

Striders of Croydon

JUNE 2022 MAGAZINE



**Jennifer Gutteridge closely followed by John O'Mahony in the Sutton 10K on 15 May
(photo by Stuart Roberts of Sutton Runners)**

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 26 June – Richmond 10K – Petersham (Surrey Championships & Road League)

Monday 27 June – Southern Veterans Track & Field League – Kingsmeadow

Saturday 2 July – Banstead parkrun mob match v Tadworth, Collingwood, Epsom

Saturday 16 July – Elmore 7 miles – Chipstead (Surrey Road League)

Wednesday 20 July – Southern Veterans Track & Field League – Croydon Arena

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 at the East Surrey League road race at Ewell
(Mick Turner, Tatsuya Okamoto, Andy Perks, Consuelo Kennefick, Stephen Siu)**

EDITORIAL: JUNE 2022

Welcome to our second issue of 2022. This is a larger issue than we were able to produce in March. We begin with two well-illustrated articles about 'ultras'. Ally Whitlock leads the way with an account of her efforts at the Thames Path 100-mile race from Richmond to Oxford. Despite not being entirely satisfied with her performance, Ally still set a new club women's record for this distance.

Our second article is from Debra Bourne, who ran her first ultra-distance race just over ten years ago, and recently completed her 100th ultra. She gives an account of her progress, including some of the injuries she has suffered along the way and how she has overcome them to continue running. We hope that the September magazine will include a follow-up article, in which Debra will summarise the lessons she has learned in completing 100 ultras.

Newer Striders may feel reassured to hear that we still have many more members participating in parkruns than in ultras, so our two articles about ultras are followed with a briefer article from Steve Tyler, giving some travel tips for some of the many parkruns in the Greater London area. And for newer Striders who would like to know more about the trails which we frequently use for our Sunday runs, we republish an article about the southern part of the London Loop.

The final articles in the magazine include a summary of our competitive highlights over the last three months, and a look back at the corresponding periods from 40 years ago and ten years ago. The 'competitive highlights' article includes the first three races in this year's Surrey Road League. At the time of writing, the league tables on the Surrey AA website only include the first two races, but our men have made a good start and are placed eighth of the 37 clubs in the league. Our women did not make such a good start, but we had a good turnout of women in the third race, which was the Sutton 10K at Nonsuch Park, and I hope that this will continue into the second half of the season.

On the subject of road races, it might be worth reminding members, especially new 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).

On the track, our first Southern Veterans League match of the season took place at Ewell in May. We only had seven competitors, and it would be good to see more Striders competing in the remaining matches (see 'dates for your diary' for the details).

At the Surrey Cross-Country League AGM in May, it was agreed to expand the first two men's divisions for next season to include 10 clubs in each. This does not save our men from being relegated to Division Three, but it should certainly increase our chances of gaining immediate promotion back to Division Two, as we did on the last two occasions that we were relegated to Division Three (in 2004 and 2016).

The September issue of this magazine will coincide with our 40th anniversary, and we are hoping to include a club history quiz and an article from one of our founder-members giving more details about the club's formation.

Alan

THAMES PATH 100: A RACE OF THREE THIRDS (by Ally Whitlock)

It's mile 51 and I'm having a one-woman sit-down protest. I'm sitting on the grass by the river in Henley refusing to move.

I've spent the previous ten miles listing all of the reasons why I'm stopping.

It's too hot.

My legs hurt.

I've fallen behind my target and so won't hit my goal, therefore I've failed.

I feel sick.

My stomach hurts.

I'm not enjoying it.

It's not fun.

I don't want to do it anymore.

The list goes on.

I thought it would be easy to stop. I was going to sit down, tell Nikki I was done, take my number off and go home. I'd already decided what I was going to have for dinner.

What I hadn't counted on were friends who refused to listen.

Friends who wouldn't take no for an answer.

Friends who picked me up, pinned my race number back on my shorts and pushed me on.

Friends who, at that moment in time, believed in me more than I believed in myself.

The Thames Path isn't the glorious story that I wanted it to be. It is not a story of a joyful scamper along the river. Rather it's a bittersweet story of self-doubt, tears, and temper tantrums.

9:30am as the sun shone down on us, I stood on the start line with 287 other intrepid souls. I was quietly confident. I had had one of the best training blocks ever; everything, and I mean everything, had gone to plan. I felt fit, strong, and ready to see what I could do with 100 miles along the Thames Path.

The day was already warm as we crowded around James the Centurion Running RD for the pre-race briefing. There was an excited buzz of nervous anticipation in the air. This was the return to mass race starts that we had all missed over the Covid years. Standing side by side with friends and fellow runners, waiting for the starting klaxon to sound.

As we counted down, I said goodbye to Kerry, Dan, Paul and Jaco and I made my way nearer to the front of the crowd to avoid getting caught up in the early melee. I switched off

from those around me, oblivious now to who was next to, in front, or behind me. I was focusing on one thing and one thing only: the path ahead.



©Jaco Swart

I had a goal for the Thames Path 100.

A big goal.

A scary goal.

I'd questioned it many, many times leading up to the race. Was it realistic, was it possible, was it really achievable? Could I, an average runner in her 40s, really run a race like that? I was stretching myself way outside of my comfort zone. I knew that in order to achieve my goal, everything on race day had to align. I needed to be aggressive and run with confidence right from the start.



My philosophy going into any race is that I never know what I am capable of if I don't try.

Sometimes I may fail, but sometimes I may just fly.

At 9:30am it was already warm. Unusually warm. The sky was blue and cloudless; the sun blazed down on us in all its glory. I usually run okay in the heat; NDW100 in 2020 was a testament to this. But the preceding weeks have been chilly and there has been no real opportunity to acclimatise and this worries me. I'm sweating before the race even starts.

The path is crowded during the early miles as we settle into our groove. The day is full of promise and potential. People sprint past me and it's hard not to get caught up with their enthusiasm. I let them go.

My plan is to start easy and keep my heart rate (HR) in zone one for as long as possible. From my training, I know I can get around 50km before it starts creeping up and I know roughly what pace on the flat this should equate to.

But the best-laid plans and all that...

From the onset my HR is high, flirting with low zone two in the first couple of miles. I find myself stressing over it, which in turn exasperates it further. I know that the heat is a factor, but this is not normal.

I ease off. My HR drops but my pace also slows. In training, I was comfortably running a 9:15 min/mile pace in zone one. Today, the 9:30 pace is pushing my HR towards zone three.

I have an internal debate. An argument with myself.

Do I keep my HR low, allow my pace to drop and fall behind target this early on? Or do I stay with the target pace and let my HR creep up?

I go with pace. My ego won't let me fall behind target at this early stage.

In hindsight, this was the wrong decision and I'm kicking myself. I know better than this. I got caught up in the pressure of having a goal that I wanted to hit and forgot to keep my eyes on the big picture.

I train and run to HR for a reason, and I know for me it works, but in the heat of the moment (quite literally) I lost all sensibility and this was to be my downfall.

The first 20 or so miles wind their way along the river out of London and into the Home Counties. Starting in Richmond, we're already some miles from the city but there is still a very London feel to the riverside. Families, couples and groups of friends bask on sunny restaurant terraces enjoying a leisurely weekend coffee. Rowers are out on the water, their coaches barking instructions at them from the riverbank.

With it being a short train ride from home, I know this section of the path well. It's a route I often run when I want a flat respite from my usual hills.

Perhaps the hardest part of this race for me was the changes I had to make to my training. I'm a big believer in training specificity. The Thames Path is flat, so I needed to train on the flat.

I abandoned my favoured hilly trails of the North and South Downs for endless flat miles along the Waterlink Way and Wandle Trail, with brief forays onto the Thames Path when time allowed. I pounded pavements instead of splashing through mud. I ran laps of fields rather than reps of hills. I wore out a pair of road shoes as my trails lay gathering dust.

Normally I run in tune with the ebbs and flows of the hills. The rolling ups and downs allow for a natural change in intensity. The inclines give a natural walk break, a chance to take stock and take on fuel. The descents a chance to fly with ease. I like hills. I run well on hills.

Without this natural rhythm, I settled into a 28:2 run-walk schedule. Run for 28 minutes, walk for two. The two minutes are a chance to pause, mentally check in and eat. Like with HR, it's how I've trained for the past four months and I adopt the same strategy right from the start today.



Onto Teddington, a quick high-five with Krysia who I ran some of last year's SDW100 with. Kingston, past the hustle and bustle of the busy riverside restaurant quarter on a Saturday morning. Over Kingston Bridge, the first of many river crossings. Past the grand Hampton Court Palace. Another bridge. Walton, a cheer from Rik, the RD from the track race I did in March as preparation for the TP.

It was that race that made me think that maybe, just maybe my 100-mile goal was achievable.

I wanted to run a sub-20 hour 100 miles.

There, I've said it. The goal I kept quiet throughout the training block and onto the start line.

My goal was to run the Thames Path 100 in under 20 hours.

Knowing what we know now, you may ask was this realistic?

I ran a very unexpected 21:18 at the hilly SDW100 last June, finishing as the fourth lady. At Phoenix Running's 12-hour track race in March, I ran 50 miles in 7 hours 56 minutes. A whopping 54-minute PB.

True, I will happily agree that track is a completely different scenario to a towpath, pavement or muddy trail so is it really a good gauge of ability?

I'd entered the track race to prepare my mind and body for the mundanenesses of flat jogging. I ran with a strict pacing strategy; easy HR zone one for the first 25 miles then up the intensity. Alongside the 50-mile PB, I went through marathon distance in 4:10 and scored an official 50km PB of 4:52.

A few weeks later I equalled my three-year 5km PB. Whilst running 5km at 6:50 pace is a completely different scenario to running 100 miles at 12 min/mile pace it indicated that I was the fittest and strongest I had been for a very long time.

I knew I was in good shape, and I believed that a sub-20 hour 100 miler was well within my capabilities. For the final two months of my training block, everything was geared towards this.



©Jaco Swart

Back to Walton, 11 or so miles in. We cross the river again and wind our way through the streets of Shepperton. This section up to Staines is one of my least-favourite stretches. Apart from some pretty ostentatious houses, it's just all a little bit, well, boring. It's also where I begin to struggle.

The riverside is open with very little shade and the midday heat is oppressive. Occasional bouts of coolness when the sun flirts with a cloud are not enough to bring respite. The relentless warmth is draining and I feel my energy slipping away. And along with it my enthusiasm and confidence.

Through Staines and onto check point two (CP2) at Wraysbury where the lovely Ella hands me a banana. I intentionally skipped through CP1 at Walton and here I pause only briefly to refill my water bottles.

Ella had asked in the Centurion Facebook group if anyone had any special requests for CP2. I asked for bananas, knowing that they are one of the few foods I manage to eat during an ultra. As soon as I walk into Wraysbury she calls out “Ally, I have your banana!”.

The volunteers throughout the whole race from the start line to the finish line were, as always, incredible. They simply cannot do enough for us, from filling bottles to preparing food. And always with a smile, even in the dark depth of night and cool chilliness of the early morning.

From Wraysbury, we pass the site of the 1215 Magna Carta, still an important symbol of liberty today and onto Windsor, home of Her Royal Majesty. The Thames is a river with an illustrious past and rich in history as it winds its way from the source in Gloucestershire to the estuary some 184 miles later.

Running in the shadow of the imposing Windsor Castle, I begin to feel as if I am operating on auto. It's taking everything I have to simply keep moving and in frustration I take extra unscheduled walk breaks. All I want to do is stop and sit down.

I switch from listening to podcasts to music in the hope that the energy of some ‘old skool dance classics’ may get me going again...

By CP3 at Dorney, I have slipped five minutes behind on my pacing strategy. Five minutes is nothing over the course of 20 hours. I know this, I tell myself this, yet unwanted doubts silently slide into my previously strong mind. If I am finding it this hard at 30 miles, how I am going to keep going for another 70?

A hug from Zoe as she sends me on my way with a banana and words of reassurance. She tells me everyone is finding the heat hard work. I take some, perhaps selfish, comfort from this. I am not alone in my struggles.



Smiling on the outside, inside I'm crying. ©Zoe Norman at CP3

On the trail towards Maidenhead, metaphorical storm clouds are gathering at speed over my head, darkening my mood further and further as I fall deeper into a pit of self-doubt and self-pity. Every single step is an effort that I don't want to make.

I'm done.

My pace has fallen so far off target that I don't even want to look at it anymore and I know, only one third into the race, that I won't finish in 20 hours.

If I finish at all. I berate myself for my weakness, my perceived failure. The words I silently speak to myself are not kind.

I remember very little from this stretch of the race. It took everything I had to keep moving. I paid no attention to the path or my surroundings. I could have been anywhere, by any river, in any town, any country. I simply don't remember.

