



SERPENTINES

SPRING 2009

THE ENDURANCE ISSUE

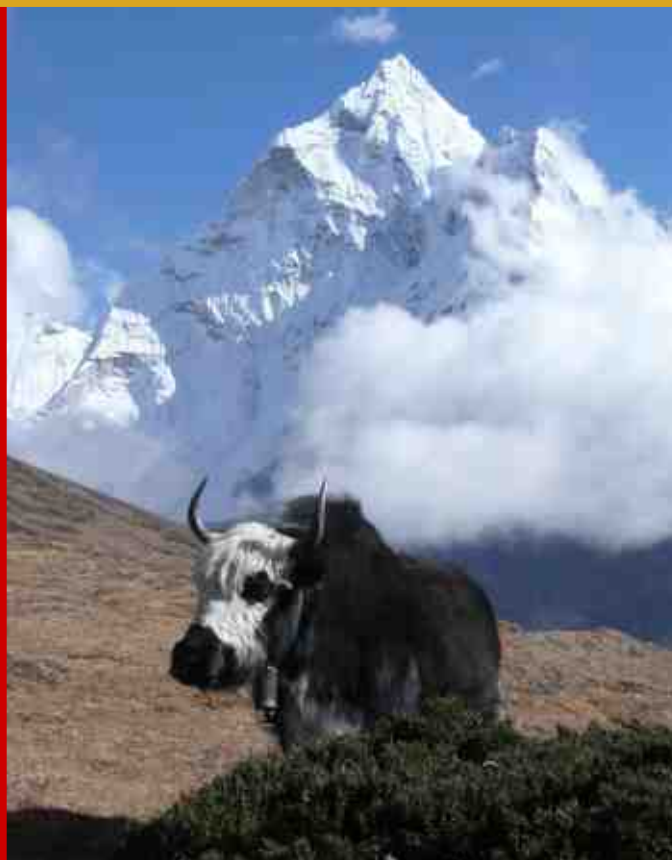
Ian Sharman tackles the Yeti duathlon

James Adams versus the Moose

Two views of the Norseman

Plus

- The Serpie Interview: Brent and Mariana
- OMM – OMG!



THE EDITOR SPEAKS

Welcome to the latest edition of Serpentimes

At 48 pages it is one of the largest we have ever put together and, fittingly, the emphasis is on staying the distance – endurance.

We have articles from ultra runners Ian Sharman and James Adams, an interview with ground-breaking marathon runner Katharine Switzer, two contrasting accounts of the Norseman long distance triathlon and an eye witness view of the running story of the autumn – the abandoned OMM ('original mountain marathon') in the Lake District.



The production team: (L-R): John, Rachel, Rob, Amy, Ian, Steve, Jol.

Added to the big interview with Mariana and Brent and the usual package of club news, coaching advice and race reports, we think there is something for everyone.

I say "we" because this issue has been a real team effort. A motley crew including Ian Payne, Rob Westaway, Amy Whiddett, Jolyon Attwooll, and Stephen Haynes all helped with production, and we are of course indebted to all of the contributing authors. Thanks to all of you, and hopefully we'll see you all for the next one! We always need more people to help so drop us a

line at serpentimes@serpentine.org.uk

Summer brings lots of opportunities to compete for the club, in the London Tri League, the Summer and Assembly Leagues, various track and field meetings and of course the club championship grand prix and handicap. We look forward to seeing you out there in the red and gold, though if you can't compete, there are plenty of opportunities to help out and socialise.

Have a great summer! John & Rachel

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Front cover – top: Katie Crowe in Ironman Austria; bottom: Everest Yak (photo: Ian Sharman). We are grateful to www.Marathon-Photos.com for allowing us to use the picture of Katie. Last year they photographed around 60 endurance events in the UK, as well as other events in 30 countries.

Brent & Mariana – Wine, Running and Song

Sally Hodge meets stalwarts of the Serpie social scene and this year's Lanzarote trip organisers, Brent Plump and Mariana Ivantsoff

Despite the fact that they have only recently moved into their new home, a mere stone's throw from Liverpool Street station and they are still in the midst of finding homes for their belongings, Brent Plump and Mariana Ivantsoff have kindly agreed to spend the evening talking to me. I start by asking them both, why London?

Mariana originally came to London from Sydney on a holiday visa. "I intended to stay for a year. I was having such a great time that I ended up getting sponsored through my work and stayed and I've been here ever since," she tells me.

Brent is from Portland, Oregon, "on the west coast of the States," he points out helpfully, anticipating my non-existent knowledge of US geography. After graduating, he moved to Austin, Texas. He tells me that the small team he worked in consisted of "one guy who had never left the confines of Texas, two people who had worked in Paris and one guy who grew up in Scotland; and I didn't want to be like the guy who lived his whole life in Texas."

Brent made the move to the UK and loved it. "It's been my long-running joke that I wanted to be out of the country until Bush was out of office and now it looks like I've pretty much made it," he says. So with Obama in the White House, is he planning to head back? "I kind of like it here," he says, and I notice a relieved looking smile on Mariana's face.

'It has been my long-running joke that I wanted to be out of the country until Bush was out of office and now it looks like I've pretty much made it'

Basing themselves in London hasn't stopped Brent and Mariana from wanting to see more of the world. They travel as much as they can, often with running involved, though not always as the main purpose of the trip. Last year they holidayed in Israel, ran the Marathon du Médoc and visited the Oktoberfest as well as heading to New York for the marathon. "This year may be a bit quieter," says Mariana, although she adds that they are planning a trip to Russia, which will include a trip on the Trans Siberian railway.

Will they run in Russia? "We always pack our running shoes, so we'll give it a go," she says. "I go along for maybe one out of every three runs that she does on holiday," says Brent. Mariana tends to be the one who gets them out for a run, "but then you keep us going, so we make a good combination," she says to Brent. Their pace is, Brent says, quite similar especially over longer distances "and she makes me talk," he adds. "When he doesn't want me to talk, he just speeds up," Mariana says, laughing.



Brent and Mariana look far too relaxed for this to be in Lanzarote

I ask when they began running. For Brent, his move to Texas was the catalyst. "Portland is a bit like here, with nine months of rain," he says. Running in Austin, however, was a different proposition. "Austin is gorgeous. It has Town Lake that runs through the middle of it and like the Thames it has a number of bridges over it so you can cut off when you want. Unlike London, though it's sunny 320 days per year," Brent tells me. So, when a friend suggested going for a run, Brent agreed. "That was in '98 and I made it for 14 minutes," he says. But soon, living only half a mile from Town Lake and with Portland's rain a distant memory, he was running reasonably regularly, although still "just to keep fit".

Brent didn't run much when he first moved to London, but with typical Brent-style energy, when he decided that he needed some new things to do, he grabbed the bull by the horns. "I signed up for Japanese lessons, five-a-side football and the Serpentine Running Club all at the same time," he says. He still plays five-a-side regularly and has been a member of Serpentine for almost six years. How about the Japanese? "I did Japanese for a year, but I've now switched to Russian, partly because Mariana speaks it," Brent tells me. Two out of three, I comment, is not bad.

Serpentine has a bit of a reputation, deserved or otherwise, as a dating club, but instead of being a helping hand, the club was almost an obstacle to Mariana and Brent getting together. Aptly for the current Serpie committee member responsible for social activities, Mariana first met Brent "out clubbing" and they were both keen to see each other again. Brent was already a Serpentine member and had promised himself that he would try his utmost not to miss Wednesday night club runs, but with a Japanese class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, finding a mutually compatible day for their first date was proving tricky. So he suggested Wednesday, unaware of the fact that Mariana was also keen to avoid Wednesday nights for the same Serpie club run. She was not yet a member, but had tried the club out one Wednesday with another Serpie friend. "She told me that she usually ran on a Wednesday," says Brent.

The attraction was, however, strong enough to persuade both of them to forego their run. "That was in 2004," says Brent, "and Mariana didn't run with the club again until 2006. I love the fact that she nearly blew me out

for a club that she didn't even belong to and never went to," he adds, with not even a hint of bitterness.

"Brent's the one who got me into long running," says Mariana. "I'd only done short runs before – 10k was the longest I ever ran." Even training for her first London marathon in 2007, she basically stuck to lots of 10ks and spin classes. "It ended in disaster," she tells me. Mariana suffered for months after her first London experience. "I couldn't run for ages and it taught me a really good lesson," she says. However, the experience didn't put her off running marathons, and she "actually trained" for her second London marathon the following year. "That's what makes my last London time look a lot better," she says of her 3:31:47 finishing time.

Marathons certainly don't seem to phase her, with 2008 including that London time, followed by the Marathon du Médoc "for fun" and then New York in November, for which she says she probably didn't train as hard as she should have done. "It just inspired me to push on and train more," Mariana tells me.

I am curious to know whether Mariana has truly fallen for the marathon or would secretly like to go back to those 10ks, but it's in fact somewhere between the two that she is happiest. "I loved the Cabbage Patch 10," she tells me. "The distance is perfect – long enough, but not too short to make you really suffer. Brent also loves the Cabbage Patch 10 but points out that there is a major gap in both of their running careers – a half marathon. "I was really surprised to check on the results database and find that I don't have a best half time, because I've never raced a half," he says.

Mariana may have taken on the challenge of running a marathon on 'long' runs of 10k, but Brent isn't averse to setting himself challenging goals either. After all, he entered the 2006 Ironman USA having never done a triathlon at any distance. A week before registration for Ironman Lake Placid was due to open, he had a call from an old university friend. "I had

'My goal, which I'm pretty sure I'll never hit, is to beat 3.20 in a marathon, because that's Brent's best time. Perhaps I could put a plea out to the club for anyone who's willing to coach me to beat my boyfriend?'

done three marathons, and Steve did stuff but not really long distance stuff, so I thought, if Steve can do it, I can do it," he says.

Almost before he had time to think about it, Brent had committed \$400 and signed up for an Ironman. "Then I did the research about what was needed," he admits. "I did all of the distances of triathlon that year," he says and he describes the year of training as fantastic. The only real downside was that he and Steve couldn't train together, since Steve was living in the US. "That said, I made so many good friends on my long bike rides and long runs and at the Monday swim sessions," he says.

Apart from the mini-tri in Lanzarote last year, he has not done a triathlon since 2006. So, I ask, any plans for another Ironman? "I'm not doing Ironman again. 2006 was my triathlon year. I'm going to sell my bike now," Brent tells me.

Mariana also plans to stick to running. "My goal, which I'm pretty sure I'll never hit, is to beat 3.20 in a marathon, because that's Brent's best time," she says with a smile. "He's given up marathon running for now, so he won't go on any long runs with me, so the idea is to beat him and then that'll get him started on long runs again." Brent says that nowadays he runs mainly to be social. "What little I do that could be called competitive is more against myself than anyone else," he says. "Except when we do hill training together" interjects Mariana. "That's true," he



Mariana and Brent model the new Serpentine cross country kit



It's December and we're Serpies so it must be the Kensington Hilton

agrees, "I am very competitive with Mariana." "When he laps me, that just makes me crazy," Mariana adds with a giggle.

Does Mariana have a particular marathon in mind for her sub 3.20 time? "I'm doing London, but I think that'll be more of a fun sort of thing. I'll have to choose another one – an ultra fast one like Berlin that's flat or downhill. Perhaps I could put a plea out to the club for anyone who's willing to coach me to beat my boyfriend," she suggests. I think Mariana's idea of a Serpie 'beat your boyfriend' campaign has legs and she may well find that she has a sizeable group of women wanting to join her when she finds her coach.

I ask them about their favourite places to run in London. Hampstead wins for Mariana, closely followed by the South Bank. "The South Bank is my favourite," says Brent. "In a 20 minute run you can see so many famous landmarks." The social side of running is also clearly a huge attraction for both of them and they love the Wednesday night club runs. "There's such a great group of people to run with that is makes training so much easier," Mariana says.

Brent picks out the Nottingham team triathlon relays as one of his favourite events combining racing and sociability. "They're awesome – 120 of us camping together, going to the pub the night before, having the whole nutty race day then having a barbecue. It's just totally Serpentine all the way." Cross country is another of Brent's loves. Mariana, however, has more of a love/hate relationship with cross country. "The distances are so short that it's really painful," she says, "but having everyone there to cheer you on, then a few drinks in the pub afterwards is great; and some of the places you run are just beautiful," she adds. For Brent, cross country is perfect. "You can go out on Friday night, then wake up late on Saturday, hop on a train, run, then head off to the pub," he says enthusiastically.

'Everyone at work thinks that all we do is run, cycle and swim, I tell them that I do one training activity a day and then spend a lot of time playing pool and singing karaoke'

With all this talk of pubs, I wonder if they needed to add any special training before attempting the Marathon du Médoc. On the night before the event, they admit to staying up late and drinking plenty of red wine. They ran the first 20 miles, then, as planned, began to walk and sample the wine, ham and oysters on offer. Brent found, however, that following a similar regime the night before the New York marathon was not quite so much fun. "New York is a great city and I had friends there who weren't running, so I went out drinking the night before the marathon and I suffered," he admits. "I get too tempted by what's on offer when you travel somewhere to run, so perhaps I should stick to half marathons. Or I can chaperone Mariana to all her overseas marathons, put her to bed nice and early and then go out."

The talk of trips abroad brings Lanzarote – now only around 10 days away – to mind. Since Mariana and Brent are this year's trip organisers, I am a little anxious about their reaction to me bringing the 'L' word into the conversation. Indeed, Brent admits that organising the trip has taken a lot more work than they anticipated and they certainly have a lot of respect for previous Serpie Lanzarote organisers. I hope that, after all



That's the first 20 miles over, now where's that red wine?

their hard work, they will have been able to relax and enjoy the trip. "Everyone at work thinks that all we do is run, cycle and swim," says Brent. "I tell them that I do one training activity a day and then spend a lot of time playing pool and singing karaoke."

Certainly the two of them have as much enthusiasm and energy for having fun and enjoying what London has to offer as they do for running. Since moving into their new flat, with Spitalfields market and Shoreditch just a short walk away, they have already discovered a vegan raw food restaurant and seen a marathon comedy improvisation performance. Brent and Mariana show no signs of losing their love of London or Serpie life.

Lanzarote 2010

Look out on the mailing list for details of next year's Serpie Lanzarote trip. It will take place in March 2010 and to secure a place you will need to put down a non-refundable deposit of £100, with the balance payable towards the end of 2009. There are rooms of various sizes and we can match you up with like-minded Serpies if you want to share but don't know anyone else going.

Isle of pleasure – and pain!

Running up cliffs, a town in a time warp, and an all-female horde of Goths – it was all in a fell racing weekend on the Isle of Wight. Jolyon Attwooll reports.

Fell running was definitely not for me. That was my conclusion after reading Richard Askwith's 'Feet in the Clouds'. A fell-running obsessive, the author paints a vivid picture of the sport's legends, granite-hard men and women of the mountains whose indomitable wills drove them to remarkable feats.

I knew I didn't belong to that bonkers club. Not for me their half-heroic, half-loopy descents, bounding improbably down inclined banks of shale faster than Justin Lock in a dash to the nearest watering hole. I was happy experiencing the rush of extreme hill-running vicariously, from the comfort of my own armchair.

So it was a surprise to find myself at the foot of a fierce hill in Ventnor, lining up at the start of a regional fell-running competition. It was all something of a mistake. A Serpie member since January, I had decided to branch out and try something beyond a three-parks run. One Wednesday night warm-up, I heard there was a place going on a running trip to the Isle of Wight and put myself forward. It was only when I logged on to the Ryde Harriers website to enter that I realised the truth. I would be competing in the South of England fell-running championships. Oops.

It was too late to back down so I spent the rest of the summer seeking reassurance. Bad idea. "Part of the run is actually marked as a cliff," one of the previous year's veterans gleefully informed me in the Victory one evening. "It's true— look on the Ordnance Survey map."

'I knew I didn't belong to that bonkers club. Not for me their half-heroic, half-loopy descents, bounding improbably down inclined banks of shale'

I was still looking for some comfort on the way to the start. Again, my efforts fell flat. I chose that moment to find out about fell-running categories, from A-C, with A being the steepest. Guess which category that first race fell into?

Surprisingly, I started well enough up the Category A course. Perhaps reassured by the familiar tarmac underfoot on the initial slope, I seemed to make good progress. Then we hit the main off-road section of the hill. The gradient and the terrain forced the running to stop, and a strange half stride, half wade motion to begin in its place. I started to suffer. By the time we turned round at the radio tower on the summit, it was worse. On the downhill stretch several runners herded past, something I got used to that weekend. And so my fell-running initiation began.

In truth, this series of three races held over a weekend in late September



On track: Laura Denison leads Helen Usborne & Pam Rutherford

could probably be termed 'fell-running lite'. Or at least I suspect so. I have still resisted the temptation of going to the Lakes in search of mounds of shale to bound over. But running in Isle of Wight September sunshine must differ from the average race in the raw, uncompromising surrounds of Cumbria. And the other two longer races, it should be said, fell into the softer 'B' and 'C' categories.

Our Serpie-contingent seemed to handle them well. Hugh 'brakes off, brains off' Torry shone in the first, steep race, the St Boniface Fell, careering down the slope to take second place, while his brother, Nick, flew in the final event.

Richard Phillips showed his love for any surface that isn't concrete by claiming overall victory, while Kate Laforet was unlucky not to do the same in the women's category, despite storming to victory in the final race. "I hope the Serpentine success spurs other clubs to come and give some competition next year," the prize-giver said, after announcing another gong to the gold-and-maroon-vested weekend contingent from London.

Both our men and women swept the team prizes, although there was an agonising wait for the women's 'B' team prize. Jane Harris had completed the final long course under duress, lured by the promise of a women's medal. When the organisers overlooked that category, it was only the swift, slightly fearful, intervention of Andy Robbins and Kate Laforet, who had convinced Jane to compete, that rescued the situation.

There were other triumphs against the odds too. My room-mate, Simon Barrett, managed to plough through all three events despite a severe cold and having to spend more time in our en-suite than any man ever should. One Serpie, Stephen Cook, even completed all three races on a toe he later discovered to be broken. Another battled with toenails that seemed to drop off at regular intervals.

Fell running lite it might have been, but few would doubt the toughness of three gradient-heavy events over two days – especially after hearing the tales of ailments, injuries and illness on our return to the mainland. When we arrived at the first incline of the final race such was the pain in my legs I started to swear, rather futilely, at the hill. Fellow Serpie Richard Fanning was within earshot behind, and was so disgusted by the language that he overtook and surged ahead, not to be seen again until the finish.

At least I still had enough breath to curse, which was more than I had when a procession of fresher-legged competitors poised ominously on my shoulder as I hauled myself up the "cliff" steps. I spent a good half mile looking out for the red arrows mentioned by one of them as he eased past. Funny, I hadn't seen any marking the way. Then I looked to the horizon, and there was the RAF's most famous flying squad in perfect formation over the shimmering surface of the Channel.

It was to those fresh waters that we headed after each race, for a more natural version of Kelly Holmes's famous ice bath. Swarms of fell-runners would hobble over Ventnor's pebbled beach, then bob up and down in the chilly sea water, seeking respite from their lactic acid pain.

The glorious weather made the lure of the sea even stronger. Ventnor lived up to its "Mediterranean" billing, its pleasant microclimate apparently the result of its southerly position and the sheltering cliffs. At least there was something to be said for them. Rain is a genuine rarity on this fell-running weekend, we were told.

Along with the sunshine, other things seemed to change little round there. Like the 1970s wallpaper at our hotel, for instance. Some returnees speculated that the hotel owner's Hawaiian shirt might not have changed since the previous year either. This was part of the charm of the whole trip. Not the Hawaiian shirt so much, just the sense of an old-fashioned English seaside resort in a time warp. Even the transport from the ferry was a relic of yesteryear, a 1930s former underground train (old Northern and Bakerloo line stock, in case you were wondering) that rattled through to the southerly terminus of Shanklin.

The time warp sensation continued as we awaited our food on the first evening in the outdoor seating area of a pub along Ventnor esplanade, Hawaiian-style parasols on the tables, and Lionel Ritchie on the sound system.

Later we went indoors, and an all-female horde of marauding Goths spilled into our section of the pub, belting out a mawkish rendition of a Bon Jovi classic and some other even cheesier numbers. Not so much 1970s, just surreal. The hen party, as we discovered it was, stumbled back out almost as quickly as it came...

Curious incidents like this made the trip much more than just a series of arduous ascents. I waver when I think about returning this year, remembering the cliff, the pain, and the sound of trail shoes on hillside as other competitors thundered past. I would know exactly what I'm in for this time – and I still don't think fell-running, even fell-running lite, is for me. Then I remember the views, the faded seaside charm, the exhilaration of finishing and the good company and I'm not so sure...

No doubt everyone on the trip would like to extend their thanks to Andy Robbins for his superb organising of the whole weekend. And I would personally like to thank Andy for stopping "to appreciate the view" in the first race, allowing me to ease in front and avoid a hat-trick of humiliations at his hands.

