

Striders of Croydon

SEPTEMBER 2023 MAGAZINE



Sara Rahmani and Sarah Allport in the Veterans League at Wimbledon on 17 July

(photo by Stephen Allport)

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Competitive Highlights: June – August 2023

40 Years Ago – Local Athletics in July – December 1983

25 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Autumn 1998

10 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Autumn 2013

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 8 October – Switchback 5 miles – Lloyd Park (Striders marshalling)

Saturday 14 October – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Div 2 – venue tbc

Saturday 14 October – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Div 3 – venue tbc

Sunday 15 October – Cabbage Patch 10 miles – Twickenham (Surrey Road League)

Saturday 28 October – Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships – Nonsuch Park

Saturday 11 November – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Div 2 – venue tbc

Saturday 11 November – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Div 3 – venue tbc

2024

Sunday 7 January – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Dorking

Saturday 13 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Div 2 – venue tbc

Saturday 13 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Div 3 – venue tbc

Saturday 10 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Div 2 – venue tbc

Saturday 10 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Div 3 – venue tbc



Striders in the Veterans League match at Sutton Arena on 19 June

EDITORIAL: SEPTEMBER 2023

Welcome to the September issue of our club magazine. This summer has seen Striders re-enter the Rosenheim League after an absence of nine years. And while our men had to settle for sixth place in the Eastern Division, our women definitely exceeded expectations. Some good placings from Lorraine Hunte and Sarah Allport saw them finish the season in fourth place in the Eastern Division, ahead of local rivals Croydon Harriers, and qualify for the Shield Final, which brings together the leading clubs from both the Eastern and Western Divisions. Ten of our women competed in this match, where we finished seventh out of eight clubs. Our leading article comes from Sarah Allport, who gives her account of her first track season with Striders, and we hope that it will encourage other female Striders to join her in the team next season.

We follow Sarah's article with accounts of two highly scenic, but definitely undulating, off-road races which took place in July. The first of these is from Ally Whitlock, who ran very well to be the third woman to finish the Wendover 100-mile race, and gives us her account of the race. We follow this with an article from Stephen Allport about the Chevy Chase fell race in Northumberland, which is almost 20 miles in length.

We still have more Striders competing in parkruns than in long-distance races, so we follow these articles with one from Martin Gourlay describing his visit to the Sheffield Castle parkrun, which he ran in August. We follow this with an article from Rick Di Mascio, telling us the lessons he has learned after suffering a hamstring injury just as he was making significant improvement. This is quite a common experience for relatively new runners, as our cardiovascular system tends to adapt to increased training more quickly than our musculoskeletal system.

We also include our usual 'competitive highlights' and history articles. The article '25 years ago' is a reminder of how much the club has progressed since 1998, when we had only 73 members, and our Wednesday runs usually attracted 20-25 runners, who all ran as one group. Since then, our membership has increased substantially, and we frequently now have eight or nine different groups running on Wednesday evenings.

Our men have been performing very well in both the Southern Veterans League, where we finished third in our division, and in the Surrey Road League. At the time of writing, the Road League tables on the Surrey AA website have only been updated to the end of June, but the latest tables circulated to team managers include the races in July, and show our men as being placed fourth out of the 40 clubs which have entered the league. Our women also made a very good start, but a shortage of runners in some of the later races has demoted us to 23rd place.

As usual, October will see the start of the cross-country season. This year it will also see the return of our popular five-mile race, the 'Switchback', for the first time since the Covid pandemic. This race was first held in 1992, to celebrate Striders' tenth anniversary, and was held each autumn from then until 2019.

I hope that all Striders continue to enjoy their running.

Alan



A STEADY RUNNER'S FIRST TRACK SEASON FOR STRIDERS

(by Sarah Allport)

22nd May 2023, I am stood in the spectator stands at the home of Epsom and Ewell AC listening to a rather bizarre chat about race numbers and wondering why on earth I am here, in running kit. I don't do track racing; heck I have only just got enough fitness back to hang on to Group 4B. Surely this is for the speedier Striders isn't it? Then I remembered I volunteered for this. Why? Because I had spectated a few times and it seemed like good fun, and everyone seems friendly enough. Plus, there is that added bonus of not having to remember a route and it is all flat, surely that beats a very hilly Wednesday club run? I mean what's the worst that can happen? For those who don't know, Striders are members of the Southern Counties Veterans League and have recently re-joined the Rosenheim League, so there are options for track racing throughout the summer.

Southern Counties Veterans League

The league comprises four matches held on Monday evenings for anyone over 35: Striders are one of eight clubs taking part in the South London Division. The first match was cancelled at the last minute due to torrential rain, so only three events were held this year. Athletes are banded by age: 35-49, then over 50s, over 60s etc. Within each age band clubs can nominate two scorers, A and B, their fastest runners. These are given a number between 61 and 69 (the number 6 designates Striders). First person over the line scores eight, down to a score of 1 for the eight-place finisher. Crucially the A and B scorers and the age banding are scored separately. Any non-scoring Striders collect a larger number from the registration area and use that to sign up to the event of their choice. It all sounds straight forward but as I was hearing on the first night, not knowing if everyone is coming, some indecision about which event to run and who is faster can cause a lot of last-minute number swapping and headache for the team captain. So, what event(s) to go for: something short and fast or long and steady?. There is usually a selection of shorter distances to choose from: 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, plus at least one middle distance of either 1500, 3000 or 5000m, plus if you are really lucky a steeplechase or race walk. Additionally, there is a selection of field events, although these are dependent on the availability of qualified officials).

I decided that it was safer for me and for all concerned for me to stick to the track. A recent health issue meant I was not sure about the really short distances, and although I knew I could run 5000m did I really want 12.5 laps of the track? No. I could be considered mad but not that mad, so 3000m it was, and I wasn't going to be alone as Consuelo Kennefick and Yazz Anderson were mad enough to join me. The first issue was where to start: not on the start line, as it was 7.5 laps, so it was over on the back straight near to what I have learnt is turn three. Was I nervous? Oh yes! Look at all these women; they are going to run rings (well ovals) around me – but there wasn't time to dwell, we were on our marks and off and that's me left for dust within 100 m. Halfway around lap one I am convinced I am not going to make it, can't get the breathing under control, legs won't move quick enough and there is that fear of being lapped and left alone. Then suddenly it all seems okay: I can breathe, I find that rhythm and I am doing okay. Sure, they are lapping me but once a lap I run the home straight and there is what can only be described as a roar. That's the Striders, nothing better to do than to cheer Yazz and me home. I was quickly left the only one on the track finishing with a 19:42. Yes, I was last, but crucially this is where the scoring worked for us because it's not just where you finish in the race, it's where you finish within your age-band and if there are two of you in the same age-band how many other A or B scorers are completing. Yazz and I are in the same age-band and she finished two places ahead of me but was fifth in the A scorers, taking four points. I may have been last, but I was also the fourth B scorer so gained five points and we also had Consuelo fourth overall but first W50 so eight points.

That got me wondering: so few teams sent females, so what could we achieve if I could convince a few more female Striders to come along? I decided I might make myself really unpopular at the next few Wednesday club runs, but it was worth seeing if anyone else was interested.

Match three took place at Sutton's track in Carshalton. My only option here for middle distance was 5000m and I really didn't fancy that, so I opted for 800m on the basis that it was two laps so short. I had realised

after the last race that there was nothing I could do right now to make the legs move quicker but I could deal with the issue of being lapped. I just had to accept it was going to happen and run my own race. I can't keep up and will only make it worse trying to chase them down. The sooner I can find my rhythm the sooner I can work on speeding up. The first lap was easier, probably because I knew there was only one more to do, possibly because I had accepted the inevitable. As expected, I finished last with a 4:55, but the results sheet showed only four runners in my age-band and a fourth place gets you 5 points. This was also the match where I had convinced a few of the other female Striders to also run the 800m and with Consuelo Kennefick first W50 with eight points, and Vanessa Wheeler third W60 with six points, we had scored 19 in one race. We also had Lorraine Hunte second W60 in the 200m, adding a further seven points. It also meant we had four women so could in theory form a relay team for the 4x200m. We decided to give it a go. Yes, we were nervous, and we were not totally certain on the track markings for handing over the batons, let alone how to pass them. We decided our strategy was to watch the men and if they were not disqualified copy them, if they were, don't. Not the best of tactics but as we went to our start areas it became clear only two other teams were taking part. Our mantra became "don't drop the baton" – so long as our last runner crosses that line we can get third and another six points to add to the night. Yes, dear reader, we succeeded: a crucial third place in the bag and six points. It's just a pity there is no podium presentation!

The fourth and final match of the league was hosted by Hercules Wimbledon at their track in Wimbledon Park. The only middle-distance option here was the mile and as I haven't run a mile race before, why not? I was joined by Sara Rahmani who we put forward as our A scorer with me as B scorer, which worked brilliantly with Sara coming home sixth for three points and me fourth with a 10:05 to score five points. My plan of trying to increase the women's team was also working, with Annabel Crouch joining us and taking fourth in the W35 100m and four points, and Lorraine Hunte first W60 100 m and eight points. It also meant we had four women for another relay, this time for a 4x100 m. We adopted the same philosophy as before, after all it worked, and we were one of only four teams lined up so although we came last, we scored another five points. Unfortunately, we may have been celebrating a bit too long as we missed that the park gates are locked at 9 pm, so a few of us had a slightly panicked additional lap of the park until we were kindly showed the 24-hour gate and could escape.