As a photographer, I always take photos whilst running. I'm known on social media as [@PhotoGirlRuns](#).

Photography is how I communicate. It's a powerful way of connecting people, telling stories, creating emotion and capturing memories. I love looking at photos I've taken and being transported back to that moment in time. Remembering where I was, what I was doing, who I was with. I hear the sounds again, I remember the conversations, I feel the emotions.

I do this whilst running. My snaps remind me of my runs.

Knowing my tendency for perfection, for taking an excessive amount of time to make sure that the composition and lighting for a photo is 'just right', I set out today with the intention of limiting my photo taking. I did not want to miss my 20-hour time goal because I was waiting for the sun to move so that the lighting was perfect for a photo.

I do this. All the time. And for a zero-pressure training jog, it is totally worth waiting and getting it right. But not today. Once things start to unravel, you could argue I had more flexibility to take photos. However, such was my funk, I simply could not be bothered to take my phone out of my pocket.

I took four photos during the whole race, and this is now one of my biggest regrets because I now have no way of remembering those parts of the race that have slipped from my mind. No photo to trigger a memory. No photo to transport me back to that path.

Many of the photos you see here were taken by Jaco Swart who very graciously has let me borrow them, otherwise this post would be a whole lot of words and no pictures.

Coming out of CP4 at Cookham I text Nikki.

"Ridiculously hot. Heat is draining. Am pulling back on plan to try and conserve some energy."

I try to put a positive spin on it. I don't want her to know quite how bad I am feeling. A few minutes later I text again.

"I'm not sure I can do this".

Nikki is crewing me for the second half of the race. The plan was that she would meet me at mile 58 in Reading with Jon (aka JayZ) my first pacer.

I planned to run straight through Henley, CP6 and push onto CP7 at Reading. Henley is the official halfway stop and the first location crews can meet runners but psychologically I wanted to get past halfway before my pacers joined me. This tactic worked well for me on the NDW and SDW, so I saw no reason to change it on the Thames Path.

Nikki immediately replies saying they'll reroute and meet me at Henley with some ice and cold drinks. This is still some 12 to 13 miles away, but I feel a small sense of relief. I am boosted because I think it is giving me a way out. If they are there, I can stop at Henley.

Through the small town of Marlow. On my recce run, I somehow went wrong here and ended up on the other side of the river. The correct side is much prettier although also very busy on a warm spring afternoon. I pass through a small park and look longingly at the kids running around with giant ice creams, their parents lazing on picnic blankets with cool glasses of drink.



©Jaco Swart

Over another bridge and just after Hurley the trail turns away from the river and winds up through parkland. A runner in front of me points out a herd of white deer grazing to our left. It's here I take three of my four photos. Not of the deer, of the river.

I see the Church spire in the distance and I'm now on a countdown to Henley. To stopping.

A row of smart marquees interspersed with banks of seating line the towpath into town. The signs tell me they're getting ready for the upcoming Henley Regatta. I wonder how it would feel to have the stands full of people cheering us along our way.

I see a couple dressed to the nines arrive at one of the riverside pubs by boat, sailing up and 'parking' at the moorings outside. It feels like I have entered a completely different world to the one I left in Richmond some nine hours earlier.

So back to that patch of grass in Henley. I'm 50 minutes late arriving.

I sit down and tell Nikki and JayZ that I'm done. I'm stopping.



One of mine! Looking back from Henley towards Hurley

Nikki hands me a Calippo and some fizzy orange. I don't hear her response. All I know is it's not the supportive one I was hoping for. I am wrapped in a self-absorbed blanket of pity, knowing that I have failed. I am oblivious to what she is saying.

Stu, Spencer, Helen and Keith, Kerry's crew and pacers wander over. SJ, Paul's wife, pops up. There are other faces I don't recognise circling around me. I tell them that I'm done, that I'm stopping.

They tell me I can do it.

I tell them I can't.

I relay the list of reasons that I have been composing for the last 20 miles.

I am adamant. I am stopping. I am NOT carrying on. Stubbornness is a Whitlock family trait. I dig my heels in.

When challenged, I take my number off and defiantly drop the pins on the grass. I'd have taken my tracker off too if I could have worked out how to undo the tape that fixed it to the left shoulder of my pack.

Lou, a Henley CP volunteer, Drew from Centurion and ultra-running queen Anna Troup join the party. I am the Henley entertainment, and all eyes are on me.

I tell them I'm stopping. They also tell me no.

Spencer gets down on the grass next to me and talks. I don't remember what he says but I remember the encouraging tone of his words.

I am crying. I am drained. I feel physically and emotionally broken. I don't see how I can do another 50 miles; it feels like an impossible task.

Those who know me well know that I don't do emotion. For me to be crying here, now, in front of all these people, shows just how much this race meant to me. How much my self-perceived failure upset me.

Whilst Spencer is speaking his words of wisdom and I have tears running down my cheeks, there is a hive of activity going on around me. JayZ appears in his running gear, his race pack on his back. Lou, the Centurion volunteer, pins my number back onto my shorts. Anna Troup crouches down next to me, puts her arm around my shoulders and tells me I can do it.

I don't have a choice. I'm encouraged to get up, handed another Calippo and told to give just one more mile a go. If I still want to stop in a mile then I can come back.

JayZ steps in for pacing duties seven miles early. With him leading the way, I start to slowly walk away from Henley and back onto the Thames Path. I hear cheers and shouts of encouragement behind me.

They know – as I think deep down I do – that once I leave, I will not be back.



©Jaco Swart

Just past Henley, there is a route diversion that we found out about during the pre-race briefing this morning. Yesterday afternoon, with no prior warning and no notice given to Centurion, the Environment Agency closed a bridge due to safety concerns. The diversion is 2.5 miles, but it cuts off one mile of the Thames Path so in total adds an extra 1.5 miles to the race route. Or as RD James put it, an extra 1.5%.

The diversion meanders up a hill and through a small bluebell wood. The late afternoon sun shimmers golden through the trees casting long shadows on the ground. Although I think about it, and as pretty as it is, I still don't take any photos. I quite like the diversion as it adds a little variety to the previous flatness of the towpath. JayZ and I are chatting away and before I know it we've done a mile, and then another. At some point we've switched from walking to running and before long we're back on the Thames Path.

I guess I am carrying on then.

As daytime morphs into evening the temperature drops and I begin to feel a little more comfortable. JayZ encourages me to eat, and I am conscious that with the waves of nausea coming into Henley I haven't taken on any significant fuel for quite some time. I manage most of a banana and a gel or two over the next hour. At this point in time, I am celebrating any small wins.

Almost before I realise it we are approaching Reading. Nikki is there, ready and waiting. Alongside Stu, Spencer and Helen. There is no talk of stopping here.

I'm back in the game!

I freshen up and change my t-shirt. I've got some chaffing on my back that we deal with. I drink. Nikki checks and sorts my pack, filling me up with fresh drinks and snacks. Gives me a liberal spray of insect repellent and off we go.



©Jaco Swart

As we leave Reading the head torches go on. The next planned stop is for a water top-up at Goring in 13 miles. My watch is charging but I've stopped looking at it. For now, I have no idea of distance, time, or pace. It's just a case of getting it done. Run as much as I can. Walk when I need.

I don't know what changed in the last few miles but my head, which I lost somewhere around Cookham, is in a completely different place. Physically and more importantly, mentally, I now feel as if I can do this. I've had to let go of all thoughts of finishing in under 20 hours and I am okay with that.

JayZ and I chat, as we move forward. I remember very little of our conversations, although I do recall at one point reciting the 1995-96 Liverpool FC starting line-up to him... **(What can I say, it's a party trick... If you're interested; David James was in goal, then we had Jones on the right, Bjornebye on the left, Ruddock, Scales and Babb in the centre. Barnes, McManaman and Redknapp in midfield with Rush/Owen and Fowler upfront).**

Henley to Goring was the last one of my recce run's along the Thames Path. In the lead up to race day, I ran the whole route over four separate runs. Whilst some people are quite happy to go into the unknown on race day, for me, this pre-race preparation was important.

When I enter a race with the intention of 'racing', I like to know where I am going and what to expect. It helps me to prepare my mind, which is as important as training the body.

Two days earlier I had sat down with OS Maps online and 'run' the whole route again so that it was fresh in my mind.

During the nighttime miles, I am so thankful for those real and virtual runs. There was nothing unexpected, no surprises, nothing to throw me. Running across Pangbourne Meadows I am tiring but I can see in the distance the bridge and know that just after we cross the river there is a small hill, perfect for a walk break. I don't need the CP at Pangbourne, so I tell JayZ that we're running without stopping to that hill.

I also know that once we've climbed the hill there is a lovely little winding downhill trail through the woods back down to river level. It's my kind of path; full of twists and turns. Roots to jump over and uneven paths to avoid. Had it not been nearly 70 miles in and by the light of a head torch I would have flown down this hill with my usual reckless abandonment!



©JayZ

We reach river level, dark and foreboding to our left. I know we're not far off Goring. Not long after Goring is Benson and my next crew stop. Knowing what is coming up helps me to break the race down into manageable chunks. I don't think of X miles to the finish, but rather X miles to the nice downhill trail, X miles until I see Nikki.

Originally I was planning on stopping at Goring CP only to refill my bottles. I have enough food. As I'm topping up my water one of the volunteers asks me if I want some soup.

Yes, yes I do. I really, really do want some soup.

I have a few mouthfuls of hot, salty vegetable deliciousness and decide I need something to dip in the soup. I see the cheese sandwiches. I am mainly plant-based, I refuse to call myself a vegan, but I eat a 95% plant-based diet. Suddenly all I want is a cheese sandwich. I grab one, dip it in the soup and it is THE BEST THING EVER!

Zero fucks given as I have a second cheese sandwich.



The joy of an illicit cheese sandwich and sit down at 70+ miles! @JayZ

I needed that. I come out of Goring feeling refreshed and revitalised. An unplanned 10-minute break, a toilet visit, a sit-down and a little bit of proper food has worked wonders. (Although, I do wonder what my stomach will think about the sandwich in a few miles' time...)

I wonder now if the unplanned breaks are one of the things that saved my race. My body simply needed the downtime my protest gave it at Henley. It gave me a chance to rest and refresh. Likewise at Goring.

As we leave Goring and cross the river JayZ is now on his final pacing stretch. Next stop Benson and handover to Martin.

I cannot thank JayZ enough. He stepped in early and with the diversion between Henley and Reading ran 10 miles more than he planned. And he hates flat jogging even more than I do! He was one of the many people who rescued me today and I am not sure if I would have made it to Reading without him.

We breeze through Wallingford with only a cursory glance at the CP and soon we're approaching Benson Lock. I hear the thunderous roar of the river crashing through the weir before I see it. Up and over running across the narrow footbridge and down to the marina. 82(ish) miles and my next crew rendezvous.

Nikki is ready and waiting with Martin and Rel, my third pacer. JayZ had messaged ahead to say that I wanted a five-minute sit-down. They even have a chair borrowed from Stu and Spencer ready for me. More importantly, they have my requested flask of coffee. I've been thinking about this coffee for many, many miles.

As I sit, there is a hive of activity around me. My pack is taken off my back and a blanket is placed around my shoulders. A clean buff is put on my wrist. My head torch is changed over. Bottles are filled and Rel spoon feeds me fruit whilst Nikki puts Sudocrem on my chaffed back.

I don't have to do or think of anything. I don't even have to feed myself!

As I'm getting ready to leave, Kerry runs in with Keith, her first pacer. He is handing over to Helen here. We hug and whilst I am delighted to see her, I am also a little disheartened. Knowing that we had very different pre-race goals, for us to cross paths here, shows that whilst she is having the race of her life, I am not. I was aiming for 20 hours, and she was aiming for 24. I am down on target, she is deservedly well ahead.

I say goodbye to JayZ as he passes the pacing baton (aka coffee flask) onto Martin. He's heading for a well-earned nap in Nikki's car. I have to admit I am slightly envious; a nap sounds very enticing right now.



©Jaco Swart

Martin and I quickly ease into a gentle run with him leading the way. He knows the score, this is the third time he has paced me. He also knows that things haven't quite gone quite right for me today.

I don't know how many sugars are in my coffee, but it works like super charged rocket fuel! Had my race gone to plan, I was expecting to be running around 13 min/mile pace between Benson and the next crew point. In the five miles after Benson, I run three miles at 11:30 minute mile pace. After 80+ miles and however many hours, I feel better than I have done since 9:30am this morning (or is it now yesterday morning...?)

