

Striders of Croydon

DECEMBER 2020 MAGAZINE



James Rhodes competing at Battersea Park on 15 September
(photo by Belgrave Harriers)

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2021

Sat 9 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Lloyd Park (tbc)
Sat 16 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – venue tbc
Sat 16 Jan – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – venue tbc
Sat 13 Feb – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – Lloyd Park (tbc)
Sat 13 Feb – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – Mitcham (tbc)
Sat 20 Feb – Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships – Morden Park (tbc)
Sat 6 March – British Masters Indoor Championships – Lee Valley



Striders' competitors at Battersea Park on 31 October.
Left to right: James Rhodes, Steve Massey, Nikki Javan, Phil Coales

CHAIR'S CORNER DECEMBER 2020

Welcome to the Winter edition of our magazine.

It certainly feels unusual to start to reflect on the last year as, although with hopeful news of vaccines now being approved, we still have a few uncertain months to get through both as a club and in our wider lives.

That said, we should take the time to reflect on how well we have supported each other in difficult times and how we have adapted to change with very much a can-do attitude.

This was especially reflected in our 'virtual' marathon day at Kenley aerodrome in October. In challenging conditions, the community spirit of Striders really shone through with all of the amazing supporters and runners and many marathon PBs!!!

As we emerge out of the second lockdown, many thanks to Paul Cripps for arranging the Run Every Day challenge during this period. Well done to all who took part and congratulations to the eventual winner Nick Fiander.

In this edition we have our usual range of informative, inspiring and diverse articles for your reading pleasure.

James Rhodes began the year looking forward to a trip of a lifetime to the Tokyo Olympics. Making the best of changed circumstances he applied further focus to his training, track racing in Europe and locally, scoring some impressive PBs including a new Striders record for the mile.

Despite her numerous long-distance running achievements, Debra Bourne continues to set more goals and takes on the Centurion Autumn 100 mile with the aim of completing in under 24 hours.

Susan Haynes takes on her first triathlon, diving head-first into the IronMaori Half Ironman.

Mick George puts pen to paper to reflect on the joys of running and other sports participation, including his 30 years and counting as a Strider.

Alan Dolton provides his expert advice for training for a quick 10k or 10 miles, and also gives us his usual comprehensive round-up of competitive highlights over the last quarter and of yesteryear.

Best wishes for the festive period and continued safe running.

Tony



2020: LOCKDOWNS AND PERSONAL BESTS (by James Rhodes)

12:02 AM, 1 January 2020: I tweeted "*Happy Olympics Year!*". As anyone who's met me knows, athletics defines a large part of my life, whether as a fan, photographer or slightly-above-average runner, and 2020 was going to be a big year for me. You see, it's not just elite athletes that centre their dreams and motivations around the Olympics, fans do too. I'd saved up for the past six years, got tickets for every athletics session, and agreed an extended break from work. I was finally going to the Olympics, seeing people whose careers I'd supported since day one at the biggest competition of their life, the (literal) countdown was on! Simultaneously, over the summer of 2019 I had discovered a real love for racing. I've always run, sometimes more consistently than others, but there was a step-change last year and I was excited to grow and test myself as an athlete. So much so that on New Year's Eve I made a list of personal running goals – some minor, some very ambitious. I was motivated and ready.

We all know what happened next.

In the space of a few days in mid-March my life and routine went from club group training three times a week, whether that be Alan's track sessions on Tuesdays, 19:30 club runs on a Wednesday or the joint Striders/Harriers sessions on Thursdays, and planning races; working in an office with friends; and counting down to an Olympics-infused adventure in Japan... to nothing. Compared to the wider world – rising death tolls, a stretched NHS, and vulnerable people forced into isolation – **I knew this wasn't that important; but my life, or escape from life, was no longer there** and the apparent frivolity of it made it that much harder to talk about.

After the initial frustration/sadness/stress about how much money I might lose and whether Tokyo 2021 was a-go (a trip to the Olympics, especially in Tokyo, isn't cheap; luckily I had booked some hospitable hotels that were happy to refund non-refundable bookings), it didn't take long to find some positives. I couldn't control external factors, so why worry? Plus, an extra year of saving could enhance a Japanese trip in 2021. I also got to reevaluate myself as an athlete.

Lockdown meant I was no longer spending two hours a day commuting, and with my other pastimes (theatre, film, Friday night drinks) on hold, there was a chance to train properly. I viewed it as a form of elite-style-but-definitely-not-elite winter training block, with no defined end date, but cemented with a belief there'd be a chance to race and reap the rewards at some point in the year. I felt lucky to have this opportunity and didn't want to let it go to waste, so I trained like never before. The role Striders played in keeping me motivated cannot be understated, from Chris's weekly solo speed sessions and monthly virtual challenges to Lyes's quizzes and the social virtual catch ups, there was a real sense of community. I am sure many members can relate to this. It was also a chance to discover some of the areas essentially next door that I'd never been to – trails towards Biggin Hill (thanks Ally), the hills around Upper Norwood and Sydenham, and the Waterlink Way. Who knew there were so many nice running routes around Croydon?!

Each month I increased my mileage, culminating with over 400km in July – almost double what I had reached in any of the build ups to my three marathons. Each good run added to the motivation; I was ready.

My first race was actually a 5000m – my preferred distance – in Holland in early August. With no prospect of racing in England at the time, particularly at my favoured distance, I looked abroad with guidance from some elite athletes who were doing the same. After much

research and deliberation, I went for Holland. The COVID rates were very low but I was still doubting the whole idea beforehand, and tried to minimise risk as far as I could – staying in an apart-hotel with a kitchen in the room to avoid the need for eating out, travelling by Eurostar instead of a plane. It was a lot of effort to try for a PB over 12.5 laps of a 400m track – would it be worth it? It turns out, yes.

Being back at a running track and at a competition felt special, even if I didn't know anyone (except my friend Bjorn, another athletics photographer, who made the trip across the Netherlands in order to cheer me on). Before every race I listen to Lose Yourself by Eminem, the lyrics '*feet, fail me not, this may be the only opportunity that I got*' seemed more apt than usual. On the start line I felt a sense of calmness I don't remember feeling before, and despite 30 degree heat and extra pressure of a special introduction as a "special guest from the UK", I had a feeling it was going to be a good race. I ran a 29 second PB for 16:50.91, breaking one of my big 2020 goals of running sub-17 minutes. All the effort and miles during lockdown was made worthwhile by that one race.



At the same time, as a fan, it was amazing to see athletics returning. Events like *World Athletics' Garden Challenges*, *The Impossible Games* in Oslo or *Podium 5k* made me smile in a way only pole-vaulting from a back garden or 400m hurdling in an empty Norwegian stadium could. But I missed live athletics. I couldn't replicate the adrenaline and excitement that comes with being there in person at home; plus, I was craving the chance to grow as an athletics photographer. As COVID levels dropped and events allowed limited spectators, I began dreaming of a trip somewhere. The *Monaco Diamond League*, with some of my favourite athletes, minimal COVID cases and a good risk plan in place from the organisers, seemed perfect, so I booked it all. Of course, this was 2020 and quarantine restrictions were announced nine hours before I was due to fly. It was painful to watch a 5000m WR from rainy south London knowing there was a seat in the stadium with my name on it. As it turned out, my first live athletics trip was a bit closer to home, 4km to be precise, at the *Bromley Twilight Invitational*. Being back at a track and seeing athletics friends I'd not seen for half a year was fantastic, and despite not being the most glamorous location in the world it has stayed as my favourite event of the summer. I remain grateful to Mark Hookway from Tonbridge AC for inviting me as a photographer, and am in awe of his efforts to put on such an outstanding COVID-secure display of the best of British endurance racing.

Track racing had started to return in England, albeit with some rather bizarre rules, and I made the most of it. Following that 5000m in Utrecht, August saw a 3000m PB in Battersea Park, sneaking under 10 minutes for the first time; a (for me) frustratingly bad 1500m in Harrow – the negative side of a maximum of six people in a race where two don't turn up and there's no clock; my first ever 400m in Bromley, where I ran sub-60 for the first time ever and won the race by 0.01 seconds; and my first 800m PB of the year in Canterbury (2:13.1).

September continued the trend – three 800m races, bringing my PB down to 2:09.45), two 1500m PBs (4:27.57) and one of my favourite races of the summer – a 3000m in Wimbledon – one of those days where everything just felt right. I ran 9:41.36, a 17 second PB and a proper step-change. That's circa 16:15 pace for a 5000m, which is both exciting and mildly frustrating since there's no chance for them in England any time soon!

September also presented me with an opportunity to photograph from the infield at the *Memorial Kamila Skolimowskiej* in Poland. I had to say yes, even if it meant I raced an 800m in Tooting 20 hours before then went straight to Stansted Airport in full race kit... how 2020 had changed. Whilst being in an almost empty stadium was a bit strange, it was brilliant to experience live athletics again – especially when the performances didn't disappoint – from a viewpoint I wouldn't have had in a 'normal' 2020. Seeing the longest javelin throw there has been since I was 3 years old from about 1m from the runway was a special moment. There was a case of deja-vu the following weekend. After racing another 800m on the Saturday, I decided on impulse to go to Berlin 24 hours later to see Mondo Duplantis and Karsten Warholm attempt World Records, in another stadium that holds many good memories for me. There was no World Record, but it was a mighty fine feeling to be back as a fan. Plus, I got a five-mile training run in the next morning around Berlin's Tiergarten with two of Britain's leading middle-distance runners, which was an added motivator for the next races.



Of all the races that had taken place across London over the summer, one distance had been missing – the mile. It's the one track distance I have run each year since 2016, so presents a good benchmark to me for my progress. I also had half an eye on the Striders' Club Record, set by Phil Coales back in 2016 (4:44). It would require a big PB, but my shorter races had given me confidence it could be in me. October gave me the chance with two races 48 hours apart. The first was in Harrow in a field of fairly mixed abilities, where I ran 4:46.9; an eight second PB but no record. The second chance was the *Stan Allen Mile* in Tooting. It was a much more competitive field, I went in on paper the second slowest, but hoped that would drag me round in another PB. It did, and I remember a feeling of enjoyment during the race in a way I'm not used to as I realised at halfway I was on course. 4:43.72, a Club Record and a nice memento for the season.

