

**THE NORTH FACE : COURMAYEUR – CHAMPEX - CHAMONIX**  
**86km & c 19,500 feet of climbing**  
**August 31 – September 1, 2012**



Chamonix : It's why we're here !

**Autumn 2011**

The reason that I am able to write this report about my most epic journey of trails and the mind is all down to two separate incidents both connected to my very good friend Paul Appleby. The first was Paul's inspiring account of the 2011 CCC where he brought to life a magic kingdom of ultra running not without its dark moments and aroused a curiosity within. The second quirk of fate occurred a few weeks later when I picked up a flyer for the 2012 Hardmoors Series in the Newcastle Hotel after the Simonside Cairns race, which of course Paul organizes.

Although I had sufficient qualifying points for the CCC I had never run (?) further than the 37 miles of the Old County Tops and doubted if I could go further but then again there was only one way to find out.

**January – July 2012**

I submitted an entry for the CCC in early January, which in effect meant that I was entered into a ballot, with around a 1 in 2 chance of being accepted but lady luck shined on me. I was in, no turning back, so better get some serious training in.

I then embarked upon a series of "long days in the hills"; Lammermuirs and Pentlands in the Lothians, BG reccies a la Ms Scott and random days out in the Lakes, a long reccie of the Hardmoors 55 route in late February with Paul and Dave Wiseman and then the race itself a

month later. Despite suffering from a horrendous blister (very bad shoe choice) I had got round okay. Onward and upward.

There then followed some memorable days out in the Lakes; races - the Old County Tops with John Duff and some truly awful jokes, the Dawn 2 Dusk run in truly appalling conditions in so called midsummer and the Lakeland 50 as well as equally rewarding Bob Graham and Joss Naylor legs being a part of the BG success of Steph Scott and Paul Hainsworth and Geoff Davis in their respective JN triumphs.

My final big day out came three weeks before the CCC when I ran the final two anticlockwise legs of the BG making it back to my B&B just as Mo Farah was winning his second Olympic gold. The omens were good and I was ready to run.

To demonstrate my intent the following night I signed the pledge of sobriety whereby no fine ales or alcohol of any form would pass my lips until the race had been run (nearly 475 hours – sad and alas very true).

### **Last Week of August 2012**

I flew out to Geneva with my eldest and youngest daughters, Natalie and Charlotte on the Sunday morning ahead of the following Friday's race. Helen, my wife (yes I do have one despite all she has to put up with – dirty kit usually) followed on the Tuesday, having seen Amalie, our middle daughter, off on her own adventure, for some reason thinking a 4 month stint working out in Singapore was a better bet than a week watching her old man slog around the Alps.

Being neither a skier nor a climber I was new to these parts but was captivated by the scenery and the atmosphere that grew by the hour over the coming days. We witnessed the start of the Petite Trotte a Leon (290 km and 22,000m of denivele positif, as they call it in these parts) on the Monday night giving us all more than an idea of the atmosphere that surrounds these events, not to mention the royalties that Vangelis must be coining in from his compositions which seemed to be resonating non stop around Chamonix all week.

The glorious blue skies which had greeted our arrival and had permitted us unrivalled views of Mont Blanc from 12,600 feet up on the Aiguille de Midi on the Monday began to subside on the Tuesday (totally unconnected to Helen's arrival that day). By Wednesday the UTMB website and text message service was going into overdrive carrying messages of great foreboding and inclement weather. First it was snow at 2,000m then 1,800m and the need to wear at least four layers of clothing. By Thursday I was half expecting the big screens situated around town to be showing clips of Private Frazer shouting out "We're doomed, Captain Mainwaring, doooooomed, ah tell yee."

Slightly spooked by all of this I registered early for the race on the Wednesday afternoon in case I failed the kit inspection and had to hot foot it off to The North Face or one of the other many gear shops in town who were doing a roaring trade in light of these malevolent forecasts. However, the person assigned to undertake my kit check, the one almost non English-speaking person I encountered all week just wanted to see my mobile phone. I for one was not going to stop and argue....in any language.

