

ROVANIEMI 150

A dream come true



March 2015 – by Rachel Frei Bandieri

Pictures by La Garenne, Jaska Vepsä, Maria Codina, Àlex Casanovas, Kamil Jagodzinski, DFL, Marc B and Rachel FB

The Finnish Lapland challenge

« Have you heard about the **Rovaniemi 150**? It's 150 kilometres race that takes place in Finnish Lapland in February, you can do it on ski, fat bike or on foot», a Swedish friend told me. We are in November 2013. I visited Rovaniemi and the Finnish Lapland in January 2013 and simply fell in love with it. So as soon as I heard about that ultra-distance race, I knew I would do it, sooner or later.

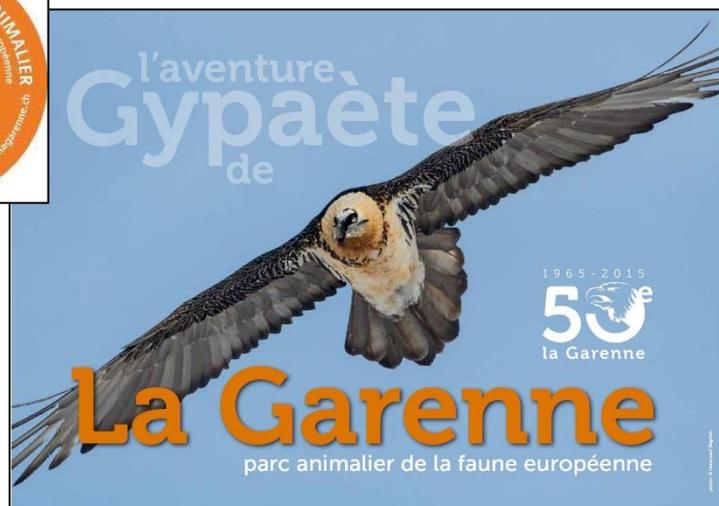


Summer 2014. I am desperate to take on another challenge. It has been nearly 9 months since my last long distance race, 12 months since the Trailwalker 100k and four years that I hiked the 500 kilometres and the 35'000 meters of climbing of the Alptrekking on my own, self-supported, for 14 days. I want to do something unusual, that I have never done, that not many people do... The Rovaniemi comes naturally back to my mind. And along with it, the promise made to myself: from now on I will run to support charities or to raise awareness on causes dear to my heart.



The goal is set. I am on it.

A few weeks later, my cousin Laurent tells me about online crowdfunding platforms. I really like the idea and take some time finding the most adequate one for my kind of project. My final choice goes for a "keep it all" platform which allows me to ask more without taking any risks. I know the budget I need. Any amount above it will go to the chosen charity: the animal rescue park of La Garenne based in the small village of Le Vaud, Switzerland. Helping and protecting the European fauna and flora: that just sounds like the perfect match to a race in Finnish Lapland! Contact is taken with the zoo and they are really enthusiastic about the project, giving me all the necessary marketing material and support.



Early December, I complete the registration for the Rovaniemi 150, very easy, very professional. Flights and hotel booked. The project got online. The fundraising will last two months. There is no way back now... I am so excited! Mailing to my friends and acquaintances, articles in the local and on online newspapers, posts on Facebook, posters... anything is good to draw attention to my arctic challenge. It is really a first for me. And it is amazing! I really enjoy it, all boosted up by the success of the campaign and the support of all these friends and people. It is fun well ahead of the race! I had never lived such a thing before...



During these months of preparation, I slightly adjust my training to the arctic race I will be running. Those who know me well know that I never really stop running, cycling, riding, walking, climbing... so I knew I was already fit enough for a standard 150k, it was just a matter of getting more specific. And that is when the tyre comes into the picture... I will be pulling a pulka, with all my necessary gear to the some 40-hour race, meaning it might be heavy, so I better get used to drag something as uncomfortable and 100% friction as a used car tyre. Uphill, downhill, on roads, on tracks, on forest paths, I have taken it everywhere for two months. I have hated it when it remained stuck, dragged it on rough terrain, got finally used to it and even appreciated it when I became stronger and it easier to pull...