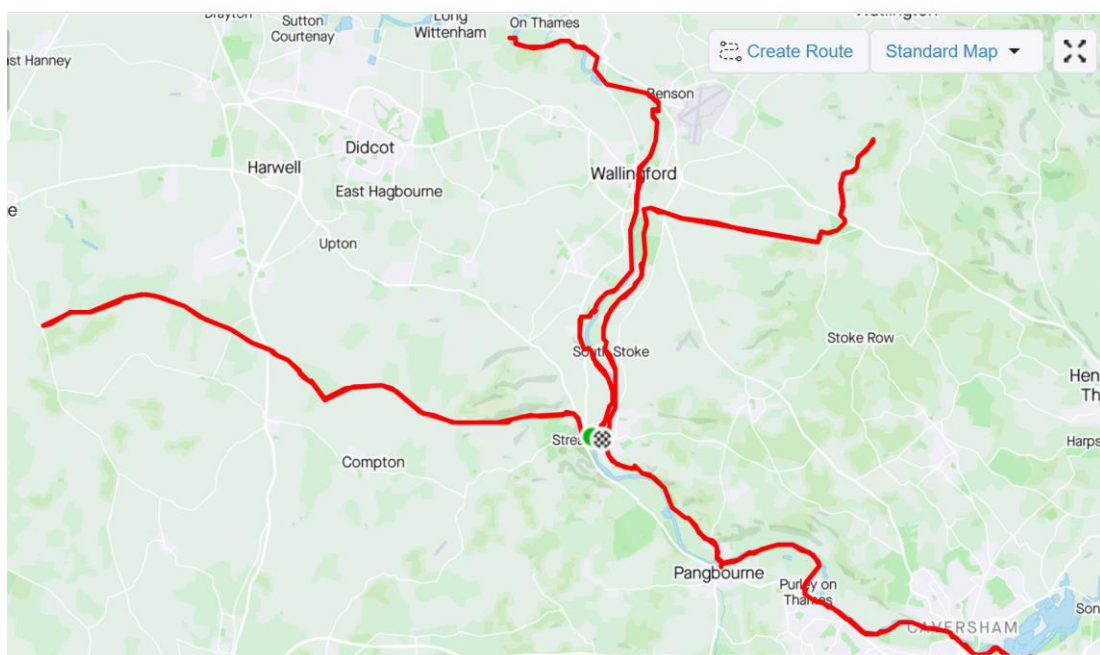
The efforts of every club who put on races in such difficult circumstances will never get the recognition they truly deserve, but I have to thank Blackheath & Bromley, Herne Hill, Belgrave, Hercules Wimbledon, South London Harriers and Harrow for giving me a chance to run.

As the UK comes out of a second lockdown, but uncertainty remains on when racing will return, when times get stressful or bleak, I'll look back on this summer and remember there are always better times ahead, some of which will be unexpected. Hopefully you will be able to do the same.

THE CENTURION AUTUMN 100 (by Debra Bourne)

The 2020 edition of Centurion's Autumn 100 was a very special race for me: 23 hours and 8 minutes of special. All my training over the past year, the speed sessions and strength training, progression runs and long days out on the trails, paid off with my first sub-24-hour 100 mile race, earning me my first '100 miles – one day' buckle.

In normal years this is the fourth and final race in the Centurion 100-mile Grand Slam (this year it was third, and the South Downs Way 100 (SDW100) was cancelled by the start of the second lockdown). The other three races – Thames Path 100, SDW 100 and North Downs Way 100 – are point-to-point along their respective National Trails, but the A100 is a series of four 25-mile out-and-backs from Goring in Oxfordshire, with the first and fourth legs being on the Thames Path, while legs two and three use the Ridgeway.



Running trace for the Autumn 100

The format means that runners can access their drop bags at 25, 50 and 75 miles. James Elson (the Race Director) in the briefing video had asked us to keep these as small as possible, and certainly no more than 50 litres, but that had to be balanced against bringing food I knew I would eat, plus some I might want, changes of footwear and adequate clothing options. I realised I probably wouldn't use all the clobber I took (although I did eat most of the food), but it was good to have the choice.

With COVID-19 travel restrictions, I hadn't had a chance to recce. The Ridgeway sections, legs 2 and 3, I had run before during the Ridgeway 86, but only westbound and, particularly west of Goring, in the dark (although I had also run a bit of it during Chiltern Wonderland 50 (CW50), westbound again). Part of leg 4 on the Thames Path I had also run during CW 50, and I must have run legs 1 and 4 in the downstream direction in reces for the Thames Trot 50, but that had been back in 2013, and large sections of the race were diverted off the Path on race day, due to flooding, so I didn't remember much of it!

We drove most of the way on Friday evening, staying overnight at the Travelodge in the M4 (this time without road closure worries, unlike with CW50). In the morning we were on our way by 6.30, following a bit of a wait for the windscreen to clear after a cold night. We arrived

in Goring and I made use of the carpark toilets, avoiding any queue at race HQ or the start at Streatley, then my husband Aidan kindly carried my drop bag most of the way to the village hall before leaving me, with a kiss, as we had been requested not to bring anyone with us. I dropped off the bag, said hi to Nici, picked up and attached my tracker, then set off walking down the road to Streatley, setting my Garmin to 'run' and loading Leg 1 in as a course. I was using four courses, one for each leg, after discovering the miserly 50-waypoint limit on the Garmin 935. (Many thanks to Chris Mills for chopping the course up for me after James posted the final version of the GPX). After the problems I'd had during NDW100 with the watch stopping recording the run when I hooked it up an external power source, this time I started off with the Powerbank attached.

I felt cold walking to the start at Streatley and for the first 5 or 10 minutes of running, but soon warmed up, then used hat and gloves on and off to regulate temperature. About half a mile in there was a narrow humpbacked bridge, where we had to mask up and cross one at a time, guided by a lovely and very polite volunteer. My coach had suggested I should run easy on the first leg and practice my eating and drinking breaks, get into a rhythm, and I did. It would have been easy to run faster than was sensible, given the flat route and decent underfoot conditions. I didn't stop at the first aid station, Wallingford, just said hi and got a great greeting from Anna Troup. Then onwards to the Leg 1 turn-around point at Little Wittenham, where I filled water bottles and took a satsuma and piece of banana. I continued running easy, walking to eat and drink, getting practiced at juggling food while carrying the Powerbank in my hand. Back through Wallingford, again without stopping, but Anna was very encouraging at a point where I was feeling quite low – I felt like I'd been pacing sensibly based on perceived effort, despite which my legs felt tired, which I hadn't expected only about 20 miles into the race on flat terrain. Anna reminded me to enjoy the run!



Along by the Thames

The best aspect of this first 25 miles was the out-and-back nature of the course, which meant that I got to see all the other runners, the faster ones returning while I was still heading out, the slower ones heading out while I was on the return journey. Some nice wildlife moments – watching swans take off from the river, and seeing Red Kites soaring overhead. It was great to see familiar faces such as Gareth Allen, Ollie Dawson and Rob Cowlin, as well as a load of others who are becoming familiar on the Centurion races. I did find the route a little boring, without the variety of a trail such as the North Downs Way, but it was pleasant running and pleasant enough surroundings. After about 20 miles my laces started to press into the tendons on the tops of my feet. I stopped once and loosened them, but they started to hurt again in the last mile or so – it was definitely time to change shoes.

Back at Goring I experienced the fantastic Centurion organisation, with my drop bag pulled out and placed on a chair (those were at two metres distance from one another) while I sanitised my hands and filled my water bottles. I reported a lost glove – one of my really nice Inov8 ones, that had been a present – and hoped someone else would bring it in (although I did have a spare pair in my backpack). Sitting down, I changed shoes as fast as possible, and swapped my depleted bags of food (mixed vegan sweets, raisin-cranberry mix, salted snack pretzel sticks and boiled salted new potatoes) for pre-prepared full bags. I also took one of my hot cross buns to eat, and a satsuma from the tables. Nothing else needed, so I sanitised my hands – holding the bun and satsuma in a piece of kitchen towel kindly provided by a volunteer – and left, loading the course for leg 2 as I set off.



Woodland path along the Ridgeway

Leg 2 heads along the Ridgeway, northwards then eastwards, to Swyncombe (and back). Initially the path lay alongside the river, on the opposite bank to the Thames Path, so the terrain was, not surprisingly, similar to that of the first leg. Past South Stoke on a little diversion off the Ridgeway that James had warned about, and into North Stoke, not really needing the aid station. Then over a road and into Grim's Ditch. Here a volunteer in orange

high-viz jacket warned us that the path was narrow and we should take extra care and give way to others. I rather enjoyed this section, roots and all; it was interesting to run it west to east for a change. I was meeting returning faster runners sooner this time and could only marvel at their speed as I stepped aside to let them pass. Another opportunity to say hi to people I knew as well. Gareth Allen seemed to be doing pretty well and looked much happier than when I'd seen him during NDW100.



Heading into Grim's Ditch

Onwards, up and over some rolling hills. A large field, then another, dipping down then climbing up again towards woodland. At the far side I spotted Stuart March and stopped gazing at red kites for a few seconds while my photo was taken and we exchanged greetings, before I disappeared on the path through the trees. Onwards. Up the lane (which I recognised from going wrong on my CW50 recce) past St Botolph's Church, and into the turn-around aid station. Reach into my pocket for my mask... no mask. I realised I must have dropped it, so pulled a buff on instead. Sanitise hands, fill waters, take a bit of fruit, sanitise, thank the volunteers and head off back down the lane. By now some light showers had started, but they were not enough bother for me to put my coat on. Through the woodland, which anyway gave shelter from the rain. As I emerged and drew breath to say hi to Stuart as I passed, I spotted my face mask, which another runner had carefully placed on a gate post for me, and happily retrieved it, saying a mental 'thank you' to my anonymous helper.

Across the two fields, running the inclines as well as the downhills, because it had started raining again and I wanted to get back under sheltering trees. Another orange-coated volunteer as we plunged back down Grim's Ditch, then over the lane and through North Stoke again before following the diversion to South Stoke, then back down the river. I passed Rob Cowlin again somewhere along here and worried, as he was in road shoes and struggling on ground that was getting more slippery. It started raining again, and grey clouds stretching to the horizon suggested that this would be more than a shower, so I sheltered under a tree, dug my waterproof coat out of the backpack and donned it. Right decision, as

the rain accompanied us all the way back to Goring. I was running mostly by myself, but there were a number of runners that I played 'leapfrog' with for shorter or longer periods throughout the race, depending on our personal running speeds, walking breaks, times spent at checkpoints and so on. Some I had met during other Centurion races, but with the minimal interactions under COVID-19 restrictions I was finding it hard to pin names and faces together.



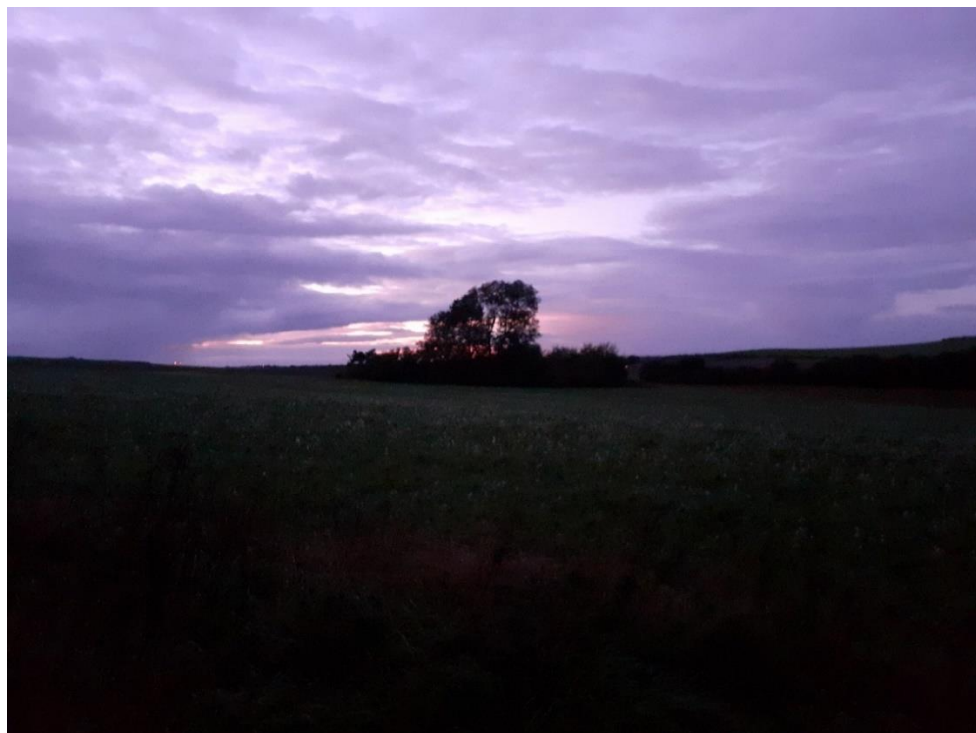
Across the fields

Back down the alley, mask on and into the hall – where, to my delight, my glove was waiting for me! Fantastic. I had planned to change socks at this point, but given the worsening weather I didn't see the point – the ones I was wearing were not rubbing, and whatever I was wearing would get wet and muddy in the next hours, so it would be better to keep these on and change for a hopefully dry leg 4. Now stationary as I replenished my food supplies, I was starting to feel cold. It would get dark sometime during leg 3 and the temperature was likely to fall. What to wear? I pulled a long-sleeved running shirt on over the NDW50 shirt with my number pinned to it (I considered swapping the shirt, but then I would have needed to move the number), and donned my waterproof trousers as well as the jacket. They would protect me from windchill and from worry of getting soaked and cold if the rain got heavier, while leaving my long running tights dry in case I needed them for leg 4. With 50 miles done, I felt confident that my watch battery would last the rest of the race, so I dumped the Powerbank and lead into the drop bag, glad not to have to mess with it any longer.

