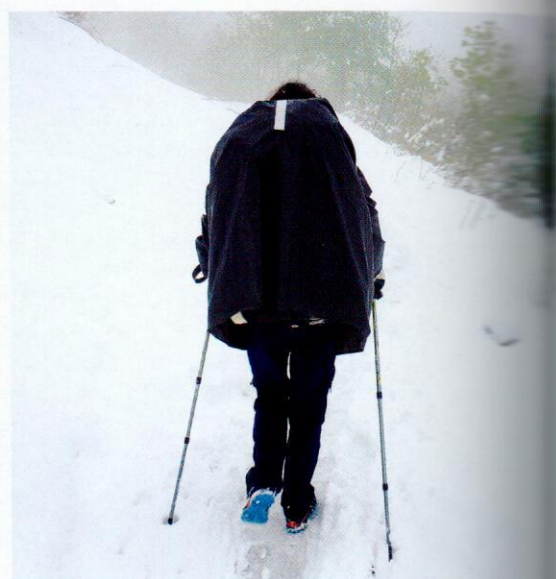




# THE VIEW FROM THE BACK

Marcus and Charlie King take on the challenge of the Bornes to Fly – a weekend warrior hike-and-fly race in the French Alps





#### ▲ FIRST DAY ON THE ROAD

From top left, clockwise. The race begins on Talloires beach

Auréliane Lehen planning the route

Charlie King climbs through the snow of Col de Chernel

The winning tandem team of Guillaume Kapjir and Loren Lecar run along the shores of Lac d'Annecy

Photos: Marcus King and Sophie Tudor

#### ◀ ◀ SUNNY MORNING

Walking through the picturesque valley near Sainte-Reine at the start of day two.

Photo: Sophie Tudor

**I** take a step forward and sink halfway up to my knee in mud. Shouting expletives at the trees I throw my weight back and escape its clutches to gain solid ground. Looking ahead, the path looks worse. Decision made, we'll have to double back. We've wasted an hour taking a path that was supposed to climb then contour round the hill, rather than taking the road in the bottom of the valley.

Lesson one learnt – take the obvious route.

Back on track on an old mountain road that climbs gradually to the Col de Chernel my anger at the mistake drives the pace. We are clearly at the back of the field now. At least I've got company as Charlie, my wife, and I are doing this on a tandem. It's the first day of the Bornes to Fly, a three-day adventure race starting in Talloires on the shores of Lac d'Annecy.

Exceptionally bad weather delayed the start and we left Talloires in the pouring rain, but now it has cleared somewhat. The late start and our detour have meant we are now racing daylight and

the clock to get over the col and down before the cut-off time. The rules stipulate that we have to stop at 9pm each day, and then mark our position so we can carry on from the same place the next morning.

As we climb, the rain turns to snow and we gradually enter a surreal white world with snow on the ground and clouds all around. Daylight is dwindling. Suddenly I realise we are in quite a serious situation. Forget the race – we've got to get over this col safely.

Thankfully, being at the back does have its benefits, as 59 other competitors have left their footprints in the snow.

At 8.30pm we're still climbing. "How much farther can it be?" Then through the mist the ground subtly changes angle and cow troughs appear out of the murk. We're over the top, and now the route descends steeply. The thought of not wanting to re-climb this in the morning spurs us on, and we throw ourselves down through the slush and mud, half falling, half running, intent



on getting as low as possible. Charlie is counting down the minutes on her watch as we slide and slither downwards. The phone rings, but we can't stop. We have to get down. Ten minutes to go, five minutes to go, still dropping steeply we charge on, ignoring the mud and snow inside our shoes. Just one last push to get as far as possible. Then Charlie shouts, "Time's up!" We stop, mark the position on the GPS, check in with HQ and I call Sophie, our supporter, to let her know where we should come out. She's been busy chasing her tail, thanks to the bad comms and our failure to answer her call! Rules complied with, we head on at a more leisurely pace and turn a corner onto an easy track which quickly takes us to the headlights of the waiting car. Phew, no re-climb in the morning.

Sophie scoops us up and whisks us off to the tents that she has already pitched and feeds us pasta before we collapse into bed with an alarm set for 5.15 the next morning.