It is only weeks later that I learn about Tyre Lady, a much crazier woman than me that is pulling a tyre on ALL the races she takes part in, including marathons and ultra, and will run the Rovaniemi 150 with a tyre on her pulka... Well for me, this year, the challenge will be sufficient enough, I might think of it for the next one 😊

Getting all the right gear has been quite a story too. What kind of clothes and shoes should I wear if temperatures drop really low? How can I stay warm enough and yet not sweat when running? What socks, and gloves and facemask? Which pulka, sleeping-bag, Neos overshoes or not? What about hydration, etc. Living in Switzerland, I am used to snow and to cold and rough weather. I did the Solokhumbu Trail, a stage-race in Himalaya, Nepal with -7°...But... here we are talking about the GREAT NORTH! Which could mean -20° or even -30°!! It took me some two good months of research and enquiries before being sure of what I wanted. I searched the web, read the blogs of former participants, asked Àlex, the organiser, on some specific points. Having a good experience in long distance running, multi-stage races and mountain trekking also helped me figure out what would suit me or not. And mainly I knew I had to do it with my Inov8 minimalist trainers, there was no other way – I simply cannot run in any other kind!

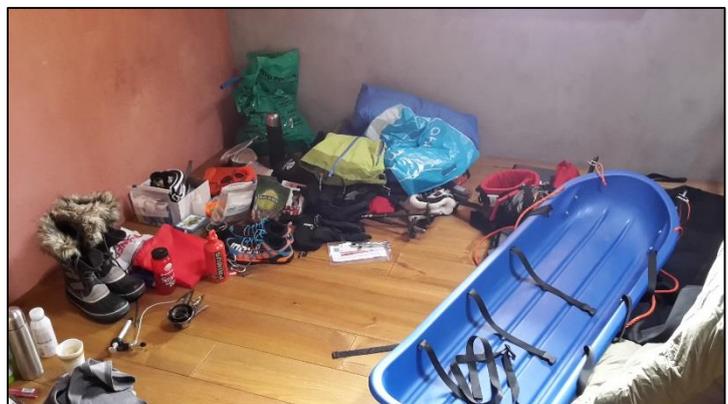




And then comes the snow. End December, I could finally take my pulka on a test-run. At first it felt a bit strange but definitely so much lighter than the tyre! Due to this year weather conditions, I have not actually been able to train as much as I planned with it: too little snow, too much snow, wind storm ☺ My longest and best training in race conditions was on January 1st when I ran by night the 42k between the Mollendruz pass to St-Cergue, with -10°, clear sky and nearly full moon. I was feeling good, strong, having fun all the way running on my own in the middle of this beautiful landscape. A night to remember! The day after I was normally tired but feeling fine and in great shape.



After that long training session, I did some adjustment to my gear, shoes and pulka to increase comfort and performance. I must say: my support team here is amazing and of great help when it comes to sewing, drilling or finding unbelievable solutions to my requirements. I cannot thank them enough ;-)



By end January I was finally happy with my pack, all geared up, feeling good and impatient to fly to Finland. We prolonged the fundraising for a few more weeks but I already had covered my budget and was now collecting



entirely for La Garenne, how exciting! Since the beginning, I was enjoying my preparation to the race. It was good fun testing the sleeping-bag and matt in the garden during afternoon naps or putting on the total “stormy-icy-cold-heavily-snowing-weather” outfit on those famous days in early February when I was stuck at home with all the access roads closed and peak wind 90! So what was coming next could only be better...

