



**Runner's High:** Jornet leads his pacers high above Tahoe.

**Sky Runner Kilian Jornet**  
 In which we try to keep pace with the man who may just be the toughest runner ever. By Jayme Otto

PHOTOS: JAYME OTTO

After running went ultra—with Dean Karnazes ticking off 50 marathons in 50 states in 50 days and Lisa Smith-Batchen breezing through the 150-mile Badwater Ultra in Death Valley, where temperatures approach 130 degrees, and turning around and running it back to the start—we figured the sport had no where else to go. But a 21-year-old kid from Spain by the name of Kilian Jornet has kicked it up a notch.

At the helm of a new breed called Sky Runners, Jornet is on a year-long quest to tackle the toughest alpine trails in the world. Unpretentious and understated, Jornet won't tell you he's out to shatter high-elevation records, but that's exactly what he's been doing. EO caught up with Jornet in September after he stomped the Tahoe Rim Trail, where he tackled 165-miles around the largest alpine lake in North America, with a total elevation gain of over 21,000 feet. He finished in 38 hours and 32 minutes, pulverizing the record set in 2005 by nearly eight hours.

we asked...

**You grew up at the foot of the Pyrenees, cross-country skiing to school. How did that upbringing influence your quest?**

● I grew up seeing the mountains as a playground. And so that's how they've always felt to me, not as a place of suffering. I feel at home there, in high elevation. I don't shy away from the steepest parts of a trail, because those are the places where I feel like myself.

**What was your inspiration for Kilian's Quest? What do you hope to accomplish?**

● It's my dream to seek out and explore the mountains of the world. There's no greater calling than chasing a dream. If I can inspire one person to follow a passion, then I will be a success. For me personally, there are a lot of compelling things to be found in the mountains, not only racing in the mountains, but the beauty, the discovery – what inspires me the most is discovering new trails in new environments, and also connecting with other runners.

**What was the toughest part of conquering the Tahoe Rim Trail?**

● Physically it's very tough, but your body can handle it with proper training. The toughest part is the mental side. You need to be able to keep yourself motivated the entire time. You need to be able to get past setbacks in your head because there will always be problems, things you didn't anticipate or plan for. I try to stay optimistic and always look ahead. At one point in the night, my pacer and I got off track. It was pitch dark, and our headlamps didn't help much. We were lost for over an hour. I told myself, it's lucky you love to run, because now you get to run even longer than you expected.

**How do you stay motivated when the going gets tough?**

● There are three things I tell myself. One, "I can do this," two, "This is possible," and three, "There's not much left." And my over-arching theme is always, "The earlier I arrive at the checkpoint, the sooner I can rest."

**What's your best memory from running the Tahoe Rim Trail?**

● The last ten kilometers were very emotional because the entire pace team ran it with me. And when we arrived at the finish, well, all I could think about was all of the moments I'd shared with each of them at various points on the trail. It was an overpowering emotion. It's hard to explain. My most beautiful memory was the part in the Desolation Wilderness, but it was hard to appreciate because I was so tired. The best part was probably where I started at the north end of the lake—the first 60 kilometers to Tahoe Meadows. I was fresh, and the morning light was beautiful.

**Rumor has it that you dropped your first pacer, Bryon Powell (www.iRunFar.com) right off the start line.**

● Ha! He was just letting me get some confidence to start. I did start fast, but I felt good, and was excited to get going, so why not? I really couldn't



Liquid Lunch



Scanning the Route with Pacer Adam Chase

have done any of this without the other runners who volunteered to pace me. I was never alone. There was always someone to talk to, someone to encourage me. The camaraderie that we all shared was something I'll never forget.

**How did you train for this?**

● I ski mountaineer in the winter and trail run during the other seasons, so I am literally training year-round. I train four to five hours in the winter, and up to nine hours in the warmer months. One month before Tahoe, I did a race in Europe called the Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc, so after that I had to recuperate. The specific training I did for Tahoe was to arrive a week before and run different parts of the trail.

*[Ed's note: The Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc – a mountain ultramarathon covering 150 kilometers in the Alps across France, Italy and Switzerland, with a total elevation gain of 8,500 meters. The race is run in one leg. It is known as the most difficult foot race in Europe. Jornet won it this year. And last.]*

**You're known for your aggressive uphill speed.**

**What's the trick to moving so fast on the steepest parts of the trail?**

● It's simple—training, just training.

**What advice do you have for us mere mortals for running well at high elevation?**

● Prepare yourself well. Get used to the altitude through training. Use your mind for motivation. And most importantly, have fun. You need to enjoy what you do. If you don't enjoy what you're doing, it's not worth doing it.

*Elevation Outdoors' assistant editor Jayme Otto paced Kilian Jornet for one of his 165 miles before he dropped her. Frequent EO contributor and Boulder resident Adam Chase also represented Colorado's runners and paced 27 total miles with Jornet over two segments of the run.*

Follow Kilian Jornet around the world at [salomonrunning.com/us/kilian-quest.aspx](http://salomonrunning.com/us/kilian-quest.aspx)