I hope that my fellow female Striders enjoyed the Vets League as much as I did. As I mentioned, few clubs have female representation, so although I was last in every event there were quite a few points to pick up. I think the provisional final league positions speak for themselves, with the Striders female team finished sixth from eight teams, ahead of Croydon Harriers and Walton. I should also mention here the men's team are provisionally placed third but if there were prizes for cheering definitely first.

However, that was only half of it, whilst all the excitement of the Vets League was taking place Striders had recently re-joined the Rosenheim League.

Rosenheim League

The Rosenheim League is open to any adult Strider, with matches on a Wednesday night. The scoring is simpler, with one scorer per race and instead of a number they wear a letter: K for us as the Harriers already had C and Serpentine had S. There is the same system for non-scorers and a similar format of the types of events available. There are three matches, with clubs divided into two divisions, east and west, each comprising six clubs. Striders complete in east, with many of the same teams as the Vets League. There is a fourth, final match where the top four male and female teams from each division are invited to a final competition to settle the overall league positions. I was unable to attend the first match hosted by Herne Hill Harriers at Tooting due to a prior commitment, but Lorraine Hunte was there, coming fourth overall and first W65 in the 100 metres.

For the second Rosenheim League match we were back at Sutton's track in Carshalton. This was a chance to try again at the 3000m, and I wasn't as nervous as I had already raced here. It was incredibly hot, so I wasn't too hopeful as there are a lot of younger faster females in this league, but it appeared that not many do the longer distances so my 21:06 gave me third. Sadly, the only female Strider but very well supported by the Striders men cheer squad.

The third and final Rosenheim League match saw a return to Tooting. This became the Striders 3000m unofficial club competition due to the volume of entries; I am not sure we were that popular with the track officials! I finally managed my season's best of 19:09, which for me rounded off the season nicely. Unfortunately, there are no official results available due to an issue with the number of qualified officials, so I don't know where I placed or if I scored points, but on the night, I didn't know that - it was just a great end to a fun season, or was it? A few weeks later whilst cooking Sunday dinner a Facebook post announces the unbelievable. Between Lorraine and I we had managed to get the Striders women's team into the final! The only non-track club in the competition. You may have spotted a common thread in this article, that not many clubs have women competitors. Holland Sports had none, and we managed to just outscore Croydon Harriers. Having gone through disbelief and excitement whilst trying not to burn dinner it became apparent; Lorraine and I couldn't do the final alone. Remember those female Striders from the Vets League? Sorry but we needed one last favour...



Sarah in the Rosenheim League 3000 metres at Tooting in July (photo by James Rhodes)

The Rosenheim League Final was hosted at the Kingsmeadow track near Kingston. We had put the call out and our fellow Striders did not disappoint. Not only did we get some returners we also attracted some new people as well and between us we covered every event bar the pole vault (you need your own pole) and the steeplechase because really why would you. For the final we also had some last-minute changes; our regular captain James was racing himself that night before heading to Budapest to cover the World Championships in Budapest, so we welcomed Stephen Allport with the help of Andy Perks. We were also one of a few clubs that discovered we were racing with the same letter as another club. Kingston Polytechnic also ran with K; and S, O and C were also taken, so Striders quickly bought a set of T, as no one had that letter. I switched to 1500m as it was the last chance to record a time for the season (9:15), it also left a stronger field covering the 3000m. Once again we had a chance at the relay, finishing provisionally fifth and not a dropped baton all season. Sadly, official results are still being sorted at the time of writing but provisional results have us placed seventh ahead of Herne Hill Harriers.

There is no way Lorraine and I could have managed it without Sandra Francis, Michelle Klein, Annabel Crouch, Nikki Javan, Ruth Pearson, Sara Rahmani, Vanessa Wheeler and Jay Brzask. Thank you, ladies you were amazing.

So, what have I learnt from my first track season?

- It doesn't matter what you race speed or your preferred distance anyone can take part and by doing so potentially earn the club points.
- It is incredibly friendly, yes there is the Striders cheering squad on the home straight, but all the clubs are happy to give advice and support.
- It is human nature to want to give team mates extra support as they complete those last few laps alone, sadly running alongside is considered pacing and frowned upon. Luckily, we had a very understanding track official.
- If you have any queries such as which line to stand on, where the start is, or which distances you have to stay in lane for, ask one of the officials – they are there to help.
- Never ever cross the grass in the centre of the track even if you see officials do, and never cross in front of the timekeepers.
- It will never run to time, some matches run later than others but everyone there is a volunteer, and we are grateful to them.
- There is a lot of controversy around shoes, I just wore my normal road shoes but stay clear of anything carbon plated or thickly soled seemed to be the best advice.

Finally, none of it is possible without the team captains, Andy Perks for the Vets League and James Rhodes for the Rosenheim League. Thank you both, yes I will be back next season and I hope with a stronger female Strider team. With this in mind we are looking at putting on a track basics type session before the start of the next season to answer some of those frequently asked questions and to try a bit of relay baton practice. Most likely at Croydon Arena: please look out for details next year.



Striders' women at the Rosenheim League Final at Kingsmeadow on 16 August

Back row: Sandra Francis, Michelle Klein, Sarah Allport, Annabel Crouch, Nikki Javan, Ruth Pearson, Lorraine Hunte, Sara Rahmani. Front row: Vanessa Wheeler and Jadwiga Brzask-Makiela

WENDOVER REDEMPTION (by Ally Whitlock)

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again, because in the words of Elizabeth Day, "learning how to fail is learning how to succeed".

Two years ago I DNF'd (Did Not Finish) the Wendover Woods 100. As I sat wrapped in all my clothes trying to keep warm after calling it quits mid-way through lap eight, I said never, ever again. I had pushed myself to the absolute max and had nothing more to give.

The thing is, I am slightly* (*AKA very) stubborn. I don't like to be beaten and I don't like to fail. In my mind, despite giving it everything I had and knowing that the DNF was the right decision, I had failed.

I had failed to finish a race I had started. And it hurt.

It hurt my pride.

It hurt my ego.

It hurt me.

I didn't race again until Thames Path 100 the following May. Whilst that was far from the perfect race, it showed me that I am capable of overcoming adversities and that I can do hard things. It taught me to believe in myself.

And then at Autumn 100 in October 2022, everything came together in perfect running synergy. I had the race of my life and proved to myself exactly how strong I am.

Two weeks later, still overflowing with Autumn 100 endorphins, I entered Wendover Woods 100 again.

And so here I am.



A Friday morning in July 2023. In a field in Wendover with some unfinished business in the woods.

Named after the nearby town of Wendover, Wendover Woods is an area of woodland on the northern edge of the Chiltern Hills, managed by Forestry England. With a mixture of coniferous and broad-leaved trees it covers 800 acres – or 1.25 square miles.

Several years ago, Centurion Running created what's become an iconic ten-mile loop with 2,000 ft of elevation gain within the woods. I'll say that again. A ten-mile loop with 2,000 ft of climbing in the space of 1.25 square miles.

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

The Wendover 50-mile race is five laps and 10,000ft of climbs. Or twice up Ben Nevis.

The 100-mile race is ten laps and 20,000ft. Four and a bit times up Ben Nevis.

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

The five main climbs and several sections between them are named to help distinguish one path from another and one hill from another. Winding and weaving around the woods, crossing paths with runners coming in the opposite direction and running on adjacent paths, separated only by a line of trees. It's no mean feat to get a ten-mile loop out of space this size!



A week earlier I had swung by for a lap on my way to visit the in-laws in Birmingham. I sold it as an excellent walk opportunity for the dog and then persuaded the husband to walk the dog whilst I went for a run!

Having negotiated 1hr 45 minutes of running time I threw myself at lightning speed around the woods. It had been a year since my last foray in the forest and that was in the dark of the Night 50km. It all came flooding back. Every twist, every turn. The fallen trees to jump over, the roots to avoid. The hidden turns, the steep climbs. I'd loaded the route onto my watch but I barely needed to glance at it as my feet remembered exactly where to go.

I used the loop to visualise the race. To finalise in my mind my race day strategy. To remind myself of my learnings over the past two years. For this one time, I let myself get carried away. I pushed hard. I ran the flats, flung myself down the hills with reckless abandonment and ran up all but the steepest of the hills. I ran my fastest-ever lap. It was out of my system and I'd shown myself I could do it. My ego now had nothing to prove on race day.

That one loop had done its job. I knew, with a week to go, I was ready to do battle with the woods.

At 9:55 am we are gathered at the start line. There are only 30 of us. Eight women, 22 men. The small starting field – ten fewer runners than two years ago – is perhaps a testament to the difficulty of the race. Some are old-timers, previous finishers wanting another go. Some, like me, are returning for redemption. A brave few souls are attempting their first 100-mile race.



As it creeps closer to 10 am, I take a deep breath and close my eyes to calm my racing mind and block out those around me. My stomach fizzles with nerves but I am in control. I have no doubts. None. I know I am going to finish this time.



10:00 AM FRIDAY MORNING

ONE

The starting horn sounds and we surge forward down the trail as one. Cheers of encouragement send us on our way.

I won't talk much about the route itself as I describe it in some detail in 2021's race blog (see the September 2021 issue of this magazine). It's not changed. The hills have sadly not shrunk in the interim period. Rather, this is about what I did differently to turn 2021's failure into 2023's success (so there's the spoiler, I did finish this time...!).

