

# Striders of Croydon

SEPTEMBER 2019 MAGAZINE



**Striders' team at our final Surrey Road League match of the season, the Wimbledon 5K on 11 August.**

**Left to right: Steve Corfield, John O'Mahony, Victoria Legge, Andrew Pickering, Michelle O'Mahony, Peter Johnson, Michael Joseph, Alex Legge, Niamh Vincent, Mark Hutchings**

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## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

Wed 25 Sept – Striders AGM – Sandilands  
Sun 29 Sept – Switchback 5 – Lloyd Park (Striders marshalling)  
Sun 6 Oct – East Surrey League Cross-Country – Lloyd Park  
Sat 12 Oct – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – Reigate  
Sat 12 Oct – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – Reigate  
Sat 19 Oct – Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships – Morden  
Sun 27 Oct – Croydon 10K – Lloyd Park Avenue  
Sat 9 Nov – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – Wimbledon  
Sat 9 Nov – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – Mitcham  
Sat 14 Dec – South of the Thames Cross-Country Championship – Lloyd Park

### **2020**

Sun 5 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Dorking  
Sat 11 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – Chobham  
Sat 11 Jan – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – Guildford  
Sat 8 Feb – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – Lloyd Park  
Sat 8 Feb – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – Richmond Park  
Sun 15 March – Croydon Half-Marathon – Sandilands (Striders marshalling)

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER SEPTEMBER 2019

Welcome to the autumn edition of our club magazine.

Not long to go now until the club AGM which is on Wednesday 25th September, which will as usual be held in the clubhouse following the evening's run. We had a great attendance last year and please do try and come along. This is an important event providing a forum for members to raise issues, hear about and reflect on the past year's progress for the club and of course to celebrate the achievements and contributions to the club of our fellow runners, finishing up with our awards ceremony.

The AGM is always closely followed by our annual local cross-country race for all-comers, the Switchback 5 on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September. This event always showcases the talent, efforts, diversity and sheer strength in numbers of our Striders of Croydon bakers. On that note I'm very pleased to announce the arrival of 'Readers Recipes' to these pages ...

With thanks to our first contributor Mick George (who is also intending to bring some of his Triple Chocolate Muffins along to the Switchback). Now there's a good reason to enter ...

Reading Alan's recount of local athletics from 20 years ago our next Switchback event will be the 28th edition.

Also in this edition Ally takes us on a 100 mile journey across the South Downs Way, travelling through day and night and ever-changing thoughts, feelings, dietary preferences and much more!

Debra hasn't been taking it easy either and recounts her experiences of the Wendover Woods Night 50k, the Lakeland 50 and the somewhat toasty Ridgeway Challenge 86.

It was also great to read about how other Striders (both expected and unexpected) helped and supported Ally and Debra along the way and of course the wider running community and its volunteers without which such events wouldn't be possible.

Also this month, Robin recounts his own personal endurance event in helping to set up Roundshaw parkrun, having to deal with all the inevitable council procedures and how chance meetings, Google Earth and his own personal endeavours helped to shape this event, now in its tenth year.

Finally and last but not least, it really is amazing and inspiring to see how many outstanding personal performances across track, field, road, trail and across all age categories there have been in this last few months and Alan rounds these up in his regular Competitive Highlights section.

Tony



## THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY 100 (by Ally Whitlock)

How do you condense the story of 100 miles into just a few hundred words? You don't. Mix a G and T, this is a long one.

A few weeks later and I'm still not sure if I have the right words to accurately tell my SDW100 story. I sit here, trying to think of the words I need, not just to paint the picture of the physical journey from start line to finish line, but also the words to describe the emotional journey, because this adventure was as much about the mental challenge of completing 100 miles as it was the physical.

I feel a slight numbness, an emptiness. You know that feeling you get post-holiday, when life returns to normality and it all seems rather flat, that. The thing I have been striving towards, working towards, putting hours of training into over the past six months has gone, and I feel lost. Aimless. It's a strange feeling to have about a race, as there was no more meaning to it than it simply being a personal challenge: was I capable and could I do it.

I was and I did, but not in the way I wanted. Perhaps that explains some of my emptiness?

I look back with a tiny flicker of disappointment as it wasn't quite the race I wanted, the race I planned and prepared so diligently for. I had this image in my head of how I wanted the hundred miles to pan out, and the end result looks nothing like it did in my mind.

Sometimes the idea you have in your head of how you want something to be is so vivid, so detailed and so thought through that when the reality is something different it's hard to let go of the dream. Ridiculous really, I mean, I'd never run 100 miles before, how on earth was I supposed to know what it would be like? How can you plan for going into the unknown?

Perhaps I need to just pause for a moment and remind myself that I JUST COMPLETED 100 MILES! No matter how I made it to that finish line, I did, and I should never, ever, be disappointed with that.

One hundred miles. My feet just carried me one hundred miles. One hundred freaking miles.

### Beginning



photo © Stuart March



It's 5:45am, Saturday morning and I am standing alongside 375 other runners in the Matterley Bowl on the outskirts on Winchester. It's dull and grey with a dampness in the air. A light drizzle swirls around our heads in the breeze. Most of us are wrapped up tightly in our waterproofs as we wait for the race to start. I have butterflies in my stomach, proper fluttering and dancing butterflies turning somersaults. I am nervous, so nervous. I don't know why; it's only jogging with a large group of friends, and I like jogging.



This race has been my running focus for the past six months. I have put every ounce of energy I have into training and preparing for it. I knew that if I had any chance of completing 100 miles I had to give the distance the respect it deserved. I would not, and could not, go into this under-trained or unprepared. After months and months of work, finally it is race day.

My nerves for are for the unexpected, the unplanned and the uncertainty.

The South Downs Way (SDW) actually starts in the centre of Winchester on a tiny bridge by the Winchester City Mill. It would be impossible to squeeze 375+ runners plus all the crew into the space by the trail head, so instead the race starts at the Matterley Bowl, a 50 acre site on the outskirts of Winchester originally used by Eisenhower to rally troops before the D-Day landings in WW2.

As the clock clicks closer to 6am we gather under the blue arch for the pre-race briefing. James, the RD, asks how many are doing their first 100. I raise my hand, as do many others. I look around, silent nods of understanding pass between us, I'm not the only nervous one. The countdown starts, 10, 9, 8.... and we're off.

The first few miles of the race wind round Matterley Estate. I look ahead and watch the slow line of brightly clad runners snaking its way along the narrow paths. It's crowded and congested. This is a good thing as it stops me enthusiastically racing off with my usual reckless abandonment. After a mile we pass the start area again, to cheers of support and encouragement. I settle into an easy jog alongside Dan and Spencer. The plan is to start slowly, keep my heart rate low and to slow down some more.



I am determined to avoid my usual kamikaze approach to races and am aiming to run in heart rate zone one as much as possible, to walk all the hills and walk anytime my heart rate dips above zone one. I've practiced and practiced and practiced this on my long runs and it seems to work.

The early miles are easy and conversational as I chat to those around me. Most of our group dissipated at the start but Dan, Spencer and I stick together. We bump into Bob who I'd met at the NDW50 the previous year, a quick word with fellow Strider Debra and we start chatting with a guy called Tim.

Just before the four-mile mark we turn onto the SDW proper. I recognise the path from my one and only run on this section on an unseasonably hot day in February that saw me make a start on 2019's tan!

The rain that has been incessant since the previous day stops, waterproofs are discarded and the early miles start to fly by. I tuck into my first snack after about five miles. Fuelling is going to be critical over the next 95 miles. So often when I've volunteered at these races I've seen runners suffer and struggle because they've not got their nutrition right: too much, too little, not the right thing or not being able to keep food down. I've struggled with eating on all of my previous ultra's, at last year's NDW I ran the final 30 miles on little more than watermelon and half a banana. I'm determined to get it right today. My aim is around 200 calories an hour, made up as much as possible from real food.



**Leading the boys up Old Winchester Hill! © Stuart March**

All of a sudden we hit Check Point (CP) 1, we're at 10 miles already. I waste no time, top up my water and tailwind, grab a bit of fruit and a sandwich, a quick hello with Sam who is volunteering and I am on my way. 10% done, I feel good, I feel happy, I'm enjoying myself and I know just around the corner is the first of many views across the Sussex countryside! The views are one of the reasons I love the South Downs. I'm pleased that as the morning progresses the weather seems to be improving, the rain has stopped, the sun is making an appearance and there's a tiny hint of blue sky above us. Before every race my Dad messages me and says "Run well, run strong, but don't forget to pause and take in the view". I always hear his words bouncing around in my head as I run, reminding me to take in my surroundings.



**The first view! Spencer and I © Dan Thompson**

The South Downs is continuously up and down, up and down following an ancient chalk ridge. The race has over 12,000 ft of elevation over the 100 miles so it's not just the distance we have to contend with but also the climbs. But we all know I love a hill! Much of it is open with little shelter or shade. The occasional wooded section often providing a welcome change of scenery and terrain.

21 miles in we're at the top of Buster Hill, the highest point on the South Downs, looking over to the woodland of Queen Elizabeth Country Park, we're not far off CP2. It's just Dan, Tim and I now, we lost Spencer five or six miles back. I was fully expecting to be running the first half of this race solo but discover that I'm enjoying having company. We make a decision to run together for as long as we are able and I'm pleased about this. Ultras run by yourself can become very solitary and lonely affairs.

I remember Buster Hill from my training runs, a long grassy descent, very runnable and for a girl who likes her downhills, fun! A wave to, and hi-five with, Stu the photographer mid-way down and then for the first time I let myself go a little, let gravity take effect and start to fly. Arms out to the side, zooming down the hill, wind in my hair, sun on my face, I'm in my element! My fastest mile of the whole race, still a very conservative 9:59 though, and I reach the bottom with a grin on my face! I'm enjoying this!



**Buster Hill © Stuart March**



We cross into the shaded woodland of the QECP. I hear my name being called. Standing ahead of me are James and Annabel from my running club, Striders of Croydon. They had come down here for some parkrun tourism, seen the Centurion banners, realised it was the race I was doing so hung around for a while afterwards. A very happy and unexpected coincidence. I think people underestimate how much of a boost simply seeing friendly faces and a few brief words of encouragement can give during a long race.

Another quick turn-around in the CP, topping up bottles, filling a bag with sandwiches for the journey, a couple of cups of squash and we're off again.

QECP is one of the few forests along the SDW. The softer woodland trails hidden under the canopy of trees make a nice change underfoot from the open chalky paths and trails we had been running on. The climb out of the CP is steep as we dodge a few mountain bikes whizzing along the MTB trails.

## **Storm**

I run into CP3 at Harting Down with a smile on my face. 27 miles, that's more than a quarter of the way through. I feel good, I feel happy and I am already anticipating the views that I know are hiding just over the top of the hill in front of me. I fill my bottles again, drink some squash and grab a few more sandwiches whilst I wait for Dan and Tim to get what they need.

This is one of those moments that I pause, I stop, I look. What's a few minutes over 100 miles to take in the view?



In front of me spreads a panorama of the Sussex countryside. Petersfield to the left, Midhurst to the right. Somewhere between the two snakes the Serpent Trail, the scene of last summer's 100km. There are the dark, foreboding clouds of a rainstorm beating down on the hills opposite. A patch of blue sky to our right. The wind is picking up, we watch the trees dancing in its breeze, the storm clouds racing through the sky. Someone jokes, hoping that they aren't coming towards us, as we ride the crest of the next hill and begin our decent down. We reach the bottom the same time as the storm unleashes a torrent of water on us.





**The storm clouds roll in**

Within 30 seconds the waterproof is out of my new Salomon race vest; no time to take my bag off my back so the jacket goes on over the top, I pull my hood up and hunker down trying to find a little respite from the already battering wind and rain. Turning up the next hill the wind beats the rain at full pelt into our faces. I curse. My top half is nice and dry under my jacket and I once again appreciate the investment in quality waterproof kit; my bottom half however is soaked through within seconds.

As the sky darkens so does my mood. I feel myself dropping into a predictable low. The weather changed so quickly. Five minutes ago I was cheerfully munching on biscuits whilst sharing the gorgeous views on Instagram, now I'm huddled up almost double battling against the wind and rain to climb the hill. I pull away from Dan and Tim. Company is great, but sometimes you just need to put your head down and move forward; this is one of those times. With over 70 miles still to go I hope and pray that this is just an unexpected blip in the weather as I bemoan the inaccuracy of this morning's forecast: this was not supposed to happen!

Still solo, I reach the top of the hill; a solitary tree stands on the horizon. I recognise where I am from my run a few weeks earlier. I pause and wait for Dan and Tim, relishing the thought of, and perhaps now needing, some company again. The rain begins to ease. We run on in a comfortable silence. After a low period, I appreciate having the guys nearby again so that I'm not alone.

