Trionium
Magazine
Issue 2: January 2006
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Are you who you think you are?
Fit but lonely hearts
...and much more...!
PINARELLO
194

This issue's front cover...
Jure Robic of Slovenia powers his way towards winning the solo men's category in the 3052 mile 2005 Race Across America (page 29). The race includes ascent of 110,000 feet, more than four times the height of Everest...

Trionium Magazine

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Trionium Magazine welcomes contributions from readers, particularly race reports and articles, which must always be accompanied by good digital photos. Please see Trionium.com for details.

Trionium

Ordinary people doing extraordinary things

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The Trionium Manifesto

BY ROBERT MCCAFFREY, EDITOR, TRIONIUM MAGAZINE

Sometimes, it's good to count your blessings....

I don't know if you've ever heard of the phrase 'Just count your blessings,' but it's one that I recently took literally, in a rare idle moment. With a large sheet of paper in front of me, I asked my wife and two young daughters if they could list the good things in our life. The result surprised me. The piece of paper was eventually filled with three columns of writing, and I've since thought of a few more that would have to go on the other side of the paper. When I counted my blessings, I actually had 81. The list of our blessings actually starts off with 'Our eyes work.' It's another way, really, of saying that our health is good. In fact, phrased differently, this theme recurred seven times on the list of our blessings (including 'good mental health,' which is a blessing not to be overlooked).

Second on the list was 'lots of toys.' My children do seem to have a lot of toys, but many of them have been bought by my wife second hand, so they did not cost a lot of money. If you take 'toys' in its widest sense, then you might include our other possessions which give us pleasure. These include 'camping gear,' our two modest cars, our bubble machine, our TV and radio, a doll's house, our telephone and the washing machine.

Third on the list was 'We laugh a lot.' Top of my list for a happy home life is laughter, closely followed by lots of singing. References to aspects of home life, including 'playing with sisters,' and 'bed-times stories,' occur 14 times on this list. Many of these blessings stem from the fact that my wife and I are still together, after seven and a half years of marriage. Those 14 'home life' blessings don't include the factors that give rise to comfort or ease in our corporeal bodies, such as 'clean water in the taps' (which actually occurred twice on the list), 'the house is nice and warm,' 'we have enough food,' 'we have nice beds to sleep in,' and 'we have pleasant sanitary facilities.' We take for granted all these last items, but if any of them were absent, we would notice.

Going down the list a little, I start to recognise a category that might be termed 'the things we do.' For my children, the list includes things like 'colouring,' 'skipping,' 'gym club,' 'family holidays,' and 'other children to play with.'

For my own part, the blessings on this list that I might include under 'things we do' would include running, swimming and cycling (particularly in triathlons), as well as singing, digging at my allotment, and a bit of sailing. Included under this heading would be the existence of my local clubs for running (Dorking and Mole Valley Athletics Club), and for singing (Dorking Choral Society). Among my blessings I count my experience in runnng marathons and other races, and my sailing experiences.

Nearing the end of my list of blessings, are those blessings that stem from where we live - Epsom, south west of London. It's a nice (but expensive) part of the country and from here it is fairly easy to travel to events everywhere, not just in the UK, but in the world.

We are lucky to have many of our relatives still alive, even though we wished that they lived nearer to us (although they wish that we lived nearer to them). We are lucky to have our friends all around the world.

My day job has given me very many blessings, including having been able to travel around the world and meet a lot of people.

There are many other things on the list that don't fit into any particular category ('we are allowed to eat chocolate,' 'we are free to do as we wish,' 'the National Health Service').

At the end, there is one other thing that we are blessed with, from which many other things flow, and it is - although my generation gives it scarcely a thought - PEACE.

Trionium Letters

Please send feedback to trionium@propubs.com, or click on the 'feedback' button at the top left.
Letters may be edited for clarity and length (but we don't take out negative comments if your letter is published).

Just starting out...

I'm a mother of two pre-school children, and am training with a view to entering my first triathlon season, as well as training for a spring marathon (folly?). I'd love to see some articles for (domesticated) beginners. For example, I have only recently bought a road bike and am totally useless when it comes to mechanics and bike terminology, and am oblivious to what I need to do to become an efficient group cyclist. In fact, I don't even know what to wear, it's snowing so I'm too scared to ride on skinny slick tyres, and what's more I can't even fathom out how to use my (borrowed) turbo trainer! (The quick release skewer won't fit onto the clamp on the turbo). Any articles on earnest novices who are pressed for time and knowledge greedily accepted!

All in all a great read, looking forward to the next issue.

Kate H. by email

Kate: I'm a father of a 6 and 4 year old: hang on in there, it gets better! I think that you are fine training for a spring marathon: just listen to your body, take your rest days, and try to enjoy yourself.

The absolute number one thing that you can do to help yourself is to join a club...preferably running, since they often have triathlon enthusiasts as well who can point you in the right direction. Believe me, this will be one of the most significant things you'll ever do in your sporting career (can you tell I'm an enthusiast for being in a club?). You should also try perusing the forums at RunnersWorld.co.uk - there is a lot of knowledge and advice up there!

Trionium's first issue...

This has reminded me to say thanks for the first issue which was a good read. I'm looking forward to the first one in 2006!

Nigel C. by email

I really enjoyed the mag - skimmed a lot of it (as I do Runners World), but read other things in full (including, to my surprise, the celebrity interview) and of course your accounts of eg the Ironman experience - many, many congrats. Great idea, professionally executed.

John S. by email

Wow what a great magazine. I heard about the magazine from a friend who had been talking to the editor during Beachy Head. It was great to read interesting articles, rather than the usual 'easy ways to knock five minutes off your PB'. Not so sure about the horoscopes but I can live with that. Really looking forward to the next edition. Well done on producing a super read and excellent pictures.

Ed C. by email

While I can understand your exuberance in including a report on the Beachy Head Marathon (admittedly more than the usual road marathon), there was no mention of the main event for ordinary peeps doing extraordinary things of the weekend, the KIMM (see http://www.kimm.org.uk/). Over 3000 competitors, the elite doing over 40 km with plenty of climb on day 1 with tent, food, sleeping bag, and then starting at dawn for the return journey (shortened because of bad weather).

Never heard of Nell McAndrew before - if you're looking for another extraordinary young lady, can I suggest you talk to Muriel Grey. She is a prodigious hill walker in her native Scotland, having ticked off ??? Munros!

Henry M.

Henry: so many celebrities, so little time...on my list are Dave Bedford, Paula (of course), Jane Tomlinson, Mike Stroud and more...!

Trionium Letters

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Trionium: Hard work!

Great to see a mag that covers a broad range of serious challenges. I suspect there's a lot of people like me who want to do anything as long as it's hard enough! Excellent concept. Keep up the good work.
Dave V. by email

That feedback in depth...

Firstly, congratulations on your new magazine. I've long felt that there's been a gap in the market for a magazine with a much stronger focus on race/event reports, particularly for the more unusual/extreme sports.

Like you, I'm more than a bit bored by '10 ways to knock seconds off your times' and pointless dietary equivalence tables, the 'how many mushrooms could I eat instead of one mars bar?' type of thing. It's race reports that inspire me and the more far flung and exotic the better. I may never run the Spartathon or Badwater but I love to read reports from folk who have.

When I've tried to submit race reports to the existing magazines I've been met with complete indifference. As a runner who I think knows just a little bit about what runners like to read, I find this very disappointing.

If I'm honest, the name doesn't do anything for me as it doesn't really hint in any way as to the content of the magazine. Given that the magazine has a much wider scope than simply triathlon, the 'Tri' bit doesn't really signify anything and the 'onium' just leaves me scratching my head. It doesn't seem to capture the element of human endeavour that you seem to be trying to put across. I suspect 'Endeavour' would sound just too pretentious though.

I don't know if it's just me, but I really hate reading things in pdf format. To make the text big enough to read easily you end up scrolling up and down the screen endlessly to read an article. I had to print it out to make it readable and then found that all the quotation marks got replaced with little oblongs. (Maybe a problem with my PC). If you can maintain the standard of the content. I'd happily pay for a printed copy.

As far as the content goes (the important bit after all), I enjoyed most of it. The Nell McAndrew interview was possibly a bit too long to maintain my interest all the way through. The Road to Kona was good. I liked the cross channel swim report as having run a few ultras, I could relate to the long distance effort required.

Graham Russell's photos were good but I think if you're sticking with the pdf format for now, they might have been better placed at the end to make it easier to print out the rest of the magazine without the photos. Horoscopes leave me absolutely cold. There's enough mumbo-jumbo in the world already.

'Feet in the Clouds' I've already read and enjoyed. I'm not sure that the review would have had me rushing out to buy it though. A few quotes from the book itself were what enticed me to buy it in the first place. Perhaps you could have included a few.

The 'Focus' section I thought was good though the 'lonely Hearts' could perhaps have been relegated further back in the magazine. Nothing against it per se but it seemed a bit odd placed where it was. I enjoyed all the reports although the Beachy Head article was a bit tricky what with the sideways printing! That said, the photo deserved the landscape format.

Tim D. by email

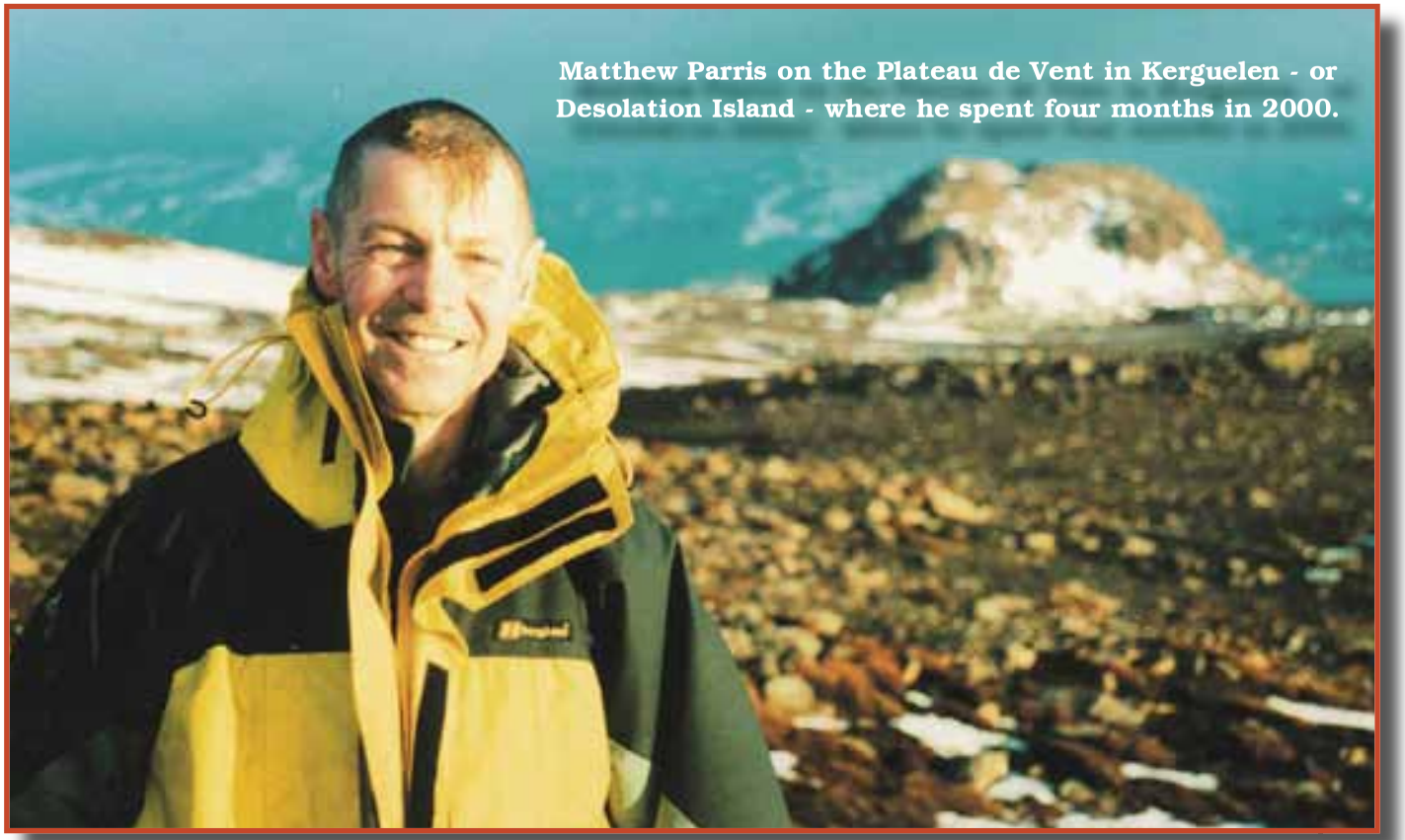
Thanks for your detailed feedback, Tim. I'm afraid that 'Trionium' stays...it will eventually mean whatever it represents... hard, tough, interesting and inspirational challenges in every sporting discipline. Taking on-board all the comments from readers of the first issue, Trionium is experimenting with a landscape format and larger font size, to allow each page to be read on-screen more easily: the format also allows photos to be used to their full potential. We've also included 'turn-page' links at the bottom of each page...try 'em out! Let us know what you think! TM

Matthew Parris digs in for 2:32

INTERVIEW BY ROBERT MCCAFFREY

Matthew Parris has been an MP, TV presenter, adventurer and columnist and has a marathon PB of 2:32. How and why?

Matthew Parris is better known than you think he is. If you hear his voice on the radio, it will bring a smile of recognition to your lips, and if you see his impish features on the TV, you'll know that some astute - and sometimes acerbic - comments will be along in a moment, whether it be on politics, the state of the nation or on life in general. He's not yet a Grumpy Old Man, since he is by nature an optimist, but when he finally hangs up his running shoes and dons his slippers, then the subjects of his ire had better watch out. Trionium started by asking Matthew how he became the man he is today...



Matthew Parris on the Plateau de Vent in Kerguelen - or Desolation Island - where he spent four months in 2000.

Out of Africa

"I was born in Africa - I've never been completely English! My childhood was spent in wild places. Southern Rhodesia, Swaziland, Cyprus. I love roaming around the world and I'm restless by nature. I've tried about six different jobs in my life and only really been any good at the last one, which is print journalism. I'm endlessly proud of the fact that I was the fastest MP ever to complete the London Marathon: my certificate is framed and hung on the back of my bathroom door. The time was 2hrs 32mins, and although we don't mention the seconds it was actually 57 seconds."

"I would have started a lot earlier if I hadn't hated compulsory sport at school, which, until I was about 15, completely put me off any kind of organised sport because the rebel in me refused to do what I was told. Then at the age of 15, because I wouldn't play football and rugby and I

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got sent with the rest of the laggards on long yomps over the hills of Swaziland, I found out that I was, in fact, quite a good runner - something that I had never realised before. I wasn't a bad short distance runner, but I was an even better long distance runner and the longer the run, the nearer the front of the pack I found myself. I have the great distinction of having represented the Northern District of Swaziland in the National Swaziland Cross Country Championships. I didn't win but I did fairly creditably. My best distances were a mile, 880 yards as we used to call it and the longer distances up to 5 miles. That was the longest distance we did."

"I think the moment when the bug really bit me was when I was obliged, as all members of the school were, to take part in an annual race which was from the main road up to the school. This was a climb of about 200m and a distance of about 2 or 3 miles and mostly it was just clambering up a little earth path through the African bush. I found myself fairly near the front of the field - rather to my surprise - and then I saw in front of me the captain of our school with whom, for other reasons, I felt an intense rivalry and also knew that his girlfriend, or rather hoped for girlfriend, was watching the finish of the race. He had always won the race before and I knew that he wanted his intended girlfriend to see him win and he was pretty cockily confident about doing that. So I thought to myself, 'I'm going to spoil your afternoon.' My running shoes really bit into the earth and with my heart pounding and my lungs nearly bursting I just forced myself onwards and up the hillside and I overtook him at about the last 100 yards and it was one of the sweetest moments of my life!" And, Trionium asked, did you win the girl? Without a moment's hesitation, Matthew replied, "I didn't want the girl I wanted the boy!"

Being chased by hunting dogs - on assignment for The Times

Matthew eventually went on to study at Cambridge, but it didn't go quite according to plan. "The problem about Cambridge was that the standard was so high that unless you were something close to national level you didn't really get involved. So I gave up running completely at Cambridge and, as I thought then, for life."