I keep getting pulled up for calling 75 miles a failure, but it was. I did not finish the race I set out to finish. But that DNF is now part of my story. It's helped shape and define the past two years and I'm a big believer in the importance of learning when things don't go right.

Today, from the very start, I walk the gentle hills that two years ago I ran up. No matter how tempting the excitement of the first lap is, I walk the slightest hint of an incline. The majority of the field rush past me on the first climb. Many are running. I silence my ego and keep walking.

Another runner passes me. And another.

My race strategy is simple. Walk the hills. Run the downs, run the flats, keep my heart rate in check and eat every 30 minutes.

And ignore what everyone else is doing.

In many ways, this final point is the hardest. Over the last couple of years, my ultra running has improved exponentially and I've had some excellent race results. 4th at South Downs Way 100, 5th at Thames Path 100, 4th at the Night 50km here last year, 2nd at the Autumn 100 and most recently 5th overall at the Summer Spine Sprint.

I run for the love of it and I don't do many races. But when I do, I now race. I run to **compete**, not complete. And when you're racing you become much more aware of what the people around you are doing.

It's hard to let go of this. It's hard to ignore the competition. It's hard to have another female pass me towards the end of lap one and not drop into race mode. It's hard to simply let her go because I am competitive, I always have been. This was one of my failings two years ago. I led the women's race from early on which put me under (self-imposed) pressure. I ran harder than I should have done because I didn't want to lose that lead. I let my ego run the race rather than my brain.

I finish lap one in 02:03:56. This is 12+ minutes slower than I ran the first lap two years ago. It feels good, it feels comfortable and I run into the Trig Point race HQ with a smile on my face.

12:03 PM FRIDAY AFTERNOON. LAP ONE CUMULATIVE TIME: 02:03:56 (2021: 01:51:13)



TWO

One lap down, nine to go!

I head out on lap two in the heat of the midday sun. It's warm. Very warm. The sun blazes down from a vast and cloudless blue sky. I thought that in the deep depths of the woods it would be sheltered and cool. But under the dense canopy of leaves, it's like a furnace. The heat has nowhere to go. It's oppressive, the air is thick. It swirls around, hugging tightly to my skin. The humidity drenching me more than a rainstorm would.

Sweat is pouring down my face, stinging my eyes. My vest is stuck to my body and I am drinking and drinking but no amount of water is quenching my thirst. My heart rate creeps higher and higher. On lap one it was nicely in zone one throughout. Now, only very easy jogging and walking will keep it that low.

I pull back and adjust my effort accordingly. I think back to NDW100 in 2020 when I walked 20+ miles in the 40°C heat of the day to conserve energy before finishing strong in the cool of the night. I tell myself I can do that again.

Two years ago, the air temperature wasn't as high, but the humidity was in the 90s, making it feel hotter than it was. I didn't read the woods. I failed to adjust my effort and pushed too hard in the heat with disastrous results.

I start to find my groove...

- ...Gruffalo Trail
- ...Crossroads Loop
- ...Powerline
- ...No Name (it will always be No Name)
- ...Go Ape
- ...Root Canal
- ...Hale Lane
- ...The unofficial Sandwich Hill
- ...Boulevard of Broken Dreams
- ...The Snake
- ...Hill Fort
- ...Gnarking Around
- ...Railing In the Years
- ...Nettle Alley...

Just some of the wonderfully named paths.

Interspersed with my 30-minute feed alarm, I find my rhythm during lap two.

14:25 PM FRIDAY AFTERNOON. LAP TWO CUMULATIVE TIME: 04:25:12 (2021: 03:57:52)



THREE

With 20 miles done, I feel as if I am managing the heat and the conditions well and I head out on lap three in high spirits. I am comfortable and I feel good. I am still eating and drinking well and leave the checkpoint with another round of peanut butter and jam sandwiches. I now have a buff around my head to stop the sweat from dripping in my eyes and stuff this – and my bra – with ice as I leave.

The ice helps to cool my body temperature and my heart rate drops accordingly. I get back into my groove... Gruffalo trail, sharp left, Crossroads, Powerline and on I go.

As I pass through the Hale Lane checkpoint I am handed an orange ice lolly. Feeling the heat simply standing at the CP, one of the volunteers popped to a nearby shop and bought handfuls of ice lollies. That slightly sticky, melting, icy cold orangey goodness was simply the best thing ever. I walk up Sandwich Hill, this time not eating a sandwich but an ice lolly and suddenly all is right. again

It's the little things like this where the volunteers shine.

They are the unsung heroes. Many worked double or even triple shifts over the weekend stopping only for short naps here and there. In a crew-less race, they become our crew looking after us every step of the way. Catering to our every need. Run into a checkpoint and they are grabbing and filling our bottles before we've even had a chance to say hello. They check that we are eating, make us sandwiches and later in the race cups of coffee.

At the end of lap three, slightly concerned that I hadn't been taking on enough salt for the amount I was sweating, Zoe Norman swaps the plain water in my bottles for Tailwind as Sarah Cameron feeds me slices of watermelon sprinkled with salt. It is surprisingly delicious!

They send me on my way with the first of my snack bags from my drop bag. I've managed solid food for 30 miles but my stomach has had enough. A bit like at A100, this time I don't try to force it and instead abandon the peanut butter and jam sandwiches for easily digestible gels and baby food.

This being a lapped race, we have access to a drop bag every ten miles. Two years ago I filled my bag with an endless amount of food that went uneaten. Sandwiches, vegan sausage rolls, cakes, nuts and cereal bars... I finished each lap and sat staring at it. I had too many choices but nothing that I wanted. My drop bag this time is carefully organised with a small bag for each lap containing two gels, two baby food sachets and a clean buff. I have nothing to think about. No choices. No decisions to make. Just things that I know, even when at my lowest, my stomach can digest.

Three laps done, I run into the Trig Point race HQ just before 5 pm.

16:53 PM FRIDAY AFTERNOON. LAP THREE CUMULATIVE TIME: 06:53:15 (2021: 06:20:58)



FOUR

Early on in the race, I set myself several non-negotiables.

- I walk any hint of an incline.
- I walk if my HR goes above 136/137.
- I run from the car park down the Gruffalo trail until the sharp left turn.
- I run the majority of the Crossroads loop.
- I run through the woods from the road and down the gully that crosses the Ridgeway.
- I run down Powerline and across the field to the stile.
- I run down Steep Hill.
- I run from the top of Go Ape to Hale Lane, including Root Canal (I relent on this bit during the night to reduce the trip hazard!).
- I run the Boulevard of Broken Dreams down to Snake without stopping.
- I run Hill Fort to Gnarking.
- I run from the gate to the Trig Point CP.

My feed alarm sounds every 30 minutes and I eat. As the race progresses and eating becomes harder, I allow myself to miss one, but not two consecutive alarms. I fail this non-negotiable a couple of times when I simply can't get food down.

Eating, or lack of it, was my biggest failure in 2021 and ultimately my downfall. My stomach was a mess, I couldn't keep any food down and the worse I felt, the less I tried to eat. I knew I had to do something different this time.

I try to preload fuel during the first three laps. I eat a quarter of a peanut butter and jam sandwich every 30 minutes and top this up with fresh fruit at the aid stations. I drink water and squash. At the end of my third lap, I proudly announce that I have eaten 14 sandwiches!

Many people will try to tell you that you need to eat real food when running long distances in order to fuel properly and I spent many of my early races forcing myself to do this with disastrous results. I struggle with digestion during races, especially when it is hot. I've looked into the science behind it. Essentially, when it is hot, the body uses its energy to keep its internal temperature down, diverting energy from other body processes, like digestion.

There comes a point during every race when I simply cannot digest solid food any more. I bite, I chew, I chew, I chew some more but I can't swallow, I can't get it down. And if I do, it doesn't stay down...

I am pleased that I managed 30 miles of solid food, but I know that from lap four onwards it's just not going to happen. And that is okay. One of my biggest learnings in the past two years is not to make myself eat food my body does not want. I ran an 18:27 100 miler at Autumn 100 fuelled entirely on gels, baby food and coke. And I can do that again.

I'm pleased to say that although I suffered a little from nausea during the race, I didn't leave the contents of my stomach in Wendover Woods this time. I took 2021's failure, I learnt from it and made positive changes.

19:29 PM FRIDAY EVENING. LAP FOUR CUMULATIVE TIME: 09:29:49 (2021: 08:42:34)



FIVE

Lap five is not the one.

As I leave the trig field sometime before 8pm, it's still light. My head torches are stuffed in the back of my pack for the rapidly approaching darkness. Lap four passed without incident and I have no reason to think lap five will be any different.

Nothing happens. I don't fall. I'm not sick. I don't go the wrong way or get lost.

My mind, so strong earlier on, falters. I look at how far I have to go rather than how far I have come. I can't comprehend that I am not even halfway and that I have many, many more hours left in the woods. I dig myself into a mental black hole.



I remember very few specifics about this lap, just the darkness both in my mood and the impending night. Seeing the sunset from the bottom of Snake lifts me slightly before the serpent beast squeezes the joy back out of me. Rachel Fawcett, the leading female, laps me halfway up the climb.

It's humbling to be lapped by another woman so early on but shows just how good Rachel is. She goes on to break the women's course record in an astonishing 22:57:13, claiming her victory as I finish my eighth lap. Coming into the trig field a few minutes ahead of her, I am delighted that she doesn't quite manage to lap me for a second time!

