

# THE "JAMIE BRUNNING" NEWSLETTER

4<sup>th</sup> May – 6<sup>th</sup> June 2015

Days Run **215**      KM Run **9147**      Money raised **c. 10,000**

PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#) TO VISIT MY FACEBOOK PAGE AND "LIKE" IT – IT HELPS WITH SPONSORS!

Find PHOTOS from the expedition [HERE](#)

Find lots of VIDEOS from the expedition [HERE](#)



A kid from the Emberá Community at Lake Bayano, Panama

**STAGE TWO COMPLETE** – In this installment I am going to give myself a little self pat on the back... I have run from Vancouver City, Canada, to Yaviza, Panama. On Friday, 5 June, I arrived at the end of the road where I literally could not run any further. Over 9 months and twenty days I ran 9147km, crossed 8 borders and ran in 9 countries. I have worn through 9 pairs of running shoes and raised £10,000 for charity. I have never had a blister (from running) and my worst injuries have been solved by making simple changes to how I do things. And after all this I still have a smile on my face and still love running. Everything has not gone completely as planned but I have learnt that sometimes life is better if we let it take its own course every once in a while. Some of my favourite moments and experiences have come from situations that were out of my control. While I take a well-earned break to enjoy my sister's wedding, you can rest assured I will be itching to get back on the road!



**A big thank you to my friends!** – "Unsupported" is how I described this expedition to help make it sound big and scary and help get a following! But if I am honest this trip has had the most phenomenal support from the day I first told people of my proposed route to when I ran into Yaviza where the Pan American Highway unceremoniously stops before the Darien Gap. Support has come from so many places, from friends and family to complete strangers and amazing sponsors. I have received support on a daily basis and people continue to offer

ways to help me get to the next stage of my expedition. We all care about what our friends think about us and this expedition would have been harder to get off the ground if my friends and family had told me it couldn't be done or it was a stupid idea. The great thing about my friends is that they all got behind my hair-brained plan and gave me their full support and encouragement. Now this may have been because they just wanted rid of me but I like to think it is because they honestly believe in me. So I just want to take this opportunity to say a big THANK YOU to my friends for being awesome and helping me just be me – a slightly podgy runner on an extreme expedition! Every message on Facebook or email helps me power on to the next km. I am sorry I don't get time to

**Illegal immigrants crossing the Darien Gap** – To many of us the Darien Gap is just the strip of jungle between Colombia and Panama inhabited by drug dealers and machine gun toting guerrillas. It has a reputation of being impassable and only the insane would ever think about attempting it. Every time an organised group of experienced adventurers successfully makes it across it is heralded in media around the world. I really wanted to make the crossing as part of my expedition but sense got the better of me and I have accepted that it is an adventure for another time when I am not pushing a baby stroller but I did make the run to where it begins in Yaviza, Panama. When you arrive it is advised that you check in with the Senafront so they know you are there. The Senafront is not the military though you could be mistaken. They dress in camouflage, carry machine guns and have helicopters but in reality they are just border police, apparently! When I arrived there was a mob of people standing by the main office being monitored by the Senafront guards. I enquired about who they were and was informed that they were all illegal immigrants who had just made the crossing from Colombia to Panama. In the office there is a whiteboard with a chart of who has arrived in Yaviza and where they had come from. On the day I was there 20 had arrived from Nepal, 15 from Ghana and a few from other African countries. These people had no equipment, no guides only a pressing need to get to America to try and start a new and better life. It really put my expedition into perspective. I had just run 9150km from Vancouver to Yaviza for fun and here was a group of people who had risked their lives in a journey that had begun by fleeing their countries with nothing and making it across the Atlantic ocean, across countless borders and then through one of the most dangerous stretches of jungle in the world and what makes it worse is we don't know about how common this is.

### ***ANY FINANCIAL SPONSORS OUT THERE????***

*"How am you financing this expedition" is a question I get a lot. I have been very fortunate to have some amazing kit providers who have supplied the most amazing equipment but when it comes down to everyday costs it is mostly coming from my savings and they are by no means limitless!!!*

*In June, I will be getting five fresh running shirts all with a nice space on the front for anyone who would like to sponsor a shirt. I will need to get them printed before June so there is a one month window!! If you know anyone that might be interested in financially supporting my expedition please let me know....*

*If you would like to donate a few pennies to the costs I would also be hugely appreciative! This can be done by clicking [here](#)*

### **The Route:**

This month of the expedition took me c.1000km from Quepos, Costa Rica, to Yaviza, Panama, where the Pan-American Highway takes a break and I will also take a break. There have been two main terrains – deforested land and jungle but the heat and humidity have remained a constant.