Isle of Wight by numbers

3,775: The overall ascent (in feet) over the three races

5,000: The population of Ventnor

23: The official total distance, in miles, covered over the three races.

For more information on the south of England Fell Running Championships, visit www.rydeharriers.co.uk/fellinfo.htm



Both our men and women swept the team prizes (photo: Lars Olsen)

Walk this way

James Adams introduces us to a gentler type of endurance event: Long Distance Walking

Gordon Brown (Prime Minister at time of writing) has told us that we have to tighten our belts. Given that most runners are using the very first holes in their belts, I can only assume that for us specifically he means we should spend less money.

Marathon running can be expensive. The entry fees are going up all the time. You insist on buying shiny new trainers so that the photos (which also cost a bomb) will look good. You spend your pre-race evening in an overpriced Italian restaurant where they charge £2 "corkage" for tap water. You walk through the expo and insist that you need yet another long sleeved running top to add to your collection. Before you know it, you have dug a hole in your pension fund that you may regret in the extra years you are exercising yourself towards.

But it does not have to be this way. There is an alternative. It is one that will not require you to re-mortgage your house or sell one of your kidneys. And it is much closer than you might think.

The Long Distance Walkers Association (www.ldwa.org.uk) is a goldmine for challenging runs. Every single week there are events up and down the country which range from 10 to over 100 miles. Though primarily aimed at walkers they welcome runners to all their 'Challenge Events'.

So, with a recession looming and destitution a possibility, why not try one of these great runs? Here is how they differ from the type of marathons that you may be more familiar with:

Cost

A typical marathon costs £30 (not including the credit card payment fee), has to be paid online long before the event and is more often than not non-refundable or transferable. Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA) events usually cost less than £10 and you can pay on the day (with the spare change you have saved since you stopped going to Starbucks every morning). You'll make further savings on entry to events by becoming a member – the joining fee is £13 – as well as getting the pleasure of reading the LDWA magazine Strider three times a year.

Transport

You'll often have to get up in the dark and get a train to the middle of nowhere, but you'll find that trains are very cheap at 5.37am on a Sunday

'Route descriptions often force you to look up and take note of beautiful hill views and forests, and you'll often discover hidden treasures'



Why worry about times?

morning. There is also less time spent in airports so the temptation to buy needless electronics and perfume is less.

Expo

Marathon expos, just like Ikea and Selfridges, are cleverly designed so that you wander around in circles trying to find an exit that is not marked. By the time you finally exit you realise that you are carrying an electric skipping rope, 20 energy gels in a flavour you don't like and (yet another) innovative running top. LDWA events on the other hand have a small box of sew-on badges that you can buy for £2.

Food and drink

For your £30 in a marathon you get up to 12 cups of water or orange flavoured energy drink. If you are lucky you may get a gel or be able to snatch some sweets from small children along the course.

LDWA events often boast extensive menus. At various checkpoints along the course you can typically expect homemade cake, sausage rolls, cheese and pickle sandwiches, soup, hot drinks, crisps and juice. That's not including the bacon sandwiches, beans on toast and burgers that greet you at the finish line. If anything you are probably going to put weight on running marathons with the LDWA. No need to tighten that belt just yet.

Equipment

All you need are a pair of decent trail shoes and a rucksack to shove your rain jacket, compass, torch, food and phone in. And though you may take more stuff on an LDWA event than you would on a regular marathon, the chances are that you already own most of it and so really you are only justifying previous investments.

Distance

Marathons are run in miles which are usually displayed as you run so you can obsess about your split times and generally make yourself miserable. LDWA events, on the other hand, are actually run in paragraphs.

At the start of each event you will be given a few sides of A4 (plastic cover not included so remember to take one) with paragraphs of directions through the English countryside which become the equivalent of mile markers. Some are obviously longer than others and some might be made longer by poor navigation but that is part of the fun. You can mark your progress without having to look at your watch every 3 minutes. The last paragraph is a landmark, and by that point you can smell the bacon.

Time

Why worry about that sub-<insert desired time> <insert relevant distance> time? With LDWA events it's all about the enjoyment of doing something challenging in a beautiful environment. And there is no 'gun time' - you leave when you think is the best time for you to get around the course within daylight hours.

Another weight off your mind is that unfavourable comparisons between LDWA events of the same distance are not possible since each one is so different. Even comparing the same event over subsequent years isn't really worthwhile as many events change the course significantly from year to year.

Route

A standard marathon can be great for the first and last miles when you are actually running in the city of interest but the interim 24 miles are all too often on A roads or through dodgy industrial estates. Not that you really notice, since you are too busy looking at your watch.

LDWA events on the other hand take you on a journey through our very underrated countryside. Route descriptions often force you to look up and take note of beautiful hill views and forests, and you'll often discover hidden treasures such as castles and villages that you would never have noticed from running 26 miles on the road. You might even end up running further than the advertised distance but don't panic: the LDWA won't charge you extra for this.

Terrain

The undulating routes through the countryside of LDWA off-road runs provide an opportunity for great cross training and will reduce your chances of further injury. And by avoiding tarmac roads and opting for lots of grass and trail, you'll help to make your shoes last longer.

Atmosphere

It can be difficult to judge whether or not to talk to someone in a road marathon as you never know how they might respond. They may not be able to speak, or just be really annoyed by your chirpiness as you overtake.

This is not a problem in the countryside. Everyone is out there for a nice brisk stroll through the mud and is happy to talk all day (and all day is what you have). These events are great for small groups to run together for support, navigation assistance and general social interaction.

Thanks to Rob Westaway and Alan Hall for their input to this article.

Recommended events

Best for scenery: Punchbowl Marathon

Where & When: The Devil's Punchbowl, Surrey; early February

The Devil's Punchbowl is a naturally occurring crater that has been carved into the ground, leaving a residue of sand and trail. The event takes place around its rim and includes routes of 20 or 30 miles with some challenging hills and staircases but plenty of downhill stretches.

Best for running: Bath Beat

Where & When: Bath, Avon; April

This is a relatively flat 26.5 miles, making it the shortest ultramarathon in the world. Much of the route is alongside a canal and includes sections which are perfect for running. Some of the checkpoints along the route are unmanned and so you pick up notes from a pillar box or bench.

Best for atmosphere: Six Dales Circuit

Where & When: White Peak District; November

This beautiful route takes in the fantastic limestone scenery of the White Peak District where you'll enjoy the company of lively rivers and even livelier fellow runners. You run along deep rocky valleys and over the gentle pastoral sections that link them together. It may be a bit of a journey from London but is worth the effort. The food is good too (I recommend the Staffordshire oatcakes on checkpoint 2).

Best for food: Gatliff Marathon

Where & When: Edenbridge, Kent; late November

The Gatliff Marathon offers a choice of 20, 35 and 50km routes, which change each year, with varying degrees of difficulty. You are guaranteed to get muddy as much of it requires crossing grassy fields and a lot of stile climbing and gate opening is involved. The food alone at various checkpoints in this race makes all your effort worthwhile and you'd do well to not put on weight during this one.

Best for mud: Round Rotherham

Where & When: Rotherham, South Yorkshire; early December

This 50-mile orbit of Rotherham is very popular with first time ultra runners and the off road route includes plenty of hills to occupy you. Starting at 6.30am you'll experience the joy of running through a sunrise. The checkpoints are well stocked and the variety of people taking part also means this is a great race for making friends. Scenery is not always the best and you may end up running in a sewer for some of it but pound per mile it is amazing value.



As we approach spring marathon season, Andrew Hibbert gives a guide on how to...

Taper, Race, and Recover

After months of training targeted towards a goal endurance race, a few weeks can make or break the race. This time is when you capitalise on all of your training. The essential aim is to adapt to and recover from your training to reach the race in peak condition and to carry that conditioning into the next training cycle, when you prepare for your next goal.

Much of how you approach this phase will be very individual and so there are only a few fixed guidelines. Ideally everything I discuss below you will have thought about and experimented with during your training so that you will know what will work well for you. As you approach or run your big race it is not the time to try something new.

Tapering – getting the most out of your training

In the weeks before the taper, you were probably training at a level that you could only maintain for a few months. At the end of this your body will be tired and not in top race shape. A period of recovery is needed during which you heal, build up your energy and adapt to the level of training you were doing, leaving you in peak racing condition. This is all the goal of the taper.

Tapering will last 1-2 weeks before a half marathon or 2-4 weeks before a marathon. You should decrease the distance you are running in fairly even steps each week but maintain the types of training you were doing. This means you will still do a long run, race pace run or tempo run, at the same speed as you were before (not faster), but for a shorter distance. These sessions should hopefully feel relatively easy.

This effort will probably drop even more for the last week before a marathon, when you will do very little running or other exercise and conserve energy for the race. For example from a peak of 40 miles per week you might drop to 30, then 20, then 5 in the week before the race.

Final preparations for the race

Hopefully you will have been thinking about the race for a while and visualising the course. As you approach the day it is very useful to picture the course again and think about how you will feel at the different stages of the race.

I find a very useful tool for this is mapping software such as MapMyRun,

available online, to trace out the route and then import this to Google Earth. This allows you to fly around the route and helps you to remember what you should expect on the day.

As you think about what to expect don't forget to plan for things to change. How will you approach a wet, hot, or foggy day? What if you are late or the start is delayed? If you think about possible problems now they will have less effect on you on the day.

As you approach the end of the taper nutrition becomes very important. The key things you need are lots of carbohydrates and lots of water. The carbohydrate will fill your glycogen stores in your muscles and liver, which you will need during the race. Different foods suit different people, but pasta, rice and porridge are among the favourites. Especially during the last 24 hours, be aware of any foods you should avoid. In particular, dairy foods can lead to stomach problems in some people when racing, as can too much heavy food. Again, if you have experimented already you will know what works for you.

Race day

Your approach to this day is almost entirely your own choice. Everyone has different approaches to their preparations (quiet or sociable, maybe using music, discussing the race or almost anything else...), the warm up (which might be useful, if gentle, but might be skipped especially if there is a busy start), to the race itself (running by feel or relying on their watch, picking runners to stick with or staying on your own, energy gels or not...) and afterwards.

The best source of ideas and tricks people use on race day is to talk to other members of the club about what works for them. Again, your past races will be your best guide of what works for you.

Recovery, and the next cycle

Now what? You have trained for months to reach your target race and now it is finished. Hopefully it went well but either way your running focus for a long time has been and gone. At this stage I hope your goal will be to get back into running and start thinking about your next challenge. The training stages of base building, sharpening and taper/race/recovery are a cycle, so the next stage is base training again.

However, you should first recover from your race. A guideline for how long this takes is 1 day per mile raced, so 2 weeks after a half-marathon or a month after a marathon. During this time you can build up to your past base level of training (or less, if you choose) and ensure you are injury free.

During this recovery you can run, or not run, as you feel. If you are very tired from the race then pushing yourself to run will risk injury. A simple way to stay in touch with your running as you recover is to help the club, volunteering at club runs or marshalling at races. These activities and talking to your fellow volunteers will also help you to evaluate all that you have done in preparing for the race. What went well and badly? What could you improve next time? What would you like to be your next goal?

Through these questions of evaluation and goal-setting you are starting an important part of base building, and the cycle begins again. I wish the best of luck to all of you in chasing your goals.

Andrew is a UKA level 2 coach and coaches at Battersea on Thursdays. This article can also be found in the Advice section of the Serpentine website, which features articles from experienced coaches. Photo by Kieran Geaney.

Some like it Hot! (and some Not)



Andrew Reeves tells us when to use cryotherapy and when to use heat when treating sports injuries

A few weeks ago I carried out an ice massage on a triathlete who had just completed a “crash” training week, but yesterday I advised a distance runner to apply a heat pack to his calves before training. So when to use heat and when ice?

First, a caveat: if you are in any doubt as to the severity of, or how to treat, an injury, or there is a reason why you should not apply an ice pack (e.g. if you are a diabetic or have poor circulation) you should seek medical advice. The following are meant as general helpful hints only and not as an alternative to professional healthcare.

You hear a lot about the benefits of icing an injury – it’s the “I” in RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) – but you also hear about heat treatment and we all know how good a hot bath can feel after a hard day. But don’t top athletes and the England Rugby Team take ice baths? Hot baths AND cold baths! What is going on here – how can both be right?

Effect of Cold Treatment on Inflammation

Inflammation is a short-term process characterised by swelling, redness, pain, heat and loss of function. During acute injury capillaries are broken and begin to leak fluid (plasma and white blood cells) into surrounding tissue. Ice reduces inflammation by reducing both pain and swelling:

Pain: The area of treatment will first feel cold, then hurt/burn and then become numb – this will reduce/remove the pain temporarily. Icing should stop once this numbness is reached and further treatment should wait until the temperature of the area returns to normal.

Swelling: This is caused by the lymph system being locally overloaded by the additional fluid. Cold constricts the capillaries reducing this flow and decreasing the swelling.

The key knock-on impacts of the above are to reduce loss of function.

How to apply Cold Treatment

Cold should be applied using flexible ice-packs, bags of peas or as an ice massage using polystyrene cups filled with water and frozen.

The cold closes the tears in the capillaries but we do not want to reduce the flow of blood to the area via undamaged vessels, hence it is important not to over-ice. Treatment should be carried out:

- for 10-20 minutes per hour but stop when it becomes numb;
- repeatedly up to 3 or 4 times a day;
- until inflammation has stopped, which can be up to 3 days or sometimes even longer, especially after a marathon.

Severe over-icing can cause frostbite and caution is required in areas of low muscle bulk e.g. tendons, feet, hands. In these areas the pack should be wrapped in a thin towel and not applied directly to the skin.

Then what?

Once inflammation has stopped the healing process is best encouraged by heating an area. This has the following effects:

- Increasing blood flow to an area so bringing in tissue repair cells
- Relief / release of tightness / tension in a muscle
- Reducing joint stiffness
- May provide pain relief
- Increase in range of movement through flexibility

How to apply Heat Treatment

Heat is best applied using microwavable heat packs (often the same ones that can be frozen to apply the cold therapy). But there are a few points to note:

Water is a better conductor than air, so any heat pack should be used moist, for example by applying a wet towel to the injured area. This will allow the heat to penetrate deep into the muscle body.

Hot baths are good for all-over aches and pains, but it is better to treat a specific injury locally in order to allow the body to increase circulation just to this area of most need.

Again, just as with cold treatment, more is not better and excess heat will rekindle the inflammation and swelling process again, so apply for no more than 20 minutes at a time. If inflammation does re-occur switch back to cold therapy.

Acute vs Chronic Injuries

Ice should be used on sudden, painful injuries (including micro-tears caused by racing) and heat once symptoms cease. But if the injury becomes chronic and keeps re-occurring, for example an overuse injury (e.g. tendonitis, bursitis) then heat can be used in the symptom management, by warming up the area before a training session or race. This can help to pre-empt and reduce possible symptoms. Ice should still be used after the session until any symptoms die down.

Andy is a UKA level 2 coach, and he has an ITEC Diploma in Holistic Massage and a VTCT Diploma in Sports Massage. His website (www.AndrewReevesTherapies.co.uk) has a longer version of this article.

References: VTCT Diploma in Sports Massage, course notes; Claire McLoughlin; St Mary’s University College; Sports Injuries: Ice or Heat?; Dr Donald C DeFabio, DC, DACBSP, FACO; Treatment for Exercise & Sports Injuries; Melissa Conrad Stoeppler, MD; www.medicineNet.com; Should I Ice or Heat My Injury?; Elizabeth Quinn, www.About.com

Kathrine Switzer, Marathon Woman



Josie Perry talks to an inspirational marathon runner dedicated to equal running opportunities

The Olympics and the Marathon go hand in hand. Not only in the level of reverence that non-runners place upon them, but also in the way their histories are continually intertwined. Or perhaps that should be the men's Marathon. For actually, before the Los Angeles 1984 Olympics, women weren't allowed to run the Olympic Marathon.

And only 17 years before that they weren't allowed to run any Marathons. The perceived wisdom of the day being their uteruses would fall out if they ran that far! But one woman, Kathrine Switzer, won her place in history by becoming the first woman to officially finish a marathon and has since dedicated much of her life to creating opportunities and equal status sport for women. Switzer, who recently met a group of Serpies at a marathon, agreed to give an exclusive interview to Serpentine.

Switzer wants to be remembered for her success at getting the women's Marathon into the Olympics, but she should also be remembered as a pioneering runner. In 1967 she inadvertently challenged the all-male tradition of the Boston Marathon by entering the race using her initials. This concealed her sex and it wasn't until the race started that an official realised and tried to wrestle her to the ground. She survived the fracas and her stubbornness forced her to finish. She came in with a time of 4:20 – and the honour of being the first woman to officially enter and finish the event.

Switzer describes running as her secret weapon. "It gives a huge sense of personal accomplishment and power that we can do much more than we ever imagined. You need to feel this, to do it to get that feeling. You can't just 'visualize' it. I also think it needs to be physical; when you do it physically you can then translate that in to everything else – work, book writing, changing jobs, starting a business, taking more risk."

This secret weapon led her to notch up 35 marathons during her running career including a win at the 1974 New York City Marathon. She ran her PB of 2:51.33 finishing 2nd in the 1975 Boston Marathon.

For most of us a win at New York would be a memory of a lifetime, but Switzer says "my best race was actually a 2nd place, my biggest win was one of my worst times, and my most famous was getting attacked mid-stride."

Her hardest race was the 1974 New York City marathon – the race she won. "It was like being in a living hell. I'm not sure I really ever recovered from it." Despite that she doesn't even know where the trophies are. "I give most of them away to kids or clubs to recycle. The Boston trophies are in the national distance running hall of fame in Utica, New York. I don't know where my New York ones are, they are so ugly I think they are in a box in the basement."



Serpies Rachel Whittaker and Chris Saunders meet Kathrine

Her favourite session when she was in training for a marathon was a Sunday long run. "I could just escape and dream." Her favourite in terms of getting her results was a "20x400 with a lap jog, endless, awful; I hated it, but loved the results." Her hardest a "repeat 2 miles on the track, about 5 or 6 of them, endless." When she ran her 2:51 she was running "110 miles a week, 2 times a day with a long run on Sunday of 20-22 miles."

Despite the 2:51 marathon, in a time when training techniques, technical sportswear and nutrition were in their infancy, Switzer claims she does not have any natural talent for running. She puts her achievements down to hard work rather than running ability. "I still believe I am not exceptionally talented either mentally or physically. But I am endowed with whatever genes or survival instincts, brought on by generations of hard working people or whatever, to work very hard. When I became a good runner, I thought almost anyone could do this if they are willing to work, but the amazing thing was that it also worked mentally. I never thought I was very smart, but I sure got a lot of things done and have good ideas. Part of that is the confidence of previous success; you know, you just build on success."

She puts her success down to the miles she ran and thinks that some runners today can be too pampered with lots of equipment. "It's a matter of what takes time. Running takes time. Email is a big time waster too. We got a lot of running done in those days because we had more time. Email and cell phones demand instant attention and you have to harden yourself not to do them."

Even today, at 62, Switzer still loves running. "I am still running. Not many people can run for 45 years. So obviously I have some strong muscles and bones there. I have never had a major injury, and that is a gift, and it is also because I cannot go fast so I avoid injuries a lot."

In fact she still does up to six run sessions a week – three of those being long runs. And she hasn't put marathon's completely behind her. "I have eventually a dream of maybe running a full marathon again, off road, over the mountains here in NZ. Still a long way to go, though." But in January

she flew from New Zealand (where she lives) to Bermuda for the Bermuda triangle challenge – 3 races in 3 days (mile on Friday, 10k on Saturday and half marathon on Sunday). And last year, after 45 years of running, she won her first prize money in this event – becoming a professional athlete at 61.

She also loves watching runners, her favourite athletes being "a toss up between Paula Radcliffe, Catherine Ndereba and Tegla Loroupe. Tegla as the innovator in Africa who overcame incredible odds to succeed. Catherine as arguably the best of all time in terms of her consistency and longevity. And Paula on sheer talent and hard work, having come up through years of youth running to dominate so brilliantly. How Catherine and Paula balance children in this equation is mind-blowing. And they are all very, very nice and very, very intelligent."

The running-related ambitions haven't stalled either. She'd like to write a book to inspire young female runners and has an idea about a Bull Durham style movie based in the world of running.

But rather than be remembered as a runner, Switzer says she wants to be known as the woman who led the drive to get the event into the Olympics. "In many ways, the first Boston was something that happened to me, not something I did. I was just lucky to be inspired by the negativity of it to create positive things, and eventually the Olympics was one of those very positive things."

'My best race was actually a 2nd place, my biggest win was one of my worst times, and my most famous was getting attacked mid-stride'

While Switzer opened the door to running for many women she believes there are still many restrictions for women. "To women in the Mid-east and Africa, everything is restricted. To poor women everywhere, much is restricted. Speaking globally, we've made huge strides but there is a long way to go. This is the only time I wish I were younger as I'd set out to make some more changes in those areas. Since I'm not up to it physically to do this I will continue writing."

