



NAPAPIIRIN TALVIKILPAAILUT ROVANIEMI 150 ARCTIC WINTER ULTRA RACES

“You want to do a race where?”

Situated on the arctic circle at 66°33' N, the small, Finnish city of Rovaniemi has a number of claims to fame. Most famously it is the official home of Santa Claus and is the administrative capital and commercial centre of Finland's northernmost province, Lapland.

Rovaniemi150 was the first Arctic winter ultramarathon in Europe, first ran in 2012 and similar to winter ultramarathons in Alaska, Rovaniemi150 combined three categories starting at the same time: ski, foot and fat-bike. It was the only one of its kind in Europe until 2015, when the organiser, Alex Cassanovas of Polarguide and Logistics, added two more races: Rovaniemi66 and Rovaniemi300.

I first stumbled across it about 18 months ago whilst looking for something a bit different to challenge myself with. Instantly, it ticked all the boxes for me. I'd been to Lapland before, I knew what to expect from the environment, I just didn't know whether I could run an ultra on snow and ice in temperatures as low as -30°C. Time to do some research. It soon became apparent that the big issue was going to be hydration. Camelbacks and race vests weren't going to be much use, they'd just freeze. The only water available on course was at the CP1 and CP5. So drinking water would have to be carried in an insulated flask and I was going to have to melt snow to refill it. The weight of the gear to be carried was increasing the more I learned about it, stove, fuel, kettle, thermos flask, no wonder some competitors chose to transport their equipment by pulka.

Race Entry

For my entry to the 66km race to be accepted I had to present a resumé of my 'running career' and cold weather experience. I spent a full day listing every single event I'd ever entered, trawling through FRA race calendars, power of 10, Strava etc. Creating a long list of events, from Mountain Marathons to The Tor Mile I left nothing out and also including detail of previous visits to Lapland and skiing & snowmobiling in -34°C. Somewhere in the back of my mind a small part of me was hoping that my entry wouldn't be accepted as I clicked the 'send' button on the online application form. I was expecting an email back in the next few days saying 'Dear Paul, who are you trying to kid? You've not got what it takes to take on this event'. So imagine my shock when I received the email reply within the hour, from the R.O, Alex, telling me my entry was accepted and I was in. Once the entry fee had been received a few days later, my entry was officially announced on the race's Facebook page and included on the official entry roster on their Website.



Start line on the Ounasjoki River

Training

Once my entry had been officially accepted, I needed to put together a training plan for the race. There were 15 weeks to go to the race, plenty of time to prepare. The overall focus of the training was to improve endurance. Although I'd run similar distances a couple of times, I knew that due to the nature of this event I'd be out on course for longer than I'd ever ran before. Each week involved a treadmill session, a couple of short runs, and a long run, with times & distances increasing throughout the cycle and peaking a couple of weeks before the race and then tapering.

Training started well, one of the highlights was a long mixed terrain run from home through Rawtenstall, Edenfield, over Owd Betts into Norden, then off road up by Greenbooth reservoir, across the bottom of Rooley Moor Road, through Whitworth to Cowm Reservoir and back via the Lee Mill race route. It was a great 31km outing at a good comfortable pace. To get used to the race conditions I had planed all my long runs to start in the daylight and to finish after dark and coming over the Lee mill route in the dark was challenging, but thankfully the relays were taking place the next day and the course had already been flagged.

The training plans hit a bump in December, work got in the way, the biggest casualty was the long runs. I wasn't able to find the time to go out for 4 or 6 hour runs. After Christmas, things settled



**Mad Dog with
"haircircles" &
Jätkäkynttilä Bridge**

down and training was back on track. In the new year I'd really got the bit between my teeth, I'd started carrying my backpack with gear in even on short runs and treadmill sessions. The pack included what I would be carrying during the race including full flask of water, stove, kettle & snowshoes! It was weighing between 5 & 6 kg. One long run taking in Hailstorm Hill, Top o' Leach, Rooley Moor Road, Knowl Hill, Whittle Pike & Cowpe Low was designed as a gear test run. Finally managed to get the knack of running with poles, tested out the new stove, and with freezing temperatures once the sun went down the new thermal gloves and duvet mittens. In week 10 we got some snow! Time to try out more gear on late night hill runs, a first outing for the Inov8 Artic Talons and a snowshoeing session. Everything was coming together nicely. I managed a PB at the Mad Dog 10k race in Southport without trying which meant the training was working. Confidence was high, but it didn't last long. I was hit with nasty cold/flu symptoms which turned into a troublesome cough and put paid to all training just 2 weeks before we were due to fly.

