

# Striders of Croydon

DECEMBER 2024 MAGAZINE



Ellyw Evans in our Surrey Cross-Country League match at Hurst Green on 9 November

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## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

### **2024**

Wednesday 18 December – Striders Annual Awards Presentation – Sandilands

Saturday 21 December – South of Thames Cross-Country Championship – Tonbridge

### **2025**

Saturday 4 January – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Lloyd Park

Saturday 11 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Divisions 2 & 3 – Oxshott

Saturday 8 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Divisions 2 & 3 – Lloyd Park

Saturday 1 March – East Surrey League Cross-Country – Lloyd Park

Sunday 9 March – British Masters Half-Marathon Championship – Paddock Wood

Saturday 3 May – British Masters 100km Championship – Kirkby Mallory (Leicestershire)

Sunday 24 August – British Masters 5000m Championship – Nuneaton

Saturday 13 September – British Masters Track & Field Championships – Derby



**Striders' women in the Surrey Cross-Country League at Reigate on 12 October**



## EDITORIAL: DECEMBER 2024

Welcome to the December issue of our club magazine. Many Striders will be contemplating running a marathon during 2025, so we begin this issue with two articles recommending marathons which very few Striders have run. In October, Chris Green ran the Ljubljana Marathon in Slovenia. We include his review of the race, which he recommends as an overseas destination for other Striders. And in late September, Liam Redmond travelled north for the annual Morecambe Marathon, in search of a 'good for age' qualifying time for London. He was rewarded with a personal best, and has written a brief article recommending the event to other Striders.

Many Striders are keen parkrun tourists, and we follow our marathon articles with an article by Michael Bassett, describing three Canadian parkruns which he took part in during the summer. And as many Striders will know, the first weekend in October saw the 20th anniversary of parkrun, so we also include an article looking back at its first 20 years. We follow this with a review of 'The Art of Running Faster' by former English cross-country champion Julian Goater, and we also include our usual 'competitive highlights' and history articles.

At the halfway stage of the Surrey Cross-Country League season, our men are placed eighth of the ten clubs in Division Two, only just above the 'relegation zone', so we will need good turnouts in the last two matches in order to retain our Division Two status. Our women are placed fourth of the 14 clubs in Division Three: the top three clubs are promoted, so if we get good turnouts in the last two matches we have a chance of getting promotion back to Division Two. Our nearest rivals, Walton, will have home advantage in the next match, at Oxshott on 11 January, but we will have home advantage in the final match, at Lloyd Park on 8 February.

As most Striders will know, many races have a 'search by club' option on the results section of their website. However, looking at some recent race results indicates that it is worth reminding some of our members that they should include the club name 'Striders of Croydon' when entering races, particularly if they would like their performances to be included in our annual road rankings or in our weekly press reports. And it may also be worth reminding members that there is a form on our website (<http://www.stridersofcroydon.org.uk/races/results/>) which members can use to submit results of any races outside the Croydon area.

I hope that all Striders continue to enjoy their running.

*Alon*



## THE LJUBLJANA MARATHON (by Chris Green)

How do you pronounce Ljubljana? If you'd asked me a year ago to name the capital of Slovenia, I'd have struggled to remember it and failed to pronounce it. However, when I was looking around for an Autumn overseas marathon, Ljubljana kept popping up in my searches. I was looking for a marathon in a country I hadn't visited before, on a date that fitted in with my diary, which had good reviews and, crucially, which was flat. Ljubljana ticked all the right boxes.

Slovenia became independent of the former Yugoslavia in 1991. It's a small country, about the size of Wales but with a third fewer people. Its longest borders are with Austria to the north and Croatia to the south; with Italy on the western border and Hungary to the east. The British Airways flight from Heathrow only took 1 hour 45 minutes from take-off to landing at the very small and quiet Jože Pučnik Airport about 15 miles from the centre of Ljubljana. There isn't a train station at the airport, but there's an efficient system of shared minibuses that take passengers to their hotels in the city centre for €12 each. Alternatively, there are taxis that are supposed to cost around €35, but one lady I spoke to said she was quoted €75 before deciding to opt for the minibus.

I arrived at my hotel on the Friday night, with children's races taking place on the Saturday, and Sunday 20 October 2024 being the main race day. I'd booked a 4-star hotel, which was probably a bit extravagant for what I needed, at €160 a night, but it was less than 400 m from the start line. On race day, this was a great help as I didn't have the stress of getting across an unfamiliar city to the start line on time, or having to deal with the bag drop or the inevitable loo queues. The start and finish areas are very close to the main historic square in Ljubljana old town and there are lots of hotel options nearby.

I spent Saturday getting my bearings around the centre of the city and going to the sports centre about 2 miles away to collect my bib number. There were the usual running brands with stalls at the expo and everyone was very friendly, helpful and excited about the race. As well as my bib number, I was handed a technical T-shirt and a nice sports bag (that I was just able to fit into my hand luggage for the flight home).

On the Sunday morning I watched the start of the 10K race at 8am, with the lead men going off at an incredible pace (the winner came in under 30 minutes), and then I got ready for my own race starting at 9am. It was a cool misty morning, a bit warmer than Croydon at this time of year, but the forecast was for sunshine and a midday temperature of about 17 degrees, so I was careful not to overdress (which was definitely the right decision as there were exposed stretches of road in the race in direct sunlight).