## A Few Stats:

- Distance run in this 33 day period: c.1000km
- Total distance covered in 295 day period: 9147km
- Longest day in this period: 70km
- Daily average: 42.5km (excluding days off)
- Running shoes used – 9 pairs used – Looking forward to receiving my new sparkling running shoes thanks to the generosity of Adidas who will be providing my running shoes for South America.

## A few events from along the route

There are literally so many different events and scenarios that would qualify for inclusion but I have to be selective and pick just a few, so here goes.



*Avi with his kids at Lake Bayano, Panama*

**Event 1:** Sleeping in crazy places in Panama – During my month in Panama I got to sleep in some really fun places and not just cheap hostels and hotels at the side of the road.

Emberá Community – When I arrived at Lake Bayano, south of Panama City, I had run, stumbled and crawled 40km and was completely spent. On both sides of the bridge there were Emberá communities. This is where I bumped in to Avi (above) and his family. I asked if I could camp on his land and he didn't hesitate in agreeing. We waited by the road while he sold his plantains to people driving passed and then walked up to where his hut was situated, overlooking the bridge and the beautiful Lake Bayano. I was introduced to everyone and then set up camp on a small patch of semi flat land. Once camp was complete we all headed down to the lake below. In total there was Avi, his seriously pregnant wife and numerous kids. We splashed around for a while and then bath time commenced with a shared bar of soap. After we climbed back up to the settlement I was offered the prime seat in the hammock and asked if I wanted dinner. Shortly after a plate arrived with beautifully fried plantains and fish from the lake. We all sat around chatting and then as it got dark every retired to their wooden huts. It was an amazing experience and great to spend time with real locals.



*The church shed in Panama*

Church shed – After a 60km run I found myself at a junction with nothing more than a church, a bus stop and a couple of very basic shops. Not wanting to risk going any further I thought I would test out the generosity of the local church. Luckily a service was about to begin and I managed to track down someone who was connected to the church. I asked if I could set up camp and she said yes immediately but then led me to a small adobe hut and said that I could set up camp in there. Basic is definitely how I would describe it. There was a table, a flat surface where people had cooked in the past and mud walls and floor. While the rain drizzled down outside I set about making this small hut my home. It was a surprisingly comfortable night despite a scare from a tailless whip scorpion in the “bathroom”.



*The dorm at the Chepo fire station, Panama*

Fire station – On my first day running south from Panama City into the Darien I was having no luck finding anywhere to camp or get a bed and it wasn't until arriving in the town of Chepo (60km+) that I found a small hostel. Before I got to it I passed the fire station. I had heard from other travellers that they were sometime amenable to letting you pitch a tent on their land so in I strolled. At first it wasn't looking likely but then they directed me to the old

fire station saying that there might be an opportunity there. A few minutes later I was standing outside a building that looked more like a mechanics workshop and was shaking the hand of a fireman who was to be my host. He led me through the chaos and into a small room with old disused bunk beds. This was to be my home for the night and while not luxury it had everything I needed – a bed, a shower (with no light) and a kitchen with a pet mouse scuttling around. Of all the places I have stayed this was definitely the one where I thought I might encounter bed bugs but luckily that didn't turn out to be the case. When you are travelling any roof is a luxury!

**Event 2:** An amazing 24 hours in Yaviza, Panama



*Cockfighting in Yaviza, Panama*

I had no idea what to expect when I arrived in Yaviza as it is the town where the Pan-American Highway abruptly comes to an end but I ended up having a great 24 hours. It's hard to describe what Yaviza is like because it is so curious. The first street you walk down is lined with bars with music blasting out and a very mixed clientele drinking beer and playing dice at rickety tables. People seem to mill around a lot and at every street corner there is a group of guys just standing there. They are in no way threatening they are just there. The buildings are mostly run down wooden huts on stilts that protect them from the mud below. Children run around everywhere and most of the ladies seem to have rollers in their hair. Men are dressed in football jerseys and the women in colourful skirts and everyone is a little overweight. Three sides of the town are bordered by rivers and these act as highways into the surrounding jungle. Dugout motor boats buzz up and down the muddy river with people or plantains. This was a special weekend as there was a cockfighting tournament. I know this activity is not ethical and is banned in many parts of the world but here it is very much a popular sport and because I was here I thought I should experience it.