Running down Beacon Hill I'm aware of a slight niggle in my right knee, the exact same place it hurt during April's SDW50. Then I put it down to hammering the downhills, today I have been consciously sedate in my descents. After years of issues in my early days of running I so rarely get problems with my knees anymore. I'm quickly frustrated, knowing that if it hangs around for too long it will start to hinder me. I'm only 30 miles in and I'm trying not to think how far I still have to go. Dan's knees are also playing up, so we have a little grumble together and push on. Up the next hill, a moment to take in the view before turning into another small wood. The rain briefly beats down again; this time the trees offer us a little shelter. After ten minutes or so the rain eases off, the sun comes out and dries us off. The waterproofs are pulled off and stuffed back in bags, the sunglasses go on as we're back out in the open, the now wet, chalky paths sometimes slippery under foot.



35 miles, Cocking CP and a far too brief hello to Paula. Paula and I started chatting on Instagram sometime last year and this is another of those little moments that make me smile; someone you've never met before in person taking the time to come and support, encourage you and cheer you on. Again I spend only a few minutes at the CP before we carry on.



**Paula**

18 miles later and we're on the climb out of Amberley; our knees and Tim's ankle are still unhappy. Pausing for a photo of the view all three of us have adopted a bit more of a run/walk approach. Running the flats, hiking the ups, run/walking the downs. There's an unspoken agreement that one of us will say when it's time to run again after a walk section. We pick a tree or a landmark in the distance and agree that's where we're running too. My body is starting to struggle a little but my mind is still strong and determined.



### Halfway

Just before Kithurst Hill, CP6, my watch beeps. 50 miles. Half-way. 50%. 10 hours 30 minutes. I am on the home stretch.



**50 miles, 50% with Tim & Dan**



Is that too quick? Have I gone out too fast? Will I suffer later? That's some 2 hours 40 slower than I ran the SDW50 in April but 50 minutes quicker than I ran my first 50 miler. It's forever a guessing game, too fast and you may suffer later, too slow and you may run out of time. I may hurt already, a lot, but I am still on the whole feeling ok and enjoying myself. Surely this must be a good sign? I joke and calm myself with the knowledge that I have 19 and a half hours to cover the second 50 miles & still finish within cut-offs. That's 23 minute miles which I can easily do.

Can't I?

I'm now counting down the miles & the minutes till 54 miles and CP7 at Washington. Drop bags, hot food and meeting my first pacer.



It's another horrible descent into Washington, uneven, rocky chalk that's tough on sore knees before a short section through the village and past the picturesque church. Dan and I run into the CP, Tim just ahead of us, and I see Martin ready and waiting.

As soon as I decided I was going to do a 100 I knew I wanted to use pacers for the second half. They're not pacers like the elites use in a marathon, they're not to keep me at a certain min/mile pace but more to keep me company and keep me actually moving. For the Centurion 100's you're allowed pacers from half-way onwards. I'd paced Dan for the final 20 miles at the NDW100 last year, and seeing how tough those final miles were on him I knew that I would need someone alongside me to push me and keep me going.

I'm lucky enough to have two pacers, both from Striders, Martin from mile 54 to 70 and then Rachel from mile 70 to the end. Simply, and I am going to say this here, I could not have



done this without them, without their support and encouragement. Without their uplifting words and complete faith in me. I may have doubted but they never once did.

Washington is considered the half-way CP. You can have a hot meal, a hot drink; you collect your first drop bag, there's toilets and a washroom and it's a good time to get yourself ready for the night time miles. Having volunteered at this CP last year I had seen how easy it was for runners to waste time. They're tired, they sit down, have something to eat, a drink, slowly change socks, t-shirts, have a chat and before they know it 30 minutes have passed and standing up and getting going again is a struggle.

I was intentionally strict with myself, I didn't want to be one of those runners who became too comfortable in their chair, cup of tea in hand, hot meal in front of them. I knew what I had to do.



**Me, Martin and my drop bag! © Jon Zincke**

I put my watch on to charge and ask Martin to fill my bottles for me. I use the toilets and wash my hands for the first time since leaving the hotel in Winchester 12 hours earlier. This was the thing I was most excited about: washing the sweat, jam, coke, peanut butter, tailwind, dust and dirt off my hands was the BEST feeling EVER! I change my T-shirt and bra, a liberal spray of deodorant, throw a couple of wet wipes over my face and arms and clean my teeth, which feels like heaven after the amount of sugar I've consumed. I wash my hands again, simply because I can. Ready.

I discard all the things I didn't need back into my drop bag, put my warm top in my pack and make sure I have my head torches, which are mandatory kit from Washington onwards. A volunteer brings me a small bowl of pasta with tomato sauce which I eat whilst sitting on the floor and then I am done and ready to go. I say goodbye to Dan and Tim. In and out, 16-ish minutes.

## **Nemesis**

I have someone new to talk to, or talk at, as I start to tell Martin all about the preceding 54 miles on the hill out of Washington. I've always been a fairly solitary racer, I may run with someone for a couple of miles in a race, or chat to people I'm running alongside for a minute or two, but for the majority of my races it's me, myself and I. I've always liked that, but having now experienced a race with company I'm not sure I want to go back. In many ways it made the race more enjoyable. I'm doing this momentous thing and I'm sharing the experience with other people, Spencer, Dan, Tim and a few others in the first half of the race, Martin and Rachel in the second half.



**Martin**

Would it have been as enjoyable by myself? I don't think it would have been.

Would I have been able to do it alone? I'm not sure I could.

Within a few miles of Washington we are onto the SDW50 route. My feet are at home on the familiar paths and I know exactly where I am going. It is very much a run/walk strategy now, even on this relatively flat and runnable (for the SDW) section, which was not my original plan and I'm disappointed about having to adopt it quite so early on in the race. My knee is

still bothering me. My stomach also starts to feel a little unsettled; its churning brings me to a walk a number of times. Maybe pasta hadn't been such a good idea. We pass the smelly pig farm, thankfully for once the wind is blowing the scent away from us, and head down the hill towards Botolphs and CP8.

61 miles.

Immediately after Botolphs comes Truleigh Hill. I really, really don't like Truleigh Hill. It goes on and on and on with a nasty road section that looks flat but isn't in the middle. I think everyone has a running nemesis and this is one of mine. Every single time I've run it I've found myself slipping into a dark place, a place of doubt and uncertainty. I'd forewarned Martin, told him how much I hated this hill and that if there was a point I'd start thinking about quitting, this was likely to be it.

We chat all the way up the hill, stopping for a selfie mid-way to send to Rachel. We're approaching golden hour and I stop to admire the early evening sunlight filtering through the clouds. As a photographer I get excited by beautiful light and this really is beautiful light. One of my biggest wishes ahead of race day was to have weather that meant I saw sunrise and sunset and it was looking like I might be lucky. Martin starts to tell me all about his work as an accountant (tbh I did ask...!), I didn't expect it to be numbers talk that distracted me up the hill!

Without even really noticing we reach the top. I smile, I've done it without a flicker of doubt crossing my mind, I've beaten my nemesis!



**The beautiful light**

Downhills are still a struggle but I am hiking the ups strongly, the miles are ticking by. I glance occasionally at the average pace and am happy to see my splits are still between 14 to 16:30 minutes per mile. I know I'm a little behind the target I had in my mind, but not by



much. I keep reminding myself that the main goal is to simply finish and that anything above that is a bonus. The thing is, I'm ambitious and competitive with myself. I want to do more than just finish and I'm beginning to see my dream float away. This hurts almost as much as the physical pain does.

Climbing up Fulking Hill my Garmin beeps for 65 miles. Arms in the air I celebrate a new distance PB. Whatever happens over the remaining 35 miles, today I have run (run/walked) further than I've ever run before. This deserves another Instagram update!



**Celebrating my longest EVER run!**

Just past Devil's Dyke we start the decent into Saddlescombe Farm and CP9. As the elevation dips with the downhill so does my mood. As well as my right knee, the tops of both feet are now screaming with pain on every downhill step. My eyes are heavy and I'm starting to feel tired. My two hours sleep last night now seem a very long time ago and once more I curse insomnia for stealing valuable sleeping hours from me. Under a heavy blanket of tiredness the uneven path feels even more unstable at my feet. I stumble, stubbing my toes on loose rocks, and my mood drops lower and lower. I'm in a funk, a bit of a grump.

We arrive at Saddlescombe Farm, 67 miles. The CP is in one of the barns. I feel lost. I can't think, I don't know what I want. I stand staring aimlessly at the table filled with food, volunteers and fellow runners buzzing around me, but I feel dazed, like I'm in a world of my own. I'm hungry, I need to eat, nothing on the table appeals to me. My mind can't focus. My stomach turns at the thought of food. There are a couple of runners sitting in chairs. One guy is in a bit of a state and is talking about dropping from the race. I can't get like that, I can't get to the point where dropping becomes a consideration. I must eat. Martin fills my bottles for me. A volunteer offers me some soup. Soup! That sounds nice. A small cup of warm vegetable soup hits the spot. I also manage a couple of small potatoes with salt. It's not a lot but at this stage in the race every little bite is a victory.



Standing outside the barn I look up, the sky is a beautiful golden colour. I glance at the time and realise sunset is imminent. If we're quick and get a move on we might catch it at the top of the next hill. That is all the incentive I need to get moving. A little food and the promise of watching the sunset lifts my mood once more, I march with purpose up the hill, thankful for the respite of an incline on my sore feet.

Near the top of West Hill I stop, turn and see the sun sinking beyond the horizon. I made it. Sunset, the close of the day. Catching sunset has made me smile once more.



**Martin worshipping the sunset...**



A little further on I stop running, it is just too painful and I can't do it any more. I feel daunted at the thought of walking 31+ miles but I try to make peace with it in my mind. I'm frustrated and slightly disappointed with myself as I have the energy to run, I have the mental capacity

to run, but my body simply won't oblige. It's not how I planned the race to go, but as long as I am moving forward I try to stay happy.

Relentless forward progression.

## **Jack and Jill**

We turn into Pyecombe Golf Course; the paths are so familiar that even in the failing light I know exactly where I am going. We turn the corner and head towards the two windmills, Jack and Jill. This is the 70-mile crew point where I'm meeting Rachel, my second pacer.

The gathered crowd clap and shout words of encouragement as I run towards them. This is a place for crew and pacers to meet their runners, rather than a check point. I see Rachel, ready and waiting. With a lingering golden glow in the sky, daylight has all but disappeared, along with it the warmth of the sun. The temperature is quickly dropping. It's time to put the head torch on and put on some extra layers for the night-time miles.

With a hug I say goodbye to Martin and thank him profoundly as he heads towards Hassocks and a train back to Croydon. Rachel and I start up the next hill. I tell her I'm unlikely to be running at all and that it's going to be a very, very long walk home. I'm frustrated that my body won't allow me to run, it really is too painful, but my mind is still strong, I still have energy and at the moment I tell myself that I am still happy to be simply moving.

I'm not sure I can describe the pain in my lower legs and feet. It was intense and all consuming. I look back and wonder was it really that impossible to run? Could I have tried a bit harder, was the pain really that bad? I wonder now was I being a bit of a wimp? A wuss? Did I give up too easily and was there anything I could have done to get running again?

The first few miles with Rachel, despite walking, go quickly as we catch up and I tell her all about the first 70 miles. A few miles in I have another little low point. These moments creep up on me unannounced every now and again when all of a sudden I realise the magnitude of what I am doing and I become fixated on how much I hurt, how tired I am, how cold I am (I am now wearing my waterproof as well as my warm top in an effort to keep warm) and how far I still have to go, rather than celebrating how far I have already come.

I remember quite a few miles back, I think coming up the hill out of Amberley, stopping, turning around and telling Dan and Tim to do the same. One of the things I love about the openness of the South Downs is that if you do that, you can look back and see how far you've already come, rather than looking forward at how far you have to go.

Over Ditching Beacon, Rachel leaves me be for a while, I need the quietness and the solitude to focus my mind. I know that if I keep moving, keep focusing on one foot in front of the other, this moment will pass. Rather than thinking of the finish line, I try to focus on the next CP, Housedean Farm, just a few short miles away.

I've not eaten much over the last few hours. I'd been forcing myself to have a little bit here and there, a biscuit, half a sandwich, a couple of mouthfuls of soup at Saddlescombe Farm, a sachet of baby food at Clayton Windmills when the thought of solid food made me queasy. I knew I was way off my target of 200 calories an hour and was probably flagging due to not eating enough. I force down another sachet of coconut rice baby food, easy to swallow, easy to digest. It does the trick; pretty soon I feel a little jump in my energy levels and I'm regaling Rachel with tales of my last run on this section five weeks earlier when I got caught in a torrential rain storm, got absolutely soaked right down to my underwear and ended up

travelling home underwear-less as I hadn't thought to pack any spare with the change of clothes in my dry bag!

