



SERPENTINES

SPRING 2006



INSIDE

The Serpentine Interview:
Malcolm French

Triathlon – Keep It Simple

Plus

- Base (Camp) Training
- No Nonsense Nutrition
- Mental Strength



Serpentines editor abandoned on iceberg (photo: random penguin)

A lot has changed for me since the last issue of *Serpentines*. I no longer spend my days in meetings and I can run and swim during the day. While I am waiting in anticipation for my newly fledged freelance career to take off, the workloads of our previous *Serpentines* designers, Richard Melik and Hel James, have increased, making them unable to get involved in this issue. My pleas for more volunteers yielded several replies and Steve Brett took on not only getting another issue together, but has also created a great new design, to take advantage of the fact that we are now in full colour! I hope you like the new look *Serpentines*.

THE EDITOR SPEAKS

Several of you contacted me to say that you couldn't help with design but would like to help and I must thank all contributors new and old. The range of subjects in this issue goes to prove what a diverse and interesting group of people the Serpies are. I'm sure you'll find Douglas Gurr's close encounter with a large and hungry polar bear as fascinating as I did. I was also particularly pleased that Malcolm French, who already gives so much of his time to the club, agreed to give up a little more to talk to Juliet Allan.

The summer has lots of Serpie events to offer, many of which you can read about in our News section. There's something there for everyone including the unmissable Green Belt and Welsh Castles relays, track and field and the Grand Prix club championship races. The Serpie Planner on the website lists all these and more. I know that I check it out regularly to make sure I don't miss out.

With the advent of colour, we've been able to include a lot more of your photographs. As usual I must thank David Knight for his great pictures, but thanks also go to everyone who happily sent me their photos. Now that so many more people have digital cameras and camera phones, sending pictures in for *Serpentines* is something that lots of you could think about doing. If you've taken a great shot of an event, or your mum or granny got the perfect picture of you crossing the finishing line, then please send it in to serpentines@serpentine.org.uk.

I look forward to hearing what you think about the new style *Serpentines* and receiving your pictures and stories for future issues.

Sally Hodge

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A French Legend

by Juliet Allan

Late one evening in March, the usually mild-mannered Malcolm French was packing for a holiday in Portugal when the phone rang. “Who on earth’s phoning me at this sort of time?” he thought. Assuming it was someone phoning for a last-minute 5k place, he grabbed the receiver and growled “Yes?” It turned out to be Nadya Labib. She said she had some good news, but wasn’t going to tell him: he was far too grumpy. In fact he deserved an award for the grumpiest person of the year. But she relented and told him that he’d been voted “Club Volunteer of the Year” for the London region by UK Athletics. It’s a nice compliment, and he’d like to thank whoever nominated him; but he’s at pains to stress, with characteristic modesty, that he does nothing independently, “so it’s an award for the Club, really”.

I catch up with Malcolm in the Warrington, where he’s fresh from coaching a track session. He’s far from grumpy this evening, and is happy to chat to me about his many years in the running and athletics scene.

Malcolm, who needs no introduction to most Serpies, grew up in Harrow, where still lives (alone “in my tip”). His father ran for Harrow Athletic Club and played rugby for WASPS in the 1930s. But he didn’t particularly encourage Malcolm in sport. He has a certificate for walking a width of the Seymour Leisure Centre pool at a Cubs gala in 1962. (There was no way out: if you couldn’t swim, you had to walk.) The old pool still lurks under the floorboards of the basketball court. He admits that it was his younger sister, Lynette, who eventually kick-started him. She could swim before he could “and you couldn’t have your sister beating you at swimming”. But while he went on to swim for Harrow Borough, he never ran.

All athletic efforts ground to a halt when he left school at 18, and joined NatWest Bank. But in the early 1980s the newly-established London Marathon was inspiring all sorts of road races. A Watford newspaper organised one with some local charities and asked NatWest to do the banking. The branch manager agreed readily, adding rashly that he would “provide lots of runners, starting with my PA”. No prizes for guessing who that was. Malcolm was on holiday, so had no chance to object. “Were you fit?” I ask. “No!” But a couple of runner colleagues took the 29-year-old Malcolm up to Cassiobury Park (familiar to some Serpies as the starting point for the Watford Half Marathon). He ran about 0.3 miles and had to call it a day. “I just couldn’t do it. I was so ill. I had to stop the car on the way home and get out, because I just couldn’t drive. I couldn’t breathe, I couldn’t do anything! That first training session scared the living daylight out of me”.

But he persevered and made it through the 10-mile race. Shocked at how unfit you could be without realising it, he was determined not to lose his new-found form. Once his knees had recovered from racing in plimsoles, he took on another



Malcolm, club 5-mile championship (photo: David Knight)

10-miler in Welwyn Garden City. He jokes that he didn’t realise there were shorter races. Ian Thompson – the European and Commonwealth marathon champion – started the race, ran it, won it, presented the prizes and then stayed around chatting. “This is quite unique”, Malcolm thought, “I can’t think of any other sport where the rank amateurs can toe the line with the European champion. There was something rather special about that”. He thinks it’s still largely true today.

Malcolm had been persevering for a couple of years on his own, following schedules in magazines, when a groundsman spotted him running alone on a Harrow track. He suggested that he join a club, but assured him that (at 31) he was “too old and too slow” to follow in his father’s footsteps at Harrow Athletic Club. So Malcolm decided to give Serpentine a go. That was 20 years ago, when the club was still tiny. Everyone was very kind. They made sure he got round and made him tea. And as he ran with people who stretched him, his performances improved.

10-mile races have remained a favourite and he bewails the diminishing number of them. But he also enjoys 10ks and 5ks, holding PBs of 39 and 18 minutes respectively. He says that the benefit of shorter races is that you can do a lot more. He starts each year with a clean slate, restricting comparisons to his performances within that year.

Running, he says, gives you a release from what you do during the day. It gives you freedom and space. You can either wash your mind free of everything else or think without being distracted. Nonetheless, it’s not been without its embarrassing moments. Once he arrived at a race in Battersea Park without any shorts. “I borrowed some from somebody in Blackheath



Cross country – one of Malcolm's favourite events
(photo: David Knight)

Harriers, who was definitely small, because they were very, very tight. I know that!" I giggle. "Yes. Hmmm", he says.

Malcolm's never been a great fan of marathon running. He's not run London. He can think of nothing worse than finding the down escalator in the tube not working, then having to totter up the steps at the other end after running 26.2 miles. His first marathon was in Stratford in 1992. He'd been last out of work on the Friday, locked the bank up carefully and posted the keys through the letter box, before realising he'd locked all his marathon kit inside. So he ran without a watch, which he thinks may have helped: he's never beaten his time of 3:36. He's since run marathons in Barcelona, Turin, Florence, Lisbon and Prague. "If you're going to run that far, you might as well treat yourself to a trip abroad," he says.

After Stratford, he ran 3:46 every time. It didn't matter how he trained or raced. "I was getting very fed up with it", he says, sounding genuinely peeved "doing all this training and not getting any quicker". It was Prague that was his nemesis. He could see the finish for the last four miles and he seemed to run round in ever-decreasing circles without getting much closer. He finally made it, only to find that bag collection was the one thing that had been badly organised. "I couldn't collect my bag", he says, shaking his head. "I could not collect my bag

for love nor money". He looks stressed at the very memory. Shouting got him nowhere and by the time he got it back there were only two bags left in the trailer. A fraught day was rounded off by getting the tram in the wrong direction after a few Budwars. He was so fed up that he decided he was "never going to run another marathon ever again". And he never has. So there.

But it's the sheer amount of time and hard work that Malcolm selflessly puts into helping out with events that has turned him into something of a celebrity on the running circuit (albeit a somewhat reluctant one). And it's not just Serpentine that's benefited from Malcolm's willingness to help out. He's been Treasurer of Middlesex Athletics Club for five years, he's secretary of the Sunday Cross Country League, officiates for Hillingdon, Thames Valley Harriers and Ealing and recently finished a year as President of the North London Cross Country Association. At the National Cross Country Championships last year, dozens of people round the course yelled out his name. "It really annoyed the bloke behind me, I know that", he says, with a touch of glee.

He derives a lot of satisfaction from volunteering and coaching. He thinks the crucial thing is breaking the work down into smallish chunks, so that no-one feels overly put-upon. He admits that some tasks are more enjoyable than others, but says, philosophically, that they have to be done. You meet some interesting people, who are often incredibly modest about their achievements. The late Derek Johnson is a case in point. And he loves the variety. "It's one of the good things about the club, that you have this continuing rolling membership". The club never stands still "and we must make sure that it never does", he says.

Malcolm particularly enjoys helping out at schools events, hoping that children will be inspired to go on and fulfil their athletic potential and their dreams. He loves "being able to help facilitate that in some small way". He enjoys helping to organise the LFOTM 5k for similar reasons. In fact that's the event with which he's most proud to be involved. "I really think that race is unique. For the club to organise a race of that standard every month, and for it to be open to serious athletes wanting to use it as a time trial, while not being too daunting for office groups wanting to come out and give it a go – that's quite an achievement".

Cross-country, in which he captains the men's team, has been another success story. The club has started to win a few things and people are beginning to say "Who are this lot? Where have they come from?" He relishes the more "old-fashioned" routines of cross-country; going back to a club house afterwards and mixing with people from other clubs. He says that uniquely winter activity is an important part of the social side. It's great, too, to see people having an opportunity to do so many different events. "The fact that we've embraced triathlon is outstanding". Filling in the application for affiliation to the BTA was the first thing he did when he was elected onto the committee and "looking back, in a silly sort of way, it's something I'm quite proud of".

The recent growth of the club has been enormous. When he became membership secretary (originally for a three-month trial), there were about 500 members. That's grown to 2,400 in five years. I comment that his membership duties must be rather dull. "It is exceedingly dull, and it takes up a huge amount of time" he confesses with a grin "especially when I've managed to order 1000 envelopes without windows, so I've got to address them all by hand now". But someone recently told him it was so nice to get a hand-written letter. I almost get the impression that the thought that it might give other people some small pleasure would be enough to make Malcolm quite happily hand-write 1000 envelopes.

He admits that all the running, coaching and volunteering don't leave much time for anything else. Both his parents were good pianists and he grew up surrounded by music, which he still loves. He plays the piano (very badly, he claims) but he used to do a lot of choral singing. He's a life member of WASPS and has always enjoyed rugby, although he's never played much.

Looking back over 20 years, some memories do stand out. There was a Malta Half Marathon, where he did his PB of 1:28. He felt light on his feet and knew he was running well. It finished

on the coast and everything, right down to the temperature, was just right. Then there was the Man versus Horse race. He didn't beat the horse, but he did beat some cyclists (though on reflection, he remembers that it was very wet and they'd had to carry their bikes).

But there's one memory that tops the lot. "This year at the National (cross country championships) at Parliament Hill Fields. It's often called the 'home of cross-country running'". He'd done other events there, "but to run in the National, with the club, and to have a decent run – and know it was probably the only time I'd ever do it there, that was very, very special. It was very emotional. I spent a long time sitting in the changing rooms afterwards because I was so emotional about it." In fact the emotion's not far from his voice now. "It seems silly", he adds quickly. "It was something I'd always wanted to do; a one-off opportunity".

