

# Striders of Croydon

SEPTEMBER 2021 MAGAZINE



**Joseph Ibe winning the third heat of the Dave Clarke Mile Extravaganza  
in heavy rain at Wimbledon Park on 28 July**

**(photo by Mark Hookway)**

## **CONTENTS:**

**Dates for your Diary**  
**Editorial (by Alan Dolton)**  
**The South Downs Way 100 (by Ally Whitlock)**  
**The Wendover Woods 100 (by Ally Whitlock)**  
**The Wendover Woods Night 50K (by Debra Bourne)**  
**NDW 100: The Muddy Monsoon Edition (by Debra Bourne)**  
**The Round Sheffield Run (by Stephen Allport)**  
**Competitive Highlights: June-August 2021**  
**20 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Autumn 2001**  
**10 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Autumn 2011**

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

Wed 22 September – Annual General Meeting – Sandilands  
Sun 3 October – London Marathon (Striders marshalling)  
Sat 9 October – Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships – Morden Park  
Sat 16 October – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – Epsom Downs  
Sat 13 November – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – venue tbc  
Sat 18 December – South of the Thames Cross-Country Championships – Beckenham (tbc)

### **2022**

Sun 9 January – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Dorking (tbc)  
Sat 15 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – Richmond Park  
Sat 19 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – Lloyd Park



**Nikki Javan on the podium after finishing third in the women's 5000 metres in the Surrey Masters Championships**



## EDITORIAL: SEPTEMBER 2021

Welcome to our third issue of 2021, and the final one before our AGM which will take place on Wednesday 22nd September. I am pleased that we are again able to provide more than 60 pages of reading, thanks primarily to our two most regular ultra-distance runners, Ally Whitlock and Debra Bourne, who have each provided two good-length articles. Ally reflects on her excellent run at the South Downs Way 100-mile race, where she ran what we think is the fastest time any Strider has ever recorded for 100 miles, and also provides balance by reporting on a less successful race at Wendover, where she was unable to finish. Debra reports on her efforts at Wendover (50K at night) as well as on her successful completion of the North Downs Way 100-mile race on a very wet weekend in early August.

Stephen Allport provides balance by writing about the 'Round Sheffield Run', covering a 23-kilometre loop around Sheffield, which I expect that most Striders would choose in preference to a 100-mile race. We also have our usual 'competitive highlights' article covering the three months from June to August. Matthew Stone is continuing to rewrite the club's road running age-group records, and it was encouraging to see our oldest registered athlete, Kevin Burnett, win four gold medals in the Surrey Masters Championships.

The emphasis on long-distance running in this (and some other) editions does not reflect our editor's personal preferences: I have not done a marathon since 2002 and still have no intention of doing another one, let alone testing myself at a distance beyond the marathon. Like many Striders, I have been delighted to see the return of parkrun since our last issue: the reason that there are no articles about any parkruns in this issue is that nobody submitted one! We have a lot of members who enjoy parkrun tourism, and there is such a huge variety of parkruns to choose from that it would be interesting to hear from some of our members as to which parkruns outside the London area they would particularly recommend. I would definitely be interested in hearing from anyone who would like to submit an article reviewing one or more parkruns in other parts of England, or in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or anywhere outside the UK. It has been interesting to see that a couple of our members have recently gained high places in parkruns in France (higher placings than they usually achieve at Lloyd Park).

Another sign of a gradual return to normality is that at the time of writing, it looks as if the Surrey Cross-Country Leagues will be returning on 16 October: the dates appear to be agreed, although at present not all the venues have been officially confirmed.

Good luck to all our members who will soon be running a marathon, and particularly to those who are tackling the distance for the first time. And thanks to all those members who have offered to help by marshalling at the London Marathon on Sunday 3rd October.

Alan



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

I've been pondering over this blog for days, weeks, not really knowing what words to write. Mainly because I'm a typically reserved Brit who doesn't like to shout about their own successes. But there really is no other way of writing about this race. Because you know what, I did good on the South Downs Way. In fact, I did bloody good.



© Stuart March

It's early Sunday morning, 99 miles into the race. I turn into Eastbourne Sports Park, and Nikki and Martin are waiting for me. I want them to join Rel and I for the final lap of the track. It's my race, but I know that really, it's a team effort. They have looked after me superbly all day and I want them by my side for the finish.

As my feet hit the athletics track Martin turns to me and with a firm look in his eyes tells me to run as fast as I possibly can.

We round the first corner, the three of them ushering me into the inside lane, pushing me on, telling me to run faster. Faster. I protest. I'm running so fast, I feel sick but the finish line is in sight and I know that I have hit my goal.

They won't let me slow down. Down the back straight, faster, faster, pushing me on as we round the final bend. There are shouts, words I now can't remember, as they tell me to go, go, go.

I kick and sprint the final 20, 30, 40, 50 metres. Strava tells me I was clocking 6:12 min/mile pace. At the end of 100 miles. I run under the Centurion banner, cross the line and stop. Eyes closed a huge smile.

I've done it.

I knew as I crossed the line that I'd hit my sub-24 hours goal but Nikki and Martin knew something I didn't.

At five o'clock the previous morning I had crossed the start line a hundred miles back in Winchester. I stood there in the middle of the Matterley Bowl completely fearless. Two years ago in the same field, my stomach had been in knots, petrified about my first attempt at the distance. Today, I was calm. I knew what to expect. I knew what I was doing and I knew that I was going to hit my goal.



**At the start with Spencer, Andy, Jon and Yvette**

Does that make me sound overconfident and cocky with not even a mile run? Maybe. But if I have learnt anything from ultra-running, it is that mental strength is as important as physical strength. In the week leading up to the race, I've worked hard on maintaining a positive mindset. As I stand there, my mind is strong.

Whilst training has not been perfect, it has gone well enough to give me confidence that I am capable of a sub-24 hour finish.

Two weeks earlier as my final long training run, I ran the Extreme Energy Devil's Lite 50km on the South Downs. On the day I had to let go of my ego. That race was all about nailing my 100-mile strategy, NOT racing a 50km. I ran to heart rate, keeping it below 140. Ran the flats and downs, hiked the hills. Fuelled every 45 minutes. Paced to perfection, I had enough energy to run up the final few hills and finished with gas still in the tank. Finishing 4th lady and 1st FV40 was an added bonus as I entered a two-week taper feeling strong.

I did a few things differently during taper this time around. I cut out the booze. I don't drink a lot but I do enjoy a glass of wine or a G&T. In the four weeks leading up to the race, I had two drinks and as much as I hate to admit it, I felt better for it. I started taking daily liquid iron supplements to help my energy levels. I switched heavy strength training for mobility work and tried to sleep more (difficult for an insomniac, thanks to sleep aids for the assistance!).

I kept my runs short and flat but added tempo blocks at pace to fine-tune and sharpen. I did everything I could to prepare for the race and I stood on the start line confident that there was nothing more I could have done.

Similar to last summer's North Downs Way 100, this race has been somewhat a saving grace for me. Giving me something to focus on and work towards when life around me was crumbling. I never imagined after finishing the North Downs Way that Covid would throw another curveball at us. Another lockdown, another period of uncertainty.

There were times early on in 2021 when I simply wasn't coping. As a photographer who photographs people, I couldn't work. I had survived the first lockdown and was just beginning to rebuild my business when the second and third lockdowns were thrown at us. I had a near-full shoot diary for January and in the space of 24 hours lost a month's worth of work. Lockdown dragged on and on. It was harder this time around. It was winter, cold, wet, raining and miserable. I had no significant work for nearly four months, it felt like hope was slipping away and running once again became my sanctuary. My escape.

I ran.

I thought about running.

I dreamed about running.

I read about running.

I talked about running.

Because when I was running or thinking or dreaming or reading or talking about running, I couldn't think about anything else. I forgot that I had no work, no income and at times it felt like no hope. When running up hills, I couldn't worry about whether my business would survive. I pounded out my frustrations, fears and worries on the trails and pavements of South London.

Running once again saved me and I am thankful to Centurion Running for once again giving me something to look forward to, something to hope for and focus on at a time when it was very much needed.

Twice their races have rescued me and as always, today's was superbly organised despite the restrictions they had to operate under.

As day to day Covid restrictions eased going into May I began working again. Whilst it will take many months to repair the damage the lockdowns have caused, picking up my camera has helped calm my mind and ease my worries. I am going into the race in a much happier place than I was even a few short weeks ago.

Back to that start line.

It's 5am. As night turns to day, the sun begins to peer over the horizon. A layer of mist swirls around the lowest parts of the Matterley Bowl blanketing the tents of the brave few souls who camped here the night before. With the Covid-secure staggered start, there is no fanfare or ceremony. It is simply rock-up, pin your number on, grab your tracker and run.





The start © Stuart March





**The sun just beginning to rise over the Matterley Bowl**

The first few miles wander leisurely around the Matterley Bowl. We follow the lower path, looking back over the start area. Watching the hive of activity down below me, I feel a sense of peace and serenity on the trail. A mile in we run back through race HQ to cheers and applause. They feel somewhat premature so early in the day.



**On the South Downs**



Nearly four miles in we join the South Downs Way (SDW). I smile. I'm here. I feel good, the sun is shining, the views are already superb, there is a calmness in my mind and I'm looking forward to the day ahead.

My race strategy is simple. For the first half, keep my heart rate (HR) below 140. I will run the flats and the downs, hike the big hills and run smaller hills as long as my HR is below 140. The second half strategy is to simply keep moving. This is how I trained. Based on my last couple of long runs, I have worked out a rough timing schedule. It sits in my pocket. It is also with my crew.

For the first time, I have a race-day crew. Nikki. Nikki and I trained together throughout the winter and the most recent lockdowns. We ran sick-inducing mile reps at silly o'clock in the morning together. We ran up and down hills late in the evening. We ran through snow, wind, rain and pain-inducing hailstorms. We drank mulled wine on a running tour of the Christmas lights and diverted a run on the North Downs to visit the Silent Pool gin distillery. We chatted incessantly on these runs. In short, she currently knows me better than anyone else. She knows my training, my fitness and my goals. There is no better person to crew me.

Three weeks earlier she ran her first Centurion race and her first 50 miles at the NDW50. She smashed it is still on her own ultra-high. Today, she has a task that may prove to be harder than running 50 miles, crewing me for 100!

Crewing is something I've always had mixed opinions about. Does a crewed runner have an unfair advantage over an un-crewed runner?

Nikki is meeting me at various pre-designated points along the route with food, drink and anything else I might need. It means I don't need to rely on aid stations. I estimated I spent about an hour in aid stations at the NDW100. With Covid protocols some of that time was spent queuing, some of it was simply me wasting time. Filling bottles, dithering about what to eat, faffing with my drop bags. Needlessly changing my t-shirt and cleaning my teeth ... There is nothing wrong with any of that, but today I am on a mission and Nikki is here to help me.

But then is it ever a level playing field in racing? You could also ask does a runner with a coach have an unfair advantage over an un-coached runner?

I've noticed that an increasing number of runners in the ultra world are coached. These coaches, with their experience and expertise, plan their training, telling the runners what sessions to do and when. Making each run specific to the goal race ahead.

I'm not coached. I'd love to be but after the past year, it is a luxury I simply can't afford. I've done the best I can by myself. Learning from what's worked (and what hasn't worked) in previous training cycles, piggybacking onto some of Nikki's sessions set by her coach and principally just running.

Ten miles in and a quick glance at my watch as I approach the first aid station. I'm not stopping but I want to know if I'm on schedule. Fuck. I'm 20 minutes ahead. A mild panic. Have I started too quick? Have I been running too fast? Will this affect me later on in the day?

I pause my thoughts for a quick mental check-in. My HR is well within range, my legs feel fine. I've been fuelling as planned and I feel good. I decide not to worry and to carry on as I am. I came into the race rested and fuelled, I'd slept and hydrated well. The early morning is cool. My HR is not lying to me, I know how far I can push it. I have to have the confidence to

trust my training, to trust the process. I send Nikki a quick text to let her know I'm running a little ahead of schedule as I trot on past the checkpoint (CP).

Just after the CP at Beacon Hill, the trail opens up and we're greeted by a stunning early morning view across the downs. I forget that it's still early, not even 7am. I've been awake since 2:45. I politely ask a cow to move off of the path in front of me as I let my legs go and fly down the hill, stopping just in time to open the gate at the bottom. I'm strong on downhills and always take advantage of this strength.



**The view from Beacon Hill**

Although there are runners all around me at this early stage of the race, I am essentially running solo. I exchange a few words as we pass each other by and I see Windsor Andy 100m or so in front but I am quite content running by myself.

This is my time, my headspace, my thoughts. I am enjoying myself. I am happy.

I'm thinking ahead to what is to come. I know the second half of the race well. I've run it time and time again, most recently at the SDW50 in April. The first half I am less familiar with. I'd hoped to get a few recces in ahead of race day, but, well, Covid ... I quickly realise that this wasn't necessary as I remember far more than I thought I did.



