

GTPMB : Grand Trail Du Pais Du Mont Blanc

The start of it all

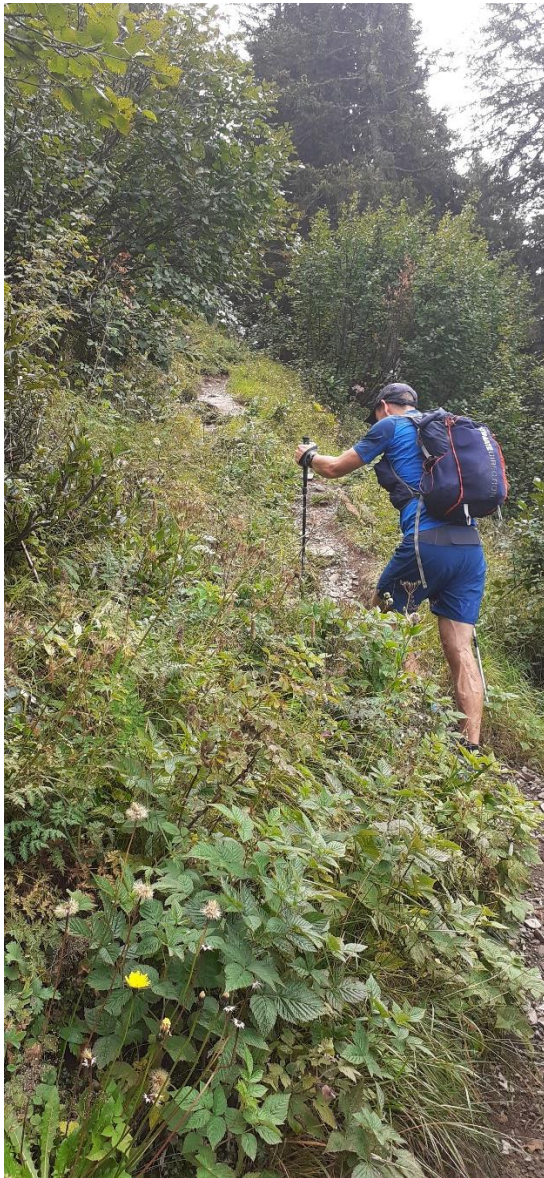
Since I started my ultra-run career back in 2013 I always had one ultimate dream. To run the PTL ('Petit Trotte a Leon': 300K race with 24.000 D+, to run as a team around the Mont Blanc) seemed like something unreachable but still worth to use as a goal for trainings and ambitions. Every year I trained because I love running but also to be able to enjoy the short running adventures in the mountains every year. These adventures grew every year and step by step they came closer to that ultimate dream I had. I came closest running the EMI-extreme, a 63 hours race running 168 km with 17.500 D+ with Erik Michels in 2019, a race on very demanding terrain. Running this race with Erik made it clear I would go for the PTL one day as team Slow & Steady. Erik already tried the PTL in 2019 but didn't reach the end because of his teammate who decided to quit, so he was eager to finish that ambition. In 2020 I ran the 'Petite Trotte a Vic' (200 km, 17.000 D+ in 5 days) as a stage trail with Erik and Bart when Covid made races difficult to plan. After this adventure I saw a message on Facebook to promote a new race in the Mont Blanc region which seemed like a PTL-clone but without the hard restrictions of the PTL : previous race-requirements an selection by PTL-team needed. Erik shared my enthusiasm and we were the second team to be enlisted in January 2021 for the first edition of the [GTPMB](#). A running adventure : 300 km on technical terrain with 24.000 D+, based on a GPS track, only teams allowed, self-sufficiency as a key. Specific training could start and the last year I succeeded running an average of 115km/week with 3000 D+/week. The goal of this training was to be able to finish the race without too much suffering, knowing that a bit of suffering is part of this game. A long training session with Erik in Chaudfontaine (90 Km, 4000 D+) in June showed we were ready for the big challenge. I also ran the 280 km long '[Haute route des Ardennes](#)' in July to see if I was up to the long lonely hours on the road.

Pre-race

2 weeks before the race, I started preparing all material and adding the last items on the list so I was more than prepared when we drove to Chamonix on Friday, 2 days before race day. We even slept on 1000 m that Friday to let our body adapt to the higher altitude.



Saturday, we finished packing close to a ski-station (2000 m high) and went for a short technical running trip, giving our body the extra stimulus to get used to running on technical terrain above 2000 m.