The whole registration process was a bit like a game of pass the parcel where you were the parcel – show identification, pay 20 Euro deposit, get kit checked, receive number, get your

bag electronically tagged, pick up goody bag, pick up coach ticket, get out of stifling hot sports hall. I was ably assisted in this process by Natalie who also had to go and get the accompanying persons bus tickets at 25 Euro each a pop (on the actual day they were never asked to show them once).



Chamonix Post Registration – Nice glacier, nice inflatable ..... shame about the man with the bag.

It poured down most of Thursday with the cloud cover almost down to the valley floor doing nothing to lighten my mood now very seriously contemplating the burden of what lay ahead. I managed a couple of hours sleep on the Thursday afternoon feeling distinctly lacking in energy and not really as excited as I thought I would be.

An early pasta meal in town and a walk back to our apartment in the pouring rain was followed by an early night, knowing full well that I wouldn't sleep well. However, as the man at the Lakeland 50 had said it is the quality of sleep "the night before the night before the race that really matters". So I was not unduly worried when I was still contemplating this point whilst Helen who had come to bed an hour after me was happily fast asleep.

### **August 31, 2012 – Race Day Lead Up**

The Telfer's are not early morning communicators and up around 6.30am we went about our various tasks in almost monastic silence - making breakfast, packing bags (again), checking Facebook (Charlotte) and generally getting ourselves ready. Leaving the apartment at 7.30am, having checked we had all our bus tickets for at least the 5<sup>th</sup> time, it was thankfully dry but cold and the menacing clouds in the valley indicated precipitation could not be far off.

We joined our respective coach queues to take us to Courmayeur. Just as we set off around 8am the heavens duly opened and as we entered the Mont Blanc tunnel I really began to fear what lay ahead. So imagine my delight and surprise when after 20 minutes we emerged out of the tunnel into Italian blue skies and stunning mountain views. A spontaneous cheer erupted (a similar event also occurred on the girls' bus) and the French women, who I had been sat next to in silence for the past half hour, exchanged large inane grins, or maybe she just had a bad attack of wind.



Courmayeur – Fri 09:15 : Charlotte reports to the waiting world – “It’s raining !!!”. Pretty building though.

This wave of joie de vivre (or whatever the Italians call it) lasted but all of the time it took the local mobile network to kick into gear and it was back to the Private Frazer Text Messaging Service of Doom informing us that due to the weather forecast the first big ascent to La Tete de la Tronche would be missed out (as it was in 2011) as would the last major climb of the race at La Tete Aux Vents. This meant we were now looking at a race some 14km shorter than the prescribed 100km but according to race statistics lost almost none of the height. Slightly disappointing this may have been it came as no huge surprise and nothing in comparison to the decision taken 3 hours later to abandon the UTMB course and run it over 100km, and entirely in France.

By the time I had completed my obligatory pre race ablutions and walked into the square at Courmayeur, Helen and the girls were huddled outside a café clutching hot chocolate drinks for warmth as the wind blew and waves of rain fell. The music was getting cranked up (Vangelis – who else?), the atmosphere was building and dire warnings of extreme weather conditions were being blasted out the town square in around 5 different languages.

Around 9.45am, the girls having found a sheltered spot near the start to watch proceedings it was time to part company with a hug from each of my loved ones, I was quite unashamedly welling up inside (after all I was about to be apart from my wife for nearly 7 and a half hours). I then took my place around half way back in the first of the three ranks of runners who would be setting off at ten-minute intervals.

Whilst listening to the national anthems of the three host nations I looked around, hope, excitement and trepidation in equal measure. I was stood next to a runner from Greece who seemed to be having great trouble fastening his bag. I am sure he was really just waiting for a French and German runner to come and help bail him out.



Courmayeur – Fri 09:40 : The closest I'll ever be to the front of the field.

Eventually after what seemed like an eternity the countdown began as did the strains of yet another breast thumping Vangelis composition, and after a seven-month wait I was on my way !!!