**Old Winchester Hill © Stuart March**

Climbing up to the top of Butser Hill I cross paths with Krysia. Krysia and I have been 'Instagram friends' for years but have never met in person. We said a brief hello in the toilet queue at 4:45 this morning and I am pleased we meet properly on the trail. We chat a bit, she pulls ahead, I catch up, I pull ahead, she catches up ... I find myself searching for her white hat in front of me or looking over my shoulder to see if she is behind me. This goes on for at least the next 30 miles as we cross paths.



**Krysia coming out of Cocking later in the race**



At the top of Butser Hill, I look down on Queen Elizabeth Country Park, knowing that Nikki and my first crew stop is at the bottom. Once again I fly down the hill with reckless abandonment, a huge grin on my face. I like this!

I cause Nikki a mild panic as I am way ahead of target. We almost miss each other. She tells me I'm 40 minutes early as she pours me a cup of coke and hands me a banana. I grab a gel, shout my thank yous, goodbyes and still feeling really good I trot on. As tempting as it is to stop and chat (and believe me, Nikki and I can chat!), I want to keep moving.



**Crew stop!**

I hike the hill out of QECP. Grateful for the shade of the trees. The sun is beginning to feel quite warm and the shelter is welcome. I finish the banana and gel.

Gels are something new to me. Previously I have been very anti-gel, or any synthetic sports nutrition for that matter. I think because my early experiences with sweet and sickly gels were not good. They made my tummy hurt. Over the last few months, I have started using the occasional GU gel with positive results and so they have become part of my fuelling strategy for this race.

I have an alarm on my watch set to beep every 45 minutes to remind me to eat. So far, I have religiously eaten at every beep. In the first 23 miles, I've gone through three peanut butter and jam wraps, several biscuits, a banana and a gel. In my pocket, I've now got cold potatoes and mini cheeses!

Eating is something I struggle with on long ultras. I really, really like food and it frustrates me that after about 40 miles I struggle to eat anything substantial. I see other runners tucking into a pizza or a big bowl of pasta and I feel as if I am missing out on delicious treats. I don't know if it is physical or psychological. I just cannot get solid food down.

I've been working really hard on fuelling in this training block and am hoping that I may finally have cracked it. Because it only affects me in the latter miles, distances I don't hit in training, only time will tell.

Just past QECP, my watch clicks over 25 miles. 25%. A quarter of the way.

I feel AMAZING. I am not exaggerating. That gel had something magic in it. I have to pull myself back and stop myself running up hills. I am literally bouncing along full of energy. Marathon distance in 4 hours 30. I would be pleased with that time for a stand-alone trail marathon. Never mind the first of four consecutive marathons. I wonder yet again if I've started too fast but my HR is still well within range and once again I decide to continue as I am.

The morning on familiar paths passes me by. Looking back, I remember very little, or rather it's not that I don't remember, it's just that very little stands out. My sole focus is on moving, I rarely stop, I rarely speak. My mind is calm and empty of distraction. The only focus is putting one foot in front of the other.

I see Nikki at Hartling Downs. She has bumped into Chris, aka 'Box Hill Dude', my SDW50 saviour. In 2019 he got my sub-9 hour finish back on track when I had all but given up hope. He pulled me up the final two hills and sent me on my way to an 8:50 finish time. Today he is crewing another runner. We exchange a few words as I drink more coke and Nikki covers me liberally with suncream. 28 miles in and she's already doing my thinking for me.



**The view from Hartling Downs**

I eagerly run on as I know what's to come around the next corner. A slight incline, a gate and the trail opens up to a stunning view across the South Downs. I remember my Dad's words to me; **“run well, run strong but don't forget to pause and take in the view”**. I do just that. Jogging can wait for a few moments because this view right here is exactly why I run trails. I pause absorbing the glory of it, watching the sunlight dance on the fields of purple far below me.

Where two years ago there were fields of golden rapeseed, today there are vast patches of purple, I assume lavender, shimmering in the sunshine. With each step forward the view changes and I greedily soak it all in. I have to drag myself away. As I turn, I look to the sky.



Two years ago angry storm clouds rolled in and soaked us with a sudden downpour. Today there is not a grey cloud in sight.

Having reached the crest of the hill, I let myself go and fly down the other side. A sharp turn to the right before the next climb up. Hills are a good place for snacks and I crack open the cold potatoes that Nikki handed to me a few minutes earlier. It's eight miles until I see her next.

I'm almost completely alone and I'm in my element. A few cyclists whizz past me in the opposite direction. Up, down, up, down. A moment of doubt flickers across my mind as I can't see any other runners in front of me. Am I still on the right path? Looking far ahead I see red and white tape fluttering in the breeze and sigh in relief, berating myself for doubting even for a moment.



**Running into Cocking ©Stuart March**



Down into Cocking, a virtual high-five with Stu March who's snapping us on the descent. I enter the farmyard to cheers and shouts of 'well done' from the crews lined up on either side of the trail. There's a lively buzz, a party-like feel. Crews waiting for their runners bask in the sunshine. Car boots open, chairs ready for weary legs and snacks laid out like a buffet at a children's party. Nikki is there. Drinks poured. Fresh flasks of tailwind and water ready to go. She hands me a bag of snacks and best of all a surprise Calippo!

I don't stop for long, keen to keep my momentum going. I have no idea what time of day it is, how long I have been running or where I am compared to my goal. And I don't want to know.

All I know is the sun is high in the sky and getting hotter with each step I take. Beating down onto my back and reflecting off of the white chalk path onto my face. I seek out any small patch of shade for some respite from the intensity of its rays. A quick wild wee takes far longer than it should as I relish the coolness of the shade of the bush I squat behind. (TMI...!)

It's hot but I remain focused on the task at hand. I count my steps as I hike every hill. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10... up to 100 and then back to one.

We go again.

It's far too easy for a hike to slow to walk and for a walk to slow to a stroll. The rhythm of counting gives me a determination to my step and I power up the hills. I lost ground on the hills at April's SDW50 and I'm pleased today to feel strong on the ups as well as the downs.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10... 99, 100

We go again.

Up, down, up, down...

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10... 99, 100

We go again.

My mind, strong so far, starts to falter. I know it's the heat causing me to doubt. For miles, there is not a single scrap of shade. I remind myself of last summer's NDW100. Thankful that it's not as hot as that. Watching the long grass waving in the breeze I distract myself with the views. The rolling hills, the lush greenness of the fields, the splash of colour from the wildflowers, the blueness of the sky. A cloud flirts with the sun giving a few moments of coolness. Running down the hill I see the flutter of a Centurion flag in the distance and know I must be near Houghton Farm, the next aid station and crew point.

Nikki, ready and waiting as always, hands me drinks, snacks and asks me questions I don't remember. I say hello to Dai and Lou, Jay-Z's (aka as Jon) crew. I ran a couple of miles with Dai at last summer's NDW when Jon was crewing him. Today he is returning the favour. This epitomises the Centurion family and the spirit of ultra running.

The climb out of Amberley, a small village just past Houghton Farm, is the hottest moment of the day so far. The hill feels longer, higher and steeper than I remember it. A line of runners stretches out in front of me and snakes behind me, slowly trudging up, up and up. My stomach is feeling unsettled, my mind is restless. I don't enjoy the climb. I turn and look behind me. Trying to change my mindset by looking at how far I have come as opposed to how far I have to go.



**Looking back at how far I have come**

The top of the hill levels out as the trail winds through a small but very welcome patch of woodland. Refocusing, I push on knowing that Nikki is only a few miles away at Chantry Post. My watch clicks over 50 miles.



**50%. Half-way**

I take a rare glance at the time. 9:17. 43 minutes ahead of target. Only eight minutes slower than I ran the SDW50 in April. Then, 50 miles was the finish line. Today it is halfway.

Before the race, I decided that I wanted to run straight through Washington, the traditional 'halfway' CP at 54 miles. I knew from volunteering there in 2018 and running in 2019 that Washington is a time vacuum.

Nikki and I chose the Chantry Post at 51 miles to be my 'halfway'.

Nikki's instructions are to get as much food into me as possible and to make sure I have enough supplies to last me until I see her at Devil's Dyke in 15 miles. She has warm water and a damp flannel so that I can freshen up. At 3pm it is still so damn hot I know that I will be a sweaty mess again in a matter of moments but the simple joy of having clean hands and face, even for a few minutes, cannot be beaten!

I drink copious cups of coke and squash, eat half a pot of tinned fruit and a veggie sausage roll. I'm having to mush the sausage roll up with water in my mouth to actually swallow it but I am proud that I am actually still eating. My pride did not last long...

As Nikki stuffs my pack with supplies, my stomach starts to churn. I know this feeling well from the NDW. I need a bush and I need a bush fast. The only problem is, Chantry Post is in the middle of nowhere on a section of SDW with no shelter, no shade and no bushes. I rather abruptly tell Nikki I have to go, walk out of the car park and start up the gentle slope, eyes scanning the horizon for any sign of cover.

In the heat, the body prioritises keeping key organs cool leaving no energy for digestion. I had stomach issues at last summer's Sahara style NDW, it looks like I'm going to have similar issues today too. Perhaps selfishly, I take comfort that I'm not the only runner suffering.

I didn't know it at Chantry Post, but despite all my good intentions, that veggie sausage roll was the last significant piece of solid food that I would eat during the race.

Stomach issues dealt with, for now, I feel good again and pick back up into a steady run into, and through, Washington. As bad as I feel when my stomach goes, I've learnt that the best thing to do is deal with it as quickly as possible because 99% of the time within a couple of minutes I will feel absolutely fine. There is no point in prolonging the suffering and no point in being embarrassed about it. Stomach issues are one of those things that will affect most ultra runners at some point.

After an initial lung-busting climb through the woods out of Washington the trail meanders gradually up to the Steyning Bowl. It's gently undulating and very runnable. A mixture of grass paths and rocky tracks. I have energy, so I run. Pushing a little on the ups, easing off on the downs. HR well within the target range. I still don't know the time. By the position of the sun, I guess it's heading towards late afternoon. I could look at my watch but my stubbornness at not wanting to know how I am doing forbids me to.

This is something I am quite particular about when I am deep into a long race. Bar key points like half-way, I do not want to know the time, where I am compared to my target or what race position I am in. Nikki has strict instructions not to tell me. I am very aware that whilst running these kinds of distances I can only control what I am doing and the mile that I am in. Any other information is purely superfluous and adds pressure that I don't want or need.



Along the hilltop looking down onto Steyning, I pass several other runners, some of whom look in a pretty bad state. I almost feel guilty for being so bouncy and cheerful. I'm running out of ways of saying how good I feel. I feel good just doesn't cut it. I feel GREAT!

I pass the iconic pig farm. Today the wind is, unfortunately, blowing in the wrong direction. Approaching Boltophs CP I clock a 9:14 minute mile. Nine fourteen. At mile 61. In a hundred mile race. My mind is blown that this is even possible. As I hit the CP I know I've had a bloody good section coming out of Washington. I felt amazing and made the most of it.

I also know what is to come.

Bleeding Hill. My nemesis.

I don't like it.

It goes on forever.

And ever.



**The bottom of Bleeding Hill**

I pause at the bottom and look up. Preparing my mind for the task ahead of me. I don't know what it is but Bleeding Hill gets me. Every single time. It starts as an uneven, rocky trail transforming halfway up into a smooth road. You'd think I'd relish the ease of a road but it's the tarmac I dislike. It's deceptive. The gentleness of the slope lulls you into a false sense of security. Stretching into the distance it looks runnable. It's not. It's tough on fresh feet, let alone legs that have 62 miles in them.

I distract myself with music knowing that this will be a long walk. I'm okay with that. I knew from the start that I would be walking this section and my mind is at peace.



**Snapped at the top of Bleeding Hill! © Stuart March**

I catch up with a guy in front. I forget to ask his name but he is wearing a Bad Boy Running vest so we will call him Bad Boy Runner. We chat, as you do halfway up a hill at mile 63 of a 100-mile race; a bit about the run, how we're feeling, our dodgy stomachs and what our goals are. He tells me I should easily get my sub-24. I'm liking his confidence.

At Truleigh Youth Hostel Bad Boy Runner buys a Calippo and a BEER...! I opt for the slightly safer option of two Calippos. One I eat and one I stuff down my top. This is HEAVEN!

Leaving the youth hostel we hit the top of the hill before our lollies have had a chance to melt and it's time to run again. For me anyway. I bid farewell to Bad Boy Runner and with Calippos in hands and tunes in my ears I trot off down the hill. I've beaten my nemesis, I have ice lollies and I'm heading towards Devils Dyke and my next rendezvous with Nikki.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10... 99, 100

We go again.

Up, down, up, down.