We finished our preparation with the race briefing where we met the organiser and his small team. They made it clear this was not a race like most others but rather an adventure where the race organiser acts as a facilitator, but most responsibility and planning came from the competitors. A check of mandatory gear was, in this spirit, not necessary. They assumed that everybody should take what they assumed needed for an adventure of this kind. A step by step review of the track showed only a few 'difficult' sections. The organiser stressed this was an adventure and not a real race, the goal was to have as much finishers as possible. If we weren't able to reach certain points within the timeframe we could simply take a 'raccourci' and continue the race as finisher.

After the briefing we enjoyed a lovely local pizza and we were able to camp very close to the start.

Race: [3-D replay](#)

Day 1: 51,6 kms, 4504 D+/4187 D-: [3-D replay](#)

The race started comfortably at 8.30 so we could sleep a full night before this long adventure. All teams gathered on the parking by the lake in 'Passy'. We met the colleagues for the first time in real life. 20 teams, 2 or 3 members, showed up, a lot less than the 50 teams that could attend due to Covid and the first edition of this race with a rather new race concept. Our race could start, we were ready and eager to go all the way.



The running pace in the first part of the race was at ease, it was clear everybody knew the race would be long and all the energy should be carefully spent. At km 2 we started the first of 75 long climbs, now it all started to get serious, the game was on and we enjoyed every second of it. Soon we were running together with 4 other teams in 4th position. 3 teams were in front and were going significantly faster so no option to close in on them and that was fine. We didn't think in terms of our place in the pack, the only concern was to manage ourselves: go up at ease, go down even slower to have no impact on the muscles as long as possible. The week before the race I read a report of this year's PTL being even more technical than other years and I was a little worried that our GTPMB would be less technical leaving me with an unfulfilled desire to go even further and more technical. The second climb of our track (a 2500 D+ climb) leading us through some very technical climbing sessions left no doubt, there would be no unfulfilled desire after this trip.



After this monster climb we sat down for our first of many lunch breaks. One of our principles was to sit down for all of our lunch breaks so the stomach has all the time and energy to do the job on which our effort was based. At this stage we switched position with the other 4 teams that were always

around. As we went down following the main path we were distracted as we were chattering on so we didn't notice we were off track. We had to go back some 250 m uphill, even in a 300 km race a 250m uphill section seems endless. Now we knew we had to focus a bit more on the track and where possible take the smaller/more technical path rather than the obvious road. As we went down, clouds were gathering on the top of the mountain we just left. Weather previews showed no rain or storm for the next three days for this valley but the clouds were there anyhow. They grew darker as we came closer to the valley and they were concentrated in the valley our next section would cross. The thunder sounded scary. Before the trip we agreed we would not cross ridges or peaks in a storm with lightning. We were still running in a cloudless, sunny valley so for the time being there was no real concern.



Down the hill we were able to fill our water supply. It was clear this would be a very important issue in our trip. As we were moving very slow on the technical terrain, there would be very long hours in between waterpoints. When we crossed to the next valley, the clouds slowly disappeared and there was no more threat. Hail on the road and in the forest showed how we had just missed a fierce storm. We thought ourselves to be team 'lucky bastards' at this point. Another long climb (700 m D+) lead to the first of 8 official supply posts: 'Réfuge de la Platé'.



Approximately every 40 km we would find a post where we could rest and eat. This means there would be about 15 hours between each point. As we entered the Gite, they served a full meal with delicious soup and a lovely dessert for on the road. The teams that were running the same pace were also present and one of the teams (Team number 8) indicated they were suffering hard and would probably stop. We only took 30min to eat/relax/pack/leave as we wanted to pass the 'Dérochoir' section before sunset as this would be the most technical section of the GTPMB and rain had worsened the terrain. We took the rope-section together with another team and found it tricky but doable.