Switzer also loves sport "with the exception of auto racing and now American gridiron football." But she seems to have a rather unlikely taste in football clubs – a result of her husband "converting me to be an Aston Villa fan."

And she's also been tempted by triathlon, but just a short one. "I would have been a good triathlete in my 'prime' as my girlfriend and I just for fun would swim a mile a day when I was 15 and thought nothing of it. But it will be a very big learning curve, I don't even know how to change gears on a bicycle!" She's also not run an ultra-marathon yet – but doesn't say never.

So, if Paula fulfils her dreams and is on the start-line in 2012, and you find yourself screaming with excitement at your TV, remember it was Switzer that made it possible. And if you spot a 60-65 year old American with a Kiwi accent at the World Age Group Triathlon Championships, then you'll know Switzer also made that happen – and has learnt to change gears along the way!

Peak District Weekend

Helen Usborne still can't get the sheep dung stains out of her jeans

But don't let that put you off. The Peak District fell running weekend was a good'n and one that I would recommend for those seeking a gentle introduction to fell running (even if you have to invest in post-race stain remover). It was a wonderful weekend, made by both the Serpie camaraderie and the friendliness of the race organisers.

We pulled up late on a Friday evening in the picturesque village of Castleton. At the time we didn't know it was picturesque as it was dark, but it became evident 12 hours later that we'd arrived at one of England's gems. Castleton is set on a hillside with 11th Century Peveril Castle towering above it. The views over Derbyshire countryside are stunning.

We didn't make the best impression on the locals by arriving late and ringing on the wrong doorbell but we eventually tracked down where we were supposed to be staying. It wasn't long before we hit the sack.

The following morning John Cullinane (who coordinated the weekend) led a run into the hills. We took a lovely route up the valley and across the ridge before braving our downhill running skills down a steep slope with a following wind hastening our trail. 'Let yourself go'. What's that all about? Shoe confidence has a lot to do with it. Not everything. Downhill running is something I've yet to master (hence the laundry issue).

In the afternoon we headed to the hills yet again. This time at a slower pace. A dozen of us strolled out to a reservoir (talk of swimming dried up as soon as the clouds rolled in) and back. Via a teasop, of course. Later on, in the interest of pre-race carb loading, we headed to the local pub for dinner. The local brew went down, but I'm not sure how well...

Sunday hailed the Peak Forest Fell Race, which the organisers kindly postponed for ten minutes after our minibus broke down, leaving three car drivers shuttling Serpies from Castleton to the start. The route was lovely. It was up and down, involved stiles, gates, a treacherous strand of barbed wire and other obstacles and negotiating your way around livestock. Comparable to the Tower 12 but with more trees and less concrete. I would have gone up for the post-race cake alone.



Peak performance: Lars Olsen, Lisa Pettit, Rachel Whittaker, Dave Simpson & Mark Braley reach another summit

What I talk about when I talk about running



Lula Rosso reviews a book by Haruki Murakami and relates it to her own running experience

Haruki Murakami is such an interesting author that when I found out that he was also a long distance runner and had written this little book on running, I had to buy it immediately. I was not disappointed. It is a charming, insightful, poignant, deeply personal and honest collection of stories on how running influenced his life and vice versa. It will naturally trigger an avalanche of thoughts, memories and personal reflections in every runner, and this is what prompted me to write this article and share mine.

As a runner, like all of us amateurs, Mr Murakami takes himself both extremely seriously and not seriously at all. Characteristically obsessing on mileage, training strategies, detailed race replays, he intersperses his book with humour and beautiful reflections on running, life, marriage, work and growing older.

He started running in his thirties for the reasons most of us would recognise. First for a desire to keep fit at an age where you actually need to make an effort at it, then for the mental benefits, the sense of achievement after a challenge and, last but not least, as a socially accepted way to be a loner and spend time by yourself, free and far from everything. In just a short time, running became part of his life and part of the training he felt he needed to cope with his job as a writer. After all, focus and endurance are personality traits that can be developed as any technical skill and he analyses meticulously how his running trained him for writing, and how these two aspects of his life are now totally interdependent.

'It is a charming, insightful, poignant, deeply personal and honest collection of stories on how running influenced his life and vice versa'

His quirky sense of humour is immediately evident. In one chapter, he is only half jokingly irritated by being overtaken by young American girls with long legs and ponytails. He wonders how it would feel to run like them, with fast strong strides instead of the low shuffle of the long distance runner, only to conclude regretfully that "even if I had a long ponytail back then, I doubt it would have swung so proudly"!

Another hilarious moment comes when he almost had to stop during a race, where he describes how he imagined every hurting part of his body as an angry member of the French Revolutionary Tribunal pounding on tables and shouting at each other and himself trying to convince them just to cooperate and not send him to the guillotine. I look forward to trying that in a race.

I could also relate to a very funny episode, when he writes that in the exhaustion of a race that started badly and continued worse, negative thoughts became so overpowering and all-encompassing that he got worried his wife was going to leave him after learning some terrible secret about him and suddenly believing there were some! Doesn't it ring true?

The most intimate and insightful pages of the book are about coping with the "runner's blues". Running has such a beneficial influence on the body, mind and life in general that only rarely books and articles talk about possible negative effects. I don't mean anything too serious or clinical. However, there are times when running is less of a positive, esteem and adrenaline boosting activity and more of a source of frustration which in turn may lead to a slump.

For Murakami, he thinks it all started when he experienced something that I can only describe as one of the mystical experiences that may happen in long distance running. During his first ultra marathon, after hours of extreme pain and feeling at the very end of his rope, suddenly and without conscious thoughts triggering this change, he felt "passing through something physical", entering a calm state of void, at once feeling able to run effortlessly and continuing strong for the remaining fifteen miles.

After that, he says, even though he was feeling proud and relieved to have met the challenge, he has been unable to enjoy racing (and, for a long while, the act of running itself) with any of the former passion and satisfaction, even if he kept on marathon training for the next 10 years almost every day. Was it because ageing made it increasingly difficult to run at the same pace? Was it then just hurt pride and inability to accept realistic goals? Was it exhaustion? Physical exhaustion after a tremendous effort or psychological exhaustion in the sense that there were no other goals that would give him a comparable rush and satisfaction? Or was it something that happened at a very deep level, that mystical experience, after which nothing could be the same?

I only know I also have been not able to feel good about running for months, after a similar experience in my first marathon, although everything went well and I was relatively prepared for the pain.

Obviously many different factors may trigger the "runner's blues". Most running manuals would suggest it is product of exhaustion or overtraining and advice decreasing mileage and intensity. But this seems reductive sometimes. When confused or lost, we all (or at least Haruki and I) turn to coaches and professional athletes, hoping they will give us some clues on how to understand our bodies and minds more deeply. I have been very fortunate to have had access to fantastic guidance, inspiration and encouragement in my brief time as a runner. I will never forget hearing Francesco Panetta (the 1987 World Steeplechase champion), a larger than life athlete by any standards, saying that training is the only thing he misses of his professional running life, and, if he could, he would choose to relive some training sessions performed in a state of grace, 100 times over any of the races he won.

Concentrating only on the experience of running, rather than any other external factors, is what I used to get over my runner's blues, as if only today's training session exists. It may not be perfect, but it is in the bag and tomorrow is another day. Murakami concludes the book with a similar philosophy and this, I believe, fundamentally divides those who run a given race as a one-off challenge and those who continue in this seemingly pointless activity because of the emotions and personal growth that running gives indirect access to.

'Concentrating only on the experience of running, rather than any other external factors, is what I used to get over my runner's blues'

But exactly how can we keep up morale when it becomes physiologically impossible to improve on the times? Murakami doesn't present an answer, and up to now he still does not feel good about his running races. He never talks about age grading so I assume he doesn't find it equally motivating or it is not that popular in Japan. However, the book does not end on a negative note at all, as he has not lost hope that something will change one day and running is still a source of happiness and a fundamental part of who he is.

In addition, as running was not providing the extra reward he was used to, he went on trying different sports (a very common and positive reaction for runners losing motivation), choosing squash for its immediate energy and stress relief and then triathlons.

A long chapter is dedicated to triathlons, a sport (you will have noticed) that can be practised alone and where still you have only your time to beat. Running performance is due to natural talent and that ever escaping magical balancing act between pushing your limits without overdoing it. In triathlons, he explains clearly how exciting it is to improve with

experience, which is so much more concrete and accessible, by improving the equipment and your confidence with it, or learning how to manage better the technical aspects of each single discipline and their combination. It is reassuring to read how he describes the discomfort and sheer terror he feels when strapped on a flimsy bike on steep wet downhill (my fear as well which I rarely confess openly) or the challenges of swimming in the notorious first metres of the open water leg.

At the end however the most touching parts of the book are the ones dedicated to other runners. There is a social aspect in racing that should not be underestimated. Coming back from a race, who does not feel proud of having been there and shared that experience with so many fellow human beings?

'Without all of you, I would not have kept on running'

Running is a solitary enterprise that may take you where you have the courage to go, but a smile from a passing runner, the instant fellowship that you feel for people engaging themselves completely like you are, is enough to brighten up a whole day. I feel that this pleasure is what makes us gravitate around clubs, and surely is the reason why I wanted to join one. For the open, generous, understanding, supporting smiles of fellow runners. As Murakami says, "Without all of you, I would not have kept on running".



Sarah Knox, winner of the Serpie Ladies Vets cross country season rankings 2008-09 (photo: Ian Hodge)



Val Metcalf, winner of the 2008-09 Serpie Ladies cross country rankings and the Ladies Cross Country trophy (photo: Ian Hodge)

American Road Odyssey

Steve Haynes talks to a former ninja turtle about an epic running journey

With London just around the corner, many of us are naturally thinking about running a single marathon, so for those of you in training, imagine running one marathon every day for a whole year!

Matt Hill and his partner Stephanie have taken a year off work to do just that, running over 11,500 miles together in a circular tour of the whole continent of North America. Serpentimes's Steve Haynes recently spoke with Matt the day they arrived in El Paso, Texas, to find out more about this incredible adventure.

So how did it come about?

"When Steph and I got together and started running regularly we talked a lot about how lucky we are in our lives. This run resulted from one of those organic processes – we both love to run and we are both committed to environmental issues."

The idea then came to them that they could use their love of running as a way to challenge themselves physically and also encourage kids around the US and Canada to think more about their environment. At the end of almost every day's running they arrive in a new city and as guests of local elementary schools, talk about simple steps everyone can take to help the environment – from turning lights off to recycling.

"We are trying to encourage, through our millions of steps, everyone we meet to take just one new step or action for the health of our planet. We concentrate on people taking just one action of their choice and doing it exceptionally well - one step is simple and very achievable for everyone."

'We are trying to encourage, through our millions of steps, everyone we meet to take just one new step or action for the health of our planet'

Matt has a unique gift that helps the pair in getting the message across to the kids – his day job is as an actor and cartoon voice artist. He is the voice of "Ed" in the top children's cartoon "Ed, Edd and Eddie" although those of us a little older will probably have heard him as the voice of Raphael in the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles series. "When Steph introduces 'Ed' and I do the voice all the kids want to be selected to come to the front of the class", Matt laughs.

When they arrive at the schools the kids are already prepared for them, in many cases having been working on school projects to follow the couple's progress on a map and have thought about what they can do in their day to day lives to help the environment.

"At the kids' request many schools have now started recycling and composting programmes as well as reducing their use of plastic bags and so on."

When we chatted, they were already 7,500 miles through the challenge



Step changes: Steph and Matt hope to help the environment

(which began last May). We were interested to know how they managed to complete so many miles, day after day?

"We need to ensure that every day we have enough energy left in the gas tank from the day before, we try to keep the lactic acid from forming, keeping the heart rate down below 125 most of the day. We have a 50% vegetarian diet supplemented with quality organic meat based protein - we tell the kids 'don't try this diet at home' though, as we need to pack in between 3-4000 calories a day to sustain the constant pace."

So what happens when they complete their epic adventure?

"We will have the biggest cold beer and blizzard [a type of ice cream] ever!", Matt joked, but more seriously continued, "We have formed a partnership with the Vancouver Foundation to create a fund called The Legacy of Action for kids. Kids will be able to apply to the Legacy for 'seed' money sponsorship to make their very own 'green dream' ideas become reality."

Matt is a marathon veteran and completed several Ironman seasons, whereas Steph is stepping up from previously being a 10k specialist. Theirs is an epic and ambitious journey and demonstrates the very truth in the message they also inspire in others; "don't be afraid to have a dream and act on it."

By the time you read this they will have turned the corner in Texas and as Matt laughed, "made the run for the border", passing through California and back to finish in Vancouver in a couple of months time.

They may not have the fame or marketing of '50 in 50 ultra-marathon man' Dean Karnazes, but the scale of their journey is much larger, and only matched by the inspiration they will leave behind in a generation of kids.

To find out more and follow their progress check out www.runforoneplanet.com. To hear Serpentine's Steve Haynes and his running friends talking with Matt, see Episode 16 of the Runners Roundtable at www.runnersroundtable.com. Steve also talks about his running life on his free weekly podcast "A Mile with Me" at www.amilewith.me.uk.

Track & Field

As cross country season draws to a close, we whet your appetite for the track & field season with a look back at the highlights of Summer 2008. Andrew Reeves tells the men's story

A Serpie...

Sprinting 100m in 11s? You must be joking!

Clearing 2m High Jump? Pull the other one!

Throwing 45m in the Javelin? Whatever!

Running 2:02 for 800m? OK, I'll buy that...

It is a little known fact that some of the Club's best athletes are not marathon runners, IronMen or 5km specialists, but a small group of sprinters and field-eventers that call Serpentine home for the summer. It won't surprise many of you that we perform well in the middle distance races at our T&F matches, but it will be quite an eye opener to hear that we regularly win the 100m, 200m, 400m as well as Triple Jump (TJ), High Jump (HJ) and Javelin. Captain and club stalwart Robin Kindersley has been in the team since 1990 when it was in Division 7! But since promotion to Division 1 in 2005, we have suffered by not having a regular, committed core of middle distance runners so the team usually ended the season languishing in the bottom half of the division. This despite the encouragement (as well as participation) of one Danny McIntosh who has been in the team since its Division 6 days in 1994.

However, in 2008 there was a complete root and branch restructuring of the whole Athletics outlook at Serpentine. In came JT Wong as Squad Manager, to co-ordinate the Division 1, 3, 4 and Rosenheim teams. Unlike previous years, a top-down approach was taken so the Division 1 team slots would be filled before filling the Division 3 team, with the Division 4 team coming last - even if it meant Division 4 had only 3 competitors, as was sometimes the case!

One key element of this strategy was to encourage the top middle distance athletes in the club to step up to Division 1 from the Division 3 standard that they had been used to in previous seasons - way beyond their comfort zones (or so they thought...). So, while the captain's role in the other divisions remained the same, it was decided to bring in a co-captain to support Robin in merging the old and the new, in order to forge a fully functioning team. A kind of thesis meets antithesis to create synthesis. So - lucky old me!

Match 1

Match 1 was held at Battersea. It soon became clear that there was work to be done gelling the team and, more immediately, making sure all the team had renewed their Serpentine membership! Before the 400m hurdles, recognition was given to Neil Tunstall for his recent World Masters Silver medal, although on this day he could only manage 3rd



High times: Andy Reeves demonstrates how to clear the high jump at the Serpentine decathlon (photos: Rachel Whittaker)

place against the young whippersnappers, in 59.70s. On the track we had no victories at all, but a double 2nd place in the steeplechase for Andrew Reeves and Ebrima Noble. We did better in the field with a win in the javelin for Keston Thomas and six 2nd places. Among these were pole vaulters Jasyn Savage and newcomer Angus Beaumont, both gaining 2nd places in the A and the B string competition. Overall we came 3rd out of five teams.

Match 2

Our 2nd match was far away in deepest darkest Portsmouth and unfortunately clashed with the Green Belt Relay, leaving our team severely depleted. Luckily Robin came out of retirement picking up valuable points in the 1500m and 5000m and Alessandro Brandimarti stepped up from the 4th Division to fill the slots in two track and two field events. Despite wins for Keston in Javelin and LJ, Myro Rush in HJ, Sheldon Noel in 400m, and Dixon Courtney in LJ, TJ and HJ, we finished in last place.

Match 3

With the full squad back in business we returned to Battersea with high expectations. Neil kicked off proceedings with a victory in the 400m Hurdles, followed quickly by another win in the 100m courtesy of Leslie

2008 T&F Awards

Southern Men's League

Robin Kindersley Trophy (Div 1) - Dixon Courtney & Keston Thomas

Tony McGahan Trophy (Div 2) - James Nelson

David Lipscomb Trophy (Div 3) - Tony McGahan

Southern Women's League

Ladies' T&F Trophy - Jennifer Marzullo

Vet's Leagues

Derek Paterson Trophy (Men) - Cliff Hide

Jan Farmer Trophy (Women) - Pam Rutherford

Rosenheim League

Lars Menken Trophy - Monica Kiraly

Serpentine Decathlon Winners

Jun (JT) Wong & Pam Rutherford

Frederick - 10.90s! We also did well in HJ with a double win by Dixon (1.95m, with only his loose number clipping the bar preventing it being 2m) and Myro, and good results in the hammer and TJ, but struggled in the track disciplines. We ended the match in 3rd place, but it was notable for being former Chairman John Walker's final match as a track starter. An announcement was made and John received some well-earned applause.

Match 4

Match 4 was held in Abingdon and began in utter chaos. A new event schedule meant all events were starting an hour earlier and we were not prepared. The first track events were called at 12:30, just 5 mins after the first 3 Serpie athletes arrived with the main contingent still en-route. Fortunately Ebrima Noble, Richard Phillips and Andrew Reeves managed to fill all the slots for the 400m Hurdles and the 100m until the rest of the team arrived. Jasyn gave a good account of himself in the technically challenging events of Discus, Hammer, PV, shot and 110mH (spot the decathlete!) and there were wins for Andrew in 110m Hurdles, and Leslie in 400m. The 1500m was one of the best races of the season – Nick Torry stretched the pack from the beginning then Richard Phillips took on the mantle and picked up the pace. Then on the last lap Nick showed his tactical judgement by outprinting them both to the line in 4:20! After further wins in the 5000m we had won the match! We didn't get confirmation of the victory until we arrived at the pub, where we shared the celebrations with a equally victorious Women's Team.

Match 5

The 5th outing saw us at Windsor. There were wins for Andrew in the

400m Hurdles and 3000m Steeplechase, Hugh Torry and Richard in the 800m and Nick in the 5000m with a sensational 15:27.60. These were supported by wins in the jumping events by Sheldon, Dixon, and Keston. However, with some key field-eventers and sprinters missing we were unable to pull off another win and finished in 2nd place.

Match 6

Our final meeting was all the way down south in Yeovil, but despite this, Serpie turnout was excellent with a full complement of the old-guard via mini-bus. However, from the new-guard, we were missing Nick, Ebrima and perhaps even more notably Jasyn, our Pole Vault and Throws specialist. Plus we were up against the top 2 clubs in the whole league so every point was going to be hard fought anyway. In fact, we were only able to secure two outright wins in the whole day, with Leslie clocking 11:03s in the 100m and Dixon clearing 1.90m in the HJ. However, there was some good news with Hugh finally able to try the 3000m SC - earning a 2nd place into the bargain. In the end we came 4th, a disappointing ending to a good season. The final standings saw us finish in the top half of Division 1, 11th out of 25 teams.

What's in store for 2009?

The Division 1 team is set to build on last year's successes and with some new blood, some re-energising and a lot of hard training "things can only get better" (cue: spotlights, music and dancers...). Serpentine competes in the Southern Men's League which stretches from Norfolk to Cornwall and all 1st claim club members are eligible to compete. Whatever level you are, from never having thrown a discus to being able to pole vault 3m there is a place for you!



Jen Marzullo resists the temptation to give Monica Kiraly a little pat to send her on her way (photo: Rachel Whittaker)

The Ladies' team

Pam Rutherford reflects on a summer of spikes, sun, snacks, and Serpie ladies in the Southern Women's League

In 2008 a crack commando team of female athletes were committed to trekking to tracks all over and occasionally beyond London to compete in sports they didn't always fully understand. They survived as athletes of fortune. If you have something you need throwing, jumping over, or running after, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire (or join) the 'L' team...

OK, so in appearance our 'L' team may have resembled more hen party in spikes rather than Hannibal, Face or BA Baracus but the 2008 women's track and field season did bring back some memories from the 1980s. Think Zola Budd in shoes and possibly a fraction slower. Mainly it was a mixture of some great performances and huge fun.

The 2008 season was also special because it was the first time for over a decade that Serpentine has competed in the Southern Women's League (SWL) since until last year the women's league was only open to clubs with a junior division. Rachel Whittaker did a fantastic job of captaining the team, getting everyone out there and encouraging anyone who wanted to try their hand at any event.. We had a fantastic team throughout the summer, many people came along to all the fixtures but it was also fine to come to as many or as few as you liked.