Malcolm, in his quiet, unassuming way, has given so much to so many of us. There are expressions that wear thin with over-use, but when the news of his award came through, there can have been few people who know him from whose minds one particular old chestnut was far: it couldn't have happened to a nicer chap. It really couldn't.



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Triathlon – Keep It Simple

by Charles Doxat

Triathlon, associated cross-training and multi-sports generally, are “growth industries”. However, remember that much (even most) of the media you’re exposed to is designed to sell product. And many of the ideas promulgated are based on small-scale “research”, which is later contradicted.

I am, therefore, urging newcomers to triathlon not to be seduced into the sophistry of the sport; and those who have already succumbed may like to re-think.

Essentially, think of triathlon as being as simple as a, b, c:

- a. Technique (the swim)
- b. Technique and stamina (the cycling)
- c. Stamina (the run)

The Swim

Although significantly the shortest leg, this is often the most off-putting – even scary – for newcomers arriving from a cycling or running background. ALL that matters is that you develop a fundamentally sound freestyle technique, enabling you to complete the distance with ease and in physical comfort; almost like a warm-up for a (hard) bike ride.

Although competitive swimmers do much interval training, until and unless you are completing 1,500m in sub-22 minutes you don’t need to. What you need is to complete that distance in a smooth 750 complete strokes – so go to a coach or class that will teach you the five or six key drills and “swim-thoughts” which, with some perseverance, can help you achieve just that.

The Cycle

This discipline adds dangerous subversion to our simple sport – sexy bikes. Please don’t waste money saving a few grams in bike-weight whilst you can still cut a few thousand grams off your body-weight. Just get an expert to ensure that your bike is set up to fit you (rather than the other way round) to maximise your efficiency and help you become “at one with your bike”.

Technique is important – not just for going round sharp bends and jumping over discarded Coke cans, but for pedalling correctly and with the right gear ratios. Get advice (and an inexpensive rev counter/speedo fitted). I wasted enormous energy turning over too high gears when I should have been turning lower ones at 90 rpm.

Bike comfort, competent technique and long rides with a friendly group – that’s all you need. OK, plus a £75 turbo machine for safe winter workouts with your i-Pod pumping out your favourite rock.



Swimming drills in Lanzarote (photo: Leila Hudson)

The Run

If you’re reading *Serpentines*, you’re probably a competent runner. However running straight after cycling can feel strange, so practise it. Many athletes train with the “aid” of a heart-rate monitor. Don’t bother, unless you’ve had your anaerobic threshold measured scientifically it’s pointless; and even if you have, the so-called zones are too arbitrary.

Maybe if you go to a training camp you can join in the HRM fun, but then forget it. Even some top athletes are abandoning them. One notable world champion threw his away because he never liked what it said!

Treat the final leg of an Olympic distance tri as you might a half marathon, but remember, stamina is built not just on LSD (long, slow distance) so include interval training if you can. Take advantage of the excellent Serpie track sessions for your run training. The club also caters for the other two requirements: swim technique sessions (eg Total Immersion) and a variety of long group bike rides.

SUMMARY

- Focus all of your swim-time on technique.
- Don’t buy a titanium bike.
- Go for long rides at a comfortable pace, with good pedalling and gear use.
- If you must wear sunglasses, don’t spend more than £20.
- Avoid heart-rate monitors like the plague.
- Run training should include off-the-bike and interval training.
- Question everything you read in the trade press or on the internet.
- Don’t buy into special diets, supplements or re-hydration products – instead choose what you eat and drink using your God-given brain.
- Always remember, triathlon really can be as easy as a, b, c.

Charles Doxat won many National age-group swimming championship and records; and 10 National age-group triathlon titles (inc V50 record of 2:09:37, Royal Windsor 1994).

Tony Smith 1939 – 2006

Tony Smith, an Honorary Member of Serpentine and a Vice President of the Road Running Club, who died on 1st March, was known to many runners as the owner of Run and Become, the shop he began with his wife Cherry in 1982, but he was much more than the proprietor of a running shop. Tony offered inspiration, advice, support and encouragement to new and old runners alike at Run and Become, the Sri Chinmoy races in Battersea Park, London and the annual 24-hour track race at Tooting Bec.

In October 1979, before the advent of big city marathons, Tony and fellow members of Sri Chinmoy AC competed in the 'Masters and Maidens' Marathon in the hilly Surrey countryside. Tony completed this, his first marathon, in 3:47 wearing Adidas Jeans trainers. He was hooked and a month later finished the Barnsley Marathon in 3:39, this time in a pair of proper running shoes.

Tony was inspired to take up running by Sri Chinmoy, the spiritual leader, and in turn Tony inspired many novice runners to try the self-transcendence runs he started in London in 1980. "Tony couldn't have been nicer, more reassuring or welcoming, telling me all standards were welcome and not to worry, they wouldn't pack up and go home before I finished", said one runner who soon became a Battersea Park regular. "Tony had a knack of getting everyone to do their best, whether seasoned runner or first-timer" another regular Serpie participant recalls. Perhaps it was something to do with the bananas, bagels and doughnuts, all provided free of charge.

The 80s road running boom was beginning. Many of the 6,700 runners of the first London Marathon must have experienced the same problems as Tony when searching for advice on shoes and shops with a wide range to choose from. So in 1982 Tony left the comfort of a 25-year career in quantity surveying to open Run and Become as a specialist running shop that would cater to all runners. It became a real family business, as Tony and Cherry were joined by their two daughters. On most weekdays the alleyway outside was filled with runners, trousers rolled up to their knees, dodging sandwich buyers while Tony and his team studied their feet. In 1991 Tony opened a second Run and Become in Edinburgh and nine years later, a third shop opened in Cardiff.



Tony at Tooting Bec, 2005

(photo: Roger Chamberlain, Run and Become)

As a test of self-knowledge and tactics as much as experience, the 24-hour race format was ideally suited to Tony's philosophy. Tony became the organiser of the annual self-transcendence 24-hour race at Tooting Bec track in London, where his genuinely warm smile was there for everyone.

In recent years Tony quietly battled with Wandsworth Council to keep the Battersea Park runs going throughout the year. Tony will be greatly missed by the running community of London, which will be a much poorer place without his smile.

**"Run and Become. Become and Run.
Run to succeed in the outer world.
Become to proceed in the inner world."**

Sri Chinmoy

Base (Camp) Training

by Douglas Gurr

“Guys! I’m serious! There’s a bear outside!” are not the words you really want to hear at 11pm at -25°C in the middle of the Arctic, 1,000 miles from help, without a gun.

All that long slow distance stuff gets a bit dull after a while and – stupidly forgetting that winter training camps are meant to be in warm places – fellow Serpies Hugh MacKay, Lucy Makinson, James Wheaton and I decided to bag some “cross training” by heading off on a climbing jaunt in the frozen wastes of Greenland. Nice steady slog up, fun ski back down – what could be a better way to round off our winter base training?

Greenland is one of the last great wilderness areas. Despite being ten times the area of the UK and the world’s largest island, it supports a population of only 56,000 with the majority of its land permanently covered in snow and ice. One ninth of all the world’s fresh water is locked up in its ice cap, whose melting would raise global sea levels by over ten metres! The idea of our trip was to try to make the first winter ascent of Gunnbjornsfjeld (3,760m), the highest mountain north of the Arctic Circle. Despite the lure of a “highest” tag, it has only ever had a handful of summer ascents, and the combination of short days, bad weather and extreme cold had defeated all previous winter attempts.

Getting there is a flight (with all the stag/hen parties) to Reykjavik in Iceland, an exciting internal flight weaving between the mountains to Isafjordur on the Northern coast of Iceland and then a charter ski plane to fly you into the mountains (“ridiculously accessible” as one of the climbing magazines puts it!) It’s a lonely moment when the ski plane takes off and you’re left in the middle of a huge glacier with nothing but your mates and a big pile of bags. There’s little time for introspection, however, as temperatures range between -25°C and -35°C at night, rising to a balmy -15°C or so during the day. Nothing like a chilly ride on the Surrey Hills of course, but it still takes a bit of getting used to.

The next two days were spent ferrying gear up the main glacier in pulk sledges to establish Advanced Base Camp (ABC) at around 2,400m. Hauling pulks uphill through soft snow is reminiscent of old school training methods like running on a track dragging a car tyre, so we felt reassured that training wasn’t diverging too far from a “proper” runner’s routine. Without the pulks, climbing on skis has more of the feel of a long slow distance session, only with perhaps a few more crevasses and hanging ice cliffs than your average Sunday run.

In an ideal world we would have spent the next couple of days checking out the route, acclimatising to the altitude, getting used to each other’s pacing and sorting any equipment niggles. With bad weather forecast, however, we decided we had to grab the

chance when we could and rose early the next day to have a crack at the summit. Route finding proved a little difficult but we slogged on to reach the final shoulder below the summit ridge at around 3:30pm after 7.5 hours of pretty continuous effort. At this point the summit was still some 200 vertical metres above us along a sharp icy ridge. It was touch and go whether we’d make it down safely before dark and most of the party were suffering from extreme fatigue, mild altitude sickness or both. Naturally we pressed on. We are Serpies after all! The ridge itself was “delicate” (climber speak for: you fall, you die!) but technically not too challenging until we reached a point just 50 vertical metres below the summit. Here it all changed. We now faced a steep icy ridge up with sheer 400m falls over rocks to both sides. It was so late in the day, there was no time to fix any safety ropes so the choice was climb unprotected or to turn back and try again another day. You probably wouldn’t fall but you certainly wouldn’t survive a fall. Ha! We are Serpies, we run marathons, we swim with Dan Bullock, we laugh in the face of death. We wimped out.

We retreated in some disarray, exploiting various means to get back down as quickly as possible. Our crazy mate Barry paraglided off the shoulder to reverse the seven-hour climb in about 20 minutes! The more confident skiers had an “interesting time” through some vile snow but still made it home before dark in just over an hour, while those with more of a climbing background had an exhausting four-hour struggle, arriving well after dark and barely avoiding a night in the open.

The next period of our winter training camp was spent in recovery mode as the weather window slammed shut with four solid days of whiteout conditions, heavy snowfall and storm force winds. This is where the old Arctic hands tell you the mental training comes in as you fight – and slowly lose – a constant war of attrition against lack of sleep, loss of appetite, the constant cold, the inability to get any of your gear to dry out properly, the sheer grind of just cooking, cleaning, eating and surviving on the inside of a deep freezer. Three of us made one trip out in awful conditions to explore and mark out a better route up the icefall, but otherwise no-one moved from the tents for four days. Still, beats working!