"Then I went to Yale to do a postgraduate degree which, for various reasons, I hated. I liked Yale but hated the degree, hated the work. I wasn't doing well at the work and I think that in running I sought some kind of release. They have a wonderful gymnasium at Yale called The Payne Whitney Gymnasium which is about as big as the Parthenon and has an indoor running track and fantastic changing rooms, showers, unlimited hot water - everything. As time went by I realised I was spending more and more of my time in the Payne Whitney Gymnasium pounding round and round the running track. My aim was to do a sub 5 minute mile and just before I left Yale I achieved that. I think I did about 4min 53 seconds. To me this was a huge achievment and, at the same time, I joined a group of 'Yalies' who used to go out running. They were going to run in the Boston marathon. There weren't many marathons in those days and the Boston was the most famous. They suggested I came along for the ride, saying that I didn't have to run. But there was no question - having come along for the ride there was no

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way I wasn't going to do the run as well!"

"I was about 21 years old, and I did it in about 4 hours and 5 mins. I really suffered for the last 10 miles. I'd never run more than 5 miles in my entire life, ever, and 26 miles, which I thought would be a doddle, wasn't! But those years in Yale bore in me again a love of running and when I got back to London and joined the Foreign Office, I decided I wanted to carry on with it."

"I joined the Herne Hill Harriers and a better decision I never made in my life. They were such a nice bunch of people. There was a guy called Stan Allen who was probably already a vet, even when I joined them. He was the life, soul and morale of our Sunday runs. We used to go out every Sunday for between 10 - 18 miles across South London, Windsor Great Park, the riverbank pathways, all pretty well known to me, and at the end of our Sunday runs we would all go to a pub together and drink quite a lot of beer. It was a really happy episode in my life. I got into some semi-serious running for the Herne Harriers. I wasn't really good enough to be in their first team, but I was good enough to go to events and I joined in the National Cross Country every year and started running marathons."

"I then became a Member of Parliament and decided to carry on and enter the first London Marathon in 1980, even though very few MPs did. I did it in about three and a quarter hours and I entered every one that followed and shaved a bit of time off my finishing time in each one. I was never beaten by any other MP, in fact I'm not sure that any of them got in under 4 hours. At the same time I was doing a lot of running in my constituency. I was in the Matlock Athletic Club who were an excellent crowd of people. I did a lot of running in the Peak District, both uphill and downhill, which was very good for my strength and endurance. There's a very good marathon called the White Peak Marathon which is across railway tracks and paths and I enjoyed doing that 3 or 4 times. I think and got just below 3 hours, which is actually quite good for that one, since there's a lot of climbing in it."

Moments of glory

"When I went to the London marathon in 1985 I would have been about 35 at the time. I think I was probably conscious that I was around the time in my life when, if I trained hard enough, I could run as good a marathon as I was ever going to run in my life. For some reason I just got completely silly about it for the whole year beforehand. I started going out every morning and every evening. As I was an MP I would wait until the votes were over, which would often be 10pm or midnight, then I'd run home to Clapham where I lived. I would run to the House of Commons every morning and shower and change there. Often, if there was an adjournment during a debate that I had to attend, I would go out and do a quick three or four miles around the bridges in central London and then I would be doing between 10 - 18 miles with Herne Hill every Sunday."

"I built it up to the point where one week I calculated that I had run something like 150 miles just in that week and I must have run thousands of miles over the year. I slowly got better and better and one evening, not long before the London marathon, I had to go and visit the headmaster of a local comprehensive school, in a town called Wirksworth. This was a 7 mile drive over the hills and I decided to run. The headmaster entertained me, so to speak, in my running shorts (I took a track suit along as well as it was a winterish evening!) and then I decided to run back. It was late at night and I was running up a long winding tarmac road with a very gentle uphill slope and, in a way that I think many other runners will understand, there was a moment when I suddenly hit my stride and I felt I was going like a bomb and I could keep going like a bomb until the crack of dawn! I just had that wonderful feeling when everything comes together and I would say that that was the moment, in a way, when my happy fate at the London marathon was sealed. It just went perfectly, the weather was perfect, the crowds were perfect, my condition was tip top and I tried a carbohydrate

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loading diet which I think probably did make a difference. It's the opposite of what they call the Atkins diet now! I realised that I was probably actually going to make it inside 2 hours 40 mins which I had never expected, and as it turned out, I took about 15 mins off my best time."

"After that marathon, I decided that was as good as I was ever going to get and, although I have huge admiration for the vets that keep going into their 50's and 60's and 70's, I didn't want to be one of them. I had seen older running mates inventing smaller and smaller and more and more specialised categories, so that, as they got older, they could still shine. You know - Fastest person in Streatham under 5ft 8" who is also over 53 - kind of thing! I realised that I'd peaked and I was going to rest on my laurels! I carried on training and cross country running. I did a fell run in Derbyshire but I quickly stopped competitive running and I've never run another marathon. I've never been tempted to go back to it, because I wouldn't do as well as I did before. I'd always want to do better than the time before and as you become older that becomes an increasingly difficult thing to do. I did enjoy fell running for a while but I don't have such good balance and am not so confident of my step as to be able to hurtle myself down 45 degree slopes with rocks in them. I lose my confidence and you have to have a kind of madness to be a really good fell runner."

Matthew running the White Peak Marathon for Matlock Athletic Club.

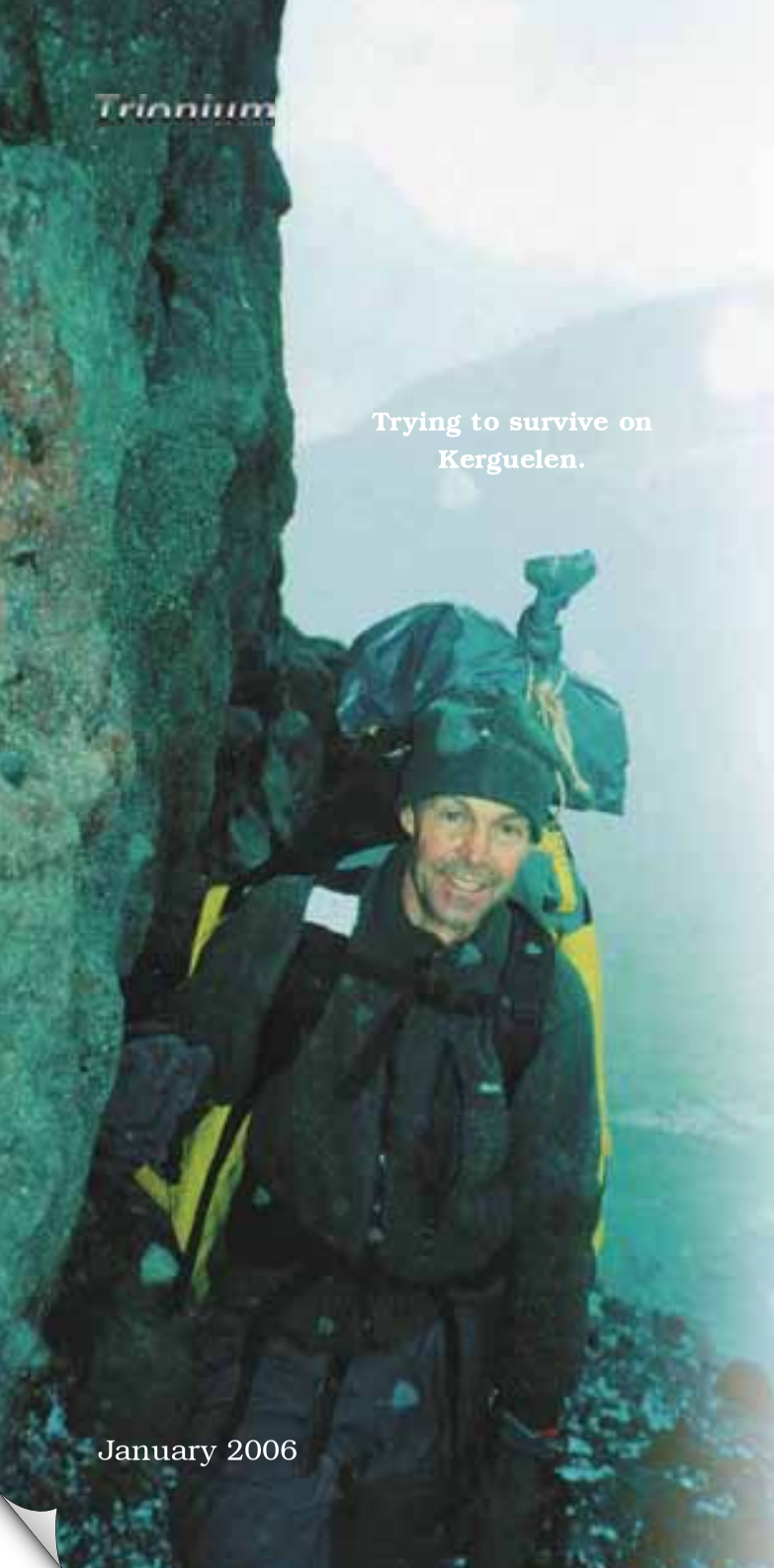
Shambolism

"I've kept up a habit of never taking a bus or a car when I can walk and never walking when I can run. This is assisted by the fact that I'm shambolic about planning, always cram too much into my day and am always slightly late for everything I do! So I find that I run most of the time and am afraid that I'm a familiar sight at Monument, Westminster and Limehouse stations, panting desperately, late for wherever it is I'm going! I walk a lot in Derbyshire and I travel a lot. Earlier this summer I went for a 4 mile walk in the high Andes. I love walking at very high altitude. In that way I think I keep reasonably fit."

Hang on, says Trionium, with managing to get 150 miles a week under your belt, didn't your constituency work and your Parliamentary work start to suffer?

"No it didn't at all. Actually, it was the other way round. I never let my running interfere with my duties as an MP, and the truth is, though you have to whisper it in the House of Commons, as MPs will not have it said, is that MPs don't have an awful lot to do quite a lot of the time! You take refuge, as I did, in constituency work and it's very important to be seen in your constituency as a human being. There's a real problem in politics now, and there was then, in one's constituents, not seeing you as one of them. The fact that I was a keen runner and was always involved in local races and a member of the local athletic club, helped me as an MP rather than the opposite."

"I was a carpet bagger, in that I would have had any constituency that would have had me! I interviewed at a couple of other seats - one in Stockton-upon-Tees North, for instance, but I was just very lucky: West Derbyshire chose me. I didn't know where they were and promised to go and live in the constituency. Initially I thought this was just a chore that went with politics - you had to go and live there and the constituency was a rung on the ladder to fame and fortune! In fact it worked the other way round for me. I fell in love with the constituency, I still live there and politics was really just a rung on the ladder to Derbyshire for me: A very good move."



Trying to survive on Kerguelen.

Start young

Adventure has been in Matthew's blood since he was a child. "I'm always getting into scrapes. Ever since I was a little boy and lived in what was Southern Rhodesia - it's now Zimbabwe - and I would go off cycling with my brother and a little knapsack on the back of my bike, camping in huge areas of rocks and mountains. My first real scrape was when I fell off a cliff when I was six! I was walking with a bicycle that I'd just been given for my birthday. It wasn't a very high cliff, only about 25ft, but my bicycle slipped over the edge and, because it was new, I wouldn't let go of it, so I went over the cliff after it and struck my right arm. All the bones were sticking out of my elbow and my right arm has never been straight since! I'm always getting into scrapes but you learn!"

He has not been sitting still since his retirement from competitive running. In fact, he has over-wintered in one of the most isolated spots on the planet. "It's called Kerguelen but it's more commonly known as Desolation Island which is the name Captain Cook gave it when he first saw it. That was the most ambitious bit of 'human off-roading' that I've ever done in my life. Desolation Island is right down in the Southern Ocean, north of Antartica, 4000 miles south of India, 2000 miles from any continent. The sea around it is about 2°C for much of the year. It's crossed by anticyclones every 2 or 3 days and winds of up to 150mph are absolutely commonplace. It's as big as Cyprus and there isn't a single tree on the whole archipelago and it's absolutely pristine. It has never been settled or colonised. There's a small French scientific station (it belongs to France) and I went and wintered there with 58 French men and 2 French women for the winter of the year 2000. One of the Frenchman shot another Frenchman dead in a ghastly hunting accident. It was an accident, absolutely for

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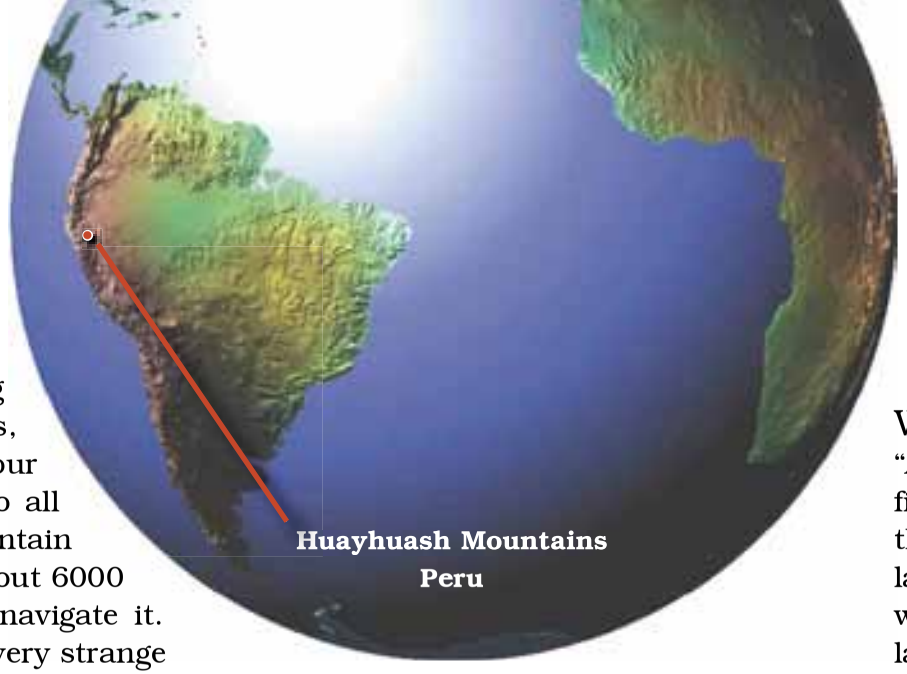

sure. I was making a TV documentary about the whole experience for Channel 4 so that gave me something to do, but I ended up walking about 1000km across the islands. We would be walking and camping and staying in caves, nearly getting blown away in our tents. At one point we tried to go all the way around the highest mountain which is called Mount Raft. It's about 6000 feet and our plan was to circumnavigate it. We got into serious difficulty in a very strange landscape of rocks and ice flows. We camped for the night and the winds came down at about 100mph. The ice began to melt and we ended up in about 2 or 3 feet of water with our tents blown almost completely flat and at one point, I really did think we were going to die and it was really quite a hairy time. We just stayed in our soaking sleeping bags, in our flattened tents and finally dawn came and we were all alright."

Keep on walking...

"Early this summer, with a couple of friends, I was up in the Huayhuash Mountains which are the northern range of the Andes north of Lima. They were the place where "Touching the Void" was based. We were not attempting to climb any of those mountain peaks but we were at the base of the mountains just walking with an Indian guide. We had a fantastic time. Wherever I go I try to write about it, mostly just for newspapers or magazines. I wrote a book about Bolivia and Peru 10 years ago called Inca Cola and that's still in print. One day I'd like to write something similar on islands. I've always felt the allure of islands, Kerguelen being the most romantic of all but I want to go to Madagascar and I had a good time in Reunion in the middle of the Indian Ocean. I've just come back from a walking and bus riding trip through the Outer Hebrides. We were really lucky. We had the only five sunny days that the Outer Hebrides were likely to enjoy between summer and next spring I think!"

"I want to go back to Kerguelen and it's really hard to get there. You have to go west from Capetown, you'd have the wind behind you. If you ever feel like something really ambitious.....It's only 2000 miles! Captain Cook did it for God's sake why can't we?!"

What makes Matthew tick?

"Action. I like doing things, and curiosity. I find the world completely intriguing. I find the natural world completely absorbing. I find landscapes endlessly beautiful, and I just want to be moving across new and exciting landscapes, not just in geographical terms but in human and even political terms for the rest of my life."

And here comes Trionium's crux question...'Why are you a Conservative?'

