

# SERPENTIMES

SUMMER 2008



## INSIDE

An interview with Ian and Sally Hodge  
From Land's End to John O' Groats  
The Golden Girls cross America

## Plus

Andy DuBois tackles Mont Blanc  
Winter off road races



John Cullinane

# THE EDITOR SPEAKS

## Welcome to the latest edition of Serpentines

One of the themes in this issue is how much the Club needs people to help to keep going at the level it is currently at. Juliet Allan's interview with the Ian and Sally Hodge – the first opportunity we've had to interview them since Sally

handed over the editorship – is a great reminder of the many ways they have, and continue to, serve the club. There are introductions to our newest committee members, Mariana Ivantsoff, Malcolm Hinsley, Malcolm French and Lisa Pettit, an article suggesting how you can help, a report on the High Peak Relay by the serial weekend-away organiser Alan Hall, and the denouement of a very exciting 2007 handicap. Hopefully these will inspire you to make a contribution – all it takes is a little bit from everyone.

This includes Serpentines. During the production of this issue we have lost the services of two editors, Nicola Miller and Jelle Brons and Mel Pryke as designer, and we'd like to thank them for their contribution over the last years. It has also become clear that we need more help on the design side too in order to ensure we get two editions out each year. If you can help design or write please email us at [serpentines@serpentine.org.uk](mailto:serpentines@serpentine.org.uk). For this edition, thanks are due to

Rachel Whittaker, Denise Kelly and our friends at Athletics Weekly for pulling it together towards the end, and to our two advertisers.

Finally, there has been a major change at the top of the club. John Walker has been with the club since the beginning, founded the Last Friday races, has been the club's starter and pigeon-scarer in chief and is of course the only person to win a handicap when starting last – among many other achievements and successes. Juliet's interview with John in the Summer 2002 Serpentines is well worth a read. John leaves as Chair as he and Sue head off to Spain with the best wishes and thanks of Serpies everywhere and we welcome Malcolm French as new chair.

Hope you enjoy the mag and find inspiration somewhere – let us know what you think. Cheers,

John

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# When Ian met Sally

by Juliet Allan

It was on an auspicious day in October 1979 that Sally Roach and her older sister set out from Southport in their father's car. They were bound for Leeds, where Sally was about to embark on a degree in Spanish and management. Sally's sister was desperate for a cigarette by the time they arrived, and sent her young charge off to find her hall of residence while she satisfied her nicotine cravings. As Sally stood scrutinising a map on a signpost, a young Geordie approached her and asked if he could help. "Little did I know that he had absolutely no idea of his way around either", smiles Sally. "Well, I figured I could read a map quicker than most people", Ian retorts. I ask whether his offer had anything to do with the fact that Sally was an attractive 18-year-old. "Probably, yeah", he says, laughing. I bet it did.

Four days later, Siouxsie and the Banshees and The Cure were playing at the university. Andy Kershaw, a contemporary of Sally and Ian's, was the events secretary. "The quality and frequency of good bands was quite amazing", explains Ian. Sally queue-jumped bit by bit until she chanced upon the helpful Geordie and muttered to a friend that she wasn't going any further. Over post-gig drinks, she dropped numerous hints about a disco Ian had mentioned, but he failed to take the bait. Not to be so easily defeated, Sally took things into her own hands. Her heart in her mouth, she beat a path to Ian's apartment. Just as she was about to chicken out, Ian appeared from nowhere and asked her what she was doing. Disarmed, Sally decided the best policy was honesty. She'd come to ask him to go to the disco with her. I bet he was pretty chuffed? "Yeeees. Eventually", he admits with exaggerated reluctance, and flashes me a cheeky grin. "Watch it" says Sally.

The romance moved on a pace. By the end of their second term they were engaged and a few months later they moved in together. It wasn't a life of luxury: the house was a shared, condemned back-to-back. That was more than quarter of a century ago, and a far cry from the large, warm, comfortable Edwardian house in which we're now sitting.

Opportunities for sport were many in Leeds and Ian admits that, compared with most people outside the running club world, he's always done a relatively large amount of exercise. Until he joined Serpentine, however, it was all in the cause of keeping fit for his main passions – mountaineering, skiing and climbing. He used to do short runs round the local park in Leeds (prophetically called Hyde Park) and spent the weekends caving. It worked well: Sally was a social member of the caving club and, while Ian explored underground, she hiked in the Yorkshire Dales, joining the cavers for drinks in



*Sally and Ian on their wedding day*

the evening. Ian points out that while caving is not an aerobic sport, it gives you incredible endurance. You get a full body workout for eight hours at a time. The caving club all adopted porcine nicknames. There was Brown Pig, Mad Pig and Hodgepig. If for no other reason, anyone who's ever emailed Ian or Sally will know that Hodgepig has endured.

The urge to keep fit certainly wasn't inherited from Ian's parents. He can't remember ever having seen either of them "take any form of exercise whatsoever". Nonetheless, his father stayed reasonably fit doing semi-physical work as an electrician for ships' control systems on Tyneside. Sally's parents, meanwhile, used to take the family on frequent trips to the Lake and Peak Districts, but walks rarely went further than the nearest picnic spot.

Cycling for sport was still a long way off. In those days, Ian explains, his "two wheel fix" was motorbikes. In fact, in their early days together, Ian's motorbike was their only form of transport. Sally rode on the back. One year they even rode down to the South of France from Leeds. Ian's never been without a motorbike and still rides a couple of thousand miles a year.

Crunch time came when Sally spent her third year in Mallorca. That was before the days of cheap flights, cheap international calls and emails. Each managed one visit to the other, but otherwise they relied on good, old fashioned letters to keep in touch. They've still got them, says Ian, and I can almost convince myself he looks a bit misty-eyed. As soon as Sally graduated they moved down to London, but Leeds retained a



*Sally at the Helwith duathlon (photo: Ian Hodge)*

strong place in their lives. They returned to Yorkshire to cave and hike most weekends and it was in Leeds that they tied the knot in 1984. Sally, audaciously, wore a scarlet and black flamenco dress. She looked stunning.

And so the Hodges settled into married life and the reality of the working world. Ian, an electrical and electronic engineering graduate, got a job in Basildon working on a project designing the specs for GSM mobile phones. Then the company was bought out by a Canadian group, who shut down the mobile phone operation. Mobile phones, they decided, had no future. It's hard not to smile.

Ian took advantage of his notice period to learn as much as he could about IT systems and had no problem picking up a job in the IT section of One-2-One. The new job wasn't in London either and Ian made the long commute out to Borehamwood by bike a couple of times a week. He supplemented the ride with twice-weekly swimming sessions, squash and short runs. "So I was already, 15 years ago, doing swim, bike and run, before anyone in Britain had even particularly thought about triathlon." But it was very much a means to an end. It kept him fit for his new passion: Scottish winter mountaineering. "The concept of entering a race just never entered my mind", he



*Ian modelling his tri suit at Nottingham (photo: Sally Hodge)*

says. He did do one 10k in the Yorkshire Dales to raise money for Cave Rescue. He ran 45:10. "I was beaten in a sprint finish by my mate. B\*stard!" he says. "At that point I established the fact that I did not have a sprint finish and I still don't".

Meanwhile, Sally took a telesales job as a stop-gap, but her dream was to move into marketing. She progressed through jobs at a diary manufacturer's and bookbinders in Tottenham, various financial printing companies and a design and translation agency before getting her foot in the door with a job in the publishing department at an asset management company. As the company grew, the publishing department developed into a proper marketing team. Recognising Sally's talent, they made her marketing manager for the Asian operation. Like Ian, she swam at least twice a week (a habit which she still keeps). This, she explains, was to get fit for hill walking, adding with typical self-deprecation and a very Sally giggle, that she "was always at the back and was madly trying to get fitter."

It was a mid-life crisis that eventually got Sally into her first pair of running shoes. The year before she turned 40, she made a pact with a friend to do the next Great North Run. To her surprise, she found that she really enjoyed the training. "I

wasn't anything like as bad at it as I thought I was going to be", she says. In the run-up to the race, she ran the Cabbage Patch 10 miles. She noticed lots of people in club colours, including a good smattering of red and yellow. They were all happily chatting and smiling and after the race they flocked off to the pub. Sally, in miserable contrast, finished the run and drove home alone. She vowed not to let that happen again. A friend introduced her to the Mornington Chasers, but Sally was the only woman. Left behind by seven fast men, she decided it just wasn't going to work.

Then, as the autumn nights drew in in 2000, finding people to train with safely in the dark became an urgent priority. Sally ventured out to the Seymour Centre one Wednesday night, where Ros Young took her under her wing. She was swept off to the pub afterwards and returned home fully enthused. "I'd sort of got into running and was doing all of these races. I'd just been so unsparty before and it was something that was really exciting and I loved it." Ian could see that. Sally's enthusiasm was contagious, but he didn't want to cramp her style: the running club was Sally's thing. He held out for a couple of weeks before asking ("very nicely", Sally interjects) if she would mind if he tried the club as well. So a couple of weeks later, she took Ian along with her and they have both been heavily involved in the club ever since. Within a year or so, Ian started helping out with the website, then got involved with the e-group. It was only a matter of time before his arm was twisted into joining the committee. In the meantime, Sally got increasingly involved in helping to produce *Serpentines*. Her long tenure as editor saw the transformation of the magazine.

I'm curious to know what their favourite Serpie events are. "I sort of love and hate the relays", confesses Sally. She hates the amount of organisation beforehand. "A few years ago Ian was doing so much of the organisation that it just took over our lives for weeks" she says. "We couldn't go out because there'd be phone calls coming in. There'd be papers strewn all over the place." Ian adds that when he first joined the committee, it was the same few people who took on the organisation of



*Sally & the hodgepenguin (photo: Ian Hodge)*

everything. But he, too, really loves the relays – particularly the Green Belt and Welsh Castles. "Hopefully the Welsh will let our vets' team back in this year", he adds. He loves cross country too, and regrets that he never manages to do as much as he'd like. And it's not just competing themselves that they enjoy. Both enthuse about supporting at the national and southern road relays. "It's hard to describe how exciting they are till you go", Sally says. "They're a really high standard and the afternoon just disappears. It's really exciting".

I ask them if they had to pick out one run that has stood out above all the rest, what would it be? Sally doesn't hesitate. "It has to be the Florence Marathon. It was just absolutely astonishing." She'd trained really hard. Her goal was to get in under four hours, having famously run London in an exasperating four hours and 11 seconds. She pulled it off comfortably, clocking 3:53:54. "I just loved it. I absolutely loved it". Her face really lights up at the memory. "It's such a beautiful course and there was wonderful support." Ian admits that he's probably going to contradict people's expectations. "One of the ones that sticks in my mind is the first time I went to Davos to do the K30 (as it was then)." He knows he has a reputation for not being a long-distance runner "But it's such a beautiful course. It's absolutely glorious. I just loved that."

They've recently set up their own consultancy company, with a wide variety of clients – among them "Parents for Children" – the charity of which Eddie Brocklesby is director. Sally contributes her marketing and financial journalism skills and Ian offers IT project management. The company's called "Verrinus". Trying to be clever (a big mistake), I suggest that it sounds as if it might have something to do with truth. I should have known better. They laugh. It means "of a boar". "It took me ages to find a classy-sounding, intellectual name that, behind the scenes, had a link to Hodgepig" Ian admits.

You might think that with busy jobs, their training and the amount that they contribute to the club, Sally and Ian would have no time for anything else. But their energy seems to be boundless. They travel whenever they get the opportunity. In the last few years, expeditions have included Bolivia, Ethiopia, Cuba, Australia and Antarctica. Their next big trip is planned for Thailand in November. The performing arts are another shared passion. I don't think I've met anyone who manages to pack in so many plays and concerts. Last but not least (and a matter close to my heart), they are excellent cooks. The interview over, we settle down to an incredible home-cooked meal. The civilised accompaniment of a Bach cantata transports us a quarter of a millennium back from Siouxie and the Banshees and that day all those years ago when the gods were smiling down on Leeds: the day when a fresh-faced undergraduate got to test his speed-reading skills on a map: the day when Ian met Sally.