*The two girls we gave a lift to in The Darien*

I met a fellow traveller (Eric) in town and we teamed up for a day in the Darien. We managed to negotiate a lift in a dugout and set out on an adventure to El Real, a town about an hour into the jungle. The journey there was beautiful and felt like proper adventuring. There were about 10 of us crammed into the long thin wooden boat and the cargo included a rocking chair and a gas cooker! As we motored through the waterways we witnessed life on the river. When we passed two girls paddling up the river we stopped and gave them a lift. We passed farmers, loggers and fisherman who all lived in little huts on the river bank. When we arrived in El Real we visited a local fighting cockerel breeder and had a walk round the village. We were amazed at just how developed this small village was without access to any roads. Cable and Wireless phone boxes stood on corners and the paths were paved with concrete. Before heading back to Yaviza Eric and I decided to go for a quick swim in the river. It wasn't 10 minutes later that our boat driver started pointing to alligators gliding through the water – something we may have wanted to know before we went for a swim.



*Two men prepare a cockerel while a lady makes a bet*

Once back in the town we went for a little stroll and prepared for the cock fight. The town was buzzing with people preparing for the nights sporting event and men strolled around with their cockerels in boxes. The ring was in a shed and the event seemed to be organised by the local Senafront, indeed even the commissioner had a cockerel to enter. The ring was small, with wooden seating built round the edge. As the beginning of a bout neared the seats quickly filled with very enthusiastic and slightly inebriated supporters. I am not going to talk about the fight itself but the atmosphere was electric. It was amazing to witness the emotions flowing, the shouting and the dollar bills being waved in the air.

Yaviza is a town in a part of the world that is perceived to be dangerous and that is probably why there were only two tourists there, but the town I will remember is where music is blasting, people are drinking and everyone is welcoming. Not at any point during my stay did I feel threatened or at risk. A special time!

### **Acts of kindness:**

The thing that has been the most amazing part of this trip is the number of people who have gone out of their way to make my life that little bit easier. These include, and this is by no means definitive:

- Raul – Thank you for letting me stay at your amazing hotel in the Darien Province. You have built an amazing birdwatching sanctuary and I look forward to returning one day as a paying guest!
- The French guy in Palmer Norte for giving me \$20 to find a hotel room
- The amazing person at Lunas Castle who paid for me to change my flight home so I could spend more time with my family!
- The fruit sellers who gave me free fruit as I ran passed in Panama
- Avi and his family for letting me camp in his community on Lake Bayano
- The church who let me stay in their hut
- The Chepo fire department for letting me sleep in their dormitory
- Hostal Vista Serena for giving me a free night and doing my laundry
- The owner of Brooklyn Bakery in Quepos for the choco milk and donut



*Me with Raol, owner and founder of the Canopy Family Hotels*

### **Charities:**

There is obviously a serious aspect to this trip and that is to raise money and awareness for the charities I have chosen. So far we have together raised about **£10,000** for all the charities. While this may not all show up on the VirginGiving page it is sitting in a paypal account or I am waiting for cheques. As stated on my website a

proportion of monies may be used to help fund the cost of the expedition. Thank you for all your donations so far. Hopefully by the end of the expedition we will have got closer to the £20,000 I would like to raise.

Click on the logos for a reminder of the charities:



To donate please click [here](#)

Thank you to the companies that have helped me:



To find out what products I am using go to: <http://jamieisrunning.com/companies-that-have-assisted-me/>

Where you can follow:

- I am trying to update my blog as often as possible: [www.jamieisrunning.com](http://www.jamieisrunning.com)
- Photos can be found [here](#)
- Video can be found at [www.youtube.com/jamieisrunning](http://www.youtube.com/jamieisrunning)
- GPS tracking can be found [here](#)
- I am on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) with the name jamieisrunning

Reminder about Dad's webpage:

Please check it out by clicking [HERE](#)

**Jamie is running**

You can contribute to Jamie's supported charities on his web site

How's he going?

Days so far:- 261 Running days:- 193

Kilometres run:- 8125

The screenshot shows a website layout with three main sections. On the left is a map of North America with a red line indicating a running route. In the center is a progress summary box with a small photo of Jamie running and text indicating 261 days so far, 193 running days, and 8125 kilometers run. On the right is a map of Nicaragua with several blue house icons marking specific locations along a route.