TMI. There's something about the pain and discomfort of long distance running and over-sharing!



**The evening sun**

## **Cheese**

I can almost see the CP. There's a lovely runnable downhill into Housedean but I still don't feel up to running. The Centurion flags flapping in the wind at the entrance to the farmyard are a very welcoming sight. The barn is full, light and lively. I see Tracey who I first met volunteering at TP100 in 2017; she is volunteering again. Rachel gets my drop bag, I find a chair and gratefully sit down.

I grab my spare long-sleeve base layer out of my drop bag, an afterthought when packing that I am now very thankful for. I strip down to my bra (after 76+ miles, as well as over-sharing, all inhibitions generally go and I don't give two thoughts about stripping off in the middle of the CP; to be honest, I doubt anyone even noticed!)

I know I need to eat but am still struggling with the thought of food. In my drop bag I have a cup-a-soup that I had been fantasising about for the past three or so miles, something hot and salty. I make this up and for some reason grab a cheese sandwich.

Oh My God! The cheese sandwich is the FOOD OF THE GODS!

I am not a fan of cheese, I always actively avoid cheese sandwiches at CPs, sliced white bread, cheap mild cheddar, thickly spread margarine, it just seemed wrong to me to eat this mid-run. But dunking it into my tomato soup it quite literally becomes the best food I have EVER eaten! I grab another, and another suddenly feeling and feeding my hunger.

Conscious of time and that I don't want to become too comfortable sitting down I walk away from the cheese sandwiches, Rachel makes me a strong, sugary coffee, we say goodbye and thank you to the volunteers and head on our way.

Most of the things in my drop bags were superfluous and came home with me untouched and unused; the two invaluable items were somewhat of a luxury: a proper travel mug rather than the flimsy thing used as mandatory kit (I used a Stoj mug) and some posh coffee filter bags. I like my coffee. A lot. But I am a coffee snob and I won't drink instant. Having a proper, strong, sugary coffee, in a proper mug that wouldn't spill on me, on the walk up the hill after Housedean Farm was HEAVEN!

Having eaten well, drunk, rested for a few minutes and had a good dose of caffeine I was feeling rejuvenated and reenergised. I still wasn't running but I felt as if I was marching with a bit more motivation. I'm still strong on the hills and like I had on the SDW50 I say a silent prayer of thanks to the hundreds of hill reps I had done over the past six months that make the climbs, even in these later painful stages, feel so much more manageable.

Looking back I would say that the section between Housedean Farm and Southease was my best period of the latter miles. Don't get me wrong, I was slow, walking, and it hurt like hell, but my mind was good and I was feeling mentally strong. I knew this section, I was happy to just keep plodding along. I was possibly slightly euphoric with over-tiredness as I talked non-stop for a good few miles. I absolutely have no idea what about and I'm not sure Rachel got many words in, but it meant the miles sped by (relatively speaking...). The pros of putting three sugars in your coffee when you usually have none!

Down the 'yellow brick road' and through another farm, I know I'm close to the next CP at the youth hostel in Southease. I pause for a moment as I hear the sound of bird song, the dawn chorus: morning is on its way. Suddenly the train line is upon us, up and over the bridge. Even in the dead of night to cross the tracks is an instant DQ. I nearly hug the volunteer who tells me the CP has a PROPER TOILET! There are only so many wild wees you can do before you really want to just sit on a normal toilet and not have to worry about squatting on a bramble, sitting on a stinging nettle, weeing on your shoes in the dark or flashing a fellow runner because the extra couple of metres to hide behind a tree feels like a few meters too far.

Even better than a proper toilet is SOAP and WATER (can you tell that when I'm REALLY excited about things I use capital letters!). It really is the little things that are getting me excited now. To wash my hands for the first time since Washington, some 30 miles and 10 hours ago, feels like complete bliss!

After inhaling the whole plate of cheese sandwiches at the CP (nothing else interests me now I've discovered the deliciousness of a cheese sandwich) we are on our way again.

84 miles. 16 to go. The end is in sight.

## **Morning**

My very first run on the South Downs in August 2017, just after I'd signed up SDW50 2018, was from Southease to Eastbourne. I didn't know the trail and I had yet to learn about gpx files and using tech to navigate. I got the train to Southease and simply followed the SDW signs to Eastbourne. For this reason this part of the trail will always hold a special place in my heart. It's the section I've run the most often, the section I know the best. I've run it in all weathers, from glorious sunshine to thick mist with 20 metres visibility.

Southease to Eastbourne (via the Seven Sisters rather than Jevington) is one of my happy places. It's the run I will do when I need to escape, when I need some time alone, some time to think, some time to just be. Starting with a climb to the top of the world along the chalk ridge, finishing with a paddle in the sea. This route has everything I love about trail running



and whilst I'm running, life and its problems pauses. The path from Southease calms my soul and eases my mind.

Rachel and I start the climb out of Southease. It's another of the never ending hills of the SDW that just go on and on. And on. But it's manageable. It's big, it's long but it's not too steep. As we climb we notice a tiny slither of light on the horizon. I stop and turn to look behind me again. I am greeted with a beautiful sight that becomes one of my favourite memories from the race.



I see the hill behind us leading down into Southease covered with tens of tiny little lights, bobbing around in the darkness. The head torches of my fellow runners. I may have Rachel here with me but this is a poignant reminder that in the darkness of the night I'm not alone. As I am struggling, wondering how I am going to make it to the finish, there are many others out here with me running their own journeys and battling towards the coveted buckle. A photo doesn't do it justice but this is about the memory, not the image.

The sky brightens with almost every step, the light turning pinkish in colour. I'm excited to see sunrise and it's an incentive to keep climbing, to get higher up the hill for a better view. I'm struggling to comprehend that it's only a few hours ago that I was watching the sun set with Martin and that I'M STILL GOING! There is something very magical about seeing sunrise, about watching life and colour come into the world at the start of a new day. Today it feels extra special.



**Good morning!**

## Struggle

I am now counting down the miles. In some ways I am wishing them away as they become slower and slower, harder and harder, more and more painful. I know I've got some tricky sections coming up and I become fixated on them; rather than living in the moment, living for the mile I am in, I start worrying about the miles to come.

Rachel reads me another message from one of my Striders teammates. She has a whole pile of words of support and encouragement that people have sent her and reads me one whenever she senses I am dipping into a low point. Without fail they make me smile through the pain.

I can't remember where it started getting really bad (really bad, is of course all relative). Somewhere between Southease and Alfriston, maybe just after. Looking back, I remember at some point stumbling. I don't remember where, when or how and at the time I didn't really think anything about it. But somewhere around the 90 mile mark I'm aware of an intensifying pain in my lower right leg/ankle and my walk is becoming less walk more shuffle as I struggle to put weight on it.

Whilst it has been tough for many, many miles, the decent into Alfriston, 91 miles in, is the point where I start having serious doubts as to whether I can do this. I usually fly down this hill in sub-8 minutes. Today it takes me 23. Every downhill step hurts, it is rough, uneven, and the angle is unkind on my leg. I am stopping every few metres to recompose myself and I find my eyes drooping with exhaustion, I'm struggling to keep them open. Occasionally I find myself swaying as a wave of intense tiredness hits. Rachel has the patience of a saint, stopping with me, allowing me all the space and time I need.

Alfriston, CP12, 92 miles in. Toilet, wash hands, sit down, jam sandwiches (no cheese here), coke, coffee and go. I'm in a daze. 8 miles to go. We're into single figures countdown but it seems impossibly far.



**Top of the hill out of Alfriston**

I'm looking forward to the hill coming out of Alfriston as going up is easier than going down. A couple of hundred feet up, Keith Simpson, with his daughter Cat pacing him, comes storming past me looking strong AF and not like a 70+ year old who had just run 90+ miles. Keith is also a Strider (in name only, he hasn't been on a club run for many years) and I often bump into him at Centurion races or out on the North Downs Way. If you want someone to look up to, someone to inspire you, Keith is your man. Never mind running 100 miles at age 70, I just hope to still be running!

The journey from Alfriston to Jevington feels almost dream like in my mind. I can see the path, the steep hill, the cow blocking my way. I feel the heat of the morning sun on my back, the need to take my jacket off and put my sunglasses back on. I can see the view, the Exmoor ponies that I have never noticed before, I remember describing the route into Jevington in minute detail numerous times to Rachel, as if talking about it would make it come quicker. But this whole part of the journey doesn't seem real. I'm simply moving.

## Trig

I want that final hill, I want to get to the trig point at the top. 96 miles, I can smell the finish and I know that there is nothing that's going to stop me now, I can crawl if I need. And crawl I nearly do. I overtake a couple of people on the up, I feel ok. Rachel comments on my increase in speed and strength. Going up is fine but what goes up has to come down.

I reach the trig point with delight. The marshals directing the runners off of the SDW laugh as I Instagram the moment. Those who know, know. I know this will be my last post until I cross that finish line.



From here it is less than three miles to the finish. This is the real home stretch and it's all downhill. Back in April it was here that I knew my sub-9 hour 50 mile dream was still possible if I put my foot down, so put my foot down I did to make it in 8:51. Except today, a day that I can barely put any weight on my right foot, the 'Gully of Doom' down to the roads of Eastbourne doesn't fill me with a single drop of joy and I can't put my foot down. At all.

It's a steep, narrow, rocky and rutted descent. I really should have photographed it as words just do not do it justice but by now I am so over photos, I just want to finish. I need to concentrate, to think as I descend, looking ahead at every step. I love technical downhills like this, I love throwing myself down, letting gravity and my feet take me to the bottom. On a

good day, when I haven't already run (aka walked) 97 miles I reckon I could do the mile from the trig to the road at the bottom in 7 or so minutes. Today it takes me 38.

Every step has me wincing in pain, no matter where on the path I put my foot it hurts. I stop, swear in annoyance. I shuffle another metre or two as fellow runner after fellow runner stumble past me, some running but many also walking. Mid-way down I can't hold them in any longer and the tears start to fall in pain and in frustration. This wasn't how it was meant to be. This is not the glorious finish I had dreamt about. I sob quietly to myself, my sunglasses, not really needed under the cover of the trees, hide my eyes as the tears streak down my cheeks.

But I continue to move forward. One tiny step at a time. There's nothing else I can do. Relentless forward progression. Rachel leaves me be, I think she senses I need to be alone.

My body has deserted me, the only thing I have left is my mind. I glance at the tattoos on my wrists one last time; "Believe" "Achieve".

Your body achieves what your mind believes. Through my tears I know that I am going to finish, I know that I have that buckle.

It's rare that I'm actually happy to see tarmac, but I hit the road at the bottom of the gully with a smile of relief. A flat, smooth surface. No more rocks, roots, or hills to navigate my tired and sore feet around. The finish line dot is now visible on the map on my watch, so, so close but still so far. I marginally increase my pace and manage a 27-minute mile for the next mile!

99 miles. One mile to go.

## End

I turn into the sports park; the tears have dried up and my smile grows wider and wider with every step. Everyone I pass claps and congratulates me. I start to feel like a hero. Onto the track, the Centurion crew cheering me on. Rachel peels off and I start my lap, my final 400 metres. I had visions of running around the track, perhaps even a sprint finish. I hobble a bit faster, 200 metres to go and my watch ticks over 100 miles. 100 metres to go. The final bend, I see that line, I pick my feet up.



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**27 hours, 34 minutes, 35 seconds** since the starting gun went off in Winchester and I jog the final 10 metres to cross the finish line in Eastbourne.

100 miles. I had only gone and bloody done it!



**Finish line relief © Stuart March**

I push the disappointment of the past 30-odd miles away and am handed my buckle. Hugs from Rachel, Stu the photographer and Spencer, who had unfortunately had to drop at 74 miles. I pose for my finisher's photos with a ridiculously big grin on my face, I don't believe I've actually done it.

**I've just completed 100 miles!**



**© Stuart March**

## Reflect

I started off my saying I look back with a flicker of disappointment, and yes I do.

I did have a time in mind that I wanted to run, and I finished far outside that time, but more than time I wanted to run strong, I wanted to feel good. I wanted to power up the hills and run down the other side. I didn't want to walk the final 35 miles. I didn't want to hurt so much I cried, I didn't want to take nearly four hours to cover the last ten miles.

I know the disappointment is purely mine, no one else's, because I had set expectations of myself and I didn't live up to those expectations. Were they unrealistic expectations? No, based on my training I don't think they were. And that too disappoints me. I put my heart into training for this, I couldn't have done any more, yet despite that I couldn't perform on race day and I'm disappointed.

I try to counterbalance my disappointment with pride. I am proud that I finished, proud that I was able to suck it up and get it done when the going got tough. I'm proud of my mental strength that never failed me even when my body did. I'm proud that I pushed myself, that I challenged myself to even try something that seemed almost impossible. I'm proud that I'm no longer hiding in my comfort zone. I am proud of my buckle and the journey to get it.