### **August 31 – September 1, 2012 – The Race**

The start, like an awful lot of the next 15 hours, was a bit of a blur. I am not sure why this was but my pet theories include, unfamiliarity with the route, lack of visibility, focusing on the next six feet in front, pitch darkness, having to be ever watchful of flailing poles, being wrapped up in i-pod land or just being totally in't zone.

Matters weren't immediately helped by the fact that the start was downhill, there were photographers all over the place and maybe jostling and pushing is just a way of life in these parts. It took a good few hundred yards to command just a scintilla of personal space in which to run and the girls reported a few first corner pile ups caused by over eager

individuals who may have thought we were engaged in an 8.6km race rather than one ten times that length.

Having run through the town we eventually hit the trails and a relative calm descended. On the ascent up to the Refuge Bertone the most common sight was of runners shedding layers (myself included) as the body heat generated merited less than the suggested 4 layers which had seemed sensible standing in the wind and rain at Courmayeur. Up in the skies the race helicopter shattered any hopes of peace and tranquility as well as providing a diesel scented back draught to help us on our way.

The first checkpoint was reached in just under the hour and anxious not to dally I made do with a quick dose of coke (the drink) and a refill of my water bottle. After a short initial climb, I shed another layer and actually got into a rhythm of running for the first time since leaving Courmayeur. The route to Refuge Bonatti (7 km) was on good but reasonably narrow tracks, with numerous short ups and downs. Sadly the views over to the Grand Jorasses were obscured by low cloud and an ever freshening head on wind made it feel more like running the Tour of Pendle in November rather than the tour of the Alps in August and back on went the third layer.

By Bonatti, some 13 kms into the race, and in 374<sup>th</sup> place, I felt I had just about myself oriented to the task in hand and felt was taking stock of what this was all about. Up until now the weather had been kinder than predicted with only the occasional shower but as I began the descent to the next checkpoint at Arnava, and the first food checkpoint, all the grim forebodings began to come home to roost.

First rain, then sleet, coinciding with the paths just turning to liquid mud making the downhills an absolute lottery. Those without poles tumbled over time after time in ever worsening conditions. Even with my poles I was skidding all over the place. The only people deriving any pleasure from this were the good folk of Arnava, who know a good thing when they see one, and were lining the final mudslides into the checkpoint, ringing their cowbells for all their worth, shouting "Allez, allez, bravo" (a phrase I must have heard over 200 times that day and to be honest never tired of hearing) punctuated only by gasps and cheers when a runner took a spectacular fall only to rise up again.

Whilst being fully wound up in the immediate challenge, my head started preparing for what lay ahead - what I needed to do and eat at the checkpoint and more critically what lay ahead, and what turned out to be the most gruesome ascent of the day, the climb up to Grand Col Ferret (2,500 m on the Italian Swiss border) in near whiteout conditions.

By the time I arrived in the checkpoint marquee in Arnava the ground was a mud bath and I was in 349<sup>th</sup> position out of 1,917 starters. First of all I grabbed some coke, the first of many bowls of the legendary chicken noodle soup and an assortment of the cakes on offer. I then found a quiet(ish) corner and set about equipping myself for the mountains under the watchful eye of a race official who was making sure people did not leave the checkpoint under-attired (Chris Eggett was even told to zip his top layer up to his chin). On went the fourth layer, hat, thick gloves, buff and waterproof trousers. Downing my food and jelly babies, I sat in quiet contemplation for about a minute just gathering my thoughts checking everything was closed on my pack and then before venturing back out into the elements.

Driving sleet greeted me and the next half hour winding upwards to the Refuge Elena on ever worsening paths made me pleased that at least I had left nothing to chance gear wise.

About a third of the way up to the Col was the Refuge Elena, where a tethered and howling wolfhound, half in lament, half in warning merely added to what was becoming a personal challenge with the elements whereby the hideous mud we were trekking through was the very least of our worries.

Sleet gave way to driving snow and worsening visibility. The only respite came as the track zig-zagged up towards the col meaning that sometimes the snow blasted into your face and at other times into your back. The (somewhat better) conditions, experienced by the leaders about 45 minutes ahead, can be viewed here.