# RAAMing their way into the Record books

by Josie Perry

Five Serpie ladies have decided that Marathons, Triathlons and even Ironman are just that bit too, well, normal. Their list of events completed (and often won) and the huge number of trophies and medals between them has pushed them to find a more difficult challenge. And they seem to have found just the thing. An adventure which will see them exert themselves, physically, mentally and financially. They are setting out to Ride Across America. And no – that’s not just the title of some fancy race – it is the race. Coast to coast, covering over 3000 miles, in a non-stop relay. And they are racing to get a new record which means they need to complete it in 188 hours

– that’s less than 8 days. And on top of all that, what really makes this group truly remarkable is not just that they are one of the first British teams of women to take on this feat of endurance, but that their average age is 60.

The team, consisting of Margaret Sills, Hilary Webber, Hilary Walker, Eddie Brocklesby and Ros Young, handed over the important decision of their title to the Serpie eGroup, and were duly christened the ‘Serpentine Golden Girls.’ Individually they are all already highly accomplished athletes – together they have an amazing opportunity to achieve a new record. The current female 50+ record is their goal but it was set by a team on average 10 years younger so it won’t be easy to break. But it seems this will just make the team even more determined. Between the five of them, they have clocked up, 27 World and European Championship Medals, 182 Marathons, 172 Half and Full distance Ironman and Ultra races and have represented Great Britain both as elite athletes and in their age groups 80 times.

Setting a new record, and pushing themselves to the brink of their cycling ability are not their only reasons for undertaking RAMM. They are also keen to help older women understand the importance of sport and to raise money for charities close to their hearts.



*The Golden Girls practice their echelon skills (photo: Ros Young)*



*The Girls at a rare moment of rest (photo: Ros Young)*

Team Manager, Ros Young, says: “We are all committed to this challenge because we want to inspire other older women to take on their own personal challenges. We have been competing for many years so have built up to this ambitious challenge but we can all set our own challenges. Exercise has helped all of us improve the quality of our lives and cope with the aging process and it is great to see so many women of all ages joining clubs like Serpentine and very quickly increase their speed, fitness and sporting ambitions.”

Even with such a depth of talent in the team, Race Across America, will not be easy to complete. It is the longest running ultra-distance bicycle endurance competition in the world. It covers over 3000 miles through 14 states from the Pacific to the Atlantic Coast. It starts in California on June 11 and they must finish in Maryland by June 20. The Golden Girls will have to cope with all types of weather conditions, road traffic, route navigation and terrain including horrendous ascents and death defying descents. And, as anyone who has raced long distance will know, they must do all this in the knowledge they have cut off times to beat and miles to complete.

To train for a race of this kind, the team will be spending a huge amount of time in the saddle. With five months to go till the race, they will be cycling 175 – 200 miles a week. This breaks down to about 10 hours of cycle training a week including one long slow distance ride of 4–5 hours and the rest in 1–2hr slightly faster more intense sessions. With three to four months to go they will focus more on speed endurance and power and from March their goal will be to build up speed. They will do this by racing 10 & 25 mile time trials – back to

back where possible. Alongside the training they are also working to secure sponsorship to help them raise the entry fee and expenses.

Training to race as a team is quite different from racing solo. Each rider will be racing 30–60mins on then 30–60 mins off for eight hours then having eight hours to fuel and sleep. Thus training to recover quickly and be able to race again quickly is important. Nutrition, sleep, and psychology will all be vital components of their preparation as will be getting to know each other as riders and learn their colleague’s temperaments. Training weekends in Somerset, Derbyshire, France and Portugal have been set up to enable this.

Their ultimate goal is not just a new record. They want to inspire other older women to get active and take on their own personal challenges.” Challenges don’t get much tougher than this – but then women don’t get much tougher than the Serpentine Golden Girls.

### The members of the team are

- Margaret Sills, Age 57
- Hilary Webber, Age 60
- Eddie Brocklesby, Age 65
- Hilary Walker, Age 55
- Ros Young, Age 64 (Reserve rider and team manager)

The Serpentine Golden Girls have set up a website so to see more information on each team member, and their challenge, go to: [www.sggdoraam.org.uk](http://www.sggdoraam.org.uk)

### Update

**Josie wrote this article to be published a while ago. Since when, the Golden Girls have only gone and done it! They completed the race in 8 days, 5 hours and 19 minutes, just outside the target time but remarkable nonetheless, just behind the wonderfully named Colorado Flash. Their website gives a full account of the ride from the riders’ and supporters’ point of view, and includes tornados, snow, breakdowns and swimming pools.**

# La Santa

by Georgina McFadyen

When I headed out to Lanzarote this year I was a runner. Plain and simple. Returning from Lanzarote however things had become a little more complicated. I was still a runner (having tripled my normal weekly mileage) but I was more than that. I was now a duathlete, and a triathlete. I had survived a week long training camp comprising of winter sun, ice cream and 116 Serpies for company – what could be better – well the bad karaoke and Hawaiian shirts paraded by the Serpie men of course.

Being able to join in as many activities as you like allows you to remember the fact that Lanzarote is in fact a holiday. After the runs which vary from 5 to 20 miles, several Serpies could be found lounging around the pool, iceing their legs, topping up their tans, relaxing in the spa, swapping race stories, debating which flavour ice cream is the best and gossiping about what a select few in the group got up to the night before. People are there to work hard, but most play hard too – Having shots the night before a ten/twenty miler doesn't seem sensible – until you're in Lanzarote. Doing a duathlon the day before a half marathon doesn't seem sensible – until you're in Lanzarote. It's amazing what your body can withstand when push comes to shove!

It's at this point I'd like to mention that I don't fall into the super fast category. In fact managing a 9/9.30 min mile pace on the hot, hilly landscape made me one of the slower runners. Did it hold me back? Did it heck! I was only 10 seconds outside my half marathon p.b. Many of the fastest runners were minutes off theirs. Pounding up the steep El Cuchillo hill



**Georgina in the hills above la Santa in the duathlon**

(photo: Georgina McFayden)



**Team 38 - Ella, Georgina and Andy**

(photo: Georgina McFayden)

the La Santa complex and little villages on the horizon. It really reinforced the distance and height we had climbed, the feeling of accomplishment when finishing the run was far stronger than normal because of the tough inclines and dry terrain. Coming in near the back of the pack meant the number of Serpies standing at the finish line were abundant. The cheers and clapping made for a great atmosphere as I crossed the finish line.

La Santa is definitely a place to try out new sports. Trying out a few beginner rides led me to doing my first ever duathlon, even though I've never done a brick session in my life. I can't say it was easy but I certainly felt like I had achieved something trying to run off the 'wobbly leg syndrome' after cycling. I took part in the mini triathlon as part of a relay team and the camaraderie was brilliant. Waiting for my team members to return gave me a chance to support everyone else.

It's not just about the running. As well as the coaching supplied by Serpentine, the complex puts on several activities such as windsurfing, golf, tennis, aerobics and everyone's favourite – 'stretch and relax'... The number of men in the class kept on increasing, perhaps because word got round as to how flexible and lycra clad the teacher was!

Although I've come back with a new p.b of the number of miles I've run in a week, I've also come back with lots of new friends, and a new found enthusiasm to take my running forward. Thanks to Vicky for arranging everything and all the coaches for their time and advice. Roll on La Santa 2009!



**Brent Plump, in Lanzarote but wishing he was in the Victory!** (photo: Georgina McFayden)

## Anti-Lanza quiz

By Helen Osborne and Ros Smith

SHADES, sarongs and flip flops found their way to The Victory pub, near the Seymour Centre, as determined Serpies resolved to enjoy themselves while their club mates sunned themselves in La Santa.

Parallels with Lanzarote took some imagination. There was no bright sunshine or black sand but if you squinted hard enough at that plant in the corner, it began to look a bit like a palm tree... And after a few colourful cocktails, you could almost smell the sea breeze...

Pub landlord Nick Scrivens conspired with Serpies Helen Osborne and Ros Smith to engineer the evening on March 5, designed to console athletes left stranded in London while their friends were living la vida loco.

Tropical beverages, including Tequila Sunrise, Sex On The Beach and Long Island Iced Tea, made an appearance on the drinks menu, with a healthy discount for people braving beachwear or Hawaiian shirts for the occasion.

And about 10 teams went head to head in a tropical themed quiz designed to transport competitors mentally, if not physically, to warmer climes.

A current affairs round kicked off the event, testing competitors' capacity to recall the day's news (as well as to spell it correctly).

Ros' inspired Round Two required Serpies to scabble around in their bags for items, including a clean piece of underwear, a sweet wrapper, a book and a shoelace, as well as to present a 'gift' to Helen for an additional five points. The creditcard, top-of-the-range watch, back scrub and cheque for \$1 million were well appreciated, but it was the mighty bear hug that won the day!

General knowledge was the subject of Round Three, while Round Four featured 'hot' tunes from seasonal singers such as Joe Cocker (Summer in the City) and Nat King Cole (Those Lazy Hazy Crazy Days of Summer).

Perplexed teams next had to identify unusual fruit and vegetables, found commonly in the tropics (or on the Edgware Road) before embarking on the final picture round.

Team Copacabana won the quiz, netting an astounding 97 points from a maximum of 123 and its members went home with a beach chair, an umbrella and two tankards kindly donated by The Victory. The top three teams won Bounty bars and the team coming last left with a six-pack of Lilt (for that totally tropical feeling?).

Admittedly the quiz might not have compared with a week in Lanzarote (even if it did have a tropical theme) but at least no one got sunburned!

## LANZAROTE TRIP

26th February - 5th March 2009

Bookings for the Serpentine trip to Lanzarote in 2009 are now open

[www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/training-Lanzarote.html](http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/training-Lanzarote.html)

## High peak relay weekend

*Event report, by Alan Hall*

On 11th November 2007, eight Serpies and two guest runners from Heathside Athletic took part in the High Peak Relay in Derbyshire. We came a respectable 11th out of 43 teams – despite most of us having also run a half, or in two cases a full, trail marathon the day before! Yes, we took advantage of a weekend away to take part in not one but two events – the Six Dales Circuit on the Saturday and the Relay itself on the Sunday (as well as finding time for a trip down Poole’s Cavern).

Friday night saw a people carrier full of Serpies heading up the M1, under a gantry which read simply, THE NORTH. A place where it is alleged to be Grim. How would a team of soft southerners fare in this forbidding territory?

First event of the weekend was the Six Dales Circuit, a trail marathon providing a very cross-country tour of the scenic delights of this part of the Peak District. Despite grey skies and drizzle in the air it wasn’t grim at all, but actually very beautiful. The area is a plateau of rolling high meadows and small, shapely hills, intersected by deep, sometimes almost gorge-like dales. Long Dale, the first of the dales for which the route is named, is gentle and wooded. It’s followed closely by Bradford

Dale where you have a lively stream for company. Here we had been warned of a hazard not often met with by the road racer: Lord Silverspoon and his party were shooting across the dale as we scampered along the bottom. We were advised to keep our heads down and look as unlike a pheasant as possible. On joining Lathkill Dale you find a sizeable river, which you follow upstream all the way up to its lonely source. Craggy slopes and a bouldery path to negotiate lend this section something of a mountain atmosphere – an impression which is reinforced by a stiff climb to emerge from the dale head.

This brings you to the village of Monyash, where the half marathon “Three Dales” finishes. Those going for the full Six have a stretch of more open countryside to follow, before the final three dales come in quick succession: Beresford Dale, Wolfscote Dale and Biggin Dale. These are part of the same river system feeding into the River Dove, and are the deepest encountered on the route. Which means a sting in the tail...you have to climb back out of them to get to the finish.

This event is one of those organised by the Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA). It’s open to both walkers and runners and is not officially a race – though times (give or take a few minutes!) and finishing positions (presumably more accurate) are recorded. You can go for a time if you want, but this may not be advisable if you are doing another event the next day! The atmosphere tends to feel more laid back than in a race – it’s just a splendid day out amid spectacular countryside. The LDWA look after you rather well too, providing generous refreshments at the checkpoints. And of course it would be rude not to stop running and sample the fare on offer.



*Ivana Olachova going downhill fast (photo: Alan Hall)*



*The Serpie team in an impromptu identity parade (photo: Alan Hall)*

Another day, another event. And this one definitely WAS a race, so it was time to don Club colours and change up a gear. The High Peak Trail is a former railway line, starting near Matlock and running through the heart of the White Peak area for around 18 miles. The concept of the Relay is simple: an out-and-back run along this trail, split into 10 stages. So despite passing through very hilly country, the course is nearly flat – except for stages 1 and 10, that is, where a narrow track runs up the hillside from Cromford to join the trail proper, a change in elevation of some 800 feet. Fortunately we had a very fit fellrunner to do this bit, in the person of Adam Dunajko from Heathside.