"I believe in the individual human spirit. I believe in individual strength. I believe that people are, if tested and given the opportunity, very much stronger than most of us realise. I also believe that present throughout your life has to be the possibility of failure and this is what keeps us sharp and on our toes. I don't believe in arrangements in society in which it is impossible for people to fail because such societies eventually become societies in which it is also impossible to succeed. I hope that the party will rediscover its core beliefs in individual freedom. I am a Cameron fan, and I don't agree with those who say that he is wishy washy and fudgy and doesn't really believe

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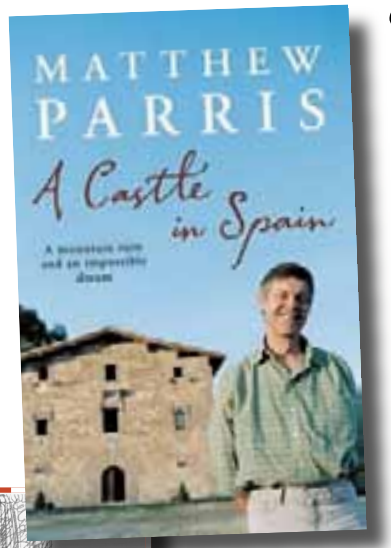
in anything. He is an instinctive Conservative and instinctive Conservatives don't actually need to talk about why they are Conservatives. They are often a little bit baffled when people ask them why they are and baffled when people ask them what Conservatism means. It comes out in the way they act, the way they react and in the approach they take to problem solving and I think we will see that with David Cameron."



Matthew famously keeps a small herd of llamas in Derbyshire, and is in the process of renovating a 'castle' in Spain. Not eccentric at all then.

So, if you were the leader of the Conservative Party what would you do to change it?

[Laughs] "Leading the Conservative Party is no different to leading a company or a platoon or a pack of girl guides, or boy scouts. You lead by doing things, by setting yourself goals and destinations. As leader of the Conservative party I would want to be Prime Minister of a government doing those things and at this point I begin to become boring! My big interest in politics has always been transport and I think that Britain's transport system, both public and private, is in a terrible state and has been neglected by government after government. I have plans for a spinal high speed railway right up the middle of Britain. I have plans for new six lane motorways. I have plans for free bus services in city centres. There's a lot to do!"

So what, if you have so many plans, has brought you from being an MP to being a correspondent and commentator to being a print journalist?

"Failure! If I'd been more successful as an MP, if I'd been promoted and become a minister or a cabinet minister, I would have stayed in the hope of getting to the top. I left because after seven years I was only a backbencher and I could see that my career was not in rocket mode. I left in order to be a media star by presenting a political programme on television and I led that programme, which was called Weekend World, to an early grave. It had been Brian Walden before me and I was to be the new Brian Walden. I didn't work out so I quit politics to be a success on TV and I quit TV because I wasn't a success on TV. Indeed I quit the Foreign Office because I wasn't any good in the Foreign Office! I think you just keep quitting the things you can't do until you find something you can."

"However, now I am very, very happy. I'm a completely free spirit. My fifties are happier than my forties, forties happier than my thirties, them than the twenties and twenties happier than my teenage years."

So, you have any advice for runners?

"Dig in. This is just advice for long distance running as I can't really give advise on short distance. Dig in." And any advice for aspiring politicians? [Laughs again] "I was good at doing it on the running track and I wasn't good at doing it in the House of Commons: I became impatient. To be a politician, you have to learn to dig in!!" TM

On the run

BY FLOYD BAILEY, ESQ. XK1570, HMP FRANKLAND, DURHAM

Imprisoned for life, the only way out is through endurance: In his own words, Floyd Bailey tells his triathlon story

Perfect Peace To The World: I am writing this article for the benefit of those who are not aware that there are some good men left in the system, who are prepared to assist and show society that the guilty and innocent can contribute to those who are in agony and anguish through no fault of their own. Through my sentence, which is life, I have organised many events for many charities. The cause is within and not out. I am into my ninth year of this difficult period and have contributed to Multiple Sclerosis, Sickle Cell Anemia, Muscular Dystrophy, Cancer Research, Stroke Association, Mentally Retarded, and the British Heart Foundation. This has not been a cry of guilt, actually totally the opposite as I am innocent prisoner in the system. I would like to show that my heart is in the right place, showing society respect and empathy to the disadvantaged.

Establishments

I have been in many establishments over this period of time and demonstrated the energy and professional organisation that is attached. I have raised thousands of pounds for these charities. My activities range from marathons, football matches, volleyball matches and triathlons. My recent conquest and challenge on the 31st August 2005 was at Frankland Prison in the Northeast UK. The objective was for each man to complete a triathlon in the gymnasium. The events which were in action was 10,000 meters on the treadmill: 10,000 meters on the Concepts 2 rower: Also 10,000 meters on the bike. The purpose and aim was for each man to complete their 18-19 miles in less than two hours with no break and not stopping. This challenge was met with flying colors.

Sponsors

We were sponsored by Glaxo/ Smithkline - The Brain & Energy Drink - Lucozade. I would like to give thanks to this organisation for its contribution. I would also like to say well done to Darren, Kevin, Andy, Mich, Steve, Darren No 2, Davie, and Ted. These men showed that they still have the salt of the earth in them. For this event we raised £11,073.60. I would like to say thank you to those who sponsored us from friends, associates, prisoners, solicitors, PO Ian Ferguson, PEOM Ramsey of the gymnasium, staff and the Governor of the establishment, Phil Coppel.

Help the unfortunates

Every man does his thing a little way different. In the world today, a lot of achievements go by unnoticed. Our quandaries have no respect to how it affects us and others. Remember there is always somebody worse off than yourself and if you can assist them while they are in distress, maybe some day the professors in the

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laboratories will be able to cure the anguish and emotive connotations attached.

Who feels it knows it. A cry of despair is not heard because sometimes it is within, but the smile of joy is shown. Many are called but few are chosen. So when you get the call, appreciate the enterprise because the love in you is cherished and treasured even though you may not realise it. The aura and persona which one delivers has a funny way of re-birth. It is like an Australian boomerang.

Good men in the system

Although society has trepidations about prisoners, I would like to say do not tarnish and stereotype us, as there are still some good men and women in the system who are lonely but willing to support one in universal distress. If any future employer is reading this article, please remember everyone deserves a second chance in life and do not judge a book by its cover. None of us asked to be born but through the journey, many experiences and encounters have made us. The same application is applied in sport - always give 110%. The euphoric emotion that is achieved by accomplishment is tremendous. So always strive for your aims, goals and objective.

A prison. If you think it's easy, lock yourself in your room for up to 23 hours a day, memorise your number and try to make yourself comfortable: you're in for a long stay.

Next challenge

My next challenge will be in May or June of 2006. This challenge will be 45,000 metres on the Concept 2 rower. I have not decided which benefactor or charity to entertain, as there are many people in the world in need. We will be having a presentation in the near distant future for the two organisations. This is the first of its kind in Frankland and thank God I have been able to arrange and participate in this worthy cause.

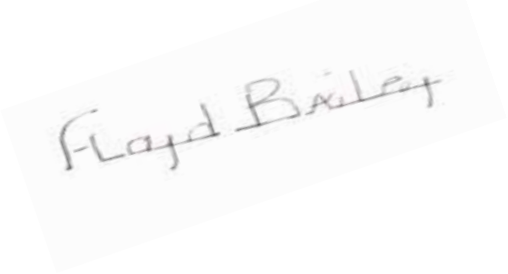
HMP Frankland: Home sweet home.

I am sorry to say that the photographs which were taken while the activity took place have been lost, I feel very aggrieved about this, but the Devil works in mysterious ways.

Wherever you are reading this article on the net around the world, please consider those who are unable because of no fault of their own. Always be prepared to climb the corperate ladder, as this is one of the zest of sport.

Farewell for now

I hope this critique has given you inspiration. So until my next venture. God bless you all, and be lucky. Can't does not win, so try again until you reach the ultimate. TM



(You're) Welcome to Luton

BY LINDA ROBSON

'Not the most scenic place in the world to run a marathon' may be the understatement of the century, but read on....

As the shops are filled with Christmas baubles, the nights are getting darker and the cold of winter is starting to set in, there is one last marathon to be run before the year ends – the Luton Marathon.

Not the most scenic place to run 26.2 miles, but the notoriety of the housing estate through which each of the three laps passes, doesn't deter over 400 marathon runners and 160 relay teams from setting out on a chilly December morning. The ease of traveling to Luton Airport means that this race attracts a significant Irish contingent, as well as those coming from the surrounding towns.

Welcome to Luton

In 2005, the Serpentines dominated the relay event with 24 teams (three runners each completing 1 of the 8 miles laps), in addition to five runners going the whole distance. But being the biggest mob wasn't enough for a trophy - Darren Deed, opened with the fastest lap of the day, 43.58, to take an early lead for team Boxfit. A strong second lap run from Tom Beedell of University of London saw the two teams leaving the second changeover only 50 seconds apart, but Richard Powell of Boxfit put in the second fastest lap time, 47.01, to put the trophy firmly in Boxfit's hands with a lead of over 8 minutes (2:26.05).

In the women's relay, University of London (Angharad Care, Nina Griffith, Flo Newton) took the lead from the start and stayed there to convincingly take first place in 2:48.50.

Meanwhile I was amongst the 426 individuals who had opted to run all three laps themselves. I was strangely nervous about this race. I completed two Ironman triathlons (2.4m swim, 112m bike, 26.2m run) in 2005, but never run a straight marathon. Logic says that if you can do an Ironman, running a marathon should be easy, but I wasn't so sure. In an Ironman you've already raced 115 miles before you start to run, and the pace is not dictated by strategy but by what your legs will allow: finishing is the aim and finishing inside a target time is a bonus.

For me, coming off the bike in Ironman is the time when I become more determined than ever that I'm going to finish. There is enough time to walk the marathon and every step I run is helping to get closer to an ever changing target time. Running a straight marathon requires a different approach: instead of running between feed stations/walk breaks I was setting out to run the full distance. There is no excusing the walk breaks because I am tired from biking!

So the gun sounds and we all surge down the road on this bright and sunny winter day. Intending to start slowly and speed up on the last lap if I have energy to spare, I drop in

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along side clubmate Jim who claimed to be 'just taking it steady for the first lap.' Passing the second mile marker at 14:37, I realised I needed to choose my friends a little more carefully and, watching him disappear into the distance, I put the brakes on a little. Towards the end of the first lap an excited cheer spurred me on as my Dad excitedly informed me I was only 10mins down on the leading girl. It was the first time he had seen me race and I hoped that he wouldn't be too disappointed if I didn't manage to make up those 10 mins to come home in first place!

Welcome to Luton.

Into the second lap people started getting more chatty and I soon discovered that this was no average field of marathon runners. There were 15 members of the 100 Marathon Club running, including superman who was running his 237th! It had also attracted a number of ultra-runners, which at one point left me thinking that it was perhaps just another short run for 50% of the people there! There was the man who had run 13 London to Brighton races, a couple training for the Grand Union Canal race and veterans of the Marathon De Sables. Hopefully by next year I will have my own tales of ultras to share en route!

Welcome to Luton.

Finishing the second lap, the first woman had extended her lead and I was slowing, but Dad was still sounding hopeful as he informed me I was currently 16th woman. Just one more lap to go, but I was starting to regret the speedy start and wishing that I had managed training runs of more than 12miles! But with two thirds completed I just had to hang on now and started playing 'count the women' to ensure that I was going to stay in the top 20. Playing cat and mouse with the girls as I started run-walking the last lap, hoping that my last gel would give me the kick I needed for a strong finish. Although convinced that the hills had suddenly grown, it was on this final lap that I realised that it is in fact a beautiful course. Running out through the back of the housing estate you come onto a long flat section up the A6 towards Bedford. Turning left into the village of Streatley you are treated to quiet country roads through rolling countryside until you finally return to Luton. I can't describe the high-rise council flats as beautiful, but I was glad to pass them one last time before digging deep to find my trademark sprint finish to end my first 'straight' marathon.

Meanwhile the men's race had been won by Matthew Hawcroft (2:44:51), and Zoe Lowe had managed to further extend her lead over me (3:25:28). Luckily the race was also the Bedfordshire County Marathon Championships, so although I didn't win, Dad could get out the proud grin as I collected the medal for first Bedfordshire Woman – I'd better come back next year to defend my title! TM

The Great British Treble

BY EDWARD CHAPMAN

Three marathons in three days: England, Wales and Ireland. The only problem was the food!

The end of October is a magical time for marathon runners. It is just like having your birthday and Christmas all at the same time. Why? Because by taking advantage of the Irish bank holiday, you can run three marathons in one long-weekend. And what fantastic, glorious marathons they are!

On the Saturday there's the Beachy Head Marathon (see Trionium 1, November 2005), a tough off-road marathon with stunning views and excellent facilities. On the Sunday, there's the Snowdonia Marathon, a tough road marathon, well organised, well marshalled and again with stunning views. And on the Monday, there's Dublin, a big city marathon. It may not be as big as London, having only about 10,000 runners, but Dublin does have a big, big heart. This was well illustrated by an incident that occurred after the race. I was walking back to the hotel when a stranger stopped and offered me a lift. I was only a short distance from the hotel but I am sure that even if my destination was five miles out of his way he would have cheerfully taken me. Dubliners are great people.

The start of the Beachy Head Marathon...

Fellow travellers

I was accompanied on my quest to complete the treble by Dave Ross, who took care of most of the arrangements, and by Jim Munday who proved to be an excellent navigator. Unfortunately I did not see much of these two during the marathons as they are both much faster than I am. One day this tortoise will beat those hares! My motto is that 'the race does not go to the swift, but those that keep going.' We were greatly helped by advice from Mike Gaunt who completed The Treble a few years earlier.

'Training *might* help...'

The key to a successful Treble attempt is good organisation and paying particular attention to nutrition: you will see why later. I suppose training might help, but if you are a regular marathon runner, you can tough out the extra two marathons. It is important to be organised enough to get your marathon entries in early. This is especially true for Beachy Head as there are a limited number of places and it is very popular. Having got the entries confirmed, the next job is to plan the logistics. Getting from one marathon to the next can be a nightmare unless it is properly planned. Even then things can go wrong and the British weather never helps.

The drive from Eastbourne to Snowdonia is okay, and the clocks going back provides you with an extra hour. It is however very difficult to get anything to eat on the journey. You will get well fed at the end of the Beachy Head marathon but you will need something else in the evening. Motorway service stations are

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nutritional ghettos and poorly named: Why is the word 'service' in there? I have been told that it is written into the contract that they must provide food of a lower quality and a higher price than any nearby establishments, to prevent motorway service stations becoming 'destination' venues. Whether this is an urban myth or true I don't know, but I do know that it is impossible to get any decent fuel for a marathon runner at a motorway service station in Britain. So either arrange to visit a friend or relative en route for a meal, leave the motorway and visit a decent restaurant or ask Gordon Ramsey (he is a marathon runner) to pack you a nice hamper. OK, rant finished.

Carry on regardless

Bed and Breakfast accommodation near the start of the Snowdonia marathon is relatively abundant if booked early. The Welsh are great hosts and will cheerfully accommodate you arriving late, asking for an early breakfast or any other strange requests. Our B&B landlady lent my travelling companion, Jim Munday, a scarf because he had woken up unable to move, with a trapped nerve in his neck. The ambulance crew, who were called out in the middle of the night, advised Jim not to run, but when they said that his crippling condition was nothing serious and would get better, Jim took it as the okay to run in the morning. I am pleased to say that he completed the marathon in a good time but missed all the views as he had to run keeping his head still and looking straight ahead. The Snowdonia marathon was in sharp contrast to Beachy Head; Beachy was off-road and sunny, Snowdonia was all road and tipping it down with rain.

The journey from Snowdonia to Dublin is best made by air. Ignore the siren call of the ferry even though the port of Holyhead is very close to the marathon finish. I have learnt from bitter experience that the ferries are often cancelled due to bad weather in the Irish Sea. One 'poor' soul desperate to complete the Treble in 2005 paid over £300 for a last minute flight from Liverpool. Book in advance and the price is a fraction of this: if you are lucky you can get a flight for a tenth of this. Flights to Dublin leave from both Manchester and Liverpool airports, which are both within comfortable driving distance of Snowdonia. Again food is a problem. Airport food is only marginally better than the offerings (I will not call it food) at motorway service stations [*that's enough ranting - Ed*]. However airport outlets seem to close early and are poorly stocked. We were lucky at John Lennon airport: having been told of our Treble attempt and our need for food, the chef kindly rustled up some chips and beans. Budget airlines of course mean no in-flight meal, however you can buy something called a filled roll. Don't; our £3.75 purchases tasted like cotton wool dipped in stagnant water but had less nutritional value. [*Enough!*]

Snowdonia Marathon: tough enough.