Overlooking Brighton, Devils Dyke has a party atmosphere. Crews and supporters lazing in the late afternoon sunshine with cool boxes of snacks and drinks. I spot Nikki and with her another familiar face, Yaz, one of my Striders club mates. I squeal with delight. With a child-free weekend, Yaz is on her own little adventure. She's walked 17 miles along the SDW and has been hanging out with Nikki waiting for me to come past. I cannot tell you what a boost seeing her friendly smile gives me.

I have no recollection of what I eat (or don't eat), drink or say at this crew point. I'm keen to keep on going, maximising the power of the Calippos. Also knowing that the next time I see Nikki she will have Martin, my first pacer, with her.

It's down from Devil's Dyke. I run on. Still running. And feeling comfortable doing so. 66 miles in. Through Sadlescombe CP, still, I don't stop. Pushing up West Hill. Towards the top, I turn and look behind me. Two years ago, I watched the sunset from this spot. Today, there are still many hours of light in the day.



**West Hill**

This is what the training has been for. I have worked bloody hard to be in this position. Mile 70 of a 100-mile race, still running, still feeling good. Body strong, legs full of energy. Mind stronger.

I reflect back to two years ago when everything fell apart at mile 70. Then, I'd been run-walking since before halfway and didn't run a single step after 70 miles. By 85 miles I could barely walk. I learnt a lot from that race. Looking back I am thankful for the experience, knowing that I wouldn't be where I am today if it hadn't gone so badly wrong in 2019.

I power hike up the rest of the hill and break into a jog as I reach the top. A 10:57 minute mile takes me to Pyecombe Golf Course. I'm slowing but still running.

Clayton Windmills. Nikki has the crewing down to a fine art now. I stand there drinking coke whilst she liberally sprays me with insect repellent. She knows my stomach is not happy and is trying to tempt me with anything and everything. I manage a few bites of banana before she hands me my poles and sends me on my way with Martin.



Martin, who like Nikki is one of my Striders of Croydon clubmates, paced me for miles 54-70 two years ago. He knows what he is in for although I don't think he can quite believe how different the experience is today. Relishing solitude earlier in the race, now I'm glad to have company. We run, walk, talk. The gradual incline from Clayton Windmills is frustrating. It's not steep but it's not quite runnable now. As soon as the path flattens at Ditchling Beacon we break into a jog. Down into Housedean I don't stop at the CP but fill my bottles at the water tap just before. One of the great things about the South Downs is the abundance of taps along the trail. I stop at several during the race rather than using the CPs.



© Martin Filer

Climbing out of Housedean, the poles come out. Do I really need them? I don't know. Do they help on the climb? Yes. It's back to the counting, poles in hand. This time silently in my head so that Martin doesn't think I am completely bonkers!

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10.

We go again.

And again.

The sun sinks low in the sky, a burning ball of orange. The lingering pinks, reds and oranges lighting the sky long after it has disappeared. Dusk is slowly creeping in but the vast openness of the downs means head torches aren't needed until the sky is almost completely dark. A week short of the longest day, there will be very few hours of darkness tonight.



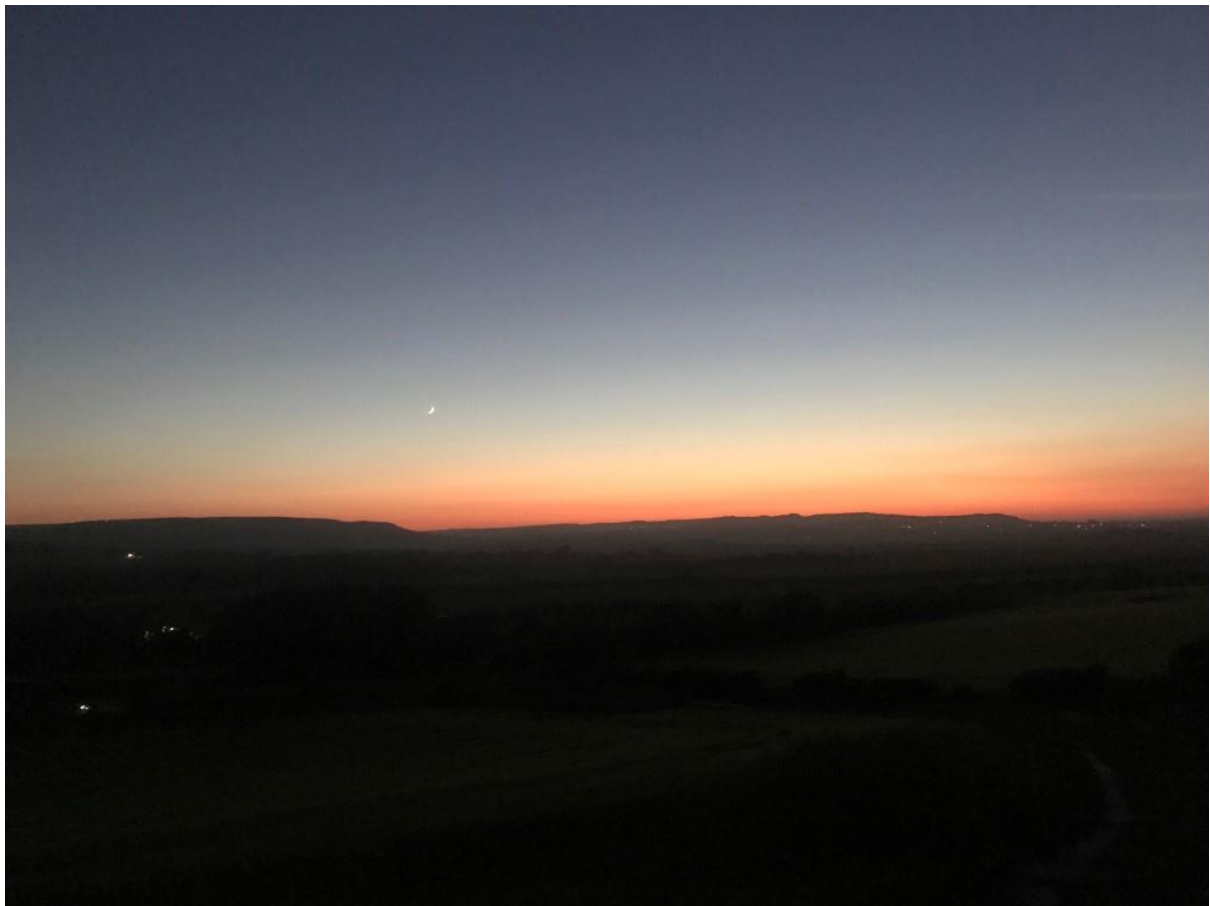
We fill our bottles at Southease Church and dig our head torches out of our packs. It's 10pm and I have the next hill in my sights as I reluctantly turn my light on.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. Up we go.

Pause. The words of my Dad ringing in my ears; "don't forget to stop and take in the view". I turn. Look behind me. The hill I descended a few short minutes ago now sparkles with the lights of my fellow runners. It reminds me I'm not alone out here.

From the river bed at its foot to the trig at the top, the hill out of Southease is more than 500ft in just a couple of miles. This climb was my first introduction to the South Downs, now nearly four years ago. Since then I have scaled this hill time and time again, each time cursing its size whilst marvelling at the views.

Tonight, the fields below are blanketed in darkness, the towns hidden in the night. A faint golden glow lines the horizon to the west. The very last remnants of sunset. Two years ago as I walked up this hill the faint golden glow of sunrise lined the eastern horizon.



**The last remnants of daytime, a crescent moon and some twinkling head torches in the distance**

A glimpse of Firle Beacon ahead of us. It looks deceptively nearer than it is.

Run, walk, run, walk. Down, up, down, up. Waiting at Firle is Nikki, Rel, my second pacer, and a longed-for cup of coffee. Fighting waves of tiredness, I have been dreaming about the sweet taste of this coffee for many, many miles. Nikki hands me my flask. At my request, it



has four sugars in it. I never normally sugar my coffee but this evening the caffeine and sugar combo is my rocket fuel.

Martin hands the baton over to fellow Strider Rel and we push on. Rel saw me at my very worst two years ago when she paced me from mile 70 to the end. My body gave up on me and it was only sheer stubbornness and mental strength that got me to the finish line. I learnt a lot from that experience.

Today we run out of the crew point and away from Firle Beacon, the coffee giving me renewed vigour and a spring in my step. I have a flask of it to keep me going for the last 14 miles!

I still can't eat any solid food but I am religiously trying to take on 'something' every 45 minutes. A gel, a sachet of baby food, one bite of flapjack, a banana, tiny bite by tiny bite. It's not a lot but I am trying to do the best I can. Despite my lack of fuelling, I don't feel devoid of energy. What little I am managing to take on, supplemented by coke and squash at the crew stops, is obviously just enough to keep me going.

I see Nikki for one final time at Bo Peep. It's only a couple of miles from Firle Beacon but when we planned our crewing schedule I was expecting to be suffering by now and needing all the support and encouragement we could muster. Instead, I'm happily bouncing along!

Nikki has been amazing throughout. It's been a learning curve for us both, her in how to crew, me in how to be crewed. I'm not used to letting someone else take control and letting go took me a good few miles but she has everything under control. I may not have eaten as much as I hoped, but she had me eating far more than I would if the decision had been only mine. By the second half, she was thinking for me, topping up my suncream, spraying me with insect repellent. Handing me drinks and making me take my poles despite my protests.

As brilliant as they are, not needing to rely on aid stations took a huge uncertainty out of the race. And perhaps most importantly, having Nikki saved me time. I did not stop, I did not need to wait at CPs, I didn't waste time filling my bottles or trying to decide what to eat. Nikki did all that for me. I didn't sit down and struggle to get up again because, on my instruction, Nikki wouldn't let me sit down. Nikki was invaluable and she has played a huge part in the success of my race.

I go back to my earlier musings about whether crews give runners an unfair advantage. After my first crewing experience I'll readily admit they help. Is it unfair? Possibly, but all the front runners had crews so does that level the playing field?

I suppose the same could be said about pacers. Does their company, support and encouragement during the hardest night-time miles give a runner an advantage? Martin and Rel chivvied me along, kept me moving, focused and even opened gates for me! (Those gates can be pesky things to open after 90 miles of running, believe me!).

I may have run the 100 miles but it has been a real team effort and I can't thank Nikki, Martin and Rel enough for the part they played. Could I have done it without them? Yes. Would I want to? No.

Back to the race.

It's always further between Southease and Alfriston than I remember. Every single time I run this section I am convinced the turning is just around the corner... just over the next lump... just past the hedge... It never is. I am starting to walk more than I would like but my legs are protesting at any inclining of an incline. Flat fine, down, fine. Up? Legs say no.

Down into Alfriston, through the town, past another CP without stopping and over the Cuckmere River. Turn left instead of my favoured right. As much as I love running over the Seven Sisters I really don't want to see them today.

My second nemesis is fast approaching. The hill out of Alfriston. I pause at the bottom and grab my flask. As I drink the sweet caffeinated goodness I'm mentally preparing myself for the upcoming climb.

Poles out. Deep breath. Head down.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. We go again.

It's the focus, the rhythm. I think of nothing else except climbing the hill in front of me. On I count. The darkness covers the views that incentivised me earlier in the day. Beyond the light of my headtorch, all I see are shapes and shadows. There is peace and tranquillity to the night. I look to the sky and in the clearness of the night notice for the first time the thousands of stars twinkling above my head.

I continue counting, climbing. One step in front of the other.

Pretty soon we're running, slowly now, along the hilltop, the climb behind me. Another nemesis slayed. One to go.

Several miles later we hit upon Jevington. The beast. This is what 16 reps of Box Hill was for. This is what running up and down the hill opposite my house at 5am was for. This is what the 110,00ft of elevation during training was for. I have visualised this moment, this hill, during every hill session I've done over the past six months.

Mile 95.

The final hill.

423 ft in one mile.

According to Strava, it takes me 18 minutes and 3 seconds to climb. Also according to Strava I have climbed this hill 8+ times. Today is my third fastest, beaten only by two 16 mile training runs. I power up with strength and determination that I didn't know I possess. I'm strong, I'm powerful. I'm invincible. Nothing stops me until I reach the trig at the top and see the lights of Eastbourne spread out below me. I'm almost home.

Dropping out of the rocky gully, off of the trail and onto the roads of Eastbourne, I glance at my watch for the first time in many hours. I have zero concept of time. It could be midnight. It could be 5am. The elapsed time reads 20:50 something. I believe the phrase I use is 'What the Fuck'.

I look again and again. Not quite believing that I've read it right. How was I on the home stretch with the clock reading 20:50 something?

A wave of relief washes over me and my smile widens. I'm still a couple of miles from the finish line but I know that I've hit my goal. My watch beeps reminding me to eat and I confidently tell Rel that it's 22 hours. It takes her a few minutes to convince me that 21 comes after 20. I'm in complete disbelief. My mind can't quite comprehend this sort of time.

After the beauty of the Downs, the night-time roads of the town are somewhat soul-destroying. However, I relax, safe in the knowledge that I have finished in under 24 hours. I walk more than I should. More than I need. I take my foot off the pedal.