Many of the popular big city marathons have got rather overcrowded in recent years. This can be really frustrating, as it's easy to end up wasting energy by zig-zagging around slower runners in the early stages, or starting off slower than a target pace so you're worried throughout the race about having to make up for lost time. For this reason, I'd entered in the sub-3:45 category even though my PB is 3:58:14 that I achieved in Istanbul last year. Despite both the marathon and the half marathon starting at the same time, the course wasn't too crowded at all so I quickly settled into a 9:05 minutes per mile pace (a 4-hour marathon is 9:09, but I was aiming for a slightly faster pace to allow for the extra distance from not taking the perfect racing line). Within a mile, I was surprised to see a clear 5 to 10 metres of space in front of me – unlike when I ran in Amsterdam or Rome, for example, that were packed all the way round.

The course goes to the outskirts of the city with some long straight sections. It was all on closed roads with plenty of well-organised water stations that also had sports drinks and fruit available. A marathon is a long way, so I tried not to think too far ahead. I soon ran a parkrun, then I aimed for 10 km and then 10 miles. I managed to keep a very even pace, helped by the virtual running partner on my Garmin watch.

At 11 or 12 miles, the half marathoners around me were starting to increase their pace for the finish. As we headed back to the city centre there were signs for the half marathoners to go left and the marathoners to go right. It was very tempting to go left! At this point, I realised that probably only about a third of the runners around me were doing the full marathon, so as we turned away from the finish line to head out of the city again the race had really thinned out and I was able to stick to my pace. I went through halfway in 1:59:30, so I was hopeful that even if I slowed in the latter stages of the race I should be able to finish in around 4:15.



I always find the third hour of a marathon tough. By this time I'm pretty tired but there's still an awfully long way to run. I tried not to think too far ahead and when I felt the pace slipping I ran behind or alongside runners who were going a fraction faster than my body wanted to go. There were some quiet patches as there weren't many supporters out on the course, just pockets of people in designated "fan zones", so I gritted my teeth and stuck to the task. Side roads were blocked off with tape, but there were so few runners on the course that the marshals were letting cars cross in the gaps between runners.

As we turned back towards the city centre with about a parkrun left to go, I was 30 to 40 seconds ahead of my virtual pacer. I took the decision to run straight past a water station, to save time, but I still had some isotonic drink left that I'd brought with me. The last couple of miles are a bit of a blur. I remember going through the old town and cursing the cobblestones, then past my hotel and through the start gantry. From there I knew it was around 800m to the finish, as I'd had a careful look at it the previous evening so that I could judge my final effort to get to the line. The cheering crowds were lining both sides of the street and I tried to muster up a sprint finish. The last 100m were slightly downhill and I could see the clock on the finish gantry saying 4:01 – but I knew that I'd started just over 3 minutes after the gun, so I was going to dip under 4 hours!

In the end, my chip time was 3:58:34 and I couldn't believe that I'd run under 4 hours for only the second time in my life – and on the back of doing no runs further than 10-13 miles since the Rome marathon in March. Another surprise was getting a second (different) technical T-shirt along with the medal in the finish area.

Overall, I'd highly recommend Ljubljana for a running weekend. It's a small quiet city and there are 10K, half marathon and full marathon options. The races are really well-organised and not at all crowded. The start and finish areas are in the city centre, so the logistics are easy. The course is flat (apart from a couple



of places where the road dips under bridges), all on tarmac and quite straight (with just one hairpin bend). Parts of the course are a bit dull (there are some industrial areas, office areas and out-of-town retail parks), but there's also a forest area and clusters of suburban houses with an Alpine feel to them. The only thing I can think to criticise is that the organisers could have given better directions to get to and from the expo (I think there might be buses, but I took a taxi there and walked back) and some of the tables at the water stations weren't very long so the ones early in the race got a bit crowded.

So I had a very enjoyable and successful few days in Ljubljana before taking the train to Zagreb in Croatia (a 2 hour journey through lovely scenery for just €9) and flying home from there.

Oh, and the first "j" is silent and the second one is pronounced like an "i".





## THE MORECAMBE MARATHON (by Liam Redmond)

On a cool Sunday 29 September 2024, I completed the Morecambe Marathon with an 11:00 start. This is the last substantial marathon to provide a chance of gaining a Good For Age (GFA) qualifying time for the London Marathon 2025, with a flat and fast course of 2 laps (the half marathon times two). Friendly staff and well organised.

Morecambe is a pretty bay, in a historic Victorian holiday spot. Despite my best efforts I could not convince any Striders or Fire Brigade persons to join me. Accommodation and entry are cheap, but the train fares were unusually expensive. I would recommend the event; a 10k and a half take place simultaneously, perhaps a Striders contingent for 2025?

I finished 18th, out of 112 runners. First Strider (as it was only me!) with a personal best of 2hrs 57min 30 secs. Not sure if this will get me a GFA in London, as they recommend a 10-minute margin. The winning time was 2:35:18.



# **A TALE OF THREE CANADIAN PARKRUNS: JUNE-JULY 2024**

**(by Michael Bassett)**

There is a Whitby parkrun in North Yorkshire, but it's known as The Cinder Track. Instead, we visited the WHITBY parkrun in Canada, a 35-minute drive from Toronto centre, travelling northeast, close to the shore of Lake Ontario. Heavy rain hadn't dampened the spirits and as we approached the nearby Tim Hortons (more later) to use the facilities, the rain eased.

We joined a small group of wet volunteers setting up at the Gordon Street Waterfront Trail near the Whitby Yacht Club and were eventually joined by around 40 other runners. Apparently Lake Ontario is usually visible from the course, but with the rain and mist there wasn't much to see.

