

**BEDFORD HARRIERS**



**Awards Edition**

# *On the Run*

January 2017



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## A few words from Club Chairman, Steve Crane.

First of all, a belated Happy New Year to all our members and their families!

It is an honour, a privilege and a humbling experience to be invited to write this opening for the 2016 edition of On-The-Run. It gives me the opportunity to thank the Club's countless volunteers and is an opportunity that arises all too infrequently. Bedford Harriers AC is a hugely successful club by whatever method is used to measure success. This is 100% attributable to the efforts of the members. A heartfelt and public thank you goes out to each and every one of our innumerable and tireless volunteers.

The recently adopted club constitution contains, as does the first paragraph in the Club objectives, 'To facilitate participation in, and promotion of, the amateur sports of recreational and competitive running (including cross country, trail running/racing, multi-terrain), athletics, triathlon and duathlon and related sporting & social activities, in the area of Bedfordshire and amongst the local community.'

In 2016 the Club attracted 85 new members and a total of 3831 results were recorded by Harriers' members. These results covered 384 events including road races, cross country, trail, multi-terrain, athletics, triathlon and duathlon which demonstrates how successful the Club was at meeting this objective.

A considerable number of events and activities happen every year, so many in fact that my few words can only give a snapshot of them. However, some of the 2016 results deserve a little further scrutiny and maybe ones that escaped your attention. For example, 'Fellowship of the Idiots' 19.7 miles, 13th February, appeared intriguing. One Harriers' member took part; Robert Jones completed this in a time of 2.28.25 on a course in Albermarle, North Carolina YMCA to the top of Morrow Mountain and back. It was free to enter and amusingly, the three categories of entrants were, 'First Timers', 'Returning Idiots' and 'Not Running The Entire Distance'.

Also fascinating was the 'Trans Gran Canaria' (since I was writing this whilst relaxing in the Canaries this seems even more appropriate). Matt Burgin completed this in 28:56:55, a 126k run with 8,154m of climb. Well done Matt! Matt's full report is on the Harriers' website.

January 2016 saw the finale of the closely contested 'Three Counties Cross Country League'. Bedford Harriers had the pleasure of hosting the final race of the series using Sharnbrook Leisure Centre and its environs for the first time. Harriers men's and ladies' teams both finished 2nd overall giving a combined outcome of 2nd place. A very creditable effort and result by one and all.

As previously mentioned, these are just a glimpse of the huge number of events Harriers took part in during 2016. As you read through the magazine you will see more that will inspire and motivate you in 2017.

Best wishes to all.

Steve

# Plans Injuries and my first Ultra - Stephen James



12 months ago I was wondering what to do in 2016. My answer came from an unexpected Christmas present; a subscription to Trail Running magazine. There was a training programme in the January issue making the somewhat unlikely claim to go from Marathon to Ultra distance in 8 weeks. It had the expected tempo and half marathon runs each week with weekly long runs, set not by distance, but by time: 3, 4, 5, 2, 6, 7, 1 hours for 7 weeks and then the event. I was also struck by an article about eating savoury food including 'bean burritos' during ultras which also seemed pretty unlikely. My year plan for 2016 quickly shaped up to do MK Festival of Running's half marathon in March, MK marathon in May, then the 8-week programme and then St Cuthbert's Way Ultra 45-mile trail run in Northumberland in July. What could possibly go wrong?

A well-known ultra-running Bedford Harrier asked me in January why I was only doing the 45-mile (two thirds) version and not the full 100k starting at Lindisfarne? 'If you can do 45 miles you can do 62' was his very logical reasoning. Really? Having never run more than a road marathon I didn't know if I could get anywhere near 45 miles and 6,200 feet of ascent. Anyway bigger issues than whether I was being under-ambitious were rapidly developing. I had had hip problems since a fall the previous summer and the 3 Counties XC competition was exacerbating these. My hamstrings were starting to seize up and I had to duck out of my Wednesday Harriers' sessions with Neil and Sally's Group. I pulled out of the MK Running Festival and I limped around the Oakley 20 about 20 minutes outside my previous year's time. MK Marathon in May was equally bad; I got deep cramp in both hamstrings and I had to walk and jog the last 10 miles, relieved I was able to finish with some energy left.