To be sure, to be sure

The final part of the logistics involves making arrangements to collect your Dublin marathon number. They are supposed to be collected on Sunday at the expo however you cannot do this as the flight arrives after the expo has closed. This is not the problem it seems thanks to the helpfulness of the organisers and in particular Carol McCabe. A quick email meant that we were able to collect our numbers from a hotel near the start on the morning of the race. Not only was Carol a cheerful oasis of calm amongst

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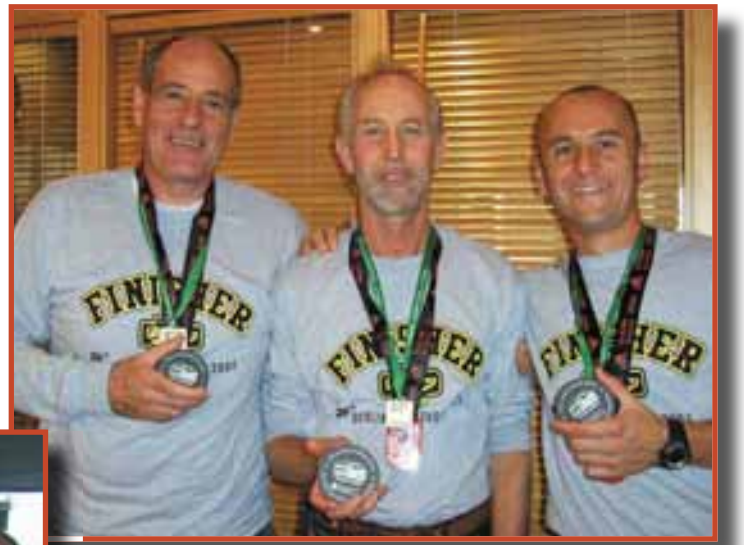
the bedlam of anxious marathon runners, but she even offered to lend us 20 euro to buy coffees. Thanks Carol.

The Dublin marathon was by far the easiest of the three being flat (although I did hear a few people talk about hills) and was well-supported. It was also very cold and wet, which prompted Dave to wander into a smart hotel on the way to the start and ask a bemused doorman in a top hat for a black bin bag to wear. In true Dublin style, Dave was invited in and allowed to use the very posh toilets while a roll of bin bags was found.

Having completed the Dublin marathon all that was left to do was shower, change and get on the Guinness. This was easy; Dublin has an ample sufficiency of pubs and bars, all serving Guinness and, Mr Blair take note, completely smoke-free. Hooray! However getting food was a problem, because of the Bank Holiday; none of the city centre pubs were serving food. To solve this problem we had to take breaks from the Guinness drinking to nip out to a take-away for pizza and chips and later to an Indian restaurant for curry and Tiger beer.



Medals or beers: which is more important?

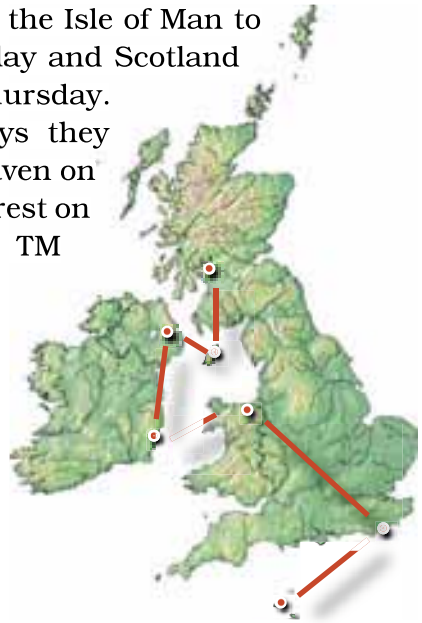
What about the running?

I know I have not mentioned much about running or the marathons. The running was good and so were the marathons, but they were just marathons. Over the weekend I met lots of people who had run hundreds of them, so they are nothing special. One American I met in Dublin, Andy Velazco, had run over 150 in his running career. Even that is not amazing compared to what some people have done, but what was amazing was that he knew about a treble in America but had not run it. Three marathons around Lake Tahoe is on my agenda for 2006: check out www.laketahoemarathon.com.

And on the seventh day...

All I need now is for the Channel Islands to arrange a marathon for the Friday before Beachy Head, Northern Ireland to arrange one on the Tuesday, the Isle of Man to arrange on Wednesday and Scotland to provide one on Thursday.

Then in seven days they will have created heaven on earth. Who needs to rest on the seventh day? TM



Questars - tri with a difference

BY QUESTARS

Adventure racing is the fastest-growing sport in the UK - and Quest runs some of the best races...

Do you enjoy outdoor activities such as running, mountain biking or kayaking? Do you think you are reasonably good at navigation? Do you like to challenge yourself? Then you might like to consider entering a Quest Adventure Race in 2006: a triathlon with a difference!

Team canoe underway (are they paddling in the same direction?)

Adventure racing is the fastest growing sport in the UK, and Quest - a leading National Outdoor Activity Company - is the front runner for organising these orienteering events. Quest Adventure Races are suitable for both novices and experienced competitors.

Quest will be running 4 races in 2006: the first one on the 1st April in the New Forest - No kidding! Due to the huge increase in competitors taking part in Questar races in 2005, record numbers are expected. A vast majority of the entrants in 2005 took part in the Novice category. This suggests that a lot of people are starting to realise that adventure racing is where the fun is to be had and people of all abilities can take part.

You can enter on your own or in teams of 2, 3 or 4 people. Teams can enter either the Questars Trio (three disciplines) or the Questars Duo (running and biking). Categories include men's solo, men's teams, ladies teams, mixed teams, veteran teams (40+) and a new category for 2006 - the family category, where competitors of 15 years and over may race, accompanied by an adult family member. All of these individual categories can be entered into either the Master race (6 hour races with more prize potential) or the Novice race (5.5 hours with map reading and route choice help from Questars team if required) .

The possible maximum distances for the one day Trio race are as follows:

- Trail Run - 10 - 15km
- Mountain Bike - 40 - 45km
- Canoe - 2 - 5km

Online entry and more information can be obtained from the Questars website, www.questars.co.uk TM

Best of British!

1st January 2006: Box Hill Knacker Cracker in Photos: Results at www.trionium.com/knackercracker

Jenni Van Deelen

Gregg Daniel

Christine Chambers

Robert Chart

Jonathon Tennant

Ballbuster race report

BY LINDA ROBSON

Start with a hilly run of eight miles: then repeat three times on a bike: then repeat the eight mile run. Welcome to the Ballbuster.

Those duathletes who like a real challenge have a love/hate relationship with Box Hill. The ascent attracts cyclists like bees round a honey pot throughout the year, but as Summer drifts into Autumn, there are an increasing number of people adding a short run to the end of their cycle. As the clocks go back that run is getting longer, and thoughts are focused on the 2nd Saturday in November – The Ballbuster!

350 athletes: 350 wardrobe choices. Hot on the run, cold on the bike, hot on the run again.

The Ballbuster duathlon is raced round an 8 mile circuit – 1 lap run, 3 laps cycle and a final lap run making it 5 accents of the Zig Zag road up Box Hill, combined with 6 miles of undulations and tricky downhill sections along quiet country lanes. And if all that isn't enough to contend with, there is the unpredictable November weather!

But despite the harshness of this challenge the race always attracts a field of 350 individuals keen to sweat and battle up that hill again and again and again and again. (and again!).

Arriving at the race start this year, my second time at this event, it was pleasantly surprising to discover that the forecast rain and blustery conditions hadn't materialised and we were going to be treated to a chilly but bright morning of racing. I wasn't the only person who had arrived with an entire wardrobe of kit and promptly spent half an hour faffing over what to wear. Having eventually decided I was suitably dressed I organised my transition, then nipped back to the car to get thicker socks and gloves (maybe it's not quite so warm as I thought!) before joining the assembled masses for the race briefing and GO! We were off...

The field surged from the muddy field and through a car park before getting out onto the road before spreading out as everyone found their own comfortable pace. I hadn't had the best preparation for this race, having combined a running injury with a spectacular cycle summersault manoeuvre during my taper week, but perhaps a few days rest had

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done me good as I set off feeling great and setting myself a steady pace.

At the end of the first lap comes the first climb of the zig zags. It's a gruelling run, especially when you think about doing it again in a couple of hours time!

Into T1, I suddenly regretted that last minute decision to put on thicker socks – the state of my few remaining toe nails clearly shows that my shoes are a little tight! Too late to worry about it though: socks and toes were rammed into bike shoes as I hoped the extra warmth would outweight the added discomfort. (I have since invested in new shoes!).

Bike legs...

On the bike you suddenly realise just how bad the road surfaces are, as you bump and judder your way along trying to avoid the worst of the potholes. The descents are steep and bendy and not the time to be remembering last week's crash! I must check for wear on my brake pads, but most importantly I negotiated the cycle laps without any mishaps.

Through T2 and out on to the second run and you to start feel this race biting your legs. The bike-to-run jelly-legs that we know from all triathlons and duathlons hits you particularly hard. You've just completed the 4th accent of Box Hill and despite being a beautiful day, it is still November, so your toes and most of the rest of your feet are numb with cold. Last year I had arrived at T2 at the same time as the race leader crossed the finish line, so I was relieved not to have been lapped this time.

However, I wasn't that far ahead, since shortly after I left T2, the race leader Richard Hunt was crossing the finish line in an impressive 2:40:18, over half a minute up on second-placed man Mark Groombridge (2:40:54).

The blood in my feet was gradually thawing and feeling started to return as I headed on to the water station at Headley Heath, looking forward to flatish and down hill sections before a couple of bumps and that final accent up the big one. By now the first lady, Michelle Parsons, has just crested the hill to cross the line in 3:01.18, leaving second-placed lady Helen Pakinson (3:02,22) somewhere back on the zig zags. Dropping down to the lowest point in the course, I spotted a friendly face who I've raced with several times this season. I drew alongside only to be greeted with "Not you again! You've destroyed my season, you've run past me at Bala, Ironman Switzerland and now here too!" Of course, that's my cue to dig into my final reserves and push on!

Reaching the bottom of the Zig Zag I realised that I might be able to break 3:30, but by now I was tired and struggling. I adopted a run-walk strategy up the first half of the hill until there were enough supporters along the course that you couldn't walk without being spotted. With a final push I reached the top of the hill, now crowded with supporters with a big cheer as each of us cross the line.

I just missed 3:30, but only by 17 seconds, so I quickly decided that all times should be rounded down to the nearest minuite...☺

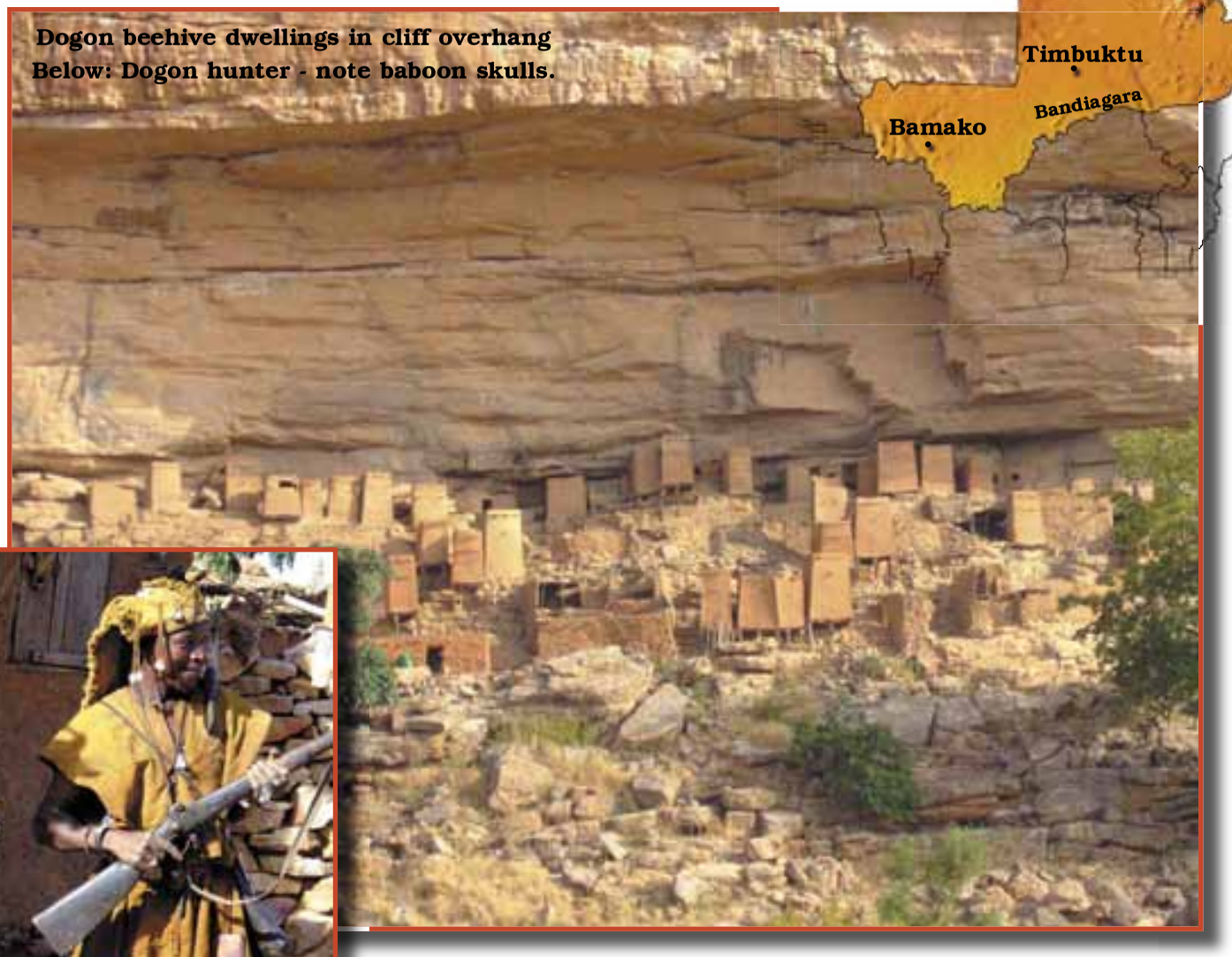
TM

Linda Robson -the article's author - is in yellow and black Pirates kit.

Overland to Timbuktu

BY CATHY HILLMAN

The Dogon country of Mali is one of the most amazing - and difficult-to-get-to - desintations in Africa...



Dogon beehive dwellings in cliff overhang
Below: Dogon hunter - note baboon skulls.

"Welcome to our Champs Elysee," said our guide, as he indicated an empty grey, open, sandy market square. I confess the similarity was lost on me.

Smack in the middle of Timbuktu in West Africa there were no chic designer stores, no avenue of trees, no cafés and no elegant shoppers - however there most certainly was sand and whipped up by the wind, it seemed to infiltrate everything. It had taken us about 10 days to arrive in this remote desert location - and this is the story of that journey.

Sitting in England the previous winter, looking at travel brochures, I had no comprehension of the contrast of their lives and ours, just a few hours flight away. Nearly everybody has heard of Timbuktu, but most are unsure where it actually is.

Our journey began at 3.30am on October 29th at the airport in Bamako - the capital of Mali. Despite 'Bamako' meaning 'crocodile river' in the local language, through a sleep-induced haze everything seemed calm, with barely any cars, people or noise.