A bright, chilly start showed off the White Peak landscape in its true colours – not that there was much time to admire the scenery while running – and promised ideal racing conditions. Later on though some sharp showers blew in, and Nicola Webb in particular was subjected to quite a deluge on her stage. With an average of only 3.5 miles per stage, this race was fast and furious. The drivers were also kept busy ferrying each runner along narrow winding lanes to the next changeover point before the previous stage finished.

The Serpentine / Heathside team was a model of inter-club cooperation, but a little friendly rivalry did emerge at one stage: a pint was riding on whether Jany Tsai could run down

the hill in the final stage, faster than Adam (Heathside's very capable fellrunner) had run up it! With the honour of the Serpentine riding on her shoulders Jany braved an injured ankle to put in a storming descent of the hill, finishing with over a minute to spare.

Events of this type are a great way of getting to know others in the Club as well as tremendous fun. Running may not usually be thought of as a team sport, but when taking part in a relay you really do feel part of a team. The High Peak is an excellent introduction to relays, having short beginner-friendly stages and welcoming all abilities. The 2008 race takes place on 9th November and we're hoping to enter two teams – if interested please send an email to Alan Hall, [ahall.gm@googlemail.com](mailto:ahall.gm@googlemail.com)

### Some memories of the weekend, by Lula Rosso

- Claire shooting for the moon
- Nicola finding out she knew Adam as a boy
- Mark in brown leather jacket, running shorts and cup of cappuccino with saucer in one hand waiting for his turn
- Alan guessing our placement correctly and most optimistically
- Finding out that calling someone nice or sweet sounds patronizing in English.

## 10 MISTAKES:

### a tongue in cheek guide to training badly

by Malcolm Hinsley, with thanks to all contributors

Over the last year or so I have noticed a few different approaches to training among Serpies, and as an interminably mediocre runner I'm ready stick up my hand and own up to most of these at some point over the last 13 years. I've been there and got the T-shirt. It's all old hat, but how many do you recognise in yourself?

#### 1. The Fantasy Runner

(Whoever it is). We all have runners we look up to, identify with, and wish to emulate. So we surmise, '*Speedy Gonzalez*' does X, Y, and W, runs ever so fast, therefore if I do the same training sessions as they do, I will be that superstar. Wrong! Not only are we all physiologically different to start with, we have different lifestyles and training histories. And we haven't even considered that Speedy G is doing his current training based on where he is now, and that's not the same as what he did to get there.

#### 2. "Whatever it takes"

A phrase generally heard from the more committed runner who's set themselves a challenge requiring a big increase in their training volume. Enthusiasm and commitment are great when you are trying to stretch yourself, and quite possibly one of the keys to success. But the trouble with this manifesto is that the phrase '*except rest*' has been deleted off the end. Resting is when you recover from training and get stronger, it's the most important session you can do, and doubling your training overnight is a really good way to *not* make it to the starting line.

#### 3. Getting confused about racing and training

A strategy from the 'no pain no gain' school - treat every training session as a race. Every session you do, run as fast as you can so that by the end you can do no more. Benefits include always knowing that you are 'going to get a really good work out', and also knowing that you and your friends know *exactly* what the pecking order is. Difficult issues include 'should I train in my racers?' (how else can you be prepared to race in them if you haven't trained in them?) and also 'should I race in my trainers?'. Either way, when you do race it will be like a training run.

#### 4. Zero to Hero...

...In a matter of months. There are a few very talented people who can perform well with hardly any training but what's the chance that they've had an active life so far? So the phrase 'with hardly any training' should be viewed with suspicion. Think in terms of seven years, possibly more - 'some are born to greatness, some have greatness thrust upon them, but 99.99% of us work hard at it for a very long time' (sic).

#### 5. Sticks and stones may break my bones but muscles will never hurt me

You're training well, improving fast, and getting a real buzz out of it. So you do more and more. How long will it take to hit that injury? Muscles are strong - they are literally capable of breaking your own bones, and with a plentiful blood supply can grow relatively quickly. Tendons, ligaments and bone grow at a slower rate and need time to adapt to the greater stresses you are putting on them by increasing your training. There is a complicated network of nerves (getting technical: gamma neurons) that function to hold you back and prevent injury, but if you get too strong too quick it can't adapt soon enough. Take a rest/easy week occasionally and come back to training stronger.

#### 6. It ain't what you do it's the way that you do it

Don't miss that session, *especially after a hard session the day before*. Most people who have been training for a while can manage two sessions on consecutive days, the usual way is to do the faster/more intense one first while still fresh. Have you tried to do three in three days? Like Tuesday track, long hard run on Wednesday night, then Thursday track. Be honest now. Is there anyone out there who might have asked for advice about four hard sessions in three days and could they do more? Surely not!

#### 7. Leave that nebuliser at home

Take a deep breath. And relax. Now, close your mouth and nostrils and try it again. Not easy is it? Seems like a no-brainer, but we've noticed this is an occasional but regular occurrence. If you are prone to asthmatic symptoms and have been prescribed an inhaler, wouldn't it be better to have your medicine with you? Especially considering that symptoms can be triggered in some people by exercise. How about asking your GP if they think it would be helpful to take a blast before your session to pre-empt an attack.

#### 8. Getting fit the easy way

AKA not getting out of your comfort zone. Often found in people who have been given a training plan by a physio a year or two earlier, good when recovering from injury but now no longer relevant. Or perhaps you trained well in the past, got faster, and keep repeating the 'magic sessions' on account of the fact that they worked back then. It is *easier* this way though isn't it?

#### 9. Wheel out the party piece

We all enjoy success, so it's more fun to practice what we're good at. And if there's something we find hard, there's less chance to show off, so let's not do that so much, we're doing this for fun aren't we? A strong link in a chain will compensate for a weak one. Hmm...

#### How many do you recognise in yourself?

**1-3:** good luck with your future running career;

**4-6:** you are an experienced runner;

**7+:** are you a coach?

### Seoul Serpie

By Eoin O' Colgain

After two-plus years of enjoyable running at Serpentine, my first proper, but tax-free job meant Seoul. When I accepted the contract, I knew little about Korea. I had previously lived in Japan, so I sensibly decided it would be familiar. Experience with bibimbap and kimchi – solid introductions to Korean cooking – also indicated the food to be fun if one could get by the ubiquitous red pepper paste. I also understood some of my favourite Japanese dishes, “okonomiyaki” and “yakimiku”, to be reinterpretations from Korea. I also knew Korean women who spoke Japanese like Japanese men i.e. being smart and outspoken and not being bothered that it made them less attractive in Japan. So nutrition was of little concern and I was equally buoyant that there would be distractions for the injuries. All positive so far.

Dampening my running aspirations in Seoul were reports that 40% of Koreans were inactive and registered “warcraft” as a hobby, that winters were bitterly cold with Siberian winds, and that smog levels in Seoul rivalled Beijing. The last two are probably true, though I found a lady in my institute take the lift two floors DOWN the other day.

So how is running life after a large hook-up club for 30 something professionals? Running alone can be lonely, so I had to find some new friends quick. I now run with Seoul Flyers [www.seoulflyers.com](http://www.seoulflyers.com), an intimate bunch of expats centering on Korean-American Jae Kim, whose language skills run the show. We assemble weekly for a run along the Nam river to see the deer in Seoul forest, or in the opposite direction to World Cup stadium where Korea established footie credibility in 2002. Our Seymour centre is Jae’s van which can be left unlocked for late arrivals. No records are set on our 7am runs, but the real attraction for some is the English. Some poor wretches live in the middle of nowhere and are starved for an ear by Saturday. Amongst the notable members are Dave Deubelbeiss who has a 24-hour treadmill record on his CV and Seok-Ho Jang. Seok-Ho recently turned up to support a friend in a marathon after being embroiled in a car accident in the morning, only to be enthused enough to run along for 42 km.

As all runners require motivation, Jae enters us in races. Costs are roughly 20–40,000 Won (drop 000 for USD) with entrants showing a keen interest in the “goodie” bag, the usual contents of which are branded: adidas, reebok, etc. polyester running tops. In these cold climes, a sweaty cotton t-shirt upon freezing would be a nightmare. I’m informed that people only enter for the contents of these bags, so there are many beneficiaries of unwanted numbers. In fact, I was Conor McLaughlin in my first 10km. In my second, Jae entered a grey-haired E. O Colgain in

the 40+ category (because I look it? Thanks Jae!) and I won a union jack (I’m Irish!) reebok bag which was posted out with the price tag attached. However, races here are fun: troops of dancing girls pre-race, local celebrities dragged along to warm-up the crowd, cameramen mounted on motorbikes, and staggered starts as most events combine 5km, 10km, half and full course events totalling anything up to 10,000 entrants. Metropolitan league it is not.

Running here doesn’t have the same depth as the British Isles. My 1st 10km was won in 31:40 and the winner received 2,000,000 won for his effort. I was in 2nd for the 1st km until I realised there were 10 Koreans sitting on my shoulder, so I pulled to the side and they disappeared. Such a large purse would not be too bad for a decent club runner from elsewhere. It makes a change from vouchers. The 3 big Marathons: Chuncheon, JoonAng and Donga (Seoul) have generous purses, attract very competitive African runners amongst the Korean elite and are well supported. As Koreans spend hours in the office, it’s not surprising that they are obsessed with endurance, in particular sub-3 marathons.

Seoul has a reputation as a high-rise city with little greenery, however rivers provide many kilometres of traffic-free running. Local councils splurge before Christmas and lay down lots of rubbered surfaces for retired Koreans who enjoy walking. It made me immeasurably happy to discover 3km of soft rubber 10 minutes jog from my institute. There is a 800m stretch between bridges that a local English teacher training for a masters’ 400m and I routinely use. There are also hills nearby with trails running through woods, so I can’t complain too much. However, -5 degree temperatures require motivation, but another male Serpie shot at Welsh Castles next June suffices!



*Seoul Flyers in Namgang snow - Eoin second on the left (photo:Eoin O' Colgain)*

## Land's End to John O'Groats

by Martin Gaunt

In the late summer of 2007, I swapped running for cycling, rashly setting myself the challenge of cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats. To those unacquainted with this classic route, it is a journey of around 1000 miles from not-quite-the-most southerly nor westerly point in mainland Britain (Land's End) to not-quite-the-most northerly nor easterly point (John O'Groats). Blissfully unaware of the geographic incompleteness until, frankly, I was too tired to care, I comforted myself with the thought of the exalted company I sought to join. The records for completing the trip stand at 44 hours on a bike and 10 days on foot. Even more impressive than this were the 20 arrests racked up by the 'naked rambler' of 2003/04 fame, wearing just boots, socks, rucksack and occasionally a hat. Travelling light, but not quite that light, I arrived in Penzance on a beautiful August Bank Holiday, the country stretched out before me.

Unfortunately, Land's End is some twelve undulating miles from Penzance; a frustrating though scenic prologue at the start of a long journey. Still, I got the necessary tacky photo, stuffed myself with a Cornish cream tea, and set my sights on Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. For two days I hugged the coast before heading inland towards Dartmoor and Glastonbury, cutting a rather haphazard swathe across page one of my road atlas. I even met a fellow end-to-ender on the way. After comparing notes it was a confidence booster to leave him in my wake, albeit as I made yet another wrong turning.

Surveying my route from Glastonbury Tor, it was time reflect on the journey so far. The south west was largely behind me and, after another days cycling, I had a rest day planned north of the River Severn. However, the rest day was to be a little unconventional. My arrival in the Forest of Dean happened to coincide with the arrival of six old university friends, and, happily, the Big Woody triathlon. I'm never going to win any cycle races, but you won't find any of the Tour riders completing a sprint triathlon on their rest day...

Triathlon and night out behind me, I pushed north along the Welsh border towards Chester. I'd been going a little over a week by now and, aside from my clanking chain, everything was going smoothly (disconcertingly so). After a memorably wet summer, I had yet to see rain for my entire trip. The next day the darkening clouds over the inappropriately named Port Sunlight put paid to that record, and rain lashed down as I



*Martin at Land's End, being pointed in the right direction (photo:Martin Gaunt)*

took the ferry across the Mersey. Fortunately, the rain didn't last, but neither did my front wheel as I paused for longer than advisable in the wrong part of Liverpool.

