



**Town and
Country
Harriers
(TACH)**

ROUGH RUNNING NEWS

July 2025

Letter from the Chair

Helen King, TACH Committee Chair

The big news from the past few months is the fabulous success (again!) of the wonderful Butcombe Trail Ultra on 26 April 2025. The race has been going for nine years and continues to be a favourite in the regional Ultra diary. This year we saw a new Race Director (Dave Bignell), a hugely popular new distance (50km) and a fantastic new HQ (Mendip Activity Centre). I was involved in the original recces of the route in 2015 but this was the first year that I've actually raced it myself – I'm running out of hyperboles to describe what an amazing day it was! Massive thanks to Dave, the team of marshals and everyone else who made it happen. We also raised £3,000 for the Mendip Hill Fund and we're delighted to be able to give something back to support the people and landscape we've gained so much from. Entries are open already for next year's 10th anniversary edition on 25 April 2026.



Another momentous occasion in April, that probably passed you by, was the 30th anniversary of the formal founding of TACH as a club. We'll be celebrating the 30th anniversary of our first run in November at The Angel, Long Ashton, with Antony Clark (founding member) and Chris Smart (first Woodwose) leading runs, and Chris Bloor (founding member and creator of the Community Forest Path / Green Man route) joining us for cake in the pub.

Final update from me comes from our recent committee meeting. We have made the formal decision that membership of TACH and Thursday night or social runs are available only to over 18s. We will formally update the constitution (which currently has membership at 16 years), with approval from members, at the AGM in November.

Have a great summer of trail running and I'll see you for an update in the Autumn!

Editors' Note

Welcome to Rough Running News for July 2025. Meet regular TACHers Alex Smith and Terry Rogers, read Andy Grant's breathtaking account of his 100+ mile mountain race, enjoy news of other races and events, pick up a new recipe, and peruse the events schedule for some new race ideas. We always welcome contributions, so if you'd like to share some thoughts with fellow TACH members, why not send us something for the next edition? Deadline is 31 October. Also, let us know any suggestions for how we can improve TACH communications. Speak to us on a run, or email comms@tach.club



Sarah



Tricia



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Do you have a product recommendation to share with fellow TACHers?

Perhaps you have a favourite recipe for some delicious running food?

Or you have an interesting story to tell, or idea you want to explore with others?

Why not write about it for Rough Running News!

Next edition copy deadline is **31 October 2025**

Please send your articles, photos or anything else you want to see included to

comms@tach.club

Thank you 😊



Meet a TACHer

Alex Smith

How did you first discover TACH and when did you join?

I heard of TACH through learning about the Rowberrow romp as a local race. I joined in May 2024.

What led you to take up trail running?

I've dabbled in road running for years and always enjoyed hiking around different terrains so thought combining the two was the perfect thing to take up after retiring from playing rugby.

What's your favourite distance and type of terrain?

I'm still building up but I'm enjoying about 10 miles at the moment with a mixture of fields, woods and hills.

What's your favourite bit of running kit, and why?

I recently bought a cap which I've avoided because I'm such a hot person, I thought it would make me too hot. However, it's the perfect antidote to the extreme amount of sweat running down my face!

What work do you do?

I'm a project engineering manager in an energy tech company.

What's the most interesting book you've read in the past year - and why?

The Big Short (of Steve Carrell film fame). Really eye opening about how some of the most influential financial institutions in the world operate, the tomfoolery they get up to and the cause of the 2008 global crash.

If money and time were no obstacle, what would your dream run be?

I've got Patagonia on my bucket list to visit. I have no idea what the running is like there, probably quite challenging but spending a few weeks slowly exploring the landscape there would be incredible.

If you had one tip for anyone new to trail running, what would it be?

Just have fun! You can explore so much just going a bit off the beaten track, you don't need to be a world beater and there are so many benefits to getting out there and taking in the world.

What's your favourite thing about TACH?

Obviously, the people! Such a welcoming, varied and friendly bunch.

Do you have a favourite running route you'd like to share with RRN readers?

I'm still enjoying learning all the routes around Wrington where I live. Happy to share gpx with anyone interested.





And in order of like to dislike....

Sunsets, bluebells, cider, marshalling, cows, marshalling, sunrise, hills up, getting lost, hills down, races, black toenails, gels, 5am alarms, ticks.



Terry Rogers

How did you first discover TACH and when did you join?

I first discovered TACH years ago when I ran one of their old races, the moorland 10k. One of my cousins told me about the race and why they did it, which prompted me to take part. It still took me quite a long time to join as I was quite content running solo for many years but in July 2022 I finally decided to give joining a running club a go. My first run was in Downend led by Neil Tague and Vikki Carter.

What led you to take up trail running?

My passion for outdoor scenery, I get a nice sense of achievement when hitting the top of any view, plus my well-being - nature really does take my mind away from things.



What's your favourite distance and type of terrain?

It was a basic ultra, but I haven't done that distance for a while now and I've been doing different distances a lot, I'm curious to try out shorter distances depending on the location, I tend to think the further away the race the further I will go, for me to justify the travel (with a max of 50k). I have two different types of terrain but they basically combine into one. I love running through forests, but I also love to climb mountains. It keeps me focused. I'm always looking for the best route. I love both of these because you tend to find you have to go through a forest to climb a mountain. I also like when I get a technical downhill.

What's your favourite bit of running kit, and why?

My favourite bit of kit is not necessarily my favourite but more for safety! Because I prefer to run light, I tend to only carry one litre of water with me therefore I carry a Salomon soft



flask with filter, meaning as long as there is a water source, I am able to refill at any point with nice fresh water! A lot of routes do have water points on them so, distance depending, this is a crucial thing I think of when doing summer runs as a lot of rivers/creeks will be dry. I would carry this in my bag all the time as it weighs nothing.

What work do you do?

I'm a bench joiner which is a very physical job therefore I do consider this a lot when I am planning my training for a race as recovery for me is key.

If money and time were no obstacle, what would your dream run be, and why?

I don't necessarily have a dream run, but I think I would be living and running in the mountains somewhere, whilst also trying to live off the land.

If you had one tip for anyone new to trail running, what would it be?

Make sure you know why you're running, and take time to appreciate the trails.

What's your favourite thing about TACH?

The fact that it's a non-structured club (it's more about the social) is part of the reason I didn't join a club for many years. I didn't want Tuesdays to be hills or Wednesdays to be sprints, I found that if I wanted structure, I had this when I was training for a race. I can still incorporate this with TACH runs being my recovery run, hence why I sometimes stay at the back on a short run to keep my heart rate down.

Do you have a favourite running route you'd like to share with RRN readers?

This would be Marshfield area. I have a 12 mile loop that I've done so many times that I have no gpx for it, but it goes out along St Catherine's valley up to little Solsbury Hill then loops back around the reservoir and up to Cold Ashton before a descent into the valley back to Marshfield. Lots of nature/scenery there for me to let go.

Likes and dislikes in order

Sunrise - Sunset - Bluebells - Cider - Mud - Nettles - Getting lost - Gels - Ticks - Early morning alarm - Cows!!!





Race reports and running adventures

Ultra fun TACH style: tales of a first-time Race Director By Dave Bignell

I don't know about you but at the end of a race I get a rush of emotion. It can take many forms, but one recurring form is overwhelming appreciation towards the organisers. It's just such an outstanding effort for someone to create an opportunity to get away from it all, doing what I love, with likeminded people, somewhere deep in this wonderful countryside of ours.

So I realised it was my turn to give a little back. I wasn't aware the position of Butcombe Trail Ultra (BTU) Race Director was open, and when it came up in discussion I didn't hesitate to jump at it. Well that's not exactly true, I did have a fleeting feeling of going in at the deep end a bit, but I don't think anyone noticed and I said yes.

When the race committee first met in June 2024, I soon discovered the experience already round the table meant my role was more like a train driver stepping on an already trundling train, the engine purring smoothly, and very much in the groove. To Do lists, templates, equipment and contacts all carefully filed and ready to be used when needed. Massive kudos to previous committee members for getting all this in place.

At the same time some challenges soon came up. Firstly, we would have to move Race HQ from The Swan, which we seemed to have outgrown. And secondly, we decided to try and make the event more accessible for more females and ultra first timers. These challenges translated into three changes: replacing 56 miles with a 50km distance keeping the 50 miles, moving our Race HQ to Mendip Activity Centre, and switching to running anticlockwise to avoid major road crossings early in the race.