I try not to let my disappointment with the final few miles cloud my memory of the preceding ones, because despite the pain late on, I enjoyed the race and I hope that enjoyment shows. Running on one of my favourite trails, though the beautiful British countryside with great company from friends old and new. How could I not have fun?!

And I guess as this race didn't go quite to plan I'm just going to have to do another... 😊



© Stuart March

To end I'm going to repeat some of the words I said at the end of my SDW50 blog, simply because they're true.

"I'm reminded what a brilliant community Centurion is. From the RD who cheered me by name as I ran into the sports stadium for my victory lap, to every single volunteer who gave up their time to look after us at the check points throughout the day. The crews of other runners who cheered as I ran past them out on the course, to the other runners, those I know as friends and those I met on the trails, there is something very special about the Centurion family and I'm proud to be a part of it.

"I can't shout loud enough about Centurion races, I've now run five, volunteered at three and paced at one. They are brilliantly, well organised races, run by runners FOR runners. No airs, no graces, no pampering of elites or so-called influencers and whether you're first over the line or last, everyone's victory is celebrated."

And as a side note, two and a bit weeks later I am back running, I did 13 trail miles this morning and thankfully I am not broken, none of my aches and pains were anything serious, for which I am very thankful.

### **After**

I was in two minds about sharing my after story, it's a little embarrassing, but one of the things I like about reading race reports from other runners is learning from them and so if my experience helps even just one person I can deal with all the embarrassment.

About 30 or so minutes after finishing I head into the changing rooms to have a shower. I'd been chatting, having 'official' photos taken, taking selfies and updating Instagram. I sit in the changing room for a few minutes trying to muster the energy to actually shower. I stand and start moving around and as I do I start to feel really light headed and faint. I slump down onto the bench. I'm dizzy and struggling to focus. A volunteer walks in, sees me and asks me if I'm ok. I'm not.

The next thing I know the medical team are with me, I'm having my pulse, heart rate and vitals checked. My blood pressure is dangerously low. I'm wired up to a machine for an ECG. My blood pressure is taken again. I'm shivering and so cold, they wrap me in three blankets and a couple of times I drift into light-headedness. I want to lie down but the medics say they need me to sit. There are three of them surrounding me. They say they may need to take me to hospital. Suddenly I'm alert. I do not want to be going to hospital. I ask someone to find Rachel for me and ask her to phone the friend I have as an emergency contact to come and get me (**Laura, you saved me!**). A stretcher is wheeled in. I am adamant I am not getting on it or going to hospital but my blood pressure is still very low.

I'm told I'm dehydrated. I argue. I drank a lot over the 100 miles, filling two 500ml bottles at most check points as well as drinking cups of squash and coke. I was peeing regularly (at one point it felt as if my pee per mile ratio was 1:1). I didn't understand how I could be dehydrated. I'm made to drink a bottle of water. And another one. And another. My blood pressure begins to creep up. I'm feeling a lot more alert but still shivering uncontrollably.

90 minutes later my blood pressure is at an acceptable level and I'm given the all clear. Finally I can have that shower.

I may have been well hydrated whilst running but I stopped running and when I stopped running I stopped drinking. My body still needed fluids and still needed hydrating and as I wasn't giving it any it went into shutdown. It's interesting, I've talked to a couple of people since who have had similar, though perhaps not as extreme, experiences at the end of races. None of us, although all experienced runners, were aware of quite how important it was to carry on hydrating when you finish. It's a mistake I won't be making again, that's for sure.

## THE WENDOVER WOODS NIGHT 50K (by Debra Bourne)

It's a little before 11 pm and about 175 runners, wearing backpacks and headtorches, gather round James Elson for the pre-race briefing. He asks a couple of questions, such as who is running their first Centurion race, then "How many people here are running their first ultra?" Two or three hands go up. He adds that it's the first time he's been able to ask that question. Centurion Running normally organises 100-mile and 50-mile races, but all of those ultras require proof of previous ultrarunning experience. A 50K was a new (and intended to be one-off) length of event for them.



The Wendover Woods Night 50K was itself an offshoot of another one-off event, the Wendover Woods 100, requested by Centurion runners who didn't feel that the Thames Path 100, South Downs Way 100, North Downs Way 100 and Autumn 100 were enough 100-mile races for Centurion to put on in one year. With only a few dozen runners able to take part on the chosen day, the idea of an overnight 50K was born, and 100 entries were offered. They were snapped up within about 10 hours. Later 75 more places were offered and those too were grabbed quickly.

With the late evening Friday start I had to put in a full day at work in the office, with lots of work irritations. Just before 5pm my husband phoned and told me that the trains through Lewisham were delayed. That was all I needed! I fretted my way home, quickly checked and double-checked I had all my kit, said hi to Aidan as he arrived home, and dashed back out to take the train to Charing Cross – finding that the delays were not a problem, thankfully – then the Tube to Marylebone Station. Here I was to meet Simon Webster, the only other



member of Striders running in the race. I was more than an hour early, so I sat for a bit, fretted a bit, ate the snack I'd brought with me and finally Simon arrived. He went off to buy a sandwich and I chatted with some other runners (identifiable by their running gear) evidently aiming for the same train. Then Tim, a parkrun Run Director who I'd met before, appeared.

On the train I was too fed up with the work stuff to be good company – sorry, Simon! As we approached our destination Tim came through the carriage and suggested sharing a taxi to the venue, which we accepted. He also asked me if I was going to the parkrun. After I said I didn't think I could make it back in time for Lloyd parkrun he said "No, I mean Wendover parkrun – it's right near where we'll be running." That was an idea I hadn't thought of, and it sounded good – and of course I had my parkrun ID barcode with me: – but first there was the 50K to run.

Race briefing over – with a couple of pauses to cheer when 100-mile runners came through the marquee – we funneled out into the open field – then we were off, following the yellow arrows and the red/white/reflective striped tape. The course loop was 10 miles, and we would be running it three times. To make the distance up to 50K, we had a small add-on loop at the start. Briefly in the first few hundred yards I was near to Simon and I wished him luck, knowing that he was faster than me and I probably wouldn't see him again until after I finished. Then I found myself running by Tim, who had run the Wendover Woods 50 mile race the previous November. "Take it easy on the first full lap", he advised, "even on the downhill runnable sections. You can run faster on the other laps if you really want to once you know what it's like." That sounded like good advice, particularly as I was running this as my final long training run before the Lakeland 50 (two weeks later).

Wendover Woods, in the Cotswolds, is hilly. Very hilly. It's also, being full of trees, full of tree roots. Having managed to trip over a tiny tree root at Lloyd parkrun just a week before, and bloody my hands and knees, I was feeling a bit nervous and was particularly cautious on some of the paths that seemed to be ALL tree roots. Additionally, while the open field at the start had been fairly cool, inside the woods it was pretty warm and humid – much warmer than I had expected for a night race – and I soon took my windproof jacket off. After about 6.5 miles we reached the half-lap aid station, where I filled the water bottle I'd been drinking from and grabbed a couple of bits of fruit, then went on. I fueled most of the run on fruit and, of course, my standard energy source – Kendal Mint Cake. Not long afterwards I found I was having to slow down more and more in order to see the tree roots. Then three women caught me up and the light from the first headtorch put me into deep shadow. I let them past, realising that my headtorch was seriously dimming. I'd thought the batteries I had in it were practically unused. I'd been wrong. Dumb mistake. I dug in my backpack for my spare, recently-bought batteries, plus my backup penlight so I could see what I was doing, and changed the batteries. In the renewed light, the tree roots were a lot more visible.

Downhills, flattish sections, uphill. Another downhill, with a sign warning it was "steep" – which seemed funny as it was nicely runnable and far easier than some of the other slopes on the course, but I suppose that for the wider track sections it was steep. Round a corner and a particularly steep uphill faced me, soon followed by a section of steps, then a further steep slope. I was thankful that the ground was dry – and wondered how on earth I'd get up the steepest slope if it was wet when I came back for the 50-mile version (5 laps) in November. An easier section, and suddenly I was on a driveway, then an arrow pointed right and into the field – once I'd climbed over the stile. Lap 1 finished. In the marquee I filled my soft water bottles, ate a few bits and pieces. "Do you want your drop bag?" asked the volunteer – who had been running the 100-mile race but got a stomach upset very early on so had dropped out – then stayed to help. "No – but thanks for the offer," I replied, and left quickly, with a brief stop at the portaloos before heading over the cool field and plunging back into the humid warmth of the woods.



**[Images: woods seen in daylight during the parkrun]**

Now I knew what I was facing, and I decided that I could go a little faster on the easy runnable sections. I was also losing my excessive fear of tripping on the tree roots, particularly with the improved light from my headtorch with its fresh batteries. I felt good. Until about four miles into the lap when I realized the circle of light was dimming again. And I hadn't taken my second set of spare batteries from my drop bag. What a STUPID error! I trotted on as best I could in the diminishing light, hoping it wouldn't fade completely before I reached the aid station. Although I wasn't sure what I'd do when I did reach it. Downhills, uphill, down again. There was the aid station.

"Anything I can get you?" one of the volunteers asked. "Spare batteries for my headtorch?" No answer. While my water bottle was being filled I thought about it, then worked out what to do. The headtorch took three batteries. I still had one completely unused battery from the pack of four, plus there were two batteries in the penlight – thankfully the same size (AAA). If I was lucky they would hold for long enough to get me back to the main base where – I

hoped – I had a set of lithium AAAs. Batteries in and I switched the light on – it looked okay. “On the bright side, the adrenaline has woken you up,” one of the volunteers noted. He was right. I’d been feeling tired, but now felt wide awake, which was good. Additionally, after coping with the dying light, the renewed brightness looked fantastic. However, I was very aware that the batteries might not last, so wherever the footing was better I switched to medium or even low power. Despite this, I noticed dimming well before reaching base camp, and hoped the torch would last just long enough. Over the stile again and into the marquee.

“Can I get you your drop bag?” This time the person asking the question was very familiar. “Myles!” I’d had no idea we had a clubmate volunteering, but it was great to see him – a real boost. “Yes please!” He handed me the bag and with a little trepidation I unzipped it and opened the box holding the essential items. Vaseline, glidestick, spare Kendal mint cake... There! A wonderful pack of four gleaming silver-and-blue batteries. Quickly I swapped them in, then another hug from Myles – who also said he’d close up the drop bag up for me – and I was off again for the third and final lap.

Downs, ups, down the first of the so-called “steep” wide track sections. Into the half-way aid station and I thanked everyone for all their work, then went on. The dawn chorus was starting. I love hearing that on a through-the-night run. Gradually the world outside the headtorch beam was coming into view. On a section across a field I even switched the headtorch off. At the end of the field I politely averted my eyes from another runner obeying the call of nature, only to have him call after me: “Wrong way!” – as I’d missed the arrow for the right-hand turn! Oops! Into the wood again and the headtorch was needed again for a while, but it was getting lighter and lighter, and soon I found myself turning it off again and trotting along in the dawn light.

Up the horrible steep hills, then a hill I thought might be the last one, and I had to put my hand up to shield my eyes against the rising sun. I stopped for a moment, turned to look down over the slope I’d just come up, and spotted some red-and-white Centurion tape off to the side – which was when I realised that in shading my eyes from the bright sunlight I’d blocked my view of one of the course marker arrows. However, I’d not gone far and I was soon back on course. Last time up the driveway – reflecting that it would be two more laps to go when I returned for the 50-mile version in November – over the stile and across to the marquee. Done! Simon had come in only about 20 minutes ahead of me, and looked fine. Myles gave me my drop bag again and I added some clothing layers before I cooled down too much, then sat around chatting with other runners.



**[Wendover Woods Night 50K done!]**



I had the great pleasure of watching Anna Troup finish the 100 – second overall and one of only three runners to break 24 hours in the race. She's a lovely woman, very friendly, and let me hold her Centurion winner's trophy, which was heavier than I'd expected.

Tim finished, and in conversation we discovered a couple of other dedicated parkrunners, so in the end there were four of us waiting to walk/lurch down to the start of Wendover parkrun. Tim and at least one of the others knew where we were going, thankfully, so we got there in good time. Waiting for the start and I spotted a couple of Centurion marker arrows and realised we were right by the route we'd been running all night. Then one of the 100-mile runners trotted wearily past and we and the other parkrunners gave them some encouraging applause. James Elson and one of the other Centurion people turned up – they were offering to marshal at the parkrun, which was lovely.

My legs had stiffened up, so I set off at a sedate trot, feeling really, really slow, and walking the (gentle!) uphill. I also stopped several times to take photos and appreciate the woods now I could see them properly. The 5K seemed much longer than usual and I was very happy to reach the finish funnel.