The Rovaniemi 150 – running on the Arctic Circle

Pre-race days

Rovaniemi

For those who do not know it yet, who stayed away from any social media or lived in a cave for the



past 10 years ;-), Rovaniemi is the capital of Finnish Lapland situated directly on the Arctic Circle **and the official home of Santa Claus!** So it is quite something to go and run in such a special place, mostly when you are a bit of a fairy tale addict and



a dwarfs and elves fervent believer like me!

I have already been there two years ago. But when I landed this 18 February, the same feeling caught me again: hey! I am back home! It is unexplainable but it feels as if I belong. Is this due to my Slavic origins?

My pulka and luggage are there, nice and undamaged, what a huge relief! At the airport I spot some of the bikers with their huge bike boxes and a few other runners. The shuttle bus is packed so we got into small groups to share a taxi to the city centre. Fortunately we all go to the



same hotel. I share the cab with a Dutch family – they came along with their 3-year old daughter and the grand-ma to take care of the little one while the parents will be racing -, she will do the 66°North (short version of the Rovaniemi 150) and he the long distance, both on fat bikes. I had never seen fat bikes before. They are quite recent in Switzerland and

really taking off this winter: special event, promotions, test-days, every ski resort are coming with some fat bike something in 2015! But I must say they are impressive! Big, with larger frame and tyres, very comfortable to ride as I will be given the opportunity to try later on. One will definitely stands on my list to Santa (or to my not-yet-known-too-shy-to-show-oneself sponsor) for next Christmas 😊

Once at the hotel, I met Rima – Tyre Lady – and Wayne, her partner. Lovely people! We get on immediately, sharing many things in common and went out for dinner in a nearby restaurant serving traditional Lappish food. They travelled from London – oh England, my second homeland after... hum, well alright... I may have a few dearest places... - and they both drink hot water instead of tea or cold water during meals. I cannot believe it! I thought I was the only one to do that! (aside from Ayurveda aficionados) A habit adopted in Nepal that serves me well. We shared about our experiences on ultra-distance races and travel and I really enjoyed listening to their countless anecdotes and stories. Well, that first evening in Finland was a very pleasant one.

I have two more days before the D-Day. Thursday is meant to be for me myself and I, on my own in Rovaniemi. I wanted to have sufficient time to buy all the little rewards I “owed” my supporters and take a visit of the city that I had no time seeing last time. And Friday is THE pre-race day, with the visit to Santa Clause, the race briefing, the packing... it promises to be a busy day.



Reindeer experience



After a huge breakfast just as I like them – very similar to British ones, perhaps in a less greasy version ;-)- no offence! - I took Thursday morning to unpack my gear, pick up the snowshoes I had rented and then went off to the city centre, buy books (as always) and souvenirs. It is a pretty small town, on the riverside of the Kemijoki and Ounasjoki with an impressive bay bridge. The temperature is mild: $-1^{\circ}/+0^{\circ}$! I was expected something more

extreme... The weather forecast is not too good for the week-end, quite mild and wet, so I sincerely pray for the Finnish Meteorological Institute to be as good as Météo Suisse and that it will turn out to be wrong...



In the afternoon, Jaska, a Finn from Rovaniemi that I met on the plane, took me to a reindeer farm not far from town. Finns are known for their hospitality and during this short trip I



experienced it myself on many occasions. They are welcoming, warm and friendly in a very respectful manner. I really appreciate it. The visit to the farm will remain in my mind forever:

I was taken to feed the reindeer with a young Japanese couple, along with Jaska and a Sámi guide (there is a little secret story about this guy but I promise not to put it in writing, so for the most curious ones... please ask me direct!) and I learnt a lot about reindeer husbandry and herding. Then we went for the reindeer tour... I know I cannot do anything like anybody else. But still. It was supposed to be a very very easy and gentle touristic ride on a sleigh pulled by a fully-used-to-do-it-many-times-a-day-jaded reindeer. It was not. The reindeer led by the Japanese suddenly took off and started galloping, trying to catch up with mine at high speed, getting rid of the Japanese guy on the way! I ended up pulling like a maniac on the rope, trying to calm things down, feeling like Calamity Jane on a horse race! We arrived cantering in the paddock, me dying with laughter and the Japanese girl turned white as a ghost! Well, it all ended up well, the Japanese bloke found his way back to the farm, we got tea, coffee and biscuits and a reindeer driving licence for our spectacular efforts!



