

Striders of Croydon

DECEMBER 2021 MAGAZINE



Striders' young athletes' team at the first Surrey Cross-Country League match of the season, at Richmond Park on 16 October

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2022

Sun 9 January – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Dorking
Sat 15 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Division 2 – Richmond Park
Sat 15 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Division 2 – Mitcham
Sat 19 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Division 2 – Lloyd Park
Sat 19 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Division 2 – Effingham
Sat 12 March – British Masters Cross-Country Championships – Tonbridge



Striders' women at their first Surrey Cross-Country League match of the season, at Richmond Park on 16 October

CHAIR'S CORNER DECEMBER 2021

Welcome to the winter edition of our club magazine.

It's been an eventful few months! Lots of races taking place; we were back marshalling the London marathon; and my thanks as ever to lead organiser John Gannon and the around forty or so volunteers. Also huge thanks to everyone who volunteered for Race for Life, and it was particularly nice to be helped out by Croydon Running Sisters this year.

Coming up in this edition in our always diverse offering to readers ...

Ally Whitlock sets off to navigate the whole of the 68 miles of the Vanguard Way in a day. As if that wasn't enough of an achievement, she also aims for a FKT (Fastest Known Time) for a self-supported female. Oh, and Ally didn't tell anyone either other than advising her husband she was going out for a long run ...

Staying with amazing achievements we have a profile of veteran UK runner Arthur Walsham, still going strong.

As someone who has had their fair share of foot injuries (although I'm sure many of us would probably say the same!) I was particularly interested in Alan Dolton's book review of The Runners Guide to Healthy Feet and Ankles. (My favourite running fact is that 25% of your bones are in your feet).

There have been some great individual and team performances over the last quarter including four Striders age-graded records broken!

Reading on to Alan's competitive highlights from both 10 and 20 years ago I was struck by how many runners mentioned are still active members of Striders.

I'm sure I'll be sharing a drink with some of them at our club Xmas social this weekend!

Safe running and best wishes for 2022.

Tony



THE VANGUARD WAY (by Ally Whitlock)

The Vanguard Way (VGW) was where I discovered trail running in 2016. Before the Vanguard, I was a road runner pounding the pavements of Croydon day after day. I knew no different.

One evening early in the summer, the club run took us off the roads and onto the trails of Croydon. I entered a whole new mystical world. Over those summer months with Striders, I discovered a wonderful side to Croydon that I never knew existed: woods, forests, fields, tracks and trails. I started to fall in love. One evening we ran a few miles along the Vanguard Way. I saw signs around the woods, my curiosity was piqued.

I went home, googled 'Vanguard Way' and discovered a path that started at East Croydon Station and wound its way 68 miles south to Newhaven on the coast. In the summer of 2016, 68 miles was an inconceivable distance.

I ran the club run by myself, once, twice, three times. Creeping a little further along the trail each time before one day I plucked up the courage to try running a significant section.

I set off on my first big trail adventure in an old pair of road shoes knowing nothing of gpx files, apps or watches that told you where to go. I armed myself with a map printed off the internet and faith in signs to run the first 18 miles to Edenbridge, where I knew there was a train that would take me back to Croydon.

I ended up in Merstham, some 20 odd miles away from Edenbridge.

I lost the VGW six miles in just past Chelsham. A sign was deceptively hidden and my inexperienced trail eyes didn't know where to look to find it. I ran round in circles for what felt like hours trying to find the path both on the ground and on my useless printed-off-the-internet map before giving up and following the signs for cycle route 21, which having cycled some of, I knew would take me to Caterham.

With numerous accidental detours and missed turnings, it took me another two attempts to find my way to Edenbridge. By then I owned trail shoes and had learnt how to import a route into the Google Maps app on my phone – but I still didn't have a watch capable of navigation.

Finally arriving in Edenbridge I felt an enormous sense of pride. It had taken me over a year to get there but I had done it. I had navigated myself to somewhere I didn't know. In the interim period, I had almost fully transitioned to trail running and had run my first ultra, the North Downs Way 50. I'd even managed to find my way along the North Downs Way in training before race day. Admittedly the NDW is a lot better marked than the VGW!

But nothing beat the satisfaction I felt when I made it to Edenbridge.

I immediately began to plan to run the next section, wondering if I could eventually make my way along the whole trail.

But then brighter, shinier, more exciting challenges came along. I abandoned the Vanguard for the South Downs, the North Downs, the Serpent Trail, adventures on the SWCP and climbing Pen y Fan. I ran another 50 miles and another. 100km and 100 miles. Occasionally I'd cross paths with the Vanguard as I was off exploring another trail and I'd be reminded of that early dream.

One day I said.

One day.

August 2021. After the pandemic we don't talk about, work had been relentless for several months and I was tired and in need of some time away from my camera and computer. I cleared a few days in my diary.

Some five years after first discovering the Vanguard Way, I set about planning a few days of back-to-back running to cover the whole path from my hometown of Croydon to the trail end in Newhaven. At the start of the year, I had bought a lightweight tent, sleeping bag and camping stove, and was keen to try it out.

I reverted back to Google to plan. I was primarily looking for campsites, small, rustic ones close to the trail and local amenities, but also I was trying to find an accurate gpx file of the route to upload to my watch. I am now fully engaged and on board with digital navigation!

Doing so I stumble onto the Fastest Known Time (FKT) website.

There was no female FKT for the Vanguard Way...

I wonder...?

I click on the FAQs. The rules. The guidelines for submitting a run. I read the report from the male VGW FKT holder. I wonder some more.

"An FKT is, it's exactly what it sounds like: the fastest known time on a certain route that is at least five miles long or has 500 feet of climbing. Your goal is to get from Point A to Point B as fast as you can. A few things differentiate it from an actual race. First, you are not technically racing anyone else while you are running. You pick the date and start time, and you either try to beat the existing fastest known time or you run as fast as you can to set the first official fastest known time on a new route. Secondly, the entirety of the event is on you; there are no course markings or race marshals directing you where to go and no aid stations along the way. Anyone is allowed to attempt an FKT on any trail at any time at any point in a year!"