So, I started the training programme feeling that not finishing or coming last were distinct possibilities. The summer weather was kind and I stuck to every training session in the plan, doing nearly all my training in the early morning (4am onwards) and most importantly; I slowed down. No Harriers' sessions (whoops) and no timed sprints, just longer and longer runs each Saturday in the cool of the morning with the shorter weekly runs being quicker but still relaxed. The long runs were mainly on the 3 Shires Way and I generally ran quite a bit slower than my road marathon pace for an hour, then walked, ate (including my own versions of bean burritos!), drank and anything else needed for around 5 minutes, in a repeating pattern.

I enjoyed looking round at the countryside but I did get lonely on the longest runs and I enjoyed meeting up with other runners when I could. Once I coincided with a group of Olney Runners and ran with them for several miles. I enjoyed their shock when I said I had already nearly run a marathon that morning. Two things were happening: my legs were loosening (someone said it must be like just 'doing loads of massive warm down runs') and while I was exhausted at the end of each long run I somehow managed to extend again the next week. The final hour of the final long training run was different though – for the first time I thought 'I could keep this going'. I had found a sustainable pace where I did feel I could run all day. Extraordinarily, my legs felt looser and better than at any time for years as the day approached (and they still do).

In Northumberland, it did mostly fall into place. I had a great logistics plan executed with family support. There were 36 starters for the 45-mile event (about twice this did the 100k event) and, while about 7 of these disappeared out in front to do times around 9 and 10 hours, there was a main peloton of runners in which I was near the front. The first half has three big hills including the highest, Wideopen Hill, at around 1,300ft. I felt strong and steady, mainly running on my own but in touch with and chatting to a group of around 6 people. As it went on, the soles of my feet started to get sore and later developed into big blisters. I realised my socks were too thin and I had missed a footbridge so ran through a ford, which didn't help. I did manage to stick to my hourly eating pattern, apart from a major sugar binge on the big final climb approaching Melrose. My time was just over 12 hours and I was the 13th finisher (11th male) which was a bit slower than I expected but much higher up the field. Apart from the blisters, I had no muscle or other injuries and was back running within a week. I am running better now than a year ago and back at regular Harriers' sessions and the new XC season. I have since researched and bought much thicker, better trail socks and I am hoping and planning to do the full version (100k) in July 2017. I really did enjoy all of it and it has done me no end of good plus, second time round, I will be much wiser for the event. Maybe Kevin was right about doing the 100k all along - we'll see.





# EMAC Race Walking

## Adam Hills discovers his hidden talent

Race walking is something that I had never tried until June of this year when Anna Folland entered me into the 1,500 metre event in Bedford as part of the EMAC series. I am not sure if it was because Anna had some intuition of my ability or whether it was just a random allocation but, my name was put forward.



I think it was in the last 250 metres that, through sheer determination, I managed to overtake him and then found myself in the lead! I thought this was too good to last and would not be able to maintain it as I have never won an important race in my life. I remember looking behind several times with some anxiety trying to gauge how close the guy was; he was approaching fast. As I reached the last 50 metres or so, I thought 'I could actually win this' and, guess what? I bloody did, by a tiny 3 seconds! The feeling of crossing that finishing line and actually winning a race just made me so happy and euphoric. It was such a surreal feeling and, I think it would be an understatement to say, that my success took many people by surprise.

The next EMAC event was a 1 mile Race Walk event in Milton Keynes. This time I decided to put in some practice and felt quite confident by the time the day arrived. Again, the same procedures applied with lining up and listening to the strict rules. I remember taking the lead straight away and was very determined to stay in this position. I loved hearing that 'last lap' bell knowing I only had one more to go. I won this event in a time of 8 minutes 42.4 seconds and was pleasantly surprised to beat Ian Hammet! (sorry mate!). On a serious note, I think everybody else did really well, especially as we don't train for these type of events and, there were some commendable performances by other Harriers who did other EMAC events that evening in support of our club.



Then, I competed in the 2k Race Walk EMAC event in Stevenage in August and I remember feeling more relaxed this time, but still not expecting to win because the distance was a little longer than I had been used to. I was really amazed to win this one also and in a time of 10 minutes 50.4 seconds. By now I had completed three Race Walks and won all of them. Still to this day, I have no idea how this happened; it was a total surprise.