Route changes were happily absorbed by the team, including setting up a new Checkpoint at Rains Batch. I was more directly involved in the liaison with MAC. Discussions with them were a little protracted because we needed them to do things a little differently (like serve pre-paid meals over a long period), early in the year when the shop/cafe would normally be closed (hence not staffed or stocked) for a larger number of people than usual (without plans for traffic management). But at the same time, they totally shared our drive to help people to get outside and active, so solutions were always found.

I was also pleased to get involved with Butcombe. Their brand is very strong about staying local and associating with family and a healthy, outdoor life. They have provided runners' goody bags in previous years but were keen to get more involved. It was honestly a pleasure to work with MAC and Butcombe people who are so in sync with the TACH ethos: a real "win win win".

Apart from this the RD is responsible for organising and facilitating meetings, ensuring decisions are made when needed, making sure everyone has a voice. I don't mind the job of organising things, it's part of my day job. And for decisions I was keen to harness the collective experience rather than dictating too much.



Along with this there is certain admin like sorting out the race permit, notifications to police, permissions from landowners, booking first aid and ordering race bibs. I also picked up ordering trophies for which I was lucky enough to find a friendly local company. Plus organising a trial of Trackers which was fun and, in the end, led us to agree to use some kind of trackers in 2026.

There are certain race day roles like giving the race briefing, handing out prizes and being on hand if someone has a problem. To be honest I found race day pretty chaotic, making some decisions on the fly without realising all the consequences, thankfully none too serious. And I was the lucky one to receive the many thank yous and well dones from finishing runners – pretty overwhelming and humbling seeing the emotion I have experienced myself.

We decided to take the opportunity of MAC being a campsite to offer camping to runners and marshals. I was one of the 60 or so people who camped and I loved it! From waking up early to the damp dewy grass, making good use of the first-class facilities, food and drinks. There was a laid back mini-festival vibe growing in the morning, culminating to a real buzz with cowbells and cheers of supporters in the afternoon and evening, as someone's mum or dad or friend finished the final 100m through the prayer flags with children or dog in tow. Then in the dark the biggest cheer of the day emerged from the bar and fire pits for the last runner and last runner marshal. Goose bumps.

Finally, RD has the post-race honour of presenting the £3,000 donation to the Mendip Hills Fund, an extremely worth cause, funding conservation and community projects across the Mendip Hills like scout groups, art projects and opportunities for isolated people to help with conservation, helping to create strong community networks.

This is the moment for me to show MY appreciation. Firstly, to everyone on and around the committee, so committed, experienced, flexible, and everyone going above and beyond at times when it was really needed. Equally to the 50+ marshals helping with course marking and setting up HQ during up the days before, all around the route through race day and packing up into Sunday too. Mostly from TACH but also a selfless group of family members and friends. If you were involved in any way, please consider yourself a bone fide hero. Events like these live or die on the contribution of people like you, so thank you from me and from all the runners who spoke to me on the day and gave amazing comments in the post-race feedback. Getting 4.85/5 rating is all down to you. The whole team should be extremely proud of what was achieved.

Personally, I loved meeting all the other runners at recces and on race day: it was a privilege to witness their journeys from training hard work, registration nerves, start line excitement, checkpoint ups and downs, finish elation and finally exhausted but content chill out. I also loved meeting more TACHers: so many like-minded people doing what you love!

So finally, the dust is settling on 2025 BTU, the kit is in Tom's garage, the results are published, and feedback is gathered. Now our minds turn to 2026. Already the date has been fixed as 25 April and entries are coming in. There should be fewer big changes, but new ideas and helpers are always welcome. Come and join the fun!

If you want to get involved for 2026 in any way large or small, or just to chat things though, don't hesitate to contact me or anyone else on the TACH committee.



Dave butcombetrailultra@tach.club

Just a few of the 50+ marshals helping on race day, sorry I don't have more photos of everyone involved, huge well done to all!





UTS Snowdonia (and me) 2025

By Andy Grant



So, here I go again, it's just before 1pm on Friday 16 May and I'm stood on the start line for my second attempt at completing the UTS Snowdonia. If I finish the race, not only will it be a fantastic achievement for this old bloke, but I also get to go in the UTMB draw in September. This could win me a chance to compete in the world famous UTMB race in Chamonix, France in 2026. The race starts and finishes here in the town of Llanberis. Ahead of me for the second time are 100+ miles of running with 31,000+ feet of climbing, going up and over the hardest, steepest, gnarliest, and most technical trails that the slightly sadistic organisers can throw at us.

A quick build-up of clapping and cheering, a ten-second countdown, and we're off, a quick trot through Llanberis and it's up to the top of Snowdon we go. Last year I had a good plan to deal with the heat, I took a legionnaires hat to dip in one of the many streams on the route, keeping my head nice and cool. Good plan but what I didn't know was that the blooming thing was waterproof, first time I dipped it in a stream the water ran off it like water off a duck's back. It may have kept the worst of the sun off but underneath my head was glowing red hot! Not this time though, same hat but now I had washed it within an inch of its life, removing all trace of its unnecessary DWR coating. Good job as well, half a mile up Snowdon and it was getting roasting hot already, the sun was beating down and the heat was reflecting back up off the rocky path, I dunked that hat in the first stream I found, luckily it was full of cool clear water, straight back on my red-hot bonce it went, a shower of freezing cold water with it, straight away it took the sting out of the sun's heat and cooled me down, lush.

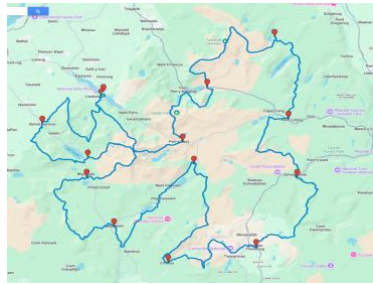
We soon got to the top of Snowdon, skilfully weaving our way through the floundering tourists like an Uber Eats moped rider weaving through town centre traffic on a Friday night. Without stopping to pause at the summit we carry on down to Pen-y-Pass, straight away it was a case of "Let's Rock"- or rather let's run over some rock steps, loose rock, solid rock, rock slabs, sharp rocks, smooth or slippery rock, any type of rocky path your trainers could carry you over was encountered on the way down that path. It's worth mentioning here that the leather footed Slovenian hard man Ivan Hrastovec ran all 100 miles of this race last year - barefoot!



Soon we were down at Pen-y-Pass, checkpoint one, 8 miles in and that's the first mountain summit done. Most runners (me included) are keen to press on, so take advantage of a large bucket of cold water to dip their hats in, top up their water supplies and press on. We have to press on for good reason, the race has a 48-hour cut off and in any other race this would be a very generous cut off time, but when you leave a checkpoint here it's a rocky scramble/climb for hours up to the summit of a mountain, then the descents down the other side are just as bad, so steep and rocky that they are often un-runnable and sometimes downright terrifying. Normal running times just go out the window here, what might seem like a generous cut off time for the whole race and between checkpoints is actually very tight, and sadly every year lots of experienced runners are forced to retire from the race because they get timed out.



240 runners ready to go



The route



Just before the summit of Snowdon

We leave Pen-y-Pass behind and straight away it's up the mountain we go, false summits and scrambles up rocky climbs eventually lead us to The Devil's Kitchen, not a new TV series by swearsy celebrity chef Gordon Ramsey but a huge, magnificent gully with a stream springing straight up from the rock, feeding a large lake below.

Sadly, not much time to admire the view here though and we crack on down to checkpoint two at Glan Dena. Glan Dena is 15 miles in and the first checkpoint to allow outside assistance. Only one member of your support crew (who must wear a special identification wristband) is allowed anywhere near the checkpoints and this job falls to my daughter Erin, she does a superb job of looking after me and keeping me going, literally day and night. The job of getting her over the mountains to every checkpoint on time, sometimes in the dead of night and in remote locations, falls to my support crew driver (and cracking Son) Sam. There are very few roads that go up and over the mountains here, so what may be an eight mile run over the top of a mountain for me can often be a wild forty mile round trip driving for Sam with Erin co-driving, the tight and twisty little lanes here are often cut through the local rock with only inches to spare. Sam says it's like a year's worth of driving experience in three days! I never imagined that my own kids would end up being such a superb support crew, lumbered with the job of keeping their old man going on his mountain top adventures. Now I bet you think that they wouldn't like staying in some remote Airbnb, being woken up in the middle of the night by alarms, usually signalling that they have to jump up and drive like Colin McCrae and co-driver to a remote checkpoint over the other side of a mountain in $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour, well you would be wrong. They know they wouldn't get the chance to go off on these little mini adventures if their bonkers old Dad did something normal like playing golf, and they love it. One day I will be too old for this nonsense but when that day comes boy will we have some crazy mountain adventures to look back on.