In the dark we could continue our descend smoothly to reach the next supply point at 22 hrs. Before the race I made a one-page sheet with all major climb/descends/waterpoints/supplies/time spent/time limits. This would be our bible we would use to manage our journey.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
Lieu	repas	dormir	zak	Alti.	Km	Section	Total					eigen	Rapide	Lent						afkorting	Opmerking
Refuge de Plâze	X	!		2,023	32.21	784	375	3,698	2,220	5.5	1:30	zo 5	17:00	45	Di	16:30	16:00	Lu	1:00		
Col de la portette				2,354	33.51	325	0	4,023	2,220	1.3	0:30	zo 5	18:15		Di	17:30	16:45	Lu	3:00		Barmus (fontaine sur coté gauche)
Passage du				2,190	35.31	0	164	4,023	2,384	1.8	0:30	zo 5			Di	18:00		Lu	4:00	40 9.7 9KM/520+	
Plaine Joux/Lac Vert	O		X	1,350	40.91	0	840	4,023	3,224	5.6	1:00	zo 5	20:00	15	Di	19:00	18:15	Lu	8:00		Lac Vert: restaurant : tot 18u. Chatelet d'Ayères: refuge, (tête de la fontaine)
Joux				740	45.41	0	610	4,023	3,834	4.5	0:45	zo 5	21:00		Di	20:00	19:15	Lu	7:30	51: 5.9KM/530+	
Refuge Anterne	X	X		1,990	61.91	1,672	422	5,695	4,256	16.5	3:30	ma 6	1:00	60	Di	23:30	22:30	Lu	14:30		
Col de Saienton				2,528	68.31	717	151	6,432	4,437	7.4	1:30	ma 6	4:20		Lu	3:30	3:30	Lu	18:30		
Refuge Séraud	X	X		1,924	71.61	0	802	6,412	5,039	2.3	0:40	ma 6	5:00	60	Lu	2:10	1:45	Lu	20:00	76.5 2KM/590+	
Le Buet				1,341	77.23	0	553	6,412	5,622	5.62	0:45	ma 6	7:30	30	Lu	3:00		Ma	22:30		Hotel buet, camping 300 m verder, koffie ?, bevoorrading mogelijk
Aiguille des				2,201	82.85	866	6	7,278	5,628	5.62	1:15	ma 6	9:45		Lu	4:45	4:45	Ma	1:00		
Le tour				1,483	87.2	0	738	7,278	6,366	4.35	0:30	ma 6	11:00		Lu	5:15	5:45	Ma	2:00	87.5	Les Écuries de Charamillon (restaurant), refuge alpin du tour bevoorrading
Tele grand chantet				1,967	90	504	0	7,782	6,366	2.8	0:50	ma 6	12:00		Lu	6:05	6:30	Ma	4:00		
La rosière				1,263	95.3	26	730	7,808	7,096	5.3	0:40	ma 6	13:00	60	Lu	6:45	7:30	Ma	5:30		centrum argentière dichtbij, bevoorrading mogelijk, buvette des Mottets: restaurant 1 km voor de refuge: 8-21
Refuge Montensvers	X	X		1,913	109.66	1,468	818	9,276	7,914	14.26	3:00	ma 6	18:45	135	Lu	9:45	11:00	Ma	12:00	113: 3 3KM/475+	
Plan de l'aiguille	O	O		2,207	118.52	907	613	10,183	8,527	8.96	2:10	di 7	1:00		Lu	12:25	14:30	Ma	16:30		réfuge du plan de l'aiguille, bevoorrading mogelijk
Les peliers				1,018	126.04	0	1,188	10,183	9,715	7.52	1:15	di 7	3:00		Lu	13:40	16:00	Ma	19:00	126: 3 3KM/475+	
Refuge de Bellachat	O	O		2,160	133.42	1,142	11	11,325	9,726	7.36	1:40	di 7			Lu	15:30		Ma	22:30		crémèrie, jeugtherberg, bevoorrading mogelijk: U-express 8-19.30, champion bevoorrading mogelijk: REFUGE
Aiguilles des				2,263	135.59	212	99	11,537	9,925	2.27	0:35	di 7	5:45		Lu	16:00	17:45	Me	0:30		
Les houches	O	O		1,011	144	33	1,285	11,570	11,110	8.31	1:00	di 7	7:45	60	Lu	17:00	19:00	Me	8:00		gite michel fagot, bevoorrading mogelijk: carrefour 8-20
Col du Mont Lachat				2,077	149.66	1,066	0	12,636	11,110	5.66	1:35	di 7			Lu	20:30		Me	11:00		
Les rognies				2,777	153.22	700	0	13,336	11,110	3.56	1:05	di 7	11:30		Lu	21:35	0:00	Me	13:00		
