

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 08, 2007

## Mel's Beast of Ballyhoura race report

It all started a few weeks ago when I got a phone call from Ivan Park ([Causeway Coast Adventure Races](#)) - asking if I wanted to take part in the [Ballyhoura Beast](#) - they were looking for a girl to complete their team. The Ballyhoura Beast is a non-stop 24-hour adventure race in the Ballyhoura/Galtee mountains region, including disciplines such as orienteering, mountaineering, mountain biking, abseiling, clay pigeon shooting and kayaking. The other two guys on the team were Paul McArthur and Rowan McMahon ([Not the Sunday Run](#)) - both mostly unknown to me. I had actually already decided to not take part but then I thought, what the heck, changed my mind and said: "Sure, I'd love to!". What did I get myself into.... Due to various other race commitments and them living up North, we didn't manage to have a single training session. A few e-mails back and forth we had all the gear sorted between each other and I made my way up to our lovely B&B with another team. Meeting Rowan and Paul in the evening for the first time for 5 minutes before we went to bed, we all woke up the next morning to a full Irish breakfast fry - mmmmmhhh. Might not be the best food from a nutritional perspective before a strenuous 24 hour race, but from a mind perspective it was exactly what I needed.

After the breakfast, we made our way up to the race HQ in Ardpatrick and then the kit sorting began. I had to get a puncture sorted on my bike - making Rowan the official bike doctor for the race. After the kit check and being each fitted out with an electronic SI card on an irremovable wristband, we were transported to the race start. A short briefing and we were off at about 12 o'clock for the first orienteering stage - closely watched by some TV cameras. A short sharp run along a river we retrieved our first orienteering maps from under a bridge and tactical discussions began. There were 8 mandatory points to find and each of them giving clue to an optional super control worth 40min as well as about 13 optional, closer spaced controls, each worth 10min. With jogging pace we made it to a ruin after fighting through some jungle, down to a river, over a river, down to another river, up that river, onto a saddle, down to the woods, down to another river, through some undergrowth, through some gorse (ouch!) and along some fire roads back to the orienteering start - having found all the mandatory and 4 of the optional controls. At the start we were awaited by a zip line over a river which was a fun bit - especially seeing some of the heavier folks bum skimming the water .... Unfortunately we didn't figure out the super control location correctly.

Ah well, we didn't get deterred by that and made our way towards the mountains for the mountaineering stage. The weather, which had held up beautifully until now turned worse and it started raining (and didn't stop for the next 14 hours.....). Anyway, we struggled our way up on the open mountain, through heather and some burned gorse. With deteriorating weather conditions, we all put on our warmer rain proof coating and arrived up on Galtybeg mountain in now atrocious weather conditions to be greeted by a poor marshal in a tiny tent guarding the control. As we were too late for the cut-off for the optional orienteering loop up here (thank god!!) we headed straight towards Galtymore mountain along the ridge walk in knee deep mud. One wrong step and you could have tumbled down a few hundred meters on either side. The rain was joined by fog when we tried to navigate our way after Galtymore towards the gorge where the abseiling was taking place. Due to Paul's and Ivan's excellent navigation skills we found the gorge even in deep fog with less than 10m visibility and were greeted by the abseiling marshals. So, after harnessing up, we had to abseil 50m down a river turning waterfall in a swollen

riverbed on slick slippery stone with cold water streaming down on top of you as you were hanging down the edge of the waterfall.... Just as a beside, this was Ivan's and my first abseil.... Oh my god!!! However, after overcoming our fears, we arrived safely and soaking wet on the bottom of the waterfall and made our way down to the bridge to pick up the last control before the run-bike transition. Followed by the TV crew we sped along the road to the transition and were welcomed by a cheer from the support crew after being about 8 hours or so into the race.

