



swissalpine – more than a race. <http://www.swissalpine.ch/cms/overview.phtml>

78.5 km +/-2320 m

The biggest mountain ultramarathon in the world, and the ultimate challenge. 21 km of the race is on high alpine terrain, the highlight being the Panorama Trail (a narrow and, in parts, exposed mountain path) at an altitude of 2,600 m.

OK, so this is what the website says – and it certainly lived up to its reputation for me as a great challenge. After reading an article (in Summit) about Lizzy Hawker winning the K78 last year, it inspired me & I decided that it sounded like a good challenge for this year.

So a week before the race, Dave and I set off to Switzerland for a holiday, involving acclimatization (rock climbing in the Bregaglia mountains), some resting (at a mountain hotel at 3000m) and then on to Davos for the pasta party the day before the big race.



“La Fiamme”, Bregaglia



3000m, Berghaus Diavolezza



Davos, pre-race pasta

I was quite nervous on the Friday night as Dave and I sat planning what times I thought I would get to certain points so that he could work out which trains to hop on and off to cheer me on en-route. I had a bit of a plan – but really did not know how it would work out as this was my first 50-mile race.

With 5000 participants on various courses, there was a lively atmosphere around Davos. The K78 started at 8am from the stadium in Davos and wound its way through the town then was soon out in to alpine pastures and wooded hillsides. The running was nice through the woods and I started off at a good pace. The first main village was Filisur and the crowds with their cowbells were out to greet the runners. Then some of the uphill started as we headed up to the village of Bergün. The K42 race started just after I had passed through Bergün, so it meant that there was suddenly a rush of people passing – at

first it was strange – was I really slowing up so badly on the hills? – but came to realise that they were a little fresher, as we had already completed a marathon! After Bergün the climbing really begins, up through woodland and some small villages, and on up in to the mountains. The aim is the Kesch mountain hut at 2632m – I was walking a lot at this point. Up at the hut there were great mountain and glacier views. But did not have time to stop... onwards towards the Scalettapass. Going along the next valley there was a bagpiper whose tunes could be heard accompanying the runners for miles around. Across a few patches of snow, over the last pass, then a steep descent into the village of Dürnboden. Then I hoped it was all nice gentle downhill running from there – my legs weren't so keen on moving by that point though so it was a tough run for me through the last few pretty villages and round the forests on the edge of Davos. Dave had been waiting to cheer me on in the last few kilometres... just what I needed to get me over the line – very relieved! I finished in 9 hours and 12 minutes, as 25th lady & it was a great experience.



At the start



Heading out of Davos



Bergün



Starting the hills



Kesch hut



Relief at the end!

Rachael Lawrance. 29th July 2008