Finally, the familiar Centurion sign. This way to the finish. Turning left I see the stadium, its lights glowing in the darkness, and break into a run again. I am here. I am home. I have done it. To cheers, I enter the stadium. Nikki and Martin join me and we start on that lap of the track.

As my feet hit the athletics track Martin turns to me and with a firm look in his eyes tells me to run as fast as I possibly can.

They know something I don't.

- 21 hours 18 minutes 38 seconds.
- A five and a half-hour 100 mile PB.
- 4th lady by 17 seconds.
- 1st FV40 by 17 seconds.
- 56th out of 308 finishers.
- The sprint finish got me fourth place and first FV40.



© Stuart March



## REFLECTIONS

I sit here three weeks post-race still in disbelief at what I achieved on the South Downs Way, I ran a time and a race that I never in my wildest dreams thought achievable. And more importantly, I ran it well.

This was my A race. The one where I wanted to prove I could do what I believed I was capable of.

And you know what?

I think I did just that.

I felt comfortable and strong throughout. I didn't crash, I didn't burn. I didn't run out of energy. I didn't have a single moment of doubt. I knew as I crossed the start line that I would be crossing the finish line. My body was strong throughout, my mind was stronger.

It was a race experience you can only dream of.

I ran a 5.5 hour PB.

I beat my public goal of 24 hours by 2 hours 41 minutes. I beat my private goal (only known by crew and pacers) of 22:40 by one hour 21 minutes. I beat my private goal (only known by me) of a top 10 finish.

But more importantly, I enjoyed the race and I ran pretty much the whole way with a smile!

As I reflect on my race I am proud of what I achieved, and what I achieved by myself. I am not coached, this was all me and my own hard work in training. However, I also look back and think I had more in me.

I eased off too much in the second half. I didn't push as hard as I could when I was still capable of doing so. I ran the majority but walked more towards the end than I needed to. I wonder if subconsciously I was expecting the wheels to come off and was holding back just in case? I have a glimmer of frustration with myself, a wonder at what more I could have achieved with just a little more confidence. I wonder if this confidence is something a coach would have been able to coax out of me?

I almost can't believe that I am expressing a hint of disappointment after the race I ran. But I think this is also a reflection of how well I actually did. To run like that and believe that I could do more, that is how good I felt.

For many years my running has been all about experience and enjoyment. I run because I love it. It's my time, my place, my thing. I will do two or three races a year and I thrive on a personal challenge but I've never been particularly concerned about times. Aiming for sub-24 – very much a time-based target – was a shift in approach for me and I feel as if I thrived on having a tangible goal.

The South Downs Way has lit a fire within me. A glimmer of wonder. With a little more focus, a little more determination, just what am I capable of achieving?

## AND FINALLY

This wasn't just a simple running challenge. I was also raising funds for a fantastic charity, Feed London.

Feed London's vision is that no child, living in poverty, should ever go without access to fresh food and should never have to miss a meal whatever their circumstances.

The terrifying stat is that over a third of London's children are living in poverty – that's over 700,000 children. COVID-19 has devastated their lives – during lockdown 35% missed at least one meal per day.

Feed London supports 1000s of children and their families by providing essential food boxes and personalised family support packages.

Thank you, thank you, thank you to everyone who sponsored me.

Together, we raised a whopping £1,510. This money will enable Feed London to support 1000s of children and their families. It isn't just food aid, every pound raised through this challenge gives a family hope.



## THE WENDOVER WOODS 100 (by Ally Whitlock)

I shout about the good ones so it's only right that I also shout about the ones that \*don't\* quite go to plan.

At the end of 2019, I ran the Wendover Woods 50. The hilly woodland trails were everything I love about running and it instantly became one of my favourite races. When Centurion Running announced they were holding Wendover Woods 100 for only the second time, I knew I had to be on that start line.

Wendover Woods is an area of woodland on the northern edge of the Chiltern Hills. Named after the nearby town of Wendover, the woods are part of the Public Forest Estate and are managed by Forestry England. Covering 800 acres or 1.25 square miles, it is a mixture of coniferous and broad-leaved trees.

Several years ago, Centurion Running created a now-iconic ten-mile loop with 2,000ft of elevation gain within the woods. I'll repeat that. A ten-mile loop with 2,000ft of climbing in the space of 1.25 square miles.

As an aside, Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the UK, is 4,400ft high.

The 50-mile race that I loved in November 2019 was five laps and 10,000ft of climbs. Or twice up Ben Nevis.

The 100-mile race is ten laps and 20,000ft. Four times up Ben Nevis in 32 hours.

The route is a constant rollercoaster of a ride and almost impossible to describe in words. Up, down, up, down. Dancing around tree roots and jumping over logs. Scrambling up inclines that practically require hands to ascend. Letting loose on steep downhill, your stride is only broken as you jump over a fallen tree blocking the path before turning a sharp corner.

Winding and weaving around the woods, crossing paths with runners coming in the opposite direction and running on adjacent paths, separated only by a line of trees. It's no mean feat to get a ten-mile loop out of space this size!

I described it at the end of WW50 as cross-country on steroids. It's more than that. Cross-country on steroids and every single drug you can possibly imagine.

And I love it!





So there I was one Friday morning with 48 other intrepid souls. Considered to be one of the toughest 100-mile races in the UK the starting field was small. Only seven women stood on that start line. And I was one of them.



It was Centurion's first mass race start post-Covid. After a year of individual starting waves, there was something special about standing together as one for the race briefing. As we waited for the hands of the clock to tick over 8am there was a shared buzz of nervous anticipation.

### **8AM. LAP ONE.**

With a race like this, it is very difficult to run to either pace or heart rate. One of the other ladies asked me on the start line what pace I was aiming for and I said I honestly had no idea. I was under no illusion, this was going to be hard. My aim going into this race was to simply run my best and finish. No more, no less.

With just four short weeks since my dream race at the South Downs Way 100, I had questioned whether a month was enough time to fully recover and tackle another race of this level. But not knowing when, or indeed if, there would be another opportunity to run Wendover Woods 100 I was determined to do it.

Training in the interim had been minimal. Mainly focusing on maintenance rather than improvement. My longest run had been 14 miles on the Vanguard Way and North Downs Way that felt a lot harder than it should have done. I'd also thrown in several short, easy runs and a couple tempo sessions to keep the legs moving. I was as ready as I could be.

I eased into my first lap feeling comfortable. Running to effort, I ran the flats and downs. Walked the steepest of hills and jogged a few of the smaller ones.

I usually run to heart rate but with the varied terrain, it was impossible to keep it steady. It would spike worryingly high on a steep climb, and drop worryingly low on a descent. Constant variation and impossible to monitor. It wasn't helped by the insane heat, which always wreaks havoc with my HR. Looking at the weather forecast ahead of race day, it looked pretty good. Overcast, a few sunny spells, possible light showers and 21 degrees.

What I hadn't noticed was the 94% humidity...

This added several degrees to the temperature. Within a matter of minutes sweat was pouring off me and my vest was soaked through. It stayed like this well into the night and even a brief rain shower late afternoon did little to reduce the oppressiveness in the air.

During lap one I was regularly crossing paths with other runners. Chat was sporadic unless we were on an easier path. All energy and concentration was needed to move. Loose concentration for even a fleeting moment and you could easily stumble on an exposed root. This is not a route for idle chat.

As the race progressed and we all settled into our own individual rhythms, the field spread out and the gaps between runners grew larger. I'd occasionally catch a glimpse of a brightly coloured t-shirt ahead of me or behind me as our paths nearly converged. I could never quite work out where in the loop they were. Were they in front of me or behind me or was I in front of or behind them?





I saw more dog walkers than fellow runners. A few of them stopped me to ask what I was doing. I'm not sure any of them quite believed me when I told them.

I wondered if it would get lonely in the woods but I relished the silence and the solitude of my own company. A bit like at SDW100, I wanted to be alone. Life is somewhat chaotic and hectic at the moment; running is often the only time I get to myself. After a particularly busy working week, I simply needed to be by myself in the stillness and tranquillity of the quiet woods. I was content in my own company.

For a couple of hours bridging laps two and three, I listened to Friday morning's Kisstory, but for most of the time, deep in my own thoughts, the only sound I listened to was the sound of the forest.



During lap five, I didn't see another runner for the whole ten miles. The only indication that the race was happening was the race markings and the aid station at Hale Lane.

There were two aid stations on each lap. Hale Lane at 5.5 miles (although we also ran past, but not through, it at 3 miles) and then the main race HQ in the trig field at the end/start of each lap.

I didn't use the aid stations at SDW100 and only popped into a couple at SDW50. During Covid, they have been much changed with less 'shared' foods and more single-serve packaged foods. Wendover Woods was a happy mix of old and new and I was delighted to see the return of sandwiches and a selection of fruit, including my favoured watermelon. Hale Lane individually wrapped foods, the Trig Point had covered plates, serving tongs and paper bags so that we could help ourselves. It worked well and was a definite improvement on the restrictions that Centurion had to work under at NDW100 last summer.



I really must give a HUGE shout out to the volunteers at the aid stations. It was a small team who worked shifts, but most were there for the whole weekend with just a few hours break.

Because there were so few runners it almost felt like having a personal crew. They did EVERYTHING for us from filling bottles to making our food. All the time supporting, encouraging and helping us battle our individual demons. Races like this couldn't happen without the volunteers who freely give up their time to stand in a field through the night so that we can run.

We also had access to a drop bag every ten miles at race HQ. As usual, I packed the kitchen sink... Because my stomach had misbehaved at the SDW100 and because I wasn't sure in a post-Covid world what would be at the aid stations, I packed baby food, bananas and a few other stomach-friendly treats that I had managed to eat four weeks earlier and hoped I would be able to stomach again.



I also packed three warm tops expecting it to be cold in the woods at night. It wasn't.

A bonus to having such frequent aid stations and access to drop bags was that the mandatory kit list was a lot smaller than usual. Just a foil blanket, waterproof and a whistle – and head torches between 6pm and 5am.

It was a JOY to run with a bag that weighed half of what it usually did!

Back to lap one. It passed without event as I familiarised myself with the course again. Although only eight weeks since my last loop of Wendover there were some paths I swear I had never run along before. How some runners can do the loop without race signage or a gpx I'll never know!

I didn't stop at the first aid station and was in and out of the trig point HQ at the end of lap one within a couple of minutes. Although not mandatory for this race, I was carrying drinks with me which meant I was able to quickly refill them and fuel on the run.

**Lap one done in 1 hour 51 minutes 13 seconds. Nine more to go.**

A mile into lap two I pause for a photo with the Gruffalo, the iconic guardian of Wendover Woods. Having taken a selfie with him on the first lap, it became a personal challenge to photograph myself with him on every lap. It's the small things that keep me amused on these long jogs!



After saying hi to the Gruff there are five big climbs on each lap and numerous smaller climbs. When I say big, I actually mean mini-mountain. The largest climbs are named, I think, to try and distract the runners from their evilness.

So, in the order they come...

### **NO NAME**

A tenth of a mile and 151ft with a 25% gradient. I always forgot about No Name until I turned the corner into it. Bastard hill. (The Strava segment is actually called B\*\*\*\*\*d with No Name). I got a PR on lap one.

### **GO APE**

So named as kids on zip lines whizz over your head as you huff and puff up a climb. Another 10th of a mile with 123ft and a 22% gradient. The strata segment doesn't include the incline leading up to Go Ape which I'm sure adds another 100ft... I also got a Strava PR here.

### **SNAKE**

This one is long. And ironically where I saw a snake\* on one of my training runs. (\*actually a slow worm but it looked like a snake so I'm calling it).

It goes on forever.

And ever.

Actually only a quarter of a mile but with 238ft and 18%, it feels like forever. PR'd here too.

### **GNARKING AROUND**

This climb magically doubled in size every lap. Midway through the day, RD James took a hacksaw to a fallen down tree to make it marginally easier for us. Did I mention the fallen-down trees that we had to climb over whilst scrambling up practically on our hands and knees?

Gnarling is less than a tenth of a mile but has a 29% gradient. Bastard hill. But yes. PR.

### **RAILING AGAINST THE YEARS**

There are handrails on this climb. They do not help. AT ALL. Another 200ft and 21% gradient. No PR on this one though.

Lap two was understandably tougher than lap one. Lap one was a novelty and full of shiny newness and sporadic chat with my fellow runners. By lap two I'd realised what I was in for. The sounds of Kisstory helped a little but I found my mind wandering down a dark road of fear and doubt wondering how I was going to manage ten of these.

### **Time on the clock 3:57:52. TWO LAPS DONE.**

Almost as soon as I'd finished lap two I was in a much more positive frame of mind. I'd got into a rhythm. I was beginning to know when to run when to walk, when to push on and when to pull back. I'd been eating and drinking well, using the walking climb following Hale



Lane aid station and the exit of the Trig Field to refuel. By lap three I felt as if I knew what I was doing and I returned to the comfortable feeling of lap one. I marked the awkwardness of lap two down as a minor blip.