## Day 2: Today we'll fly (hopefully)

We wake with the alarm to a sunny morning, and the discovery that the campsite gates are locked at night. Darn. Another lesson learnt – always check you can get out of your accommodation early. Luckily Sophie is able to charm the sleepy campsite owner and we are soon on our way back to last night's stopping point. It's a stunning morning, the fresh snow glistening on the summits

in the morning sunshine, and we are in high spirits as we start the day's walking.

Our first goal today is turnpoint one, the launch at Montlambert in the Albertville valley; it's protected from the forecast northerly winds so we should be able to fly there. Some of the leaders are already there, having run most of the initial section. They are taking morning sled rides as far across the wide valley towards the next turnpoint as possible, while we walk in the valley to Col du Frêne.

Our early start means we have overtaken a few people and we're excited when we see some of the competitors take off from a hill above the valley. That confirms it's flyable. As we continue along the valley we see some pilots launch from a slope not far above the col. Now a decision is needed. Should we head up to do the same, or continue with our original plan to walk to the launch at Montlambert? Watching a failed launch and feeling wind from the south we decide to stick with Plan A. I'm also a bit worried that we won't have the height to get to the turnpoint, so will have to climb back up to it. With hindsight we may have made the wrong choice, but there you go.

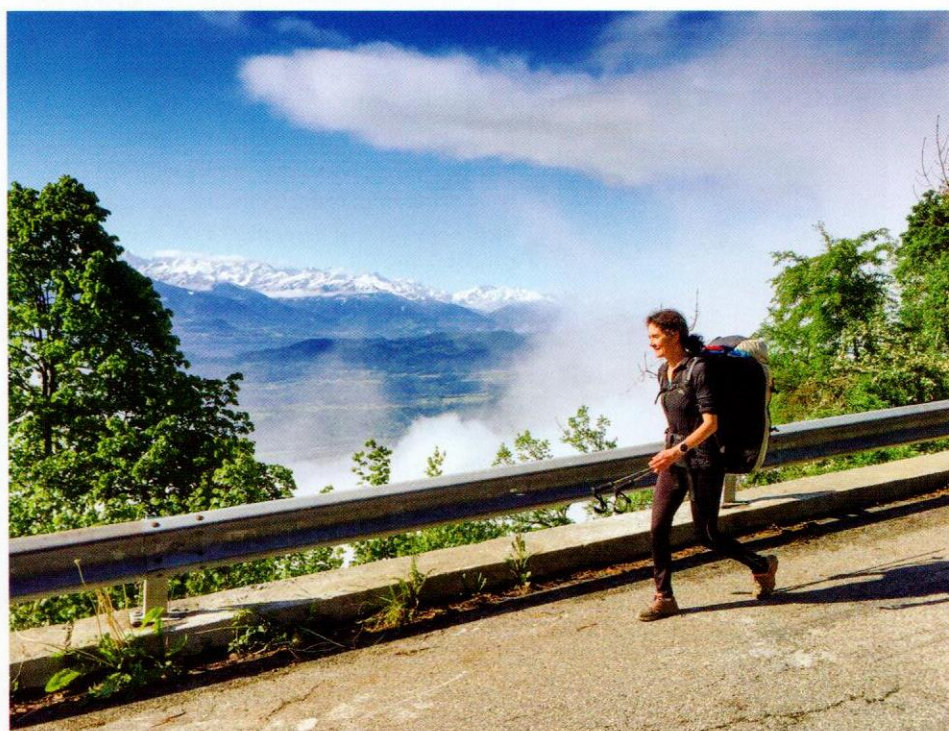
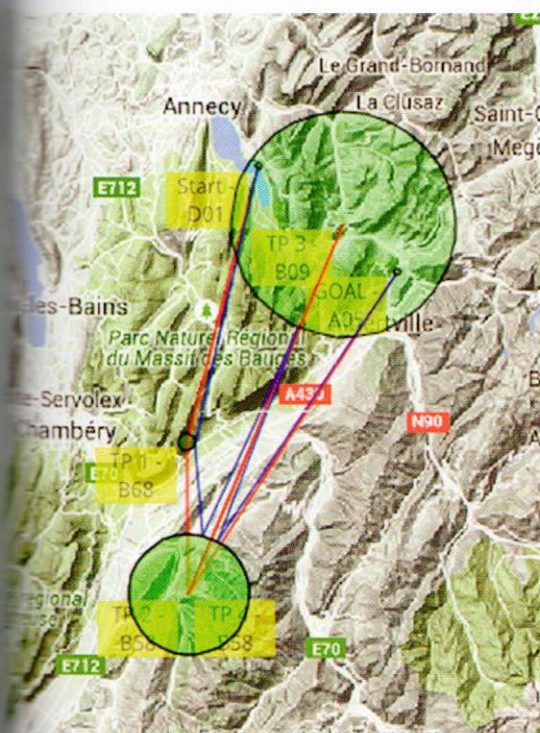
As we pass over the col the new views to the south and the Belledonne range are impressive, with the new snow and a thick layer of cloud below. We're happy with our decision – it would be touch-and-go whether we would have been able to avoid the cloud, and cloud flying is illegal (in France, and in the comp). Despite the mysterious paths that cut