I abandon looking at campsites and instead look at the first bus to East Croydon Station from my home in the north of the borough, and the last train from Newhaven to Croydon. There are 18 hours between the two.

I form a plan. It's Friday. I want to run on Monday. I have three days to prepare.

MONDAY 16TH AUGUST 2021

My alarm goes off at 3:40am. I debate rolling over and going back to sleep but the draw of an adventure is too great and it pulls me out of bed. I'd prepared everything the night before, running kit laid out, bottles filled, snacks prepared, bag packed and breakfast made. All I need to do is brew some coffee, a morning essential no matter the time!

At 4:30am and still in the dark of night, I catch the first bus to Croydon. The roads are unusually quiet but I'm surprised by how many people there are wandering around the town centre before dawn on a Monday morning.

Just before 5am I set off from the unmarked and unremarkable trailhead at East Croydon Station. My only goal is to arrive in Newhaven in time for the last train back at 11pm.



Sunrise is not due for nearly an hour. Under the light of my head torch the early miles speed by. The paths are familiar, my feet know where they are going and I barely need to think. Across Lloyd Park, I'm careful to pick the right path through the centre, so used am I to running the Cross-Country route around the perimeter. Conduit Lane and Littleheath Woods. Keeping my heart rate low, as if I was in a race, and my effort levels easy, I walk the small inclines through the Littleheath and Selsdon Woods.

Six miles in, on the edge of Farleigh, the sun rises. A deep orange ball in the morning sky, only visible for a matter of moments before it slides silently behind a blanket of cloud. I hope it reappears during the day.



Sunrise... just!

I'm lost in my thoughts, thinking about the day ahead.

As much as I have spent the past couple of days planning, in many ways, I am not prepared and I don't know what to expect. And that makes me slightly nervous.

Only nine weeks since completing the South Downs Way 100 and five since attempting the Wendover Woods 100, I am confident I can run the distance. But can I run the distance alone? The furthest I have run by myself outside of a race is 35 miles. And that was tough. I worry about fuelling, my nemesis in races. I worry about not finding anywhere to top up on water, despite having a list of shops and pubs on or near the trail in my pocket.

I worry about navigation, even though I have the route on my watch, imported into Google Maps on my phone and OS Map downloaded for offline viewing. I know my way until Edenbridge at mile 19 but then I know nothing of the trail until it converges with the South Downs Way some 43 miles later in Alfriston.

I may be a little apprehensive of the unexpected but at the same time, I am looking forward to my adventure. All I am doing is going for a long jog, and I like jogging. There is zero pressure or expectation. I haven't told a soul what I am doing, not even the husband (I told him I was going for a long jog and would be home later... I thought he might try and talk me out of it!).

This telling no one stems back to fears from my early days of ultrarunning; if I don't tell anyone what I am doing, then I won't need to tell anyone when I fail. I don't know why I have reverted to this mindset and I berate myself a little for doing so. In my head, I am confident I will make it to Newhaven.

I just need to keep moving.

And not get lost.

I am running self-supported. This means I can have as much support as I can find along the way, but not from "any thing or person just for me"; any support I employ must be equally available to anyone else. I can stop at shops, pubs, cafes, etc, to refuel.

Unsupported, you cannot do this, you have to carry all that you might need for the duration of the run, although you can top-up at public taps if they are available. The third FKT category is supported, this is where you have a crew of people who are there to help just you.

I couldn't do an unsupported run as I knew I wouldn't be able to carry enough food and drink for the whole day. As far as I can tell there are no public taps on the Vanguard route (unlike the South Downs Way which has an abundance of them). I start with two litres, each litre adding a kilo of weight onto my usual trail kit (first aid, warm base layer, waterproof, etc), which makes my bag quite heavy enough!

In the kudos stakes, self-supported supersedes supported and unsupported supersedes self-supported.

Back to mile seven in Chelsham. The path I couldn't find back in 2016 I now confidently run along, ignoring the private property sign nailed to a tree. Five years ago this sign threw fear into my mind and was the reason I got lost. Now I know it's just placed there by an overzealous farmer trying to deter people from using a public right of way that crosses his land.







Skirting around the edge of Henley Wood and I'm at the top of the first significant hill; Nore Hill. It's been a gradual, almost unnoticeable, climb over many miles. Behind me sits the London skyline, in front, the Surrey Hills. As I fly down the subsequent steep descent my mind ponders that although I'm some 90+ minutes into my adventure, most of London behind me is not yet awake.

On the ridge at the top of Botley Hill, nearly the highest part of the VGW route at 853 feet, I look out over the M25. Rush-hour traffic is almost at a standstill. I know where I would rather be on a Monday morning. Here, with the motorway on my right, the Vanguard Way shares a mile with the North Downs Way. Another path familiar to my feet and home to many happy trail memories.



The VGW and NDW sharing the trail

As I run I'm trying to remember what I see and how I feel because I know I will need to write a report for the FKT people as part of the verification process. Fifteen miles in and running over the M25 I'm simply feeling good. The day is warming up with the sun peeking out from behind the clouds every now and again. It's pretty perfect running weather.

At this time of day, the trails are silent and bar a couple of dog walkers and farmers I don't see another soul. I revel in the silence and solitude, sharing the path only with cows who eye me warily and sheep who scatter as I approach.

Sixteen, 17, 18, 19 miles. Past Edenbridge and we're onto new paths! A field of sunflowers waving in the breeze distracts me as I cross a small grass airstrip at East Hasted Farm. I take far too many photos, but the flowers are somewhat unexpected and beautiful.





A few miles later, I photograph a Vanguard Way sign. It says 22 miles to Croydon, 44 to Newhaven. It's only 9am and I am already one-third of the way but I still have a long way to go. This momentarily blows my mind. I post the photo to Instagram Stories, a little tease, and wonder if anyone will twig what I am doing. (The answer is, yes... take a bow SDW100 crew extraordinaire Nikki!)