The participants are just as keen on the social side and many were regulars despite the conditions, which worsened again during the run. The course is mainly wide tarmac, dropping slowly as you make your way through parkland and briefly into a housing complex at the turning point for the out and back with the occasional bend but no corners to slow you down.



**A very wet post-parkrun picture with the parkrun pop-up sign.**

**As it was the last Saturday of the month (June), we were wearing our 5K Your Way tops**

Drying out took place in the Tim Hortons afterwards with around half the runners and volunteers enjoying a choice of the wide variety of breakfasts, meals, snacks, drinks and donuts on offer. We had a lovely chat with the Event Director / Area Ambassador who emphasised the importance of the local community. Interestingly, any thoughts of expansion were to set up another in the next neighbourhood rather than to increase numbers locally at Whitby even though the course could handle a bigger crowd. A great start to the holiday, sat in a big circle of like-minded parkrunners, all refusing to let some heavy rain spoil their Saturday morning gathering. We felt very welcome.

The contrast couldn't have been much bigger on Monday, yes Monday, a bonus parkrun day! The weather had spun on its head as we sweltered in the sunshine for the start of the RIVER OAKS parkrun in Oakville, around 25 miles (40k) southwest of Toronto along the shore of Lake Ontario. It was Canada Day and the volunteers were in full red and white maple leaf themed mood, with plenty of bunting. The rain at the weekend had reduced the participants then to just 27 on Saturday and maybe the thought of a festive run to look forward to had persuaded some to stay away. Or perhaps it was the promise of cake that led to their record attendance of 180 turning up for this event including international tourists from Welwyn Garden City, Aberdeen and Windsor.

The course starts close to the River Oaks Community Centre with ample parking available and makes its way on a tarmac path before turning right into a limestone woodland trail with dappled sun and areas of shade, before returning to the path and turning away from the start line to a turn point, bringing you back, to turn again onto the woodland path for a second loop. The course is the best part of flat with the odd stretch of soft ground. The next main left turn out of the woods heads you back to the finishing line with the almost straight path showing you really early where the finish is and when to press the turbo button.





**River Oaks: the wide straight path to the finish, and a big cake to celebrate Canada Day**

It felt like a real family day with many happy to sit on the banked side of the finish funnel amid the bunting watching others finish, enjoying the sunshine and sharing slices of a massive Canada Day themed cake. For us it wouldn't be a Canadian parkrun-day without a subsequent visit to a Tim Hortons (and there wasn't much else open early on a bank holiday!).

There may be hills and even mountains in eastern Canada but we saw few and managed to find a third venue where there was barely any elevation. DUFFINS TRAIL is in Ajax, Ontario, northeast of Toronto around 28 miles and 50 minutes driving parallel to the shore of Lake Ontario. The start was by a road intersection, marked by a totem pole. It was an unlikely looking place for a parkrun but the few people standing around when we arrived looked like possible parkrunners, then an apricot T-shirt came into view and we were able to pull into the Courtyard parking lot close by.

Duffins Creek is part of the Trans Canada Trail (The Great Trail) spanning the country for some 15,000 miles from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Fortunately, our bit was planned to be just the usual 5k.

The parkrun makes its way through woodland described as 'lush' and it certainly added some humidity to the route under the tree lined canopy and over a couple of footbridges on the out and back course. It may be a little narrow in places, but the small number of participants means you are rarely held up. A more leisurely pace will allow you to enjoy the scenery more, and the different bird songs.



**Totem Pole by the start / finish, and one of several waterways crossed by bridges on the route**

We met Eve and Ian from Stockport, of earlier apricot T-shirt fame, a little way up the road at a brilliant little coffee bar, The Bean & Basket in Pickering, offering discount for parkrunners post run (no Tim Horton's this time). The coffee was good and the cookies even better. We shared tourist stories, mainly theirs of the 200+ venues they had visited. We may have added three more brilliant parkrun venues to our list on this trip, but we are still a long way from that.

## 20 YEARS OF PARKRUN (by Alan Dolton)

As many Striders will already know, the first parkrun took place in Bushy Park in October 2004, so that this autumn saw parkrun celebrate its 20th anniversary. And, as many Striders will remember, the tenth anniversary of parkrun was commemorated by the publication of a book written by Debra, entitled 'parkrun: much more than just a run in the park'. I reviewed Debra's book in the December 2014 issue of this magazine. Ten years later, I thought that it would be interesting to look back at Debra's book and reflect on some of the changes there have been in the time since its publication.



The very first event, in October 2004, was called the 'Bushy Park Time Trial'. It attracted just thirteen runners, eleven of whom were members of Ranelagh Harriers. (One of them, Matt Morgan, subsequently joined Striders and still holds our men's steeplechase record.)



**Runners at the start of the first parkrun, at Bushy Park in October 2004**



The second anniversary run, in October 2006, attracted 378 finishers. The 392nd Bushy parkrun, in January 2012, attracted exactly 1000 finishers. That record was broken a year later, when the 445th Bushy parkrun attracted 1051 finishers. Numbers have continued to grow: the 1000th Bushy parkrun took place on 31 August 2024, and attracted a total of 6204 finishers (including nine Striders).

A second venue, at Wimbledon Common, began in January 2007. In June 2007 it was followed by a third venue, at Banstead Woods. Later in 2007, parkrun expanded outside the M25, with venues at Leeds and Brighton, and also with a venue at Harare in Zimbabwe which only lasted for a couple of years. Paul Sinton-Hewitt formed a limited company, UKTT Ltd, to administer the growing number of events. In 2008 the company decided to begin using the term 'parkrun', and registered the domain name [www.parkrun.com](http://www.parkrun.com). Debra's book quoted former Strider Kevin Hann as observing that:

"I'd heard that Bushy Park Time Trial was going on, and the appeal was obviously that it was free, but the name 'Time Trial' gave the impression that it was elitist, that it was for faster people. It gave no indication that it was also for slower or all runners. ... But when it changed to being parkrun, that gave it a completely different image, because it's open to everyone. It doesn't give that elitist overtone."