In a funk, I ignore my feed alarms and neglect to take on any fuel during the second half of this lap. My gel and baby food goes untouched. My internal dialogue argues with itself. I know I need to eat but I don't want to eat. Negativity wins this argument, and fully self-imposed, I suffer up Gnarking and Railing with zero energy.

I roll into the Trig Point CP in a piece over 12 hours. Spencer and Stu now on volunteer duty get the full effects of my grumpiness. I'm tired. I feel nauseous, I feel sick. I worry that this is going to become a repeat of 2021 when sickness, not fitness, ruined my race. I feel, to put it politely, shit. And it's all my own doing. I ignored one of my non-negotiables and I didn't eat.

Five laps down, five to go. I decide I need to spend a little bit of time in the CP between laps five and six to rest, reset and shift my state of mind.

With Kerry and Windsor Andy on the daytime shift alongside Zoe, Mel and Emma, Spencer and Stu on the nighttime shift, my friends are there throughout and it feels like I have my own personal crew.

Seeing me at my lowest point so far, Spencer and Stu bring me drinks, make me coffee and try to coax me into eating. I honestly can't think of two better people to look after me during the tough nighttime hours and I know that with them here at the end of every lap, I will be okay.

The simple act of changing my t-shirt, splashing on some deodorant and wiping the grime from my face and arms makes me feel happier. I take off my HR monitor. I am moving so slowly the data is now redundant and it has chafed my ribcage raw.

I drink a cup of Coke, allowed as I am now passed halfway, and somehow, very slowly, eat a hot cross bun. A small solid food win. I spend 33 minutes at the checkpoint. Two years ago I would have seen these 33 minutes as wasted time. Today, I realise how important those 33 minutes are in changing my mindset ahead of lap six.

I leave the CP in a very different mood from the one I was in when I entered it.

22:25 PM FRIDAY. LAP FIVE CUMULATIVE TIME: 12:25:31 (2021: 11:19:39)



SIX

I learned a lesson on lap five. I didn't eat and I suffered for it. I didn't eat because I didn't want to. I felt slightly nauseous but the less I ate, the more nauseous I felt and the more nauseous I felt, the less I wanted to eat... It became a vicious circle.

I start lap six with a boiled sweet. This is a little trick I heard Sports Dietician Renee McGregor talk about on a podcast to help alleviate nausea. Sucking on a sweet can help to trick the brain into thinking it has some energy in the tank but also brings sugar levels back up so you can start to take fuel back on.

All I can say is pure GENIUS, it worked! (even though I discovered after the race that my boiled sweets were sugar-free...). The sweet I pop in my mouth as I leave the trig field lasts me until my first feed alarm of the lap. I then slowly, over the course of five or so minutes consume a gel. Tiny bit by tiny bit, drip-feeding my body the sugary fuel. Another sweet to hold the nausea at bay. A banana baby food just before I climb Go Ape, slowly, slowly...

A cup of Coke at Hale Lane sees me up Sandwich Hill. Another gel on the Boulevard of Broken Dreams takes me up Snake and around Hill Fort. A banana baby food powers me up Gnarking.

I run into the Trig Point CP with a smile on my face. Stu comments that I am a different person to the end of lap five. I reply "It's amazing what a gel can do...!"

02:00 AM SATURDAY MORNING. LAP SIX CUMULATIVE TIME: 15:59:53 (2021: 14:24:08)

SEVEN

Knowing that there were only 30 runners and anticipating being by myself for most of the race, I filled my phone with podcasts and playlists to occupy my mind. I actually end up running in silence until lap seven, quite content with my own company. I share an occasional fleeting word with another runner as our paths cross, but I like being alone. I like running solo. In a busy world, I crave the peace and quietness that running by myself gives me.

Aside from thinking about the race itself, I remember very little about my thoughts during those first 16 hours. Running is my time. It's often when I get some of my best ideas. I 'wrote' my first business plan whilst running and I've brainstormed many a project out on the trails. But today, I am so focused on what I am doing, I don't remember any other thought that crossed my mind.

A week later, so void was my mind of thought, I struggle to distinguish one lap from another. Although each lap was different, they all seemed to have merged into one. It's almost as if out on those trails, my mind emptied of all significant thought.

We started lap one under a cloudless blue sky, the blazing hot sun high in the sky. As the laps progress, the light changes from a cool blue to a warm orange. The shadows on the ground lengthen. Patterns of light dance at my feet as the sun, sinking low in the sky, shimmers through the trees. Dusk comes. The sky is golden as the sun slips silently below the horizon, leaving a pinky hue in its wake.

I leave it as long as possible before putting the head torch on. I don't remember which lap, or where in the lap I am when the path in front of me becomes illuminated by my torch rather than the sun.

Was it towards the end of lap five? Are laps six and seven my nighttime laps?

A July race brings long hours of daylight and short hours of darkness. The sun sets around 9:20 with darkness enveloping us around ten. It rises again a mere seven or so hours later. The nighttime miles, however, are some of my favourites. I love the silence and solitude of running by myself in the woods at night. I feel completely safe and at ease wrapped up in the Wendover bubble. Occasionally I see another head torch shining in the distance or briefly stumble on someone else – who or when I now cannot tell you – but most of the time, I am completely alone and completely at peace.



Running down the fire trail into Hale Lane on one of my nighttime laps I look up from the spot of light illuminating the path in front of me. The tree line ahead is silhouetted dark against the deep nighttime sky. The moon, a half-crescent, shines brightly. The sky is clear with not a cloud in sight. A blanket of stars sparkles high above my head.

It's one of those magical moments etched in my memory.

05:27 AM SATURDAY MORNING. LAP SEVEN CUMULATIVE TIME: 19:27:35 (2021: 17:44:50)

EIGHT

I have a little moment as I summit No Name on lap eight. This is where I called it quits in 2021. I remember how awful I felt at that point. I was dizzy and light-headed and thought I was going to faint. I'd been unable to keep down any food for 30-odd miles and was quite literally running on empty. There's a bench a few metres past the top of No Name. I sat on it, leaning on my poles with my head in my hands for several minutes as I battled with the decision I knew I had to make.

Whilst acknowledging that there have been some low moments, as there are in every race, today is a completely different story and I run past the DNF bench (as it is now called) feeling strong, in control and knowing that this time, I am going to finish.

I don't want to come across as arrogant, but I never once doubted my ability to finish today. I knew from the moment I started that I would finish, I had 100% belief in myself. It wasn't easy and it wasn't a smooth ride. It was a roller coaster of emotions and there were some tough and dark moments. The oppressive heat got to me. I couldn't cool my body temperature. I drank and drank but couldn't quench my thirst. I felt nauseous, I felt sick. I struggled to eat. I chafed my torso to smithereens and I spent far too long sitting aimlessly at the checkpoints.

But I never once doubted that I would finish.

08:49 AM SATURDAY MORNING. LAP EIGHT CUMULATIVE TIME: 22:49:07 (2021: DNF)



NINE

I begin my ninth lap just after 9 am. At 9:30 am the 50-mile race starts. From the silence and solitude of the nighttime hours, suddenly the woods come alive with sound. Voices chattering, marshals directing, poles tip-tapping, footsteps beating down the paths and storming up the hills.

I'm running (slowly) down Steep Hill when the race leader passes me. For a few short seconds, I imagine that I am leading the 50-mile race. He hurtles past me leaving words of encouragement trailing behind him.

As I turn right at the bottom of Steep Hill and head towards No Name I get caught in the melee of the chasing pack. They catch me on a section of narrow single track and I get frustrated at having to repeatedly step off the path to let them pass. Each time I pause it feels harder to get going again. When I'm moving, it's good, but when I stop my legs freeze, almost as if they suddenly realise the magnitude of what they have already done. Selfishly I think that after 80-odd miles, the 50 runners should be jumping off the path for ME!

I watch the fresh-legged 50 runners bound enthusiastically up No Name as I drag myself up one tiny step at a time. My legs are at that point in a race when they have lost all strength and power. Pole, step, pause... Pole, step, pause... Pole, step, pause... I picked up my poles at the start of lap six and the further into the race I go, the more I use them and the more I appreciate them.

No Name, past DNF bench, down the winding narrow track to the bottom of Go Ape. Up Go Ape. Pole, step, pause... Pole, step, pause... Pole, step, pause... Pole, step, pause... Top of Go Ape. Non-negotiable, I now run to Hale Lane.

I start using the poles on the descents – especially those that are uneven – as well as the climbs. Communication between my brain and my feet is floundering. The poles give a little added support and stability in those moments when my feet are a little slow to respond to my brain's commands.

I silently tick off each landmark as I get closer and closer to the end of my penultimate lap. Sandwich Hill, Boulevard, Snake, Hill Fort... At the top of Gnarking, I turn, as I have done on each lap, to look back down the hill I have just climbed. I see Laura hot on my tail.

You could say that Laura is the reason I am here. A number of years ago, she ran 50km to celebrate her 50th birthday. Until she did this, I did not even realise that it was possible to run further than a marathon; she introduced me to the enticing world of ultra running. Forever my supporter and my advocate, to run a few steps alongside her as she tackles the 50 miles is one of my race highlights.

My ninth lap is quicker than my eighth.