Given that this latest embellishment was entirely fictitious and included simply to perpetuate an unfair stereotype, my bike was in good health as I approached the halfway point. However, my book told me that the halfway point was Windermere, in itself more northerly than I could comprehend. I realised that Scotland must be much bigger than I had thought. I resolved to cycle faster (failed), and cut more corners (achieved). To this end, I cycled lonely as a cloud through Wordsworth country and on to Carlisle.

The next day, across the border and all the way to Edinburgh, was to be the longest, most challenging, and most beautiful of the trip. 96 miles across the Southern Uplands was a long way for a novice cyclist, particularly when for a 60 mile stretch I failed to pass a single shop. Energy levels plummeting and concentration subsequently wavering, I had an unfortunate run-in with a cattle grid. With both man and machine wounded, I eventually limped into Innerleithen. Never before have adjacent Co-op and bike repair shops brought so much joy. Partially recovered, the twilight descent from the last of the hills to my former home, Edinburgh, was the most memorable part of the trip.

After a more relaxing rest day to my previous one, I crossed the Forth and headed for the Highlands. Incidentally, and this may have had as much to do with my fitness levels as

anything else, the Highlands were not nearly as challenging as the undulations of Cornwall and Devon. Whereas the English tend to build their roads over the hills, the brilliantly lazy Scots build theirs around them. Nevertheless, it was a relief to reach Inverness, the final city on my route. Leaving the banks of the Ness and the monster in my wake, I passed the first sign for John O'Groats. (After two weeks in the saddle, it's nice to know you're heading in the right direction after all). It said 120 miles, and that day I cut that in half, spending the eve of my final stage in Helmsdale. The next day dawned bright but as I left the coast to cross the peatlands of Caithness, the wind picked up and the final few miles were as tough as any that had gone before. A victory parade it certainly wasn't, but it was somehow fitting. I reached John O'Groats on Friday September 14th, eighteen days and 1032 miles since leaving Land's End.

I planned to celebrate with a wee dram and my first shave since Lancashire. But it was all something of an anticlimax. When I had arrived in Land's End, the tourists had cheered, mistakenly assuming I was completing, rather than starting out on my journey. At the 'Last House in Scotland', I was met by a drunk Scotsman (not entirely unexpected) who tried to flog me a souvenir t-shirt. Then two other cyclists arrived and their congratulations were no consolation for the fact that they had completed the trip three days quicker than me. I had literally reached the end of the road but I decided I had to go further. The next four days were split between bike and boat as I continued through Orkney and Shetland, before, closer to the Arctic Circle than to London, I got bored and came home. Two days later I was back running in Hyde Park, but with some great memories of what was quite an adventure. It was an adventure I fully recommend.

For more details and pictures of my trip, and info on my worthy cause (no, I wasn't doing it for fun) see <http://landsendtojohnogaunt.blogspot.com>



*The real star of the ride, relaxing in the Lakes*  
(photo: Martin Gaunt)

## “It's all in the mind”

by Tony Murphy

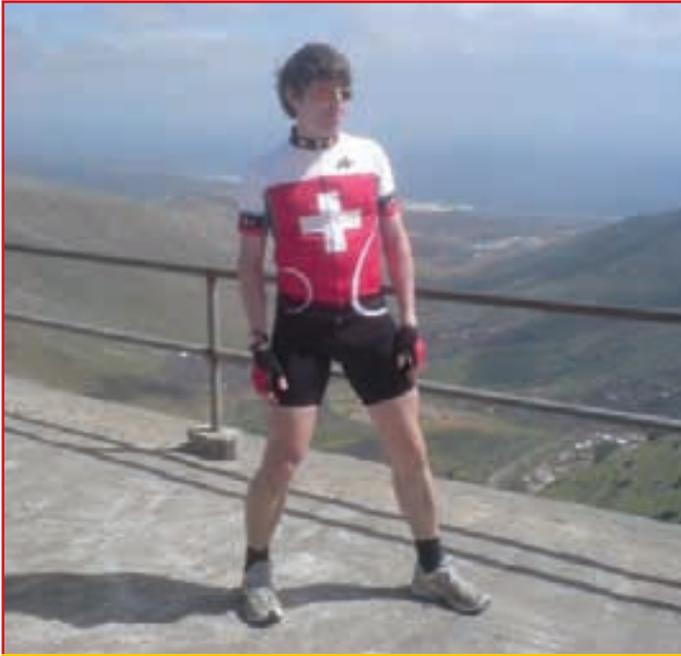
“Picture yourself running that final 5k down Unter den Linden to the Brandenburg gate. See yourself as if you were a film director, directing that final scene of your Berlin Marathon movie. Add a soundtrack of people cheering, make the picture richer and more colourful, add in extras playing the other runners around you, what do they look like as you overtake them? Now zoom into your body and see things from your point of view as the runner, through your own eyes. Take time to notice how you are. Breathe in the smells. What do you see? How are you feeling? What are you hearing? Look at your watch – what time do you see? “

This was one of the exercises that I ran as part of a course for Serpies preparing for Autumn 2007 marathons. Carrie Doyle, the runner who was directing her film in Berlin, and the first “graduate” of the course improved her PB by 10 minutes, and her personal goal for that marathon by 5 minutes. She thought she had hit a plateau at her previous race in New York, so was understandably thrilled at her result.

Whether you have run in Berlin or not, as you read the first paragraph, many of you will have been running your own movie in your head. The more real you make the film, the more real it seems as an experience, to the point that your heart rate and breathing increase, and you can smell those other runners.

It's not just visualisation, it's more like being there, particularly at that point where you “zoom” into your own point of view. Your mind doesn't really know the difference between rehearsal and reality – which is what makes this a great preparation exercise.

My day job is coaching people to improve their confidence and performance at work or in their personal lives. As far as running goes, I noticed that, although everybody recognises that much of distance running is about mental strategies and “visualisation”, nobody was actually translating this into things people could go away and do for themselves. I wanted to find out if first-timers and “average” club runners would benefit from some mental coaching, based on NLP (see box). About a dozen people responded to my appeal on the e-group for Spring marathoners, some dropped out, seven stayed the course.



*Luzian Wild visualizing at the top of Haria  
(photo: Luzian Wild)*

### Where you look

Next time you're out in the street, watch people as they walk around. Particularly in London, you'll see that people are looking down. That's not to avoid eye contact, it's because they're either talking to themselves in their head, or checking out how they feel. Usually they look down to the left when self talking, and down to the right when examining how they feel. They are disassociated from their environment, wrapped up in their internal world, which is why they bump into people and street furniture. It's also possible to look ahead and still disassociate – the thousand yard stare – that glazed over look which often happens when listening to a music player or using a mobile phone, when you know they are back inside themselves again.

So it's a fair bet that when you see a runner looking straight ahead, they're in visual mode, which means they are outwardly monitoring, paying attention to their environment. Watch top-class runners, they will tend to always look ahead, with a brief glance down to their watch. Compare that to your average runner in the last five miles of any marathon. Most will be looking down, most of the time, examining how much pain they are in, and telling themselves how and where they feel bad.

Sports psychologists know that it's important for athletes to not spend too much time inwardly associating (meaning checking out how you feel) and that it's better to put your attention outwards (either taking in the scenery or checking your pace).

The missing step was to explain that you can control this by just looking ahead, not down. In NLP they're called eye-accessing cues. In sport and business we call it focus – but it's not all about where you look either.

### What you say to yourself

When you are doing internal dialogue, it's important to say the right things. Be realistic and positive at the same time. Beating yourself up in order to motivate yourself is kind of weird, and ultimately counter-productive.

Frame statements positively – how far you've come and how well you've done so far against your plan, how well your training is going – this is why it's important to keep a training log.

This will serve you far better than remembering how much you haven't done, and recalling those missed sessions. If you stop to think about it, it's very strange how you can recall something you haven't done.

Saradhi Rajan was worried about a hip injury which had stopped him running the Stockholm marathon, so he was keen to make it to the New York start line in one piece. The injury had healed, with little pain any more, but when he went on a training run, he was paying the injury site a lot of attention, almost waiting for it to fail. That's going to undermine your confidence and, paradoxically, also bring about the event you most fear – another injury. There's a saying in NLP that "energy flows where attention goes", so I got Saradhi to pay attention to the old injury site in a positive way. Basically to say "thanks" to the affected limb for getting him so far and being so reliable, in spite of that old injury.

Yes, all you have to do is talk nicely to your Self.

Saradhi's hip wasn't an issue during his training or in New York, and he achieved his goal of a sub-4 hour run, despite a very tough last three miles with cramp.

There were seven runners who completed the programme of six half-hour phone sessions, covering visualisation, goal-setting, mental rehearsal, confidence, pre-race preparation and specific problem-solving. Two participants got injured and couldn't run on the day. There were two first-timers and three who were looking for a better experience than their last marathon. All achieved their goals and made it a day to remember and build on for the future.

If you want to know more about the current programme for Spring marathons,

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# Women's 07-08 cross country

by Angie Palin

Well, we've made it to the end of the 2007/8 season having endured mud, hills, icy cold showers and the boys yelling at us to start at the front of the pack. Best of all, we have had a very successful season with a really good and consistent turnout. Lots of new faces turned up (and came back). Helen Usbourne, Stephanie Vaatz, Clare Levermore and Alice Rickford particularly spring to mind but I'm sure there were others too.

Our annual excursion to Richmond Park for the Dysart Cup was very successful as we won it! (last won in 2004). As usual our hosts put on a magnificent tea for us afterwards before we lowered the tone of the Dysart pub in our lycra.

Although we couldn't rival the enormous piece of silverware picked up by the men, we also did very well in the North London Champs in Perivale with Serpentine's teams placing 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th. The Masters team placed 3rd.

The good form continued to Kingsbury for the North of the Thames championship with the teams placing second and third. I'd like to see a better turnout for this race next year as we can easily win with a strong team.

The good weather now turned a bit nasty with a miserable wet day and very muddy conditions at Parliament Hill for the London champs. The ladies team of Karine Pradier, Ruth Clifton, Alex Openshaw and Sarah Edmunds took bronze. I was particularly pleased with the massive turnout for this race with 6 ladies teams (of 4 in each team) in total.

At the Middlesex champs we managed to wangle our way to some more silverware by winning the Corlin Trophy. (Angie will explain how if you buy her a drink). The race was a tough, muddy and hilly race at Trent Park over 8K and we were more than happy to take away any prize they wanted to give us.

The Southern Champs were held at a still muddy Parliament Hill. Although we had a couple of mid-race falls, everyone made it to the end with 18 ladies taking part and the team placing 10th.

The vets (ably looked after by Jan Farmer) did well in the Middlesex Vets champs placing 2nd V35 team (4 to score). Individual successes included 1st and 2nd V55 individuals (Jan Farmer and Margaret Sills) and 3rd V45 individual (Theresa Brady).

The last race of the season was the National Championships at

Alton Towers. The ladies team finished 33rd out of 61. I'd urge the ladies who didn't take part to consider doing this race next year as it really is a fantastic event and one of the only chances most of us will ever get to race against the top athletes in the country!

We placed 4th in the Metropolitan League and were the 1st placed B team. In the Sunday League, we came 4th overall in both the senior women and masters women categories with Cheryl Sacks picking up a richly deserved silver medal in the individual V35 category.

The apres cross country pub sessions were also well attended this season. As usual we sampled a wide variety of London inns from 2 for 1 scampi and chips in Ruislip to seafood enveloped in organic breadcrumbs accompanied by hand-cut sweet potatoes in Hampstead. Notable drinking performances were put in by a number of cross country regulars and there were generally a fair number still there when the last orders bell was rung.

Thanks to those who provided vital cake-energy by baking for us including Jo Conn (who also cooked lunch for 12 at the end of the Sunday League in Watford), Leanne, Lynne, Penny, Val and Rachel P. I could have made a sarcastic comment about the gender bias in cake-baking this season but I'm informed by Andy Reeves that he prevented Penny burning her cake and thus saved the men from complete domestic inactivity!

