

Striders of Croydon

DECEMBER 2023 MAGAZINE



Harry Madgwick-Lawton on his way to victory in the 'Switchback' five-mile race on 8 October
(photo by Stephen Allport)

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Competitive Highlights: September–November 2023

20 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Winter 2003/04

10 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Winter 2013/14

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 7 January – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Dorking

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

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

Sunday 4 February – British Masters 10K Championships – Goodwood

Saturday 10 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Div 2 – Lloyd Park

Saturday 10 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Div 3 – Lloyd Park

Sunday 21 April – London Marathon – London (Striders marshalling)



Nikki Sturzaker, the first woman in the 'Switchback' on 8 October (photo by Stephen Allport)

EDITORIAL: DECEMBER 2023

Welcome to the December issue of our club magazine. Our leading article is from Ally Whitlock, who ran a highly scenic ultra-marathon in the Peak District earlier this year, and gives us a very well-illustrated account of the race.

We follow this with an article from Michelle Klein, outlining her running journey from joining Striders nine years ago to qualifying as a 'Leader in Running Fitness'. I was interested to note that Michelle's first run with Striders was on the 'Addiscombe' route, which used to be a regular Wednesday route for us (and was one of my favourite club routes) but seems to have fallen into disuse.

At the start of October, Debra Bourne ran her first 200-kilometre race, at Samphire Hoe. She gives us her account of the race.

We recognise that there are some Striders who would prefer to improve their speed at distances of less than ten miles, rather than tackling ultra-distance races. Therefore, we also include a review of a book entitled 'Run Fast', written by the very experienced coach and former World Masters Marathon champion, Hal Higdon. This is followed by our usual 'competitive highlights' and history articles.

Our men have made a good start to the Surrey Cross-Country League season. They have had 22 finishers in each of our first two matches, and did well to finish second out of the ten competing clubs in each match. With the final match due to be held on our home course at Lloyd Park in February, we should have a good chance of being promoted back to Division Two, where we have spent 17 of the previous 22 years.

Unfortunately our women have not shown quite the same level of enthusiasm for cross-country, fielding six runners for the opening match and eight runners in the second match. However they have still done well enough to be placed above the relegation zone at the halfway stage of the season.

October saw the end of the Surrey Road League season. Our men did very well to finish the season in seventh place of the 30 clubs in the league. Our women were unable to field complete teams of three in some of the races, but still finished the season in 19th place.

On a personal note, I am very grateful to the many Striders who expressed their good wishes during my unexpected recent stay in hospital. I was particularly impressed that our Social Secretary, Elsa, relinquished the place she had booked on one of our speed sessions in order to visit me there.

I hope that all Striders continue to enjoy their running.

Alon



SPRINTING ALONG THE SPINE OF BRITAIN (by Ally Whitlock)

In the summer of 2022, I discovered the beauty of the Peak District. I know, late to the party. Somewhere I had intended to visit for many years but had never quite made it that far north.

One Friday in mid-August, I looked at my diary and realised that I had an unexpectedly clear week coming up. By Monday evening I was in Edale, the small Derbyshire town in the heart of the Peak District, sitting outside my tent with a gin in my hand, watching the world go by.

After an early morning train via Sheffield, I arrived, rucksack on my back, in the picturesque village at lunchtime. I pitched my tiny one-person tent at the idyllic Newfold Farm Campsite nestled at the foot of the Pennine Way and by early afternoon was scampering up the nearest hill.

And what a hill.



Those familiar with the Peaks will know Grindsbrook Clough. For a southern girl, this was less hill, more mountain-esque and unlike anything I had ever run* (*gently tip-toed on) before. At points, with no discernible path, I was clambering over huge rocks and literally climbing up a waterfall.

But oh my god. I was in literal heaven.

I had no idea what I was doing, or even in all honesty where I was going. All I had was a route borrowed from that there internet on my watch and I was blindly following the little blue arrow as it took me further into the rocky enclave. But with every cautious step and every glance over my shoulder at the view beneath me, my smile grew. I knew I was discovering something magical.

At the top, with my heart pounding from the effort of the climb, I simply stood and looked. I marvelled that just a few short hours ago I was submerged in the hustle and bustle of London town, and now, here I was standing by myself on one of the highest points in the Peaks (Kinder Scout at 636 metres).



I continued following the blue arrow on my watch to the trig point at Kinder Low, around Edale Rocks, down Jacob's Ladder and back to Edale via the Pennine Way. In 8 short miles, I fell in love with the Peak District.

SKYLINE

The following day, I ran the iconic Edale Skyline route circling the Edale Valley.

From Edale, I go straight into a lung-busting climb up to Ringing Roger. The path is a simple worn groove between the multitude of rocks. I jump over small gorges. In the winter they would be gushing waterfalls but in the heat of the summer, there is barely a trickle of water. I pull myself over large rocks and turn to watch the remnants of a cloudy sunrise light up the valley behind me.

Along Upper Tor, my eyes pick out the route I ran the day before. Onto Edale Head with Kinder in the background. Brown Knoll to the Lord's Seat and onto Mam Tor. Standing on the top of Mam Tor, I look over the ten miles I've already run.



On the Edale Skyline route

Lose Hill, down to the village of Hope and a vegan sausage roll. Onto Win Hill, overlooking Ladybower Reservoir. Across fields and along the ridge, looking across the whole valley to Mam Tor and Lose Hill. And finally scrambling back down to Edale.

24 miles of some of the hardest and most challenging running that I had ever done. But also some of the most fun and rewarding.

4,600ft of elevation gain with 1000ft in the first 1.5 miles – at times I was quite literally climbing. The whole route was less jogging and more hiking/scrambling. Arriving sore, tired, and slightly grimy back in Edale at the end of the day, I felt a sense of pride in what I had achieved.

PENNINE WAY

After a night snuggled deep in my sleeping bag, lulled into a fitful sleep by the sound of heavy rain beating down on the tent, I was somewhat apprehensive about venturing up into the hills again. But I was also determined to make the most of my last few hours in the Peaks.

This was to be my proper introduction to the Pennine Way. The path I had spent the past 48 hours looking out on from my tent.

The Pennine Way was the first National Trail in England and has subsequently become one of the UK's most famous long-distance paths. It follows the rocky spine of England from Edale, through the Peak District, the Yorkshire Dales and the North Pennines before heading over Hadrian's Wall to the Cheviots and finishing, some 268 miles later, in the Scottish town of Kirk Yetholm.

My introduction was a simple 8 miles out, 8 miles back, ascending and later descending Jacob's Ladder; a steep, rocky, never-ending climb. Up and over Kinder Low again; this time I carried on towards Kinder Downfall.

As I ran (*hiked/scrambled) along the ridge at the top, the fierce wind – blowing in every direction – was bitterly cold. I was wrapped up in a base layer, waterproof, hat and wore thick gloves. In August. I began to understand the importance of having proper kit when in the hills and mountains.

Despite the less-than-optimum weather conditions, the rocky but runnable path from Kinder had me skipping along with joy. In just three days I'd found my confidence on the technical terrain and I ran gleefully up and down the path, my feet dancing as I bounded from rock to rock with a huge smile on my face!



Looking out over Kinder Downfall, summer 2022.

I crossed Kinder Downfall, the magical waterfall where when conditions are right, the water blows back on itself, creating a steam cloud that can be seen from miles around. Today, it was just an ordinary stream. Then, midway along the flagstone path leading to Snakes Pass – and having already sneaked in a couple of extra miles – I reluctantly turned to make my way back towards Edale and the train back to real life.

I could have quite happily kept on running along the Pennine Way.

On my way home, full of endorphins and buoyed by a pint while waiting for my train, I popped my name on the 2023 Summer Spine Sprint waitlist.

A bit of background. The Spine Sprint is part of the Montane Spine Race Series. Marketed as “Britain’s most Brutal”, the full Spine race runs the entire 268-mile length of the Pennine Way from Edale to Kirk Yetholm in Scotland. Called the Spine because the Pennine Way – running up the middle of the nation – is referred to as the Spine of Britain. The Sprint, at a mere 46 miles, is its somewhat younger sibling.

Fast forward ten months.

RACE DAY

I am in Edale again, this time with 100 other intrepid souls about to sprint* 46 miles along the Pennine Way from Edale to Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire. (*there will be no sprinting...).

Still some 20 minutes from kick-off, the promised sunshine has turned into rain and I’m wrapped up in my waterproofs trying to keep warm. There are whispered rumours of incoming storms lasting for several hours. I feel a sense of dread as I remember the bitter wind at the Kinder Summit last summer. I run these races partly for the challenge and partly for the beauty of the routes. When I say beauty, I mean the landscape photo opportunities of sunny views, blue skies, green grasses and trees in full bloom. The grey and dullness of the rain somewhat spoils the photo and the joy of romping around the rugged countryside.

I arrived at Race HQ with Windsor Andy some two hours ago after a slightly long and convoluted train journey from the finish line in Hebden Bridge, via Manchester, to the start in Edale. In our wisdom, we decided to camp in Hebden Bridge so that at the end of the race we could just roll into our tents. I know future me will thank past me, but current me is regretting the 5am wake-up to get to kit check and the race start in time.





