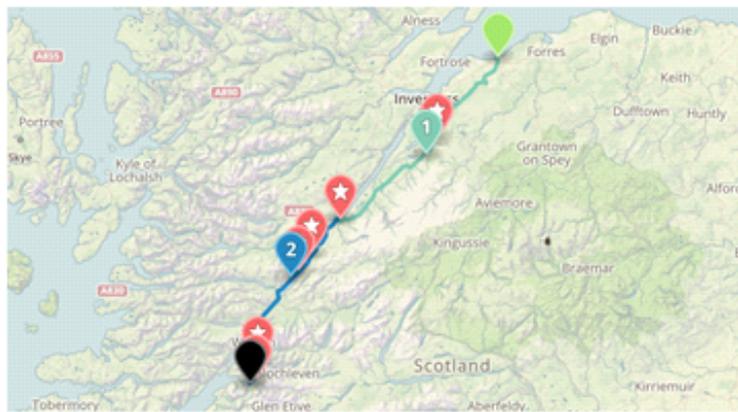




My Rat Race 2019 – A Celebration of us Sapiens' Musculoskeletal System

September 2019

written by Gareth Milner, Director of Osteopathic Solutions Ltd



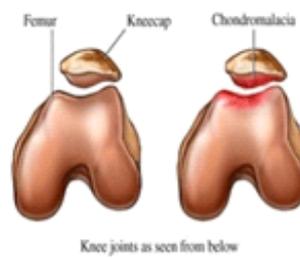
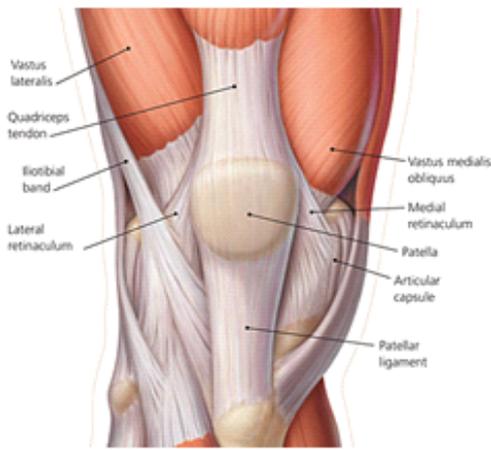
On the 14th September 2019 my second Rat Race Coast to Coast started at 8.30am at Nairn Links, Scotland. 3 months prior to this date started my preparation for this 105 mile, 2 day challenge.

This preparation was the most intensive period of exercise I have ever done. I built up from 1 hour runs to 2.5 hour runs (normally with a KFC half time!), which for those of you who have never experienced are simply amazing in what they do for your mind. With all of life's stresses and inevitable tough times, running long distance is like a vacuum cleaner for your negative thoughts and experiences, replacing them with clarity of thought, inspiration and peace. I am now a long distance running addict, and if your knees allow you, I call to action this in you. Weight training was also a key part of my Rat Race prep. A combination of an upper body and leg weights 4 times/ week routine was religiously performed. Nearer the event, to cope with the lactic acid burn (from 15 hours of exercise in 2 days) I introduced drop sets (where you perform 3 sets of 8 reps on a weights exercise dropping the weight on each set) to give my muscles and brain the ability to cope with the pain during the Race. Swimming was also part of my rigorous, body challenging routine. In the last 3 weeks before the race, I would run an hour to my gym, perform an hour of weights, then 40 lengths in the pool, followed by an hour run home.

Nutrition has been an essential part of this prep. Supplementing a balanced diet of meat, fish, eggs, complex carbs, nuts and fruit, after each exercise session came my Whey protein shake with added creatine and glutamine. Think of creatine as your muscles' contraction fuel chemical and glutamine as the essential amino acid (the basis molecule of proteins) that builds and maintains your muscles' size.



As well as the body building of my exercise routine, there was the rehabilitative side of my 'no stone unturned' routine. Physical therapy with both Osteopathy and Deep Tissue Massage (DPT) was an absolute necessity. Running for 2.5 hours is hard on the knees. I have had a history of tendonitis and chondromalacia patellae since my early 20s.



Back of Knee cap
CARTILAGE

Softening

CHONDROMALACIA
PATELLA
(SOFTENING OF
CARTILAGE)

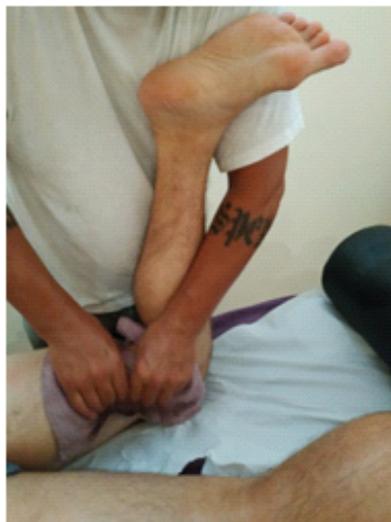


For the 5 weeks prior to the race I had a weekly Osteopathic treatment with my friend Helen Bonetti (shown below). Whether she was manually treatment my spine, pelvis, right shoulder, knees and ankles over the 5 appointments, her intention was to put my musculoskeletal system in a biomechanical place of excellent structure and function.