Nid d'aigle	X	X		2,404	154.96	0	373	13,336	11,483	1.74	0:20	di 7	12:00	60	Lu	22:00	0:30	Me	13:45		
Col de Tricot				2,120	160.78	402	686	13,738	12,169	5.82	1:15	di 7			Lu	23:15		Me	16:15		
Chalet de Miage	O	O		1,561	162.84	2	561	13,740	12,730	2.06	0:20	di 7	14:45		Lu	23:45	1:45	Me	17:00	162	bevoorrading mogelijk
Le cugnonnet				1,161	168.79	137	537	13,877	13,267	5.95	0:45	di 7	16:00		Ma	0:30	2:30	Me	18:30		
Porchery	O	O			173							di 7			Ma			Me			bevoorrading mogelijk
Mont Joly				2,528	176.03	1,404	40	15,281	13,307	7.24	2:00	di 7	19:00		Ma	2:30	5:00	Me	22:30		
Les condamines				1,134	184.04	9	1,364	15,290	14,161	6.10	1:00	di 7	22:00		Ma	3:30	6:30	Me	6:00		Spar
Tré la tête	X	X	X	1,974	192.31	937	137	16,227	14,808	8.27	1:40	woe	0:45	135	Ma	5:10	8:30	Je	7:00	192: 6 3KM/350+	
Notre Dame de la				1,205	198.81	0	778	16,227	15,586	6.5	1:00	woe	4:30		Ma	8:00	12:00	Je	8:00		bevoorrading mogelijk, nant borant
Col de la fenetre				2,248	204.53	1,036	0	17,263	15,586	5.72	1:35	woe			Ma	9:35		Je	12:00		nant borant
Col du Joly	O			1,988	207.88	16	274	17,281	15,860	3.35	0:30	woe	7:30		Ma	10:05	14:00	Je	13:00		bevoorrading mogelijk
Col de Véry				1,962	214.53	230	257	17,511	16,117	6.65	1:00	woe			Ma	11:05		Je	15:00		bevoorrading mogelijk: refuge de la croix de pierre
Petit Tétras	O	O		1,700	219.63	143	405	17,654	16,522	5.1	0:40	woe			Ma	11:45		Je	16:30		bevoorrading mogelijk
Praz sur Arly				1,015	223.9	6	691	17,660	17,213	4.27	0:25	woe	12:15		Ma	12:15	17:00	Je	17:30		bevoorrading mogelijk
Ref plan de l'are	X	X		1,702	230.17	713	26	18,373	17,239	6.27	1:10	woe	14:00	90	Ma	13:30	18:30	Je	20:00		
La Gletiaz				1,078	235.77	225	848	18,598	18,087	5.6	0:45	woe	17:30		Ma	15:15	21:00	Ve	6:50		bakker, bevoorrading mogelijk
Col des Aravis	O			1,486	239	415	9	19,013	18,095	3.23	0:45	woe			Ma	16:00		Ve	7:00		restaurants, bevoorrading mogelijk
Aiguilles calvaires				2,251	244.5	860	95	19,873	18,190	5.5	1:15	woe	20:45		Ma	17:15	23:30	Ve	9:30	246: 3 3KM/570+	
Lac des confins	O			1,372	252.1	12	890	19,885	19,080	7.6	1:00	wsp 8	23:45	45	Ma	18:15	1:00	Ve	11:30	253: 1.7KM/850+ of 6 2KM/480+	power nap, restaurant : 10u tot 24 u/bevoorrading mogelijk
Tete Pelouse				2,480	256.9	1,107	0	20,992	19,080	4.8	1:30	do 9	3:15		Ma	19:45	2:45	Ve	14:30		
Ref. Bombardellaz	O	O		1,610	262.9	240	1,110	21,232	20,190	6	1:30	do 9	5:00		Ma	21:15	4:00	Ve	17:30		refuge // bevoorrading mogelijk
Pas. de la gde forcle				2,311	266.38	776	75	22,008	20,265	3.48	1:00	do 9	6:30		Ma	22:30	5:30	Ve	19:30		
Col de Doran				2,178	272.51	472	605	22,480	20,870	6.13	1:25	do 9			Ma	0:00		Ve	22:30		
Chalets de Doran	X	X		1,518	275.17	0	659	22,480	21,529	2.66	0:35	do 9	9:30	150	Me	0:35	8:00	Ve	23:30		
Luzier				540	282.85	16	995	22,496	22,524	7.68	0:55	do 9	13:30		Me	3:00	11:30	Sa	6:00		
Refuge de Varan				1,620	292.57	1,360	280	23,856	22,804	9.72	2:00	do 9	16:30		Me	5:00	13:15	Sa	10:00		
Plaine Joux	X		X	1,350	298.32	232	502	24,088	23,306	5.75	1:00	do 9	20:00		Me	6:00	16:00	Sa	12:00		