Campsite views

It's the most stringent kit check I have ever experienced, for the most detailed and comprehensive mandatory kit list I have ever been given. But I think back to my brief foray on the Pennine Way last August when even in the middle of summer, bad weather made it feel like winter and I know that every item on the kit list is there for my safety. (Except perhaps the shit shovel... That is probably for other people's safety...). I only hope that I don't actually need to use any of it, but equally, I know that if anything should go wrong, I am carrying the right equipment to be able to look after myself and keep myself safe.

THE KIT LIST

THIS LIST IS FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES, A FULL KIT LIST WITH SPECIFICATIONS AND GUIDANCE WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO YOU. The compulsory items are in addition to the layers you start the race in. You must always carry the compulsory equipment throughout your race and you will be checked at checkpoints. We may spot check at any time for safety and failure to comply will incur a range of penalties which depending on severity could ultimately result in disqualification.

COMPULSORY KIT

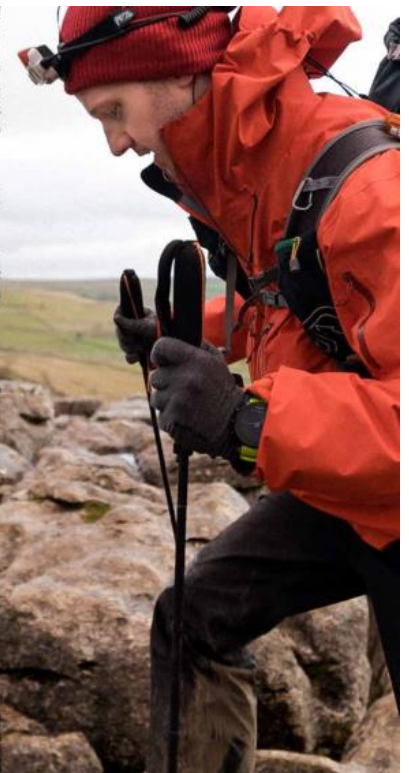
- Backpack
- Compass
- Course Maps
- Knife
- Goggles or Safety Glasses
- Head Torch
- Waterproof Jacket
- Waterproof Trousers
- Hat
- Gloves
- Spare Socks
- Neck Gaiter
- Spare Base Layer Top
- Spare Base Layer Bottoms
- Spare Cold Weather Mid Layer
- Appropriate Footwear
- Bivvy Bag
- 3L Water Carrying Capacity
- Food
- Mobile Phone
- Mug - 400ml Capacity
- Rear Red Pack Light
- Toilet Kit

COMPULSORY MEDICAL KIT

- Full Size Emergency Blanket
- Plasters/Dressings
- Antihistamine
- Imodium
- Antiseptic Spray or Wipes
- Blister Care Kit
- Personal Medication

RECOMMENDED KIT

- GPS Device
- Sleeping Bag
- Sleeping Mat
- Spare Batteries
- Additional Food
- CP Towel and Footwear
- Charging Plugs and Battery Blocks for Devices



Registration is smooth and painless. You can tell that the Spine crew have done this many, many times before. My kit is checked. It passes. I show my ID and I'm given my race number, my photo is taken for online tracking and the tracker is fixed to my pack. I now have an hour or so to faff and repack my bag.

Alongside the multitude of mandatory equipment, I am carrying three litres of water. As the race is self-supported – there are no aid stations or checkpoints on route – I am carrying as much fluid as I can. Three litres is equal to three kilos. My pack weighs just over 6kg in total. Equivalent to a little over 10% of my body weight. It's heavy.

I've done a number of training runs, including reps up and down Box Hill and 50km in the Pennines three weeks ago, carrying the full race day kit to try and get used to the weight, but it is still a shock when I pick the bag up.





Start line selfie with Windsor Andy!



Standing on the start line, I'm slightly apprehensive. I sneaked this race into an already full schedule and my lead-up has been far from perfect. I came out of a hard marathon training block at the start of May with a tight Achilles. This took a few weeks to settle, and I had barely started a very condensed Spine training block before a knee niggle scuppered any plans of squeezing in any heat and hill training specificity ahead of race day.

It was only three days ago that I made the decision to run. Two weeks ago, my left knee hurt walking. In fact, it pretty much constantly hurt. I had no idea what I had done to it. I went to bed one night, woke up the next morning, got out of bed and my knee hurt... One of those freakish niggles with no rhyme or reason behind it.

It's only down to my fabulous sports therapist Lauren that I am standing on this start line. Three sessions of massage, ultra-sound and intensive rehab exercises worked wonders. Rather than treating the symptom – a sore knee – she traced and treated the cause, a tight sartorius muscle pulling on the knee. Loosening this muscle, eased the pressure on the knee and there was not a single grumble from it all race. For a runner, a good sports therapist is worth their weight in gold!

EDALE

At 12 midday the starting gun sounds. Full of nervous enthusiasm the crowd surges across the start line and runs across the field as one. Rain is beating down on us as we leave the grass and hit the road through town. We run all the way through town before passing Newfold Farm campsite. I smile as I remember last summer's adventure.

Turning onto the Pennine Way, I reel in my ego as I slow to walk up the gentle incline. Many continue running and pass me one by one. I remind myself this is my race, no one else's, and that it doesn't matter what anyone else does in the first mile. It's hard. Egos are big things and to have half the field overtake me in the first mile brings a flutter of doubt and uncertainty to my mind. But I know the route, I know what is coming. I know walking the early gentle inclines will conserve energy and mean I may be able to run the later hills.

Today, knowing what is to come feels like a major advantage. The race is self-navigated. There are no race markings, no arrows pointing us in the right direction or pieces of tape flapping in the wind to guide us along the path. The Pennine Way is a National Trail and as such is marked with the iconic acorn, but the marking is at times somewhat ambiguous or even non-existent and I wouldn't want to rely on it. I have the race route on my watch and having run all bar about seven miles of it previously, I feel confident with the navigation.

After running the first eight miles last summer, I popped up north last month to recce the latter stages of the race. Staying overnight at a youth hostel in Manchester, I got an early train to Glossop and ran along local trails before picking up the Pennine Way just before Topside Reservoir. From there I ran right through to the finish in Hebden Bridge. About 30 miles in total. There are only 7-8 miles between Snake Pass and Torside that I haven't run.

Knowing the route gives me peace of mind. I can visualise much of it, I know what is coming; I know where the trickiest sections are, where the runnable bits are and where there are possibilities of water top-ups. (With the lack of aid stations, water availability during the race is one of my biggest worries.)

Within the first ten minutes, I take my waterproofs off. It's still lightly raining but after only a mile I am far too hot and decide I would prefer to be rain wet than sweat wet.

On the approach to Jacob's Ladder, the eat alarm on my watch sounds. 30 minutes have passed already. I eat a peanut butter sandwich.

As I did with Autumn100 last October, I am not looking at my watch for anything other than feed alerts and keeping a check on my heart rate. It's on my wrist, it's recording as usual, but I am not interested in time, distance or pace. My strategy is simple, run the best I can, keep my heart rate in check and don't forget that in three weeks' time, I am running Wendover Woods 100... (aka don't break myself...). I will also use my watch for navigation when I need to.

Peanut butter sandwich fuelled, I feel surprisingly strong on Jacob's Ladder, the first significant climb of the race. Jacob's Ladder, named after a local farmer, Jacob Marshall, who farmed the land at Edale Head in the 18th Century, is a set of stone steps cut into the hillside, ascending from the small hamlet of Upper Booth onto the Kinder plateau.



Looking down Jacob's Ladder in the summer of 2022 – I didn't pause for a photo during the Spine!

From the Grade II listed packhorse bridge over the River Noe at the bottom, to the cairn part way up, is around 300ft in a quarter of a mile. Keep going right to the Kinder Low trig point and you've climbed 800+ft in a little over a mile.

I keep my effort in check but I find it easier to power up the hills rather than dawdle. Baring the occasional brief glance over my shoulder to take in the view, I don't stop. I now overtake many of the people who overtook me earlier.

It was the final block of hill training that was missed with my untimely knee niggle so to feel so strong on the first big climb is an early confidence boost I wasn't expecting. Some of my apprehension begins to drift away in the wind and is replaced by a renewed enthusiasm.

I settle into my groove dancing along the path, letting my feet follow the worn groove between the rocks. The rain has stopped and the sun is threatening to break through the clouds. I remember the joy I felt here last summer and I can't help but smile. Past Edale rocks and the trig at Kinder Low. The path is just as I remember it and I scamper along it with glee.

Crossing Kinder Downfall the stream is completely dry. The water isn't even flowing in the right direction, let alone the wrong direction... I didn't realise that there had been that little rainfall up here.

From a cramped start, the field has started to spread out. There are a few people in front of me and a few behind me but we're no longer running side by side, jostling for space on a narrow path. There are three or

four of us who cross paths fairly regularly between Kinder Low and Snake Pass. One of us is strong on the inclines and pulls ahead. Another is stronger on the descents. Someone else comes alive jumping from rock to rock on the flatter paths. We share a few words here and there.



Just past Kinder Downfall

At Mill Hill, we turn right and hit the flagstone path across Black Moor. With a small incline, the smoother surface is pretty runnable. I'm always slightly wary of the flagstones because although they are a path as such, they are often uneven and any small lack of concentration could result in a trip.

10 miles in and we hit the A57 road crossing. The Safety Team (ST) are parked up here. The ST are stationed at various points along the race route, primarily for, well, safety, but they also carry a limited supply of water. It's not an aid station, they have nothing else, and the maximum they will give you is 500ml if you need it. You also can't guarantee where they will be because if there is an accident or a runner is in trouble, that is their priority.

