

Striders of Croydon

MARCH 2022 MAGAZINE



**Milo and Kara Boaks in our mob match against Croydon Harriers on 12 February
(photo by James Rhodes)**

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 13 March – Wimbledon 5K – Wimbledon (Surrey Championships & Road League)
Sunday 8 May – Ranelagh Half Marathon – Richmond (Surrey Championships & Road Lge)
Saturday 14 May – Surrey 5000m Track Championships – Kingsmeadow
Sunday 15 May – Sutton 10K – Nonsuch Park (Surrey Road League)
Sunday 5 June – Surrey Masters Track & Field Championships – Kingsmeadow
Saturday 11 June – British Masters Track & Field Championships – Derby
Sunday 12 June – Dorking 10 miles – Brockham (Surrey Championships & Road League)
Sunday 26 June – Richmond 10K – Petersham (Surrey Championships & Road League)
Saturday 16 July – Elmore 7 miles – Chipstead (Surrey Road League)
Sunday 24 July – Elmbridge 10K – Elmbridge (Surrey Road League)
Sunday 14 August – British Masters Marathon Championship – Isle of Man
Sunday 2 October – London Marathon (Striders marshalling)



**Striders' women at the South of England Masters Cross-Country Championships
(photo by Stephen Allport)**

EDITORIAL: MARCH 2022

Welcome to our first issue of 2022. This issue of the magazine is rather shorter than has become usual in recent years, probably because not many of our members are travelling to races outside Greater London and Surrey. One notable exception is Debra Bourne who has written an article on the Keswick to Barrow Challenge, in one of the most scenic parts of England, which she took part in last autumn. And this issue still comprises 32 pages, so I hope that our members will not be too disappointed at the limited number of articles.

We appear to be returning to normal after almost two years of disruption following the Covid pandemic. I was very pleased to see that the Surrey Cross-Country League was able to resume after the cancellation of the previous season, and has been supported by many of our runners. Our men's team have suffered the disappointment of relegation to Division Three, but we have consistently fielded larger teams than most of the other clubs in the division. On the last two occasions that we have been relegated to Division Three (in 2004 and 2016), we have gained promotion back to Division Two the following season, and I hope that we can repeat that next season.

Another good sign of a return to normality is that the Surrey Road League is resuming in 2022 after two years of inactivity due to Covid. The first fixture is the Wimbledon five-kilometre road race which is being held on Sunday 13 March. This is much earlier than in previous years, and I hope that we will see a good turnout of Striders for this race despite the relatively short notice. The course should suit Striders because it includes a hill, and our run leaders have continued to do their best to ensure that all Striders have plenty of experience of running up hills. The seven Surrey Road League races are all listed on page two of this magazine under 'dates for your diary', and there is more information about the league on the Surrey Athletics website (www.surreyathletics.uk/road/index.php).

On the subject of road races, it might be worth reminding some Striders that there is a form on our website (<http://www.stridersofcroydon.org.uk/races/results/>) which people can use to submit their race results. Submitting results via this form should make it easier for Graeme Drysdale to compile our annual road rankings, and is also helpful for whoever is submitting our weekly press reports to the Croydon Advertiser (although we do have a limit of 300 words for our press reports, so that it is not usually possible for our reports to include all the races which Striders have taken part in).

Some of our members will again be competing on the track this summer. James Rhodes has already shown the way by competing in a few indoor races, and has already broken the club mile record in a race at Lee Valley. We do not yet have details of this year's Southern Veterans League races, but we hope that they will be published soon. I would be delighted to see some more Striders at our regular evening track sessions at Croydon Arena.

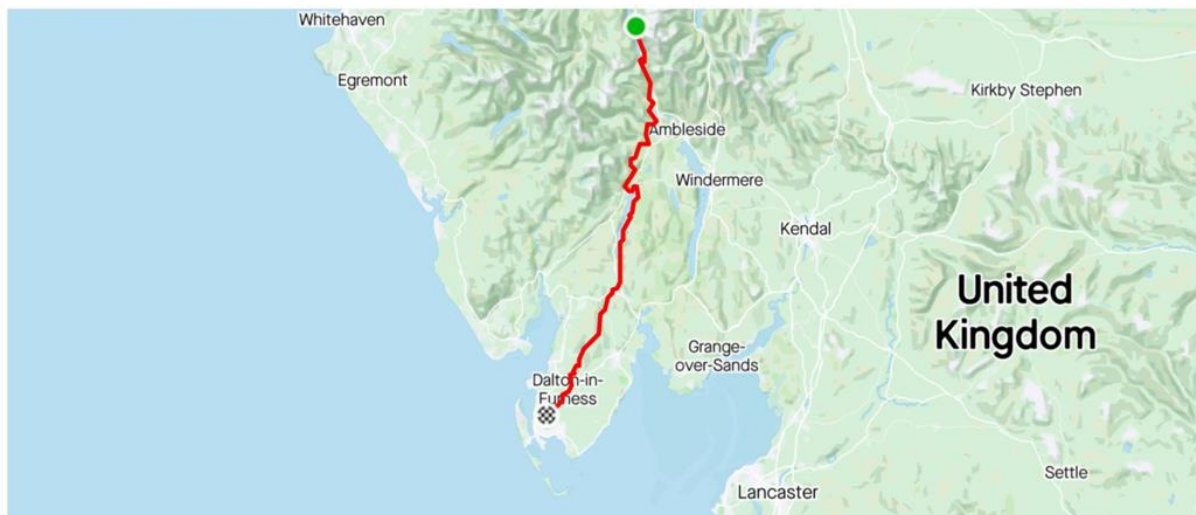
Some newer Striders may not be aware that later this year, Striders will be celebrating our 40th anniversary: we were formed in September 1982, with the aim of helping runners to train for the 1983 London Marathon. We are still helping runners to train for marathons: several of our runners have been following our programme of Sunday runs in preparation for Spring marathons in cities including Manchester and Southampton, and in October we will again be marshalling at the London Marathon, where we hope to have a good number of runners. The September issue of this magazine will be a special issue to celebrate our 40th anniversary, and we are hoping to include a club history quiz and an article from one of our founder-members giving more detail about the club's formation.