Despite the failure of the venture into Zimbabwe, parkrun did succeed in expanding outside the UK, with the first parkrun in Denmark taking place in 2009. Closer to home, the Lloyd parkrun began in October 2010, while the South Norwood parkrun began rather later, in July 2017. Debra's book also noted that March 2014 saw the launch of parkrun in Russia. The Russian events were subsequently suspended in March 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. 2022 also saw the suspension of parkruns in France, after the French authorities ruled that parkrunners must produce a medical certificate.



**The Yelagin Island parkrun, to the west of St Petersburg, took place from 2014 until 2022**

It now seems to be generally accepted that parkrun is a run and not a race, and has 'first finishers' rather than 'winners'. However this was not always clear in the early years of parkrun. The Croydon Guardian regularly published reports describing the Banstead Woods Time Trials, and later also the Roundshaw parkrun, as races. The magazine 'Athletics Weekly' published weekly lists of the fastest times, referring to the first finishers as 'winners'. For example, a report in January 2013 stated:

“Clare Elms’ two wins on New Year’s Day, at Greenwich and Hilly Fields, meant she became the first athlete to win their first 50 parkruns. However, Richard Ward, who beat her into second overall at the latter, leads the all-time lists as he won his 135th parkrun in 157 starts.”

Athletics Weekly continued to print parkrun results until late 2017. More recently, in an attempt to demonstrate that parkruns are not races, parkrun HQ has removed some of the historical data, including lists of the fastest 500 runners at each course, from the various parkrun websites.

The sixth chapter of Debra’s book, entitled ‘the numbers game’, emphasised one of parkrun’s main attractions, which is that runners receive our official times very soon after finishing. When I began competitive running, more than 40 years ago, it was common for there to be a delay of at least a week before runners received the official results of road and cross-country races. And although things have improved with the development of the internet, it is still fairly common for the results of some weekend races not to be available when the weekly Striders newsletter is emailed early on a Monday morning.

The chapter also mentioned that by the tenth anniversary of parkrun in October 2014, a total of 147 runners had completed at least 250 parkruns. This included one Strider, the late Kevin Burnett, who ran his first parkrun at Banstead Woods in 2007 and died in May 2024: his obituary appeared in the June 2024 issue of this magazine. By the end of August 2024, when the 1000th Bushy parkrun took place, a total of 49 runners had completed at least 700 parkruns, while a total of 260 runners (including three Striders) had completed at least 600 parkruns.

I found the ninth chapter of Debra’s book, dealing with the timing and recording system, particularly interesting. The late Jenny Booth, who was one of the most regular helpers at the Lloyd parkrun and frequently acted as run director, recalled that when she began volunteering at Banstead, “we just had the timer, that was all. Everyone’s name and position had to be written down by hand.” The barcode system was introduced in 2009, although initially it was not made compulsory and several run directors (including Debra and Jenny at Lloyd Park) continued to enter runners without barcodes into the official results manually. This was somewhat time-consuming, and eventually parkrun HQ introduced a rule of ‘no barcode no result’. (This doesn’t mean that a runner with no barcode will be banned from running, but it does mean that they will appear in the results as ‘unknown athlete’.)

The Covid pandemic meant that there were no parkruns in the UK between 14 March 2020 and 24 July 2021, and when parkrun resumed, it was with a completely new system of timekeeping and recording. The stopwatches and barcode scanners which had been used before Covid were replaced by the current system whereby the volunteers acting as timekeepers and barcode scanners download the ‘Virtual Volunteer’ application onto their mobile phones. This clearly reduced the risk of volunteers catching Covid, but the one drawback is that the application uses a lot of battery power, so it is not really suited for those volunteers (including me) who have lower-quality mobile phones which use up battery power quite quickly. Of course, there are still several other volunteering roles available for people in this situation.

The chapter also included a section on the finish funnel. Most parkruns, including Lloyd Park and South Norwood, still cope with a single finish funnel. Bushy Park, with its very large numbers of runners, uses a multiple funnel. Incidentally this is a case where a parkrun volunteer seems to have ‘reinvented the wheel’, as one of the volunteers at Bushy Park told Debra that he had introduced the multi-funnel system based on his experience of boarding a car ferry. In fact, the multi-funnel system had been used in major cross-country races such as the National Cross-Country Championships and the English Schools Cross-Country Championships since the late 1940s. It was introduced by Leslie Cohen (1908-1985), a member of Belgrave Harriers who was secretary of the Southern Cross-Country Association for many years after the Second World War. The multi-funnel system was being used for the National Cross-Country Championships when I first competed in them in the early 1980s, and several members of Ranelagh Harriers who volunteered in the early years of the Bushy parkrun had previously competed in major cross-country races and seen the use of a multiple funnel.

Chapter 14 of Debra’s book included a section on the ‘points prizes’. Newer Striders may not be aware of these, but when the Bushy Park Time Trial began, it had ‘points tables’ for men and women, whereby the first finisher of each gender received 100 points, the second finisher received 99 points, and so on. Additionally, each parkrunner received 100 points on each of the first three occasions that they acted as a volunteer. Prizes were awarded in October 2005, at the first anniversary of the initial run. Similar points



tables and prize presentations were introduced at the subsequent venues such as Wimbledon and Banstead Woods. The points tables had the effect of encouraging runners to attend their local parkrun (although once parkrun expanded outside the M25, a growing number of runners began to use parkrun as an opportunity for tourism, which was discussed in chapter 8 of Debra's book). The tables also definitely encouraged parkrunners to volunteer at least three times per year, because anyone who had run frequently but never volunteered could easily be identified from the tables on the parkrun websites.