Glan Dela is for the most part an outside checkpoint. I was sat on a bench sorting my kit out here when I realise that I'm being filmed, then before you know it, I'm being interviewed by a small film crew. Hot, tired and caught off guard, I try to answer a few questions without sounding too much like a cow licking country Yocal, well (if it doesn't end up on the cutting room floor) I will have to wait till the official UTMB programme on the race comes out to see how bad I did.

Second checkpoint done, it's back up into the mountains I go. By now I am just expecting endless false summits with relentless, technically and challenging ultra steep climbs, and I'm not disappointed. It's a relief to finally make my way down to checkpoint number three, sadly though the sun sets when I'm on my way down and I miss the mountain top sunset that I enjoyed last year.

Llyn Cowlyd is checkpoint three, 24 miles in and no assistance allowed here, being quite remote. It's just a tent and some portaloos but it's a welcome sight now I'm nearly a quarter of the way round. I get some food and water and make my way to the portaloos. It's been boiling hot all afternoon, and I've been sweating worse than the owner of a 52 plate Transit Van that's currently on the MOT ramp, 25 miles of jiggling and salty sweat have taken a toll on my undercarriage, and I need to check to make sure my gonads are not rubbed red raw. Now I know it's lazy but when I go inside and lock the door, I keep my backpack on, instead of hanging it on the back of the door like I should. This soon makes the task in hand tricky as the backpack makes me lean forward on the loo. I have never thought of it before but this is how awkward it must be for a Teenage Mutant Ninja turtle to sit on a portalo, or any toilet for that matter, I bet Raphael didn't have to try awkwardly to check his love spuds in the dark of a Welsh mountainside toilet with the light from his head torch though. I think if anything were ever needed as an example of the glamour of the ultra-running lifestyle this would be it. Who knows what my struggle looked like from the outside, a blue portalo on its own in the pitch dark being randomly lit up from the inside by a powerful light source erratically moving round. Did they think I was having a bit of a rave in there or maybe they thought it was secret filming for a new crap (literally) version of Doctor Who, where he travels the universe in a blue portalo instead of a police box. I will never know, but I look forward to the chance to apply some Vaseline to my tender undercarriage at some point in the future and set off up a mountain, leaving checkpoint three behind.

I run past past Llyn Cowlyd reservoir and encounter yet more mountain climbs and summits, finally arriving at checkpoint four, Capel Curig. I arrived at Capel Curig at 12:08am in the morning. I am now 32 mountain miles in and while far from worn out, my legs are starting to feel it. No assistance is allowed here, and it is one of those sombre middle of the night checkpoints where it all starts to get (sur)real, everyone is quiet, and many are slumped in their plastic chairs clearly the worse for wear. I see one poor bloke being led down the corridor to the first aid room at the back, someone has hold of him for support and he is walking very slowly, hunched over and visibly shaking, he looks really off colour and I hear him say he's been sick and can't keep anything down, I didn't know what was wrong but I knew that he was in a bad way, and that for him the race was probably over. Every runner feels sorry when they see someone in a bad way like that, but you know that it could just as easily be you, and you are just grateful that it's not. I keep my fingers crossed for him just the same. It's then time to leave the checkpoint, and once more I step out into the darkness. I know from last year that there is definitely one scary section between me and checkpoint five. I know it as the cliff, now I'm sure to the hardy outdoor locals up here



it's just a long scramble down some rocks but to me a scramble down some rocks is how you get down from Crooks Peak, this is just another level and did I mention that you do it in the pitch dark! I get to the top of the cliff and start to climb down, it's scary and seems to take forever and tonight I have perfect conditions, it's warm and bone dry, how people come down this in the race when it's been raining and freezing cold (and they have), I don't know. After what seems like an age I get down off the cliff and into a forest and make my way down to checkpoint five, Dolwyyddelan.



A section of the path (really!)



The first climb out of Pen-y-Pass



The view from the top, just before "the Devils kitchen"

Dolwyyddelan is 38 miles in, assistance is allowed here, I am so glad Sam has worked his magic and got Erin to this checkpoint on time. It's 3:21am and still pitch dark. I see Sam and Erin together outside and we take the time to look back at the mountain I have just come down, on it you can see what looks like a string of fairy lights leading all the way back up the mountain, the highest ones on top of the mountains are undisguisable from the stars in the black sky above, we knew the lights on the mountain were only the twinkling head torches of the other runners but it looked like a string of stars had fallen from the sky and slid down the mountainside. Erin and I then go inside the checkpoint to get me ready to continue my journey, this time it's off up a mountain to meet the sunrise.

Last year I remembered setting off up the mountain and distinctly hearing the cuckoos calling out in some woods to my right. Apparently they are quite rare in Wales but here at least they must be doing well, as again now I hear the cuckoos call floating out of the forest on the still early morning air. I am running alone now as I climb up past the forest. I get to the top of the mountain, it's getting light and I can see for miles, right across the top of the mountains and out across the Irish Sea. Just as the view is taking my breath away, the sun decides to rise up and set the early morning sky on fire, in a blaze of hazy orange and red glory. Wow! It's not quite "attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion", but it's close enough that I will remember this mountain top sunrise forever.

So far, all the checkpoints have been a little further away in miles than the official race plans predicted, they were between half a mile and over a mile at times, not a big problem but now it was making it seem like they were never going to come. According to the mileage on my GPS I was at the next checkpoint but I was still on top of a mountain, worrying! I kept going on the route and finally came to the top of the (working) quarry that marks the beginning of the descent to checkpoint six. I was relieved to say the least and at 6:07am in the morning I found myself happily running down the middle of Blaenau Ffestiniog high street with a big smile on my face.

Blaenau Ffestiniog, checkpoint six, 46 miles in and tired but still going ok. It's an assistance checkpoint, so Erin is there to meet and take care of me. It was in an outdoor centre that

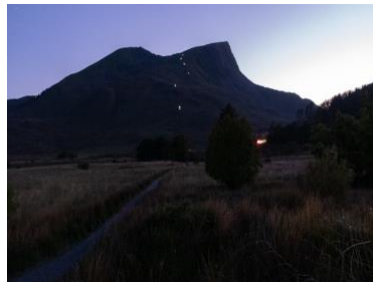


looked like an old pub inside, so very civilized. Supplies all topped up, I leave the checkpoint, in daylight this time and you'll never guess where I am going next.

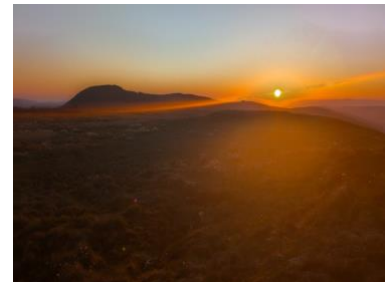
Off down the high street, then up another mountain I go, this time through an old long closed atmospheric slate quarry, there's not another soul and its eerily quiet as I run past a huge lake that sits halfway up the mountain. As I get to the top, the terrain turns to old quarry workings and then finally you come to the abandoned slate cottages that the miners themselves would have lived in. How they survived up here in this beautiful but desolate and exposed place in the winter is beyond me. I leave it all behind now and continue back down the other side of the mountain to checkpoint seven.



Just another of our beautiful mountain top summits



Lots of little lights making their way down the mountain



If only you could see what I've seen with your eyes

Cresnor, checkpoint seven, 54 miles in, 8:26am, no assistance here. Some checkpoints were almost like a mountainside rave in a tent with a party atmosphere, not this one though, this is usually a sleepy little cafe but it was now full of grubby, bedraggled runners all in various states of repair, this was also the halfway kit bag drop off point, so inside were loads of kit bags being packed/unpacked by very tired runners. Food and drink was everywhere, this was making lots of extra work for the staff and they just looked cheesed right off, I tried not to add to all this mayhem but failed miserably. I needed to refill my bladder with water, now not the easiest of things to do at the best of times, a bit like trying to fill up a Tesco carrier bag with water from a garden hose, without spilling any. I take the bladder over to one of the water containers on top of a table, I turn on a very stiff tap on a very flimsy water container and fill my bladder, but now the tap won't turn off. By the time I manage to turn it off without breaking it there's water all over the floor. Looking at the state of the floor I can see that I'm not the first person this has happened to, but I still feel really guilty and apologise. They don't look too impressed, so I think it's a good time to get out quickly and climb another mountain.