I've drunk close to a litre so far so I top up one of my soft flasks. Although it's overcast and the temperature has dropped by several degrees since the unbearable heat of yesterday afternoon, it's still very humid. I am struggling to quench my thirst and whilst I still have a couple of litres of water in my pack, I am anxious about running out so take the opportunity for a refill.

FALL

Leaving the ST behind I am on new-to-me territory. This is the mid-section that I have not run so I know I need to be a bit more observant with navigation. A few minutes later I take my eyes off of the path to check the route on my watch. I'm not looking where I am going, I stumble, fall and slide ungracefully across the gravel path. Self-consciously, I pick myself up and look around. Thankfully no one saw me. Blood is pouring down my leg, mixing with the dirt and dust. My left hand – put out to stop my fall – is also bleeding and there is dirt all up my arms.

I'm annoyed with myself and berate my stupidity for falling. I am also stubborn and that stubbornness immediately comes into force. A fall isn't going to stop me. I glance down, my knee looks a mess but I am pretty certain it is only a graze. Grazes always initially look worse than they are. I barely break my stride as I keep moving. Nothing hurts, no bones or muscles appear damaged, just a wounded pride. As I'm jogging along I dab half-heartedly at the cuts with a tissue soaked in anti-bac hand gel. I have my first aid kit in my pack but decide that at the moment, it won't help. Dressings won't stick and there is no point in cleaning the wound properly until the bleeding stops.

After 20 or so minutes I cross a stream and dip my buff in the cool water to wash the worst of the dirt and dried blood off. I slap on some more anti-bac gel to try and keep the wounds as clean as I can. Whilst it stings like hell, I now look marginally less dishevelled. As it's not affecting my running I decide to simply ignore it.

With my mind distracted by the fall, I don't fully appreciate this section around Bleaklow. I would have enjoyed it a lot more in a slightly more positive frame of mind. Undulating rocky paths crisscross tiny streams. Where the Kinder plateau was fairly barren, here the path winds through moorland filled with colourful heather and grasses. I see Torside Reservoir, the largest man-made lake in Longdendale, in the distance, and know that I will be on familiar paths again soon. It was somewhere around here that I joined the Pennine Way three weeks ago.



Torside Reservoir

I drop quickly down from the ridge along Torside Clough to the reservoir. A quickly corrected navigational error whilst chatting with another runner (my only one in the whole race) adds a couple of hundred metres as I run around and over the concrete barriers to the other side. 16 miles in and it's starting to feel a little tougher.

BLACK HILL

Coming up from Crowden I'm about to hit the second-biggest climb of the race, on Black Hill. It was one of my favourite parts of the run a few weeks back. I like the climbs. I'm not fast but I'm strong and I can keep on going. Like with Jacob's Ladder, I keep my effort in check and simply keep moving.

The path gently winds its way through a carpet of deep green ferns. It is grassy and runnable. The higher we climb, the rockier it becomes. Soon we're clambering up and over rocks. Finding groves to steady our feet whilst pulling ourselves up with our hands. I relish the challenge, again marvelling at just how strong my body is.

Halfway up, I stop at a small stream tumbling down the hillside. The crystal-clear water gushing over the rocks is enticing. I pull out my water filter. Fill the bottle from a small waterfall, screw on the filter and drink. The water is cool and oh so fresh. It's absolutely delicious! I greedily gulp down a whole bottle before refilling again and stashing the bottle in my pack. This is the first time I have used my filter and drunk from streams. A gadget I never thought I would use but one I am so grateful for today. Whilst I still have some of the water I started with, every top-up I can find on the route keeps me going that little bit longer.

Refreshed and revitalised I carry on climbing with a spring in my step.



Looking back from somewhere near the top of Black Hill. This was one of my favourite views.

Even knowing the path, every time I think I'm approaching the summit I round a corner to discover another incline. The climb feels never-ending but the views make it worthwhile. I pass a number of other runners on the way up, some obviously struggling with the severity of the climb.

I reach Laddow Rocks, a sheer rocky outcrop with splendid views over the rugged moorland below. The narrow path is precariously close to the edge of the ridge and I'm reminded of running along the cliff path in January's ARC50. I do not want to fall again here! The Pennine Way follows the path of Crowden Great

Brook as it crosses the moorland, crisscrossing tiny fords and streams. Follow the stream and you will find the path.



WESSENDEN

At Wessenden Moor the ST are parked up by the side of the road. Sadly the truckers van selling ice-cold cans of coke a couple of hundred metres further along is closed. With several hundred thirsty runners passing by, they missed a trick there. I ask the safety team for another 500ml water top-up.

I walk along the road sipping the now-warm water, conscious that I have missed a couple of my fuelling alerts (missed, AKA ignored...) I force down a peanut butter sandwich. I gag with every bite and have to mush it up with water in my mouth to be able to swallow. In the heat, I've been struggling to eat for the last few miles and I am not sure how much more I will manage. This worries me as I am only just over halfway through. I have many hours of running left and if I am not fuelling properly I will end up making the remaining miles much harder on myself.

With the sandwich just about eaten, I head towards Wessenden Reservoir. The well-packed paths around the lake are easy miles providing a welcome respite for the body and mind. There is one path, slightly downhill, and one way to go. I zone out and let my feet do their thing. It feels good to let go and simply run for 20 minutes.



Wessenden Reservoir – see the lovely path to the right!

A sharp left and steep drop takes me down to the small brook meandering along the valley floor between the reservoirs. I let gravity take over and I fly, feet barely grazing the ground as I skip from rock to rock.

A couple of Challenger South runners are sitting at the river edge, packs thrown to the ground as they peel their socks and shoes off. The gushing water looks cool and inviting and I am tempted to join them for a paddle.

The Spine Challenger South is another race in the Spine series. It started in Edale at 8 am this morning and finishes in Hawes, North Yorkshire. The runners have 60 hours to complete the 108 miles. If my race, the Spine Sprint, is the younger sibling of the full Spine race, the Challenger South, alongside the Challenger North, is the middle sibling.

I saw my first Challenger runner just before Torside Reservoir and a few others between then and now. I wonder how hard it must be for these guys as we overtake them, knowing that – although covering less than half of the distance they are – we started four hours after they did.

The path up from the river follows a tumbling waterfall, the water noisily crashing down the hillside as I scramble up alongside it. I pause at the top* (*it's never really the top...) and look back in the direction I have come. My eyes trace the path back as far as they are able.



The path along the top and the steep descent to the right-hand side of the image.

I am now struggling quite considerably and my mind is faltering. I'm hot, sticky and no matter how much I drink, I still can't quench my thirst. As I look back along the path, I try to reflect on how far I've already come, rather than looking at how far I have to go.

I make myself push on. Simply focusing on moving forward. As long as I keep moving I will be okay. Crossing the flagstone paths around Black Moss I stumble a few times, catching my tired and heavy feet on the edges of the stones. A couple of deep breaths to try and calm my mind. I force down a gel, hoping the caffeinated goo will give me a much-needed boost.

A couple walking their dog around Black Moss Reservoir cheer me on. One of them asks if I am doing the Sprint and tells me I am doing well. She mentions third and I think fab, third lady. I'm surprised by that and

it gives me a much-needed and timely boost. I know that there is at least one other lady not far behind me and I start to hope that I am able to hang on.

Energised by the gel and the cheers of the walkers I find myself running up a gentle incline when previously I had been walking.

Approaching Standedge I see the ST. Once again I ask for some water and am given my 500ml ration. Rummaging around in my pack, I pull out the emergency sachet of Tailwind, thrown in at the last minute. In the heat, I've been sweating far more than I expected to and in a rookie error have neglected to take on any salts. I wonder if this might be contributing to my feelings of nausea.

The unending flagstone paths across the moorland become monotonous. I find this section somewhat bleak, with less appealing views and very little to distinguish it. There are no discernible hills so I move with the gentle ebb and flow of the path, running as much as I am able. In the distance, I see the TV mast that I know is next to Nicky's Food Bar. I fixate on this, allowing it to pull me in as I start dreaming about what I will buy when I reach the cafe. Nothing fancy. An orange Calippo would be my absolute dream. Maybe some Coke.

NICKY'S

Nicky's Food Bar is a small roadside cafe housed inside an old shipping container near the M62 road crossing. Usually serving truckers and passing motorists, the Pennine Way crosses its forecourt and as a result, it has become a Spine institution.

There are no checkpoints or aid stations in our Spine Sprint race. The 108-mile Challenger South has one checkpoint and the 268-mile Full Spine race has about eight. Although there are limited official aid stations, runners are allowed to stop at shops and cafes along the route. Bar the small snack van at Wassenden Moor (which was closed...), Nicky's is the first place on the Pennine Way that you can do this.

The cafe has a special "Spine Menu" for runners and opens before the first person passes the door and won't close until the last runner has gone by. Runners can pre-order a meal and Nicky will follow the trackers to have it ready when they arrive!

As I run up, there is a party-like atmosphere outside with several runners – I don't know if they are Sprinters or Challengers – and supporters gathered around chatting noisily.

I buy a can of orange pop (sadly no Calippos so the next best thing...), drink a cup of flat coke and top up one of my water bottles. The temptation to join the party is strong but I just want to keep moving. I don't feel good at all and am hoping that the Coke may help settle my churning stomach.

