

The blue signs blessing

or

POLARDISTANCE 2004 through mu eyes

I am on the last "leg" of POLARDISTANCE 2004. I started out on this leg from the checkpoint Off Road at 18.30. On this "leg" we first went south towards Höktand and then turned north and back towards Off Road and Särna where the finish was. It had been dark for several hours and the old tracksigns without reflexes was hard to see. A thought grinded in my head that I soon ought to pass a little blue sign that confirmed that I was on the track. Suddenly and most welcome I saw the glimmer in front of me and just a few meters later I passed the sign with its reflex in the centre. This short meeting with this blue sign made everything so much easier and positive thoughts returned and I felt that the sauna in Särna was no longer far a way.

When I passed this sign I had made 255 km from the start in Särna 55 hours earlier. The Start was very intensive, just as it used to be and during the first kilometres the teams were close together. After the first checkpoint, Storbäcken, the situation changed and I was alone most of the time. I was exposed to my self and my thoughts, thoughts that changed from deepest doubt if this really was what I wanted to do, to the highest happiness that from the privilege of been out with my dogs under stars with a sparkling northern lights in the north. In this world of changing moods the blue signs became the sense of security. Dark thoughts disappeared and I got new motivation and strength to go on towards the Finish.

My thoughts went back to the start and the all the kilometres that I had behind me. What had happened and what would I do in an other way if and then I thought if, I was to start next year. Masstart always involves a lot of stress and since Arri at the start during the last years first have started out straight forward for about 30 meters and then turned 90 degrees right you my understand that I was slightly more nerves then usually. Would he do the same this year? Of course, he took to the right, but due to experienced mushers around me there where no troubles and very soon even Arri understood in what direction we where expect to go. Next year (Notice that I now is writing next. I few sentences I wrote if) I will take a position far out on the right so that I at least not will create problems for the other competitors.

Just as it used to be the speed was must to high during the first kilometres but after the first passage of the "Mörkretvägen" a more moderate speed appeared and life was quite nice in the pleasant whether. At the first checkpoint most mushers still where close together but now it felt as if the competition really started, because now I didn't got any direct answers when I asked the other mushers what their plans where. I myself planed to keep on going until approximately 19.00 and then stop for the night. Everything worked well apart from Alfa who had problems with the speed. I was not surprised and had almost thought that this could happen, since Alf not is as well built as Arri and Dersju. During my planning of the race I had also thought that perhaps I shouldn't take her in to the team. But I wanted her as a reserve, if one of the other should be injured. Once again I could establish that the first thought often is valid and when we reached the second checkpoint, Off Road, I took here out of the team.

The team got much better when Alfa was taken out. Arrio and Dersju are very equal and they now could trot in their own speed without me having to brake them down so that Alf could follow. This was very positive because the speed increased and my temper became much

better. The present leg started at checkpoint Off Road, went by checkpoint Lövhögen and back to checkpoint Off Road. This leg is the most beautiful part of the race and runs partly above the treeborder. Apart from a few kilometres around The Dalkoja the terrain is very nice country for dogsledging. I stop and slept a few hours on this leg and by then the fastest nomestyle teams had reach me (I myself goes pulkastyle) and passed me although they started 24 hours after me! It was a very special feeling to lie in my tent and hear the breath from the passing dogs and a short command from the mushers to the dogs not to leave the track to examine the tent beside the track. When I stated out from this place I experienced one of the most dramatic drop in temperature ever. I crawled out of my sleeping bag at 02.30 to feed the dogs and to get something to eat myself. The moon could be seen behind the clouds and it was not very cold. When I left the place at 04.00 the clouds had disappeared and the temperature fell very fast. The clear morning with moonshine that I hade expected was rapidly changed to a foggy black morning, with almost no visibility and my moist, not to say wet, boots was transformed to armourboots which not was very nice to have on my feet. However, the fogs slowly gave away for the rising sun and in a few hours I met the most fantastic mountain word with glitzy frost in the trees.

When I reached Lövhögen, the most beautiful checkpoint in this race, I met 4 nice men (the checkpoint staff) and here I stop to eat and drink. From Lövhögen to Off Road the track is very nice and mostly downhill. About 20 km before checkpoint Off Road, this leg and the last leg of the race meets and goes the same way down to Off Road. At this point there where to blue signs and I thought that when I passes these sign the next time I will fell very happy, because then I know that I will reach the goal. Most of this came true. The difference was that when I at 03.00 the following night passed the signs I just screamed “YEEES”, because then I knew that a once again was I winner – I would make the 300 km.

After resting for 5½ hour at Off Road I started out on the last leg. It showed out to be a most fantastic, but very cold night. Although I was grown up only some 200 km south of the arctic circle I have seldom seen such marvellous northern lights and suddenly I thought that there was some kind of lasershow at some village in the neighbourhood and that was because I did not only saw the classic northern light on the sky but also some kind of lightflashes during parts of a second. It was spectacular! We worked our way through the night on a schedule that said 2½ hours of working, 15 minutes rest for feeding and the 2½ hours work again and so on. We put kilometre after kilometre behind us. The only problem I had was that the batteries to my headlamp was not of a good quality. The light disappeared very soon after changing to new batteries and at one occasion this could have given me and another musher some serious problems. Suddenly I saw a reflex in front of me. I saw that it was not a reflex from a tracksign but I could not understand what it was, here out in the middle of nowhere. Not until a was close up to the reflex I realized that it was a dog team lying (sleeping) on the track. A succeeded to stop my dogs in time and the outer musher came out of his sleeping bag like a steel spring and when we after a while on broken English understood each other he could help me to pass his 10 dogs. The rest of the night went well although I was a little irritated that the moon didn't show up before 03.00 and at that time I got the moonshine straight into my eyes so that I almost had to use my sunglasses. When I once again reached Off Road there where only 3 kilometres to go and when I came down on the river I met a very cold wind from the north and this was probably the coldest part on the race. However, this was compensated by the torches that was standing along the track the last kilometre of race. I felt very, very happy and a tear fell down my cheek. Image, the old man almost cried of happiness! My wife and my youngest son met me at the riverbank. Björn run easily in front of me up the last slope.

Sten Tiger met me at the finish line at 05.33, witch meant that I had reached my goal to go under 60 huors.

When you have read this you my wonder why should I take part in such an event, when it most of the time seems to be hard work lonely in the middle of nowhere, with dark thoughts felling your soul. The question is not a surprise and the answer is that I do not have any answer. This question is as hard to answer as why I have spent so much time in the Swedish mountains, summer and winter or why I also loves to go out in the archipelago of Stockholm or asking a marathon runner why he or she runs 42 km on asphalt in a city. There is no good answer to this but what I think links these things together and makes it al worth the effort is that suddenly al the peaces fall together and you will experience something great. These kind of experiences are not for free, you have to earn them and that is what make them special and it makes you start planning for the nest trip as soon you have reach the goal, what ever that was.

Summary:

- The greatest experience was to see the fantastic ability of the dogs to work during such a long time.
- The most satisfaction I got was from seeing that the dog was in good health al the way.
- The most memorable was the fantastic sky during the last night.
- Most painful, my feet after reaching the gaol.
- Why start next year? The time together with my dogs and the warm and friendly atmosphere between al the people involved in the race.

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