Now, I realised the next event was going to be the biggest challenge; the 2016 EMAC Championship event in Sandy on 3 September. I felt quite confident because I had already completed the 2K distance and was familiar with the event, kind of, but did not expect to win. I was hoping to finish in the top five and anything higher would be a bonus. So, I turned up in Sandy and didn't know anybody; I believe that I was the only Bedford Harrier taking part on that cold, rainy day.

I did some practice around the perimeter of the running track trying to compose myself for what was going to happen early that afternoon. As the moment approached, I went to the start area and engaged in a bit of small talk with the other competitors. Again, the officials spelt out the rules including cautions and warnings for the race walk. Bizarrely, there was no gun, which I thought was a shame but, instead, they used a whistle. So, off we all went and I went straight to the front. I think I had a good idea that I was going to do well because there was quite a gap between me and the competitors behind me.

As I got to the back straight, I had a feeling that the official was going to do or say something to me because I noticed he was looking at me very closely. I was right, because as I approached him, he made absolutely sure that I saw the caution paddle; apparently, I had not kept my leg straight. I didn't mind being cautioned as I know they have an important job to do. Then, the bit I was looking forward to most; the sound of the bell (I know this might sound sad but, it adds to the experience!) but only if I was able to maintain the lead.

Then on to the last bend. The lady official was looking very closely and started to walk toward me. I thought I had done something wrong, but in actual fact, she was cheering me on. I then fully focused on that finishing line straight ahead of me. Even though my calves were burning, I felt elated when I crossed the line and achieved a new 2K personal best time of 10 minutes and 37.61 seconds. From being relatively unknown at the start of the race it was a wonderful experience to have people come up and congratulate me at the end.

I could not believe it when subsequently, I saw myself on the back page of the Times and Citizen newspaper; this has never happened to me before. Winning the EMAC Championships and the fact that my achievement was recognised in the local press was my most popular Facebook status. I have kept the newspaper as a souvenir because it may never happen again.

**So, what's next?** Well, when I won the 2016 EMAC Race Walk Championship, an experienced race walker approached me and said something like 'you need to be getting into this' and somebody else suggested that I enter a race walk event at the British Masters Athletic Federation. This sounds pretty serious stuff and I think, for now, I am going to see how things go.

I have to say that, generally, I have had a great year what with running a new 5K personal best after eight years and, of course, winning all race walking events. My thanks go to the coaches who have inspired me to come out of my comfort zone and to those who helped organise and took part in the EMAC series. I look forward to competing in EMAC events in 2017 and hope that our club can one day make it to the finals.

Adam Hills

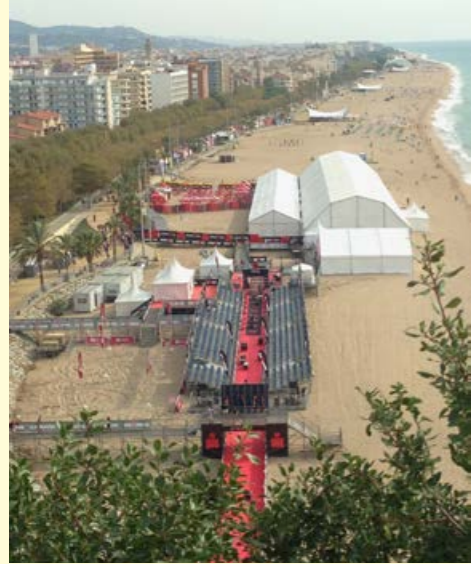




# The Spectathletes of Ironman Barcelona

Lynne Greenard and Elaine Fullard

Having marshalled on a previous occasion at Ironman Barcelona and having loved every minute of it, I asked Elaine if she would like to join me as a supporter at the 2016 event. To be honest, I think the pull of some late summer sunshine and delicious Catalan food was greater than the actual supporting bit but, she readily agreed.



So, we reserved our flights and booked accommodation at the local Camping Bungalows which, as it turned out, were ideally positioned right above the finish line and bike turnaround point - perfect for spectating. Our accommodation came with bicycle hire thrown in; more of that later.



So, the date in October soon came round and off we went. We got off the train at Calella station, ('Barcelona Ironman' is something of a misnomer as it actually takes place along the coast about an hour's train ride away) grabbed our suitcases and trundled up the road in search of our accommodation. Within about 5 minutes we bumped into a group of Harriers heading out to rack their bikes ready for the next day's racing. We said our 'hellos' and carried on our merry way only to bump into another group about 100 yards on. This was to be something of a pattern over the weekend to come.

