

The Kerry way by Róisín Dunne



Last year tracking Paul Twomey around the 200km Kerry Way with the help of Aime Roche keeping us posted, I was inspired by this challenge. I wondered how could a gang of us head down to Kerry to take on the Ultra Lit (60km). I can tell you now there is nothing “Lit” about that 60km trail run.

Roll on nearly a year later to March and we’ve signed up and have our crew sorted.

Runners: Aoife McEvoy, Denise Murphy, Trish Flood, Róisín Dunne

Support Crew: Claire Cosgrove, Martina Gardener, Sinead Lynch, Trish Flood



The week leading into the race I was a bag of nerves and when I heard the news that Trish Flood couldn’t participate due to injury and would now be joining the support crew this made me realise how lucky we all were to be able to toe the line after months of training.

Saturday morning quickly approached with a 5.30am start we headed from Killarney to the start in Sneem. Watching the Sunrise across the mountains with a cloudless sky above the mountain peaks I knew we were in for a good day.

The Kerry Way is the most laid-back race I've ever participated in, definitely when compared to the triathlon world. Last year's 200km winner, Aoife Mundow checked my bag for all its' kit. Trying to not fan girl at the time. She was just back from Chamonix UTMB World Championships only taking up trail running two years ago there is time for us all to get involved in this mad sport.

I had three things in my head as we gathered together to start the race at 9am.

1. Smile

2. Dont fall

3. Make it to the end by the cut off

We set off into the hills of Kerry guided by the yellow man, he would lead us back to Killarney. On the recce when Aoife and I doubted his guidance I told her it's never down always "UP" when following him meander through the boreens and grassy paths.

Aoife McEvoy "the chance to have an exhilarating run in the calmest most beautiful trails and mountains of the kingdom, where friendships are made, battles are fought, and the true meaning of support emerges"

The first section all the runners were bunched together along the narrow trails. All of us cautious on footing for the first few kms as we meandered up into the mountains. We crossed Sneem river and followed quiet backroads across bogland areas and up Knockanamande mountain to soak in the spectacular views of the Beara Peninsula.

There was a lovely wooded track that led to the abandoned 19th century village of Tahilla.

I was shocked to still be surrounded by lots of runners even though the pack had thinned out a bit along this mountain section. I had my head down concentrating on getting up this section closely followed by 3 others when I stopped and looked to my right to see a beautiful view of the mountains, (Picture attached). I think at that moment about 10km in it sunk in how lucky we all were to be able to take on this adventure together on a picture-perfect day and I don't have Michelle Grainger skills!

Sinead Lynch "Exhilarating"

At this stage one of the marshals shouted that I was in the top 10 women. I was slightly buzzing off this news, however, as we descended down off the mountain the women following me quickly overtook me as I carefully descended this section terrified to fall. We all had to go to work Monday morning and I'd be no good to anyone in a sling! I have no competitive bone in my body. I'm all about the participation and being in the outdoors therefore I was happy out following the pack.

Claire Cosgrove "most dramatic run I've ever witnessed from the isolated and dramatic landscapes to boreens and mountains".

Welcomed across the Black Valley Bridge to our cheering Support crew this was a great lift to get as we now ran into a stunning section wooded area looking across at Coongar Harbour and Drongawn Lough.

We headed for Templenoe our first crew stop a with a beaming smile I met the amazing crew with ice and cold drinks for the back pack. Walking up this section with Jaffa cakes and a cold drink I was delighted to get this far feeling so good heading into the mountains again with 40km to go!

From Templenoe the route ascended to the spur of Lacka hill crossing the Reen river and climbing to Gortamullin Hill again witnessing remarkable views of the Caha mountains and Beara Peninsula from a different angle.

Along this route I met many 200km runners, at this stage they were on the route for around 30 hours. Their sticks were their anchor as they focused on the road ahead. I sent words of encouragement and they still managed a "thank you".

I couldn't get over how kind everyone was along the route we all had words of encouragement for each other and had little conversations along the way to pass a few kms together.

Trish Flood "It was mentally the toughest sporting event I've ever done as a result of watching from the side-line but every single bit of pain watching three fantastic ladies completing their awesome challenge along with friendships that I built up with all the support crew"

The boggy terrain was dried up to make it a blissful path to run down into Kenmare. My biggest concern of the day was losing concentration as even though the path was dry you still had to dodge holes, rocks and marsh. Five-star treatment 6km to Kenmare on top of a mountain I rang the crew for flat coke to get a bit of a boost the final section.

Delighted to reach Kenmare town an energetic little town with runners and support crews.

Blisters started to creep in at this section. Plasters applied, the flat coke was drunk as if it was going out of fashion!

Denise Murphy "an amazing event that provided challenging mountain trail and terrain where both mental and physical limits are tested. All with being helped along by a support crew that met your every need with a smile and a cheer right to the finish line. The team comradery was every bit inspiring as the views".

This climb out of Kenmare lasted about 4km and 4 times the size of the Cut in Laois. A fellow runner described it as a "hill from hell". I was also warned to walk this section. No problem, I ate my flapjack happily ascending the hill. I really think we are blessed in Laois to have the Sliabh blooms on our doorway, I pretty much spent every Saturday morning in the hills and didn't shy away from climbs just slow and steady and you'll get to the top. I won't lie though the back hill in Stradbally is still a monster of a hill I've named that "cardiac hill".

Up and up, we go into the mountains following the old Kenmare Road. We cut through Peakeen and Knockanaguish mountains into the Windy Gap with superb views of the MacGillicuddy Reeks mountains. From here we passed Mangerton Mountain. This section was the most difficult part for me. There were lovely benches hidden away in the rocks and all I wanted was a nap! We had to climb over boulders and I thought this section wasn't runnable at all. Until a few mountain goats of runners came flying past me! I had about 10km to go and there was no sign of Torc mountain. I was delighted that my nutrition plan went to plan I got great tips from Pam Grogan leading into the race and stuck to the plan meticulously. Earlier in the year I was told by one of the 200km race past runners that if you master the nutrition that will get you to the end not your head. I had believed for endurance events that you just hang in there at the end. However, he was dead right to get the nutrition in consistently.



Finally, I saw a man descending off the Torc mountain to my euphoria! I knew it was finally all down hill and flat to the Nissan garage to town. I hit the Torc Waterfall where I met my Mam and Martina I'd say they were delighted to finally see me emerge from that section. To my shock I met a girl that had passed me 10km earlier. We shuffled down by Torc waterfall together with tourists cheering us along this section. At this stage I got a new lease of life and didn't look at the watch. Running as best I could through the national park passed Lough Leanne and Muckross House. I couldn't believe I managed to catch up with all the mountain goats that passed me along the old Kenmare Road! I managed to catch them and got one of the girls to run along with me for a bit until her knees gave in and demanded her to walk.

Now the final section, still running, the clock distance ticking downwards to the last few kms. I was thrilled to be still running at this stage of the race and no pains or aches. Don't worry I made up for this the next day! Exactly how I dreamt the finish line would be, there was Aoife McEvoy with a cheerful smile all dressed and washed to meet me with Aime Roche, Paul Twomey, Mam and Martina. The finish line set up is exactly like running into Downey's garage and rush hour lunch time. So many people oblivious to the challenge that hundreds of runners took on that day.

Martina Gardinar "A great race to be able to crew for with inspirational ladies taking on a challenging course in the Kerry mountains"

The best race to date, with the most scenic views. Counting myself lucky with the weather and for the day to go absolutely perfectly for all three of us. We had the best crew along the way, always one step ahead of us with anything we needed to get us through the day.