The cough lingered and effected training for about 10 days which took me into the tapering period and meant I had missed the last 2 long runs. Training was to finish with an acclimatisation run once we'd arrived in Rovaniemi.

Travel to Finland

An early rise after a sleepless night, packing suitcases, unpacking suitcases, deciding what's not required on voyage and repacking suitcases to stay within the baggage allowance for the flight. The battle through the morning traffic on the M60 was nothing compared to the battle through the chaos that is Manchester Airport security, after arriving at the airport in plenty time for our flight, we ended up ditching our coffee cups and rushing to the gate for the final boarding call. The 2 hour 30 minute flight passed quickly and smoothly, we touched down on time and transferred to the terminal for a 5 hour wait for our connecting flight to Rovaniemi. A good mooch around the airport shops ensued, Shelley hunting for Moomin merchandise, and then something to eat. It was soon time to go to the boarding gate. Seeing all the other passengers waiting to board, I suddenly got the jitters, the sort of stomach churning feeling that I'd normally get when standing at the start of a race. Clearly the majority of travellers here were fellow competitors, one was walking around the airport wearing her race vest complete with drinks bottles! Suddenly the dream I had had for over 12 months now became very real. Pre-race nerves got the better of me and the start was still over 2 days and a plane flight away. At least I had plenty of time to calm down! We land at Rovaniemi on time, collect our luggage and catch the airport shuttle bus to our accomodation in the city. Time to

unpack and have a drink before bed and enjoy a day of exploring the city tomorrow.

Pre-race preparations

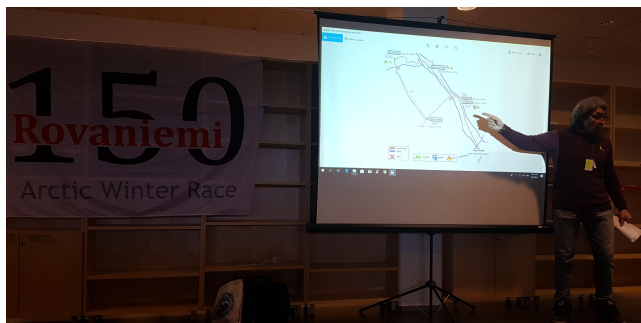
Thursday dawned clear, bright, and as expected, cold, -15°C . But the weather forecast was for something very different for race day. Temperatures were set to rise to a very unseasonable $+5^{\circ}\text{C}$. "Good news", you might think, but not so. High temperatures create a number of issues, specially when you have been training and preparing for -15°C to -20°C . Warm weather has significant effects on the trail conditions. The surface snow becomes soft and you sink deeper into it than if it were colder and firmer meaning more effort needed to continue to move forward at whatever speed you'd be travelling at whatever your chosen method of transport (foot, ski or fat-bike). It also meant an increased risk overflow on rivers and lakes which account for about 45km of the route. This is where water is present between the surface of the ice and the snow on top of it. With the snow on top of the ice being soft it is all too easy to sink through the snow into the water on top of the ice below. This means wet feet, at the very least, which in extreme cold can result in frostbite – thankfully it wasn't going to be extremely cold. Secondly it is impossible to run through these conditions and even walking is highly energy sapping.

After breakfast, a walk to the city centre, orientation more mooching around shops (more Moomin hunting). A visit to Lordi Square for lunch. Then food shopping and back to the apartment for the evening.

After tea, a short, easy pace, evening run from the apartment. Through the city, down to the riverside, on to the river and up the race route for a while, turn round head back. It was -20°C , ask Shelley about her frozen hair. To round the evening off once back in the apartment, a nice, relaxing sauna.