Jaska was so kind to take some good pictures of me that afternoon – he is a professional photographer, so I now have some souvenirs of this epic visit.



Back in town, I still had plenty of time so I headed to the Arktikum Museum. I had heard about it long ago and knew it was really worth paying a visit. And it was, indeed. I spend some two hours there and did not even see it properly. It housed different exhibitions, such as a temporary one on the Sámi sleigh. The permanent exhibition is on the Arctic (as you may have guessed..!) and the important changes occurring to that region of the globe. It is very well explained, interactive,

interesting and very absorbing. An idea was born in my head for my next adventure... But that will be another story.

Back to the hotel, I came across Rima, Wayne, and Darek, an amazing disabled Polish runner, who will also run the Rovaniemi 150. I will write more about him later on. We chatted on for a while and then went all in our respective rooms for a relaxing evening. I needed to get my head down on the race, looking at the route, jotting down the checkpoint time limits, checking my stuff, etc.

D-Day -2.



On the Arctic Circle

Friday. Breakfast. Gym – needed some exercise...And after a short walk on the riverside I met the other participants for the visit to Santa. Here I got to meet Àlex, Maria from the organisation and more of the participants. There were people from all over Europe and further! Many Italians, Spanish, British, some Americans, a few Swiss, French, Swedish, Dutch and German guys and a lovely yet crazy Czech girl: Markéta, 19 years old, coming to race these 150k just to give it a try! We met during the visit to Santa and when I learnt she had no place to stay and had slept outside the previous night, I could definitely not let her out another night and offered her to share my room – there was an extra bed anyway! So here I got a funny always laughing Czech elf to keep me company ☺

The visit to Santa. Well hard to say. Perhaps under other conditions I would have found it more magical? It was nice though to see how they built it, the whole place with all the decorations and staging, the picture – I was sitting right next to HIM!! A very charming and real Santa – but still...Oh well, I was probably not in the mood... I will go back on another occasion and let you know my updated version! Telling anything else but nice things about Santa is just something I cannot do ;)



Later that day we had the race briefing and gear check down in Hotel Pohjanhovi. A long and well explained briefing of the race course, with details of some specifically tricky stretches. We got all the required information to pack our gear for the next day. Checkpoints will provide us with (cold) water, fire and a basic shelter, except for two of them where there would be tents and one with a proper shelter. It is a self-supported race which means we must carry everything from food to equipment that we may need along the track. Weather forecast is not great, though not catastrophic neither. - 3° expected at 8-9 am, which means that it would at least be frozen on the river. I would be able to run. Some snow and milder temperatures over the hours, but it could change... Risk of over flooding and high probability of soft and deep snow. Àlex says it is difficult to tell us for sure what gear to take or not. Well, there is nothing we can do about it, so I better get ready for any terrain conditions! I signed Rima's Tyre now called Lumi, filled my Primus bottle with white gas and move back to the hotel where Markéta has already settled in.



Friday late afternoon. Packing. With Markéta in the room. I am not sure whether anybody could really figure out the seriousness of the situation. It might well have been the toughest thing I went through, race included, during those 5 days in Rovaniemi. In less than 20 minutes, my room looked as if some kind of tornado has just been through: clothes, gear, food, poles all scattered in all parts of the once nice and tidy room. Markéta trying to figure out how to assemble that pulka of hers. Me desperate to keep things a little bit under control. "And is that yours or mine?" "What about the snowshoes, and the overshoes?" "Yes, I am taking that huge and heavy down jacket in case temperatures drop! (Believe me: I took it all the way from Switzerland because I was coming to a cold country so there is no way I will leave it behind!)" Two hours later we are sorted out. Out of the storm. Pulks packed, mine twice times heavier than Markéta's but yet twice lighter than Tyre Lady and her monster stud tyre. Time to go out and have something proper to eat.