Alan

THE KESWICK TO BARROW CHALLENGE (by Debra Bourne)

The Keswick to Barrow Challenge is an annual charity fundraising event, starting (as the name suggests) in Keswick in the northern Lake District and finishing almost 40 miles later in Barrow-in-Furness on the Cumbrian coast. The Challenge is primarily designed for walkers, but runners can and do take part.

The route description says: “The K2B route starts next to the car park at Legburthwaite Keswick, proceeds down the banks of Thirlmere at the foot of Helvellyn, winds up and over Dunmail Raise, and continues down through the villages of Grasmere and Elterwater. From there the route passes through The Langdales and Conistown village, before reaching the head of Conistown Water, where the quiet east bank of the lake is followed. There are fine views of Conistown Old Man as the route passes Brantwood, the former home of John Ruskin, and then continues through the village of Nibthwaite before arriving in Lowick. The most challenging section is the progressive ascent up Kirkby Moor to the highest point of the route. Then it descends through the village of Marton and on via Dalton-in-Furness to the finish at Hawcoat Park Sports Club on the outskirts of Barrow-in-Furness.”



Usually the K2B is held in May, but COVID restrictions meant that the event never took place at all in 2020 and was delayed until mid-September in 2021.

An unusual aspect of the event is that it is entirely a team event – you cannot enter as an individual, only as a team of anything from 4-12 people, although members of a team do not have to stay together. It is also very much focused on fundraising for a variety of charities. In addition to a registration fee of £20, each participant pledges to raise at least £80 to go to one or several of the named charities associated with the event.

I had heard of the Challenge several years ago, and thought about running it, but the May date was never good around other races. However, in the spring of 2021 one of the runners I know from Comrades suggested that we should put a team together and have a small Comrades-runners reunion. We chose our charities from the list provided (Headway South Cumbria, Furness Group Riding for the Disabled, and Cumbria Wildlife Trust) and, via various group and individual electronic messaging channels, the team and the weekend took shape. The date was near-perfect for me: six weeks after NDW100 and 4 weeks before the Autumn 100 – a good time to have a long training run.

With COVID and various other events, it was only in the final days that we were sure who would be running in our team. In the end there were five of us, with another Comrades runner and her husband also travelling up from southern England to support us and attend the reunion in the evening after the run.

With traffic delays, I didn't reach Barrow until about 9pm. By the time I had booked into my hotel, and walked over to the hotel where some of the others were staying, to collect my K2B lanyard and electronic dibber from one of my teammates, it was time to lay out my running gear, pack up my clothes so I could dump my bag in the car quickly in the morning (as I had only booked in for one night), set an alarm, and head for bed.

Woken by the alarm much too soon, I swallowed a bit of breakfast while I dressed, and was soon outside, heading for my 'Happy Bus'. It was now 4.20 am and we would have about a 2-hour ride to the start. As luck would have it, the coach I got onto had a few more stops in Barrow on the way, and a couple of my teammates got on at one of those stops, so we chatted about Comrades a bit and I probably snoozed a little as well.

It was raining when we reached Keswick in a line of coaches. After a while, the bus inched forward a bit then stopped for us all to disembark. Each of us had to decide whether to pull out a waterproof jacket and risk getting too warm, or leave it packed and hope the rain would soon ease. I chose to leave the jacket off for the moment.

Normally at this point I would have queued for the toilets, but we wanted to get moving rather than risking getting chilled standing around, so instead we headed for the start, where there was the first dibber point. Off we trotted in the half light, and I somewhat regretted not having a head torch with me, but the light level soon increased.





Only a short distance down the lane we reached a marshalled road crossing – with a whole bank of Portaloos off to one side. I told my teammates I was going to take advantage of those, and we split up.

I always love the Lake District, and although I prefer trail, the views nearly made up for the feel of tarmac underfoot. I ran at an easy pace, sometimes chatting with other runners, and almost constantly weaving past the more numerous people walking the whole way. The rain got heavier and I put my jacket on rather than worrying about getting too cold, but once I had warmed up I started to get too hot, so I took it off again and allowed the rain to cool me pleasantly.

The course was well marked with easy-to-spot signs, plus there were marshals at road crossings and a couple of turns that might otherwise have been missed.



The Challenge being held on a Saturday, I had wondered beforehand whether I might manage to fit in a parkrun along the way – alas there are not enough parkruns in the area and there were none close enough to the route at the right time. If I had been really organised I might have managed to arrange a lift from Grasmere to Ambleside, then back again after the run – but I wasn't that organised.

After I had been running for a while, I saw my teammate Becca just ahead of me and managed to catch her, after which we stayed together pretty much the whole time. Normally Becca is a bit faster than me at Comrades, but I had been training a bit more than she had, so we were well matched.

We had set off about 6.30 am and knew that one of our teammates, Roger, had set off about 30 minutes earlier. Becca was using heart rate to set her pace, as she does in Comrades, and our pace felt comfortable. Although the course was mostly on quiet lanes rather than trail, it was definitely not flat and we automatically started walking the hills. It was pleasant during these times to chat with some of the walkers around us, many of whom had completed the K2B on multiple occasions. One boy who looked to be perhaps 12 years old was walking the whole distance with his father – and, his Dad said proudly, it was his second time. Given the beautiful surroundings, we also stopped from time to time to take photographs.

Up hills, down again. There was one hill that was quite long and steep; one of the walkers told us, as we ascended, that this was the worst climb in the Challenge. Onwards. More roads. There was one fairly long diversion off the road onto 'trail' – although this was very light trail, being a recently-constructed graveled path.





Aid stations were provided at reasonable intervals, with water and some basic snacks. At Coniston, approximately half-way, there was more substantial food available – those walking for 20 miles by this point no doubt would be glad of a chance to sit down and have a reasonable meal.

We had not been expecting to stop and dine, and were basically carrying our own food – which was a good thing, because when Becca asked one of the marshals there were any vegan options available the woman looked blank then said, “we have ham sandwiches!”

Becca and I somehow got separated from one another in Coniston while dibbing in, looking for the (non-useful) food and visiting the portaloos. I guessed she was ahead of me so I pushed on and after some miles managed to catch her again.

