

Low e Alpine Mountain Marathon – Beinn Dearg

You can read Jim's report for a full account of the ups and downs of our recent LAMM success. I thought I'd illustrate the tale with some of my top 10 tips for doing well at mountain marathons!

1. Pick the right partner. It is unlikely you will be well matched over two days of running, and it is common to hear stories of one partner carrying the other's pack towards the end of the race. However Jim and I were fairly close, although we each had ups and downs: he was stronger on the first day, I was stronger on the second, but you keep spurring each other on. However there is more to it than just the running: I had more navigation experience than he did, but that was balanced by his greater long distance running experience.

2. Do some training. It goes without saying. Although that said I only did about three long distance runs (2 hrs+) previously this year, and otherwise relied on an aerobic base built up over the years, and training for the orienteering season of events in the spring (which are typically only 45-90 minutes in duration).

3. Know the terrain. The LAMM is unique in that they only announce the location on the Thursday before the race. Prior to that all they had said was "4Hrs Drive North of Glasgow/Edinburgh, 1½Hrs Drive From Inverness!" As you can imagine, I'd had Google maps out, plotting driving times to potential locations, seeing where the LAMM had been before etc. It turned out to be Beinn Dearg, near Ullapool in the far north. My predictions were hopelessly wrong, but it was fun anyway, and some things would always be true wherever it was in Scotland: steep hills where we'd have to walk but keep up a brisk pace, some of the running would be hard work (rocky or peat bogs) etc.

4. Get analytical. I was introduced to this at the OMM last year, when my partner there (Shane Ohly) produced a spreadsheet with everything weighed to the nearest gram, and food calories to be eaten added up. It makes a difference – see below!

5. Travel light. My pack weight for the LAMM was just under 5kg. The biggest items were our tent (500g split between us), sleeping bag (430g), rucksack (535g), waterproofs and spare clothes (720g) and food (1897g, but much less at the end!).

The tent deserves a special mention. Jim had bought a new [Terra Nova Laser Ultra 1 Tent](#). This currently holds the Guinness World

Record for the “lightest double wall shelter in the world”. The “1” in the name gives a clue, and the description says: “Suitable for 1 person, or two people at a squeeze”. Suffice to say it was cosy, but at least you were warm overnight!

6. Eat enough. Incredibly important - the body will get through all the readily available energy in its glycogen stores in about 60-90 mins of hard exercise, and then there are two choices: start burning fat or muscle (which is inefficient), or feed it some easily digestible food. So eating on the run is vital, as is recharging at the overnight camp. More statistics from the spreadsheet: I ate 740 kcal during the day 1 race, 2541 kcal at the overnight camp, and 739 kcal during the day 2 race. Race food was SIS Go bars and isotonic gels, and jelly babies. Overnight food was mainly noodles with cup-a-soup for flavour, Eccles cakes, salt + vinegar crisps (crushed; important to replace salts you have sweated out), and a protein bar. As it happens, Jim hadn't brought enough food, but I had too much, so we shared it around.

7. Drink enough. Again important, especially at the LAMM where we had warm weather. You pass enough streams that you can rely on drinking out of them and don't need to carry much water

As an aside to hydration, Jim likes his coffee. Sadly the espresso maker weighed too much, but he was brewing 10mins before the bus to the start, he asked for extra coffee in the free meal at the finish, and the portable kettle and coffee maker were pressed into action to keep him awake on the long drive home on Sunday night!

8. Don't stop moving. It is surprising how much time can be gained by not stopping. For example, we had food we needed for the day easily accessible in pockets on the rucksack waist straps. Water bottles are in the side pockets that can quickly be filled and stowed, but was also had a mug that could quickly and easily scoop up water.

9. Be ready to suffer. There are people who do mountain marathons at a comfortable pace, on a shorter course, and just enjoy the scenery and experience. I also hugely enjoy some aspects of them: the remote terrain (on both days for about 3 hours we didn't see a soul, but did see about 25 deer), the beautiful scenery (one memory was cresting a particularly brutal hill climb to be presented with a vista stretching miles towards more mountains and on to the sea beyond), the sense of freedom etc. However, to do well, particularly in the elite class, you have suffer a bit. Travelling light has its consequences: a cramped tent, not as much warm clothing etc. And you can be sure it will hurt: in

the last 5km both days, I felt sick, I was tired, my legs ached, my body was telling me to stop. Why did I carry on?.....

10. Want to win. This is perhaps the most important factor – how much do you want to win? A mental challenge. At times it would have been easy to have a rest, go a bit slower, but you are spurred on by this desire to push yourself to the limit and see where it takes you.

So was it all worth it? Yes, definitely. On reflection I think this ranks as the most satisfying race achievement I have had. Ever. And on top of that the first place prize for us both: flights, accommodation and entry to the [Björkliden Arctic Mountain Marathon](#) in August, in Sweden, north of the Arctic Circle. Of course that means we have to do it all again, but I can't wait!

Duncan Archer