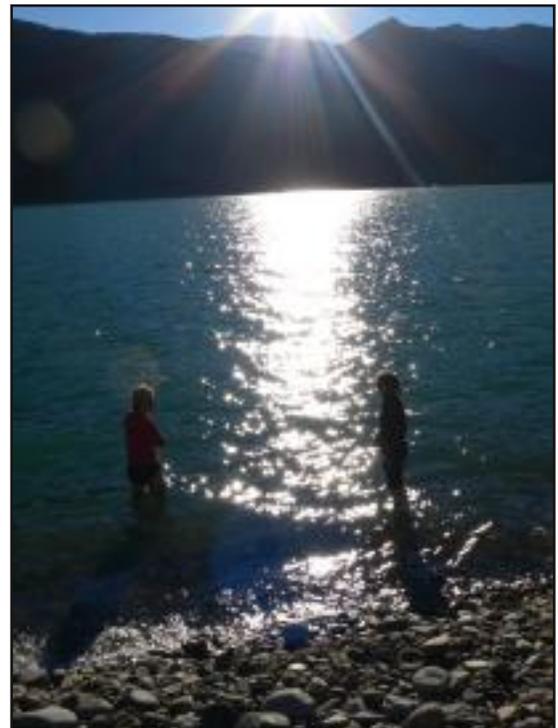
Camden Town | Canary Wharf | Holborn | King's Cross | Liverpool Street | Oxford Circus | Victoria

... and the runner-ups!



SECOND PLACE (left)- Shallow depth of field has thrown out distracting background figures to highlight a great shape in profile of Serpie baton relay running!

Photo: Gavin Edmonds



THIRD PLACE (right)- A different slant on Serpie - fun in this picture. Evocative composition and I can just feel the icy waters reinvigorating tired leg muscles for that recovery post exercise dip!

Photo: Stéphane Schneider



FOURTH PLACE (left)- Great photo technique of motion blur to give a real sense of competitive cycle speeding. Would have finished higher if Serpie red and gold was more visible!

Photo: Graeme Purdy



FIFTH PLACE (right)- Another water jump frame from summer track and field - with top of the jump captured. Nice frame though background a little distracting and not quite as dramatic an expression as our winner.

Photo: Penny Thorn

Meet the new committee

John Cullinane, Chairman

I am delighted to have been elected as Chairman of not only the biggest but the most diverse running and triathlon club in the country. I have a long and mostly undistinguished history as a runner, although I am proud to say I have represented my home county of Middlesex and remarkably did not have to bribe anyone to do so. I have competed for the club at every distance from 100m to ultra, thrown things and jumped, as well as coached, edited Serpentine and served on the Committee for the last two years.



I take over from Malcolm with the Club in a very strong position. We are competing at the highest levels ever; we have an excellent beginners' programme; we organise outstanding races; we have a tremendous array of communications including the website and magazine; and, socially, our reputation precedes us. My aim in my time as chair is to help the Committee build on these strengths and address some of the areas in which we are not as strong – retention of members, for example.

I would like your feedback on what we do well or could do better, and can be contacted at hon.chairman@serpentine.org.uk. In closing, I would like to thank the previous committee, and in particular Malcolm French, Charles Lescott and Rachel Whittaker who have contributed so much to the Club. I wish you all a productive winter and look forward to seeing you at a race or social function sometime soon.

Sid Wills, Club runs and mentoring



Very happy to serve for another term on the committee in what is probably the greatest running club in the world and one of London's best kept secrets. I will continue trying in my own idiosyncratic way to welcome newcomers to the club and make them feel safe and happy in the daunting hot house atmosphere of a running club. It seems strange writing this as I only joined the club as a millenium resolution and was already 60. It is exciting to work with new committee members. I will carry out my tasks with passion, iron tenacity, sincerity and an overriding view that "running is magic".

Katy Levy, Participation Co-ordinator



My aim is to ensure that all people who join the Serpentine Running Club are fully aware of all the different training, coaching and races available to them. My aim will be to organise Wednesday night club runs into distance and relevant pace groups. I will look to Sid to ensure that beginners who come to the club don't just stick to 2 parks but feel comfortable to join the Serpie folk on both social and race occasions. Another important aspect of my role is to rally volunteers together for club races going forward together with organising and helping out with track and field events in 2011.

Ian Hodge, Competition & Team Events



I've been a committee member since 2003 and am responsible for all aspects of competition in the club. I believe Serpentine has the potential to be one of the best clubs in the country for running, X/C and triathlon performance and it's my mission (with the help of our coaches) to get us there. For myself, these days I do very little road racing and concentrate on triathlon and cross-country.