Our 'bungalow' was great; not for those looking for the luxury of Egyptian cotton sheets and room service but comfortable enough for us. We had our own little pad

with parking, an on-site swimming pool and restaurant. A word of warning though for anyone thinking they might stay there on another occasion, there is a steep climb from the reception up to the bungalows which, after completing an Ironman, might not be your idea of heaven.



In the evening, we went out to explore downtown Calella and local Spanish culture. However, the town seemed to be in the middle of 'Oktoberfest'; there were 'Oompah' bands on every street corner and people dressed in traditional German garb. Clearly the local German population was staking out its territory against the marauding hordes of International triathletes. Predictably, we soon bumped into another group of Harrier competitors and supporters, some of whom it has to be said, had really got into the spirit of 'Oktoberfest' judging by how unsteady they were on their feet, and by the fact that they were planning to enter every Ironman and ultra competition in the world. I distinctly remember at least three people deciding to run across Norway. I wasn't sure if they'd planned to do that after the Ironman or just as a warm up.



The next day was Sunday and the day of the competition; the real reason (or so 'tis said) we had decided to turn up. I got up early so that we could see everyone off at the swim start. Happy in the knowledge I had a good hour to spare, I went down and had a leisurely breakfast and coffee. Elaine joined me about half an hour later but she seemed a bit agitated that I was sitting at the table in reverie, admiring the view. She then pointed out that time was getting a bit short. 'It's fine' I replied, 'we've got nearly an hour to get there'. It was then she showed me her watch and I realised that I hadn't adjusted mine and was still working on UK time. Oops! We

had exactly 10 minutes in which to sort out the bikes and get about a mile along the sea front. We pedalled as fast as we could on bikes that had definitely seen better days - to be honest, there was no need for the locks we were given as no one in their right mind was going to try and pinch them - and arrived at the start in the nick of time to join the other supporters. Alastair handed us the 'Harriers support crew' hats he had ingeniously decided to have made so that the team would be able to spot us on the course. So, suitably attired, we were ready for the off.

Once in their swim caps and wetsuits it was difficult to spot competitors we knew but the start was still an emotional affair. Even standing on the sidelines you could feel the adrenaline in the air so I can only imagine how those taking part were feeling. At least, on that particular morning, the sea was warm and as calm as a millpond and, for a fleeting moment, I almost felt jealous of their 2.4 mile swim to come. Soon they were off! It took about 45 minutes to get the last wave away and, by this time, we could see the elites returning to the exit.



It was time to move off and find another vantage point but first, we had more pressing concerns, so went off in search of the loos. The public ones were just up from the beach and were occupied when we got there so, doing what the British do best, we formed an orderly queue. We waited patiently for about ten minutes but there didn't seem to be any movement (bad choice of word on so many levels) so someone, who obviously wasn't British, knocked on the door and asked them to hurry up. It was then we realised that the loos weren't occupied but had been locked by the local council. Which jobsworth thought that was a good idea when thousands of people were descending on the town that weekend??? By now our little group had grown somewhat with more friends and family supporters all looking increasingly desperate. Like a military manoeuvre, we all moved up the promenade in search of the race portaloos. Now, I don't have to tell you, dear reader, just how disgusting these facilities become during big races and these were no exception. A couple of horrified, elderly (like me) ladies (not like me) tried several cubicles and complained loudly that there was no soap or loo paper. Demonstrating an uncharacteristic level of

organisation, I produced a roll of the sacred material and wet wipes from my rucksack and knocked on all the doors in the row offering the occupants a share of my charitable provisions. All were gratefully received. Well, that was my contribution to international relations for the day.

So, finally we moved a short way along the bike course ready to watch out for the team and give them cheers of encouragement. Identifying Harriers wasn't easy as, for one reason or another, some were not wearing the familiar black and yellow. We had no problem in spotting Angie as she was her usual 'vision in pink' but for the rest, we had to rely on face identification - really difficult with hundreds of cyclists whizzing past all wearing helmets and glasses. We ticked those we recognised off the list but there were still a few names to go, amongst them Gary Finch. It was really strange how many times we both thought he was approaching and started our 'Come on Ga.....' only to discover it wasn't actually him. 'What was going on?' we asked ourselves. 'Was there a Gary lookalike contest going on in Calella that weekend?' Just hope Angie checked that she took the right one (or, at least, the one she wanted) home.



