

The Libyan Challenge – 190km 6th – 9th March 2007

The challenge started with the training really, none of the bog standard training but lots of running on sand with backpack and in the heat and at approximately 5 miles per hour!! Training started much later than anticipated due to an ongoing Achilles problem. After LEJOG last year recovery was pretty quick and was having no problems returning to off-road marathons in similar times to previous years, but the left Achilles was starting to let me know it was there. With the challenge of running on sand with extra weight I was going to have to make sure the Achilles could hack this so went back to Darren Cooper at the University of Teesside for an assessment and another ultrasound scan with Dr Martin Speight, a Sports Medicine Doctor. The left Achilles was not as bad as the right had been earlier in the year and was still “runnable”, but the advice was to stop running and strengthen it to take the rigours of the challenge ahead. That wiped out half of November and most of December.

Darren assessed the strength of the Achilles after a month of no running but the results were not good, the left Achilles was still significantly weaker than the right and was not yet ready for hard work. When returning to training it was still only very short runs of 3-5 miles for the first few weeks to continue the strengthening process. Eventually with about 6 weeks left I was allowed a big jump in mileage and packed in as many miles as possible. Training during the week was mainly on the sand dunes at Redcar, initially with half a loaded backpack and eventually a fully loaded backpack. The difference was incredible, I really struggled to run uphill and the extra weight seemed to really strain the quads. At the same time as this Matthew Wright from the Elite Athlete Bursary Scheme guided me through my weights sessions, very specific for the challenge ahead. I was continuously aching from the heavy sessions but put this down to lots of changes over a short period of time. I was also lucky enough to use the environmental chamber at the University of Teesside to train in similar temperatures expected in Libya, the longest run being at 6 hours with full backpack at 37 degrees, with various testing taking place. This helped to justify how much liquid I would need to carry; checkpoints were to be approximately 20km apart. I drank 5.5 litres over the six hours, was exactly the same weight at the finish as I was at the start and guessing by my runs in the dunes an average 20km run was to take around 3 hours – so that meant 3 litres of fluid to carry.

With just a two week taper fitness had improved significantly, I was having no problems with my Achilles and was ready for my new challenge; I had been fitter but knew my level of fitness was good enough to finish in a reasonable time.

I travelled to Paris on Saturday 3rd March, selection day for the World 24 Hours in Canada, a result I was not to get until my return. It was an early start and was up at 4:30am for the flight from Newcastle. Everything went smoothly and was soon settled in the Formula 1 Hotel awaiting some other runners to arrive. I started sewing on my bottles holders to the pack, I had found they drifted around the waist belt and “hung” in front of me, I also had to adapt an arm held mobile phone holder to fit on my wrist to hold the GPS that I was to use for navigation. That took up most of the afternoon and soon the other athletes arrived and went for an evening meal together.

Sunday 4th March

Another early start, up at 3:30am as we were supposed to get our tickets at 4am at the airport. The flight was at 6am. At Sebbah Airport there was a long wait as expected and a very long coach journey to base camp near Ghat. The journey was amazing, very rutted and deserted roads through the desert region. As darkness fell around 7:30pm the coaches turned onto a sand track and eventually ground to a halt. We were here, mud huts had been allocated and I was sharing with Lizzy, a fellow English athlete. The mud hut was actually better than expected, I had been warned to expect “basic” accommodation but the mud hut felt like a small brick hut with straw roof and door. Inside was a big mud lump of a double bed, felt like concrete with a 3-inch thick mattress on the top and just enough space around it to fit the suitcase. It was quite novel and was comfortable and didn't need to use the airbed I had brought.



After finding the toilets, a hole in the ground, dinner was served in the open sided hut opposite, plastic tables and chairs and the meal expected was what we got – salad, chicken and cous cous, quite edible though. It was soon to bed while the music and drums continued until around midnight, but slept well after that.

Monday 5th March

Breakfast was bread and jam or soft cheese and was the only time of the day that hot water was provided for tea/coffee. After breakfast it was kit check, collection of numbers and flare. This was quite a simple process, they had a list of items to check, you showed them and they were ticked off. Some else came to check the food to make sure that the compulsory 8000 calories were carried. We were issued numbers, road book, t-shirt, souvenir buff and a heavy flare. I sat making tea in the sun with my stove, the temperature on my clock was reading 31 degrees in the shade, but there was to be no shade on this event so put it in the sun, it went up to 59 degrees before going “black”, it did recover again once in the mud hut though.

Lunch was around 2pm and exactly the same at the evening meal the night before. I took a walk out of the back of the camp to see the finish line, from our little “greenish” haven there was just rich golden sand and dunes for the finish, just as I had imagined with a few camels to one side.



For my 8000 calories the food was very different from what I would use in a normal 24 hours, the difference being I had to carry the food and had to go for “lightweight” food instead of my normal potatoes and custard. I had opted for a few sports drinks to start with, then my usual milkshakes from Mannatech (Glycoslim) and for eating I had fig rolls, Nutri-grain and nuts. The exact calories and weight:

10 x sports drinks	350g	1330kcal
10 x glycoslim	400g	2790kcal
4 x ginger nutrigrain	180g	672kcal
4 x kellogs oatbakes	200g	824kcal
cashew nuts	100g	588kcal
peanuts	100g	618kcal
6 x gels	150g	450kcal
2 packets fig rolls	400g	1440kcal
TOTAL	1.88kg	8712kcal

The total weight in my pack minus flare had weighed in at 6.5kg, with the water it was around 10kg. Other compulsory items were sleeping bag, anti-venom kit, lighter, antiseptic, penknife, torch, GPS, spare batteries, signalling mirror and compass. The race briefing was around 5pm, information was given about navigation and what to expect, this was not supposed to be about complicated navigation and often there was a track that could be followed. There was one dangerous descent of around 300m to check point 7. There were 10 checkpoints including the finish, the average of 20km between checkpoints went out the window – distances were 20km, 21km, 36km, 26km, 21km, 10km, 13km, 13km, 12km, and 13km. I was quite worried about the 36km checkpoint, this would mean carrying a lot of extra water as it would still be quite hot at this stage of the race. The road book listed the 86 GPS points, had a small sketch of what to see and observations. After the usual dinner it was bed at around 10pm.