Even the endless fields leading into Clifton Hampton don't seem to drag as much as they did when I ran them a few months ago. I have my moments; I take regular walk breaks and occasional hands-on-knees-this-is-bloody-hard pauses. My stomach makes the occasional protest, but for the most part, I feel good.

On the whole, I ran well during the night and despite my setback earlier in the race, I ran far more of the latter miles than I walked. I was pretty much on target pace wise from Reading onwards. I had some slower miles, but I also had some considerably faster than expected miles too.

Martin's ten miles speed by and soon we're approaching Culham, my final crew stop and where Martin hands over to Rel. By comparison, this stop is brief. At 90 miles I can smell the finish and I'm eager to keep going. My bottles and coffee are topped up and Rel and I set off.

Rel is looking very glamorous. On Saturday (for it is now very definitely Sunday morning!) she was a bridesmaid at a friend's wedding and came straight from the wedding to the Thames Path! Her hair is neatly styled and she wears a sparkly tiara. She is also wearing make-up. I have never seen Rel in make-up before.

She runs the whole final section wearing her tiara which makes me smile every time it sparkles in the light of my head torch.

The support of friends is incredible. Running is often considered a solo sport, but ultra running is anything but. This is very much a team effort. Nikki, JayZ, Martin and Rel all freely gave up their time to spend a night hanging out with me on the Thames Path. Martin, a Crystal Palace FC season ticket holder, left the match at half-time whilst Palace were winning to make sure he got to me on time. Rel took the last train out of London after dancing the day away at her friend's wedding to come and pace me. Nikki organised everything, making sure everyone was in the right place at the right time doing what they needed to do. I ran through the night, they crewed and paced through the night. They made sure my every need was met and if I asked for something it was there, ready and waiting for me. They kept me going, pulled me along, encouraged me to eat and dealt with my temper tantrums, all without a second thought.

And then Stu, Spencer and Helen. Not my crew, but my cheerleaders, my supporters and my encouragers.

Without them all, I would still be sitting on the grass in Henley.

Back to the river. Dawn is breaking as we approach the pretty market town of Abingdon. During the day a busy tourist destination. In the early hours, it is eerily still and silent. The grass under our feet is damp with morning dew. The birds in the trees above our heads serenade us with the dawn chorus. As we cross the river, light and colour is creeping back into the sky as nighttime gradually transforms into day. I'm still only wearing a t-shirt, as I have done all night. I was told it gets cold by the river after dark, I haven't felt cold once.

The path is now rock solid, dried out mud; rough, uneven and hard to run on. A fallen tree, a remnant of the winter storms, blocks the path. I clamber over, following Rel's sparkling head. Hurdling at 92 miles is not on.

I'm frustrated. I want to run, I feel as if I am capable of running, but the lumpy trail beneath my feet is breaking my stride. I swear at it in anger and push on slowly through to Lower Radley, the final CP. I don't stop as the volunteers cheer me through, shouting out sweet words of encouragement and telling me I have just 4.5 miles to go. And 2.7 miles until we reach a good running surface!



Breaking Dawn ©Jaco Swart

We trot over two small bridges crossing channels leading into the main river. My watch ticks over 100 miles. I glance down. 20 hours 44 minutes. With the earlier diversion and the race already having one “bonus” mile, there are still two and a half to go.

On we push. I hear the noise of the city in the distance. The roar of the traffic on the roads. We’re emerging from the quietness of the rural world to the sounds of the urban. The finish is near.

I run mile 101 in 11:35.

We cross a meadow. On my recce run, children were splashing in the river whilst their parents were BBQ-ing on the riverbank. Today we see only a few early dog walkers.

My foot hits the pavement and I have never been so glad to feel solid tarmac underneath my feet. The rutted trails over the last six miles have taken their toll.

Mile 102 in 10:49. Half a mile to go. Half a mile to reach the finish line I didn’t think I would cross. I see the finish gantry teasing me through a gap in the fence. On I run. A sharp left-hand turn and through a narrow gateway.

Nikki, JayZ, Martin, Spencer, Stu, Keith, the Centurion team, runners and volunteers, all cheering me on.

Across the Queens College sports pitch. I break into a sprint as my watch clocks sub-7-minute mile pace. The finish line is mere meters away. I cross it.

Now, I am done.

Now I stop.

102.5 miles in 21 hours 12 minutes 15 seconds

5th Lady (out of 43 finishers)

34th Overall (out of 203 finishers)

A 5-minute 100 mile PB (on a long course with bonus miles if I am going to be pedantic!)



REFLECTION

Looking at the stats above, you could argue I had a great race and in some ways, I am inclined to agree. I am delighted with a new PB, and delighted to finish 5th lady. However, it is not the race I wanted nor the race I trained for.

It feels somewhat erroneous saying I am unhappy with my result when it's a result that many can only dream of. But I wanted that 20-hours. I wanted to do what I thought (think) I am capable of.

I am disappointed that I didn't achieve what I set out to do.

I am angry with myself because I know, had I done things differently in the early miles, I might not have fallen apart in the middle miles. I put my hand up to that.

Miles 25-55 lost this race for me. Up to mile 25, I was pretty much on target and I was doing okay. From mile 25 it began to unravel. I can blame the heat (it peaked at around 30 degrees) but conditions were the same for everyone. I am experienced enough now that I should have been able to adapt and deal with it.

As things began to fall apart, my mind, usually so strong, went. I fell into a deep, dark hole of negative thinking that I was unable to climb out of. The more my mind faltered, the more my body hurt. The hurt wasn't real, I wasn't injured or in real pain. But the deafening avalanche of negativity in my head told me I was broken, damaged and my body was unable to complete what I'd started.

Much of the negativity was fear. Fear of having to explain myself, fear of what other people would think. That they would think I was cocky or arrogant for going after such a fast time and then failing quite so spectacularly. I was worried that people would think I had illusions of grandeur and thought myself better than I am.

I told no one of my goals before the race (apart from my crew and pacers) so that I wouldn't have to explain myself if I failed.

Why do we place so much importance on what other people think?

And why in times of difficulty are we so unkind to ourselves?

As I sat in Henley drowning in a sea of negativity, friends stepped in. Friends who believed in me more than I believed in myself.

They picked me up and pushed me out.

They told me I could when I didn't think it was possible.

They said yes when I said no.

They saved my race.

After Henley, this became a race of two halves, or perhaps even three thirds. A reasonable first third, a torrid middle third and a pretty amazing final third.

I left mile 60 at Reading approximately 90 minutes behind my target. I was the 8th lady and in 60th position overall.

Between Reading and Oxford, I climbed 26 places. I finished the race as 5th lady and 34th overall. 287 runners started, and 203 finished the race. I overtook 26 of them in the last 40 miles. I finished only 72 minutes behind my target. I actually GAINED time in the final third of the race.

34	5	59	Whitlock, Ally	F	Finish	Finished	21:12:15
Split	O.Pos.	C.Pos.	G.Pos.	Pace	Duration	Time	
Walton On Thames	94.	5.	8.	9:29	01:39:42	01:39:42	
Wraysbury	61.	4.	7.	9:32	01:49:40	03:29:22	
Dorney	50.	4.	7.	10:26	01:27:46	04:57:08	
Cookham	56.	4.	7.	12:35	01:35:45	06:32:53	
Hurley	49.	4.	7.	11:58	01:11:50	07:44:43	
Henley	53.	4.	7.	12:14	01:25:43	09:10:26	
Reading	60.	5.	8.	18:05	02:06:38	11:17:04	
Pangbourne	55.	5.	8.	13:34	01:56:41	13:13:45	
Goring	52.	4.	7.	14:29	01:00:50	14:14:35	
Wallingford	52.	4.	7.	16:40	01:51:43	16:06:18	
Clifton Hampden	49.	4.	7.	15:33	01:56:38	18:02:56	
LowerRadley	39.	3.	5.	13:21	02:13:38	20:16:34	
Finish	34.	3.	5.	11:08	00:55:41	21:12:15	

Something went right in that last third. Perhaps it was the company of pacers. Perhaps it was the cooler temperature. Perhaps it was the self-belief that I could do it.

If only the whole race had been like that.

If only...

If only it wasn't so hot...

If only I had eased off slightly during the early miles...

If only there wasn't a diversion...

If only it wasn't a 'long' 100 miles...

If only I could fuel well...

If only I hadn't had a temper tantrum in Henley...

If only...

Was I arrogant? Was I cocky? Was my goal unrealistic?

No, I don't believe it was.

My Garmin clocked 100 miles in 20 hours 44 minutes. Taking out the unplanned 25-minute stop in Henley and 10-minute break in Goring, that's an extra 35 minutes of time right there. That brings me to 20 hours and nine minutes.

Suddenly my 21 hours 12 minutes doesn't look quite so far off my 20-hour goal. If I can work on the things that didn't go right on the Thames Path, I do truly believe that I have a sub-20-hour 100 mile in me.

I was right to try, I was right to give it a go.

Because you never know what you are capable of if you don't try.

I tried. Today I didn't fly.

But perhaps next time I will soar like a bird.



©Stuart March



**The dream team; Rel, Martin, me, Nikki and JayZ
(and yes, I do have a mouthful of food ... I was hungry)**

100 ULTRAS, 100 FINISHES – ONE RUNNER’S ROCKY JOURNEY (by Debra Bourne)

I never set out to run 100 ultras. I look back and I try to work out where it truly started. When I started running 4 miles round South Norwood Country Park in 2004, soon after we moved to Elmers End? When I was asked to run the Royal Parks Half Marathon for charity in 2009?

The real start to my ultrarunning journey came in late 2010, with two half marathons to my name, when I read about the Lakeland 50 and thought, ‘I want to run that!’ The roots of that decision reach back to my 20s, when I started spending long weekends walking in the Lake District. One walk in particular, an amazing day of glorious weather, when I parked at Seatoller, strapped on my Teva walking sandals, walked the Corridor Route to the top of Scafell Pike, nipped back down and onto the little peak of Lingmell where I ate lunch, then back up Scafell Pike. There were some people there who had been there also when I reached the peak the first time – in retrospect I think they were possibly officials for a fell race. “Didn’t you come up here an hour or so ago?” one of them asked. “Yes,” I replied, “but I’d forgotten on the way up that I’d wanted to top Lingmell as well, so I went back to do that.” I grinned and set off again, heading for Glaramara and the ridge route back along to Seathwaite village, fizzing with energy, running sections (even though I wasn’t yet a runner), finally, a little weary, dropping down to the village and walking back up to Seatoller.

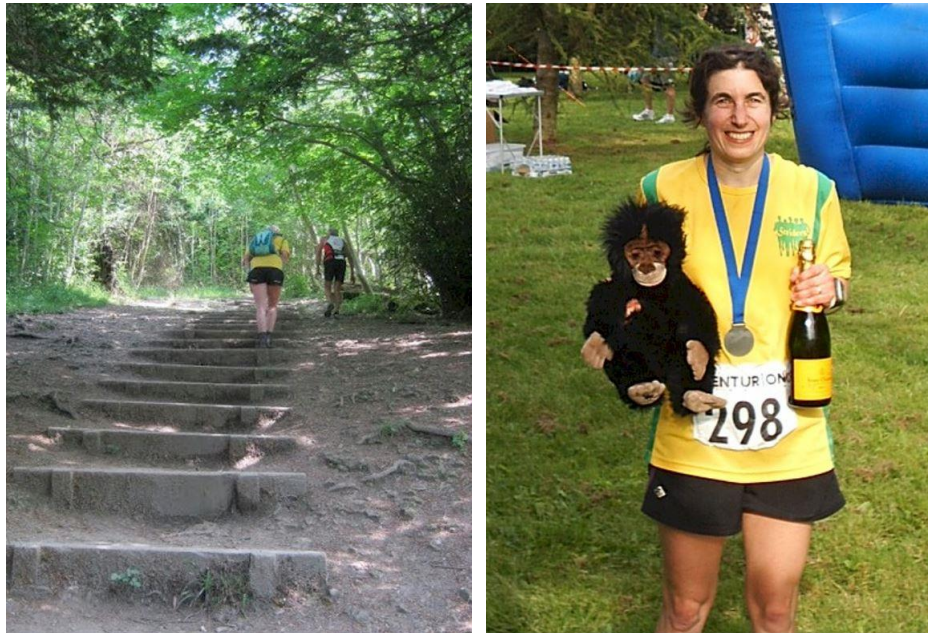
My decision to run the Lakeland 50 – 50 miles with 3100 meters of ascent – came only weeks after I had told my husband, Aidan, that I would love to run a marathon someday, but didn’t see how I would find the time, so I would have to stick to half-marathons for the foreseeable future. Now I was setting out on ultramarathon training. I started increasing my running, at the same time as switching to minimalist shoes. Predictably (in hindsight!) this led to my first running injury early in 2011 – a typical ‘too much too soon’ minimalist injury, probable metatarsal stress fracture plus tendonitis of the tendons on the tops of my feet. That was when I started volunteering at Lloyd parkrun – eventually becoming Event Director.

