



# Ultra training in the Alps

We sent our publisher, Nick Bryant for some hardcore holidaying at the Alpine Oasis Ultra Trail Running Camp, held at Mont Blanc Massif in the French Alps between the 20th and 27th August 2010

“I arrived on the Saturday afternoon and was breathless with excitement, as I took in the stunning surroundings of the Alpine village, Les Contamines.

“After settling in, I was introduced to our guides for the week, Phil Coates, and Andy Mouncey. Phil, the course director has led over 30 international expeditions across the world, including filming for *The Discovery Channel* on the north side of Everest, following in the *Footsteps of Mallory* across the high peaks and passes of Tibet. Originally a walker and fell runner from the Yorkshire Dales, he got into mountain marathons in the mid 1980s, and then Alpine mountaineering. Andy is an ultra running expert, blogger and all-round inspirational character. In 2003 he signed off a 17-year triathlon career setting new record stage times for the *Enduroman Arch to Arc Challenge* – a 300-mile solo triathlon linking London and Paris via an English Channel swim.

“My room was comfortable, with a lovely balcony and breathtaking views, and a nice ensuite bathroom. Dinner of steak and chips in the local restaurant was welcome after travelling four hours from the UK, and it was good to meet up with the other runners and discuss what we wanted to get from the week.

Everyone had different goals, I was keen to find out about the week ahead and to get to know our coaches a bit better. We were briefed about the next day's activities, and headed off to bed at around 10 o'clock.

“Day one started with a gentle 5k run. The track was along a river and through Alpine woods, teeming with wildlife and a clear blue sky above. By 9am we were back for breakfast of croissants, bread and jam, and coffee, in preparation for our first mountain ascent.

“Andy was a superb coach. As someone completely new to mountain training I welcomed his tips, including a reminder, that if you want to see the view then you STOP!

“Andy watched me closely and taught me to manage my cadence as I climbed – stand tall and get air into the lungs, and take smaller steps! This simple tip was brilliant. I was off! In fact, I went a bit too fast, lost the others and went the wrong way, but, in true form, and tuned into mountain rescue and survival, Phil was already ahead of me to make sure I didn't get too far away!

“At about 1 o'clock we arrived at the top for snacks and a bit of R&R. Then, it was back to climbing, until we reached a

higher point and took in some stunning views of the glacier. I hardly noticed the climb up, it was so beautiful and new to me, I was distracted.

“The climb up inevitably was followed by a descent down – and we ran all the way! This killed my quads, and when we reached the bottom after almost four hours of walking/running my thighs were burning. On any other occasion if someone had asked me to sit in a freezing cold, fast moving mountain stream for three minutes, I might have declined, but it was a welcome reprieve for my achy legs.

“After the first day, I settled into the routine. Every day we ran along the river as a warm up, joined by Annie (another course leader), Phil and their dog, Pickle. Then it was off for my daily dose of running/trekking up ascents of up to 3,000 metres,

absorbing the breath-taking scenery, passing mountain marmots, and chatting, being coached, learning all the way to the top. This, then followed by the exhilarating quad-burning descents.

“The course included crucial lessons for mountain runners from Phil on navigation, using poles correctly, and understanding the weather systems. We were constantly being coached on all things running and were taught the benefits of gentle, easy running to build a base. A video was taken of us running so our technique could be taken apart and analysed. One of the highlights was the moonlight run (plus head-torch!). It was also the toughest part! It was in the middle of the week so I was feeling the pain and tiredness at this stage. On the descent, in the dark, running past ski-lifts with burning thighs was tough. As we came down and the lights in the village got closer, it was a relief, I think we ran into the town at around 1am, greeted by Phil with the most amazing pizza!

“A couple of nights, when we were planning to continue climbing the following day, we stayed in a mountain refuge. I'm not sure why they used the words refuge as it conjures up visions of a shack. It was more like a nice hotel with hot food, good beer, amazing views, warm showers and a comfy bed.

“Despite all this activity, it still felt like a holiday! We slept a lot and had free time to recover, shop (we were even taken to specialist running/mountain shops), and relax. And we met up every evening for dinner, to drink strong beer, and philosophise: discussing how the day had been, and what we had got from

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it. It was good to talk to the others about what we had thought before the day started, and how that compared to our thoughts at the end of the day!

“It was fantastic to be shown the start of the gruelling UTMB race in Chamonix.

We watched the entrants parading around Chamonix at least three hours before the start of the race, proudly showing their running attire and parading like peacocks with their running numbers. And we were then given a taster of the course where we experienced the toughness and wonder of this amazing race.

“Ultra running is very much a sport that requires a strong mind that can get over the matter. And there was no one better than Andy Mouncey, who also doubles up as inspirational speaker to help us focus on the positive! ‘Only focus on what you want to achieve, not what you don't want to,’ he reminded me.

“At the end of the week, we all sat down and compared the notes we'd been encouraged to make through the week. The consensus was this: pleasantly tired; exhilarated; overwhelmed by the beauty of the surroundings; inspired, and impressed with our brilliant coaches! ”  
For more, [www.alpine-oasis.com](http://www.alpine-oasis.com).

## WIN A WEEKEND FOR TWO PEOPLE!

### RF & Alpine Oasis's running weekend camps

You can choose the location and date. We hold camps in the Lake District, the Peak District and North Yorkshire. Your running weekend includes:

■ Bed, breakfast & evening meal in either twin rooms or a dormitory – depending on location.

■ A week's training. Courses generally start on Friday afternoon and end on Sunday afternoon – but check the website as course length can vary.

#### HIGHLIGHTS:

■ Experience the beauty of the mountains during our dawn, dusk and overnight high runs.

■ Race-specific preparation – let us know what you're training for and we'll tailor the course for you.

#### KEY OUTCOMES:

Learn with our experts and improve:

■ mountain-craft and navigation;  
■ race performance;  
■ balancing racing and training with the rest of your life;  
■ progressing from completing to competing;

■ choosing the right gear.

#### WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT:

■ A warm welcome from your hosts who are smart, approachable and who practice what they preach!

■ A good standard of accommodation and food.

■ Inspiring mountain locations.

■ To challenge some of your beliefs about yourself, the sport, and what you might be capable of.

■ To learn new skills to help you become a more efficient and effective ultra-marathon runner.

■ To make new friends and share new experiences.

■ To run faster and easier ultras.

■ To learn about your inner resources and ability to achieve.

#### WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED:

■ Travel to & from the running camp location;

■ Insurance;

■ Lunches;

■ Beer money and your