Drying out at Advanced Base Camp (photo: Douglas Gurr)



Approaching the summit (photo: Douglas Gurr)

Finally, and just in time as we were running low on food and fuel, the 6am review came up clear – if windy – and the second summit push was on. Moving as three independent groups this time and following our new route, we made better progress this time and reached the shoulder below the summit a full two hours earlier than before. With time to string out a dubious-looking safety rope there was no stopping us this time and finally, at around 3pm with the wind howling and the temperature down to -40°C , Hugh, Lucy, James and I stood on the summit of GBF. The ski down, in four days of fresh snow, was a dream this time and a happy – if exhausted – party reassembled back at ABC. In all, eight of our party of nine made the summit, with Lucy the first (and only) woman to make the first winter ascent.

Completely out of food and fuel now, we broke up ABC and headed back down to Base Camp the following day. By now, most folk were beginning to feel a little worn down. Conditions were too bad to do much skiing or climbing and with another big weather front forecast we decided to call up the aircraft and see if we could get out before it hit. Planes can't fly in Greenland in bad weather, as they rely on line of sight to avoid the mountains and the wings ice up if they fly through the cloud. We were keen to avoid the experience of the previous

winter attempt, which had been stuck waiting for 10 days before they could finally escape! It was now Saturday and the plan was to fly out Sunday or Monday depending on weather. After hanging around camp in rubbish weather for a while, a few of us headed out for a final Saturday morning hill session (climb up, ski down, repeat) before coming home to tidy up and cook.

Normally we would be in bed pretty much as soon as it got dark, but with the end approaching, standards were slipping, and Lucy and I headed off to visit Hugh and James for a quick game of Trivial Pursuit and a celebratory glass or two of whisky. Owing largely to our extreme incompetence, the first game was still carrying on at the (unheard of) hour of 11pm. The other tents' occupants were all fast asleep, but we could hear the footsteps of someone stumbling around outside, clearly sleepy or careless, tripping over the odd guy rope.

Fortunately, our expedition leader and old Arctic hand, Paul Walker, was either a little more perceptive or curious and poked his head out of his tent to see who was stumbling around. It was *Ursus Martimus*, the polar bear: 1,000 pounds of the world's largest and most ferocious carnivore, just a few feet away and casually brushing aside the front of Barry and Adrian's tent with one gentle sweep of his right claw.



On the summit (photo: Douglas Gurr)

Inside our tent, we heard two things. First Paul, “Guys, guys. There’s a bear outside!” Weird: my initial thought was that it must be a joke. Then Barry’s voice shouting, “Aargh! Aargh! There’s a bear here. Aargh! Aargh!” Surely it had to be a joke – something Paul and Barry had cooked up between themselves as a last night jolly. Then Paul was heard again, more urgently, “Guys! I’m serious! There’s a bear outside! Everyone out of the tents now!”

We stared at each other for one more moment, realisation dawning that this was for real, then the tent exploded into action. Game chips, cards and whisky went flying in all directions as we leapt to our feet, scrambling madly for boots, hats and gloves and launched ourselves into the freezing night, yelling madly at the tops of our voices in a frantic attempt to scare the bear away.

Adrian and Barry were still yelling madly – unzipping their tent they had come literally face to face with the creature as it stuck its nose in through the slash it had just made in the tent door. While the bear hesitated, confused – or maybe just amused – by our yelling, the camp exploded with lurid red light as Paul’s mad scramble to the store tent brought success and he let rip with the first of our flares. The bear took off down the glacier, past the shredded remains of our tent, which he’d earlier destroyed, fortunately without us in it. Just as well we are so terrible at Trivial Pursuit!

The next half hour was surreal, frightening, confused, a bit crazed. Shouting all round, “Everyone get axes! Get fuel in pans ready to throw. Stay together. Get the stoves lit. Don’t get separated!” The one thing we did not get was a gun. Permits for most parts of Greenland insist that you carry a rifle. It wasn’t a requirement in our area, as it was, of course, impossible for a polar bear (which live by the sea in winter) to be 35 miles inland at 2,000m of altitude. How we had joked back in Iceland when deciding not to bother with the rifle. “Just our luck if we do get attacked by a polar bear!” It didn’t seem quite so funny now.

We formed a rough circle, staring frantically outwards, upturning pulks, grabbing ice axes and skis as weapons and potential barriers. “There! There! There he is!” We spotted a dark lumbering shape out on the ice, perhaps 100 metres away but unmistakably moving back in, as hunger or aggression overcame uncertainty and confusion. We gripped our axes more tightly, huddled together, raised the tone of our voices and tried to prepare for the fight.

Suddenly a huge bang, a whoosh and the whole glacier exploded into brilliant red light as Paul launched the biggest rocket flare we owned. It hung there under its parachute casting its eerie glow as the bear – scared finally by the noise and light – took off in a headlong dash away from camp.

We never saw the bear again, although his tracks and the damage to the camp were all too evident in the morning, but that did not save us from having to stand vigil all though the endless night. Ten solid hours of banging snow stakes against shovels and peering into the mist until your eyes were so tired that all they could see was thousands of bears coming at you from all directions. Freezing, exhausting and I think that clanging noise will live with us forever. Much to our relief the plane made it through the next day and a weary bunch of explorers headed home to the dubious pleasures of media notoriety.

Perhaps next year we will stick to Lanzarote.



Who needs zips when you've got claws?
(photo: Douglas Gurr)

Having a Baby Shouldn't Stop You Running

by Jacqui Porjes

"You're going to have to have a caesarean. Your baby is in the breach position". I know I should have been pleased to be having an operation that would guarantee the safe arrival of my much wanted little boy, but all I could think about was "they're going to cut me in half. Hmmm – wonder how long it will be till I can run again?"

I ran in a leisurely manner, twice a week with the Serpies until six months pregnant. Even then, I only gave up because my pelvis started to complain and, if I'm honest, because of the amazed looks that I started to receive from the general public.

I had an easy pregnancy and although I ate healthily (there's nothing wrong with the occasional packet of hula hoops) and exercised, I managed to gain three stone. Soon after giving birth I lost half the excess weight, but couldn't wait to start running again and return to my pre-pregnancy wardrobe and fitness level. My wonderful husband fully researched the jogging pushchair market and I was soon the proud owner of a fabulous jogging pushchair – I was all set.

I turned up at my first post-preggers Wednesday night Serpie run with baby in tow. Just getting there had tired me out, but I

was excited. Could I make it round the two parks run? But, there was an additional problem I hadn't figured on. Everyone wanted to talk to me. How old is he? What's his name? How was the birth? How much did he weigh? There is a basic method to test levels of fitness called the 'talk test' ie, if a runner can talk while they run, they're ok. Not in my case. I wanted to be friendly and appreciated all the lovely comments and conversation. I just couldn't run and chat at the same time – I was too unfit.

I started running on my own, but that was no fun. Then the idea came to me. After consulting a few mums and like-minded people, I decided to take the plunge and set up 'Buggyfit': an exercise class in the park for mothers with their babies. Leaflets were hastily printed, insurance was arranged and a twice-weekly class in Regent's Park for mums like me who want to get fit post-baby, was born.

I have been running Buggyfit since August 2005. My fitness levels have increased, I've made loads of local friends and I've lost my extra weight. I still continue to take the classes and now I run with the Serpies whenever I can. This is usually when hubby can babysit, as baby now weighs 24 kilos, and although the jogging pushchair is good, it ain't that good!

The moral to the story is, there is fitness after birth, but sometimes you have to be prepared to change the way you have been doing things, and if the service doesn't exist – make it yourself!

Do feel free to join me at Regent's Park Hanover gate entrance (opposite the mosque) every Monday and Wednesday at 9.30am for a one-hour class (cost £5). For more information you can call me on 020 7487 5840, email Jacqui@buggyfitmarylebone.co.uk, or check my website: www.buggyfitmarylebone.co.uk.



I just hope they don't start feeding my rusks to the ducks (photo: Jacqui Porjes)

Challenging Over 50's

by Stephanie Ellis

Serpentine welcomes people of all ages, which makes for a great club with a great atmosphere. However, some of us have been talking recently about how most older people don't recognise the great joys and benefits of being involved in sport. As people get older they tend to assume that sport is only for younger people: we know that's not true. So how can we help to get more of them to engage in sport? And just as important, how can you help?

There are at least three ways – none of which involve much work.

- Firstly, you can spare us five minutes to complete a simple, short survey form, which will be emailed out soon. We need people, young and less young, to complete this. There will be questions on your experience of being involved in sport: what were the barriers to you starting and what were things that most helped you get into sport? The results will help us identify the barriers and facilitators to being involved in exercise and sport.
- Secondly, please tell us about any sports group you think we could send similar survey forms to. You may be a member of another club as well as Serpentine – and don't forget, we are looking at sport, not just running, so the experiences of members of tennis or cycling clubs are just as important. The more people we can involve, the better our information base.
- Thirdly, you can be included in our email newsletter, learn more about our thoughts and plans and send your comments and suggestions: the more people reading and commenting the better. My email address is strokeworks@hotmail.co.uk.

Our central idea is to set up an organisation, Challenging Over 50's, to be funded by a wide range of organisations (eg large companies, government departments, primary care trusts as well as sports clubs). We would ask them for a relatively small subscription to give us the core funding to begin developing programmes and initiatives to help older people get back into or stay in sport.

We have so far identified several areas to work on:

- Development of groups and programmes helping newbies get into a sport, not unlike some the excellent work already done within the Serpines.
- Development of activities and programmes that give more experienced people appropriate challenges.
- Developing training materials for coaches with specific advice on how best to coach older people whose training needs may be different – eg older muscles need longer to train; more realistic goals for older athletes; motivating the older athlete. Most current training materials tend to be geared around the needs of younger competitors.



Jan Farmer, Ros Young & Margaret Sills, Nottingham Sprint Triathlon Relays 2005 (photo: Ian Hodge)

- Developing materials to be used by GPs and health professionals who want to help their patients get into exercise. These materials will mostly signpost patients to local services, programmes and clubs which are geared up to help maintain a person's motivation, especially in the first few weeks of returning to exercise.

We believe there are some sports (eg running, swimming, walking, cycling) that are more easily accessible to many people and at the project's outset will target these, but would also want the initiative to look at other sports.

We're sure many of you will have your own ideas about what might best help to get people back into exercise, or to motivate someone older who already exercises to continue. Your comments, ideas and suggestions would be most welcome.

But Why?

asks Simon Gardner

I cannot be alone in having to field this question from non-athletes trying to understand motivating factors behind endurance events. I usually mumble an answer referring to the thrill of a challenge and the joy of realising an ambition when everything comes together on race day. However plausible this explanation may be, I have never really been satisfied that this answers what really drove me to run two marathons and an Ironman triathlon in my first year of long distance “competition”.

A more in-depth answer to this question has interested me ever since. In an ideal world I would have carried out a short survey amongst our members to collate as wide a range of opinions as possible to answer this question, and, depending on interest this may yet happen. What I have cobbled together here, however, is a brief overview of motivating factors in testing the human body to the limit of its capabilities.

I am sure that most of us know that the term “marathon” comes from the legend of Pheidippides, a Greek soldier who, according to legend, ran from the town of Marathon to Athens to announce that the Persians had been defeated in the Battle of Marathon – and died shortly after. Why then did some bright spark on the first Olympic committee decide that it would be a sporting wheeze to resurrect this event in the form of a race – history, at that time suggested it inadvisable, with a 100% mortality rate.