Thanks also to those who have helped this season. It makes it far easier for me (and means that I can race too) if there are people to help with results on the day. People who lent a hand included Darren Over, David Lipscombe, Miguel Branco, Richard Phillips, John Cullinane, Nadya Labib, Jeanette Mueller, Bev Thomas, Bob Davidson, Gowan Clews, Leanne Keltie, Rachel Whittaker and Brent Plump. Rachel Powell also kindly dealt with the rankings competition throughout the season and Val Metcalf put in a great deal of effort in keeping the spreadsheet of runners updated so that I could enter people into the appropriate championship events. As ever, the biggest thanks is reserved for Malcolm French who was at every event despite having been injured and unable to run himself. Cross Country really is a team effort and it is very heartening to see how many people are prepared to volunteer for the sake of the club and other runners.

Finally, I'm delighted to announce that the winner of the Ladies Cross Country Trophy for 2007/8 is Stephanie Vaatz. The trophy is awarded to the person who has shown team-spirit and commitment throughout the season. Despite being a novice cross country runner, Stephanie has been at practically every race. An enthusiastic participant in the ladies races, she also always stays to cheer the boys round their course. Many congratulations Stephanie.

See you all in October 2008!

## Off season? Off road!

by Rachel Powell

The triathlon season is but a distant memory. Next year's marathon seems an age away. So what might the seasoned athlete do with all that free time? Why, try something new of course! Off-road running races.

Off-road races come under a range of guises – there are trail races, hill races, fell races, multi-terrain races and of course cross-country. All have one thing in common – they involve little, or often no, running on roads. Instead, competitors are treated to a range of surfaces underfoot – tracks, trails, woodland paths, open hillsides, and usually a fair bit of mud too. More often than not, at least a few hills are thrown in for good measure, and in some races there is little, if any, flat to be found at all. There are distances to suit all tastes – everything from a few miles to marathons and ultras too.

There's no doubt that running on such surfaces can be hard work, as off-road races are rarely flat, but with that hard work comes many gains. The softer and uneven surfaces are kinder on the joints, excellent at building leg strength, and ascending all those hills can result in noticeable improvements in speed on the flat. Running through beautiful scenery and fresh air awakens the mind in a way that traffic fumes and concrete buildings never can. Mile markers are sporadic or non-existent, and distances often estimated and obscure, so the time pressure is off, enabling you to concentrate on having a good time without worrying about PBs. In a nutshell, it's good for body and mind!

**October:** Ridgeway Run

**Distance:** 15k

**Organiser:** [www.tringrunningclub.org.uk](http://www.tringrunningclub.org.uk)

Starting in Tring, Hertfordshire, and taking in some glorious Chiltern countryside, the Ridgeway Run attracts a large field each year, including many beginners and people using the race as a pleasant training run. Clearly marked and marshalled, the route begins with a flat mile or so on an old road, before heading up through woodlands and over a ridge. There is a brief respite downhill across some fields, and then the main ridge is climbed – it's not a steep climb, rather a long drag up a rough and stony path. The reward at the top is a long undulating trail through beautiful woodland, which then emerges onto an open hillside. The views here are glorious – weather permitting (and the weather always seems to be good for this race!) you can see across the Chiltern escarpment to the flatlands heading north. It really is quite stunning! The next section is across small grassy hills, the chalky surface

giving great grip on the downhills. There's a water station just before the steepest climb of all, and then the route reverts to undulating trails back through the woods, down the hill, and the final flat mile to the finish. There's always a friendly welcome at the finish, and t-shirts and goody bags all round.

**November:** Herbert's Hole Challenge

**Distance:** 10K (approx)

**Organiser:** [www.chilternharriers.org.uk](http://www.chilternharriers.org.uk)

**Nearest station:** Chesham (Metropolitan line)

There can't be many races where one can arrive by tube, walk 5 minutes from the station to the start, and see red kites circling in the sky overhead, but this is one. Starting in the park in the centre of Chesham, the race heads sharply uphill, sharply enough to have some people walking within the first couple of minutes. The route then heads across fields to the rather oddly named Herbert's Hole, a dry valley running between two Chiltern Ridges. For somewhere so close to a town, it has an amazingly remote feel. For a short while the run heads gently uphill, before taking a sudden sharp turn up onto the ridge – again, this has many people walking. Once onto the ridge, muddy farm tracks are followed along the undulating ridge, followed by a short section of road, including a very steep downhill. Heading back off-road, there are more undulations through some woodlands and fields, before the main track (or should that be mud-bath?) through Herbert's Hole is rejoined, and an easy mile or so of downhill back to the park. It's not over yet though – there's a fairly steep climb into park (at least it feels fairly steep by this stage in the race) and the 10K sign is passed. Now the race instructions do make it clear that the race is approximately 10K, but the finish is nowhere in sight at this point – it's at the end of a long downhill followed by some flat ground – great for that sprint finish! There is a t-shirt for all finishers but not a lot else, but as the town centre with its



**Rachel makes it to the top of Butser**

(photo:Denmead Photos)

numerous coffee shops and pubs is less than 5 minutes away, it makes for a good day out.

**January:** Box Hill Fell Race  
**Distance:** 7.5 miles (approximate)  
**Organiser:** [www.sloweb.org.uk](http://www.sloweb.org.uk)  
**Nearest station:** Box Hill and Westhumble

Box Hill Fell Race is one of the very few races in the south of England to be permitted and insured by the FRA With 1700ft of ascent over 7.5 miles, it's not an easy undertaking, but you get a great sense of satisfaction when the finish line is reached. The climbing starts before the race, as the start line is partway up a steep hill. There are no facilities, just a nice big tree. You can see the hill heading up steeply from the start, covered in nice smooth green grass – it actually looks rather inviting. But the race does not go that way, instead taking runners about 100m round the side of the hill to where the thick, tussocky grass starts, and then straight up. The combination of long grass and a very steep slope makes for interesting running (or walking in a lot of cases), but the route soon flattens out onto the top of the hill and some amazing views can be seen. After a few undulations, a long steep downhill sorts out the brave from the not-so-brave, and then a long uphill drag along a rough track leads to the second climb of the hill, steeper, rougher and rockier this time. Just when you think the finish line should be in sight, there are a couple of particularly nasty specimens thrown in for good measure. And then, when despair at ever finishing has set in, the route pops out at the top of the nice smooth grassy hill seen at the start, and that is the way to the finish. It's a heavenly finish for those who like to run downhill, in fact it's actually pretty difficult to stop at the finish, with most people overshooting by some way. There are no rewards here, just that sense of satisfaction at finishing – and probably sore legs the next day too.

**February:** Meon Valley Plod  
**Distance:** 30K – 32K  
**Organiser:** [www.pjc.org.uk](http://www.pjc.org.uk)  
**Nearest station:** Petersfield (then taxi)

With a strong Serpie following, the Meon Valley Plod has to be one of the toughest races on the off-road calendar of southern England. Traversing the picturesque Meon Valley, at the western end on the South Downs, this race is a true test of stamina and determination, and completing it is considered at least equivalent to running a road marathon. In fact, many people use the race as a training run for a spring marathon. The route tends to vary slightly each year but is usually in the region of 19 – 21 miles, with over 2500ft of ascent thrown in for good measure. Over the past few years, snow, hail, wind and driving rain have

added another level of interest and difficulty, although the 2008 race took place in almost perfect conditions.

The race begins with an easy gradual ascent across chalky fields, before descending down a rough track into the valley, lulling runners into a false sense of security – it's not all going to be this easy! At around 3 miles, the first hill looms ahead, rising steeply from a field. It's at this point that all but the most athletic of runners need to take their first walk. A stile to be climbed partway up provides an added challenge for the quads – there are several of these dotted around the route.

Well-stocked feed/water stations break up the next few miles, with an array of sweets and cake on offer. At around the halfway point there is another killer climb, the kind where the grass in front seems to be in danger of touching one's nose; some interesting walking styles can be spotted here. Unsurprisingly, there are yet more ups and downs to follow. Underfoot this section varies greatly according to the weather. In good conditions, the mud is slightly sticky and slippery, causing uncertainty when placing feet; after rain, the mud can be thick, gloopy and knee deep, making even a slow walk hard. The small sections of road on the route come as a welcome relief.

At about 15 miles the biggest climb of all looms ahead, Butser Hill. It is enough of a hill to have a hill race in its own right each summer. It may not be as steep as some of the other climbs but it's longer and after 15 miles of hard running, it's the toughest. Runners up on the ridge ahead look like ants crawling across the skyline - the only way to join them is to walk – few can run up here. Following a brief run across the top of the hill, the route heads back down into the valley via a chalky track, and with one more not-so-steep climb, the finish line is almost in sight. After almost 21 miles of running, it seems a little cruel that the last half-mile should be slightly uphill, but the last 100m are flat, meaning that most people can at least cross the line running. There's a t-shirt and medal for all finishers, and for those who haven't overeaten at the feed stations, free soup, rolls, fruit, tea and cake, making the entry fee seem very good value indeed.



*Andy Robbins on the climb to Small Down*  
 (photo:Denmead Photos)

# Completion of the 2007 Handicap

by Rachel Powell

We left the Tom Hogshead in the last edition of Serpentines finally balanced after nine races, with John Dsouza leading on 192 points followed by Jeremy Freer (176) Lula Rosso (159) and Sid Wills (145).

October saw a near capacity race of 98 runners toeing the line. Laura Denness came in first in her 18th race, while Peter Loveridge and Alice Rickford both picked up PBs to take silver and bronze respectively. The packed field saw a total of 29 PBs. Jeremy Freer scored strongly, while John Dsouza failed to increase his points total (only your top eight scores count), so Jeremy closed the gap at the top (up to 184 points, just 8 behind John).

November saw the start of the long, cold, winter months of the handicap.

Mark Fowler, in his second handicap, lopped four and a half minutes of his time to set a PB and take first place. Gary Hymns, in his 91st race, turned in his best time of 2007 to take second place, while ex-handicapper, Simon Maughan, returned his best time in over three years to take third.

In the increasingly titanic battle for silverware, John Dsouza shaved 5s of his PB to finish sixth and score 27pts, knocking out a prior low of 17 points. Jeremy Freer cut 21s off his PB to come in 8th and score 24 pts, displacing a prior low of 14 points. So both gained a net 10 points and remained 8 points apart. Third place had by now evolved into a four-way fight between Lula Rosso, William Simpson, Alice Rickford and Sid Wills.

December saw a "minor" re-routing of the handicap course due to the presence of a Winter "Wonder"-land. Good to see a field of 74 runners resisting the blandishments of Olde England Yuletide traditions - 3D polar adventure rides, candyfloss and the like! Wai Sem Morris, in her 20th handicap, knocked 60s off her personal best to take gold. 7 seconds behind, Simon Bampfyld scored a PB to take silver, with Chris Notton taking bronze.

Turning to the final outcome in the Hogshead. John Dsouza scored just 5pts in December, worse than his previous low, so remaining on 202pts. Jeremy Freer put the hammer down and managed a near-PB, scoring 11 bonus points plus 9pts for finishing 12th on the day; however, his total of 20pts only knocked out an 18pt "low", so he gained just 2 points, to reach 196 for the year. John thus took the Tom Hogshead Trophy for 2007, with Jeremy second. William Simpson, finished 8th on



Jane Harris (photo:Tim Smith)

the day, with a PB, scored 25 points, to pull clear of the pack and secure bronze on 173pts. Highest placed lady over the year was Lula Rosso, who finished in fourth on 168 points.

Some not-so-trivial trivia for the year: 36 medals, 34 different medallists (Ellis Kurland and Sid Wills bagged 2 apiece) and medalling times between

25:07 and 46:06. We saw a total of 263 PBs over the course of the year. Ian Druce with 23:09 in September set a new course record. And if you had run your PB every single month - to finish in a gross time of 48 minutes exactly every time, you would have scored a total 219 points over your 8 best races, which would have won the Hogshead every year for the last ten years, except for a tie in 2001 with Anthony Stranger-Jones. Simple really!

## New Season

Which brings us on to 2008 and the first race of the new season. For normal months, a runner's start time will include a weighting for the number of medals won in the season (1% for each Gold, 0.5% for each Silver, and 0.25% for each Bronze). In January the slate is wiped clean, so there are no carried-over medal weightings - start times are based only on the best time in the last 6 races (though "new runners" have a introductory tapered weighting of 8%, 6%, 4%, 2%, 1% for their first 5 races to add too).