12 NOON SATURDAY. LAP NINE CUMULATIVE TIME: 26:00:52 (2021: DNF)

TEN

I start to choke up as I think this is it, this is my FINAL lap.



As I leave the trig field for the last time it starts to rain. Proper rain. We've had a few showers and even some crashes of thunder and flashes of lightning over the past 26 hours, but this is significantly more than a shower. Big fat wet raindrops bounce off of the ground in front of me. I don't put my waterproofs on, I'm still far too hot for any additional clothing. The rain runs down my head and drips off of the end of my nose. I reason that I am no wetter now than I was in yesterday's humidity.

As I make my way down the winding path to the road, my stilted shuffle becomes a slow, faltering jog. I start the lap determined to carry on running as much as I can. I run down the Gruffalo trail, waving a silent goodbye to the Gruff as I pass him for the last time. Up the first hill, poles dragging me step by step. In some disbelief, I overtake a 50-mile runner on only his second lap.

Through the woods. Covered by a thick grey raincloud, they are almost as dark as they were during the night. A volunteer stands lonely and forlorn at the Crossroads junction. I shout a thank you as I run past and down the now muddy gully. Round the Crossroads Loop, I go. Up towards the Ridgeway. Powerline. The precarious descent is now wet and slippery underfoot. I jog slowly across the field, lift my protesting legs over the stile at the bottom and tip tap my way up the next hill. I shuffle down Steep Hill wondering if I can in all honesty still call what I am doing "running".

I climb No Name for one last time sticking my fingers up at the b*****d as I go. I choke up again in the knowledge that I am doing it. I am doing it. I am f**king doing it. I make it to the top of Go Ape. Two of the five big climbs are done for the final time. As I stumble somewhat haphazardly down the path after Go Ape, my run becomes a jog, a shuffle, a walk...

By now, walking is just as quick as running.

I make the decision to walk the rest of the lap. I will finish. Whether it takes me three hours or three and a half to do my tenth lap is irrelevant. Walking is less painful and therefore more enjoyable and I want to enjoy my last few hours in the woods.

I settle into a new groove. A new pattern. I'm a strong walker, with the poles I am even stronger. I have my favourite playlist, saved especially for my final lap, playing in my ears. The rain, torrential only minutes ago, eases, and I see a glimmer of blue sky peeping out from behind the clouds. I'm smiling.

Hale Lane for the last time. All I can stomach is half a cup of Coke. I thank the volunteers as I set off up Sandwich Hill, sans sandwich... Tip, tap, tip, tap, left, right, left, right. With no pressure and a renewed determination, I hike strongly up the hill faster than I have since lap four.

My non-negotiable is negotiable on this last lap. I don't run down Boulevard of Broken Dreams. I walk with intent cheerfully singing along to the songs playing in my ears. Apologies to anyone who may have heard my dulcet tones filtering through the trees.

The Snake. Hill Fort. I choke up again. A lump in my throat with tears threatening to spill. Although super tough, I am enjoying this lap more than I thought I would but simultaneously am filled with all the emotions.

At the foot of Gnarking, I pause. This is going to take a monumental effort. Just one-tenth of a mile, but with a 29% gradient. I breathe deeply and lean heavily onto my poles. One foot in front of the other, head down I climb. All form and technique has been lost. My only goal is to reach the top. If I hadn't got my poles, I would be crawling on my hands and knees.

The climb starts gently, lulling you into a false sense of security. I gingerly step over the fallen tree as the ascent sharpens. I move forward step by tiny step. Pole, step, pause... Pole, step, pause... The sound of cheering tumbles down the hill towards me. I look up to see a waving crowd at the top. Their shouts and cheers reel me in, I grab hold of them like a rope and pull myself up, up, up.

I now don't remember everyone who was at the top and this makes me sad.

Carefully down the gully before the short undulating rollercoaster of a ride to Railing in the Years. The final climb of the final lap. The sun is shining. The wet leaves shimmer in its light shaking the last remnants of the rainstorm over me as I brush past.

I have less than a mile to go. That lump again, those tears threatening to fall. Nettle Alley. A short, sharp climb. The gate. I can see the marquee. Race HQ. The finish line. I walk around the perimeter of the field,

shielded from view behind the tall trees. The stile into the field proves to be problematic as I slowly lift my legs over one at a time, apologising profoundly to the 50 runners stuck behind me.

Safely over the stile and into the field. I walk the first 10 metres and take several deep breaths before easing into a jog. I turn the corner and see the finish gantry with a crowd gathered around it. I lift my poles from the ground and with an absolute banger in my ears break into a sprint.

Redemption.

15:44 PM SATURDAY. LAP TEN CUMULATIVE TIME: 29:44:57 (2021: DNF)



REFLECTION

Wendover Woods 100. Quite simply the hardest thing I have ever done. A test of both physical and mental strength.

- 100 miles (actual 105 miles)
- 20,000ft elevation gain
- 29 hours 44 minutes 57 seconds
- 7th overall, 3rd female
- 30 people started the race. Only 13 finished.
- Of the finishers, 6 were women and 7 were men.
- 75% of the women who started the race finished.
- Only 32% of the men finished.

That failure two years ago hurt. The pain followed me around, taunting me.

After the race, I reviewed every step; what worked, what didn't work, what did I do wrong and what could I do differently. I made mistakes so I made changes. I raced again, and again and again. Learning more each time.

Along with two more years of running experience and many thousands of training miles, I took my learnings to the start line on Friday morning.

I started slowly.

I walked every. single. hill.

I ignored time.

I ignored pace.

I removed the pressure.

I ate every 30 minutes. When I could no longer stomach solid food, I drip-fed gels and baby food. Lap five when I failed to fuel properly was a wake-up call. Lap six was different.

I ignored what everyone else was doing.

I ran my own race.

And this time, I beat the woods.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again, because in the words of Elizabeth Day, "learning how to fail is learning how to succeed".

Split	O.Pos.	C.Pos.	G.Pos.	Pace	Duration	Time
Hale Lane 1	15.	3.	4.	11:44	01:04:33	01:04:33
Trig Point 1	16.	3.	4.	13:11	00:59:23	02:03:56
Hale Lane 2	16.	3.	4.	13:42	01:15:22	03:19:18
Trig Point 2	16.	3.	4.	14:38	01:05:54	04:25:12
Hale Lane 3	9.	3.	3.	14:25	01:19:22	05:44:34
Trig Point 3	8.	3.	3.	15:15	01:08:41	06:53:15
Hale Lane 4	8.	3.	3.	15:28	01:25:06	08:18:21
Trig Point 4	7.	3.	3.	15:52	01:11:28	09:29:49
Hale Lane 5	7.	3.	3.	16:39	01:31:39	11:01:28
Trig Point 5	7.	3.	3.	18:40	01:24:03	12:25:31
Hale Lane 6	7.	3.	3.	22:35	02:04:18	14:29:49
Trig Point 6	8.	3.	3.	20:00	01:30:04	15:59:53
Hale Lane 7	9.	4.	4.	21:48	01:59:54	17:59:47
Trig Point 7	9.	4.	4.	19:30	01:27:48	19:27:35
Hale Lane 8	7.	4.	4.	21:39	01:59:07	21:26:42
Trig Point 8	7.	4.	4.	18:18	01:22:25	22:49:07
Hale Lane 9	6.	3.	3.	18:49	01:43:33	24:32:40
Trig Point 9	5.	3.	3.	19:36	01:28:12	26:00:52
Hale Lane 10	7.	3.	3.	22:32	02:04:01	28:04:53
Finish	7.	3.	3.	22:14	01:40:04	29:44:57



THE CHEVY CHASE (by Stephen Allport)

It's the first Saturday of July and, falling into both "great stupid ideas of mine" and "let's have a reason to visit family", I enter the Chevy Chase... Before anybody wonders what the actor Cornelius Crane Chase has to do with anything, the Ballard of Chevy Chase recounts a hunt (chase) and resulting battle in either the 14th or 15th century between Percy Earl of Northumberland and Earl Douglas on the other side of the border. Chase's grandmother claims ancestry of the Douglas and gave him the nickname that stuck...

History lesson over. Saturday morning I wander up to Wooler Youth Hostel, get my number collected and dipping thing attached to wrist. The woman behind me is recognised by one of the volunteers from doing the Winter Spine. Then kit check is done (mandatory kit: fleece, snood for a hat, gloves, full waterproofs, map, compass, whistle, food and drink). Chatting to bloke doing kit check, discover I could have had a decent base layer instead of a fleece and it sounds like a snood for a hat is a fun debate he's avoiding. Decide sunscreen is a good idea and call Sarah who brings some up from my parents.

About 9:45, everybody starts wandering along the footpath to the start and I point out to Sarah the house I grew up in:



10 o'clock and we are off. I run past and don't see my brother and his family (oops), and head up to Wooler Common. This is being run under Fell Runners Association rules so although I'm allowed to record the race on my watch, electronic navigation is banned and there is no marked route, just 7 checkpoints you must visit in order. My plan is to keep following runners in front (old joke, you can follow fell runners anywhere except out of the pub) and if goes horribly wrong I have OS app on my phone with maps downloaded, along with the paper map and compass.

At some point before the first checkpoint I passed Graeme of @northernfellrunning which was a hmm moment, only frame of reference for goal time was that I'd finished just ahead of him in a lot shorter race in December and he'd done the Chevy last year around 4:30 but obviously runs more in the hills than I do (and no, Sandilands & Lloyd don't count). Turned out he had a bit of a nightmare of a day.

