

Rallarvegslopet Norway

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Ali Matthews

Sightseeing in Norway- On Foot!

I should have known what I was letting myself in for when I married an extreme "Adventure Race" fanatic . . .

Paul sold it to me as "a weekend away in the West of Norway with a bunch of his new Norwegian running friends"...sounded quite pleasant, so I agreed to it.

As it turned out however, I was about to embark on my first Ultra Marathon race adventure, which covered in excess of 50 miles over a famous route from the high mountain plateau in the west, to the fjords in central Norway. Some may be familiar with the popular tourist attraction, "Norway in a nutshell", which covers this part of the country in a relaxing fashion, usually by train and boat.

It is an annual 'point to point' race over two days, starting in Flam on the west coast. Getting to the start was a bit of an ordeal in itself! First thing on the Saturday morning, we left Oslo city centre, and drove 4 hours west, to the town in which the race finishes, Haugastol. We then boarded the

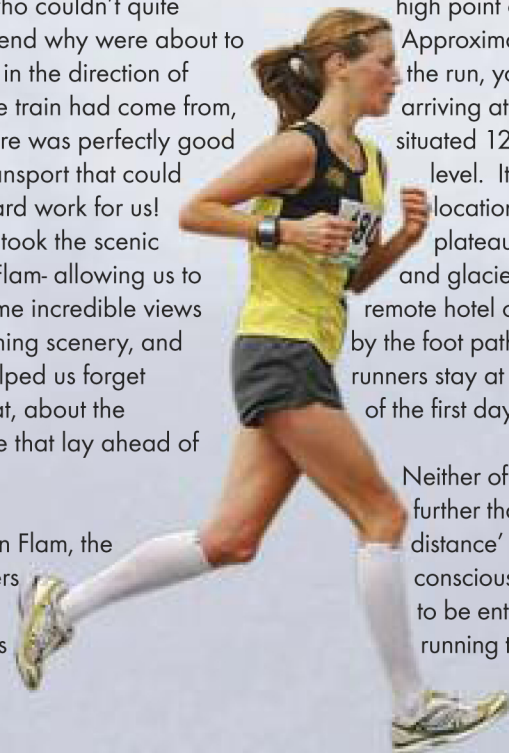
tourist train, along with dozens of other scantily clad runners, gibbering away excitedly in Norwegian, munching on bananas, and quaffing sports drinks. This sight was all much to the bemusement of the regular tourists who couldn't quite comprehend why we were about to run back in the direction of where the train had come from, when there was perfectly good public transport that could do the hard work for us! The train took the scenic route to Flam- allowing us to enjoy some incredible views and stunning scenery, and which helped us forget somewhat, about the challenge that lay ahead of us.

Arriving in Flam, the Organisers quickly herded us

all together, and after a few token "group photos", we were off! Day one involved a lot of climbing. The race starts at sea level, and winds its way over endless hills to a high point at 1343m.

Approximately 34 miles in to the run, you are rewarded by arriving at the Finse Hotel, situated 1222m above sea level. It sits in a stunning location on the mountain plateau surrounded by lakes and glaciers. This is a remote hotel only accessible by the foot path or by train. All the runners stay at this Hotel at the end of the first day.

Neither of us had run much further than 'marathon distance' before, so we were conscious that we were going to be entering unknown running territory that day.



For me, the first 18 miles passed without too much ado, however after that point, I began to struggle mentally. All the tough climbs had stripped me of my energy, and it was such a daunting thought that there was still more than a half marathon to run. However, after going through the 20 mile checkpoint, having necked a snickers bar, washed down with some coke (who said running was a healthy sport?!), I managed to pick up again, and slowly but surely, I was ticking off the miles. The sun came out, and I'd stumbled upon an Irish runner, who stayed with me for the last hour, and kept me entertained with Irish jokes, topping me up regularly with jelly babies. Before I knew it, there was only a mile to go, and I could see the finish line, which was basically on the doorstep of the Finse Hotel. Hobbling, but elated, I crossed the line in 5hrs 44mins. Paul was there waiting for me with a milkshake in one hand, and my warm down jacket in the other. He

had finished day one in a speedy 5hrs 21 mins.

That evening was really quite strange because on one hand, we wanted to kick back and relax, but on the other, in the back of our minds we knew that we had to get up at 7am the next day to run another 17 miles to complete the race. The only comforting factor, was that the route on day two was almost flat, in anything, slightly downhill. With that in mind, we treated ourselves to a few beers, and big hearty dinner along with all the other runners. But, as soon as our heads hit the pillow that night, we were out for the count!

The sun was streaming through the window on the Sunday morning, which made it quite easy to drag ourselves out of bed, and after a light breakfast, we were back on the start line with heavy legs, but recharged and ready to go. Paul had woken up

with really sore calves, so decided to run this section with me. As promised, the route was much flatter over the 17 miles, and again, the scenery and views were incredible. It was just a case of keeping the legs moving, and churning out the miles. A few hours later, we were welcomed at the finish line by the Organisers, cheering us on, and congratulating us, I think, in Norwegian. (Note to self- I must get learning Norwegian!)

We were exhausted, but also delighted to have finished unscathed- apart from the obligatory sore muscles, joints and bones...but that's to be expected when you entertain long distance running! It was a very well organized race, and we met some incredible people along the way. All in all, a great experience, and I'd go as far to say that we'd do it again next year.

Ali Matthews