The January race suffered from its own special additional "weighting" - the mince pie belly. The cold weather didn't help, but performances were generally poor for the 77 runners who managed to waddle to the start line. Of the runners who were not "new" (i.e. in their first 5 races) - there was only one personal best scored by Andy Sinclair who not unsurprisingly won the race taking gold. Second place was Sue McGinlay in her 93rd race, and Richard Long came in third in his 58th race with decent following performances from Kathleen Broekhof, Tom Donovan and Owen Barder just outside the medals.

The resulting Hogshead points after the race tally up as: Andrew first (32pts), Tom Donovan second (27pts), then Richard Long, Kathleen Broekhof and Owen Barder all tie for third (26pts). The race points are a combination of position points (20pts for first, decreasing down to 3pts) PLUS points for matching or exceeding your target PB for the race (up to 12pts) - which explains why the medalists in January do not necessarily become 1st, 2nd and 3rd in the Hogshead table as you might initially expect.

February's race returned to the standard course and saw a more respectable 22 PBs among the 90 finishers. Emma Danks took gold with a massive PB and a lead of 20s over silver medalist Mel Pryke (another PB) followed by a strong run



**Eamonn Richardson and Marielle Vestlund battle for the line** (photo: Tim Smith)

from Jane Harris (fractionally short of her PB). Tom Donovan had another good race (2s short of a PB in 15th), as did Chris Notton (5th), Logan Campbel (7th, PB) and Jeannette Mueller (8th, PB). This resulted in the Hogshead being shuffled to move Tom to first (44pts), Jeannette Mueller second (42pts) and another three way tie for 3rd this time between Chris Notton, Jane Harris and Logan Campbell (40pts each).

Strong winds buffeted runners in March's handicap, with most performances below par. Yet Marielle Vestlund managed to score another PB (the sixth in the previous seven races) and take the gold medal 52 seconds ahead of James Stratford in his 147th handicap. Michael Morris in his 44th handicap came in third. Jane Harris just missed a PB again in 7th, but her consistent performances meant that she took the lead in the Hogshead (on 65pts). The next three places were by the smallest margin: Graham Carsen's PB gave him second (62pts), Marielle Vestlund's win gave her third (61pts) and Tom Donovan followed in fourth (60pts).

The last handicap was the April race, which took place one week before the London Marathon. The medals went to an all female line up: Jacqueline Morris and Poppy Lenton took gold and silver, both pulling off large PBs, while bronze went to Jane Harris whose own PB was also the best age-graded performance of her life (68.9%). The ladies dominated the higher race positions with the only places 6, 8 and 9 of the top ten being salvaged for the gents. Not surprisingly, Jane Harris leads the Hogshead. In fact, her 95pts has opened up a gap of 17pts over second place Graham Carson (on 78pts) who only has 3pts of comfort between him and Marielle Vestlund and Kathlene Broekhof (both on 75pts).

It is sometimes said that when the men take home the trophy, it comes back grubbier, and when the ladies win it, it usually comes back shiny and clean... As the ladies haven't taken the Hogshead home since 2004 (when it was won by Nadya Labib on 195pts) it looks a little ... tarnished. This year, however, with Jane's spectacular 95pts (after just four races, and only carrying 0.25% of medal weighting) and two more ladies tying for third place the trophy might just be in line for a sparkly Christmas!

#### Updates

Since Jon wrote his article, there have been a few more handicaps. In a big change around, Graham Carson has continued his good form and now leads the Tom Hogshead (as of August), now with a 28 point lead over Tom Donovan and Abdi Dhuhulow. Monthly winners were Charles Doxat, Abdulrashid Abdi and Peter Tallboys.

# First Ironman

article by Josie Perry

So many Serpies are setting off on their first Ironman adventure this year. Josephine Perry caught up with Annie Emerson, former World Number 1 Duathlete and now a triathlon coach, to learn just how to should approach your first Ironman.

## Before you enter

If you plan on doing your first Ironman in 2008, chances are you'll already have entered. Many races fill really quickly – in hours for some – but a few are still open so if you haven't yet entered one, or have it at the back of your mind for next year, then Annie says don't leap straight in and really think about it hard. "Ironman races cost a fortune so make sure you really want to do it before you enter. You need to know that you are going to be able to put all the training in. Do your homework. Know what you are up against training wise. Lots of people sign up on a whim but first you really need to know how long it will take."

Her next piece of advice is to know that you already like the sport of triathlon. She doesn't think there is a rule of thumb as to how many races you should have done before tackling an Ironman but that "you really need to have experienced running off the bike and open water swimming before you start training for an Ironman. Annie suggests that ideally you'll have at least a season doing Olympic distance racing with maybe a Half Ironman at the end of that season. She also says "it is about the swim really. You don't want to be learning to swim at the same time as training for the Ironman. You've got to be able to handle a 2-3k swim session really before signing up." As she, and many others have said, it is possible to train for a Half IM on Olympic distance training but that stepping up to the full Ironman is a whole different story.

So, you've done a season in tri, you've checked out the training schedules and you've decided the challenge is for you. So which race do you choose? Annie admits this is a hard choice because you want to do one which isn't too far to travel to which will give you a good feel for the distance without costing loads of money but also one which is friendly weatherwise. "You want to find one that doesn't have severe humidity or heat." She says a race like Lanzarote would be crazy to do as your first as it has such extreme heat and is very hilly. Instead she says that "races like Switzerland are much better as they are not too far away and usually have good weather."

## Preparation and training

So you've taken the plunge and entered. How long should you give yourself to prepare? Annie says the longer you can give yourself to prepare the better. "This means if something

comes up with work or you get injured and you need some time out it isn't a problem. With a good base and experience in racing shorter distances she says you could manage it in a few months but without the base training in your body you are really looking at six months."

Ironman requires both mental and physical preparation. Mentally there are three things Annie suggests you can do to maximise your chances of success: Checking out the course profile, knowing you have done the training and completing confidence boosters. "Looking at the course profile is really important. You must know the course well and not be under-prepared. Understand that if something like swimming isn't your strong point then make sure you choose a race where there will be a wetsuit swim." Next, knowing you have done all you can is a boost. "Knowing you've done the miles on the bike or on the run is a great mental boost. Knowing you've got the best preparation steadies the nerves and really helps mentally." Finally, she suggests you complete specific sessions which you know will make you feel confident on the day. Sessions like an hour continuous swim. "This is a really dull session but it gets you feeling confident you can the distance."

Physically there is obviously a great deal to do. Annie suggests "if you are very strong mentally and are prepared to hurt a lot and not do a great time then you can get away with fewer hours but considering the top athletes are doing 35 hours, 8-10 should be a minimum." With three sports to train for there are always questions of how to split the training. Annie says there is no easy way to divide it as it will depend on each athlete, their natural abilities and background. In general though, she says "it is crucial to do the long bike sessions. The swimming you can probably do least off and can get away with three sessions a week but biking is where you spend most time so your focus needs to be there – followed by running." She also reminds athletes not to forget about their weaknesses and to make time to focus on them. While she suggests doing a couple of half Ironman's in the build up she says it is also really important to focus on certain key sessions. One of these, a long cycle and run brick session is essential and needs to be a regular session. She also suggests doing the full bike distance in training and to make you're happy swimming up to 4k in a session. She advises against a full marathon in advance. Instead she suggests a couple of half marathons.

## The race

Annie's advice is that rather than setting a very specific time goal for your first Ironman, use your training to give yourself a rough idea of what you think you can do but give yourself up to an hour for leeway. You are stepping out into the unknown and to give yourself time pressures, which could lead to disappointment, will ruin the amazing achievement of just finishing. "For your first you should be really aiming to get

round in one piece so that at the end you hopefully want to do another.”

So, you get to the race and as you expect it's tough. Are there strategies you can use when you are struggling to cope? Annie relays the mantra of a pro-athlete who says however tough a race is he can never quit because he knows how disappointed he'll be afterwards. She suggests “when you hit a rough patch you remind yourself how elated you'll feel at the end and what a sense of achievement you'll have the next day if you finish.” She tells the story of the 2002 World Duathlon Championships when the course was wet, the weather dreadful and she could see other competitors crashing. She was so worried about coming off her bike she very nearly dropped out. But she didn't and was rewarded with a silver medal. Imagine quitting and realising afterwards you could have won a medal.

A final thing that many will be wondering, once you've finished the race, worn out your finishers medal and sat through the Hawaii roll down, how long will it take you to recover? This will completely depend on the person, how long it took them to finish, how quickly their body adapts, what nutrition they took and on their genetics, says Annie. However, finishing isn't an excuse to do nothing at all for a while. “Most people should do something as soon as they feel able to as this loosens up the legs and will actively help the recovery process. I'd say take a couple of weeks off running but bike easy and swim easy as soon as you feel able as this will actually help.”

Annie's final tip for budding IronSerpies is one which holds resonance in all walks of life – keep everything in balance. “It is really important to have balance in your life when training for Ironman. Don't shut out everything else in your life.” She suggests making time for the other things in life which capture your imagination and not cutting out your other sources of enjoyment (like spending time with family and friends or having a glass of wine with a nice dinner). “These distractions help you stay focused and let you have fun too.” After all, while it may not seem so at the time, Ironman is meant to be fun.

## IRONMAN CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP

The ironman club championship race in 2009 is Lanzarote Ironman. Or if shorter distances are more your thing why not race other Serpies in the club triathlon championship races? Look on the website for more information.

**Look on the website for more information.**

## Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc by Andy Dubois

by Andy Dubois



*Fortunately that's not the route going straight up the hill... (photo: Andy DuBois)*

The North Face Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc is a 163km race that circumnavigates the entire Mont Blanc massif, starting in Chamonix, France and passing through Courmayeur in Italy, then Champex-Lac in Switzerland and finally back into Chamonix. It involves 8900m of ascent and descent and competitors have 46 hours to complete the course. I had been to Chamonix before and loved the mountain scenery and so was drawn to the challenge of the race.

I lined up at 6.30pm on Friday August 24 with 2319 other athletes who dared to think they could complete this race. Last year only 40% of the field managed to make it back into Chamonix so the odds aren't good. We left the town to the cheers of the large crowd and I set a comfortable pace of just over 8 minutes per mile. After an undulating 8km I passed through the small town of Les Houches and set up the first big climb of the race the to Le Charme. Everybody walks the climbs – they are just too long and steep to be able to run up. Most people including me use lightweight trekking poles, they help you go faster up the climbs and help take the stress of the quads on the descents. As the climb continues the views across the valley to Mt Blanc as the sun sets, alighting

the clouds a fiery pink and red are breathtaking. One of the best reasons for doing this race is the scenery – it is simply awesome. The first descent is down a skislope and is very steep. I lack the technical skills to run quickly down something this steep – even the steepest hills in Hampstead heath where I did endless hill repeats in training is nothing compared to this. I decided to make sure I don't fall on the really steep bits and stride out on the not so steep bits. This strategy preserved my quads and I was able to pass most of the people who passed me on the technical parts of the course.

The next 10 hours is spent ascending three more major climbs – the Croix de Bonhomme at 2479m, the Col de la Seigne at 2516, the and the Arete du Mont-Favre at 2435m with of course the large descents between them and passing through a few small villages along the way. The villages are great to run through even at 2 in the morning – large crowds all enthusiastically yelling out calls of “allez, allez, allez”. This is another feature of this race – the support from volunteers and spectators is amazing – everyone is so friendly and encouraging, it really does lift you. Running at night in the mountains is a surreal experience. The sight of a windy trail of headlights reaching up to a nearby summit, then looking down and seeing there is a trail of headlights stretching far down the mountain as far as the eye can see is unforgettable. The moon was almost full and illuminated the enormous bulk of the Mont Blanc massif. It is an awesome sight. The glaciers could still be seen under the reflection of the moonlight and on any normal night I could have sat and stared for hours taking in the majestic scene.