Checkpoint at Broadstuther done and it starts ramping up slightly, then kicked up to Scald Hill and checkpoint and then onto the Cheviot, average grade 12.8% if you believe Strava, and start walking up the well-worn path, heading into the quite dry peat bog, jumping across the odd muddy puddle.



A few people are walking past me; okay if there is a next time, more (some?) hill training. It was forecast to be windy and it was. As I got onto the flat of the summit of Cheviot you could see the rain cloud providing the shower racing through, and the steps over the drystone wall were an exercise in staying upright. Onto the stone slabs and up to the trig point, and checkpoint reached: 815m up its all kind of downhill from here...



Across some squelchy peat bog, over the fence and then it's time to descend into the Harthope Valley. The photo doesn't do it justice, it's steep (25% average apparently). I'm in controlled walk mode as I descend, others moving quicker, others just sliding down on their backsides.



Make it to the bottom and cross the burn and it's straight up to Hedgehope, a mix of sheep paths covered in bracken, reeds growing in the squelchy stuff and bog moss until you get to just below the summit.

Approaching the top I see the marshals pulling on waterproofs as the wind hits. Check the timing chip in and start descending. It's started raining – not heavy but hard icy cold drops being blown horizontally. I don't stop to put my glasses on, so squint to text Sarah where I am as the family might come out and cheer me on. New phone, old eyes which are squinting, so probably texted her work phone. Careful on the steep bit of the descent and it levels off. Pass one lot of crags realising it's not the next check point...



...then a couple of km later it is. I accept a cup of water and head on. It's wide-open moorland and although there are fewer runners around I can see them in the distance, but it's getting quieter.

The next checkpoint, Brands Corner, is the one that's been worrying me. It's off a marked footpath but by the fence line and skimming the Facebook group beforehand, I saw a comment about it being in a dip. Anyhow, off Langlee Crags, turn right onto a track, after a little over a kilometre I see runners on the right going over a hill as I hit a gate, guessing that's Brands Hill and the checkpoint is the other side of it. Is this the fence I follow? Runner who catches me as I ponder doesn't know so I start following the fence as he goes straight on, hmm other runners are coming at the hill from the other side and this all looks like barbed wire which I don't fancy clambering over, I do a little U-turn and follow the track, then turn back on myself 400 metres later having dodged crossing an interesting gorge. I now follow the fence and can see somebody ahead of me, then I can't see them, keep going and suddenly there is the checkpoint, phew. Thank the volunteers and then the members of mountain rescue stretched out in the sun while thinking "bet they are glad not to be on the tops".



Looking back at the summits

It's then "follow the path" towards the Carey Burn Bridge, which is a mix of running and walking as it's tricky seeing where I'm putting my feet and I really don't want to trip. The bridge is one of the two retirement points, so marshalled, and they were kind enough to bring homemade flapjack. Then it's over the bridge and continue up the valley. At this point the mojo ran out and I struggled to run and as the path narrowed and became more interesting it was definitely walking time. Then a route sign! Turn right and go up the bank, handy as it would be dead easy to overshoot the turn.

It's the final checkpoint!!! Check the timing chip in and keep going, I've had three lasses following me since along Carey Burn; one says "3 miles to go," me: "so parkrun to go," "no, less than a parkrun!" is the reply. Keep going, now retracing the route from earlier, approaching the farm at Wooler Common and it's where is the path? One of the group behind me recognises a tree the path goes round... They go past and I follow them down to the ponds and back into Wooler, slowly losing contact. Keeping an eye on my watch, okay, sub-5 hours is possible: keep going. Onto the top of Ramsey Lane, right onto the footpath, hey it's the bloke I spoke to before Brands Hill, can I get past him? Yes! Round the corner into the Youth Hostel and done... Time 04:57:32; if you believe Strava 31.84 km run with 1,636 m elevation. Hand in timing chip, collect goody bag and ask about chips, and get directed into the Hostel. Chips? One of the sponsors is Particularly Good Potatoes, hence finishers get a cone of chips. Collapse in the grass outside the Hostel and somebody asks how I got on and it's Peter who I'd been chatting to around the first checkpoint at Broadstruther and I accept the offer of some water to wash the sweat and dirt off my face.

I have a look at the finishers bag and it's generous. The bag itself is a reusable drawstring rucksack containing a T-shirt (cotton, bright orange so will probably appear again in the Sandilands bar), bottle of water, bag of crisps, two chocolate biscuits, a handful of jelly beans and a voucher for a drink at the Milk Bar - a local cafe that's another sponsor.

Would I do it again? Yea, would I do it differently? Yes, firstly do slightly more than one 15 mile run along the Vanguard and rely on what fitness is left from London Marathon; and secondly see if I can get the weight of my pack down, not sure how but...

Anyhow, after consuming most of the finishers bag and an ice cream, Sarah helped me back to my parents. At some point I glanced at my watch Training status: "Unproductive" – thanks a lot, Garmin!

THE SHEFFIELD CASTLE PARKRUN (by Martin Gourlay)

I am lucky enough to be able to afford a running coach. Tasha Vernon has been coaching me for over five years, and a recent block of training was aimed at me doing a parkrun on 12th August.

I'm also a HUGE Crystal Palace fan and in the excitement of buying a match ticket for their first game of the season away in Sheffield, I'd completely forgotten that the dates clashed.

Initially I suggested that I didn't run and pushed the parkrun back until September, my next Saturday off, the only time I can do parkruns; this was rejected by Tasha, so I had to find a parkrun to do on the 12th.

My nearest is Riddlesdown, but the times with the trains from Caterham to Croydon to London to get me to Sheffield were too tight to try. The only other option was to research parkruns in Sheffield and travel up on Friday night, ready to do the run on Saturday morning before the game at 3pm.

I found that Sheffield had several parkruns, one of which (Sheffield Castle) was reasonably central for the station, my hotel and the football stadium.

Having travelled up on Friday and arrived at my hotel, once settled I decided to walk to the parkrun so I knew where I would be going the following day. The map app on my phone gave the time to walk from my hotel to the parkrun site as 45 minutes, a little long but I could use it as part of my warm up.

I set off and after approximately 10 minutes I found myself at the bottom of a hill that turned out to be a very long hill. Having reached the top of that hill there were more hills, until I eventually reached the park. I had a quick look on my phone to see where the run started and set off to walk back.

On the walk back I messaged Tasha, commenting on the hill and it was decided that whilst it was not the ideal prep for a parkrun that we had hopes of doing 25/27 minutes in, I just had to do the best warm up I could do.

By the time I got back to my hotel I felt like I'd done a session of running, so felt I had no option but to walk to the station on Saturday and get a cab to the parkrun.

Sheffield Castle is a three-lap undulating course, almost entirely on paths. I believe it was Totley Runners (wearing green vests) who organised the marshals. There was a short briefing with myself and a guy from Stirling in Scotland as the only tourists (interestingly the guy from Stirling was wearing a "50" t-shirt, printed on the back were the names of 50 different parkrun venues he'd run at – something Steve Tyler might look into).

When discussing with Tasha what I'd do pace-wise during the run, I'd hoped for 9:30 for the first kilometre then push on from there. Obviously as it was a three-lap course I decided to try for even splits per lap; however it soon became apparent that the "undulating" nature of the course was going to make it hard to be consistent with pacing: lots of downhills, with two particular uphills, one soon after the other, including a stinging uphill finish.

I looked at my watch at the end of the first lap: 9:44. The second lap time was similar, but I could sense myself tiring: it's just as hard running downhill as it is uphill.

On the hill on the last lap I caught up with someone I'd be chasing for the whole of the lap, a barefoot runner who ran entirely on their forefoot, with very little heel action at all; I pulled level, but they moved ahead, and knowing I had nothing left I just tucked in behind them and that's where I finished.

My time was 29:49, fourth in my age group and 55% age grading, considering how I felt at the finish I'll take that.

I stopped for a brief chat with the barefoot runner. They were aware of me behind them, when I pulled level, they realised I was struggling by the fact that I didn't immediately speed off, so just sped up to stay in front of me. I commented on how strong their calves/quads must be as they run entirely on their forefoot, and we chatted about that before they left.



Someone kindly offered to take the picture of me with the parkrun sign, then it was time to start the long walk back.

LESSONS LEARNT HAVING TORN A HAMSTRING (by Rick Di Mascio)

After a particularly painful run Keith 'suggested' I should see Alan Dolton, as he would get me back on my feet. The following describes the lessons I learnt while Alan was digging away at my leg and I was digging him for information on all the things I had got wrong. I hope you find it useful.

There are three critical things I should have known but now do; they are:



- 1) If you think you have torn a hamstring, get it checked as soon as possible because if it has gone, it won't heal itself. All that happens is that the other muscles around the tear learn to accommodate the injury. This is the single most important lesson I learnt and further down you will see that I sadly had to put it into practice.
- 2) When we are starting out, our muscles advance at a slower rate than our cardio capacity. This may seem a bit of an obscure point but in practice it means that people like me get over-confident and push it too hard. Then trouble.
- 3) The importance of stretching. As it Alan put it 'men in particular will run for an hour and if they do stretch at all (e.g. me) then it might be for no more than a couple of minutes'. I now 'cool down' my legs after a run and stretch for up to 10 minutes and actually have a massage gun which I find to be really helpful.

