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Bold, beautiful and brutal: My Journey Into the World of Skyrunning and Beyond



Lučka Bibič, PhD

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“When I finally let go of what I thought I am, I became what I have been all along.”- unknown runner with bib 707, UTMB Julian Alps 2023

For years, I never considered myself a runner. From youth sports through my college times, I only ran out of necessity to condition for playing tennis, or karate, or volleyball, or running 400m sprints faster. I tried running 10k roads, but that only lasted a year in my high school. Running long distances never seemed to appeal to me. My view of myself was that I wasn't a runner who could commit to making a long journey on foot.

Once I entered my early 20s, I wanted to outrun my ever-changing metabolism, so I decided to give running another shoot. I had a goal someday of running the marathon. At that time, 42k seemed like something that only mutants could run. Running for 3–4 hours straight seemed maddening. I've never done a form of physical activity in my entire life that long, or at least didn't have a nice long beverage break in the middle of it.

I don't know how I came across it, but I ended up picking Dean Karnazes' book *Ultra Marathon Man*. Reading about someone running all night, eating entire pizzas on the run because they burned so many calories seemed crazy....and appealing.

I asked myself, “how could I do that? And why? How much training would be needed?”

I ended up parking that thought in my mind for a while. I barely had time to scale my running up to 30k a week, much less than 70k a week. I was 22 at that point, working part-time while also being engrossed in my full-time studies as a dedicated nerd.

The thought never left my mind. Neither the nerdiness to be honest.

Over the course of the following decade, I went on to participate in numerous road and trail marathons. With time, I found myself drawn to distances beyond the 42k marathon distance.

Last weekend I ran 60k with 4500m elevation gain during UTMB Julian Alps race. Surprisingly, I somehow managed to clock 8 hours 3 minutes, and came in 11th in the female category, out of 88 female participants (55th overall, out of 410). Nuts, if you ask me.



UTMB Julian Alps Skyrunning 60k in September 2023: 8 hours 3 minutes, and one blister party later.

I might not be the most average person you could meet. I love to run up mountains for fun and run as far as I can. I like to see how far I can push myself and how far I can go sustainably.

But where did running start for me? For sure, we all run as children but somehow it became part of the fabric of my life. Part of my normal. But how? I am not sure.

From birth we all are developing muscle strength and coordination, and our movement progresses to rolling, sitting, crawling, until that moment arrives when we have gained sufficient confidence and balance to take those first teetering steps. As that confidence and balance grows, the teeter evolves into a toddle, and the

toddle into a run. We become nimble on our feet. We sprint with little hesitation. We play. We run around. We play, we run, we run, we play. It is spontaneous, it is an expression of what we are feeling — excitement, apprehension, mirth, dismay. It is instinctive and impulsive. A happy burst of enthusiasm and joy.

But life happens and we all too often seem to forget all of what we once knew. We either don't run, or if we do then running has become an 'exercise', something that either we are told to do, or we tell ourselves to do. Something that is measured in terms of value and benefit, rather than being an expression of feeling. But sometimes, in spite of our forgetfulness, a thread holds us fast to what we once knew so well and that tenuous connection keeps us running through the years of growing up until we arrive in adult life knowing what it is still to run. Maybe less carefree, but the memory of a what it felt like to love running is not forgotten. A memory when it was simply being there in the moment with a pure trust that the world is full of infinite possibilities.

It is that memory for me, that run. It is the run that brings me back home; to that still small place within the core of my being where I can sometimes find a fragile peace.



Julian Alps from the Mountain Stol (2250m), north view



Julian Alps from the Mountain Stol (2250m), south view

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Edit profile

Written by Lučka Bibič, PhD

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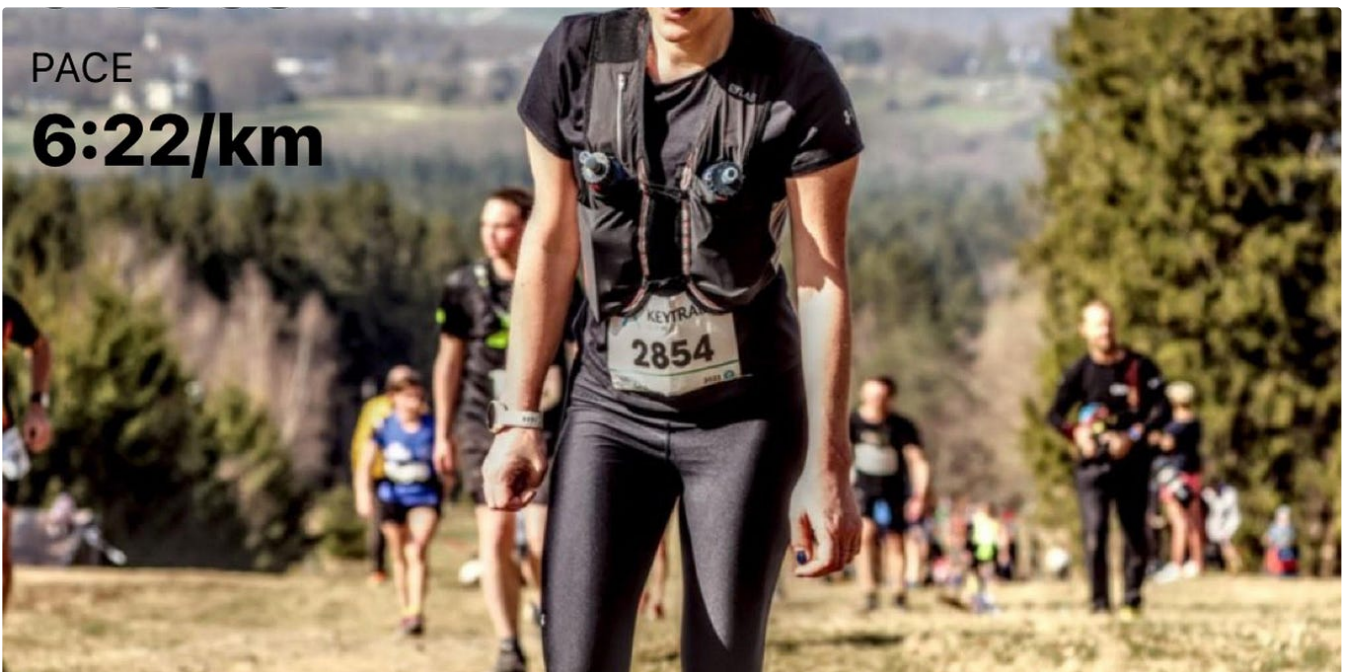
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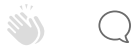



