

The Line South

A 2000 mile run from Yorkshire to Morocco

Prologue

“A journey is best measured in friends, not in miles.”

Tim Cahill.

I'm almost there. It's day fifty-one of my two-thousand mile journey running an ultra-distance everyday across England, France, Spain and Morocco. My final, ultimate challenge awaits me.

I'm standing in darkness looking at the mountain range I know so well, one that holds a special place in my heart.

The night sky is clear and I can see every star in the shimmering cosmos above me; I have a realisation that I am not just looking up but out into the vast universe and for a fleeting moment I feel quite small.

The mountain's presence feels slightly ominous. The range appears as a dark jagged silhouette against the starlit backdrop and I can see my end-point illuminated by moonlight high above me. I have to reach its summit today to complete my journey.

Despite having feelings of apprehension the morning's silence provides moments when I feel an inner peace, a calmness as I ready my body for the challenge ahead. There is a voice in my mind asking whether I will make this; I know I will, there is no other option.

It has been a gruelling fifty days to reach this point and on many occasions I have been at the point of collapse, severely physically and mentally exhausted. I would need to dig deeper into my reserves than ever before.

I reach Les Mouflon refuge at 3207 metres and surprisingly feel quite strong. Beyond the refuge I begin the steep climb up the rock, scree and boulder fields and here the ascent starts to take its toll. Exhaustion begins to affect my co-ordination and the scale of what I am about to achieve hits me hard.

I pass some English climbers descending the mountain and on hearing them ask me what I'm doing I burst into uncontrollable sobbing. The weeks of running on my own then hearing voices from my home country sends me into a mental turmoil, as an overwhelming surge of emotion overtakes me. I dig deep and push it to one side as I concentrate on the challenging terrain and the immediate task at hand; the next foot placement, managing breathing and maintaining balance as my body gives up its last reserves of energy.

Five hours after setting off from Imlil, I take the final step that brings me to the summit of Jbel Toubkal, the highest point in North Africa.

The wind across the High Atlas Mountains is cold but the sun is shining and the sky is clear, the heat haze has not yet taken full effect. The breathtaking panorama from the top fosters a great sense of awe as below me Morocco stretches to the far horizon; south to the Saharan Plateaux and north to the fertile plains which I had run across days earlier and, somewhere beyond was Whernside where my odyssey began.

My journey has been transformative and the cathartic release on completing it serves as a powerful reminder that my true reward is not only reaching the journey's end but in the person I have become in overcoming the challenges to do so.

I have followed my line south and achieved my goal.

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