

THE TORRIER

NEWS, INSPIRATION, RACING, OBSESSION, MEMORIES, ADVENTURE AND MORE!

SPRING 2017



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Right: Legend Jim Smith surrounded by admiring Toddlies at the Jim Smith 5k in September.

Cover: Scout and Pike by Rob Tyson; see p. 24 for more pointy monument pictures.



A word from the Chair...

Spring appears to have arrived, the nights are lighter and the rain is a little warmer. I'm starting to dig beneath the longer layers to find my lighter kit and soon I'll be trying to tan my legs.

Bad weather hasn't deterred you and there's been plenty of good turnout in races. Well done on some great performances and notable improvements from many of you. The various championships: fell, road, trail, ultra, cross country and club that the club arrange, also the English and soon British all seem to be stimulating quite a bit of interest. It'll be exciting to see how things progress in both the open categories and the team championships (you are needed!) There really is something for everybody so brush down those racing shoes and come join us!

Outside of the above championships many of you have been taking part in some mammoth events including club secretary Jonathan Wright who took a podium place in February's Spine MRT Challenger "Britain's most brutal race". Member secretary Dazz Graham prepares for the Dragon's Back and several members are preparing for their Bob Graham rounds. 2016 was awesome but I've got a really good feeling about 2017!

This Torrier edition has been put together by ultra running, unicorn Kim Ashworth who I'd like to say a big thanks (I know the amount of work that goes into a Torrier). I'd also like to thank all of you who have been getting involved in turning out for races, directing events, writing press reports, marshalling, liaising, web administrating, pack running, Torrier contributing, committee commenting, forum/Facebook posting and anything else that you may have done for the benefit of making Todmorden Harriers such a superb club.

This April we will be running from the Shepherd's Rest, don't forget

though its a 6:45 start and in May we plan to run from the Hare and Hounds in Old Town at 7:00.

If you're looking to train smarter and get some speed in your legs Graeme Wrench's sessions are back on a Tuesday at 6:30. Currently at Ferney Lee School until further notice (Keep an eye the forum and the Facebook page for updates)

Finally, this your club and you have a say in how things are ran. This is an open invitation for any members too attend committee meetings. If you have any matters that you would like to discuss, please either come along to your committee meetings. Meetings are held at the Golden Lion in Tod 7:00 - 8:00 on the first Monday of each month.

Best wishes to you all.

Nick Barber
youngbulltodharrier@gmail.com



I feel this picture requires no explanation... if it does, ask Nick. –Ed.



A word from the Editor...

First of all, thanks to everyone who's taken the time to put some words together for this issue. I've really enjoyed reading all your contributions, and as always, I'm massively inspired by the huge amounts of hard work that go into the super cool things that Tod Harriers do.

Being a relatively new club member, and indeed runner, my mind still boggles when I hear about the stuff you lot have done. A big part of my training motivation is knowing the amount of individual sweat that go into solo and team efforts on behalf of the club. Everyone's so supportive too. Only last week I was struggling through some speed intervals when Robin pulled over in his car to offer a few words of encouragement!

Just a few years ago I dabbled in climbing and mountaineering, thinking only superhumans would choose to run up hills...now thanks to Tod Harriers (and Strava) I've run further and faster than I ever

thought possible. The 'unicorn' title stems from my 27th birthday run, where I ran 27 miles (ish...damn Garmin) wearing a party hat with a balloon attached to my rucksack (why not), and for some reason I've signed up for more ultras this year (if you're interested, check out our new Ultra Champs on the website - still plenty of opportunities to qualify).

As Nick said, it's not just running, and a lot goes on behind the scenes to make everything possible, so here's to another great season. It's a privilege to race with the Pike on my back, knowing I'm part of such a dedicated, friendly and welcoming club.

Thanks for your patience as I'm aware it's been a while since the last issue. We've got a wonderfully eclectic mix for you to enjoy, including Greg's account of his epic ride down the length of the United States, Joolz's journey going sugar-free for a month and Rob's Groundhog Day torment of trying to find a different way to run up the same hill (thanks to Rob for the atmospheric pic of Scout and the Pike on the cover). We've also included details on last year and this year's Grand Prix results. If you're left wanting more, there's a superb collection of race reports on the website... and of course I'll be on the hunt for more material for the next Torrier!

I'll leave you with some words from Marc Laithwaite that struck a chord with me this past year, which I hope you find encouraging:

"Just because all your friends do it doesn't mean it's normal."

Kim Ashworth
kkashworth@gmail.com

Yes, its that time of year again!

Membership renewals are due at the end of March for the coming year. Prices, as promised last year, are the same.....

Fell only - £15

Fell and road (inc. EA membership) - £30

Happy to accept cash BUT would much prefer if all payments are paid directly into the bank.

Account details:

Sort Code - 20-35-84

Account No. - 63803716

Payment Reference - Your Name

Any issues, please contact me.

Dazz

daz1968@hotmail.co.uk

Grand Prix 2016: A year of record turnouts

This season saw a record 111 of its members run at least one race of the 33 in their GP fixture list. There were best ever turnouts in both the fell and trail categories, and the club record of 42 entrants was equalled in two races. The most prolific runner this season was Richard Butterwick who completed 17 GP races. Mark Williams in his first season of competing ran the most road races and Stu Wolstenholme ran the most on the fell—both with 9.

24 qualified for a certificate in the GP, it was won by Richard Blakeley for a record 6th time – he first won it in 1996.