Time to grab the velocipedes and head off back to the bike turnaround point. We saw a few Harriers go past us, negotiate the roundabout, and then pass us again to go back up the hill. Tony Parello was next along. We saw him go down and then waited for him to appear the other side of the roundabout. We waited, and waited but, no Tony. In the next instant an ambulance arrived. We convinced ourselves that Tony had come a cropper on the turn and was about to be whisked off to hospital. We rushed over and asked the crew what was going on but the answer was.....absolutely nothing. So, we decided either Tony had disappeared into thin air or, which is probably more feasible, he slipped past without us noticing. I'm pleased to report it was the latter.



Now, as we had transport, we decided we would go to the far end of the run course which was about four or five miles out of town. There, we figured, it would be a bit of a desert in terms of support so was a place we could be of more use. We took up our positions and waited for the Harriers to appear. It just so happened that we had positioned ourselves by the side of a boardwalk where a plank had become loose. Several runners had quite nasty falls there so we did our best to offer them solace, a wet wipe and a jelly baby. Pathetic tokens of sympathy they may sound but, you'd be surprised just how comforting they can be when you're stuck in the middle of nowhere, seemingly abandoned by the rest of humanity.



We stayed at our post for quite a while and cheered on several Harriers. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this issue, supporting is hard work. You have to concentrate so hard that your brain kind of freezes over and names of club members, even those you know well, momentarily escape you (please tell me this happens to everyone and not just me). Anyway, on this occasion, whenever I saw Paul Stuart, for some reason, I kept calling him 'Stuart'. I can only assume that my memory loss was due to being so excited by his outstanding performance. I have since apologised profusely and clearly he harbours no hard feelings toward me as he now addresses me as 'Greenard'.

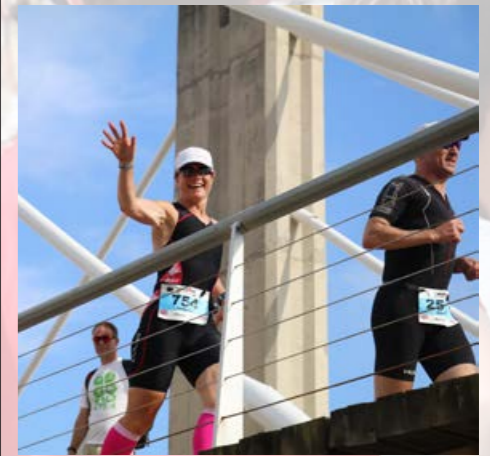


As the race progressed we moved back to the town and met up with several other members of the support crew to compare notes. The hours ticked by and dusk descended. The winners had received their medals, done interviews, had photos taken and were long gone. The majority were still out there and would be for some hours.

Anyway, we decided to go to the finish line and wait in the stands hopefully to see some of our team come home. Just as we got to a good vantage point we heard over the loudspeakers 'GARY FINCH, YOU ARE AN IRONMAN'. We hadn't got there in time to see the first 4 Harriers but we did manage to cheer Gary, Tony Parello and Simon Fisher home. Everyone, without exception, who crossed the finish line had a mixture of sheer relief, exultation and achievement etched on their faces even though most were on the verge of collapse. It's then that you realise just what a test of endurance and character this race is. Ironmen, we salute you all!



I could go on and bore you further with tales of what happened next; our mission, by fair means or foul (foul, as it turned out), to get a race flag for Simon Fisher, our search for the local nudist beach, the chaotic celebratory meal where none of the waiters could match up the food orders with the 30 or so diners in our group, another waiter, patently drunk, who force-fed us the most enormous paella but, I'll spare you the details.



So, if you fancy a weekend in the sun participating in the Ironman or just supporting the competitors and generally creating mayhem, we'll see you in Calella next year.

Lynne



# Are you a ~~victim~~ <sup>Sorry</sup> - Winner!

Name all Bedford Harriers in the pictures and win a chance to be the next victim of Billy's - photo corruptions!

You'll find Billy at the Awards Night behind the camera in the photobooth!

By Billy Fadden



And 2015 Awards Night photo corruption winner goes tooooo...