### ▼ THE TASK MAP

A 133km optimised route was set to avoid the forecast strong northerlies

### OVER THE COL

Charlie crossing the Col de Frêne with the Val d'Isère below  
Photo: Marcus King







#### ▲ CLIMBING

Marcus and Charlie under their BGD  
Dual Lite wing.  
Photo: Charlie King

#### ► WHO ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

Assistant Sophie Tudor wonders who's  
pointing a big lens at her.  
Photo: Christophe Albaladejo

the corners of the road's bends, which are clearly marked on the map but which don't appear to exist, we are in good spirits. Today is a sunny day.

As we negotiate the paths and tracks to contour around to Montlambert the morning seems to melt away. Arriving on launch it's already gone midday, but we have 25km under our belts. Having been alone all morning our senses are assaulted by the crowds that greet us. It's the only flyable launch in the region and busy with pilots. Still, at least we have plenty of wind dummies. We bump into some of the other competitors on launch, who have been waiting for conditions to improve. It seems we're no longer at the back.

Time to check our plan. I phone Sophie, who is down in the valley, to ask about the conditions. The valley breeze can blow strongly down there. She, and the number of pilots descending, assures me it will be safe. We decide to fly as far as possible across the valley then walk to the next turnpoint before turning round and heading back to get as close as possible to this launch ready for the flyable day that is forecast for tomorrow. I put the route in my flight instrument, in case conditions are better

than they look and we can make more progress than expected in the air.

Clipped in and ready to go, I pull the wing up and we run off the grassy launch. Rather stupidly we hadn't been able to test fly this setup, and it is instantly apparent that Charlie is sitting quite high and blocking my forward view. Not ideal for a crowded sky, but Charlie's a pilot too and she keeps lookout. On launch we watched some pilots climb out to the right, so that's where we head to maximise the few metres available below the low cloudbase before heading off. Below us pilots are drifting down to the valley floor. Charlie spots some pilots circling and we head towards them. Feel the lift: one elephant, two elephants, oh come on, let's go round

Thankfully the Dual Lite has super-light handling and I can get it quickly into the core. We go up surprisingly fast considering the cloud cover. Keeping up with the solos we climb, but the drift is taking us back towards the col where the wind will be from the north. Time to move on, into the next bowl where people had been climbing, but the cloud is shutting things down a bit now. I get in close and work every bit of lift, then a stronger bubble comes through and



## THE SUPPORTER'S VIEW

Sophie Tudor gives us the inside track on what it's like being a supporter



When I saw Marcus's hopeful FB post fishing for a support driver for the Bornes to Fly comp my gut reaction was, "I'll have a go at that!" Annecy is a cool place to hang out and driving support for big buddies, well, how hard could it be? Our plan was to have a fun adventure, stay safe and just do the best we could.

I'm fairly good at adapting, making things happen and winging it, though I had no idea the supporter's role would be so consuming, intense and exhausting. Thinking I might be parked up waiting around much of the time I packed a chunky book to read. I managed a full three pages. The rest of the time was spent driving round like a blue-arsed multi-tasking fly.