The problem with multiple laps however is that I now cannot remember what happened when. As far as my memory allows, lap three was uneventful. The sole focus was on moving. Up, down, up, down. One foot in front of the other.

**Time on the clock 6:20:57.**

Lap four was also uneventful. **Time on the clock 8:42:34.**

As was most of lap five.

Most of. It rained as I was partway through the lap. I barely even noticed it if I'm honest. It did absolutely nothing to cool me down and there was no point in putting on my waterproof as with the humidity I had been soaked since the start of lap one. All the rain did was make underfoot conditions slippery.

Halfway round I began to feel the familiar ultra nausea. My stomach was churning, unsettled and I felt nauseous. Great. This has happened on all my 100 milers. After suffering quite badly at SDW100, I was hoping that the slower pace and lower intensity of WW would prevent the same issues. Sadly not.

I ran into Race HQ at the end of lap five with mixed feelings. I was halfway, my legs felt strong, I was moving well, climbing well, but my stomach was beginning to affect me. **Time on the clock 11:19:39.** This was some 50 minutes quicker than I ran the WW50 18 months ago when the end of lap five was the end of the race. You may ask had I started too fast and gone out too hard? No. This simply shows how much fitter, stronger and confident I am now.

I'd earmarked the end of lap five to be a slightly longer rest at race HQ. I knew I would need to take my head torch out on lap six and I wanted to change out of my sweat-soaked vest and into a clean t-shirt ahead of the nighttime miles.

For the first time, I dove into my drop bag. Clean t-shirt. Battery pack to charge my watch and phone. Headtorch. Half-way snacks. I forced down a veggie sausage roll, a sachet of baby food and some coke. Nowhere near enough calories for the energy I was exerting but all my body could handle.

Whilst changing my t-shirt I was kit checked (passed!) and told I was leading the women's race... I knew I was doing well but hadn't realised I was doing that well. Those who know me, have run with me, paced me or crewed for me, know that I don't like to be told how I am performing during a race.

I'm very much of the mindset that the only thing I can control is what I am doing and that over ultra distances it's not helpful to think about what other people are doing. Although I must admit, being told this by James the RD did give me a bit of a boost and perhaps pushed me out the door with a bit more of a bounce to my step.

Lap six was tough. My legs were good, my stomach wasn't. The nauseousness slowed me, messed with my head and made me question every step. If you've not suffered from nausea whilst running, it's hard to describe quite how bad it makes you feel. Your stomach churning with every step, the constant feeling that you may be sick (or worse). The knowing that you need to get some calories inside you but the inability to get food down.

Just past Hale Lane CP and coming down the Boulevard of Broken Dreams the woods ahead of me are glowing deep orange. Either they are on fire or the sun is setting. The chance of seeing sunset pushed me on. I know there are some gaps in the trees coming up



and that I may be able to see it disappear over the Chilterns. Somehow I run up a gentle hill in my eagerness! Not long after I need to find a bush... The first of many.

## **SIX LAPS DONE.**

**Time on the clock is 14:24:08.**

At the end of lap six, I force myself back out of Race HQ for lap seven. I fail to eat or take on any significant fuel, my stomach just won't allow it.



It's gone 10:30pm. My head torch is now on, the woods are dark, mysterious and shadowy. I love night-time running and the quietness and solitude of the woods is incentive enough to keep going. My nighttime lap at WW50 was my favourite lap and I'm looking forward to this one. I wonder if I am a bit blasé as I have no fear about running around the dark woods alone.

Tom Sawyer laps me going up Go Ape. He goes on to finish second but was also suffering from stomach issues. I take comfort in that he is only the second person, after the eventual race winner, to overtake me.

No matter how much I love night-time running though, it can't take away how rough I feel. I lose track of how many times I dive behind bushes on lap six. I seriously cannot have anything left in my stomach but yet it still churns, still, I feel constantly nauseous.

The last couple of miles of lap seven are a struggle. My mind has gone as well as my stomach. I resolve to stop when I reach Race HQ. To hand in my number and not finish.



**17:44:50 is on the clock** as I enter the trig point field.

I DECLARE I'M STOPPING.

Am I sure?

Yes.

No.

I sit.

The volunteers gather around me.

I'm stopping.

No, I'm not.

Yes, I am.

Maybe.

I'm not sure.

I know I can't carry on without taking in some fuel.

Zoe Norman tempts me with all of the food on offer at the CP. I look at all of my snacks in my drop bag. Nothing appeals. She offers me a cup of soup.

I sat there drinking a tomato cup-a-soup. It actually tasted pretty good. Once the cup was empty I began putting things back into my bag. I ate a gel and grabbed a handful of jelly worms. No one was near me when I stood up and declared I was off. 20 minutes ago I had been about to take my number off. But I wasn't sure, I wasn't certain. There was a fleeting doubt in my mind. Was I really done?

I picked up my poles, put my headphones in and with Rasputin playing in my ears left the trig field for the start of Lap eight.

I'd been sitting for 20, 30 minutes. I was just beginning to get cold and my legs took some warming up again. The movement was initially stiff and stilted, but within a few minutes they remembered what to do.

I walked the first hill. Poles pushing me forward. Tip, tap, tip, tap on the hard surface. Past the silent and closed cafe and the obligatory selfie with the Gruff. I was moving well again and ran down the firebrick road to the first climb. Up, through the woods. Run, walk, run, walk. Music in my ears although I remember no sound I heard. Turn at the crossroads and down. Onto the path that we share with tomorrow's XNRG Chiltern Challenge. We go down then up one way; they will be going down then up the other way.

Top of Powerline. I don't feel so good again. I'm drowning in waves of nausea. My stomach churns with every step. Diving into the bushes, I empty my stomach again. That tomato soup didn't last long.

In the dark of night, I gingerly make my way down the Powerline descent. Tricky on lap one, 48 runners + numerous laps + the afternoon rain and the path is now slippery. I'm glad of my

poles to steady my step. Do I run across the field at the bottom? I can't remember. On my first lap, I decided that this was a section to be run on all ten loops. Did I at the start of this 8th? I honestly can't remember.

Over the styles, the fairly gentle incline through the tunnel of trees. A sharp right. Fuck. No Name. I pause, look and know I have no other option other than to climb. Poles in hand, up I go. I do not feel good. It's slow going. I'm drowning once again under waves of nausea. I reach the top, stop, lean on my poles. I look to my left and see the steep descent to come. After which comes Go Ape. I can't go on.

I dive behind another bush. I didn't think there was anything left in my stomach.

I sit on a bench looking over No Name and contemplate my options. I am running on empty. I'm 75 miles in. I haven't had any significant food for 35 miles. I dread to think how many hours that is. What I have had, I've not been able to keep in. I feel woozy, light-headed and dizzy after the climb. I try to visualise the rest of the lap. Another 25 miles. I see the climbs, all 14 of them, the terrain. I feel my dizziness. I can't do it. I have nothing left to give. The only sensible option is to stop.

I know where I am at the top of No Name and I know it is a, relatively speaking, easy walk back to the trig field. I sit for a few moments longer just to be certain. I stand and start moving in the wrong direction. I feel a calmness and at peace. I know I have made the right decision. It's a mile or so back to race HQ and I'm moving okay. But, I am on the fire track road, it's smooth, flat and compared to the rest of Wendover, easy terrain. I pass the Gruff in the opposite direction. I take one last photo of him standing forlorn in his field but I can't bring myself to pose with him for a selfie.



20, 30 minutes later I arrive back, through the wrong door, at race HQ and hand Nici my number. My first DNF (Did Not Finish).

Official DNF time, **end of lap seven 17:44:50** (my lap eight miles don't count as I didn't reach Hale Lane CP for my timing chip to be registered).

I sit.

I'm still smiling on the outside but on the inside, I feel rough. I'm not alone in my DNF. Over half the starting field have already stopped, some only managing one or two laps. There are only two women still running. It's a tough race and today it has beaten me.

## REFLECTION

More than a month post-race (yes, it's taken me this long to write about it) how do I feel about my DNF?

I am disappointed. However, I will balance that with however disappointed I am, I know that I made the right decision.

I'm mostly disappointed because I was running well and I was enjoying the race. Even at the start of that 8th lap, whilst I had a little bit of food inside me, I was running well. As a runner, I felt strong. My legs were doing their job, it wasn't them that stopped me but my stomach.

The DNF hurts that little bit more because I was in the lead, I had a whiff of a win. To lead a 100-mile race for 70 miles and to not just fail to win, but to fail to finish, hurts. I will put my hand up to that and admit that my ego has been bruised.







## You're the Local Legend on Wendover Woods Kill Me Now Climb

Most segment efforts in the last 90 days

Distance  
**79.12 mi**

Elevation Gain  
**15,761 ft**

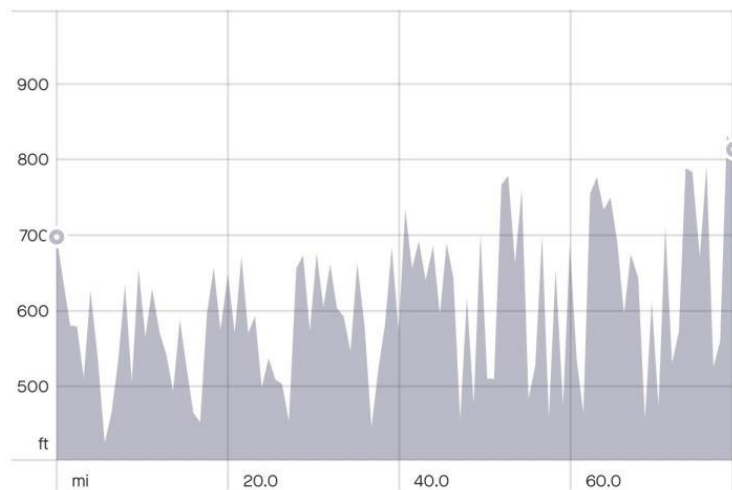
Elapsed Time  
**20:19:39**

Avg Pace  
**15:25 /mi**

Avg GAP  
**13:09 /mi**

Calories  
**6,180 Cal**

### Elevation



Elevation Gain

**15,761 ft**

Max Elevation

**833 ft**

### I WONDER: DID I GIVE IN TOO EASILY?

Could I have forced food in? I could have done, but it would have come right back out again... (and believe me, this was not a pleasant experience). I've now had stomach issues in three out of my four 100-mile races and nausea at all four. Before my next attempt at this distance, I need to try and solve this problem as I can't continue running on empty.

Could I have kept on going on empty? In an easier race, maybe. But when the effort required to climb the first of 15 remaining hills leaves you dizzy and light-headed, it's probably not a sensible option. As I sat at the top of No Name trying to decide what to do, I had visions of fainting down Gnarling.

No, I did not give in too easily. I gave this race 100% and left everything I had out on the trail. Quite literally.

Too many people only see the finish line of the race they are in rather than the ongoing running journey and risk their health to get there. I am in this for the long run. I want to spend the summer bimbaling around the trails of SE England (and maybe further afield). I want to start training for my next race in September feeling strong and powerful. Not struggling because I pushed myself too far in one race and made myself ill.

Running means far more to me than one race. Without running, I am not me.

I am at peace with my DNF.

I am at peace because I know I did my best. I have nothing to prove to anyone other than myself.

In Wendover Woods, I proved to myself that I am capable. I may not have finished but I can compete in tough races. I can hold my own. I am strong, powerful and determined. I can make tough decisions and even with a DNF, I can finish with a smile.

I also know that if I can resolve the stomach issues that I can finish Wendover Woods 100. And if I can finish one of the UK's toughest 100 miles, then I can do anything.

If anything, my DNF has given me the confidence to try. Because, in the words of Elizabeth Day, "To learn how to succeed, we need to learn how to fail". Wendover Woods 100 was not in any way a failure, but by not finishing, it's certainly taught me what I need to do to succeed. And for that, I am thankful to the lumps and bumps of the woods.

Wendover, I'm not finished with you.

I'll be back. (Just need to persuade James Elson to hold WW100 one more time... )

Split	O.Pos.	C.Pos.	G.Pos.	Pace	Duration	Time
Hale Lane 1	25.	1.	1.	11:22	00:56:52	00:56:52
Trig Point 1	22.	1.	1.	10:52	00:54:21	01:51:13
Hale Lane 2	22.	1.	1.	13:33	01:07:49	02:59:02
Trig Point 2	21.	1.	1.	11:45	00:58:50	03:57:52
Hale Lane 3	22.	1.	1.	15:27	01:17:17	05:15:09
Trig Point 3	22.	1.	1.	13:09	01:05:49	06:20:58
Hale Lane 4	18.	1.	1.	15:09	01:15:47	07:36:45
Trig Point 4	18.	1.	1.	13:09	01:05:49	08:42:34
Hale Lane 5	14.	1.	1.	16:33	01:22:47	10:05:21
Trig Point 5	14.	1.	1.	14:51	01:14:18	11:19:39
Hale Lane 6	12.	1.	1.	21:38	01:48:11	13:07:50
Trig Point 6	12.	1.	1.	15:15	01:16:18	14:24:08
Hale Lane 7	12.	1.	1.	22:56	01:54:41	16:18:49
Trig Point 7	11.	1.	1.	17:12	01:26:01	17:44:50

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

The Wendover Woods Night 50K is, not surprisingly, a 50K race set in Wendover Woods and held at night. Centurion first held this race in 2019, in conjunction with what was supposed to be the once-only Wendover Woods 100-mile, but it was sufficiently popular to be added to their race calendar as an annual event.