Out of the hall and off up the road, heading west on the Ridgeway. It felt strange to be running this section in the light, unlike either of my Ridgeway 86 runs. The rain eased and I was overheating, so I took the waterproof trousers off. A couple more miles and I was getting too hot again, so took the jacket off – but before I could tie it round my waist the rain returned, so I put it back on – this time to stay on. This section was mainly wide chalk and flint paths, not too slippery yet, although I worried that might change with the rain. I was very aware on every down slope that I would meet it again as an incline later, but encouraged myself on the uphills by thinking about returning down them. East Isley Downs was a lovely oasis of cheer, with little chemical lights edging the paths in and out, and volunteers making

sure that people left in the correct direction outwards or inwards. I should have stopped there long enough to get my head torches out, but didn't, because I wanted to clear the way for incoming runners. I regretted that a while later, fumbling for them in my pack in the dark.

As the light faded, and with the rain having paused, I got a couple of nice sunset pictures.



Sunset on the Ridgeway

Onwards, running where I could, walking when the footing seemed too treacherous or I was hunting for the best rut or ridge to run along. The last stretch before the turn-around point I

bumped into Ollie Dawson and we ran together for a bit. He reassured me that I was well in time for my sub-24 goal. Finally into the turn-around aid station, buff on as I couldn't find my face mask (again), fill water bottles, take a banana and set off again, taking cheer from the thought that the wind would now be behind me rather than into my face, and the muddiest section was first, so I could look forward to better footing later. Ollie stopped to drink some coffee, which he said would help his upset stomach.

The sky cleared and at one point I glanced upwards then stopped dead, turned out the headtorch and simply stood for several seconds gazing at the wonderfully bright stars with no city light clutter to dim them. Back through East Isley Down aid station, then continuing back to Goring. I alternated running and walking, depending on the terrain and on how hot I was feeling, slowing when necessary to cool down. I felt I could probably run more and faster if I took a layer off, but I calculated that in the time it would take me to peel something off and stow it I would get too cold, so I just pushed the sleeves of my tops up my arms. At about 11pm, feeling a bit sleepy, I took a caffeine tablet and a little while later felt more alert. I didn't spot Rob Cowlin on this section and realised he must have dropped, sadly. I was alone for long stretches, which I don't mind, with other torches periodically approaching and passing, and sometimes seeing other patches of light down the trail and moving in the same direction as me, visible then hidden, depending on curves in the path. There was one very surreal moment when for a few seconds I saw what looked like balloons or something caught up in a tree ahead – then I realised it was a steep section of path and my torch was reflecting from a runner ahead of and above me.

At Goring, final replenishment of food from my drop bag and final hot-cross bun to eat, as well as changing headtorch batteries – the one in the main torch was still fine, but it made more sense to change it than not. I didn't feel any need for hot food, so didn't bother making up the instant noodles I'd brought. It was set to be a clear night and cold, according to the volunteers, so I deposited the waterproof trousers into my drop bag. I was well prepared in case it was much colder by the river: my backpack held a lightweight windproof and my arm warmers, in case I felt the need for another layer on my top half; Montane windproof trousers in case the legs got too cold; thicker gloves, a beanie and a buff. In the end it stayed quite mild and I used none of these. Leg 4 set on the watch, plus other runners going the same way, supplemented the Centurion markings – not that the Centurion markings were lacking, just that I was tired and having the extra confirmation was comforting.

Down to the river, along a little way. I spotted something on the path. It was a buff, evidently recently dropped, as it hadn't been trampled, and almost certainly from an A100 runner, so I picked it up and stuffed it into the back of one of the vest pockets. Along a bit further, then uphill and a section through undulating woodland, which I really hadn't expected. However, that, for me, was the highlight of the section! The remainder was almost dead flat and most of it was rather dull. Despite Ollie having told me I had plenty of time for sub-24, I was worried about not making it. My legs were not really stiff or sore, but keeping them running, rather than walking, was getting more and more difficult. I started setting myself tiny goals: 100 running strides with each leg then I could walk for 50 strides. Repeat. If I didn't reach the 100 strides running, then I tried to make the following walking break shorter. As an added complication, my guts started telling me that a visit to the toilet would be a good idea. This 'suggestion' became more insistent and I had to walk, along a road, through a churchyard. I was NOT going to squat in a churchyard. A little further and I spotted a lit-up building with people moving about inside; I wasn't sure why they were active this time of night, but decided to knock on the door and hope someone (a) answered and (b) let me use a toilet. Then I saw the Centurion arrows directing me there and realised that this was the aid station! I shuffled to the door: 'please tell me there's a toilet!' 'Yes' came the welcome reply. It was up the stairs. That was okay, I could manage that. I fished in my pocket, couldn't find my mask, so took a single-use mask from the pack by the door, sanitised my hands and

hurried upstairs. Soon, somewhat relieved (pun intended!), I took a bit of banana from the aid tables, thanked all the volunteers and continued.



Mushrooms growing on a tree stump

Across a couple of fields, past some dark cattle, their eyes brightly reflecting my headtorch, along by the river. Through a bit of woodland then suddenly, it seemed, into a built-up area, up a road, going a little past a junction but slowing and checking and turning back, my watch buzzing at me just as a couple of other runners whistled to alert me that I had missed the turning. A bit further along roads. I was sure I had already gone about eight miles on this leg, and Ollie had warned me that the turn-around point was six miles after the 'Welcome to Reading' sign. Where was that sign? After what seemed an age, I spotted it. Another six miles out. My heart sank. Nothing to be done except keep moving. Walk, run, walk, run. I was too warm when I ran, too cold once I dropped to a walk, so I seemed to be constantly taking my gloves off and putting them on again, as well as pushing my sleeves up and pulling them down. I thought of removing a layer but was worried that I would get too chilled if I did. I passed a huge gathering of roosting swans and geese, and a couple of lit-up bridges, but otherwise, being dark outside the circle of light from my headtorch, there was not a lot to look at. About 2.30 or 3 am I took another caffeine tablet.

By this time I had 'ultramarathon brain' sufficiently that I couldn't manage the calculations for how much longer it would be to the turn-around point, nor how much longer I had if I was to finish under 24 hours. A couple of times other runners passed me and I tried to tag on behind them, but always broke into a walk after 100 paces or so. I asked a returning runner how far... 'about another mile or two'. Surely not? It was indeed nearly a further two miles. I spent a good mile expecting to see it round every corner, but finally, finally there it was!

Water, a banana (I think) and off again, definitely happier to be heading back. So much of running ultras is a mental game. I had been depressed by the elusive, ever-receding Reading turn-around checkpoint, but now I could tell myself there were only 12 and a half miles to go, and surely I could make that sub-24. My mood improved considerably!



Lights on a bridge



Roosting swans (with a few geese)

Despite feeling mentally better I still couldn't maintain a run, so I went on run-walking and reminding myself to eat and drink. Back past the roosting waterfowl, back past the bridges. When the leg 4 trace said that I had about 8 miles to go, I dug my phone out and called my wonderful husband. 'I'll be about two to two and a half hours. Probably two and a half'. 'Okay, getting up now; I'll send you a text when I reach the car park.' Onward, back onto the road section, past the cows, Pangbourne Meadow, always giving a 'well done' to runners still on that outward leg. Another brief stop at the part-way checkpoint. Now less than 4 miles to go! My stomach was feeling a bit uncomfortable, but much less so than on NDW100, and I could still run in short but frequent bursts, walking at a good pace in between.

Up the road, striding into the incline, looking forward to the trail through the woods and the descent on the other side. I stepped aside for some runners who were catching me up, but they soon slowed and I caught them again. The front runner was pacing one of the others, aiming to get him finished in sub-24, and the other guy had the same aim. I said I was also trying for that. 'Come on, girl!' the pacer called, so I joined them, and after a few minutes found that I was generally managing to keep up with the pacer better than the other runners were doing, although none of the three of us could keep running for long before dropping back to a walk. Finally we were down back by the river. Nearly there now. A couple more turns, then onto the road. A final effort, running alongside the wall encircling the green, then over the timing mat. Finished! I pressed the button on my Garmin and walked down the alley, pulling my buff over my face, towards the Garden Room.

I knew that I had finished in under 24 hours, but not how much under until I looked at my watch (and discovered it still running, so I pressed stop more firmly!) – it said 23:08. No way! What a fantastic result for my 90th ultra! I had to wait a little until this could be verified from the Centurion system, before I was allowed to pick up one of the coveted '100 miles – one day' buckles and pose, grinning, for my finish line photos. I was given my T-shirt and offered tea and chilli. Veggie chili was available, and I felt bad for refusing it, but I didn't think it was wise on an unhappy stomach.



Finished! Earned my first "100 miles – One Day" buckle

I did accept the offer of a tea and a sit down inside the hall. Various runners were draped over the carefully spaced chairs. I was given my drop bag for the last time, and placed the shirt and buckle into it so I couldn't lose them. A few minutes of chat with Nici and volunteers, then just as someone presented me with my tea I saw the text from Aidan and replied. A couple more minutes and some sips of tea, then I levered myself out of the chair, hauled my drop bag onto my shoulder, thanked everyone one last time and headed out.

Musings

It has been ten months since I contacted Centurion Coaching and Neil Bryant started setting my running schedule, making my training more focused. Having spent the past three years running lots of marathons and ultras, and qualifying for the 100 Marathon Club, I had wanted to see if I could get faster. My stated goals had been a marathon under 3:40 (maybe even under 3:30), Comrades under 10 hours and a 100-miler at sub-24 hours. The COVID-19 outbreak meant no Comrades, and with most of my other ultras postponed and squeezed into the last 5 months of the year, no way of fitting in an attempt at a fast marathon. That left the sub-24 goal. Massive PBs at 5K and 10K over the summer in Chris's virtual challenges and the England Athletics 5K virtual championships had shown that my training was improving my speed at those shorter distances, but I wasn't sure how this would translate into ultra-distance performance.

I had coped better than most with the heat during NDW100, as shown by my 4th woman, 1st FV50, 22nd overall placing, which had been fantastic, but I hadn't gone under 24 hours, so niggling doubts remained – although I tried to remind myself that only 17 runners **had** gone sub-24 in the race. This time my placing wasn't quite as good – 1st FV50 again, but 6th woman and 77th overall, but I was delighted with my finish time of 23:08:38 – which smashed my goal and set a new FV50 record for the course by more than 27 minutes.