Tuesday 6th March and Wednesday 7th March

My wedding anniversary – 15 years today we had been at Gretna Green dragging two people of the streets to witness our marriage, I could not even ring Bill as the mobile phones didn't work out here. We were up at 6am for the 8am coach journey to the start, I could not see anyone having breakfast and was desperate for hot water to make my ready brek and coffee so got the stove out again, the fumes were quite overwhelming in the hut and had to open the door, poor Lizzy, I was either going to gas her or freeze her with the door open, it was quite cold at this time in the morning. Breakfast done it was still dark and just about getting light as we got to the coaches. At one stage the coaches had to leave the road to follow another sand track, unsurprisingly we ground to a halt, embedded in the sand. 4 wheel drives to the rescue we were packed in and bumped speedily to the start, surprised I managed to get out alive.

The start was just a gantry system. The 9am start had long since gone while stuck in the sand, it was still quite cold at the start was just sat in the sand waiting for the start. As 10am approached it was getting hotter by the minute and soon retreated to the shade from the gantry. I had opted for a long sleeve shirt in the end, I had got a t-shirt but was worried about burning in the intense heat. My hour in the sun yesterday making tea had seen me get a bit of colour on my arms and didn't dare risk two days running in the sun, it also meant I did not have to carry sun cream either, extra weight. I had put on sun cream to start with.

Eventually it looked like we had all arrived and around 10:15am we gathered for the start. The air horn sounded and we were off. The route was like a gravel track that forked in several places but ended up in the same place, but very flat. I was shocked at the pace of the early starters, I was well down the field, my GPS said I was running nearly 6mph, this was faster than anticipated and could not believe how many people were overtaking me, I just had to settle down and accept that they would come back to me, this was a long race and had to slow down a bit and not get carried away. I tried to concentrate on the GPS to get used to running with it, I had only managed to do one run in the hills with it before the event, but it was enough to demonstrate how to use it.



After around 3 miles the path became very rocky with big boulders, it was difficult to follow the line on the GPS now as it was pointing straight up the rocky boulders. A couple of lads in red went straight up the boulders so I followed, only to realise a group of runners behind us were contouring around the bottom, what a waste of time and effort, this was not like the desert I had expected, a very steep drop back to the path saw me at the back of a big group of runners, only some way behind. The route was now following a gully that got steeper and steeper. I was getting very frustrated now, clambering over rocks, using arms and legs to climb steep sections, I had not anticipated this and the group in front kept disappearing. As we neared what I had hoped to be the top a big scree climb with loose rocks appeared. If this had been dark I don't think I could have done this, was there more of this to come? I had not prepared for this, my feet were getting sore tripping and stumbling on the rocks, I felt like I was back in Scotland climbing something like Ben Nevis. I was scared now as I tip toed across the scree and rock path, ahead looked like one big rock climb and possibly the top. At the bottom of the climb I looked around me, it was horrific, I was surrounded by steep rocks and could not even see where I had climbed up to get where I was, there was no way back, the group in front of me had disappeared so there was a way out. I climbed up a very steep section, hoping that this was the end of the climb, wondering why no one was behind me, and there was the answer in front of me. There had been a nice, zigzag path all the way up and we had just climbed parallel in a gully, relief in some ways that this was off- route and hoped not to encounter any of this again, but a lesson learnt to look a bit better if the route becomes like this it probably means it is not the route.

I was well behind most of the field now and many of the fellow Brits were in front of me. The path was now rocky and gently downhill. I picked up the pace again and was easily overtaking people. After just getting in front of one of the French women Katel I hit a cliff face, the GPS was pointing straight up and over, obviously not the way but was it left or right, impossible to tell. The rocks had now given way to soft sand and judging by the footprints in the sand runners had turned right, I followed the footprints and was now going over a mile off-route and the alarm came on my GPS. I just had to trust my instinct and follow the footprints, the runners were right, eventually the sand contoured around the rocks and was back in line with the GPS, it was now a mixture of soft sand and rocky/gravel paths with amazing rock formations appearing around us. I was aware it was hot but was not bothered by the heat at all.

I felt as though I was on my own now, the runners were getting more spaced out and no-one to follow, good in some ways as made me rely more heavily on my own judgement, which I knew I would have to do for most of the race. It didn't seem that long and the first checkpoint appeared in the distance, just as well as was just running out of water. I had carried 2.5 litres for this checkpoint as know I do not drink much in the first hour of running. At the checkpoint there were a couple of men in red just leaving – the same two I had followed up on my first navigational error – I know not to follow them again. The checkpoint was like a kind of gazebo, tent overhead, no sides and very low. Inside there were stacks of water, no-one was giving me any so went and helped myself to a bottle, only for uproar to take place, it must be allocated, your number written on the bottles and card punched. Problem solved and water given I refilled my bottles, two for water and two for sports drink, same as before, took one last big swig and off I went.