Lordi Square, -11°C



Race organiser Alex giving the pre-race brief

Friday was pre-race briefing and mandatory gear check at the Pilke Science Centre which was to double up as Race HQ and official finish line. Alex the RO delivered the brief and the bad news about the trail conditions. Last week they had been working on the trail to get it ready for the race and the conditions had been perfect. But recent high winds had blown a lot of snow on to the prepared tracks, there was not enough time to go out and clear it all again. More importantly, the weather forecast was still for a very warm

weekend and large areas of overflow had already been reported on sections of Sinettäjärvi lake. The race had never been held under these conditions before.

After the briefing, a quick trip to the river to look at the start line in the daylight and then back to the apartment for lunch and time to start getting my gear together for the race. Everything I had planned on wearing was laid out on the sofa and various items were discarded as not required under the circumstances. A complete head to foot layer had to be removed. At least higher temperatures meant that perspiration wasn't going to freeze. Once the clothes were sorted, it was time to work on the backpack. Again everything laid out on the sofa and various items discarded. The main item that was discarded was the stove. I decided there would be no need to stop between checkpoints to melt snow. That could be done on the campfire at checkpoint 3. Food parcels were made up with malt loaf, Jaffa Cakes, jelly babies, Haribo Minions, Chocolate peanuts & raisins, biltong, electrolyte tablets,



That lot'll never fit in there!

gels and energy bars. It was all packed into the backpack and the snow shoes attached to the outside. I picked it up to feel the weight, it actually felt lighter than the packs I'd used during training. Pasta Bake for tea, reply to tons of messages of support and good luck wishes on Facebook and early to bed for a good night's sleep ready for an early start. Pointless! I couldn't settle, too excited, too nervous, too many things going round inside my head – race plan - pacing charts – nutrition plan – what not to forget before leaving the apartment in the morning – preparing excuses for abandoning halfway round etc.

Race day : Saturday 23rd February 2019 - The start

Another early rise after a sleepless night. Head buzzing with excitement and nervousness. But focused, I knew the plan. Short walk across the city underneath last night's full moon which hadn't set yet, to the Pilke Centre to sign-in, photos in my Rossendale Harriers vest on the start line. Wasn't going to be wearing it for the race, just another item rejected due to the conditions. Back to Pilke to get ready, pre-race wee etc. 10mins to start time back down to the river to the start line. Just about to get in the crowd of competitors when I realised my GPS batteries were dead. A mad panic ensued. Alex announced 3 mins to race start and I was dismantling my pack to locate the spare batteries buried deep inside to protect from the cold and install them in the GPS, repack the backpack, get it up and running and get in the start area with seconds to spare before we're off.



**Rossendale to
Rovaniemi**

To Checkpoint 1 - Porohovi 1

We're away. Runners, riders and skiers, all heading north on the ice of the Ounasjoki river under glorious blue Rovaniemi skies. But there is the problem, temperatures at the start were probably 0°C



Heading North on the Ounasjoki River

and by km 1 I was shedding layers. Off came my Union Jack beanie and my Rossy buff. At km 2 I was unzipping jackets and vests to get comfortable. Everyone around me, at some point in the first 5km was having to rethink their set up due to the heat which increased as the sun rose above the hills behind us to the south. The snow on the river was too soft, but still runnable providing you chose the right line. I found the best line was to follow the fat-bikers trails. If their tracks became too deep I knew the snow was about to get softer. It didn't take long to get into a good steady rhythm, the opening kilometres went by quite quickly. Before I knew it, up ahead I could see Porohovi, Checkpoint 1. Into the checkpoint, announce my race

number in Finnish "Yhdeksäntoista" (you don't need to do it in Finnish, but I was just showing off!). Sign-in & sign-out immediately - not going to get stuck with a DQ for that one! Time for a quick drink, refill my flask, (last water station for 45km!) shoulder my pack & exit the checkpoint with a cheery "Kiitos" to the volunteers