If you want to find out more about Osteopathy check out our Blog ' Thank you Andrew Taylor Still - An Osteopathic Treatment ' on www.osteopathicsolutions-manualhandling.co.uk/osteopathic-solutions-blogs and also watch a video of my Osteopathic Treatment for my Osteopathic Solutions colleague Emma Farrell on <https://youtu.be/E2pvOEYITLI>

I also had 4 Deep Tissue Massage treatments. This was essential for my knees and calf muscles as I was experiencing calf muscle cramps on the long runs and generalised aching around my knees. To view my Blog ' My preparation for the Rat Race - A Deep Tissue Massage Treatment ' view our Blog page.



As a qualified Osteopath my expert knowledge of the musculoskeletal system also helped. Stretching, pilates and use of a theraband and foam roller enabled me to self treat my body aiding my exercise routine, preparing me for the grueling 2 day race.

The Race



105 miles of beautiful Scottish landscape over 2 days. Fueled with my morning porridge and coffee, the race started at 8.30am with a 7 mile run from Nairn Links to Cawdor Castle. As I missed registration the night before (no thanks to Easyjet) I had my camping bag on my back. I have never run with such weight on my back before and this was good practice if I ever want to join the Army. With my training (regularly doing half marathon distances of 15 miles), this 7 mile run should have been easy. However, with a weight bouncing around every heel strike on the uneven off road terrain, this was a physical challenge straight away. The high level of mental concentration needed was immediate also as with the uneven ground, the wrong choice of where to put your foot could easily have ended up in a bad ankle ligament sprain.

After the 7 mile run came the transition stage where my hybrid bike was. A quick 5 minute water, toilet and energy bar break was followed by the most physically challenging bike ride I have ever done. The 38 mile road bike ride was from Cawdor to Fort Augustus. The direction was south west and the wind was south westerly for the whole 38 miles, gusting at 70kph. I have never cycled downhill and had to pedal as the wind was slowing me down. With the wind came the chilled Scottish mineral water from the sky. I must have taken 5 energy gel sachets on this ride as my legs were burning easily 3 times more energy than in fine conditions.





Quick stop offs to take photos for my daughters (cows in the background above left & childrens´ playground in the hill above right)

As well as these sachets I was regularly drinking water with magnesium effervescent tablets to ward off leg cramps. The last climb up to the downhill that leads down to Fort Augustus was brutal (shown below). With the wind as it was, I and many of the other participants just simply got off and walked it.



The Rat Race Coast to Coast <https://ratracecoasttocoast.co.uk> is a special event. At Fort Augustus they have a huge marquee which has food, beer, massage therapists and a cracking atmosphere from all the like minded participants.



Normally at Fort Augustus there is a 500 metre kayak along Loch Ness, but this year due to the awful weather this was cancelled by the event organisers - so no chance this year to see Nessie :(. In 2017 I camped which I must be honest was grim; a poor night of sleep in the cold followed by waking at 6.30am to put your tent down in drizzling rain. This year I went back to my youth and stayed in a great youth hostel called Morag's Lodge (shown below).



Day 2 started with an excellent breakfast at Morag's Lodge. Complex carbs in the form of porridge and 2 slices of Hovis toast with some protein laced peanut butter washed down with some caffeine and simple sugars with orange juice. Day 2 is more challenging. It starts with a 48 mile bike ride from Fort Augustus to Fort William. The off road ride is awesome, riding along the River Oich, along old railway lines, across bridges, passing farms, all surrounded by breathtaking Scottish scenery. After 21 miles it turns into a road ride which was tough with many small but tiring hills. My magnesium water and electrolyte sachets were really needed to prevent my calf muscles from cramping which I felt they were near doing. Again the scenery is spectacular, riding alongside Lochs Lago Oich and Loch Lochy, observing the beautiful houses that overlook them. The intensity of the colours was a sight to behold, the purples with the deep blues of the water with even a beautiful shade of grey.



