

# Ultra Trail Mount Blanc

25/26/27<sup>th</sup> August 2006

I'm sitting on the bog. I'm having one of those really satisfying dumps, nice solid ones. I've been going, so to speak for over 30 hours, running and walking my way round Mount Blanc.

I hold my head in my hands. I'm knackered. I'm going to fall asleep if I don't move off this bog. Suddenly the light goes out. I'm not in a fit state for this. It's pitch black other than a small glow on the wall. I press the glow and the light comes back on. Clearly not designed for people taking up residence. I didn't think I was there for long, but maybe I was. I could just sleep in the dark for a few moments. Still, there comes a time like when in a cheap restaurant that joy of sitting down changes to a sore bum and the desire to leave. We had to press on,..... well, once I get up.

I realised that standing up could be difficult when I managed a controlled drop, come stagger, on to the toilet seat, hoping that the seat and the porcelain weren't going to crack. Looking around there was very little to pull up on. My legs were not going to be much help and the toilet paper holder looked a bit fragile. Still at least the marshals knew where I was from the muddy trail across their shiny hall floor and up the stairs. I did ask, in pigeon French, if they minded me making a mess. They replied back in fluent English that it was no problem. I realise now that I was actually in Switzerland – so I must have come over as a real tit.

My running partner Jane was having a twenty minute power nap. So close to the finish, but she struggled up one of those huge hills that go on for ages. I didn't know until afterwards that she was trying not to step on the crabs that were on the path. At 2000m there are no crabs. Still we got her to one of the pit stops and feed her food, coffee and sleep. I was annoyed that we had dropped our guard and not kept fuelled up properly. However, the biggest disappointment down was the lack of variety of food. Noodle soup at every stop, cheese at every stop, salami at every stop, bread at every stop, chocolate at every stop. I didn't expect pork pies or Cornish pasties but some Italian pizza in Italy would have helped. Interestingly they even had prunes but I took caution to the wind and didn't.

The lowest section for me was at the 2<sup>nd</sup> big base, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  way round. For hours we had looked forward to a decent stop, maybe a change of clothes, and something good to eat. What we faced was a massive marquee filled with desperate faces and soulless bodies. We both hated this place. We should have taken more fuel on and drank more coffee, hence our problems above, but it was the pits. Any other time I would have loved wandering around the underground bunker that offered toilets and showers, but that night the pain of the steps and the distance of the corridors was too great. I just wanted to wash my face.

As for the terrain, any trainers would be okay, but some of the paths got very muddy and wet on the second half as it rained on the second night. I wore my Lycra shorts and Merino wool top all the time, and only putting my waterproof on during the second night. Very comfortable all the way round, with the temperature just ideal – cold if you stopped for too long but nice and snug if moving. Poles were essential, although I did see a few people (out of the hundreds) not bothering with them.

Getting round was the aim, that is getting around with my mate Jane from the Dales. Originally we were going to do it with Mike (another mate from the Yorkshire Dales). It was Mike that came up with the idea in the first place, but the bugger died a couple of weeks before the event. Easy saying now, but with the loss of Mike, getting round was a certainty. For Mike, I wanted to help Jane round – 'cos that is what he would have done. With no holds barred, I even went shopping with Jane, only to tell her that she could only buy a fluffy jacket once she had finished the race – what a bastard I can be. Although I think she had the last laugh when we went shopping again after the race – like straight after the race. My feet were in bits.

There are many great parts to the race – I'm still glowing. Sadly most of the race is in the dark. But there was that great sunset. At night I marvelled the way there was a trail of head torches meandering way behind in to the valley below, and the head torches snaking their way ahead to meet the stars. We were part of something big. It felt like we were (and probably looked like) a line of Orcs walking up the hill. Bonfires were lit all over the hillside, and the only noise was the clatter of walking poles. We were fired up for action, with nothing going to stop us.

I was chuffed that Jane and myself met Dave and Phil on our way out of the Courmayer pit stop, which is just under half-way. They seemed a bit shocked. Great to leave them milling around. Of course, moments later they both sauntered past us. I just loved the way that Bill and Ben had the same rucksacs, same shorts, same coloured socks, in fact same haircut and about the same height. What a perfect team. Good to see them together.

Jane's partner, Harry, was watching our progress on the internet back in the Dales. He texted us saying Jane was the 128<sup>th</sup> woman. There were two women in front so we made it to 126<sup>th</sup> position with little effort. We passed the next couple of check points and found that Jane was 83<sup>rd</sup>. We were making great headway. It spurred us on. One time Harry texted us saying had we passed an American woman yet. What American woman? But sure enough, around the corner and a further few hundred metres we met this American woman – technology for you. We talked to her for a bit, but hey, competition is competition.

We got Jane down to the 7<sup>th</sup> English woman. A tremendous effort considering she kept on telling me she wasn't competitive (like I believe her), and swimming is actually Jane's strength. Mike would have been proud, and I certainly was.

Would I do it again – you bet. It's got a lot of potential, and Chamonix is just great for chilling out.

*Rohypnol Rhys*