Now I have beaten the 24 hours once, I know I can do it again and I'm sure I will. Lots to learn still, as it was mental/neurological fatigue rather than tired muscles that slowed me down in the last 25 miles, and I need to improve my nutrition strategy to keep my stomach happier.

I have lots of people to thank. First, my wonderful husband for his support throughout my training, as well as getting up at 5am two mornings in a row to drop me off and pick me up again, and walking back to the village hall with the tracker when I realised, sitting in the car park, that it was still on my backpack.

Many thanks of course to James, Nici and the whole of the Centurion crew. It takes a huge amount of work behind the scenes plus the efforts of dozens of volunteers for a race like this to go ahead, and the organisation was spot-on. Thank you to Anna Troup, for reminding me to enjoy the race, thank you to the other runners who returned my glove and left my mask on the post, thanks to all the runners and volunteers who gave me encouragement during the race. The sense of community in ultrarunning is wonderful.

Special thanks to Neil Bryant, whose coaching has led me to find an extra gear and reach this goal. Last but not least, I owe thanks to Chris Morton, whose speed sessions over the last year, and encouragement with the 5K and 10K virtual races, have really helped me to push harder and get more out of my speed work.

HALF LUNATIC (by Susan Haynes)

With my 50th birthday approaching at an alarming rate, I decided it was time to deal with my fear of “the bike thing” and finally do a triathlon. Pour yourself a cuppa, grab a biscuit and pull up a comfy chair. This could take a while.

How It All Began

I should first confess that I do have form for being a little crazy. I took up running in my 30s and my first ever race was the London Marathon. Then, when I was approaching 40, I ran an ultra-marathon. And I've taken on Kilimanjaro (it won). Safe to say that I jump in at the deep end. So, it probably wasn't a surprise that I decided, with 50 looming, I should have a go at a Half Ironman Triathlon.

For the uninitiated (and therefore sane) people among you, that's a 2K open water swim, a 90K cycle and a half marathon. One after the other. All on the same day. No tea breaks. This had “deep end” written all over it.

Early Set Backs

Cycling is not my thing. My balance is terrible and I am a scaredy cat about speed on two wheels. I did think I was reasonably fit from running and had a fairly high level of endurance, which is what made me think the following would be a good idea.

About a year before the tri I had set my sights on, I did a 64K cycle event around a local lake. At the time, the only bike I had was my trusty hybrid that I had (occasionally) ridden to work in the UK (Croydon to Bromley, a huge 10K each way). I did one 40K cycle two weeks before as training for the 64. I mean, come on, it's cycling, right? How hard can it be?

Turns out “very” is the word I was looking for. 64K on a heavy, old, not-built-for-speed-or-comfort bike is hard and painful work. By the end all I wanted to do was chuck the bike in the lake and drink wine. A LOT of wine. Fortunately, we were in wine country and I was so knackered I couldn't even lift my bike let alone throw it. Half Ironman plans were shelved. Perhaps I could take up needlepoint?

Listening to the Wrong People

Some months after “The Lake Incident” as it came to be known, saddle soreness and the cramp in my hip-flexors had subsided, that magic 50 was getting closer and I was itching for a challenge. I came back to the UK on a work trip and made my next mistake. “I'm thinking of doing a Half Ironman” I told a few of my old running buddies. To a man and woman they said “You're bonkers”. Except one. Step forward, Justin Macenhill: “That's brilliant! It will be an amazing achievement!”

I believed him. I entered. I swore that I was only doing this once.

At this point I was about 7 months out from my goal event of the IronMaori Half Ironman in Napier, NZ. I hunted out books on tri training, watched countless YouTube clips and cornered everyone I knew who had done a tri for advice (this ranged from “Don't” to “I'm surprised you haven't done one before”). All this did was reinforce the fact that I had no idea what I was doing. Time for some professional help.

No, not a psychiatrist, a tri coach.

Starting Training

First thing my coach got me to do was swim. I thought I was an OK swimmer. Turns out, I'm rubbish. Technique is everything in swimming. The idea is to use technique to make yourself as aerodynamic and efficient as possible. I was using my technique to make me look like a wind-up turtle in the bath. We worked on a few things and she suggested I join her swim squad. I'd seen them in the pool. They looked fast and scary. I said I'd think about it.

Next up: "The Bike Thing". We were hitting winter, which in Wellington means wet, windy and dark nights. Time to head indoors for cycling. I borrowed a wind trainer (don't ask) and went to a group WT Session with Trusty the Hybrid. My coach was kind enough not to laugh and merely suggested that I borrow a road bike for a while to see the difference. One of my fellow trainees, Tanya, (who I met that night) lent me her spare bike. It is testament to the nature of Kiwi's that Tanya, who I had only just met, was prepared to lend me a fairly expensive piece of kit for as long as was needed, no questions.

I took the road bike out for a spin. I immediately fell in love. I didn't really believe that being on a different, lighter bike, could make such a difference. But it's true. I was gliding along, minimal effort, maximum return! Then I tried to turn a corner. Let's just say that road bikes can be "twitchy" on the steering. This was going to take practice. And I hadn't even tried clip pedals yet.

Finally, it was time for some running training. Run squad, on the waterfront, on a clear, cold, still evening. Perfect. I am in my comfort zone and it shows. Coach is impressed and my confidence is boosted, despite not seeing my training buddies for dust once the warm-up is over. Doesn't matter, I tell my coach, who is cycling very slowly beside me. I'm not the fastest, never likely to be. I'm just happy to be doing something that isn't scaring the living daylight out of me.

Over the next few weeks, I increase my cycling and swimming distance and learn that the same principles that apply to running, also apply to swimming and cycling. A mix of interval, tempo and distance training yield good results. On the bike and the road, this means hill reps, different lengths of intervals and some endurance or "aerobic" sets. It's the same in the pool. Well, apart from the hills. That's a bit tricky. Maybe it means you swim up waterfalls? No, it means you need more kit.

Once upon a time when I went swimming I took a costume, ear plugs and goggles. I was now hitting the pool with all of this, plus a pull buoy, hand paddles, a kickboard, a centre snorkel, flippers, a tempo trainer (a waterproof metronome for setting stroke cadence) and some foul-tasting potion to stop me from getting cramp.

Not content with splashing out on swim kit, I decided to find other ways of making my cash disappear as quickly as possible. I bought my own road bike.

"Flighty"

She is black and orange, beautiful and scary. The chap in the bike shop took a long time making sure she fitted (seat adjustment, handlebar moving) and, it turned out later, still didn't do it properly. Still, I now had my first road bike, complete with clip pedals.



My Dad used to have an expression to describe flirty, capricious women. He used to call them “a flighty piece” (forgive him, he was very much of his time). My new bike was definitely such a creature. So “Flighty” became her name. The slightest touch on the handlebars could send her off in wild directions and see me wobbling ungracefully to stay upright

And clip pedals were a whole new kind of special.

Falling Off

It is my worst fear and why I am terrified of going at speed on a bike, especially downhill. As someone with an unreliable sense of balance, who can fall over their own shadow on a flat surface, cycling is a challenge. Two, very thin, wheels, feet clipped into pedals, traffic, overly responsive steering, the fact that hitting tarmac hurts... I was a wreck before I even got in the saddle.

It took me several attempts to be brave enough to clip my feet into something that, despite her beauty, was as frightening as a rodeo bull. Every cyclist I know has fallen off their bike because they forgot to unclip their feet from the pedals. I kept saying that I was far too conscious of them to forget. I was wrong.

I fell off three times because I either forgot or couldn't get my feet out of the pedals. Two of the three happened in quick succession right before my first ride along the scariest stretch of road in Wellington. The adrenalin and cortisol were pumping so hard through my body that it was only when I got home, after the 50K ride and hour run, that I realised how battered and bruised I was.

Lessons Learned: put Vaseline on your clips to help slip your feet out and do not cycle up The Hutt Motorway EVER AGAIN.

I'm a chicken, I know this. That said, even the hardest of cyclists has to admit that the words “cycle” and “motorway” do not belong in the same sentence, unless there is a “don't” in there somewhere. Aet Wellington cyclists insist on doing it. Yes, it is probably closer to a dual carriage way than a British motorway and yes, there are wide shoulders. These do not make a jot of difference when a logging truck is tanking past you at 100K/hour or you are crossing an off-ramp when a 4x4 is exiting. It's not even a nice ride. Dead straight, no views AND TOO MUCH FAST-MOVING TRAFFIC. I'll stick to cycleways and quiet roads from here on.

“Racing”

By August, I’m starting to put the disciplines together. Swims followed by bike. Bike followed by run. Occasionally all three. Coach decides it’s time I pushed my comfort zone (again) and did some racing.

Tri Wellington organises a series of events throughout the year. In August these are duathlons (run/bike/run), mainly because only fools (and some of my tri group) go swimming in the harbour in winter. There are short, medium and long distances.

I enter. I turn up on Race Day and Coach is there. I tell her I’ve done as she asked and entered the long distance (5K Run/30K Bike/10K run). She swears she only told me to enter the middle distance. Ah well, in for a penny. It goes OK and, though my cycling clearly needs work, I feel strong on the runs. Once my legs get over the switch from the bike and stop shouting “What the hell are you doing to me?” that is. Getting off the bike and starting running is like no other exercise sensation. The only thing I can say is that it’s like you spend the first few K of the run teaching your legs what to do.

Note to self: do more brick (bike-to-run) sessions to stop this from happening. I do lots. It still happens. I never get used to it.

Returning to the Scene of the Crime

You would think that incredible pain, fatigue and frustration would be enough to put someone off doing something a second time. Apparently not. It seems that it can actually spur you to not only do it again but to make it potentially even worse by making it harder.

I am back at Lake Wairarapa for my second attempt at the Challenge and this time I have upped the distance from 64K to 80K. I am in much better shape than I was a year ago and I have a proper bike this time. Flighty and I take on the event hoping to do the same time for this year’s 80, that I managed last year’s 64 (3 hrs 45 mins).

The start is certainly more encouraging than the previous year. Instead of being left for dead by my fellow cyclists, I actually manage to keep up with some of them. Even managing to chat to a few as we go along. And passing people while going uphill is a real novelty. Flighty and I cross the finish in 3 hrs 15 mins. First female from my age group in my start wave (OK, ONLY female in my age group in my start wave) and not dead last like I had been last year. I also walk away (rather than limp) with a spot prize of a new \$300 cycle helmet. Not a bad day’s work, and a huge boost to my confidence.

Rubber Suits, Jellyfish and Other Open Water Creatures

Summer is now approaching. Lighter mornings! Yay! Warmer weather! Double-yay! Open water swimming! Oh, hang on a minute...

I’d bought a wetsuit in the sale at the end of the previous summer. I’d used it once, for an open water lesson. A lesson that resulted in me deciding that the swim event I was hoping to do a fortnight later probably wasn’t a good idea. Now, 9 months and countless laps of the pool later, I was digging it out of its box in the garage. Trying it on, I realised another benefit of tri training: weight loss. The suit was snug, but not the tummy-crushing snug of the previous summer. To my disappointment though, it still didn’t make me look like Catwoman.



Me (right) with training buddy Sarah, still not looking like Catwoman

Here we are, on the man-made beach on Wellington Harbour. Every nerve in my body is jangling and every instinct telling me to run for the Northern hills and home. As if reading my mind, Coach grabs my wrist and pulls me towards a lady who has eschewed a wetsuit and is standing at the water's edge in just her costume and a swim cap. I immediately decide she is bonkers (water temperature is 13 degrees) with a sadomasochistic streak. My nerves get worse.