Never try to run the whole 300 km, always focus on the next climb/supply/rest. At this point we were already over 2 hrs behind on the scheduled time but that didn't worry us as this schedule brought us to the fish on Thursday which was well before the cut-off on Saturday. It did indicate the route would never be a 'run in the park' and we had to keep managing all essential aspects of the run/recovery. We almost missed the checkpoint as there was no clear light or indication on the building but after a while from the race director we found the building a few 100 m further. We took the time to eat/drink and refill all supplies as we had access to our drop-bag at this point and the next point where we could refill would be at 192 kms, a 150 kms stretch without extra supplies. We went into our first night, prepared for whatever would come.

Day 2: 67,8 kms, 5284 D+/4248 D-: [3-D replay](#)

At midnight we started a climb of 1400 m D+, one of countless 1000m+ climbs in this race. We always took a 10 min break at the half-point of these climbs/descends to let our body rest for the rest of the journey. After the long climb we crossed to reach the next 'Réfuge Moede Anterne' at 4.30 in the morning. Our plan was to pass the first night without sleep but the rough and demanding terrain was unforgiving and we really needed a first nap. The whole climb we hungered for the delicious soup and hot meal we would receive as promised. Imagine the disappointment when we found nothing but a note leading us to the sleeping room an a bit of cold dry pasta's without any sauce or cheese. One bottle of coca cola for the 6 teams that passed that night was also a bit disappointing. We didn't complain and slept delightful for an hour so we were on the road again by 6.00 when the sun came up. This was one of the most remote sections of the track and with the open sky, rising sun and the Mont Blanc at the horizon it was breath-taking.



We were very surprised to find ourselves suddenly leading the race with only one team ahead of us. Where we had the possibility, we could check [online](#) where the other teams were in the race. When we went to bed, 5 teams were ahead of us, some with a few hours advance. Most of them took a very long break that first night or were forced to step out of the race. Virtually 2nd in this race, we didn't change our strategy: 'slow and steady', eat, drink, rest, run, enjoy. I already hiked this section some years ago with my family and it felt strange to recognise so much of the track. At 9 o'clock we were up the 'Col de Salenton', ready to find our next meal 600 m lower in the 'Réfuge de la Pierre a Berard'. The reception here was all we had missed in the previous. The guardian served us a delicious meal, adding a free coffee to the message we were now officially the first full team in the race as the leading team had to split and continue solo. This was un hoped for but we knew very well this was only the beginning of a very long race in which a lot could happen. At least 4 teams were still within 1 hour so nothing was decided yet. To illustrate we didn't want to keep our place at all cost we enjoyed a coffee at the bottom of the valley in 'La Buet'.



The GTPMB is a succession of long and steep climbs and descends, always on technical terrain. Every 1000 m downhill section followed by a steep rocky climb, never a dull moment. Next on the menu is the long climb to the 'Aiguillettes de Possettes' which we reach at noon. A lunch pause is followed by one of the many micro-siesta's we would take as part of our sleep/rest strategy: 10-15 min of deep sleep keeps us mentally strong. Our goal here was to reach the next 'Réfuge Montévers before 22 hr. Only 20 km further but 3 monster descend/climbs in between. Reaching the last climb a runner catches in on us. He lost his partner and asks to join our team to be able to continue, we agreed as he got this far at the same pace and a bit of company is always welcome. It also helps for the navigation if there is an extra eye on the map. Again there was a warm welcome and meal in the Réfuge and we chose for some 2hrs of sleep.

Day 3: 58,5 kms, 4611 D+/4452 D-: [3-D replay](#)

At midnight we started for another up/down section : 900 m down, 100 m further 900 m up. At this point I found it hard not to fall asleep in the long, slow climb so I lay down for 10 min only to find myself frozen and still tired. Luckily we found a Réfuge at the top of the climb where we can have a cup of coffee and a nap in the warm dining room as they served the climbers that got up at 5 o'clock. With renewed energy we (our third team member is still following us). When we start our next climb it was already getting very warm as the sun was shining at full strength today. I ran out of water 400 m D+ before the top so I fastened the pace to reach the water a bit sooner. At the 'Réfuge de Bellachat' there seems to be no water source, luckily they sold bottles and fresh soup so we had a lovely break there. The next section required some bushwhacking through the 'Myrtilles'.



At this point our chasing team had the lead in the race for 30 min as they took their break some 500 meter further. When going down de next hill we took the lead again, this game of catching/catching back would go on till far in the race.



At the bottom of this hill we found a supermarket where we could have some fresh food/drinks before the next long one. In Les Houches at km 144 with already 12.000 D+ we found ourselves at the

foot of a new monster climb. The start of the Mont Blanc route. The spirit is good and it's just past noon as we slowly started going up.



When you engage this type of events, you have to master the ability to live in the present, only the next section matters. Not what you've already done and surely not what lies ahead. Only experience learns you to master this skill and luckily we have that. In silence or discussing about (less) important issues, time passes by without notice. We thought this climb would take us about 3 hours, 4 hours was more accurate. We passed the train that goes all the way up to 'Nid d'aigle', our next stop. The last climbing section was one of the type you rather don't want to do in the dark with only 'Bouquetins' as witness. Ladders/ropes and some sections rather taken on 4 legs. We took extra care as all rocks lay loose, one wrong step could induce an avalanche for the ones behind us.