To Checkpoint 2 – Sinettjärvi

Back on the Ounasjoki river, cross back to the opposite side. Quick text message to Shelley to let her know I was safely out of CP1 ahead of schedule. Shortly we cross to the eastern side of the river again before coming to an ice road crossing where we leave the river and head west. The route follows the road for a short distance where the fat-bikers have the advantage and disappear. Only to be caught at the top of the next section - an icy road with a moderate gradient climbing for about 2km. I passed a number of Rov150 & 300 runners with their heavy pulkas on this section too. The route continued straight on a snowy trail descending through the forest. Up ahead I could hear the squeak of fat-bike disc brakes as they slowed down for the bends. The sun was flickering through the birch trees on my left reminding me that I had forgotten to apply suncream and casting a shadow across half of the trail in front of me. This meant that the shaded side of the trail was firmer to run on, it also meant I was going to get sunburnt! The trail was much narrower and worn down to a depth of a couple of feet so it wasn't so easy to pass the pulka pullers and the fat-bike pushers. The next downhill section took us to a road crossing which I recognised from Google Earth. That meant I wasn't far off CP2 Sinettjärvi. Here there would be no campfire, no shelter, no water and therefore no reason to stop. Sign-in, sign-out, check watch. 21.2km in just over 3hrs was nearly 35mins ahead of my quickest possible schedule, feeling great & looking forward to the "Pain in the Ass Section"



Leaving the Fat Bikes behind at the top of the climb before CP2



Pulkas struggling through the "Pain in the Ass Section"

Pain In The Ass

Out of CP2 another quick text to Shelley to update on progress & time to feed before tackling the section of the race that Alex calls "The Pain in The Ass Section". However, a minor navigation error meant it took a few minutes longer to find the entrance to the section. A mistake made by quite a few of us on the day. How so many missed it, I'll never know it was clearly marked!

"The Pain in the Ass Section" is a very narrow, winding, pathless route through the trees that is marked only by bits of tape. It descends from the road just below CP2 down to the southern end of

Sinettjärvi lake. I found it very runnable and actually really enjoyed it. But I can see where it gets its reputation. You're going to struggle to get through it quickly with a pulka, a fat-bike or on skis. It only slowed me down when I came up behind a group of struggling pulkas after about 500m. Ever been stuck behind a caravan on a country lane with nowhere to overtake? Same thing!

To Checkpoint 3 - Mellavaara

Out of the Pain in the Ass and passing lots of exhausted fat-bikers sitting in the snow. A text to say I'm through it OK but a little delayed and still ahead of schedule. Then on to Sinettjärvi lake. Approximately 10km of frozen lake to cross south to north. This was not going to be an easy traverse. The snow was too soft to run on and we were coming across large areas of overflow with increasing regularity. I made the decision before everyone else around me did. Snowshoes on! Overall progress

would be slower with them on, but at least I wasn't going to expend as much energy as I would without them. A small number of 66ers on foot without snow shoes gradually disappeared ahead of me up the lake. I would catch them all later, and a number of them would abandon. Progress was painfully slow but at least I could maintain a steady rhythm and a more direct route. Eventually I came to the northern part of the lake where it joins a number of smaller lakes and the snow surface seemed to be improving. I took the gamble to remove the snowshoes and push on. It paid off, the snow was firmer, there was a lot less overflow to contend with as my pace increased and I started to catch and pass others.

CP 3 was still a few km away and now being off the flat lake we had some little hills to tackle.

Nothing steep or long but enough to give me an advantage on those in front of me. I soon caught up with a Finnish couple who had walked all the way up



Looking back from the top of Lehtojärvi after the long slog up Sinettjärvi

the lake holding hands. I asked how they were doing as I passed them they said they were OK but a little tired. They never made it to CP3. I'm running again now up the snowmobile trails and eventually come across the temporary shelter and campfire of Mellavaara checkpoint. I sign-in and tell the Finnish gent manning the checkpoint that I would be stopping for a bit.

Mellavaara checkpoint - planned rest

Just over half way now, I had no idea what time it was but I just knew I'd lost loads on that bloody lake! I was resigned to the belief that I was probably behind schedule now but didn't want to check my pacing charts, it would only upset me. I just wanted to continue with my race strategy at a good,



Melting snow at Mellavaara checkpoint. (Rob Watkins – Abandoned race at CP 5)

comfortable pace. If I could do that then I couldn't see any reason why I couldn't finish the race. All the hard work was behind me now, wasn't it? Time to get the kettle out and melt some snow.