There were eight of us in our party and until that first day we were mostly strangers to each other. We were to spend the next 15

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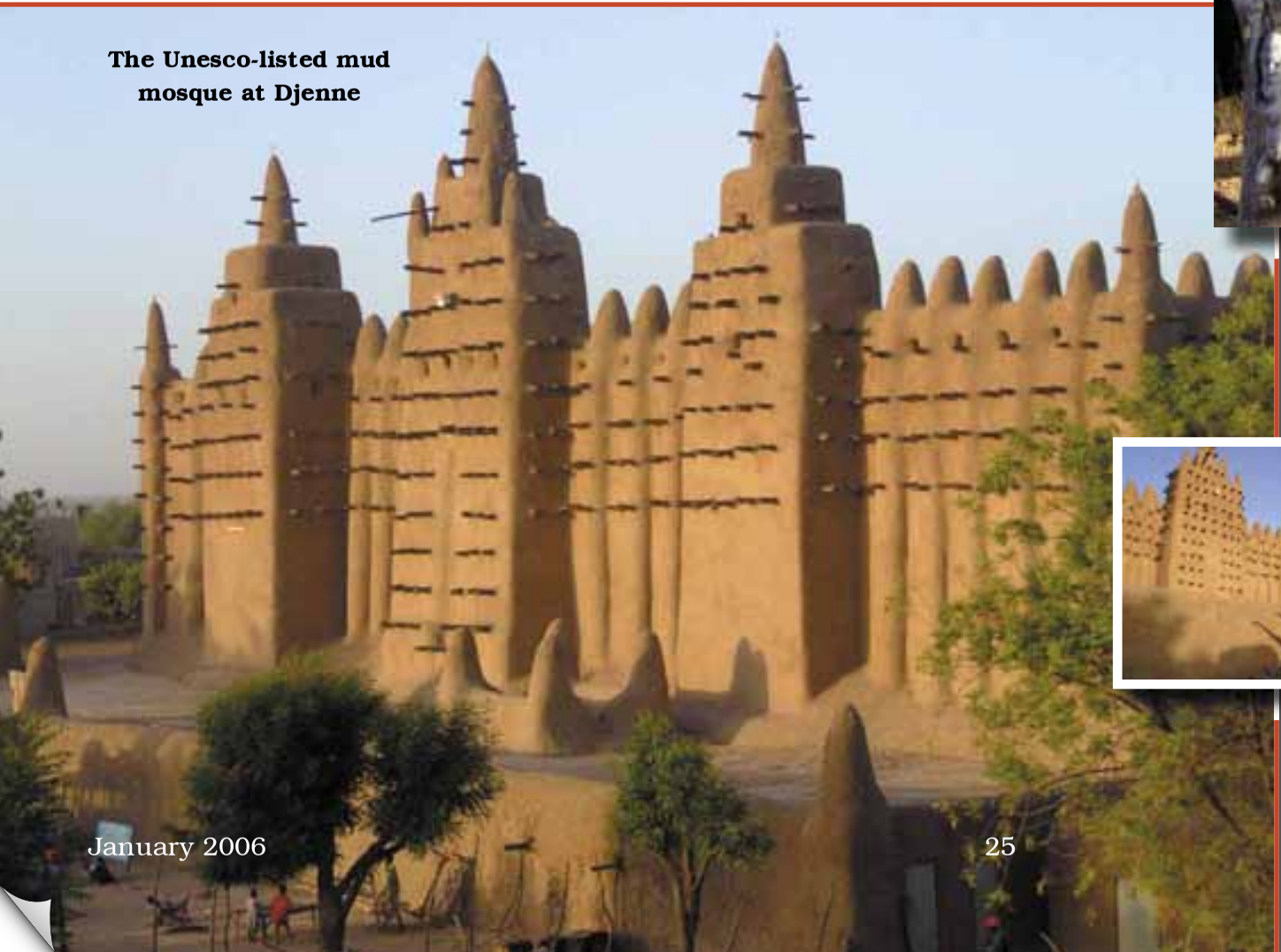
days exploring the sights and often the sounds of the country, travelling by road up to our northern most point - the elusive Timbuktu - before taking advantage of the vast Niger River for the long journey back to Bamako.

The first "Oh my God..." comment came as we arrived in the town of Djenne. Imagine the biggest, most intricate sandcastle in the world and you are half way there... Granted World Heritage status, the mud mosque has to be seen to be believed. They say a picture paints a thousand words, but I can't begin to articulate it's 'Wow factor.' After the rains in August/September and with the help of thousands of volunteers, this fabulous building is given another 'coat of mud' to keep it looking spick and span for the following season.



The Unesco-listed mud mosque at Djenne

A village meeting house, with seating and roof kept low so nobody can stand up and shout.

I've heard people say that a constant reminder you are in Africa is the heat, the dust, and the flies - but these are minor irritations compared to the diversity and richness of the cultures, the colours and bustle of local mar-

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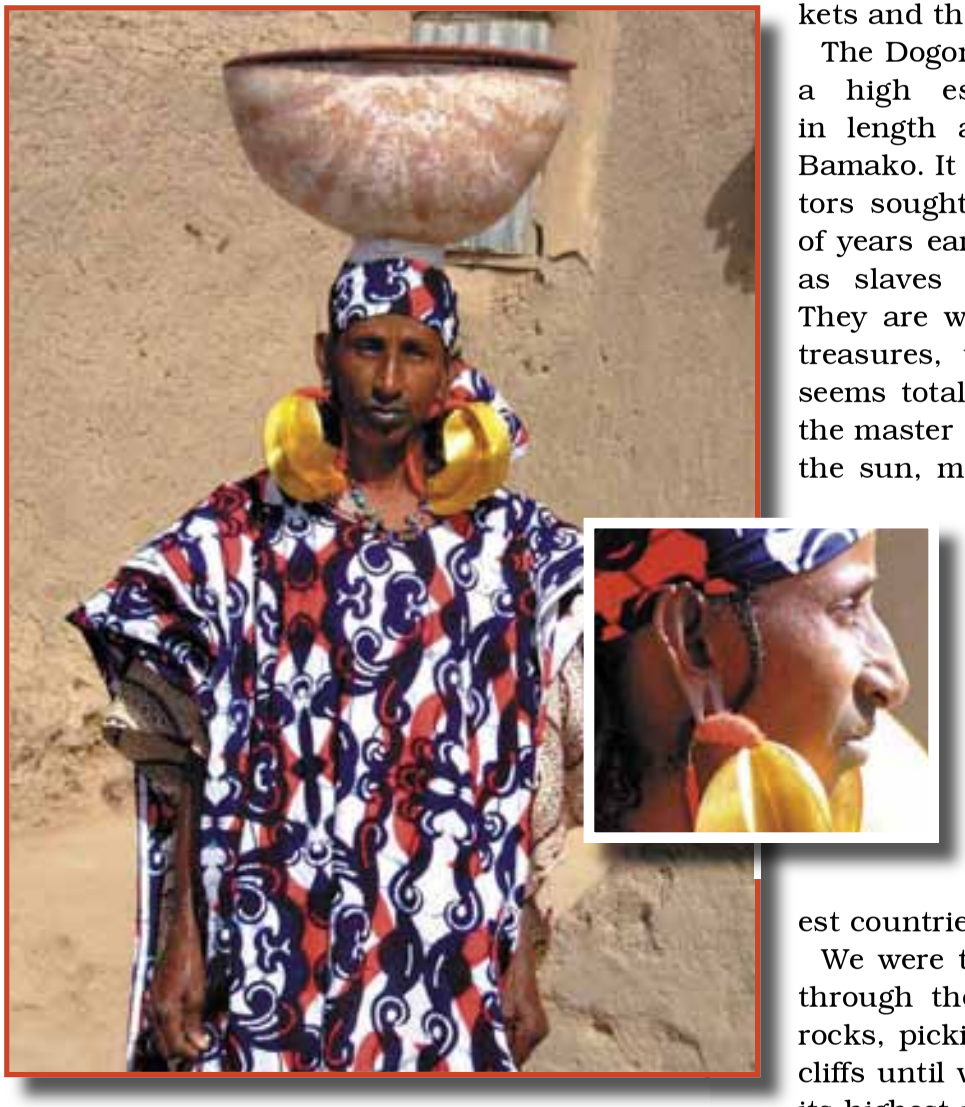


Local Fulani woman with mouth tattoo, wearing her wealth in huge earrings of pure gold.

kets and the astonishing night sky.

The Dogon people live in and around a high escarpment, some 200km in length and about 400km east of Bamako. It is thought that their ancestors sought sanctuary here hundreds of years earlier, to escape being taken as slaves from neighbouring lands. They are without doubt one of Mali's treasures, with a belief system that seems totally alien, based on Amma - the master of the universe who created the sun, moon and stars. Throwing a ball of clay in the air, he transformed it into earth and then consummated the marriage resulting in the birth of a jackal - with this union being the beginning of Dogon people on earth. Today approximately 300,000 of the Dogon live a peaceful, ordered life in one of the world's poorest countries, mainly as farmers.

We were to spend four days walking through the villages - scrambling up rocks, picking our way up and up the cliffs until we reached the plateau - at its highest point 2000ft up - for a view of the plains below. I confess I am not good with heights and had I known then what I know now, I probably wouldn't have done that particular day's trek....

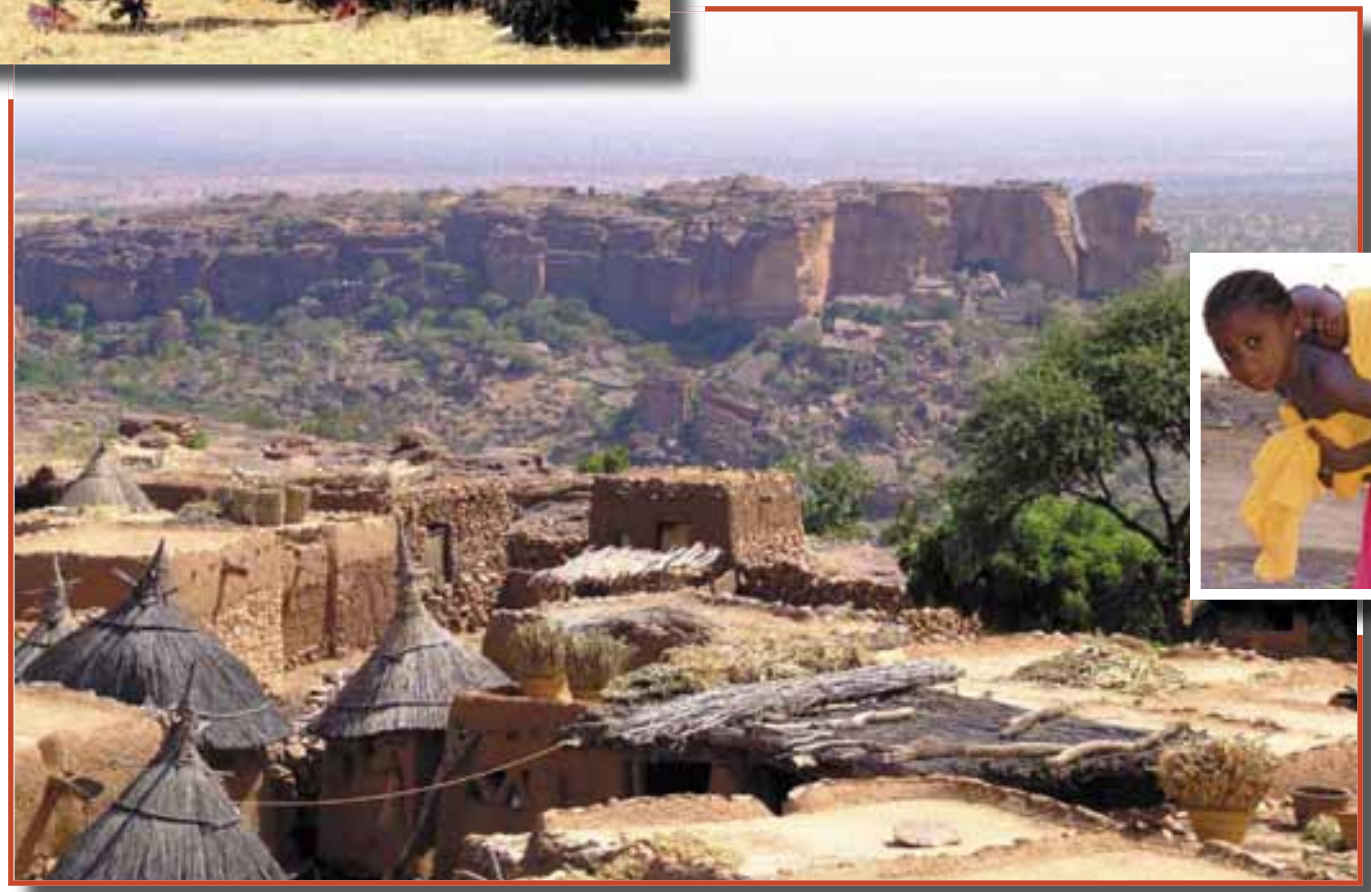
My idea of fun isn't skirting a narrow ledge almost on hands and knees, only to arrive at the top of an apparently bottomless ravine with little more than two notched tree trunks to use as a bridge. There were no guide ropes, nothing to stop me slipping or falling - I was supported by nothing more than words of encouragement by our guide and fellow travellers (one of whom - luckily - was a therapist). I have a new phrase for terror - 'The Dogon Ladder,' but completing it has given me renewed confidence to tackle anything over 6ft above the ground from now on.

Anxious to avoid tourist blunders, but conscience of the calls of 'Cadeaux' and 'Bon-Bon' from the children, I had come prepared. Imagine the scene - a village high up in the escarpment, no electricity, no shops, no mobile phone signal, no similarities with western life whatsoever, a people still living their lives exactly the same as their ancestors had probably done generations ago...

There, amongst all the goats, donkeys and chickens, eight hot, dusty tourists arrived followed by children of all ages - some shy, some frightened, some tugging at our clothes and water bottles, but all curious about what I held in my hand - a small pink plastic bottle with a 'wand' inside the lid. As I lifted the lid, the breeze caught it and one perfectly shaped

Left: Dogon mask dance. Every 60 years, a 'Sigi' - dance cycle - takes place, and takes several years to be performed.

Below: Part of the 200km-long Bandiagara Escarpment, with the Dogon Plateau on top. Inset: Young Dogon girl on babysitting duty.

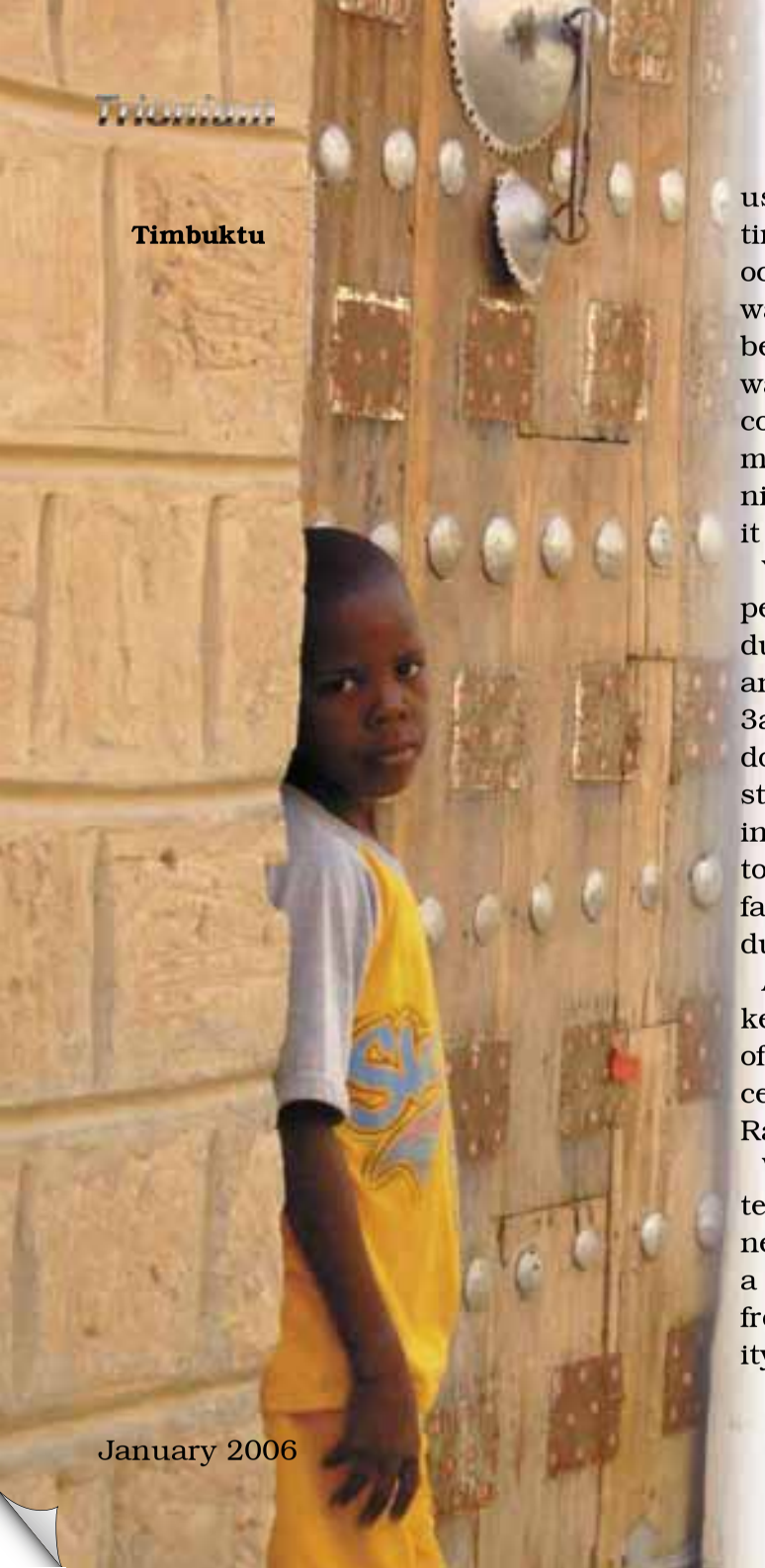


bubble floated up. Stunned, the children stopped talking and stepped back not sure weather to laugh or hide. I tried again, but this time an assortment of bubbles floated over their heads, disappearing as they shyly raised their hands to touch them.... Wondering what was happening, more children ran over, each one jostling and pushing to look and within minutes the laughter began. It was an uplifting sight - neither they nor I had seen anything like it - perhaps we never would again.