Meanwhile, I started running again. I did have some sense. I realised I would need to work up to the Lakeland 50. For my first ultra I settled on one much closer to home and with a lot less ascent and descent: the London Ultra, 50K along the Capital Ring in February 2012. I had found a couple of 50K training programmes online and mostly followed the Ultraladies programme. I recced the course in sections, using public transport to get me to and from the end of my runs, with some help from my husband to drop me off when the train connections were convoluted. During one of those training runs I passed 26.2 miles for the first time.



London Ultra and Croydon Ultra

After the London Ultra I reduced my distance running a bit (dropped back-to-back long runs), added in some speedwork and ran the inaugural Greater Manchester Marathon (4 °C, gale-force winds, rain and hail – I aimed for sub-3:45 and finished sub 3:48), then jumped into the Ultraladies 50-mile programme to train for the Centurion North Downs Way 50 (NDW50 – 50 miles). Along the way I ran the Croydon Ultra, 30 local miles organized by Striders' club member Ian Campbell. It poured most of the time, and our race numbers disintegrated, but thankfully it was also 18°C and I never got too cold. The NDW50 was held in August alongside the 100-mile event, and with many good runners opting for that, and some last-minute drop-outs, I surprised everyone, including me, by finishing first woman. During 2012 I also ran the North Downs Run (30K), Jog Shop Jog 20 (20 miles on the South Downs) and Beachy Head trail Marathon.



Going up Box Hill Steps, and finishing first woman

For 2013 I had an ambitious goal: run FIVE 50-mile races at age 45. Five. One of these was my original ultra target of the Lakeland 50. The others were the flat Thames Trot, Centurion South Downs Way 50 (SDW50) and repeating the NDW50, with Ladybower 50 to finish as a relatively easy 50 on a looped course around a couple of reservoirs.

During the winter's training along muddy paths and up and down slippery hills, I started to get pain on the inside of my left ankle and I finally worked out that I had strained my left posterior tibial tendon (PTT). I had never heard of the PTT, but it is a fairly important tendon on the inside of the ankle, used in stabilizing the ankle. It is also needed to support the arch and for standing up on your toes when doing heel raises. Having possibly more determination than sense, I kept running despite the pain, slipping and sliding all over muddy sections of the Thames Path on recces. On race day, flooding resulted in multiple diversions, and my nice flat run along the towpath turned into quite a lot of road, many more hills than I had expected, 100 yards wading through freezing cold water up nearly to my knees, and a period lost in the middle of a wood in gathering dusk. Thankfully a local runner pointed out the correct direction and I hobbled (my knees were hurting by now as well), alongside another runner with painful feet, to the finish line.

The SDW50 was also memorable. At Worthing we sat around in glorious sunshine before the start, but after three hours on the trails the forecast weather front moved in, bringing rain, high winds, and low visibility – maybe 50-100 meters on the tops. Thankfully, after the awful conditions at the Manchester marathon the previous year, I had packed appropriate gear

and donned the waterproofs before I got soaked and chilled. I came in looking like a drowned rat, but finished without hypothermia. Seeing the state some of the other runners were in (wrapping emergency blankets round their torsos underneath inadequate jackets in an attempt to keep warm), I decided never to skimp on gear in an ultra.



At an SDW aid station

Back to the NDW50. The tendon was still hurting and slowing me down, which was frustrating. Additionally, during this race I developed what is best described as an 'invisible blister': it felt like I had a large blister on the back of my right heel, over the Achilles' tendon, but when I looked, there was nothing to be seen. I remember hobbling in the last few miles, over hard-backed rutted fields.



On the Lakeland 50 route, during a training run

Lakeland 50. I was really excited to finally be running this race. I had managed to get up to the Lakes for the organized recce runs, plus some navigational training, so I hoped I would not get lost. This would be my first ultra with no course markers, only a map and a route

book. The ankle was still fairly painful, if feeling a little better. Waiting in the start pen I noticed that one of the other runners was equipped with one full leg and one running blade, and I decided I had no right to complain about a sore ankle. The course was tough and sometimes wet, the views were glorious. I was definitely hobbling on the final descent into Coniston, but I managed a slow jog down the final streets to the finish line. I started thinking about other hill races for the years following: Highland Fling, Hardmoors, West Highland Way Race and of course Lakeland 100.

Ladybower was very tame by comparison. The single short lap and three long laps were undulating simple to navigate, the views were pleasant and the worst hazards were dogs – particularly the one on an extending lead that I only just managed to avoid kneecapping me. The ankle was definitely a little less painful, although still sore. With my challenge for the year completed, I decided to be sensible and rest, let it heal. It was the Striders' AGM the following week; I would run the 40-minute pre-meeting run as my last run then take October off running. I was going to be SENSIBLE!

Fate had other ideas. Cycling home from the club, I clipped my handlebars on a parked car's mirror and spun off, sticking my left leg out in an attempt not to fall, before landing with my chest the other end of the handlebars. How I managed to cycle the rest of the way home I'm not sure, but by the time I got off the bike I could barely stand on the left leg and my ribs hurt. A lot. My stepmother – a GP – diagnosed probably cracked ribs. Nothing to be done except wait for them to heal. I took a strong NSAID for a few days and otherwise simply coped. Thankfully I was working from home. With this enforced rest I was sure my ankle must be on the mend. A few weeks later I jogged three or four steps and pain shot through my ankle. The rest had not helped at all.

I needed to know exactly how badly it was injured. I paid for an ultrasound scan and then an appointment with an orthopaedic surgeon. He told me the bad news: I had torn the tendon, it was weeks too late for surgical repair, and it would never be the same again. He prescribed a special ankle brace with an air cushion under the foot arch to provide support and let the tendon rest entirely. I was to wear this for the next several months. In February I had an MRI scan (thankfully on the NHS) and he explained that the tendon not only had a tear but was totally disorganized, lacking in the normal structure. He thought that in time I might be able to do 5K or 10K runs, but I was advised to never walk barefoot, even in the house; he wanted me not to wear slippers but shoes with orthotics to support the feet; and he told me to give up all idea of barefoot or minimalist running and longer distance running. I was gutted.

I was also determined that this would not be the end of my long-distance running. I restarted very carefully, wearing half-length orthotics in my minimalist VivoBarefoot shoes, and increasing my distances very gradually. I did a lot of reading and decided the best way to strengthen the foot to compensate for the tendon damage was lots of heel raises and as much barefoot running as possible. In November I went to The London Running Show; serendipitously, a physiotherapy group there was offering to show you an ultrasound scan of your Achilles or patellar tendon. I signed up then asked them to look at my PTT. To my delight, although the tear was visible, after seven months of use and increasing load, they said that otherwise the tendon structure looked normal.

With that reassurance I started to up my mileage, not rushing it, and by June 2015 I was finally doing training runs up at 25+ miles. Then I went to the compulsory work 'day out', and on the way back to the coach in the evening walked down a small grassy bank, slipped, and broke my ankle. The same ankle. Only the fibula (the thinner bone on the outside of the ankle), but right at the joint, so I ended up having a plate put in. Two months on crutches, first in a cast, then a boot. Three weeks gradually learning to walk again. My job was in Herne Hill and they wanted me back in the office as soon as I was mobile. I walked slowly to the station, initially with my crutches for support and reassurance, and gradually progressed

to no crutches. Then one day I was worried I would be late for the train and found myself jogging a short distance. I was on the mend!

The NHS provided physiotherapy to get my ankle moving again, but stopped it after four or five sessions when I confessed to having run 17 miles the previous Sunday. Alas, I hadn't regained full flexibility in the ankle. That might not have been a problem for most people, but by this time I was back to ultramarathon training, targeting Comrades Marathon – 89 km in South Africa, and there would be negative consequences. In December 2015 I ran Dymchurch Marathon – a low-key event up and down the promenade, organized by Saxons, Vikings and Normans (SVN), to qualify for Comrades. The other runners seemed friendly, and I thought I might do another of their events sometime. Meanwhile my training continued.

During early 2016 I got some groin pain and had to pull out of a Striders' Sunday run. I rested a couple of weeks until the pain was much less – although not gone – before restarting running.. I didn't want to wait too long, because I was worried about falling behind in my training. I had developed back pain first, so I decided the groin pain was probably due to that. I was wrong. I pushed through the pain and completed the Endurancelife Sussex Ultra in March 2016. My last properly long training run, five weeks before Comrades, was the London Marathon. About 16 miles in, the nagging groin pain suddenly got a lot worse and in the space of a few strides I went from running to being unable to lift my leg. I was sure it must be a muscle spasm, so I massaged it a bit and continued, at a limping walk. Four miles later, I still couldn't run and it hurt a lot – but there were only six miles to go and it would be a waste of those four miles of pain to stop now... I kept going for two more miles. Now only four miles to go – really no point in stopping. A brief pause and a few tears on Victoria Legge's shoulder at 25 miles, then I limped on through to the finish. When I went to A&E, an X-ray showed I had stress-fractured my pelvis.

Searching online, I realised that there was one thing in common in all the stories from people who still had problems six or 12 months after their pelvic stress fractures: people tried to keep moving or cross-train while it was healing. So I was sensible and rested. I used crutches for the first week, walked as little as possible, and slowly, after that. My only exercise was a couple of times a week swimming arms-only with a pull-buoy to support my legs. With Comrades only 5 weeks later I couldn't run it – but I had flights and hotel booked, so I still went to South Africa, managed to walk North Beach parkrun in Durban, very slowly; went with friends to the start at Pietermaritzburg (it was a 'Down' run, from there back to Durban) and experienced the amazing start pen atmosphere, with the Chariots of Fire music, and 25,000 people singing the unofficial anthem 'Shosholozza'; and spent the later part of the day in the stadium in Durban watching everyone finish – which was fun.

Three weeks later, after an X-ray had confirmed healing of TWO stress fractures (the second fracture hadn't been seen on the initial X-ray), I jogged 20 strides on the Sandilands cricket pitch and it felt okay. From there I returned to running gradually again, working back up the distances and determined to run Comrades in 2017.

This time I found the New Forest Marathon in mid-February for my qualifier, and entered it just before Christmas. Early February I realised I hadn't got my number or anything, checked online and found that I wasn't on the entry list. Then I recalled a slight computer glitch when I had been entering... evidently not so slight. Refusing to panic, I went to the Saxons, Vikings and Normans' website where, I remembered, there was a 'Marathon Day marathon' on the same date (26th Feb...). It was full. NOW I started to panic. I needed to qualify for Comrades, and the only other marathon I had booked, the Boston (UK!) Marathon, was in April and too close to the deadline for my comfort. I emailed Traviss Wilcox, who runs SVN together with Rachel Smith. "You might not remember me, but I ran Dymchurch Marathon with you in December 2015 to qualify for Comrades and now...". Very kindly, he replied saying he could fit one more in for the Marathon Day marathon.

This was at Betteshanger Country Park, developed from an old mine spill heap, running 2-mile circuits on a tarmac cycle track. After 13 laps my watch said 2:02. If I speeded up, maybe I could finish under 4 hours? I kept increasing my pace lap on lap as I recalculated, running the last half mile at about 7:30 per mile and finishing in 3:59:35! The support from other runners had been amazing and I thought that I really ought to enter another SVN event to say thank you to Traviss. So a month later I ran the SVN Charity Challenge on the trail route at Betteshanger (light trail – crushed gravel paths), finishing with 35 miles in 5:58:58. After that, I ran a few more SVN events as well as Boston (UK) in 3:54:51, Comrades 'Up' run (Durban to Pietermaritzburg) in 10:36:12 and two local trail marathons – Vanguard Way (which starts and finishes in Lloyd Park) and Woldingham. I started to feel that I could trust my left ankle again.

It was during 2017 that I really started to become aware of the 100 Marathon Club, with runners in their blue and yellow vests at every event. Additionally, at the SVN events I was seeing colourful running shirts proclaiming '10 marathons in 10 days', '52 marathons in 52 weeks', and '100 marathons in 100 weeks.' These were not only being worn by the faster runners. There were plenty of people both faster and slower than me who were wearing these.



Samphire Hoe – Kat, heading away, is wearing a '10 marathons in 10 days' shirt

My perception of what was truly possible – for ordinary runners, not only the racing elite – shifted.