Act 2

This for me is the most frustrating part. I am very much an early riser operating a simple 9 to 5 rule: bed at 9pm and up at 5am. So I like to have breakfast and go out for a run when there is only me and a few brave dog walkers.

The next lesson is that the legs wake up at a slower rate and that we shouldn't run hard for the first two or three hours after waking up. Not knowing this, or more likely even if I did I would have ignored it anyway, I got a second injury so back to Alan for more digging.



Fixing a torn hamstring

These are my words not Alan's who would be able to give a much better description of what's happening, It seems that a torn hamstring is actually a tear in the muscle fibres, which has caused internal bleeding. Part of Alan's job is then to release the blood through the process of prodding and massaging. After about 20 minutes, Alan will say something like 'your leg is turning slightly red' which for the uninitiated is slightly alarming. All it means is that the blood is getting released to the surface of the skin, and the hamstring is starting to heal.

I hope this hasn't put anyone off going to Alan as he's really good at this. That's all for now, until the next injury and chapter in this medical report.

COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: JUNE – AUGUST 2023

In the Dorking 10-mile road race on 4 June, Striders' men placed seventh in the team event. Tatsuya Okamoto was 26th (59:13), Andrew Aitken 27th (59:28) and Martin Filer 30th (60:22). Steve Corfield placed second in the M60 age-group and 80th overall, in a new club age-group record of 65:08. Striders' women were 16th in the team event. Cindy Siu was the 76th woman to finish (85:09). Maria Gabriel was the 79th woman to finish, setting a new club W55 record of 85:34.

In the second Rosenheim League match of the season, at Sutton Arena on 14 June, Striders' women placed fourth. Sarah Allport was third in the women's 3000 metres (21:06.2). Striders' men placed sixth. James Rhodes was third in the 800 metres (2:17.1).

Striders' men placed third in their Southern Veterans League match at Sutton Arena on 19 June. Steve Corfield won the M60 200 metres in a club age-group record of 28.7 seconds, the M60 800 metres in a club age-group record of 2 minutes 20.7, and the M60 5000 metres (18:38.8). Paul Cripps won the M50 triple jump (9.49) and was third in the M50 javelin (23.58) and fourth in the shot (7.91). Jon Dean was third in the M60 shot (5.76), javelin (19.24) and triple jump (7.24). Justin Macenhill was third in the M50 800 metres (2:22.6) and 5000 metres (19:18.6). Striders' women were fifth in their match. Consuelo Kennefick won the W50 800 metres in a club age-group record of 2:59.8. Lorraine Hunte was second in the W60 200 metres in a club age-group record of 36.0. Vanessa Wheeler was third in the W60 800 metres (3:52.2).

Striders had 18 finishers in the Richmond 10K on 25 June, which incorporated the Surrey Championships. Striders' men placed sixth in the team event. Tatsuya Okamoto was 19th (35:41), Andrew Aitken 26th (36:00) and Martin Filer 31st (36:30). Steve Corfield was second in the M60 category and 74th overall (38:50). Niamh Vincent was the 42nd woman to finish, placing 223rd overall (45:28).

Ally Whitlock ran very well to be the third woman to finish the Centurion Wendover Woods 100-mile race on 8 July, placing seventh overall (29:44:57). For more details, see her article earlier in this magazine.

Striders had 12 finishers in the Elmore 7-mile road race at Chipstead on 15 June, which was the fifth race in this year's Surrey Road League. Tatsuya Okamoto placed 14th (40:33), Martin Filer 19th (41:13), Andrew Aitken 21st (41:25) and Conor O'Hara-Barrett completed the scoring team in 43rd (44:00).

In the final Southern Veterans League match of the season, at Wimbledon on 17 July, Steve Corfield won the M60 100 metres (14.1), the M60 400 metres (62.2) and the M60 mile (5:25.8). All three of these were new club age-group records. Paul Cripps won the M50 100 metres (14.2), the M50 high jump (1.45) and the M50 long jump (4.04), and was third in the M50 discus (18.42). Stephen Allport won the M35 2000 metre walk (13:41.3). Richard Dyson was second in the M35 400 metres (58.0) and third in the 100 metres (12.8). There were also third places for Peter Johnson in the M50 mile (5:45.8) and Steve Tyler in the M60 discus (18.12). Striders' men placed third of the eight clubs in the match and in the final league table. Striders' women placed sixth in their match and in the final league table. Lorraine Hunte won the W60 100 metres (17.6) while Annabel Crouch was fourth in the W35 100 metres (20.5).

In the Elmbridge 10K on 23 July, Striders were led by Andrew Aitken who placed 24th (36:18), with Martin Filer 32nd (36:46). Steve Corfield was second in the M60 age-group and 62nd overall (38:51), while Erik Schrijnemaekers completed the scoring team in 67th (39:07). Cindy Siu was 240th (51:08). The penultimate event in this year's Surrey Road League was the Wedding Day 7K in Bushy Park on 28 July. Martin Gourlay placed 396th (41:43), Karen Peake 463rd (47:12) and Keith Dube 464th (47:12).

In the England Masters Inter-Area Challenge at Nuneaton on 6 August, Steve Corfield ran very well to set a club M50 record of 4 minutes 52.18 for the 1500 metres, placing fourth in a high-quality field.

In the Eastern Division of the Rosenheim League, Striders' women finished fourth while their men were sixth. Striders' women therefore qualified for the League Final, at Kingsmeadow on 16 August, where they fielded ten competitors and finished seventh of the eight clubs in the match. There were fifth places for Nikki Javan in the A 3000 metres (13:02.43) and for Sarah Allport in the 1500 metres (9:14.8).

40 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN JULY – DECEMBER 1983

The Surrey 20-mile championship took place at Wimbledon on 16 July. Melvyn Page of the short-lived club Omega AC won in 1 hour 51 minutes 22. Omega were based at a public house in Weybridge, and their leading runners had previously been members of Walton AC. For Croydon Harriers, John Lee placed fifth (2:00:16) while Dave Bryant was 32nd (2:34:29). No Striders competed.

At Crystal Palace on 23 July, Bob Benn ran a lifetime best of 1 minute 48.96 seconds for 800 metres, which was the second fastest time ever recorded by a Croydon Harrier. Bob was a close friend of Olympic 800 metre champion Steve Ovett, and was well-known for acting as a 'pacemaker' in some of Ovett's world record attempts.

In September 1983 Striders moved the club headquarters to the CASSAC building in the south-west corner of Lloyd Park. The club also continued to hold lunchtime runs from the Philips office in West Croydon. The CASSAC building was to remain Striders' home until May 2001, when we moved to our current base at Sandilands. The CASSAC building was subsequently demolished in 2007.

The Surrey Road Relay was held at Brockwell Park on 10 September. Home club Herne Hill led from start to finish to win this event for the first time for 21 years. There was a close battle for second place between South London Harriers, Croydon Harriers and Woking. SLH finished nine seconds ahead of Croydon, with Woking a further seven seconds behind. Croydon's team comprised Alan Dolton (12:48), Alex Nisbett (12:44), Ken Penney (12:42), Ian Wright (12:38), Don Faircloth (12:40) and Gary Bishop (12:43).

The 33rd annual London to Brighton road race took place on 1 October. Croydon Harriers' ultra-distance runner James Zarei completed the course in 7 hours 09 minutes, becoming only the fourth member of Croydon Harriers to complete this event.

The third annual Croydon 10-mile road race took place on 23 October. It was held on the same course as the previous year: a relatively fast two-lap course starting in Oaks Road and finishing in the grounds of John Ruskin School. The school has subsequently been demolished, and Postmill Close now stands on the site. Striders subsequently adopted the course for our annual club handicap, until the arrival of Tramlink prompted us to switch to our current course for reasons of safety. The 1983 Croydon '10' attracted a large field of 1200 runners, more than 60 of whom completed the course in less than an hour. Andy Evans of South London Harriers won by almost two minutes, recording an impressive time of 49 minutes 19. Barry Heath of the Royal Marines was second (51:11) and Ray Marriott of South London Harriers was third (51:42). Host club Croydon Harriers had two athletes in the first six, with Gary Bishop finishing fifth (52:16) and future Strider Alan Dolton sixth (52:44). The first over-40 was Don Claxton of Herne Hill, who finished seventh overall (52:47). The second over-40 was Robin Dickson of Croydon Harriers (53:24). The first Strider was club chairman Steve Owen who ran a personal best 62 minutes 10, ten seconds ahead of club colleague Miles Mayne. Striders' third finisher was club secretary Mick Meech (62:32).

The first woman was again Margaret Lockley of London Olympiades, whose time of 61 minutes 58 saw her finish more than five minutes clear of the runner-up, Jennie Yeoell of Croydon Harriers (67:34). The first female Strider was Susanne Eyre, who was the 12th woman to finish (75:20).

The Surrey Veterans' Cross-Country Championships were held at Richmond Park in November. The winner was Fred Bell of Hercules-Wimbledon, with Don Claxton of Herne Hill finishing second and Robin Dickson of Croydon Harriers placing third. Croydon won the team event. The first over-60 was Bob Penney of Croydon Harriers.

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country League began its fifth season. Croydon Harriers won the first match, led by their outstanding 16-year-old Niobe Menendez.