Coniston is also where the “C2B” participants start. This is a little over half the full route, about 22 miles, and a lot of families use it to introduce their children to the event. We wondered when we would overtake Roger, who is normally slower than either of us. Being Roger, he was also wearing a costume for the race – in this case a Star Wars Stormtroopers get-up, complete with face-covering helmet, so we started asking the marshals how far ahead of us the Stormtrooper was. “Fifteen minutes” they said. A while later “ten minutes” and a while after that “oh, about 5 minutes” – but they kept saying “about five minutes” for a very long time.



After a bit of mental arithmetic, I commented to Becca that if he had started 30 minutes ahead of us and we were running on average a minute a mile faster than he was, it would take us about 30 miles to catch him. I was right: we caught up with him at about 27 miles.



Becca reeling in the white figure of Roger



Star Wars stormtrooper outfit

A little while later we reached a pub where we had agreed to meet our supporters (Comrades friends). We told them to expect Roger very soon and they told us that our other two runners, Jon and Peter, had each passed there previously. It was fun to chat for a minute, then we were off again. A little while later we saw two friends of Roger's and let them know that he was not far behind us.

The course is net downhill, with Barrow being a port town, so we knew that at some point we would be dropping down to the coast. However, although we were in the last 15 miles, there was a long time when we seemed to keep going more up than down. If I had looked at the route profile properly I would have been prepared for this.



By now we were passing a lot of the children doing the C2B with their parents. Some of the children appeared to be enjoying it more than others, so once we started to pass them later in the course, we did our best to be encouraging and congratulate them on their efforts. Finally we started to descend towards the sea. We ran through the streets of the village of Marton, on along boring roads towards and through Dalton-in-Furness, and eventually reaching a welcome "Welcome to Barrow-in-Furness" sign.



It seemed a long distance on suburban roads after that before we finally turned in through the gate into Hawcoat Park Sports Club and the finish.

There we were given our medals and T-shirts, both dated 2020 (the results are also online as the 2020 results), and sat on the grass for a bit until Roger finished.



This was a fun event to take part in, mainly because of the camaraderie – plus our team raised £645, which went to Headway South Cumbria (supporting and improving life after brain injury), Furness Group Riding for the Disabled, and Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

My personal preference is for trail, so normally I would not have chosen a 40-mile road ultra, but the views on all except the last few miles were glorious (I do love the Lake District), so this would be a great option for those who like road running and would enjoy the opportunity to run an ultra in the Lakes without worrying about navigation or trail conditions.



No wastage of 2020 medals just because the event was held in September 2021!

500 PARKRUNS (by Alan Dolton)

As many Striders will know, parkrun began in Bushy Park in 2004, and first came to the Croydon area with the start of the Roundshaw parkrun five years later, in July 2009. There is a good account of the growth of parkrun in Debra Bourne's book entitled 'parkrun: much more than just a run in the park', which I reviewed in the December 2014 issue of this magazine. And there is a good account of the birth of the Roundshaw parkrun, written by our former chairman Robin Jamieson, in the September 2019 issue of this magazine.



The cover of Debra's book, published in 2014

When the Roundshaw parkrun started, my initial reaction was that since I lived more than three miles from the course, it was a little too far for me to want to take part. However I heard very favourable feedback about it from several other Striders, and by the end of October 2009, I had come to the conclusion that it might be a good addition to my training if I were to do an occasional five-kilometre tempo run, combined with jogging to and from Roundshaw as a warm-up and warm-down. So on 7 November I took part in my first parkrun there, finishing 14th and completing the course in 22 minutes 02 for an age-grading of 68%.

I only ran there twice more in 2009, and only twice in January 2010, but on 13 February I ran Roundshaw in under 22 minutes for the first time, and was so pleased that I also ran there on the next five Saturdays. On 13 March I improved my age-grading to over 70%, and on 1 May I ran the course in under 21 minutes for the first time. On 12 June, in my nineteenth parkrun, I improved my time to 20 minutes 18, which gave me an age-grading of 74.47%. Sadly, this was as fast as I would ever run a parkrun, and I have gradually been getting slower ever since. And only three of my parkruns have produced an age-grading of above 74%: all three of these were at Roundshaw, between June and September 2010.

The Lloyd parkrun began in late October 2010. By this time I had been running cross-country races in Lloyd Park for more than 30 years, and knew from experience that it can become quite muddy in winter. Therefore, although the course was much nearer to my home than Roundshaw was, I was not particularly enthusiastic about doing parkruns there. So initially I continued to do my parkrunning at Roundshaw, even in early December when a heavy fall of snow meant that I had to travel to and from Roundshaw by bus, rather than running there and back.



Roundshaw parkrun in the snow: December 2010

However, in January 2011 I had a conversation on a club run with Damian Macenhill (who must have been taking the run easily to be running at my pace). He had been doing the Lloyd parkrun regularly, and pointed out that if we wanted to attract more new runners to Striders, it would be helpful to have a good number of club members doing the Lloyd parkrun each week. So, in February 2011, after the snow had gone, and when Lloyd Park was less muddy than it often is in winter, I changed my allegiance from Roundshaw to Lloyd Park.

Looking back at the early results on the Lloyd parkrun page, it is interesting to remember just how few people actually ran at Lloyd Park in those first few months. On the Saturday before Christmas 2010 there had only been 15 finishers, and on 15 January 2011 there were only three volunteers. In my first Lloyd parkrun, on 5 February, I placed ninth out of 22 finishers in 23 minutes 34. Three weeks later I improved to place third out of 23 finishers in 22 minutes 52. This was the first time that I had placed in the first three in a parkrun: my best placing at Roundshaw had been fourth. Later in the year I placed third on three more occasions, although I was always beaten by younger runners who were significantly quicker than me.

On 26 March I improved my time to 21 minutes 30, giving me an age-grading of 70.85%, and four weeks later I improved my time again, to 21 minutes 17. My quickest run in the Lloyd parkrun came on 20 August, when I placed sixth in 21 minutes 01 for an age-grading of 72.48%. This was my twentyfifth parkrun at Lloyd Park, and I have been getting slower ever since, although I did slightly improve my age-grading in April 2014 when I ran 21 minutes 24 at the age of 57, for an age-grading of 73.05%.