After filling our stomachs with food and changing into dry clothes we got ready for our biking stage. At this moment in time, we had darkness breaking in. We followed a network of small country roads till we had to face some hike-a-biking up an overgrown single track along the Ballyhoura way (thanks Rowan for pushing my bike!), ending up in a dead end. Luckily we found the right way eventually and headed along fire roads to the clay pigeon shooting place. Earplugs in and gun loaded, we were given instructions and each fired our 10 shots (each missed shot was a minute penalty). Coldness and tiredness made it harder to aim (try and hold a heavy gun still after about 11hours of running and cycling!!), but we were pleased to hit about half of the fluorescent clay dishes. Back onto the bikes and into the relentless rain, we hit some formidable single track and followed the signs along the Ballyhoura way until we hit the Ballyhoura mountain bike park a few hours later. Greeted by the TV crew (who were BBQing and not sharing any of it!!!) and an ever energetic Vanessa, the main organizer we were given instructions on the next bit on the new and purpose built Ballyhoura mountain bike trails. Along the sheer endless single track which made it hard to concentrate after such a long time on the track, we were surprised by some glow stick enhanced masks, the beasties, some of which contained our controls. A crash and a "brufen" and some more single track later we made it back to the start of the trails after about 2 hours and 13 kms and headed on for the rest of the mountain biking stage which was mostly along fire roads with the day ahead dawning on us. Sounds easy? Not when there has been 12 hours of rain! The tracks resembled full raging muddy rivers and I was wondering why they hadn't added wetsuits as mandatory gear to this stage! After an unfortunate waste of time searching for a control near some ruins we were caught up by another team when we eventually found it, so we went back on our bikes as fast as possible and raced towards the kayaking transition where we arrived after a total biking time of about 12hours.

After exchanging the wet gear one last time, this time for a warm wetsuit and filling up on some food we headed down the overgrown and swollen river in sit on top kayaks. Oh - the rain was stopping now - of course, no rain needed when we were going to get wet in the kayaks! Under trees, over trees, over rapids, around rocks and again under and over trees and more trees and trees and trees and some capsizes and lost rucksacks later we had collected our last two points and even had had a bit of a competitive time with the other team that had caught up with us. We made sure to get out of their eyesight as fast as possible and kayaked down the river over and under trees and more trees and trees and did I mention the trees? A last fun section around the weir and we could already hear the drums of the finish at the castle. Spurred on by the near end we ran up the finish and were greeted once again by Vanessa and Co., drums and an amazing feeling of achievement. We took just over 24hours non-stop to complete the course. What an amazing and great race! I had soooo much fun on the race and am sooo happy with how we worked as a team, everybody supporting each other and we just "gelled" really well which was very lucky considering we had never raced with each other and barely or not knew each other. I really really enjoyed this race! Can't wait to do the next one! Hold on, is this pain that I'm feeling? And this and this and this..... Ouch and what is this? Chafing from my rucksack? Tendinitis on my Achilles tendon? Ok, I'll wait until I've cured my various injuries.... The post race scenario included lots of food, a hot shower (aaaahhhhhh) and a free sports massage (or bum grab as others prefer to call it). Unfortunately I was too tired and wrecked to stay on

for the post racing party - so I only found out later that we actually placed third - a formidable achievement. Thanks to Vanessa and **Outsider** to put together such a great race and thanks to my team-mates for just being, well, a GREAT TEAM!

Mel.

P.S. What I have eaten/drunk during the race:

15 **Energy gels**,  
6 **Powerbars**,  
2 bags of pasta,  
1 bag of porridge with raisins,  
2 sandwiches,  
6 cereal bars,  
2 bags of wine gums,  
2 bottles of sports drink,  
4 cans of red bull  
2 pain killers  
a big bite of cracker cheese  
several liters of murky river water with **nuun tablets**

and my stomach was still grumbling of hunger at 8am!!!

Posted by Mel at **4:07 pm**



Labels: **adventure race**, **Ballyhoura**

1 comment:

**Geconn** said...



Heh Mel

Great race report - you ate a bag of porridge sounds yum...NOT. Now you can't say your unfit after doing that. well done on completing the race.

Grainne

**7:12 pm**

Credit:

<https://ryansherlock.blogspot.com/2007/08/mels-beast-of-ballyhoura-race-report.html>

See also:

<https://ryansherlock.blogspot.com/2007/08/video-from-ballyhoura-beast-adventure.html>

<https://avervagejoesar.wordpress.com/team/>