It had taken 3.5 hours to reach this checkpoint, I had anticipated 3 hours, but given the nature of the Ben Nevis I had climbed instead of the nice zigzag path I guess this was acceptable. As I left the checkpoint I had noticed Anke in front, I first met Anke when I shared a classroom for sleeping while competing in the Moravian Ultra Marathon back in 2004. I wondered if there were any more women in front as felt I had overtaken a good few people now. It was hard to run now, the water refilled and could significantly feel the extra weight, I ran and walked and overtook Anke. The navigation to the next checkpoint was really easy now, underfoot was a mixture of soft sand and gravelly tracks, spaced out in front was the odd person or two whom I overtook, it was pretty much the same surrounding now, always surrounded by stunning rock formations. Eventually I made ground on the two men in red as they caught another three athletes, I then somehow managed to trip over a rock, fall and kick myself in the calf. It was agony, it started cramping and thought it was the end of my race. It probably wasn't that long before it started easing, there was no one in sight behind me as I lay on the ground. I crawled up to standing position again, hobbled a bit and then it was back running, 10 minutes and disaster over it was not to bother me again for the rest of the race. I finally got back to the five runners in front of me, I was flying again now, I was down to my last 500ml of drink and decided to make the most of being light weight as the next one was the long checkpoint of 36km. I took the runners and was soon at checkpoint 2.

Same set up as before and got allocated my water a bit quicker this time. I was surprised at the number of runners in the checkpoint, around 5 people sitting and laying and eating food and having their feet seen to. I did the essentials of filling my bottles and mixing drinks, I changed from sports drinks to milkshakes now, it had taken 3 hours to reach here from the last checkpoint, more like the time I expected. All my bottles filled I also decided to take an extra bottle of water with me so added a 1.5 litre bottle to my pack, it was still hot and sunny and now had 36km to the next checkpoint.

I got going again just as another 2 runners set off, they were walking and so was I, the weight was hard to cope with. The path forked and the 2 runners went left, my GPS was pointing to the right and could see the path well in the distance and felt like it was the right direction. I trusted myself and went right, occasionally running a few steps to keep up the pace. I kept watching the other 2 runners and they kept looking at me, great, I was right, they were now making their way to my path. I was now walking and running and drinking quite heavily to try to get the weight down. Another two runners then caught us, it was Paolo and a French man who had taken a good break at the last checkpoint. Paolo was great, he had chatted to me while I had been making tea the previous day, he had seen me in several 100km races and was a member of the Italian National 100km team. He spoke very good English. The next few miles passed quite quickly, still a mixture of soft sand, gravel and stones. I was sort of with a group of five runners, continuously leap-frogging as they walked then I ran, then I walked as they ran.

I was becoming aware of the time now, it was approaching 7pm and light was beginning to fade. Of the runners around me Paolo was the only one that appeared to speak English, he was also very good company and felt he was the stronger of the athletes around. I knew it was going to be difficult to navigate in the dark and thought it would be nice to have company, its always easier to navigate with two and not so

lonely if you do get lost. As the light faded the group split, I went ahead with Paolo as the other runners walked more and dropped back out of sight. We stopped to put on our head torches and was aware of a runner in the distance we were catching, he kept looking back and quickly realised it was one of the Libyan runners, he had a flag sticking up out of his pack and very distinctive.

Into the darkness and another GPS point achieved, we hit another rock face, Paolo somehow guessed the path was to the left, he was right, I was now very glad of his company, this is what I had anticipated may happen, the path contoured around the rock face and back on route, all of a sudden someone appeared behind us, it was the Libyan, no GPS and no head lamp on, he followed us. Every now and then he let out what I can only describe as a "war cry" he kept making me jump and did not like it. Checkpoint 3 was closer than expected and as darkness has fell the temperature had dropped and was not drinking quite as much. I still had around a litre of water left and so dumped $\frac{3}{4}$ of this when I realised it was only a couple of km to the checkpoint.

Paolo didn't take much longer than me with his break which was good so we set off together again with Libyan in tow. About 15 minutes out and we hit the edge of a cliff face looking down, obviously not the way, I was thinking do we go left or right while Paolo was thinking we should go back to the checkpoint and start again. I just had not thought of this, but he was right and we went back and started again, this time we noticed a couple of small cairns, piles of stones, to our left and followed these over a small rock face, there were footprints in some of the sand bits we hit and felt more confident, it was the route and were soon progressing well. It was difficult to run in the dark and navigate without falling over so we walked quite well navigating together and chatting away.

Next was a Balise, a clip point on the top of a big sand dune, you would be disqualified if you did not clip your card here. In the dark with two GPS navigational systems we could not find the clip point, we spend ages climbing soft sand dunes to no avail. Eventually in the distance we could see the lights of the runners behind catching us, we decided to wait, four GPS systems could surely find the clip point. Round and round in circles and nothing, I was getting really fed up now and just wanted to continue, we could not wait until day light and this was just impossible. Frustrated I just sat in the sand to wait, but I didn't sit for long, something was coming towards me, it was a massive rat heading straight at me, YUK, up and away I was just not going to wait any longer for the local vermin to get me. I continued with Paolo up and over some of the softest sand dunes yet, it was like climbing up and avalanche as the sand cascaded down. I had to run with all fours like a dog up the dune to reach the top, just to sit on my backside and slide down, good fun in some ways but the sand went over the top of my gaiters on this section.

Paolo had problems with his gaiters and his feet had filled up with sand. Eventually he was forced to sit down and empty his shoes as his feet were getting sore. I had experienced this running in the dunes at Redcar and had made my own gaiters, just ankle height and glued them to my shoes. I had finished them off by sticking gaffa tape around but this had come off on the first rocky climb that felt like Ben Nevis. My gaiters were holding out well considering, but were none too white at the moment.