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country Championships were held at Morden on 10 December. The senior champion was Jo White of local club Mitcham AC (who have subsequently been absorbed into Sutton & District). Rachel Disley of Hounslow placed second. Mitcham won the team prize with Downland Harriers (who no longer exist) second and Croydon Harriers third. For Croydon, Jill Burchett was tenth, Karen Ellis eleventh and Samantha Lloyd 25th. Croydon had two winners in the younger age groups: Niobe Menendez won the under-17 race while Karen Sutton won the under-13 race.

25 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 1998

At Striders' AGM on 30 September, club secretary Michele Lawrence reported that our membership had risen to 73. After debate, the meeting rejected a proposal to split our Wednesday runs into separate 'fast' and 'slow' groups. (This change was subsequently implemented in the summer of 2006, following a steady increase in the number of runners taking part.)

On 4 October, Alan Purchase ran very well to complete the London to Brighton road race in 8 hours 49 minutes 26.

The fifteenth Croydon 10K was held on 11 October. The winner was Croydon Harriers' talented 20-year-old Somalian, Yacin Yusuf, who ran 31 minutes 37. He was two seconds ahead of former Harrier Gary Bishop, running for Box Hill Racers. Former Strider Lee Morgan, running for South London Harriers, placed third (33:29). The first female finisher was Jane Lansdown of Striders, who recorded 40 minutes 43. Striders' first man home was Eric Parker, who placed eighth in 35 minutes 55. He was followed by John Kirby (37:50), Alan Dolton (38:05), John McGilvray (38:24), Colin Cotton (38:33), Henk Witlox (41:01), Phil Mazur (41:16), Neil Furze (45:04) and Tom Littlewood (46:50).

On 17 October, Striders' women competed in Division Two of the Surrey Women's Cross-Country League at Tilford. Their first finisher was Jane Lansdown, who placed seventh. She was followed by Elene Kayum (24th), Sandra Johnson (46th), Penny Little (54th) and Michele Lawrence (55th). The team finished seventh.

On the same day, Striders' men competed in Division Three of the Surrey Cross-Country League, on a very tough course at Wisley. Eric Parker was first home in 22nd, with Tony Sheppard next in 36th. They were followed by John McGilvray, John Kirby and Colin Cotton. Striders finished a disappointing eighth of the nine clubs in the division.

The East Surrey League held its annual cross-country race at Lloyd Park on 31 October. Striders finished fourth. Our scoring team comprised Eric Parker, Tony Sheppard, John Kirby and Nigel Davidson.

The second match of the Surrey Women's Cross-Country League match was at Brockwell Park on 14 November, where Jane Lansdown again led Striders' challenge. Our other scorers were Elene Kayum, Barbara Cole, Clare Mitchell and Michele Lawrence.

Our men were in action a week later at Stoke Park in Guildford, on an unusually short, flat and fast course around playing fields. Our first man home was Tony Sheppard. He was followed by Eric Parker, Nigel Davidson, John Kirby, John McGilvray, Colin Cotton and Alan Dolton.

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships were held on a very muddy course at Happy Valley in Old Coulsdon on 12 December. The senior women's race was won by Anita Mellowdew of Epsom, who completed the five-mile course in 34 minutes 07. Estle Viljoen of Hercules-Wimbledon was second (34:57) and Rachel Disley of Thames Hare & Hounds was third (35:07). Herne Hill won the team event for the fourth successive year, with South London Harriers second and Thames Hare & Hounds third. Striders finished seventh, led by Jane Lansdown who ran well to place 14th of the 69 finishers (37:53). One place behind her was Pippa Crocker of South London Harriers (38:27), who is still running well 25 years later under her married name as Pippa Major. Striders' second finisher was Michele Lawrence who placed 51st (64:08). Barbara Cole was 53rd (46:32) and Wendy Smith was 56th (47:08).

The senior men's race was won by Yacin Yusuf, who became the first Croydon Harrier to win this event. He completed the 12-kilometre course in 43 minutes 22. Yacin subsequently moved to Belgrave but retired from athletics while still in his twenties. He later became a teacher at Haling Manor. The team event was won by South London Harriers, whose team was led by Stuart Major who placed fifth (45:27). Their sixth scorer was former Strider Lee Morgan, who placed 21st (47:44). Herne Hill were second, Box Hill third, Ranelagh fourth and Croydon Harriers fifth. Striders finished ninth, led by Eric Parker who placed 72nd of the 172 finishers (53:01). John Kirby was 77th (53:26), Colin Cotton 93rd (54:47), John McGilvray 96th (55:18), Nigel Davidson 101st (55:50) and Nigel Costiff completed the scoring team in 121st (58:23). Striders also had four non-scorers: Simon Smith was 143rd (63:07), Bob Owen 165th (69:33), Ron Carver 167th (72:03) and Kevin Burnett 171st (83:57).

10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 2013

On 21 September Striders had 31 finishers in a mob match against Blackheath & Bromley, in conjunction with the Bromley parkrun. Blackheath won by 1031 points to 922. Striders were led by Ernie Hann who placed fifth of the 388 finishers in 18 minutes 22. Justin Macenhill was eighth (18:38), Richard Lee-Smith tenth (18:49) and Damian Macenhill eleventh (19:08). Striders' women were led by Becky Laurence who was the 12th woman to finish (23:03).

Striders hosted their 22nd annual Switchback cross-country race on 29 September, with Debra Bourne succeeding Mick Turner as race organiser. The race was won by Neil Reissland of Collingwood in 29 minutes 17, while the first woman was Clare Elms of Dulwich in 31 minutes 36. Striders' Rachel Lindley ran very well to be the second woman to finish, placing 15th overall (32:51). Steph Upton was the eighth woman to finish, placing 47th overall (37:42). Striders' men were led by Ernie Hann who finished eleventh (32:23). Chris Morton was 12th (32:27), Simon Webster 17th (33:06) and Gearoid Quigley 20th (33:28).

The first Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season was held at Richmond Park on 19 October. Striders' men had 18 finishers. They were led by Iain Harrison who ran well to place eleventh, covering the five-mile course in 29:26. Lee Flanagan also ran well for 18th (29:58) with Matt Smith 27th (30:29), Ernie Hann 35th (30:41) and Damian Macenhill 39th (30:55). Justin Macenhill was 51st (31:50) with Richard Lee-Smith 54th (32:03), Taylor Huggins 70th (32:48), Simon Ambrosi 74th (32:59) and Greg Williams completing the scoring team in 88th (33:29). The team finished fourth of the nine competing clubs.

Meanwhile Striders' women placed 15th in their Division Two match at Lightwater. Zoe Williams ran well to place 40th of the 146 finishers, covering the four-mile course in 29 minutes 40. Alice Ewen was 75th (32:08) with Becky Laurence 76th (32:10), Linda Daniel 94th (34:04) and Steph Moss 99th (34:29).

Striders produced an excellent team performance to win the East Surrey League's annual cross-country race at Lloyd Park on 26 October. Both Striders and Reigate scored 34 points, but Striders won the match as their fourth scorer was ahead of Reigate's fourth scorer. Striders were led by Damian Macenhill who ran a well-judged race, moving through the field on the second lap to place fourth out of the 71 finishers, covering the muddy five-mile course in 31 minutes 49. Ernie Hann was ninth (33:01), Taylor Huggins 10th (33:05) and Richard Lee-Smith 11th (33:21). Striders' Rachel Lindley also ran well to be the second woman to finish, placing 19th overall in 35 minutes 42. Serena Stracey was 36th (37:26) and Becky Laurence 56th (41:24). Striders' youngest competitor, Adam Shew, placed third in the under-13 race.

Striders' men placed ninth out of 41 teams in the Reigate Priory Relays on 2 November. The team comprised Ernie Hann (15:58), Lee Flanagan (15:38), Iain Harrison (15:27) and Damian Macenhill (16:10).

The second Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season was held at Wimbledon Common on 9 November. Striders' men finished eighth of the nine clubs in the match, and slipped to seventh place in the overall Division Two table. Striders were again led by Iain Harrison who ran well to place 14th of the 155 finishers, covering the muddy five-mile course in 29 minutes 17. Lee Flanagan was 28th (30:10), Matthew Smith 35th (30:32), Taylor Huggins 64th (32:11), Justin Macenhill 69th (32:22), Simon Ambrosi 82nd (33:01), Andy Marlow 88th (33:15), Barry White 89th (33:17) and Chris Morton 90th (33:19). Mick Turner completed the scoring team in 104th (34:09).

Striders' men placed 22nd in the London Cross-Country Championships at Parliament Hill on 16 November. They were led by Taylor Huggins who placed 131st, completing the ten-kilometre course in 39 minutes 38. Barry White was 155th (40:34), Chris Morton 174th (41:28) and Simon Pannell 199th (42:59).

Striders finished 12th in the South of the Thames Cross-Country Association's inter-club race for the Brent Shield, at Streatham Common on 23 November. Ernie Hann placed 58th, completing the five-mile course in 32 minutes 37. Taylor Huggins was 83rd (34:14), Barry White 113th (35:37), Chris Morton 137th (37:07), Sam O'Dongo 146th (37:37), Steve Rhodes 174th (39:27), Dan Astley 186th (40:38) and Mike Stewart 215th (46:03). Alice Ewen was the 53rd woman to finish (43:53).

November 2013 brought the sad news of the death of Helen Furze, only a few days after her 48th birthday. One of our best-ever female runners, she had been diagnosed with cancer in July 2012.



Helen Furze, one of Striders' best female runners, who died of cancer in November 2013

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