

THE NORTH FACE CCC. COURMAYEUR - CHAMPEX - CHAMONIX 98KM 5600M 26TH AUGUST 2011

2010 – Big birthday approaching next year, what can I do to make it memorable. Maybe something overseas, an ultra run perhaps, something in the mountains. I had read some inspiring reports by NFR members about the gruelling UTMB and thought wouldn't it be good to be fit enough to attempt something like this, and talked to my good friend Peter Moralee about his difficult but ultimately successful completion of the UTMB in 2009.

The UTMB, TDS and CCC events all now require 5, 2 and 1 points respectively to qualify for the ballot entry system. A quick look at the qualifying events and the 2010 Highland Fling Ultra – worth 2 points is duly completed and my entry submitted early January for the 2011 CCC event. A few weeks later and I get word that my entry has been successful.

Need to start increasing my miles with longish days out and long events. Kielder Borderer, Round of the 4 Passes, Allendale Challenge and Highland Fling Ultra all completed before the end of April – a decent start to the year. Also managed to walk St. Cuthbert's Way with Wendy over Easter weekend in glorious weather.

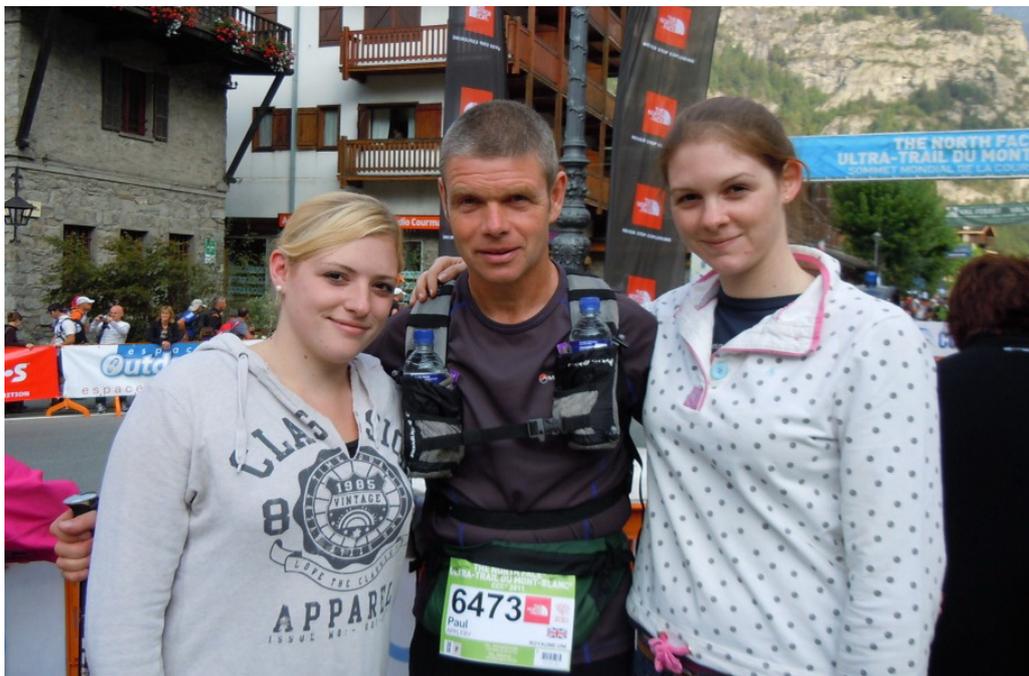
Further events completed in the build up - a poor run at Ennerdale, a good run at Cheviot 2000, Chevy Chase and Borrowdale.

But mainly concentrating on long days out, Joss Naylor reccie with the 2 Peter's, Byrness to Yetholm in both directions (not back to back), and a few 7-8 hr days in the Cheviots.

14th August 2011 – last training run done, 12 days to go. Wendy and I arrive in Chamonix on Saturday 20th August, 6 days to get acclimatised, rest and get fuelled up. Rachel and Sophie arrive on the Wednesday for a few days and to become part of the Appleby Support Team. The weather is superb, maybe even too hot in the valleys – lets hope it cools down a bit for race day.

Thursday 25th August – a little bit nervous but manage a restful day with lots of calories. W, R & S manage a decent walk leaving me to prepare for tomorrow.

Friday 26th August – The day I have been preparing for has finally arrived. Up early at 5.30am to check kit, have breakfast and walk into Chamonix to get the 7am. Shuttle bus to Courmayeur. Get there before 8am with 2hrs to go till the start. Lots of runners and supporters and the atmosphere is starting to build. A good luck hug from W, R & S and I make my way to the start. 1800 runners are lined up to start in 3 packs to be set off at 10min intervals; I am in the middle pack.



With Sophie and Rachel in Courmayeur prior to the start

Get talking to a Scotsman at the start (one of the few brits I encounter on the whole route) who has just flown in the day before and is leaving the day after – not ideal preparation. An announcement is made that the route is being changed slightly due to a storm that is expected later in the day. The route will be 5km shorter with 500m less climbing. It is a bit cooler than recent days and hopefully the anticipated storm will hold off.