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



**Some runners like to end their parkrun with a finishing sprint (photo by Sean Parry)**

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



**November 2016: the final presentation of the Lloyd parkrun male points trophy  
(Steve Corfield first, Alan Dolton second, Matthew Stone third)  
(photo by Rowena Stone)**

Chapter 15 of Debra's book discussed 'parkrun and the wider running community'. Debra observed that 'some running clubs took enthusiastically to parkrun right from the start while others took longer to be convinced'. Striders can be ranked in the former category, as we were heavily involved in the creation of the parkruns at Roundshaw and Lloyd Park, with our former chairmen Robin Jamieson and John Gannon helping to design the courses.

Some runners who had been competing in mainstream events became enthusiastic parkrunners. One of the leading examples, referred to in Debra's book, was John Hanscomb of Ranelagh, who had competed in all of the first 28 London Marathons (from 1981 to 2008). He began parkrunning at Bushy Park in 2005, and in 2010 he became the second person to complete 250 parkruns. He ran his 648th (and final) parkrun in March 2020, just before the Covid pandemic. In 2005, at the age of 69, he was still able to run a parkrun in less than 26 minutes: in 2015, at the age of 79, he could still run a parkrun in less than 40 minutes. Sadly, he slowed significantly in his last five years of parkrunning: in October 2019 he was timed at 59 minutes 59, and that was the last occasion when he completed a parkrun in less than an hour.

Debra observed that 'in general, membership of running clubs increases due to participation in parkruns'. Striders are certainly an example of this, as our membership has grown significantly since the Lloyd parkrun began, and many of these new members have discovered Striders through parkrun. Some clubs were more dubious about parkrun, with some team managers expressing concern that their members might choose to compete in parkruns rather than compete in team competitions such as our Surrey League matches. Although one can understand the frustration which team managers may sometimes feel at a good runner not competing for the club team, on balance there can be no doubt that Striders have benefited from having a successful parkrun so close to our club headquarters. And, as a later section in the chapter indicates, parkrun has also provided a way in which runners of all abilities can compete for their club through the use of parkruns as inter-club 'mob matches', such as our annual matches against Croydon Harriers, which are now incorporated into the South Norwood parkrun.



# BOOK REVIEW – THE ART OF RUNNING FASTER

(by Julian Goater: reviewed by Alan Dolton)

Julian Goater was one of Britain's leading distance runners of the early 1980s. He is probably best known for his outstanding win in the 1981 National Cross-Country Championships at Parliament Hill Fields, held on a course which had become exceptionally muddy following torrential rain, and which has been described as the most difficult 'National' since 1972 (when the race was held at Sutton Coldfield in such a severe blizzard that one of the marshals died of hypothermia shortly after the finish). Goater coped with the mud far better than any of his rivals, winning by almost two minutes, which was one of the biggest winning margins in the history of the race. Goater was not quite as successful on the track, having narrowly missed selection for the 1980 Olympics, but he still places 13th in the British all-time 10000 metre rankings, with a best time of 27 minutes 34 seconds, set in 1982. He subsequently became a successful coach. Among the athletes he has coached was Cecilia Morrison, who in 2012 set a British W70 5000 metre record of 22 minutes 06.2. (This record was broken by Angela Copson in 2017, but still places Cecilia third in the all-time British W70 rankings.)

Goater's book 'The Art of Running Faster' was originally published in 2012. Twelve years later, it is still in print and still available in local bookshops. The book is divided into 13 chapters and into two parts, the first of which is entitled 'Building the Base' and the second is entitled 'Sharpening the Knife'. The first chapter ('pushing the limits') observes that, while many runners appear to be obsessed with improving their stamina, they should also aim to improve their speed, suppleness, strength and running technique. The second chapter ('aiming true') recommends that athletes should do at least one long run and at least one repetition session as part of their week's training: he also recommends fartlek sessions (including some faster efforts on mixed terrain), and some easy recovery runs. The third chapter ('running with skill') encourages runners to improve their technique: he suggests that many runners need to improve their stride-rate and shorten their stride-length. He expands on this in the fourth chapter ('gearing up for success'), in which he comments that many runners take too long a stride when running up hills.

The fifth chapter is a brief but very useful guide to stretching for runners. Goater comments that some runners are deterred from stretching by the wide variety of possible stretches. He picks out six stretches (one each for hamstrings, quadriceps, adductors, each of the calf muscles and the piriformis) to give a short but effective way for runners to maintain and improve their flexibility. This is followed by a chapter entitled 'take a deep breath', which encourages runners to try to improve their lung capacity by breathing more deeply. He also recommends that runners should do their steady runs at a pace which allows for conversation, and some Striders will be happy to follow his advice that 'if you're running with a group, talk a lot'.

The final chapter in this part of the book explains the benefits of joining a running club for company, coaching and motivation. Goater observes that 'running as part of a club team, whatever your level, gives you more motivation and inspiration than running on your own, and that helps you dig deep and discover your potential'.

