



## From Exile Medic to ultra-marathoner

"I'm going to do it." "I'm thinking about doing it."

"OK, I'm in too." Twenty minutes later, sitting in Java café in Nairobi airport on the way home from a week of a lifetime, *Team Exile* was born.

**Flossie Carpenter** | Exile Medic and ultra-marathon runner

**W**e three, with seven other medics from around the UK, had just finished providing medical cover for the first ever ForRangers Ultra, a gruelling 5-day, 230-km foot-race across Kenya's Laikipia County. To say it was inspiring is an understatement.

A year on, a few extra injuries and a few pounds lighter, Sam (pictured middle two images), Charlotte (bottom left), Save the Rhino's David (an honorary Team Exile member and fellow ultra-newbie, pictured top left) and myself (lower right) were clutching our race packs on an aeroplane back to Kenya, this time as 'athletes'. Our training had been pretty varied. Sam decided that skiing was more important and spent his winter in the Alps, Charlotte ran steadily throughout the year, terrifying me with her progress, and I was a little overenthusiastic and ended up with a stress fracture, which set me back several months.

The nerves increased in the last few weeks leading up to the race. Had I done enough? Did we have the right kit? Sam and Charlotte were quicker than me: would I get eaten by a lion because I was on my own? What if I didn't finish? We had seen what the runners had been through last year, blisters, heat, vomiting, exhaustion and we had helped them through it. And yet here I was about to embark on the same journey; what sort of madness was this?

As the start-line countdown began, slightly delayed because of a buffalo on the route, I told myself: "It's just putting one foot in front of the other until you reach the end, you've got this". The days were filled with walking the uphill and running the flats and downhill; or in my case walking the uphill, walking the downhill and walking the flats! Sam and Charlotte soon found a routine of running and bickering like siblings, boasting about how much food each had eaten. With their heads down, running past some giraffe and a buffalo, Charlotte shouted to Sam to stop. He looked surprised, "Why else are we here?" she said.

It's true that at times it was hard to think about anything other than how painful your feet are, how far you have to go, how hot it is and how heavy your pack is. But lifting my head and taking in the beauty of my surroundings, watching a giraffe gracefully stroll over the horizon, I reminded myself of the privilege of being sharing this landscape with these creatures.

It was tough. In fact, I spent most of my time thinking "Never again", and yet by the end of each day I would look back and grin. The next morning, after a slow start, I would pull my shoes over my blisters with a wince and plaster a smile on my face remembering what fellow runner Clive had said to me: "Remember Floss, no matter how you are feeling, you are in Mint Condition!" This tactic worked better at some points than others. But crossing that finish line to receive hugs, a beer and that enormous medal made all the pain worthwhile.

At that point, I would have said "Never again", and yet in recent weeks I have found myself googling ultramarathons in far-flung places. Perhaps a new obsession has begun!

### Flossie's top tips for an ultra-marathon in Kenya

- No pants necessary, in fact they might become a hindrance
- Find a nice bottom to follow, a wonderful way to while away the time
- Cheese – possibly the best snack ever
- Socks with toes
- Gurney goo, everywhere