I open my can of fizzy orange and walk for a few minutes as I drink. After hours of warm, flavourless water it is absolutely delicious! I acknowledge to myself that I am in the middle of a real low point and I know that I am going to have to work hard to pull myself out of it. At the worst possible time, when my mind is already wavering, two Sprint ladies run past me. The first is absolutely flying, the second is running hard behind to chase her down.

Do I push and go with them?

Do I chase?

Looking back, I wish I had.

Is Wendover in the back of my mind when I decide to let them go? Or do I just use that as an excuse to choose the easy option?

Now, I wonder. Should I have had more confidence in myself? Should I have at least tried to keep up? I always say that you never know what you are capable of if you don't try. Here, I didn't try and in hindsight, that disappoints me.

Baring the crowd at Nicky's, those two ladies are the first Sprinters I have seen in a long time. Although I am regularly passing Challenger runners, my own race has become very solitary.

I'm still moving well, albeit slower than I was. My legs feel heavy and tired and are starting to lose some of their strength. They don't have quite so much power on the climbs. Is this because I pushed too hard early on or is it because I missed my final three weeks of hill-specific training?

Heading down the hill from Blackstone Edge I pass 8, 10, 12, maybe more Challengers. They cheer me on as I trot (no longer flying) down the rocky descent and cross the road towards the reservoirs.

The next three miles or so are a tedious slog.

The trail follows paths alongside three reservoirs. It's 'easy' running. It's flat and relatively smooth (although I am convinced that there is a very subtle incline), but oh so boring. After allowing the ups and downs of the rolling hills to guide the pace of my run, my mind and body struggle with the constant repetitiveness of the flat. There is no natural respite.

I take a couple of walk breaks, as much for the mental break as the physical. I count to 60 in my head whilst walking and then make myself run again. Not quite the same as the structured 9:1 run-walk ratio of Autumn 100, but having a definitive start and finish stops me from walking more than I need. It can be very easy on these long jogs to get distracted and suddenly realise that ten minutes have gone by and you're still walking.

After what feels like an eternity, the path bends slightly to the right. A gentle incline leads us away from the soullessness of the lakes and back onto proper trails. Almost as soon as my feet hit the uneven, rocky path my spirit lifts and with a second wind, I find myself running everything bar the steepest of inclines. My feet feel at home on the unevenness of these paths. Sometimes dirt, sometimes flagstone, sometimes rock. They relish the differing surfaces and the variety of the terrain beneath them.

STOODLEY PIKE

In the distance, I see the Stoodley Pike monument standing tall on top of its namesake hill. Dominating the skyline above the small Calder Valley town of Todmorden, it was built at the end of the Crimean War in 1856 and is a useful marker just before the Pennine Way drops down the hillside towards Hebden Bridge. I know that from Stoodley Pike, it's downhill almost all the way to the finish!



Stoodley Pike in the distance. Photo taken during my recce run three weeks before the Spine.

It's still several miles away but gives me something to aim for, a bit like the TV mast before Nicky's. I feel very tired, both physically and mentally. I keep losing concentration and stumbling on the edges of loose flagstones. I am thankful when the man-made path ends and the simple groove in the dirt winding around the rocks reappears. For some reason, my feet feel safer on the naturally worn path.

I pass another Challenger who tells me I'm looking strong and says that the ladies are smashing the Sprint. At the moment I don't know what he means by this but thank him for his kind words.

Over my left shoulder, the sun is sinking low in the evening sky. Streaks of golden orange are partly hidden by low clouds. One of my goals is to not need to use my headtorch, and for this reason I deliberately packed it at the bottom of my bag.

Sunset is scheduled for 21:38. By the sun's current position, I estimate it is approaching 9 pm and as darkness won't throw its blanket over us until 30 or so minutes after the sun has set, I have an hour to finish if I am to achieve this. I know I could look at my watch, but I have made it this far without absorbing any of its data and that stubbornness that I have already mentioned rears its head again!

As a side note, I am not a weather buff but as a photographer, I am well-versed in reading the light and gauging how much time I have before the sun sets to get those magical golden hour photos. I do wonder if I might time it right for a photo of the iconic Stoodley Pike monument with the sun setting behind it but sadly I am a little too early!

From Stoodley Pike, the next three miles are almost all downhill and it is pure JOY. The initial descent down Stoodley Pike Hill is wonderfully steep, rocky and technical. My legs don't quite have the strength and stability in them at this stage in the race to fly down with my usual reckless abandonment. I tip-toe gently down with a slow skip rather than a jump, placing my feet carefully with each landing.

Across a field, sheep scattering as I approach. Over a stile and along a small country lane leading into a patch of woodland. Adrenaline pumping, I know that there's only a mile or so left. A giant yellow arrow points to the right. Challengers to the left, Sprinters to the right...

HEBDEN

Down a steep slope through the woodland to the river bed. Across a small bridge before climbing up the other side. Pretty soon my feet hit the tarmac and I'm running down the road into Hebden. The road is steep and running is actually quite difficult. I don't dare let gravity take over – I'm unsure if my legs would keep up.

I hit the valley floor and take the road bridge over the river before turning sharply to the right. I made sure I ran this last section through the town three weeks ago so that when I knew where I was going. I have a habit of nailing navigation on deserted trails and then getting lost in the hustle and bustle of town (see Hayle at ARC50...!). Thankfully bright yellow arrows point the way. I don't need to think. I can just run.

It's a pleasant summer evening. Running along the narrow cobbled path by the river I pass several bemused-looking couples on leisurely evening strolls. I do wonder what I look like; haphazardly running along the riverside, legs caked in dried blood, dirt smeared up my arms, dust, sweat and windswept hair... Up through town, noisy Saturday night party-goers spill out of the bars and pubs and bars and onto the streets. I cross the main road and follow the arrows onto the street that leads to the end. I know that, just like the ARC in January, the finish line is on top of a hill.

As much as I would love to run it and finish in glory, there is absolutely no chance of that. I have no power in my legs and this hill is steeeeeep. I walk as quickly as I can, turn left and through the gate to the Hebden Bridge Hostel. Run down a small side alley smiling as I cross the very unceremonious finish line.

It's still light.

FINISH

I finish the race absolutely spent. I cross the line and collapse into a chair, having left everything I have out on the Pennine Way. I immediately know that I just ran my absolute best and that I could not have done or given any more.



I am led inside the hostel. A volunteer takes off my shoes for me whilst someone else hands me a drink. Another volunteer gives me my drop bag and I'm given a certificate and finisher's t-shirt (sadly cotton and I debate giving it back as I don't wear cotton t-shirts but there is something about the prestige of having a Spine t-shirt that makes me keep it).

All I want is a shower. I am filthy.

The Spine have commandeered two of the hostel's bedrooms, one for men and one for women, to shower and freshen up in. My name goes on the waiting list and as I've finished early, I thankfully don't have long to wait.

Never has a shower been so welcome.

Clean and fresh, a medic checks my bloodied knee and hand. As expected, they looked worse than they actually are. They leave me to clean and dress them myself having reassured me that there is nothing to worry about. This is where the mandatory first aid kit comes in use!

Showered, hair washed, clean clothes and wounds bandaged I sit silently in the corner of the main room. I'm a people watcher and I enjoy watching the hustle and bustle of Race HQ. I watch other runners finish, listening to their Spine stories as they come in. I'm waiting for Windsor Andy to finish before heading back to the campsite.

After a couple of hours of this (yes, it's a long wait...!), I feel pretty good. I'm tired, it's nearly midnight and I long for my bed, but I don't ache and I am moving around well. Every now and again I get up and wander around to keep moving. I find it really helps with recovery.

Andy finishes at midnight and at 3 am, nearly six hours after I finished, I finally roll into my sleeping bag. Almost as soon I zip the tent up it starts raining. Within minutes, it's hammering down, every drop a loud drumbeat on the flimsy canvas above my head. A flash of lightning illuminates the tent as a roll of thunder rocks the sky around me. I marvel at our perfect timing.

Although at the same time, I think of those runners still out on the Pennine Way. I am hunkered down in the warmth of my sleeping bag and there are still three hours until the Spine Sprint's final cut-off. The weather out there sounds wild and as I drift into a restless sleep, I don't envy those still running.

REFLECTION

It turns out that when the lady just after Black Moss Reservoir told me I was third, she didn't mean third lady, she meant third overall... I didn't hold onto this, those two ladies passed me. I finish fourth female and fifth overall. This is mind-blowing, four women in the top five, I don't know if this has ever happened in an ultra before and shows how strong women are becoming in the ultra-running world.

All four of us ladies break the existing female course record. Hannah Rickman, the first female (second overall) smashed it to smithereens. The second and third ladies finished almost neck and neck taking five minutes off of the record. I sneaked in with seconds to spare.

It's not often that you break the female CR and finish fifth overall but don't make the women's podium! Those three ladies in front of me ran incredible races and I am delighted to have been part of such a powerful women's field.

I went into the race with zero expectations and the simple goal to run my best. I could be disappointed with losing that coveted second female/third overall place but I'm not. The women who beat me were stronger over the full 46 miles. Finishing 5th in a Spine race is far beyond my wildest dreams and I am overjoyed. If you had told me at the start that I would i) not need my head torch, ii) break the women's CR and iii) finish fifth, I wouldn't have believed you!