Season highlights

There were some fabulous performances with many of the team repeatedly setting new PBs as the season progressed. Highlights include club records broken by Alex Openshaw in both the 400m and 100m hurdles events, and some consistently excellent performances in the 1500m by Monica Kiraly, and the 3000m by Marielle Vestlund, culminating in the most exciting and closely fought race of the season in the final match at Dagenham. Marielle and Penny Thorn battled it out to the finish with Penny just pipping Marielle by 0.2s, with season bests for both of them.

Aside from the actual events, a few other highlights that spring to mind were: glorious sunshine, a range of off-track crossword activities, good snacks, sunbathing opportunities, brilliant team spirit, post match socialising, and some great support from the many men who came to officiate and support (observing the talented female athletes competing was just an added bonus!).

So what's the appeal?

If the snacks, viewing, and sunbathing opportunities haven't piqued your interest, imagine this: A race that lasts more than a minute but less than 2. Sprinting as hard as you can to then jump as far as you can into a big pile of sand. Or pushing yourself to the limit around the track for distances from 100m to 3000m. Its nerve wracking, public, but exhilarating, a great chance to test your limits and very rewarding individually but also being part of a big team.

The standard is extremely varied and we welcome anyone who wants to try it out. T&F is a really good opportunity to do stuff that you might



Pam ain't gettin' on no plane to clear the 100m hurdles
(photo: Alessandro Brandimarti)

otherwise not get the chance to do. Tracey Reay was mildly persuaded to take part in the high jump at the Serpentine Decathlon in August only to equal the 4 year old club record of 1.35m. If it hadn't been raining I'm sure she'd have quite easily smashed it!

Naturally as a running club we are better at the track events, but the field also offers a wealth of chances to uncover hidden talents (or just occasionally make a slight fool of yourself in good company - I'm remembering barely throwing the hammer out of the cage while our competitors were hurling it 50 metres beyond). Its quite impressive to watch (and hear!) the Division 1 women who are really good at some of the field events

It's not just the young women who are good either, the Vet's track and field team for over 35s is a great opportunity to compete against your peers and there are some seriously talented people competing. At one of the meetings in Strawberry Hill we watched a high jumper from another club clear 1.70 metres.

Team spirit

Team spirit was a huge part of the fun of T&F. A lot like Cross Country where everyone - men's and women's teams - come out to celebrate afterwards. Everyone got to take part in lots of events but one that sticks in my mind was a very closely fought match at Parliament Hill where we fiedled our biggest team of the season. Caroline Ringrow fell badly in the hurdles but despite the pain picked herself up to finish the race and gain us vital points. Just goes to show that you don't have to win events to score for the team!

After some varied results in the individual matches - first, last and everything in between - partly due to the wide range of abilities in the new league, we finished the season mid-table out of 16 teams. We'll be staying in Division 2 next year but with the best teams moving up to Division 1 we should come up against clubs more closely matched to us in ability and we can aim to finish higher up the table in 2009. We would love to have more women come along and join the team!

Finally a very big thanks go to everyone who made it all possible not least Malcolm French, John Cullinane, Charles Lescott, JT Wong, and others who came out regularly to help.

National Road Relays

Martin Gaunt

The National Road Relays are held each October and represent the very pinnacle of road running in England. Or, at least, that is the gist of what Ian Hodge tells us each year. In reality, it is a nice day out in Sutton Coldfield (pardon the contradiction), a chance to mix it with some pretty handy runners, and the opportunity to further Serpentine's inexorable if not meteoric rise up the athletics rankings.

Successful performances in the Southern Road Relays saw Serpentine qualify for the 2008 Nationals with two women's teams and a men's team.

So we headed north by train and, as is becoming traditional, lost a Torry en route (the best way to beat Nick Torry these days is to make sure he doesn't make the start line, but this was hardly our intention in a team race). With brother Hugh dispatched to find him and the once close-knit team spread along the national rail network, it was a relief finally to be reunited in time for the start.

The girls kicked things off, with Claire Imrie for the 'A' team and Louise Croxson for the 'Bs' the first to try the winding 4.3km course, which included a tough slog uphill in the first half. In a highly competitive first leg, Claire ran close to 17 minutes, a feat matched by later teammates Amy Balchin on leg 3 and Louisa Ruderman on the anchor leg. It was on the

second stage that Serpentine made the most ground however, with debutant Jenny Lundgren running the fastest time of all the Serpie girls to gain 21 places.

The 'A' team finished in 36th place overall (or 30th best club in England – six 'B' teams were amongst those ahead), which was a highly satisfactory performance... but one which leaves room for improvement in 2009. Serpentine are rightly renowned for their strength in depth, and strong runs from Marielle Vestlund, Lisa Pettit and Penny Thorn saw the 'B' team home in 57th place.

Swiftly on the heels of the girls, the guys set off looking to go under 2 hours for the first time on the 6 x 5.9km course. Nick was first to go, the thinking being to use him early, lest we lose him again (upon such practical considerations are Serpie tactics unfortunately based). In fact, Nick ran the fastest time of all the Serpie men, and was unwittingly rewarded with an action photo that landed up in the Ronhill 2009 calendar.

Taking over from Mr August on leg 2 was not Mr September, but the apparently less photogenic Richard Phillips. Still, consistent performances from him, Hugh Torry, Andy Robbins, and yours truly, saw Serpentine hold down a mid 40s placing going into the final leg.

Skipper Andy Reeves anchored the team home, gaining five places to achieve 42nd place overall (or the 35th 'A' team) in a time of 1:56:47. Mission accomplished, although a few more laps of Hyde Park are necessary if we are going to challenge winners Belgrave next year.

Ladies' Tri Squad

Katie Crowe

The Serpie Ladies' Tri Squad was formed by Beate Vogt and I in 2007 to provide a unique environment within the club for novice female triathletes to train with like-minded others. We are now on to our third squad (we have a new intake every November) and we have the addition of Jenny Gowans to our coaching team.

The format is simple. We take on athletes who are relatively new to the sport (perhaps having completed a few sprints and wanting to step up to Olympic distance, or have done one Olympic distance race and want to improve their time), usually finishing around the 1.5 hr mark for a sprint or 3 hr mark for Olympic.

We meet once a week to train – this might be at one of the current Serpentine sessions or we set up our own session (brick sessions, swimming, bike handling, core stability etc). We often meet after the session to discuss elements of the sport such as training plans, logs, and goal setting, or we enlist the help of external speakers (nutritionists, sports psychologists, physios etc). The idea is that we provide the athletes with a portfolio of information to help them train mentally and physically to hit their race goals.

In previous years we have had a range of abilities – some went on to compete at the European and World champs, while some successfully completed their first Olympic



In height order? The Womens' team: (L-R) Penny, Marielle, Lisa, Amy, Louisa, Louise, Jenny, and Claire (photo: Ian Hodge)



Calendar boys: (L-R) Hugh, Nick, Andy, Martin, Richard, Andy, and Hugh



Art of the matter: Martin Gaunt hotfoots it through the Tate Britain

distance races. Every result is gratifying to the coaches as it shows the athletes pushing themselves to their full potential.

This year we have an equally diverse mix of talent. The key thing that drives each of our athletes is their determination to improve on their triathlon experience. It is the ability to work together as a group and motivate each other in a non-competitive environment that makes the tri squad successful. We have just returned from a training weekend in Kent where everyone made vast improvements in terms of confidence, skill and knowledge to take them forwards into the next stage of their training. Beate, Jenny and I will be with them every step of the way.

The tri squad opens its doors to new athletes later in the year – keep an eye on the mailing list for further information.



Serpie ladies become proficient at cycling

Modern art movement

Jolyon Attwooll

Serpentine member Martin Gaunt repeatedly got his kicks by running full pelt down the normally hushed, hallowed halls of the Tate Britain gallery in Pimlico last year.

He was not acting on a strange urge to unsettle London's culture-goers, however, but participating legitimately in an art installation set up by Martin Creed, the Turner Prize-winning artist. Starting in July, Work No. 850 involved a runner bursting at full speed down the neo-classical main hall of the gallery every 30 seconds, reflecting its creator's own love of running and movement.

Martin participated from the beginning and had the opportunity to rub shoulders with athletics greats who were inspired by the installation to come along and run. Lord Sebastian Coe, Dame Kelly Holmes, Marlon Devonish and Jonathan Edwards ("who literally bounded down the gallery – he must have done it in half the number of steps of everyone else – incredible spring," Martin recalled) all took an active part in the work.

However, the honour of sprinting the final length of the hall before curators drew the installation to a close on November 16 went to Martin.

Earlier in the day, the then 25-year-old Serpie had participated in the St. Neots half-marathon. After he clocked 1.14 and helped Serpentine to retain the team prize, he loyally traipsed back to the Tate Britain to complete his final shift.

"The prospect of four hours' sprinting through the gallery was daunting to say the least," Martin said.

"It was a long day but it was a glorious conclusion to the Tate Britain project – it was really a great honour.

"My legs were sore but it was all worthwhile."

Tutu can play at that game

Jolyon Attwooll

A sextet of tutu-toting runners – including two Serpies – sent ripples through the normally genteel surrounds of Henley-on-Thames when they flashed their crimson dancing attire through the streets last autumn.

The Oxfordshire town, usually associated with the Henley Royal Regatta, was swamped by the unusually dressed Serpies when they participated in the Henley half-marathon in October.

It was Serpentine runner Susan Kennedy who started the tutu trend. Competing in the London Marathon last year, she kept to the race's spirit of fancy dress by weaving through the capital's famous course in a tutu. When she and five others were preparing for the Henley half, they decided to don the same style to celebrate the birthday of Sian Griffiths, one of the runners taking part.

Visitors to Primrose Hill had a sneak preview when the six Serpentine ladies participated in a Saturday hills session, with coach Gowan Clews donning a matching pair of red shorts.

Susan, meanwhile, insisted the tutu could become a fashionable running accessory for Serpentine runners. "I thought the red tutu matched my Serpies top," she told Serpentine. "With a yellow T-shirt or Serpie top the red tutus are a great addition to the kit."



Susan Kennedy (2nd from R), Sian Griffiths (3rd from R)

Lost in Lakes

Jolyon Attwool

The headlines flashed across the world, from the BBC to China to Fox News: "Runners missing in flooded Lake District"; "Mountains almost turned into morgue"; "Thousands stranded".

Catastrophe, it appeared, had struck the hardy souls in the Original Mountain Marathon, a two-day race known as one of the world's toughest endurance events. Those dramatic reports made for a worrying October weekend for friends and families of those taking part.

The truth, however, proved somewhat tamer than the sensational headlines suggested. At least two Serpentine members, Richard Phillips and Kate Laforet, were among the competitors. Richard has been a regular at the event since 2000 – and his experience of the last race did not match the drama of the news stories.

"It had been reported as a major disaster when it was pretty much all absolutely fine," he said. "I was really annoyed – there were a lot of people who were quite upset when they saw it on the news."

Although the conditions were extreme – he and his running partner cut short the first day after Richard was blown over by the wind – he said it was not unexpected. "We're all grown-up people," he said, "we can all see the weather forecast, and whatever that's like we make our own decision to do it. "You get all your kit ready if you know it's going to be two cold, wet and windy days."

Following the initial media frenzy, it emerged that no runners were stranded and that no serious injuries occurred, although 10 people were treated by Cumbria NHS. Inevitably, however, some finger-pointing followed – and Richard is clear where his sympathies lie: "Pretty much without fail all the competitors are very supportive of the organisation."

The organisers acknowledged the lack of broadband and satellite phone communications hampered their ability to keep the press informed, but stressed their "trust in the vetting process of these competitors and in the event organisation."

Richard plans to return, and believes most other participants agree, despite the challenges last year: "There wasn't any question of anyone not wanting to go back because of it."

Beck and fall

Jolyon Attwool

A top 10 finish in the Metropolitan League cross-country is no mean feat in its own right.

Throw a broken metatarsal into the mix and you've got a story to dine out on – and make people wince – for years to come.

That's what happened to Becky Glover when she was competing in the Ruislip cross-country fixture last November.

She was poised in eighth place, and gaining on the group in front, when disaster struck about a quarter of the way into the race.

"I landed on a rock, and the force from the spikes hitting the rocks went straight into my foot," she recalled. "I felt a crack and then stupidly carried on."

Becky, who was leading the Serpentine cross-country rankings at the time, somehow managed to hold her position and cross the line in eighth place. It was only then that she was taken to hospital by other Serpies to find she had fractured the metatarsal bone in her left foot, consigning her to several weeks on crutches.

Was she proud of her persistence, Serpentine wondered? "Not really," she said. "I think I just look silly. Three years ago, I ran on a chipped kneecap for two miles and didn't learn my lesson then."

"I think I'm too competitive, and the competitiveness for me overrides any pain. I'm



Lean on me: Becky Glover props herself up as she recovers from her injury

not very good at giving up."

Happily, however, Becky is making a rapid recovery from her injury, with the crutches and protective footwear being removed ahead of time. She plans to gently work her way back to running fitness and return to the cross-country circuit next season – hopefully dodging painful obstacles next time round.



Calm before the storm: seasoned OMM competitor Richard Phillips (right) enjoys relatively clement weather during the 2007 event.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Sue Lambert, MBE

It wasn't just Olympic sportsmen and women who featured in the 2009 New Year's Honours list – Serpentine member Sue Lambert also found her name alongside the likes of Christine Ohuruogu and Rebecca Romero.

Sue is due to make the trip to Buckingham Palace to receive an MBE for her dedication to her career in the court service, where she works as a clerk, as well as for her considerable fundraising efforts.

Now 68, Sue has run 62 marathons and collected around £30,000 for charity, most significantly for the Great Ormond Street Hospital.

She said of the honour: "It's amazing really, I can't see how I deserved that at all."

Sue started her distinguished marathon running career during her 30s when she won a race in Kent. Sixty-one marathons later, she is still going strong and has no plans to hang up her running shoes. Her next run is the London Marathon this year, where she will, of course, be raising money for charity.

"I only get sponsorship for marathons because you can't expect people to give for anything else," she said.

[See a picture of Sue on page 43.](#)

Manuel Moreno

Last year at the Spanish Embassy in London, Manuel Moreno received the Order del Merito Civil from Spanish Ambassador Carlos Miranda, on behalf of the Spanish government and King Juan Carlos. Sid Wills and several other Serpines were there to witness the event, when Carlos Miranda said that Manuel had made "an exceptional effort in recuperating facts from the past of the Spanish exile and bringing them to the present day" and "represents all those who have fought to keep alive the memory of their struggle for democracy and that of our ancestors".



Magic of Oz: Leila Hudson keeps the Serpie flag flying Down Under

Tri again

If ever there were proof needed of the Serpie name spreading across the world, Leila Hudson provided it in the far-flung city of Perth, Australia.

Competing in a triathlon in aid of Breast Cancer Research, Serpentine member Leila was wearing a club tri-suit when she crossed the line in second place for her age group.

"I have to admit I stood out like a sore thumb," she said, adding that she missed the encouragement from the sidelines. "It really makes a difference when the Serpie support is not there."

Grim victory

Eric Phillips left more than 1800 runners trailing in his slipstream when he claimed victory in the Grim Challenge in December.

Competing in the eight-mile off-road event near Aldershot, Eric took first place by 10 seconds, blitzing his way through a waterlogged course via army-style nets and unpaved tracks in 51 minutes 40 seconds.



Sid and Beate: Vogt of confidence

Life Membership

At the Christmas Party, Sid Wills (membership liaison committee member) presented **Beate Vogt** with a life membership in recognition of her dedication to the club, especially her work as a running and triathlon coach.

John Stonham Cup

The John Stonham Farewell Cup was also awarded at the Christmas Party, to **Stephanie Vaatz**, for her commitment to running and representing the club. John Stonham was a club member from 1986 and the award was donated anonymously in 1993 upon his departure to Thailand.



Stephanie: Vaatz my girl!

CROSS COUNTRY RESULTS

In the Met league, our women's team finished the season in 3rd place behind Highgate Harriers and Woodford Green with Essex Ladies. Our men's A team finished the season in 2nd place in division 1, behind Woodford Green, and our B team finished 12th so will be staying in division 1 next season. The Serpentine cross country trophies were awarded to Val Metcalf (pictured on page 15) and Richard Phillips (pictured left, at the OMM).

Comrades Marathon

Ian Sharman reports on his favourite event, a superbly organised, South African institution, known as one of the world's great ultra-distance races

For me, one race stands head and shoulders above all others – the 87-90km (54-56 mile) Comrades Marathon in South Africa. Even seasoned marathon runners find it reignites their passion.

It is an institution there, although not particularly well known abroad. Almost every South African I've ever met has either run it, wants to run it, or their parents have run it. It's a rite of passage to complete it, usually more than once. The build-up, including press and TV coverage, gives a greater sense of anticipation than even the biggest city marathons like New York and London.

More than twice the distance of the normal marathon, Comrades encompasses five major hills, known as the "Big Five" and is either an "up run" from Durban (at sea level) to Pietermaritzburg (at 800m) or a longer "down run" in the opposite direction. Both versions start along wide roads and finish in a stadium. 2008 was an up run.

'Almost every South African I've ever met has either run it, wants to run it, or their parents have run it'

Thousands of people take part each year. The race became much larger during the apartheid era when South Africa was unable to participate in international competitions. Successful domestic runners increased the appeal, including South African legends such as Alan Robb who dominated the race in the 1970s, Bruce Fordyce who won nine times in the 1980s, and Helen Lucre, who won three years straight in the same era.

Helen is a good friend of Dave Pearse, with whom I was staying when I went to South Africa to take part in 2008. I met Dave at the Thames Meander and again at the Marathon des Sables and he insisted that I stay with him in Durban. His hospitality was without limit and made the entire trip even more enjoyable. I met many of his friends, all of them Comrades veterans.

Another element that makes Comrades stand out is the different coloured race numbers which represent the number of times the competitor has run the race. Green numbers go to those who've completed 10 or more, a highly esteemed club to belong to. That race number remains yours forever. Runners on their tenth run wear a yellow bib to signify that they



Comrades in arms: Ian Sharman finds a compatriot (photo: asipfoto)

will earn their green number on the finish line. They get extra encouragement along the way, especially since the numbers are worn on front and back. Both Dave and his brother are green number holders.

Also, different finish times get different medals. There are six in total, from a gold medal for a top 10 finish to a Vic Clapham medal for finishing between 11 hours and the cut-off at 12 hours.

Having run the down run in 2007, I had an idea of just how incredible a race it is – Comrades instantly became my favourite race, out of around 100 which I've run, mainly marathons. 2008 proved even more memorable. The medal I was aiming for was the same as I'd achieved in 2007 – a silver for going sub 7hr30. Only about 300 people would earn one this year. The next step up was unrealistically difficult – going sub 6h for a Wally Hayward medal. Maybe one day...

Anthems and atmosphere

On race day, it was still dark when I arrived at the start area just before 5am. It was winter in South Africa. The sun would rise at almost 7am and set soon after the finish cut-off time at 5.30pm. The announcer added to the atmosphere by playing the national anthems of the 10 countries with the most entrants. Since the UK had the most runners (100), God Save the Queen was played last, just before the 5.15am deadline for entering the seeding start pens.

The local guys then started singing a mining song in chorus, joined by a singer over the speakers. I couldn't stop smiling and felt the raw emotion of the moment. After the singing died down the theme from 'Chariots of Fire' was played, which almost brought a tear to my eye, not something that happens to me at other races where it is often played.

When the traditional cock crow started the race, I deliberately took it easy, keeping to a pace where I could comfortably chat. The field charged off, many zooming past me at unsustainable speeds. It felt thrilling, like some kind of street riot with thousands of people sprinting down the dark streets.

As we ran along, the uphill seemed endless even though we hadn't even reached a named hill yet and it was still dark.

My seconding team had agreed seven meeting places, the first about 11km into the race, before the first named hill, Cowies, a moderately difficult climb rising about 137m in the space of 1.5km. However, the preceding 14km is a relentless rise to an altitude of nearly 300m.

All South African runners have to be a member of a club and run in their club kit, while international runners can wear what they like. I'd opted for my club vest and got many shouts of "Go, Serpentine!" Some knew the club and one guy shouted out that he used to be a member.

The early morning went well and I felt very comfortable at 20km at the bottom of the biggest hill, called Fields. Named after an early pioneer, this hill rises some 213m over a distance of 3km.

I enjoyed this long slope going down in 2007. This year, it was early on so my legs were still fresh enough to take it in my stride. I was pacing myself with another Brit, Matt Ray, who I discovered had run a 2hr37m London Marathon earlier in the year but was on his first Comrades. We both felt very comfortable at this stage. And once Fields was out the way it was good to know that we'd risen to about 800m above sea level so that the undulation of the remainder of the race was roughly evened out.

The next few miles went by easily, despite more gradual ascents. At around 32km, I saw my crew again. We'd overtaken Maria Bak, a three-



Ian's support crew proved invaluable (photo: Ruth Gray)

time winner who'd last won in 2002. She looked strong but must have lost some of her pace even though she was still in a gold medal position. She had a huge group of men latched on to her so it was difficult to pass through.