Club Champions: Mel Blackhurst & Andrew Worster



Road: Sarah Glyde & Robin Tuddenham

Fell: Pauline May & Andrew Worster

Trail: Nina Fedorski & Matt Flanagan

XC: Rebecca Patrick & Nick Barber

Ultra (new this season): Louise Greenwood & Dwane Dixon

Most Improved Runner: Andrew Worster

Eric Stottart Trophy for best performance in English and Brit Champs:
Jon Wright

Toilet Seat: Ben Crowther

Club Person of the Year: Nick Barber

If you'd like to be on this list next year, read on for the current Grand
Prix standings...

Grand Prix Table

As it's early in the season, at time of going to print, everyone has yet to qualify. For the Grand Prix below, members who have completed 2 or more races are included.

Pstn	Name	Cat	RACES completed	number of FELL	number of ROAD	number of TRAIL	Qualified	GP SCORE
1	Andrew Worster	M	6	2	3	1	x	570.6
2	Paul Brannigan	M50	5	2	2	1	x	432.2
3	David Leslie	M65	5	1	3	1	x	427.0
4	Mel Blackhurst	F50	4	3	1		x	385.0
5	Richard Butterwick	M45	4	1	2	1	x	342.2
6	Matt Flanagan	M40	3	2		1	x	266.9
7	Sarah Glyde	F40	3		3		x	266.5
8	Michael Harper	M45	3		2	1	x	265.4
9	Duncan Cannon	M	3		2	1	x	251.4
10	Darren Tweed	M	3	2		1	x	246.6
11	Stu Wolstenholme	M45	3	2	1		x	234.7
12	Simon Galloway	M50	3	1	2		x	227.1
13	Peter Ehrhardt	M70	3		3		x	223.8
14	Josh Murphy	M	3		3		x	220.7
15	Heather Rostron	F35	3		2	1	x	218.4
16	Dan Taylor	M	3	2		1	x	216.8
17	Mark Williams	M40	3		2	1	x	214.5
18	Dave Collins	M60	2	2			x	194.7
19	Rebecca Patrick	F40	2	2			x	186.4
20	Robin Tuddenham	M45	2	1	1		x	184.4
21	Andrew Bibby	M60	2		1	1	x	178.0
22	Claire Parfitt	F40	2	2			x	178.0
23	Elise Milnes	F55	2		1	1	x	168.0
24	Tom Barker	M	2	1		1	x	148.9
25	Graham Milnes	M60	2		1	1	x	148.0
26	Myra Wells	F55	2		1	1	x	144.4
27	Kim Ashworth	F	2		1	1	x	143.1
28	Nina Fedorski	F50	2		1	1	x	135.5
29	Dave O'Neill	M55	2		1	1	x	116.7

Championships - Top 10

Fell (after 3 of 15 races)

			Completed	Points
1	Mel Blackhurst	F50	3	216.4
2	Andrew Worster	M	2	191.8
3	Matt Flanagan	M40	2	158.5
4	Darren Tweed	M	2	156.8
5	Dave Collins	M60	2	151.3
6	Rebecca Patrick	F40	2	147.7
7	Claire Parfitt	F40	2	145.6
8	Stuart Wolstenholme	M45	2	141.5
9	Dan Taylor	M	2	140.9
10	Paul Brannigan	M50	2	136.6

Trail (after 1 of 6 races)

			Completed	Points
1	Duncan Cannon	M	1	88.1
2	Michael Harper	M45	1	82.3
3	Tom Barker	M	1	78.3
4	Joe Courtney	M	1	77.9
5	Ian MacLachlan	M50	1	77.0
6	Dan Taylor	M	1	75.9
7	Guy Whitmore	M45	1	75.3
8	Andrew Bibby	M60	1	75.2
9	Paul Cruthers	M50	1	72.2
10	Mark Williams	M40	1	70.2

Road (after 4 of 12 races)

			Completed	Points
1	Andrew Worster	M	3	277.7
2	Sarah Glyde	F40	3	225.4
3	Josh Murphy	M	3	220.7
4	David Leslie	M65	3	205.2
5	Peter Ehrhardt	M70	3	165.0
6	Richard Butterwick	M45	2	164.8
7	Duncan Cannon	M	2	163.3
8	Michael Harper	M45	2	160.7
9	Paul Brannigan	M50	2	159.8
10	Simon Galloway	M50	2	140.8

Ultra (after 2 of 7 races)

			Completed	Points
1	Bev Holmes	F45	2	127.9
2	Robert Tyson	M	1	72.8
3	Peter Bowles	M45	1	69.5
4	Dave Garner	M45	1	67.6
5	Joe Daniels	M40	1	65.6
6	Jonothon Wright	M40	1	65.3
7	Bob Halstead	M55	1	64.4
8	Dan Taylor	M	1	61.1
9	Tom Barker	M	1	61.1
10	Zoe Dijkman	F	1	58.2

Full tables, details of how to qualify and links to all the results are on our website www.todharriers.co.uk



Jack Dowling 1940-2016

As mentioned in the Forum, Jack Dowling died on August 30th, aged 76. His funeral was well attended by harriers, old friends and his close family - wife Jean, son John, daughters Joanne and Janette and three of his four grandchildren.

Jack was not quite a founder member of Todmorden Harriers, having joined just two weeks after the formation of the club in the late 1970's. My first recollection of Jack was in the 1980's when he com-

peted in the Gale Fell Race. Harry Clayton, Brian Hargreaves and John McDonagh were present. Harry was the organiser, coach and manager; he would enter the foursome in lots of local fell and road races. On Wednesday packruns I had the pleasure of running with Jack, often having great difficulty in keeping up with him.