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xt6kuu\\_2012-ultratrailtv-ccc-grand-col-ferret\\_sport](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xt6kuu_2012-ultratrailtv-ccc-grand-col-ferret_sport)

After about an hour and a quarter in some of the worst weather I have ever run in, even compared to a Lakeland winter, the sound of a lone cow bell could be heard in the distance. I dared to hope that it signified the checkpoint and the end of 3,000 feet of ascent, then again it could just be a cow with a bell. Fortunately, it turned out to be the former.

Having had the bar code on my race number “swiped” by the checkpoint marshal it was virtually all downhill for 9 kms to the next food checkpoint at La Fourly. Fortified at having completed the longest climb and feeling positive both mentally and physically I set about the downhill with gusto making up nearly 50 places in the process. The lower we went the better the weather. The walkers stood to the side cheered all except one group of around a dozen elderly ladies all attired in huge capes and who appeared distinctly unimpressed at the flying dervishes whirling by, refused to cede any ground and led to some of my continental cousins foregoing the usual “pardonnez” and “excusez –moi” with language a little less couth.

A grand reception in La Fourly awaited (yes, those cow bells again). More soup, cake and coke and a quick call to Natalie by then on the bus to Champex to let her know all was well. By the wonders of the chip in my race number she was able to tell me I had arrived in La Fourly in 326<sup>th</sup> place having taken 5 hours 9 minutes to get there. All this was done under the roving eye of a race official who was checking there was nothing amiss and remonstrating with one (admittedly slightly underclad) young runner.

And so back into the heat of battle but not before a family from Tring had stopped and wished me well and taken my photograph and had a quick chat about fellrunning in Northumberland. I cannot emphasise how important this type of support was proving to be and what I would usually brush off with a quick thanks and a wave turned into a 2 minute conversation and I am sure it gave me more energy and drive as a result.

Maybe slightly distracted by this chit chat I was saved my disaster whilst running slightly ahead of an Italian runner he very sportingly suggested by a variety of cries which I didn't understand that I may be benefit by following the route which was clearly marked rather than heading into the coach park to where I was headed.

Composure regained I was on my way for the 14km journey which would re-unite me with my family. The first 9km of which took us mainly through a forest above a river, people overtook me and I overtook others feeling just fine. The route then went through the village of Praz de Fort, a pure chocolate box village set amongst rolling meadows that I half expected Julie Andrews to appear and start belting out a tune from The Sound of Music (pedants please note I know the film was based in Austria). Old wooden barns, houses with logs stacked up the roof, winters must be a bit chilly in these parts. Despite Chris telling me

he took a photo of a property for sale JT will not be back in these parts as despite all its loveliness only one restaurant was viewed and certainly no taverns at which to slake the raging winter cabin fever thirst.

As I ran through the edge of the village two young girls were jumping up and down in the rain in a state of great excitement shouting "Monsieur, monsieur, café, café ici" pointing to the front of their house where a bottle of coke and water and some biscuits had been set up on a little table with Mother in charge of proceedings. Although I had just put on a downhill spurt to overtake around half a dozen folk how could one ignore such a random act of genuine kindness? And so coke was taken, places were lost and the world seemed a better place for it. As they say in these parts "Every little 'alps".