Hill number three was Botha's Hill, which took me higher than the finish line, giving me the welcome thought that there was now more down than up.

At the top lies Kearsney College, a well-known landmark, with boys outside in school uniform. They are noisy supporters and, on spotting I was a pom, a couple shouted out comments about the South African defeat of England in the rugby World Cup. They weren't the only ones that day to 'apologise' for beating us, but they were the youngest.

Half-way there

I still felt comfortable at half way but knew the hardest part of the race was to come. The traditional wisdom is that runners need to feel comfortable at the top of Inchanga, the hill straight after the half-way line, for the race to go well. I was able to jog up it and wasn't yet struggling yet – although some idiot half way up was telling runners that they'd virtually reached the top when there was still a mile to go.

I went through the '42km to go' marker near the top of Inchanga. It felt comforting to have less than a marathon left. I had 3h28m to complete the final marathon to break seven hours. I knew I could do it, but it would take some will power.

Soon afterwards, I saw my crew for the fifth time. They ran by my side

and commented that I was looking strong.

There was only one more named hill to go, the dreaded Polly Shortts near the end, which has ruined many a runner's race. Before that, at the '35km to go' marker, I started to feel very tired and I had to walk a couple of times up hills, although only for around 100m each time. I used one of the hills as a rest break, in both senses. Two runners were mugged for their shoes on a toilet break, but I was blissfully unaware of this at the time. I wonder if they finished...

The overhead sun had raised the temperature to a dehydrating 26 degrees. Whenever I was struggling I thought about my girlfriend, Amy, using the thought of her to encourage me to dig in. I know many runners who've broken into tears during an ultra because of the mental and physical hardships, but when these are overcome, it makes the races immensely rewarding.

I saw my crew again at Cato Ridge with under 30km to go, just taking a gel from them as I flew by. Now I was very fatigued – further on I missed the sign marking the highest point in the course.

'The crowds were magnificent and the km markers kept ticking down. Most people around me had slowed so I was gaining positions all the time – great for morale'

Earlier, a local runner had told me to push hard down to Ashburton at 11km to go, then rest by walking part of Polly Shortts. I did some of my fastest running of the race on this section, a real boost as I got more time in the bag, which I could now afford to lose on Pollys.

The crowds were magnificent and the km markers kept ticking down. Most people around me had slowed so I was gaining positions all the time – great for morale.

I saw my seconding crew for the last time on the route at about the '11km to go' marker at the top of Little Pollys, the short hill before the real thing. I walked a small section of that hill but was running again by the time they saw me, so they thought I was in great shape and

Did you know?

The first Comrades Marathon took place in 1921, making it the oldest modern day ultra.

The distance varies between 87km for an "up" run and 90km for a "down" run.

The 2009 race will be a "down" run and will be held on Sunday May 24.

See www.comrades.com for more information.



Comrades is a rite of passage for many South Africans (photo: asiphoto)

encouraged me. Dave advised me to take Polly Shortts easy since I had time to spare and I agreed, saying I'd use an alternating walk/run strategy.

Pollys is the ultimate in heartbreak hills, although Bruce Fordyce said it was his ally since he could usually break ahead of challengers. The climb is about 1.8km with the summit at an altitude of 737m, a rise of nearly 100m but it seems much more.

Reaching the top almost felt like the end of the race and it signalled the last serious mental challenge on the course with just 8km left til the finish. However, the elite runner Maria Bak had caught me up and I stayed just ahead of her, using her to push me on.

Emotional finale

The last km was gently downhill and I accelerated into the stadium to the sound of the roaring crowd. The atmosphere spectators create throughout is unlike any other race I've seen. Every runner is made to feel like a genuine hero. I felt the huge relief and satisfaction at completing such an unbelievably emotional race, clocking a final time of 6.52.11, which placed me 117th overall.

After some faffing around – I had been randomly selected for a drugs test – I collected my silver medal and my medal for completing two consecutive years. Small as these are, they represent countless hours of training and are worth more to me than all my standard marathon medals combined.

I was led to a room where the elite athletes were sitting, including the winner, Leonid Shvetsov, who had taken the "up" record in a time a mere 88 minutes faster than mine.

I couldn't eat until I had given a urine sample – but I was far too dehydrated to go. Eventually, almost two hours and four and a half litres of fluid later, I was able to give the sample. The experience made me feel like an elite runner. In fact, the spirit of the race and seeing the professional racers made me want to earn my place among them. In 2008, I would have needed to cut 59 minutes off my time and beat an ex-winner of the New York marathon. So, pretty easy then...

The following day there were plenty of people wearing their Comrades T-shirts and medals, reflecting the pride we all felt to have completed the world's greatest ultra marathon.

On the trail of the Vikings

Last summer, three Serpies tackled one of the toughest long distance triathlons in the world: Norseman. Jenny Gowans and Rachel Powell share their contrasting experiences

Jenny's story

I had heard nothing but good things about Norseman and I was looking for a break from racing fast on the Ironman M-dot circuit. Norseman offered the perfect solution – a race that would be an adventure and one I would need to treat with even more respect than a conventional Ironman. So I signed up for Norseman 2008 and I was not disappointed.

Not only is the course very difficult – over 3000m of climb on the bike and 1800m in the last 17km of the run – but the weather conditions change the race from year to year so you can never know exactly what you will face come race day. However, the fear this instilled in me made me commit to training like never before and this resulted in me having a very good day.

Norseman is a point-to-point race that takes you on a spectacular journey through dramatic Norwegian countryside. Every competitor needs their own support team and car and, with weather conditions constantly changing, the car needs to be full of numerous race wear options and plenty of nutrition. My support crew was faultless and proved that organisational and motivational skills are more important than knowledge of the intricacies of triathlon racing.

The race begins in the dark at 3:45am when you board a car ferry along with 200 other wetsuit-clad athletes. This is the most surreal part of the day as you wave farewell to your support crew and settle into the bowels of the ferry for the hour-long ride straight up the centre of the fjord. Just as it seems to be getting a little lighter, you are called to the top deck and given a 10-minute warning to the start.

For me this was the most frightening part of the day. It wasn't the 4-metre jump from the back of the car ramp that I was dreading but the temperature of the water. But with five minutes to go I jumped in and was pleasantly surprised: the water was beautiful and comfortable with a wetsuit and neoprene hat.

Swim

The ferry horn sent us on our way and soon I was swimming with clear water in front and only two others in sight. We had been warned the current was against us this year so I headed for the shore and stayed close the whole way. The swim was the best experience I have had in any triathlon race. The water is dark but clear, slightly salty and every time you breathe you catch sight of mist hovering over the water and steep mountain sides plunging down to the side of the fjord. There are no buoys or markers - you just swim in a straight line up the fjord towards the twinkling lights of Eidfjord before making a left-hand turn around a rowing boat that takes a bit of finding.

I exited the water 9th overall and 1st woman by 20 minutes. I knew I had had a great swim although due to the current my time was over 20 minutes slower than expected at 1 hour 18 minutes. This was my sort of



Almost too quick for the camera: Jenny is the first woman to emerge from the swim

race – with tough swimming conditions the swim seemed to mean something more than the usual warm up for the bike and run.

Bike

The bike course allows you a few kilometres to warm up before you head on to an old tourist road for the first 25km climb at 8% that will bring you out at the 40km mark. This was my first support crew stop and I needed to layer up with a winter jacket and knee warmers.

From here the course takes you across the stunning Hardanger plateau before you descend into Geilo to hit the halfway point on the bike. This stretch really cost me time – it should be fast and we were lucky this year with a slight tailwind – but there was driving rain for most of the way and I was getting desperately cold. As I had feared, it was the weather conditions that threatened my race rather than the extreme course.

Over this section I watched the support car for number 21 coming up past me and stopping for a time check – I knew this was the support car for the second woman on the road. After 70km I stopped seeing them and I assumed this meant I had stretched my lead. Now I know they no longer needed to pass me because she was eating massive chunks out of my lead.

From Geilo it all started to look better. The sun came out and we headed on to three climbs in quick succession all between 3-5km long and 7-9%. Normally I am in my element on the hills but although I was able to ride strong, I could no longer feel my feet or hands. At the top of the middle climb I sat down at the side of the road while my selfless support crew massaged my feet and changed my socks and toe warmers. Although this made me feel better it was not a good sight to see number 21, Heidi Harviken, fly over the top of the hill at high speed in full aero set-up.

Back on my bike and a little warmer I knew I couldn't match her speed on the flats or descents so I settled into riding well on the hills and trying not to lose too much time on the downs.

At 135km you start the last climb, Imingfell. This stretches on for nearly 10km at 9%. This climb is a classic and switches back on itself just like any good climb should. I was starting to warm up now and climbed well to come back to within three minutes of Heidi. The top of the climb levels out across a beautiful plateau for 10km with plenty of wild flowers, houses with roofs covered in grass and mountain lakes. Spirits rise along

this part of the course as all you have left is a 30km descent into T2.

I rode badly for the last 30km – I was more tired than I realised and when I hit the flatter final 10km I realised the cold had taken a real toll on me and I had very little left to give on the bike. I rolled into T2 over eight mins down on Heidi and very glad to see the back of my bike.

Run

I knew I needed to regroup in T2 to get my race back on track but my longer-than-usual transition meant I went out onto the run over 15 mins down. The run was beautiful and as the route quietly undulated around the side of a lake I quickly got into my running stride. Time checks were being made by the number 21 support crew but they were also being made by my main support man Johnny and we knew we were catching her.

The run is mainly flat for 25km before you hit Zombie Hill and Gaustatoppen mountain for the last 17km. With Heidi coming into sight I decided to run hard on the flat to put as much time as I could between us as I had no idea how I would fare on the mountain. At 14km I passed her and willed myself to keep the pace up. Later the race organiser, Haarek, would tell me that he thinks the smart way to race is to do exactly the opposite, although on this day I don't think I would have won if Heidi had me in her sights on the mountain.

At 18km you see the Gaustatoppen mountain in front of you and you realise that 1880m is a very high race finish. The stretch from 18km to 25km passed without event and I just focused on hanging in to the start of Zombie Hill.

Funnily enough I felt like the race was over at Zombie Hill and all I had to do was walk my way up 7km of switchbacks and then the mountain. This allowed me a lot of time to eat, drink and reflect back on the amazing journey so far with my support crew. We were all in great spirits and I was getting messages that my boyfriend, Richard, was also having a dream race and even running parts of the hill.

The support from other crews and the Norseman team on this hill was phenomenal and I soon found myself at the 32km mark and being directed towards a mountain top finish. From 32km to 37km the road really levels out and on any normal day you wouldn't question running this road. This is the one part of my performance I really regret – I walked this section. I walked it fast, but I walked and I really wish I had run.



Ain't no mountain high enough: Richard heading for Gaustatoppen mountain



Reaching new heights: Jenny celebrates victory

At 37km I put my backpack on and Jonny and I headed off the road and on to the mountain. I have never had any natural talent for walking or mountain climbing so I knew I wouldn't be making any time on this section. I was content to walk my way up and savour one of the best views you will ever see.

People were applauding me as the first woman on the mountain but I suddenly realised that I had no idea how close Heidi was. A quarter of the way up the mountain we were greeted by another member of my support crew, Toby, and I asked him to wait there and see how much time I had on Heidi. After too short a time the call came through to Jonny that she was not far behind – I really had relaxed too much.

So I had to leave Jonny to struggle up the mountain with his very heavy backpack full of celebratory beers and make haste to the top. Halfway up I realised most of my food was also in his backpack and I deliriously asked a stranger for some sugar. The chocolate produced gave me the final energy I needed to reach the mountain top. I got to relax over the last 10 minutes when I could see that I was going to be the first woman at the top of Gaustatoppen.

14 hours, first woman!

Crossing the finish line after just over 14 hours was pure elation. To win was a dream and it was even more special at 1880m. Tomato soup has never tasted so good and sharing it with Richard (the first non-Norwegian at the top) and our support crew of Jonny, Toby and Piers was priceless, as was the two hours it took us all to walk down from the mountain.

The prize for reaching the mountain top is a black finisher's t-shirt presented the following morning; there are no special prizes for the winners because at Norseman all finishers are winners. The sheer enormity and challenge of the Norseman race is what made me train and race smart and it is a race I will never forget. Finally I have found a race sticker that I am proud to stick to my bike box.

If you are looking for a race that is run across spectacular scenery and by a race crew that organise the race for the right reason – a love of the sport – then you must do Norseman. If I haven't convinced you then have a look at the video at <http://www.youtube.com/user/nxtri>

Norseman

continued...

Rachel's story

Norway is known to most people as the land of the midnight sun, the home of trolls and Gods. But in the world of long-distance triathlon, Norway means just one thing – Norseman, reputed to be the hardest Ironman distance triathlon in the world. Hardest because of the harsh, mountainous terrain through which the race travels, and hardest because the ascent on the bike and run course is equivalent to climbing Mont Blanc. Established just six years ago, Norseman has become a Mecca for those who love extreme challenge.

Norseman is unique in other ways too. Firstly, as a point to point event, little support can be provided by the organisers, so each competitor needs to organise a support crew with a car. Secondly, getting to the start line involves jumping from the deck of a car ferry into an icy fjord, and thirdly, Norseman is unique in that there are two finish lines.

Competitors who reach 32K on the marathon stage in less than 15 hours 15 minutes are allowed to go to a mountain top finish and receive the coveted black t-shirt; those who reach 32K by 17 hours and 30 minutes go to a lower level finish and receive a white t-shirt, the second hardest iron distance in the world, and those who do not arrive by then are not allowed to finish at all. At the race briefing, the organisers stressed that although few women have ever entered Norseman, none have ever DNF-ed. It was made clear this was a reputation they wished to maintain!

At 4am one August morning I found myself sitting on the ferry with two fellow Serpies, Jenny Gowans and Richard Melik, as it sailed 3.8K through the dark waters of Eidfjord, heading for the spot where we would take a leap into the unknown. Nerves were high; the small contingent from the UK amused ourselves with final preparations – joining the toilet queue, donning earplugs and neoprene hats, and pondering over just how cold the water would be. Just before 5am the ship's tannoy summoned us onto the deck; in the darkness only our bright green swim hats stood out. The sky was still black as, one by one, we leapt into the water.

'Norseman has become a Mecca for those who love extreme challenge'

Swim

The shock of hitting freezing cold water never came – at 17 degrees the water was surprisingly pleasant. Before I could reach the kayaks marking the start line, the ship's horn echoed off the mountainside and we were on our way, heading for the lights of the village twinkling in the distance.

In keeping with the extreme nature of the event, there were no marker buoys: we had been told simply to keep as close to the side of the fjord as possible, and to turn left around a boat at 3K. We had also been told that the tide would be against us, bad news for me as I am not a particularly strong swimmer.

But as the light dawned on the fjord, that was not foremost in my mind. I was having the swim of my life. Words cannot describe the beauty of it: I was surrounded by towering mountains, dark forests, crashing waterfalls.



Ferry hard: competitors line up for an unusual swim start

The water was clear and green; I felt totally alone with nature, and totally safe. It was serene beyond belief.

Thanks to the tide, which turned out to be the strongest the organisers had ever known, it took me over two hours to reach the swim exit. There, aided by my wonderful Serpie support crew of Nadya Labib and Val Metcalf, I was soon dried, clothed and on my way.

Bike

I had always known that my chances of reaching the mountain-top finish were only 50:50, but by the time I set off on my bike I knew that I was likely to be heading for the lower level finish. My spirits were high as I started the first climb of the day – 40km and 1250m up a rocky gorge, on a twisty disused mountain road.

Having done most of my bike training on hills, I was pleased to find that I not only held my own on the climb, I even overtook a few people too. Up and up we climbed, skirting vertical rock faces, into thicker and thicker mist; it was a scene straight from Mordor. After two and a half hours, exactly as I had planned, I arrived at the top and donned warmer kit for the flatter section ahead.

For the next 45K, I enjoyed a tailwind across the undulating Hardangervidda plateau, a bleak and hostile place; this is where the 'Heroes of Telemark' hid out before sabotaging Hitler's atomic bomb factory. As far as the eye could see were miles of small lakes, rocks, and patches of snow, broken up by wind-beaten grass. The road surface was smooth though, so I made good time. Every now and again I would see glimpses of red and yellow ahead – Val and Nadya were ready to provide whatever I needed. Due to the small field of just 170 triathletes I was pretty much on my own in this cold and unforgiving landscape, although occasionally someone would overtake me or I would see another competitor's support car.

I arrived at the 90K point feeling strong, ready for the four big climbs ahead. The road signs in Norway are superb; they informed me that a 5K climb of 7-8% would be starting in 0.2K, and so on. For the first three climbs, I appreciated this. I was still feeling good and was able to spin up them all feeling quite comfortable, buoyed on by Nadya and Val shouting messages of support from the UK out of the car window. Up and over those climbs I went, enjoying each long fast descent as respite for my legs before the next climb.

It was as I descended from the third summit that things started to go wrong; not in my body but in my head. The demons of ironman had come to get me: they told me I was last, that I wasn't going to make the cut-off for the lower level finish, and I believed them. They were still in my head as I turned for the final climb, 7K at an 8-10% gradient. Such a climb would be no problem for me normally, but the demons told me I couldn't do it; I wasn't going to make it. As I climbed each hairpin my cadence got slower and slower, until I stopped. I slumped over my handlebars and decided I was quitting. I was going to ruin the race reputation but I didn't care. I'd had enough of this stupid race and these stupid hills.

'The demons of ironman told me I was last, that I wasn't going to make the cut-off, and I believed them'

I realised I'd have to tell Nadya and Val who were waiting somewhere up the climb, so I got back on the bike, turned the next corner and was deafened with a cacophony of shouting and whistling. I promptly burst into tears and was a soggy mess by the time I reached them. They were having none of it – they would not let me quit. They sorted me out, put me back on the bike, and told me they would see me at the top. So up I rode, feeling much better, although still unsure if I would make the cut-off and be allowed to start the run. While I descended the final 30K to T2 through glorious countryside bathed in warm sunshine, they went ahead to prepare for my arrival.

Run

After nearly ten hours on my bike I was glad to get off: ten hours in the saddle by yourself is a very long time, believe me. I'd made the cut-off though, so I had to get ready to run. Nadya and Val had my kit prepared, so in no time at all I was heading out onto the road. As Norseman allows competitors to have support crew running or cycling alongside, Val had very kindly offered to run with me. So we started along the lakeside road, enjoying the late afternoon sun and, for me, some company at last.

The run course is basically a flattish 25K road run, followed by the infamous Zombie Hill, so called because of its continuous 10% gradient for 7K. Then, for me going to the lower level finish, there would be a final 10K on flattish ground.



Rachel (middle), with her support Val (L) and Nadya

Although glad to be off the bike, the run was harder work than I had hoped. My legs were fine, but my stomach was very bloated and it was painful when I ran, so my planned run/walk strategy turned into a 'run whenever you can and walk the rest' strategy instead.

My efforts became totally focused on catching people ahead. It had been hours since I had seen another competitor and I was determined to find one somewhere, so with the help of some scouting ahead by Nadya in the car, we managed to catch and pass a couple; that made me feel really, really good. By the time the race director caught up with us at 25K, I was feeling optimistic about making the cut-off, and he confirmed that I did indeed have plenty of time. All that remained was to walk up Zombie Hill.

Hairpin after hairpin, Val and I walked as fast as we could. That hill went on forever and ever. As Val said when we passed a waterfall, "In any other circumstances this would be beautiful", but it wasn't, it was awful, really awful. Just when we were thinking this torture would never end, the race car appeared again and told us we had 1K to go, and would make the cut-off. Buoyed up by the news that Jenny (Gowans) had won the women's race, we bounded round the corner to the checkpoint, and, head torches beaming in the darkness, we set off to the finish line.

'In any other circumstances this would be beautiful", but it wasn't, it was awful'

The last 10K were not the nicest I have run. It was pitch black, with potholed forest roads and tracks, and unexpected hills. A stream of traffic heading to the finish line hotel meant that although I felt like running, doing so was difficult. Added to this, we had to run 4K to the finish line, turn round, run 3K back to a turn-around point, and then run the 3K back again. Cruel. I was feeling great by now, but everyone else going to the lower level finish line seemed exhausted, lifeless and expressionless; we called it 'the Walk of the Living Dead'. Nadya was running with us too now, and Richard and Jenny appeared to support, so our merry little band of Serpies livened the mountainside up a bit.

18 hours, 55 minutes

18 hours and 55 minutes after the ship's horn had sounded, I crossed the finish line. I was a Norseman. There were no crowds, no pom-poms, no music or razzmatazz, just me, Nadya, Val and a Norseman race crew member who strolled over, asked if I had finished, and wrote down a finish time. A cup of divine tomato soup and a fleecy blanket made a welcome end to what had been one of the longest and hardest days of my life, but also the most amazing.

The t-shirt presentation the next morning was an emotional end to the experience. The Norseman briefing emphasises that everyone is a winner, and everyone was treated as such. Although the winners got extra applause (well done Jenny!) they got no prizes, just the same t-shirts as everyone else. Each person was called up individually, each person celebrated. Black t-shirt or white, we were all winners.