This brief summary hardly does justice to a highly talented person. He had several jobs in a varied career, including one of his favourites - in the parcel despatch department at British Rail. Rather late in life he completed a degree course in Social and Economic History, thanks to Jean agreeing to work as the main breadwinner. Jack later became employed in two local schools, teaching the top age Junior classes. His pupils became quite proficient in origami and copper plate handwriting. (Calligraphy was one of his many skills).

Jack was an accomplished pianist, an ideal qualification for a Junior School teacher. His two daughters became good pianists, thanks to Jack taking them to Manchester on Saturday mornings for lessons. They played at piano festivals.

One of Jack's main interests was as a member of Todmorden Brass Band. He did the full brass band circuit, which sometimes involved more beer drinking than trumpet playing. His son John was recruited into the band. At Jack's funeral John composed himself to play a beautiful cornet solo which brought a round of applause

Joanne and Janette joined the Harriers, both doing very well in races. Jack and John travelled up to Fort William to support Joanne in the 1997 Ben Nevis race. Joanne did not let the side down, completing the course in an excellent 2 hours 47 minutes.

Jack had a deep knowledge of local history. He and Alan Ainsworth would regularly entertain everyone with hilarious stories, many of them relating to local characters and events. My recent contacts with Jack were all in the vicinity of Gaddings Reservoir. He was a cam-

paigner for the restoration and upkeep of the dam. He enjoyed taking his dog for walks around Gaddings. His memory will always be with me when I go for walks in the area.

Goodbye Jack. We will all miss you.

Jim Smith

Shortly before his death Jack chose the following poem:

HEAVEN - HAVEN

I have desired to go
where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.
And I have asked to be
where no storms come,
where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea.

Gerald Manley Hopkins



The Divide

How does one sum this up? Six years accumulating route and equipment knowledge. Three years of directed training. 16,431km of off-road riding. 241,674m of elevation gained. All to do what? To ride off-road from Banff in Canada, to the US/Mexican border in as short a time as I could.

4,285km with 52,645m of climbing. No medals. No badge. No stamp on your Brevett Card. No support. No organiser. No backup. Nothing. That's it. The Tour Divide. That was 19 days last year.



The Divide is about the beautiful simplicity of being self-sustained in the wilderness. Often, you're travelling at high speed. Just as often you're sat on a dirt road licking the inside of a packet of peanuts to try and get something edible even though you did this an hour ago when you ran out of food. Your next food stop is 40km away. There is a 3,000m pass in between it and you. Sitting here won't make it any closer. Move along. Normality skewed. Canada in a nutshell.



Day after day, pass after pass, becomes your day. Wake up, crawl out of your bivi bag, find a bush to fertilise, eat a Poptart for breakfast, get on your bike and ride. 18 hours later: stop, repeat. A Montana Hilton awaits you tonight. A pit toilet block. A chance to stay safe in the woods. Fall asleep with yesterday's breakfast burrito in your hand. The only bit of safety food you've hoarded. At some point in between here and Antelope Wells you may shower and wash your one pair of shorts. It's ok. In the wilderness no one can smell you. Bar the bears. And the mountain lions. And the tarantulas. And the rattlers.

Idaho. A pointless 60 mile blip in the heart of Trump territory. The Rail Trail 30km of sand and buried railway sleepers. ATVs and idiots. America in a nutshell. You'll not miss it.



If you're lucky at some point you'll get a tail wind. You probably won't care by this stage. Cross the Great Basin. 550km of Wyoming's most beautiful bleak bushland. Oil derricks and Mustangs. Sagebrush and dirt. 43 degrees centigrade during the



day, -5 at night. Exit the state and the final climb to Brush Mountain Lodge. Kirsten. Bed. Shower. Pizza. Hummingbirds. Halfway through now.

Colorado brings new heights. Day after day spent above the treeline. Passes over 3,800m.

Your body wastes. Your mind feasts on the sights. Your lungs will suck down the oxygen depleted air and you'll keep pedalling. Relentless forward progress engrained in you by now. You enter through summer ski resorts with Armani clad idiots. You leave quickly; this is no place for you.

Eventually the perfect gravel terminates and rises up the conglomerate hell of New Mexico roads. Hour by hour you move from the state line and the roads get worse. If it rains you're in trouble. Adobe mud is not your friend. Rain showers during Monsoon season are not showers. They are torrents. You'll tick off the best and worst the route has to offer now. The Gila wilderness – no water for 500km, pack accordingly. Vallecitos and its dog pack – bring snacks, or your calves. Then the final insulting 110km of tarmac – a gradual climb to the border post. But the CTR alternate. The Chaco alternate. Pie Town and the Toaster House. This is why New Mexico will be special. The nug-



gets of gold among the desolation.

The end. Probably no one there. Maybe a bored CBP officer. No food, no water, no medal. You turn off your satellite tracker and stop. That's it. Go home. You're done.



It's hard to put into words what the Tour Divide is. For some it is a tour through the most beautiful and desolate parts of North America. For others, it's a fast flight through it. Always racing, always watching the clock. I was somewhere in the middle. Next time it'll be faster, rookie mistakes that can be learnt only once, applied to the next ride. After that who knows, a slow tour with trailer and family. Stopping and enjoying rather than passing and ignoring. Time will tell. For now, I still dream of the Divide. Solitude. Silence. Simplicity. I miss it.