A guy I'd met earlier just after CP2 was already here melting snow too. We had a chat about how tough the trail was on the lake. I got the impression he was suffering a bit more than he was letting on. He left before me, we shook hands and wished each other good luck. The Finnish gent manning the checkpoint gave me a twig and showed me how to use it to get the kettle right into the heart of the fire to melt the snow quicker, but all I managed to do was spill the entire contents onto the fire. He walked away and left me to it. Time to feed while waiting for snow to melt. A few magic biscuits, some squidgy energy and a handful of Riley's jelly babies. More people arrived in the checkpoint, three decided to stay

and rest while the other 2 pushed on out and up the hill. I'd got all the water I needed now, packed up my backpack, signed out of the checkpoint and set off up the hill. I didn't know this at the time but I was leaving CP3 2 minutes before I was due to arrive on my slowest schedule. I was still within my target window and the going was only going to get easier from here on in. Wasn't It?

To Checkpoint 4 – Sinettänlavvu

Refreshed after the break I set off with a good pace up the hill, knowing I'd lost time on the previous section, I was just concerned with completing this section before dark. This was all on snowmobile tracks through the forest, it was undulating and winding. We'd been warned at the briefing that this section was busy with snowmobile traffic, and we needed to be careful and to be seen. I saw only six snowmobiles, and all were courteous and slowed down when approaching, I expressed my appreciation with a wave and a nod of the head. After a few kilometres I caught and passed the couple who had passed through the last checkpoint whilst I was melting snow. We exchanged greetings and leapfrogged each other for the next few kilometres. They passing me as I stopped to take a drink and then my passing them once running again. The trail was generally heading downhill which meant that a fairly steady pace could be maintained. I was slowly descending back towards the Ounasjoki river where I would turn south for the final 20km.



Snowmobile trail sign at dusk, 42km in, 24km to go.

It was dusk now, running alone through the forest. The tranquillity and remoteness was beginning to have a hypnotic effect on me. I found I couldn't do even the the most basic, straight forward thinking. My mind went completely blank, the more I thought of stuff the less I could remember. Names, places, dates, everything came back empty. I was cured after a few kilometres of laughing at myself as I came upon a road crossing which meant I was only about half a kilometre from the river. Brain was back in gear and everything started to make sense again. Once I hit the river that would be about 44km leaving 22km left to do, so I'd done two thirds of the route, about 8:45hrs gone, Plenty of time to beat my target window. Finally hitting the river and heading south on the ice, I could just make out a runner in front up ahead. It's going dark, time to don the headtorch and push on to the next checkpoint. The runner in front of me appeared to be getting closer each time I looked up. After a few minutes he was very close, but he was actually leaving the checkpoint that I was now approaching. There was a line of flickering candles leading off the river and up the bank to the checkpoint shelter, but here the surface of the river was un-runnable, soft snow, breakable crust and overflow, making the diversion off the river to the checkpoint very difficult and slow. I signed-in & signed-out of Sinettänlavvu

To Checkpoint 5 - Porohovi 2

Getting back on the river after the checkpoint was even tougher than getting off it in the first place.. Although it had been dark for a while now, the temperature hadn't dropped enough to improve the conditions on the river. Every step was a nightmare, it wasn't possible to find a runnable route anywhere, it was energy sapping. Nothing I can do about it, just need to push on. After about 4km the route starts to cross to the eastern side of the river and somewhere near the middle of the channel the surface firmed up a bit. Now I can run once again. It was also getting colder as the skies cleared and the stars came out. I stopped for a moment with headtorch switched off, grew accustomed to the dark and looked up. Sadly there was no aurora visible. Although tonight's forecast was good, but that was for after midnight, and I wanted to be finished and back in civilisation by then. Pushing on I quickly caught the runner in front of me. It was the guy who went wrong after CP2 and who I'd seen again at CP3. "How you doing? You Ok ?" I ask as I passed by. "Yeah, good thanks" he answered. But just as our conversation at the checkpoint, again I got the impression he was struggling but not wanting to say so.