Without the benefit of Serpie insights into the subject I turned my attention to the hard cold facts of science. Sports psychology is a relatively new scientific field, and triathlon is a very new sport. Research into motivating factors of sporting involvement is correspondingly thin on the ground (at least in publicly available internet sites). What has been established comes from *Motives For Participating in Triathlon*, a study conducted at the Australian Catholic University, who in turn had borrowed from *The Motivation of Marathoners Scale* and a study on motivation defined as the direction and intensity of one’s effort.

A link can be distinguished between marathons and triathlons, because, not only is one a constituent part of the other, but success in either sport has to do with the centrality of the event in the participants’ lives.

Running a marathon or completing a triathlon of any distance does not simply consist of arriving at the starting line at the designated time and then having to endure several hours of physical and, let’s face it, mental, exertion before arriving at the finishing line. The achievement of crossing the line is a testimony to the months, if not years, of training and daily preparation. Apart from the obvious physical training and psychological effort that long distance preparation requires, the participants typically have to make sacrifices in their everyday working, family and social lives.



Simon Barrett at the London Marathon 2005
(photo: Ian Hodge)

The study required respondents from Cronulla (New South Wales, Australia) triathlon club to rate their motivating factors within the following categories:

- **Achievement motives** (competition, personal goal achievement).
- **Psychological motives** (self-esteem, psychological coping, life meaning).
- **Physical motives** (health orientation, weight concern).
- **Social motives** (affiliation, social recognition).

The conclusion of these studies is that the broad category of personal goal achievement and competition are the two highest motivators. This is then followed by health orientation, self-esteem and affiliation in respective order. Recognition, weight, psychological coping and life meaning were found to be of a lesser importance.

This all seems to be very sensible and self-explanatory research. However, why the need to achieve the goal and compete to the limit of ones ability?

Don Fink, author of *Be IRON Fit* helpfully breaks down the process of finding yourself on the starting line of an endurance event (specifically Ironman) into four stages:

- **Awareness of the event itself:** a 2.4 mile swim followed by 112 miles on the bike before finishing the day off with a marathon, all done non-stop and back-to-back, within 17 hours, is usually met with disbelief. “Surely not?” and “impossible” being typical responses.
- **Realisation:** yes, people do actually do this, and there are lots of them doing it again and again.
- **Curiosity** ...maybe I ...?
- **The Dream** – if they can, I can.

Without now turning my attention to deep psycho analysis, this seems like a safe place to conclude that we do all this in order to keep our dreams alive. We start by wanting to finish, and knowing we can spurs us on to doing it faster the next time. We exercise in order to counteract the effects of our largely sedentary modern lives, and doing it longer and quicker than our fellow competitors brings us joy, and satisfies that primordial competitive beast that lies within us all.

Albert Camus hits the nail on the head in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

“The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart”

Precisely – it's fun.



Ironman France swim start

A Serpie Boy's Guide to Shooting and Bagging

Advice for the Serpie man who has recently found himself amongst single Serpettes

In the last issue of *Serpentines*, an invaluable guide for the Serpette on how to acquire a Serpie Man (SM) generated much interest amongst the female readership. With a large number of single Serpettes now suitably armed and able to grab themselves a Serpie Man, what can the SM do to avoid missing out?

The first question is where to meet. For the SM this presents no problem and requires little effort on his part. Outnumbered and greatly desired, Serpettes will flock to any gathering of eligible Serpie men like bees around a honeypot. Therefore, simply attend any Serpie function – the Christmas party, barbecue, boat cruise, post cross country, Wednesday night; the list is endless, just check the planner) arm yourself with a beer and wait. The mating ritual will soon commence.

It is at this point that the SM will require patience. Any Serpette worth her salt will spend a long time preparing for a social gathering, particularly after a race. However, the wait won't concern many Serpie men, since they will usually spend the first part of an evening participating in male bonding anyway. Don't forget to enjoy yourself; this makes you even more attractive to the ladies.

Once the ladies arrive, don't be too hasty and pounce on the first one to come along. Remember, they will come to you. Serpettes hunt in packs and require a critical mass before approaching. This gives the added advantage of allowing you to observe the gathering lovelies from a safe distance and mentally to separate the wheat from the chaff.

At this point, a word of warning is needed. Although Serpettes outnumber Serpie men, it is best not to be too fussy. Serpettes come in many different shapes and sizes, with few possessing the truly athletic proportions expected of a runner. Why complain though – this means most have more curves!

Once a Serpette has got you cornered you have two options: make your excuses and leave; or buy yourself a drink and talk to her. The subject of conversation is pretty much up to you. If you choose to talk about running, she is bound to know less

than you and will no doubt benefit from your wisdom. If you find that you exhaust this topic, you can move onto other popular areas such as football, DIY, ex-Serpie girlfriends etc. You'll pretty much be doing most of the talking, so remember to keep your glass topped up.

Towards the end of the evening is the time to make your move. Numbers will have dwindled over the passing of the hours and it will be fairly obvious to observers that the two of you are going to get together. If things go wrong now you will have to suffer Serpie shame. The odd compliment might serve to reassure her that you're the Serpie Man for her. Notice her beautiful LK Bennett boots and you'll really have cracked it.

Having had the first brief encounter you might consider moving onto the first date. By retrieving her number from Serpiebase you can arrange this at your convenience. Unfortunately, she will insist that the two of you don't just go to another Serpie event, so you will have to get your thinking cap on. You will naturally have a busy training and racing schedule, but fortunately she will understand this. Sunday night is always a goer and a simple meal at a Whacky Warehouse pub should do the job – two for the price of one on main courses! Now, what to wear? Whilst old trainers and race t-shirts will usually suffice for the catch, they won't do for the date. The answer is simple – new trainers.

It is in the more intimate surroundings that you now find yourselves that you will be able to assess the quality of your Serpette. Most want to be servile and will sacrifice their running priorities for yours, but you might discover that she is actually quite fast or, heaven forbid, faster than you. You need to decide whether this is something you can deal with. It is worth considering that you are bound to be better than her at something.

If the date goes well, watch out, a relationship may develop. You can continue your socialising within the sanctuary of the club, but she may insist on parading you in front of her non-running friends. Put her off by only talking about running, getting drunk very fast, and falling asleep in the corner. She will soon prefer you only among fellow Serpies.

This guide will steer you safely through the first few weeks of your "relationship" (frankly the best bit). What you do from then on is up to you. Something to bear in mind, in case it all goes wrong, is that there are 1,200 plus other willing Serpettes who are ready for you.

SERPENTINES

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

If you'd like to send a race report, a photo, an idea for a feature or just want to let the Editor know what you think about the magazine, she would be delighted to hear from you.

Email: serpentines@serpentine.org.uk

Running in Dibaba's Country

by Sally Hodge

Ethiopia is home to some of the world's greatest distance runners so it was with a feeling of trepidation that I put on my trainers and headed out of our hotel in Gonder, northern Ethiopia for a run. Would I be laughed off the road? I hadn't learned the Amharic for "Do you call that running?" but was pretty sure that I would work it out from the tone of voice used. My worries about local reactions to my slow jog were, however, completely unfounded.

Ian had already tested the ground out for me earlier that day. Our hotel was perched on top of a hill on the outskirts of Gonder, Ethiopia's capital city from 1630ish until the mid 1800s. The hilltop location gave us stunning views of the city which has been called Ethiopia's Camelot from the flower-filled hotel gardens, and meant that we could head straight out of town for a run instead of having to fight our way past vast numbers of small boys, mules, sheep and traffic. It did, however, mean that the only way back at the end of the run would be uphill. Gonder is at 2,200m above sea level and at such altitude the sun, while by no means hot, is bright and strong.

Ian had run down from the hotel onto the main road and out of town through the village of Wollaka, before turning to head uphill and back. Almost as soon as he got to the road he had been greeted by a huge number of people walking, working in the fields, herding animals, waiting for minibuses – all shouting out to him. The shouts varied from loud "hellos" through to teenage boys running with him until they got bored while quizzing him on how many Ethiopian runners he could name. Once they discovered that he was English, several talked about Paula Radcliffe in almost reverential tones, at least one saying that she was a great runner who could beat their athletes. It certainly wasn't a peaceful run in the countryside!

So off I went, and sure enough I was greeted by the same cacophony. What struck me immediately was the number of smiles as I ran past. The Ethiopian people we met throughout our travels in their country often smiled, but I am unused to so many smiling faces accompanying my training runs. As with Ian, I had youngsters running with me for short distances, asking me which of their runners I thought was the best. Luckily I had done my homework beforehand and could name Dibaba, Gebresselasie, Bekele and Tulu, which seemed to make them think that, despite my lack of speed, I might be a real runner after all. I even had some really tiny children who joined in and ran with me for a short time before being called back to look after their herd of goats.

When I decided that I had gone far enough and turned to return to the hotel, much as in the London marathon, it was the people who kept me going! After all, I was in Ethiopia – how



Typical northern Ethiopian countryside
(photo: Sally Hodge)

could I start walking, even if it was uphill, hot and 2,200m above sea level? Despite the fact that this was a country road, there were people everywhere and nowhere to stop for a rest without someone seeing – I was well and truly worn out when Ian opened the door of our room for me.

We ran in several other places during our stay and always had a similar experience. On one of Ian's runs (another downhill out, uphill back route from yet another hilltop hotel, this time in Lalibela) he was accompanied for the whole run by two boys of about 15, wearing their normal town clothes and shoes, who invited both of us to a traditional coffee ceremony at their house that evening. We had a very relaxed and pleasant hour or so while the coffee was roasted, incense lit, popcorn passed round and then the first of three cups of strong, black coffee served. The third cup is known as the "berekha" or blessing cup and it is important to drink at least three cups at the ceremony.

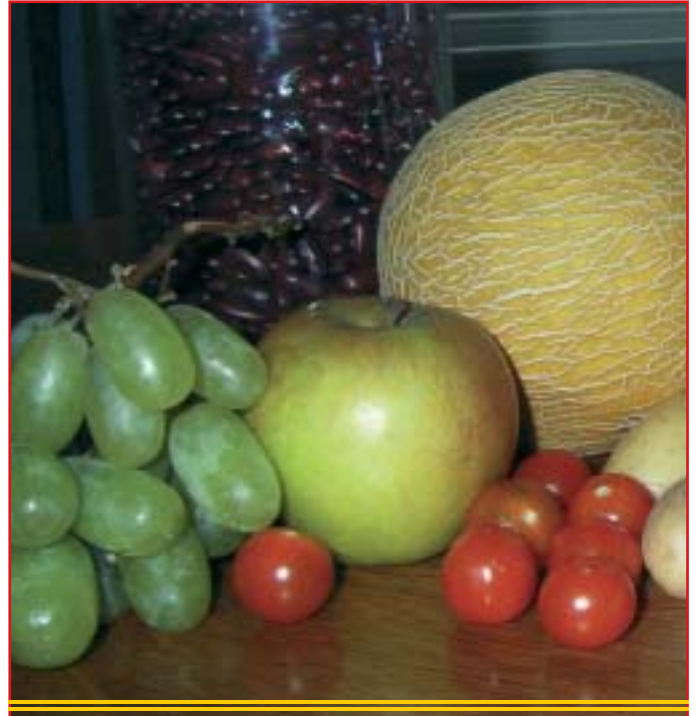
Ethiopia is a fascinating country to visit, with so many places of historical significance and some of the most beautiful churches and monasteries I have ever seen. The Ethiopian people were very welcoming and made our trip a real pleasure. I would recommend it as a destination to anyone, especially to runners, who, just by mentioning the names of a few Ethiopian running stars will feel as if they're being cheered on by an entire town on a training run.

