

## Just a Walk in the (Yorkshire Dales National) Park – Summer 2013

*Reflections & Tips from Alliance Yompers – the Oxfam Trailtrekker team from The Alliance*



Our team from The Alliance – aka ‘Alliance Yompers’ – took part in the Oxfam Trailtrekker event in summer 2013. We completed the Gold Challenge and were the top fundraisers for the year. We would like to share an extract from our blog and our Top Ten Tips to support and encourage anyone who is thinking of giving this kind of challenge a go. If you want to know more about Alliance Coaching go to [www.alliancecoaching.co.uk](http://www.alliancecoaching.co.uk).

From our blog:

The last energy drink has been drunk, the last Snickers bar has been eaten – and in the event we didn’t need as many of either as we thought we might. We did it! The Alliance Yompers yomped home after a blistering 108km (the 100km turned out to be a neat marketing number) in 28 hours 32 minutes. What a team. The walkers were all in remarkably good shape at the end of the Trailtrekkers course and we were definitely all still smiling as we were buoyed across the finish line on a wave of euphoria and exhaustion.

We put this down to the back-up provided by our remarkable support crew. They fed us energy-giving, appetite-tempting food, from soups and sandwiches to homemade cakes and bacon sandwiches. They stretched out our stiff, weary legs at every stop and tended our blisters. They sent motivational messages from South Africa. They dressed up in pink romper suits and rude aprons with sheep on. They drove down winding country roads in the dead of night without any sleep.

The course itself was gruelling but spectacular. Walking through the night was cold and tiring, but also magnificent. Oxfam volunteers had hung glow sticks in trees to guide us, and as we groped our way along the uneven ground underfoot they were like little beacons beckoning us to success. Quite magical.

As Sunday dawned, a sunny glow hung above the river we were tramping alongside and we knew we were going to make it. Eight weary hours later, we arrived back in Skipton and began what felt like a victory lap through the town to Aireville School, with locals of all ages congratulating us. Reaching the finish line, where we’d started out over 28 hours earlier, apprehensive and unknowing, was a proud and emotional moment. We hugged each other and our supporters and bowed our heads to receive our well-earned Trailtrekkers medals.

## Our Top Ten Tips

(Note any reference to 'team' refers to everyone involved in the event: walkers and support crew.)

### 1. Play to your strengths

A strength is something that you are good at, enjoy and that also gives you energy. It is more than simply excelling at something. As a team, have a conversation about your individual strengths and how you might use them in the run up to the event and during the event itself. Once you know this you can think about the different roles that are needed to be successful. In our team for instance, we had one member who thrived on familiarising himself with the maps of the route and at least two others who didn't know one end of a compass from the other. But don't depend exclusively on one person, for safety's sake. If this is a work team, don't let work roles or hierarchy limit you.

### 2. Pick the right team

In addition to the usual factors such as fitness and compatibility, you should consider if your team members are different enough to come up with good ideas or to be able to respond appropriately to different situations. As a walking and support team, we knew each other really well and revelled in our differences. Also, think about the fundraising potential of the team. We found that having different social and professional networks in addition to our shared network helped us enormously.

### 3. Have a business mindset

This is a fun activity and you may be sharing it with friends rather than work colleagues. However, if you think about your business skills, they may be useful in this situation. Examples include thinking of the event as a project in respect of planning, resources and targets. How can you use this experience to generate conversations with existing and potential clients? They will be impressed, so how might you link your success to the service / products that you provide? How could your business networks boost your fundraising? We were overwhelmed the donations we received from clients.

### 4. Begin with the end in mind

Give everyone a chance to share their vision and purpose behind doing this event. Keep reminding yourself of this and write it down to hardwire it. We were advised by a contact with a background in sports psychology that writing down your *story*: why you're doing the event, your concerns, and what your best friend or coach might advise you to do to mitigate these potential problems is a really effective tool, especially if you copy out your story five times, writing by hand rather than on a computer. We talked about our stories and motivations during the event itself, especially when someone needed an energy lift.

### 5. Picture success

Athletes have been doing this for years. Use Oxfam resources to watch clips of previous events and *be* the person crossing the line. Rehearse this. Your brain won't know that it is a rehearsal and will help you when it comes to the real thing. This will not be a perfectly smooth ride all the way. There will be disharmony at some point and that is OK. However picturing success will get you through the dark moments. We watched some great video clips including 'Your very best' on YouTube and Derek Redmond's memorable 1992 Olympic performance.

## 6. Fundraising

Be creative in how you do this. Do you have any professional skills that you can trade? As an example, we offered sample coaching sessions for a donation. Keep your JustGiving site updated, as people like to chart your progress. Ask businesses to match any donations you receive and add fundraising details to your email signature. Keep asking people for donations (research suggests that it's fine to approach people up to seven times, in different ways): you will be surprised by how generous people are. Ask people who are not part of the team to fundraise with you. We used our JustGiving site to create conversations – many of our donors referred to it.

## 7. Team building opportunity

On an event such as Trailtrekker you get to know each other very well! It is a great way of bringing a team together, providing a shared challenge where each participant is likely to experience being positive, a leader and vulnerable at different stages. Think about *how* you want to be in this event not just *what* you want to achieve. Give each other feedback and encouragement. One member of our team had a blister popped which left her feeling faint. Another team member simply sat with her, held her hand and said nothing. His presence was enough. And remember to celebrate your achievement: we had arranged an early shared supper with wonderful food and champagne to bring the immediate experience to a close.

## 8. Role of support team

This is mentioned many times, but it is worth repeating. They are vital. Have a conversation about what you want from them, especially if you are struggling (e.g. our support crew provided us with photos that meant a lot to us, along with mind games and puzzles, which we opened when we needed a boost). You should be working together throughout and trust is important. We put our success down to the perfect complementarity of our walkers and our support team.

## 9. Have tough conversations

Some questions are hard to face, such as what to do if 'X' doesn't seem to be training hard enough? Or if one person drops out? Be brave and face this before the event as it will make it easier on the day. You will also learn more about each other's vulnerabilities. Our practice walks highlighted challenges around coping without sleep. We had to think about this and come up with options for managing this. Having the conversation took some of the fear away and we all achieved things that we did not know we could.

## 10. Reflect and learn

After the event it is tempting to put your boots away and move on. Invest time in reflecting on the experience. As a team you could work through these questions:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking and feeling?
- What was good / bad about the experience?
- What sense can you make of the situation?
- What else could you have done?
- If the issue arose again, what would you do?

(Taken from *Gibbs Reflective Cycle*)