Good job I had something to get me out the door at this checkpoint, I was in no hurry to take on the next leg of the race to Gwstadanas farm. This is not one I'm fond of, the climbing is long and hard, the top goes over lots of tough and wiggly paths, knee deep in prickly heather, then there are the bogs, lots of bogs. Still, I crack on, I climb the climbs, I endure the heather and at the start even the bogs aren't too bad, but overconfidence and a deceptive crust means that eventually I get stuck in one up to my knees. I manage to get out but with my trainers full of black boggy slop, lovely. Next up I came to a fence post completely covered in swarming bees, never seen this before and considered a picture, but then I considered how badly a remote mountainside encounter with a swarm of angry bees could go, and I decided to crack on before I catch their attention. As I begin to descend to Gwstadanas farm, checkpoint eight, down in the well drained lower field by the river, I



recall my visit here. This is where my first attempt at this race ended abruptly in 2024. By the time I had run the 62 miles to Gwastadanas farm, my quads were smashed so much I could hardly walk on the flat, never mind down the hills, I was moving so painfully slowly that I ended up out in the sun far too long and got heat stroke. I had no choice but to pull out, totally beaten and with a DNF for my trouble. So, I got home, recovered, pulled myself together and decided to go back and try again. One whole year of hard training and months of preparation later and here I was again, but this time when I entered the checkpoint tent it's with a smile on my face. Yes I was looking hammered, tired in both body and mind after twenty four and a half hours on my feet since leaving the start in Llanberis, but this time I was still going strong. Up till now, for me this race had just been a recap of last year's attempt, now it was an actual race, and one that deep down I wanted to finish so badly - I could taste it. Last year I felt like I let everyone (including myself) down.

Now I was leaving the checkpoint at Gwastadanas farm behind with the opportunity to put that to rights. Ironically the next leg is one that starts with the most flat and runnable section of the whole race, just when your legs are getting tired and running along on the flat is getting to be a bit of a struggle. Still, every ultra-runner knows what to do now, run 100 metres, walk 10 and repeat. You keep moving forward at a decent speed and the walking is enough rest to keep your legs going. Soon I was past Llyn Dinas lake and climbing again, strangely my legs are always happier climbing, and I went up the small climb (by Snowdon standards) from the lake quickly and was soon following the riverside path into Beddgelert.

Beddgelert, checkpoint nine, 71 miles in, not only were Sam and Erin able to see me as I ran through Beddgelert park but my brother Steve, his wife and two boys were there to cheer me on as well. Spirits well and truly lifted I went to the checkpoint with Erin, I stocked up on supplies and changed my shoes, this being the first checkpoint to allow assistance since my knee-deep encounter with that bog. Up until now my aim has always been finishing the race within the cut off time. This race is known as being one of the toughest 100 mile ultra mountain marathons in the UTMB Ultra trail world series, you have to have at least UTMB 100km index to enter the 100 mile race here at UTS Snowdonia. That means that everyone on the start line here is a seasoned ultra runner, yet most years here over a third of the runners don't make it over the finish line. For most of my years trail running I've done races claiming to be "tough" this and "hard" that but for once here is a race that is all that, turned up to eleven!

I'm in the 60-64 age category. Erin had informed me during the race that there was always one person in my class that was in front of me. Fair enough, I couldn't go any faster and was trying to blow my chances of finishing the race. Now she tells me the runner in front of me has pulled out, I'm now in first place in my category, this changes nothing I thought, I still must continue at a pace that enables me to finish within the cut off time, or that's what I thought. She tells me that the bloke in second place is number 80 and he is about 20 minutes behind me. I decide to have a few minutes rest on my little plastic chair before I step out the checkpoint door, then that door opens and in steps a runner, a tall lean bloke who looks roughly the same age as me, then I see the number on his chest, Holy cow - number 80! He comes in and takes a seat opposite me. I could get a cup of coffee and have a chat, like old (in age) adversaries sitting down drinking a coffee, engaging in polite conversation, just like Robert De Niro and Al Pacino in Heat. But then the racer in me kicks in, he has just got into the checkpoint and I'm about to leave here - after 28 hours 20 minutes of racing this is my 20-minute lead. It's slim, but it's a lead, and I am not going to



throw it away, I leave checkpoint 9 and head off up into the mountains once more. Now I have more to win and more to lose - it's going to be a long night.

After another long climb up, I get to one summit and turn round to look at all the silhouettes of the mountains against the dark skies around me, the stars in the sky seem to form halos around every mountain, and on each of them there is a procession of little bright twinkly lights, ones snaking up the side, some on top and some going straight up and down. It's like someone has decorated all the mountains with a massive set of fairy lights. I look across to the mountain opposite (I now know this was Snowdon itself) and I can see runners making their way up a steep rocky knife edge ridge, they can see nothing in front of them but a little patch of head torch light illuminating the rock beneath their feet, they must be aware of the big sheer drop just to the left of them as they pick their way through the rocks, but still they ignore it and just keep on climbing up. I think to myself that they must be mad. Then I dip my head torch down and look at my own feet. I stood admiring the view, on a steep rocky knife edge ridge, halfway up a mountain with a big sheer drop to my left, so much for just them being the mad ones.

I mentioned before that the mileage of the checkpoints were a little out, the next one was due at the 80 mile mark, but the way the extra mileage was adding up it looked like it was going to be more like 82 miles. As I climbed up yet another rocky mountain ridge I looked down at the mileage on my watch, 76.1 miles. Hours seemed to go by till I looked again - 76.4 miles! because I was just climbing up and down the mountain top ridges my mileage was barely going up, the distance between the checkpoints seemed to be going up and up, it looked like this was going to stretch the race out to over 105 miles long, up here in the mountains running an extra 5 miles could take hours. I was currently staying 2-3 hours ahead of the cut off times, but those extra miles could be the end of me, if I couldn't get a move on I could end up getting timed out! After 30 hours on my feet running, I was knackered, no sleep meant that I wasn't really thinking straight and more worryingly, negative thoughts were starting to take hold of me. My resolve was slipping and I was getting really demoralised.

Then I met Swiss Tony. Well to be honest his name probably wasn't Tony, but it said on his race number that he was Swiss and the thought that he could be called Tony put a smile on my tired face, so in my head I went with it. The race route is marked about every 10-20 metres with little fluorescent flags, when you get to one you should always be able to see the next. At night they really show up well in the light of a headtorch, so it's a system that works quite well. I had followed the markers to the end of a mountain ridge and was now standing next to one on a bit of pointy rock about the size of a big manhole cover, wondering which way I had to go next. In front of me was a near vertical rocky cliff composed of nasty looking, big chunks of sharp rock, to my left was a nasty sheer drop, my head torch couldn't pick out the bottom - it was a jet-black bottomless abyss. To my right was a small rocky ledge a few metres down followed by another jet-black sheer drop. Where did the course go? where was the next marker? I was starting to get worried and then as if by magic Swiss Tony appeared next to me. He scanned around for the next marker flag, saw the cliff edges in front of us and turned to me and said to me in a Swiss accent "this is totally bonkers". I was so relieved that it wasn't just me stuck here alone on a mountain top with no way forward, and that it actually was bonkers, to be fair I was also impressed to meet a Swiss bloke on top of a mountain that could use the word "bonkers" in such perfect context. So, we both scan around with our head torches, looking for that



elusive next flag. Suddenly we spot it, about 25 metres below us. Trouble is, the only way to get there is down the cliff of nasty, pointy rocks, Tony is hesitant but agrees that we can't go back and no matter how tricky it looks, this must be the way down. So we both climb over the edge and start to descend the nasty, pointy rock descent from hell. I'm a runner not a rock climber, so this descent would have scared me this absolutely witless in daylight, never mind in the pitch dark, but somehow I get down it, closely followed by Tony. As we finally reach the safety of the next marker flag we say nothing, but by the look on his face I can sense he is as relieved as me. We stick together for the rest of the descent down the mountain. We then begin to run along the long path leading to the next checkpoint. I have to pick up my pace a bit to keep up with Tony, he tells me that he is knackered and feels like he can't go on, saying that he will probably quit at the next checkpoint, I turn to him and said "Bollocks, you are running better than I am along here and I'm not quitting, neither are you". Now under normal circumstances I would never normally speak to someone like this but these were now definitely not normal circumstances. Without saying another word, both looking knackered from the running and spaced out through scary mountain top experiences and lack of sleep, we arrive at the next checkpoint.