Re-reading Debra's book is an interesting reminder of how some aspects of parkrun have changed between 2014, when the book was published, and today. When Lloyd parkrun began, generous sponsorship from 'Sweatshop' enabled parkruns to have a 'parkrunner of the month' award, presenting the winner with a certificate which allowed them to buy a new pair of running shoes. And sponsorship from Adidas meant that anyone completing 100

parkruns received not only a free T-shirt, but also a lightweight black running jacket with '100' boldly emblazoned on the back.



September 2011: Marcia Dillon presents a 'parkrunner of the month' award



January 2013: in the snow at Lloyd Park, wearing the Adidas '100 parkruns' jacket

In addition to the 'parkrunner of the month' award, each parkrun also had 'points tables' for men and women, whereby the first finisher of each gender received 100 points, the second finisher received 99 points, and so on. Additionally, each parkrunner received 100 points on each of the first three occasions that they acted as a volunteer. The points tables had the effect of encouraging runners to attend their local parkrun (although there were still many parkrunners who used parkrun as an opportunity for tourism). The tables also definitely encouraged parkrunners to volunteer at least three times per year, because anyone who had run frequently but never volunteered could easily be identified from the tables on the parkrun websites. As Debra commented in her book, "volunteering is at the heart of parkrun", and is

a great way for an injured runner to keep in touch with their running friends and colleagues. She also observed that “club runners and other competitive runners often volunteer when they are saving themselves for a team cross-country on the Saturday afternoon or a race the following day”. (I have been fortunate with injuries in recent years, and my volunteering has usually fallen in the latter category, i.e. the day before a road race or a track race.)



Acting as timekeeper at the Lloyd parkrun (photo by Kevin Hann)

While the fields at parkruns remained small, the points tables worked reasonably well, because (for example) if there were only 30 finishers of each gender, then even the slowest finisher would receive more than 70 points, and could finish higher in the points table than a very fast runner who had competed less frequently. However, as the numbers grew, the way the points tables were structured meant that they no longer acted as an encouragement for slower runners. For example, when the Lloyd parkrun first had 100 male finishers, the first finisher received 100 points and the slowest finisher only received one point, so that the slowest runners could no longer entertain any realistic hopes of featuring highly in the points table. And additionally, because the points were awarded by reference to finishing position, the points table acted as an incentive for runners to try very hard to outsprint the people that they had been running with, which may be admirable in a Surrey Cross-Country League race but is not really the objective of parkrun.

Personally, I thought that the points tables could still have been valuable if the points had been awarded by reference to a runner's age-grading, rather than by reference to finishing positions. Thus, for example, a runner achieving an age-grading of 80% could have been awarded 80 points, while a runner achieving an age-grading of 55% could have been awarded 55 points. This would have placed the emphasis on a runner improving their time, rather than on improving their finishing position, and would have meant that most runners could achieve a reasonable points total in each parkrun, rather than only receiving a handful of points. However, in late 2016 parkrun HQ decided that the points tables were no longer fulfilling the objective of encouraging participation, and would be discontinued.



The Lloyd parkrun male points trophy, photographed in 2014

Debra's book noted that Richmond Park had begun the use of a 'tail runner', so that the volunteers at the finish funnel knew when it could be packed away. Striders had already used a 'tail runner' for several years in our 'Switchback' race. Since Debra wrote her book, the role of 'tail runner' has been renamed as 'tail walker', and appears to be used at all the local parkruns. (The volunteer roles at each parkrun are not identical: for example, some parkruns including Lloyd Park have a role of 'photographer', while others do not.)



May 2013: about to be overtaken by Rachel Lindley



June 2014: the last time I ran the Lloyd parkrun in under 22 minutes



July 2016: a hot day for my 300th parkrun (photo by Oliver Hosken)

Although I enjoy reading other Striders' accounts of overseas parkruns, so far I have only done one parkrun outside the UK. This was in October 2016, when I was on holiday in Western Australia, where the World Masters Championships were being held in Perth. I ran in the parkrun at Claisebrook Cove, which was less than two miles from the hotel where I was staying. This is the oldest parkrun in the Perth area, and takes place along the northwest bank of the Swan River, a couple of miles east of the centre of Perth. Like most Australian parkruns it is an 'out and back' course, starting off upstream before turning round and coming back downstream towards the finish.

The Swan River rises northeast of Perth, and heads southwest, passing through Perth before reaching the sea at Fremantle. In the Perth area there are cycle paths, which are also open for use by runners and walkers, along both banks of the river. These are very popular with runners in the early morning, and I made good use of some of them for my training runs while I was in Perth. However they are somewhat narrow for a parkrun, so that the organisers made the sensible decision to start the Claisebrook parkrun in a park close to the river, allowing a wider start and giving runners about 250 metres to establish their positions before the course takes a sharp left-hand turn to join the riverside path heading away from Perth.



The Claisebrook course is quite narrow in places (photo by Jon Binet)



The south side of Claisebrook Cove, about 400 metres before the finish

Like most Australian parkruns, the Claisebrook parkrun starts at 8.00 rather than 9.00, in an attempt to ensure that the summer parkruns are not too hot. In Western Australia, 12 noon really is the middle of the day, unlike most European countries including Britain, where the effect of British Summer Time is that the midway point between sunrise and sunset is usually at around 1pm. There were several 'tourists' from the UK and from other parts of Australia who were in Perth for the World Masters Championships, so it seemed clear that there would be some quick runners in the field. Knowing that the course narrowed quite soon after the start, I started fairly quickly and reached the sharp left-hand turn in about 20th place. I subsequently overtook five runners who had started too fast, but was overtaken by about fifteen others, finishing 30th in 21 minutes 34, which was almost 90 seconds quicker than I had run at Lloyd Park in my previous parkrun two weeks earlier. My age-grading of 73.72% was the best I had achieved for more than six years (my best age-grading at Lloyd Park in 2016 had been 70.25% in late July). My only slight disappointment was subsequently being told that, although the Claisebrook parkrun usually has a photographer, it did not have one on the day I ran there (the two photos of Claisebrook in this article are from earlier parkruns).