I had intended to run this race in summer 2020 as a training race before the North Downs Way 100. That went somewhat pear-shaped, as the NDW100 ended up being the first Centurion event after lockdown. My entry was automatically carried over to 2021 and I didn't bother cancelling. Given that I had decided to run the Centurion Grand Slam in 2021, WW night 50K could be a training run for NDW100 in 2021 instead.

Shortly after the South Downs Way 100 in early June, my 88-year-old mother became ill, and she died on 1<sup>st</sup> July. I returned home from her funeral only a couple of days before WW50K. My training during this period had been disrupted to say the least. I considered not going, then decided to run, but go out simply to enjoy it, to relax and lose myself in running for a few hours – which I needed.

In 2019 I had taken the train to Wendover then shared a taxi with other runners. This time, partly because of COVID-19, partly so I could simply stuff everything I might need into the car (I was out of mental energy for making choices on what I did and didn't need), I drove.

It was a fairly warm night and I remembered from 2019 that it would be hot and humid running through the woods, so I dressed in shorts. I opted for a short-sleeved shirt rather than a vest. Ally had warned me of wet and slippery conditions, and I took a couple of different pairs of trail shoes along.

With parking right near the start/finish, I backed my car to within a couple of feet of the rope separating the runners from the car park area, and got myself somewhat sorted with spare water flasks, Kendal mint cake etc. where they would be easy to find. The only other things I needed to do were register (getting my number and tracking device) and visit the portaloos.



**Runners ready to start**

There was a starting 'window' and I was all ready when the Race Director started walking to the start. I took off my jacket, stuffed it into my backpack, just in case, and joined the many runners drifting that way, then realised I hadn't started my watch. Oops! A couple of button presses, a short wait for the watch to find the satellites... a longer wait... Nearly 10 minutes



later I gave up, went to the car and got my old watch out – the one I'd thrown into a bag at the last minute. That one found the satellites almost immediately, so I set off.

As expected, while it had been a bit chilly out on the field, dropping down into the woods it felt several degrees warmer almost immediately.

The course is three laps, and having run both the night 50K and the 50-mile version before, I knew how much ascent and descent I would be dealing with (approximately 2,000 feet per lap). There isn't a whole lot of flat on this course. Fitting a 10-mile loop into the confines of Wendover Woods means a lot of doubling back, places where the path nearly crosses itself, with marshals to help avoid any errors. As well as the main aid station at the end of each loop, there is another one, Hale Lane, at about 5.5 miles into the loop. However, the route passes this station twice. The first time, after about 3 miles, you pass around the back. On the first loop, approaching the aid station for the second time, I was intending to fill one of my water bottles, but a volunteer was urging us all past and onwards. I thought I must have misremembered and we passed it twice before being allowed in? No, as I headed off up the hill I heard behind me the volunteer adding to her cries of 'Keep going, keep going' '... and if you need the aid station, turn in here...'. Too late; I wasn't going to go back and I just hoped I had enough water to last me to the end of the loop.

Onwards and upwards, interspersed with runnable descents, lots of roots and some mud. The paths were not as muddy and slippery as I had expected. There were some sections of deeper mud, but those were not too long, and were soft but not too bad to run through. I had a much better head torch than I'd had in 2019, which definitely helped, and I knew the battery would last for the whole night – also a bonus. I was particularly careful on the Power Line descent to the field in the middle of the lap, as I remembered from previous races just how slippery that little section could get. Care was needed, and I did slip a bit there, but it was not nearly as bad as when I'd last navigated the slope, during the WW50 in November 2019. Nor, on one of the infamous uphill sections, Gnarking Around, did I feel like I was slipping backwards half the time.



**Gnarking Around on lap 3**

Up the steps of Railing in the Years, making good use of my hands, arm-over-arm on the rail to help me ascend, a little more, then the flatter sections at the end of the lap. Over the stile, across the field – already noticing how much cooler it is up on the open field than down in the woods – and into the marquee. First lap done and my water had just held out. A quick refill, a couple of bits of food from the tables, thank the volunteers, then onwards, with a brief stop at my car for more Kendal Mint Cake.



**Railing in the Years, seen on the last lap**

I hadn't bothered checking my lap times from 2019 and had no idea whether I was going faster or slower, nor did I care really. This was simply about enjoying the race – which for me meant pushing myself, but not too hard. Across the far side of the chilly HQ field and back into the humid woods for lap two.

Much of the time I was alone, just me and the trail and my headtorch, with occasional owl hoots and other sounds of night wildlife, possibly disturbed by all the idiots running around their woods shining bright lights. Little bits with other runners and chatting a little, before paces diverged again or we split at an aid station. Thanking the volunteers of course (always!) at the points where the trail almost crossed itself.

This time I was ready for the half-way aid station and stopped briefly for some fruit and a quick water top-up from the friendly volunteers. "Thank you!" and onwards. The long runnable downhill named the 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' seemed much longer than I had remembered, and it was a relief to finally turn and head back uphill, walking rather than running.

Back to HQ, and rapidly through, only taking a few bits of fruit, then bleeping my car boot open and exchanging empty for full water bottles – faster than refilling – and a final plunge back into the trees and humidity.

One of the nice things about the 50K is that because it's a lapped course, after the first lap you know what to expect when, and can be mentally ready for it. On lap two if you're finding it hard you can remind yourself that you will only have to do that section once more. And on lap 3 you know it's for the last time in the race.

The overnight format provides an extra boost for lap 3, as the dawn chorus starts well before there's any lightening of the sky, and the woods around you fill with birdsong. It's an absolutely magical time. Gradually, you become aware that the world outside your headtorch beam is less dark. Then it's obviously lighter, and finally, as you continue, colour returns both to the sky and to your immediate surroundings. Part way through the lap I found I could switch off my headtorch, at least in the more open sections, then later for longer periods.

One last time past the Gruffalo; one last time safely down the slope to the field; once more through the aid station, this time just taking a piece of fruit. Once more running down the Boulevard, leaning into the Gnarking slope, making use of the handrail up Railing in the

Years. A final time over the sadistic end-of-lap style, across the field and over the finish line. Done.



**Colour returning to the world**

I had gone into the event with no expectations, no goals other than losing myself in the running. Somewhat to my surprise I discovered that I was 4<sup>th</sup> female finisher, 1<sup>st</sup> VF50 – and I had finished in 6:44:57, 25 minutes faster than in 2019 (7:10:11).



**Finished and happy**

I would definitely recommend this race. It's a tough event, but it's a great challenge.



**Dawn over the HQ field and marquee**



## NDW 100: THE MUDDY MONSOON EDITION (by Debra Bourne)

It's dark outside the beam of my headtorch, I'm bent almost double making my way along a green tunnel of spiky vegetation while trying not to trip over roots or slide on the mud, and my chance of reaching my A-goal of finishing in under 24 hours vanished behind me hours ago. But I keep going.

NDW100 is the third in the four-race Centurion Grand Slam and after finishing sub-24 at both TP100 (23:30) and SDW100 (22:31) I was very keen to run sub-24 at NDW100 as well. This would be harder, as NWD100 is 103.5 miles, with a similar total ascent and descent to SDW100. The forecast was for showers, temperatures likely to be 17-21 °C during the day, dropping to maybe 13 °C at night, but dry by then. After last year's event at 30+ in the shade, that sounded pretty good. A bit of rain, even the occasional heavier burst, in those temperatures would not be a problem.

Training in the eight weeks between SDW100 and NDW100 had not gone according to plan. My intention had been to run very easy for a couple of weeks after SDW100, then recce sections of NWD from start to finish in weekend long runs, as well as returning to speed sessions on Tuesdays and tempo or progression runs on Thursdays (plus yoga and strength sessions).

However, my mother became ill and I spent the first four weeks after SDW100 driving between Beckenham and Manchester, spending hours in the hospital at my mother's bedside, and finally, sadly, attending her funeral. Although I did some running during this time, and even ran the Summer Ranscombe Challenge with SVN during a period in the middle when she rallied and I came home for a bit, I was very stressed and my training was disrupted to say the least. Soon after her funeral I ran the Wendover Woods Night 50K (that I'd entered expecting to run it in 2020), then tried to fit in as much as possible of the NDW into two long recce days of 34 and 26 miles, two shorter ones of about 14 miles each, and a trot of the final 4.5 miles - which I was hoping I'd be navigating in the dark. Although I have run NDW100 before, much of it I hadn't run since the race last year, and I wanted to remind myself of the route profile and easy-to-miss turnings. The recces were definitely useful, with errors made during those enabling me to be very aware of the places I might go wrong, which gave me greater confidence and helped me not go wrong on race day.

The start time window was 0500-0600 and I aimed to be setting off by 0515. I've always tended to be a bit last-minute with booking pre-race hotels, and on this occasion there were no rooms left close to Farnham, so my husband and I decided we would get up at 3 am, and leave at 3.30 for the 75-minute drive to Farnham.

The alarms worked, we had no problems on the road. Got to Farnham in good time and all the pre-race prep of getting number and tracker, dropping off drop bags etc. went well and my watch found the satellites quickly. All good. I said goodbye to my husband and headed for the start.

My plans went pear-shaped not far into the race.

The forecast of showers was wildly incorrect. Saturday morning was stormy and during the first nine hours of the race I estimate we had a total of 30 minutes, in periods ranging from maybe 30 seconds to 5 minutes at a time, when it **didn't** rain. The rain was irritating, but no worse than that – it wasn't too cold and I'd run in much worse downpours, including during one of my NDW recces. Much more important was the result of all that water on the state of the route underfoot. In brief, it was muddy. Very muddy. The first few miles the footing was

fine, and I really enjoyed the running. After that long lengths of paths were slippery with various depths of loose, slippery mud, slowing my running and tiring my legs as I worked hard to stay upright. In many places the paths were covered pretty much side-to-side by large puddles. Options were running through the puddles – risking injury as the depth was unknown and any debris underwater was not visible – or spending extra time going round the edge and risking slipping into the water and in some cases risking slipping off the edge of the path.



**Here's where it all starts – trail head in Farnham**

Several trees lay across the path. Some I had seen on my recces, but others had fallen in the last week or so. They variously needed to be climbed over or round. On one occasion I decided that with my short legs I would be better off ducking **under** the trunk. It was highest at the downhill side of the path, and as I moved to that side, crouched down and began to slither under, my feet started to slip off the path and down the steep slope. For a moment I thought I was about to slide right down the hill. Thankfully I managed to grab the tree and stop myself before scooting through to the other side – not helped by a taller runner shaking the trunk as he climbed over while I was sliding under!



**Typical muddy path and puddles –  
photos and modelling of puddle depth by Trinity Buckley**



I was not feeling fresh anyway – too little sleep, too much stress, interrupted training – probably a combination of these. Even in the first miles, where the ground was okay, I felt that I wasn't running as well as I had at SDW100 or WW Night 50K. Added to this, the muddy ground conditions were surprisingly tiring. In 2020, I had been relatively slow in the first half of the race because my pace was dictated by the temperature (and because of delays waiting at aid stations due to COVID-19 prevention measures). The net result of this was that at 50 miles, while the heat was energy-sapping my legs had felt fairly okay. This year there were no aid station hold-ups, and heat wasn't a problem, but by the time I reached Knockholt Pound after fighting the mud, my legs felt drained.



**At Newlands Corner and Caterham. Photos courtesy of Stuart March Photography**

The rain had finally stopped and I took the time in the aid station to change my socks and shoes. The kinesiology tape protecting blister-prone areas and providing support to my old ankle tendon injury was saturated and peeling off, so I dried my feet on paper towel and replaced the tape. This all took time, but the increased comfort afterwards made it well worthwhile – and I never developed any blisters, which was a definite plus. I was well behind where I had wanted to be timewise: I had arrived at Knockholt Pound later than expected and left it a lot later than I had intended.

As in 2020, my back started to chafe under the pack and I phoned my wonderful husband to meet me in Oxted, the next point where crews were allowed, to tape up the rubbed areas, before heading up the steep hill out of the village. Onward.