Rhyd-Ddu, checkpoint 10, 80 miles in, outside the checkpoint I meet Sam, Erin and my brother Steve, its 11:06pm so it's just Steve now, his wife has the kids safely tucked up in bed back at their B+B. Sam and Steve have coats on, with hats and scarves completely covering their faces, I thought this was strange because it wasn't that cold. I find out later, while outside they got attack by swarms of midges and were nearly eaten alive. Erin and I go inside, I sit down, and I immediately start to feel demoralised again, I feel really knackered, rough as a badger's arse and really worried about my slow progress. Extra miles to the checkpoints and looming cut off times were all conspiring to get me down, I now start to know how Tony feels. Erin gets me food and drink, and we top up my supplies ready to get going. Erin can see I'm flagging and sits down opposite me. She smiles and tells me that based on my current progress, the official race time tracking data predicts I will finish the race, back in Llanberis, at 10am tomorrow (Sunday) morning, What! me finish at 10am Sunday, that's three hours before the cut off, I was going to make it after all! This is the kind of life saving lift that only a superb support crew gives you, better news than someone telling you that you had just won the lottery. Confidence and positively cannot be bought, only given. Instantly my mood lifts and I may be tired in mind and body but now I'm on cloud nine.

Then the checkpoint door opens and in comes number 80. The inner racer inside me stirs again and I'm off out the door. Remember those runners going up Snowdon for the second time on that exposed rocky ridge, well now it was my turn. Up I went, it was a technical climb at times and totally different from the path most people take to the top of Snowdon from Llanberis, but after the decent of doom that Tony and I had encountered on the previous mountain, it was not too bad. After it seemed like I had been going up forever, I climbed up yet another big rough natural rock step and looked up. To my surprise and out of nowhere, in front of me the shuttered front of a café appeared. I was at the top of Snowdon again. Even more of a surprise was that stood right in front of me was a fox. It was probably used to having the top of the mountain to itself at night but didn't seem to be bothered by me as it slowly walked off. Also probably used to more quiet nights up here were the people camped in tents. Considering all the deserted mountain tops in Snowdonia, it was a surprise to see so many people up here "wild camping" on slab of concrete next to a café.



Top of Snowdon done for the final time, I started the next decent to the bottom of the valley. It was not too technical under foot, so I soon found myself back down at the next checkpoint.



Making my way to a checkpoint with Erin



Just a walk in the park....



Yes those are gritted teeth

Bro-y-Fedw, checkpoint eleven, 87 miles. These checkpoints, especially the nighttime ones that were set up tents, were getting to feel very surreal. The cheerful young staff did a great job of looking after us, they had music on and gave it a bit of a “rave in a tent” vibe, but one look round the tent told a totally different story. There were bedraggled runners strewn all around the tent, some sat on benches with their heads in their hands, some laid on the floor. You could tell that for a lot of them now it was all going a bit “Pete Tong”, they manage to give it the feel of a war time field hospital rather than feel of the dance tent at Glastonbury. I come in to the carnage and collapse on a bench. Erin comes over, greets me with a cup of tea made in a bright orange collapsible dog bowl, with some biscuits, I take a sip, this instantly becomes both the nicest and the sweetest cup of tea that I have ever had in my life (Erin later told me it contained over five spoons of sugar). I drink my tea while Erin restocks my supplies, this is the last assistance checkpoint before the finish so my backpack is well loaded up. Before I go, I look up and into the tent walks Swiss Tony. Yes! Not only didn’t he quit at Rhyd-Ddu, but if he had made it to here he should have a good chance of making it to the finish, well done mate. I will never know if my harsh words spurred him on or not, but they definitely didn’t stop him. As I pass him, we acknowledge each other with a nod and a smile. When I get by the tent door one of the young staff (not more than 20 years old) says here’s a good tune for you, to his work mates and puts on “get ready for this” by two unlimited, they all start to smile and dance around. I ask him how he knows this song as it was probably out when he was just a kid. He replies that everyone knows this tune because it’s an old classic, not wrong there young’un. I looked it up when I got home, “get ready for this” came out in 1991, if that young lad was 20 years old it was out 14 years before he was born! old classic tune indeed, but how old does that me feel.

The next climb is up through Beddgelert forest and it’s getting light now. As I go up, the noise of the birds’ dawn chorus in the forest is deafening, but it sounds fantastic, it’s great to have so much wildlife in the trees up above me for company. The forest soon ends and I begin to climb up a really long, steep grassy climb. I’m cracking on, in my own little world and climbing well considering it’s such a steep slope, especially for someone whose legs have



covered over 90 miles. Then suddenly a bloke steams past me, he is in the 100km race not mine and quite a well-built bloke for a runner, this makes me even more impressed with the turn of speed he is displaying, taking off up the hill in front of me. As I continue climbing, he gets ten metres in front of me and completely blows up, he stops and hunches over his poles, his chest rapidly heaving up and down, I am surprised when I realise he was trying to race me up the climb, this is the sort of thing you do in the last 20 metres of a local 5km race, not at the beginning of a long climb ultra-marathon mountain ascent, especially when you think I'm not even in his race. Still, it's a free country, I climb past him, and his now slow progress means he soon becomes just a speck in the distance on the mountainside. It's getting quite warm again now and I keep going over the top of the mountain.

Betws Garmon, checkpoint 12, 93 miles. This one is in a campsite at the bottom of the valley and as soon as I down get there I'm in for a surprise. The sun hasn't reached down here yet and the valley bottom must be acting like a cold sink, it's absolutely freezing and as I look up I can see my breath. I get inside the checkpoint quickly and get water. I need to mix up my hydration supplies. I want to get a move on - not only is the finish over the top of the next mountain, but I haven't seen number 80 for a while and don't know where he is, still behind me? or has he managed to get past me and is now on his way to Llanberis? All I can do now is leave the checkpoint as quickly as I can and crack on.

As I start to climb up away from Betws Garmon I am now with a few other runners, mostly in the 100km, as we are now all following the same route to the finish. I climb up the mountain once more and I enter a small wood, it's marked on the map as Garreg-fawr, which in Welsh means the big stone, but for everyone who does the UTS 100km/100mile it is known as something else, it is the wood where the legend of the big red velvet chair was born. Legend has it that when you get to see the big velvet chair in the woods, you know that after all you have been through, and no matter how tired you are, you are going to make it to the finish! I quietly pass the chair, a tear rolls down my cheek, I finally realise that a year after failing spectacularly the first time, I was finally going to get to run back into Llanberis, where Sam and Erin would be waiting for me at the finish line. One proper mountain summit and many false ones later the gravel track down into Llanberis finally comes into sight in front of me, one more nastily steep grassy wide decent to go and I will be joining it at the beginning. Now this decent was so steep that you couldn't run down it, if you were to try you would soon end up like one of those mad people trying to run down Coppers hill after that cheese, ending up going so fast you can't stop, then it would be arse over t*t you go, probably getting a free visit to the local A+E for your trouble. I was going carefully down this slope when disaster struck. I tripped up, not normally a problem but in managing to stay on my feet by leaning forward, I had to run a few steps down the hill, but now I couldn't stop. I was terrified, now running flat out down the hill and unable to stop, only seconds away from a big trip that I was never going to be able to save, and a faceplant that was definitely going to hurt. It all happened too quick to think about what to do and I still don't know how I knew to do it, but as my right foot landed I turned it slightly sideways to my right, as my left foot landed I did the same, before I knew it I was running sideways. I then ended up running a few steps uphill and came to a stop. My heart was pounding but I was still intact. Somehow I had saved it.