Greg May





Changing the old routine

I live in Hebden and have worked in Burnley for the last 10 years. The job is fine, but doing the same commute day after day in the car gets a tad mind-numbing, so I thought I'd better do something to shake it up. I've tried cycling it, but I hate cycling, so that was never going to work. So I thought why not run it? I can't believe I'd never thought of it before in all those years. The route was around 12 miles with some good trails at either end, with a properly boggy fell section in the middle.

I set off at 7am on a beautiful Spring morning, and by 9:15 I was showered and at my desk. What I didn't expect was how incredibly focused I was all day, totally on it, really buzzing after an amazing start to the day. Next time I'll try a different route, maybe via Thiev-eley Pike.



Here's the view from Hoof Stones Trig, with Burnley looking very far away still.

Matt Flanagan



Malta Marathon

It was a tricky decision as to where to run my first 2017 Marathon. The idea was to find somewhere I had always wanted to go; where the weather would be nice – but not too hot and humid; where nobody else I knew would be running in case I messed up completely and made a fool of myself in an ambulance; and somewhere capable of organising a really good race. Malta was then the obvious choice. So after a cheap Easyjet flight – with the luxury of a bag checked in to the hold – and two glorious days of sightseeing I found myself lined up at the startline in M'Dina along with about 950 other marathon runners of a wide range of nationalities. Race start was 7.30am so it was still cold but a warm up in the narrow mud walled streets of old M'Dina was quite different to any other race warm up I ever had. Suddenly, bang and we were off, and for me there was a cracking pace downhill for the first 2 kilometres – yes the organisers even agreed to my preference for km markings rather than miles. There followed two or three long loops with views of the old cities of M'Dina, Rabat and running through Mosta. I was still able to think and run despite having covered about 25km by this stage and at what for me was a good

pace – maybe averaging 5min 30 per kilometre. However from then on the rot began to sink in. Not enough training, not enough water taken on board as the temperature rose, too fast a pace in the first few kilometres. I was still running by the 35th kilometre but then cramps started and I was into a run/walk sort of hobble downhill to the final stretch along the glorious Malta waterfront. Still I was still running at the end and with a time of 4 hours 11 mins and overall about half way down quite a fast field. I did not feel disgraced and was certainly happy with the overall time – if not the last 5km.

The winner was a Moroccan Mohammad Hajjy in 2:21.06, this being the fourth time he has won the race. I made various pals before and during the race including various Leeds and Yorkshire runners, a 72 year old Japanese man, a Brit living in Istanbul (who came home just one place behind me), Sue from my hotel and others. This and the fabulous island of Malta made this an unforgettable experience which I can recommend to anybody who likes long distance.

David Leslie



Interlude...

As some of you may know, I'm a big fan of Instagram for food, running and yoga inspiration. This is a classic favourite recipe that I often have after a run. For more deliciousness and pictures of our valley, follow me @adventureandcake on Instagram.

Recipe: Nice Cream

Vegan, dairy free, gluten free, refined sugar free but not fun-free. It's healthy - but it doesn't taste like it! A great indulgent breakfast or post-exercise treat. Freeze the bananas beforehand to save time.

Blend the following (shove it all in, I'm not a measurer!):

1 banana per person, super ripe, frozen for at least 30 mins (allow to defrost slightly if your blender isn't very powerful)

Peanut or other nut butter to taste (smooth is best)

Cacao/cocoa powder to taste

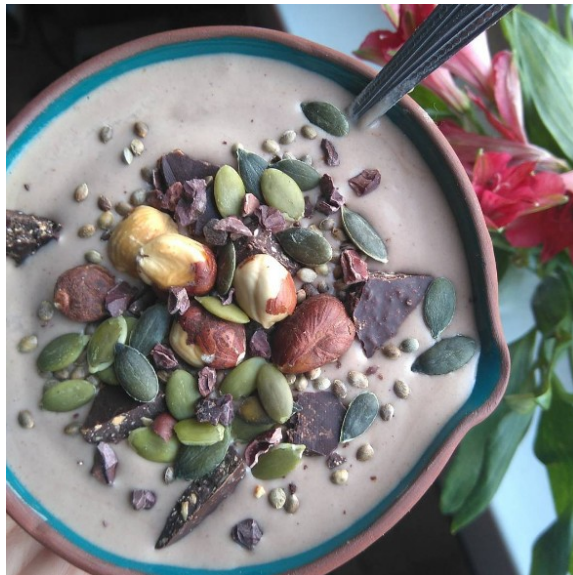
Add plant milk to loosen (e.g. soya, hazelnut, rice, oat, almond, hemp)

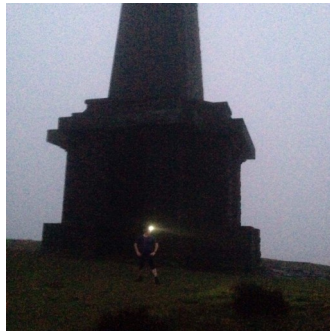
Top with nuts, seeds, tiny banana stars, chopped up dark chocolate, edible flowers; anything that takes your fancy.

Scoff immediately from a bowl. Brain freeze!