Checkpoint 4 was at a place called Elephants Foot, the formation in the rock looked like this, it was easy to see the outline in the darkness. Paolo had forewarned me he was going to take a longer break this time to have some mash potato and get his feet seen to. I decided it was best to wait with him, I was not in any hurry now, Paolo had told me I was the first lady and around 5-6 place overall, he was good company and still was worried about getting lost in the dark. We told the checkpoint we had been unable to find the clip point, they told us not to worry as previous runners had not found it either in the darkness, later runners were told not to bother to find it.

It was quite cold on sitting down, it was around 2am now and had been told it gets very cold early in the morning so put on my extra long sleeved top. After getting his feet sorted he got out some mashed potato, the checkpoint provided hot water and Paolo kindly offered some of his coffee for me – he joked why am I not having tea?? Because I had not anticipated sitting down long enough to make some. The hot water was not hot, barely luke warm and probably only just dissolved the coffee, I am sure it will not have dissolved his mashed potato either. I forced down some peanuts, not something I usually eat. The fig rolls had been going down really well, the nutigrain not so good, as I had sat down I had started to feel hungry but didn't fancy any of the snacks I had, I now wished I had got some mashed potato.

While sitting there another runner had come in and gone again, he was Christian and was to be the 4th person, I did have the choice to go with him but Paolo spoke English and was good company. Then Katel came in with another runner. I said nothing but Paolo shoved down the rest of his mashed potato and quickly got his shoes on. Just as we left some more runners appeared with another lady, this was Florence.

The route was quite easy to navigate again, a mixture of mainly soft sand with occasional gravelly bits. At around 5am Paolo was again struggling with his feet and shouted at me to go, I was aware that there were two women not too far behind now and if I wanted to be the first lady must make an effort now. I had walked the entire night up until now and probably lost nearly two hours looking for the clip point and waiting at the checkpoint. The Libyan man was still in tow between me and Paolo, I hoped he would stay with Paolo. I started shuffling into a run and found it quite easy, I had not taken quite so much water with me as it was quite cold now and checkpoints not so far apart. After a while I took a look behind, no sight of Libyan man and just a distant light of Paolo.

The food was just not going down now, the last Nutri-grain bar nearly came straight back out and felt quite sick, I just needed some real food now but didn't have any. I took a couple of Rennie tablets as my stomach was quite empty and often it is the acid in the empty stomach that makes you feel sick. I did improve after this but could not face eating any more food for the rest of the race – that was another 12 hours of no food, just milk shake and water to drink.

Then it was straight up to a rock face again, left or right, the road book said follow the valley, the valley was on either side, ok right, ¾ mile later I was completely surrounded by rocks, ok back again and try left, flat on my face again and a long graze down my left shin, that was sore. I could see one light in the distance, it must be Paolo, the other women had all been with other runners, this was a single light. It was still in the distance as I circled the rock face. Dawn was breaking now and a sort of

track appeared, round another corner and I could see two people in the distance, checkpoint 5 was not too far away now so guessed the people were connected with that. Around another corner and there was the checkpoint, I got to the checkpoint before the two people, they were the checkpoint staff.

A quick refill of water and mix the milkshake and off again. The path was quite rocky and uphill, I struggled with running and walking and as I reached a gradient walked again. The blister on the ball of my left foot was now quite painful on this rocky path, I thought it would have burst itself by now but was obviously going to have to stop and burst it myself, I should have done this at the last checkpoint but didn't want to waste time and wanted to be away and out of sight should any of the women come in, psychologically if you can see the person you want to catch it makes it easier, but if the person is out of sight it always seems harder. I stopped, burst the blister, and a couple of others I noticed, took off my second top as the sun was beginning to give out heat again now and then had to walk to the next checkpoint as the blister was so sore. The rocky path made the whole of my feet very tender and was much easier on the sock sand. The rocky path led all the way to the next checkpoint and navigation had been easy.

Checkpoint 6 was at the base of a rocky plateau, I had wondered where the path out was as it was not obvious. A man from the checkpoint showed me the way, behind the tent was a steep sandy path to the top of the plateau. It took me ages getting up the path, there were all kinds of patterns in the sand, some from snakes but one looked really curious, it looked like a mountain bike had been up here, it wasn't until later when I watched a very big beetle that it was the beetle that left the bike tracks.

Once on top of the plateau a whole new world opened up before me, it was out of this world, it was like the whole surface had been covered in shiny polished stones that had been carefully placed next to each other in the sand, absolutely stunning, I felt as though I was on another planet, it didn't feel real. I continued walking and as if like magic a small path seemed to appear before my eyes, this sea of shiny blackness had a white path leading through it. The path led to a sharp drop from the plateau to an old seabed, there were fossils all over and even fossilised trees sticking out of the ground. I didn't realise at the time this was what they were, it was only on finishing when someone showed me a photograph that I realised what they were. The path then skirted a cliff edge, the dangerous descent was not far away on the GPS but was a long way snaking around the cliff edges. The descent was really tough on the feet and really picked my way down, my feet were really throbbing. Every now and then you could glimpse the checkpoint at the bottom, but more intriguing for me was the sight in the distance, far away from this rocky lunar landscape was the sight of rich golden sand dunes in the distance, I just knew this was the last two checkpoints in the distance.