Waving for the camera with the sound of Vangelis to set us on our way

10am and the first pack are off to the sound of Vangelis, very moving and inspiring, then 10 mins later and our pack are on our way. A nice smile for the camera – hope I can still raise a smile if I get to the finish. Through the streets of Courmayeur with masses of supporters and we are straight into the first climb up Tete de la Tranche, it becomes so easy to be swept along faster than you really want to go and it feels like hard work although we encounter our first route change contouring round to Refuge Bertone avoiding 500m of climbing straight away. Fairly level running along wonderful mountain paths with amazing views for about 10km before a steep descent to the valley and the first food checkpoint of the day Arnuva.



Taken on the climb out of Arnuva, about 3.5 hours into the run.

Feeling pretty tired already after about 3 hrs but manage a good refuel –noodle soup, pieces of orange and bananas, tray bakes, cakes (give the tuc biscuits a miss), juice,coke,tea and refill my water bottles up.

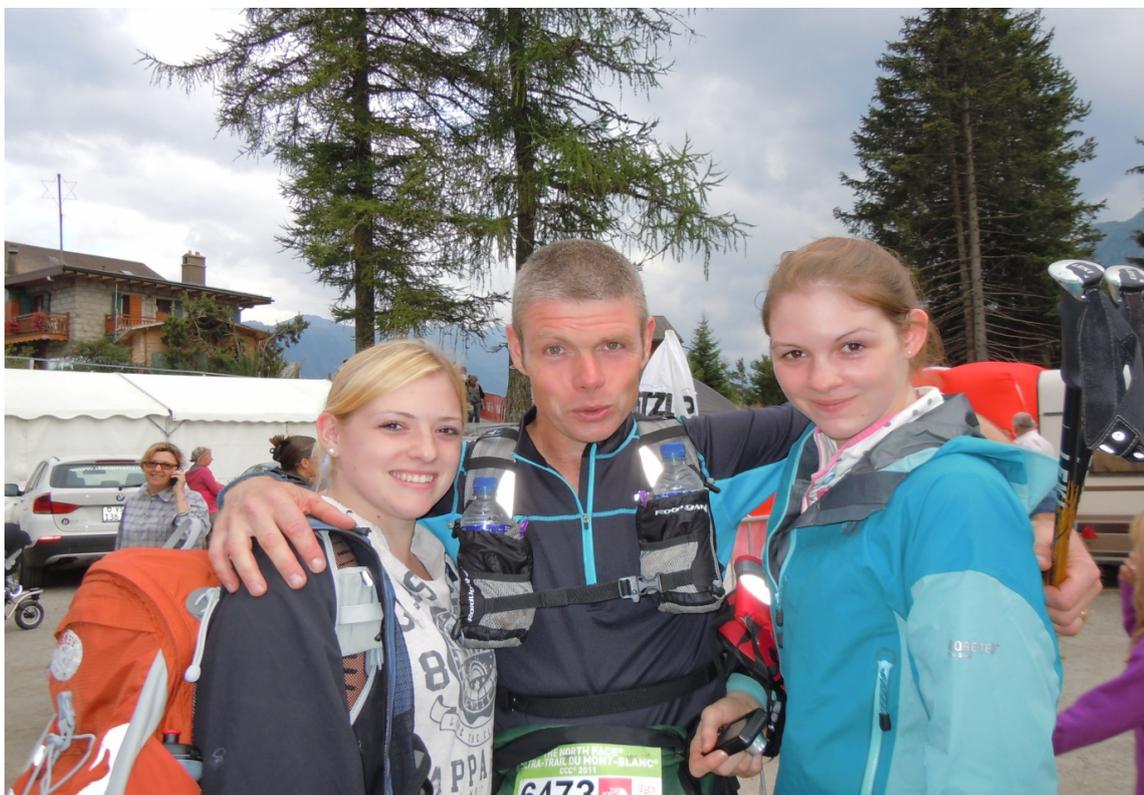
Out of the checkpoint and our 2nd big climb of the day to the Grand Col Ferret. Not feeling too good and finding this climb hard going, stomach churning and lacking in energy – hope it doesn't last too long. Eventually the Col is reached; the path is just coming a bit less crowded as the field stretches out and enters Switzerland. A long descent of about 10km down to La Fouly on great runnable paths but still not feeling 100%. More noodle soup, a sit down, a couple of glasses of coke which really seems to hit the spot and a quick phone call to Wendy to let her know where I am. Due to meet up at Champex. A huge offload at La Fouly and soon I am feeling considerably better.

Another longish descent partly on tarmac takes us through some picture postcard Swiss villages with what seems like most of the residents cheering and clapping as you pass and the kids slapping your hands as you go bye, just can't stop smiling, feeling great and really enjoying the route.

Looking forward to meeting Wendy and the girls at Champex-Lac. 400m climb up through the trees and I arrive in Champex almost 8hrs since the start feeling tired but glad to see my support crew. Immediately find a seat in the covered check point while Wendy queued up to get me some food. Fantastic spaghetti bolognaise, fruit, cake, yoghurt, tea and coke. Change of clothes and a photo with Rachel and Sophie as I leave Champex feeling great.



Arriving at Champex after 8 hours, looking pretty knackered!