I felt great up the first two climbs but started to struggle on the last one and was very relieved to reach the top. The descent was unbelievably steep but not as technical and I managed to pass a few people. As the sun rose and brought the finer details of the mountains back into focus I reached the first major checkpoint of the race at the 75km mark in the town of Courmayeur after just over 12 hours since the start. You could fill two bags with whatever you wanted before the race and the organizers had it ready for you at Courmayeur and Champex. It is a chance to change clothes, fill up energy supplies, you can even have a massage, see a physio or podiatrist. They put on a big spread of food, fruit, cakes, chicken noodle soup and god knows what else. I didn't eat a thing during the run so didn't pay much attention to what was on offer. I used a mixture of a fuel called perpetuum (high carb with small amount of protein and fat designed for ultra-marathons) and hammer gels. I mixed this with water into a 600ml water bottle and it forms a runny paste similar to a banana smoothie in consistency. The bottle contained almost 2000 calories and it was just about empty by the time I reached Courmayeur. I also used a three litre camel back for water and electrolyte tablets to keep my sodium potassium levels in check. I had spent about 20 minutes at the checkpoint by the time I changed socks, tops,



**Andy enjoying some post-race refuelling**  
(photo: Andy DuBois)

filled up water bottles, etc. After a quick chat with my wife I was on my way again. The organizers put on buses that transport spectators to various parts of the course so Catherine was able to see me in half a dozen villages throughout the day. I left Courmayeur in 224th place having passed over 400 people since the first checkpoint at the 20km mark. I was hoping to finish in between 30 to 34 hours and according to the race splits I had downloaded off the race website I was on track for around 32 hours.

The next section of the run to Champex-Lac is around 50km long and whilst is not as brutal as the first section it does have two major climbs including the highest point of the race – the Grand Col Ferret at 2537m. It is also the most remote section of the race as it doesn't pass through any towns or villages and the only spectators and people who just happen to be hiking along the path or the volunteers at the aid stations. I struggled up the first climb due to not consuming enough calories on the previous descent so I stopped for a few minutes at the top at one of the 15 or so aid stations the organizers had set up along the course and knocked back about 4 cups of coke, 4 cups of maxim, a dozen jelly beans, a gel and some of my special drink and left feeling much better but with a very full stomach.

Running along the flank of the valley with the Mont Blanc massif on one side and several mountains over 2500m on the other the scenery is never anything short of spectacular and certainly helps take your mind off the pain. I felt ok on this section – still able to run the downhills and the flats but was worried how my legs would cope with the next big climb. When I reached it I tried to get into a rhythm at the bottom and hoped it would keep me going to the top. About half way up I noticed that instead of losing ground on other runners I was starting to make up some ground, a nice feeling after struggling up the last two

climbs. Once the top is reached there is a long descent down to the town of Prez de la Fort in Switzerland. My legs felt great and I was able to run down the non technical sections in under 8 minute miles and made up quite a bit of time. Only one more climb remained before the next major checkpoint at Champez at the 122km mark. The sound of cow-bells ringing became more and more prominent as the course passes through Switzerland and the number of spectators increased. I felt even stronger up the climb to Champez and arrived there back on 30 hour race pace and in 127th position. I had been going almost 21 hours and amazingly, felt great. Catherine met me and we had a quick chat. She was receiving text messages from the race organizers every time I passed through a checkpoint and my Mum in Australia was following the race on the net and was texting Catherine what position I was in so I had a good idea where I was in the race. At the checkpoint I decided to get rid of some of my wet weather gear and warmer clothes. We had perfect weather conditions, although some might have said a little hot; blue skies, sunny and in the high twenties when you're in the sun. It was much colder overnight but not anywhere near the freezing temperatures it can get down to. Apparently last year it rained for the whole second night making it a very muddy and miserable. Thankful it's not like that this year.

From Champex-Lac there is only a marathon to go! Unfortunately it also crosses two passes of around 2000m so it's not exactly an easy finish. I was still managing to run the flats at around 9-10 minute miles and the downhill at 8 minutes per mile so I made good progress. The last two major climbs were the best climbs of the race for me. My conservative start was starting to really pay off as I was passing more people and found only on the technical descents could anyone keep up with me. By the time I reached the second last checkpoint in the town of Vallorcine Catherine told me I was now in the top 100. I couldn't believe it. I was hoping for top 200 at best.

The last sections are through heavily forested areas and although the organizers had hung foot long reflective strips every 100yards or so it is still difficult finding the correct path. I was on my own by then – no-one in front of me and no-one behind and lost a bit of time choosing the wrong path every now and then. Finally the path emerged from the forest into the outskirts of the town. For the first time my legs didn't want to run anymore. I had been amazed that I was still running after more than 150km but they were not that keen anymore. I gave myself a bit of a talking to and forced my legs to stop walking and start running again.

The last kilometre through the town is something I'll never forget – every person I passed applauded and acknowledged me enthusiastically. I started to smile as I realised I had done it. As I ran through the streets, the crowd thickened and the cries of "allez" and "superb" got louder and louder. I had a

grin from ear to ear as well as a tear or two trying to escape. Crossing the river Arve for the final 200m I was waving my arms in the air happy beyond belief. Rounding the last corner I saw the finish line and with both hands in the air I crossed the line in 28hours 48 minutes in 74th position.

At the presentation the next day I learned the winner was Marco Olmo from Italy. What's special about that you might say? Well the man is 59 years old and he was 45 minutes in front of 2nd place! He won it last year and this year every big name in Ultramarathons from Europe and America was at the start line to challenge him. He was behind until the 130km mark just setting his own pace and then just ran away with it. What an unbelievable effort.

As happy as I am with my placing it is not the placing that will stay with me in my memory, it will be the view of the mountains and glaciers at sunrise and sunset, the sight of the long line of headtorches disappearing down the mountain, the never ending cries of "allez, allez allez" and "superb" from spectators, the sounds of cow bells ringing out support, the support I had from Catherine and my parents and in-laws, the feeling of insignificance that being surrounded by these incredible landscapes brings about, that feeling of mind and body working together for the whole race, finishing what to any sane mind seems to be an impossible task, the cheers and support as I crossed the finish line, a thumbs up from a fellow competitor, seeing the slower finishers joy in their faces after being out there for more than 42 hours – these will all stay with me much longer than my time or placing and these are the reasons why people do these kind of races. For anybody considering this race I can't recommend it highly enough. The organization is superb and the course whilst extremely challenging (this year with better weather conditions just over 1400 out of 2319 finished) is extremely beautiful. The atmosphere it what sets it apart from other races though. The French, Italian and Swiss people are extremely generous with their support and it gives the race an incredible atmosphere.

As far as training for a race like this- simply put – hill, hills and more hills. In the four months before the race the only flat runs I did were Tuesday night track sessions, everything else was either hill repeats, stairs, step-ups or uphill treadmill walking. The key is getting your legs strong enough to handle the descents.

### Information

For more information check out the website  
[www.ultra-trailmb.com/accueil.php](http://www.ultra-trailmb.com/accueil.php).

If you have any questions or want some advice about how to train for something like this feel free to email me  
[andydubois@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:andydubois@hotmail.co.uk).

## Fell running races

article by by Stephen Cook and John Cullinane

If you read Feet In the Clouds you could be forgiven for thinking that fell running is mainly a Lake District affair. John Cullinane and Stephen Cook take a look at some of their favourite races outside of the Lakes.

### MARCH

**Ian Roberts Fell Race, BM, 7m, Marsden West Yorkshire.**

- Both of us ran this in 2007, one of us got lost...a nice early season run around the South Pennines going over Pule Hill which is much loved by paragliders. Nothing too tough here – as long as it's not too windy.

### EASTER SATURDAY

**Rivington Pike, BS, 3.25m/700', Horwich, Lancs**

- A classic fell race – up the road onto the fell, round the tower at the top and back again. Short and sweet and no navigation skills needed!

### MAY

**Hutton Roof Crag Race – BM 7m/1300',**

**Hutton Roof village, near Kirkby Lonsdale**

- Very runnable, with a scree climb and fun step towards the end. Good views of the M6 too, and a village fete at the end.

### MAY

**Lordstones – AM 7.2m/2330ft Carlton Bank Top nr.**

**Stokesley, North Yorkshire**

- A tough race on the North Yorkshire Moors, a former counter in the English Fell Championships

### JUNE

**Pen Y Ghent AS 5.5m/1650' from Horton in Ribblesdale, North Yorkshire**

- One of the famous Yorkshire Three Peaks (the others are Ingleborough and Wharfedale) – get a taste for what would be in store in the big race itself.

### JUNE

**Castleton Fell Race - AM 6m/1500' Castleton,**

**Hope Valley, Derbyshire**

- A Friday night race taking in Mam Tor and a classic descent back to the rugby club.

### JUNE

**Buckden Pike AS 4m/1500' Buckden, Yorkshire Dales**

- An easy start from the village, over a stream and then an incredible climb to the top of the Pike with great Dales views. And then back down – only the very best can descend without scrambling. Will you dare to hurdle the wall at the finish? Another village fete (with beer tent) awaits.

### JULY

**Wharmton Dash Fell Race, AS 2m/600',**

**Greenfield, Lancashire**

- Straight up, round the transmitter and back down. And then swim across the River Tame to be greeted by the crowds at the Saddleworth Show, and the inevitable photographer.

### AUGUST

**Golf Ball Fell Race - BS 5m/900' Loveclough,**

**Rosendale, Lancashire**

- The Golf Ball is up among some radio receivers in the Pennines. A very runnable race with the best view of Blackburn (insert your own punchline)

### AUGUST /SEPTEMBER

**Pinchinthorpe Plod BM 6.3m/1200ft Pinchinthorpe,**

**nr Guisborough, North Yorkshire**

- Part of the North Yorkshire summer series, takes in the beautiful hills around Guisborough.

### OCTOBER

**Autumn Leaves Fell Race CM 10m/1700' from Diggle,**

**Saddleworth**

- Nowhere near as easy as the “CM” would suggest – runnable, but with a steep set of stairs to climb and a long drag back over the tops of the Pennines. Lots of free cake at the end, which may explain its popularity! For exact dates of these races, check the Fell Runners' Association website. Or join the FRA – for £12 a year, you will get a fixture calendar with details of over 600 races, including races in the south – the Isle of Wight series in September is popular with Serpies. You also get Britain's second-best running magazine, three times a year.

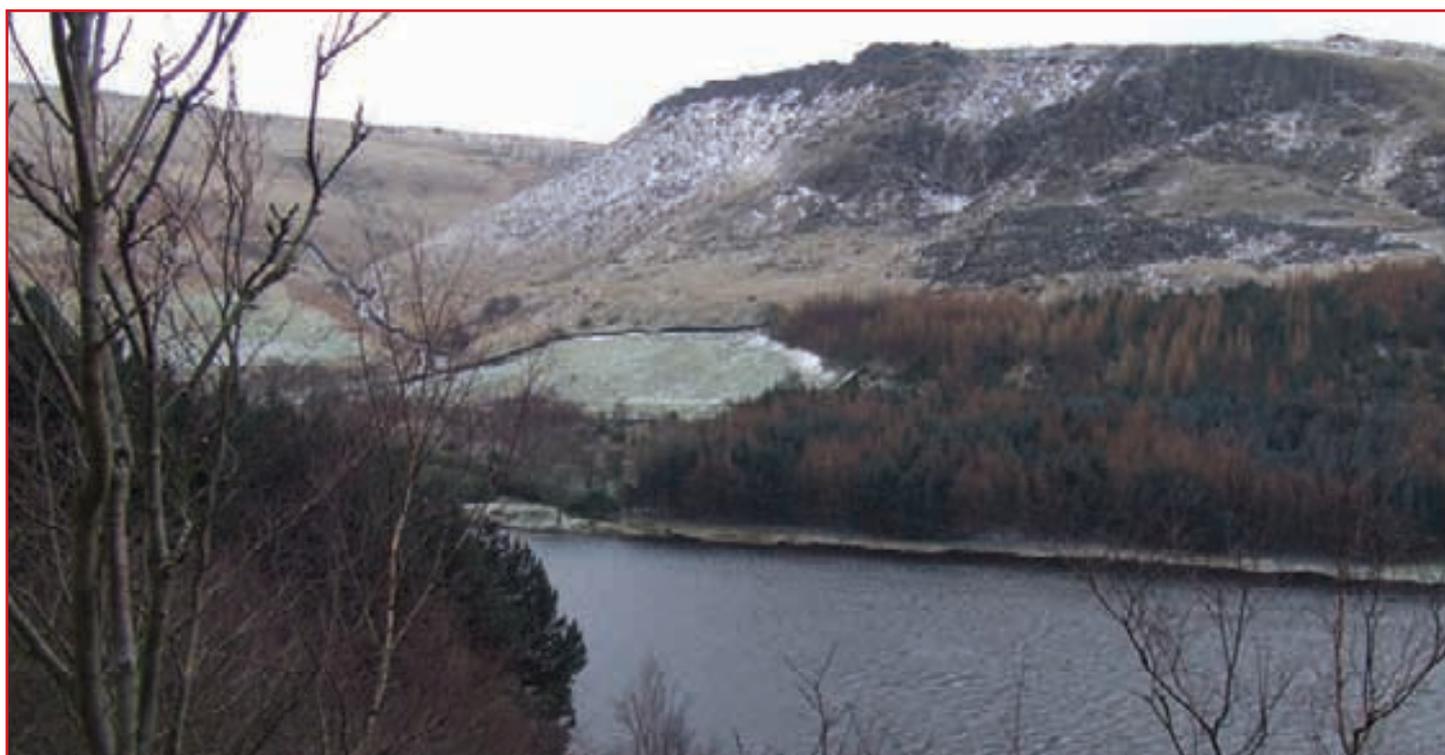
## CROSS-COUNTRY

Cross-country season starts on Saturday October 11th with the first Metropolitan League match at Woodford Green.