## A Quick Beard Update:

As many of you know I am trying not to cut my beard while on this expedition. Here is the latest on its progress:



Photos from the road:



If my foot could talk



Arriving in Panama



The beach on Isla del Cano, Costa Rica



A beach in Uvita, Costa Rica



A monkey in Manuel Antonio National Park, Quepos, Costa Rica



An iguana in Manuel Antonio National Park, Quepos, Costa Rica



A road-side break in Costa Rica



A big beetle, Panama



Dresses for sale in northern Panama



A housing block in Panama City



A Street in Panama City



Homeboys in the Darien





Dogs in The Darien



My Campsite on Lake Bayano ([Force Ten Tent](#))



A typical house on the road in South Panama



A night of luxury camping at Canopy Camp



A pot-hole in The Darien



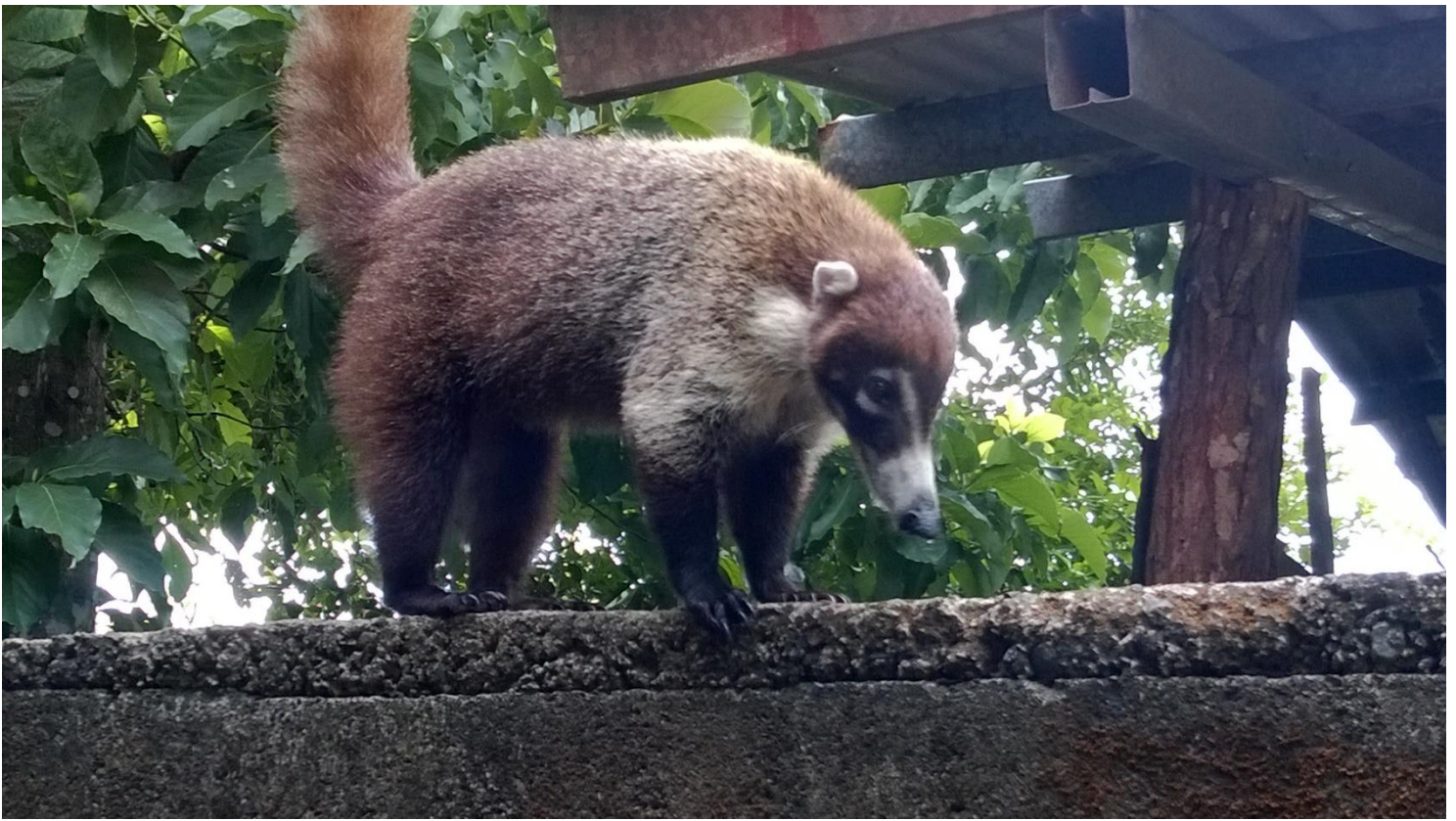
The dugout in The Darien



Dugouts in El Real, Darien



A "boat" in Yaviza, Panama



A Coati in David, Panama



My Thule stroller on the banks of Lake Bayano, Panama



I arrive in Yaviza, Panama – The end of this section of the Pan-American highway



Fried Bread in Yaviza, panama

To see more visit my Microsoft OneDrive photo page by clicking [here](#)

**THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT**

**And sorry for typos and grammatical errors – I am always very tired when I write this and the blog!!**