That evening we went out for the traditional pre-race pasta party. I had salmon and veggies – my vision of pre-race meal. Along with me and Markéta were Rima, Wayne, Darek and another Polish

friend of his, Kamil, who lives in Rovaniemi and Darek's supporter during his stay in Finland. We had a really good time all together. I think I never had so much fun before a big race! A great way to get your head away from any kind of stress or pre-race anxiety.

D-Day -1

The Arctic Race



The first 50k

Saturday 6 am. Wide awake. Ready to go. I am excited! Markéta is still sleeping. I get ready and head for breakfast. Darek is there, having a much bigger breakfast than me – I didn't believe it possible. We try a mix of French-English-Polish-say-it-as-you-can language while eating out our cereals bowl. I didn't know yet but I will be using it many times over the race. Many participants are preparing sandwiches and food to bring along.

7 am. Back in the room. Markéta is preparing a bowl of dehydrated pasta. "Are you *sure* you don't want to go down for some real yummy *breakfast*?" Time to fill in my Thermos with boiled water and off we go.

8 am. Kamil and a friend of his meet us at the hotel and help us carry with the pulks over the gravel and down to the starting point on the river. Rima is not at her best, she has got a cold, but is also excited to get started. On the starting line, participants start to line up, checking their gear one last time, taking group pictures, laughing, warming-up (well just a few...). The temperatures are mild, - 2 or -3° maybe. I spot Jaska: he came! I am really pleased and touched to see him there, to greet me on the starting line. I try to realise. I am there. I am on the picture I saw hundred times on the internet: on the starting line of that dream race. I feel good, confident and in very good shape. I am ready.



Ready for the Rovaniemi 150. Ready to have fun.

9 am. The start is given by Julian's young son. Darek and Bettina, a very nice English woman, take off immediately, going with the head of the runners. The bikers are of course much faster than us runners especially on the frozen river and are soon nearly out of sight. The race course goes under the bridge and then keeps on up the river Ounasjoki until the first checkpoint 11k away.

I had planned a very gently start, walking. Instead I started running right from the start. My pulka doesn't seem so heavy after all. I run nice and easy, taking the time to warm up properly, regularly checking my heart rate to stay within my endurance zone. It feels nice to run on the frozen terrain, very



unusual. Soon I am running alone, overtaken only by the skiers and Julian who walks but really fast! This year he is doing the 66°North and his pulka is much lighter. That is the excuse I told myself... 1h20 minutes later I reach **Pohorovi**, checkpoint 1, held on a small cabin on the river shore. We have to sign in and out every time we enter and exist a checkpoint. No signature means disqualification... so better not miss out! Sign in – out, managing to turn my looong pulka on the narrow trail and off I go. Another girl is quicker and leaves ahead of me. “take it easy girl!” I keep repeating myself, “This is only the very beginning, plenty of time ahead”.

Soon we leave the river to take on a nice road passing through a nice neighbourhood. I try to look and appreciate and take on as much as I can: the landscapes, the colourful wooden houses along the riverside, the morning light... I am in Finland! I am running in Finland! In Lapland!

I try to drink regularly and have a bit to eat every hour or two. Soon the road start going uphill. I walk, fast, easy. I really feel good and do not rush myself. “Keep going like this and you’ll do great! Nice and positive thoughts. Have fun. Enjoy yourself” is my mantra. The road turned into a path and the snow becomes much more soft and hard to walk on. I walk. I feel light and overtake many runners struggling. The girl ahead of me is putting on her snowshoes. I keep on.