No Nonsense Nutrition

by Val Metcalf

In the preparation for a major sporting event the importance of nutrition is often overlooked. It doesn't have interesting terms, such as fartlek, or exciting concepts, like tempo runs, associated with it. And, much as we'd like to, very few of us get up bright and early on a Sunday morning for a three-hour eating session. But this doesn't mean it's not important.

Having a high carbohydrate intake is important to keep the body's glycogen levels at an optimal level. It is the ratio of carbohydrate to other energy sources that is crucial, so this is the same as having a low fat intake while still eating enough to maintain a healthy weight. All carbohydrate foods are good, but starchy foods (such as bread, rice, potatoes, pasta) are better than simple sugars. However, a very concentrated intake of carbohydrate can lead to the excess being stored as fat rather than glycogen and so can be counter-productive. For the same reason, it is best to snack frequently during the day rather than concentrating all your food into two big meals. That means not skipping breakfast and/or lunch, and especially not skipping breakfast and/or lunch for a run. Pack the fruit, rolls or salad into your kit bag along with your running gear and do both! Athletes have higher energy requirements than non-athletes so should eat proportionally more than the generally recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.



Protein is the basis of muscle tissue and so is just as important as carbohydrate. While constant training and the resultant muscle breakdown does increase protein requirements, most modern diets provide more than adequate protein. The important thing is that protein sources are predominantly lean proteins to avoid upsetting the high carbohydrate low fat balance. Diets that may not provide adequate protein are strict vegetarian or vegan diets where plant proteins are the major or only source of protein. Most plant proteins don't provide all the essential amino acids, so to be effective as a protein source different plant protein sources should be combined at each meal.

There is a lot of marketing material promoting vitamin and mineral supplements but much less scientific evidence that they are beneficial. The body has feedback mechanisms to control nutrient balance so any excess vitamin C or any of the B vitamins is going to be excreted and never used. To avoid passing (yup, correct vowel used) large quantities of vitamins down the drain it is best to confirm, by blood test, that you do have a deficiency before taking supplements. The supplements that athletes are most likely to need are calcium and iron. Calcium is an essential component of bone and a lifetime of adequate calcium intake is the best way of preventing osteoporosis, a contributing factor to stress fractures. Iron deficiency is only one cause of anaemia but any form of anaemia has a detrimental effect on performance. Again, it is best to confirm an iron deficiency by a blood test before taking supplements.

Luckily most of these things take care of themselves. Hard training increases your requirements of most nutrients but will generally also lead to an increased appetite so, as long as you're have a balanced diet, you should be providing your body with everything it needs to fuel and recover from all those training sessions.

2006 Club Championships

Here's a brief reminder to get those race entries in for our club championship races before the events fill up.

The Serpentine Club Road Running Championships are a series of races of 1k, 1 mile, 3k, 5k, 5 mile, 10k, 10 mile, half marathon, 20 mile and full marathon with club trophies awarded to the fastest male and female Serpie and the runner with best age-graded score. To qualify, you must be a first-claim Serpie member and run in club colours, with the exception of the marathon, where we would ask you to wear club colours if you possibly can. All events must have been entered under your own name. Over the summer, the shorter events (1k, 1 mile, 3k & 5k) also make up the Serpie Grand Prix competition which has its own trophy.

There are four Club Championship triathlon races: sprint, Olympic, middle-distance and full Ironman, plus a duathlon and aquathlon. You must be a first claim member of Serpentine Running Club, have entered the event in your own name, have registered your club as Serpentine when joining the BTA (if you are a member) and compete wearing club colours (except for Ironman events) to count.

The Club Championships also form part of the Serpie Multi-sport Championship: a points competition based on triathlon championship events, selected duathlon & aquathlon races and all the running club championships events, plus the Serpie decathlon and some cross country races.

There are dedicated pages on the website where you can find out more detail about each championship series. In addition, all of the events are highlighted on the Serpie Planner. www.serpentine.org.uk/planner.php.

Track&field

Serpentine had a very successful 2005 T&F season, with our Division 4 men's team gaining promotion. This means we now have men's teams competing in Divisions 1, 3 & 4, giving you more opportunity than ever before to take part.



Ruairi MacIver in the 3,000m steeplechase (photo: David Knight)

We also compete in the Rosenheim League on Wednesday evenings. This league is open to men and women, and is particularly good for beginners as well as 'elite' athletes. Finally, for the Masters (Vets) amongst you, we have men's and women's teams competing in the Southern Masters League.

T&F is great fun, and you don't need to be experienced to take part. All of the fixtures are listed on the Serpie Planner on the website and feel free to contact the organisers for more information.

Div 1, 3 & 4:		Justin Lock
Rosenheim: Men		Lars Menken
	Women	Rachel Brough
Masters: Men		David Lipscomb
	Women	Jan Farmer

Marathon Club Championship

Any marathon that's run by a Serpie this year will count towards the club championships. For marathons where lots of Serpies compete, you'll find that the results are picked up and added to our results database without the runners having to do anything. If you run a smaller marathon, or maybe one where you're the only Serpie, you'll need to add your finishing time yourself, so it counts towards the 2006 club championship.

You can do this on the website. If your marathon isn't available from the drop-down boxes within the results database, simply email the details, including the race name and date and if possible their website, to results@serpentine.org.uk so that it can be added. You will get an email once the race has been added so that you can input your time. When entering your marathon time, please use your official finishing time (chip time is fine, but your own watch time isn't).

Tri Results

Serpentine triathlon results are prepared by Brian Tennant and Chris Tant. If you've taken part in a tri in 2006 and your results haven't already been added to the results on the Serpie website, please email the details to b.tennant@ucl.ac.uk. If you spot anything that needs changing in results that have been published (eg additions, revisions or omissions) please also let Brian know. We need as much of the following information as possible: event name, location, date, distances, webpage for full results (or the complete results in an Excel file).

Don't forget that any Ironman event counts towards the club Ironman championship this year, so you need to make sure your Ironman result is in the list.

Great Serpie relay weekends

Serpentine are again taking part in the Green Belt & Welsh Castles Relays this year.

Green Belt Relay – 20/21 May

The race is a two-day, multi-stage, multi-terrain relay around London's Greenbelt countryside and surrounding towns. The route is divided into 22 sections (between 7.6 and 13.8 miles each), and teams consist of 11 runners. This means that runners must run at least twice, once on each day of the race.

There are five Serpie teams entered: a fast men's and a fast women's team plus three more teams for the rest of us who run at slower paces (down to 10min/mile which is the cut-off pace). Lots of people will tell you that the GBR weekend is one of the most enjoyable Serpie weekends of the year.

Welsh Castles Relay – 10/11 June

This is a 20-stage event starting in Caernarfon on Saturday morning and ending in Cardiff on Sunday afternoon. The stage distances range from 8 to 14 miles in some challenging terrain. Teams have 20 runners who each run one stage over the course of the weekend.

Serpentine has three teams taking part: men, women and vets. This is one of the most important races of the year for the club. Will 2006 see our women's team, with Angie Palin as captain, win as they did in 2004 & 2005? Our men's team made their highest ever placing in 2005 and



Welsh Castle runners set off from Harlech Castle (photo: David Knight)

Paul Fromme, the team captain, is hoping to improve again in June. The Serpie vet's team is always up against some fearsome competition but captain Nadya Labib's target is to do well in the Monarchs of the Mountains prize.

With teams of 20, there's plenty of room for most members to get a place on the teams, especially the women's and vet's teams. Unfortunately the standard for the men's team may well exclude some who'd like to run, which is a shame, but we're unable to get any more team entries for this prestigious race. For Serpie men who don't secure a team place, the Green Belt Relay is a great alternative and we can guarantee a place on a team in that race if you're not selected for Wales.

If you'd like to learn more about the relays, there are dedicated pages for each one on the Serpie website. You can also check out the organisers' websites:

www.greenbeltrelay.org.uk &
www.lescroupiersrunningclub.org.uk/castles

So take a look, talk to Serpies who've taken part before and then why not sign up by sending an email to:

greenbeltrelay@serpentine.org.uk and/or
welshcastles@serpentine.org.uk.

AGM

The club's Annual General Meeting will be at 11am on Saturday 24 June in the Trafalgar Room at the Victory Services Club, 63/79 Seymour Street, London W2 2HF.

The AGM is your chance to hold the committee accountable; to debate how the club should be run; and to elect the new committee. You may be thinking about standing for the committee yourself. If you are, feel free to contact Nadya Labib or David Knight with any questions you may have.

Nominations must be received by the Honorary Secretary in writing (email is fine) by Saturday 10 June. Any first claim member of at least one year's standing may be nominated. He or she must be proposed and seconded by two other members, and must confirm their willingness to stand for election.

Race the Train 2006

Several Serpies Raced the Train on the Talylyn Railway from Tywyn on the mid-Wales coast to Abergynolwyn (and back) last August – you may have read Lynda Isaac's report in the last issue of *Serpentines*.

There are tentative plans to form Serpie teams for this year's race, which is on 19 August. If you like the idea of a weekend in the beautiful Welsh countryside for a tough but fun race, have a look at www.racethetrain.co.uk/. Adrian Lloyd (adrianlloyd@bcsb.org.uk) plans to run for a third time and would like to hear from anyone else interested – or register your interest on My Events.

National Triathlon Team Relays

The weekend of the 5 & 6 August is probably the busiest weekend in the triathlon calendar; with both the supermarket processing experience that is the London triathlon and the National Triathlon Team Relays at the National Water Sports Centre, just outside Nottingham. Serpentine is entering 10 teams of four in the national relays, which are organised so that each team member competes in each discipline in turn: 400m open water swim, 15k bike and 5k run.

This event is perfect for anyone even thinking about having a go at a triathlon – the distances are short and the transitions long. For experienced athletes, it's a great chance to post some really quick times on a fast, closed road course. It's also a fun event, with many Serpies making a full weekend of it, with camping and barbecuing. You can sign up individually or as a complete team of four. If you'd like to know more about the event or sign up straight away, contact Simon Gardner at simonfgardner@googlemail.com. But don't delay – places are limited.

Starter group on Wednesday nights & the two parks run

Over the last few weeks the starter group has been integrated into the main two parks group. Why? Firstly, it was expensive in terms of the number of volunteers needed. Secondly, it became apparent that most of the starters were no slower than many in the main group.