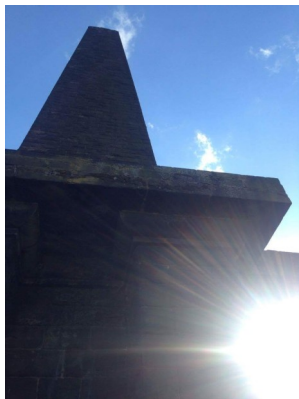
Variations: the possibilities are endless! Add frozen berries, protein powder, cinnamon, cardamom...

Kim Ashworth



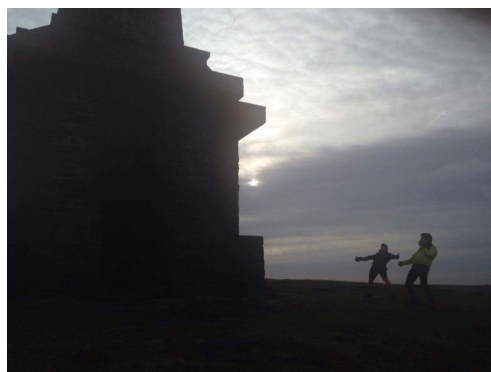


365 Days: 100 Stoodleys.



Why would you bother? That is a good question, one which I have asked myself repeatedly whilst dragging my sorry self out of bed on early cold November mornings. The reason being...Bob Graham is looming! Topping out on our not-so-lofty local landmark 100 times in a year seemed like a good way of motivating myself to get out more than once a week and gain some ascent. Many have said that 10,000 feet and 30 miles a week is the magic formula for

the build up to a BG attempt. Although, with Stoodley being just under, or over 1,000 feet (depending on where you attack it from, but it has to be the valley bottom to count) this leaves a big chunk of altitude to be gained. The only solution was to start doubling up, tripling up and sometimes quadrupling the ascents! I am now on my 85th and getting incredibly sick of seeing that monolith looming up out of the horizon. It has been fantastic to see the change of seasons and the interesting routes that can be achieved, with a bit of creative thinking



mind you. Some have been achieved in races, others on pack runs, others snuck in before or after 13 hour shifts! I have climbed from multiple locations and descended through hail, wind, fog, snow, blistering sunshine (you get the idea). There have been mornings where I have burst



through the clag to witness transcendent cloud inversions that have made me glad to have made the effort. There have also been dark evenings when I've stumbled upon the creepy looming tower through sheets of driving rain and wondered why I'm doing this! I will be happy and relieved come late June, when I can look across the valley towards the monument without the internal counter clicking into place. 15 to go... I'll get my shoes.



Rob Tyson

Out-fox the Fox

I've been mountain biking with varying degrees of success for the past ten years or so. Fell running's pretty exciting, but for me it's just a bit too much like hard work. Mountain biking has almost as much suffering, but the penalty for failure is often more catastrophic; something which appeals to the devil in me.

As it's such a (relatively) young sport, mountain biking has been pretty rubbish at reaching out to anyone other than shouty young men, and for a long time has had something of an image problem when it comes to female athletes. Fortunately the tides are turning and "the

industry" (an alien concept to fell runners, mountain biking is a whole lot more expensive and faffy) is now trying to appeal to a broader spectrum of riders with the bikes, kit, events and races they provide.

That's the reason for events like the Red Bull Foxhunt; an all-female event which has been running annually for the past couple of years. The premise is simple: take one women's World Champion, 250 riders, one long, steep Cumbrian fell, a mass-start, and let the carnage commence: First one to the bottom's the winner!

The World Champ' in question is Rachel Atherton, a truly inspirational figure who has come back from what could have been a career ending injury to win every single professional race last season. She won all the world cups, as well as the world championships. A herculean task and something no downhill (female or male) has achieved before. The opportunity to race against an athlete who's just come out of the perfect season is too much for anyone to resist, plus weird and frankly ridiculous races are my preferred scene, so I promptly signed up and found myself yet again packing up an inordinate amount of kit for the weekend's racing.

Downhill (unlike other disciplines) usually has uplifted climbs, so the only riding you do is, as the name suggests; downhill - usually for a maximum of about five to ten minutes. It's not as easy as it sounds though; the tracks are very steep and technical, often with mandatory jumps, gaps and drops as well as deadly rocky bits and pedally fast sections. You're basically pedalling as fast as you can, or holding on for grim death, or a combination of the two, for six terrifying minutes.

Downhill racing usually takes place over a whole weekend, with practice and qualifying one day, then more practice and race runs the next (again, far more faff than running). This weekend was much like any other race weekend, except that women were, for once, the massive majority!

I had a great start to the weekend, managing to stay upright on all my practice and qualifying runs. Unusually for a downhill race, this was a mass-start event. 250 of us lined up at the top of the hill, with grid position allocated according to qualifying. The World Champ' started at the back of the grid, albeit with a very large start ramp to give her a boost. The premise was essentially not to get overtaken by her, not to crash, and to cross the line before anyone else.

The track wasn't my usual cup of tea, I prefer more technical rocky riding, where the pace is a little slower and there's more traction but you need to have strong bike handling skills. This track was fast, off camber and slick with the morning's rain, it was also very VERY pedally, something I never really relish!

Sooner than I'd have liked we were off. I had a good start, picking a smooth line through an early rocky section and overtaking a few girls through the first couple of flat corners. Somehow I ended up at the front of a baying pack of mountain-women and the fear of being battered beneath 500 knobbly tyres was enough motivation to keep pedalling through the searing lungs and the screaming legs into the more technical sections of the course.

From here the course was more suited to my riding style, steeper and more technical singletrack which made overtaking suicidal. I started to relax and enjoy myself a bit more until the next wide corner when I caught sight of my old rival Roz out of the corner of my eye.