I reach checkpoint 2, **Sinettäjärvi**, 21.2k, 3h22 after the start. That one seems rather close. A bite in my sandwich, a few dates, sign in, sign out and off I go. We are entering the forest and its



notorious 700 meters-stretch of rough terrain. One of the English runner is just in front of me and already seems to struggle. He tells me to pass him, as I am faster with my pulka. I had untied the harness, carrying it in one hands and am using only half of the hauling system to drag it through the woods. Some ten minutes later I catch up with Darek. He really is struggling. He has very little use of his right arm and his right leg is weak. His pulka keeps on acting as a silly turtle, always on its back. I cannot let him alone on this so we make it slowly, together, through

this hard segment. Some runners with the snowshoes on and backpack overtake us. Never mind. Keep on. 30 minutes later we are done, for 700 hundred meters. That kills any speed statistics! But here we are, on the Sinettäjärvi, an 11k-long (hopefully) frozen lake. I reassemble my hauling shaft and start off again, running gently on the lake. Darek is soon out of sight, this guy flies on level ground! I catch up with other runners, some walking some running slowly. One made me laugh: each time he felt me coming to close, he speeded up, making sure I would not overtake him... Some time later I passed him and never saw him again.

At the end of the lake, the Rovaniemi 150 turns left and those on the 66°North race keep on straight ahead. Inge, the Dutch woman and single one on bike, passed me shortly before our route



separated. She was enjoying the flat lake more than the forest! You bet! With those heavy bikes, going through that forest track must be horrendous, pushing, dragging, carrying...! I reach a road going up and downhill through a nice neighbourhood. Suddenly, coming toward me is one of the Italian skier that had passed me long ago. "I got lost, I am tired". After less than 40km that is not a good sign, believe me. He tells me his feet are killing him and he is struggling in every uphill and downhill. I tell him to keep on, that checkpoint 3 will soon be in sight. Well...it took me an extra hour and a half to reach it, somewhere in the middle of nowhere, deep inside the woods after kilometres of deep snow. I stop once to eat something, gather my strengths and walk on.

Finally reaching checkpoint 3, **Vittavaara**, 44.28k, after 4h20 minutes, well ahead time limit. I sign in and out, without stopping long. Four Italians are there, one is the skier I talked with a while ago and who tells me he quits because he fell and got injured on the way down. I get going. I am feeling good, still strong and enjoying myself. Next checkpoint is **Morajärvi**, 10k away. Night is gently settling down. I have to turn my headlamp and my rear flashing lights on. I came across Maria, one of the volunteers, at a road crossing. Nice to see her there! I feel happy and keep on the hilly trail, a mix of cover-with-ice roads, hard pack snow and soft forest tracks. I haven't seen anybody for a while now.

Silent night

I love running by night. I am really used to it and I love the quietness, the lights shining through the woods, the starry sky. I pass a farm in the middle of the woods, all lighten up, and a woman waves at me through the window. I feel merry! For the time being all is going tremendously well. It is great. I hope that I can get some warm water at the next checkpoint otherwise I will have to boil some water sooner or later and really do not feel like stopping. And yes! Amazing: there is hot water waiting for me when I got there! A dream! I cannot believe it! I sign in, chat a bit with the Finnish couple in charge of the checkpoint, bid them goodbye and head back on the trail. I know what is now waiting for me: a nice downhill path through the forest all the way down to THE Bridge, a famous and tricky segment to walk. Half way down, some 5 minutes later I realise: Gosh, Rachel, you forgot to sign OUT!!!!!!!!!!!!!! What should I do? Walk all the way up? Hope they will sign out for me? Nope. I cannot bet on it and I do not want to be disqualified for such a ridiculous oversight. So I drop the pulka and run uphill back to the point. You should have seen them, feeling so sorry for me when I got there! But well, it happens. Sign out. And run back down, grab the pulka and keep on walking. But it has moved me...



