



“...my slower pace meant I could look around and appreciate the truly stunning view from my lofty vantage point high above the cliffs.”

Breathing in the cold sea air, I felt a sense of tremendous positivity. Running in a natural environment, with not a car or housing estate in sight, is said to be associated with greater feelings of revitalisation and increased energy. It's even being prescribed as part of holistic treatments for those suffering depression and similar psychological ailments.

And I was going to need all of that positivity to see me through the next 10 miles!

After a gruelling uphill section past the picturesque Greve de Lecq bay, the course flattened out, but it wasn't necessarily easier. At Sorel the smell of bacon rolls wafting by from a nearby food van was a cruel and unexpected distraction. At another point, sheep with alarmingly long horns blocked the path forcing me to give them a wide berth.

Then I saw runners on their way towards me. First it was James Manners, who would go on to finish in first place, then some of the relay runners just ahead of Jason and Mark. They'd got to Batterie Moltke at L' Etacq, had a break, and were on their way back. I was happy for them, but it was demoralising too.

It sapped the energy from me and for the final few miles I stumbled over rocks, tripped on stones and dragged myself towards the finish line. Excruciatingly, I could see it in the distance but ended up taking a wrong turn and found myself in the middle of a clearing with gorse bushes surrounding me. I would need to turn back. I swore. Loudly.

A sense of relief washed over me at the end. Well, that and agonising leg cramps. It was 3 hours 59 minutes of pure agony. Never again, I told myself, slumping into a chair.

Runners came and went, most of them taking a quick break and turning to go back. It must have taken an enormous amount of willpower not to just stay and call it quits. I had to admire them.

Later that day, I headed back to St Catherine's breakwater, just as Jason and Mark were finishing in second and third place. It had taken them 7 hours 15 minutes... and they still looked fresh!

By then I'd recovered. I'd said never again, but someone mentioned a Trail Monkey Marathon. Bizarrely, I was tempted. The camaraderie, the achievement, the views; it was overwhelming. The sun was now shining, and I felt great. I just knew that I'd be on the trail again soon. ■