April 2017: outsprinted by younger runners (photo by Debra Bourne)

In April 2017 I ran the Lloyd parkrun in 22 minutes 51, for an age-grading of 70.17%, and four months later I ran it in 22 minutes 56, for an age-grading of 69.91%. This was the last occasion on which I ran a parkrun in under 23 minutes. My performances during 2018, both at parkruns and in track races, were significantly slower than they had been a year earlier.

July 2017 had seen the birth of the South Norwood parkrun. Because the gravel paths in South Norwood Country Park are quite narrow, I had expected that the organisers would do what the organisers of the Claisebrook parkrun had done; i.e. start the parkrun in a wide grassy area before reaching the gravel path. However, as most Striders know, it was decided to start on the path outside the Visitors Centre. I was slightly concerned that this could lead to a lot of congestion at the start, and initially decided to remain loyal to Lloyd Park, although I did have my first run at South Norwood in September 2017. In 2018 I ran at South Norwood eight times and concluded that in summer, my times there were very similar to my times at Lloyd Park, but that in winter, when Lloyd Park became very muddy, my times were significantly quicker at South Norwood.



March 2018: wintry conditions at Lloyd Park (photo by Debra Bourne)

In September 2019 the Lloyd parkrun was still relatively dry, and I ran 24 minutes 42, which gave me an age-grading of 66.06% (my best age-grading for that year was 66.19% in the South Norwood parkrun at the end of August). However the autumn of 2019 was very wet. On 7 December I only managed to run the Lloyd parkrun in 28 minutes 51, which was more than four minutes slower than I had run only three months earlier. I was so frustrated by this that I decided to temporarily abandon Lloyd Park and switch to running at South Norwood, which was very wet in places but was much less muddy than Lloyd Park. I returned to Lloyd Park for its 500th anniversary run in February 2020, but then went back to South Norwood until the Covid lockdown in March 2020 halted all UK parkruns for more than a year.

So far I have never failed to finish a parkrun, but the one occasion when I really should have dropped out partway through the run was in July 2021, in the first parkrun since the Covid lockdown. I returned to Lloyd Park, although the course was much more overgrown than usual and the runnable path was very narrow in places, so that the run was quite congested and it was difficult to see some of the tree roots and sections of uneven ground. On the downhill section in the second half of the first lap I tried to overtake a runner who was slowing down, and turned my ankle on some uneven ground. If this had not been my first parkrun for well over a year, I think that I would have dropped out: but in fact I continued to run, and finished in what was then a 'personal worst' of 29 minutes 41. My ankle rapidly became quite swollen, and I had to limp back home and take a few days off running. I decided to stay away from Lloyd Park for a while, and revert to doing the South Norwood parkrun, which was attracting fewer runners and was therefore less congested.

I continued doing the South Norwood parkrun until I had reached a total of 498 parkruns, which I did in early January 2022. On one of our September club runs, I had promised Debra that I would return to Lloyd Park for my 500th parkrun. And I had noticed that the numbers attending Lloyd Park had fallen from 213 in early September to 113 at the start of 2022. So I decided to return to Lloyd Park for my 499th and 500th parkruns. The conditions for my 499th were worse than I had expected, with some frozen and rutted sections but also some very deep mud on the ascent of 'Hammond Hill'. After seeing the course I decided to concentrate on avoiding injury, and I finished in a new 'personal worst' of 31 minutes 09, which was almost 90 seconds slower than I had run any of my previous parkruns. I went back to Lloyd Park the following week to complete my 500th parkrun. It was not as cold, so that the course was less rutted. However, there was still plenty of mud, and a larger field meant that the course was quite congested, so I set my second consecutive 'personal worst', although only 14 seconds slower than I had run a week earlier.



Celebrating my 500th parkrun with Michelle Campbell-Jardine, who had run her 100th

Having completed my 500th parkrun, I was interested to see how many other runners had also reached this milestone. When parkrun resumed in July 2021 after the Covid lockdowns, only Darren Wood had run more than 700 parkruns, while a total of 116 runners (including Kevin Burnett) had run 500 or more. Six months later, when I joined the '500 club', three more runners had followed Darren in running more than 700, and a total of 182 runners had run 500 or more. That number should increase significantly during 2022, as a substantial number of runners have run between 400 and 500.

Reviewing the statistical record of my parkruns can be a bit depressing, as it shows how badly I have slowed down in the last ten years. And while I realise that it is normal for runners to slow down with age, the age-grading shows that I have slowed down much more than I should have done: having managed a high of 74.47% in 2010, my best age-grading in 2019 was only 66.19%, and my best age-grading since I returned to parkrun after the Covid lockdowns has only been 62.55%.

However what the statistics do not show is that parkrun has become an important part of my social life: I have met many other runners through parkrun and made many new friends as a result. So what I have to do now is to try to keep myself healthy in the hope that, in 13 or 14 years' time, I will still be here to write a follow-up article entitled "my first 1000 parkruns".

BOOK REVIEW – BRITISH MARATHON RUNNING LEGENDS OF THE 1980s

(by Gabrielle Collison: reviewed by Alan Dolton)

Gabrielle Collison used to run for Belgrave: she placed second in the 1993 Surrey Women's Cross-Country Championships, and the following summer she placed second in the Surrey Championships at both 1500 metres, where she ran 4 minutes 36.1, and 3000 metres, where she ran 9 minutes 42.6. She subsequently obtained an MSc in sports science.

This book contains interviews with 18 of Britain's leading male and female marathon runners of the 1980s, including Hugh Jones and Mike Gratton, who won the 1982 and 1983 London Marathons respectively; Charlie Spedding who placed third in the 1984 Olympic Marathon; and Joyce Smith who won the women's race in the 1981 and 1982 London Marathons. (The most notable omission is Steve Jones, who set the British marathon record: Gabrielle has explained that he twice failed to attend scheduled interviews with her.)

These 18 interviews are followed by a section entitled 'pilot study interviews', which features interviews with Jim Alder and Bill Adcocks (first and second in the 1966 Commonwealth Games Marathon) and with Croydon's own Don Faircloth, who placed third in the 1970 Commonwealth Games Marathon. Personally I would have thought that it would be more logical to have these three interviews as a prologue rather than as an epilogue, but they still make very interesting reading.