The second part of the book begins with a chapter encouraging runners to do some training on hills. (Most Striders should be well aware of the value of this, as we are fortunate to have our base very close to the North Downs, giving our 'routemasters' a good selection of hills to choose from for our Wednesday and Sunday runs, and our local parkrun also includes an uphill section on each lap.) This is followed by a chapter entitled 'strength in the fields', encouraging runners to improve their strength by taking part in cross-country races.

The tenth chapter deals with speed training. Goater recommends that runners should include regular speed sessions for at least ten months of each year, and encourages runners to vary their sessions, rather than repeating the same session every week. (Our club sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays deliberately vary from week to week.) He also comments that speed sessions should be short enough for runners to do them at faster than their race pace, and specifically criticises coaches who set sessions of 10 x 1,000 metres at 10K pace, commenting that this session is hard enough to tire runners out but not fast enough to allow them to improve.

The eleventh chapter deals with injuries. Besides qualifying as a coach, Goater also qualified as a sports massage therapist, and not surprisingly he advises runners who have any type of minor injury to visit a sports massage therapist without delay. He observes that many injuries result from postural imbalances, such as always carrying a bag on the same shoulder or in the same hand, and that 'women who always carry their babies on their left hips because they're right-handed' are liable to suffer from problems in their back, hips or gluteal muscles. He also advises runners who are training hard to visit a therapist even if they are not injured, observing that 'a sports massage therapist can identify imbalances and treat them before you're aware of them and before they develop into injuries'.

The penultimate chapter, entitled 'all in your head', deals with the psychological aspects of running, while the final chapter ('reaching your peak') deals with the process of peaking and tapering for an important race. Goater advises runners to 'focus on an important race months in advance and use other races to help you build up to the important one'. For many Striders, the focus of their training will be a marathon: but for others, it may be a particular championship (such as the Surrey Masters Championships, or one of the Surrey road championships such as the Ranelagh Half-Marathon or the Dorking 10 miles); or it may be a race on a particularly fast course which gives a good chance of a personal best.

I found this to be an inspiring book, with some interesting anecdotes about Goater's days as an international-class runner as well as quite a lot of training advice. I do not share all Goater's views: for example, I do not share his enthusiasm for fartlek sessions, because my experience as a coach is that many novice runners find these to be too unstructured, and can end up doing them either too hard or not hard enough, whereas with repetitions over a set distance it is much easier for a runner or a coach to judge the appropriate pace. However, I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who is serious about trying to improve their running performance.



**Cecilia Morrison, who was coached by Julian Goater,  
and who set a British W70 5000 metre record of 22 minutes 06 seconds in 2012**

*(This article previously appeared in the March 2015 club magazine, but is republished here – in a slightly revised form – for the benefit of newer Striders)*



## COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2024

In the England Masters Inter-Area Challenge at Corby on 7 September, Steve Corfield ran very well to set a club M60 400 metre record of 61.10 seconds. In the Kent Masters Championships at Gillingham on 14 and 15 September, Peter Johnson won gold in the M60 1500 metres (5:16.81) and 5000 metres (19:29.49).

Striders' men did well to place second in the first East Surrey League cross-country race of the season, at Lloyd Park on 28 September. Tatsuya Okamoto was eighth, completing the five-mile course in 29:11. Andrew Aitken was 13th (30:04), James Rhodes 18th (31:29) and Nathan Robertshaw 19th (31:35). Striders' women placed fourth. Kara Boaks was the eleventh woman to finish (38:22), with Ellyw Evans 16th (40:00), Cindy Siu 19th (41:56) and Ruth Pearson 28th (52:13).

The 30th Switchback five-mile race took place on 6 October. The first man home was Toby Rowlands of South London Harriers (29:56). For Striders, Tatsuya Okamoto placed third overall and first in the M40 age-group (30:12). Harry Madgwick-Lawton was seventh (31:36), Nathan Robertshaw eighth (32:19), James Rhodes ninth (32:22), Max Veglio 12th (32:33) and Andrew Aitken 13th (32:37). Lee Flanagan was 14th overall and first in the M50 age-group (32:48), while Steve Corfield was 21st overall and first in the M60 age-group (34:40). The first female finisher was Alexandra MacEwan of Frontrunners, who placed 20th overall (34:38), followed by Lucy Cole of Croydon Harriers who was 25th overall (36:50). The first female Strider was Selena Wong, who placed 78th (45:00), while club colleague Debra Bourne was 88th (46:36).

Striders' men placed eighth in their first Surrey Cross-Country League race of the season, at Reigate on 12 October. Phil Coales ran well to place 25th, completing the undulating five-mile course in 31:09. Andrew Aitken was 51st (32:16), Harry Madgwick-Lawton 64th (33:00) and James Rhodes 69th (33:10). Lee Flanagan was third in the M50 age-group and 71st overall (33:17), while Marc Burrows was 100th (34:33), Martin Filer 107th (35:02), Peter Mills 113th (35:12) and Erik Schrijnemaekers 128th (35:49). Steve Corfield completed the scoring team, placing third in the M60 age-group and 133rd overall (36:15).

Striders' women placed fifth in their Division Three match at the same venue. Team manager Ellyw Evans placed 13th, completing the six-kilometre course in 30:25. Consuelo Kennefick was 23rd (31:37), Debra Bourne 26th (32:24), Cindy Siu 29th (33:02), Jane Hughes 68th (38:05), Yasmin Anderson 70th (38:19), Linda Jones 71st (38:37), Eleanor McCallum 72nd (38:44) and Ruth Pearson 73rd (38:50).