Most of the 'must do's' for driving support seem mighty obvious, though when you're making it up as you go along the most basic tasks slip your mind. So here are my top tips for support driving:

### Stay in touch

Plan As turn into Plan Bs. Text or phone each other with updates every two or three hours. The competitors are running their own race, out there making their own decisions. I felt my job was to be aware of, anticipate and adapt to the ebb and flow of their ever-changing plans. On the first day they walked over Col de Chernel in the snow, comms weren't working and it was getting dark. I had no idea if they were OK or not. First big lesson learnt.

### Tracking

If you are competing with the front-runners then Live Tracking is great for tactical moves. We weren't and I found the app 'Find my Friends' invaluable. It was more of a one-on-one way of keeping in touch.

### Carry cash

Don't assume that there will be a cashpoint in each village. Equally, don't assume there will be a petrol station when you need one. Top up when you can.

### Camping

While zooming round keep an eye open for a camping spot. We decided to camp and needed electricity to recharge the comp tracker. OK, you have to drive the competitors back to the GPS race start point at the beginning of

each day but after the first day of rain and snow, the campsite was a welcome haven. I pitched tents in the rain but was allowed to start cooking the evening meal in one of the campsite communal rooms, so we could all feast on some hot grub in the dry as soon as the comp day was over. A blessing.

### Fatigue

Comp days are long days. The race ran between 6am and 9pm. Be prepared for long days and fatigue.

### Comfort

After two days of rain and damp camping gear, as soon as the sun came out I found a disused shop car park to spread out, dry and de-slug the tents. If you're not used to camping take an extra camping mat, then at least you're as comfy as possible.

### Water

Don't ignore the obvious. Competitors will drink more than you imagine. They won't want to carry too much and you have to be there to top them up when they need it. Fresh water from the village springs went down well. Though, in France, watch you only fill up with 'Eau Potable', as 'Eau non Potable' is not for human consumption.

### Meals

Have several basic meal options in the car. Carry tins, eggs, pasta etc. and buy fresh food each day, whenever you can. Competitors will need fuel but will also have cravings too, savoury and sweet. Marcus's little weary eyes lit up when he found out I'd bought a bag of random 'penny' sweets one day; his face dropped when he found out we'd run out of fruit juice. Charlie fancied cherry tomatoes. Note that there might not be a village shop where and when you need one, so think and plan ahead.

### Take time for yourself

OK, a bit of a joke really but I found I was so switched on to them that I wasn't necessarily eating well or taking care of my own needs. I remember thinking 'sod it' and sitting at a bar with a mighty fine espresso, in the sun with splendid mountain views and taking a breather. It was a brief affair, as we were in such a hurry to be off at 5am that morning I'd dressed over my merino wool pyjamas. The supporter was overheating!

### Camaraderie

The sense of togetherness among the supporters was great: everyone was willing to chat and share info. I met some amazingly motivated people over the three days, many passionate about hike-and-fly who were already signed up to a whole season of similar events. Everyone pushed themselves to the max. Everyone, including the better-known sports superstars, was hobbling at the prizegiving.

How the X-Alps competitors do it I don't know; I'm in awe. While watching them on live tracking this summer, spare a thought for their dedication, determination and their supporters' efforts. It was a great adventure, a huge learning curve, a pleasure to support friends I've known for years and an inspiration to meet the other teams with such a lust for life.

Would I do it again? Hell yeah!





#### ▲ FLYING

Winner Maxime Bellemin launches from Chamrousse for a well-earned fly  
Photo: Michel Ferrer

#### ► SUNNY MORNING

From top left clockwise:  
Roadside food stop

Maxime approaches goal

No chance of speeding

Interesting footwear

Photos: MF, MK & ST

#### ► ► P102, GOAL

Julien Irilli flies across the line  
Photos: Michel Ferrer

we are top of the stack, approaching base. I expect to be sucked up by the clouds but it's not to be. We drift back and forth trying to get as high as possible, then take the decision to head off into the valley.