28 miles in and I reach the small Sussex town of Forest Row. Having spent hours poring over maps in the preceding two days, Forest Row, with a conveniently placed shop, was one

of the places I had earmarked for refuelling. I top up with a litre of water, 500 ml of coke and 500 ml of orange. And a Calippo. Always a Calippo!

From Forest Row, the route climbs steadily. I'm now carrying 2.5 litres of fluids and my bag suddenly feels very heavy again. A little grumpy with the extra weight, it is not a good time for my first serious navigational challenge.

I'm trotting through a golf course when suddenly my watch beeps angrily to tell me that I've gone off course. But there was no other path. I took the only one. I turn, look around me. Wander up and down a little. By the thin green line on my watch screen, I can see that I have quite clearly gone wrong. Out comes the OS Maps on my phone. I trace my steps back, of course, it's up a slight hill (isn't it always?). At the top, there's a bloody big Vanguard Way sign that I missed. But no path. Until I look closely. The tiniest of tiny gaps in the undergrowth, not even one leg width wide. I venture in and my watch beeps to congratulate me on finding the path again. Fighting my way through the overgrowth I breathe once more.



Can you spot the path?

The last golf course I crossed had a sign almost every 20 metres. This one has none. I am relying entirely on my watch for navigation which is good, but not perfect. In the next mile, I lose the trail another two times, becoming more and more frustrated. Normally I wouldn't be so bothered, I'd just wander on until I picked the path up again but today it is really important that I stick to the route. I don't want to make it to the end and to have my FKT application rejected because I missed a few hundred metres of trail when I got lost.

Thirty-three miles in and I lose the path yet again. My watch doesn't pick it up. The trace on Google Maps doesn't pick it up. The OS Maps app doesn't pick it up. I go round and round and round in circles. The only time that any of them tell me that I'm on the path is when I am stood in the middle of an overgrown patch of trees where there very clearly is NO path.

I have a few choice words about the lack of signage as I traipse up and down. Just as I am ready to give up I spot a walker on one path, I ask him if he's on the Vanguard Way and he says yes! Hoorah! The path is nowhere near any of the paths on any of the maps, my watch

is still beeping angrily at me telling me that I am off course but at the bottom, there is a small, hidden, VGW sign. Why was there not one at the top?

It's a sign of things to come... Ashdown Forest is one of the wildest and most beautiful areas in southern England and part of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. But it does NOT HAVE A SINGLE VANGUARD WAY SIGN! I am relying 100% on my watch and with paths crisscrossing all over the place, it is tricky to navigate.

This is where I should have paid more attention to the Vanguard Way website in my planning. It states: **"...waymarking of the VGW through the Ashdown Forest is under discussion and has not been implemented. ...so you should concentrate on the route description."** Needless to say, I had not read the route description.



Ashdown Forest. Beautiful, but NO SIGNS!

These miles are some of my slowest of the whole run. I have come so far but yet I am only just halfway. My mind wonders if I have another 30 odd miles in me, especially if navigation continues to be so tricky.

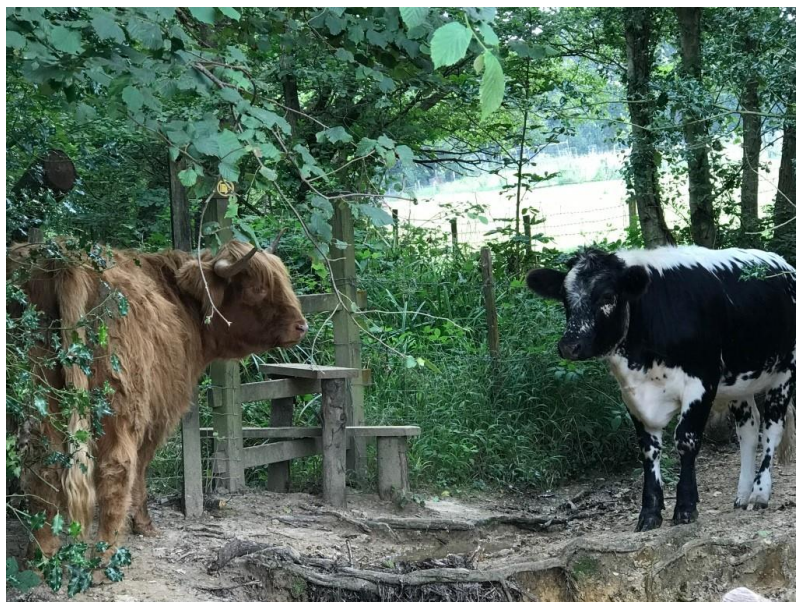
This was something I hadn't anticipated at all. I knew that navigation would be a challenge, but at times it was so much harder than I thought it would be. Missing or non-existent signs (we don't realise how lucky we are at the Croydon end of the trail). Paths that are so overgrown you can't see them, the gates, stiles or the signs (those that aren't missing). My watch is a lifesaver. There were a few times when it was slightly out but having it beep at me when I'd gone off course or missed a turning stopped me from making any serious navigational errors (like ending up 20 miles from where I intended to be).

Despite its navigational challenges, Ashdown Forest is beautiful. A large area of woodland and heathland with stunning views overlooking the high weald. There's an abundance of enticing paths and were I not trying to stick to a specific one, I would love to run off and explore. The trails are those slightly technical ones I love, a happy mix of undulating woodland, rock and stone. A few short and sharp climbs followed by a dancing descent as my feet jump from rock to rock.

Still no signs mind you.

The next section passes by without a major event. Features have merged into one. Rolling countryside and small farms. Fields, overgrown paths, woodland trails and a little too much tarmac for my liking.

Across the River Uck and two angry looking cows are guarding the only stile out of a field. It takes me a good five minutes to wander around, discover that there is NO other option and that I am going to have to persuade them to move. With a little coaxing, they take a step to the side and I make a run for it and jump over the fence. Cows don't usually bother me but these two looked a bit too mean and moody for my liking!



It's 2:30pm, I've been going for close to 10 hours and I'm roughly two-thirds of the way. After a fairly quick first 20 miles on paths that I knew well, the second 20 are frustratingly a lot slower as I battle with navigation, overgrowth and the tiredness that comes with long jogs. However, I'm still eating and drinking well, alternating a gel and solid food every 45 minutes.