**[With other parkrun enthusiasts after Wendover Woods parkrun after the 50K]**

Afterwards, one of the regulars gave three of us a lift to the train station (Tim was meeting some Vegan Runner friends) where we arrived just five minutes before a London train was due – perfect timing. It was a good thing that Marylebone was the terminus, as I nodded off. All in all, a great experience, an excellent final training run to set me up for the Lakeland 50 and a good taster for the WW50 (miles) in November. And the take home message? Have new batteries, of a brand you have used before, both in your head torch at the start and as spares.

And of course, if you're to take advantage of an unexpected chance to run a parkrun, then wherever you go, #DFYB (Don't Forget Your Barcode).

**Note:** The Wendover Woods Night 50K **IS** being held in 2020!

## THE LAKELAND 50 (by Debra Bourne)

I was crossing Tilbethwaite fell, the last ascent before the descent into Coniston, when it started raining. Again. "Give us a break," I thought. "It would be nice to finish **not** looking like a drowned rat." Alas my request was ignored, and the rain continued to fall. It was heading towards midnight and I had been on my feet since 11.30am. It had rained for at least 10 of those hours, with only brief respites to get nearly dry before the next wetting.

It was reading about the Lakeland 50 that had encouraged me to start running ultramarathons, back when I'd only done a couple of half marathons, and I'd run it in 2013 as part of my "5 50-milers at 45" challenge. Having lost 2014, 2015 and 2016 to injuries and failed to get in for the 2018 race because it had sold out in 8 minutes, I'd made sure I got in for 2019 (it sold out in 6 minutes. We crashed the server).

[Note: next year there will be a 3-hour window to enter, followed by a ballot, with charity places (pledging to raise £100) opening a week later.]

The course is unmarked, and the compulsory kit includes a map with the route marked on it (provided), compass, and a route book divided into sections between the checkpoints. Not having run the course for 6 years, I decided to do both of the offered organised recce runs: one evening run of the final 16 miles from Ambleside to Coniston, running much of it in the dark (with head torches) and the other from Pooley Bridge to Ambleside. There were some sections that I found I remembered, others for which I not only really needed the refresher but also wished I lived close enough to recce several times more.

In the week leading up to the race we had been worrying about sunburn and dehydration, but during Friday the forecast changed from 'showers' to 'rain'. Driving north from London, although it was nearly 11pm when we finally set off to Manchester on the Thursday evening, it was over 30 °C and we brought freezer packs with to make sure the cat didn't overheat. The following day we drove to our B&B in Ambleside and then across to Coniston. Registration was in a marquee on the grounds of John Ruskin School, and we were very lucky to get a parking space close by. In the marquee we joined the slow-moving queue, and gradually came to realise that there were two queues, first to confirm identity, with photo ID required, then kit check. Kit check was thorough, looking at each runner's waterproofs, emergency base layer, emergency food, head torch, cups (two: one for cold drinks, which could be a soft cup, plus a rigid mug for hot drinks/soup), and so on. A number of runners had come prepared with their backpack and kit all laid out inside a box or plastic tub. The rest of us had to pull everything out then try to stuff everything back in again. With how slowly we were moving we soon realised we were not going to be through kit check in time for the pre-race briefing. However, it was to be repeated at 8.30 in the morning, so we could attend that one. Passing kit check, I then was weighed and given a Tyvek wrist band with my bodyweight written on, as well as a wrist band for my place on the buses up to the start and one holding the dibber that would be used to record my arrival at each of the checkpoints. Additionally, a tracking device was attached to one of the shoulder straps on my backpack. We finally got through as the briefing finished. As Coniston was so crowded we hopped back into the car and returned to Ambleside to find somewhere to eat before I triple-checked I had everything ready, set two alarms and we went to bed.

I didn't need to be getting on the coach up to Dalemmain until after 9am, and the race briefing wasn't until 8.30, but my husband wanted to get down to Fell Foot parkrun, so the alarm woke us at 6.30 and by 7.15 we were on our way to Coniston once more. After he dropped me off, with my backpack plus a few extra items in my drop bag, I wandered into the marquee. Runners camping on site were breakfasting; some were even queuing up outside

for the showers. I spotted a runner I knew and we chatted for a few minutes before she wandered off in search of coffee and I found myself drawn to the screen where the progress of the 100-mile runners was being displayed. The front runners were not only well past Dalemmain but a couple of checkpoints further along, while the tail enders were several checkpoints further behind. I wondered whether I could sit or lie somewhere and have a snooze. I was offered the use of a tent but declined, thinking it would be too easy to sleep through both the briefing and the departure of the coaches, and made my way to the hall, where I greeted a few other runners and was just closing my eyes when we were kicked out by the organisers who wanted to prepare for the briefing! I did manage a very brief nap outside, then we were let back inside and the briefing began. About five to nine, near the end of the briefing, my telephone rang – Paula, acting as Run Director at Lloyd parkrun so I could run, evidently had a query. As quietly as I could I answered it and sorted out her problem. The briefing over, I apologised to a few nearby runners, explaining why I'd needed to answer the call, then joined the queues for first the portaloos and then the coaches.

The ride up to Dalemmain can be a bit boring, but I chatted a bit with the people sitting next to me and opposite, and ate a sandwich, since I would be running by lunchtime. At Dalemmain I had time to queue for the portaloos (again!) and apply glide stick and Vaseline in all the appropriate places, before deciding whether to take the third soft flask with or leave it in my drop bag (I decided to take it) and depositing the drop bag. This period was punctuated by a handbell being rung whenever a 100-runner came through, at which point we would all clap and cheer. About 11.15 I drifted to the start pen, carefully dibbing in at the entrance. A light rain started, leading to debates regarding donning a waterproof or windproof/showerproof or staying in just a T-shirt. I was regretting having forgotten my arm warmers.

The first 4 miles are a loop around the Dalemmain estate, to make the race distance up to 50 miles. I think I started a little too far back, as people in front of me were walking on even the mildest incline, and the long grass and uneven ground made it almost impossible to go around them. Finally we left the estate and headed through the fields towards Pooley Bridge. With so many people it was impossible to lose the way, although on the down side of this there were short queues to get through some of the kissing gates. Through Pooley Bridge with lots of people cheering us on, then along a quiet road before turning off onto the fells. It was still raining, but it was definitely too warm for waterproofs, although as we headed uphill a bit I did put my windproof on – and spent the rest of the race pulling it on and off as I tried to balance my temperature and avoid either overheating or excessive cooling while also not getting too wet, if possible.

I remembered this section reasonably well from the recce run – and with so many other runners it would have been hard to take the wrong path. We passed 100-mile runners every so often and always congratulated and encouraged them. Down into Howtown, the first checkpoint, where I dibbed in (important to do that first, so you can't forget), filled my soft flasks, ate a couple of orange quarters, and took a small pack of crisps to eat as I walked back up the slope.

Howtown to Mardale Head, the next section, is the longest distance between checkpoints (9.4 miles) and was the reason I'd decided to carry the third bottle of water, since I remembered another runner in 2013 who had run out of water a mile or two before Mardale Head and needed to borrow my emergency supply. It also includes the first long climb, up to the highest point on the course, over High Kop. I passed several people on the way up, one of whom made a pointed comment about people who didn't take the advice not to go too fast on the uphills early on, but I didn't feel like I was pushing myself, just trying to settle into a comfortable pace. As on the recce I didn't easily spot the path where we had to descend from Low Kop, and relied on following the other runners. With all the rain the descent was treacherous, sodden ground crumbling under feet to add to the hazards of rocks hidden by tall growths of bracken. The bracken did however sometimes provide a handhold when a



foot slipped on a slope. I tried to go a little faster and then tried to keep my legs underneath me and not let the rapid descent become a fall. One runner complemented me as I ran past him “way to descend!” “I wish!” I replied, “it’s more I-hope-I-regain-speed-control-soon!”

A sharp right turn at the bottom, with two spectators cheering us on, then we all settled into the flattish section contouring above Haweswater. On paper this looks like it should be runnable, but the path is strewn with rocks and punctuated by boulders. The rain meant that all the rocks were slippery. It’s single-track and if you catch someone up you have to wait until they find a good place where they can let you past. For quite a while I was at the front of a line of runners, not willing to go too fast but feeling pushed on by the people behind me. Suddenly my left foot plunged down as the saturated soil at the edge of the path gave way. My hands hit the ground and I levered myself back up and carried on. Having put my windproof on to cross High Kop I was now overheating, so when we reached a slightly wider bit of path I stepped to the uphill side and stopped to take it off, then merged once more into the line. It was a relief no longer being the front person. That path seems to be never-ending, but finally we were round the corner, over the footbridge, and turning the corner into the checkpoint.

Tea, coffee and soup were on offer, but I dibbed in, filled my water bottles (stuffing the third one away, as I was sure I wouldn’t need it on the rest of the course), ate some fruit and took some sandwiches (peanut butter, and jam) and crisps to eat on the next ascent.

The 6.5 miles from Mardale Head to Kentmere are basically one long ascent followed by a long runnable descent. There was a bit near the end where I wasn’t 100% sure I’d got the lefts and rights correct, but two people running as a mixed pair were very sure of the way and I followed them into the checkpoint, dibbing in before going up the steps and in. Hot food available again but I wanted to get in and out rapidly. I had a sore spot on my right foot, just below the tape covering an area I knew was prone to rub, so I took the shoe off, peeled back the sock and took a look. The skin was wet and wrinkled, but I couldn’t see anything, so I pulled the sock up, shook the shoe upside down in case of any tiny stones, pulled it back on and went on. 27.1 miles done – more than halfway.

Kentmere to Ambleside involves two ascents and descents. As I started out from the checkpoint I was pleased to have other runners in front to confirm I was on the right road, but I still kept checking the route book. I spotted the right-hand turn, we needed to take, signposted Troutbeck, while a small group ahead of me had gone straight on. “Stop!” I called, “This way!” and I pointed. Two of them stopped immediately and started calling to their companions who were a little further ahead down the wrong track (it’s nice to chat but you do have to keep navigating as well). Up and up a decent track, then down, down, down to Troutbeck.

Through Troutbeck and then up a seemingly-endless road (the roadbook says it’s only for 1.2 km, but it felt much longer) until the gate marked with a signpost for Ambleside. Then down on a pleasant runnable section across farm fields and into Skelghyll Woods for the descent to Ambleside. I remembered to take the slightly longer but easier track where the path split into two. My legs were feeling unexpectedly tired at this point and I took several short walking breaks of a hundred paces or so. Into Ambleside and lots of people were giving encouragement to weary runners. Best of all, as I ran down Vicarage Road and towards the checkpoint at the Parish Centre, I could see my husband, Aidan, waiting to meet me. A quick greeting, then I dibbed in and chose some sandwiches to eat – with a moment of alarm for one of the volunteers “are you bleeding?” – before I realised the red on my fingers was from the Skittles I had just spotted and eaten. I decided not to go into the Parish Centre, as I didn’t feel the need for any hot food or drinks.

Ambleside to Chapel Stile: 5.6 miles, 768 ft ascent, 699ft descent. Aidan walked with me through Rothay Park, and I paused under a tree to put my windproof back on, as the rain had restarted and I had started to cool down after the brief stop at the checkpoint. Then a quick kiss and I set off again, over the cattle grid, up the track and out onto the open fell of Loughrigg. Initially I was with two other runners, but they pulled ahead. I rather wished I'd managed to stay with them, as I remembered clearly that the directions as we came off the fell and towards Skelwith Bridge Hotel were ones that I'd never managed to get straight: I couldn't work out which bit was track versus road, and therefore couldn't work out the lefts and rights. Thankfully at this point the couple who had helped me before caught up again and they knew the way.

There's a good 2.3km along the river all the way to the Elterwater Car Park, and it was nice to run along there, with only a couple of very short walking breaks. I'd never previously run this section in daylight – which indicated I was definitely ahead compared to 2013. Arriving at the Chapel Stile checkpoint – a marquee in a field past a campsite – it was still light. As a bonus, there was a Portaloo!

Chapel Stile to Tilberthwaite: 6.5 miles, 1270 ft ascent/1060ft descent. Dusk was descending now, and it wasn't long before I stopped and put on my headtorch. I'd brought two, my Silva Ninox 3 (300 lumens), which I'd worn on the South Downs Way 100 and the Wendover Woods 50k, and a Petzl Tikka which I'd earned by being 1st VF50 at Wendover Woods 50K. The Tikka had seemed reasonably bright when I tried it at home, but I soon decided it wasn't particularly good for running and I wished I'd brought my older Silva Ninox 2 as backup instead. By now I was playing leapfrog with the helpful couple from earlier.