An uphill battle in the Nepalese Himalayas

Not content with Comrades and many other marathons and ultra races in 2008, Ian Sharman also raced in a 50km running and 100km mountain biking duathlon: Land of the Yeti Duathlon

I've always considered myself to be very firmly in the runner category, and certainly not a bike racer of any sort, yet when I was looking for an 'excuse' to go to the Himalayas, I picked a duathlon – the Land of the Yeti Duathlon in its first year. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

In preparation I bought myself a mountain bike and had excellent intentions to train with it and learn the art of mountain biking on some of the world's harshest terrain. Unfortunately all I managed to do was the Edinburgh Rat Race with a day of basic and mainly flat mountain biking and so when I flew out to Kathmandu in August I knew I was in for a tough race.

It started relatively easily with a flight out to Lukla at 2,850m and nine days of acclimatising by gradually trekking the well-worn route to Gorak

Shep and Everest base camp, staying at guest houses along the way. We covered the course for the running stages of the duathlon so were keen to not see too many downhills, all too aware that these would be uphill in reverse.

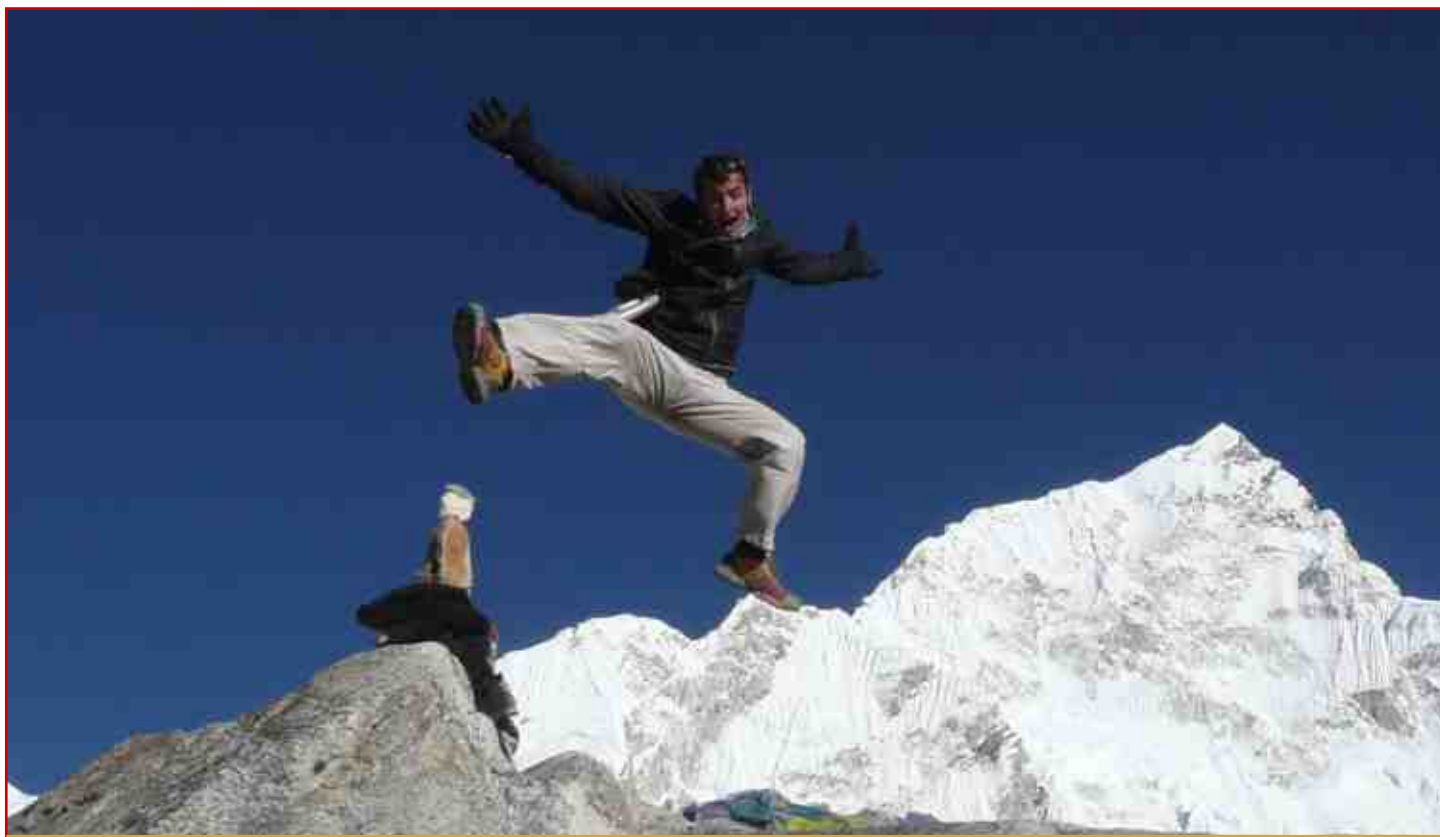
As the air got thinner and it became noticeably harder to ascend, the mountains gave increasingly stunning views. Altitude was a much larger issue than expected, with one competitor having to descend a day early to miss stage one, due to the onset of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS).

The full list of competitors totalled seven with three Nepalis (including Dipak Raj Rai, winner of the last three Everest marathons and the course record holder), three Britons (including the race director) and an Aussie.

Day one of five

The first stage of the race was 30km long from Gorak Shep to Namche Bazar. This involved a net drop in altitude of 1,700m from 5,200m, but still with around 700m of climbs. The marked contrast between the three Nepali racers and the rest of the group was staggering as they covered the initial ground around three times faster than the Westerners. At that altitude I felt like a fat 90-year old and even jogging at about 12-minute miles on the flat felt like running a 5k at sea level. That would probably be due to the fact that there was only about 40% as much oxygen at that height as at sea level.

For all of that first stage my lungs were bursting and, at times, my heart beat harder than ever before. At the end of day I managed to finish 3rd but was a good hour behind the winner, Dipak. The others came in over the following few hours and we spent the rest of the day getting our breath back, literally.



Ian Sharman was on peak form in the Himalayas

Day two of five

I had fancied day two as my best stage since we only had 20km to cover and relatively little undulation – 600m of uphill and a net fall of 600m back down to Lukla where we'd flown into – but despite the air being thicker than the previous day's stage, it was still thin enough to be felt. The two fastest Nepali guys shot off down the large rock steps from Namche at an unbelievable speed but must have got lost somewhere on the sharp descent and I found myself in the lead until almost the bottom when lightning Dipak appeared in full pursuit. And he looked a lot fresher than me!

On the other side of the bridge at the bottom of the descent, I had to revert to my previous tactic of walking every uphill because they were just so steep. The top two Nepalis disappeared into the distance again, but I kept up as good a pace as possible and was pleased to finish the stage once again in second place.

After such a short stage we had some time to play around with the bikes which we had left in Lukla in preparation. I copied the seasoned bikers and checked the brakes and suspension but I was soon getting worried that my inadequate training could lead to problems. Even though I'd not really mountain biked before, I planned to use the same kind of intuition as required for fell running to pick the best route. But I was soon to discover that high-altitude trekking paths were set to be my baptism of fire into the art of mountain biking.

Day three of five

After a decent night's rest, we were up and ready for the three biking stages. We started off on the first downhill out of Lukla as a group but only managed to ride for a couple of minutes before the boulders and other obstacles on the path made it impossible to ride. Before long the group was well spread out as we pushed or carried our bikes down the 600m descent and up the similar ascent on the other side. At this point I still trusted the course description so wasn't too fazed. But after carrying my 15kg bike over 700m of terrain on which it couldn't even be pushed, I wasn't having fun. The Nepalis were again in the lead with their bikes resting easily on their shoulders as they trekked upwards quickly. And I had thought a duathlon was meant to involve riding a bike...

Sadly we found out at the end of day three, after 1300m of vertical ascent and under 1km of actual riding, that the race director hadn't personally checked the course. Although the scenery was undoubtedly stunning, it was difficult to appreciate it when having to carry the bike the whole way. Rather than the sparser terrain at higher levels, we went through areas which were more jungle-like and equally beautiful.

I finished day three in 8h43m and in 4th place, behind the three Nepali guys, but it no longer felt like a race. The two other participants who'd paid for their entry were similarly disappointed with the lack of a course and, given that the fourth day was meant to be the hardest and with similar terrain to day three, we decided to give up on the idea of racing a duathlon and to instead ask the three guides to carry our bikes on the following day.



As the air got thinner the mountains gave increasingly stunning views (photo: Ian Sharman)

Day four of five

As it turned out, it was lucky we left the bikes to be carried for us since the route description of 26km turned out to be a massive underestimate. I took over nine hours to complete the stage, and the other two who were also without bikes came in last and well after dark had fallen.

We walked and trekked through two high passes which were particularly tough but only actually missed out on a couple of kilometres of rideable sections by not having the bikes. We were in no rush since we'd written the race off, but even trekking was very tough. This added justification to not continuing in the official race, as did the fact that the legendary Dipak (who had had a puncture and so carried the bike every step of the way) had won this stage without riding once.

Day five of five

The last stage was described to us by the race director as being easier than the previous ones and, after being assured that we would be able to cycle most of the route, we reclaimed our bikes from the guides and set off. However, after the surprises of the previous two days, I stayed with the two guys I had set out with on day four so that we could finish together.

The initial 'easy' climb turned out to be around 1,000 vertical metres of steps, so we took much longer than anticipated. But at last, after five hot hours at lower altitudes, we managed to do over two hours of tough downhill riding where I was very happy to manage not to fall off at all.

We soon discovered that there were multiple routes and we had no map, just the name of the finishing town, Jiri. As darkness approached, we found ourselves asking every local which way to Jiri and getting answers in Nepali which we could understand to mean that it was a long way away. Different people pointed in different directions, with one old man even pointing in both directions down a road depending on which one of us asked him.

Feeling demoralised, exhausted from our efforts and somewhat ill from the cold temperatures and altitude, we decided to stay in the next village overnight and to try to contact the race director.

Just as we had made that decision, two of the guides suddenly appeared and, as glad as we were to see them, we were less than glad to learn that it was over a two-hour cycle to Jiri and there was only one hour of daylight left. Given that all timings we'd been given for distances were more appropriate for the leaders than the scope of the entire field, we took their estimation of timing with a pinch of salt and decided that leaving early the next morning would be the best option.

Day six of five

So at 5:45am on day six of our five-day race, we set off again. I opted to go on the walking route over the mountains with one guide while the other two biked with the second guide. I had my doubts over how long the bikers would take, but at least by having guides with everybody we could guarantee that no-one would get lost.

Exactly two hours later I arrived into Jiri and ate a big breakfast while waiting on the bikers who turned up about an hour later. We were all in one piece and the first aid kit had remained almost unused, which was lucky since nobody was medically trained (the official thinking seemed to be that you either deal with it yourself or use your insurance to get air-lifted out!).

By 11am we were ready to go along the first mountain road we'd seen for

the entire trip. The bikes were loaded onto the back of the truck and then we had a mere eight-hour drive to Kathmandu to cover the scenic 195kms.

Do I regret taking part?

Definitely not. We'd all had an amazing time and seen some spectacular sights. The Himalayas are certainly an incredible venue for a race. However, it was without a doubt thanks to the toughness of the competitors' fitness and everyone's will-power, rather than any organisation behind the race, that we all arrived safely back in Kathmandu.

'However, it was without a doubt thanks to the toughness of the competitors' fitness and everyone's will-power, rather than any organisation behind the race, that we all arrived safely back in Kathmandu'

We had taken on some of the hardest fell running in the world but had had no medical support. The bike stages had involved small amounts of very tough mountain biking along cliff edges but mainly consisted of exhausting hours of carrying and dragging the bikes over virtually impassable terrain. With no contingency plans, there was no way back (except by helicopter) once the first bike stage had started, and our only option was to keep going no matter how ill, tired or injured we were.

Altitude racing at over 3,000m is incredibly tough, harder than any other type I've tried. And the addition of extremely technical fell-type trail makes this a great challenge.

The Land of the Yeti Duathlon is dead. The race director admitted that it had been executed very badly and that there wasn't really a mountain biking circuit there. The approximate 150km course would make for a very hardcore running stage race, and that was effectively what we did (less the competitive element for most days).

But for those interested in running near Everest, there are already several excellent one-day and multi-stage events to choose from, including the Himalayan 100-Mile Stage Race in India at slightly lower altitudes or the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon from base camp to Namche Bazar (the one Dipak has won for the last three years). There are also multiple biking races and tours, but my strongest recommendation would be to pick one which has been held previously to ensure they know what they're doing... and at the very least that there is an actual course.

The Welsh 14

One weekend in August 2008, twelve Serpies set out to run the "Welsh 14", a classic fellrunning route taking in all the 3000 foot peaks in Wales. How did they get on? Alan Hall's pictures tell the story...

1. The route began with a long, gentle ascent of the northern Carneddau.



3. We took a welcome break to fill up with water from a mountain stream, before heading up the next mountain.

Tryfan beckoned us from across the valley...



6. Down the other side of Tryfan, Gary, John, Ella and Ruth descended. Next up, the Glyders.



7. Even with John's weight nearest the end, we failed to tilt the famous Cantilever Stone!





2. We traversed Yr Elen, dipping in and out of the clouds, while the fast group (who had started later) overtook the slower group. Descending Pen yr Ole Wen, the hills were alive with Serpies!



4. Negotiating one of the more technical bits on Tryfan, we came across a Serpentine Exclusive: Mark Braley without the grimace!



5. Finally we reached the rocks known as "Adam and Eve" on Tryfan summit (Gary and John pictured).

Victory! The fast group arrive on a cloudy Snowdon summit, 10 hours and 56 minutes after leaving Foel Fras. With daylight fading, the slow group called it a day after the Glyders - still a respectable day's run.



8. Mark and Quintin tackle the north ridge of Crib Goch.



10. Look, no hands! Matthew on the narrow Crib Goch main ridge.



The storm racers

Kate Laforet

When I signed up to the Original Mountain Marathon (OMM) this year I had absolutely no idea what I was getting myself into. Some colleagues from work entered and one was looking for a partner and before you could say “fell running?” I was entered into the 2 day mountain race. Little did I know that I had chosen the one year that this event, previously known only to seasoned fell runners and mountain lovers, was to become a national news sensation.

My first shock came when I received the kit list. I quickly realised that I was horrendously under-prepared. The warning that “every participant is expected to be well versed in the symptoms and treatment of hypothermia” was the least of my worries. You are expected to be self sufficient on the mountain for 36 hours so each team has to carry a tent, stove and gas and each individual somehow has to find a light rucksack capable of carrying a floor mat, cooking stove, sleeping bag, full waterproofs, a compass and food and water to keep yourself going for 2 days of endurance running. I checked my cupboards. I had a compass. After making a mental note to check details of events before I sign up to them I spent a small fortune in Ellis Brigham, but left the shop feeling that tickling sense of anticipation for my next adventure.

The event comprises 7 different races with participants either choosing to do the original point-to-point race where you have a set number and order of checkpoints to visit (there are 4 difficulty levels covering distances (over the 2 days) of 80km, 65km, 50km and 40km). Alternatively you can choose the long-, medium-, or short-score categories where you have a set time and have to visit as many checkpoints as you can in 13, 11 or 9 hours over the 2 days. We picked, somewhat randomly, the medium score category.

The start is staggered from 8.30 - 10.30am to avoid a procession of teams following each other around the course. My start wasn't until 10.02am and about 5 minutes before we set off for the start line it started to rain. No, it started to pour. By the time we started I was pretty cold and had water streaming down from my hood but was excited to see the

course map and to get out onto the hillside.

At exactly 10.02 we were handed 2 laminated A3 maps with checkpoints scattered over the terrain, colour coded to denote which day they could be collected on. We spent a couple of minutes planning the route and then bounded up the road, which was fast becoming a stream, for a few hundred metres before turning off to climb our first hill. By this time, the rain was so hard that visibility was at a minimum and where a few hours earlier there had been one main stream running down the hillside, streams were now appearing by the minute. Due to our excitement and inexperience, we failed to account for the fact that the start had been moved a few hundred metres due to the bad weather but had not been re-marked on the map, so we completely missed our first checkpoint and spent the next hour struggling along the mountainside in horrific weather.

I've lived in England my whole life and I have never seen weather as aggressive and extreme as on that innocent Saturday morning in October. The wind was absolutely howling; battering the rain into any exposed skin, feeling like hundreds of needles hammering into your face and there were points when I was practically crawling up the hill (at a decent pace I might add) as leaning into the slope was the only way to stay balanced.

'The wind was absolutely howling; battering the rain into any exposed skin, feeling like hundreds of needles hammering into your face'

When we finally found our first point we decided that we needed a new strategy as going over the top of the mountain was clearly off the cards due to our well-founded fear of not being able to remain upright. Our new route took us back down the mountain and along the valley back past the farm. Getting down was one of the most fun moments I've ever had in a race. As the surface was so slippery underfoot, the fastest and safest way down was through one of the rushing streams so I spent a hilarious 10 minutes hurtling, slipping, stumbling and sliding (mostly on my bum) down the mountainside.

Back on track

Once at the bottom we could actually run and I finally warmed up enough to be able to feel my feet. Underfoot the terrain was no easier as all the paths were now fast flowing streams, sometimes knee deep, giving the ankles a bit of a battering. As we were passing near the base camp, we passed tons of participants heading back defeated by the punishing weather. We passed a number of streams that had burst their banks or were getting precariously close, but it felt good to be out in the elements active, able and back on track (literally).

After a fun few hours chasing the next checkpoints we reached the one road through the area and noticed the numbers of teams heading home suddenly increase. A fellow racer stopped us to say that the event had been called off due to bad weather conditions and we were instructed to head back to camp. After initially thinking it was a joke we noticed the forlorn looks and, with a sinking feeling in the stomach, realised it was true. It was only when we had stopped and turned back that we fully realised the extent of the damage. The landscape was unrecognisable, with white streams covering all of the surrounding hillsides and with the original rivers and streams pounding the surrounding fields, roads and



Despite the extreme conditions last year, even more applications are expected for this year's event (photo: Simon Caldwell)



Some of the streams burst their banks (photo: Simon Caldwell)

buildings. When we reached the road back to the farm, it was completely flooded. Cars were submerged and we had to wade through thigh-deep water to get back to camp.

The thoughtful organisers had hot soup and dinner waiting (originally meant for Sunday night), but the barn was soon pretty full with people trying to find the slightest respite from the relentless rain. I got changed into my dry clothes but despite putting my waterproofs back on, by the time I got back to the car I was almost soaked again.

Front-seat shelter

Luckily I wasn't the first one back as my colleague's girlfriend and team mate had retired early and were camped out in the car tucking into their race provisions. I managed to salvage a few semi-dry clothes from my bag and was determined not to step foot outside the car until the rain stopped hammering down, so I made the front seat my bed for the night. The downpour finally eased at 0930 & I braved the outdoors.

Our friend (the driver) hadn't come back to the car so we were a little concerned and headed to the barn for an update. It was only then that we saw the news crews and the helicopter and realised that the evacuation had made the news. Although the weather was pretty extreme, the event hadn't felt dangerous so it hadn't even occurred to us that the nation was being fed horror stories all day and night. I queued up to use the one pay phone at the site to the considerable relief of my family and friends. We ended up waiting until 12.30 for our friend to arrive back and heard that he had been on his way back when he reached a road that was blocked and the authorities had initiated the local flood evacuation plans so he was taken to a village 40 minutes drive away where he was given free food and a mattress to sleep on.

Everyone I spoke to agreed that the news coverage was over the top; the race organisers had made it clear that everybody was fully responsible for looking after themselves on the mountain for the duration of the event. Apart from giving the organisers a very hard time, the excessive press coverage will no doubt result in a much higher volume of entries for next year's event so if you're interested in testing your navigation, endurance and tolerance skills in a fun weekend event, be sure to get your entries in early. I will definitely be back next year to complete the challenge and not only to make use all of that kit that I bought; I'm determined the OMM won't defeat me in 2009.

Snowdonia Marathon

John Cullinane

While the OMM runners were taking it easy, 100 miles further south 10 Serpies took on both the weather and possibly the hardest road marathon in the country. The Snowdonia marathon is a trip round, and fortunately not up, Snowdon, undulating with a stiff climb at the start, rolling hills and a very tough last five miles. Add the weather factor, and it was clear this was going to be a bit of a challenge.

Driving up on Friday the weather was great and the mountains sublime. By Saturday morning it was cold, wet, and windy, and the mountains may or may not have still been there. We had to get a bus to the start at Nant Peris, and waiting in the queue I was glad I'd just bought a new jacket to put over the other three layers, and a pair of socks to use as emergency gloves. At the start, I still had four layers on. We set off up the climb of Pen Y Pass and within minutes were hit by a huge gust of wind which stopped everyone in their tracks. There was a lot of nervous laughter.