For someone that does not have ready access to that terrain to train on, I'm thrilled with how it went. Whilst I am an experienced trail and ultra runner, the Peaks and the Pennines are not the gently undulating North

or South Downs. My biggest local climb is Box Hill at a mere 370 feet and I'm not sure I've ever had to use my hands to pull myself up and over a rock in the Surrey Hills!

I loved every part of this race and it just deepened my love for the Peaks. I had some low moments, I had my struggles and I finished feeling absolutely drained. But I ran 46 miles across the demanding terrain of Pennines and I'd be pretty surprised if there were no low moments.

I had such a good day. I loved the challenge of the race. Of needing to navigate and not rely on race markings. I loved being self-sufficient (and am very pleased that I was able to use my filter and drink from streams!). I was in my element on the trickiest of the terrain, jumping from rock to rock and scrambling up inclines with the biggest smile. I loved the lung-busting climbs and reaching the top of Jacob's Ladder feeling strong AF.

I loved the technical trails, the steep climbs, the scrambling, the rocky paths. The beauty of the views, the scenery, the countryside. I loved doing something different and pushing myself outside of my comfort zone.

I loved the whole experience and I feel very lucky and privileged that I am able to take part in races like this.

Who knows, maybe one day I might be tempted to run the full 268 miles of the spine of Britain... but for now, I am very, very happy with my little sprint along its spine!

PHOTOS

I didn't take many photos during the race as I wanted to concentrate on running. To give a bit more of a flavour of the route, here are a few photos from my previous forays along the Pennine Way.





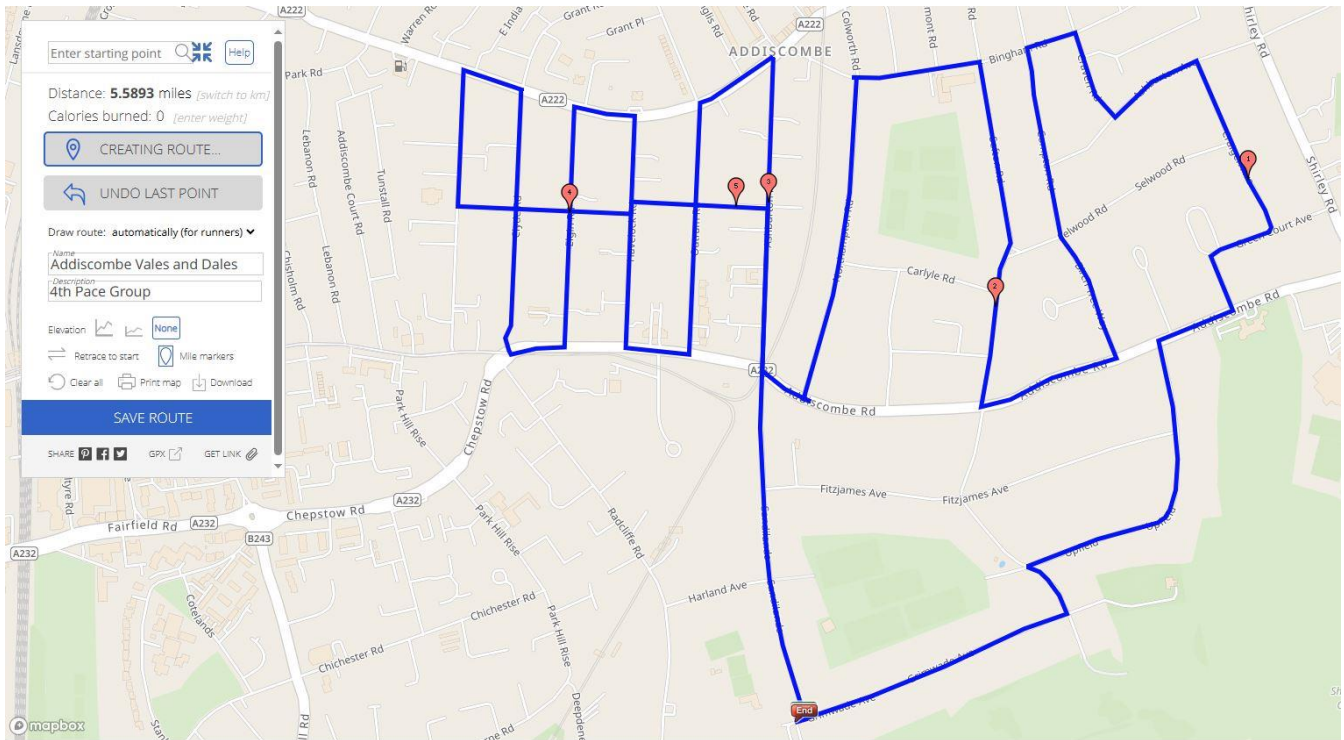


MY RUNNING JOURNEY WITH STRIDERS (by Michelle Klein)

I have been reflecting on my running journey with Striders of Croydon.

When I first joined the club, I was warmly welcomed by our then chair Robin Jamieson, who assured me I would be able to run with Group 4. I hadn't run more than a Parkrun before joining Striders.

My first run with the club was on the 10th of February 2016. It was the Addiscombe route, better known as the "marmite route". We do not seem to run that route any more, I guess it must be a hate route for our route masters but a love route for me!



The Group 4 version of the 'Addiscombe route'. This was a regular Wednesday route from about 2001 to about 2016, but we do not seem to have run it in recent years.

Robin was right, I was able to run in G4 and I loved it from my very first run. I signed up to join Striders of Croydon the very next day.

A couple of years later in August 2018, Tony Flowers put a shout out for more run leaders (we are always on the lookout to recruit more run leaders) and I volunteered to lead my first Sunday run on the "traditional route" on the 26th of August. It was the only route I knew off by heart after running with the club for 2.5 years! I am still a pretty useless navigator but these days I have my trusted Garmin with all the routes downloaded, or more likely have seasoned runners and navigators in my group who help me out when I get stuck.

Over time and during lockdown like many others I ran alone and learnt most of the Striders' routes quite quickly - it's surprising how much quicker you learn when you have to self-navigate.

I also remember quite clearly having a socially distanced walk and chat with Ally Whitlock who suggested that I'd be a great candidate for LIRF - England Athletics Leadership in Running Fitness. She definitely planted a seed that day!

When club runs re-commenced, I regularly started to lead Wednesday runs too.

I really enjoy leading; it is extremely rewarding to have new, and perhaps less experienced runners join your group and seeing them progress, but it is even better witnessing special friendships develop.

We are quite a social group and that's the benefit of running in a steady group - there's plenty of time for chat and sharing of life's ups and downs.

I would thoroughly recommend thinking about becoming a run leader as there is a group of run leaders who would happily support you in learning the run leader ropes.

I'd also sporadically been going to Tuesday REP (speed) sessions, which are always hard work and are not chatty or fun runs, but I know that they make a noticeable difference to my running by changing things up in my running routine, such as adding in shorter sessions at higher efforts while getting my legs running faster than they usually would and allowing recovery between reps. These sessions in the week certainly make me a stronger runner and increase the rate at which my running improves.

The key is to have variety in your running routine: easy days and hard days.

But motivating myself to get to these sessions on a Tuesday evening, especially in the cold dark winter months, is difficult.

However, earlier this year on the 20th of April I completed my Leadership in Running Fitness course.

The course fees were covered by the club from the various club fundraising activities that had been taking place over the last year. I was incredibly grateful to the club for allowing me the opportunity to get "qualified" and also enabling me to safely lead groups of runners.

The course comprises four online modules which cover topics such as the importance of warmups and cool downs, safety and organisation and safeguarding, as well as two practical sessions where you lead a five-minute warm up and then a five-minute speed session. This involves a group of runners, a coach and someone doing the filming of you leading the practical sessions - thank you to those who helped support me on getting the practical sessions completed.

This has in turn led me to supporting the Tuesday REP sessions with Simon Ambrosi, one of our certified coaches. By having another LIRF run leader, we can open up another group of up to 12 runners. I have personally been really pleased with the attendance from more women and more steadier runners. There were many REP sessions where I was running on my own with the fast men!

It is so much better if you're able to run in a group so you can either be chased down or can chase!

For those of you who are now regulars - thank you for coming along and for club camaraderie.

The Tuesday evening REP sessions are available for anyone who wants to improve their running, so please do sign up and join us.



Michelle finishing her 250th parkrun

SVN HOOTIFUL HUNDREDS AT SAMPHIRE HOE (by Debra Bourne)

Running 100 miles is not something I find easy – in particular, staying awake that long. So why, when Saxons, Vikings and Normans (SVN) announced their “Hootiful Hundreds” – a one-off event with options of 100 km, 100 miles and 200 km (125 miles), did I opt for the 200 km? Partly for the challenge, pushing my ‘longest run’ distance out a little further, by 20 miles or so (some of the 100-milers I’ve done have been a wee bit over distance - I’m not complaining, merely mentioning, but don’t tell Centurions’ James Elson). But mostly because I knew that my goal race for 2024 was going to be the Lakeland 100 (I’d decided to go for a charity place if I didn’t get in on the ballot), which, with some 20,000 feet of ascent and descent, over difficult terrain, was likely to take me 30-35 hours (cut-off is 40 hours). The Hootiful 100s, although on much tamer terrain (of which more later), would boost my confidence by taking me well over the 105 miles of the Lakeland 100 (note: another ‘100-miler’ that’s more than 100 miles long). Later, when I had a moment of pure madness and entered the Centurion Winter Downs 200, it also became a good event to do as part of training for that – reducing the ‘never done before’ mileage to 80 or so (WD200 being about 204 miles).