I'm not going to lie: the first half of the race was difficult. The second half of the race was hard. The ground conditions were somewhat better in terms of mud, but with lots of sections that were rooty and/or overgrown. My legs were really tired and I found that while in 2021 I'd been running the downhill and flattish sections from Knockholt Pound to Hollingbourne, this year I was finding it hard to run at all after 50 miles. I soon realised that my A goal of finishing in under 24 hours was gone. Then my mental calculations indicated that my B goal of a course PB was becoming impossible to reach – I wasn't going to finish under the 24:45 I ran last year either. In the TP100 and SDW100 I had been able to dig into reserves and keep running. This time I was still prepared to dig deep but there simply were no reserves. My C goal, always, is simply to finish the race and I had to concentrate on that: just do it. Keep moving forwards even if that means walking; finish the race without serious injury; and stay in the Centurion Grand Slam.

As the light faded, I took what comfort I could from my familiarity with the course: at least, unlike on TP100 in May, I wasn't worrying that I was going off-course – and I didn't go off-course at all.

Most of the first half of the race I had been running alone, occasionally passing another runner or being passed. Approaching Knockholt Pound I had found myself with two other



runners, and I bumped into both of them again during the second half. Neither knew the course, and I was able to give them some information on what to expect.



**Early parts of the second half. The rain had finally stopped**

Mentally I was breaking the race down into sections, concentrating on getting to each aid station in turn. Knockholt Pound is the closest point to home, which is an advantage in NDW50 as the whole race is 'running home', but in the 100 there's a risk of feeling discouraged afterwards as I'm heading back away from home. I countered this by thinking of miles 50 to 70 as 'heading for Ranscombe': a positive thought because I have enjoyed many Saxons, Vikings and Normans challenge events in the Ranscombe nature reserve and associated woodlands. Just after Ranscombe is the Medway Bridge crossing, which I hate – noisy, traffic thundering by on the other side of the fence, no shelter. I tried to think positive thoughts, that at least as it was night I was not being sun-baked, and concentrate on making progress towards the Detling aid station and my second drop bag there. I kept my time at the Wrotham, Holly Hill and Bluebell Hill Aid Stations as short as possible – fill bottles, take some fruit and jam sandwiches, thank the volunteers and leave. About 10pm I took my first caffeine tablet of the night and I popped at least two more during the race.

At Detling I was in and out of the aid station reasonably quickly – no change of shoes needed, just refilling water bottles, getting food and replenishing my supplies of salted roast potatoes and Kendal Mint Cake. Nearing Detling I had found I was back with the runners I had met earlier. Coming out of the village, I teamed up with one of them, Dave. He was from Yorkshire and didn't know the course at all. I was able to act as a 'native guide' and reassure him that yes, the tunnel of greenery that we were negotiating, uphill, in the dark, bent double and trying not to trip over roots or get too badly snagged on brambles, was indeed the NDW. That bit really is in a sorry state for a waymarked National Trail! Detling to Hollingbourne is gnarly: steps up, steps down, rooty sections; the undergrowth adding to the tripping risks by making it difficult to see what hazards lay at ground level. Last year I rather enjoyed the challenges of this section. This time it was slow, and it was great to have company. We chatted and encouraged one another, sometimes joined by another runner.

Down into Hollingbourne. There is a tap at the pub on the corner, the Dirty Habit, and I topped up one of my water bottles. From here through the next aid station, Leyton, and all the way to the final aid station at Dunn Street Farm is straightforward and fairly boring: mildly undulating (with more up than down, unfortunately), all on minor roads and broad gravelled tracks in various states of repair – and some with large puddles, indicating that there had been heavy rain here too. Dave and I stayed together; the other runner was walking faster than we were and pulled ahead.

Dave was suffering from blisters as well as specific painful bits of legs, and eventually, slowing further, he encouraged me to leave him and go on alone. I didn't have any particular

painful areas, but my legs felt very heavy and tired. Leaving Dave, whenever I reached a slightly downhill section I managed to jog a bit, but never fast or far, and always dropping back to a walk at the slightest incline. Through Leyton with a brief stop for water and food, then onward. I was still pushing to keep as good a walking and occasional jogging pace as I could, although this was depressingly slow. Finally to Dunn Street Farm. A quick trip to the toilets there helped me feel more comfortable, and I set off on the last section. First the NDW crosses and skirts round the edge of some fields, emerging onto a roadway where the route diverges from the NDW through a small gate, passing around an old church before continuing on roads down into Ashford. I was pleased that I had reced this and was very sure where I was going, even if my pace left a lot to be desired.



**The sun rises, although this doesn't make my legs feel better, alas!**

During the last mile or so I managed to jog for more of the time than I walked. I passed a few people and then finally was caught up to by another runner with her pacer, and we jogged together for a few hundred meters. Up a final little hill on the road, then dropping down and entering the stadium, with the other runner handing her pack to her pacer and running ahead of me round the track. I managed to run round the track, if a bit more slowly than she did, and under the arch. Finished in 28:10:12 – a really disappointing time for me, but with a consolation prize that I still came in 1<sup>st</sup> VW50 and 6<sup>th</sup> female, in a race with a 46% DNF rate.



**Finished! – photos courtesy of Stuart March Photography**

## **Afterthoughts**

This was one of the hardest races I have ever done. Both physically and mentally I was in poorer shape than I should have been. I was still stressed after my mother's death and from trying to catch up with work, and sleeping badly. My running schedule had been disrupted; my strength training had collapsed, and possibly I had fitted in too many long reces in too short a time. As at TP100 and SDW100, ranitidine, taken Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, had kept my stomach comfortable and prevented it from bleeding (a vast improvement from last year's 100s). From what the volunteers told me, I was one of the few runners who didn't fall, but the mud had been energy-sapping, requiring a lot more effort than normal simply to keep upright as well as for making forward progress. Skirting the puddles, as I had done most of the time, had also slowed me down. Chatting with other runners in Ashford, at least one had a DNF following twisting her ankle on submerged debris having run through a large puddle, so I was happy with my decision not to splash through the muddy opaque water.

I'm sometimes asked what keeps me going in these races, especially when it's gone wrong and is not in any way fun at the time. To date, after more than 100 ultras and marathons, I don't have any DNFs, which gives me an incentive to keep up that record. The NDW100 is also part of the Centurion Grand Slam of 100s (TP100, SDW100, NWD100 and A100) which is my main goal for this year: a DNF in any of the four races would also mean a DNF for the series. And I am using these runs to fundraise for two charities – giving me extra reasons for keeping going.

Basically, it comes down to two things: a) I'm stubborn and don't like to quit; b) the satisfaction of finishing for me outweighs the discomfort during the race – it's 'Type 2 fun'. I think and hope\* that I would have the sense to stop if I was seriously injured or at risk of causing myself long-lasting damage (or shorter-term damage that would rule out a goal race I was working towards) if I continued. Other than that, I'll keep going unless I time out.

(\*Arguably I -should- have stopped when I stress-fractured my pelvis during the London Marathon in 2016, but at the time I didn't realise what I had done, and I really didn't want to have to run London again.)

**\*\*\*\*\*Still fundraising for Wildlife Vets International, in memory of my colleague and friend John Lewis, and for Five Talents. Both are doing fantastic work of totally different types.\*\*\*\*\***

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/debra-bourne-wvi>

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/debra-bourne-five-talents>



## THE ROUND SHEFFIELD RUN (by Stephen Allport)

This may sound awful, but as Sarah and I don't exactly live near our respective parents, finding an event to be a reason to go and visit them is something we've done over the years. As Sarah is from near Sheffield, when I saw the Round Sheffield Run in one of the running comics a couple of years ago, my interest was piqued - I mean a one-multi-stage run? Don't see many of them, do you? After a couple of years of delays due to missing "the sign up has opened" e-mails and the event filling, then getting a place for 2020 and, well, you-know-what delaying things, we finally headed north at the end of June 2021.

Surprise, surprise, the M25 and bottom of the M1 were painful, and plans to get my number the day before were promptly abandoned. Instead, the car was stashed at the Mother-in-law's, coffee drunk, before getting the tram-train across to Sheffield. Then hotel check-in, book time slot for breakfast (thanks you-know-what), pizza, pint, then sleep.

Saturday morning, up bright and early, fast broken, day pass bought, bus caught and I'm in Endcliffe Park about twenty minutes before my "please be here at this time so there aren't too many people due to you-know-what" but no issues getting number and timing chip/dibber early. Took a moment at the Mi Amigo memorial and then back to the start area. Useless trivia, Steel City Striders kit is a slightly more orangey yellow than our yellow but with the same green side panels. Anyhow, the tannoy asked for my wave to start lining up. Social distancing meant two queues keeping their distance and every thirty seconds the front of the queues would dip in and start.

So: dip in, multi-stage?

Simply the race is a loop of just over 23k but only 11 sections totalling 11k are timed. The timing chip/dibber mentioned earlier is a pendant you wear around your neck:



and at the start/end of each stage you insert it into one of these:



to trigger the start/end of a stage.

The first stage is a path running along a stream, slightly uphill but nice and wide. As there are a couple of reasonably busy roads to cross, runners are encouraged to dip on each side of the road so the time lost waiting for a gap in traffic doesn't count to your race time. Stage two had the most climbing of the timed stages. Getting into the head of the valley we'd been running up with a couple of hairpins. The Liaison Stages between the timed stages have time limits, but for whatever reason they don't want runners flooring it along them: between stages one and two it's the path past a café, between stages two and three it's a narrow path alongside a B-road above Sheffield. I planned to take a few photos with a GoPro and keep that handy, leaving my phone safely in my bag. However, while taking a photo of the view across to the city and thinking how quickly we got into the countryside, the GoPro decides the memory card is corrupt and doesn't want to play.

Stage four is a decent back into the suburbs, the liaison is a walk up the main road and onto a path, "oooh steps, oh", unlike the Box Hill fell race (and no doubt other races), this is part



of the liaison and not timed. Talking to some of the runners around me it used be, but is no longer part of the timed stages. Get to the top of the steps and start running, it's single track along the side of a steep slope so have the fun of trying to pass other runners when it's safe to do so. The next few stages and liaisons are a repeat of good paths to run, walk the less interesting parts and then we get to Meersbrook Park; see how this looks like you are above Sheffield?



Well, you are and then it's a steep drop: looking at Strava afterwards the section averages a 9.3% descent and hits a maximum of 23%.

By the time Stage 10 comes around and it's another reminder that Sheffield isn't exactly flat as the road turns uphill again, I'd lost track of how far I'd gone/have to go so may have eased off a little and the marshal shouts "come on Stephen, you are almost at the top, would I lie you?" Despite me saying "yes" I was almost at the top of the final climb, a gentle wander down the other side of the hill and back into Endcliffe Park. The final stage is a flat 400 m "sprint" (with spot prize for the fastest runner), how fast can I go, hmm not bad, not brilliant but after just over 600m of elevation in the legs over the last 2½ hours it will do. Finish and dip in for the final time, receive the obligatory medal, goody bag (slightly more generous than some events), return the dipper and get a printout of the stage times in return.

The event village has a pizza van and a beer stand; seating for the beer drinking area has a marshal by the entrance to stop the general populous getting in. As we are still in you-know-what restrictions it was table/hay-bale/deck chair service so find a seat, put your arm up and somebody will take your order and then bring a drink to you. As the instructions said, probably not a bad idea after the run...



Then it's "where have I put my travel card?", and a couple of buses to get back to the Mother-in-law's.

Looking at the results over both days, I've placed 420<sup>th</sup> out of 2161 finishers, so happy to be in the top quarter and it was a pleasant day out. With a mix of trails and residential roads as the timed sections, and the liaisons meaning there was no worry about things like losing time crossing major roads or having to dodge pedestrians on the busier sections, along with what felt like a well organised event with good communications during the previous year as you-know-what provided its challenges, it's definitely something I'd consider doing again and recommend if anybody wants a (non-flat) reason to visit the Steel City.

Finally couple of thoughts about environmental impact: yes it's a long way to travel but for us it was also combined with family visits; and yes, feed stations were a mix of halved bananas, those small waxed paper cups pubs put ketchup in, but instead they contained jelly babies, and bottles of water. It sounds wasteful but it was to reduce touch points, due to you-know-what...

However, race t-shirts were an optional extra (and cotton, not a synthetic sports t-shirt) and the medal is multi-use: that crescent of metal above the squirrel's head is recessed so it slides under the cap of a nice cold bottle of beer and the rest of the medal acts as the lever to open it...



## COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: JUNE – AUGUST 2021

Two Striders produced excellent performances in the South Downs Way 100-mile race, from Winchester to Eastbourne in hot conditions on 12 June. Ally Whitlock was the fourth woman to finish, placing first in the over-40 age-group and 56th overall out of 433 starters. She finished in 21 hours 18 minutes 38 seconds, which is believed to be the fastest time any Strider has ever recorded for 100 miles (although our records of ultra-distance races are incomplete). Club colleague Debra Bourne was the tenth woman to finish, placing first in the over-50 age-group and 95th overall, and recording a personal best 22 hours 31 minutes 57.