There's a part of this section where there's no obvious path and the directions basically say to head southwest and stay high on the contours – to avoid the worst of the bog. Obeying this, I spotted what looked like a light low and to the left (downhill). A few minutes later I saw another, then another – and realised that someone had marked the route with small stakes bearing tape/ribbon with reflective bits! The markers led directly to the unmanned dibbers (failure to dib in here meant disqualification) – which were being held by a friendly gentleman who had taken on himself to act as an unofficial volunteer, not only setting out those markers but also standing on this lonely bit of road for hours, holding the dibbers to make it easier for runners to dib in.

I thanked him and we ran on – down the road (and by this time a bit of road with no trip hazards was pleasant), then another fairly short uphill section before the descent to Tilberthwaite. The light of the checkpoint (a large tent) was visible for some time, looking close but then appearing to recede as the road bent away. In the light of my headtorch I spotted a toad in the middle of the road and stopped a moment to look at it, pointing it out to a couple of other runners. It hopped and one of the other runners commented “that's the first legs with spring in them that I've seen in some hours!” The road finally bent back towards the aid station and suddenly there it was, all lit up and welcoming.

Tilberthwaite to Coniston: 3.5 miles, 928 ft ascent, 1263 ft descent. Once again I got into and out of the checkpoint as fast as possible, although I did pause for long enough to dig out £1 for the charity box. Leaving the checkpoint we immediately ascended a tall stone staircase, the bottom of which had been decked out with glowsticks. The glowsticks finished but the steps went on, morphing into a steep stony path – with a couple of large boulders to climb over. It was hard at 47 miles and I really, really admired the 100-mile people who tackled this when they had already covered more than 100 miles (the Lakeland 100 actually being 105 miles long). I passed a few of those hardy souls on the ascent and encouraged them verbally. The path is mainly single-track and I was content to fall in behind about half a dozen other runners. I kept checking the route book, but was also reassured when the

runner directly in front of me said that his team mate just ahead had the route on GPS – although said team mate then muttered that the battery was going!

However, we kept on, up and up, then less steeply – which is when it started raining again – and then down and down on the long, long, long stony descent. My right knee had started to complain, so I was slowing a bit, but another runner came past and I found myself following her past Tim and Ian (the pair with the GPS) and onwards, down the trail, remembering not to take the first left fork, but then getting confused and taking the right at the next fork as well – where we should have gone left! So a bit of a detour, but thankfully we worked it out after only a couple of hundred yards out of our way.

Now it was time to run, or at least jog, down the track, past the Miner's Bridge, down the road and finally into Coniston, with marshals in yellow bibs making sure we went the right way through the town, and a considerable number of people still out and encouraging us. Over the river bridge, Left turn into Lake Road, right turn into John Ruskin School and through the finish arch: done! Except I wasn't quite – I still needed to dib in to get my official finish time. Then a volunteer led me onwards, through into the marquee, with cheering runners and supporters, and I was given my medal and my Finisher's T-shirt, and my race time breakdown, and hugged Aidan.

It was just before midnight: I had finished in 12:26:44, so although I hadn't finished in under 12 hours I had made it in before midnight, and taken 57 minutes off my time in 2013. The live tracking showed that I had moved steadily forward through the field for most of the race, as well as leapfrogging with a few people in the later stages.

I got a plate of hot food (initially just rice, as I wasn't sure about chili, even vegan chili, just then) and found space at a table to sit and eat, and get my wet shoes and socks changed for dry footwear (wonderful!), and put on the clothes that Aidan had brought, before I started getting chilled.

I watched out for other runners I knew, but sadly missed my navigationally-helpful running pair, who came in only minutes after me – I'd wanted to thank them for their help. After a bit I levered myself up from the table and we collected my drop bag and headed for the car and the drive back to the B&B in Ambleside, a hot shower, and bed.

As usual after a really tough long race I slept badly, my legs restless all night, but I was pleased to be able to walk okay down the three flights of stairs for breakfast. With a long drive ahead of us, back to Manchester (where we'd left our cat with my stepmother) and then back to Beckenham, I'd decided not to go to the awards ceremony, as that was at noon, back in Coniston. However, my stepmother sent a text saying I appeared to have come in 1st VW50, so we decided we ought to go after all! They make a big thing of the awards, and those of us collecting something were kept at the back of the packed hall and then called to walk, jog, dance or shuffle all the way down the aisle to the stage. There were awards for people who had completed the 100 five times – including, for the first time, two women – and for the youngest and oldest finishers, as well as the 1st to third for each of the two races and the age group winners. I now have a rather nice slab of Lakeland slate on my mantelpiece.

It was amazing to see Anna Troup getting her award for first woman in the 100, just two weeks after she was first woman in the Wendover Woods 100 – and she looked fresh and not at all tired!

The Lakeland 50 is a tough race, but it was very satisfying to improve my time so much, and amazing to get the age group win on a race that's rather special for me. Now I have to decide whether to tackle the 100...





## ROASTING ON THE RIDGEWAY CHALLENGE 86 (by Debra Bourne)

The Ridgeway Challenge 86 is a trail race along the Ridgeway (the oldest trail in the UK, 5000 years old) from Ivington Beacon north of Tring to Avebury Stones south of Swindon. I had great plans for the Ridgeway 86 this year. I was going to cut my half-way checkpoint time down from 40 to 15–20 minutes, stay awake and moving through the night, without any stops to nap, and hopefully take an hour, maybe even 90 minutes off my total time.

Plans are one thing, reality is another.

In the final days before the race, weather forecasts started showing amazing Bank Holiday weekend weather, with plenty of sunshine, blue skies, and temperatures reaching 30 °C. Great for a stroll, not so great for running 86 miles.

I was in the 12-noon start, but we left home at 6.45 so that Aidan could run Tring parkrun. It was already warm enough for shorts and T-shirt when we arrived in Tring and warmer by the time the parkrun finished. As I was on 99 parkruns and wanted to run my 100<sup>th</sup> at Lloyd parkrun, I had offered to be a “voluntourist”, and was given the Number Checker role. A great set of people at Tring parkrun, and they were having a Hawaiian-themed run. The course is out-and-back, with the first mile uphill, and after the downhill section a final little rise to the finish line. I will have to get there and run it sometime. Rather to my surprise, amongst the finishers I spotted someone I recognised – Matt Shields from Waterworks parkrun, Belfast, who I'd interviewed when writing my parkrun book! It was great to see him again. Another runner, Ashley, was running the Ridgeway 86, so of course we gave him a lift. On our way out of Tring we passed a number of runners – those from the 10am start.

We had stayed chatting for a while, so it was nearly 11am when we reached the Ivington Beacon car park. Time passed amazingly quickly while I was collecting my number, changing into my running vest and so on. Saw a few people I know, such as Richard Fox (Collingwood), James Elwood of Centurion Running, and three runners I know from Saxons, Vikings and Normans. I was still slathering on suncream when Race Director Tim Mitchell set off leading us to the start – a little below Ivington Beacon, due to erosion issues. In the pre-race briefing Tim stressed that it was going to be hot and strongly suggested that we take it easy in the first half, until it cooled down.



With 2 10-in-10 buddies (photo by Robert Treadwell)



We set off and it was soon clear that Tim had, if anything, UNDERstressed the heat. We were roasting out there and I could feel my pace dropping while the effort level remained high. Normally on an ultra it's "run the flats and downhill, power hike (aka walk) the uphill", with the degree of incline that counts for walking rather than running decreasing over time, but it was so hot that it was hard to run even on the slightest incline. On the tarmac road sections, with the heat reflecting off the surface, I found myself walking on some sections that had such a minor incline they might as well have been flat. At some points it was seriously difficult to keep putting one foot in front of the other even at a walk. Any section that was through woodland was very welcome – shade and slightly cooler air: fantastic! Rare breezes were also very much appreciated.

It was 10.5 miles to Checkpoint 1 and I was glad that I had decided to hand-carry a third 500ml soft flask to supplement the two in pockets on the front of the backpack. Normally I expect to get through maybe 500ml per 5 miles, but I was well down on the third flask, and would have had an uncomfortable time without the additional fluid. I know some people are good at taking in huge volumes at checkpoints, but I prefer to sip little and often – although there were some times during this race when I found myself gulping more than usual at one time, which at one point led to my running out shortly before the next checkpoint. Another indication of the heat was that when I finished the first half-pack of Kendal Mint Cake (my preferred basic energy source for long runs, rather than gels) and dug the unopened pack out of my backpack, it had melted into a semi-solid lump slumped in the bottom of the packet! At the checkpoints I really didn't feel like eating in that heat and only the fruit looked any good to me, so I mostly ate orange, sometimes banana or watermelon, and if I could see them then I took a handful of pretzels with to eat later. I always tried to make myself take a couple of jam sandwich quarters as well and nibble them as I set off again.

As is common in these races, I found myself passing and re-passing people and starting to recognise their backpacks, headwear and so on – but (as is also normal!) not really their faces. Depending on times spent at checkpoints, people can drop behind, or you can catch someone up, and if you notice you've not seen someone for a while you often don't know if they are in front of you or behind – or indeed have dropped out.

There were some amazing views at high points, and I stopped at one of them to dig out my phone and take some photos.



There were numerous times when it would have been very, very easy to decide to give up, to just get to the next checkpoint, sit down and stop moving, wait for a van to take me to a cooler place. I reminded myself that if I quit simply because I felt hot and tired, rather than due to real injury or serious illness, then I would feel awful later, and the regret would last a lot longer than the current discomfort. I reminded myself that this was marathon/ultra 93 and it wouldn't count towards the 100 Marathon Club if I didn't finish (and told myself to ignore the little voice pointing out I could find a marathon or short ultra later in the year which would be easier). I kept going.

The Devil's Dyke section – mostly single-track through woodland – was easier than I remembered it being – possibly the paths of Wendover Woods have changed my perspective regarding 'lots of tree roots', also last year I'd been trying to run faster than I could manage this year. However, I reached it later, so had to stop part way through and don my headtorch – last year I hadn't needed that until leaving Goring at halfway. The air temperature was finally beginning to drop, and dropped further on the stretch through the river meadows heading towards Goring – I'd never realised before running ultras how much cooler it is near a river, very noticeable at night.

Into the Goring checkpoint for a welcome break. I set my watch to charge from my powerbank (it was down to 43%), ordered food (I chose baked potato with lentil ragu – delicious) and a cup of tea, then went to visit the toilets and change my running top. Sat down to eat and changed my socks while I did so. One runner, I was told, had tucked in a corner and was having a good sleep! I forced myself to leave as soon as I had eaten and repacked my drop bag, although I was tempted to stay a bit longer and get the watch charge up further, as it was only on 67%. I hoped that would be enough, but feared it wouldn't.

Head torch back on and I set off once more. This section was roads, lanes, tracks of chalk and flint, and seemed to be all uphill. Looking at the route profile, the first half is very much undulating up and down, with some decent hills to climb, but some good downhill also, and net downhill. The section after Goring is net uphill, with few real declines before the second-last Checkpoint. I'd hoped that, having been slower in the first half, I'd have more energy and be able to run faster in the second half, but I felt really drained.

On SDW100 I'd found it was much easier to keep going overnight in company, and I hoped I might find some on this race as well. I caught up with a couple of guys soon after leaving Goring and they said I could stay with them, but their walking pace was too fast for me, while I was wanting to jog (it really wasn't running by this time) more than they were doing, so I went on alone. I started getting sleepy, and was regretting having changed from a vest top to a T-shirt, as I was still getting too hot. At one point I sat down for a couple of minutes just to cool my legs down on the grass. Some time later a runner hailed me "Is that Debra? It's Tara." We'd met before, and now we continued together.

The downsides to running with someone else are that you might want to spend less time at checkpoints than they do, and you end up stopping if either of you wants to stretch or dig for something in your backpack. The upsides are a reduced risk of falling asleep, and that you keep each other moving. Tara is a bit taller than me and her uphill walking pace was slightly faster, so I had to put in bits of deliberately faster walking to keep up, which improved my uphill speed (and there was a lot of uphill); I think I encouraged her to run/jog more than she would have done alone, so overall we almost certainly kept moving better than either of us would have alone.

My pulled hamstring, which Alan had tended a week earlier, had twinged occasionally early on, but settled down. Now my legs – especially glutes hamstrings and calves – all simply felt



solidly tired. Towards the end my feet also began to feel sore – no obvious pain points, just fed up of the pounding on hard surfaces.

Checkpoints came and went – there was a volunteer at one of them who knew me from Comrades – and finally we were at the second-last checkpoint, with only 16 miles to go: about 10 miles to the final checkpoint at Banbury Castle, then 6 miles to Avebury. The first streaks of colour had been visible in the sky behind us for a little while, and now we were able to take out headtorches off (despite the leaving-checkpoint sign saying “Headtorches ON now”. It was lovely to hear the dawn chorus and watch colour returning to the world, and to see the sunrise.