I started asking the other runners about these accomplishments. I had never run back-to-back marathons or ultras. I had read in one of the running magazines about the Brathay 10-in-10, but that seemed to be only for top runners, and I didn't know of any other such events. In 2013 I had contemplated a two-day ultra, but knowing how tired my legs felt after a marathon or ultra, the idea of running 30 or 33 miles and repeating it the next day had seemed too much. Now I decided that an excellent way to celebrate turning 50 would be by running 10 marathons in 10 days! And by happy coincidence, SVN had a 10-in-10 starting only a couple of weeks after my 50th birthday. In late October I ran back-to-back marathons for the first time, following Betteshanger Marathon on the Saturday with 30.5 miles in the Cakeathon Challenge on the Sunday; that went fine. A month later I started the 10-in-10,

with my husband driving me to and from the events. It was a fantastic experience. The weather wasn't always great, and I got a rotten cold in the middle, but I was running with a whole bunch of amazing people doing the 10-in-10 (plus other runners doing one or more of the events) and I am still friends with many of them. There were times it got hard, but I said to myself: 'if you can't do this, how are you going to finish the 100 next year?' and kept moving – one foot in front of the other, running if possible, otherwise walking. The final day I even ran 50K.

The following year, 2018, was an amazing running year for me. I ran 38 marathons and ultras, including the Comrades Down run to get my back-to-back medal, and the Viking 100 with SVN in some truly horrible mud – during which I discovered (a) that my new headtorch didn't work with my rechargeable batteries; (b) falling asleep while walking is totally possible. Although it was 16 laps around farm lanes and footpaths, which was not very exciting, it was a very safe environment in which to do my first 100, with practically no navigation and zero logistics (back to your drop bag every 6.5 miles, and an aid station at about 2 miles before and after that). Additionally, most of the other UK 100s are either hilly or along a river or canal. With this one, if my eyes closed (which they did repeatedly) and I wandered off the path, I didn't risk either falling off the side of a mountain or needing to start swimming. I also did another 10-in-10, this time doing 50K each day, which was definitely harder than the previous year's marathons, and I ran the Ridgeway Challenge – hillier than the Viking 100, but a bit shorter (86 miles).



On the Ridgeway

More generally, the SVN challenges during 2017 and 2018 gave me a safe environment in which to discover what I was able to do after my major injuries and with the permanent weakness in the PTT. The ankle still ached a bit after ultras, but held up okay with only a little support from kinesiology tape strapping.

During 2019, I ran a mere (!) 28 marathons and ultras. No Comrades, because I wanted to run the Centurion SDW100, which was held the same weekend. The early part of the year was difficult. In mid-January I got a horrible cough. I coughed so long and hard that I strained all the intercostal muscles – the ones between your ribs that are rather important for breathing. After a few weeks off I was able to run, but only slowly – a marathon took me nearly six hours and the SVN Samphire 100 took nearly 27 hours (the rain and strong winds

didn't help either – the 80-mile gusts even blew one of the Portaloos over and sent the others skittering across the car park!).



Ranscombe Farm and Nature Reserve on the North Downs – my favourite SVN venue

The rest of 2019, while still running in SVN events, I was also returning to tougher trail races. In May I ran my first stage race – the XNRG Devil's Challenge, covering the South Downs Way over three days (32, 35 and 30 miles), mostly as an easy way to recce for the SDW100 in June, but also because I was curious about stage races. I had a good run on the first day, finishing highest placed in my age group (VF50). The second day I was sent off with the 'elite' runners, soon being left behind and running badly, while the VF50 who had finished just behind me, and also been assigned to the 'elite' start, petitioned to run with everyone else on the earlier start and had a good day running with others, opening up a 6-minute lead. The third day I set out determined to claw back that time. I gave it everything, setting off fast, and later teaming up with two younger women and pushing each other on. Finishing, I waited to find out how far behind my VF50 rival was. She came in 8 minutes or so later, so I earned the age-group win by about two minutes after three days and 18 hours of running. I hadn't really realised before that I could be competitive.

After that, I ran NDW 50 in 9:42:21 for 1st veteran female (VF) 50; SDW100 in 25:17:12; Centurion Wendover Woods 50K in 7:10:11 for 1st VF50 – then ran the Wendover parkrun a few hours later (very slowly!!!). I returned to Cumbria for the Lakeland 50, finishing in 12:26:44 – and 1st VF50, also taking that position for the Ridgeway Challenge (in incredibly hot conditions).

By now I was seriously chasing full membership of the 100 Marathon Club, and discovered belatedly that their definition of a road marathon and mine did not match. For membership, at least 10 of the 100 qualifying races (which could be marathon or longer) had to be certified-distance road marathons – any other marathon, even if all on tarmac roads, was lumped in with 'trail' marathons. This left me scrabbling to find five road marathons during the year, while avoiding big city marathons, which I don't enjoy. Two were provided by SVN events; I ran Boston (UK) again and the hilly Isle of Wight marathon (with an unexpected VF50 win); and finally ran laps around a boating lake for the 'Nottingham Christmas Marathon' – although the fog was so thick I could have been anywhere. Two weeks later,

Traviss presented me with my 100 MC medal and vest at the start of the SVN 'Usual Suspects' event (which has the only medal I am aware of with all the runner's names making up the design). 100 marathons. Nearly 70 of them had been ultras. How long before I could reach 100 ultras, I wondered? Possibly during 2020, certainly by early 2021...



Wendover Woods

In 2020 I decided to find out whether – and by how much – I could get faster. I was fairly sure by now that my past major injuries were not going to cause me problems. I signed up for coaching. My main aims were to run Comrades in under 10 hours, dip below 24 hours for a 100-mile race, and go sub 3:45, preferably below 3:40 and maybe even faster, in a marathon. My coach modified my training mainly by adding speed sessions every Tuesday – many of which I did with Striders – and progression (starting slowly and building speed through the run) or tempo runs every Thursday. We disagreed somewhat about how many short ultras, 50K or so, were appropriate as my weekend long runs. I entered Comrades and both NDW100 and another Centurion 100, the Autumn 100. On 14th March I went back to the Sussex Ultra and finished 1st VF50 in 6:23:44. Two days later the first COVID lockdown started.

I did some of my best ever running and certainly my best training during the following months, particularly after I was furloughed from work and could put all my energy into my running. During the months of lockdown I ran eight 'virtual' ultras – mostly with SVN, plus one with Centurion and a virtual half-Comrades. Running those, even by myself on various local trails, helped my sanity as much as my running. Additionally, I ran in the virtual 5K challenges organised by Chris Morton, finishing with the England Athletics virtual 5K championships in which I chased Chris and finished in 21:20 – a one-minute PB and 81%

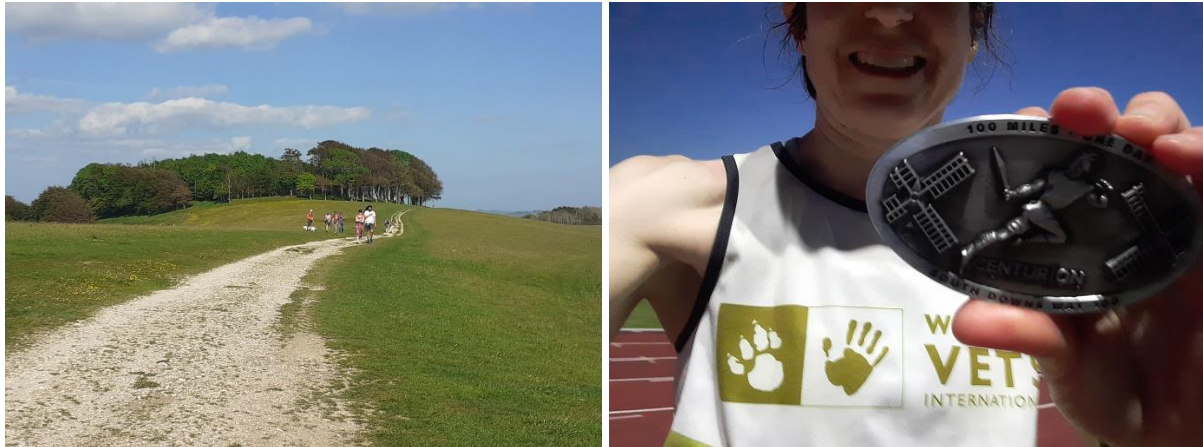
age graded. I also knocked a chunk off my 10K time. I wondered how this would translate to the longer races that were my real goals, and itched to find out. In August I started a new job (thankfully working from home) and could not put quite so much into running. Comrades had been cancelled, so I didn't get to find out what I could do there, and I couldn't find a marathon that fitted around my other races. But the NDW100 went ahead in late August, on a crazily hot weekend, and I paced it well, allowing the heat to slow me down during the day then pushing more at night, to finish 1st VF50 and 4th woman, in 24:43:22. I followed that with the Autumn 100 for my first sub-24: 23:08:38, 1st VF50, 6th woman and a course VF50 record (which fell the next year – records are only ever held in trust). Three weeks later I ran the SVN Halloween 100, in horrible winds, dragging myself round and keeping going by telling myself: "think of the T-shirt!"



Devil's Challenge day 3 – giving it everything

For 2021, with a free place at Thames Path 100 (TP100) because I had marked part of the course the previous year, and with Comrades again looking unlikely due to COVID, I planned to run the Centurion Grand Slam of four 100-mile races: TP100, SDW 100, NDW 100 and A100. My first goal was to complete the Slam; my 'best possible' goal was to go sub-24 at each of the races and PB the A100. The year started with the second lockdown and more virtual races, opening up in time for the SDW50, which I finished in 10:02, running easy in preparation for the slam. The TP100 I finished in 23:29:21 despite some early rain and later muddy stretches. This was the first time I had ever had a pacer, with Rel joining me from Henley to Pangbourne, and it was nice to have the company, particularly on the stretch through Reading. I was a bit disappointed with my time, having gone off course several times and feeling that I could have run better.

Regrettably, I had never quite developed the partnership I had been wanting with my coach. My running was improving, but I didn't feel we were communicating well and I wasn't getting the feedback I needed. In May 2021 I decided to stop the coaching at the end of that month. In early June I ran SDW100 in considerable heat, losing time in the middle of the day but clawing it back overnight (helped by teaming up with another runner for about 20 miles) to finish in a very pleasing 100-mile PB of 22:31:57 – and 1st VF50. Things were looking good; I was really looking forward to NDW100 and A100.



SDW 100 – finishing in 22:31 for an amazing PB

Then life got complicated. My mother went into hospital for a blood transfusion and developed pneumonia. I spent the rest of June dashing up and down between Beckenham and Manchester, spending hours by her hospital bed. After three very difficult weeks she died. The rest of the year was dominated by all the formalities associated with my being an executor, dealing with the contents of her house, and trying to catch up at work after losing a lot of time while she was ill.

My training collapsed. My strength work stopped, I did yoga less regularly, and my long runs reduced in both length and frequency. I had a surprisingly good run at Wendover Woods 50K, and finished the final two races in the slam. NDW100 took me over 28 hours (in truly awful rain and mud – despite the slow time I was still 1st VF50 and 6th female); my legs were shot from fighting the mud by half way, and I had to walk most of the second half. The A100 really showed how much my fitness had dropped: ideal conditions, but it took me nearly 26 hours, when I should have been looking for sub-22. I felt very frustrated. I needed to get back to proper training. Three weeks of easy running after A100 then I returned to speedwork – only to push too hard (given I hadn't done speedwork for about 2 months or strength work for nearly 6 months) and pull a hamstring. I was really cross with myself. The previous few years without injury had led to complacency and I had just learned the hard way how important my strength sessions had been. I rested, then eased back into running.

Worse was to come. On Christmas Day I was volunteering at Lloyd parkrun when I slipped on some mud and fell. I seemed okay, but that afternoon my right foot started hurting – soon so badly I couldn't walk on it. I ended up in A&E having it X-rayed. No break. By the following morning it hurt much less. I rested a couple of weeks then started running again. Unfortunately, the foot never settled. It stayed a little swollen, a bit painful particularly when doing speedwork, and it hurt if I did lunges or down dog – anything with weight on my toes while they were extended. I noticed that the second toe was pointing towards the big toe. It was not until early April that online searches led me to a probable diagnosis of a plantar plate tear (I had never previously heard of this injury), which was then confirmed by a podiatrist. Another permanent injury. I started a 16-week rehabilitation programme to strengthen the toe and foot muscles to compensate. Meanwhile he said I could keep

running, so long as I didn't run if the foot hurt more than four on a scale of 1-10. So I ran SDW50, slowly and carefully in 11:40:37, then 33.75 miles at the SVN Spring Ranscombe Challenge (an amazing combined working farm and nature reserve, with fantastic bluebell woods in the spring), and did my exercises religiously several times a day.