No rest for the wicked; I got my head down and concentrated hard through the last slick corners and the final big "sender" (a silly word for a big jump that you can pull a big trick off, should you so desire). By this stage I was whooping and squealing with joy, I collapsed in a big dignified heap over the finish line, overcome by the thrill of finally winning a race and *technically* being the only person to ruin Rachel Atherton's "perfect" season!

Sorry for filling the hallowed pages of the Torrier with such frivolous nonsense, but if you think it sounds like your sort of fun, say hello at a pack run and let's get out on two wheels (It's easier than running anyway!).

Rosie Holdsworth



The Sun Always Shines on TV (Transvulcania - Parte Dos)

Everyone knows that the 2nd part of a trilogy is usually the worst, not quite as good as the original and just marking time, going off track with cryptic subplots, indulgently long flashbacks, setting the scene just for the final one. Matrix Reloaded, Back to the Future II, For a Few Dollars More, etc. to name a few.

It's as though after the surprise success of the first one, the dreams get big and all the focus goes on the grand finale. Feel free to skip this article and wait for part 3 to come out, probably still not as good as the original but it will have had a lot more money splashed out on it!

After my first taste of racing abroad at the 2015 Transvulcania Half Maratón, there was a logical progression toward tackling the full Ultra distance, in 2017. There was just the pesky middle step to get out the way first in the shape of the 2016 Transvulcania Maratón.

However, whilst a 24km mountain race had been achievable with a little bit of extra running, a 45km effort – 50% further than I'd ever run before – was going to take a little bit more thought and planning, maybe even some of that mysterious 'training' stuff I'd heard others talk about.

After a bit of analysis, I drew up a highly undetailed four month plan focussed around my key areas for improvement with the intention of spending about a month on each:

Base Fitness – do some slow runs.

Endurance – do some long runs.

Strength – run up some hills.

Strength Endurance – run slowly up some hills during long runs.

After an easy December the intention was to hit the New Year fresh but a feeling of overtiredness (from doing virtually nothing?) led to various mysterious pains afflicting my legs, knees, achilles, feet, calves and I really struggled to get anything done in January.

I wasn't too worried as the race wasn't until May, so I could always compress my 4 month plan into 3. There was just the immediate issue of my test event at the start of Feb, the Grizedale 27 mile Trail Marathon (with an extra mile thrown in for free!).

I've never had much faith in 'training plans' as most are overcomplicated nonsense, but I've definitely not seen a first marathon plan that involved running an average of 25km a week in the 10 weeks leading up to it. It was barely enough to be fit for a 10k.



Never previously having run further than 30km meant right up to a few days before I thought there was no way I'd be even starting. However, the Wednesday before was a lovely warm sunny day, and I managed an unplanned 20km run that gave me just enough hope to risk it.

On the early drive up to the Lakes I had all sorts of concerns over fuelling (I'd never needed to eat whilst running), fitness (complete lack of) and whether it would be a first ever DNF out of hundreds of races. It was a very windy day with the threat of showers but thankfully mild for early Feb.

The route is a wonderful hilly hourglass loop around the Grizedale Forest with early views looking down towards Coniston Water and then working your way right across to the shores of Windermere on the second hillier loop.

It was here that I passed the 19 mile marker – marked by a celebratory photo whilst running backwards much to the befuddlement of a couple of walkers - and headed into uncharted territory still feeling fairly good. Soon after, a stiff climb reminded me that I was nowhere near fit enough despite the regular catching and passing of other runners who were thinly spread out by now.

The final climb was excruciatingly long and painful but soon forgotten when I reached the finish (actually it was succession of unrelenting climbs over about 5km and I haven't really forgotten!)

So with that confidence booster that I could actually manage the distance and with my legs seemingly working again, I started building

throughout Feb and March. At least I still had the reassurance that the race fee included insurance and helicopter rescue.

April would be all about the 'Vert' – I set myself the ambitious target of climbing Everest i.e. 8848 metres of climb, or an average of about 300m a day. This would double what I had managed before in a month, another big step for me, upwards this time.

It was close, with 2 days to go I was still nearly 700m from the summit, but then there were 2 days on La Palma – the hilliest island in the world! Whilst many were running through the snow and mud at the Yorkshire Three Peaks Race back home, I was doing my own 3 Peaks in the sun (Pico de la Nieve, Pico de la Cruz y Roque de los Muchachos!) to blast past the 10,000m mark for the month.

A week to prepare on the island was a delicate balance of catching up on missing runs and tapering down. Two days before the main races is the Vertical Kilometre race, 1200m of climb in just over 7km distance. We decided to walk the course during the day and then watch the race in the evening.

Unfortunately, Myra took a big tumble on the way down suffering quite a battering and after ensuring she wasn't going to die, I left her in the car with a headache and a large drumming band (they were outside the car, the 30 of them wouldn't have fitted in, especially with the size of the drums!) whilst I ran up and down the hillside taking photos wishing I had entered the VK too.

The next day it was clear with one arm totally out of action Myra wasn't going to be able to drive across the island to pick me up at the finish as planned. In trying to find out possible options, having previously declined the race transport back, I inadvertently found myself in the elite runners briefing with some of the world's top mountain runners – blended right in!

The next morning was a leisurely start – the Ultra runners coaches had left at 4am, I had a 2 minute walk to catch the 8am coach transfer to my more respectable 11am start.