I needn't have worried. Corrina, it turns out, is a perfectly friendly, encouraging and knowledgeable coach. She is remarkably gentle with me and the other first timers. She's amazingly supportive and understanding and I calm down immediately in her presence.

Coach meanwhile seems to sense she needs to up the adrenalin level. During her pre-session briefing she says "remember, it's just like swimming in the pool. Oh, and watch out for the sharks over by the pontoon. Don't worry, they're only small." Tell me again how this is "just like the pool"? Fortunately, by the time we get to the pontoon, the faster swimmers have scared off (or provided dinner for) said sharks, so we don't see them. On swims later in the season, we do, however, see (and feel) jellyfish. Suffice to say that dragging your hand through the water only to meet with the resistance of slime and something resembling sticky rope, is not a pleasant experience.

I keep going to open water swims throughout the early summer. It is hard work; I am still very nervous and never truly comfortable in the wetsuit. I've always been a water baby and love being in or around water, so this nervousness comes as a surprise to me. Could it be that I am recalling the words of one Chris Morton? He once said to me "If you stop when you're running, nothing happens. If you stop when you're swimming, you drown". I decide to interpret this as an incentive to keep swimming, even if that's not how it was originally meant.

One amazing moment on an evening swim comes when there are just three of us in our group. For once, the harbour water is amazingly clear. As we head into the shallows, just as the sun is sinking, a stingray glides slowly underneath me. Magic.

Getting Lost

About a month before the Half IronMaori, they hold the quarter event over part of the course. I have a couple of friends doing the quarter, so I decide to head up to Napier to cheer them on and cycle the bike leg of the half course. I have the worst sense of direction in the World. I arm myself with two maps, the GPS on my phone and plenty of water. Flighty and I get to Napier at around mid-day and set off.

First half seems to go fine. I get out to the spot that is the turning point for the quarter – Clifton, or Kevin as it becomes known (you have to be a Strictly fan) – and head back towards the turn that takes me away from the quarter course, on to the half course. I take the one I think it is, it's not.

I try again. Still wrong.

One more go. Nope.

The afternoon has turned blisteringly hot and my water stock is running low. I decide to cut my losses and head back to the start. I've managed 80K, most of it going in the wrong direction.

The following day, this time armed with a husband who has an in-built sat-nav, we drive the course. By the time we finish, I almost wish we hadn't. There are hills. Big ones. With tight hairpin bends on the steepest climbs. Anyone who knows me, even slightly, will know that silence for me is unusual, borderline worrying. There is silence in the car. OMG.

Panic-Calm-Panic – The Last Week Waltz

Taper Madness. It's a thing. We've all experienced it. You feel every niggle. Every sneeze is pneumonia. You are paranoid about hygiene, whether you're ready, have you got your nutrition right, is this really a good idea, should I have trained more/harder/smarter, do I need to strap my Achilles, if I do will it stay on in the water, I'm really not ready for this... It's exhausting.

In the two weeks before the race I am a wreck. After seeing my friends do the quarter, I realise that this is where I should have started. Not jumping straight to an event that even some of my hard-core tri buddies don't feel ready for. I am an under-trained, not-fit-enough idiot.

My poor friends have to suffer through this too. I go for breakfast three times in two weeks with an experienced Half IM friend. Just so he can reassure me that I've done enough. That I will be fine. Calm down. My husband switches to broken record mode constantly repeating the mantra: "You'll be fine. Have more confidence in yourself. Remember how you were before your first marathon and that went OK, didn't it?" (Kind of, but he means well).

The week before the race, Coach gets me to do a local, short distance tri. We get there a bit late and I am in a bit of a fuff to get my gear ready. My heart rate is already up and I don't get chance to get in the water to warm up before the race starts. As I head into the sea my husband shouts "don't drown!" We really do need to work on his motivation techniques.

It's a 500m, two-lap swim and barely a quarter of the way into the first lap I have what I later realise is a panic attack. I can't breathe, the wind-up turtle is back and I'm tense and stressed. The only thing that gets me into the second lap is knowing that my coach is watching and I don't want to let her down by bailing. I am last out of the water. Knackered,

wrung out and ready to go home. In transition I pull myself together and get on the bike. By the time I hit the run, I'm back to my usual self.

The experience in the water has rattled me though. Knowing that I have to swim *four times* the distance in a week's time fills me with a terrifying dread. Coach persuades me to go to one last open water swim session, three days before the race. The wonder that is Corrina works her calming magic. Talking me through getting in the water, relaxing (remember to exhale – this is the calming part of the breath) and generally spreading a feeling of confidence. I leave the session uplifted and eternally grateful to Corrina and Coach. I'm glad that my last experience of the water before race day is not the blind panic of the previous Sunday but Corrina's soothing tones.

Race Day

It's a 4am wake up call. 4am! I haven't seen that time in the morning since my clubbing days (which are a very long time ago) and then I was getting into bed not out of it.

There is panic and nervousness this morning. But it's not mine. Roy, my husband, is in such a state, you'd think he was racing. "Have you had enough breakfast? Are all your water bottles full? Have you mixed your drinks? Got your power bars? Shall I bring the car round?". Amidst all this, I am strangely calm. Even when we see that the water is a little choppy. "It's Wellington flat," I tell the lady there to support her son, "we'll be fine".

The start area is full of people of every age, shape and size. While elite triathletes all look a bit like the Brownlee Brothers, the rest of us cover the full spectrum from skinny to well-upholstered. This is particularly true of IronMaori participants. The ethos of the event is to get people involved and to improve their well-being. Taking part and challenging yourself are the key things here. Over the years it has changed the lives of many people, making them healthier and more active. I feel right at home with this broad array of people, nervously chatting or silently contemplating what they are about to do.

Napier is on Maori land and the sea is in the guardianship of the local iwi (or tribe). They perform a welcome ceremony for us and give us their blessing for the trials ahead. One thing sticks with me: "Tangaroa is the God of the Sea. If you take positive energy into the water and offer it to him, he will give it back and protect you." I muster all the positive energy I can.

"Be like a fish!" my husband shouts as I hit the water. This departure from his usual words of encouragement makes me chuckle. More positive energy for Tangaroa.

The swim is surprisingly OK. Tangaroa hears my silent pleas and takes care of me, as promised. I remain calm in the water, even on the numerous occasions I find myself swimming in the wrong direction. At one point I think I decided to make a break for South America. The lifeguards are amazing, yelling and pointing to get us back on course. All up, I estimate I probably swam over 500m further than I needed to. More lessons: practice sighting and buy some prescription goggles.

As I leave the water, I feel a bit wobbly. I suffer from vertigo, so I am glad of the help from a marshal to steady me. As I head into transition, another marshal starts to help me out of my wetsuit. It's a strange feeling, having a man you've never met help you get undressed in front of your husband. Roy is still a bit too strung out to notice. He saw me wobble as I left the water. I reassure him I am fine and that he should go and do parkrun, like we planned. Several reassurances later, he finally leaves, and I head into transition.

There I meet Danella, a work colleague and fellow participant. We've been encouraging each other all year, so it's fitting we meet here. I'm surprised she's behind me out of the swim and she says she's had a shocker – feeling sick and having to hang on to one of the safety boats. I know she'll storm the bike though. We hug and go our separate ways.

Getting out of the wetsuit is tricky. My balance is all over the place and I eventually sit down with a bump and give myself a few moments to regain my equilibrium, during which I do a bit of sit-down dancing to S-Club 7's "Reach", which instantly becomes my new favourite song. Please note: my brain is sawdust during exercise and I cannot be held responsible for my choices.

I've taken a while in transition but when I get on the bike I realise it was worth it. There are no balancing wobbles and I scoot off down Napier's art deco-lined Marine Parade feeling very happy indeed. Knowing that the hills are coming, I take the first half steadily.

On the way to Kevin (Clifton) we pass some of Hawke's Bay's best wineries. Not stopping for a tasting is proving to be the hardest part of the ride. There's not much in the way of support, other than a few friends and family who are following their participants around the course. One family, a chap and his two children, adopt me. My name is on my number and every time one of them sees me they call to the others "Susan's coming! Susan's here!", and give me a big cheer.

Second half. The beautiful Tuki Tuki River valley. Hills. Roy is at the start of the first climb with additional supplies and words of encouragement. I head into hill number one, which is a long slow drag with a bit of a sting at the top. My adopted family are there "One down! You've got this!". Down the other side, over the river, quick loo pitstop and into the real testers. Three steep, winding climbs.

Amazingly, I don't find the climbs too bad. I even manage to pass people. All my hard work on the bike seems to be paying off. Adopted Family are at the top of every hill. Cheering like crazy people and making me smile like a loon. Eventually at the top of the final hill amidst shouts of "Last one! You did it!", I finally ask Dad his name, given that he has been shouting mine for the last few hours. "Ben" is the answer. "Thank you, Ben and family! You're amazing!" is all I can manage as I head into the final downhill. Roy is at the bottom and I am truly ecstatic. "I did it! I rode them all! I did it!". Only the small matter of the final 20K to go.



It's all flat, which is a relief after the hills. The downside is that a lot of it is dead straight. There comes a point in every race when you just want it to be over. With around 5K to go on the bike, I just want to get off. I'm saddle sore and I've had enough. Surprisingly, this spurs me to up the effort and I storm back down Marine Parade, not noticing its architectural loveliness this time.

I also have the benefit of knowing I am heading into my strongest leg, the run. My friend Laurence had told me that, as a runner, I have an advantage at this point in tri. Most triathletes are stronger on the bike and a lot dread the run. Going into that final transition, knowing this is your strongest leg and not dreading the next 13 miles, is a real boon.

As I head onto the four-lap course, I hear myself say "Oh God my legs are shot!". "No, they're not!" comes the response from a nearby marshal. "They're strong! They will carry you! Kia kaha". Once I shake the post-bike lead from my limbs, it turns out she's right. I find myself pushing the pace. And the words of another friend, Tom, come to mind; "You'll feel strong at the start of the run and will be tempted to push hard. Don't give into it. Keep it slow. Otherwise you'll suffer later".

Even with Tom's voice ringing in my ears, I can't seem to keep the pace slow. Eventually I give into it, find something comfortable and decide to worry about the last lap when I get to it.

I see Danella. As predicted, she's stormed the bike and is a lap or so ahead of me. Over the course of the first two laps, I manage to catch her but her strong bike means she'll finish ahead of me. I see Ben and my new family too. Still cheering, still noisy. Danella later asks me: "How do you know Ben?". Turns out he is the husband of one of her training buddies. Village NZ.

The support is much better on the run, especially around the transition and finish areas. I'm having fun and the laps flash by in a blur. So much so that Roy is completely unprepared for my arrival. I find him sitting back, coffee in hand, reading the paper as I head onto the second lap. He'd planned on me doing 30-minute 5Ks. I'd scoffed at this and said it was more likely to be 35-40. I thought it would be around 2:30 for the whole run.

As I head into the last lap, I'm still feeling OK. Still dancing with marshals and returning hi-fives and shouts of "Ka pai!" (which can be interpreted as "All good!" or "You're doing great!"). It's only in the last 500m or so that my legs really start to flag. Giving myself a kick up the backside and with a final hi-five and "thank you" to the turn-around point marshal, I push on.