On 21 May 2022, my husband got up with me at 4:10 am and we drove down to Farnham. After three rainy days the forecast was for perfect conditions of sun and light cloud. Ten years and three months after my first ultra; ten years minus three months since my first NDW50, I ran NDW 50 a fourth time. I was slow, both being careful for my foot, and because of a bit of left hamstring strain and piriformis syndrome I had developed, probably by slightly favouring the right foot. I got my nutrition totally wrong (didn't eat anywhere near enough in the first few hours), was generally lacking in energy, and horribly slow. I hit a real low point when I realised that I had more than 12 miles still to go at the time when, in 2019, I had already finished. But I kept on going, and was cheered by a couple of minutes chat with clubmate Amanda Hewett who was out walking on the trail near the Greenwich Meridian, shortly before the climb through the Titsey plantation up to the final aid station at Botley Hill.

Finally, with 12:23:29 on the race clock, I crossed the finish line of NDW100 – and my 100th ultra. It hadn't always been easy, in that race or the previous 99, but I had come through in all of them and I am proud of the fact that in 100 ultras (plus 31 marathons and 16 virtual ultras), I have zero DNFs!



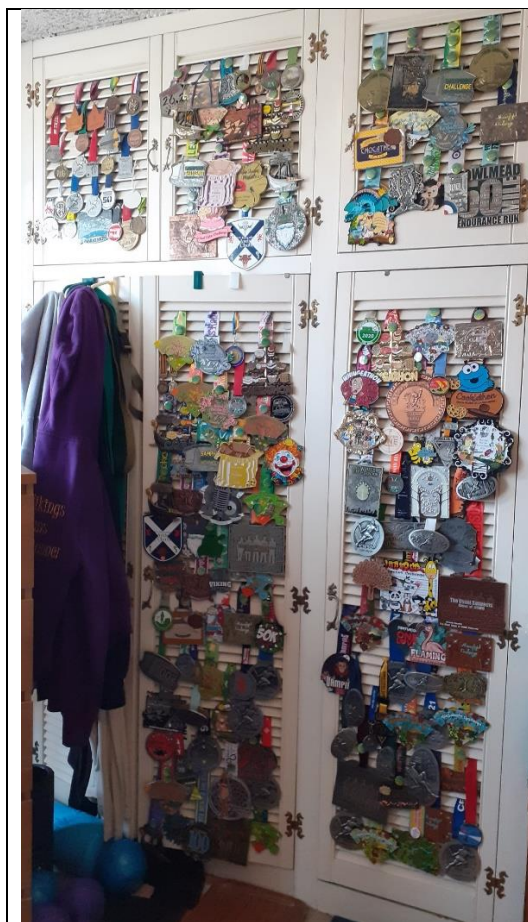
How?

Other members of Striders have often asked me how I do this, or said that knowing how tired they are after finishing a marathon, they find it hard, or impossible, to think of running another six miles to reach 50K, never mind almost a second marathon to reach 50 miles, or a total of nearly four marathons to reach 100 miles.

How do I do it? At the most basic level, I put one foot in front of the other until I reach the finish line. It's not that I don't feel tired – I do. My legs feel tired. I may be reduced to something more resembling a shuffle than a jog. I might end up walking for long sections –

even most of the last 10 or 20 miles (or more) on some 100s I've done. My shoulders sometimes ache; the skin on my back can get sore where the pack rubs. Sometimes my stomach hurts. The tops of my feet can start to hurt from the pressure of the laces. The bottoms of my feet might hurt from hours on hard ground, rocky trails and road. Occasionally I get blisters. Sometimes my pace is far slower than I wanted it to be, and I know my A goal – a PB or a certain time – is slipping away or totally impossible, and my more modest B goal is also looking unlikely. That's frustrating. My C goal, however, is always possible unless I'm seriously injured or ill so I can't actually walk; or I'm caught by the sweeper/fail to get out of an aid station before a cut-off. Because my C goal is always to finish, and short of one of those things happening it is always in my power to reach my C goal: I simply have to not quit. My sports ID band bears the message 'Run long and dig deep' – a shortened version of what the great ultrarunner Scott Jurek wrote when he signed my copy of his book. I try to do that. I use whatever thoughts are necessary: "Think of the money you're raising for charity"; "Think of the medal"; "You can quit later if you really can't continue, but at the moment you can, so keep going"; "Think of the T-shirt!". Other times I simply follow the advice of Travis Wilcox, the Race Director of Saxons, Vikings and Normans challenges: 'get it done'.

One advantage I have by now is experience. After ten 100-mile races, 18 of 50-86, 18 in the 35-49 mile range and 54 at 30-35 miles, I know that when I go through a low point – and I do go through low points, sometimes several times during a longer ultra – I will come out the other side. In the final analysis, 'how' comes down to keeping moving until you cross the finish line.



Medals so far!

Why?

I've also been asked WHY I run ultras – and why so many? I run because I love running, particularly on the trails. I love the fact that I am capable of travelling 100 miles on foot in under 24 hours, or 50 miles in under 10 hours. I enjoy challenging myself, finding out that I can do more than I ever thought I would be able to do. I love the hours spent by myself, seeing different views opening up before me, listening to the birds, watching red kites soaring or falcons hovering; catching glimpses of deer through the trees, or badgers, or small rodents scurrying across the path. I love the camaraderie within each of the various trail- and ultra-running communities that I have been part of.

I run ultras because it's difficult and because it's fun – if sometimes definitely Type-2 fun.

PARKRUN LONDONE GUIDE (by Steve Tyler)

There are some Striders who are more adventurous when it comes to their weekly parkrun than others, and you only have to check the various event sites to see who our usual suspects are and where they have visited.

For the over-sixty runner armed with his or her Boris pass (assuming that they live within a London borough), it is virtually free within the GLA. It might well be the same for those who have an annual rail season ticket but I cannot be sure of that, for from 2001 until I retired I had a different type of pass. (And now during the working week, I am a “Twerly”.)

Some venues are more conducive to public transport from this direction than others, e.g. Riddlesdown where you need to drive or get the bus to Hamsey Green.

Plan your events, park close to a tram stop (street parking at Lloyd is ideal) and get to East Croydon.

If you are venturing into the north and east of the metropolis, Thameslink to London Bridge is recommended (but make sure you are in carriage seven by the loo as that door opens by the escalator). If going further up the line, you can stay on to Kings Cross or Finsbury Park and change onto the underground there instead.

There are also various routes via Victoria and/or Wimbledon – you just have to check train times, connections and engineering works.

From there, the world is your lobster. For east London, pick up the Jubilee Line east to Stratford and you have many options. Cable car from North Greenwich to the Royal Victoria Dock is a one-off – and an event that is as flat as a pancake!



Or, if you are heading west, use Victoria if it's open, or Tramlink to Wimbledon. Running all the GLA parkruns is mildly anoracky, I accept, but not as daft as the other “sets” that have been dreamt up such as the alphabet – the only parkruns beginning with Z are outside the UK, and there are no X's.

It did surprise me how many lovely parks there are in the GLA area with boating lakes, duck ponds and deer to mention but a few.

The men in the white coats haven't come for me yet... who's that knocking at the front door?

THE LONDON LOOP – SOUTH FROM COOMBE LANE TRAMSTOP

Most Striders who come on our Sunday runs will have seen some of the signposts which relate to the 'London Outer Orbital Path' (commonly known as the 'London Loop'). This extends for about 150 miles around London, from Erith to Purfleet. Our former chairman Robin Jamieson walked the entire length of it (in eight stages of about 20 miles) during 2007. For those who want to emulate Robin and walk the entire length, I would suggest purchasing a copy of the book 'The London Loop' by David Sharp. But I suspect that more Striders will simply be interested in walking the sections which are within easy reach of Croydon, or using the Loop to do an out-and-back training run.

It is easy to join the Loop at Coombe Lane tram stop, from which one can head south towards Hamsey Green, or north-east towards High Elms. This article will concentrate on the route south. From Coombe Lane tram stop the Loop, and many of our Sunday runs, head east adjacent to Coombe Lane, before crossing Coombe Lane by the junction with Ballards Way. Our club runs generally head down Ballards Way before turning left into Riesco Drive: the London Loop takes a more scenic route into Heathfield Gardens before reappearing in Riesco Drive. At the bottom of Riesco Drive we pass through a gate into Bramley Bank. The London Loop takes the shortest route through Bramley Bank: our main group of runners generally follow this path, whereas our faster runners usually add a bit more distance by taking a fork to the right which gives a longer path through the woods before rejoining the Loop by the exit from Bramley Bank, at the clearing alongside Edgecoombe. Both the Loop, and many of our Sunday runs, then head south into Littleheath Woods.



Shortly after entering the woods there is a clearing where our Sunday runs usually split into a 60-minute group and a 90-minute group. The 60-minute group usually head west and leave Littleheath Woods by the junction with Queenhill Road. The 90-minute group usually head south towards Selsdon Park Road. The Loop follows neither of these routes: it heads south-west across the clearing and back into woodland, before turning left to join the Vanguard Way, which has run from the north-west (bottom) corner of Littleheath Woods. The path usually taken by our 90-minute group merges with the Vanguard Way before reaching and crossing Selsdon Park Road very close to the point where its name changes to Addington Road, near the junction with Ashen Vale. Ashen Vale bends to the right, but the Loop (and our Sunday runs) continue downhill along a narrow bridleway which ends at the junction of Yew Tree Way, at the northern entrance to Selsdon Woods.

Entering Selsdon Woods, the Loop turns right for a few paces and then turns left (heading south-east) up a steep hill which is very muddy in winter and is one of the toughest sections of our Sunday runs. After a section of level ground, the Loop then heads downhill to leave Selsdon Woods at the junction of Courtwood Lane and Bakerboy Lane. (Most of our Sunday runs do not follow the Loop quite as far as the exit: our traditional route turns right along a path called The Wend which stays in Selsdon Woods, heading southwards for a while before turning west and reaching the car park at the main entrance to Selsdon Woods, by Old Farleigh Road.)

The Loop heads south, going up Bakerboy Lane, until it reaches Old Farleigh Road by the entrance to Farleigh Court Golf Club. Bakerboy Lane acquired its name in the eighteenth century, after a baker's boy making a delivery was robbed and murdered.

The Loop follows Old Farleigh Road for a short while until Elm Farm, where it leaves the road and turns right down a rough track (heading west). This drops quite steeply downhill before climbing again, leaving the woods and reaching open fields at Mossyhill Shaw. Crossing a stile takes us into Kingswood Lane, where the Loop turns left (heading south). In the 1990s quite a few of Striders' long runs followed what has since become the London Loop from Elm Farm to Kingswood Lane: nowadays it is more common for us to enter Kingswood Lane at its north end, by the car park at the main entrance to Selsdon Woods. Kingswood Lane veers southwest and gradually becomes more urban as it enters Hamsey Green. The Loop crosses Limpsfield Road by the site of the old 'Good Companions' pub, which closed in 2012, then heads west down Tithe Pit Shaw Lane before entering Riddlesdown Common. The Loop crosses Dipsley's Field and veers right, heading northwest and approaching Riddlesdown School, before abruptly turning left and heading down a slope to join a stony track which is the 'Old Riddlesdown Road'. This passes over a railway bridge carrying the line from East Croydon to Oxted, and then drops downhill to the Godstone Road.