We finally hit a long downhill section. “Bound to be an uphill after this” said Tara – and with castles usually being built on hills I was sure she was right. Over a road – where a car driver asked if we know which way to go to reach the golf club (we didn’t) – then into the final long climb up to Banbury Castle checkpoint, which was just a slog – up and up and up – and not a gentle incline, either. I remembered walk-jogging this section last year. This year there was no chance of anything other than a walk except on some of the rare downhill sections. About two thirds of the way up we were overtaken by young Ashley, looking bright and cheerful – and RUNNING up the hill, having evidently been well refreshed by his 2-hour break at Goring – the resilience of the young!

Nothing looked appetizing out of the food on offer – no fruit other than mini-boxes of raisins, so I refilled water bottles and took one of those boxes plus a slice of bread to nibble. I sent a text to Aidan with an ETA.

Just six miles to go – two parkruns – although I estimated it was going to take us a couple of hours. At least there would be more downhill than uphill. Onwards! We walked a lot of the

time, interspersed with slow and weary jogging: “this bit looks okay – shall we try to jog to that tree?” Like last year, it seemed the turn down into Avebury would never come, but at least this time I was expecting that – and I now could recognize Avebury from the Ridgeway, so I knew when we were approaching. We were walking a bit with a couple of the 10am starters when looking ahead I saw a large black-on-yellow arrow by a fingerpost, pointing right: yes! The two Vegan Runners reached it and took the turning. We reached it and turned down. Tara was not sure – her eTrex showed us off course. I couldn’t check on my Garmin, as the battery had given out just before several miles earlier. I looked at the screen “it’s just showing the rest of the Ridgeway, and we’ve come off that now – this is right, even if I remembered gravel and it’s grass!”. The two 10-am starters caught us up and one of them confirmed – her Garmin said we were on the correct route as well. Back to the walk-jog down the path, which was getting quite painful for Tara due to blisters. Up the last little rise, then down, across the road, and a final slow side-by-side jog down to the finish ribbon. Done.

We were handed our medals, Tara did a press-up for the camera (although she could barely manage to get into press-up position, never mind actually do a press-up). I was given a second medal for the Trail Running Association Championships – Ultra Distance – and was surprised given my slow time, but pleased, that it was gold, for first F50!

Inside and finally we could sit down, eat (baked beans on toast for me), drink a wonderful mug of tea, and relax. I spent a nice time chatting with other runners, including a couple of SVN runners who had been on the 10am start, and a woman whose shirt indicated she’d been part of the UK “Last Man Standing” earlier in the year – she said it was a nice woodland course but a very strange event, with much more of a competitive feel than most ultras (most of which have a very friendly vibe). I got changed – cleaning my feet and changing into sandals felt particularly good, although I found I had one small blister at the end of a toe.

Aidan arrived and we set off home, via Reading to drop off Ashley.

It was a very, very tough challenge this year. One simple statistic says a lot: there were 163 starters and only 99 made it to the finish: that’s a 39% drop-out rate (last year it was 24%) – the highest since the race began. I finished in 22:39:54, versus last year’s 21:32, but the winner took 15 hours rather than the expected 13, so I didn’t do so badly. Where ultras are concerned the conditions make a huge difference. I started the Ridgeway Challenge 86, 2019 edition, and I finished it: challenge met!



(The detail on the medal is lovely – shows the route profile, the sun-moon-sun and the start, middle and finish locations).



## READERS' RECIPES

## A TRIPLE CHOCOLATE MUFFIN RECIPE (by Mick George)

Whenever I make cakes for the many, I keep it simple: muffins and loaf cakes, it travels well and it keeps all in one piece. It's also a very good way to encourage young children to get involved and have fun baking. This chocolate muffin I do intend to bake for the Switchback 5, I'd encourage that you should try it for yourselves, but be quick , as it tastes very yummy and it goes like super 'lightning.'

### Ingredients:



### Method:

Add all of the ingredients as shown into a large bowl making sure the mixture is chunky and not too moist. Using an ice cream scoop transfer the mix, in equal amounts, to the butterfly cases and then bake them in the centre of a preheated oven at 200deg/Gas6/fan oven

180deg for 20mins until well risen. Leave for about 15mins as the mixture is quite tender, then place onto a wire rack to cool.



#### Conclusion:



#### Tip:

They freeze well but must be consumed within one month. My experience is a family can get through 10-12 in a day. Definitely a muffin to eat while still warm and the chocolate is gooey.



# 10 YEARS AGO: THE BIRTH OF ROUNDSHAW PARKRUN

(by Robin Jamieson)

The launch of parkrun at Roundshaw Downs came about almost by chance. I have been looking back at the emails that led up to it and here is a brief diary of events.

**December 12th 2008** – Bill Rixon of L&G Kingswood, across the fields from Banstead Woods, emails Paul Sinton-Hewitt, the founder of parkrun, to suggest they reschedule the Saturday morning Banstead 5K Time Trial from 9:00am to 10:00 am as he lives in Croydon and can't get out of bed in time! Paul's reply is a polite no with a copy to Chris Phelan, Director of the Banstead event. Chris suggests the solution would be an event at Lloyd Park, run by Striders.

**December 17th** – Bill forwards mails to Simon Ambrosi who forwards to Chris Morton. He replies, copy to me, nice idea but would require huge commitment from Striders and our experience with Croydon Council was that we would only get permission at a price. Quite true, however as I am writing my piece for the Xmas newsletter I mention it and get a couple of positive responses from Alan Dolton and Yasmin Anderson so think I will pursue it and see what happens.

**December 23rd** – I mail Chris Phelan for more info, he replies he would get back to me after Christmas.

Silence

**February 22nd** – Chris finally replies with more info which suggests to me it might be easier than we think to get it off the ground.

**February 28th** – I have never run Banstead as for the last forty years I have been committed to taking Mrs Jamieson shopping on a Saturday morning, however with perfect timing she is asked to work on a Saturday (a very rare event) so I register with parkrun and go along to Banstead. The very first person I meet in the car park turns out to be Chris Phelan! I did the run (pretty average 22:51) and met up with Chris Phelan and Chris Wright (at the time the only paid employee of parkrun). They are under pressure to reduce numbers at Banstead as the woods are an SSI, and I conclude it is definitely worth giving it a go provided I can find an accurate 5k course and get permission from Croydon Council. I spend Saturday afternoon with Google Earth. Conveniently one lap round the top of Lloyd Park avoiding football pitches and Frisbee Golf is 2.5K, at the time a bit boggy but not impossible.

**March 4th** – I email Victoria Pitt, our contact at the time at the Council, to see if there was any chance we would get permission.

**March 6th** – She replies fine go ahead!!!!

**During March** – Lloyd Park gets progressively more and more boggy; I ask the council if they have any plans to improve the drainage? No. Could we use the lower field (our one-mile circuit) No it's a conservation area; I ask parkrun if they were interested in a seasonal event. No. it has to be year-round; I look at South Norwood Park. It is just as wet and difficult to fit the distance in.

**Mid-March** – I give up.

**March 23rd** – I attend a Croydon Athletics Network meeting organised by England Athletics with SLH, Croydon Harriers and other sport representatives at Taverner House. Nothing to do with parkrun but under AOB I mention I had been investigating a possible event but was giving up on Lloyd Park. Mike Fleet of Croydon Harriers suggests Roundshaw Downs as a possibility: they used to run schools' cross-country races there. As a relative newcomer (1996) to Croydon I have never heard of the place!

**During April** the focus is on the Race for Life and holidays, but sometime during the month I find Roundshaw, i.e. Croydon Airport, on Google Earth and see that you might be able to fit a 2.5K route into it. I drive up to have a look and struggle to find a way onto it! Since it was nothing like as practical as a purely Striders' event I put the whole thing on hold.



**Mid-April** – Anita Afonso joins the parkrun team – she mails me for an update on progress with Lloyd Park, as Banstead are having more problems with Nature Conservancy.

**April 28th** – We agree Lloyd Park is a no-go and I suggest they might like to look at Roundshaw, and offer to do a recce for them.

**May 7th** – I finally go for a walk round Roundshaw following a route I worked out on Gmap which almost exactly followed the perimeter. Lovely open grass land with reasonably wide paths but some complicated paths round trees in the far corner and a boggy section used as a bike dirt track so badly rutted people had laid planks across it. On the ground I can see no obvious alternative. Back home I have another look at Google Earth and see there was another path through the woods. I re-drew the route to cut out the bogs and the complicated bit and it still makes a 2.5K route.

**May 11th** – go for a jog round my revised route – not bad at all – and I realise there is loads of parking space on Airport Way.

**May 14th** – Afternoon I meet up with Anita and Chris Wright and walk round with them. Glorious weather, amazing views over Croydon and London and they think it is excellent. Thursday evening I meet up with Chris Phelan who is cycling home from Reigate and run round with him. He thinks it's excellent. We call in at Dragons Gym on the off chance it could be race HQ. The Manager welcomes us with open arms and offers use of their facilities for post-event drinks etc.

**May 16th** – Roundshaw Downs is half Croydon half Sutton. Croydon give me OK for their half and provided contact names in Sutton. Sutton are a bit concerned as it is a nature reserve.

**May 18th** – Speak to Bill Wyatt of Sutton and got provisional approval but he wants a meeting on site.

**June 4th** – Meet with Bill Wyatt, and all the parkrun team for another walk round the route. Another glorious day. I have yet to see Roundshaw in the rain. Everyone agrees it should go ahead. Launch date proposed for 18th July. Other than passing on Croydon's crazy permissions documents and providing some input to the new Roundshaw website, things then go quiet for me. By early July we have a dozen volunteers from Striders and about the same from the Banstead team.

**July 13th** – A group of us meet Paul S-H to do a pilot run and learn about the technology. I finally meet Bill Rixon who started it all.

**July 14th** – I measure the route with a wheel. The route I had plotted on Gmap is only 2 metres short.

**July 18th** – The inaugural event in glorious sunshine.



**The start of an early Roundshaw parkrun**



*(This article originally appeared in the August 2009 club magazine, but is republished here – in a slightly revised form – for the benefit of newer Striders. The editor is impressed that Robin, who was over 60 when he wrote this, considered his parkrun time of 22:51 to be “pretty average”. Subsequently, Lloyd parkrun started in October 2010 and South Norwood parkrun started in July 2017.)*



## **BOOK REVIEW – RUN FAST (3rd edition)**

**(by Hal Higdon: reviewed by Alan Dolton)**

Hal Higdon placed fifth in the 1964 Boston Marathon in a personal best of 2 hours 21 minutes 55 seconds (which is more than ten minutes faster than Striders' club record). In January 1981, at the age of 49, he won the M45 marathon at the World Masters Championships in New Zealand, recording 2 hours 29 minutes 27. He has also won three gold medals in the steeplechase at the World Masters Championships, his first being in 1975 in the M40 age-group, and his final one being in July 1991 in the M60 age-group.



**Hal Higdon (wearing no 13) in the 1964 Boston Marathon**

In 1992 he wrote the first edition of his book entitled 'Run Fast', which concentrated primarily on training for the 5K and 10K. A second edition followed in 2000, and he has now written a third edition. The subject matter of the book overlaps to some extent with 'Daniels' Running Formula', which I reviewed in the June 2014 issue of this magazine, and 'Faster Road Racing' by Pfitzinger and Latter, which I reviewed in the June 2018 issue of this magazine. However Higdon's book is rather more anecdotal, and contains fewer detailed tables, than the other two. Runners who want specific training schedules, and tables advising them precisely how fast to do their varying types of training, are more likely to prefer Daniels' book, but runners who are looking for inspiration rather than detailed training advice may well prefer Higdon's.

In the first chapter of the book, Higdon observes that among the ways that runners can improve their race times are adding speedwork, finding training partners, joining a running club and finding a coach. These suggestions are expanded on in later chapters of the book. Subsequent chapters cater for novice runners and for intermediate runners, focusing on 5K races. Higdon recommends that runners should run slowly for the majority of their long runs, but should practise increasing the pace during the final quarter of the run. He recommends that runners aiming to run a fast 5K should do a weekly speed session including short-distance repetitions ranging from 200 metres to 400 metres, as well as a weekly run at a fast continuous pace. A chapter on training for races at 8 kilometres (or five miles) is followed by a chapter entitled 'good form', advising runners how they may be able to avoid wasting energy by running with a more economical technique.

In the middle portion of the book, Higdon discusses repetition training (which involves fast repetitions with a relatively long recovery period between reps) and interval training (where



the repetitions are run at a slower pace with a short recovery interval between reps). He observes that from the 1930s to the early 1950s, most American coaches recommended the former type of training, but that in the later 1950s, influenced by European coaches such as Woldemar Gerschler and Mihaly Igloi, interval training became more popular. The chapter in which Higdon discusses interval training, entitled 'the magic workout', is 29 pages long and is the longest chapter in the book. Higdon comments that "the best venue for interval training is the track" but that training on the track too frequently can lead to boredom, and that doing very long track sessions such as 70 x 300m or 50 x 400m (both of which Higdon experimented with when he was younger) can produce imbalance injuries from "the stress of going around tight turns on a track".