Theirs is not an easy life - with a life expectancy not much more than our middle age and very limited horizons, these children will walk for miles each day to their local school, where about 100 children per class - split in two shifts, the morning and the afternoon - will have their lessons in French. They may not have any opportunity to continue their education much beyond the start of their teens.

Of course there are many other tribes that live in the country such as the lighter-skinner Tuareg in the northern regions; the beautiful Fulani woman with their black tattooed mouths and heavy gold earrings; the Bozo who are the fishermen along the Niger and the Bella who in the past were slaves of the Tuaregs.

Where we could, we stayed in hotels...we



usually had power, most of the time the showers worked and occasionally we even had warm water, but we mainly camped beneath the stars along the way. One of our party was convinced I had been shining my torch inside her tent each night: She later discovered that it was only the moon.

You might imagine that a peaceful night would ensue during our desert camp stops... and it usually did, until about 3am when every cockerel and donkey in the area repeatedly staked their claim on noise - interspersed by the mournful tones of the Imam calling the faithful to prayer at dawn and dusk.

And when the animals didn't keep us awake, the sounds of distant gunfire did: excited celebrations for the end of Ramadan.

We left our bags outside our tents each night - there was never any danger of theft, not a hint of threatening behaviour from anybody - merely curiosity from these gentle people as we carried out our routine. We had a cook traveling with us for much of the tour: how she managed to provide delicious sweet potato chips with beef and ground nut stew on little more than a few blocks of charcoal, very limited access to water and no electricity was quite beyond most of us - we ate well.

We knew we were soon to arrive in Timbuktu - the camels began to appear in amongst the sparse vegetation in the dunes. The guidebooks seem to prepare you for disappointment upon arrival at this remote town - Bob Geldof's first comment was supposedly 'Is that it?' - but for me, arriving covered in sand, coupled with the unrelenting heat only to be faced by a grey dusty main street complete with tumbled down buildings after such a long journey was just how it should have been. TM

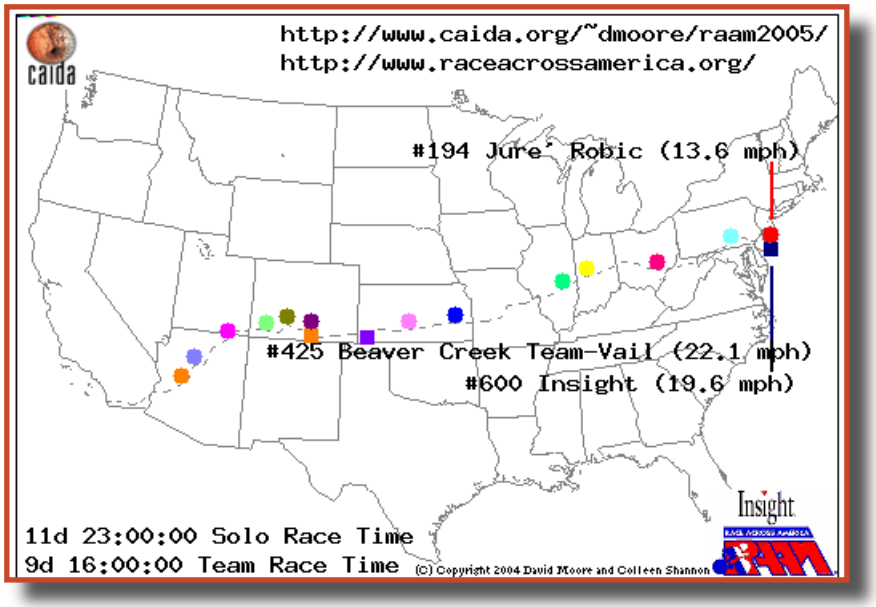
(B)race across America

THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST RACE. PHOTOS BY CHRIS MILLIMAN

Rated as the toughest solo race in the world, the Race Across America makes the Tour de France look like a race for pussies...

The Race Across America (RAAM), the world's longest ultra-marathon cycling event, tests the limits of human endurance and potential. Rated the 'World's Toughest Race' by Outside magazine, this grueling 3052-mile (4912 km) transcontinental journey through the heartland of America takes place over a period of nine days, pushing athletes to their mental and physical limits. Riders endure combined climbs totaling 110,000 feet (33,538 m) - nearly four times the altitude of Mt Everest - and punishing weather conditions that include 120°F heat in the Sonoran desert, below freezing temperatures in the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains, hail storms on the plains, and headwinds that can reach 50 mph (80 kph), all for the honour of being added to the prestigious roll of RAAM finishers.

Map showing the route of the 2005 RAAM: coloured blocks show the drop-out positions of various teams and individual riders. The map also shows average speed of winners.



In all, 130 athletes headed inland from San Diego, California, in two waves: solo riders departed on June 19th and teams on June 21st. Of the solo RAAM riders, only around 40% were expected to reach the finish line in Atlantic City, NJ. In 23 years, only 169 solo riders have finished RAAM, compared to 1,300 who have conquered Mt. Everest.

The event, paradoxically more revered across the globe than on its own turf, included 34 international competitors from 14 countries. Often referred to as America's answer to the Tour de France, RAAM differs in that it is about 40% longer and it is not a stage race, which means RAAM athletes aren't afforded the luxury of 6-9 hours sleep a night. If they're lucky, they'll grab 1-3 hours.

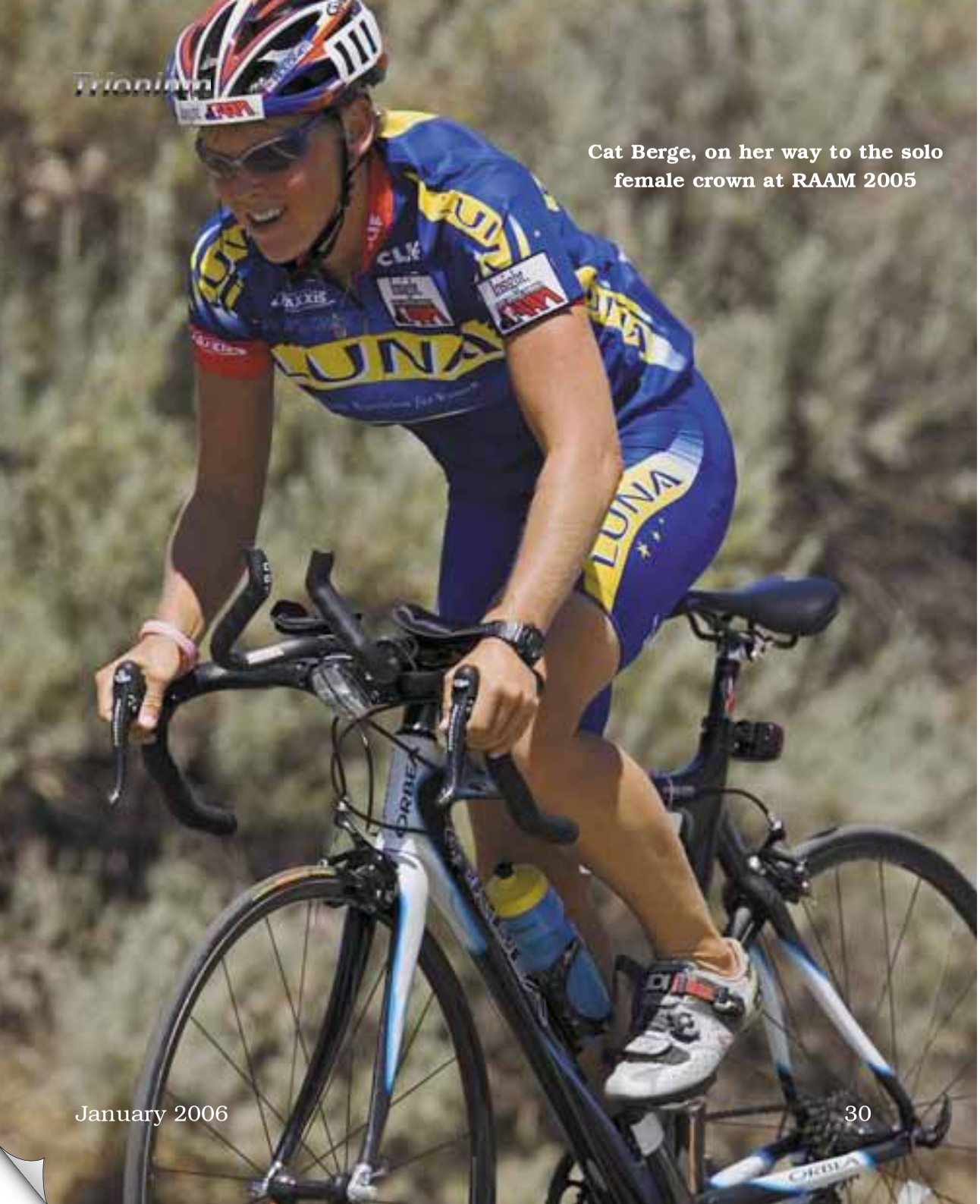
*In 2003, Outside magazine rated the World's Toughest Races as follows:

1. Race Across America, bike 3051 miles, 676.2 points
2. Vendee Globe Challenge, sail around the world, 675.0 points
3. Iditarod Sled Dog Race, mush 1,100 miles in Alaska, 417.5 points
8. Hawaii Ironman Triathlon , swim 2.4 miles/ bike 112 / run 26.2, 67.2 points

Going it alone

Solo RAAM presents an almost unobtainable challenge for the individual competitor. Athletes cover more than 650 miles in the first 35-40 hours on the first stint, without sleep. After the initial jump-start, a typical solo rider's schedule consists of 22 hours and 350 miles on the bike, per day, with 1-3 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period, for eight days.

Mike Trevino (30) who finished second in 2004 said of his experience:, "there's no black out period, no time to sleep, and that's part of the strategy. If you've got 8-10 hours to sleep



Cat Berge, on her way to the solo female crown at RAAM 2005

per night, it's an equaliser in terms of someone's ability, whereas if you've got an event that goes straight through, with no time outs, then that's a pure test of endurance."

The current record holder for the Solo men's category of RAAM is Pete Penseyres, USA ('86) 8d 09h 47m – for 3107 miles (5000 km) – averaging 15.40 mph (24.78 kph). The total prize fund for RAAM is $175,000, Euro141,226 Eur), awarded in cash and prizes.

Solo riders are sent deep into the realm of sleeplessness after about four days. At that point the race really starts taking an emotional and physical toll, in some riders causing frequent hallucinations and delusional thinking. "My body will hold up through the pain and suffering but mentally I'll be a pedaling zombie, says Thomas Rodgers, 44, 2005 RAAM participant. "I forewarned my crew I won't have a lot of sense once I get deep into the race and I'm probably going to yell like an old man one minute and be crying the next, trusting that, regardless, they'll be there to support me, encouraging me with the immortal words of Winston Churchill, to "Never ever, ever, ever give up." There aren't enough sporting events in this world that scare us anymore," says Rodgers. "As hard as it is to get into the Hawaii World Championship Ironman, once you've done it, it's not nearly as hard to finish as RAAM. RAAM is scary. It is still a real colossal event."

"Race Across America is ultra endurance," says David Hasse, 37, a participant in 2004. "There's nothing harder to do than RAAM and the severity of the challenge pushes a person way beyond what they would ever think humanly possible. When people tell me 'you're crazy,' 'you're completely nuts,' that's when you know you're doing something pretty special!" Hasse was forced to drop out

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of the race 451.5 miles from the finish line in 2004 due to an ugly malnutritional cocktail of hyponatremia (low concentration of sodium in the blood), severe muscle damage, extreme dehydration, swollen extremities and a malfunctioning kidney.

Steve Born has finished RAAM three times and says "there are many important strategies we believe all endurance athletes need to remember in order to achieve optimum performance. These include: drinking appropriate amounts of fluids - less is sometimes more; avoiding junk foods and products containing refined sugars and artificial ingredients; replenishing the body with appropriate amounts of calories, 240-300 cal/hr; replenishing electrolytes during exercise; not relying on salt tablets to fulfill electrolyte requirements; using liquid fuels as the main energy source, even during prolonged training and races; not using any new supplement or fuel, or supplement/fueling protocol, in a race without having first tested it in training; and, being flexible with fuel consumption during a race."

The Insight Race Across America has run every year since 1982, and since 2003 has followed its current route from San Diego, California to Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Jure Robic on his way to winning the RAAM solo male rider category in 2005. Check out the legs.

RAAM 2005

Sweden's Cat Berge (38, Visalia, CA) became the first solo female RAAM finisher since Cassie Lowe in 2001. Cat finished the race in 11 days, 11 hours and 20 minutes at an average speed of 11.08 mph. Veteran crew chief, Lee 'Fuzzy' Mitchell, headed Cat's crew, allowing Cat to ride totally relaxed. "It's kind of hard to believe, but it feels like a dream come true. That and the fact that I am here without having suffered greatly, and that I've been able to enjoy the whole race just feels like a blessing," beamed Cat at the finish. In the combined Men's and Women's Solo Category, Cat finished 8th.

Defending his title, Jure Robic, The reigning champion, Jure Robic, 39, (Slovenia) concluded his domination of the 2005 Insight Race Across America through furnace-like conditions on a refreshingly cool, cloudy evening on the Atlantic City Boardwalk. He completed the 3502 miles in 9 days, 8 hours and 48 minutes and easily triumphed over rookie Chris MacDonald after the two main contenders, Mike Trevino (San Diego) and Marko Baloh (SLO) pulled out.

The hardmen of Beaver Creek. Fnar.

In the ultra-competitive 4-person team division, Beaver Creek/Vail stood out as the clear winners riding 3051.7 miles from San Diego to Atlantic City in just 5 days, 18 hours, 15 minutes at an average speed of 22.07 mph (35.51 kmh). Noted for their seamless transition between riders, the team - composed of four routine 24-hour mountain bike racers -

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moved across country with locomotive rhythm despite oppressive humidity bearing down on them through much of the race.

The 18 year-old Benjamin Couturier of Eagle River, Alaska, became the youngest finisher in RAAM history. Couturier's epic took 11 days, 3 hours, 10 minutes and was fueled by candy bars and pizza, and punctuated with hallucinations of purple elephants and people who weren't really there, but by sleeping three to six hours a day he maintained his good humour and finished in good shape.

Hoppo flies the flag

After a journey that included almost every conceivable hardship, Great Britain's Chris 'Hoppo' Hopkinson rolled stoically down the Atlantic City Boardwalk to become the first Briton to finish the world's hardest ultra-endurance cycling event. Having set out with the intention of contesting the Rookie of the Year award, Hopkinson quickly realised that the remarkable Chris MacDonald (who went on to finish second overall) was too fast to catch in the searing desert heat of the first two days, and as his average speed slipped under 12 mph by Day Four, Hoppo's focus moved to simply staying in the race. Ever plucky, Hopkinson quipped at the finish, "I tend to turn negatives into positives, I enjoyed every minute of it."