About to leave Champex about 20mins later, looking like a different man.

Another route change coming up as instead of the big climb to Bovine we drop a long long way down through the trees to the outskirts of Martigny to begin the climb/slog up to Trient which starts off on tarmac, then grassy tracks then single track through forest. Head torch now on, this climb proves tiring and a few people are resting/sitting at various points and I pause for a rest, manage to get some malt loaf down and eventually get going again – this is the longest continuous climb I have ever done and it is a great relief to get to Trient. More tea, noodle soup, cake, fruit, chocolate and coke – never drank as much coke in my life!

The wind has got up and it has been raining lightly for about an hour, so waterproof top and long pants, hat and gloves on for the next climb mainly on forest road up to Catogne. It is now raining heavily, thundering and lightning flashes around us. Good progress is made and I pass a few people on the climb to the checkpoint. Waterproof bottoms on, more coke and refill bottles for the next descent to Vallorcine. Feeling strong, although my knees are starting to hurt, I pass more runners down through the trees and I really enjoy this section and get to Vallorcine at about quarter past midnight in good spirits. Wendy and the girls are there to meet me. More noodle soup and coke. Take a couple of painkillers but they come straight back up; the medics are there in a flash – what sort of painkillers are you taking, what is hurting – I tell them that they are paracetamol and it is my knees, are you sure that is all that is hurting they ask? I tell them I am fine and they let me get going. I am feeling cold and just want to keep moving. Hugs from my team, tell them I am feeling good and see you in Chamonix.

The final route change instead of Tate aux Vents and La Flegere we drop down to Argentiere, quick cup of tea and a biscuit and on to the final stretch through the forest, still feeling good and passing plenty of runners although I am passed by 2 runners on this section who are finishing really strong.

Out of the trees and through the streets of Chamonix, not many people about but as you near the centre people appear and cheer you on (it is nearly 3 in the morning and a pretty wet night).

Job nearly done, feel pretty amazing, what a fantastic journey, few more corners to go and the finish banner appears, I've made it, Wendy, Rachel and Sophie are there to greet me, hugs all-round, a few photos, collect my finishing goodies and cheer one or 2 finishers in. My time – 16h 39m 12s. 342nd out of 1591 finishers.



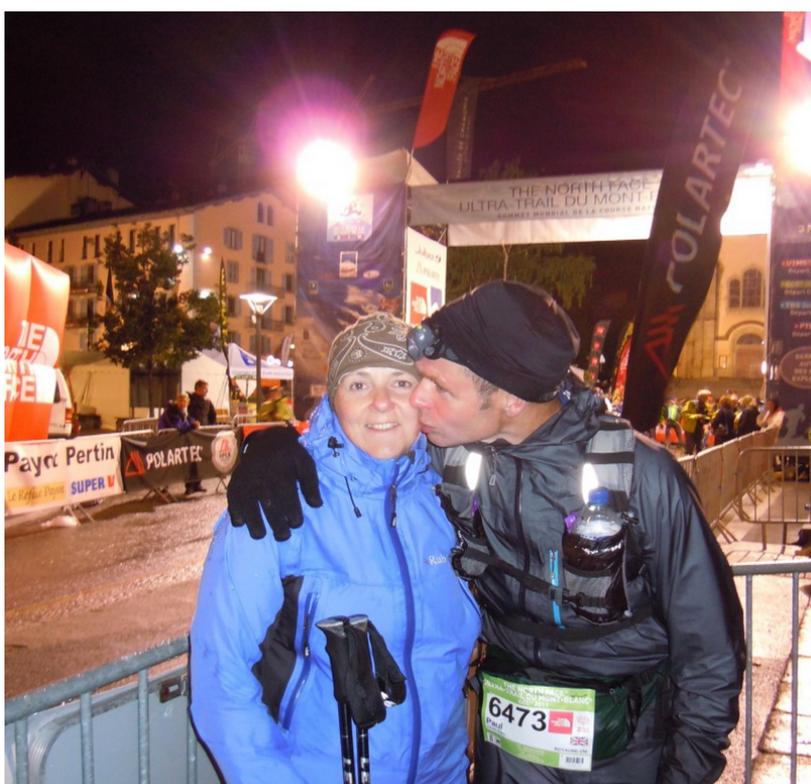
Just finished,
the elation on
my face says it
all.

Cool down quickly so start the 10min walk back to our Chalet can't stop talking, on such a high. A wonderful shower and a few cups of tea. What a day this has been.

If you ever get the opportunity to try something like this then all I can say is give it a go. This has been the most enjoyable running experience that I have ever had. The atmosphere, the scenery, the organisation, the food at the checkpoints, the shuttle busses that take your supporters to various checkpoints, all combine to make it what it is.

Finally I have to say a huge thank you to Wendy, Rachel and Sophie for sharing this experience, the encouragement and being there on the day to help out, and for hanging around in the cold and rain. Having familiar faces at some of the checkpoints gave me a huge boost on the day. And Wendy for all the support and ferrying about over the years, during long days out and long races, being there at the finish, I could not have done it without you.

PAUL APPLEBY.



Thanks! Xx
For everything.