A few miles later I cross paths with another walker, the first I had seen for a number of hours. Ankle deep in mud, we're both deliberating whether we're on the right path at the same time. The appearance of the other reassures us both that yes we are. We exchange a few words as he comments on my speed as I approached him. He's walking the trail over five days and struggles to comprehend that I am trying to do the same in just one. We bid farewell and wish each other luck. I turn around a few times over the next mile or so and see him in the distance. Having been by myself for so long, in a strange way it's a little comforting that there is someone else out here on the same path as I am.

With most of the significant climbs now behind me, many stretches on this next section cross large fields, often with no distinguishing feature to use as a guide. At one point the path leads straight into a field of crops, taller than I am. Running through it feels almost jungle-like. With my farming heritage, I feel as if I should know what was growing, but sadly I don't. Another similar field has no easy path, so I end up taking a detour around the edge. I'm not happy about adding on extra mileage at this point of the run.



At 53 miles I take a planned 400m detour along the A22 to a garage to restock on supplies again. Knowing that I still have in the region of 15 miles to go, I have a moment when I realise that this road would take me all the way back to Croydon.

Usually, by this point in an ultra-marathon, I am struggling with nutrition, feeling nauseous and unable to eat any significant food. Today I am ravenous with not a hint of nausea. I top up with another litre of water, coke and an orange drink. I also grab a hot vegan sausage roll and flapjack. With a distinct lack of seating options I sit on the floor of the garage forecourt to the amusement of passing motorists, to eat and drink. Zero fucks given. A vegan sausage roll has never tasted so good. It hit the spot and I am rejuvenated.

It's a 400m trot back to the trail, a bonus half a mile in total but a much-needed refuelling stop. I decide I should probably phone the husband to tell him how long my long jog actually is... He seems remarkably unsurprised.

And on I go.

Across a busy main road, the first time I've had to stop for traffic since leaving Croydon. I struggle to find a path hidden between buildings. I'm tired and every little navigational hiccup now becomes a major drama that leaves me increasingly frustrated. Whilst running tires the body, being constantly alert to maps, signs and paths tires the mind.

The path passes by the ancient Berwick village church and rounding a corner I'm greeted by the welcome sight of the South Downs. I pause and greedily drink the view in. This view makes me smile. I search for familiar landmarks that have so many memories associated with them. I **think** I can see Firle Beacon which means the hill to the right is the climb out of Southease and the hill to the left is the climb from Alfriston to Jevington.

Knowing where I am soothes my mind. I feel a new calmness settle on me. I am at home in the South Downs. My mind wanders back to June's SDW100 and running along the hilltops that I now stand and look up to. A path so familiar to my feet, though I've never seen it from this viewpoint before. I also know that once I get to Alfriston I won't need to worry about navigation.

I run across quintessentially English fields, recently harvested and lined with giant hay bales. Grazing sheep in neighbouring fields cast a wary eye over me as I clamber over a stile and up a small hill.



Quintessentially English views on the South Downs

The sun is sinking lower in the sky as the afternoon draws into the early evening. I've lost all concept of time, but golden hour is fast approaching. That magical time of neither day nor night when the sun is low in the sky, its shadows long, its tones warm and golden. I estimate it must be around 7pm and that I have about four hours and nine or 10 miles to go.

Running down a small road I arrive in Alfriston, the largest town for quite some time (but still not large enough to have a shop open past 5pm – thankfully I still have plenty of supplies). The Vanguard Way converges with the South Downs Way. I know I can now simply run. I don't need to think about navigation or where to go until the trails split again at Cuckmere.

I am slowing quite considerably, even on the flat path following the meanders of the river. I start to anxiously look at my watch. It gives me an ETA for Newhaven and I am well within my target of the last train, but I'm conscious that I want to keep a little bit of a buffer. I move forward without thinking. Another runner overtakes me and I want to shout out, tell him what I'm doing, explaining my slower than usual pace. Needless to say, I don't!

After miles of relatively 'flat' running, the climb out of Litlington comes as somewhat of a shock. I pause at the top to refill my front flasks from the bottle in the back of my pack. Down through Friston Forest, into Westdean and up the 152 steps towards Exceat. I climb in excited anticipation.

At the top is one of my favourite views, Exceat looking out over the Cuckmere Haven.



The Seven Sisters to my left, Seaford to my right. I pause, absorbing the scene, taking it all in. Once a regular running haunt, with lockdowns and travel restrictions it's been far too long since I have seen this view.

I fly down the hill and for only the second time turn right at the bottom. The VGW meanders its way alongside the river, a slightly different path to the one I took only three weeks earlier when I ran from Eastbourne to Seaford. Then I hugged the river edge, today the VGW takes me a little further away from the riverbank.

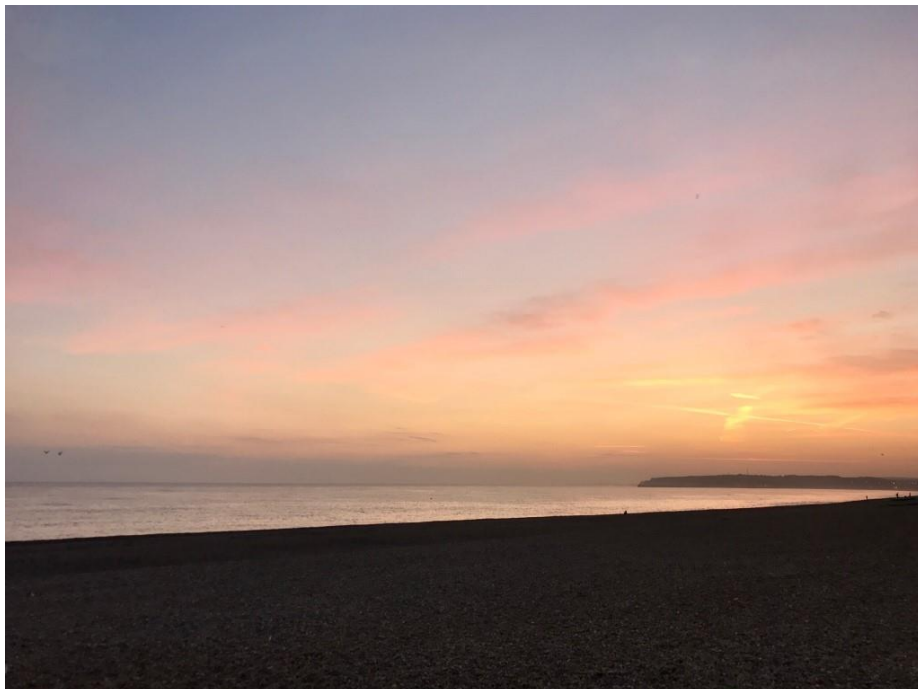
The last significant climb is up from the mouth of the river to the clifftops at Seaford Head. I turn to look at the iconic vista behind me. The white cliffs of the Seven Sisters that I have run over so many times, today glowing pink and orange in the setting sun.