The neck brace he wore bore testament to the brave face he was wearing, having suffered for days suffered with Shermer's Neck, a condition in which the neck muscles can no longer support the head. Hoppo won the heart of the Cat Berge crew, whose schedule overlapped his. They lent their neck brace to Hoppo, and his crew modified his handlebars to create a more upright position. Brace across America indeed! In his darkest hours, Hoppo called his wife in England. "Everybody at times needs support from their loved ones. I turned to Helen, and she helped me enormously. She told me I just had to make it into Atlantic City." Half way through the race, Hoppo's crew chief had to return to England to cope with a family emergency. Peter Wilson stepped in as co-chief and guided Hoppo to the end. "A few days from the finish, Chris's health was deteriorating. We were fortunate that Alexander Gepp, who was riding nearby, had a doctor in his crew. He diagnosed sodium overloading: Chris wasn't taking enough fluids to flush out the electrolytes. We made some nutritional changes, and that improved things."

Well done, Hoppo, that's a good start. What about a British winner? Who's up for it? TM

Benjamin Couturier of Eagle River, Alaska became the youngest finisher in RAAM history.

The long and winding road...

BY IAN MAYHEW - ULTRAMAN

A personal account of the Ultraman World Championships, Hawaii, 25, 26 and 27 November 2005

In August 2005 I took part in my first Ultraman race in Canada. This was a fantastic experience and enabled me to take part in the Ultraman World Championships in Hawaii over the American Thanksgiving weekend in November. Here I have given an account of my experiences in Hawaii over the three days of the event. For me the event is much more about the camaraderie and support shown between fellow competitors and their support crew and this feeling appears to be shared by all in the Ultraman family.

Ultraman basics

For those of you unfamiliar with Ultraman, I will first give a few details about the event itself. Ultraman Hawaii basically takes athletes around the 'Big Island' during the three days. Each stage is a point to point affair. There is a 12 hour cut off for each day. Atheletes who miss this cut may commence subsequent stages but are then classed as 'participants'.

Day 1 starts at the pier at Kona which will be familiar to anyone who has any interest in Ironman. The swim exits 10k further down the coast, where there are full facilities to allow you to get ready for the first bike leg. The first day finishes at Volcano National Park, where there are more washing facilities, and where, in addition, athletes can benefit from a massage (pre-booked at event registration).

The bike leg on Day 2 starts at the Volcano

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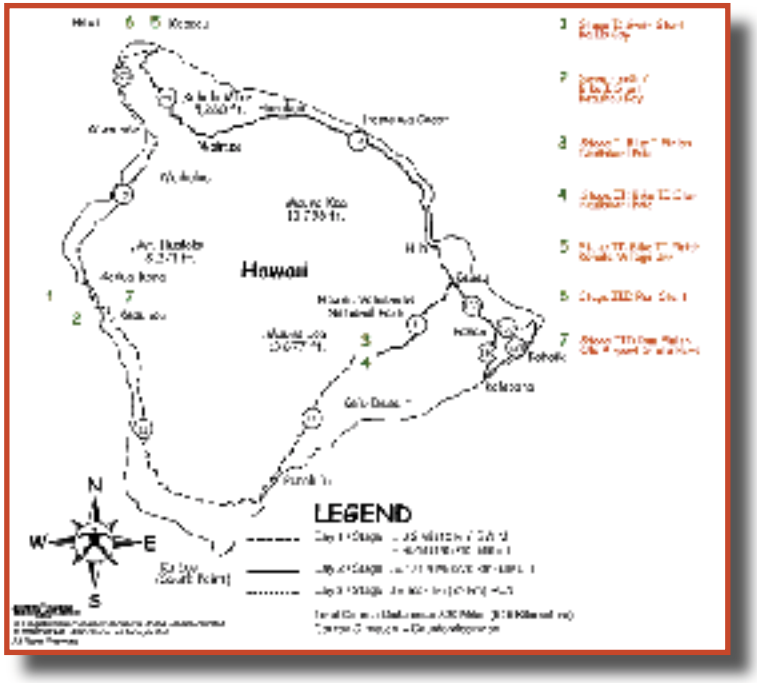

national Park, and finishes in Hawi to the North of the island at the 'Village Inn'.

Day 3 starts a few miles from the 'Village Inn' and basically follows the IM bike route back towards Kona. The run ends by the beach (see the map above).

Each athlete is supported by a crew of at least two. The crew are responsible for navigating their athlete around the course and are given a very comprehensive route book describing the route, turns, elevation, potential toilet/refuelling stops etc. The more complicated sections in towns are also supported by direction arrows.

Athletes can receive support in terms of spares, food, fluid from their crew, fellow athletes and other athletes crew. It is a very supportive event. The emphasis is on supporting each other and recognising the efforts of everyone, not on trying to take advantage of other people's misfortunes to gain a time advantage.

The entry fee is very reasonable for a three day event at around $600. But the costs do begin to rise when you add in air fare, accommodation, vehicle hire and costs of accommodating your crew for the event. As the event is point-to-point, in addition to your main accommodation in Kona you need somewhere to stay after Day 1 and Day 2. The organisers do help with sourcing accommodation and a variety of options is available. But being comfy and able to sleep between stages is important.

Preparation...

Due to other life commitments I had very limited training time available to me. I basically trained to complete rather than to compete. I would not recommend anyone embark on this adventure on the training I was able to log. It is entirely possible to train to finish the event without sacrificing everything else in your life. To be able to be competitive would however require a significant time commitment.

As for how long to recover... After qualifying in Canada, I was feeling OK after 3-4 days. However, as I write, it's now five days after the Hawaiian adventure and I still have a very sore and swollen left ankle, so I guess it will be a while longer before I am back on form. As with any endurance event, it will take the body a number of weeks before it is fully recovered.

My Ultraman

There are currently two opportunities to take part in an Ultraman event: Ultraman Canada, which takes place in August, and the World Championships in Hawaii, which is staged in November over the 'Thanksgiving Weekend'. Canada is used as a qualifier for the World Championships. This year I have been privileged to take part in both events.

In Canada, my first attempt at the distance, everything clicked and I performed way beyond my expectations and earned the right to take part in the Hawaiian event.

I arrived in Hawaii with my girlfriend, Sally, who was to be part of my support crew for the event, slightly rounder and less fit than when I was in Canada due to too many lattés and pastries but excited to be taking part in a World Championships and to be on The Big Island.

The event really begins the Thursday before the race, with the race briefing. This follows a communal breakfast and for anyone

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new to Ultraman gives the first taste of what Ultraman is all about. Ultraman is an incredibly friendly and supportive event. There are no egos. Everybody wants everybody to do well. Three Hawaiian words are used to sum up what Ultraman is about: aloha (love), kokua (help) and ohana (family). Gathered in the room were the athletes who would be facing the challenge of Ultraman and their support crews. Each athlete has to have a support crew to participate in Ultraman. The athlete is wholly dependent on them for the three days of competition. These can be three very long days and can be very demanding on the crew. Among those gathered were some incredibly, amazingly experienced and talented ultra-endurance racers. Some of these would be racing, others were there to crew for established friends, and perhaps more amazingly for new friends who wanted to experience Ultraman. Some support crews were made up entirely of family members and others from volunteers who simply wanted to help athletes achieve their personal goals.

I was to be supported by Sally and two ladies who I had never met, Linda, who was to be my guide for the swim leg, and Stephanie who would work with Sally on the land-based legs of the event. I will come back to my crew later.

Even if cycling is your forte, you will feel the heat.

Early start by the pier at Kona: Anything worthwhile requires effort - and usually an early start.

The race begins...

Day 1 began with a blessing and then the small question of a 10k ocean swim. At the swim start everything looked favourable for a calm, potentially current-assisted swim. After a short while I located Lynda in her kayak and began to follow her along the coast towards the swim exit. The sea was beautifully warm, crystal clear and calm. As the water got deeper, the sea became an incredibly beautiful blue. Two hours into the swim and I was making good progress, I was over half way, feeling good and enjoying a swim: Nice. Then the current decided to have some fun and the swells began to increase. By the time I was approaching the swim exit an additional safety buoy had been put out, forcing a wider entry into the bay to try and protect swimmers from the worse of the currents and breakers. It's fair to say that I didn't 'negative split' the swim. I exited in 4hrs 45mins, feeling shaken, stirred and absolutely shattered. The fastest swimmer had got out of the water some 2hrs 15 ahead of me: Respect.

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After a leisurely transition trying to regain some form of composure, I headed out for the 150k-bike ride. The bike legs are my favourite bit and I was looking forward to pedalling my way around the island. It was soon apparent that it was going to be hard work when, after a relatively short time on my bike, Giorgio, a friend from Ultraman Canada came past me as if I had the brakes on. Giorgio checked I was OK and offered me some food before heading off into the distance. I kept the pedals turning and my thoughts soon turned from

Hills, hill, hills. What goes down, must go back up again. Repeat.

It's tough to get to the top: support crews are vital.

making an impression on the bike legs to doing enough to make the cut off.

The first day's bike course is rolling and travels down toward the South of the island before heading East into Volcano National Park. The views are stunning. However, by the time I finished it was dark and raining.

I crossed the line inside the time limit but well down on where I'd hoped to be. But that didn't really matter. What mattered and what is so special about Ultraman was that waiting for me at the finish line to make sure I'd got in safely was Giorgio, Gary (who won the stage, many, many hours ahead of me) and pretty much every single other athlete. Think about that: that really is special and rare in today's sporting arena.

Day 2 arrived - the long bike day. The route takes athletes to the top of the island and

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treats them to some absolutely amazing views. The 'Red Road' was simply unbelievable, stunning, the coastline and the smells... WOW, what an absolute privilege.

The day went much better for me and the weather was exceptionally kind. Not too hot, very little of the infamous Hawaiian winds and no mist shrouding the final climb of the day. A truly amazing route.

Day 3, mmm ... a small question of a double marathon to take care of on undulating roads. Whichever way you look at it, 52miles is a damned long way to run and you really do have to run your own run. Everyone sets off together, just before dawn but by daybreak the field was already beginning to spread out. I had company for the first 1/2 marathon, which was great, but after that I was solely reliant on my crew for company and support, both nutritional and mental, and at times motivation. The first marathon passed by largely incident free and pretty much to plan. At this point I treated myself to an iced Frappoccino, The next 1/2 marathon didn't go well at all and my the time I reached the 3/4 mark I was doing the maths to work out if I'd done enough to make the 12 hour cut off. Stephanie was clearly anxious and Sally was running more and more legs with me to help keep me moving. After an extended walk up a long drag with one of the event support staff I got my legs moving again and things gradually began to come good. My final 13 miles ended up being my quickest. I crossed the line with all of my support crew, feeling alive and good.

Finishing any event should give you a sense of satisfaction. Finishing an Ultraman will leave you seriously emotionally charged. Over the three days you will see so many acts of friendship, support and respect, overcome a host of battles, mental and physical and share so much with your crew that when you cross that line, you will need to have your sunglasses or a box of tissues to hand, or do what I did and walk into the sea on the pretext of cooling your legs down. Unless you are seriously dehydrated your eyes will be moist! TM

The full results can be found on www.ultramanlive.com but these will only show a very small facet of what Ultraman is about. Jane (Mrs Ultraman) won't ever let Ultraman get impersonal, so take the opportunity to experience the emotions and satisfaction that comes from taking part in an Ultraman event.

Pos	Name	Age	Ctry	Swim	Bike	Run	Overall
1	Alexandre Ribeiro	40	BRA	3:03:13	14:12:42	7:16:33	24:32:28
13	*Ian Mayhew*	*36*	*GB*	*4:45:37*	*16:34:03*	*11:01:20*	*32:21:00*

The art of coarse tropical running

BY JOHN FARANG

Apparently it's not only mad dogs and Englishmen who go out in the midday sun...to run a marathon.

As someone said, "In tropical climes there are certain times of day when anyone with a modicum of common sense does not run." Why do they call it common sense? It's not common to me.

We (that is she who walks on water and I) were just looking at our past few weeks and decided that that 'someone' just about got it right – except we are not English.

The last three weeks here in Hong Kong have comprised the National Day 10K; The Lok Wah Cup 10K; a Half Marathon in Macau (the territory next door) and the Helly Hansen 50K. OK! So what is odd? Well nothing really, it is just different and painful.

The first, on 25th September was great. Nice and cool, not too many runners, and we even parked easily (parking here is about as straightforward as prospecting for gold in Windsor Great Park).

We then learnt there was a Typhoon Warning No 3 in force, and the dam we were to run across, twice, was fully exposed to the wind. You know the sort of thing – a reservoir sporting meter-high waves. The HKAAA had the cross-country championships that day and they cancelled it – but we had to run. One important question: Why does the wind always change direction at the half-way point?

Never mind! typhoons come and typhoons go (usually to the Philippines which seems a bit unfair) so next Sunday, the 2nd October, was fine. It was so nice I actually ran round Ma On Shan sports stadium to warm up. Now warming up and training are the bits of running I try to avoid – and I paid for my folly. With a temperature of 32°C, which is about 90°F in real money, I was lucky the battery hadn't gone flat in my Champion Chip by the time I'd finished.

The following Sunday was going to make up for all my trials and tribulations...wasn't it? We had a nice ferry ride to Macau and found a hotel for $130 (US$17/Euro14). Well my hero Alf Tupper would have called it a hotel. I even managed to find some edible food! If anyone tells you this neck of the woods is a food paradise – run like hell.

Macau is nice. People are friendly. They willingly shut the roads for races. I like Macau. After the first 4k we hit the wind, not from the food the night before, but the monsoon from the North. It was blowing straight in my face at a steady 40mph all the way across the bridge, which is like a camel with two humps. Guess what? It dropped at the half-way point. I am

Things to spot in Hong Kong:
• Mickey Mouse • Someone doing up their shoe laces • Someone trying very hard • Blurry man • White gloves (2 pairs) • Two traffic cones • Hat too-large girl

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not going to tell you my time, but it was 10 minutes slower than last year, and I'm only a year older. If I do a slower time than last year, her indoors doesn't let me have beer.

And then it was the Helly Hansen 50km trail race. It starts right outside my house, so I don't need to get up early. The temperature had dropped to 30°C. We managed quite well as far as Check Point 2 at Pak Tam Au, where a lone sentinel monkey decided to stay just close enough to ensure that no one relaxed with their bananas and Gatorade. I now realise that the monkey was really the devil, since that was the gate to hell.

The race is only 50k, but that is on the horizontal. It also includes about 8000 feet of climbing, and the Hong Kong Country Parks Authority believes that steps, stone, concrete or cut in the earth make for accessibility. I think they give all the labourers laptop computers, with special software to ensure that no two steps are the same height, and that they are suitable only for people less than 2' 6" or more than 8' 0" (old money).

Photos this page: Helly Hansen 50k trail race,

The half-way mark saw many young fit people earnestly debating 'To go on or not to go on,' while they examined their red peeling skin and squinted up at the next mountain section. I wasn't going to give up, while she-who-walks-on-water and who wins cups and things was smirking at me, so with hands like balloons and a full water bag, we continued – and then? What luck, what joy, what masterful strategy! The sun set. With renewed vigour, we toiled on, and finished in 13:14:21, a full 17 minutes quicker than last year. The news was good: I can have beer!

It was late when I got home, so the next morning, savouring the moment, I dragged my aching legs down to the little shop for my beer: I deserved it. The sign on the shop said "On Holiday: Back the Tuesday after next."

Deep joy. TM

Water story

BY LES NOLAN

Dive into the realm of the senses...with Trionium fiction.

The first few strokes are always the best, the most relaxed and the easiest. If only you could feel like this all the time, you could keep going all day, and into next week, but the feeling never lasts. It always turns into a frantic effort to keep your form and to not drown. But sometimes, in mid-length and when you least expected it, you can get into a rhythm that feels so good, and so right, it makes you feel superhuman.

There is an almost Zen-like pleasure in the sparseness of movement, even before you enter the pool. Finding a familiar locker, stripping in a few practised moves, and then, on automatic, moving possessions from cubicle to storage space in the exact reverse order they will be required in another forty minutes: towel last in and first out. A quick flick of the wrist and the coin drops, the fiddly strap pulled just tight enough, and the soothing touch of antiseptic tile on the tender underside of your feet. After the poolside shower, it is only ten paces before you can stand precariously on the edge of the water, maybe with your big toes dipping in to see if they have the temperature right today. There's a tendency to mollycoddle nowadays, so that it is usually far too warm: when it's cold, at least you know you have worked up an honest sweat.

