

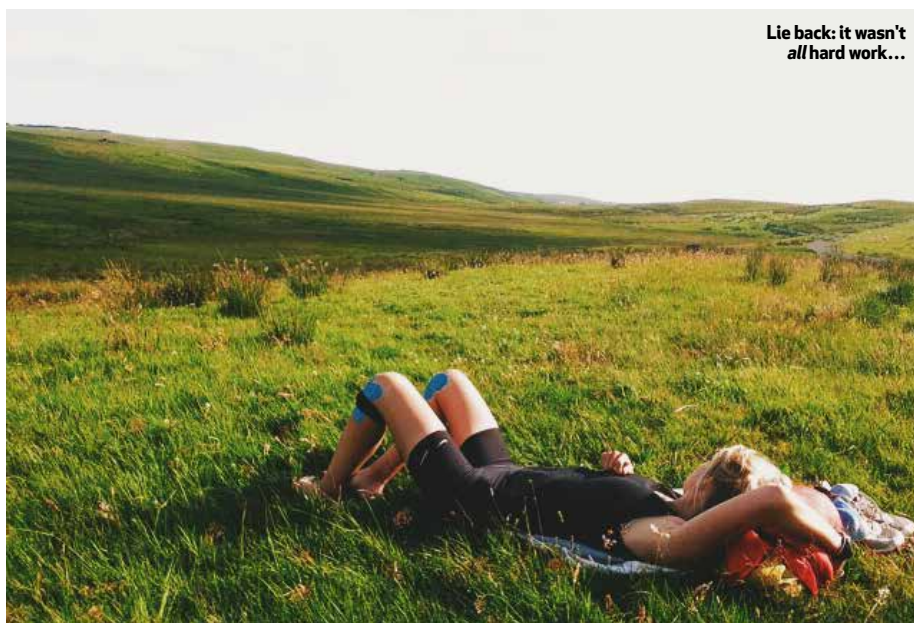
Running the country



Claire Oziem has just become the first woman to run from John O'Groats to Lands End. We find out more

“I had a chunk of time before starting a new job and I wanted to do something amazing, something I'd never forget,” says 25-year-old Claire Oziem, explaining why she decided to run from John O'Groats to Lands End. “I also realised that I hadn't really seen any of Scotland and I thought, ‘what a waste. I live in the UK, I'm surrounded by all this amazing scenery and I haven't seen the majority of it.’ And then I just thought a run would be more ballsy than the generic cycle.”

Claire, who grew up in Cheshire but has lived in Bristol for the last six years, started the run in mid June. Six weeks and over 1,000 miles later, she finished at Lands End – the first woman to run from John O'Groats to Lands End (or vice versa) unsupported.



☞ You tell everyone what you're going to do and you don't want to make an idiot of yourself by not achieving it. That was mentally quite difficult ☞

Mission statement

The mission: To run from John O'Groats to Lands End.

The adventurer: Claire Oziem, 25, originally from Cheshire, now living in Bristol.

The time: Six weeks.

The distance: 1,031 miles in total – over a marathon a day, most days.

The 'support vehicle': A three-wheeled pram, containing a tent, stove and food. “At the beginning pushing it was very awkward as it meant I had to change the way I ran, without using my arms. But now I'm worried I won't be able to run without it!”

Favourite piece of kit: A Powergorilla portable charger. “I couldn't have lived without it for my GPS, my watch and my phone.”

Advice for AT readers planning to do a similar trip? Don't let your doubts or anybody else's doubts deter you from your planned trip. And don't underestimate the importance of lubricating your feet.

“I didn't necessarily take the shortest route, I made sure I saw the bits I wanted to on the way down,” Claire says. “At the beginning I was running between 20 and 30 miles a day, but towards the end, as I got fitter, it was 30-plus miles most days. I'd be running for anything from four hours a day to the longest day which was eight hours, although that's because I got lost and had to drag the pram up and down a completely unsuitable path.”

The pram is what Claire used to carry her kit – a standard pram that came with the option of a ‘jogging wheel,’ filled with a tent, spare clothes, cooking kit and food. How much more difficult did it make the running?

“At the beginning it was very awkward as I wasn't able to use my arms so I had to change how I ran,” she says. “And as soon as I hit any

kind of uphill I was pushing a heavy weight – I don't know how much the pram weighed but it was so heavy that I couldn't pick it up. But it also made going downhill really painful, probably worse than the uphill, because it dragged me down so I had to put all my weight into grounding myself. I ended up getting quite bad knee injuries early on as I adjusted to it. But by the end it felt natural – now I'm worried I won't be able to run without a pram!”

Although she's always enjoyed running, Claire described herself before the trip as an average runner who'd never won anything or done anything particularly impressive. So did she do any training for this expedition? “Yes, but I was injured until mid-April, so I did lots of alternatives to running, like pool

running, weights and cross training. But it worked out quite well as I picked up the running element as I went along, getting fitter and fitter, whereas you need to be really strong to do something like this. I think all the weights were actually the best preparation.

“I also cycled from Cairo to Cape Town last year so I guess I got a lot of my endurance from that,” she continues. “I was pretty well versed in long days, as well as being quite practically prepared for the camping element of the trip.”

Claire planned a rough route for each day in the tent the night before, where possible sticking to quieter roads and Sustrans cycle tracks, although she says that wasn't always possible. “The busy roads were emotionally quite taxing, listening to traffic revving up behind me. I just had to hope drivers were considerate, and they generally were.”

What else did she find hard?

“The first few days were tough because I was nervous about what I'd taken on. You tell everyone what you're going to do and you don't want to make an idiot of yourself by not achieving it. That was mentally difficult. But the worst day was when I had bad blisters. In the back of my head I didn't know how I was going to get rid of them, but I still had to keep running. There was no point when it got so bad that I thought I was going to have to jack it in though. I never got near that point.”

And what were some of the run's highlights?

“The simplicity of it. Life was so easy, no complications. It felt like I was in a different world, even though I was still



Pushing on: Claire took her kit in a pram



Made it! More than 1,000 miles later

☞ I thought a run would be more ballsy than the generic cycle ☜

in the UK. I loved the scenery – it was amazing, and so nice to see the UK in that way. One highlight was the day that I got lost and ended up on a path that just wasn't appropriate. It was in the Forest of Bowland, just south of the Lake District, and it was absolutely amazing: stunning scenery and completely empty. I'd never heard of it but it's worth a trip.

“And finally the people I met along the way,” Claire continues. “Every single person I met would move the earth for me. It was a really, really humbling experience.”

Claire didn't have a strict diet regime, generally having a powdered protein and carbohydrate shake for breakfast, whatever she could find for lunch depending on whether she was running through a town, and rice, beans, tuna, noodles and whatever she could carry

in the pram in the evening. She camped for about 80% of the trip, the rest of the time being offered beds in people's houses, or staying in a B&B if the weather had been particularly dire.

“Scotland's weather was very changeable, but now I look back on it, it wasn't too bad – easier than being in the heat,” she says. “When I got past South Wales it got really hot and it was much more difficult. I had to stop much more to try and find something to drink, which was annoying.”

And as well as starting a new job as a trainee lawyer, has Claire got any more adventurous plans? “I feel like it will be Europe. I've always gone further afield so I quite fancy going into the Pyrenees or the Alps, maybe doing some mountaineering. I don't want to say too much though, in case my parents have a heart attack!”

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