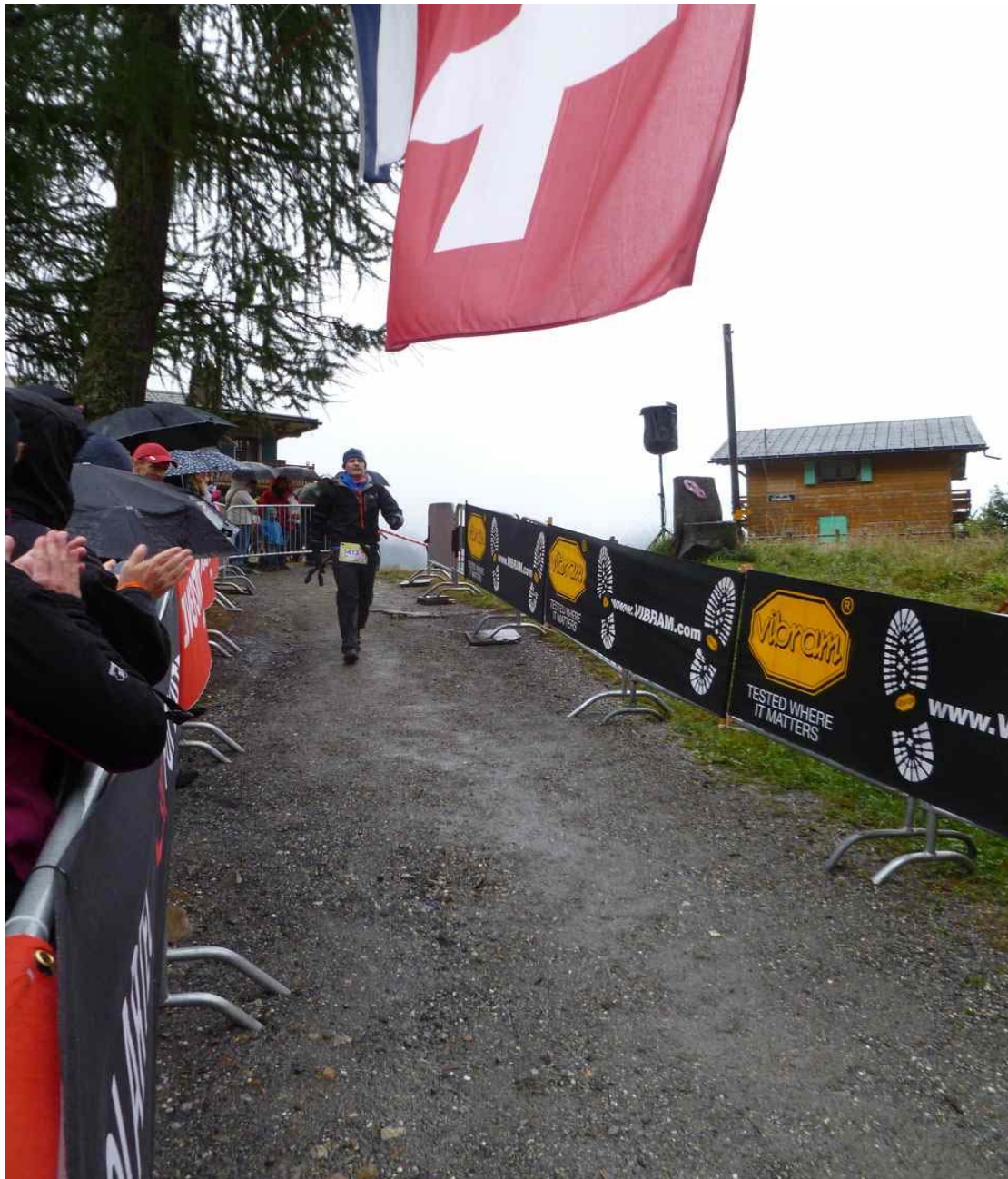
The final 4km climb up to halfway checkpoint at Champex Lac was remarkable on four counts; the first was the presence at the end of a track of a couple of very attractive young women looking as though they were dressed up for a night in the Bigg Market (at 4pm) in the pouring rain huddled under one small umbrella but were no less enthusiastic in their support; secondly, I came across the one and only native English speaking runner during the whole race but then again he was Irish. The third was the magic of the woodcarvings in *Le sentier des champignons* which basically meant there was carved statues of mushrooms all over the place.

Finally and rather more sinisterly I began to feel really sick and lethargic. The climb up to Champex is only c 1,500 feet on good forest tracks. Rightly or wrongly I diagnosed the Nuun tablet I had added to my water at La Fourly as the culprit. This was on the basis that great at curing / staving off cramp these tablets may be but as they had previously made me feel a bit peely-wally they were found guilty on all counts. I popped a Nurofen down and some jelly energy sweets and as the gradient evened out and the pelting rain turned more to a fine drizzle the first little wobble was over and soon the cow bells began to chime.....