The popular coastal path is almost deserted. I have never run along the clifftops when it's been quite so quiet and there is something quite enticing about it. A bit like running through silent woods at night. If I had more time I could quite happily have sat in the stillness and simply watched the ocean. But I don't. I have places to be.



More importantly, I have about five miles to go.



Soon I see Seaford, the small town before Newhaven. The sky ahead of me is a riot of pinks and blues. Turning to have one last look behind me I descend from the cliff tops to sea level and follow the long stretch along Seaford's promenade.



These last few miles are some of the toughest of the whole run. The hard concrete of the promenade is a shock to my tired feet. Running is painful. I trundle slowly along, determined to keep up some semblance of a run rather than slowing to a walk. As I run, I watch a large ferry sail into the port at Newhaven ahead of me.

At Bishopstone, the VGW leaves the seafront and turns slightly inland. I reluctantly stop and put my head torch back on. I'd really been hoping to finish in daylight but it's approaching 9pm and away from the streetlights it is now pretty dark.

The path reverts back to trail. It's a narrow single track on top of a bank. To the left of me is a pool of dark water, to the right a narrow stream and derelict buildings. The path is so overgrown that sections are completely impassable. At times I'm clambering down the bank hoping I don't fall into the creek. The only light I have to see with comes from my head torch. One false move and I could easily be in that water. I feel uneasy for the first time during the whole run. I have less than a mile to go.

I later learn that the derelict buildings are the abandoned village of Tide Mills. Abandoned buildings weirdly intrigue me and I am slightly disappointed I didn't get to see them in the daylight.

The trail turns once more onto road and I am running alongside a railway track in what feels like a small industrial estate. It's late, it's dark and I admit I feel slightly anxious. It's not the most salubrious end to the run.

The end of the Vanguard Way is so unceremonious that I almost can't find it and gain an extra few hundred metres running around in another circle. Within the industrial estate, behind a small row of houses, sits Newhaven Harbour train station. The trail ends. A small, insignificant station with only one or two trains an hour.

9:18pm. I stop my watch and whilst jubilant to have finished, I am also slightly disappointed at the insignificance of it.



16 hours, 26 minutes and 52 seconds.

I covered 71.3 miles (the route is advertised as closer to 68 miles).

It's another half mile or so to the slightly better served Newhaven Town station where I have a 30-minute wait for a train back to Croydon via a change at Lewes. This gives me just enough time to pop into the neighbouring McDonalds to change out of my damp and sweaty run kit, wash my hands (glorious after 17+ hours!) and grab some food.

A Veggie Deluxe and portion of chips is the first McDonalds I have eaten in about 20 years and my god, after 71 miles it hits the spot and was absolutely DELICIOUS!

Four days later this was verified as the female Fastest Known Time (FKT) on the Vanguard Way.

I have an FKT. Me, an FKT!

REFLECTION

One of the joys of exploring the whole trail was discovering the huge variety of countryside and terrain it runs through. It passes through parkland, woodland, open countryside, farmland and heathland, with expansive views over the Surrey Hills, High Weald, South Downs and the Sussex Coast. In Ashdown Forest it crosses a watershed: all the streams above this point generally flow northwards into the Thames, while those in later sections generally flow southwards into the English Channel.

Part of me wishes I had read more about the trail before embarking on my adventure as only now am I learning about some of the rich history and heritage of the path I travelled.

From Roman roads to 13th century Churches. Pretty villages, mills, ancient iron age forts and the abandoned village of Tide Mills in the last few miles of which I knew nothing about as I rushed in failing light to the finish.

Maybe one day I will have to return at a more leisurely pace to take it all in.

A few weeks have passed and as I look back on my Vanguard Way adventure I am immensely proud of what I achieved that day in August. Although the catalyst to the journey, the FKT is simply the icing on the cake.

For me, the real challenge was believing I could and then actually doing it. Believing that I could run this kind of distance completely alone. Navigating paths I didn't know. Dealing with navigational errors. Carrying all my kit and supporting myself. For some, all of this may seem insignificant but this was a first for me, a big deal.

In the same way that the club run on the Vanguard Way in 2016 lit a fire in me, this Vanguard Way run in 2021 has lit another fire.

I want more adventure.

I want more challenges.

All day I was in my element, at home on the trails.

I may have fallen over (twice, first down a hole, second off a stile...!).

I may have been scratched by brambles, stung by nettles and bitten by bugs.

I may have gotten lost.

I may have had a minor hissy fit at the lack of signage.

But for that one day, I was entirely self-sufficient.

I needed nor wanted anyone or anything else.

In a somewhat chaotic world, I found the silence and solitude of being alone calming.

Looking back, I crave the respite of that adventure, that challenge and that peacefulness.

Simply, I proved to myself I can. I am capable.

And I want more.

I've come a very long way since I first ran on the Vanguard Way five years ago.

DETAILS

KIT

I wore Hoka Challenger ATR 5's. I normally love these shoes and they were great on the trail sections but there was a lot more tarmac than I was expecting. I almost wish I had worn road shoes for extra cushioning. By the end my feet were very painful.