**CHECK THE SERPIE PLANNER FOR DETAILS**



**Castleton** (photo: Joanna Roper)



**Saddleworth** (photo: Joanna Roper)



*It's not often we get to celebrate Serpie success at World level, but at the ITU World Championships in Hamburg last year, Clive Weston won silver in the M50-54 category, completing the course in 2:11:34. Congratulations to Clive, and here's hoping for further success at this year's champs in Vancouver. (photo: Clive Weston)*

## 100 watt coaching

bright ideas

### Life coaching

**Life on track? Now that your running's going well how's the rest of you doing? Are other areas of your life off course?**

Life Coaching offers clients a safe environment within which to explore options, transform challenges (in career, health, relationships) into opportunity and move from reactive to proactive living with increased self-confidence, self-awareness and clarity of purpose.

Hannah is a qualified Life Coach and long-time friend of the Serpies who is setting up a new practice in London. For more information on introductory rates, please call 07966 626 070. References available upon request.

urban  
therapy

## New Committee Members

New committee members have joined in the last year – Serpentines caught up with them to find out what makes them tick

### Mariana Ivantsoff Background

I came to London in May of 2003 from Australia having been a keen gym goer and used to running around in the sunshine. I'd only ever raced a 10km race at that point and the idea of running more than that never entered my mind. An Australian friend of mine had run a few times with the Serpies in 2004 and I joined her on a few occasions. The people that I met on my runs were fantastic, they wouldn't leave me behind (as much as I begged them to!), gave me a history of the local sights and were really friendly. And then I met super Serpie supporter Brent Plump out clubbing one evening and I tried to convince him on our first date I was about to join this great new running club... but at that point I never did.

When and why I joined Serpentine Years went by and super Serpie supporter Brent convinced me to come out running with him on a Wednesday night, to which I'd say 'But I can't run and talk!' That fear was soon dispelled and I think I'm getting the hang of it now! I joined the club in around August 2007.

### What I'd like to bring to my Committee role

I'd really like to give something back to the club with my Committee role. I really appreciate the work of the volunteers that is so varied from the events organisers, those that stand in the freezing cold to marshal our races, the bag minders and not to mention everyone that comes out to cheer you on. The list is really endless... Without the volunteers, the club wouldn't exist. I'd like to keep the social events going that help introduce serpies to each other and mainly just keep have a great time.

### What I love about the club & how I would sell it

I think what I love about the club most is the support and motivation people give each other. I'd really recommend anyone training for an event to join the club because Wednesday night long runs are now more like a gossip session than anything else! The running is incidental! I've met some really fun people and it's great to be able to discuss anything from gossip to running ailments with them! I'm also really loving the cross-country races followed by the pub.

### Future sporting ambitions

At the moment I'm working towards doing the London marathon 'comfortably' ("comfortably" turned out to be 3.31.47!! - ed) and after that I'd like to start improving my race times. My dad was an awesome marathon runner so I'd like to do him proud! I'm hoping to complete the Medoc marathon together with Brent, in one piece- in September this year!

I'm looking forward to organising more social events and would love any input or suggestions from fellow Serpies.



*Mariana Ivantsoff*

### Malcolm Hinsley Background

I started running 13 years ago because of triathlon. I completed 8 IM races, but am now cured of triathlon madness! I now run marathons but prefer 10 miles – it's the right mix of pace control and speed. I still think I can beat my marathon PB of 2.58, but it gets more difficult as you get older. I've done 13 marathons and don't think I'll get to do more than 20.

### Why join Serpentine?

I wanted to run 13 miles on a Wednesday night. My previous club weren't interested in that so I joined Lars Olsen's group.

### What do you hope to bring to the committee?

A request was made for people to join the committee and I wanted to support the club. I do tend to volunteer for stuff! There are very few barriers to getting involved and not many clubs are like that. The organisation is so good and professional – we have had a coach ask about joining and he asked me how many professional administrators we have!

### Why did you become a coach?

I wanted to help newcomers to the sport with my experience. When you study to become a coach you learn things you didn't know and so it's worthwhile for you too. I'm now doing a Level 3 course.

### How do you see the future of coaching in the club?

We are getting lots of coaches trained. We need to make sure the coaching is directed at what people want to achieve and to cater for everything club members want to aim at and fill any gaps. I want to put a strategy in place so we go onwards and upwards! We need to be more joined up



*Malcolm Hinsley*

## Profile Lisa Pettit

Lisa Pettit has joined the committee in the role of Race Organisation & Promotion (the role previously occupied by Nadya Labib). Lisa joined Serpentine in 2005 and since then has become an integral part of the club, helping out in a multitude of ways including earning a qualification in Fitness and Running and coaching at Greenwich Park Hills sessions on Saturday mornings, organising the volunteers for the New Year's Day 10km, officiating at Track & Field matches, organising accommodation for Welsh Castles Relays, and all that in addition to her own training. Lisa describes the friendliness of Serpentine as being the thing she enjoys most about the club, having made some very good friends through running (in addition to that essential accessory, a Serpie boyfriend!), as well as the huge range of racing and training options that the club offers to suit all abilities. The fact that we like a beer or two as well doesn't hurt! On her motivation to join the committee, she says "I've always loved races and having enjoyed so many Serpie races I wanted to help be on the other side and organise our races, although I'm not planning on giving up racing myself. I hope to encourage as many people as possible to race; there can be a preconception that races are only about the fastest runners, but they're not - all runners can benefit from taking part in races and they're fun, most of the time!". Having earned some great PBs in recent years, at distances ranging from 3km to marathon, and including a superb performance in this year's Welsh Castles Relay (where this profile picture was taken), Lisa hopes her finest athletic achievement is still to come. No one who has seen the effort and determination that Lisa brings to all she does could possibly doubt that!

## Profile John Cullinane

John has joined the Committee in the role responsible for Training and Fitness. Since joining the club in 2006 he has become a familiar face to many both through competing and helping out, most notably as track and field officials coordinator, editor of Serpentine, and organiser of a club trip to the Peak District in June 2008 for some off-road training and fell racing. John got into running while living on the edge of the Pennines, when he was challenged by a colleague to run a half marathon. He completed it in 1:48 and then joined his local club, Saddleworth Runners. This led to a love of fell running, which he claims to be not much good at but is proud to have represented Middlesex at the sport!

John's first loves were rugby and cricket though, having given up T&F at an early age as his brother was a county level hurdler; he explains, "I didn't want to follow in his shadow, so I went off to play rugby and cricket instead and only ran to keep fit - and wasn't particularly good at that!". When he moved back to London in 2006 John planned to make sure running was a big part of his life here. He joined Serpentine and immediately knew he had made the right choice after doing an Assembly League race at the Dome and leaving the pub several hours later!

Since joining the club John has been injured on and off for the last two years (note: this is something of a Committee curse!), but this has led to other opportunities. He says: "I've started coaching, and am particularly keen to improve the jumps side of T&F; I coordinate officials (if you want to train, let me know!); I edit this wonderful magazine; and I've now joined the committee as Training Rep. I get to work lots with Malcolm Hinsley to develop the coaching side of the club, aimed at making sure we meet the needs of runners and triathletes, and we'd be happy to hear people's views. Just as importantly though I socialise a lot too, as with most things Serpentine, the options are usually limitless!"



*Lisa Pettit*



*John Culliane*

## A message from our new chairman Malcolm French



*Malcolm French*

I was delighted to be elected as the new Chairman at the 2008 AGM. And I'd like to add that it was great to see such a well-attended meeting. For those of you who don't know me, I joined Serpentine in 1988 and was elected a Life Member in 2004. I was a committee member for several years up until 2002. I was formerly the men's competition captain, in which capacity I made the original club affiliation application to the British Triathlon Federation. More recently, I have been men's cross-country team manager and the club's membership administrator. I am also race director for the Serpentine "Last Friday of the Month 5k" series. Among other athletics related roles, I am Honorary Treasurer of Middlesex County Athletic Association and President of the Association for 2008/9. I am also Secretary of the Sunday Cross Country League. I am a UK Athletics qualified field judge, road race and cross country official and also a qualified endurance coach.

I follow some distinguished Chairs, most recently John Walker. I'd like to take this opportunity wish John and Sue every happiness in their new life in Spain and to thank them for their immense commitment to the club over the past 25 years.

Serpentine has an incredibly diverse membership and this is one of the club's great strengths. We are fortunate to have a vibrant Committee and unlike so many sports clubs, the Committee's composition closely mirrors the age and gender profile of our membership. This should ensure that we remain fully in touch with your needs and wishes. And we're keen to hear what you want.

But your Committee members can't do everything on our own. I've long believed that an important part of the club's strength comes from the fact that so many people are willing to help in a multitude of small ways, whether it's assisting at a club run, holding the end of a tape measure an athletics match, developing our website, marshalling at a race: in fact the list is almost endless

– and so are the opportunities for you to get involved.

With the club involved in so many initiatives, one of my challenges as Chairman will be to ensure that they are sustainable and are delivered to high standards. On a personal note, I would like to see the club campaign for England Athletics to introduce an athletics equivalent of the British Triathlon Federation's "Star" accreditation scheme. I find it shocking England Athletics has no quality standards scheme for "senior" clubs like ours.

Additionally, I believe that we need to be aware of developments in the wider sporting world, particularly as some of the larger athletics clubs in the London area are beginning to develop their activities on a semi-professional basis. Sport England has recently published a radical new strategy aimed at getting more people playing and enjoying sport through activities such as swimming, running and cycling. Their target is to get one million people more active through sport by 2012. The new approach is designed to capitalise on the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity presented by the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and to use its power to inspire more people to take part in and succeed in sport. We need to be alive to the opportunities here and respond to them.

## Getting more involved with Serpentine

Serpentine is a massive organisation with 2,300 members. Our members are spread all over London and encompass a variety of different backgrounds, races, religions and occupations. We are all brought together by a common interest in running and triathlon. It is an enormous challenge to respond to the different training,

coaching and social requirements of all these people and it is a testament to all of the people who volunteer their time to the club that the club functions as well as it does.

Despite having such a large number of members, we are still chronically short of volunteers in some areas. There is a massive variety of ways to help the club and there is something that every member can do to help out in some way. Just send an email to the appropriate committee member and they will let you know how you can help out. It may be that you'd like to offer your professional skills to the club, help arrange a social event, get involved with Serpentines or simply to give some of your time to watch bags on a Wednesday night. If you want to acquire a new skill, full funding is available for becoming a qualified coach or a track and field official.

The committee is always open to new suggestions and will support and encourage any member who wants to start a new initiative. Whether it is holding a social event, starting a new coached session or something entirely different, just approach the relevant committee member with your idea and the club will support you as far as possible. Recent initiatives of club members have included a Victory quiz, a specialised coached session for throwers and jumpers ahead of the track and field session, a quiz supper, training aids for exercise warm-ups at track sessions and a beginners bike-skills session.

The bottom line is that we are an entirely volunteer led organisation. The club is only as good as the amount of time and effort that people put into it. If you are one of the people who just turns up for runs and training sessions every week, why not think about how you can give something back to the club? There is funding available for good ideas and initiatives that will benefit the club.



# CLUBKIT

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

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

The kit room is open:

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

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

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

If you have any questions please email: [club-kit@serpentine.org.uk](mailto: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	£50
Cycle jerseys (summer weight)	
– short sleeves	£25
– long sleeves	£30
Gilets	£25
Cycle shorts	£25