I had a game plan, which was to get to the top of the pass in 50 minutes, which I managed ok, along with a barefoot runner. He stuck to the white lines, probably easier on the feet, but hugely slippery on the downhill, of which there were many to the halfway point in Beddgelert. What goes down must go up though, and after a lovely downwind section alongside the Welsh Highland Railway, we turned into Waunfawr for the last five miles. And what a five miles! Steep enough to qualify as a fell race, the route climbs the Bwlch y Groes pass before descending sharply into Llanberis. At the top, the wind howled and an uprooted tree lay hanging across the course (unnoticed by Helen Osborne, who was clearly in the zone). Once again I was very glad of that jacket.

By this time, Alan Hall had finished 21st in an excellent 3.08 and been bundled into an ambulance with suspected hypothermia, which will teach him for wearing a vest. Mark Braley followed in 3.11, and looked equally cold when I saw him running back to the hotel as I reached Llanberis. I thought the finish was just around the corner. It was, but unfortunately the route went back up a hill for another mile, which was a bit soul destroying. A glory sprint to keep the crowd happy, and it was all over. Helen Osborne (9th woman) and Kate Viner had hung around and pointed me to the tea and cake.

Thanks to Rob Westaway and Lars Olsen for arranging the weekend.



'Once again, I was very glad of that jacket' (photo: Lars Olsen)

The Moose

James Adams tackles the longest 6-day footrace in Ontario, Canada

It was a year ago that I got an email advertising the "longest 6 day footrace in the world" in Canada. It came out of nowhere and with a price tag of just £800 I considered trashing it like I do with requests from Nigeria from "esteemed long good friends" for my bank details. However, at the time I was developing an addiction to any run that sounded silly. This was certainly one of those. Note to fraudsters out there - I don't play lotteries nor am I interested in making any part of my body longer. But mention tough terrain, exotic location, uncomfortable weather, wildlife, a number (100 minimum) and explain that this is the distance I'll have to cover on foot. Then you'll have a chance of clearing my bank account.

This race was run over the Bruce Trail, a waymarked path from Tobermory to Niagara. I expected it to be similar to some of the trail/coastal races I've done in the UK. I wasn't far off, it was only a question of scale. Some of the rocks here were bigger than some London boroughs.

Day 1

Not many multi-day runs start with a 50k stage, but this was the longest 6 day footrace in the world so we had nothing but tough days. I followed the pack out of the camp and soon we were running over very large pebbles along the side of a lake. It was hard to decide whether I should run or walk. One part of me thought that this terrain was really silly to run on so I should walk, the other that I'm only 1 mile into a 190 mile race and that I was being a wimp. The wimp won.

The rocks in the first 15 miles were absolutely brutal. After the pebble beach, the course entered the forest where the really big rocks started. They were huge and omnipresent. I had hoped that 4500 million years of land movement would have reduced these to a manageable size.

I scrambled on, overwhelmed by how much harder it was to run on these rocks compared to rocks back home. Having run so many trail races my feet are pretty hardy to this kind of stress and usually a twist in the ankle can be run off in a couple of minutes. Here there were so many rocks that my feet were twisting more than ever before and after 10 miles I had 2 incidents in very quick succession on my left ankle. The pain was incredible. I felt my foot slowly fill with acid which then made the bones feel fragile and sore. 180 miles to go and one false step from a broken bone - I didn't hold out much hope for the rest of the week. I hobbled on.

It took 7.30 to finish the first day and everyone there (most of them Marathon Des Sables Vets) were quite shocked by how hard the start was. Surely it was going to get easier?

Day 2

It didn't get easier. Day 2 started as day 1 finished but soon led onto more flat roads and trails. I was pleased with this as these were the only bits I could actually run on with my injury. The day got very warm which made me crave unusual things like coke.

The Coke craving is a strange thing, I never drink it normally but I desire it in races. It's like craving things when you are pregnant (I imagine). In fact



Niagara calls: the Bruce Trail's beautiful scenery
(photo: James Adams)

there are probably a lot of similarities between being pregnant and ultra-running. You crave random foods and feel like you are eating for 2. You feel a lot slower and heavier than normal, your bladder is a law unto itself. You look and feel terrible while everyone is telling you that you look great. When you're done you suspect you could have pushed harder.

I made good time running uphill along a long stretch of road and reached the 4th checkpoint(42k) at about 6 hours. There was 15k to go and another checkpoint and I guessed it would probably take a couple of hours to reach the end. What followed was probably the hardest and most miserable stretch of "running" I have ever experienced. The rocks came back with interest.

There is little way to judge distance while on trails like this. You can have an idea that it takes x minutes to run 1k and extrapolate but that was totally wrong in this race. The only way I could judge how far I had gone was the side trails that appear on the map. The route was along the main trail but every now and then a side trail would present itself and this was detailed in the roadbook. The problem with these was that they appeared quite close together on the map, but they took an age to appear in reality. I wasn't sure whether it was the hard running or the prospect of 4 more days that made me doubt I'd finish this race. It took 4 hours to do the remaining 15k.

Day 3

Day 3 was "only a marathon" but 3 of the 8 competitors didn't start. Paul had barely stopped since yesterday, Justin had injured his hip and Chris had feet that looked like bubble wrap and had to go to hospital. Many races claim to be the hardest race in the world but have a high finish rate. We were down to 58% and we still had 4 days to go. Surely it was going to get easier?

The plan today was for myself, Jo and Andy to start at 8am and Bruce and Rhodri (who were now referred to as the "robots") would start at 9. I was taking my time getting ready for the start, faffing around with my kit. Then out of the corner of my eye I saw Jo and Andy starting. I had no idea it was 8am already. I frantically threw stuff in my bag to get going. Having got myself together I ran to the start line and Chris asked me a very valid question, "Are you taking your shoes and socks with you?" I

looked down and realised that I was still in my flip-flops, my trainers and socks were on the table. If there was any doubt in the others' minds that I was an idiot, it had just been confirmed.

Day 3 was actually quite easy in comparison to the first 2. It could all be run, it was just a shame my legs weren't taking part. Andy, Jo and I started at 6 and Rhodri and Bruce set out at 8. I felt much better and was feeling the benefits of a lighter pack. It was still dark as we navigated through the town and back onto the trail.

I ran ahead and made an arse of navigating several times, I didn't mind though, I was bouncing around having not being able to push myself on the first 3 days. I was ready to do so today.

After checkpoint 1, we had to take a side trail, the "Slough of Despond". Even all the way out here people associate Slough with despondency. I continued and turned around at the end to see a sign calling it the "Presidents Path". I was on a different trail to the one I thought and didn't know whether to take the turn I thought I should. I frantically emptied my bag to find my compass (what I was going to do with it once I found it I did not know at that stage). Then Andy and Jo appeared from the same trail I'd come from and made the turning. They found it hilarious that I'd just emptied my bag and was now struggling to get everything in and catch up. The trail was marked wrong, it was as simple as that. I'd been right all along.

Day 4

The route turned back into the forest and I enjoyed the trail. The path was not as rocky as before but there was plenty there to be challenging. My foot was better and I really enjoyed being able to use it properly. For the first time in this race I felt I could let my mind wander and think about other things. It was such an amazing trail and I was really jealous of not getting this kind of running in London.

Day 5

On Day 5 I got a lie in. Yesterday's run meant that I would start with Rhodri and Bruce setting off at 9. I was still buoyed from yesterday and a bit sad that this was the last whole day. Still, I was looking forward to the end and amazed that I'd managed to run 4 hard ultras in 4 days on a injured foot.

Justin and Paul had rejoined the race and set off a couple of hours earlier. Chris was still in a bad way and had to go to hospital for his blisters. He was given some very potent drugs which were the envy of the rest of us.

I ran with Bruce and Rhodri for most of the day, but heat and exhaustion got the better of me and I let them go. This demonstrates how knackered I was: I climbed over a stile and took my bag off to get something. I put it back on, ran on, then realised that my hat was not in my hand. I returned to the stile and couldn't find it, then realised it was on my head all along.

I had difficulty in the last few miles as my map had melted. I was told to look out for a "very pretty bridge" and then turn into the finish there. This road seemed to go on for miles (which it did I think) and I was hoping that this bridge was going to be worth it.

It was a very nice bridge and even nicer to see the finish. This had been a really hard day for me and we all celebrated the almost end of the race by jumping in the stream nearby. It was great to get near the end of the race but very sad to think that in a few days time I'd be back in the mundane. I was trying to put that out of my mind now though. I was looking forward to drinking a beer at the finish in the Blue Mountain Resort.

Day 6

Day 6 – Hardly worth bothering with (21k). I set off with Rhodri and Bruce and the first half was an uphill section of road. It was very hot and really straight. I could see for miles and wondered how far I'd have to go up. It's hard to tell how far the next hill was and the mirage made it more difficult.

We reached the top of the road in about an hour. This was the last checkpoint we saw (sob). We turned left into the woods and made our way onto the trail via a very narrow gate (which I doubt I would have fitted through 6 days earlier).

Rhodri and Bruce ran on and I made my own way through the trail. We were approaching a busy tourist resort and running along what are ski slopes in the winter. I could almost taste the beer. I followed the trail down painful, steep slopes. Skis would have been useful here. Then I heard everyone screaming and shouting. I saw that Justin was ahead of me and about to finish.

It was quite nice to be the last to finish, it was great to see everyone on the line. I stopped and took off my shoes and socks, threw them in a bin and put on my flip-flops. I finished the race as I tried to start day 3. Road shoes just didn't cut it here, in fact they just got cut up.

I went through the finish line with all the grace and poise you would expect from someone who has run 300k over 6 days and is wearing flip-flops. I hugged everyone and made my way towards the beer. Coors light, fitting as that's my drink after the club runs. Well earned I think, if not for the running then for all the tomfoolery. Total Time 50 hour-ish – 3rd place.

The next Moose will be held 15-21st August 2009, see the website for details: <http://www.runthemoose.com>



James gracefully flip-flops over the finish line (photo: Richard Price)

Zurich Neujahrs Marathon 2009

Ben Cope and friends build snowmen and set records in Zurich on New Year's Eve

A few months before Christmas, James Adams said he had a killer suggestion for New Years Eve. Sucked in by a thought of drunken mayhem in some club, Simon Bampfylde and I listened keenly. I don't know why we were surprised when he suggested running a marathon, in "Zurich", in the "cold" (very cold in fact, it snowed, and was probably down to minus 10). Still, we agreed, booked flights and hotels and finally twisted our own arms to enter. We made a Gentleman's agreement to run together...

After 'tapering' (redefined as excessive turkey, booze and parties) over Christmas, the three of us were en route to Heathrow. I met James and Simon on the tube as they were recovering from 6 (?) pints of Guinness the previous night in O'Neills – I'd got an early night (and got called a girl!). After a hearty Weatherspoons breakfast (yes the marathon 'rule-book' was out of the window) we were air bound to Zurich, in about 14 hours we'd be running a marathon.

One thing we did get right was the pre-race pasta in the afternoon in Zurich, washed down by some local water (cough, sorry, I mean beer). It was then time for some well needed sleep. We awoke about 8 pm with Simon stood at the window and, like a 4 year old child, shouting "it's snowing". After donning our thermals, and dragging James away from his snowman, we headed for the start. As we slid down the road we realised this was going to be hard. Even harder, we had to pass boozed up locals, who we desperately wanted to join.

The race started and finished at a school hall in the western outskirts of Zurich, slap bang in the middle of an industrial park, which luckily it was too dark to see. James and I were the only ones in shorts, and a local informed James of our foolishness. Meanwhile we swapped Camelbak bladders for extra clothes – a wise choice.

I've been asked a few times at work when a New Years Eve marathon would start – yep it was at midnight with the usual countdown and couples kissing. I told James and Simon to "stop it!" and began running. Five minutes in, we wished each other happy new year and continued, resisting the urge to run quickly we set a steady 7min40 pace. This would slow later as the snow beneath our feet was quickly turning to ice.

'I've been asked a few times at work when a New Years Eve marathon would start – yep it was at midnight with the usual countdown and couples kissing'

The route takes the form of 1 small loop then 2 large loops around a river, mainly on gravel and occasionally on tarmac – all of this looked the same under a generous covering of snow. My memory of the run all merges into one for the most: hot sports drink (strangely palatable), cheering



At five minutes to midnight at least one Serpie was going to be disappointed with his New Year snog

locals (the race was amazingly well supported for NYE), oh, and did I mention snow and ice?

We had agreed to run together and managed this for the most of the run. However, on the second lap Simon took a comfort stop in the bushes. James and I jogged on and were surprised that after a slow few miles there was still no sign of Simon. We had forgotten he had the sense of direction of a decapitated chicken and waited at the next checkpoint whilst he speedily caught us and informed us of his misdirection. In his defence it was dark and the path he took was the only one not to be cordoned off with tape.

Anyway, 3hrs 48min passed speedily and it was over. Two tenths of a second less for James as he crossed marginally ahead to become the fastest Brit in 2009* – who said he wasn't competitive. What followed was a most bizarre race moment – a Rab C Nesbit style string vest. We were gracious (less so when we found out they had run out of beer) and headed back to the hotel. New Years Eve trips home are always challenging, for us it resulted in a taxi as we found even the most efficient of trains take a break on NYE.

Arriving back at the hotel at 5am it was time to crack open a beaver (yes we are children – this is an interestingly named beer from Davos). We each dropped asleep half way through our beavers for a few hours before heading down to destroy the breakfast buffet. Luckily for the other guests the string vests stayed in the room!

* as of 3.48am 01/01/09

Run Safe!

Wear reflective clothing at night
Never assume people in cars/on bikes can see you
Avoid running with headphones (not permitted on club runs)
Always carry ID or wear an ID tag
 Keep running magic! - Sid Wills

Curry, cows and Delhi Half Marathon

Karen Hancock

I have to admit I took some convincing to make my first visit to India. Apart from my worries about how my boyfriend and I would get on for 2 weeks together when we hadn't hitherto spent more than 48 hours in each other's company, I could only think of the potential health and safety problems which might interfere with my training. I have been slightly scared by experiences when running in African and Arab countries – although on reflection, I've had a few close encounters of the scary kind in Regent's Park and in Glasgow.

Before committing to the trip, I 'googled' safety for women runners in Goa – our destination. The results put me off completely: women were advised to run in long-sleeved tops and trousers! How would I cope with that in the heat? My boyfriend's suggestion to take a couple of weeks off running filled me with horror, thus confirming his belief that running is some sort of addiction (I should explain that he is a non-running psychotherapist who treats addicts). However the next thing I knew he had tracked down an organisation called 'Running and Living', whose 'Chief Believer' – Rahul Verghese – wanted me to run in a half marathon in Delhi (3 hours' flight from Goa) as an invited international athlete.

Encouraged by my boyfriend's support for the idea of a trip to Delhi, pride and curiosity overcame fear and I committed to the Indian holiday. Surviving a 10-hour flight to Goa by putting compression socks to good use, but refusing any Indian food during the first week of the holiday for fear of hospitalisation, I tried a few tentative acclimatisation runs at 7 am in Goa. I was not optimistic. By 8 am it was getting unbearably hot. But the forecast in Delhi was a few degrees cooler (25 degrees C by 10 am), and the race was to start at 7am.

On the morning of the race it was dark when we arrived at the start and the marathon runners, who had started earlier, were carrying torches as the street-lights weren't lit. By 6:30 dawn was breaking, I put my racing shoes on and pinned my number to my Serpie top. About 150 of us lined up for the half marathon, mostly prosperous Indians speaking English with an American accent, the majority of whom seemed to have arrived for the race in what we know as "Chelsea tractors". The contrast between the pale-skinned, sleek and well-dressed Indian runners and the dusty, wiry, cotton-clad poor Indian onlookers with more basic forms of transport was striking. I kept wondering about poor Africans who apparently see a route out of poverty through running. But that doesn't seem to have caught on in India. In any case, there were no money prizes at this race.

The course was perfect. It consisted of 7km out and back along a flat new road with a distant horizon to focus on, and markers at every km, then a 3.55km out and back loop along the same road. I was a track runner in my youth and I love courses like that: you can see exactly how far the leaders are in front, and how far your pursuers are behind you.

Not feeling very fit, I was a bit surprised to find I was in equal 3rd place at the 3km point, running alongside a young man who looked to be about 24. I had no idea of my actual pace, and I wondered whether my usually-reliable Perceived Effort pacing guide had gone awry and I had set off at



Our coach Karen is given the celebrity treatment in India (photo: Piers Harris)

an unsustainable pace. But then a motorbike came alongside me, whose pillion passenger pushed an "India TV" microphone under my nose, asking: "What is your name? Where are you from? How old are you? Are you tired yet?". Now it is possible to give answers to questions like that when running at half-marathon pace, but not if you're running at 10k or 5k pace, so I did, and I knew then I was putting in the right sort of effort.

The temperature was much like running in May in London – slightly fresh at the start, and getting warmer as the race progressed. Officials noted my race number at each checkpoint, and before the first turn at 7km I exchanged greetings with the 2 young Indian men lying in first and second place who were heading back towards the start. On my return to the start, I shouted encouragement to the women behind me. "Good job!" they shouted back, and that other American greeting: "Way to Go!". They looked a bit over-dressed to me, in their Capri pants and long-sleeved tops. The only hazard on the course was random cows wandering about, but they are very docile and could be skirted round without problems.

I crossed the finish line with slightly sore feet and a better-than-expected time. I was happy and chatted to the two young men who had finished well ahead of me in 1:16 and 1:23 respectively. There were no women's prizes, only trophies for the first 5 finishers, so I waited for the prize-giving expecting to be awarded the 3rd place trophy. But I was baffled when they gave 3rd place to a man I hadn't seen at all in the race and I was presented with the 4th place trophy instead! On reviewing my boyfriend's photos, we could see that he hadn't been photographed at the 14km turnaround point, and moreover he had crossed the finish line without a number. I told the organisers and they admitted he was known to have joined the race about 3km from the finish, but they had given him the prize as they didn't want to upset the local community. It seemed a very Indian experience to me, so I just laughed about it.

The party that night at the hotel was wonderful in part because I had my first Indian curry of the trip. It proved to be the first of a whole week's-worth of curries, as by now my fears of an attack of "Delhi belly" had receded. Funnily enough I didn't get malaria, nor DVT and nor did I have a road accident. And my boyfriend and I are still together.

Top Tips!

Ian Payne and Gowan Clews offer advice to new and old Serpies on getting the most out of your club membership

Top Tips for...

Serpie Newbies

Ian Payne

If you're a new member to one of the biggest running and tri clubs in the country, it can be hard to know where to start. Although everybody else may seem to know everyone already, Serpentine is also one of the friendliest clubs you could hope to join and it really does cater for every conceivable level. If you're struggling for inspiration on how to get involved, make some new Serpentine buddies and get the most out of your membership, then these tips might help.

Get running

Ok, so this is a fairly obvious one, but if you're new to running then having a regular date in the diary can help motivate you to keep coming along and ensure that your enthusiasm doesn't fade. The number of regular club runs on offer is so extensive that it can be difficult to know where to start, but Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings are the two biggest and most sociable runs of the serpie week, with the usual welcoming atmosphere and a wide range of different abilities. If you can't make Wednesdays or Saturdays then there are plenty of other options such as the various weekday track sessions or the Sunday run around Richmond. If you're a complete beginner and unsure about trying any of these options, you may be interested in signing up for an 8 week beginners' jogging course, run by and for members. You can get further information on this on the website or by emailing: member-liaison@serpentine.org.uk.

Get kitted out

As part of your membership pack you will have got a voucher entitling you to a free t-shirt or vest. This is good quality kit that will really make you look the part and hopefully feel it too, so make sure your voucher doesn't go to

waste. The kit room, on the top floor of the Seymour Leisure Centre above the club room, is open on most Wednesday club nights, usually between 6.15pm and 6.40pm, except the last Wednesday of each month, when it is open after the run from around 8.30pm to 9.00pm. It is also open after the Saturday morning club run, with the exception of the first Saturday of each month when the club handicap is run (watch the e-group for notices on exact opening times).

Get in the loop

The Serpentine mailing lists are the official club communications channels, and you'll want to be signed up to some or all of these to make sure you get information about club events ranging from training sessions to races, social events to special offers, all delivered straight to your inbox. You sign up on Serpiebase under 'email preferences'. Also the informal Yahoo email chat forums (egroups) are a great source of random other information, informal gatherings, flatshares with other Serpies, and a way for you to email a bunch of other people with similar interests if you want to find someone to do a long run with for example. The egroups see a lot of email traffic, but fortunately once you have subscribed, you can decide whether to have individual email messages or just a single more digestible daily summary.