Sid Wills, the committee member responsible for membership liaison, says "I believe that, in terms of an inclusive running policy, this is integral to the whole philosophy of this club; integrating people from the beginning is important to pursuing this policy."

So does the club still need people to volunteer to assist new runners? Yes! But Sid prefers to think of them as support runners. Indeed, he believes that anyone who has a few weeks' experience of running with us can help new people integrate, whatever distance and pace they run at. Many of you already do this anyway.

In addition, there are some key tasks we need help with every Wednesday night. We need someone to brief new or prospective members in the Seymour Centre, someone to set the group off at Speaker's Corner, and a back marker who knows the route. If you can help out, you can sign up on the white board outside the club room.

The Saturday starter group for people who are very new to running still continues and is led by Sue McGinlay. Also, Bev Thomas helps to answer people's questions about running with the club as a new runner.



Serpie cyclists in the Lanzarote sun (photo: Heathcliffe Jones)

Lanzarote07

Some rave about the long cycle rides up Fire Mountain; others about the half marathon in the sunshine when England is still cold and wet, others about the outdoor Olympic-sized pool with lanes set aside for Serpies mornings and evenings; and others just rave. You've heard the stories and seen the photos (at least the ones people dared to publish) and now it's time to make sure you don't miss out in 2007.

The Serpie event of the year – a week at Club La Santa in Lanzarote – is happening again in 2007. The dates to make a note of are 8-15 March 2007.

Booking is now open – contact lanzarote@serpentine.org.uk for details.

Serpie Discounts

Did you know that Serpentine members are offered discounts at several shops and service providers? You could get money off your next pair of running shoes, bike repairs, wetsuit hire or running clothing.

See www.serpentine.org.uk/club/discounts.php which lists who is currently offering a Serpie discount. To claim discounts, remember to take your Serpentine membership card with you when you go shopping.

MID-WEEK & SUNDAY summer races

Summer is a season to think about doing some shorter, faster races. There's plenty of opportunity with the Serpie Grand Prix events and the various track & field meetings, but Serpentine also competes in two inter-club leagues, which are open for all Serpies to take part in.

The Assembly League is a series of six mid-week, short races held in the evenings: two in Beckenham, two in Greenwich and two in Victoria Park. The races usually attract about 150-200 runners of all standards. You don't have to pay an entry fee – the club pays this as one of your membership benefits. If possible, we ask you to run in Serpie colours.

The Summer League is a series of four races – usually 10k – between May and September at various venues around London. All standards of runners are welcome at these Sunday morning events, which are generally followed by a short children's race and a series of 400m relays for everyone. Scoring in the relays is age-graded; so small girls in ponytails can beat accomplished adults. There's also the added attraction of food provided by the host club for after the race.

Details of all of this year's Assembly and Summer League races are on the Serpie Planner on the website.

Webmaster

At the end of March, Rob Maslen stood down as webmaster of the Serpie website after over three years in the role. Our website is the first port of call for many Serpies to choose races to enter, look at and log results, check London running routes and seek training advice, amongst other things. The site is also visited regularly by huge numbers of non-Serpies, and at least one London club has been inspired to look into adding a Serpie-style results database to their own site.

During Rob's stint as webmaster, the track & field and cross country sections of the results database have been added, as have My Events and the news stories on the front page.

So it's thanks to Rob for the hard work and long hours he's spent creating new content, developing code and co-ordinating the work of numerous others who contribute to the site.

Our new webmaster is Mike Knell, who is looking forward to the challenge of taking the website even further forward. You can contact Mike at the same address as always: webmaster@serpentine.org.uk.

Can You Help?

All our club events are run by Serpies who've volunteered to help out. Without this help there would be no Wednesday night runs, track sessions, spin classes, Sunday cycle rides, handicaps and the list goes on and on.

If you enjoy the opportunities Serpentine gives you, why not think about helping out too? There are lots of things that needing doing, on a regular or ad hoc basis. If you'd like to volunteer but you're not sure how and when you could help out, send an email to volunteers@serpentine.org.uk.

MAKE THE MOST OF BEING A Serpie

As a member of Serpentine, you've got the opportunity to get involved in lots of activities and really make the most of your membership.

There are plenty of ways you can find out about the club and what's on: talking to other members at club runs, joining the e-groups, the weekly newsletter (Sentinel) available at Wednesday and Saturday runs, and lastly but probably most importantly – the website.

There's a huge quantity of information on our website, and maybe you haven't already spent time looking at it (perhaps you checked it out before you joined but are not a regular visitor now you're a member). A great place to start is the FAQ page: www.serpentine.org.uk/faq.htm. This is where you'll find answers to lots of the questions that we've been asked many times. Many of the replies will offer you links to other website pages, where you'll find further details about club races, buying kit and how the club works, amongst other things.

Don't stay in the dark about what Serpentine offers you – check out the website.

Cycle Routes on the Website

There's a new section on the website with maps and descriptions for a few of the common cycle training routes that Serpies use, see www.serpentine.org.uk/cycleroutes/.

If you've got a good training route and would like to share it with fellow Serpies (and the world) why not send it in? The easiest way to send a route is, if you use gmap-pedometer www.gmap-pedometer.com, to trace it out so it can be converted into a map suitable for our website and then email a description of all the major turns etc., to:

- ihodge@serpentine.org.uk
- webmaster@serpentine.org.uk or
- cycling@serpentine.org.uk.

CONGRATULATIONS

To Serpies, Marina Koutsoudis and Harry Bhuller, who are engaged to be married. Harry, who joined the club in 2003 and Marina, who became a Serpie in 2004, met during the 2005 Serpentine Lanzarote trip and Harry proposed when they returned from the 2006 trip. They are hoping to get married next September and will have both an Indian and Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony.

TRAINING & RACING IN SPAIN

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Contact David Chalfen on **020 8340 7035** or davidchalfen2002@hotmail.com

Serpies Get Muddy

by Malcolm French

It hardly seems that one cross country season has finished before planning for the next one starts. By the time you read this, most of the 2006-7 fixture list will be in place. In fact, some events are already pencilled in (see below).

As far as the 2005-6 season was concerned, 144 Serpies turned out for the club on at least one occasion. It's great to see so many of you taking part. The club cross country rankings competition was won by Jo Conn, from Angie Palin, with Val Metcalf taking the female vet's award. For the men, Simon Barrett won from Andy Reeves, with Richard Smith the leading male vet.

We had some notable individual and team successes this season. The club scored a notable first when our men won the Met league race at Wormwood Scrubs in November. Our win certainly made some other clubs sit up and take notice! We continued to produce consistent results and finished the league in third, just behind powerful teams from Shaftesbury and Woodford. The Serpie women finished the league in ninth place. The Sunday league, with the exception of the Watford race, attracted less Serpie support. However, it was good to again be able to stage a "home" race, organised jointly with London Heathside. I'm grateful for the time that lots of you gave up, especially those who arrived early on a very cold morning to mark the course.

Successes in cup competitions included our women taking team silver at the North of the Thames Championship and bronze at the North London Champs, where the Serpie men took team silver. Our women also took team bronze at the Middlesex Vets Champs. Ros Young won individual silver in her age group at the South of England Vets Championship. At the main Middlesex County Championships, Emma Calderbank was the leading Serpie lady, in ninth place, and Chris Blackburn was our leading man in sixth. Following his run, Chris was selected to represent Middlesex at the prestigious Inter-Counties Championship (the highest standard cross country race in the UK), where he placed 88th. I was also delighted to see that Jeff Cunningham was selected. Competing for Cumbria, Jeff finished 170th.

The London Champs were again well supported and we fielded four women's and five men's teams. Our leading teams placed ninth (women) and eighth (men). The 2006 South of England Championships were held near Exmouth, Devon. Thanks to Rachel Powell, Gavin Edmonds and others, we were able to arrange a weekend that included various training activities and lectures. This also ensured a good turnout for the Championship races, where our women came an excellent 12th, with the men finishing in 13th. In the 12-man team competition, we won the Middlesex Cup: another first for the club.

Finally, to the English National Championships at Parliament Hill Fields, where the sunshine brought out plenty of spectators. The sight of the runners, particularly those in the senior men's race, streaming up the hill remains one of the greatest sights in any British sport – far more impressive than the start of the London Marathon. It was good to see Rory MacFarlane competing



Serpie women preparing for the South of England Championships (photo: Nadya Labib)



Penny Thorn pushes hard uphill, Exeter 2005
(photo: Nadya Labib)

in the under 13 boys race, where he ran strongly to finish in 320th place. The Serpie women placed 19th out of 47 teams, led home by Emma Calderbank, Sarah Edmunds, Ruth Clifton and Angie Palin. The men, headed by Chris Blackburn, Simon Barrett, Jeff Cunningham, Miguel Branco, Paul Perry and Chris Old, finished in 20th (out of 100) in the 6-to-score competition and 16th (out of 45) in the 9-to score event. In doing so, they won another distinguished piece of silverware; the Minor Clubs Trophy.

Angie and I would like to congratulate everyone who ran for the club last season and thank all the Serpies who helped us with team management. It was great that people who, for one reason or another couldn't run, still came along to help.

PROVISIONAL 2006/7 FIXTURE

7	October	Horsenden Relays Perivale
Metropolitan League		
14	October	Claybury
28	October	Ruislip
25	November	St Albans
13	January	Wormwood Scrubs
10	February	Perivale <small>Please note that the women's races will all be longer at c. 6k.</small>
11	November	North London Championships Venue TBC
18	November	London Championships Hampstead Heath
2	December	Ellis & Dysart Cups Richmond Park
6	January	Middlesex County Championships Perivale
27	January	SEAA Championships Hampstead Heath
3	February	Middlesex Veterans Championships Ruislip (TBC)
24	February	CAU Inter-Counties Nottingham (selected athletes only)
10	March	English National Championships Herrington Country Park, Sunderland

Hastings Half Marathon

by Chris Purkiss

Hastings is one of those races. There's just something about it that makes it one of the highlights of the running year and one you want to do again and again.

The course is "challenging" with about the first seven miles being hills of varying severity; ranging from the relatively gentle but long and will-sapping Queensway, to the outright savage if short Harley Chute Road, about a mile in from the start. Getting parked can be something of a nightmare and the start is horribly congested, with this year's record entry of around 4,500 runners crammed into a relatively small starting area. Plus there's the weather – the British seaside in March – need I say more! Nevertheless, the organisation is generally superb – the race is well marshalled and has efficient and frequent drinks stations. This year the weather was fantastic for running; cold and crisp with a brisk south-easterly wind, which was a real bonus.

So what is it that makes this, for me at least, a very special race? It can be summed up in one word – atmosphere. The whole town gets involved and turns out to support the runners. We ran past at least two churches whose congregations were outside, waving flags and singing. The route passes an old folks home where the residents sat outside, well wrapped up against the weather, banging away encouragement on pots and pans. Apart from the long drag along Queensway where the support grows a bit thin; the crowd is vocal and consistent throughout the whole route; and everyone gets cheered on – not just the local runners.