Most SVN events are on looped courses, which may not be exciting, but does minimise navigation and logistics – in this case we ran though the car park every loop, so not too much needed to be carried. Normally I’d probably have chosen to wear my 10-litre Decathlon backpack, but I had recently got the Montane Gecko VP+ 20 litre, ready for WD200, so I wore that, although only lightly filled, not carrying the 5 kg or more of gear I’d need for that race.

I’ve run at a lot of SVN events in the past seven years and know many of the other regulars, so it’s always fun before the race starts, chatting with other runners while registering, dropping off my flapjacks (both the cinnamon and the ginger ones) for the aid station, getting my car parking ticket and so on. It’s so much fun catching up with everyone that, even arriving an hour before the start, it can be hard to find time to change into running shoes and go to the toilet before the pre-race briefing. The briefing is short, but always includes shout-outs of runners who have reached particular milestones, whether in total number of marathons or ultras run, or the number of miles they have racked up at SVN events. In this crowd, someone celebrating their 200th, 300th, 400th or even 600th marathon is not unusual, while 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 miles at SVN events is also quite common.



The entrance to the tunnel, with the little gravel bank (steeper than it appears here) to the left.

On this occasion the first five ‘long’ loops of 15 km each comprised a loop of Samphire Hoe, going all the way to the end of the sea wall and back, followed by trotting through the overflow car park and the ‘wasteland’ of concrete and weeds (not the prettiest bit of the course), down a short gravel bank, which I hate, across the entrance exit road then up the entrance/exit tunnel to the top of the cliffs, turning right for a short jaunt on the gravel path and across the bridge over the A2, then turning around and running along the

path (and NDW) for about 2.2 miles, to 300 metres beyond the sound mirror, then back and down the tunnel, up that horrible little gravel bank, back through the wasteland and back to base.

After the first 45 miles, we switched to 5 km loops entirely within Samphire Hoe. 25 of them, and each of those loops 50% on seawall concrete. Which is hard. So hard that it makes tarmac seem like soft ground with plenty of bounce in it.

The first five loops were enjoyable, other than the stupidly-irritating gravel bank. I wasn't pushing it at all on the uphill, and was enjoying running the downhill but without hammering my quads. Being able to run past the sound mirror without needing to hold onto another runner was a great bonus; also (again unlike the Halloween 100) this time I didn't need to retrieve my wind-caught hat by climbing over a barbed-wire fence. As always, I spent times running alongside other runners and chatting with them, which helps to while away the hours.

The previous times I've run a 100-miler at Samphire Hoe – the Samphire 100 in 2019 and the Halloween 100 in 2020 – the weather has been atrocious, with gale-force winds and long periods of rain. This time we were very lucky: the skies were clear and the winds mild for a change; the sea was calm and the sea wall sections were dry, without waves breaking over it and needing to be dodged (at the Samphire Hoe 100 conditions got so bad that they ended up closing the sea wall for safety reasons, and an emergency course had to be used – I was one of the last people out on the sea wall before it was closed, on my last lap).



The sound mirror (photo from the Halloween 100 with grey skies)

Five long laps done in 9:50, and I set off on the short laps. At this stage, although counting laps rather than miles, I deliberately didn't think about how many of these I would need to complete. These loops start with a pleasant 'light trail' section on gravel paths, with the first uphill bit being a good place to eat whatever food I'd brought out of the aid station. Next comes a lovely runnable downhill, still on packed gravel. Then the sea wall. I already mentioned that this is hard. It's not 'too' bad when I'm running a 50K or so, but on this race I started to wince every time I reached the sea wall. I was wearing my most padded shoes, Altra Torin road shoes, but despite this the soles of my feet got really sore, particularly in the last 20 miles or so. Additionally, the top of my right foot got tender because the metatarsal pad I need to use to protect my 2nd toe's metatarso-phalangeal joint (bottom of the toe!), where I have the plantar plate tear, lifts that bit of the foot up and it was pressing against the laces - which I had made as loose as possible but was limited because the laces are a bit short. Finally leaving the sea wall, there's more packed gravel trail, starting with a short hill, paralleling the railway line that appears from, and disappears into the Dover cliffs.

During these laps, also, I whiled away some of the hours chatting with other runners, which helps you both to keep going. Usually, and this event was no exception, after what might be half a lap or several laps, your relative paces start to change, or one of you stops to change shoes, dash to the toilet or whatever, and you part company.



Packed gravel trail heading out towards the sea wall.

On this occasion I ran for some time with Dominique James, who had finished 3rd woman in the Centurion North Downs Way 100 in 2020, when I came 4th, and with Melissa Steer. Both of them ended up completing 100 miles at Hootiful. I also ran a lap near the end with Karen Grieves, who got a sudden extra spurt of energy (while I was drooping and foot-sore) and went on ahead, finishing 45 minutes ahead of me!

It's easy, when you have the whole of your car to use as your private aid station, to take too much 'stuff' with you, both in food and equipment. There was food provided at the aid station at the end of each loop, and much of the food that I took with me I never touched. I kept to my ultramarathon 'eat early, eat often' philosophy, aiming to get 250-300 calories in per hour. As usual for me that included quite a bit of Romney's Kendal Mint Cake, plus crisps, salted potatoes, fruit, malt loaf (the Soreen malt loaves are now vegan, which is fantastic), vegan lemon drizzle cake (thank you to whoever baked that!), my home-made flapjacks and fruited bread. I had planned on wraps with Marmite, and peanut butter and jam sandwiches, but didn't get around to making them the night before, so that didn't happen.

Most of the gear also went unused. I tried out my new, lightweight, running poles (Mountain King Sky Runner); my new pack, as I mentioned earlier – which amazingly didn't rub my back; and I changed my socks at 50 miles, but other than changing gloves and jackets, didn't use anything else. Nevertheless, it was great knowing everything was there if I needed it.



On the sea wall, approaching sunset.



The moon partially behind light clouds.

One of the hardest parts of the longer ultras for me is simply staying awake. I had done my best to 'bank' sleep and come into this race well rested, but for unknown reasons slept really badly on Wednesday and Thursday nights, so that didn't work. Frustratingly, I first started to feel sleepy at lunchtime on Saturday and had three 'micro-naps' of maybe 30-60 seconds around the course when I just couldn't keep my eyes open any more. I variously sat on a large grit bin and a bench, and for the third one lay down on a convenient grassy bank! During the night I resorted to caffeine tablets. I've found that I can tuck a ProPlus under my tongue and it will dissolve slowly and be absorbed from my mouth – a bit bitter, but not too bad, and definitely easier on my stomach. I also had four naps of about 15 minutes each – I might have done better to have a proper sleep for 90 minutes at some point.

I had completed the long loops in daylight, and was a couple of laps into the short loops before watching the sun setting at about 7pm. Thankfully I have a decent head torch, and anyway the footing is quite good and I didn't trip at all, even on the shallow steps between the trail section and the sea wall. The moon was also bright and clear. Nevertheless, it was pleasant some 16 loops later to be treated to the sunrise and be able to drop the headlamp off at the car at the end of that loop.



The welcome sight of the sunrise over the sea.

By now I -was- counting loops – counting down, and I was in single figures, with only nine left to go. Yay!

There were many fewer people out on the course by now. I had seen the fastest runner in the 200 km, Alex Marshall, finish in an amazing 21:31 – and she looked amazingly fresh and lively. Andy Roberts finished in 24:26, and the rest of us who completed the 200 km did so in times varying from 27:41 to 34:13 (cut-off was 36 hours). Quite a few of the 100-mile people were still on the course at 24+ hours as well, some of them finding it really tough, and a few people walking out the 100 km (at least one of whom had a nasty cold and had gone for a 7-hour sleep overnight before continuing!). I was pleased to be able to encourage some of the other runners and help them to keep going when they were feeling down and even thinking of quitting. The 36-hour cut-off was the same for all of the distances, which gives slower runners the chance to go further and reach 100 km or 100-mile distances that would be out of their reach with a shorter time to complete the race.

Five laps to go. Four. Really slowing now on those sore feet. Three, two, one... and done, in 32:41:44 – 200km, 125 miles (my Garmin made it 125 exactly; Strava cut that to 124.96). Slower than I had hoped, and the sore feet from the concrete was definitely part of that.



I planned to snooze for a few hours before heading off on the drive home, but in the end I only managed some brief naps, because I was finding it too much fun to watch other people, whose paths I'd crossed over and over through the night and the morning, finishing their various challenges.

Finally, and with another caffeine tablet recently dissolved in my mouth, I poured a mug of tea and set off for home. This proved to be an additional challenge, as I came to a sign warning that part of the M20 was closed and there was a 40-minute queue built up. With tired legs, 40 minutes of start-stop traffic and riding the clutch really sounded a bad idea, and we were just approaching the A249 turn-off, so I made a quick decision to divert over to the M2 – a longer journey but one I hoped would at least be easier. Which it was, at least after I had negotiated the diversion at the M2 end of the A249, where it wasn't possible to turn directly onto the London-bound side! I did have a stop and a snooze at Medway services, before heading on the final drive home, for a shower, food and bed, although tired legs and, particularly, aching feet, made sleep only fitful.