It was probably around 2pm by the time I reached checkpoint 7, I was feeling really down now as my feet were so sore, didn't probably realise it but was also feeling really tired. Felt like I could easily drop out but was in fifth place overall and first lady, my feet had been worse on LEJOG so there was no real excuse for dropping out. The checkpoint staff were great, the best on the whole of the course. One man came out to greet me to take me to the tent, the lady kept offering a massage but I had visions of laying down and not getting up again so declined. The two men were great,

gave me water and filled up all my drinks bottles for me, even mixed up the milkshakes for me. I was offered some coke and gratefully received a cup and eventually gave in to the constant offer of a massage while I sat there drinking coke. She cleaned my filthy legs with wet wipes, I hardly dare say but my grazes were stinging like heck, she then gently massaged by calves, after that I was offered a shower with a small device that sprayed you with water, I washed my face and hands and with clean legs did feel much better. It was time to go again, I asked how far to the next person to get some inspiration, half an hour was the answer, so no chance of seeing him.

I was led out to the track to the next checkpoint and told it was best to stay on the track but it did wind around a bit. The track was quite flat and some places rocky and gravely, others quite soft and sinking stuff. I carried on towards the sight of the sand dunes, the path did detour quite a way off line and my alarm said I was over a mile off again, but knew the path would lead me to the checkpoint. I began deteriorating again, it was mid-afternoon and really feeling tired now, felt as though I could just roll up and go to sleep, I was really struggling to concentrate, I was unable to run as my feet were sore and struggling to walk as I was so tired. I needed a pit stop for the toilet and so sat down for a couple of minutes and shut my eyes, it was heaven, I could easily have just stopped here, I opened my eyes, it had been just 2 minutes. OK, its time to go again, barely 20 minutes and I was fading again, looking for somewhere to rest, there was nothing, no shade and the heat was blazing down, I gave in again and just plonked myself down on the path. 2 minutes again and I was up. The GPS was now reading just 3 miles to the next checkpoint, one more break and see if I could make it, I was just eyeing up a rock in the distance that looked good for sitting on, as I approached it a snake slithered quickly across my path. That gave me a reality check, I am in the middle of the desert with all kinds of snakes and scorpions, wide awake now I didn't need any more breaks and powered away to the next checkpoint.



Checkpoint 8 was at the start of the sand, the big monster truck above was parked here (picture is at camp), I sat down and filled my bottles as usual, I decided to unload the food I had not eaten, I still had a few fig rolls, Nutri-grain and nuts left, I knew I could not eat this and was pointless carrying them, just 25km of soft golden sand to the finish. The checkpoint staff took my bag and immediately rummaged through it and dug out the fig rolls – “do you mind if I eat these?” Yuk, squashed, crumbling, sun baked fig rolls, he ate them, they had an oversight and forgot to bring any food!! Poor

staff probably had a long wait until the finish if I was just the fifth runner. In return I was offered a can of coke from the cool box, magic, just what I needed to psyche myself up for the last 25km. I was just about ready to go but decided to sit and drink the coke first. Several camels were wondering around, I asked if these belonged to anyone or were just wild. Apparently all the camels were owned by someone, don't know how they would find them though.

The soft sand was much easier on my feet, the can of coke and perked me up, the finish just a couple of checkpoints away. The GPS was easy to follow now, a straight line across the sand with no obstacles. I had left at 6pm and but the light was soon beginning to fade again, I had never run this long non-stop without a break before. Jean-Marc, the organiser then drove up in a 4-wheel drive, he did not speak much English but got out and shook my hand and waved me on. A small light appeared on the horizon, I guessed it must be checkpoint 9 getting ready for the darkness again. I powered away trying to get there before I had to get my head torch out, it takes time taking the pack off, rummaging around and putting it back on, had to do this to refill drinks but wanted to get their to avoid wasting more time. I made it as darkness fell, it was 8pm, just as I arrived I thought I saw a runner leaving, who is that I asked, it was Christian, the runner who left while I was having a break with Paolo at checkpoint 4.

I didn't waste much time, filled one water bottle, one milkshake bottle, got my headlamp on, hat off and ran off in search of Christian. The sand was getting softer and the dunes higher, I was falling in and out of 4 wheel drive tracks, initially there was a light 200m ahead, then it appeared 200m to my right. I focussed on my GPS up and down the dunes, just 3 more GPS points, another one done and there was no sight of Christian, the dunes were horrendous now and really struggled to climb them, I was also looking at my watch, the last checkpoint had taken just 2 hours, I should be finished by around 10:15pm, dinner on the last night had been at 10pm, I was starving and hoped to make it in time for dinner. Eventually I made it to GPS 85, GPS 86 was the finish, up and down and I just could not see the finish, I felt like I was going around in circles and not making progress at all. The dunes were massive, just had to run up them on all fours, sit on top and get my breath back and slide down on my bum. I was getting more and more frustrated as time ticked by and the GPS seemed all over the place. One last really big sand dune, I got to the top, I stood on top, just 400m to the finish and I could not see it, there were a few lights around but none looked like the finish.

I then became aware that there was something around 200m to my left, I kept looking into the darkness at it, then realised it was a person in Arabic dress standing like a statue with one arm straight in the air holding a light stick. Was he there to show me to the finish? He was silent, I stood my ground and asked "Finish?", "Libyan Challenge?" I got no response and didn't dare go near him, I took two steps forward to go down the dune and he sprung into life in Arabic, I sat looking at him and again asked for "Finish?" Only for silence again. I walked around 100m towards him and asked again, he then turned and pointed and in the distance could see another light stick. A little more confident now he turned to walk towards the second person and I followed up and down a few more dunes. Then more words and I could now see the finish in the distance, through a barbed wire fence, over some water pipes and the air horn was sounded as I finished.

I was offered a seat and Jean-Marc came and gave me some Pepsi. Another runner was there chatting to me, Christian had finished some 22 minutes ahead of me. It was around 11pm when I finished and I asked for some food - dinner would be served in the usual tent, did I want a shower first? No, I wanted food first, the other runner told me to get warm clothes on first, very sensible, I had only sat for a couple of minutes and then got some warm clothes on and the usual chicken and cous cous arrived, it was barely warm and had probably been sat on the table since 10pm, but I ate every bit and felt better for it.