My terrible sense of direction kicks in again and I try and turn into the swim transition area, thinking it's the finish. I get back out on the course and complete the last 200m at something approaching a staggering sprint. I am amazed to discover that I have completed the run leg in 1:59. I also discover it was a short course, so it doesn't count as a PB.

Crossing the finish line is emotional. Roy is there smiling and cheering, as is Danella. I manage to hug them both and hold myself together long enough to congratulate Danella. Then we turn towards transition to collect my stuff and I burst into tears. Roy hugs me and we let the emotion of the moment sink in. It has, as they say, been an epic journey.

Later that same day...

We go to the prize-giving ceremony. It's right across the road from our hotel, so it seems rude not to. They call out the names of the winners in each age category and get them to stand at the front. Then they go through the placings for each age group before awarding the prize to each winner.

Danella is third in her age group and I am stoked for her. They get to my age group and I don't really bother listening. Until I hear my name. SECOND! How the hell did that happen? I am absolutely gob-smacked. Truly lost for words (a rare occurrence indeed). At this point, I had no idea what my overall time was. When I check later, I have gone just over 7hrs (damn that loo stop). Not bad considering I thought it would take me about 8. Time for a celebration.



Still standing. With Danella at the finish (she's the tall one)

Reflections in Beer

Beer and chips. Is there a better food match? It's all I want post-race while I try to get the day's events into perspective. Sitting in the warm Napier sunshine, I can't really believe what I have done. This felt so much more challenging than a marathon. At an overall distance of around 70 miles, it's the furthest I've ever gone under my own steam. I've been pushed so far out of my comfort zone, I needed binoculars to look back and see it. It has scared me witless, exhausted me and at times left me an emotional wreck. And yet I have loved every minute of it.

"Maybe I should try for sub-7 next year?" I say to Roy. "I thought you were only doing this once?" he asks wryly. He knows me well enough to know that was never going to be the case. It was a great 50th birthday challenge and has made me fitter and stronger than I was at 40. Of course I'll keep going.

Another thing I realise while sipping my beer, is that none of this would have been possible without support. Friends who have advised me, Coach Jen who has trained me, new found tri-buddies who have supported me and Roy, who has patched me up and put me back on the road so many times, while also keeping my life in order while I focused on training. And of course, Justin Macenhill. Who I blame entirely for the fact that my quads are screaming at me, even though he was right. It was an amazing achievement.

Kia ora, Kia kaha (Be well, Be strong)

TWELVE THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO YOU WHEN YOU TRAIN FOR A HALF IRONMAN (by Susan Haynes)

Should you need any further encouragement to have a go at multi-sport!

1. You become a weather obsessive

I have three weather apps on my phone. I know which are the best beaches to swim from in a howling southerly or a gusting northerly. I can bore for England about the best spots to run to get protection from the elements. I have planned my training (and my life) around forecasts for rain, wind, or both. These things are important when you are out on a bike, though it didn't stop me riding and running a trail in a howling gale because I couldn't face 3 hours on the windtrainer. Which brings me to:

2. You acquire all manner of weird things

Like a windtrainer (something for putting your bike on to simulate road and wind resistance), a centre snorkel and hand paddles (for swimming) and a rubber suit that does not make you (or anyone else wearing one) look like Catwoman.

3. You play new games

Where Did That Bruise Come From?

Convince Yourself To Get Out Of Bed At 5am (again).

Competitive Undressing - (also known as "Transition")

Balance On Your Bike While Trying To Get Out Of Your Clip Pedals Quickly Because You Forgot You Were In Them When You Hit The Brakes. I swore this would never happen to me. I did it three times. I fell over. It hurt.

4. Your trousers fall down

Three months into my training, I take clothes to work to change into post swim. This includes a pair of trousers that I haven't worn for a while. I pop them on, do them up and let go of the waistband. At which point they fall to my hips and I have to rely on a large safety pin to stop them dragging on the floor. I lost around 6Kg without trying while training, which got me back to a weight I was when I ran my first marathon in 2002.

5. Your run times improve

I set my previous 10K PB in 2009. Four months into Half IM training I had knocked over two minutes off that time. A similar thing happened to my 5K PB too. Yes, the weight loss helped. I think more crucial factors were the cross training. Long distance cycling helps to build muscles that balance the body for running, while swimming is the best no-impact aerobic activity there is (IMHO).

6. You lose the ability to count to four

Swimming 2K in a 25m pool means doing 80 lengths (or 40 laps). I found it impossible to count these, so broke them down into sets of 200m (4x50m laps) and used my pull buoy

to count 10 sets (odd sets I turned it on its end, even sets large side down). And I still couldn't do it. Is this lap 2 or 4?

7. You sleep well

You get up early and you train hard across three disciplines, mostly outside. You push yourself in ways that expend a lot of nervous energy because you're doing things that are new and possibly scary (speeding downhill on two very thin wheels, for example). This combined to give me some of the best shut-eye I have had in a very long time.

8. Your vocabulary expands

"Brick" no longer just means something houses are made from; Functional Threshold Power and Anaerobic Threshold become things you can chat about over dinner (to the confusion and boredom of your partner).

And during particularly nasty training sessions you even invent your own words, usually to describe your coach or whichever sadist you blame for your current situation.

9. You ingest bizarre food stuffs

You think running nutrition is odd (blue electrolyte anyone?), you should try the stuff they chuck at you at triathlon expos. Bars that taste like a mouthful of raw sugar with the consistency of oat-laden chewing gum were a particularly awful discovery. Though the worst has to be the foul sour cherry liquid you spray under your tongue to avoid or treat cramp. I swear the way it works is to be even more horrible than the cramp itself, so it takes your mind off it.

10. You spend more on a push bike than you did on your first car

Her name is Flighty. She's beautiful and scary and worth every cent.

11. You learn there's more than one 4 o'clock in a day

I don't think I'd seen four in the morning since my days sneaking home from the Hacienda in late 80s Manchester. I certainly didn't think I'd ever seen it when sober. So it was something of a shock to find that triathlons start early and that not only did I need to be awake and sober at 4am, I needed to be eating breakfast.

To avoid having to do this too often while training, there's a choice: get used to getting up early, or get your body used to taking food closer to the time you exercise. I chose the latter. Even The Stone Roses couldn't keep me from my bed at that time these days.

12. You become part of a cult community

Inspiring, supportive and slightly bonkers, triathletes are great people. Always willing to share knowledge, pick you up when your confidence flags and laugh at your jokes. Being part of a tri crew is one of the things that got me through Half IM training. They're like runners, only crazier.

FEELING NOSTALGIC – PART 1 (by Michael George)

Introduction

'You are what you think', not just what you eat. Everything we do comes originally from our grey matter. With that in mind, after much soul searching I decided to share my thoughts to basically a group whereby the majority are strangers, albeit we have something in common—the joy of Running. I'm, also, very conscious of my lack of the command of our beautiful language, having had to take my English Language 'O' Level six times before passing. Perhaps, this was my first experience of a marathon; never to give up with a challenging marathon, under 4 hours. Thanks, Ally, your solo marathon article triggered this article off for me. Historically, I've written many rambling articles over the years for the Strider's newsletter, but this time I wish to write just small snippets in each of our future Newsletters. Hopefully this will keep the reader well focused and not find it too boring on the subject and give them something to look forward to as the story progresses. I have noticed that we have the regular members contributing to our Newsletter, hopefully more of you could write something about how you took up running or anything relevant for our newsletter, I know at least I would be interested to hear from any interested party.

At no time, please, think I am on an ego trip. Writing can help with one's mental health, so it sounds a good idea to me that it could become quite therapeutic to put it into practice, especially during the lockdown. The only issue was deciding how far back should I go that started to sow the seed towards my taking up running as a hobby. I decided to go as far back as my teenage years (yes I can still remember them, just). Throughout this article there is a thread of how I enjoyed watching sport and taking part, albeit not to a very high standard. I believe that taking part is what counts. When I joined the London Fire Brigade (LFB) in 1974 I joined as a Fireman, I wish to use that title instead of Firefighter which is currently used in today's fire service. I don't wish to change the history of the Fire Service. Hopefully, that does not offend anybody. I don't have any objection with the word firefighter; I can understand and accept it being used in today's very inclusive fire service.

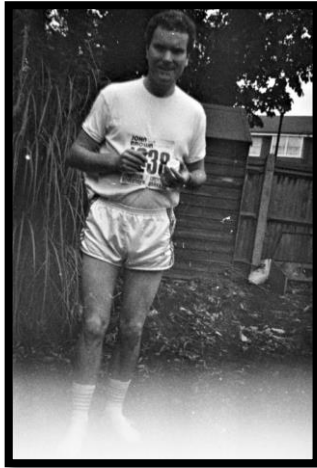
I must, also, thank Beatrice and Alan, who have been great in helping me to keep injury free, albeit some time ago. However, I decided my injuries had kept on returning too frequently, probably because I wasn't giving my body time to recover. I've been running as a hobby for 32 years, therefore knew the limitations of how far I could punish my body and reluctantly decided to stop for a few months, because I was so frustrated with my inability to run consistently before getting another injury. Running is in my DNA and I can't stop forever. I'm back and starting all over again following the couch-to-10K programme and taking on board the strength and conditioning principles I gained from Beatrice. Alan, when the time is right, I'll be knocking on your door for some further maintenance massage sessions.

Who Am I?

Let me introduce myself: I'm Michael George. That is the correct way round, and I sometimes get called George Michael by the Amazon delivery drivers – they find it quite amusing. It happens on so many occasions during different situations, especially when I worked at the Royal London and Barts. Hospital. After leaving the LFB I joined the hospital as a Fire safety and training advisor and of course my emails and other communication showed my name as George Michael, I disappointed many of the nurses when I showed up and they realised I couldn't sing nor had his good looks; I just go along with their amusement: if only I had his voice and good looks – what a waste of talent, so sad. I don't mind being called anything from any of the short versions of the name Michael: Mike, Mick,

Mickey and even Georgie Porgie who kissed the girls and made them cry as I was called at Primary School. Children can be so cruel. I can't repeat here some of my nicknames I was called In the Brigade. My favourite one though was being called Mickymmentor, as I was always willing to volunteer to guide new members to the watch or department so they were not thrown into the deep end, and basically I would coach them to further their skills.

I've been a Strider since 1990. Some of you may remember that, about two years ago, I provided some curry meals after the Wednesday run, which proved quite popular. I tinkered with taking up running in 1981, nothing to do with the first London Marathon, but I had other overarching interests at the time, and I didn't take up running seriously until 1988.

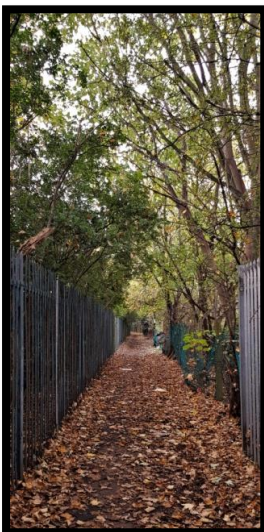


My very first 10k at Croydon



My latest 10k at Fulham 30 years later.

I just have to go off in a tangent from my story line before I lose the moment of the enjoyment running brings to me. On 30th October 2020 I went for a run, when I hadn't done any running for over 2 weeks for one reason and another. It was quite mild with a slight breeze. Just like music or the nice aromas we experience can remind us of places we have visited or send us into streams of nostalgia of hopefully good pleasant thoughts, the mild breeze blowing into my face during my early morning run took me back to La Santa, Lanzarote and running around the Lagoon, also early in the morning, which always produces a slight mild breeze. Good times. This visualisation added to my joy of running across Mitcham Common, especially around the Seven Island Pond.