In her introduction to the book, Gabrielle observes that the standards of British marathon running in the 1980s were significantly higher than they were 25 years later. In 1983, 100 British men ran the marathon in under 2 hours 20 minutes: the 100th fastest British marathon runner that year recorded 2 hours 19 minutes 52. By contrast, in 2009 the 100th fastest British marathon runner recorded 2 hours 33 minutes 59. In the 1980s, eight British men ran a marathon faster than 2 hours 10 minutes; from 2000 to 2009, only two did so.

For anyone living in Croydon, Gabrielle's interview with Don Faircloth makes fascinating reading. In 1968 and 1969, Don set Croydon Harriers club records at 5000 and 10000 metres: they are still the fastest times ever run by an English member of Croydon Harriers, although they have been beaten by runners born in the Southern Hemisphere. And in the 1970 Commonwealth Games Marathon, Don set a Croydon Harriers club record of 2 hours 12 minutes 19 seconds: this still places him second in the Harriers' all-time rankings, only having been beaten by Dave Chettle, who was born in Tasmania.

Don's best marathon time is still more than 12 minutes faster than the next best Croydon Harrier (John Lee), is 22 minutes faster than the best Croydon Harrier of the last 25 years (Steve Bayliss), and is more than 20 minutes faster than Striders' club record (held by James Bennett). So what training was Don doing, to enable him to run so much faster than Croydon's subsequent distance runners?

Don observes that he started training with Croydon's senior runners at the age of 15, doing part of their track sessions. At that time (1964) Croydon's senior runners usually did a club run of up to 15 miles on Sundays, and Don also began doing this, commenting that "it was better than running on my own". As a teenager he had more success at cross-country than on the track, where he recorded personal bests of 3 minutes 56.7 for 1500 metres (at the age of 19) and 4 minutes 14 for the mile. In 1969, at the age of 20, he set what was then a Croydon club record of 29 minutes 01.0 for 10000 metres. That autumn he suffered a stress fracture and had to temporarily stop speedwork, but continued doing long runs.

In April 1970 he won the Kent 20-mile road race in 1 hour 44 minutes, and two months later he won his first ever marathon (the Polytechnic Marathon from Windsor to Chiswick, which was then the AAA championship), recording 2 hours 18 minutes on a very hot day. This won him selection for the Commonwealth Games later that year, where he ran his lifetime best.



The start of the 1970 Commonwealth Games Marathon. The eventual winner Ron Hill is on the left, wearing number 108: Don Faircloth is immediately behind him.

At this time Don had a physical job, working as a horticulturist, which involved spending a lot of time pushing wheelbarrows. He trained twice a day, doing a fartlek session in Lloyd Park at lunchtimes and another session in the evening. Looking back at his failure to improve his marathon time after setting a lifetime best at the age of 21, Don comments "I should have gone back to concentrating on the track because track speed is really the answer to getting faster at the marathon. Most good marathoners are also good track men."

Don's mileage averaged 70-80 per week, which he increased to 90-100 while building up for a marathon. He did a ten-week build-up "which consisted of eight weeks of very hard work and a couple of weeks of easing down". He did a long run of between 16 and 23 miles on a Sunday on hilly roads, which was the only time he did a hard session on the roads: his lunchtime sessions were done in Lloyd Park and Addington Hills. His track sessions were on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. One of his track sessions, which was initially set by Croydon's long-distance coach Brian Proctor, was 52 x 200m with a 100m jog between each rep, followed by a flat-out 400 metres. Including the jog recoveries, this session totalled exactly 16000 metres, which is almost ten miles (and it is worth noting that Don's jog 'recoveries' were at quite a brisk pace). Don comments that this type of session "toughens you up mentally, especially for when you get into a difficult situation in a race". Both Don's long runs and his track sessions were always done with a group. He comments that "if you did the long run and thought that you hadn't worked hard enough, then there was always the option of going out for another session in the evening". For the track sessions, there was a hardcore group of three or four Harriers who trained together, so that Don usually had other runners with him for about two-thirds of most sessions, but he observes that although some of them may have had better basic speed than him, they did not have the same pace judgment and would tire in the second half of the session.



**The medallists in the 1970 Commonwealth Games Marathon:
(left to right) Jim Alder, Ron Hill and Don Faircloth.**

Don also comments that he benefited from regular physiotherapy and sports massage (from a GB team physio who lived in Worcester Park), and that there was “always a fine line between being fit and getting ill”. He notes that, when he was at school, his parents didn’t have a car, so that he “used to walk everywhere. I’d even save money on the bus fare by jogging to the cinema and back. Another 10 or 20 years on, and things are getting worse and worse with kids having very sedentary lifestyles.” He had “a balanced diet” and, at his peak, he only weighed 8 stone 4 (Don is 5 foot 8 inches tall, and other Harriers can testify that, despite being so slim, he was well-known for having a healthy appetite).

Many of the other interviews in the book make similar points: a background of playing out of doors in childhood, and a reasonably high mileage including high-quality fast sessions with other athletes as well as long runs, seem to be regarded as the basic ingredients of success at the marathon. Hugh Jones – still the only Surrey runner ever to win the London Marathon – notes that he did regular runs of 23 miles and considers that “20 miles isn’t long enough if you are building up for a marathon”. He ran about 90 miles per week when training for a marathon. Like Don, he used to do much of his training in local parks, rather than on the road.

Joyce Smith, who won the women’s race in the 1981 and 1982 London Marathons, began her career as a track runner and ran 4 minutes 09 for the 1500 metres (which is faster than any male Strider has run for more than 30 years). In her marathon preparation, she ran some long runs of 25 miles and also did a weekly track session such as 5 x 1 mile (in about five minutes) and 6 x 800m (in about 2 minutes 23). She averaged between 70 and 90 miles per week when training for a marathon.