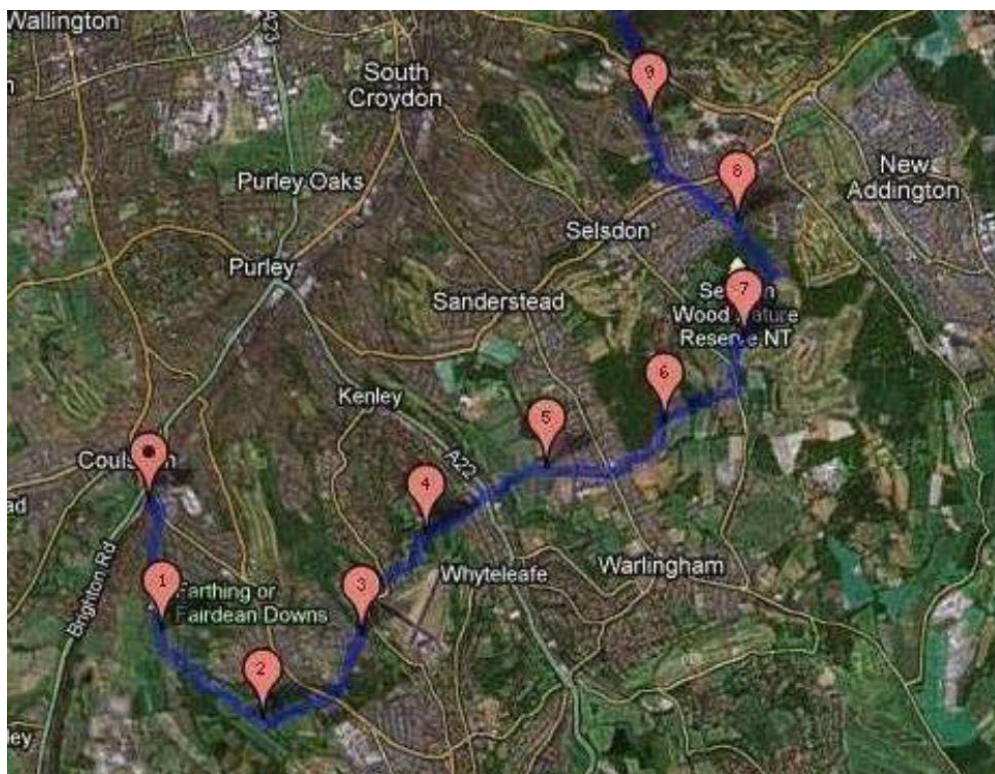
Crossing the main road, the Loop then turns southwest down Old Barn Lane and passes over another railway bridge, carrying the line from Purley to Caterham. Old Barn Lane becomes New Barn Lane and the Loop climbs steeply onto Kenley Common, initially heading southwest and then veering to the south to reach Sunnycroft Farm, close to the north edge of Kenley Aerodrome, which was used by our Spitfires during the Battle of Britain and has more recently been used by Striders for marathon training.

The Loop follows Golf Road before turning right and then left onto a path which reaches Betts Mead, where there is a small children's playground. A left turn takes the Loop to Old Lodge Lane, very close to the Wattenden Arms. Old Lodge Lane heads northwest towards Kenley but the Loop quickly leaves it, turning left over a stile and heading southwards to join Waterhouse Lane.

At the junction with Caterham Drive, the Loop follows Rydons Lane, still heading south, to reach Coulsdon Common, having passed to the east of Taunton Manor High School. On Coulsdon Common the Loop follows a large track and veers to the right, heading south-west to reach the main Coulsdon Road, just north of the border between Coulsdon and Caterham. Crossing the road, the Loop continues heading south-west down Fox Lane to reach the pub called The Fox, which is a well-known local landmark.

The Loop continues south-west and drops into Happy Valley where it reaches its southernmost point, before veering right to head north-west and join South London Harriers' cross-country course. It heads uphill into Devilsden Wood and climbs quite steeply at the north end of Devilsden Wood before emerging onto Farthing Downs. This is a favourite spot for spectators at cross-country races, who can encourage the runners up the last part of what is quite a testing hill. South London Harriers' cross-country course follows a rough path heading north, but the Loop follows the narrow road, which soon begins to drop quite significantly as it heads towards the north entrance to Farthing Downs.

Anyone who is training for an 'ultra', and has been using the Loop as a training run, may prefer to turn round at the gate close to where the narrow road merges into Downs Road, and retrace their steps to get an impressively long and scenic run back to Coombe Lane tram stop. (The distance from here to Coombe Lane is about nine miles, so this will give an 18-mile training run.)



The London Loop route back from Coulsdon to our Sandilands clubhouse

By contrast, anyone who has been walking will probably want to continue along the Loop as Downs Road merges with the B276 (Marlpit Lane). The Loop then turns left into Reddown Road and passes the back entrance to Coulsdon South station, from which one can return to Croydon by train.

(This article originally appeared in the December 2012 club magazine, but is republished here – in a slightly revised form – for the benefit of newer Striders)

BOOK REVIEW: CROYDON HARRIERS HISTORY 1920-2020

(by Mike Fleet: reviewed by Alan Dolton)

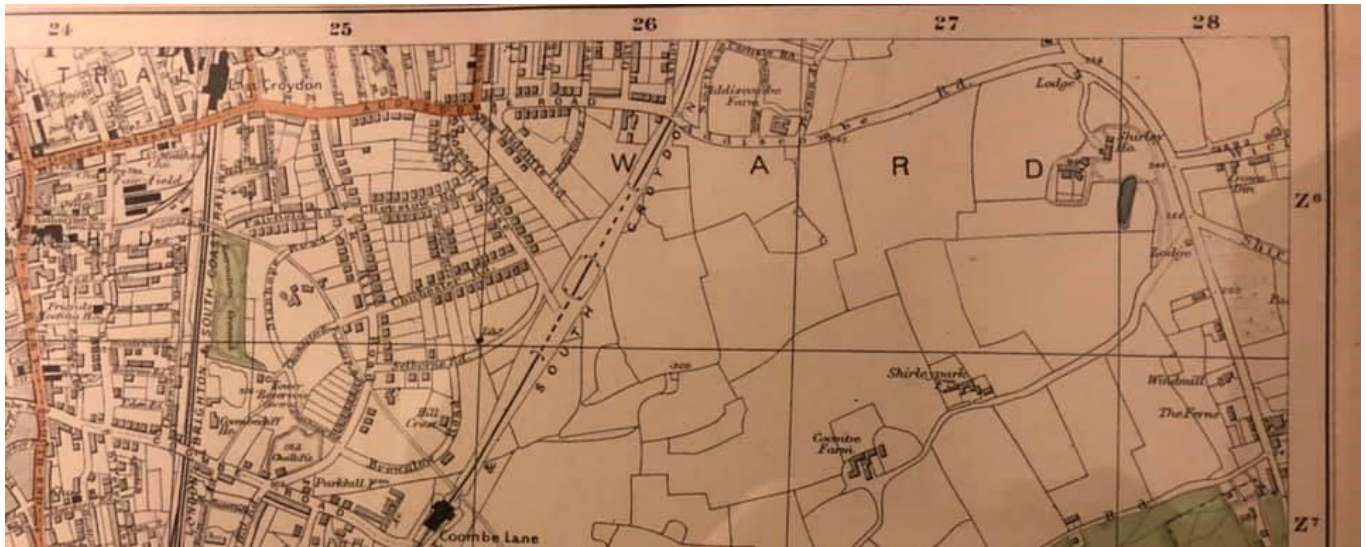
As most Striders will already know, we will be celebrating our 40th anniversary later this year. Our local rivals Croydon Harriers were formed in 1920, so they celebrated their centenary in 2020. Their senior coach and former club secretary, Mike Fleet, has written a history of his club, which was published this April. It runs to 228 pages, of which 104 are taken up by a chronological account of the club's achievements, 30 are taken up by club ranking lists, and the remainder include a variety of brief articles on various topics such as 'veterans', 'social activities', 'training camps', etc. It is well illustrated with a large number of photographs, including some vintage monochrome ones from before the Second World War.

I was interested to learn that in 1926, Harriers were based in Sandilands, not at the cricket ground which is Striders' current headquarters but at the sports ground to the east of Harland Avenue, which is now owned by Trinity School. There are three photos showing Harriers racing and training at Sandilands, including one of Cis Wright, who in 1929 became the first Croydon woman to run 440 yards in less than a minute. It is interesting that Croydon Harriers were open to both sexes from the year they were formed, at a time when longer-established local clubs such as South London Harriers, Blackheath and Herne Hill all restricted their membership to male athletes only.

I was also particularly interested to study Harriers' all-time ranking lists, particularly for the distance events. They indicate that Harriers were much stronger at distance running in the 1970s and the 1980s than they were in the 1990s and the early 21st century. The lists also show that 50 years ago, there were more opportunities to race 10000 metres on the track than there are now, and that there were more 10-mile road races, and fewer 10-kilometre road races than is the case today. For example, the list shows seven Harriers as having raced 10000 metres on the track in under 31 minutes, the first of these being in 1967 and the last in 1980. Not one of these seven also appears in the list of Harriers' 10K road rankings, which show just four athletes under 31 minutes, the earliest of them being from 1985. I was pleased to see that the athletes placed fifth and sixth on that list, both with times of just outside 31 minutes achieved in 1986, both now run for Striders. (Incidentally it should be pointed out that the rankings in the book only include times achieved up to the end of 2020, and that in 2021 Dom Nolan of Harriers ran 10K in under 30 minutes on both the track and the road, making him easily Croydon's best 10K runner of the 21st century.)

Harriers' all-time half-marathon ranking list shows 19 runners as having run the distance in under 75 minutes, 16 of which date from before 1999 (including Graham Hansen whose best time of 68:59 ranks sixth) and only three from after 1999. Striders can only claim seven runners under 75 minutes for a half-marathon, but six of our seven date from after 2013. In the marathon, Harriers have 26 runners under 2 hours 55, but only four of these date from after 2001: Striders have 23 runners under 2 hours 55, but 17 of our 23 date from after 2001. Only six female Harriers have run a marathon in under 3 hours 45: four of these date from the 1980s and only two female Harriers have done this since 1986. By contrast, 28 female Striders have run a marathon in under 3 hours 45, and 23 of these 28 date from after 1999.

Of course, Harriers nowadays are primarily a track and field club, and their track and field ranking lists include many outstanding performances. But I was pleased to see that one current Strider is still in Harriers' all-time top 20 for the 1500 metres, and that another is still in Harriers' all-time top 30 for the triple jump. And I was also interested to see that Azaria Francis, whose mother Sandra holds several of Striders' women's records, is still ranked as Harriers' second best female triple jumper with a leap of 12 metres 34 in 2002.



When Croydon Harriers were formed in 1920, what is now Lloyd Park was still private farmland and Sandilands had not yet been built



Michelle Pierre-Carr, who is now a Strider, competing in the UK Women's League



Daisy Collingridge, Striders' women's 800 metre record-holder, racing for Croydon

COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: MARCH – MAY 2022

In the Phoenix Running 12-hour track race at Elmbridge on 4 March, Ally Whitlock ran very well to set a new Striders' women's 50-mile record of 7 hours 55 minutes 52 seconds.

The final women's Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season took place on 5 March at Lloyd Park. Striders placed eleventh in the team event, and also finished eleventh in the final Division Two table. Cindy Siu placed 36th, while Debra Bourne was 51st, Grace Rehman 65th, Jadwiga Brzask-Makiela 76th, Ruth Pearson 87th and Michelle Klein 92nd. Striders' men were third in the East Surrey League race on the same course. Sebastian Munday was 20th, James Rhodes 21st and Lee Flanagan 22nd.

In the Ashby Mile at Croydon Arena on 10 March, Daniel Finch set a Striders under-15 record of 6 minutes 10.2, while Thomas Finch set a Striders under-13 record of 6:46.1.

The Surrey Road League resumed after a two-year break with the Wimbledon Dash 5K on 13 March. Andrew Aitken was 28th (17:38) while John O'Mahony was 83rd (20:58).

On 2 April Striders won a mob match against Epsom, Collingwood and Tadworth, held with the Roundshaw parkrun. Striders had 35 finishers, led by Matthew Stone who was sixth (18:33). In the Southern Counties Veterans Indoor Championships at Lee Valley later that day, Sandra Francis won the W65 long jump with a club age-group record of 3 metres 17.

In the East Surrey League road race, over seven kilometres at Ewell on 7 April, Consuelo Kennefick was the third woman to finish (30:45). For Striders' men, Tatsuya Okamoto was seventh (25:21), Andy Perks 22nd (29:33), Mick Turner 25th (30:10), Stephen Kennefick 30th (30:45) and Stephen Siu 43rd (33:35). The team were fourth in the match and third in the final league table. In the Serpentine five-kilometre road race, at Hyde Park on 29 April, Andrew Aitken set a new club M40 record of 16 minutes 46.

The Ranelagh Harriers Richmond Half-Marathon, which incorporated the Surrey Championship and was the second race in the Surrey Road League, took place on 8 May. Andrew Aitken ran well to place 13th out of 322 finishers in 76 minutes 07. Tatsuya Okamoto placed 23rd (78:57). Steve Corfield also ran well to place third in the over-60 category and 105th overall in a new club age-group record of 91 minutes 17. On the same day, Ally Whitlock was the fifth woman to finish the Thames Path 100-mile race from Richmond to Oxford, placing 34th overall in a new club women's record of 21 hours 12 minutes 15. At Stratford on 12 May, James Rhodes ran well to place sixth in his heat of the mile, setting a new Striders club record of 4 minutes 42.06 seconds.

In the Sutton 10-kilometre road race on 15 May, Andrew Aitken placed 14th (35:13), with Graeme Drysdale 56th (38:52) and Erik Schrijnemaekers 63rd (39:07). Steve Corfield won the over-60 category (39:52). Jennifer Gutteridge was the 24th woman to finish (43:42). Vanessa Wheeler (60:06) and Jo Riches (60:07) completed our scoring trio.

