

Beverley AC runner takes on Spartathlon Ultra Marathon 2013

Blamires will be back

Report by Andrew Grainger

Beverley AC runner, Mike Blamires, likes his challenges big! Not content with having completed the gruelling Marathon Des Sables, with its 5 ½ marathons in 6 days in the Sahara Desert, or the 145 miles of the 2011 Grand Union Canal UltraMarathon, on 27th September, he lined up with 300 other UltraMarathon runners from around the world for The Spartathlon “the daddy, the original UltraMarathon, no race has such history & myth behind it. For many ‘Ultra Runners’ this is it, the ultimate race & the badge of honour”, as Mike puts it.

So picture it...7.00 a.m. as the sun rises over The Odeon of Herodes Atticus, under the shadow of the Acropolis in Athens. “It’s a daunting prospect with the odds stacked against you from the start”, said Mike. A look at the race information tells you why. The race covers 153 miles, has an overall time limit of 36 hours, a cut off time of 9hr30mins at Corinth, 50 miles in, 74 checkpoints each with their own individual cut offs, daytime temperatures of around 28-30C, maybe higher, and 4000ft of mountain to cross over at 100 miles.

Mike trained for over 9 months and, rattling up 75 to 100 mile runs in the process.

Once the race was underway, the City Police performed the remarkable feat of stopping Athens rush hour traffic as the race headed out from Athens to the cheers of the crowd and drivers alike, then to the coast and across to the Peloponnese. A few less picturesque industrial areas eventually gave way to scenic Mediterranean coastline as Mike strode on through ever increasing temperatures. This is a very personal challenge but the international competitors chat and encourage each other along. Word gets round of strugglers and Mike found himself dipping in and out of conversations with a number of international athletes. Checkpoints were every 3 or 4 km, offering a chance to refuel on food, drink and to cool down with wet sponges. Illness can ensue as some runners become less picky about whether it’s the cooling water or the drinking water that the sponges get dipped in!

“The spirit and support for this race is almost indescribable, along the route school children are taken out of the schools and line the streets, holding their hands out to high five you and cheer and whoop for you. Passersby shout bravo and cheer, drivers beep the car horns and people along the route will gladly offer water and ice for you to help you along.” said Mike.

Mike stayed right on course until Checkpoint 22 at the Corinth Canal, approximately 50 miles in and 30 minutes ahead of the cut offs. Sadly and inexplicably, not long after another checkpoint and a massage to his ailing legs, his thigh quadriceps muscles became incredibly painful with a burning soreness that simply stopped him running. He bravely refused the pick-up car to the next check point, wanting to be timed out rather than driven out. Up to this point, all had seemed well and the suddenness of his crash left Mike both puzzled and devastated.

However, he is not beaten. "This race burns into your soul and has really occupied my thoughts since. It took just a few hours for me to start wondering how I can nail this next year ... perhaps if I can work out the why, I can work out the how", he said as he considers his plan for success in The 2014 Spartathlon!!

Mike (ran the race on behalf of Lighthouse school in Leeds, a free school for children with Autism. If you would like to donate to his cause the link is:

<http://goo.gl/1Z6H0z>



Mike, centre of picture, 5th from left behind front row, with The British Team at The 2013 Spartathlon