The bridge. Covered with ice, narrow, but not long. I pulled the pulka rather easily across it and start up again, on a very similar path as the previous infamous 700m. Soon I catch up with another runner...Darek! I cannot believe it. I thought he would be well ahead of me. And here we go again, dragging, carrying and pulling the Pulka Turtle out of those woods. Reaching a road, we can start running again. Darek flies ahead. I suddenly feel strange. Nausea. Oh no, not that! I have had

some bad experience on previous races and thought I would stay away from it... I keep on, running a bit more slowly, overtaking one on the runner with backpack and no pulka. He is very tired, the deep snow with the load on the back is exhausting. I move on. For a while I am doing alright. But I cannot eat anymore, and drink very little. I can feel I am slowing down. Shortly before checkpoint 6, my crazy little Czech roommate overtake me, all cheerful and happy! So glad she is doing fine. So wishing my stomach was not giving me such a hard time...



Peurajärvi, checkpoint 6, 69.7k. I decide to take a break. I walk extra slow, feel nauseous and am suddenly tired. Better stop for a while, get a grip and head back in a better shape. I grab my sleeping bag and my phone, text home to get some mental support and lie down. Darek is also there, resting. Oh my, I feel bad. I try to breathe and calm down. I can hear runners going through the checkpoint. "I will catch them later" I keep telling me, half asleep. And all of a sudden, I startled. It has already been an hour!! Darek has left what seems ages ago. I pack my stuff, get me out of the tent, put on

an extra layer as I am freezing, sign out and off I go again, feeling dizzy but slightly better. "Rach, this time this bloody nausea is not going to get you!"

Kuusilampi, the main checkpoint, 79.2k, 17.05 hours into the race. I have been walking in deep snow for hours now. 10k last much longer than on the frozen river, believe me! Once there, I sign in, refill my Thermos and sign out. The hut is packed, participants are resting, some of them are even sleeping in a separate cabin. I ask about Darek, they tell me he passed a while ago, looking tired but fine.

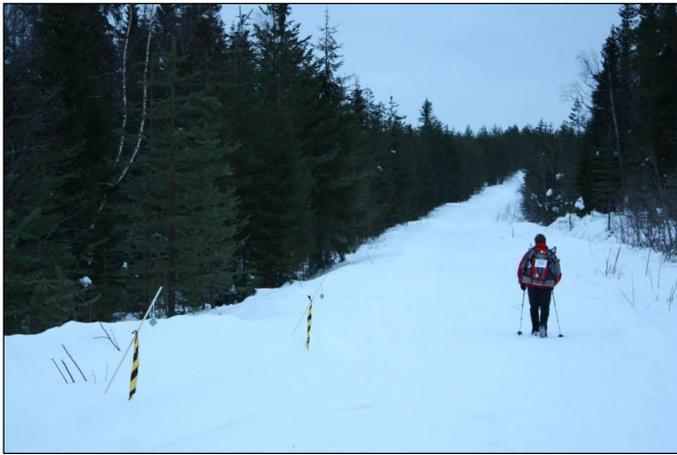


Good. The next checkpoint is some 35k away.... I set off on foot, but not for long. The terrain is so bad that I force myself to stop and put on the snowshoes. And it eventually reveal a good thing. An English runner passed me while I was struggling fitting them on my shoes but I soon overtake him again. Stomach is still no better. And soon all the food I had for the past hours make a rapid comeback. No detail needed. But after that I felt damn better! "Ok, let's go on no food then. I can do it. I can survive", reminding me of the Long Walk story where those guys managed to escape a Siberian gulag with nearly nothing to eat or to wear for months. I have done more than half, the rest will feel easier.

3.30 am. I feel awfully tired. I have been walking alone for hours and it becomes harder and harder to stay awake. I passed a runner who is sleeping on the side of a road. 1k later, I do the same. 20 minutes power nap. Now I feel really much better. But I have lost tremendous time!!! "Don't be silly I tell myself, better be a bit slower than giving up". And there is no way I can give up with all these people supporting me, believing in me, the charity I am running for...