After a couple of false dawns I reached the checkpoint of Champex Lac about 5.15pm, over 7 hours into my adventure, but more importantly it was the first opportunity to meet up with Team Telfer. Only one person is allowed into assist a runner within the main checkpoint and Natalie had been chosen for her uber efficiency, Helen and Charlotte had to make do with a cheery wave as I went by.

Natalie did a brilliant job satisfying all my culinary demands even tasting the pasta which she didn't much care for. I had planned a complete change of clothes here and was truly wet / sweat through. However my bottom half was warm and my outer waterproof layer was caked in wet mud which I didn't much fancy taking off only to have to put it back on again. Most critically, my feet were in perfect nick (and stayed so throughout), so I decided not to fix what wasn't broken. In addition, Natalie had made it clear that my feet were a definite no-go zone.

Instead up top I contented myself with a new Skin underlayer, long sleeve fleece, back on with the wet but protective layers 3 and 4, new hat and new set of gloves. An energy drink, a quick chat with a young British girl showing off a graze on her thigh (to her father rather than Natalie and myself), and I was good to go.



Fri 17:13 - Yodelling into Champex Lac

Pumped up and ready to bash on, even Captain Selfish recognized that dedicated wife Helen and youngest daughter Charlotte had spent the best part of 7 hours either on a bus or standing in the rain so I stopped for a quick chat, assured them that this was the best day of life (of course excluding day of wedding, birth of children etc). In the minute that had heralded my exit from the checkpoint zone Natalie had received a text saying that I was now up to 287<sup>th</sup> place with all my those embarrassing “dad” tunes loaded on my i-pod how could I fail?



Leaving Champex Lac – Fri 17:28 - Charlotte and Helen look on in stunned disbelief as I inform them it's now over 450 hours since I had a beer. Helen, with poles, now pleading to be allowed to do the last 40km of the race (not).

Firing up the i-pod in shuffle mode I thanked them all profusely, quick hugs (twice in one day! – who says romance is dead?) and suggested they return back to Chamonix have a bottle of wine on me and I would see them at Vallorcine around 10.30pm. And off I went back into rain, a bit choked up with emotion, probably down to the lack of suitable alcoholic refreshment over the past three weeks. The first three songs up on my i-pod were Madness, Elton John's "I'm still standing" and the Pet Shop Boys "It's a sin", a very apt metaphorical set of musical statements if there ever was.

Bashing on and despite it barely being 6 o'clock it was getting distinctly gloomy casting a somewhat sombre mood over proceedings as I and others began the initial easy climb up to Bovine, some 10 km distant. After about 6km the terrain changes and it gets steep, steeper still and then nosebleed steep. Worse was that much of this climb is over large stony ground on a narrow path and very soon it became clear there was a bit of slowcoach up at the front of our group. All day, up until now, people had been unfailingly polite in terms of asking permission to get past if they were going just a tad quicker than the person in front on a single track path.

Whether it was just fatigue such niceties were being quickly dispensed with more than a bit of poles, handbags and elbows as it began to get a "bit tasty" at 6,000 feet as the rain turned first to sleet and then snow. However, the culprits soon got the message and we found our natural order and pressed on up to Bovine in a blizzard, but thankfully not of the Col Ferret ferocity. The checkpoint was actually a cow barn and the residents, bells and all, seemed a bit put out at having being evicted from their rightful habitat.

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xt76kb\\_2012-ultratrailtv-ccc-bovine\\_sport](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xt76kb_2012-ultratrailtv-ccc-bovine_sport)

This manifested itself by them both blocking the entrance and exit to the checkpoint. In order to commence my descent to Trient I had to edge my way past a brute of a beast who looked as though he was ready to kick out at any moment. However, I was not be cowered and made good my escape unscathed but then totally overcooked the descent to the Trient food checkpoint, cue more wildly enthusiastic supporters, more chicken noodle soup and a disco in the tent with Nena's "99 Red Balloons" belting out.