Striders produced some good performances in their first Southern Veterans League meeting of the season, at Kingsmeadow on 14 June. Julian Spencer-Wood, in his first track race for four years, had an excellent run to set a club over-70 800 metre record of 2 minutes 53.7 seconds, placing third in his heat. This made Julian the oldest Strider ever to run 800 metres in less than three minutes. Club colleague Peter Johnson placed second in the previous heat, recording 2 minutes 42.6. Lorraine Hunte ran very well to record a club W65 record of 17.7 seconds for the 100 metres, placing fifth in her heat. Sandra Francis was third in her 100 metre heat (18.1) and later placed fourth in the women's long jump, winning the over-60 category with a leap of 2 metres 91.

Striders produced some more good performances in the second Southern Veterans League match of the season, at Sutton Arena on 5 July. In wet conditions, Paul Cripps did well to win both the high jump, where he set a new club over-55 record of 1 metre 45, and the triple jump, where he set a new club over-55 record of 9 metres 61. Steve Corfield had an excellent run to place second in his heat of the 1500 metres, setting a new club over-55 record of 5 minutes 05.5 seconds. Julian Spencer-Wood had another excellent run to win his heat of the 1500 metres in a club over-70 record of 5 minutes 53.2, making him the oldest Strider ever to run the distance in less than six minutes. Lorraine Hunte ran very well in the 200 metres to set a new club W65 record of 38.2 seconds, placing third in her heat.

Five Striders won medals at the Surrey Masters Track & Field Championships at Kingsmeadow on 18 July. They were led by the club's oldest registered athlete, 82-year-old Kevin Burnett, who had an excellent day, winning four gold medals. He won the M80 shot (4.22 m), discus (9.75 m), javelin (7.51 m) and hammer (10.68 m). On the track, silver medals were won by Lorraine Hunte in the W65 100 metres (17.79) and by Alan Dolton in both the M60 800 metres (3:22.47) and the 1500 metres (7:00.89). Nikki Javan ran very well to place third in the W40 5000 metres, recording 22 minutes 21.00 seconds on a very hot afternoon, while Joseph Ibe took bronze in the M40 1500 metres (4:50.69).

On 31 July Matthew Stone had an excellent run in the RunThrough Lee Valley Velo Park 10-mile race, placing fourth overall in a new Striders over-55 record of 61 minutes 22 seconds.

In the North Downs Way 100-mile race on 7 and 8 August, Debra Bourne ran very well in difficult weather conditions to be the sixth woman to finish, placing first in the W50 age-group and 65th overall out of 204 runners (28:10:12). Tatsuya Okamoto also ran very well to finish 17th (22:47:18). On 23 August Ally Whitlock had an excellent run to set the fastest known time by a woman for the Vanguard Way. She completed the 68-mile route from Croydon to Newhaven in 16 hours 26 minutes 52.

On 27 August Matthew Stone had another excellent run to place 15th in the Serpentine five-kilometre road race at Hyde Park. His time of 17 minutes 48 seconds was a new Striders over-50 record, beating the previous record which he had set at Battersea on 13 July.

## 20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 2001

The tenth annual 'Switchback' race was held on 29 September. The first two runners were both from Box Hill Racers, with Paul Haywood winning from team-mate Mike Airey. Striders' Simon Alexander ran well to place third, while Bob Ewen was fifth, Neil Furze seventh and Peter Yarlett 11th. The first woman to finish was Meredith Pannett of Dulwich, who placed 12th overall. The second woman was Viv Mitchell of South London Harriers.

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country League began its 23rd season with a match at Wimbledon Common on 13 October. For the first time since the league was split into two divisions in 1991, Striders were competing in Division One. Unfortunately we now had a much weaker squad than the one which had gained promotion eight months previously, having lost our three best runners during the close season. Not only had Jane Lansdown emigrated to Guyana to do VSO, but Diane Ballard was taking a long holiday in Australia and Susan Bowen had prematurely retired from running. Additionally Elene Kayum was unable to run because of a knee injury. So of the five runners who had scored in the team that gained us promotion, only Kate Potter ran for us at Wimbledon. Kate had an excellent run to finish 28th, and was followed by Jane Hobden (42nd), Heather Fenton (59th), Linda Daniel (73rd) and Lyn Simmons (75th). We finished in a predictable last place of the ten competing clubs. Meanwhile our men were competing in Division Three at the same venue. We did well to place second, only 13 points behind host club Wimbledon Windmilers. Eric Parker led us home in eighth place, covering the five-mile course in 29 minutes 17. Tony Sheppard was not far behind in 11th (29:45) and Neil Furze was 21st (30:30).

The 21st Croydon 10K was held in torrential rain on 21 October. The winner was Alex Rowe of Wesham in 34 minutes 36. In second place was former Croydon Harrier Barry Cooke, now running for Bromsgrove, in 35 minutes 34. For Striders, Tony Sheppard ran well to finish third in 36 minutes 32, and to win the over-40 category. The first woman was Rosalind Lewis of Shaftesbury-Barnet, who placed fifth overall in 37 minutes 20. Meredith Pannett of Dulwich was the second woman finisher (38:05).

The East Surrey League held its annual cross-country race on 27 October in Lloyd Park. Crawley won with 33 points, ahead of Hercules Wimbledon (40) and Box Hill Racers (41). Striders did well to place fourth. Our first finisher was Tony Sheppard who placed eighth in 32 minutes 19, one place and one second ahead of Eric Parker. Gerry Crispie was 23rd (34:11) and John Kirby 28th (34:37). Jane Hobden was the third woman to finish.

The second Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three race of the season was held on 17 November at Epsom Downs. Striders placed second; for the second successive match, we were 13 points behind Wimbledon Windmilers. Our team was led by Simon Alexander who ran very well to place seventh in 31 minutes 17. He was followed by Eric Parker (13th, 33:16); Neil Furze (18th, 33:59); Gerry Crispie (22nd, 34:05); Ciaran Osborn (26th, 34:22); John Kirby (34th, 35:19); Chris Morton (43rd, 35:58); Pete Yarlett (47th, 36:04); Colin Cotton (50th, 36:13) and Nigel Davidson (56th, 36:32). On the same day our women competed in Division One at Tilford. Kate Custis led us home in 49th place with Emma Hailay 54th, Linda Daniel 67th, Michele Lawrence 70th and Lyn Simmons 85th.

The third Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three race of the season was held on 15 December at Lloyd Park. Striders won the match, thirteen points ahead of Collingwood. Simon Alexander again led us home in sixth place, recording 31 minutes 24. He was followed by Gerry Crispie (13th, 32:50); Ciaran Osborn (15th, 33:16); Neil Furze (19th, 33:35); Eric Parker (21st, 33:37); John Kirby (34th, 34:39); Paul Finch (38th, 34:56); Chris Morton (45th, 35:47); Simon Smith (49th, 36:04) and Ken Low (56th, 37:02).





**Meredith Pannett of Dulwich, who was the first woman to finish the 2001 Switchback**

## 10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 2011

Striders staged the 20th annual Switchback cross-country race on 25 September. The race was won by Mike Cummings of Herne Hill, who recorded 28 minutes 31 seconds. The first Strider was Lee Flanagan who finished fifth in 29 minutes 47. The first woman to finish was Ola Balme of Dulwich, who placed 22nd overall in 33 minutes 42. Helen Furze of Striders was the second woman home, finishing 25th overall in 34 minutes 12.

Striders' women placed third of 19 clubs in the opening Surrey Womens Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Lightwater on 8 October. They were led by Steph Upton who placed 23rd of the 136 finishers, covering the four-mile course in 28 minutes 18 seconds. She was closely followed by Josephine Thompson who placed 24th (28:21) and Alice Ewen who was 26th (28:25). Faye Stammers was next home in 37th (29:13) and Hannah Musk completed the scoring team in 41st (29:40).

Meanwhile Striders' men were competing in their first Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two race of the season, at Richmond Park, and had to settle for last place of the nine competing clubs. They were led by Lee Flanagan who placed 28th of the 137 finishers, covering the five-mile course in 30 minutes 15 seconds. Richard Lee-Smith was next home in 43rd (30:54) with Simon Ambrosi 65th (32:14) and Damian Macenhill 67th (32:19).

The Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships took place at Richmond Park on 15 October. Kevin Burnett was Striders' only medallist, placing third in the M70 race.

Bill Makuwa made a very good return from injury to finish fourth in the 36th Croydon 10-kilometre road race on Sunday 16 October. He started cautiously but moved through the field to complete the course in 35 minutes 12 seconds. Lee Flanagan was seventh (35:34) while Krzysztof Klidzia placed 21st overall and second in the over-40 category (37:46). Josephine Thompson was the seventh woman to finish, placing 96th overall (43:28).

Striders placed third of the ten competing clubs in the East Surrey League's annual cross-country race at Lloyd Park on 29 October. Herne Hill won the match with 14 points, ahead of Epsom (56), Striders (60), Reigate (65) and Croydon Harriers (83). Striders were led by Bill Makuwa who had an excellent run to place fifth, covering the undulating five and a half mile course in 29 minutes 43 seconds. Steve Starvis was 15th (31:02), with Richard Lee-Smith 17th (31:45) and Dan Jewell completing the scoring team in 23rd place (32:40).

Striders faced strong opposition in the second Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, on our home course at Lloyd Park on 12 November. Their best performance came from Lee Flanagan, who placed 33rd in 31 minutes 35 seconds. Bill Makuwa was hampered by a calf injury but battled on to finish 42nd (32:01) while Steve Starvis was 49th (32:36), Krzysztof Klidzia 53rd (32:52), Damian Macenhill 59th (33:10) and Rob Sharpe 68th (33:40). John Foster ran well to place third in the over-50 category and 74th overall (34:10), while Barry White was 79th (34:23), Mike Stewart 87th (35:10) and Matt Chapman 88th (35:14). The team climbed off the bottom of the table, but remained in the relegation zone in a very competitive division.

Striders placed seventh of 20 clubs in the second Surrey Women's Cross-Country League match of the season, at Richmond Park on 3 December. Striders were led by Alice Ewen, who placed 32nd of the 161 finishers, covering the 5.8 kilometre course in 25 minutes 44 seconds. Faye Stammers was not far behind her in 36th (25:56), with Steph Upton 40th (26:07), Josephine Thompson 42nd (26:11) and Hannah Musk 47th (26:41).





**Alice Ewen was our first finisher in the Surrey Women's League  
match at Richmond Park in December 2011**



## AFFORDABLE GARDENING IN THE CROYDON AREA



quality local garden maintenance at a competitive price

lawn mowing & hedge trimming  
planting, tidying, weeding and clearing  
encouraging nature into your garden  
laying paths and paving  
ponds : cleaning and maintaining

Providing a quiet and environmentally friendly service, I have lived in the centre of Croydon for 17 years.



phone on 020 86671017

mobile on 07710008939

email [chriscroydongardener@gmail.com](mailto:chriscroydongardener@gmail.com)

website, for rates <https://chriscroydongardener.wordpress.com/>

I am fully insured and CRB/DBS checked

## PRIVATE MATHS TUTOR

11+, GCSE, A Level

Need help for you or your children in maths?

One-to-one tuition provided for Key Stage 1 all the way up to A level.

Tuition provided in your home or agreed alternative location.

Contact Simon Ambrosi via details below or see website for further information.

Phone: 07947 536973

Email: [admin@heretoteach.co.uk](mailto:admin@heretoteach.co.uk)

<http://heretoteach.co.uk/index.html>

### **Andy's Photos**

Sporting and Special events photographs.

These photos make great presents or raffle prizes.

e.g. Chelsea, Manchester United, Crystal Palace.

Athletes such as, Usain Bolt, Jessica Ennis, Mo Farah etc.

Rugby, Tennis, Cycling and many more.

Please email any enquiries to: [lorraine@lhunte.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:lorraine@lhunte.wanadoo.co.uk)

# **SPORTS MASSAGE THERAPY**

HELPS REDUCE MUSCULAR SORENESS AFTER TRAINING OR  
COMPETITION: HELPS RECOVERY FROM SOFT TISSUE INJURY

**ALAN DOLTON**, LSSM Dip, ITEC Dip, MSMA, MISRM

CNHC REGISTERED SPORTS THERAPIST  
UK ATHLETICS LEVEL 3 CLUB COACH

TELEPHONE 020 8656 0532  
[alandolton@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:alandolton@yahoo.co.uk)

70 WARREN ROAD, ADDISCOMBE, CROYDON, CR0 6PF  
<https://www.surreyphysio.co.uk/services/sports-massage/>

DISCOUNTED RATES FOR STRIDERS OF CROYDON

## **CROYDON SPORTS THERAPY**

**Sports/Running Injuries?**

**I OFFER THE FOLLOWING**

- **Sports Massage**
- **Kinesiotaping**
- **Exercise Rehab**
- **Strength & Conditioning**
- **Nutritional Advice**

**Located at 40-44 St George's Walk, CR0 1YJ**

**Call 07984 052823 or e-mail [bea@myptstudio.co.uk](mailto:bea@myptstudio.co.uk)**