It timed so that the lead ultra runners came through before we started so I had the pleasure of shivering in the misty trees watching the pro's fly through like they were starting a 10km, not already 25km through a 75km. Memo to self: more miles and more hills for next time. A lot more.

After a bit of a warm up around the woods it was time to cram into the start pen for my race. The record was 4 hours, I thought 7.5-8 hrs would be good for me but anything would do considering all the missed preparation.

I've spent a lot of time walking and running on La Palma so knew the course well – too well, it was going to be epically tough. I drifted easily along the first few gentle downhill kilometres, gaining lots of places as soon as we hit the ups climbing out of the mist into the sun. Three hours in and it was going brilliantly, I couldn't stop grinning, especially when cheered on by spectators who were dotted along the whole course with little ant-like piles of them on the peaks.

Believe me, the sun always shines on Transvulcania and it was now beating down from high overhead. I'd learnt from last year and stayed well hydrated, pacing it comfortably, feeling good and on target for sub 7 hours. Now we were onto my favourite section – the long run around the 2000m+ high caldera rim towards the observatories.

After one small climb something felt different, a few seconds later and my head didn't feel quite right. I walked a few paces, took a drink but still not right. A minute later, I briefly stopped to take a gel and a drink, a bit of water on the head just in case. I knew I was well fuelled & hydrated at this point, legs felt good, but just something was not quite right.

I was running again and the feeling faded, then 5 minutes later in the space of a few seconds I spiralled down, head was completely gone, my legs were gone, all my power wasted away. WTF? I walked. I think.



Maybe it was more of a wobble. I reached inside myself and found nothing there.

After what seemed like forever but was probably only a minute, my head came back enough to start thinking rationally again, a million options running through my mind as what was going on. And more importantly what to do about it with still more than half the distance to go.

Five days earlier, I had easily managed over 30km on these trails with no problem on less fuel and water. I had only just past 20km today, no reason I could think as to why. Maybe the sun, the altitude, the steady pace had still been too fast, everything I could think of, I had prepared for and acted to prevent problems so unlike last year's dehydration problem I couldn't explain it.

[On reflection afterwards, the best guess was maybe the delayed effects from a particularly steep climb 30 minutes prior to the problem, when I possibly pushed a bit too hard to keep up with those around combined with the sun frying the back of my head?]

Gradually things improved but my energy was lower and it was be-

coming harder work to hold position. Some of the ultra runners I had earlier been breezing past started coming back with their annoying poles stabbing into my path. I was definitely a bit grumpier, drifting gloomily through time.

Experience suggested that bad patches often turn out to be just patches, so a bit of patience and maybe it would pass. Whilst not quite what I wanted, I'm always fascinated by scrutinising how I feel, good or bad, so that occupied my mind, interspersed with admiring the never tiresome magnificent views on both sides of the ridge.

The final climb up to the highest point at Roque de Los Muchachos was particularly testing, the aid tent at the top was littered with battered bodies. I didn't hang around, you could smell the pain and despair, and headed straight onto the long descent, the final 17km dropping from over 2400 metres to sea level. Not as easy as it sounds, technical terrain with a few ups along the way too.

It felt good again, as we descended I improved but was finding the loose rocks difficult to maintain balance and was losing more time and places. Worse was to come as we hit cloud halfway down the mountain which had wet the rock and I discovered my Salomon Sense shoes were really ice skates when things got wet. Brilliant on the dusty rocky stuff but useless on anything with a hint of damp.

It was embarrassing, people who were struggling with cramp, those dragging bloodied limbs from encounters with the sharp volcanic rock and even German pensioners out for a leisurely walk were steaming past me. There was nothing I could do to ease the pressure of my ever worrying mind but to try to stay on my feet until the terrain improved – I even feigned a limp at one point as so many runners went past on an 'easy' bit.

Finally out of the cloud and the ground dried, my shoes quickly regained their now less trusty grip and I was back up to speed and hold-

ing position. Running through groves of tree I even gained a few places back despite the growing fatigue.

I was annoyed, in fact I was angry, I wasn't exactly sure at who or what or why, but I put it to good positive use by adding a bit of determination to my efforts. An ad hoc aid station, including wine which I passed up – although I later heard they had beer too, damn! – lightened my mood. Lovely generous people who had probably been out all day giving away food and drink to an endless line of strangers stomping through their gardens.

With 2 miles to go we hit the tarmac through the banana farms, I hit the turbo boost and released my frustration. It was steep, very steep, my feet were on fire, my quads were screaming, it was more than a little foolish but I'm sure my watch somehow said sub 6:30 was possible. I didn't believe it but decided to save the discussion until afterwards just in case it was right.

The road section soon ended and now there was just the scary last mile down the switchback cliff edge rocky path to the finish at Puerto Tazacorte. The original plan was always to take this sensibly, no silly mistakes on tired legs. But white line fever had me, I could hear the crowd, I could see the crowd at the finish. They were very small, a long way down. I was flying – one trip and it could be literally – there was no side, only down.

At the bottom, unknown to me, despite her injuries Myra had caught the bus over from the other side of the island to watch the finish. She watched in horror as paramedics carried a foil covered body down on a stretcher, a pony tail hanging out the top, familiar red and white shoes poking out the bottom.

A couple of minutes later to her relief I flew off the bottom steps and sprinted down the finish mat still with the 'oh my god I'm going to die falling off this cliff' crazed look of fear in my eyes.