The Common is only a mile away from my home, a nice warm-up before performing my hill reps running over the fallen crisp Autumn leaves. This is where I first started doing my solo reps before becoming a Strider all those years ago, before getting punished doing the hill reps with the Striders up and down Ballard's Way, which proved much more enduring and challenging. And, of course, using 'Chris Morton's Hill' in Lloyds Park. In a rather strange way I do enjoy racing up hills, perhaps because of the euphoria, knowing the pain won't last forever, and the relief of letting gravity take over once you have gone over the top and free-fall down the other side. I can remember achieving a PB at the Hastings half-marathon whilst enduring non-stop uphill along the Queensway. Fortunately it is quite close to the start, although mind you that provided no time for a warm-up.

My teenage years were dedicated to school: studying for my 'O' and 'A' levels, attending live music concerts, Scouting and football, especially following Chelsea FC.

I didn't consider myself very good at sport but I never shied away from taking part: at secondary school I would always play football for the house team, and occasionally I did represent the school in their 'B Team'. The 'A Team' never lost a game in the 5 years they played. A few of them represented the South London team and a couple became professionals and played for Millwall and others had trials for other London Clubs. So it's not surprising I didn't reach a good standard playing football. However, I do remember playing football every Sunday Morning for hours in the playground on our Estate, and occasionally our Estate would play against another Estate competitively. During my time in the Boy Scouts I would be chosen to play in football, handball, swimming and cross-country running . I never really had a favourite position I liked playing football in, I just imagined I was one of my favourite Chelsea players of the time: Marvin Hinton if I played centre half, Ron Harris (Chopper Harris) if I had to man-mark, Peter Osgood RIP when I played in the centre forward role. I imagine most of you reading this will not have heard of these players. Chelsea FC was my local football team and I started supporting them in 1963 when they were in the old 2nd Division, their only trophy at the time was winning the league in 1955 with a record of achieving the least points. I didn't have to wait long before I shared my first experience of when Chelsea won a trophy; what was then called the 1965 League Cup. They beat Leicester City over a two-legged affair. Of course the excitement of this experience sent me on course for following Chelsea to away-games in England, hoping and wishing for further trophies, and eventually the European Cup Winners' Cup was added, once they had won the FA cup in the 1969/70 season against Leeds after a replay played at Old Trafford for the very first time a cup final that had to be replayed. I had to line up outside Stamford Bridge for 10 hours to get my ticket, those were the days. The match was called the most 'Brutal Match' ever played. In today's game a judgement was made by the current referees there should have been at least 6 red cards and 11 yellow cards. *You can view the match on YouTube.* I also became a season ticket holder the following season.



A young me, holding my first Brownie box camera.

TRAINING FOR A FAST 10K OR 10 MILES (by Alan Dolton)

The last 20 years have seen a substantial growth in Striders' membership. And there has also been a very welcome increase in the number of Striders who are keen to improve their knowledge of training and coaching. When I joined the club, back in the last century, I was the only active member with a UKA coaching qualification. We now have at least five active members with such a qualification. However, I have the impression that as the club has grown, some of our newer members may not be aware of the opportunities of help with training that the club can offer, or may simply be too diffident to ask for personal advice. Looking at our all-time ranking lists, it is noticeable that many of our best performances were set in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, three of our top four 10K times were set before 1993 (when the club had fewer runners than it does now), and six of our top ten 10-mile times were set before 2000. My personal opinion is that we have had quite a number of other runners with enough physical ability to match these performances with the right training, but that they have not done enough quality training to do so.

My first ten-mile road race was the 1980 Epsom '10', where I ran just over 65 minutes off relatively light training (about 20 miles per week). I significantly increased my training after this, and in the 1985 Woking '10' I ran a lifetime best of 51 minutes 32. (Unfortunately I can't claim this as a Striders record, because I wasn't a Strider at the time.) I hope that some of our runners might be interested to see how I trained in the four weeks leading up to the race:

28 Jan AM 4 miles easy; PM 5 miles easy
29 Jan AM 4 miles easy; PM 8 x 800m on track (reps averaged 2 minutes 34; 400m jog between reps)
30 Jan AM 4 miles easy; PM circuit training in gym
31 Jan AM 4 miles easy; PM 6 miles fairly hard
1 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM 7 miles slow
2 Feb 13 miles in 96 minutes (a slow run for me then: I could not race at that pace now!)
3 Feb 50 x 200m on track, starting a rep every minute (i.e. 25 laps of the track; reps averaged 36-37 seconds)
4 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM 5 miles easy
5 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM 8 x 800m on track (reps averaged 2 minutes 29; 400m jog between reps)
6 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM circuit training in gym
7 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM 6 x 600m on track (reps averaged 1 minute 45; 400m jog between reps)
8 Feb (Holiday from work; travelled to South Wales for training weekend with a group of 400m/800m runners) Hill session: 6 reps of 300-350m uphill on sand
9 Feb AM 6 x c.200m uphill on sand; PM 5 miles easy then 10 x c.120m on beach
10 Feb 4 miles 'fartlek' including 12 x 100-150m uphill sprints on sand
11 Feb 4 miles slow (roads icy)
12 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM 16 x 250m on track (light snow on track: reps averaged 44 secs: 150m jog between reps)
13 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM circuit training in gym
14 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM 12 x 250m on track (light snow on track: reps averaged 46 secs: 150m jog between reps)
15 Feb 4 miles easy
16 Feb 5 mile cross-country race (Surrey League)
17 Feb 5 miles 'fartlek' including 10 x c.250m
18 Feb AM 5 miles easy; PM 5 miles easy
19 Feb AM 4 miles easy; PM 5 miles easy
20 Feb 2000m time-trial on track (5 minutes 36 seconds, i.e. average 67 seconds per lap)

21 Feb AM 4 miles easy PM; 7 miles slow
 22 Feb 4 miles easy
 23 Feb 4 miles easy
 24 Feb Woking 10 mile road race: 51 minutes 32 seconds.



Start of the 1985 Woking '10': Melvyn Page (1395), Gary Ribbons (734) and Nick Sirs (1365) are already well to the fore.

Surrey Feature, page 16

(Photo by Noel Manchee from 'Running Review')

1, K. Penny (Cambridge H).....48:21
 2, J. Boyes (Bournemouth)48:23
 3, G. Payne (Southend-on-Sea)48:28
 4, K. Steere (Ilf) 48:38; 5, N. Sirs (WS&E) 49:02;
 6, G. Ribbons (E&E) 49:24; 7, D. Rixon (Car)
 49:25; 8, D. Cox (W. Gn) 49:26; 9, K. Johnson
 (Els) 49:27; 10, P. Jones (Camb.H) 49:28; 11, M.
 White (AF&D) 49:32; 12, M. Page (Wok) 49:39;
 13, C. Tall (B'stoke) 50:01; 14, W. Snelgrove (Th.
 H&H) 50:11; 15, R. Hillier (E&E-disq) 50:13; 16,
 M. McGeoch (Les C) 50:23; 17, K. McDonald
 (Hill) 50:37; 18, M. Couldwell (AF&D) 50:43; 19,
 J. Watson (E&E) 50:49; 20, S. Brace (Bridge)
 50:58; 21, R. Roath (Om) 51:01; 22, E. Barrett
 (Om) 51:05; 23, I. Lamplough (Box H) 51:12; 24,
 B. Walters (BA) 51:21; 25, A. Mason (Barn)
 51:30; 26, G. Lizieri (GM) 51:31; 27, A. Dolton
 (Croy) 51:32; 28, S. Faulkner (High) 51:38; 29, R.
 Witt (Om) 51:40; 30, A. Gibbons (Th. H&H)
 51:42; 31, G. Newhams (Bridge) 51:43; 32, S.
 Almond (Ash) 51:45; 33, M. Duff (WS&E-V)
 51:58; 34, M. Woods (AF&D) 51:59; 35, K. Bell
 (Ox. C) 52:01; 36, C. Bradley (Ton) 52:02; 37, M.
 Coughlan (Houn) 52:05; 38, C. Hall (Wok) 52:06;

I set my personal best for 10000 metres just over two years later, in the Surrey Championships at Tooting in April 1987. My training in the three weeks leading up to the

race at Tooting had benefited by including a week where I was training in Portugal and did four track sessions on successive days:

Mon 6 Apr	AM 6 miles slow; PM 5 x 600m (average 1 min 44: 200m jog recovery)
Tue 7 Apr	AM 6 miles slow; PM 5 x 800m (average 2 min 21: 60 seconds recovery)
Wed 8 Apr	AM 6 miles slow; PM 8 x 400m (average 66.5: 60 seconds recovery)
Thu 9 Apr	AM 6 miles slow; PM 8 x 400m (average 67.3: 60 seconds recovery)
Fri 10 Apr	AM 8 miles slow; PM 4 miles easy
Sat 11 Apr	AM 6 miles slow; PM 2 x 2000m on grass (3 minutes recovery)
Sun 12 Apr	7 miles slow
Mon 13 Apr	10 miles steady
Tue 14 Apr	AM 5 miles easy; PM 10 x 400m (average 68.2: 200m jog recovery)
Wed 15 Apr	5 miles slow
Thu 16 Apr	AM 3 miles easy; PM 4 x 700m (500m jog recovery)
Fri 17 Apr	10 miles slow (hilly)
Sat 18 Apr	10 miles slow (hilly)
Sun 19 Apr	10 miles slow (hilly)
Mon 20 Apr	10 miles slow (hilly)
Tue 21 Apr	AM 5 miles easy; PM 3 x 1000m (average 2 min 57: 400m jog recovery)
Wed 22 Apr	8 miles steady
Thu 23 Apr	'Pyramid' track session – 600m / 800m / 1000m / 800m / 600m (300m jog recovery after first rep; 400m jog recovery after each of the next three reps)
Fri 24 Apr	5 miles easy
Sat 25 Apr	5 miles easy
Sun 26 Apr	10000 metre track race – 2nd in 31 minutes 01.9

During the 10 weeks leading up to this race I had averaged 67 miles per week, including regular track sessions, and was probably as fit as I had ever been. I did not do any runs of more than 10 miles in my build-up to the race, but I was doing several track sessions including repetitions of up to 1000 metres in length. Incidentally it is a reflection on how much I have slowed down that in 1987, at the age of 30, I was able to run a session of 10 x 400 metres in an average of just over 68 seconds. Nowadays, at the age of 63, and with too much wear and tear on my ligaments and tendons after more than 80,000 miles of running, I could not run a single 400 metres at that pace.

Obviously I recognise that there are many runners who will not want to do this volume of training. With the benefit of hindsight, I think that I would still have run some respectable times without doing so many miles of training. However I am convinced that my ability to run relatively fast times was largely attributable to the fact that I did regular track sessions, and I would encourage Striders of all standards who are interested in improving their 10 kilometre times to include regular track sessions in their training routine. In the four weeks prior to my personal best for 10 miles, I did seven track sessions and three hill sessions, and in the three weeks prior to my personal best for 10 kilometres I did eight track sessions. Some of the track sessions involved running fairly fast over relatively short distances, and most of the track sessions were done with a training partner to push me: I think that I would have run slower if I had been training alone. Some of our current athletes seem to think that one speed session a week is enough. That may be the case if your main aim is to finish a marathon. But I would encourage those who are training for shorter distances to do more than one speed session a week, and personally I would be very happy to help advise any Striders who are interested in doing so.