Loch Lago Oich



Loch Lochy

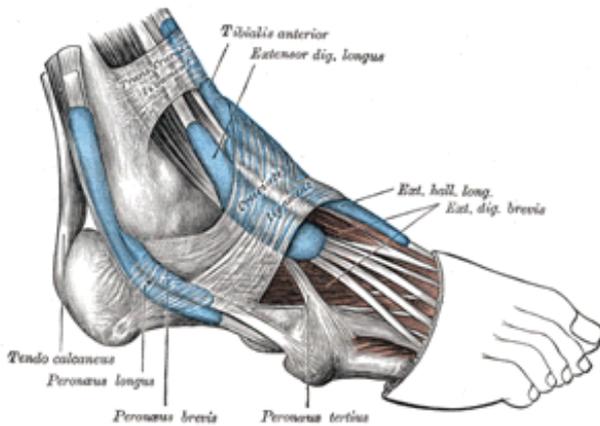
Thankfully the weather was good on Day 2 and after the 48 mile bike ride I felt ok; my training for 3 months was holding my body up well.

When you reach Fort William, Rat Race supply a dream of a feast for me. Boxes of crisps, peanuts, haribo sweets and flapjacks. Fueled up again I set off on the 14 mile trek through the Scottish Highlands. I felt like I could run a good amount of it but soon in my legs had nothing left to give. My ankle dorsiflexor tendons were painful as was my right knee. This trek is tough, not just from the steep hills but for much of the distance on each plant of your foot you have to assess where is safe to put it as the collection of 'paths', well are not paths. At one point due to mental fatigue I got off the track. This was actually quite worrying as I was walking on fallen down trees, jumping down into quagmires then walking into a field of 50 sheep (I didn't quite understand why they all bolted, 50 sheep vs. one homo sapien).

Thankfully my whistle had a compass and as long as I kept walking on a south westerly route I would pick up the Rat Race flagged route again, which thank God I did.



At one point you have to walk through a narrow stream up to your knees in Scottish 'mineral' water. As my ankles (dorsiflexor tendons – shown below) and now feet (planta muscles – shown below) were so tired, swollen and sore I stood in the stream in my trainers for 3 minutes talking to one of the Rat Race supervisors (and shook his hand!). Like icing a sore joint or muscle this cold on my sore joints helped a lot.



Ankle Dorsiflexor Tendons

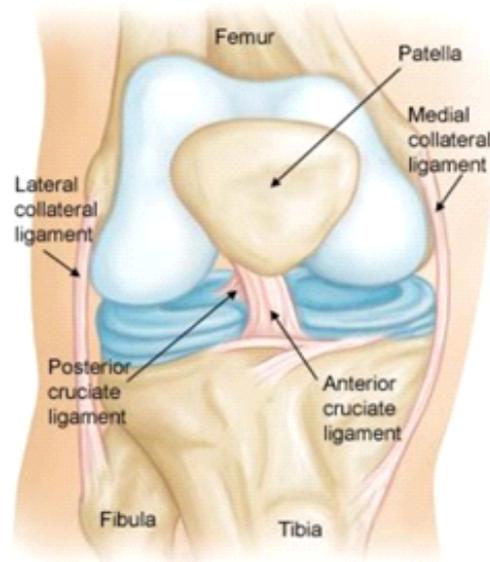


Foot Planta Muscles

Onwards I pushed through the Scottish Highlands topping up my blood sugar levels by eating Haribo sweets and chocolate raisins. After 13 miles you then reach the descent down to Loch Leven (shown below).



This part of the Race is not fun, quite the opposite. The ground is a quagmire with a steep decline. I did well this year in that I only fell on my backside around 4 times but each one was hazardous for my knee ligaments. On 2 occasions my left and right knee hyper flexed with force which risked a posterior cruciate ligament tear.



Knees Ligaments including the Cruciate Ligaments

I managed to do the descent down to Loch Leven injury free and then ran (super slowly as all my legs hurt) the short half mile road run to the kayak base.



The 1 mile kayak is tough. After 104 miles of running, trekking and cycling across the Scottish Highlands your body is simply knackered but also is your mind. The burn in the neck and shoulders was intensely painful. Across Loch Leven in around 10 minutes, out of the Kayak and then sprinting through the finish line at the Isles of Glencoe Hotel with great applause from well wishers and fellow Coast to Coast participants, with a massive smile across my face and fist punching the air.





After receiving my Rat Race Coast to Coast Challenger medal there was some hot soup and a well deserved pint in the Glen-coe Hotel bar of Caledonian Brewery's Coast to Coast Pale Ale (I asked the barman whether this was a coincidence to which it was!).



Some Thank You's now. To my Osteopath and friend Helen Bonetti. To Gonzalo for his exceptional Deep Tissue Massage treatments. My good friends for their well wishing. My children for their understanding and love. The Craigdon Mountain Experts shop team in Inverness for delivering my mandatory kit to my B&B. Steven at Highland bikes for delivering my bike to the Cawdor transition. Thank you people!

For those of you interested in taking on the Coast to Coast challenge watch Rat Race's YouTube video on <https://youtu.be/IJB5dcouud0>

Next stop for me is Ironman! Bring it on.

Email me your thoughts about my blog at garethmilner@osteopathicsolutions.co.uk

Thanks for reading.