As we glide I'm looking for landings ahead, but I'm soon happy we will make it into the small hills in the middle of the valley. There is an obvious landing in a cut field on the top of a ridgeline. We have enough height to clear it and drop into the valley beyond but it all looks tight. If I'd been on a solo I think I would be tempted to push on in, hoping there would be lift on the other side, but with the tandem I take the safe option.

Down safely we pack up quickly and head to the road where Sophie soon joins us. Momentarily forgetting what we are doing she tries to usher us into the car, but it's foot-power for us!

After a lunch stop we have to drop into the next valley then climb to the Col de Cochette, where we hope to find a launch to fly down to the main valley beyond. It's starting to hurt now. The feet are tired and sore and it's hot and humid as we climb, but we've got a plan so we have to keep going.

As we crest the col my legs are really suffering.

A tendon on the back of my foot is particularly painful – it seems like my pitiful lack of training for the event is starting to show. We've walked nearly 40km today, a lot of it on roads, and I think I may have over-tightened my boots, which is irritating the tendon.

On the col we meet another supporter who reckons there is a possible take-off just down the road. My spirits soar at the thought of being able to fly down the valley to the next turnpoint, maybe even up the other side, and on towards the next turnpoint as that slope works in the afternoon. The supporter's pilot is behind us on the road climbing to the col. He tells us that the pilot got lost in the snow and mists of the first day and had to descend back to Doussard. He's covered an amazing amount of ground today to nearly catch us up.

Five minutes later and my spirits are rock bottom as the 'launch' proves to be too shallow with too many obstacles to attempt to launch a tandem. A local farmer tells us no one else has tried it – they all headed off down the path. Looks like we'll be walking down. The farmer points out a shortcut and we push our weary legs on. Stopping for a shoe change in the





hope it will alleviate the tendon pain, Sophie tells us the solo pilot is going to try to launch. I instantly doubt my decision but then his assistant joins us and tells us he couldn't get off. Mentally I'm up and down like a yo-yo. My pace has really slowed, and getting back to Montlambert tomorrow morning is looking increasingly doubtful. As I walk my mind goes over and over the possibilities and comes up with Plan B. We can stop at the turnpoint, and then in the morning head up to the nearest take-off on that side of the valley. The problem is it doesn't work until late and the competition stops at four in the afternoon, but at least we would finish flying, and it feels better to have a plan.

Trudging along the valley taking one painful step after another it seems to go on and on. We can pretty much see exactly where we have to get to but it comes to us very slowly. A local pilot out cycling says she saw us on the live-tracking. She has done the Bornes to Fly herself, and gives us some helpful advice. She says the humidity probably means our proposed launch will be in the clouds all day tomorrow, and that Montlambert is the best possibility. I just don't think I can make it back

## IN THE BAG

**Glider:** BGD Dual Lite: We wanted to do this adventure on a tandem so we could share it. The Dual Lite is lightweight but still seemed to have good performance and felt secure and safe. It's got easy handling that feels more like a solo wing in thermals, making climbing easy. It feels reassuring when out-landing in strange places.

**Harnesses:** Sup'Air Walibi Lite: I couldn't get a lighter reserve so had to take my normal tandem reserve. For the passenger harness Charlie decided to take her normal **Swing Connect Reverse** harness minus the reserve. It's not the lightest but she really rates the back support system of the rucksack, having used it previously on the Airtour. She carried the glider while I carried my harness, the reserve and all the other kit we needed. Others used very skinny harnesses to really reduce weight with small front-mount reserves. I even saw someone with the Ozone F\*Lite – super light is a must if you are running.

**Inov-8 shoes:** I was using Gore-Tex lined ones, Charlie a lighter version she uses for trail running. We both had spares. Despite my foot pains neither of us got blisters. Plenty of spare socks are a must – clean ones really help your feet.

**Walking poles:** Indispensable for spreading the load on climbs. I used super lightweight Black Diamond poles that fold up and fit in the harness.

**Instruments:** I flew with the Syride Nav as it fits on the spreaders of the tandem nicely so I can see it. It does task navigation and logging too. We used a **Garmin eTrex** as our logger. It takes AA batteries, which lasted a full day. We also had to carry a live tracker and backup battery.