(The 10-mile training schedule originally appeared in the January 2008 club magazine, and the 10K training schedule originally appeared in the March 2016 club magazine. They are republished here – merged into a single article – for the benefit of newer Striders)

COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2020

In the Herne Hill Harriers Open Meeting at Tooting on 2 September, Peter Johnson was third in his heat of the 3000 metres, recording 11 minutes 21.54 seconds. In the South London Athletics Network Open Meeting at the same venue three days later, James Rhodes ran the 800 metres in a new personal best of 2 minutes 09.45 seconds.

Keith Simpson was the first over-70 to finish the Andover Trail Marathon on 6 September. He placed 50th overall, completing the undulating course in 4 hours 33 minutes 23 seconds. Debra Bourne ran well to be the 12th woman to finish the Chiltern 50-mile race on 12 September. She was second in the women's over-50 category and 78th overall (out of 209 finishers), recording 9 hours 56 minutes 42 seconds. At Battersea Park on 15 September, James Rhodes placed fourth in his heat of the 1500 metres in 4 minutes 27.57 seconds.

Martin Filer placed seventh out of 141 finishers in the Bewl Water Trail Half-Marathon on 19 September. He was also the second over-40 to finish, recording 94 minutes 03 seconds. In the Hercules Wimbledon Open Meeting at Wimbledon Park on 23 September, James Rhodes placed sixth in his heat of the 3000 metres, recording a personal best of 9 minutes 41.36 seconds. On 27 September Krzysztof Klidzia ran well to finish first in the over-55 category in the Folkestone Half-Marathon, placing 30th overall in 83 minutes 02 seconds.

In the Stan Allen Mile, organised by Herne Hill Harriers at Tooting Bec on 3 October, James Rhodes set a new Striders' club record of 4 minutes 43.72 seconds, beating the previous record set by Phil Coales at Bromley in 2016. On the following day Keith Simpson was the first over-70 to finish the Kent Marathon at Ashford, placing 74th overall (out of 148 finishers) in 4 hours 12 minutes 35 seconds. Meanwhile, several Striders completed the Virtual London Marathon. The fastest time was recorded by Tom Lawson who ran 3 hours 11 minutes 22. In strong winds at Kenley Aerodrome, veteran Dave Shaw ran 3 hours 14 minutes 38 while two of Striders' leading women recorded personal bests, with Niamh Vincent running 3 hours 18 minutes 59 and Nikki Javan running 3 hours 28 minutes 05.

In the Centurion Running Autumn 100-mile trail race, starting and finishing at Goring in Oxfordshire on 10 October, Debra Bourne recorded a personal best of 23 hours 08 minutes 48 seconds, which was the first time she had run 100 miles in under 24 hours. She was the sixth woman to finish, placing first in the W50 category. Simone Luciani placed second out of 231 finishers in the RunThrough 10 kilometre road race at Stratford on 14 October. His time of 33 minutes 13 seconds placed him fifth in Striders' all-time club rankings.

In the East Surrey League cross-country races at Lloyd Park on 24 October, Striders were led by Tatsuya Okamoto and Phil Coales, who tied for 18th place, each completing the muddy five-kilometre course in 18 minutes 48 seconds. Andrew Aitken was 28th (19:52) and James Rhodes 31st (20:01). They placed fifth in the team event. Striders' women were led by Ally Whitlock who ran well to place 21st in the women's race in 24 minutes 08. Team manager Nikki Javan was 30th (25:14) with Debra Bourne 38th (26:19), Elsa Santana 54th (32:54) and Sarah Allport 56th (36:51). They placed eighth in the team event.

At Battersea Park on 31 October, James Rhodes placed sixth in his 800 metres race in 2 minutes 13.7 seconds. Phil Coales was seventh in his 3000 metres race (9:34.1). Steve Massey won his 3000 metre race (11:20.8), while club colleague Nikki Javan placed sixth (12:27.3). On the following day Simone Luciani won the RunThrough ten-kilometre road race at Stratford (34:13). In the five-kilometre race at the same venue, James Rhodes was third (17:43) with Andrew Aitken fifth (17:49).

20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2000/2001

South London Harriers held the annual Pirie 10-mile cross-country race on 16 December 2000. The winner was Jason Simpson of SLH in 56 minutes 32 seconds. The first woman to finish was Striders' Jane Lansdown, who placed 22nd overall in 69 minutes 22.

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships were held at Lloyd Park on 6 January. The women's race was won by Kate Jenrick of Highgate, while South London Harriers won the team event. Despite their good League performances, our women were unable to field a complete team. For the second successive year the men's race was won by Dave Taylor of Herne Hill. South London Harriers completed a double by winning the team event with Herne Hill second. Striders placed seventh, led by Tony Sheppard who ran well to place 44th. Simon Alexander, back home from university, made a rare appearance to place 48th.

Striders' men and women competed in the third round of the Surrey Cross-Country League on 13 January. Our women, who were top of the Division Two table with two matches left, were at Richmond Park. Unfortunately our best runner, Jane Lansdown, had a heavy cold and was unable to run. In her absence Diane Ballard rose to the occasion with her best run so far, placing sixth, while Susan Bowen also ran very well to place 19th. Our other scorers were Kate Potter, Elene Kayum and Linda Daniel. The team placed fourth in the match, but inevitably our promotion rivals gained ground on us. The overall tables showed that Dorking had moved into the lead with 43 league points. We had 42, while Stragglers had 41 and Reigate Priory had 40. Thus we faced a tense final match at Lloyd Park on 17 February.

Meanwhile our men were competing in Division Three at Epsom Downs. We placed fourth in the match and climbed to fifth in the league table. Tony Sheppard again led us home, in 10th place, covering the five-mile course in 32 minutes 34. He was followed by Nigel Davidson (20th, 34:05); Eric Parker (22nd, 34:18), and Neil Furze (23rd, 34:33).

For the men, the final Surrey League matches were on 3 February. Thames Hare & Hounds won Division One, while Box Hill won Division Two. Striders were competing in Division Three, on our home course in Lloyd Park. We did well to place second in the match and climbed to fourth in the final table. Epsom and Kingston, who had both been relegated the previous year, gained promotion back to Division Two. Our team was again led by Tony Sheppard who ran well to place seventh. Eric Parker was next home in 15th. Our other scorers were Nigel Davidson (20th), Chris Morton (25th), John Kirby (27th), Gerry Crispie (33rd), John McGilvray (43rd), Neil Furze (45th), Colin Cotton (46th) and Alan Dolton (53rd).

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country League completed its 22nd season with a match at Lloyd Park on 17 February. South London Harriers won Division One with Herne Hill second. However, Striders were concerned with the battle for promotion from Division Two, where we were just one point behind Dorking and one point ahead of Stragglers. Jane Lansdown ran well to take second place, behind Janet Ray of Dorking. Diane Ballard also ran very well and with half a mile to go was in fourth place. She then lost one of her shoes in some thick mud, but battled on to finish sixth. There was then an anxious wait for our supporters, as our rivals Stragglers placed three runners in the first 15. However, their fourth runner was closely followed by Susan Bowen in 23rd, who in turn was closely followed by Elene Kayum (24th) and Kate Potter (25th). We were the first team to close in our five scoring runners. Every place proved to be crucial, for the results showed that Dorking had won the match with 78 points while we had 80 and Stragglers had 81. In the overall table Dorking had 56 points while we had 54 and Stragglers had 52. This was the first time that Striders' women had gained promotion since the league was originally split into two divisions in 1991.



Diane Ballard, one of the leading members of the first Striders' team to win promotion from Division Two of the Surrey Women's Cross-Country League



Elene Kayum, another regular member of our promotion-winning team

10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2011

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships were held at Lloyd Park on 8 January. Phil Wicks of Belgrave won the senior men's race, while his wife Emily won the women's race and led Aldershot to victory in the team event. Herne Hill won the men's team event, while Striders produced a good team performance to place eighth out of 17 clubs. The team was led by Lee Flanagan who placed 28th of the 179 finishers, covering the muddy seven and a half mile course in 46 minutes 07 seconds. He finished just one place and two seconds ahead of club colleague Steve Starvis, who was 29th in 46 minutes 09. Bill Makuwa did well to finish 41st (47:32), while Iain Harrison was 84th (50:45), Chris Morton 107th (52:47), and Mick Turner 109th (52:59). Striders only had one finisher in the senior women's race: Alice Ewen ran steadily to place 79th, covering the five-mile course in 42 minutes 12 seconds.

The third Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season took place at Newlands Corner, near Guildford, on 15 January. Duncan Lancashire ran well to place seventh of the 145 finishers, covering the hilly five-mile course in 28 minutes 37. There were also good runs from Lee Flanagan in 12th place (29:01) and Steve Starvis in 18th (29:49). Justin Macenhill was 29th (30:54) with Richard Lee-Smith 36th (31:18) and Simon Ambrosi 56th (32:25). Striders' last four scorers finished within three seconds of each other: Krzysztof Klidzia was 73rd (33:16) with Matt Chapman 74th (33:17), Taylor Huggins 75th (33:18) and Mick Turner 76th (33:19). Striders placed fifth of the nine clubs in the match.

Meanwhile Striders' women were competing in Division One of the Surrey Women's Cross-Country League at Ham. They were led by Helen Furze, who ran very well to place 22nd of the 163 finishers, covering the muddy five-mile course in 32 minutes 14. Striders' next woman home was Josephine Thompson who placed 80th (35:50). Alice Ewen was 100th (37:41) with Hannah Musk 114th (39:29) and Eve Collins completing the A team in 145th (43:26). Sadly, Striders remained at the bottom of the Division One table.

Duncan Lancashire produced another good run in the final Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Richmond Park on 12 February. He placed seventh of the 150 finishers, covering the 5.6-mile course in 32 minutes 05 seconds. Sadly, this was Duncan's last race for the club, as he had moved to Andover. Lee Flanagan also ran well to place eighth (32:22). Striders' next man home was Justin Macenhill, recovering from a hamstring injury, who placed 42nd (35:30), one place and four seconds ahead of Lee Wadsworth. Veteran John Foster ran well to place 46th (35:39). Damian Macenhill was 51st (35:46) with Simon Ambrosi 62nd (36:11), Krzysztof Klidzia 63rd (36:15), Mick Turner 72nd (36:51) and Taylor Huggins 74th (36:59). Striders placed fourth in the match and fifth in the final Division Two table.

Meanwhile Striders' women were competing in Division One of the women's league at Putney Vale. They were again led by Helen Furze, who had a very good race to finish 28th, covering the 5.5-mile course in 38 minutes 27. Steph Upton finished in 51st place (40:46), with Josephine Thompson 87th (43:19), Faye Stammers 90th (43:43) and Alice Ewen completing the scoring team in 97th (44:13). Striders placed 14th in the match and were relegated to Division Two.

One big frustration for road runners is running a good race on a course which subsequently transpires to be short of the advertised distance. There was an example of this at Sidcup on 13 February, when the course had to be shortened because of gas works, and the actual distance was less than the advertised ten miles, preventing at least two Striders from recording personal bests.

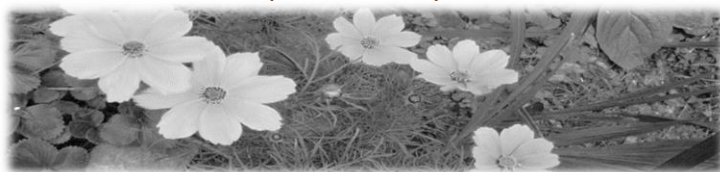
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