Jennifer Bradley, Race Organisation

I've been a Serpie for 3 years and enjoy all aspects of the club - both

the running and the social. I'm more often found off-road these days with my favourite training session being Greenwich Hills on a Saturday. Before joining the committee I'd helped the club a little, I am now organising the Duathlon and the 2011 NYD10k, plus fitting in my running! As with most of the roles on the committee I wouldn't be able to do anything without our armies of helpers who ensure the events we put on are able to take place – a big thank you to all.



Alex Elferink, Coaching & Training Liaison (Triathlon)

Hello, I'm your Triathlon Coach Liaison. It's a brand new role created by the current committee in recognition of the differences between the running and triathlon coaching offer at Serpentine. I wanted to get involved as there is currently no joined up structured triathlon coaching within the club. My goals for the role are to set up a tri squad system and put more people through the BTF coaching qualifications.



Urban Bettag, Coaching & Training Liaison (Athletics)

Having been with the club for the last 5 years, I joined the committee as I wanted to be part of shaping the future of the club. Considering our unique membership and location, I firmly believe we have an opportunity to do something great and bring the club to the next level. As a coach I am passionate about coaching and want to strengthen coaching and make it a valuable part of our training platform. We have some great people on board; I am looking forward to working together with all of you and drive the club forward.



Jonathan Hoo, Honorary Treasurer

I joined the club partly to break the 3 hour marathon barrier and complete all the Majors. It has also made me dabble in the field of ultra running, something that I'd never even heard of let alone thought

I would do. I love the community of the club and the friends that I have met along the way. It doesn't seem to matter why people join or what personal goals they hope to achieve, everyone can always bond on some level. I chose to get involved with the committee to give something back to the club. Among other things, the treasurer responsibilities include managing club funds, reimbursing members expenses and maintaining accounts for presentation to the committee and at the AGM. Since starting the role I have come to realise just how much work goes on in the background and for that I congratulate the efforts of all the volunteers past and present whose praises often go unsung!



Andrew Taylor, Club Development



Like many Serpies I started running regularly after being accepted for the London marathon. Soon after, I moved to London, googled running clubs and came across our brilliant website. My favourite thing about Serpentine is the same now as it was then - the people. My role on the committee is Club Development. This is a new role created to develop the club's strategy for this year and beyond.

Samantha Ludlow, Kit & Facilities

I joined Serpentine about two years ago to meet new people and possibly do a bit of running.... I have since started to really enjoy running, have met some great people and enjoy being involved in club activities. My role on the committee is to look after club kit - both clothing and extras like prizes, and hopefully ensuring all competitors can show off the club colours at races.



James Adams, Honorary Secretary

I've been with the club 5 years and mainly run as an excuse to go to the pub. The more miles the better.



Robert Westaway, Communications

This is my second year as a committee member of our club. My responsibilities are to facilitate the club's communication with its members and theirs with the club. I hope I can continue to help you, the members, to gain as much benefit and enjoyment as I have had over the past three and a half years.

CONTACT DETAILS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

John Cullinane
Chairman
M: 079 8565 3862
chairman@serpentine.org.uk

James Adams
Honorary Secretary
M: 078 7027 6385
hon.secretary@serpentine.org.uk

Jonathan Hoo
Honorary Treasurer
M: 077 6646 4393
hon.treasurer@serpentine.org.uk

Rob Westaway
Communications
M: 079 0154 3265
communications@serpentine.org.uk

Ian Hodge
Competition and Team Events
M: 077 6876 5670
competition@serpentine.org.uk

Jennifer Bradley
Race Organisation and Promotion
M: 078 7621 2493
races@serpentine.org.uk

Andrew Taylor
Club development
M: 0773 934 0433

Sam Ludlow
Facilities and Club Kit
M: 0781 007 6744
facilities@serpentine.org.uk

Katy Levy
Participation
M: 0794 635 6016
participation@serpentine.org.uk

Sid Wills
Club runs and mentoring
M: 079 0159 0758
member-liaison@serpentine.org.uk

Urban Bettag
Coaching (Running)
M: 0771 108 9069
run-coach-liaison@serpentine.org.uk

Alex Elferink
Coaching (Triathlon)
M: 0785 327 5340
tri-coach-liaison@serpentine.org.uk

USEFUL CONTACTS

Hilary Walker
President
H: 020 7589 5342
president@serpentine.org.uk

Results Team
results@serpentine.org.uk
or
trackresults@serpentine.org.uk

Events Calendar
events@serpentine.org.uk

Serpentines
serpentines@serpentine.org.uk



CLUBKIT

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

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

The kit room is open:

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

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

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

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

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