In the Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships, at Nonsuch Park on 26 October, Steve Corfield ran very well to place second in the M60 race. Tatsuya Okamoto was fifth in the M40 race, while Robert Zietz was fifth in the M65 race with Jon Dean sixth. David Hoben was eighth in the M70 race. Striders placed fourth in the W45 team event: Selena Wong was 12th, Linda Jones 14th and Natalie Ballarin 15th.

Striders' women placed fourth out of 14 clubs in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three match at Hurst Green on 9 November. Ellyw Evans ran very well to place sixth out of the 103 finishers, completing the six-kilometre course in 26:58. Kara Boaks was tenth (28:01), Cindy Siu 26th (29:54), Leonie Hondeborg 27th (29:56), Debra Bourne 37th (30:40), Ruth Pearson 63rd (33:58), Yasmin Anderson 65th (34:15), Rachel Gwynn 66th (34:18), Jane Hughes 69th (35:17) and Jay Brzask 90th (37:46).

Striders' men placed ninth in their Division Two match at the same venue. Phil Coales finished 60th, completing the eight-kilometre course in 28:54. Andrew Aitken was 63rd (28:59), Harry Madgwick-Lawton 67th (29:16) and James Rhodes 68th (29:17). Lee Flanagan was 89th (30:07), Marc Burrows 98th (30:28), Peter Mills 99th (30:28), Nathan Robertshaw 117th (31:02) and Conor O'Hara-Barrett 125th (31:15). Steve Corfield was first in the M60 age-group, placing 131st overall (31:25).

Also on 9 November, Ally Whitlock was the fourth woman to finish the Centurion Wendover Woods 50-mile race, placing 28th overall out of 204 finishers (9:57:47).

On 23 November, Striders placed tenth in the South of the Thames Cross-Country Association's five-mile inter-club race at West Horsley. They were led by Phil Coales who placed 32nd out of the 152 finishers (31:03). Andrew Aitken was 34th (31:07), James Rhodes 55th (32:29) and Andy Perks 86th (35:16).

## 20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2004/05

The South of the Thames Cross-Country Championships took place at Wimbledon on 18 December. Striders' men placed tenth in the team event. Nigel Davidson was 74th, completing the twelve-kilometre course in 49 minutes 54. Justin Macenhill was 84th (51:25), Chris Morton 97th (52:49), Alan Dolton 123rd (56:43), Paul Weir 138th (61:25) and Tom Littlewood 140th (61:47). In the women's race, Jo Corrigan was eleventh (58:35) and Patricia Carr 24th (69:43).

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships were held at Lloyd Park on 8 January. Striders' best placing came from Sophie Shaw in the under-13 girls' race. She ran strongly to place tenth of the 45 finishers. The senior women's race was won by Lorna Vyse of Woking, who completed the five-mile course in 30 minutes 37. Ranelagh won the team event. Striders were led by Serena Stracey who ran well to place 29th (37:57). Club colleague Faye Stammers was 44th (40:30) with Kerry Backshell 48th (41:21).

The senior men's race was won by Dave Taylor of Herne Hill, who won this event for the fourth time in five years. He also led his club to victory in the team event. Striders' senior men were without several of their leading runners, and had to settle for 12th place. Their best performance came from John Foster who placed 63rd, covering the 12-kilometre course in 50 minutes 14. Iain Harrison was 67th (50:29), Nigel Davidson 87th (52:10), Chris Morton 92nd (52:47), Ian Campbell 115th (55:16) and Alan Dolton completed the scoring team in 134th (56:42).

The penultimate Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season took place at Petersham on 15 January. Striders' women did well to place third in the match and retain third place in the league table. The team was led by Serena Stracey, who produced an excellent run to finish fifth, covering the 5,800-metre course in 23 minutes 46. Both Clare McFadzean and Faye Stammers also ran well to produce their best performances for the club, with Clare finishing 13th in 25 minutes 30, just one place and two seconds ahead of Faye. Patricia Carr ran steadily for 41st place (29:23) and Amalia Da Silva Lima completed the scoring team in 46th (29:46).

Meanwhile Striders' men placed fifth in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Three match at Lloyd Park. Justin Macenhill ran well to finish ninth, covering the muddy five-mile course in 31 minutes 20. John Foster was 15th (32:40), Iain Harrison 16th (32:44), Chris Morton 31st (34:31), Damian Macenhill 33rd (34:42), Simon Smith 59th (37:21), Steve Muntzer 63rd (37:32), Paul Finch 66th (37:47), Peter Yarlett 73rd (38:39) and Paul Weir completed the scoring team in 76th (39:06).

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country League completed its 26th season with a match at Ewell on 12 February. Striders' women produced an excellent team performance to finish second in the match, and gain promotion to Division One for only the second time in the club's history. Wimbledon Windmilers won the match with 39 points, but Striders' total of 103 placed us ahead of Walton (111) and Holland Sports (129), and well clear of promotion rivals Sutton Runners. Striders' women were led home by Serena Stracey who ran well to place fifth, covering the six-kilometre course in 27 minutes 15. Clare McFadzean continued her improvement to place 11th (29:19), with Faye Stammers 14th (30:02), Patricia Carr 33rd (33:44), Pat Edwards 40th (34:38) and Amalia Da Silva Lima 47th (35:58).

