

Laugavegur Ultra Marathon – Iceland 2009

July 2009 saw our second Across the Divide group line up on the start line at 0900 wondering exactly what they had let themselves in for. The small group of 7 runners had a mixture of experienced Ultra runners and those completely new to the sport, and represented the UK, Canada and the States. The previous day we held an event briefing covering a detailed course description, and a thorough medical brief which helped prepare our runners to run a good race. Thankfully the weather was kind to us compared to last year and it was a nice temperature at the start with no uncontrollable shivering before the race organisers sent us off running up the first steep section. The field was twice the size as last year with many more local runners taking part creating a great atmosphere at the start line.

Mainly down to the good weather, the early uphill section seemed much easier than I remembered, although there was a lot more snow on top which was a struggle to run through at a good pace. However one member of our little group did not make the first cut off at this stage, with the steepness of the course taking him by surprise. He has vowed to radically alter his training programme and come back next year to beat the course. The glare from the sun bouncing off the snow and ice made it actually pretty hot out there on some of the sections before the inevitable rain hit most of us at the half way point. It actually remained a good temperature and ideal running conditions and that coupled with the race preparation put in the previous day seemed to benefit our runners in managing their race plans. They all posted good times with Chris Hough in particular shaving over an hour off his time the previous year to take the title of first Brit home.

We all celebrated at the race BBQ before hobbling onto the bus to head back to Reykjavik and a well earned snooze. The next day was free to explore the capital, whilst some opted to explore Iceland although hopping in and out of vehicles was not the easiest after a tough race like this. We all met up in the evening to enjoy a fantastic celebratory meal at a local traditional restaurant and share race stories. The next morning we headed to the airport via the Blue Lagoon which completely surpassed my expectations. What a way to finish a trip, relaxing our aching muscles in thermal pools, and floating massages and was really enjoyed by the whole group.

For next year I am looking at adapting the itinerary slightly to camp at the race start the night before the race to get a better nights sleep in preparation for the race. This might sound a bit odd, but on race day it is a 0330 start with a 0400 coach departure along bumpy roads. That, along with 20 hours of daylight make it difficult to get a good rest in before race day, and it will also allow us to check out the first stage of the course so people can actually visualise the terrain.

This was my third year running the course and the terrain and scenery still remains as stunning and appealing as ever. The race still retains its local feel and is one of the most friendly ultras I have ever taken part in. I can't wait to get back out there for 2010.