"Keep going mate, not too far to go now", I encouraged him and carried on, now half way to the last checkpoint and another red flashing light in my sights up ahead. The firmer snow & ice conditions meant I could get a good rhythm going, not as easy to find the best route in the dark though, not as many fat-bike tracks to follow, just heading in the general direction of the reflective

tape markers of the snowmobile routes. Before I knew it I caught the other runner in front with about 3km to checkpoint 5. we exchange greetings as I come alongside him, we run together and chat briefly before I push on and leave him alone. Very soon I come across the ice road crossing where we had left the river earlier in the morning I knew I wasn't far from the Porohovi checkpoint and could now see the lights leading off the river and up to the shelter, fire and water.



CP5 : Porohovi 2 - 10 Km to go

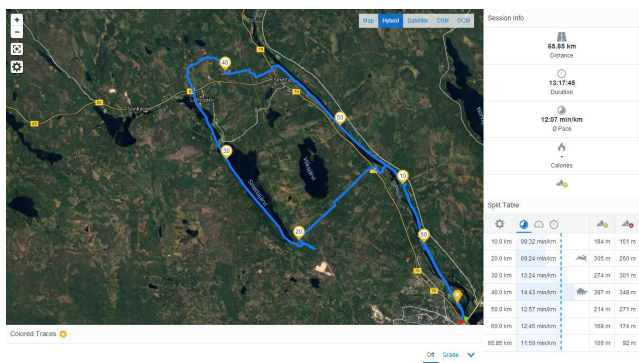
The pre-race plan for this checkpoint was to half fill the flask with fresh water, and carry on, but I felt a sit down and a bit food was in order before continuing, after all I'd put in a fair bit of effort over the last 4 hours. The guy I'd passed recently appeared in the checkpoint, he sits down and we have a chat. Not his first time in Rovaniemi, but first time doing the 66. He broke his ankle during the Spine Race recently managed a speedy recover to make it to Lapland. Just before I sign out a fat biker signs in and out and disappears towards the finish. This was Thor-Espen Jolma from Norway leading the 150km race he would finish in 11hrs 56mins. Send a text to announce I'm setting out on the homeward stretch, sign out & go.

To the finish

Out of Porohovi 2 and a quick glance back up the river to see if there's anyone else heading our way. Nothing, not even the headtorch of the guy I'd suspected was having a tough time earlier. Nobody in front of me either, the only lights visible were those of Rovaniemi twinkling in the distance. Snow conditions are much better now, head down and keep going following Thor-Espen's tyre tracks. For the first time since setting off this morning it dawns on me that I'm actually going finish this race and in a time not too far off what I was hoping for. I allow myself a cheeky little smile at the thought of success. I check the GPS 5km to go. A few snowmobiles appear from behind slowing down as they pass and wave, I wave back and they speed off towards town. The river narrows as I approach the islands at the start of the confluence of the Ounasjoki & Kemijoki rivers up ahead. I know there's only 2 km left and the trail gradually moves over to the western side of the river. Another look back up the river and there's still no-one in sight. So close to town now I can clearly make out the bridges over the rivers especially the Jätkänkylä Bridge (Lumberjack's Candle Bridge). Another check of the GPS tells me there's less than 1km left. The track swings sharply right towards the river bank and then I'm running up the hill off the river, feeling strong. There's a crowd of about 10 people standing on the top of the hill, oddly, not one of the acknowledged my presence as I ran past. Over the bridge, through the underpass, up the hill, across the car park and into the door of the Pilke building and the finish. Almost bumping into Shelley as she comes out to see where I am.



Still standing & still Smiling



GPS Trace

Results.