I used my Garmin Fenix 3 and iPhone 7+ with the OS Maps app for navigation.

I used the Salomon adv skin 12 race pack. In this I carried:

- A full change of clothes including underwear, socks, leggings and a base layer
- Waterproof jacket

- Deodorant
- First aid kit
- Foil blanket
- Battery pack and chargers for my phone and Garmin (both needed: these were all stored in an XS dry bag)
- Headphones (not used)
- Hand gel, mask, vaseline, tissues and other small misc. items.

DRINKS

I started with:

- 1.5 litres of water
- 500ml of squash

I had two 500ml soft flasks at the front of my pack and stowed the rest in the back of my pack to top up with when needed. I used one 500ml hard flask that I refilled and one normal 500ml bottle that I disposed of when used (in a bin) in an effort to reduce weight.

- At mile 28 I topped up with 1 litre of water, 500ml coke (into hard flask) and 500ml of orange
- At mile 53 I topped up with 1 litre of water, 500ml coke (into hard flask) and 500ml of orange

FOOD

- 4x Peanut butter and jam sandwiches on brown bread (I had run out of my usual white wraps)
- 2x Cheese sandwiches
- 1x Banana
- 2-3x Fig rolls
- 1x Fruit bars
- A handful of Jelly sweets
- A number of GU gels (one approx. every 90 minutes)
- Vegan sausage roll
- Half a flapjack
- 2x Calippos



Vanguard Way: Completed it!

BOOK REVIEW: THE RUNNER'S GUIDE TO HEALTHY FEET AND ANKLES

(by Brian W Fullem: reviewed by Alan Dolton)

Many runners will suffer from foot or ankle injuries during their career. This book is almost 200 pages long, but is set in a large typeface and has plenty of colour illustrations, so it is much more readable than some runners might fear.

The author himself reached a good standard as a runner, recording personal bests of 3 minutes 52 for 1500 metres and 14 minutes 25 for 5000 metres. He has worked as a podiatrist for more than 25 years.

The first chapter of the book deals with running shoes and orthotic devices. He observes that 'the best place to buy new shoes is a specialty running store'. Runners should only consider orthotics if they have an injury or series of injuries that aren't improving with treatment.

The second chapter is entitled 'keeping your feet and ankles healthy'. Among the subjects covered are blisters, fungal infections and sprained ankles. He observes that runners who suffer from sprained ankles should do some balancing exercises as soon as possible after the injury.

The third chapter is entitled 'plantar fasciitis and other types of heel pain'. He observes that 'plantar fasciitis' is often a misnomer, because runners are often suffering from fasciosis (degeneration of the fascia) rather than from fasciitis (inflammation of the fascia). The condition is often aggravated by tight calf muscles, and runners who suffer from fasciitis or fasciosis should do regular calf stretches. He recommends stretching the calf by leaning into a wall rather than by dropping the heel from a step, expressing the view that the latter technique can cause too much traction and can aggravate the fascia.

The fourth chapter deals with tendon injuries. Again, he observes that many runners are suffering from Achilles' tendinosis (degeneration of the tendon) rather than from tendonitis (inflammation of the tendon). Runners who suffer from Achilles' tendon pain should do regular calf stretches (including the gastrocnemius muscle as well as the soleus). He also discusses 'chronic exertional compartment syndrome', a condition which has affected several elite runners (including John Walker and Mary Slaney) who have run high mileages at high intensity, where the muscles swell to the point that they are compressing the tibial nerve: this injury requires surgery.

The fifth chapter deals with stress fractures. He observes that not all stress fractures are easily visible in X-rays or MRI scans, and expresses the view that CT scans are preferable to MRI scans. Runners who suspect that they have a metatarsal stress fracture should see a podiatrist.

The sixth chapter is entitled 'core and foot strength'. He comments that 'if I had to choose one group of muscles to strengthen and function better in order to improve running performance and help prevent injury in the foot and ankle, it would be the core muscles'. The chapter includes several good colour photographs of various exercises which he recommends.

The seventh chapter is entitled 'general guidance on injury prevention'. He advises runners to keep a log recording how many miles they have run in each pair of running shoes. He advises regular stretching, particularly for the calf, hamstring and gluteal muscles. He also

recommends that runners should ensure that they have an adequate intake of vitamin D and calcium.



**The author's recommended stretch for the right gastrocnemius muscle
(note that the right knee must be straight)**

The last two chapters are entitled 'when to seek surgery' and 'new treatments and technologies'. One hopes that very few Striders will need to refer to these chapters, although chapter eight does include some interesting X-rays of Paula Radcliffe's right foot before and after she had surgery to correct a bunion.

One slight weakness is that the book does not include an index, although the logical arrangements of the chapters should mean that readers should not face too much difficulty in locating the author's coverage of a particular injury. It is also arguable that the author may have assumed slightly too much anatomical knowledge on the part of some of his readers. Nevertheless, this is a useful book which I would recommend to any runner who has been suffering from foot and/or ankle injuries.

(This article originally appeared in the September 2017 club magazine, but is reproduced here for the benefit of newer Striders)

NEVER TOO OLD: ARTHUR WALSHAM

On the last weekend in October, Stuart Hills travelled to Manchester, where he combined a visit to the Etihad Stadium (to see Crystal Palace beat Manchester City) with running in the Stretford parkrun. One of the runners who finished behind Stuart in the parkrun was Arthur Walsham of Salford Harriers. Arthur was born in June 1930, so he is now 91 years old. He joined Salford in 1950, after finishing his national service in the Army. He has continued running ever since. He began by competing in half-mile track races in the summer and six-mile cross-country races in winter. His best times in track races included 53 seconds for the 440 yards, 1 minute 57 for the 880 yards, and 29 minutes 53 for the 10000 metres.

He ran his first marathon at the age of 29. In 1971, at the age of forty, he ran the AAA Marathon in Manchester in his lifetime best of 2 hours 21 minutes 38 seconds – which is more than ten minutes faster than Striders' club record. In the same year, he won the National over-40 cross-country championships. At that time he was working as a postman and running an average of more than 90 miles per week. In 1972 he won the World Veterans over-40 marathon championship in Cologne, and in 1975 he won the World Veterans over-45 marathon championship in Tokyo. He completed a total of 53 marathons, running his final one at the age of 65.

