RUNNING with the Kenyans





don't pore over GPS data – partly, because at altitude and on rough trails, it's less meaningful. They don't get nervous at the start line – why should they, they've done the training? They just run as well as they can, with the body they have, that day. While they may have some natural aptitude for running (slim build, long tendons) and the altitude helps create a conducive training environment, it's also about attitude.

Gavin and Lauren live in a small cottage on Lornah's land, and their local knowledge meant that we had the chance to talk and run with some phenomenal athletes. For example, Abel Kirui came for tea with us, right before setting off to Korea to (successfully) defend his world marathon title. We went out for a fartlek session with the group from the Run-Fast Camp (though, thankfully, we were in the coach's car). And it will be hard to ever beat doing a track session at the same time as (though far far slower than) Mary Keitany and Emmanuel Mutai, the winners of the 2011 London Marathon. As I laboured around the dirt track at Chepkoilel, they floated past, effortless and relentless. Phenomenal. And yet barely distinguishable from the other 200 plus international-class runners also on the track at the same time.

Day to day, the routine is one of dawn runs, swims, stretching and lots of food. And as well as the running, there was time to visit the local primary school, Lake Nakuru's flamingos, and – my highlight – the magical forests that sit above the Rift Valley, full of hornbills and sunbirds.

As I struggled up the hills in the thin air, with the red trail beneath my feet, there always seemed to be children at the side of the track, amused at the sight of this *muzungu* (white man) with a tired expression on his face, despite his very slow speed.

'I amu ne?' they would ask in Kalenjin. 'How are you?'.

In such a stunning place, under huge blue skies, there was only one answer: 'I am fine'



Keith MacIntosh with Abel Kirui and some other runners attending the camp. Gavin and Lauren are running camps in March and June 2012 (www.traininkenya.com) and the HATC is open all year (www.lornah.com), though it can fill up if a team is in town.

His most memorable running moment is... *his first-ever marathon, The Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA) Malvern Midsummer Marathon in 2010. 'Beautiful views, a very hilly route, and rice pudding at the finish.'*
This year he is running... *plenty of parkruns on Saturday mornings, the Box Hill Fell Race (21 January), the Punchbowl Marathon (30 miles) in Witley on 12 February, the London Marathon on 22 April, and the Comrades Marathon (56 miles!) in South Africa on 3 June.*
Top tip for runners? *Try yoga. And remember to take recovery seriously – it's part of the training, too!*