1:	Rolf Even Hansen	Fatbike,	Norway	5:18
2:	Saverio Bianco	Fatbike,	Italy	6:26
3:	Adam Broyad	Fatbike,	UK	6:27
4:	Pietro Grande	Fatbike,	Italy	6:58
5:	Mikhail Sinitcyn	Fatbike	Russia	7:34
6	Marino Malinka	Fatbike	Netherlands	7:50
7	Colin Hutt	Foot	UK	7:51
8	Jagoda Kostrubiec	Foot	Poland	8:31
9	Anna Alakuijala	Foot	Finland	8:38
10	Martin Stefanov	Foot	Bulgaria	8:55
11	David Fonseca	Foot	Portugal	9:14
12	Juan Jose Garcia	Fatbike	Spain	9:22
13	Szentes Szabolcs	Fatbike	Switzerland	9:26
14	Alistair Mackintosh	Fatbike	South Africa	9:34
15	Jouni Kesseli	Fatbike	Finland	9:47
16	Jose Ramon Planelles	Foot	Spain	9:38
17	Michele Sassu	Fatbike	Ittiri	9:49
18	Eero Moilanen	Foot	Finland	10:12
19	Hannu Lampinen	Foot	Finland	10:12
20	Giuseppe d'Amico	Foot	Italy	10:12
21	Jonathan Guppy	Foot	UK	10:13
22	Scott Bird	Foot	UK	10:24
23	Ruthann Sheahan	Foot	Ireland	10:37
24	Massimo Andolfato	Foot	Italy	10:48
25	Stefano Fietta	Foot	Italy	10:48
26	Daniel Eberli	Foot	Switzerland	11:56
27	Massimiliano Monzani	Foot	Italy	12:14
28	Rebekah Balint	Foot	Switzerland	12:21
29	Alessandro Roppo	Foot	Italy	12:29
30	Paul Heneghan	Foot	UK	13:17
31	Mal Smith	Foot	UK	13:30
32	Lucy Billings	Foot	UK	14:09
33	James Sainty	Foot	UK	14:09
34	Freddie Haines	Foot	UK	14:09
35	Lisa Marie Bryant	Foot	UK	14:09
36	Simon Bryant	Foot	UK	14:09
	Laura Helgers	Ski	Netherlands	DNF
	Rob Watkins	Foot		DNF
	Kevin Kivi	Foot	Finland	DNF
	Maiju Kivi	Foot	Finland	DNF
	Maria Ackerot	Foot	Sweden	DNF
	Marina Boitard	Foot	France	DNS

30th out of 48 on the starting roster, 19th out of the 33 competing on foot, 4th from the UK and 33 minutes inside my target window! To say I am pleased with the result is an huge understatement. I truly believed that if I actually managed to finish the race within the 18hr cut-off time limit, that I'd be the one switching off the lights at race HQ on my way home.



Official race finisher's photo

I've been asked by many people since the race, including other competitors and Alex if I would do Rovaniemi again. The answer would be a definite "YES", it was an amazing experience. However, the questions remain, which distance 66, 150 or 300 & on foot, ski or fatbike?

for full results go to:-

Rov 66 : <https://www.rovaniemi150.com/results/rov66-2019/>

Rov 150 : <https://www.rovaniemi150.com/results/rov150-2019/>

Rov 300 : <https://www.rovaniemi150.com/results/rov300-2019/>

Check out the You tube video by 2nd place man Martin Stefanov :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-p1qkRbxpo>

And also:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfIRK1X7yTM> by Julián Amorrích (2nd place in the 150 race), this shows some of the tough trail conditions with soft snow on the river, the Pain in the Ass section and overflow on Sinettäjärvi lake

Post Race.

A well deserved lie-in on Sunday morning before catching the bus to visit the official home of Santa Claus. Yes, he was in and we did see him. Posted some Christmas cards to be delivered at Christmas with the official Santa Claus post office post mark on them, posed for photos on the actual Arctic circle and hugged an giant snowman. Have to admit I was flagging a bit towards the end of the day all this touristy stuff is far more exhausting than running an Ultra race.

Monday was to be the last day of our trip before we flew home on Tuesday, so to wrap it all up we had a day skiing at the Ounasvaara ski resort a few kilometres outside the city. Not a huge ski area, and none of the runs too long or too demanding, but a great way to end a memorable trip with a bit of slope time.



Looking towards the Kemijoki & Ounasjoki rivers from the Ounasvaara Ski Area