It was more than three days before my feet stopped tingling.

Looking back, this was a good learning experience. I set off fairly slowly, I thought, but I hadn't really allowed for the fact that I'm slower than I was before I got COVID and Long COVID in 2022. In hindsight I should have started at an even more conservative pace, which might have allowed me to keep running more later on. Short naps definitely were not enough; I will be going for longer snoozes, maybe as much as 3 hours a night (!), during the WD200. I also probably under-fuelled, and I will definitely make more effort to eat a greater amount of 'real' food during WD200. Still, 125 miles under my belt – I only need to add another 80 miles for WD200 and I have 96 hours to do it – 64 hours longer than for the Hootiful Hundreds - how hard can it be????!!! (Read the next edition of the Striders Magazine to find out).

BOOK REVIEW: RUN FAST (by Hal Higdon: reviewed by Alan Dolton)

Hal Higdon placed fifth in the 1964 Boston Marathon in a personal best of 2 hours 21 minutes 55 (which is more than ten minutes faster than Striders' club record). In January 1981, at the age of 49, he won the M45 marathon at the World Masters Championships in New Zealand, recording 2 hours 29 minutes 27. He has also won three gold medals in the steeplechase at the World Masters Championships, his first being in 1975 in the M40 age-group, and his final one being in July 1991 in the M60 age-group.



Hal Higdon (wearing no 13) in the 1964 Boston Marathon

In 1992 he wrote the first edition of his book entitled 'Run Fast', which concentrated primarily on training for the 5K and 10K. A second edition followed in 2000, and a third edition followed in 2016. It is still in print and is readily available from Amazon (among other sellers).

The subject matter of the book overlaps to some extent with 'Daniels' Running Formula', which I reviewed in the March 2020 issue of this magazine, and 'Faster Road Racing' by Pfitzinger and Latter, which I reviewed in the March 2023 issue of this magazine. However Higdon's book is rather more anecdotal, and contains fewer detailed tables, than the other two. Runners who want specific training schedules, and tables advising them precisely how fast to do their varying types of training, are more likely to prefer Daniels' book, but runners who are looking for inspiration rather than detailed training advice may well prefer Higdon's.

In the first chapter of the book, Higdon observes that among the ways that runners can improve their race times are adding speedwork, finding training partners, joining a running club and finding a coach. These suggestions are expanded on in later chapters of the book. Subsequent chapters cater for novice runners and for intermediate runners, focusing on 5K races. Higdon recommends that runners should run slowly for the majority of their long runs, but should practise increasing the pace during the final quarter of the run. He recommends that runners aiming to run a fast 5K should do a weekly speed session including short-distance repetitions ranging from 200 metres to 400 metres, as well as a weekly run at a fast continuous pace. A chapter on training for races at 8 kilometres (or five miles) is followed by a chapter entitled 'good form', advising runners how they may be able to avoid wasting energy by running with a more economical technique.

In the middle portion of the book, Higdon discusses repetition training (which involves fast repetitions with a relatively long recovery period between reps) and interval training (where the repetitions are run at a slower pace with a short recovery interval between reps). He observes that from the 1930s to the early 1950s, most American coaches recommended the former type of training, but that in the later 1950s, influenced by European coaches such as Woldemar Gerschler and Mihaly Igloi, interval training became more popular. The chapter in which Higdon discusses interval training, entitled 'the magic workout', is 29 pages long and is the longest chapter in the book. Higdon comments that "the best venue for interval training is the track" but that training on the track too frequently can lead to boredom, and that doing very long track sessions such as 70 x 300m or 50 x 400m (both of which Higdon experimented with when he was younger) can produce imbalance injuries from "the stress of going around tight turns on a track".



Higdon recommends that runners should do regular track sessions

Subsequent chapters discuss training for the 10K, 'speed play' (also known by the Swedish term 'fartlek'), pure speed and flexibility. These are followed by a chapter on training for races at 15K (apparently more common in the USA than in the UK, where most race directors seem to prefer 10 miles to 15K). This is the longest distance that Higdon covers in this book: he has written separate books covering the half-marathon and the marathon.

Chapters discussing hill training and strength training are followed by the penultimate chapter in the book, entitled 'the polishing touch'. This recommends that runners should seek the advice of an experienced coach, set realistic goals and keep a training diary. Higdon comments that "good coaches have been compared to chefs. They know how to mix the different ingredients." He also observes that "most runners maintain logs or diaries, on paper or online, but they don't always know how to interpret accumulated information. A coach, based upon his experience with many athletes, can evaluate training from an unbiased point of view."

The final chapter, entitled 'ready to race', includes advice about warming up for a race, and about how to recover after a race.

The book includes advice from several American runners of differing backgrounds, and is therefore generally less prescriptive than the Daniels and Pfitzinger books which I have reviewed earlier. Personally I agree with most (although not all) of the advice contained in the book, and I would definitely recommend this book to other Striders who are hoping to improve their speed at races of 10K and below.

(This article originally appeared in the September 2019 club magazine, but is republished here – in a slightly revised form – for the benefit of newer Striders)

COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2023

Lorraine Hunte had an excellent run to win the bronze medal in the W65 100 metres in the British Masters Championships in Derby on 2 September. She finished in 17.17 seconds, and became only the third member of Striders to place in the first three in a track event at a British championship. Steve Corfield only just missed out on a medal in the M60 800 metres. He finished strongly to take fourth place in a new club M60 record of 2 minutes 19.73, just one-hundredth of a second behind the bronze medallist.

At Greenwich on 3 September, Andy Elliott set a club M75 half-marathon record of 2 hours 28 minutes 05. On 10 September, Jay Lidbetter had an excellent run to win the Richmond Runfest Half-Marathon (75:49). On 1 October, Debra Bourne completed a 200-kilometre race at Samphire Hoe in 32 hours 41 minutes 44.

In the East Surrey League cross-country race at Lloyd Park on 7 October, Tatsuya Okamoto ran very well to finish third (29:44). Rob Lines was 12th (32:09), Tom Gillespie 16th (32:58) and Andy Perks 18th (33:40). Striders' men placed third in the team event. Kara Boaks was the 12th woman to finish (39:32), with Fiona Carr 14th (42:46) and Ruth Pearson 22nd (50:40). Striders' women placed fourth.

On 8 October, Striders held the five-mile multi-terrain 'Switchback' race for the first time since 2019. Striders had the first man home in Harry Madgwick-Lawton, who completed the undulating course in 31 minutes 07. Phil Coales was fourth (31:48), Matthew Stone sixth (32:57) and Steve Corfield eighth (33:14). The first woman to finish was Nikki Sturzaker of Herne Hill, who ran well to place seventh overall (33:01). The first female Strider was Fiona Carr who was the eighth woman to finish, placing 60th overall (45:12). In the Chester Marathon on the same day, Jay Lidbetter ran well to set a new club M45 record of 2:43:24.

Striders' men did well to place second out of ten clubs in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three match at Epsom on 14 October. They were led by Tatsuya Okamoto, who ran well to place seventh. Andrew Aitken was 15th, Phil Coales 16th, James Rhodes 18th and Martin Filer 23rd. Matthew Stone did well to place first in the M60 age-group and 33rd overall. Liam Redmond was 45th, Simon Ambrosi 50th, Conor O'Hara-Barrett 53rd and Steve Corfield completed the scoring team in 56th. Striders' women placed 17th in their Division Two match. Jennifer Gutteridge was 19th, Cindy Siu 60th, Selena Wong 97th, Linda Jones 102nd, Jadwiga Brzask-Makiela 123rd and Ruth Pearson 128th.

The Cabbage Patch 10-mile race at Twickenham on 15 October was the final race in this year's Surrey Road League. Striders were led by Peter Johnson who ran 67:39, followed by Simon Webster (69:28) and Megan Davies (1:47:06). In the final league tables, Striders' men placed seventh out of 30 clubs, while their women placed 19th. Individually, Steve Corfield placed second in the M60 age-group.

In the Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships, at Nonsuch Park on 28 October, Dave Hoben was third in the M70 age-group. Matthew Stone was fourth in the M60 age-group, with Steve Corfield sixth. Andy Perks was eighth in the M50 age-group, while Jadwiga Brzask-Makiela was 10th in the W45 age-group.

Striders placed seventh out of 42 teams in the Reigate Priory Relays on 4 November. The team comprised Luke Burden (14:41), Rob Zietz (17:29), Phil Coales (13:56) and Harry Madgwick-Lawton (13:41).

At Hurst Green on 11 November, Striders' men placed second out of ten clubs in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three match. Harry Madgwick-Lawton placed ninth out of the 176 finishers. Andrew Aitken was close behind in tenth, with James Rhodes 18th and Conor O'Hara-Barrett 31st. Matthew Stone ran well to place first in the M60 age-group and 32nd overall. Phil Coales was 33rd, Andy Perks 41st, Marc Burrows 43rd, Liam Redmond 57th and Steve Corfield 58th.

Striders' women placed 12th in their Division Two match. Jennifer Gutteridge placed 16th of the 146 finishers. Ellyw Evans was 40th, Selena Wong 80th, Fiona Carr 85th, Angela Seesurrin 103rd, Linda Jones 107th, Ruth Pearson 117th and Maria Gabriel 120th.