Charlie Spedding, the only British runner to win an Olympic medal at the marathon in the last 70 years, also had a background of track running (running 3 minutes 45 for the 1500m and 4 minutes 03 for the mile). In his marathon build-up, he did one long run of about 28 miles,

about four weeks before the marathon, but apart from this he did not run more than 20 miles (an interesting contrast to Don Faircloth and Hugh Jones). He averaged about 90 miles per week. He too did a regular Tuesday track session. One of his hardest regular track sessions was 5 x 1 mile in 4 minutes 40, jogging a lap in 90 seconds as recovery. This session totals 10000 metres and Charlie used to run the session, including the recovery jogs, in just under 31 minutes. His personal best for the 10000 metres was 28 minutes 08 seconds, so that his total time for these sessions was about two and a half minutes slower than his personal best. 28 minutes 08 seconds for 10000 metres requires an average of between 67 and 68 seconds per lap, so that Charlie's mile reps were two or three seconds per lap slower than his 10000 metre race pace. He also did a high-tempo run most weeks, where he ran for 15 miles at about 5 minutes 40 seconds per mile. (It should be borne in mind that Charlie's marathon race pace was under 5 minutes per mile, and that most of his other training runs were between 6 minutes and 6 minutes 30 per mile.)

This is a very interesting book which I would definitely recommend to any Striders with ambitions to run a fast marathon, or to anyone with an interest in learning more about how British distance runners used to train in the 1980s, when British distance running had significantly more strength in depth than it does today.



**Gabrielle Collison in the 1993 Surrey Cross-Country Championship at Frimley
(photo by Ray O'Donoghue)**

(This article originally appeared in the December 2013 club magazine, but is reproduced here, in a slightly revised form, for the benefit of newer Striders)

COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: DECEMBER 2021 – FEBRUARY 2022

The South of England Masters Cross-Country Championships were held at Lloyd Park on 11 December. Robert Zietz ran well to place first in the M65 age-group, placing 185th overall in the men's 10-kilometre race. Andrew Aitken also ran well to place 22nd out of the 224 finishers, with Tatsuya Okamoto close behind in 27th. Matthew Stone was 67th, Steve Corfield 105th, Andy Perks 183rd, Jon Dean 192nd and Stephen Allport 211th. Michael Bassett ran very well to place fourth in the M70 race, over six kilometres. Striders' women also raced over six kilometres. Nikki Javan finished 74th with Cindy Siu 77th, Grace Rehman 111th, Jadwiga Brzask-Makiela 116th and Michelle Klein 121st.

In the South of the Thames Cross-Country Championship at Beckenham on 18 December, James Rhodes was 51st in the men's race while Cindy Siu was 52nd in the women's race.

In the Surrey Cross-Country Championships, held at Dorking on 9 January, Striders' men did well to place eleventh. They were led by Alastair Falconer who placed 41st. Tatsuya Okamoto was 68th with James Rhodes 78th, Luke Burden 135th, Oliver Watts 137th and Martin Filer completing the scoring team in 140th. Striders' women were led by Nikki Javan who placed 84th. Grace Rehman was 128th and Jadwiga Brzask-Makiela 131st.

On 15 January, Striders' men placed ninth in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match at Richmond Park. They were led by James Rhodes who ran well to place 49th of the 166 finishers. Andrew Aitken was 69th with Robert Lines 84th and Sebastian Munday 85th. Matthew Stone ran very well to place second in the M55 age-group, placing 86th overall. Simon Ambrosi was 101st and Oliver Watts 103rd, just ahead of Steve Corfield who was third in the M55 age-group and 104th overall. Conor O'Hara-Barrett was 106th and Joseph Ibe completed the scoring team in 112nd. On the same day, Striders' women placed 13th in their Division Two match at Mitcham. They were led by Jennifer Gutteridge who ran very well to place 26th of the 208 finishers. Ellyw Evans was 77th with Cindy Siu 80th, Nikki Javan 82nd and Consuelo Kennefick 86th.

In the South of England Cross-Country Championships at Beckenham on 29 January, Striders' men's team placed 33rd out of 46 clubs. Striders' first man home was Tatsuya Okamoto who placed 251st. James Rhodes was 290th, Matthew Stone 315th, Sebastian Munday 335th, Luke Burden 502nd and Andy Perks 566th. For Striders' women, Niamh Vincent placed 177th, Nikki Javan 227th and Jadwiga Brzask-Makiela 250th.

The South Norwood parkrun on 12 February saw the eighth annual mob match between Striders and Croydon Harriers. Striders had 52 finishers while Harriers had 42, but Harriers had nine of the first eleven finishers and won the match by 2300 points to 2165. At Lee Valley on 16 February, James Rhodes set a new club mile record of 4 minutes 42.84.

The final Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season was held at Lloyd Park on 19 February. Andrew Aitken ran well to place 30th with Peter Mills 37th (31:49) and Tatsuya Okamoto 48th. Matthew Stone also ran well to place first in the M55 age-group and 55th overall. Simon Ambrosi was 78th, Oliver Watts 80th, Steve Corfield 88th, Justin Macenhill 89th, Joseph Ibe 97th and Tom Gillespie 102nd (37:13). The team finished eighth in the match and ninth in the final Division Two table.

Striders' men placed 108th in the National Cross-Country Championships, at Parliament Hill Fields on 26 February. Andrew Aitken placed 554th with Sebastian Munday 874th and Matthew Stone 963rd. In the women's race, Steph Upton was 637th and Cindy Siu 649th.

20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN SPRING 2002

The 22nd Croydon 10K took place on 7 April. For the first time the race saw a Striders winner, with Tony Sheppard finishing well clear of the field in 35 minutes 28. Julian Dillow of Croydon Harriers was second in 35 minutes 48. Striders had four of the first ten finishers. Ciaran Osborn was fifth in 36 minutes 36, while Simon Alexander was eighth in 37 minutes 25, just two seconds ahead of Neil Furze who placed ninth. Joe Butlin was 15th (38:20) and was followed by Alan Dolton (23rd, 38:50) and Chris Morton (24th, 38:52). The first woman to finish was Gill O'Connor of South London Harriers, who placed 13th overall in 38 minutes 13. Striders' first woman was Emma Haillay, who placed 97th overall (45:19).

Two days later Striders had another successful day in the East Surrey League's annual road race at Ewell. We won the event, this being the first time ever that we had won an East Surrey League race. Tony Sheppard led us home in seventh place, covering the 4.25 mile course in 23 minutes 48. Eric Parker was 11th (24:13), Ciaran Osborn 12th (24:17), and Gerry Crispie 15th (24:25). We finished equal fourth in the overall league table.