On the same day, Striders' men produced their best performance of the season to win the final Surrey League Cross-Country Division Three match of the season at Wimbledon Common, and gain promotion back to Division Two after just one year in Division Three. Our total of 258 points saw us well clear of nearest rivals Epsom (308), Sutton (329) and Dorking (383). In the overall Division Three table, Epsom were clear champions with 1263 points, but our total of 1471 saw us take the second promotion spot, ahead of Dorking (1501), Sutton (1502) and Woking (1624). Our team at Wimbledon was led by Justin Macenhill, who placed tenth, covering the five-mile course in 30 minutes 29. Scott Antony, making his league debut, produced an excellent run to place 13th (31:03), while Iain Harrison placed 15th (31:40). Our team packed very well with the next six scorers finishing within less than 30 seconds. Damian Macenhill was next home for the club in 25th (33:03), closely followed by John Foster (26th in 33:13) and Andy Allison (27th in 33:14). Nigel Davidson was 31st (33:25) while Toby Watson made an excellent debut to finish 33rd (33:29), just one place and one second ahead of team manager Chris Morton. Paul Finch completed the scoring team in 44th place (34:23). Striders also had twelve non-scorers.



## 10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2014/15

Striders placed fifth in the Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two match at Nonsuch Park on 6 December. Striders were led by Josephine Thompson who ran very well to place 15th of the 188 finishers, recording 27 minutes 08, while Alice Ewen also ran well to place 20th (27:29). Michelle Clarke finished strongly to place 42nd (29:25) with Becky Laurence 45th (29:28) and Zoe Williams completing the A team in 48th (29:36). For the B team, Debra Bourne was 51st (29:45) with Adele Boesinger 69th (31:12), Selena Wong 74th (31:26), Sarah Hansbury 109th (33:19) and Jessica Thomas-Cole 125th (34:32).

The second annual 'mob match' between Striders and local rivals Croydon Harriers took place on 13 December. For the second successive year Striders' superior strength in depth gave them victory in the team event, by 2608 points to 1952. Striders had a total of 31 runners finishing in under 25 minutes compared to only 21 Harriers, and overall Striders had a total of 58 finishers, compared with 37 from Harriers. New member Peter Mills ran well to place second (18:24) with Krzysztof Klidzia third (18:32), Ernie Hann sixth (19:10), Simon Ambrosi seventh (19:18) and Damian Macenhill eighth (19:21). Rachel Lindley was the first woman to finish, placing 14th overall in 20 minutes 04. Debra Bourne was the fourth woman to finish (24:18) with Becky Laurence fifth (24:23). Barry Finch was the first over-60 to finish, placing 70th overall (25:15). He was just three seconds ahead of his nearest rival, Norman Hemming of Croydon Harriers.

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships took place at Lloyd Park on 3 January. Paskar Owor of Belgrave won the senior men's race, while Herne Hill won the team event. Striders placed ninth out of the 17 complete teams. They were led by James Bennett who placed 37th of the 236 finishers, covering the muddy twelve-kilometre course in 46 minutes 29. Matt Morgan was 73rd (48:52), with Ernie Hann 85th (50:02), Simon Ambrosi 94th (50:51), Krzysztof Klidzia 99th (51:07) and Damian Macenhill completing the scoring team in 100th (51:15). Striders also had 12 non-scorers.

Georgie Bruinvels of Aldershot won the senior women's race for the third time in four years, and led her club to victory in the team event. For Striders' women, Serena Stracey was 64th of the 129 finishers, covering the eight-kilometre course in 39 minutes 15. Debra Bourne was 88th (42:55) and Katie McInnes 113th (47:48).

In the penultimate Surrey Women's League Division Two match of the season, at Wimbledon Common on 10 January, Rachel Lindley ran very well to place fourth out of the 166 finishers, covering the muddy five-mile course in 33 minutes 45. Josephine Thompson was 23rd (38:12), with Steph Upton 30th (38:50), Alice Ewen 43rd (40:18) and Selena Wong completing the A team in 71st (43:09). They placed sixth out of the 34 teams. For the B team, Debra Bourne was 79th (43:35) with Jessica Thomas-Cole 96th (45:28), Linda Daniel 129th (48:52) and Victoria Legge 166th (64:48).

Later in the day Striders' men competed in their Division Two match at the same venue. They placed fifth in the match, but remained third in the overall Division Two table. James Bennett was 11th (29:52) with Simone Luciani 17th (30:08) and Matt Morgan 23rd (30:42). Phil Coales, making his Surrey League debut, finished 48th (31:38), with Krzysztof Klidzia 55th (31:55), Damian Macenhill 60th (32:11), Justin Macenhill 68th (32:29), Simon Ambrosi 83rd (33:14), Mike Stewart 103rd (33:48) and Greg Williams completing the scoring team in 110th (33:56).

In the final Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Lloyd Park on 7 February, Striders did very well to place second of the nine clubs, and finished third in the final Division Two table. Simone Luciani ran very well to place ninth of the 157 finishers, covering the very muddy five-mile course in 31 minutes 25. Matt Morgan also ran well to place 17th (32:04) with Bill Makuwa 26th (32:25), Ernie Hann 33rd (33:05), Krzysztof Klidzia 36th (33:13) and Lee Flanagan 37th (33:19). Steve Starvis was 41st (33:24) with Justin Macenhill 42nd (33:26), Damian Macenhill 57th (34:29) and Simon Ambrosi completing the scoring team in 71st (35:20).

On the same day Striders' women placed sixth in their Division Two match at Coulsdon. The A team were led by Steph Upton who placed 29th of the 159 finishers, covering the five-mile course in 39 minutes 35. Alice Ewen was 38th (40:51), Josephine Thompson 39th (40:54), Becky Laurence 41st (41:11) and Debra Bourne 46th (41:49). They finished fifth in the final Division Two table.



**Rachel Lindley was the first woman to finish the Striders v Harriers mob match at Lloyd Park on 13 December 2014 (photo by Kevin Hann)**



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