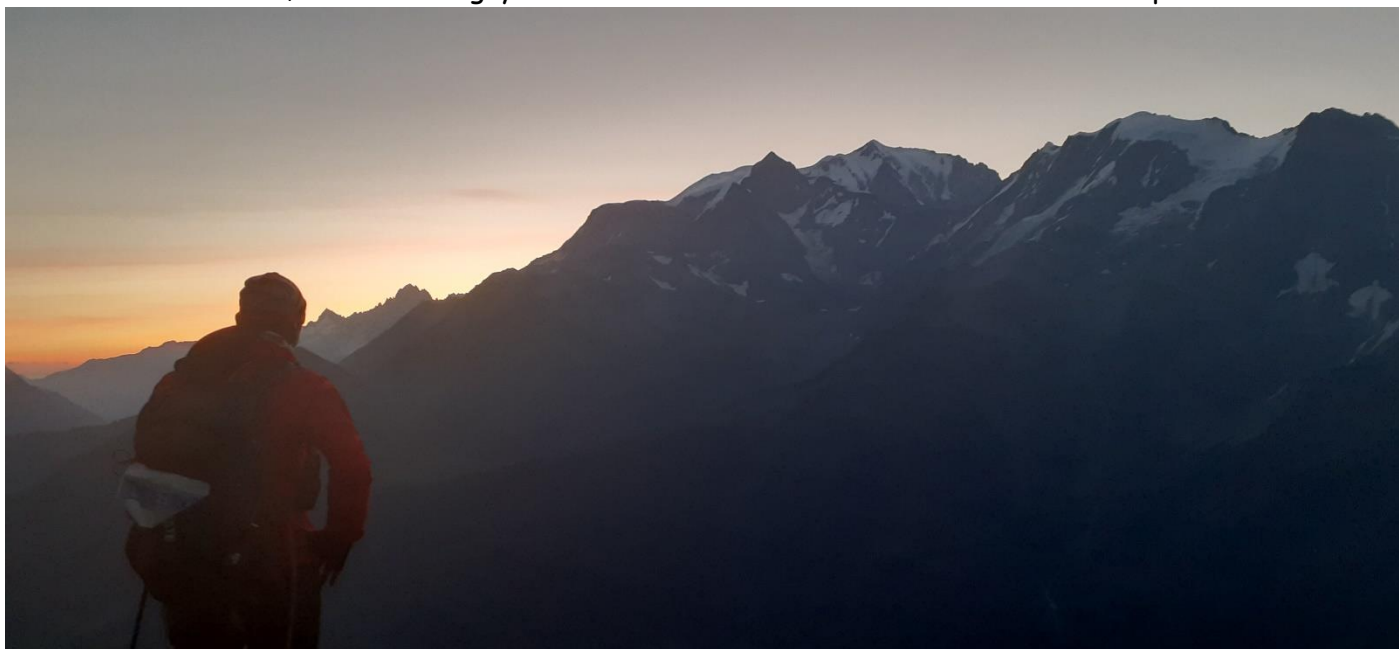


We reached the Refuge just in time to witness a beautiful sunset when we enjoyed our 3th hot meal together with team 8 that once again had caught us. We know we were team 1 and 2 in the race but there was no real competition, we all just wanted to reach the end. Our third team-member had some trouble with the knee when coming down to the 'Nid d'aigle' and he decided to stop here as he could take the train down the next day. We were officially at the halfway point but only knew the road was still long and it was not yet time to start a countdown.

After 1.5 hour of sleep (had to be 2 hrs but we had some issues with the alarm on the watch) our journey proceeded at 22hr with another long descend to be able to cross the local glacier. Reaching the next col at midnight we woke some hikers with our enthusiast chatter as they were camped next to the path. Also typical for long adventures, night-day-sunset-sunrise: everything is just one long stretch and you don't have any clue what the 'real world time' might be.