Needless to say, Arthur has slowed down in recent years, but he has continued to compete. In 2013, at the age of 83, he placed second in the British over-80 rankings for 10000 metres with a time of 77 minutes 55 seconds. He also ran a parkrun that year in 33 minutes 30, and was still able to run a parkrun in less than 40 minutes at the age of 87, in February 2018. In an interview that year, he stated that he was still running four times per week, although he commented that "it's a little more like jogging now". He also observed that he ran his marathons in cheap Dunlop shoes and commented that "shoes today are too high and increase the chances of your foot going over left or right".



Arthur Walsham in 2018 at Longford Park in Stretford

COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2021

Rachel Lindley had an excellent run in the RunThrough Olympic Park Half-Marathon in Stratford on 5 September. She was the third woman to finish, placing first in the W40 age-group and 46th overall, and setting a new club W40 record of 87 minutes 01.

In the Serpentine five-kilometre road race at Hyde Park on 24 September, Matthew Stone ran well to win the M55 category in a new club age-group record of 17 minutes 45.

Tatsuya Okamoto had an excellent run to place first out of 220 finishers in the Beckenham Half-Marathon on 26 September, recording 81 minutes 48. In the Berlin Marathon on the same day, Maria Gabriel ran well to set a new club W55 record of 3 hours 50 minutes 13.

On 2 October Striders' men placed fourth out of seven clubs in the East Surrey League cross-country race in Lloyd Park, held in unpleasantly wet conditions. They were led by Tatsuya Okamoto who placed eleventh of the 86 finishers, completing the five-mile course in 31 minutes 04. James Rhodes was 14th (31:18) with Andrew Aitken 16th (31:23) and Robert Lines completing the scoring team in 20th (32:15). Jon Dean also ran well to place third in the over-60 age-group and 42nd overall (36:52). Striders' women were led by Steph Upton who was the eighth woman to finish (39:40), with Amanda Hewett 13th (41:51). On the following day Striders had 14 finishers in the Virgin London Marathon. They were led by Graeme Drysdale who ran very well to finish in 3 hours 00 minutes 47.

Striders faced strong opposition in the first Surrey Cross-Country League races of the season, on 16 October. Striders' men finished ninth in their Division Two match at Epsom Downs. They were led by Tatsuya Okamoto who ran well to finish 35th, completing the eight-kilometre course in 28 minutes 52. Andrew Aitken was 42nd (29:03) and James Rhodes 54th (29:40). Matthew Stone ran very well to place second in the over-50 category and 56th overall (29:48). Lee Flanagan was 75th (30:38) with Peter Mills 80th (30:53), Robert Lines 83rd (31:03), Marc Burrows 86th (31:11), Simon Ambrosi 88th (31:19) and Martin Filer 94th (31:25). Meanwhile Striders' women were 13th in their Division Two match at Richmond Park. They were led by Maria Consuelo Kennelick, making her league debut, who did well to place 43rd of the 207 finishers, completing the 6500-metre course in 30 minutes 02. Jennifer Gutteridge also ran well to finish 49th (30:12). Ally Whitlock was 75th (32:18) with Cindy Siu 81st (32:42) and Steph Upton 83rd (32:47).

On the following day, Rachel Lindley had an excellent run in the Asda Yorkshire Marathon, starting and finishing at York. She was the 22nd woman to finish, setting a new club W40 record of 3 hours 11 minutes 07.

Striders' women placed eleventh in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match at Wimbledon Common, on 13 November. They were led by Rachel Lindley, who ran very well to place fourteenth of the 248 finishers, completing the six-kilometre course in 26 minutes 32. Jennifer Gutteridge also ran well to place 34th (27:47) with Steph Upton 80th (30:23), Ellyw Evans 87th (30:35) and Amanda Hewett 118th (32:15).

Striders' men placed ninth in their Division Two match at Dorking on the following day. Alastair Falconer ran very well to finish sixteenth in 31 minutes 51. Andrew Aitken was 55th (34:06) with James Rhodes 58th (34:15). Matthew Stone ran very well to place first in the M55 age-group and 63rd overall (34:37). Peter Mills was 69th (34:52) with Krzysztof Klidzia 74th (34:55), Lee Flanagan 84th (35:34), Phil Coales 87th (35:39), Sebastian Munday 114th (37:24), Steve Corfield 118th (37:40) and Marc Burrows 122nd (37:57).

20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2002

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships were held at Lloyd Park, in heavy mud, on 5 January. Striders placed tenth in both the men's and women's events. Simon Alexander had an excellent run to place 34th in the men's race. He was followed by Eric Parker (56th), Gerry Crispie (63rd) and Ciaran Osborn (85th). However, we were without several of our regular scorers and there was a long gap before veterans Alan Dolton (146th) and Mick Gambrell (155th) completed the scoring team. Our women were led by Kate Potter who placed 53rd, one place ahead of Emma Haillay. Diane Ballard made a welcome return after a long holiday in Australia and helped the team by racing despite being well short of fitness. She finished 62nd, followed by Barbara Gambrell (64th) and Michele Lawrence (66th).

The Surrey Cross-Country League completed its 40th season with races on 2 February. This was an excellent day for Striders' men who were competing in Division Three at Oxshott, on a woodland course which was somewhat short of the usual five miles. We placed second to Walton in the match, and by beating our closest rivals Wimbledon Windmilers, we made sure of winning the Division Three championship for the first time in our history. (We had gained promotion on three occasions in the early 1990s, but had never finished as champions.) Eric Parker led us home, placing 12th in 25 minutes 04. He was followed by Simon Alexander (18th, 25:32); Gerry Crispie (21st, 25:39); Tony Sheppard (22nd, 25:41); Ciaran Osborn (24th, 25:44); Neil Furze (29th, 26:31); John Kirby (30th, 26:38); Nigel Davidson (48th, 27:33); Chris Morton (49th, 27:40) and Peter Yarlett (53rd, 27:52). Meanwhile local rivals Croydon Harriers could only place eighth in Division Two, and were relegated to Division Three for the first (but not the last) time in their history. This meant that, for the first time, the 2002/03 season would see Striders competing in a higher division than the Harriers.