Off to the showers, I was a bit wary standing on the toilet floor having a shower with burst blisters on my feet. The showers were barely warm as before and was a very quick affair and then off to bed around midnight. The picture below is of the finish line from the camp side.



Thursday 8th March

I was wide awake at 6am, no signs of breakfast, I could see the breakfast from my doorway so just made myself some tea and ready-brek again. Eventually breakfast was there around 8am. I joined Andrew and Kim, both had dropped out at checkpoint 2 with sickness and dehydration problems. Andrew had asked to be taken to hospital for a drip and had been taken all over in a police car, to a different camp and eventually by ambulance back to the Ghat camp. Kim, from Denmark, a fellow 24-hour runner had to sleep at checkpoint 2 overnight before being returned to camp. We stayed chatting for quite a while and drinking coffee with a few stragglers coming to breakfast, it was hard to comprehend that most of the 68 starters were still out on the course, there were probably only about 10 finishers by now.

I went back and emptied my bag and cleaned my bottles. I then found the medical tent where a lot of runners were sat including Anke. The medical man was from France and recognised me from a 24-hour race he had attended with the French National team. He treated my blisters by draining the fluid with a syringe and injected red antiseptic, there were 5 blisters on my left foot and 6 on my right, but really only one big one that hurt on the ball of my foot. He was very good and very

gentle, he also gave me sun burn cream for my hands, the only part of my body that got burnt, my GPS hand in particular was quite red, but not really sore. Soon it was lunchtime and Paolo appeared, his feet were quite sore and got one blister infected. He had rung his wife and I asked how, there was a man in a brown dress and white turban, if you gave him Libyan Dino you could ring home for 3 minutes. I found him but he needed to buy a new card and had to go back later. Paolo kindly gave me some Libyan Dino to ring home and would not take my Euros in exchange.

I checked to see which checkpoint Lizzy had reached but she had a long way to go so knew she would not arrive during the nighttime. The door has a bolt on the inside and outside, if you are inside the other person cannot get in. After a leisurely afternoon the wind started to pick up and a haze appeared with the fine sand being whisked around. Eventually by late afternoon I was able to ring Bill, I hoped he would answer his mobile as he would still be at work. Luckily he was and first question he asked was "Who is that?" Had he forgotten me already? A brief 3 minutes later and that was over, it was nice to hear his voice and speak to him again.

Andrew had been following Luke's progress. I had met Luke on the Trans-Alpine Run in 2005, we took one last walk up to the finish line expecting Luke shortly, but was impossible to stand around, the sand storm was getting really bad now and didn't know how anyone could walk in this, I could hardly see and was getting sand in my eyes. We retreated back to the open hut for dinner, the sand was all over the table and chairs.



Dinner arrived at the usual 10pm and shortly after Luke arrived, looking very yellow from the sand, I was amazed he could finish in these conditions. He said he could not tell whether he was walking up or down a sand dune and visibility was less than a metre. The temperature started dropping again and Luke started cramping so went to bed. It was now around midnight and my door had been bolted from inside. Andrew was here, was Lizzy back? Andrew said she may have dropped out as had not anticipated her back tonight, after looking through a small hole at the back of the hut it was obvious there was no-one inside, could only assume the windy conditions had rattled the door and shook the bolt closed inside. Andrew found the camp manager to fix the problem, he spoke no English and was indicated to sit at the dinner table and wait. There were some checkpoint staff just arrived back and was offered a fleece as was sitting there shivering by this stage. After half an hour I was back in my mud hut and slept well.

Friday 9th March

Awake again at 6am, had a shower to wash all the sand out from last night's sand storm, more runners had arrived overnight but there was still a big group out. This included several people I knew. Breakfast was at 8am and Luke had asked me to wake him, his door was open and he was up, we went to breakfast and listened to some of the stories from the runners who just finished. The sand storm had passed but was still left with the haze of sand in the air that apparently takes 2-3 days to settle, so conditions were not so hot for the runners today and walked around with my fleece on as it was quite cool without the sun.

Later that day I took a trip into Ghat, the nearest local town, Paolo described this town as the aftermath of a nuclear bomb. It was very desolate, not many people around and just a couple of shops and phone exchange place. We took an hour walking around and visited a local restoration project of crumbling walls. While here Paolo negotiated with one of the sellers and I got a pottery camel with little packs on. I took a bag of golden sand home with me to fill the little packs. Paolo had told me that the Libyan with him had disappeared and not finished. The transport arrived to take us back to camp in time for lunch. But lunch was delayed as the last big group of runners were about to finish, this included Lizzy, two Irish girls Liz and Kellie, Andy – another of the Brits, an Italian who was Paolo's room mate, a French man Christian and Laurent, who I first met on the Verdon Canyon event last year. All the camp came out to greet them in after 76.5 hours in the desert. The picture shows the runners from behind heading to the finish line you can see above the fenced area.



With everyone finished we sat down for lunch at 4pm. The usual chicken and cous cous, but with the prospect of a gourmet dinner tomorrow for celebration. The evening soon passed and was good to listen to all the stories. Keith had a good one on sleep deprivation, he wanted a pee and walked to a bush to have a pee, only forgot to pull his pants down!! I suppose he soon dried.

Saturday 10th March.