Even before you dip your toe in, you can tell if it is going to be a good session today, because the noise is as good a sign as you need. Coming through the cubicles, if you can hear the high-pitched screams and shouts of uncouth youth, you can tell that it is going to be a little tiresome today. At least they keep to their own section of the pool – for the most part. Every now and again a ball or an inflatable crocodile might come winging over from the meleé, but faced with an adult brought up short in mid-stroke, they are usually abashed enough to murmur a 'sorry,' or 'scoozee.'

Sometimes though, it's the grownups that are the problem. It always amazes me the variety of swimmers that are corralled together in our little lane. There seems to be every speed, shape and size present, all going at their own pace, and all desperate to be left alone. The serious swimmers are easy to tell. They slither through the water, with hardly a splash and with a precise metronomic action that seems to be pre-programmed or drilled beyond doubting. They never gasp as they reach the end wall, but instead turn and kick off without an extra breath, barely surfacing. The water moves over them like it does over the streamlined top-secret bows of a nuclear submarine, their unstoppable power plant forcing them through the water with silent menace. You can always feel them surge past you as well, their pressure-wave pushing you out of the way as they come up behind you, and being sucked in by their wake.

At the other end of the spectrum are the ancient swimmers - men and women in their prime as Hitler's armies marched into Poland - who barely seem to move for all their effort. Their rasping breath is startling, and their

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ineffective strokes either splash you or even strike you as you move past. If you imagine that being struck by an old swimmer would be like being stroked with a flabby wet flounder, then it shocks you to find steel in their arms, like premature rigour mortis. Where the submariners are horizontal and fish-like, these Methuselans are upright, struggling, fighting a pathetic slow-motion battle against hydrodynamics.

I well remember the time when I gave up looking at the swimming baths. For me it was a relief: after all, there is so little to see. Just white tiles, and a blue line on the bottom, ending in a 'T' some distance from the end wall, to stop you bumping your head. No, there is nothing worth seeing at the baths. It is immensely more interesting to do without sight. My epiphany came literally out of the blue: I was swimming in the Thames, near Windsor, and the river was cloudy. I needed to make my way up stream, but being unable to see the bottom, I had to rely on my occasional breath-born sighting of the dazzling sun to be able to navigate. Every now and again, a waving waterweed would point to me the way that the current was flowing, and I could correct my course, but mostly it was the sun, a dazzling sun in a frigid blue sky that showed me the way. It was a hot day, and a long day, and I found myself growing weaker as the minutes and hours toiled along. As the river became cloudier, and the weeds more indistinct, I found myself having to rely upon the feel of the water passing over my body to give me some idea of my surroundings.

In between the wars, I remember my father telling me a tale that he had picked up from a man in a pub in Yarmouth. He said that the fogs do come down so thick – and so fast - out on the east coast, that you can poke yourself in the eye with a stick, and never see it coming. Well, there was once a skipper called Corsus who was caught up in one of these fogs, and right in the middle of a tricky bit of water, surrounded by shifting sand banks. He had to get to Whitby, to deliver a cargo of tallow that his trader brother-in-law needed to sell to pay off a gambling debt. Anyway, the crew of his boat, the Pride of Blackwater, saw old Corsus shift from the wheelhouse as soon as the fog came down, and dip his mug over the side on the end of a piece of cord, and give it a good sniff, and a swilley and a swallow. Then Corsus'd tell the Mate what course to steer and push his cap down over his eyes for another fifteen minutes, and then do the same again, and Corsus navigated his way up the treacherous east coast by taste alone.

Well, the delicate boquet of the Thames is a good deal more subtle than the harsh tang of the North Sea, but I soon found that you can navigate well up river without looking. Every time you push

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your hand in to the water, for example, you create a small explosion of bubbles – the sloppier you are about it, the more bubbles you make. As you move through the water, you can feel these tiny bubbles playing about your body, tickling your face, crackling in your ears, bouncing along your suspended stomach. When you are moving straight up stream – or downstream – they will form a streamline straight down your body. If you are moving across the current, you may not feel them at all, as they are stripped from your hand and swept away. With my own more-or-less regular breathing, I create the same telltale cascade of bubbles, helping me to feel the current, and to see my way up the winding river, ever into the current.

In the aseptic environment of the pool though, I can't rely on the never-ending bank-parallel push of the water to set me straight. Here I have to be even more alert. The submariners can be useful in their passing: their fluttering feet leave tell-tale vibrations in the water that I like to hang on to for as long as I can keep up, before they fade into the grey static of water with nowhere to go and nothing to do. There's a pressurised inlet for fresh water down by the steps, which jets right across the lane at arm's depth, about three strokes before the end of the pool. Once you get a feel of that jet, it's like grabbing on to an iron bar, and you know you have to brace yourself for the end.

And it can be bracing down at the end as well, since the smells at the pool can be enough to make your toes open and close with a bang. The submariners are invariably far too serious about the whole thing, and bring pool slippers for the short trip from the cubicle to the poolside. Unfortunately, they never wash them, and the submariners leave them at the end of the pool, to assault one's nose like a pair of overripe kippers. The stench of perfume on those fellow members of the fairer sex who fail to shower before entering the pool is nearly as bad as the bordello stink off the men. Although I am always glad to take on my vital gas-fuel every three strokes, I am equally happy to return to the blissfully smell-free world underwater.

Perhaps I am a dullard or a philistine, but the pool tastes like a chemical cocktail to me: the equivalent of some of the stuff the youths swig on the High Street: more style over substance. Of course I catch the occasional lungful, but my expulsion technique is now good enough that I rarely keep the stuff onboard for long. Perhaps it is for the best that I am unable to recognise the taste of humanity, which most certainly must permeate swimming pool water to its very atoms.

Without sight, my swimming pool word is without dimensions. It exists now only in my mind, purely as a story which may or may not be true. I can only perceive it in terms of the lengthless equations of lung capacity, lactate threshold, momentary water vibrations, bubble noise and perfume. I imagine the position of all my limbs, my neck, my trunk, my head, my toes and my fingers, from second to second. I update my catalogue of others in the pool with me only when they intrude on my inner radar. It is up to me to decide if the cool and fluid world that I think surrounds me exists...or not. TM

Do you have a story to tell? Trionium seeks sports stories of 1000 words for publication. Please send to trionium@propubs.com

Are you who you think you are?

BY ROBERT MCCAFFREY (WORLD RECORD DATA FROM WWW.WAKELYDAM.COM)

Do you think that you are a sprinter, whereas all along you should have been a marathon runner? Time to find out!

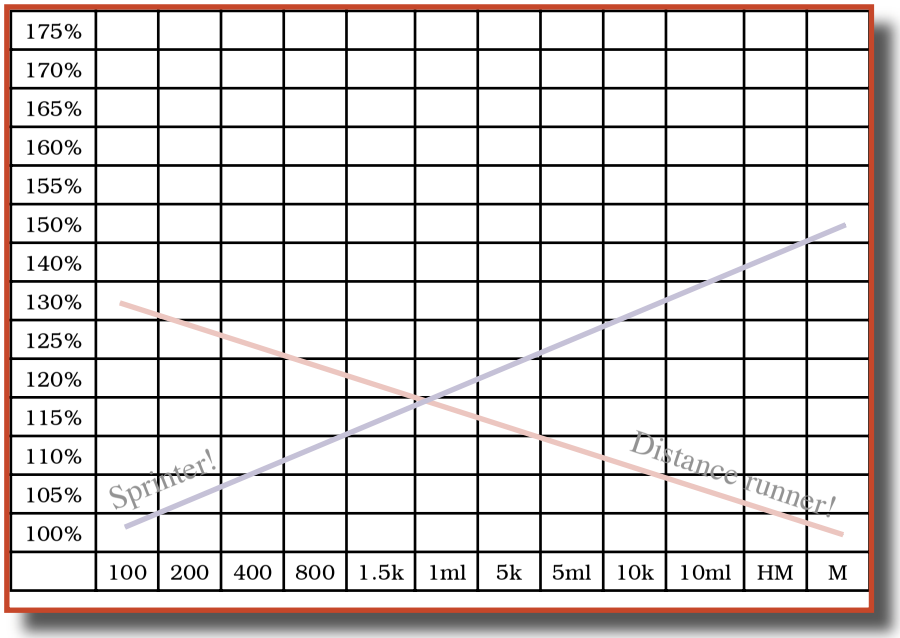
It's a simple concept: measure yourself agains the best in the world, since there is no surer benchmark, and find out how you compare. If you are closer to the sprinters, and further away - in terms of performance - from the distance runners, you may either be a better sprinter, or just need to work on your fast-twitch fibres!

How to compare?

To be able to compare yourself to the best in the world, you have to know your personal best times for a variety of distances, from 100m to marathon. Fill in your PB times, calculate how you compare (divide your time for each distance by the world record best time for the distance, and multipy by 100 to get a percentage), and then plot your comparison on the graph. If you really ought to have been a long-distance runner, your performance will be closer to the world record at the 'distance' end of the graph, while if you really ought to be a sprinter, it will be closer to the shorter distance end of the graph.

Good luck and let us know how you get on!

Plot your normalised PBs against the best in the world, and see how you compare!



World record times, in seconds, for a range of distances from 100m to marathon: Work out your normalised PB, and plot it on the graph on the left.

Distance	Men (secs)	Ladies (secs)	My PB (secs)	% of WR
100 m	9.78	10.49		
200 m	19.32	21.34		
400 m	43.18	47.60		
800 m	101.11	113.28		
1500 m	206.00	230.46		
1 mile	223.13	252.56		
5000 m	757.35	864.68		
5 miles	1325	1467		
10 km	1622	1821		
10 miles	2685	3001		
Half Marathon	3546	6340		
Marathon	7495	8125		

Fit but lonely hearts

Real PEOPLE, LOOKING FOR FIT LOVE!

Trionium Magazine has not vetted any of these 'Fit but loney hearts.' Trionium Magazine recommends that you do not divulge personal information about yourself until you are reasonably sure that the person you are 'dating' is not a 'nutter.' If arranging to meet, do so in a public place, on neutral ground, rather than in the alley at the back of his house. Really, it's kind of obvious. Please let us know if romance/children/marriage finally results from 'Trionium Love'!

Are you looking for Trionium Love? Give yourself a chance of love! Send your write-up (four-word headline, 40 word max. description) and your 'throwaway' email address (trionium**@hotmail.com suggested) to Fit but lonely hearts, Trionium Magazine, 6B East Street, Epsom, Surrey, KT17 1HH. Send a £10 cheque payable to 'Conferio Ltd'; Your 'Fit but lonely heart' ad will appear in the next edition of Trionium Magazine. Good luck!

Gent seeks lady

Have yacht, will travel

Sporty vintage 1967 sailor and runner seeks grounded lass in her 30s for sailing, running, friendship and maybe more. Six-berth Sadler 32 at Bosham Creek needs attention (osmosis): perhaps you could help me to rub my bottom? South.

Reply to Trionium1@hotmail.com

Gent seeks lady

Laid back, wearing well

Fit and tanned mid-50s with laughter lines to match. Been there, seen it and done it. Now looking for love, second time around (except this time I don't want to generate any more children - four is enough!). Solvent enough for fun. South.

Reply to Trionium2@hotmail.com

Lady seeks gent

Running singer seeks base

Blonde, gorgeous and elegant lady - late 30s - seeks white knight for romance and sporty fun after heartbreak. My children are lovely, once you get used to them.
I sing soprano - could you be my bass?
South.

Reply to Trionium3@hotmail.com

Gent seeks lady

Over the hill...?

Now that the divorce is final, I can get on with my life again. Shift this paunch, take up swimming and return to my boyhood pleasure of cycling. Celebrate by 50th. The only thing is, I need someone to kick me out of bed in the morning...are you the one?
South.

Reply to Trionium4@hotmail.com

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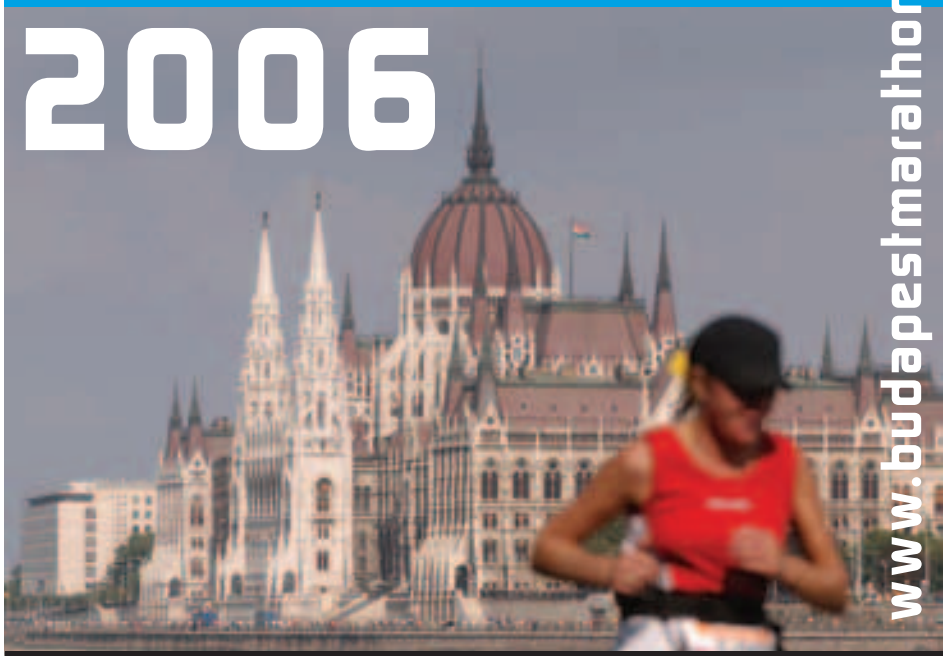
BUDAPEST 2006

www.budapestmarathon.com



3rd September 21st NIKE Budapest Half Marathon

1st October 21st PLUS Budapest Marathon

15th October 11th Budapest Women's Run

'The race was well organized and the conditions perfect for running... All enjoyed both the marathon and relay. For two of our female runners it was their first ever race and for one her first marathon. And all fell in love with your city especially the thermal baths and buildings.' *Bearbrook Joggers, running club*

Budapest Marathon Organisation
1138 Budapest, Váci út 152.
Hungary

Tel: +36-1-273-0939
Fax: +36-1-273-0936
budapest.run@t-online.hu

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on Saturday, 10th December, 2005

a testing 50 mile Trail event for one of the shortest days of the year.

Under TRA / UK:Athletics Rules (TRA Permit applied for)

Starts: Walkers 6 am, Joggers 7 am, Headbangers 8 am

Relay 8:30 (2-8 members) following the same route, with changeovers at the 7 intermediate check/feed points.

The route, mostly on footpaths, tracks and towpaths, with some roads, follows the approximate route of the ROTHERHAM boundary. Written descriptions and a "Wainwright-style" diagrammatic map provided on the day, or can be downloaded from the Navigation page of our website.

Entries: Pre-entries £9.00, Unattached £11.00 inc £2.00 levy
Entry to be received by 25 Nov for confirmation of entry and to guarantee map, memento and badge.

Awards to 1, 2, 3 (M and F), team of 3 and for 10 completions
Records: Male: Chris Parkes 6 h 17 min Relay: RHAC Men in Black: 5h 25 min
F: Sharon Gaytor 7 h 44 min (Carolyn Hunter-Rowe 6 h 48 min adj. from 48 mile)

Event Centre:**Brampton Leisure Centre** (OS 111/SE417011) off B6089.
Start and Finish, showers & hot food at finish.

Full details on our website http://www.hmarston.co.uk, and follow links to RRR.

Les Hill (Dumfries, 2004 winner) at Roche Abbey, in the 2003 run – it is not always this hot! ➔

Trionium

Ordinary people doing extraordinary things

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1/8 page 4-colour	125	110

Ad rates valid for insertions booked before 31 December 2006

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When producing your pdf, ensure that all fonts are embedded, and specify the highest-quality jpg compression for all pictures (at 300dpi).

All advertisement material should sent via email to trionium@propubs.com.

Please send a colour/layout proof to 6B East Street, Epsom, Surrey, KT17 1HH, UK

Supplements will be charged if design, import/customs or other charges are incurred by the publisher.

errors & omissions excepted

Parthian shot

The Welcombe Obelisk, Stratford on Avon

Runners: Max and Toby Crane.

Want to feature in 'Parthian shot'? Please send a high-quality digital photograph of yourself/mates running/biking/skiing/yomping/moshing (etc) in a fantastic setting, to trionium@propubs.com. Thanks!