45km with 2500m of ascent/ 4000m down in 6:22:51 and 99th place out of nearly 600, first British finisher (ok so there weren't that many!). Not bad for a half terrible run, and I felt like I could keep running, I was pretty happy.

As we drove away up the road we criss-crossed the ultra-runners path, who had a bit further up a big steep hill still to go. Memo to self: More miles and more hills for next year.

To be continued...



Buddy

Sweet Enough?

I'm not a big fan of giving stuff up just for the sake of it. I have no interest in self-deprivation. As far as I'm concerned you're only here once and you should try to enjoy every second as much as you can. I don't want to do Dry January (you never know how many Januarys you have left, why would you make any of them crap?). However, I was interested in Sugar-free February. I'd fancied doing a sugar-free trial for a while, but had never quite made the commitment. I've known for ages that I have a very sensitive blood sugar response, and for a long time had used various tactics to try to control it e.g. never eating high GI foods in the first half of the day; making sure every meal had adequate protein and/or fat; only eating very sweet foods

at the same time as other low GI meals or late in the evening. The trouble was, all that time I would regularly crave sweet foods, particularly late afternoon, and I would often succumb. I wondered whether I could break the sugar addiction, thereby stabilising my blood sugar completely and stopping the craving/snacking.

Claire D and I shared this interest, and we'd had many conversations about sugar-free and she'd lent me books in the past. She told me she'd decided to do sugar-free Feb, and I decided to join her. We'd text each other regularly to support each other and congratulate each other when it was going well, to commiserate when it wasn't. I made up my own rules to suit my lifestyle and sugar swing/spike pattern:

- * Absolutely no cakes, biscuits, chocolate, sweets or puddings at any time
- * Other foods to be limited to no more than 4g sugar per 100g
- * I was allowed free reign on alcohol (no crap Februarys.....and besides which I only (tend to) drink in the evenings when my blood sugar is stable)
- * I was allowed to eat sugary foods if I was in the middle of a long day on the hills or a long bike ride
- * I could eat as much low sugar stuff as I wanted.
- * I didn't replace sweet foods with artificially sweet foods. I didn't buy sugar-free jellies, diet sodas, diabetic jam etc. I've read these can affect blood sugar as much as sugar itself, and I was trying to break the addiction to sweet foods.

The first few days were hard. The desire for sweet foods was intolerable. I resisted. I loved that I could eat lots of my other favourite foods. I've never eaten so much marmite or cheese on toast, hummus and crackers. As the days and weeks went by, there is no doubt that it got easier and easier. It was easy to resist the Friday cakes at work (I can't stand shop bought cakes anyway, with a shelf life in years and an ingredients list like a chemist shop). Thank goodness nobody brought in any home-made cakes! Late afternoon (4-5pm) continued

to stay hard, but I was enjoying the cup of tea, marmite on toast combo. My blood sugar was noticeably more stable, and I found I could go for long periods of time without getting really hungry; my tummy would grumble, but there were none of those light-headed, dizzy, shaky spells I had experienced previously. Except for one day, which I can't explain, when my blood sugar was obviously very low. I got home from work, starving, put my usual piece of toast in the toaster, spotted the hot cross buns on the side while I was waiting, couldn't resist and ate it, then started rummaging in the 'running tin' and ate some chocolate, and some sweets. Duh! Oh well. I was determined to get straight back to being sugar free the next day, and it was easy enough.

The single hardest moment was after a long, cold, freezing day on the Rhinog mountains in Wales. In the evening we'd gone out for a lovely meal, and I was full and satisfied after my salmon and dauphinois potatoes. No-one was having desserts (phew!). Then out came the saucer with the chocolate mints on. Aaarrgh, I wanted one so much. Luckily, Robin saved the day by shoving it in his gob before I could relent.

Findings:

- * I have lost 5lbs despite not going short of food. This will be because the stable blood sugar has meant I can go for longer periods without the compulsion to eat, so have naturally ate less. Also, of course, I've avoided a lot of high calorie foods I might have eaten otherwise.

Though I've never eaten so much cheese on toast in my life!

- * If I am not hungry, I have no real compulsion to eat sweet food. I've lost the desire to have something sweet after meals. Offering me some cake when I've got no room left is as appealing as offering me a cheese and pickle sandwich. No thanks. I like it, but not just at the moment.

- * Sweet food feels really unnecessary. For rare occasions only.

- * Ideally, I would have needed a wider range of other snacks. I seemed to be eating the same things a lot, and I think more variety

would have been better.

* It's really hard to find ready-made snacks in shops that are low sugar! Most bombay mixes and flavoured nuts are too high. The ONLY thing in Costa is a packet of crisps!

So going forward, I will be stopping being sugar-free. I feel like I've learned things about my metabolism (or proved some theories at least). I will definitely be restricting sugary snacks to the occasional treat, maximum twice a week. And I'm definitely not getting back into the habit of just fancying something sweet after every meal.

NB. It was 3 days after the end of sugar-free February before I had a piece of cake. Someone brought some home made gluten-free carrot cake into work, and I participated in its demolition. Yum!

Joolz Graham



Thanks again to everyone who has written something for this edition of the Torrier. We'll be going to print again in October, which means that you should start writing for the next one now! Send word docs and pictures to kkashworth@gmail.com...and you could win a prize!*

Ed.

*prizes subject to availability and/or editor's discretion. 'Prize' meant in the loosest sense of the term, i.e. not as good as a toastie maker. Or two. Prizes may take a while to materialise.



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