Then after mile eight the real fun starts – the downhill section. This is what makes all the uphill worth it, as you all thunder down All Saints Street in the Old Town to deafening cheers from the crowds and onto the seafront, where you do a hairpin turn by the ancient net-drying huts, for the final two miles along the promenade. This year, with the relatively clement weather, this section was highly enjoyable. In previous years, in horizontal rain and a bitter wind from the sea, this has proved the most gruelling section. At the finish you're presented with a horse brass as a memento.

This year's race was won by Michael Coleman of Medway and Maidstone AC with a time of 1.06.40 – breaking an eight-year monopoly on the Hastings Half by the Kenyans.

Congratulation to the Serpies who took part in this year's Hastings Half and to those who haven't done this one yet, I say give it a go! It's the best end-of-winter tonic I know and the perfect way to get set for your spring marathon.

Serpentine Handicap

by Simon Maughan

The year got off to a cold and wet start but the conditions didn't deter a large turn out of 78 runners eager to burn off the Christmas pud. Liz Tapp claimed the year's first handicap honours, coming home a full 24 seconds before the next finisher, Alistair Howells. Richard Smith celebrated the first race of his second century of handicap races with a fine third place. Meanwhile, Andrew Maynard's PB and fourth place was enough for him to creep into the top three in the first Tom Hogshead table of the year.

February was the month of the ladies, with all three medal places going to the girls. First across the line was Claire Swann, followed by Leala Padmanabhan and Phil Kelvin. Claire took almost three minutes off her PB and unsurprisingly came home before Phil had passed the Dell café. Phil's third place put her at the top of the Tom Hogshead table with 54 points, while Leala's second place took her to the 50-point mark. Last year's Tom Hogshead winner, William Simpson, who achieved his second consecutive top-10 finish of the year, moved up to third.

In March, Sid Wills' secret handicap training paid immediate dividends. His was the standout run among a number of creditable

performances. Ruth Jackson took a well-deserved second place, while James Stratford just edged out Eamonn Richardson for third. Keith Morris was the last man across the line but he deserved his rapturous welcome for joining the distinguished company of handicap centurions. Huw Keene and William Simpson shared the leader board of the Tom Hogshead trophy, with Phil Kelvin keeping up the pressure in third.

A heavy downpour nearly washed away the registration table in April but fortunately the weather improved somewhat by the time the race got underway. Bev Bates took the honours this month, while Alistair Howells achieved his second runners-up spot of the year. Rob Maslen took third on the back of a purely cycling-based training schedule. Maybe we should all give that a go! William Simpson now takes sole lead of the Tom Hogshead table on 87 points, followed by Bev Bates and Jane Harris.

HANDICAP RESULTS

	1st	2nd	3rd
JANUARY	Liz Tapp	Alistair Howells	Richard Smith
FEBRUARY	Claire Swann	Leala Padmanabhan	Phil Kelvin
MARCH	Sid Wills	Ruth Jackson	James Stratford
APRIL	Bev Bates	Alistair Howells	Rob Maslen
MAY	Bob Davidson	John MacDonald	Steve Edwards

TOM HOGSHEAD

Current standings

1	William Simpson	115
2	Bev Bates	106
3	John MacDonald	90



All smiles at the start of the February handicap (photo: David Knight)

The Day the Wind Blew and Blew

by Wayne Keet

When my alarm clock rang I'd already been awake for hours, listening to the wind. It was March in Port Elizabeth, South Africa and the prospect of howling wind was not something that I had been worrying about. As I stepped outside the wind and rain hit my face. Surely it couldn't blow like that throughout Ironman South Africa – only time would tell.

For sports research purposes, everyone was weighed before the start. My three days of drinking and eating had resulted in a 3kg gain – great, an extra 3kg to carry around. In the darkness it was hard to see whether the wind was going to cause problems with the swim, but as the sun came up the sea didn't look too bad and we headed for the beach. I missed the starting cannon in the wind and only realised the race had started when the masses rushed into the water. If I swam easily, I should be looking at about 66-68 minutes for the swim, but as we rounded the first buoy the swells hit. It was even hard to follow the toes in front of you: one minute they'd be in front of you, and the next they'd be 5m to the right. The rest of the first lap was a constant struggle to find rhythm and power. Once round the last buoy I took 12 strokes and didn't even move forwards because of the swell.

Lap 2 was much as lap 1 and as I ran under the clock I saw 1:16 – a full 10 mins outside my anticipated time. Later I discovered that even the elites' times were about six minutes down. Then the rain started to bucket down. Could these conditions get any worse?

After a mere 200m on the bike I was soaked from head to toe, and the wind was howling. As we turned uphill and headed out on a 25k stretch it dawned on me – there would be a headwind for the entire 25k. With frozen feet (no socks was a bad decision) and feeling very, very grumpy, I put my head down. The bumpy road surface meant water bottles were strewn all over the course, and after 15k one of my bottle cages rattled loose and fell to the floor to join them.

I settled into what felt like a good rhythm, only to be passed by two huge packs of riders. If drafting would ever give a huge advantage, it would be today. Lap 1 over and I had lost any sense of humour I ever possessed. As I started lap 3 I didn't even take note of my splits – I just wanted this ride to end. In the last 2k I made a real effort to get my legs spinning to prepare them for the run, which, unbelievably, I was looking forward to.

After the bike I took the time to dry my feet and apply Vaseline, and just as I was running out I spotted a friend – wonderful, a running partner! Pain is always easier absorbed if you have someone to share it with. My hope was to keep my pace in check for the first two laps, then drop the handbrake in the last lap, if I had any gas left. My running partner was struggling with sore hamstrings so I went ahead after the first aid station.



Ironman – the ultimate endurance event?

(photo: Richard Melik)

The wind was still blowing, especially out near the University where there was no shelter, but by now the support was awesome. For the first lap and most of lap 2 I felt great, but suddenly, at 26k, my back seized up and there was no power going through my legs. I made it to the start of the last lap and walked a bit to stretch my back. I had a choice: either walk/run the last lap and prolong the pain, or get it over with as quickly as I could. After food and painkillers, I was ready for the last 14k. After 10k my watch showed that I was knocking off constant sub 5 min/k splits, and with 3k to go I was heading for a sub-11hr finish. I crossed the line in 10hr 53mins, carrying my mate's 3-year old daughter: a most unexpected Iron Man PB. At the finish weigh-in I was told that I had put on weight! I didn't care, and demolished six slices of pizza, two sandwiches and about 1kg of watermelon.

What makes IM events so special isn't your finishing time: it's hearing the announcer saying "Wayne Keet, you are an Ironman" as you run down that finish chute, after all the highs and lows of the day.

Next stop, a little training day at IM Lanzarote in May, then my main race at IM Germany on 23 July.

Wayne's split times were:

- Swim 76 mins T1 – 5 mins
- Bike 5 h 46 mins T2 – 7 mins
- Run 3 h 39 mins

Serpie Quiz

- 1** Australia topped the athletics medal table at the recent Commonwealth Games with 41 medals. How many medals did the UK home countries win?
- A** 18
 - B** 23
 - C** 34
-
- 2** After England's 4x100m men's baton dropping exploits at the Commonwealth Games, William Hill, the betting firm, were offering 3/1 that they would do the same at the 2008 Olympics. What odds were they offering (on 30 March) on a British athlete getting lost in the 2008 Olympic Marathon?
- A** 10/1
 - B** 100/1
 - C** 1000/1
-
- 3** Which is the most successful country, with 36 medals, at the European Cross Country Championships?
- A** Great Britain
 - B** Portugal
 - C** Romania
-
- 4** Which well-known politician competed in the 1964 Olympic Games?
- A** John Prescott – boxing
 - B** Ted Heath – sailing
 - C** Menzies Campbell – sprints
-
- 5** Which man, with 35, has set the most world endurance records (ie from 2 miles to marathon)?
- A** Haile Gebrselassie
 - B** Pavvo Nurmi
 - C** Emil Zatopek
-
- 6** Khalid Khannouchi set the then world marathon record of 2:05:38 at which London Marathon?
- A** 2000
 - B** 2002
 - C** 2004
-
- 7** Who, in 1997, was the first African winner of the women's London Marathon?
- A** Joyce Chepchumba
 - B** Tegla Loroupe
 - C** Derartu Tulu
-
- 8** How many top three finishes did Antonio Pinto have in the London Marathon?
- A** 3
 - B** 5
 - C** 7
-
- 9** How old was Joyce Smith when, in 1981, she won the first women's London Marathon in a UK record time of 2:29:57?
- A** 33
 - B** 38
 - C** 43
-
- 10** How many clean sweeps by one nation have there been in the women's London Marathon?
- A** 0
 - B** 2
 - C** 3

Answers on page 30

Mental Strength

by Malcolm French

Watching the TV highlights of the Commonwealth Games, I was struck by a number of instances where an athlete's mental strength, or lack of it, affected performances. In particular, in both the men's and women's high jump competitions, competitors became embroiled in arguments with technical officials and subsequently failed to clear any further heights. On the other hand, in the men's discus, one of the athletes showed considerable mental strength when he had to retake a throw after a photographer interrupted the original attempt by deciding to stand in the open cage doors and narrowly avoided being hit by the discus. The athlete had his best throw of the competition with his retake.

These incidents brought to mind a presentation given by Rob Smith, now an academy manager with the Rugby Football Union. The following is based on his presentation.

One of the significant areas for the aspiring athlete to develop is mental strength. It is one of the common qualities in all high-level performers across all sports, both individual and team-based. How do we define mental strength and how do we develop it? Indeed, is it possible to develop?

It starts with identifying Control of Attention as a key component to successful performance: the ability for an athlete to stay on task under pressure. Athletes look at the potential distractions to maintaining control of attention. A distraction could be as simple as the location or environment where an event is taking place, judging decisions, or reacting to another athlete's behaviour. Specific tactics, especially at track and field events, are sometimes used to distract opponents, especially ones thought to have a "short fuse," such as slowing down competitions or challenging decisions

and the validity of equipment. Some of these distractions are powerful. Some can be controlled and some cannot.

However ALL will trigger a reaction that will lead to an Emotional Response. The degree of mental strength the athlete has will dictate the next stage. The emotional response will either lead to Unhelpful Behaviours or result in the athlete maintaining control of attention on the task ahead. Unhelpful behaviours include confronting opponents unfairly, abusing officials or allowing technique to fail and thus faulting – in effect allowing the distraction to drive and dictate the athlete's decision making and performance rather than the needs of the situation.

This all seems straightforward, but when having to perform under the spotlight of competition, remaining in control becomes more demanding.

The Emotional Response stage of the process is worth looking at in more depth. Here, dependent on the characteristics of the athlete, the response can vary dramatically. At one end of the spectrum, there is animated rage; John McEnroe being a classic example, while at the other end is the calm, confident response displayed by the likes of Tiger Woods. However, each individual can move from this point to focus on the task in hand and the Specific Process that could, in athletics, be the next start, jump or throw. Those who cannot or do not make this step remain focused on the distraction and become entangled in unhelpful behaviours. This affects performance and results, more often than not, in failure.