Day 4: 73,6 kms, 4461 D+/5455 D-: [3-D replay](#)

We now interrupt all long climbs/descends consequently with a short break to eat at ease or to take a mini-siesta. We know it's more efficient to eat and run but we also know that the stomach is sensitive and crucial in this trip so we give it all the rest it needs. Some salt sausages and cheese, a delicacy at this section in the race. Until now we are pleasantly surprised about our general feeling. Mentally but also physically we still feel incredibly well. We can still run downhill without pain in the knees or quadriceps, uphill is still going smooth and our feet are super with only one blister due to the sole that is badly shaped (same type of shoes for us both) and which we were able to pimp (cut off some parts) so the problem no longer caused further issues. In the next climb to 'Mont Joli' we make a serious mistake not taking a little nap on the warm and soft soil of the forest. We wanted to push on until the halfway point as usual but there all was wet and cold so we had to continue. At 6 in the morning we found ourselves still struggling with the 1400 D+ climb on very technical terrain. It was cold, we were hungry and we needed at least a few moments of sleep.



Luckily when the sun rose our energy came back and we could find enthusiasm to hurry down where we were chased by dogs attending their herd, some dogs were big like wolves. Even the next climb (900 m D+) couldn't stop us to enjoy every moment. By now we had already run 15 km (and 1000 D+) extra compared to the roadbook so we knew we would have to run at least 320 kms. Although it was noon we decided to take an hour rest in the 'Refuge Tré de la tête' where we found our drop bags and another great meal. I changed shoes for some Altra Olympuses with some more cushioning and I

changed socks/clothing so we would have a fresh start after the break. Supplies were refilled although the choice was limited as the drop bag was limited to 6 kg as it had to be carried with donkeys all the way up the Réfuge. As bad weather was announced later on in the trip we were eager to continue as the next section would be 'more runnable' according to the race-director which was present at the Réfuge. We would learn that his definition of runnable was quite different from ours. When in great shape and running only 40 km on this trail you can indeed race over the loose rocks and jump the many hard steps, push hard in the steep climbs and hurry down denying the impact on the upper legs. If you want to keep enjoying every step in this adventure and be sure you reach the end, you have to stick to the 2.7 km/hr which we were 'running'. The chasing team was still on our tail and took the same amount of sleep every step to avoid having to catch in on us. This pushed us to go to the limit in the next stage although we never skipped rest/food/drinks to stay in front, 'slow and steady' had to be honoured.

Another very nice sunset at 'Col du Mont Joli' lead us over some very beautiful ridges. This climb and downhill we found no water as was stated in the roadbook. We learnt this trip that it was very important to refill supplies when possible and 2 l water for 5hrs+ sections is just sufficient. We still had the life-straw to steal some water from the cows, luckily this wasn't needed. I add some ORS to every water refill to avoid cramps and stomach problems, this worked very well, even on a 100hrs + trip.



Day 5: 55,8 kms, 4804 D+/4389 D-: [3-D replay](#)

Going down 1100 D- in only a few kms, even when you take it slow it still hurted a little at this stage. Our longing for the soup that awaits us in the 'Réfuge de l'aar' pushes us on the 700 D+ climb from 'Praz sur Arly'. We are warmly received in the kitchen of the owner that was waiting for us with some delicious, fresh prepared power food. We decided to take a longer break here (3 hours) as the sleep deprivation started to weigh. A cup of fresh coffee and the call of the rising sun helped us to start off for our almost final day. We kept in mind that a 'single push' where we went to the finish without long breaks was still an option if our competitors decided to race us. We heard the chasing team had a hard moment climbing to the Réfuge and they had to take a longer rest.

Once again the rest had done well and we feel like reborn even when the rain tries to spoil our party. A terrace next to the track offers a welcome morning break.



The climb and descend (1000 D+) of the 'Aiguilles des Calvaires' confirmed our excellent state and when we saw team 8 had an 4 hrs delay. We started to realise we might actually win this monster race that wasn't a race. We had some bad weather, a lot of clouds and when we climbed two more times to 2000m it kept raining lightly. At least the heat of the first days didn't bother us anymore.