I very tentatively descended the rest of the hill and breathed a big sigh of relief as I finally set foot on the gravel track leading down to Llanberis. My legs were so shot that I was back on the old run 100 metres, walk 10 metres routine, even downhill. My GPS now said I had



three miles to the finish and although I knew I was making good progress, I knew it was going to feel like a long three miles. My thoughts then turned to number 80. Was he in front, was he behind, had he pulled out? My biggest fear was that when I was doing my 10 metres of walking, he was going to run right by me. So, I begin to look to see if he's coming up behind, I also try to keep my walking segments as short as possible and keep the running ones as fast as I can, all this when I can hardly think straight after being awake for more than 44 hours. And my legs, Oh my legs, after covering over 102 miles (according to my GPS) they are now completely shot.

Finally the gravel path ends, I encounter a final cruel but short uphill section, then end up on the same little road that led me to my first climb up Snowdon, all those hours (days!) ago. I finally run down into the town of Llanberis itself, lots of people are out in the streets to cheer us on and this lifts my spirits no end. I am now sharing the road with lots of the 100km runners also finishing their race. I am going as quickly as I can now, the finish is getting closer and I keep turning round to make sure number 80 isn't coming up behind me. No sign of him, so I keep my fingers crossed. I can see the roundabout at the entrance to the finishing field now and manage to use my last little bit of my energy for one final burst of speed. I am relieved to get to the roundabout, but this is short lived as the marshals direct me past the race field entrance and down the road beside it. I realise that they are sending us to the bottom of the road and back through the bottom of the field to the finish, adding on about another half a mile!

As I'm running down the road, giving it everything I have left to get this last bit done, I look to my right and to my surprise Sam pulls up in his car beside me. He's been caught in terrible traffic and has been going hell for leather to try and get back here to Llanberis for the finish. Sam quickly drives into the car park, desperate for him and Erin to get to the finish line in time to see me cross it. I carry on down the road still keeping a beady eye out that number 80 running up behind me, I enter the bottom of the field and run towards the finish, the crowd are cheering on all of the finishing 100km runners, but spurred on by the commentator on the PA they save the biggest cheers for the 100 mile finishers, and now finally that means me. As I run down the finishing straight I put my hands over my head and shout YEEEEES as the crowd cheers me on. Sam is still parking the car but in the true team spirit that the three share, he tells Erin to jump out of the car and go for it. As I cross the line, just out of my line of sight, Erin runs into the field, jumps over two crowd barriers and gets herself into the finishing pen. She arrives there just as I do and I nearly collapse as she grabs me and gives me a big hug. As tears roll down my face, Sam turns up and I hug him as well before I collapse, exhausted on the grass floor of the finishing pen.

YES! Finally we did it, according to my Garmin watch after 105.4 miles with 34,262 ft of climbing (definitely a bit more than the official tracking figures), and I finally crossed the finish line in an official time of 45 hours 17 minutes. I finished in 119th place out of the 240 runners that started, not bad for this old duffer I think.

I had been laid on my back with my eyes shut for a minute when Erin ran over and shouted - guess what - you won your class! What? turns out number 80 was behind me after all. I couldn't believe it and quietly shed a few more tears. I had finished top in the old gits class (60-64), what a top result after failing to finish last year. Opposite me in the finishing pen, sat on the grass, was another guy who had just finished, he was a big, hard looking tattooed bloke, sort of bloke who could well have been an ex- marine/paratrooper and the sort of



bloke who the bouncers downtown on a Saturday night would run away from. He sees my tears, smiles and says, “me too mate, I crossed the line a minute ago and ended up crying like a baby, I don’t know why but it just brings it out of you, you try to explain it to other people but when they have never done anything as hard as this, they just don’t understand”. I reply with “yes - that was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, but we did it didn’t we”, we both nod, and the hard man and I just sit there on the grass, grinning like Cheshire cats.



I may have been the one that crossed the finish line but these two were the support team behind me every step of the way. Thanks kids.

People often ask me if I sleep at all during a 100 miler, the answer is no, some people do knap for 20/30 minutes, I don’t. If I had to so I could keep going I would, but at the end of the day it’s a race and I may not be the fastest runner out there, but I can sure as hell keep going when I’m knackered. Andy Jones, otherwise known as Number 80, finished my class in second place. After over 45 hours of racing he was just 13 minutes behind me, one little 20 minute nap would have cost me that victory, never was there a more clear-cut case of “if you snooze, you lose”. It’s a shame I never saw Andy after the race and got to shake his hand. Well done and good racing mate, I may have won, but only just, that was definitely a close one.

All the 100-mile race category winners





We went back to the Airbnb and I had a shower and got cleaned up. We jumped back in the car again and Sam zoomed us back to the race village for the prize presentation. Prizes are given out for all the races, and I'm absolutely chuffed to nuts to get to stand up on the podium. You think you have done well to complete a race like this, then you hear that a woman won her class in the 100km race, while breastfeeding her baby at the checkpoints, a fantastic achievement at any race but in one this tough it's phenomenal!

Will I be going back to Snowdonia again? Hell yeah, but next time it will be a walk to the top of the mountains, showing Erin and Sam the views they missed by always being stuck down the bottom at the checkpoints. The whole adventure of the race, the surreal atmosphere of the late-night checkpoints, Swiss Tony, number 80 and all the other runners I met on my way, they all now live on only in my memories.

Monday morning comes and we hit the road for the long journey home in Sam's car, I settle down in the front seat, legs like planks of wood, battered feet feeling, like they are on fire because of the blisters and the toe nails starting to lift before they fall off (luckily just the big ones). As we start to leave the mountains of Snowdonia behind, Erin leans forward from in the back and says "So Dad, does this mean you could be in UTMB in Chamonix next year then? I can't wait..."

GB Ultra Wales: 50

By Luke Taylor

This was my first time taking part in a GB Ultras event, so I didn't know what to expect for the £109 entry fee for Ultra Wales 50 race (85km). On Friday 20 June, I travelled with a friend (also doing the race) up through Wales, which was a long but beautiful drive. We stayed for two nights in a small cottage in Dolgellau, about 15 minutes drive from the start/finish at the Visitor Centre in the Coed y Brenin Forest Park. In the evening, we went over to the Visitor Centre to register and collect our race numbers. This was all very easy and smooth, with no kit check (which was a little surprising for a mountain ultra).

The race started at 6am on Saturday, so I was up at 4am to get ready and have some breakfast (rice pudding and ready-made iced coffee). All competitors must arrive at the race start before 05:30 to collect their GPS trackers. I thought handing out trackers to 450 entrants would be very time-consuming, but it was easy and smooth.

The race route is very varied, including trails, steep technical rocky ascents and descents, and a flat section leading to the seaside town of Barmouth. The race started along a fairly short section of quite narrow trail, which was a bit congested but it soon opened up and then the remaining 20km to the first checkpoint was all wide, undulating tracks, and overall downhill, so easy and very runnable. It was nice to think that, at checkpoint one (Dolgellau), I had 'banked' nearly a quarter of the distance at a good speed. I knew when I got to the mountain sections, I would be slow.

The route from checkpoint one climbs steadily to about 370m, followed by a long, gentle runnable downhill into checkpoint two at the Dol Idris Car Park, just before the biggest climb of the day up Cader Idris. The climb to the 893m top of Cader Idris was mostly



straightforward, with a short rocky section at the top. Then down the other side to checkpoint three at Ty Nant at 37.5km. From checkpoint three, it's downhill for about 5km then about 10km of flat along an old railway line (now a cycle path) and over the Barmouth Bridge to checkpoint four at the Dragon Theatre in the seaside town of Barmouth.

All checkpoints had been stocked with a good variety of foods. I particularly liked the salted mini new potatoes, and the salty pretzels. In addition to water and squash, the checkpoints all had Tailwind, but in a more dilute form than recommended. As I was reliant on Tailwind for the majority of my nutrition and electrolytes, I took extra Tailwind powder with me to top up what was at the checkpoints. The Ultra Wales 50 has no facility for drop bags, however four of the six checkpoints allow support crews to attend.

At checkpoint four, I was expecting some extra food options and tea, but the main other food option was Pot Noodle, which I didn't fancy. There wasn't any tea on offer, but the very friendly and helpful aid station crew made me a cup of tea. When leaving Barmouth, the route climbs initially on the road, then hillside up to about 450m before descending for a while and up again to checkpoint five at Pont Scethin, about 64km through the race.

From checkpoint five, there is a long climb, mostly on grassy paths, but also one or two rocky sections to the top of Y Llethr (756m). It was descending from Y Llethr that was really slow and hard going - very steep and lots of loose rock on the paths. I had been using my poles while ascending but was sure to put them away before descending. Using poles on steep downhill technical terrain makes the going much harder - you have to keep thinking where to put each pole as well as each foot. It's much easier with your hands free - you can balance better and use your hands to support on any big steps down.