I asked earlier whether it is possible to develop mental strength. The simple answer is: yes. An understanding of the process will help to recognise the responses we all experience under pressure. The level and type of emotional response we have to events and distractions does not need to change – it is part of an individual's characteristics. However, the ability of an athlete to control response away from unhelpful behaviour into focus on specific task and process can be learned. This is part of the beauty of sport.



The start of the National 12-stage relays, Sutton Coldfield, 2006 (Photo: Barney Southin)

Why Do They Do It?

by Jeni Vlahovic

One of the best ways to meet people and make the most out of your membership in the club is to volunteer. You have the time to talk to people, learn more about what goes on behind the scenes and generally feel good about putting something back into an event or activity you regularly enjoy.

In this *Serpentines* we profile two volunteers who marshal and officiate at the races and competitions we host, as part of our club's contribution to the wider running and athletics community.

Read their stories to find out why they do it and how you can get involved.

William Simpson – Marshal, Last Friday of the Month 5k

William joined Serpentine in 2002 after participating in a LFOTM race and deciding he wanted to race more regularly. He chose Serpentine to suit his central London working location. In March of this year, instead of racing in the LFOTM, he volunteered as a marshal for the first time. William was also last year's winner of the Tom Hogshead trophy for the handicap.

Q: What made you decide to volunteer your time to marshal for the LFOTM 5k instead of racing it?

A: Having been a member since 2002, it was scandalous that I had hitherto done absolutely nothing in terms of volunteering and had been meaning to address that for some time. I suppose that having done a few track training sessions and, more

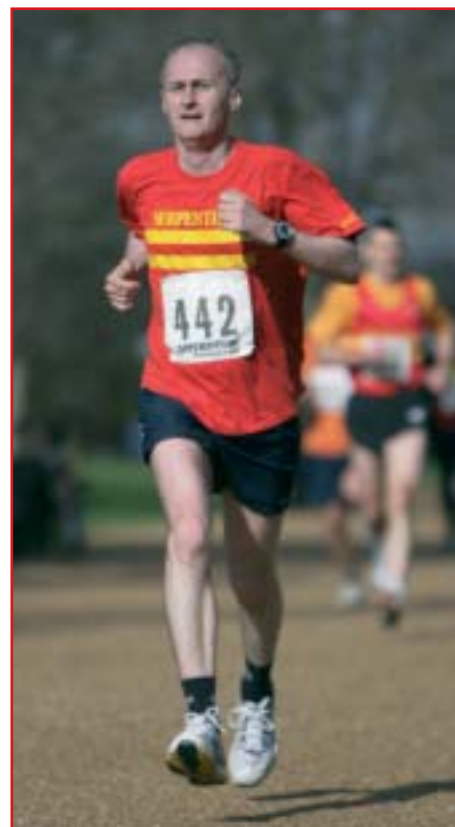
recently and regularly, the handicap and summer league, I saw first hand just how much others put in on our behalf. Seeing Malcolm French's recent well-deserved award was another timely reminder, so I thought I would contact him about helping at the LFOTM.

Q: What was the best thing about being a marshal?

A: The best thing by far has been conquering my own inertia and actually doing something about it. Other than that, it is actually quite interesting to watch an entire 5k race go past. You really appreciate the wide range of abilities.

Q: Were there any challenges?

A: No, apart from prising myself away from my desk to be there! It had been a wet day but we were spared a downpour during the race period. Oh yes, there was a reversing truck that did try to take out one of my fellow marshals, but Malcolm



William Simpson in the handicap (photo: David Knight)

seems to factor these types of things in when doing his calculations so the race still ran smoothly!

Q: Would you marshal again?

A: I will certainly do this again, especially as it is something I can do quite easily with a little bit of forward planning.

Q: What advice do you have for other members who are thinking about volunteering to marshal or help out in other ways for the club?

A: I would say to anyone that if you can find (or make) the time to marshal or anything else, just do it. I am sure you will not be asked to do anything you can't do. We all know if nobody did it, nothing would happen. We also know that if more of us do just a little then it will ease the burden on those that currently do the lion's share. And finally, it was just a good feeling to do something constructive on a Friday at lunchtime.

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Rachel Brough

– Official, Track & Field

Rachel joined the club in 2001 with her new partner at the time, Justin Lock. Both wanted to get more into running but ran at different speeds, so they decided to join a running club and found Serpentine by googling “London running clubs”. Rachel is one of the more avid volunteers in the club, and has really helped pave the way for numerous other members to get more involved in officiating at track and field as our club moves up the ranks.

Q: Why did you become an Official?

A: Honestly, I first started officiating because Justin asked me to. Justin had become team captain of the men’s Division 4 track and field team and they were short of officials. I used to do a lot of athletics at school and used to love spending my Saturday watching others compete in their events, as well as doing my own, so I agreed.

Q: What has been your biggest achievement as an Official?

A: Completing my officiating exam! Also, after officiating at track and field I was asked to captain the women’s T&F team

last year, which competes in the Wednesday night Rosenheim league in the summer. Last year was the first year women could score points in such an event. Watching the Division 4 team get promoted last year to Division 3 was also a highlight, although I’m sure that wasn’t purely down to me raking the sand pit!

Q: What challenges have you faced as an Official?

A: Getting to grips with all the rules; the officiating exam; and when it rains, although this is thankfully quite rare.

Q: What do you see ahead, especially with the T&F season upon us?

A: Because we now have teams in Divisions 1, 3 and 4, even more officials are required. So, on my Wednesday night runs, and in the pub afterwards, I hope to recruit some new volunteers.

Q: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to become an Official?

A: Just give it a go! You get to spend the day in great company, the sun is usually shining and there’s always a cold beer waiting for you afterwards!



Rachel Brough, club championship, Battersea Park (photo: David Knight)

Becoming an Official

Officials are required at races and competitions to keep time, fire the starting gun, record finishing times, and more. At track & field events, officials are also needed to measure heights and distances, make sure competitors abide by the rules and that competition areas are kept tidy and safe.

To become an official, you need to pass an officials exam, but unqualified volunteers are always welcome too. Volunteering is a good way of finding out what is involved. For more information contact the Officials Secretary, Charles Lescott clescott@serpentine.org.uk.

Volunteering as a Marshal

You don’t have to have any special skills or training to be a marshal. You just have to be willing to spend a few minutes (or longer, depending on the length of the race) standing in one spot and making sure runners follow the route and have a clear path. A smiling face and encouragement for runners as they pass is always welcome.

The club always needs marshals at the Last Friday of the Month 5k, and the monthly handicap. Contact Malcolm French, Race Director of the LFOTM (MalcolmFrench@aol.com) or Simon Maughan, Race Director of the handicap (simon.maughan@serpentine.org.uk), to sign up or for more information.

Annual Races & Events

Throughout the year the club organises a variety of races and events, such as the Grand Prix race series, Summer league home matches, cross country home matches, Jekyll and Hyde Park duathlon and the New Year’s Day 10k, where there are lots of different jobs and where help is needed. Keep an ear out for when helpers are needed for these events. To put your name down now, or for more information, contact the Committee member for Race Organisation & Promotion, Lars Menken lars@serpentine.org.uk.

Sudbury Court Report

by Martin Garrett

What's happening in our sister club?

Well, another New Year's resolution bites the dust! I had promised myself I'd pen the next Sudbury update without recourse to alcoholic stimulation: however, as I

stare out of the window over the country's best-known building site, which will hopefully metamorphosise shortly into the new Wembley Stadium, I've had to turn to my old friend "San Miguel" for inspiration. I've also imposed a time limit on myself, the 90 minutes till "Match Of The Day" starts, to see if that helps.

It's 18 months since we moved our base to Wembley and Sudbury Tennis Club, and I'm tempted to say we're going from strength to strength. Membership is up around the 50 mark, with attendances at our Tuesday sessions regularly in the mid-20s. Thursday nights are also routinely attracting double figures, and, since the turn of the year, a regular Sunday run has

been instituted. Our recent additions have been notably active since crossing our threshold, and have been responsible for over half of the dozen new club records already set in 2006.

The end of 2005 set the tone. 16 members (about half the active membership at the time) tackled the Moor Park 10k in October, a month that ended with seven of us competing in the local Ricky 9 race, whilst a similar number travelled to Sussex for the Beachy Head marathon.

November, I'm glad to say, once more saw us quorate (after injury problems in 2004) for the Watford Joggers autumn challenge (a feat only achieved by two other clubs as far as I could tell), before the year ended in traditional style with three teams competing in the Luton marathon relay. Special mention must go to our northernmost member, Tony Robertson, who drove down from Yorkshire on the day of the Luton race to compete. Tony also provided the big talking point of the day: an enormous jar of Vaseline (a raffle prize from a previous race), which looked big enough to supply the whole field!

As we head into spring, plans are already well advanced for the club's seventh annual 10k race in May, and as ever a cordial invitation is extended to all Serpies not otherwise engaged that weekend (sadly, we clash again with the Green Belt Relay). It hardly seems six years since I was craftily flying off to Jersey to leave the rest of the committee to do all the donkeywork for the inaugural event. How time flies!

Well, Ray Stubbs has just appeared on my TV screen (and my bottle's empty) so it's time to draw to a close for this edition. I'm not sure the plan was a great success and I may have to consider bringing in a "ghost writer" next time. More anon (unless somebody bails me out that is).

New Bike Showroom
Now Open!

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New Northampton Store
Opening... April

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Front cover photos
Cyclists in Lanzarote: Heathcliffe Jones
Malcolm French: David Knight

Page 32 photo
Serpies in club kit: Nadya Labib

Serpie Quiz Answers:
1=B 2=A 3=A 4=C 5=B
6=B 7=A 8=C 9=C 10=A

COMING UP

In the next issue of Serpentine

In-depth interview with the 2005 No. 1 world-ranked duathlete, Annie Emmerson

Training Camp Report – the Algarve or Lanzarote?

Charles Doxat's Tri training advice continues with Triathlon: good news – do less!

The London Marathon 25 Years On

Meet the New Committee

The hills are alive – the Helvellyn Tri

Track & field round-up

Race Reports – tell us about your favourite race, or the one you'd never do again

PLUS

- Advice from the coaching team
- Serpie News
- Why do they do it?
- Serpie Quiz

SERPENTINE

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CLUBKIT

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

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

The kit room is open:

- Most Wednesdays, usually between 6.15 and 6.40pm, except the last Wednesday of each month, when it is open after the run (around 8.30pm).
- On Saturday mornings after the run (except the first Saturday of the month which is the Club Handicap).

Watch the e-group for notices on exact opening times.

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
Cotton T-shirts	£12
Kids' cotton T-shirts	£10
Coolmax T-shirts	
– short sleeves	£18
– long sleeves	£23
Waterproof jackets	£15
Stormtech jackets	£35
Ladies' crop tops	£18
Tri suits	£50
Tri shorts	£30
Tri tops (sleeveless)	£30
Cycle jackets	£50
Cycle jerseys (summer weight)	
– short sleeves	£20
– long sleeves	£25
Gilets	£25
Winter beanies	£6
'Spider' kit bags	£4
Serpie 750ml water bottles	£3