# DOING THE ROUNDS

## Bob Wells lays down the gauntlet



I gather that the Paddy Buckley Round in Wales and the Charlie Ramsay Round in Scotland are both even harder than the Bob Graham. I do not intend to test this assertion!

A famous few have completed two BGRs in succession, but until this year, only one man had completed the double in less than 48 hours. However, in May, breast cancer survivor Nicky Spinks, broke that record by a massive 2.5 hours. This must be one of the few times in any sport where a female has held the overall record (although I do remember Beryl Burton 277 mile 12-hour cycling time trial in 1967).

Nicky has some support from Inov8 who made a film of her Double, Run Forever (on You Tube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ABR30IHq4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ABR30IHq4)). I highly recommend it. Unusually for a sponsor's film, it is almost totally free of Inov8 publicity and tells a captivating story of the parallels between the mental battles involved in the record run and those in her battle with cancer. There are also some excellent shots to show the beauty of the Lake District. You will see why I prefer Kendal to Cranfield!

If you are wondering what to do after the Ultra-Trail-du Mont-Blanc, the Grand Raid of La Reunion, and the Marathon des Sables, then there is the Double BGR challenge waiting for you in the Lakes. I'll buy a round for your helpers at the finish!

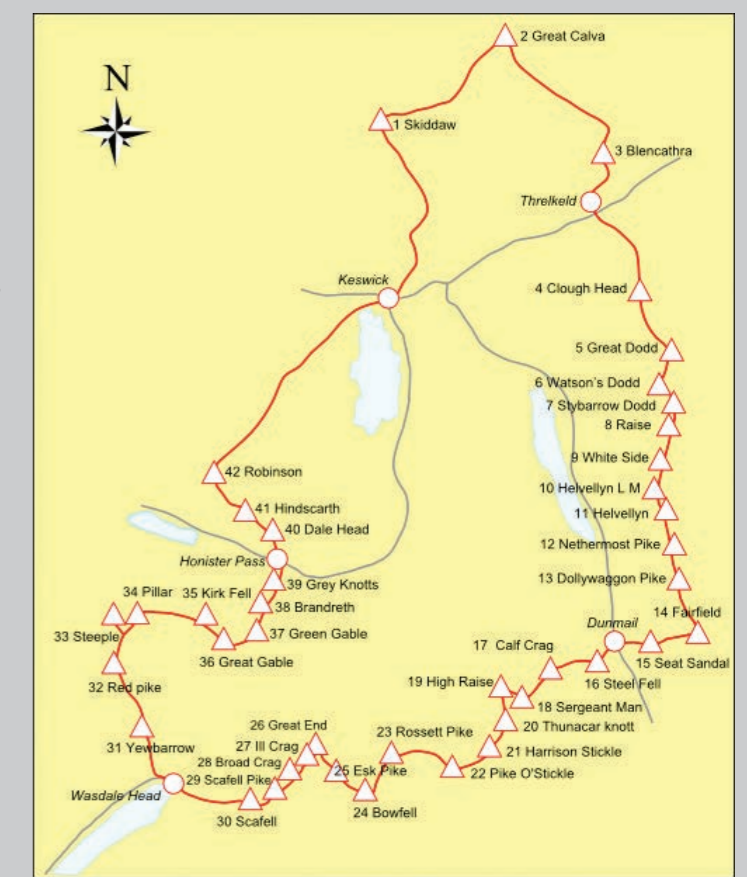
I first heard of the Bob Graham Round ([www.gofar.org.uk/bobgrahamround.html](http://www.gofar.org.uk/bobgrahamround.html)) from Garry Perratt, one of the prime architects of the Grizzly - an event which is now a popular event for the Harriers. In the early years of the Devon event, Garry arranged a weekend recce of some of the BGR route. Although I didn't manage to get to the Lake District myself, the reports that came back to the Oxford flood plain from an experienced mountain-runner friend, made me realise that the BGR was a monumental undertaking, way beyond my aspirations.

The challenge is to complete a 66-mile circuit from Keswick, with some 27,000 feet of ascent, to visit 42 peaks and return to the Moot Hall within 24 hours. Bob Graham did the first round in 1932 and nowadays there are about 100 attempts every year. Only about a third are successful. Has a Harrier ever had a go?