Get racing

Even if you're a complete beginner, entering a race is a great way to keep you motivated and give you something to focus on. It also gives you something to talk about with other serpie members, and an opportunity to meet more people and make more serpie buddies on the day. Many people join the club with the London Marathon in mind, but there are thousands of other different distances and types of race taking place all year round. You can check the Event Planner on the website for a list of these, which range from road races to triathlons, cross country and even track and field, so why not try something new? Events that are highlighted in pink on the planner are usually good for beginners as they are recommended by club members and often very friendly and well organised with a high serpie turnout. Club Championship races (highlighted in yellow on the planner) are great for newcomers, especially the summer "grands prix" races which are over shorter distances, open to serpie members only and involving runners of every conceivable standard. Sunday League inter-club road and cross country races are



Serpentine is one of the friendliest clubs, hardly anyone bites (photo: Lars Olsen)

also good for newbies as they have a particularly friendly family atmosphere and are fairly low-key.

Get socialising

The social aspect of every serpie running occasion is considered by many (if not most) members to be the most important part. The Last Wednesday of the Month "wine and cheese" session is one of the best examples of the welcoming atmosphere that prevails within the club, and is particularly geared towards welcoming beginners. But it's no exception, as virtually every organised club run or training session is followed by a well-earned drink or a bite to eat with fellow runners, swimmers and cyclists, so once you've done the hard bit it's always a good idea to stick around, mingle and introduce yourself to people. Hardly any of them will bite!

Get volunteering

A great way to get involved and feel like you're a part of the club is to volunteer some time to help out. There are often requests for help on the egroup, whether it's for Wednesday night bag watching or kit selling, marshalling at races or just generally getting involved with the organisation of the club. If you're really keen, the club can even help you become a qualified coach or athletics official, or you might eventually want to lead organised runs or cycle rides yourself. Or if you've got an interesting story to tell about what made you join the club, why not write an article for the next issue of Serpentine...?

Top Tips for...

Planning your training

Gowan Clews

You've seen the magazine headlines. "4 weeks to a 10K personal best", "A faster YOU in just 5 minutes a day" and "The secret to running fast". Well, here's the secret; running faster involves regular, focused and varied training.

Here are some pointers to help in your training. Though they are described individually, they are all dependent on each other.

Smorgasbord

A wonderful Swedish word for variety. Look at the different training sessions the club offers. There are Sunday long runs in Richmond Park, Saturday hills in Greenwich and Primrose, and various track and interval sessions on Tuesday and Thursday. Find out which ones will help with your racing or running objectives.

Add variety to your routes; running 2 Parks twice a week for 6 months can get boring. Try running 2 Parks clockwise for a change, though watch out for Serpies coming in the other direction; they hunt in packs you know! Look on the website (under Training - Running) for other routes.

Vary the frequency and intensity. Too many runs can lead to injury. Consider the types of runs, for example: a weekly long run, one or two (but no more) hard runs or training sessions each week, a recovery run, social runs to catch up (sic!) with friends. Remember that conversation can be good, as talking regulates breathing.

Then there's the Swedish Fartlek workout, or "speed play". During a regular training run, select random points and run fast and hard till you reach them, trying to maintain your sprint. It will add variety and help build fitness.

So many choices, yet without structured and committed training the improvements and rewards will be frustratingly long in coming. Look at what the club has to offer, try out the various sessions, and find what works for you, your goals and your lifestyle.



Sue Lambert demonstrates her enjoyment of running (photo: Ian Hodge)

Enjoyment

Running keeps us fit (so we can eat mostly what we like), introduces us to people from around the world, and is enjoyable. As long as we can avoid injury...

Rest

There are many neglected aspects of training. Factoring recovery into your training schedule is one. This usually means allocating a day or more per week for no running. Thus your body has time to repair itself and you get fitter and stronger. Incorporating easy weeks into your schedule, or even taking a break from running now and then can help prevent injury.

Every single aspect of the club, all activities visible and behind the scenes are put on by unpaid volunteers. So when you are resting, recovering from injury or recuperating after a race, why not help at a club activity. "Meeting and greeting" on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings are valuable jobs. Marshalling or helping on water stations is vital to any Serpie event. And it helps you to run better, as you will meet different Serpies and swap training and racing experiences.

Practise, Perseverance, Patience, Perspective

One or more of the 4 Ps can be applied in many ways including: when you're injured, missing

out on a PB, spending 3 years (for example) to achieve a sub 40-minute 10K or your first ultra, missing a big race through injury, winter training when it's dark and cold, transport problems, pub running out of best bitter or chips!

Injury

There are books and magazines devoted to injury prevention and recovery from, as well as (sometimes) expensive private healthcare professionals. The Health and Fitness part of the Advice section on the Serpie website contains a wealth of advice on injury prevention and recovery from. Remember to build up gradually, whether you are starting training or returning from injury. Keep increases in mileage or time on feet to no more than 10% a week. So many injuries come from increasing mileage too quickly, or returning from injury too early.

A few points to consider: remember to stretch after running (see below), practise rehydrating (drinking water and/or sports drinks) during training, learn to tell the difference between aches born from tiredness and pain indicating an injury. If it hurts, stop.

Enjoyment (2)

Remember to smile. Imagine holding a crisp between your fingers on each hand; it will relax you. Think happy thoughts as they will also relax you. And you will run better, train better, race better. Works for Paula Radcliffe, and it can work for you.

Stretching

You should carefully stretch after running. But it is all too easy to go through the motions, and for errors to creep into your stretches. If possible, book a session with a fitness professional and review the stretches you do both before and after training and races. They may also suggest other exercises suitable for you. Core stability (for maintaining good posture) and conditioning exercises are also worth investigating.

Gowan is the coach at Primrose Hill on Saturday morning.

Thanks to senior club coach Malcolm French, and Wayne Edwards (Senior Podiatrist at Health and Fitness Solutions) for their valuable advice.

Top Tips for...

Using the club website

Ian Payne

The Serpentine website (serpentine.org.uk) is widely recognised as one of the most comprehensive running and triathlon club sites in the UK. As a member of the club you are lucky enough to have full access to all the useful tools and gems of information it contains, of which these six are just a taster. How many have you yet to use...?

Race & Event Planner

Whether you are pondering a local 10k or an overseas marathon, speculating about your next big one-off challenge or putting together a detailed race schedule, the event planner is the place to start. It contains information and links to a wide range of road running, multi-sport, cross country, track & field and even serpie social events, with recommended events and serpie championship races clearly highlighted.

Advice and Training Tips

Drawing on the knowledge of a small army of serpie experts past and present, this section contains a wealth of information and articles on a wide range of subjects. It has something for everyone from complete beginners to more experienced athletes, containing training tips, advice on nutrition, dealing with injuries, trying new events and much more.

My Events

This is a fantastic tool that everyone in the club should be using more often. By clicking on the calendar icon next to an event on the planner, you can see who else has entered, who might be offering a lift (or seeking one), what times people are aiming to achieve and who will be coming along to support. If you are taking part yourself then you can add your own information to the list and your fellow runners will know when and where to look out for you. Genius!

Results Database

The times from every race you've ever done are most probably stored for posterity in the Serpie Results Database – a statistician's dream which contains results from as far back as the

early 90s. If your result for a particular race is not automatically added (which most of the time it will be), then you can very easily get that rectified by emailing the details to results@serpentine.org.uk.

Discounts for Members listings

As you'll no doubt be aware, your Serpentine membership entitles you to discounts on a massive range of products and services, from running and tri kit to nutrition, massage, yoga and even sporting holidays. This section of the website is updated fairly regularly and is the best place to check for all the latest deals that are available for you to enjoy.

Serpibase & the new club mailing lists

This is the heart and soul of your membership of the club, it's where you renew your membership, keep your personal details up to date, and choose what information you want to receive from the club. Most recently the 'Email preferences' page has been enhanced to include a range of mailing lists about general club news, training and racing opportunities. On this page you can opt in and out of the various mailing lists whenever you like, and there is also a tick-box for choosing whether to receive a hard copy of Serpentine magazine. Make sure you keep your email and home address up to date if you want to receive these!

Help needed

Kit Sales

We need people to sell Serpie kit on Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings at the Seymour Centre. If you can help please contact Richard Jones: facilities@serpentine.org.uk

Track & Field officials

Training courses available, but simple enthusiasm sufficient if you can't make the training. See Serpie calendar for dates of T&F matches. We need most help at home matches at Battersea.

Writing articles for Serpentine

The next issue is planned for publication in August/September 2009. Send your ideas to serpentine@serpentine.org.uk

Club Champs!

The Serpentine Club Championships are a series of races with trophies for the male, female and (for road running) age-graded winners of each race. The four short road races are called the "grand-prix" and are organised by the club so there is no advance entry – you just turn up on the day. The other races are open races and you must enter them yourself. To count for club championship competitions you must:

1. Be a first claim member of Serpentine
2. Have entered under your own name
3. Compete wearing club colours (optional only for the marathon)

Road Racing

5 miles - Victoria Park Open - Sat 28 March

1 km - Hyde Park - July

3 km - Battersea Park - July

1 mile - Willesden Stadium - July

5 km - Battersea Park - July

10 km - Middlesex & Open - Sun 6 Sept.

10 miles - Cabbage Patch 10 - October

Half Marathon - TBD

Marathon - Any race during 2009

Triathlon

Sprint - TriFest Sprint - Sun 7 June

Olympic - Bedford Classic - Sun 19 July

Half Ironman - New Forest - Sun 20 Sept.

Ironman - Lanzarote - Sat 23 May

Duathlon - Emberton - Sun 5 April

Aquathlon - Morden 6n6 - Sun 10 May

Multi-sport

The multi-sport championship combines races from the club road race, triathlon, duathlon and aquathlon championships, with the Triathlon London League races and a few extras, to find the Serpentine 'multi-sport' champions (male and female). You must complete at least five of the qualifying races, while scoring in at least four of the categories (only your best five results count).

The Runner's horoscope

Madame JJ tells you whats in your stars this year...

Aries March 21-April 19

Love is in the air. This is the year to make the first move and ask out that person whom you have fancied for months. Set up a date and arrange a romantic carbo-loading. But here is a tip for the male: a race T-shirt is not an acceptable item of clothing for your first date and will not impress. Tell her about the marathon you ran last year, but do not wear the finisher's T-shirt on that special night out.

Taurus April 20-May 20

As a typical Taurus you love the great outdoors. Have you tried cross country yet? You will enjoy being covered in mud and running up hills with your tongue hanging out. But you also like to chill out in your herd, which is exactly what the cross country crowd does. There is always a watering hole where they gather afterwards to talk about the battle and rehydrate. Join in, the more the merrier. This is your year to get dirty!

Gemini May 21-June 21

Your work colleagues call you "the running freak" and often ask: "Is this all for you?" or "Where does he put it?", when you have your 3 course lunch. They think that ITB is something that can be found in your computer. They are not bad people, they just have not discovered the enjoyment of being a runner yet. Why not take them out to the park and show them that running is fun. You never know, they might even start to enjoy it. This year you can be a great inspiration to others. But go easy on them!

Cancer June 22-July 21

You achieved a lot last year, the trophy cupboard is full and you get bored now waiting for the prize giving. We hate people like you and would love to beat you just once. This is where the handicap comes in. After your scratch run Jon and Mark will put you in your place and you will find yourself starting the next race dead last, minutes after everyone else has already set off. A brand new experience for you. The handicap is a great race and a challenge for all levels. Put it in your diary. First Saturday of each month! Try something new, see the world from a different angle this year!

Leo July 23-August 22

You are a great person, have a lot of running experience, and people value your advice and enjoy training with you. Have you thought about becoming a coach or official? 2009 could be the year for you to sign up for a course, get the right qualifications and put all that to good use. The club needs people like you... if it is hill sessions, track work or long runs... your help is always very much appreciated. 2009 is your year to step up, learn new things and encourage others.

Virgo August 23-September 22

Unlucky in love...2008 was a disaster. Don't worry this year will be different. Spring clean your wardrobe, invest in a sexy new running top or a new pair of cycling shorts and accessorise this with a Serpie cap or Serpentine jacket. Get out there and join some runs with others and you never know, you might just meet this special someone who will ask "Do you run here often?". 2009 will be a great year to make new friends and maybe start a new relationship.

Libra September 2-October 22

You are ambitious, train very hard, but you feel bored and burnt out. Why not leave your gadgets at home for once? You are peeping like a reversing fork lift truck with all these gadgets strapped to yourself. Running is supposed to be fun and a simple sport, you only need a pair of shoes and off you go. Stop listening to your heart rate for once, stop taking splits. Listen to your own breathing, the birds singing and enjoy. For 2009, less pressure, more fun and still the same great results.

Scorpio Oct. 23-November 21

Can we hear wedding bells...? No, it is the alarm clock. 7:30am on a cold and miserable Sunday morning. You must be mad. No normal person would get up now and run 20 miles. But all your hard work will pay off this year and you will have a great marathon, Ironman or whatever else you are training for. And that fry up will taste fantastic afterwards. Miles done: 20, calories intake: 3000? Sense of achievement: 100%. Your commitment is unbeatable this year.

Sagittarius Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Christmas 2008. You received 2 Christmas cards: one from your mother and one from your physio. It's time to make new friends. To be new in London is hard, but you have come to the right place: SerpieWorld. With so many different activities like cross country, track and field, club runs and relays, you will soon find lots of like-minded people. Why not try the Green Belt Relay: a great weekend away in May. All welcome, more details on the event planner. 2009 promises to be a very sociable year for you.

Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 19

2009 is Feng Shui time. Time to declutter your flat, house, garage and finally get rid of all that stuff that you never use. Why not sell perfectly good running or cycling items to your Serpie club mates. Some might not be able to afford a new bike or turbo trainer at the moment, but would love to buy your second hand one. Motto for 2009: less is more. It will give your finances a boost too.

Aquarius Jan. 20-February 18

Take, Take, Take...a famous phrase from a famous Serpie. While the credit crunch is upon us, to make a donation to the club is very cheap...indeed it costs nothing. Why not donate 1 or 2 hours of your time and help with the bags, marshal at the 5k or lead one of the club runs. In return you get something that is priceless - being part of a well organised club, and warm thanks from all your club mates. We need your help and my crystal ball tells me that you will be a very popular person in 2009!

Pisces February 19-March 20

You love the sun, the sea, the heat...but you live in London, England, where you wear a fleece and waterproofs for a BBQ in July. Don't let this stop you having fun. The many gyms and indoor pools can offer great refuge in winter. And there is always the week in Lanzarote organised by Serpentine to give you the chance to go away in Feb/March for a week with lots of other sport fanatics, for some well needed sunshine and almost unlimited sports opportunities. Even on many rainy days in 2009 your positive approach will brighten yours and other people's lives.

Whatever your star sign, 2009 will be a great year, you will achieve many goals and meet some amazing people who all have one thing in common: they look great in red and yellow!

Sudbury Court

Martin Garrett reports from our west London sister club

It seems hard to believe, but Sudbury Court Running Club will be celebrating its 10th anniversary next Spring, our inaugural meeting having been held on May 18th 1999. How time flies, as they say. In fact, the 10th running of our annual 10km race also falls on May 17th (never hurts to get an early plug in), offering us a perfect opportunity to commence the celebrations. To mark our first decade, we're also holding a 5km race in tandem with the main event, and, needless to say, all Serpies are cordially invited along to the festivities.

As it happens, the formation of the club was no overnight affair. Our Tuesday night group composed principally, but not exclusively, of Serpies had been running out of Vale Farm Sports Centre in Wembley since the early eighties, and it was the closure of the centre for a number of weeks in the Summer of '97 due to an outbreak of Legionella bacteria, that was to act as the catalyst.

One or two regulars who also belonged to

Sudbury Court Sports Club, in East Lane, suggested we use the club's bar for post-run 'refuelling', joining as social members. After a spell getting changed in the back seats of cars, and a brief flirtation with Bannister Stadium, we returned to run out of Vale Farm until early '98 (whilst still imbibing up the road) when we decided to take up the option of Sudbury Court's facilities full-time. Even then, despite (as my diary notes inform me) frequent promptings from one or two of our group, in particular Tom Blacker and Jim O'Leary who will be familiar to longer serving Serpies, it was still over a year before we 'took the plunge', partly, as it were, to commit more fully to the main club, and partly in the hope of attracting a few new faces as members were getting a little thin on the ground at the time.

Our tenure at Sudbury Court lasted until June 2004, when the parent club's financial difficulties led Brent Council to take the premises back into their own hands. Through the offices of one of our members, Gavin Imrie, who had also been one of those to point us in the direction of Sudbury Court previously, we found temporary accommodation at Wembley Cricket Club for three months before Chris Stagg, our chairman, negotiated a move to Wembley and Sudbury Lawn Tennis & Squash Club in Sylvester Road which has been our base ever since.

As with Serpentine, we've seen a good number of runners pass through our 'revolving doors' over the years, but I'm pleased to say that of our twenty-three registered members at the end of 1999 seventeen are still 'on our books' in one capacity or another, including current Serpentine Chair, Malcolm French, and beginners group stalwart, Bev Thomas. Numbers have fluctuated from the mid-twenties up to around sixty, and are currently hovering around fifty. Fingers-crossed, our involvement with Brent Council's "Adults Get Active/Jog Brent" programme, with "free taster sessions" at the club, and our website www.sudburycourt.org.uk (ably administered by Primrose Hill sessions coach Gowan Clews), will lead a few more to our door.

We have a core membership of enthusiasts who, over the years, have supported local races such as the Moor Park 10km, Harrow Hill Race and Ricky Road 9, as well as the Summer League, and our annual club excursion to Luton for the end of year Marathon Relay. No need for a large trophy cabinet, though I feel it incumbent upon me to point out that our Ladies team did finish second in the St Albans 7 in 2000, an event that stood as our pinnacle of achievement until 2007 when we shocked everyone, including ourselves, by picking up the Men's team prize at the Moor Park 10km!

Coming up: Races

Green Belt Relay: 23-24 May

Entries opening on EntryCentral in mid-March. All welcome, we will have up to 5 teams which will cater for everyone interested.

Welsh Castles Relay: 13-14 June

Two senior teams (men and women) and one mixed vet's team. Selection for the senior teams is based on qualifying standards. Contact team captains Andrew Davies, Jane Fanning and Rebecca Glover if you can run 10 miles in around 65 minutes or faster for men, or 75 minutes for women. The vet's team is open to men and women over 35.

National Club Triathlon Relays: Saturday 22 August

Our annual trip to Nottingham. We want fast mens/womens/mixed teams as well as a big crowd of all abilities.

Assembly League

A series of six Thursday evening races held April-September in Beckenham, North Greenwich, and Victoria Park, Hackney. Entry fee is paid for by the club, no need to pre-book. See Serpie planner for race dates and locations.

Summer League

Five races this year, dates to be confirmed. Many thanks to Siobhan Reddy for taking over as lead coordinator for this league.

Track & Field

The season begins on 25 April with the SWL. Match dates and locations are on the Event Planner. Serpentine competes in the following leagues, contact the team captains if you are interested. All abilities welcome, and we always need officials to help run the matches.

Southern Mens League Division 1

Andy Reeves and Robin Kindersley

Southern Mens League Division 3

Charles Lescott

Southern Womens League Senior Division 2

Rachel Whittaker and Monica Kiraly

Southern Vets League

Simon Baird (men) and Jan Farmer (women)

Rosenheim League

Alessandro Brandimarti (men) and Monica Kiraly (women)

Officials Secretary - John Cullinane

COMING UP

Dates for your diary

Sunday 5 April - Last Half of London Marathon Training Run

[Sign up online](#)

Wednesday 22 April - Talk with Christopher McDougall

Endurance runner and author of "Born to Run". Duke of York, 8:30pm, email social@serpentine.org.uk to book

Saturday 27 June - Serpie Summer Party!

Zakudia bar, near London Bridge, 7pm, advance ticket purchase only

Saturday 4 July - Serpentine AGM

Find out what is happening in your club. Stand, or vote, for the new committee

SERPENTINE

CONTACT DETAILS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Malcolm French

Chairman
H: 020 8422 3900
M: 077 8816 7652
chairman@serpentine.org.uk

Charles Lescott

Honorary Secretary
M: 079 4661 5335
hon.secretary@serpentine.org.uk

Jo Currie

Treasurer
M: 079 3174 7870
hon.treasurer@serpentine.org.uk

Richard Jones

Facilities and Club Kit
M: 078 6790 6032
facilities@serpentine.org.uk

Ian Hodge

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

Lisa Pettit

Race Organisation and Promotion
M: 079 7626 4590
races@serpentine.org.uk

Malcolm Hinsley

Coach Liaison
M: 079 7696 4359
coach-liaison@serpentine.org.uk

John Cullinane

Training and Fitness
M: 079 8565 3862
trainingrep@serpentine.org.uk

Mariana Ivantsoff

Social
M: 079 5275 1759
social@serpentine.org.uk

Sid Wills

Membership Liaison
M: 079 0159 0758
member-liaison@serpentine.org.uk

Rachel Whittaker

Communications
M: 07971 910795
communications@serpentine.org.uk

Nadya Labib

Fundraising, Sponsorship, and
External Liaison
M: 077 2949 3518
external-liaison@serpentine.org.uk

USEFUL CONTACTS

Hilary Walker

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

Results Team

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

Events Calendar

events@serpentine.org.uk

www.serpentine.org.uk



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

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

The kit room is open:

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

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

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

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

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