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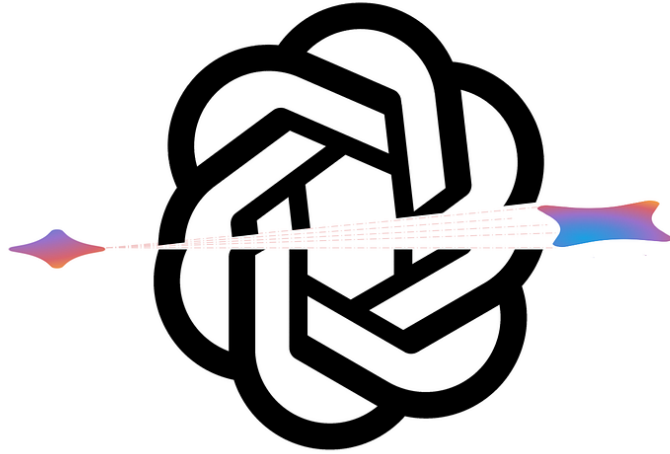
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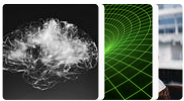
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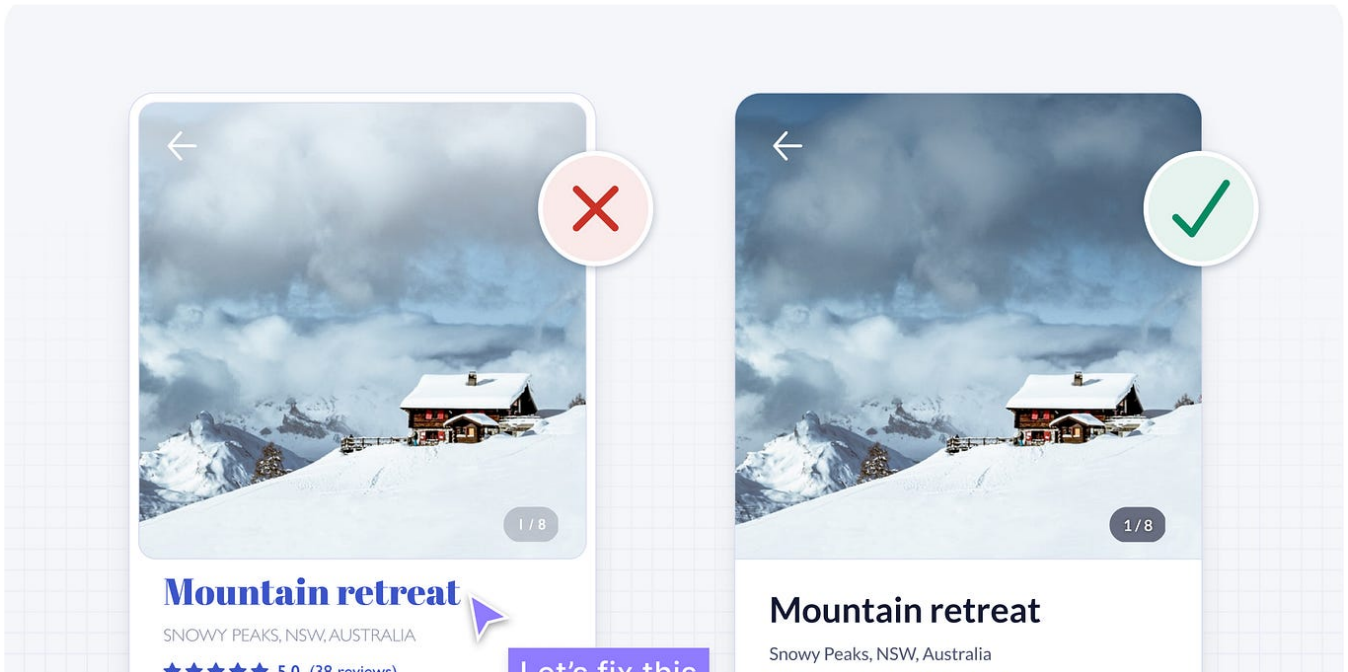
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