With a 3,000 feet climb to Catogne in the pitch dark ahead I took 5 minutes rest, changed my gloves, sorted out my headtorch, took some more food, left the disco in full swing and went back out into the fray. To be honest the next hour and a half represented the low water mark of this adventure. The usual procession of rain, sleet, snow was beginning to bring me down. I bashed on conscious of around half a dozen headtorches behind me but I was determined not to cede ground. After a while I could maintain the pace no longer and stepped aside and leaned against wire fence breathing heavily and took a swig from my ever depleting water bottle. Three headtorches filed past the fourth stopped and put his hand on my shoulder and said something which I took to be a general enquiry about my well being. I mustered a smile and uttered the words "Tres fatigue" or something similar. He smiled back, patted me on the shoulder and went on his way.

Whether it was this little show of compassion or the fact that the hideous climb had begun to level out but my spirits rose appreciably and I was up and running again. Somehow, I had got it into my head, probably driven by fatigue that this leveling out was just a pre-cursor to another hideously steep ascent in the snow. Then as if by magic, or hallucination, I turned a corner to be greeted by blazing lights and a raging bonfire near the top of some isolated mountain. At this moment I began to seriously wonder if I had somehow slipped into a parallel universe. Tempting those it was to dally for a minute or two next to a roaring bonfire I knew the girls were waiting 5km down in the valley of Vallorcine, just under an hour away.

I managed to make up a few places, yielding them only when overcome by the need to answer my first call of nature over 12 hours after leaving Courmayeur. Relieving myself also relieved me of navigational duties as about half a dozen fellow headtorches had been quite happy to let me find all the tree roots and sticking out stones over the previous twenty minutes.

Another rapturous welcome awaited all the way from the entrance into the village and into the checkpoint just after 10.30pm, twelve and half hours in. Natalie had got all my kit laid out and drinks and food ready, even surpassing her efficiency of Champex. Tempting though it was to sit down and gather my thoughts as Helen and Charlotte were stood at the front of the "fanzone" it seemed only right to go across and speak to them. I was slightly dismayed at the less than rapturous reception I got from them. This, it transpired to the fact, that I was blinding them with 135 lumens from my headtorch. Whilst I had struggled up Catogne, their bad patch had been a 1.5 hour wait in the rain for the race bus at Champex which had put paid to a leisurely dinner back in Chamonix.



Vallorcine – Fri 22:40 - Blinded soup becomes blinding soup at the flick of a headtorch switch

However, true to the spirit of the day they expressed more concern, not for their inconvenience but for those runners who had bailed out at Champex, were wet and cold, waiting for a bus that took so long to come. Back to the present and showing great Telfer competitive spirit Natalie noted that she had counted three or four runners who had come in ahead of me into Vallorcine and had retired for whatever reason and that my current position of 278<sup>th</sup> (just texted to her) could be improved on.

A new map had been put up showing that as we were foregoing the ascent to the Tete au Vents we had only a 700 feet climb to Col de Montets before what appeared to be a simple and leisurely descent back down to Chamonix, 12 km in all. So with a hug to all I was on my way.

After the joys of the forests, mountains, rivers and meadows this final section was fairly mundane following close to a fairly major road but eventually did disappear into yet another forest.

Tracking and then joining another runner we pushed on passing runner after runner, taking strength from one another and taking it turn to lead along the uneven paths, unspoken bonhomie of runner helping runner. Occasionally we would say something trivial to one another, he to me in Franglais and me to him in French Franglais (keep up). Our little cameo took a more amusing turn when we both actually ran through the hastily convened checkpoint marquee in Argentiere just as the ladies of the village were about to proffer their wares. I may have misheard but I think I now know the French for “What a couple of ungrateful b\*\*\*\*\*ds” (with Argentiere dialect).