In the London Cross-Country Championships at Parliament Hill on 18 November, James Rhodes was 115th in the men's race with Phil Coales 165th. Selena Wong was 171st in the women's race.

20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2003/04

On 13 December Striders' men and women competed in Division Two of the Surrey Cross-Country Leagues at Lightwater. The men's race was won by Jonathan McCallum of Croydon Harriers. Striders' men finished in a disappointing ninth place. Justin Macenhill led us home in 34th place, covering the five-mile course in 30 minutes 56. Don Kayum was 49th (31:36) with Damian Macenhill 58th (31:55), Gerry Crispie 68th (32:31), Dave Shaw 83rd (33:14) and Chris Morton 85th (33:19). For only the third time in 15 years, Striders' women were unable to field a complete team of five runners. Our first woman home was veteran Elene Kayum, who placed 26th, recording 29 minutes 43 for the four-mile course. Emma Haillay ran bravely to place 40th (31:23), despite not having fully recovered from a bout of flu. Linda Daniel was 52nd (32:17) and Sarah Lloyd-Jones was 85th (35:25).

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships took place at Lloyd Park on 3 January. Striders' men's and women's teams both placed ninth. For our women, Serena Stracey placed 29th, covering the five-mile course in 37 minutes 14. Emma Haillay was 54th (41:22), Elene Kayum 57th (41:33) and Cress Davidson 70th (44:58). Our men were led by Justin Macenhill who placed 41st, covering the seven and a half mile course in 47 minutes 14. Dave Shaw was 73rd (50:39), Damian Macenhill 80th (51:30), Bob Ewen 86th (52:06), Chris Morton 95th (52:51) and Peter Yarlett 102nd (53:24).

Matthew Batten placed eighth in the under-20 men's race, completing the five-mile course in 40 minutes 20. Daisy Collingridge was eighth in the under-13 girls' race, while Sophie Shaw was 30th.

The third Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season was held on 10 January at Merrow. Striders placed fifth, led by Justin Macenhill who had an excellent run to place 15th, covering the five-mile course in 28 minutes 38. Our next two runners were both veterans, with Don Kayum placing 31st (30:07) and Bob Ewen 32nd (30:08). Simon Alexander placed 40th (30:24), while Tom Thrower, in his first appearance for the club, made a very promising debut with 48th place (30:38). Damian Macenhill was 69th (31:45) and the scoring team was completed by Gerry Crispie 74th (31:57), Chris Morton 83rd (32:34), Peter Yarlett 87th (32:57) and Colin Cotton 94th (33:22).

On the same day Striders' women competed at Petersham and placed eighth in their Division Two match. Our first woman home was Serena Stracey, who produced an excellent run to finish ninth, covering the four-mile course in 24:20. Diane Ballard also ran well for 18th place (24:58), while Elene Kayum was 41st (26:44), Kerry Backshell 72nd (28:55), Patricia Carr 95th (30:55) and Michele Lawrence 98th (31:10).

The final Surrey Cross-Country League matches of the season were held on 7 February at Lloyd Park. Striders' women produced their best performance of the season to place fifth in their Division Two match, lifting us to seventh place in the final table. With Division One being increased to 15 clubs for the following season, we only missed promotion by one place. Serena Stracey led the team home in 15th place, recording 25 minutes 58. Diane Ballard placed 19th (26:48), with Emma Haillay 27th (27:52), Kerry Backshell 47th (29:25), and Elene Kayum 55th (30:04). Daisy Collingridge ran very well to place fourth in the under-13 girls' race.

Striders' men faced strong opposition in their Division Two match. Justin Macenhill had an excellent run to place ninth, covering the five-mile course in 30 minutes 33. Our next three runners were all veterans. Long-distance specialist Dave Shaw ran well to place 33rd (32:20), with Bob Ewen 47th (32:59) and Gerry Crispie 66th (33:23). Striders showed good team spirit with 24 finishers, but with only four of these in the top 70, we had to settle for ninth place in the match, and were relegated to Division Three.

On 28 February Striders produced a good team performance to win an inter-club match in Lloyd Park, promoted by Croydon Harriers. Striders were led by second-claim member Lee Morgan, who made a rare appearance in our colours and ran strongly to finish second, covering the muddy 10 kilometre course in 37 minutes 50. Justin Macenhill ran steadily to place seventh (41:12) and there were good runs from two of Striders' M50s, with David Batten placing 15th (43:30) and Peter Yarlett 18th (43:43).

The meeting also included under-17 races, which incorporated the trials for the Croydon Borough team for the London Mini-Marathon. Striders' Sophie Shaw had an excellent run to win the under-13 girls' category, finishing ahead of all the under-15 girls and covering the two-mile course in 16 minutes 27.

10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2013/14

Striders' women faced strong opposition in the second Surrey Women's Cross-Country League match of the season, at Coulsdon on 7 December. Steph Upton placed 82nd, covering the undulating four-mile course in 28 minutes 25. Zoe Williams was 157th (31:00), Becky Laurence 195th (32:48), Linda Daniel 249th (35:34) and Katie McInnes 301st (39:58).

On 14 December, the 167th weekly parkrun in Lloyd Park saw the first 'mob match' between Striders and local rivals Croydon Harriers. The competition between the clubs produced what was then a record total of 179 finishers, including 51 Striders and 30 Harriers. Striders were led by Ernie Hann who was third (18:38) and Justin Macenhill who was fourth (18:40). For our women, Rachel Lindley was second (20:25), Steph Upton third (22:53) and Zoe Williams fourth (24:16). Striders won with 1906 points to Harriers' 1415.

Striders' men placed 18th in the Surrey Cross-Country Championships, at Dorking on 4 January. They were led by Iain Harrison who ran well to place 52nd of the 247 finishers, covering the muddy 12-kilometre course in 48 minutes 45. Taylor Huggins was 105th (52:49), Greg Williams 174th (58:12), Chris Morton 176th (58:16), Simon Pannell 192nd (60:34) and Geoff Pennells 233rd (68:15). In the senior women's race, Zoe Williams ran well to finish 119th, covering the eight kilometres in 48 minutes 04.

Striders' men produced a very good team performance to place third out of nine clubs in the penultimate Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, held at Reigate on 11 January. Home club Reigate won the match with 218 points, while Wimbledon Windmilers were second with 415. However Striders' total of 418 placed them ahead of Croydon Harriers (441), Stragglers (443), Dulwich (480), Dorking (528), Epsom (538) and Kingston (614). Striders were led by Iain Harrison who ran very well to place eleventh of the 161 finishers, covering the hilly five-mile course in 31 minutes 27. New member Dave Howell made an excellent debut, placing 25th (32:33), with Ernie Hann close behind in 27th (32:39). Matthew Smith was 32nd (33:06), Justin Macenhill 34th (33:08), Darren Bird 39th (34:10), Taylor Huggins 42nd (34:13), Damian Macenhill 65th (35:19), Simon Ambrosi 71st (35:44) and Barry White completed the scoring team in 72nd (35:47). Striders also had eight non-scorers.

Meanwhile Striders' women were competing in Division Two of the Surrey Women's League, at Putney Vale. Their A team placed tenth. Striders' first woman home was Steph Upton, who ran very well to place 24th of the 163 finishers, covering the muddy five-mile course in 37 minutes 38. Zoe Williams was 50th (40:56), Alice Ewen 52nd (41:15), Andrea Jeffries 80th (44:13) and Becky Laurence 83rd (44:36).

In the South of England Cross-Country Championships, at Parliament Hill on 25 January, Striders' women placed 44th in the team event. Steph Upton was 186th, Alice Ewen 272nd, Zoe Williams 295th and Linda Daniel 429th. Striders' men placed 63rd in their team event. Iain Harrison was 170th, Taylor Huggins 423rd, Barry White 502nd, Simon Pannell 643rd, Chris Morton 669th and Simon Webster 806th.

On 1 February Striders placed seventh out of 17 teams in the East Surrey League cross-country relay, at Wimbledon Common. Team manager Chris Morton ran the first leg, covering the two-mile course in 13 minutes 10. He was followed by Mick Turner (13:09), Sam O'Dongo (13:22) and Barry White (12:22).

Striders produced a good team performance to finish fourth out of nine clubs in the final Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Lloyd Park on 8 February. They also finished fourth in the final Division Two table. Striders were again led by Iain Harrison, who ran very well to place tenth of the 148 finishers, covering the muddy five-mile course in 31 minutes 21. There were also good runs from Matt Smith, who placed 18th (32:36), and the improving Ernie Hann who placed 19th (32:38). Justin Macenhill continued his return to form with 26th (33:12), while Lee Flanagan was 34th (33:32) and Damian Macenhill 47th (34:01). Bill Makuwa made a welcome return after injury and moved steadily through the field to place 55th (34:31), with Simon Ambrosi 58th (34:49), Barry White 64th (35:11) and Darren Bird completing the scoring team in 67th (35:14). Striders also had six non-scorers.

Earlier in the day Striders' women competed in their Division Two match on the same course. They were led by Steph Upton who ran well to place 21st of the 121 finishers in 38 minutes 56. Alice Ewen was 36th (42:17), Zoe Williams 41st (43:07), Eve Collins 71st (48:57), Isabelle Kita 93rd (53:29) and Victoria Legge 120th (72:30). The team placed eleventh in the match and 13th in the final Division Two table.



Zoe Williams in the Surrey Cross-Country League match at Coulsdon on 7 December 2013

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