

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a white visor, sunglasses, a black athletic top, and black shorts, is running on a dirt path. She has a blue jacket tied around her waist and is wearing blue and red running shoes. The background features a large body of water, rolling hills, and mountains under a clear blue sky.

Colleague  
*stories*

# MY RUNNING STORY

Ali Pennefather

**For as long as I can remember, I have loved being active.** I was always on the go as a child, taking part in athletics, hockey, netball, gymnastics and dancing at school and then spending my weekends walking the dogs, cycling and riding my horses. School holidays were spent camping in the Alps, climbing mountains, swimming in lakes, sailing around the Scottish islands and walking up Wainwrights.

After university, I got my first full-time job at a building society, and to help me to get on the property ladder, I also worked two other part-time evening jobs for a few years. It was during this time that I learnt to make the most of my free time, regularly having an active holiday planned in the diary to keep me motivated.

In my early twenties, I started competing in British Eventing with my horses, which is a combination of Dressage, Show Jumping and Cross Country. This meant committing to getting up early every morning and training before work. I have some great memories of this time and there's nothing more invigorating than an early morning ride in the middle of winter.

Once I hit my thirties and became a mum of two, I quickly realised that my priorities had changed, and I could no longer commit to British Eventing. At this point, running became more important to me, not just to keep fit, but to clear my mind, escape from my worries and have some much needed 'me time'. I found I was much more able to deal with toddler tantrums after I'd had some time out.

And then early in 2020, when the pandemic hit, I found myself working from home whilst looking after my two young children and trying to homeschool. As well as this, we were living in a caravan and renovating our home, which was very testing. When I needed a break, those daily runs and walks kept me going both mentally and physically. Although the pandemic was a difficult and upsetting time, we made some amazing family memories despite the circumstances. Picnics in the garden, flying kites, growing our own veg, trampolining all day, daily walks, learning to read and write, the list is endless.



In the summer of 2020, I found out I was pregnant again with my third child and suddenly became quite ill. I stopped running altogether, despite having continued throughout my previous pregnancies. I honestly thought I would never run again, I could barely walk two miles. The medication that I was prescribed was difficult to get hold of in the pandemic, and so I really suffered. However, when my third child was born in lockdown in January 2021, I was amazed to find that all my symptoms disappeared, and I was able to start running again.



Last summer, as I was approaching my 40th birthday and a year after having my fourth child, I reflected on the last 10 years of my life. I decided it was time for me to get back out competing, not just for myself, but to be a role model for my children. But this time I would be competing on two feet, instead of four. Running from your doorstep is very convenient when you have four children. You can literally put your trainers on and go. It can be difficult to train on the fells and trails when your time is limited, so as a challenge I entered the Borrowdale trail half marathon.

In preparation, I did a couple of short training runs up my local fell and hoped for the best! Starting at the back of the race, I had no idea how I was going to do. The route began on the shores of Derwent Water leading to the hamlet of Grange and then climbing up alongside Castle Crag and descending back down to Rosthwaite. On the second climb leading to the beautiful Watendlath valley, I was surprised to find myself passing quite a lot of runners and ended up finishing 3rd female.

Spurred on by this result, I then entered the 25km Maverick Lakes Osprey race in September, which was graded a 5 in difficulty (the hardest) with over 3,500ft of elevation. The route started in Grasmere climbing to Easdale Tarn and Stickle Tarn. The weather was awful. It rained all day, and the trails were like a river. At one point I was scrambling up a waterfall. Visibility on the top was poor, and it was at this point that I lost my way and went off course. Luckily another runner spotted me, and he whistled to get my attention. After chatting and running together for a few miles, we decided to stick together for the rest of the race, and I finished 5th female.

In March I then had the pleasure of running in the Morland Ultra Marathon, which was 30 miles and 3,000ft of climbing. After losing my way in the last race, I decided I needed some practice navigating and chose this one as it was a self-navigating challenge.

The weather started out cold but turned out to be a glorious day with blue sky and sunshine. It was stunning. Navigation was tricky in places, particularly in the last 10 miles when there was no-one in sight and I was running through endless rolling fields. However, I made it to the finish with no disasters finishing 2nd female.



Following on from this, I ran the Howgills Marathon in April. It was a tough 26 miles and 4,400ft, climbing up Winder, Arant Haw, Calders and The Calf. I was aiming for under 5 hours but somehow managed to knock off over half an hour and finished 2nd female again.

Then in May, I entered the Keswick Mountain Festival 50km ultra. The route was just over 32 miles and 5,600ft of climbing. This was my toughest race so far. The views were stunning, the weather was scorching, and the trails were highly technical. After climbing Honister Pass and then descending to Buttermere, I met another running mum, and we ran the last 20 miles together. We kept each other going chatting non-stop and those miles went by so much quicker together. We crossed the finished line in just over 6 hours and joint 3rd female.

Six weeks later I was back racing at the Northumbrian 50km at Kielder. This one felt much easier, the trails were mainly forestry tracks, and the hills were much gentler with around 3,000ft of elevation gain. However, the weather was scorching, and I struggled in the last couple of miles but still managed to finish 2nd female, 4th overall.



The great thing about running is that it doesn't have to cost a lot of money, you can just put your trainers on and run straight from your door. You don't need to be a member of a gym or have expensive clothing to do it. There are free events across the country such as weekly 5km Park runs, which I often go to with my two eldest children, and there are lots of free running clubs that meet for weekly social runs. There are also charities to help people who want to participate in ultrarunning such as 'into ultra', who provide advice to help people overcome barriers such as confidence issues, lack of navigation skills, and affordability. I would recommend running to anyone who wants to keep fit, have fun and make some more friends.

Now it's the summer holidays, I'm having a little break from running and enjoying having some time off with my children, although they do keep me very active! I'm hoping to do a couple more ultras before the end of the year, and have my sights set on The Lap, Kendal Skyline Ultra, and the Lakeland 50 in the future.

*Ali*

**Ali Pennefather**  
Business Acceptance Tester