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country League completed its 23rd season with a match at Coulsdon. Striders were already doomed to relegation from Division One, and could only field three competitors. Kate Potter was 44th (29:16), with Diane Ballard 45th (29:29) and Lyn Simmons 48th (33:43). This was Kate's last race under her married name: having separated from her husband, she subsequently chose to compete under her maiden name of Custis.

Croydon Harriers held their traditional inter-club 10K cross-country race at Lloyd Park on 9 February. The race was won by Andy Flett of Collingwood, who recorded 37 minutes 56 and led his club to victory in the team event. Striders' first finisher was Eric Parker who placed fourth in 39 minutes 53. On 16 February Kate Custis travelled to Wales and was the first woman to finish in the Ras Cors Caron half-marathon, recording 1 hour 46 minutes 43.

Striders sent a team to Bristol for the National Cross-Country Championships on 23 February, finishing 70th. Striders' first man home was again Eric Parker who placed 439th of the 1220 finishers. Our other team members were Ciaran Osborn (561st), Gerry Crispie (736th), Nigel Davidson (777th), Chris Morton (853rd) and Ken Low (864th). Dave Hoben ran as a non-scorer, finishing 1216th. On the following day Tony Sheppard placed sixth (and first over-40) in the Bramley 10-mile road race, recording 59 minutes 20 seconds.

On 16 March Striders competed in the East Surrey League's annual road relay at Box Hill. Eric Parker ran 11 minutes 50 on the first leg, and was followed by Gerry Crispie (12:41), Peter Yarlett (13:07) and Chris Morton (13:04). On the following day Eric Parker again ran well to place 13th in the Woking 10-mile road race, recording 58 minutes 44. With Ciaran Osborn placing 20th and Ken Low 43rd, Striders finished third in the team event. Meanwhile Alan Dolton was competing in the Barcelona Marathon, finishing in 3 hours 25 minutes 14.



Eric Parker, who led our men's team to the Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three championship (photo by Mick Gambrill)



Kate Potter (now known as Kate Custis), our leading female cross-country runner in the winter of 2002 (photo by Mick Gambrill)

10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2012

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships took place at Dorking on 7 January. Striders' best performance came from Steph Upton who placed 51st of the 143 finishers in the senior women's race, covering the undulating five-mile course in 36 minutes 59 seconds. Club colleague Josephine Thompson was 68th (38:35). Striders' men were led by Barry White who was 99th of the 215 finishers, covering the seven and a half miles in 48 minutes 59. Striders placed 18th in the team event.

Striders' men produced their best performance of the season to finish fourth of nine clubs in the Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match at Reigate on Saturday 14 January, and move out of the relegation zone. They were led by Tyler O'Callaghan who placed 18th of the 136 finishers, covering the hilly five-mile course in 30 minutes 35 seconds. He was closely followed by Lee Flanagan who also ran well to place 19th in 30 minutes 40. Krzysztof Klidzia was 42nd (32:30) with Rob Sharpe 46th (32:52), Richard Lee-Smith 51st (33:09), Damian Macenhill 53rd (33:15), Iain Harrison 56th (33:28), Simon Ambrosi 59th (33:52), Dan Jewell 60th (33:56) and Steve Starvis completing the scoring team in 66th (34:13).

On the same day Striders' women finished sixth in the Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two match at Coulsdon. Steph Upton ran well to place 30th of the 147 finishers, covering the undulating five-mile course in 40 minutes 46 seconds. Josephine Thompson was 33rd (41:24) with Alice Ewen 35th (41:51), Faye Stammers 37th (42:03) and Carmen Somerset completing the scoring team in 52nd (43:42).

Lee Flanagan ran well in wintry conditions in the final Surrey Cross-Country Division Two match of the season at Esher on 11 February. He placed 19th of the 138 finishers, covering the undulating five-mile course in 28 minutes 02 seconds. Iain Harrison continued his return after injury and did well to place 44th (30:05), closely followed by Krzysztof Klidzia in 47th (30:10) and Rob Sharpe 49th (30:15). Damian Macenhill was 51st (30:23) with Simon Ambrosi 57th (30:39), Barry White 64th (31:11), Steve Starvis 66th (31:26), Richard Lee-Smith 68th (31:42) and Dan Jewell completing the scoring team in 69th (31:50). Striders placed sixth of the nine competing clubs and also finished sixth in the final Division Two table. Earlier in the day, Striders' women had competed on the same course in Division Two of the Women's League. Alice Ewen ran very well to place 25th of the 118 finishers in 36 minutes 52. Josephine Thompson also ran well for 29th (37:38) with Hannah Musk 46th (40:11). For the first time since February 2007, Striders were unable to field a complete team of five women. Despite this, they managed to finish seventh in the final Division Two table.

On the following day Cara Kayum ran a personal best 69 minutes 05 in the Sidcup 10-mile road race, making her only the sixth female Strider to run the distance in less than 70 minutes.

On 25 February Striders produced an excellent performance to finish as 48th team in the senior men's race at the English National Cross-Country Championship at Parliament Hill Fields. They were led by Tyler O'Callaghan who finished 426th, covering the undulating 12-kilometre course in 44 minutes 35 seconds. Krzysztof Klidzia also ran well for 663rd (47:24) while Simon Ambrosi was 743rd (48:20) and Barry White 846th (49:30). Team manager Chris Morton was 944th (50:46) with Mike Stewart 1027th (51:45), Mick Turner 1036th (51:50), Paul Stanford 1113th (52:54) and Tom Littlewood 1597th (64:14). Striders' women were led by Steph Upton who finished 337th of the 650 finishers, covering the five-mile course in 38 minutes 03 seconds. Club colleague Alice Ewen also ran well to finish 403rd (39:19).



Steph Upton, pictured here racing Nicky Atkins of Kingston, was our leading female cross-country runner in the winter of 2012

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