In the first Southern Veterans League match of the season, at Ewell on 23 May, Steve Corfield won the M60 3000 metres in a new club age-group record of 11 minutes 09.8, and also won the M60 800 metres (2:29.8). Jon Dean won the M60 200 metres (32.6). Paul Cripps won the M50 shot (7.72) and was second in the M50 long jump (3.86). Striders' men placed fifth in the match, while their women were seventh. Matthew Stone was the first over-60 to finish the Kempton Park 10K on 29 May, placing eighth overall in a new club age-group record of 37 minutes 31.

40 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN SPRING / SUMMER 1982

As many readers will know, Striders were formed in September 1982, so we will soon be celebrating our 40th anniversary. The organisation of national and local athletics in 1982 had several significant differences from the way athletics is organised today. I am one of the very few Striders who was already competing in club athletics in 1982 (although at that time I was a young track runner with Croydon Harriers, and wasn't involved in the formation of Striders). So rather than writing one of my usual history articles and focusing on the results of local races, I thought that it might be useful to give a more subjective and impressionistic account of the athletics scene in 1982 and how it differed from what we are used to today.

Local clubs

At the start of 1982, there were two athletic clubs in the borough of Croydon. The oldest were South London Harriers, who had been formed in 1871. Originally based in Peckham, they had moved to South Croydon in 1891, using the Swan & Sugar Loaf as their headquarters. At that time the area to the south and east of the Swan & Sugar Loaf was still largely open countryside, so that it was possible to use it as a base for cross-country courses. From around 1910 onwards, this area began to be developed for housing, and in 1913 SLH moved further south, to Coulsdon. In the 1930s SLH had the reputation of being a club for people who worked in the City of London; several of the club's influential members worked in banking or insurance. Nevertheless, during the 1950s they had been one of the top clubs in the country, including Olympic silver medallist Gordon Pirie among their members, and winning the national cross-country championship in 1955, 1957 and 1958. They were proud of their traditions, and even as recently as 1981 they still did not allow women as members (although they did allow them to make the tea after races). 1982 was the year in which they finally allowed women to join them.

The other local club was Croydon Harriers, who had been founded in 1920. Since 1953 they had been based at Croydon Football Club's ground in South Norwood (having previously used a grass track at Coombe Lodge Playing Fields, just south of Lloyd Park, which is now the site of Coombe Wood School). They were more enlightened in that they did accept both sexes as members. However, since moving to South Norwood they had moved away from their origins as a running club and had primarily become a track and field club. A 1981 Croydon Harriers club newsletter lists fifteen club coaches, of whom six specialised in sprints and/or hurdles, three in middle-distance running and six in field events: they did not have a single long-distance coach. And although newcomers could join their track sessions, they had stopped doing steady-paced club runs in the late 1970s. With hindsight, this was remarkably bad timing, as the early 1980s saw a significant increase in the number of people wanting to take part in road running, many of them inspired by the birth of the London Marathon, whereas previously most road runners had been people who had previously been involved in track and cross-country running. It was unfortunate for the Harriers that, at the start of the 1980s, none of their experienced road runners seemed to be willing to qualify as a coach and help to encourage novice road runners.

Gender segregation

Nowadays, most clubs are open to both sexes, as are almost all road races and some cross-country and track races. In 1982, things were very different, and there were separate governing bodies for men and women. The Amateur Athletic Association, which had been founded in 1880, decided after the First World War that women's athletics should be administered by a separate organisation. Accordingly the Women's AAA had been founded

in 1922. Sixty years later, the two organisations continued to organise separate championships. In 1975 Folkestone AC had proposed motions at the AGMs of both the AAA and WAAA seeking an amalgamation, but although the AAA AGM passed this proposal, the WAAA AGM rejected it by a large majority. The two associations eventually merged in 1988.

Nowadays, the most prestigious track and field league is the National Athletics League, which has events for both sexes. The results are computed on the basis of the combined scores in men's and women's events. The same principle applies in the Southern Athletics League. In the early 1980s, this was not the case. The British Athletics League, which had been formed in 1969, was for men only. An equivalent league for women, the UK Women's League, had been formed in 1975. There were also separate regional leagues for men and women: our local leagues were the Southern Men's League and the Southern Women's League, both of which were split into several divisions. A smaller league in the South London area, the Rosenheim League, had been formed in 1964 and was also for men only. Since 1978 it had been split into a 'western' and an 'eastern' division, with the top three clubs from each division competing in a final to decide the overall winner. The results of league matches were usually published in 'Athletics Weekly' a few weeks later, but in the 1980s this magazine concentrated on publishing the team scores, and gave relatively few details of individual performances. After 2010, Athletics Weekly's results section shifted its attention to focus on individual performances and often did not include the team scores.

Road races

At the start of the 1980s, road races generally still attracted fairly small entries, although the running boom which followed the first London Marathon in 1981 was to change this. In the early 1980s, the most common distance for road races in the UK was ten miles. There were also several races at five miles and at 20 miles. Before 1981, there had been relatively few marathon races, very few half-marathons, and very few road races at the metric distance of 10K. Locally, Hercules-Wimbledon, Herne Hill, Epsom and Woking had all organised ten-mile road races for many years, while Croydon Harriers had responded to the running boom by staging their first ten-mile road race in October 1981, on a rather complex course which produced some traffic problems, particularly with two crossings of the A222. The nearest half-marathon was promoted by Ranelagh Harriers on a rural course starting and finishing at Effingham. Since 1952 Mitcham AC had organised a race each January on a three-lap course measuring about fifteen and a half miles: originally this had been advertised as a 15-mile race, but by 1980 it had been renamed as a 25-kilometre race. At this time there was no official requirement for road races to be measured, and it was not until 1985 that the AAA set up a working party to introduce a system for certifying road race courses. This working party discovered that a few established races were actually less than the advertised distance. The most notable of these in the Surrey / South London area was the Walton AC 10-mile road race, a flat three-lap course on which many local runners had set what they regarded as their 'personal bests' and Kath Binns had run what had been claimed to be a British women's record. It was discovered that the Walton course was actually about 150 yards less than the advertised ten miles.

Moving to longer distances, Belgrave Harriers had organised an annual 20-mile road race for many years, on a four-lap course starting and finishing in Wimbledon. Before the first London Marathon in 1981, the most prestigious marathon in the south-east had been the Polytechnic Marathon, organised by Polytechnic Harriers (a long-established Middlesex club which subsequently merged with Kingston AC) and held on a course starting and finishing in Windsor (from 1938 to 1973 it had been run from Windsor to Chiswick). Since 1943, South London Harriers had organised a 30-mile race each September, on a four-lap course starting and finishing at Coulsdon. The few runners who specialised in 'ultras' often used this as a warm-up for the annual London to Brighton race, which had been first held in 1951, was

organised by the Road Runners Club and took place each October. By the start of the 1980s, many road races which had first been held before 1960, when most people did not have cars and there was much less traffic on the roads, were finding that increasing traffic was causing problems with safety.

Cross-country

For many relatively fast male runners, the main target race of the season was the National Cross-Country Championships, which was traditionally held over nine miles each March. The Southern Cross-Country Championships were traditionally held each February, also over nine miles. The equivalent women's championships were held over much shorter distances. The Surrey Men's Cross-Country Championships were traditionally held over seven and a half miles on the first Saturday in January. The Surrey Women's Cross-Country Championships were traditionally held over three miles in early December each year. Women's cross-country races generally attracted much smaller fields than men's races: in 1981/82, there had been 162 finishers in the Surrey senior men's cross-country championship but only 33 finishers in the Surrey senior women's championship.

The Surrey Cross-Country League had originally been formed, for men only, in 1962. Originally it comprised just six clubs, but the numbers soon grew and a second division had been formed in 1967. At the 1982 AGM it was agreed that a third division should be introduced for 1982/83. There had been no corresponding league for women until the Surrey Women's Cross-Country League was formed in 1979, largely through the efforts of Ron Gobey of Herne Hill (which had begun accepting women members in 1976). By 1982 this league comprised fifteen clubs, all of which competed in the same division.

A much older league, also for men only, was the East Surrey League. This had originally been formed in the 1930s. However, by 1982 it was only staging three events each year: a cross-country race in Lloyd Park each autumn, a road relay at Box Hill each March, and a road race at Ewell each April on a course which was slightly more than four miles (but shorter than the present course because it started and finished outside the track rather than on the track). Epsom had won the league for four successive years from 1976/77 to 1979/80, while Croydon Harriers won it in 1980/81 and 1981/82.

1982 London Marathon

The second London Marathon took place on 9 May. The winner was Hugh Jones of Ranelagh Harriers. This is still the only time that a Surrey runner has won this race. Don Faircloth of Croydon Harriers repeated his tenth place of 1981, in a slightly faster time of 2 hours 15 minutes 50. Bob Treadwell of Surrey Beagles was 27th in 2 hours 19 minutes 19. Three other members of Croydon Harriers finished in under 2 hours 40. John Lee ran 2 hours 24 minutes 30 while Martin Walmsley, in his first attempt at the marathon, ran 2 hours 26 minutes 46 and Robin Dickson ran a personal best 2 hours 37 minutes 45.



Hugh Jones winning the 1982 London Marathon

10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN SUMMER 2012

The Dorking 10-mile road race, which incorporated the Surrey Championships, took place on 10 June. Simon Ambrosi placed 56th (64:02), with Damian Macenhill 61st (64:39) and Barry White 68th (65:07). Steph Upton was the sixteenth woman to finish, placing 161st overall (72:23). Margaret Faherty set a club W65 record of 1 hour 43 minutes 06.

The third Rosenheim League match of the season took place at Tooting on Wednesday 13 June. Sandra Francis won the women's long jump with a leap of 3 metres 27.

Both Striders' men and women placed fourth in the second Veterans League match of the season, at Ewell on 18 June. Steve Starvis won the M40 3000 metres in 10 minutes 14.5. For Striders' women, Andrea Jeffries was second in the W50 800 metres (3:08.1), while Helen Furze was second in the W35 3000 metres (12:00.5) and Sandra Francis was second in the W50 long jump (3.25). This was Helen's last appearance in a Striders vest: she was diagnosed with cancer the following month.

Both Striders' men and women again placed fourth in the third Veterans League match of the season, at Kingsmeadow on 25 June. Steve Starvis ran well to win the M35 5000 metres (17:29.5). Damian Macenhill ran well to place second in both the M40 1500 metres (4:56.2) and 5000 metres (18:22.2). Julian Spencer-Wood was second in the M60 400 metres in a club age-group record of 65.9 seconds, while Andy Elliott placed second in the M60 5000 metres (25:03.9). Andrea Jeffries was second in both the W50 400 metres (82.0) and 1500 metres (6:16.9), while Sandra Francis was second in the W50 long jump (3.44).

Julian Spencer-Wood again ran well to set a club M60 800 metre record of 2 minutes 28.49 in the Rosenheim League match at Battersea Park on 4 July.

The final Southern Veterans League match of the season was at Croydon Arena on 9 July. Lee Flanagan ran well to win the 5000 metres (16:55.9). Bob Ewen won the M50 2000 metre walk (12:06.4) and Julian Spencer-Wood won the M60 800 metres (2:34.3). Striders' men placed fifth in the match, but held on to fourth place in the final league table. Striders' women placed fourth in their match and also in the final league table. Sandra Francis was second in the W50 triple jump with a club age-group record of 6.34 metres. Andrea Jeffries set a club W50 800 metre record of 3 minutes 06.7, placing second in the B race. Steph Upton was second in both the 2000 metre walk (12:42.3) and the W35 800 metres (2:57.2). Margaret Faherty was second in both the W60 200 metres (46.6) and 800 metres (3:55.8).

On 14 July Lee Flanagan ran well to place ninth of 257 finishers in the Elmore 7-mile road race, recording 39 minutes 52. Club colleague Damian Macenhill also ran well to place 25th (43:01), with Steve Massey 35th (44:39) and Chris Morton 64th (47:00). Serena Stracey was the ninth woman to finish, placing 84th overall (48:52).

In the Elmbridge 10-kilometre road race on 22 July, Lee Flanagan placed 20th in 35 minutes 06 seconds. Damian Macenhill was next home in 58th (37:55), holding off club colleague Krzysztof Klidzia who was 59th (37:56). In the final Surrey Road League tables, Striders' men placed seventh of the 30 clubs in the league, while our women finished 11th.

In the final Rosenheim League match of the season, at Tooting on 25 July, Sandra Francis did well to finish second in the long jump with a leap of 3 metres 62, which is still the longest distance achieved by any female Strider over the age of 35. Both Striders' men and women finished sixth in the final league table.



August 2012 saw several Striders help at the London Olympic Games, marshalling at the road cycling, the 50k road walk and the marathons.

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