

THE End of the World RUNNING CLUB SURVIVAL GUIDE

Dear Reader,

If you're going to run the length of the United Kingdom - or at least, what used to be the United Kingdom - then you're going to need to make a friend of pain. Think of pain as a drunk friend on a night out - he's not going anywhere, and he's sticking to your side like glue, so you may as well make the most of him.

Pain drives you on. I know that sounds stupid, but it does. It gives you something to focus on, a funnel through which to pour your distraction from the task at hand. 550 miles on foot through the wreck of Western civilisation, and you only have three weeks to do it. You're going to need all the distractions you can.

Of course, there are ways to combat pain. Lubrication is the first; you need to keep everything nice and slippery, so you're not kept awake at night by welts and sores stinging in the salt of your own dried sweat. Armpits, knees, neck, ankles and - if you don't want to feel like your arsehole has gone to see what all the fuss is about round the corner - between the legs too.

If you can find a chemist that hasn't been raided then good for you, otherwise you'll have to make do with grease. You'll find spots of it within cars that haven't been too badly burned. Otherwise, there's always animal fat. Bird is best, but squirrel is good too. Brains, innards and fat. Try swan or duck if you can summon the energy to catch one.

Dehydration is a shortcut to pain. Forget to drink regularly and you'll begin to feel - and hear - your hips grinding and your back stiffening every time you hit that broken concrete. So drink up.

Remember, fill your flask only from running water, and choose your spot carefully. My uncle was a hill farmer. He told me that you should always drink upstream from the sheep, in case one had died in it. Unfortunately, sheep are no longer the worst of the carcasses from which you might accidentally find yourself drinking the runoff, so aim for high ground and look out for any vehicle wreckage nearby. Some of those bodies were thrown quite far.

Other water sources include the office pipe, the greenhouse, the garden pond (those that weren't evaporated in the blasts), the boiler and our old friend the caravan toilet. An unusual phenomenon, the caravan - most of the ones we found, unlike every other vehicle, were untouched and full of supplies. Maybe they already looked apocalyptic enough, so nobody bothered to loot them.

Painkillers - paracetamol, codeine, ibuprofen, tramadol - gifts from the gods. Best shot? Handbags; the more expensive, the better. Inside you'll find a veritable treasure trove of pills once used, no doubt, to navigate its owner through the treacherous roads of middle-class, middle-aged misery. The pharmaceutical contents of a Louis Vuitton can keep you going for days.

Of course, you'll need the will to get near it first. Sometimes possessions are gripped pretty tightly.

Remember: pain tells you you're still alive, so make it your friend because when it's gone, that's when the trouble begins. That's when you'll find yourself in places through which only you can navigate - the places inside your head. Those roads get pretty dark, and I'm afraid I can't help you with them.

Good luck. I wish I could tell you that pain is the worst thing you will meet on this journey. But you and I know the world isn't like that.

Not anymore anyway.

Ed.