After the short but very challenging descent from Y Llethr, the route goes up Rhinog Fach, which includes a rocky technical ascent, followed by another steep rocky descent. But it's not too long before the terrain gets much easier and the route descends to the last checkpoint at Graigddu Ganol (75km). From the final checkpoint, it's nearly all downhill and very runnable, including some road to the finish back at the Visitor Centre in the Coed y Brenin Forest Park.



The race organisation was excellent. GB Ultras appear to know how to put on a good race. The marshals out on the course appeared to be experienced. I liked the way they always asked how you were doing as a way to test that you were OK.

The Ultra Wales 50 route is stunningly beautiful. The aid stations were well stocked, and the crew at each aid station were always very helpful. There were plenty of photographers out on the course, and the photos are all free to download. It would have been nice if there had been a meal at the end of the race (I made do with a dodgy pizza from a kebab shop in Dolgellau). The race medal is one of the best I've received. My only real complaint was the swarms of midges at the finish.

So, to sum-up, I would recommend GB Ultras and the Ultra Wales 50. However, if you've never run a mountain ultra before, it might be better to choose a shorter distance mountain race to get a feel for the mountains.

The Great Ocean Walk, AKA “The one with snakes”

By Sarah Smith

“Why do you want to run it? Is it a fitness thing?” This was Brad, my pick-up / drop-off guy for the start of day two, who made his views very clear on my plan to run the Great Ocean Walk. “It’s not a run, it’s a nature walk,” he said. I muttered something about wanting the full experience but only having three days. “Ah”, he responded disapprovingly, “so you’re trying to cram everything in.”

If I’d had more time, I could have tried to explain to Brad that running is so much more than “a fitness thing”. It’s about feeling alive and it’s about challenging yourself. The plan was to do the 100k+ in three days - do-able distance-wise, but there were a few things that I wasn’t sure about, like running in hot and humid weather – and the snakes.

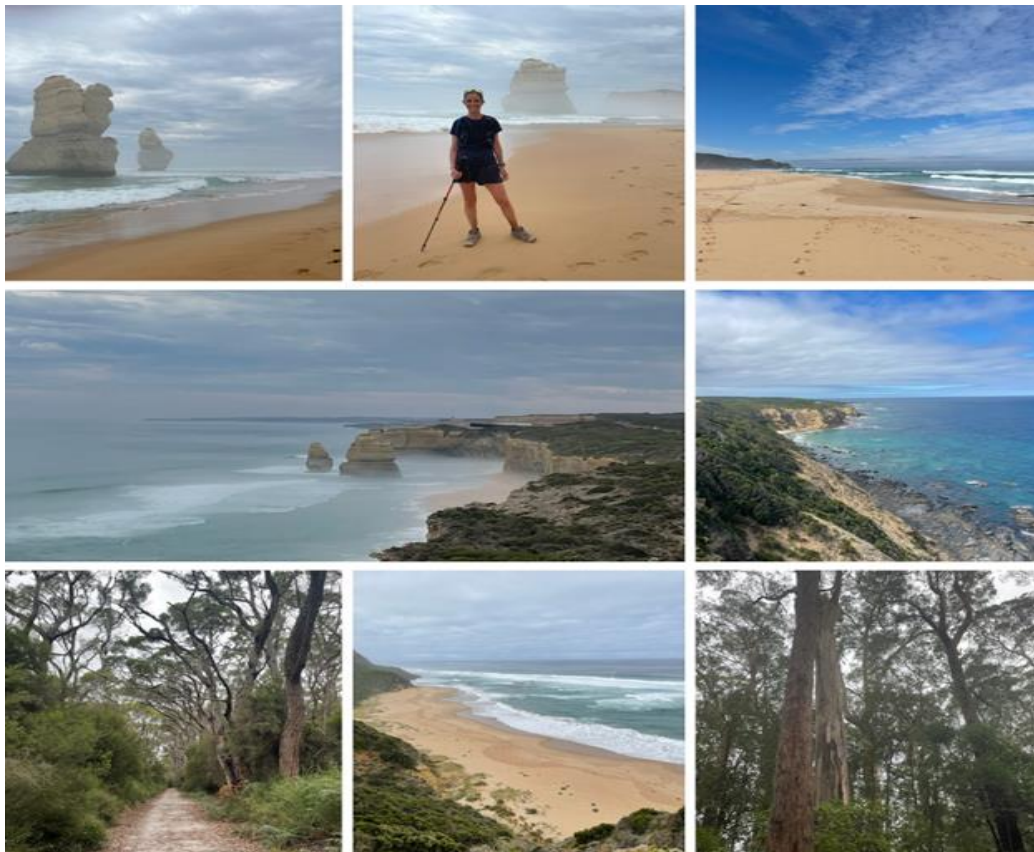
The other thing Brad told me during the 30-minute drive was that the only people he had ever known to have been bitten by snakes on the Great Ocean Walk were runners. “The runners are going too fast, they can’t stop and they land on them”, he explained. He went on to provide me with a lot of detail about an American woman who was bitten twice after having been unlucky enough to land back down on the snake she jumped up to avoid. She pulled through but only after spending several weeks in a coma. I was already feeling nervous and this anecdote caused my anxiety levels to go through the roof. I tried to point out that this might not be the best thing to tell me before the start of my day of running.

The Great Ocean Walk (GOW) is a coastal path from Apollo Bay to the Twelve Apostles. It’s a three-hour drive west of Melbourne and frequently features on lists of “best hikes in Australia”. Many people walk it in eight days, taking in all the hike-in campsites on the way. The idea for running it came from Matt, who runs the walking company Walk-91 (and employs Brad). I got in touch to see about doing some of the GOW. I told him I had three days, and also that I was reasonably fit and had done some ultra-marathons. He suggested I run it and sent me back an itinerary. I would run out of Apollo Bay on Thursday morning and they would arrange accommodation, transport my luggage and do the necessary pick-ups / drop-offs over the next three days. Crucially, they also provided me with a phone and an emergency signal. If anything went wrong, help was available.



The GOW shadows the iconic Great Ocean Road (GOR), built by returning soldiers at the end of the First World War, but it hugs the coast more closely for much of the way. There are also inland detours through the lush rain forests and eucalypt trees that make up the Great Otway National Park (a chance to spot koalas).

The coast is spectacular. In the photos, it might look like familiar places in the UK – Cornwall or the Gower Peninsula – but it feels completely different. The sheer scale of it is unlike anything in the UK. Rugged cliffs sit atop beaches that go on for miles and miles, pounded by relentless waves, rolling in with a big swell, even on a calm day. At a popular look-out point, where the GOW intersects with the GOR, allowing people to park up and get a good view, I started chatting to a woman who remarked that she didn't see what all the fuss about – “It's just water”, she said. But it's immense and awesome, and you feel truly humbled by its power. Before the Cape Otway lighthouse was built, there were hundreds of shipwrecks – immigrants who, after 180 days at sea from the UK, faced the final challenge of making it through the Bass strait. Many drowned within touching distance of Australia because they couldn't swim.



I chatted to a lot of people along the way – all more encouraging than Brad about running the route, wishing me luck and sharing more reassuring snake tales (even if they did recommend I add a snake bandage to my kit list next time). In the end, I saw two tiger snakes, one slithering away into the undergrowth on a wide, open path, the other lying partially hidden in some leaves, a little too close for comfort, but safely avoided. I also saw koalas, wallabies and kangaroos and an echidna, as well as kookaburras and brightly coloured parrots and cockatoos, flying ahead of me on the path. I'd like to think that I appreciated the incredible nature. I stopped many times on the coast path to catch my breath and admire the views, and also in the forests, just to listen.



After three days, I reached the Gibsons Steps carpark and headed down to put my feet in the Southern Ocean at the foot of the Twelve Apostles. The beach was misty with spray from the sea and the sound of the waves was incredible. It felt strange to be among so many people again and I was slightly self-conscious of the sweat tidemarks on my shorts and t-shirt, but also incredibly grateful to have had the experience.

TACH top tips

Running fuel (Emily's version of) Jim's balls

Jim Batty brought these fantastic energy balls along to one of the BTU recces. A great alternative to sickly gels and expensive protein bars.