**Higdon recommends that runners should do regular track sessions**

Subsequent chapters discuss training for the 10K, 'speed play' (also known by the Swedish term 'fartlek'), pure speed and flexibility. These are followed by a chapter on training for races at 15K (apparently more common in the USA than in the UK, where race directors almost all seem to prefer 10 miles to 15K). This is the longest distance that Higdon covers in this book: he has written separate books covering the half-marathon and the marathon.

Chapters discussing hill training and strength training are followed by the penultimate chapter in the book, entitled 'the polishing touch'. This recommends that runners should seek the advice of an experienced coach, set realistic goals and keep a training diary. Higdon comments that "good coaches have been compared to chefs. They know how to mix the different ingredients." He also observes that "most runners maintain logs or diaries, on paper or online, but they don't always know how to interpret accumulated information. A coach, based upon his experience with many athletes, can evaluate training from an unbiased point of view."

The final chapter, entitled 'ready to race', includes advice about warming up for a race, and about how to recover after a race.

The book includes advice from several American runners of differing backgrounds, and is therefore generally less prescriptive than the Daniels and Pfitzinger books which I have reviewed earlier. Personally I agree with most (although not all) of the advice contained in the book, and I would definitely recommend this book to other Striders who are hoping to improve their speed at races of 10K and below.

## COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: JUNE – AUGUST 2019

Three Striders won medals at the Surrey Masters Track & Field Championships, at Kingsmeadow on 2 June. Sandra Francis did very well to win gold in the W60 200 metres (37.85) and long jump (3.35), and also took silver in the 100 metres (17.31). Striders' oldest competitor, 79-year-old Kevin Burnett, won three gold medals in the M75 shot, hammer and discus, while Alan Dolton took silver in the M60 800 metres and 1500 metres.

On the same day, Striders had 22 finishers in the Dorking 10-mile road race. Alastair Falconer ran well to place 41st of the 514 finishers, recording 61 minutes 51 seconds. Martin Filer was next home in 61st (63:46), while Steve Corfield had an excellent run to set a new club over-55 record of 65 minutes 53, placing 86th overall. For Striders' women, Rachel Lindley was the 13th woman to finish (67:55), while Jemma Zakariyyau was 27th (70:59).

In the South Downs Way 100-mile race on 8 June, Debra Bourne finished in 25 hours 17 minutes 12, which is believed to be the fastest that any Strider has run 100 miles (although our records of 'ultra-distance' races are incomplete).

In the Richmond 10-kilometre road race on 16 June, Striders were led by Andrew Aitken who placed 41st of the 575 finishers (36:12), while Graeme Drysdale was 89th (38:24) and John Summers 124th (39:35). Jemma Zakariyyau was the 18th woman to finish, recording 40 minutes 39 seconds, lifting her to seventh place in Striders' all-time women's rankings.

The third and final Southern Veterans League match of the season took place at Croydon Arena on 8 July (the match scheduled for Walton in June had been cancelled because of torrential rain). Striders' men did very well to place second of the eight clubs in the match, and also finished second in the South London Division for the first time in the club's history. Their women were fifth in the match, and finished fourth in the division. Rachel Lindley had an excellent run to set a club record of 5 minutes 30.1 for the women's mile, finishing second in the race, just six-tenths of a second behind the winner. There were also club age-group records for Lee Flanagan in the M45 one mile (5:11.2), Steve Corfield in the M55 one mile (5:24.2), Neil Riches in the M55 shot (7.51) and Linda Daniel in the W55 400 metres (87.8).

In the Wendover 50K on 12 July, Debra Bourne was first in the W50 age-group, recording 7 hours 10 minutes 11 seconds. In the Elmbridge 10-kilometre road race on 21 July, Andrew Aitken ran well to place 35th of the 602 finishers (36:14), while Steve Massey was 137th (41:35), John Summers 141st (41:47) and Andrew Pickering 147th (41:49). Jemma Zakariyyau was the 20th woman to finish (42:58), with Niamh Vincent 24th (43:26), Jennifer Gutteridge 48th (47:02) and Alexandra Legge 95th (52:44). In the Lakeland 50-mile race on 27 July, Debra Bourne was first in the W50 age-group, recording 12 hours 26 minutes 44.

In the British Masters Championships at Birmingham on 10 August, Sandra Francis did very well to win a bronze medal in the W60 long jump, recording 2 metres 99 in wet and windy conditions. She placed fourth in both the W60 100 metres (17.26) and 200 metres (37.06).

In the Wimbledon 5K on 11 August, Steve Corfield was 58th (19:20), John O'Mahony 71st (20:08), Andrew Pickering 77th (20:49) and Peter Johnson 85th (21:06). Niamh Vincent was the 16th woman to finish (20:53), with Amanda Hewett 46th (24:24) and Alex Legge 55th (25:33). In the final Surrey Road League tables, Striders' women placed ninth while our men were thirteenth. Individually, Jemma Zakariyyau placed second in the senior women's table.

On 25 August, Debra Bourne was first W50 in the Ridgeway 86-mile race (22:39:54), which incorporated the Trail Running Association ultradistance championships.

## 20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 1999

The Surrey Road Relays were held at Wimbledon on 11 September. Herne Hill won the men's event, while South London Harriers won the veterans' race and also won the women's race. Striders entered this event for the first time. Our over-40 team placed fifth. Bob Ewen ran well to take second place on the first leg (16:19). He was followed by John McGilvray (17:21), John Kirby (17:20) and Alan Dolton (17:47). Our men's team were 14th, their fastest runners being Tony Sheppard (15:39) and Oloff Van Zyl (16:56).

Striders held the eighth annual 'Switchback' race on 25 September, ably organised by Jane Lansdown. The first three finishers were all from Box Hill Racers, with Paul Haywood first, Mike Airey second and Dave Morris third. Bob Ewen ran very well to be the first veteran, placing fourth overall. He was followed by John Kirby (11th), Peter Yarlett (12th), Simon Smith (15th), John McGilvray (18th), Alan Dolton (20th) and Nigel Davidson (25th). The first woman to finish was Meredith Pannett of Dulwich, who ran very well to place eighth overall. She was followed by Holland Sports' two leading women: Sara Stoddart placed 19th with Maggie Statham 21st. There were 57 finishers.

The Surrey Veterans Championships were held at Petersham on 9 October. Carol McKinley-Evans of South London Harriers won the women's race, while Herne Hill won the team event. Two Striders ran, with Barbara Gambrell placing 34th and Michele Lawrence 42nd. The men's race was won by Jim Estall of Belgrave, while South London Harriers won the team event. Striders placed ninth, led by John McGilvray in 61st place.

Striders' men competed in the opening Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three match at Epsom Downs on 16 October, placing fifth in the match. Tony Sheppard led the team in 10th place, with Eric Parker our second scorer in 34th. They were followed by Oloff van Zyl and Ken Low, both making their Surrey League debuts, while our fifth scorer was the improving Neil Furze.

The seventeenth Croydon 10K took place on the following day. Dave Taylor of Blackheath gained a comfortable win in 31 minutes 36, well ahead of second-placed Ray Marriott of South London Harriers (34:15). Julian Dillow of Croydon Harriers placed third (34:35). Striders' first finisher was Alan Dolton, who was 21st (38:07). The first woman to finish was Caroline Horne of Shaftesbury Barnet, who placed 20th in 38 minutes 01. South London Harriers provided the next two women, with Gill O'Connor 24th (38:29) and Viv Mitchell 29th (39:14). Striders' Jane Lansdown placed 31st (39:20).

In the opening Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Milford on 23 October, Jane Lansdown ran very well to place third. Our other scorers were Diane Ballard (27th), Kate Potter (38th), Linda Daniel (49th) and Lyn Simmons (50th).

Striders finished fourth in the East Surrey League's annual cross-country race at Lloyd Park on 30 October. Tony Sheppard was our first finisher in 8th place, with Gerry Crispie 21st and Nigel Davidson 22nd. On 6 November Striders placed a respectable 12th in the Reigate Priory Relays; our fastest laps came from Bob Ewen (15:09) and Tony Sheppard (15:11).

On 20 November Striders' men finished a disappointing seventh in the Surrey League at Richmond Park, where our first finisher was again Tony Sheppard. On 11 December Striders' men faced a tough course at Hindhead which included a climb up the Devil's Punch Bowl on each lap. We placed seventh of the nine clubs, leaving us dangerously close to the relegation zone. Tony Sheppard again led us home in 17th place, but nobody else made the top 30.



## SWITCHBACK 1999



**Meredith Pannett on her way to winning the women's race  
(photo by Tony Sheppard)**



## 10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 2009

Bill Makuwa made an excellent return from injury to gain his second successive win in the annual Switchback five-mile cross-country race on 27 September. He broke away from the field along with local rival Mike Cummings of Herne Hill Harriers and held on to win in exactly 29 minutes, just one second ahead of Mike. Iain Harrison was fourth (31:03) and Tony Sheppard fifth (31:17), ensuring that Striders won the team prize.

Striders produced an excellent team performance to win the Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match at Esher on 10 October. Our total of 248 points put us well ahead of second-placed Dorking (316). Striders were led by Duncan Lancashire who placed third of the 148 finishers, covering the undulating five-mile course in 27 minutes 56. Justin Macenhill finished sixth (28:18) and Matt Morgan eighth (28:51). Lee Flanagan, making his Surrey League debut, ran well for 15th (29:16), two places and two seconds ahead of Abdul Rashid-Abdi. Steve Starvis was 26th (29:57) with Iain Harrison 28th (30:10) and Tony Sheppard 34th (30:49). Taylor Huggins, making his cross-country debut, was 54th (32:03) while Chris Morton was 59th (32:20). Meanwhile, our women placed fifth in their Division Two match at Reigate. Helen Furze led the team home in fifteenth place, covering the four-mile course in 28 minutes 04. Faye Stammers also ran well for 19th (28:27) with Alice Ewen 26th (28:43), Suzy Yates 29th (29:17) and Kerry Backshell 39th (30:19).

The Surrey Veterans Cross-Country Championships took place at Richmond Park on 17 October. Bob Ewen placed sixth in the M50 age-group in 39 minutes 48, while David Batten was seventh in the M55 age-group (42:43).

On 18 October, in the 34th annual Croydon 10K road race, our women's team came first while our men's team placed second, behind Belgrave. Our men were led by Richard Lee-Smith, who finished eighth in a personal best of 35 minutes 54. Iain Harrison was tenth (36:35), while former winner Tony Sheppard was fourteenth overall (36:51) and third in the over-40 category. Our women were led by Cara Kayum who placed seventh in the women's race in 43 minutes 30. Karen Stretch was 13th (45:28) and Karen Knight 14th (46:31).

In the Surrey Cross-Country League matches at Dorking on 14 November, Striders' men extended their lead at the top of Division Two with their second successive win, finishing 15 points ahead of second-placed Dorking. We had three of the first four finishers. Justin Macenhill produced an outstanding run to take second place, covering the muddy five-mile course in 28 minutes 53. Matt Morgan was third (28:58) and Duncan Lancashire fourth (29:01). Lee Flanagan was ninth (29:40) with Mick Turner 40th (32:09), Richard Lee-Smith 43rd (32:22), Taylor Huggins 54th (32:42), Barry White 55th (32:42), Matthew Chapman 63rd (33:02) and Paul Stanford 64th (33:03). Our women also did well to place third in their match. They were again led by Helen Furze, who finished fourth, covering the muddy four-mile course in 25 minutes 55. Alice Ewen was 16th (27:16) while Karen Knight was 30th (28:36), Faye Stammers 32nd (28:43) and Suzy Yates 38th (29:25).

In the third round of Division Two of the Surrey Cross-Country Leagues, on 12 December, our men finished a close third on our home course at Lloyd Park, but remained narrowly on top of the overall Division Two table. Our first man home was Matt Morgan, who ran well to place sixth, covering the muddy five-mile course in 31 minutes 01. Lee Flanagan placed 14th (31:57) with Tyler O'Callaghan 17th (32:14), Richard Lee-Smith 25th (32:58) and Steve Starvis 32nd (33:25). Meanwhile our women were at Richmond Park, finishing fourth in the match but holding onto third place in the overall Division Two table. Helen Furze was sixth, covering the five-mile course in 33 minutes 17. Suzy Yates was 19th (36:08) with Faye Stammers 28th (37:10), Alice Ewen 34th (37:25) and Josephine Thompson 35th (37:26).

## **SURREY ROAD RELAY 2009**



**Our women's team in the 2009 Surrey Road Relay at Wimbledon  
Left to right: Natalie Osher, Josephine Thompson, Alice Ewen, Karen Knight**



**Alice Ewen takes over from Natalie Osher**

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