Today was quite boring, sat around the camp for a while, listening to talk about the course and the GPS navigation, as you had to deviate from a straight line indicated by the GPS, a couple of times over a mile off-route, one GPS had registered the route at 137 miles, this sounded much more realistic to me than the 190km indicated, 137 miles is approximately 220km, I could not figure out how to get this figure from my GPS. There was also talk about comparison to last year's course, the first part of the course had changed but the last few checkpoints were the same, apart from the fact that the last two checkpoints were abandoned last year and stopped at checkpoint 8. I then calculated how many calories I had actually eaten, from the previous list the actual amounts eaten were:

4 x sports drinks	140g	532kcal
10 x glycoslim	400g	2790kcal
1 x ginger nutrigain	45g	168kcal
2 x kello's oatbakes	100g	412kcal
cashew nuts	0	0
peanuts	25g	155kcal
6 x gels	0	0
fig rolls	300g	1080kcal
TOTAL	1.01kg	5137kcal + 400ml Pepsi

I was surprised my total intake was as high as this as I ate absolutely nothing for the last 12 hours, I drank all the Glycoslim taken and this just lasted out and was probably what kept me going. One 40g sachet is approximately 280kcal, so high in calories. This was the one product I was always able to take while on my LEJOG event last year. An average consumption in a 24-hour race for me is approximately 4000 calories and I had estimated around 6000 calories for this event.

In the afternoon I went into the sand to sit and make tea in the peace and quiet. Kim joined me for a while and then went back for the presentation at around 5pm. This was a long drawn out affair, several speeches in French, then converted into English, then a few more, then everyone was presented with a medal in reverse order. We were supposed to get finisher t-shirts but these had not arrived so we were going to be posted on. Then the first three men and first three women went up, I was given an Arabian purse and then dancing from the locals took place.

Dinner, which we had been looking forward to so much was not as good as expected. A big bowl of food was brought for 5 people to share, I was kind of in the middle of two pots, the one to the left I could not make out what it was, tasted like chicken skin and did not like it. The one to the right was the usual chicken but with pasta, I stuck with this. Then there was a slide show and film show of the race, I think I was everywhere but where the cameras were, but the scenery was amazing, I will eventually be sent these images. At 11pm I went to bed for a couple of hours, the coaches were leaving at 2am in the morning for the journey back. The flight had been changed yet again. Originally we had been set to arrive at Paris at 2:30pm Sunday. I booked my flight in the evening, it then changed to 10pm at Paris and so I changed my flight to Monday and booked a hotel. Now it was back to the original time, there was nothing I could do as my phone did not work, so it was just a case of wait and see.

Sunday 11th March

The coaches' left at 2am prompt for the bumpy ride back, the journey didn't seem to take so long and checked in on arrival at Sebbah. No signs of the flight though so we just waited. Breakfast arrived of tuna sandwiches, water and Pepsi. We sat on the grass outside the airport waiting for news. The flight was supposed to be 11am, I think it was around 2:30pm by the time we took off. By the time we arrived and adjusted the time it was around 6pm local time. I had it in my head my original flight had been 7:30pm so didn't really rush much, got my baggage and heard that most people were meeting the other side for a drink before going to the hotel (no alcohol in Libya). I was going to see how much it would be to change my ticket yet again and going to meet them.

I got to the Easyjet counter and the flight change was around £65, I was tired and really wanted to be home, if I got home tonight I would see Bill, if I went home tomorrow I would probably have to wait until Friday night to see Bill. The thought of another night out, travelling out for an hour on the bus and back again, I really wanted to be home and so paid up. You have five minutes to make the check-in desk was the response. What? It's 18:05 and the flight is 18:50 arriving in Newcastle at 19:30, oops! I had remembered the arrival time and not take off time. I ran across the airport to get to check-in at 18:08, check-in closed at 18:10, I was the last to check-in and by the time that was done it was run across to fight through the x-ray machine for hand luggage. There was a massive queue, asking to go in front of people as I was going to miss my flight, I got through, looked at my ticket, gate 1, I thought this meant it would be the first gate, no it was the last gate, running through the gates to the far end I just heard on the tannoy, last call for Newcastle, I just made it, went through the glass doors, onto the bus to the plane and the doors shut behind me. Wow, I would be home tonight. I rang Bill once back in Britain and said I would be home by 9pm, thought I better ring or had visions of him locking me out and going to bed. You don't know the luxury of being home, getting a nice clean hot shower, having clean clothes and sleeping in a bed with no creepy crawlies – just two dogs!!

Looking back now, 5th place overall, 36 hours 46 minutes, 7 hours off the women's course record, not too bad for my first trip to the desert. A lot of real experiences, lost a lot of time during darkness hours and food could have been better, but all part of the learning experience. My feet got really sore and had not expected the big climbs and really rocky underfoot conditions, but very good mentally to do something so different from "the norm". The whole camp conditions, environment and friendliness was great. Was so good to train differently, not so intensely and am now ready for my next challenge, back to "the norm" and the World 24 Hours in Canada in July, selection finally came through with 3 men and 3 women selected. Got to try to improve on my 6th place last year and hopefully a medal position. My legs are not too bad, probably because of so much walking, but my feet are still tender, as I write this I have already done 2 races since Libya and it is snowing. The Wednesday after I got back was the shortest race I have ever done – a 1500m time trial on my local track at Guisborough (all of 6 mins and 4 seconds of running) and at the weekend a real icy blast in the Redcar Half Marathon with bitterly cold winds and snow in the morning before the start (a steady 1 hour 42 mins). This weekend an off-road marathon (Cleveland Survival) and next weekend a six hour track race – one of two races I can

do to “prove fitness” for my selection. The Libyan Challenge apparently does not prove I am fit as it is on a different surface – the politics of selection is so restrictive, a six hour race can prove I am fit whereas 36 hours of running and breaking the course record by 7 hours proves nothing?



