It all started at the Trigger race. At registration, Mark Rippon commented, , would you be a reserve for our HPM team? I blithely agreed not really believing I would be running. A couple of weeks later when Nicky’s email came through inviting me to join the team, there was a little voice inside me said ‘she’s the best long distance female runner in the country – are you mad?’, but the louder voice said ‘you wont pass up an opportunity like this.’

A couple of training sessions with Nicky in driving rain and snow, at least confirmed to me I could cope with bad weather. Already I had learnt a lot about the route from Nicky and running behind her I like to think I may have improved my running gait. Tim was amused by me saying I was ‘bricking’ it in the few days leading up to the event but that was how I was feeling.

Tim picked me up at Glossop and we dropped a stash of food off at Snake. Tim hid it well so that half a sleep 10 hours later we couldn’t find it. We arrived in good time to register. It gave me plenty of time to feed on flapjack and get plenty of caffeine in. Once we had been kit checked and I had faffed around deciding on torch options, we dozed in the car. The nerves rose to a crescendo as the last minutes ticked by.

I was relieved to get going and set off down the road into the cool clear night. There was a train of lights leading up the muddy path to Hollins Cross. We set off at a brisk rate making the most of easy running. My stomach was still dealing with flapjack and caffeine but was glad of the energy. There was almost no wind and so I was soon over heating. I took off my waterproof and ran the majority of the route in merino and fleece. The first manned checkpoint was a French theme (or possibly Belgian). What it represented was a lot clearer than most of the rest.

Coming of Win Hill, Nicky called back to check we were together, ‘Going off piste soon’ I warned. We plunged off into the woods, Nicky adroitly avoided the rhodies and lead us down a steep decent on lovely leaf mulch. Back on the road, I dug in; deep breathes and keep going and it will be over. Stanage edge rose up black against the sky on the left. I admired the stars. We climbed up onto the Edge and picked up speed, dodging a few teams as we accelerated down the soft rock to Moscar. I stocked up on flapjack and Nicky collected water. We had come through quickly, just keep eating and we will be OK said Tim, remember its an eating competition.

Most of the cars were careful as we ran down the main road. Tim was beginning to suffer from wind as we climbed the next ascent but it was actually quite useful as I could hear we were altogether without turning round. There was already a bit of frost on the bogs which was promising. The lack of a checkpoint at Sheepfold clough was disconcerting but we had to carry on. Now we were getting to the truly boggy bits.

Nicky helped us avoid the really monster bogs. She kept encouraging us and gave us a training session in crossing the bogs, little steps, no jumping, keep the path to the right. Good advice. There was an added complication that it was not a good idea to follow in someone footsteps exactly, the frozen surface was more likely to break on the second persons’ step. When it broke, your foot would go down and the edge of the ice ram against your shin. Nicky’s nav was spot on as was her pacing, fast but realistic. Tim moved back and forth between me and Shane to help keep us going.

I’d settled down to eating about every 40 mins, it was just enough for my stomach to sort itself out each time. I had taken Ibruprofen as my knee was twinging. I fell in the bog twice; Nicky had to haul me out when I was in up to my thighs. I realised, the left knee was weak and I could not push up on it if I went in. This provided the additional complication to running that if in danger of falling in, I needed to be on my right foot.

I knew the approximate timing across the bogs so I mentally divided it up and dug in. The round slopes of the moors was visible in the cool night. The red lights of a tv mast was always visible and I wondered if it was a mirage of a check point. The check points seemed to have themes of balloons and onesies, I was not quite sure what they were.

As we worked our way up a slidey peat path to Bleaklow Stones, we played cat and mouse with a few other teams. I was fumbling with crisps as we reached the ridge. I had just having swallowed them when Nicky called ‘Leg it’. We ran down a clough out of sight of the others, giggling like nine year olds with silly joy. Tim said he was about to get a gell out but we agreed that Nicky’s call was a much more effective energiser.

The mist came in making the Wain Stones check point a bit of a hunt. It began to snow, in just a fleece, I thought I better get a jacket on. In the 30 seconds fiddling with my rucsac, I found I couldn’t see the team. A moment of shear panic was resolved when I realised they were simply the other side of a peat clough.

The dawn was beginning to creep out of the mist as we approached Snake. No tea ready but I picked up flapjack and cheese sandwiches. They were cheap bread and cheese but at that moment, they were the best butties ever.

There was enough light to run without a torch on the flags to Mill Hill but the ice on the slabs made the running harder. I tucked in behind Tim and concentrated on a steady pace. There was a shower of crusts as Tim finished his sandwich. Suddenly my foot went down between to flags and bashed my knee – again. Well it was a different set of flags to last time. Tim hauled me up and encouraged me to keep moving and after a few seconds the stabbing pain went away. I used all my concentration to miss any more holes not daring to look up at the emerging hills in the dawning. I cursed every flag!

It was a relief to get off Mill Hill to Kinder. White mist wafted up from the cloughs. The sun was being to rise to form a beautiful morning. I forced myself to keep going steady but after the downfall I was working hard to keep with Tim and Nicky. Nicky found the path to Edale Cross perfectly.

Brown Knoll was wet but we were past caring. We hid from another team and were all relieved when we found the path to Rushup Edge. Last of the nav over for Nicky. She urged us on.

We were all having to dig in up to Rushup Edge. Poor old Shane was really suffering not be able to eat. As we neared the summit I said to Nicky, ‘I think we should take his sack’. I felt guilty as I actually meant was ‘I think *you* should take his sack’. It did the trick. She was still faster than me. We all found the last resources we had as we realised we could get a good time. I ran past Anne Johnson and was not being able to work out who she was in my sleep deprived state.

We knew Jasmin’s team was just ahead. Could we catch them? Could I get down the descent fast enough? I hate descent. You have to just going. Down on the muddy track and then the short slope to the road (that had just turned into the north face of Everest!). I forced myself along the road telling myself the car park was not far away.

Nicky charged into the Hall. We all collapsed panting in a haze of sweat and exhaustion. We were 37 second behind Jasmin, better than my wildest dreams. I shook hands with Jasmin. ‘Sorry about that,’ she said. Only a fell runner would apologise for winning fair and square and I congratulated her. Third place for us -wow.

We changed in beautiful sun, looking up at the beautiful wind blown rocks along the edges kissed by the morning sun.

For me, a first HPM was great. It was not just the route but being so dependant mentally and physically on your team mates adds something really special. The intimate knowledge of the landscape required also adds something to the event. Thanks for such a great team guys.