Beyond Argentiere me and the French man in green were joined by another runner for a while and more weary runners were passed but after a while these two upped the ante and were gone, leaving me to navigate on my own in the dark, scary forest.

This of itself wasn't a problem as the trail was marked with either luminous poles or tape every couple of hundred yards, what was a problem was that my torch with new batteries seemed to be fading fast. Whether just an illusion or not, on reaching the next little hamlet common sense dictated that I stop and fish out my reserve torch.

Having lost a few places and rather annoyed with myself I really pushed on, recouping the places lost at the last impromptu stop and reeling in a few more who by now were just walking. The signs appeared for Les Bois and Chamonix and the glow of the town appeared in the distance.

The trundle through mushy, muddy tracks seemed to go on for ever, still I was passing people feeling good when I was joined by a Frenchman who sailed by me and then on the outskirts of Chamonix decided to ignore the sign that indicated that we should go right and sped off to the left (possibly to another coach park). Despite the proximity of other runners behind me I could not forsake the spirit of the day and had to change course shouting as I did to bring the hapless chap back on course.

Whether depleted by his error or just feeling in my debt he didn't challenge me again. Drawing alongside the sports complex where I had registered two days earlier the beep on the ground heralded the "1 km av arrivee" mark. Although just after 1am in the morning there were still plenty of people of late night carousers to herald my return to civilization, a final run round the square with Helen and the girls in attendance and the last 100 yards up to the arch of the finish line (which had also been the start of the UTMB and PTL) and I crossed the line, 248<sup>th</sup> out of 1,917 starters (1,585 finishers) and 7<sup>th</sup> MV50 out of around 200 in a time of 15 h 05 m 48 s.



Chamonix – Sat 01:15 – Finished and (l to r) Charlotte, Helen and Natalie smiling having been told they can now go home to bed.

The next few minutes were all a bit of an emotional blur, hugs from the family, a sombre handshake from a sombre official (probably the Joss Naylor of Alpine running), given a 20 Euro note (deposit on my microchip not prize money), and then my spoil of war, a CCC's finishers gilet (which will be on show at every fell race for the next 20 years), presented by an inexplicably jolly young man making a joke, only half in English, about only having completed one lap of the course.

The obligatory photos followed by which time I was beginning distinctly chilled so having congratulated a couple of recently arrived runners we set off back for the apartment.

Job done.



Chamonix – Sat 01:10 - Trying to look cool and laid back at the finish line .....and failing lamentably

Back in the warmth and try as I might I could face nothing exciting than a bath, tea, coke and biscuits and even by waiting up until after 3am my beer mojo did not return.

## **Post Race**

Up around 10am I was delighted to see that fellow NFR, Chris Eggett had claimed a top half finish. Chris later told me over a beer or four that his wife had got the text when he was 1km from the finish and had watched him cross the line on the race webcam all the way back in blighty. If you can't be there it was the next best thing.

We all drifted into town, the weather slightly improved, and guess what I was wearing. Natalie and I just loitered around the finish watching the UTMB finishers file in. Their route had been completely changed, reduced to 100km on a completely remaining in France. Although this must have been a real blow the Brits I spoke to recognized the conditions justified the change and all admitted they had one hell of a night out in the snow and mud. To my eternal shame they were both drinking beer within twenty minutes of being out for 18 hours.

For the rest of the afternoon Chamonix continued to resonate to the beat of cheers for finishing runners and Vangelis. Everyone coming together, runner, supporter, resident.

All very uplifting and moving, truly inspirational and nothing like I have ever experienced, a real feel good factor.

Without going into Oscar winning speech mode I could not finish without paying tribute to my loyal band of supporters especially Natalie who performed her checkpoint duties so magnificently having caught a particularly unpleasant cold a couple of days previously.

Their encouragement in trailing through Italy, Switzerland and France on a truly foul day without a hint of a moan or a groan was appreciated beyond recognition and not only made me feel intensely proud of them all ..... but also demonstrated what an excellent Bob Graham support team they would make !!! However, that's for another day in another year.

**John Telfer**

**September 10, 2012**