**Helmets:** We both used **Icaro Fly** helmets, which are light and EN certified.

**Ponchos:** Great for keeping the rain off both you and your kit, they can also double as a ground mat.

**Maps:** We used the app **iPhiGéNie** on our iPhones for navigation, which gives access to all the **French IGN maps**. Used in addition to a good detailed paper map, not instead of.

**Water:** Drinking plenty of water is a necessity, you'll find yourself getting through 3-4 litres a day. An easily accessible tube means you can drink often to keep hydrated without removing your pack.

**Energy bars:** We carried a few energy bars that proved especially important on the long walking sections. A bag of sweets cheered us up as well.







## THE BORNES TO FLY AT A GLANCE

**What?** A three-day hike-and-fly race

**Where?** The race starts in Talloires on Lac d'Annecy, France

**How far?** It depends on the weather. This year the task was 133km optimised.

**The teams?** A pilot (and optionally passenger) plus an assistant who looks after them and their safety

**Similar competitions?** Look for the Transdromoise, St Hil'Airtour, VercoFly, Trotte et Vol, Gruyère-Fly and of course the Red Bull X-Alps. Info: [www.bornestofly.fr](http://www.bornestofly.fr)

**Who won?**

Maxime Bellemin (top right) won the event ahead of tandem team Guillaume Kapjir and Loren Lecar with Martin Beaujouan in third place. The tandem podium (bottom right) saw Guillaume and Loren joined by the teams of François and Auréliane Le-Hen and Marcus and Charlie King. Congratulations to all the pilots that took part and the Borne To Fly team for running a great event.

there over the hills. It's hard enough walking on the flat right now. Despondent, we head on to bag the turnpoint then decide what to do from there.

I just want this to stop. We're in the town of La Rochette, Sophie has found a campsite and we are wandering through the streets following the GPS to get into the turnpoint cylinder. Every step is painful, and stepping off curbs sends a spike of pain up my legs. I'm done, and we decide on an early stop. In the campsite is a welcome shower, and we spot that at least one other team has taken an early stop too. By nine we are ready for bed, and drift off to sleep with no real plan and no alarm set for the morning.

### Day three: The final slog


I awake when the light hits the tent, and head outside. Amazingly my legs seem to be a bit better. I can definitely walk again – game on! Rousing the others I let them know I am up for doing some more. But what? There's no way we will make Montlambert before the 4pm finish time. The only option is to head along the valley floor, straight towards the next turnpoint. At least the roads are heading the right way.

As we leave town we meet the Czech X-Alps pilot, Stanislav Mayer, who is tagging this turnpoint for the second time and now heading for goal. He is using our Plan A route, and he quickly pulls ahead of us as we walk the same way. A little further on we meet another group of pilots heading back to the turnpoint for the final time. They tell us they are doing the same but are hopeful of finding a spot to launch from on their

way back through the hills. Later I find out they found a launch spot within sight of our campsite, from which they managed to thermal out from before crossing the valley and flying to goal! I had become so focussed that Montlambert was the only option, I hadn't thought of using that slope. Another lesson learnt – keep looking for options.

In my head I say to myself, "Maybe we can walk a couple of hours then throw in the towel and take the car to launch for an afternoon fly." I voice this with the others who think it's sensible. But, as we walk the long straights a weird determination sets in and I find myself committed to keeping going to the end, to get to the cut-off time still going. Charlie, who would never give up, is only too happy to keep going.

The day drifts past as we walk the roads, watching the lucky ones soar the cliffs above the valley heading to and from the turnpoints. I walk from shadow to shadow as the long straights stretch out interminably. It's a beautiful day and despite being on busy roads the views around are stunning. We could be in a lot worse places.

Then it's over, just like that. The clock ticks to four and we stop, marking our spot. Sophie pulls in to scoop us up and we head back to the prizegiving. The Borne to Fly 2015 is over. 

*Thanks to all these people for their support: Sophie Tudor our assistant, Nicol Brumwell and Michelle Villis-Smith for childcare, BGD, Sup'Air, Inov-8 footwear and of course all the team that organised the Borne To Fly. We'll be back.*