Position individuelle	Position Equipe	Nom	H/F	Temps cumulé	Equipe
1		Sebastien Chaigneau	H	29 H 51 MIN 08 SEC	
1		Claude Escots	H	29 H 51 MIN 08 SEC	Chod la dune 1
3		Rivoire Vincent	H	32 H 40 MIN 06 SEC	Chod la dune 1
4	2	Christian Ginter	H	36 H 22 MIN 04 SEC	Les baroudeurs
5		Sharon Gayter	F	36 H 46 MIN 56 SEC	
6	1	Florence Gay	F	38 H 53 MIN 10 SEC	Chod la dune 2
6	1	Thierry Corbarieu	H	38 H 53 MIN 10 SEC	Chod la dune 2
8		Paolo Barghini	H	39 H 16 MIN 53 SEC	
8		Michel Deschamps	H	39 H 16 MIN 53 SEC	France Lymphom espoir
10		Pierre Gagnière	H	39 H 39 MIN 12 SEC	
11		Marc Luciani	H	41 H 52 MIN 10 SEC	
11		Pascal Paracuellos	H	41 H 52 MIN 10 SEC	
11		Yousif Elgibali	H	41 H 52 MIN 10 SEC	
14		Anke Molkenthin	F	42 H 33 MIN 00 SEC	
14		Patrick Hameau	H	42 H 33 MIN 00 SEC	La bascour
14		Eric Boutemy	H	42 H 33 MIN 00 SEC	
17		Jean-Pierre Vozel	H	44 H 11 MIN 54 SEC	France Lymphom espoir
18		Harald Meyer	H	46 H 36 MIN 40 SEC	
19	2	Jean-pierre Poidevin	H	47 H 00 MIN 26 SEC	Les Baroudeurs
20		Jean-Pierre Tillard	H	48 H 04 MIN 04 SEC	La bascour
21		Eric Legionnet	H	50 H 31 MIN 22 SEC	
22		Thierry Adeline	H	52 H 32 MIN 22 SEC	France Lymphom espoir
23	3	Jean-paul Schilling	H	53 H 54 MIN 25 SEC	Team OSEO
24	1	Claudine Pascal	F	53 H 58 MIN 00 SEC	Chod la dune 2
25		Erik Basset	H	54 H 22 MIN 34 SEC	

26		Massimiliano Puntelli	H	55 H 25 MIN 05 SEC	Team marbleman
27		Jean-Pierre Roberti	H	55 H 41 MIN 40 SEC	
27		Alain Dauch	H	55 H 41 MIN 40 SEC	Savon Team
29	2	Laurent Berruyer	H	58 H 26 MIN 00 SEC	Les baroudeurs
30		Adam Dobby	H	58 H 29 MIN 40 SEC	
31		Moudar Glya	H	58 H 30 MIN 45 SEC	
32		Luke Cunliffe	H	58 H 57 MIN 40 SEC	
33		Michel Casals	H	59 H 33 MIN 26 SEC	Malissa
33		Joelle Leymonie	F	59 H 33 MIN 26 SEC	Malissa
33		Claude Coffin	H	59 H 33 MIN 26 SEC	Malissa
33		Carmen Delarue	F	59 H 33 MIN 26 SEC	Malissa
37		Otman Kashon	H	59 H 41 MIN 40 SEC	
38	3	Laurent Blanckaert	H	61 H 00 MIN 33 SEC	Team OSEO
39		Majda Daga	F	62 H 02 MIN 33 SEC	
40		Mohamed Ibrahim	H	62 H 03 MIN 04 SEC	
41		Aziz	H	62 H 03 MIN 20 SEC	
42		Paolo Casini	H	64 H 14 MIN 45 SEC	
42		Christophe Bonamy	H	64 H 14 MIN 45 SEC	La bascour
42		Frédéric Gaurat	H	64 H 14 MIN 45 SEC	La bascour
42		Luc Grajwoda	H	64 H 14 MIN 45 SEC	Savon Team
46		Sandy Mc Callum	F	68 H 13 MIN 22 SEC	Sand Cats
46		Tess Geddes	F	68 H 13 MIN 22 SEC	Sand Cats
46		Stephen Partridge	H	68 H 13 MIN 22 SEC	SPARKS
46		Keith Gray	H	68 H 13 MIN 22 SEC	SPARKS
50		Josef Golstchman	H	72 H 36 MIN 45 SEC	Team Hollywood
50		Hannes Harmtodt	H	72 H 36 MIN 45 SEC	Team Hollywood
50		Mario Schönherr	H	72 H 36 MIN 45 SEC	
50		Leo Grieshofer	H	72 H 36 MIN 45 SEC	
50		Michaël Bartl	H	72 H 36 MIN 45 SEC	Schoggispätzle
50		Ulrich Räth	H	72 H 36 MIN 45 SEC	Schoggispätzle
56		Michal Weib	H	73 H 21 MIN 51 SEC	
57		Christian Ligdamis	H	76 H 30 MIN 38 SEC	
57		Giuliano Pugollotti	H	76 H 30 MIN 38 SEC	
57		Liz Turley	F	76 H 30 MIN 38 SEC	
57		Kellie Power	F	76 H 30 MIN 38 SEC	
57		Laurent Locke	H	76 H 30 MIN 38 SEC	SPARKS
57		Elizabeth Evzangelista	F	76 H 30 MIN 38 SEC	
57		Andy Tsoi	H	76 H 30 MIN 38 SEC	

ABANDON

Abdoula Alrter	Andrew Peek
Alessandro Cucco	Laurie Coffin
Sofian Zintani	Dominique Charton
Kim Rasmussen	Christian Dubois
Ismael Salima	Katel Corne
	Benoit Sentost