Striders had 15 finishers in the London Marathon on 14 April. Gerry Crispie had an excellent run to finish in 2 hours 48 minutes 05. Morgan Steele set a personal best of 3 hours 15 minutes 54. Our first woman was Kate Custis, who set a lifetime best of 3 hours 21 minutes 04. Two of our younger women made encouraging debuts at the marathon. Alex Coe ran 3 hours 42 minutes 24 while Emma Haillay ran 3 hours 44 minutes 01.

The first Southern Veterans League match of the season was held at Kingsmeadow on 29 April. Both our men and women were fourth. Lyn Simmons did well to compete in six events.

On 5 May Striders competed in the Sutton 10 kilometre road race, which was the first race in the Surrey Road League. Our men did very well to place fifth. Tony Sheppard led us home in 17th place, recording 35 minutes 03, while Joe Butlin was 26th in a personal best 36 minutes 46. He was followed by Neil Furze (28th, 37:00); Paul Finch (46th, 38:26); Alan Dolton (50th, 38:52) and Dave Lovell (63rd, 39:34).

The weekend of 11 and 12 May saw Striders make our debut in the Green Belt Relay (a 20-stage relay around the outskirts of London). We fielded a mixed-ability team of six men and four women. This event required quite a lot of driving, and tested the organisational skills of team manager John Gannon. However, by using four cars we managed to get to the start of every stage in time, and finished 17th of the 24 teams. Both Alex Coe and Diane Ballard won a T-shirt for being the fastest woman on one of the stages.

On 19 May Eric Parker won the Heatherley 10-mile race in West Sussex, recording 60 minutes 10 seconds.

On 20 May Striders' men placed equal second in the Southern Veterans League match at Croydon Arena, in a three-way tie with Croydon Harriers and Kingston. Gerry Crispie placed second in the 3000 metres (10:11), with Alan Dolton winning the B race (10:32). Our women were fourth. Paula Bongers won the over-50 800 metres (3:15) and was second in the 3000 metres (12:53).

On 25 May three Striders were successful in the Surrey Veterans Championships at Kingsmeadow. Kevin Burnett won the M60 200 metres (34.5) and the shot (6.33m), was second in the 100 metres and javelin, and was third in the hammer. Alan Dolton won the M45 1500 metres (5:07.7), while Dave Hoben won the M45 3000 metre walk.



Alex Coe competing in the 2002 Green Belt Relay



Emma Haillay chasing a Dulwich runner in the 2002 Green Belt Relay

10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN SPRING 2012

In the annual ten-mile road race from Ostend to Bruges on 4 March, Damian Macenhill ran well to finish in 60 minutes 24, and was followed by Barry White (63:52) and Mick Turner (64:29). Serena Stracey also ran well to record a personal best 67 minutes 56.

Abdi Madar of Newham won the second annual Croydon Half-Marathon on 1 April. He covered the undulating course in 71 minutes 28. For Striders, Bill Makuwa placed fifth in 76 minutes 46. Simon Ambrosi also ran well to finish 13th (82:43) with new member Moulay Goumrhare 21st (84:27), Rob Sharpe 28th (86:37) and Paul Finch 29th (86:57). Our women were led by Debra Bourne who was the 17th woman to finish (1:40:11), with Tina Macenhill 34th (1:49:33) and Teresa O'Donnell 37th (1:50:36). Meanwhile Damian Macenhill placed 45th in the Paddock Wood Half-Marathon in a personal best 79 minutes 51. Also at Paddock Wood, Cara Kayum ran a personal best 91 minutes 42.

Striders finished sixth in the East Surrey League. In the final race, at Ewell on 5 April, our team was led by Mick Turner who was 17th, covering the 4.25 mile course in 26 minutes 44.

Striders had 22 finishers in the London Marathon on 22 April. Krzysztof Klidzia ran very well to record a personal best 2 hours 49 minutes 50. Lee Flanagan also ran well to record a personal best 2 hours 57 minutes 45. Striders' women were led by Kate Custis who ran well to finish in 3 hours 56 minutes 54.

Striders did very well to place fourth in the Richmond Half-Marathon, which incorporated the Surrey Championships, on 6 May. We were led by Lee Flanagan who ran very well to finish 14th in a personal best 78 minutes 50. Krzysztof Klidzia placed 18th in 81 minutes 30, placing fourth in the over-40 category. Damian Macenhill completed the scoring trio in 24th place (83:39). Serena Stracey led our women in 148th place (99:14). In the Sutton 10 kilometre road race on 13 May, Lee Flanagan ran well to finish thirteenth in 35 minutes 37. Steve Starvis also ran well to place 21st (36:37). John Foster was 40th overall and fifth in the over-50 category (37:51). Striders' women were led by Serena Stracey who placed 155th overall (44:51). She was followed by Alice Ewen (45:16) and Debra Bourne (49:03).

In the Rosenheim League at Battersea on 16 May, Striders' women finished equal fourth, level on points with Croydon Harriers and one point ahead of host club Serpentine, while our men had to settle for sixth. Our most successful athlete was Natalie Osher, who placed third in the 200 metres (32.3), fourth in the 800 metres (2:55.5) and fifth in the discus (11.35).

Striders' men produced an excellent team performance to place second in their first Southern Veterans League match of the season, at Tooting on 21 May. Epsom won the match with 165 points, but Striders' total of 133 placed us ahead of Kingston (130), Croydon Harriers (126), Hercules-Wimbledon (97) and Dorking (8). Steve Massey won the M40 400 metres (62.3), while Bob Ewen won the M50 2000m walk (12:23.4) and Julian Spencer-Wood won the M60 1500 metres (5:40.9).

Four Striders won gold medals at the Surrey Masters Championships at Ewell on 26 May. Sandra Francis won the W55 80 metre hurdles (20.5), long jump (3.09) and triple jump (5.83), and was second in the 100 metres (16.5) and 200 metres (39.8). Paul Cripps won the M45 high jump (1.45) and triple jump (9.79), and was second in the long jump (4.59). Alan Dolton won the M55 800 metres (2:43.1) and 1500 metres (5:22.2). Striders' oldest competitor, Kevin Burnett, won the M70 100 metres (19.4), and was second in the shot (9.71), discus (18.22), weight (6.69) and 2000 metre walk (22:03.2).



Sandra Francis won three gold medals in the 2012 Surrey Masters Championships

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