Ingredients:

- 1 cup Medjool dates (pitted)
- 1/2 cup almond butter
- 1/2 cup rolled oats (or oat bran for a softer texture)
- 1/2 cup unsweetened shredded coconut (plus extra for rolling)
- 1 tablespoon chia seeds or flaxseeds (optional)
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)
- Pinch of salt

Instructions:

Soften the dates: If the dates are dry, soak them in warm water for 10 minutes, then drain and pat dry.

Blend the ingredients: In a food processor, combine the dates, almond butter, rolled oats, shredded coconut, and salt. Blend until the mixture is sticky and well combined.

Add optional ingredients: Add chia seeds and vanilla extract, if using, and pulse to mix evenly.



Form the balls: Scoop out about 1 tablespoon of the mixture and roll it into balls. If the mixture is too sticky, refrigerate it for 10–15 minutes or lightly wet your hands.

Coat with coconut: Roll the balls in extra shredded coconut for a delicious coating.

Chill and store: Refrigerate for at least 20 minutes to firm up. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks or freeze for up to 3 months.

TACH Kit

New to TACH? Want to look the part representing TACH when you run your next event? Or perhaps you're keen to collect the full range of TACH kit, to get you through every season and even promote TACH at work with your TACH mug? Here's what's on offer. You can order any of these from George Hancu, our friendly Kit Meister, by emailing kit@tach.club. Or you can ask him when you next see him to arrange your purchase. George also organises a bulk order of TACH hoodies from time to time which come in a very attractive range of colours and styles for only approximately £20. If you want to be notified next time a hoodie order is happening, please do let George know.



<p>Classic T (£18)</p>	<p>Summer vest (£16)</p>	<p>Long-sleeved top (£19)</p>
<p>Buff (£5)</p>	<p>Mug (£5)</p>	



Race Calendar

Forthcoming races organised by local running clubs

TACH relies heavily on other local running clubs to make our races a success. A lot of promotion of TACH races happens through word of mouth, and running clubs are an essential source of positive recommendations and tips on great races to take part in locally. So while we encourage other local running clubs to spread the word about our upcoming races, we also want to promote upcoming off-road races organised by our neighbouring running clubs to reciprocate. If you know of other off-road races coming up through the year which are organised by local running clubs that we haven't listed here, please do let us know via comms@tach.club and we'll aim to include them in the next edition of Rough Running News – thank you.

Dates and Events

13 August	Crooks Peak Cake Race (5k fell race) https://www.facebook.com/crookpeakcakerace/
5 Oct	Mother Tuckers 10k, organised by Axe Valley Runners https://www.axevalleyrunners.org.uk/event/the-mother-tuckers-10k-2025/
16 Nov	Bath Hilly Half, organised by Team Bath Athletic Club (13.1 miles) https://bathhillyhalf.org
23 Nov	Brent Knoll race, organised by Burnham-on-Sea Harriers (10k) http://www.somersetseries.com/brent-knoll-mt
Jan	Riverbank Rollick, organised by Thornbury Running Club (9.6 miles)
Feb	Doynton Hard Half Marathon, organised by Emersons Green Running Club Dursley Dozen, organised by Dursley Running Club (12 miles) Ironwood Challenge, organised by Nailsea Running Club (10k)
March	Imber Ultra, organised by Avon Valley Runners (33 miles)
April	The Big Cheese, organised by Cheddar Running Club (15 miles) Hanham Horror, organised by Bitton Road Runners (9k)
June	Bradley Stoke 10k, organised by Sole Sisters North Bristol
July	Cotswold Way Relay, organised by Team Bath Athletic Club

TACH race calendar for 2025/26

17 July 2025	Purdown Pursuit
19 October 2025	Keynsham Dandy
25 April 2026	Butcombe Trail Ultra



TACH Championship Points

Compiled by Tom Houseago, TACH Captain for 2025

The TACH Championship recognises TACH members who lead runs, help at events, and write articles for Rough Running News. The annual prize (for the most points accumulated in the year) is given out on the Twelfth Night awards and party evening. The points system is as follows:

- 1 point for leading a run
- 2 points for first time leading a run
- 1 point for volunteering to help at a TACH event (marshalling, course setting, etc)
- 2 points for writing a Rough Running News article

Q1 2025	Members
5	Andy Grant
4	Tom Hunt
3	Fran Pratt, Terry Rogers, Trish Robson
2	Graham Sleightholme, Pawel Baranowski, Andy Simmons, Emily Griffiths, Luke Taylor, Dave Bignell, Dickie Brown
1	Antony Clark, Matt Claydon, Helen King, Jonny Riley, Nick Rickard, Rich Pearce, Una Miles, Martin Cott, George Miller, Richard Grant, Colin Johnson, Emila Turif

Q2 2025	Members
3	Alex Smith, Jonathan Gledson, Richard Grant, Sarah Smith, Sharon Jones, Tricia Allen
2	Andy Simmons, Justin Marshall, Martin Cott, Pavel Teklinski, Ruth Pitchers, Terry Rogers
1	Andrew Buchanan, Andrew Marchment, Andrew Mearns, Andy Fagg, Andy Grant, Anneke Bull, Antony Clark, Cathy Fagg, Chris Smart, Claire Harrison, Dan Kirby, Dave Bignell, Dave Roy, David Giles, Deborah McMullin, Emila Turif, Emily Griffiths, Emma Pemberton, Helen Eley, Jamie Smith, Jarek Turif, Jason Pitchers, Jenny Crouch, Judith Chubb-Whittle, Justin Boynton, Lawrence Pitman, Louis Smith, Lucien Campbell-Kemp, Luke Taylor, Natasha Breen, Nick Matthews, Nick Rickard, Pat Thoyts, Richard Breakspear, Richard Jones, Rob Lee, Ryan Atkins, Sarah Thorne, Simon Whittle, Sylvain Jouve, Tilly Shaw, Tom Houseago, Tom Hunt, Trish Robson, Victoria Boynton, Vikki Carter



TACH Discounts

As a member of TACH, you're entitled to 10% off at the following shops. Simply mention the club when making your purchase in store.

Up and Running - Moti - Easy Runner - Kinisi Run Club (Bedminster) (use tach10 for online purchases)

Also, **Charlotte Arter** is offering 10% off sports massage. Bsc (Hons) Sport Conditioning, Rehabilitation and Massage; SPS Diploma in Sports Massage (Level 4); Great Britain athlete. 30-minute massage treatment is reduced from £30 to £27
60-minute massage treatment is reduced from £50 to £45
07555 273016 charlottearter@hotmail.co.uk

General Club Information

Leading a TACH run

Everyone is encouraged to "do their bit" and to lead runs. It's great fun introducing people to your favourite run (and pub). If you need more information, chat to the runmeisters Emily and Jenny (runmeister@tach.club) or some recent run leaders in the pub, or have a look at the guide on <https://tach.club> for leading runs.

Lift-sharing groups

TACH has several lift-sharing groups across Bristol to help us all to get to our club runs in a more sociable, less polluting way. Current lift-sharing groups are in the following areas:

- South Bristol
- North Bristol
- East Bristol
- Long Ashton
- Cliftonwood, Clifton and Hotwells

If you'd like to join any of these liftshare groups, please do ask around when you're next on a run to find someone who belongs to one of these groups, so you can be invited to join the relevant WhatsApp group. If you'd like to set up a group in an area not listed, or there are enough people to form a smaller sub-group, please do take the initiative – these groups are all self-managing. You can contact comms@tach.club if you want to promote a new liftsharing group through our regular weekly emails, which can then also be added to this list for the next edition of Rough Running News.



Next edition of Rough Running News

Copy deadline is **31 October 2025** – please send your articles to comms@tach.club – many thanks.

Know your committee

Club Captain: Tom Houseago - captain@tach.club

Chair: Helen King - chair@tach.club

Secretary: Hannah Tracey - secretary@tach.club

Treasurer: Jonny Riley - treasurer@tach.club

Webmeister: Tom Hunt - website@tach.club

Race Committee Chair: Luke Taylor - races@tach.club

Social Secretary: Sharon Jones - social@tach.club

Membership Secretary: Martin Cott - membership@tach.club

Run Meisters: Jenny Crouch and Emily Griffiths - runmeister@tach.club

Kit Meister: George Hancu - kit@tach.club

Rough Running News Editors / Commsmeisters: Tricia Allen and Sarah Smith
- comms@tach.club