Blue dawn

I seem to be on the road again, away from the forest tracks for a good while now. That feels good. And my mood starts cheering up again. Shortly before dawn, one of the organisation staff member drives passed me and we chat up a bit. I am delighted to know that I am some 18k away from Toramokivalo, n°7... 3k to the road, then 8k on another road and 8k more on forest tracks. 5 more hours. That sounds like a dream...☺. "I am going to make it! I told the volunteer. Daylight helps a lot, I feel stronger again and keep on with my brisk walk. The blue light of daybreak is pure wonder. I pass a town or something similar. The road is really hilly, I walk mostly. "You should have used your pulk as a sledge" Rima will



tell me later. Well, at that very moment the mere idea of taking on and off my harness seems far too much bother... Once I finally reach the forest track, it is really soft. 8k to go...I grab some snow, eat it, drink a tiny sip of water and head on. I find some L-Carnitine tablets in my front pouch and manage to suck one slowly while walking. It will keep me going. I can do it, no food, pure energy! I hear a sound, turn to see Darek slowly catching me up. Really nice to see him! He manages to make me understand that he was the one sleeping on the side of the road earlier. We walk on making our way through the forest, one never-ending path leading to another never-ending track... Ten times I thought I saw people, the checkpoint even snowmobile. Niet. Nada. Niente. Just my mind playing me tricks. Darek slows down, I take him over, leading the trace. He must be exhausted... For me it is not half as hard as it must be for him in such harsh conditions. So I better get a proper grip and walk. Fast. Now.



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Getting there

And finally here it is. Checkpoint 7. **Toramokivalo**. 115.8k from the start. 35 more to go. Peanuts. 9 hours since n°6... not my PB on a 35k ☺ Very nice checkpoint, friendly Finnish volunteers. Text home to give some news. And off I go again. Darek is close behind me but looks a bit tired. I walk faster, feeling really strong again and willing to finish in a good time. Now I know I will do it. And well.

The last 35k went really fast. It took me 7 hours and 7 minutes to cover them. There were more forest and snowmobile tracks, more very hilly roads, more soft snow, another lake and the long 11k on the river to the finish line. The pulk seemed heavier when going uphill. But I never slowed down again. I walked mostly, running only downhill. And I kept on and on, chewing my four L-Carnitine tablets over those 7 hours, sipping water and eating snow. The night caught me shortly before the bridge, 5k before Rovaniemi. The light over the river was absolutely stunning. Red. Orange. Dark blue. A poetic finish.



2k before the arrival a nice surprise was waiting for me: Kamil, Darek's supporter, is there, welcoming me. I was so happy to see someone I knew! So I walked those never-ending 2k as fast as my legs allowed me too, running in the hotel to the finish line.

33hours 35 minutes.

The Rovaniemi 150 4th edition.

I was there. I have done it. A dream come true.



Epilog

I have run quite a few long-distance races, ultra, stage races over the last 8 years in various places and countries. But this one will remain as a very special one to me. It was not only a race. It was more than that. I met some extraordinary people during those few days up there in Lapland, some who immediately feel like family and will forever held a special place in my heart and mind. I learnt a lot. On me. On this inner strength that we all have and only waits to be unleashed. On friendship. On the amazing energy that can arise from human interaction and support. On the pleasure of being part of something useful and fun.

18 runners made it to the finish line, 8 had to quit. I finished 8th runners scratch, 5th woman. Markéta and Bettina were the unquestionable queens of the race!



Tyre Lady nearly made it to the finish line – she will next time for sure, she is such a strong woman. **Darek** finished in 34h20min. And he keeps on impressing me. Great man.



I cannot thank enough **Alex** for creating and setting up this event. And my amazing dear ones, friends and supporters for their trust and faith in me.

Now, have a drink on me, relax and...get ready for the next one!

Hugs xx

Rachel FB