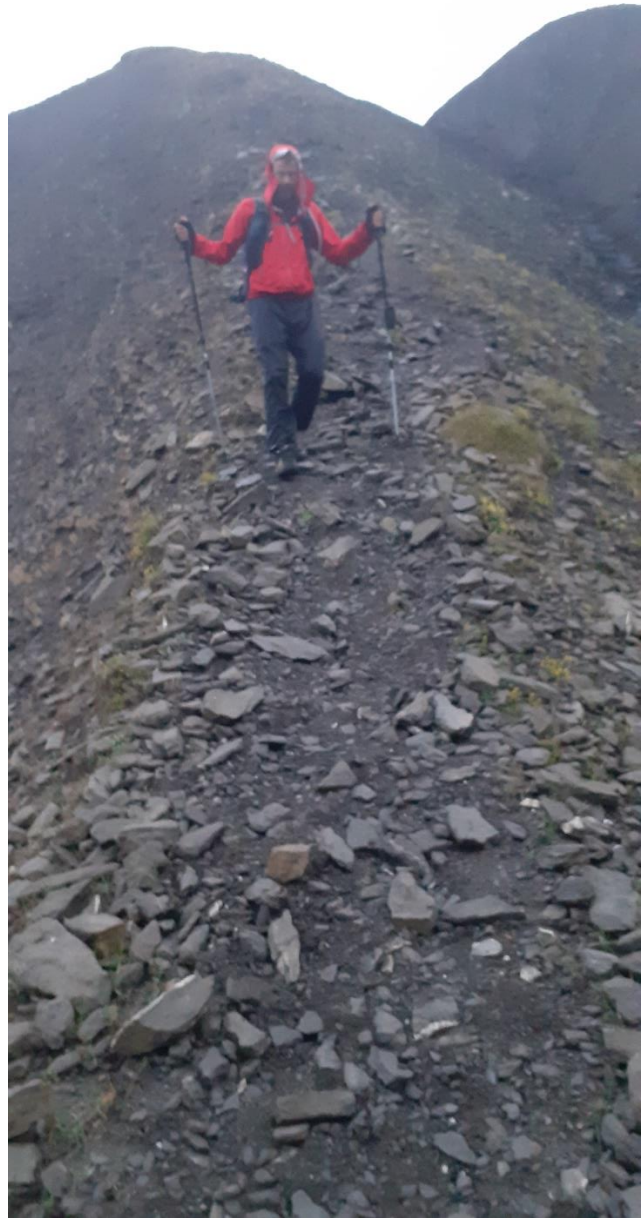


Even in this rainy and once again very technical terrain we still manage to climb/descend 1300 m in less than 3 hrs. Imagine our surprise when we noticed team 8 was catching up.



We hoped for some warm soup/break in the 'Réfuge de Bomabardellas' but it was closed so we just took a power nap and some food. Then we crossed the 'passage de la grande forclaz'. A magnificent valley, cairns all the way up. At the other site it felt like we were in a full moon landscape. It only took us 2.5 hours to reach the start of the last 3 kms section : a climb over the insignificant 'col de doran'. As we had no internet connection this whole section we were in full race mode, the difference between us and the next team had shrunk to 1 a 2 hours before we took the last climb. Going up the Doran I was able to check to find that the team had split, leaving only a solo runner in the game.

That was the reason they were able to shift their speed so sudden, only the strongest runner remained on the track. As we were only racing for the team-finish on the complete track, we knew we now only had to finish to win this contest. We sat down for 20 min to let it sink in and only continued when we started to get frozen cold. At this point we received a call from the race-director not to follow the track at the top but stay on the path and follow the marks. Great service but not really necessary as the track would have lead us in the abyss and we were not too stupid to go there. The next 3 kms to the 'Chalets de Doran' where we would sleep were so steep up/down and slippery it took us 3 hours to reach the Chalet safely. It was so steep up our hands automatically touched the ridge of the debris-pyramid so we could crawl up using both hands and foot.



Going down was a test for the grip of our running shoes, they passed. By midnight we were enjoying the last hot meal on this trip. As the next team was 12 hours behind, we chose to sleep a comfortable 3 hours.

Day 6 : 27 kms, 1763 D+/ 1903 D-: [3-D replay](#)

We woke up fresh for the last section. We didn't want to finish yet as we are fully absorbed by this event, we wanted it to last. The solo runner passed us when we started the last 1400 D+ climb of the trip and we had no problem wishing him the best. There was even a second solo runner that passed us later in the climb. We still had the ability to race and play it tactic to stay just a few moments in front of them but then we would had been forced to go hard and stop living/enjoying every moment and we didn't come here to do that. We came to make the best out of this trip with as few suffering as possible and till now that worked super, don't change a winning mood. They would arrive about one to two hours before us, hardly a difference in a 120 hour race.

At noon we reached the finish after 120 hours with 330 kms on the counter and 26.000 D+-, as first team competing the complete track. We're not hungry, thirsty, sleepy or exhausted, we managed this adventure as planned and succeeded. Happiness and joy, even some ideas for a next race: 'surplus' rounds instead of 'raccourcis'.



Some practical matters

- Shoes: La sportiva Ultra Raptor and Altra Olympus 3
- Backpack : Raidlight ultra
- Drink : ORS and sportdrink mix
- Food: 35 bars (different mix), nuts, raisins, wraps (12) with cheese, sweets
- Navigation: Garmin Fenix 6x and Viewranger app
- Walking sticks: none
- Light: Petzl Nao+