BGR disappeared from my radar until I moved to the Lakes a couple of years ago. For me the challenges of the District were the Fred Whitton cycling sportive and bagging the 214 Wainwright Fells. Whilst attempting the second of these with full fell-walking gear, I came across many mountain runners doing their thing in glorious surroundings with minimal gear.

I was most impressed. I was in awe that Jos Naylor had run all the Wainwrights in a week. It took me over 8 months (although I did sleep at night and ride the Fred Whitton in the same period!)

This fascination led me to Richard Askwith's book Feet in the Clouds (ISBN: 9781781310564) which is a real inspiration to would-be fell-racers - BGR-aspirants in particular - and a good read for all runners. He vividly describes his own years of effort and final sense of achievement in completing a successful BGR.





# Looking back at 30 years in triathlon... - Eva Kovacs



My first triathlon was in 1986; Ironman Locarno in Switzerland which, despite the name, was an olympic distance race. I signed up without really knowing what a triathlon was. I thought that spending summers at the local pool, biking daily to school and being a track athlete (up to 400m) would be enough as training. In honesty, this first race wasn't a great experience. I was kicked in my stomach after few strokes in the pool - no wonder with 15 people in each lane. Also, they made me swim 300m extra since the marshals couldn't keep up with counting. Finally, they sent me the wrong way on the bike even though I stopped to ask for directions which lead to an additional 15km. Surprisingly though, I didn't finish last but, after the race, I was sick for a week because I wasn't used to that degree of effort. This didn't stop me. A year later I was back at the same race knowing that I would easily beat my PB if this time I could stay on course. This was also the race where I stopped in T1 to dry my hair - one of those stories that make people laugh or scratch their head. It was different times... I wish I had photos to show how triathlon was at that time relative to now; tri bikes, aero helmets, compression socks, power meters, sports gels, etc. still needed to be invented.

I started practising triathlon more seriously when I moved to the Netherlands in 1994 and joined Triathlon Club Maastricht. Triathlon in the Netherlands was at its peak but, in my opinion, wasn't particularly friendly to the more recreational athletes. For example, cut-offs at races were very stringent; 6 hours for a half and 14 hours for a full. Also, there weren't many women racing, particularly on the longer distances. Often I would finish last or maybe second to last, which wasn't very motivating. But I didn't give up and I got better over time. My teammates nicknamed me 'diesel' because, while not fast, I could keep going forever. In 1998 I completed my first ironman distance race at Ironman (now Challenge) Roth. I had seen the race on TV and I got so inspired, particularly by those athletes that finished near the cut-off, that I wanted to experience the same. It took me two years to prepare and to gain the self-confidence to complete the race. It was an extremely tough one but, despite the suffering and the fact that I couldn't walk for three days post-race, I was hooked.

Fast forward several years and nine ironman distance races further, I moved to the United States in 2007 and joined the Gold Coast Triathlon Club. Triathlon in the United States was still relatively in its infancy but growing fast. It was more welcoming of recreational athletes and offered more prizes for age groupers. The number of women, while far lower than the number of male triathletes, was much higher than in Europe and growing. There were finally women of my level to race against, which helped with my motivation and performance. Surprisingly, I also reached the podium in a few races - and yes, there were more than three participants on those instances. In 2008, it was ironman distance race #10 at Ironman Florida. I promised myself that I would purchase a triathlon bike if I finished in under 13 hours - until then I had done all my races on road bikes. I finished in exactly 12 hours 59 minutes! Buying my first triathlon bike, which is the one I still use, was one of my most expensive, though most rewarding, shopping experiences. It proved totally worth every penny as it motivated me to bike even more. I got really strong as I was biking four times a week, to the point that I could challenge the boys. Not

surprisingly though, my running suffered big time as I was only running 5 miles per week on average; not a great amount when you are racing ironman.

I finally moved to the United Kingdom in 2013 and joined Bedford Harriers; 'a running club with a triathlon problem', according to one of the Ironman announcers. Initially, I only joined for the running but now I fully enjoy the camaraderie in many aspects; in training, in racing and for social events. I love it!

In 2015, as many of you know, I announced my retirement from ironman distance racing. After so many years and 25 ironman distance races, I found it difficult to maintain the same level of motivation in training. Also, my racing times got slower and bodily aches started to appear more often. But, before I knew it and, thanks to peer pressure, I was already signed up for the next one - probably one of the shortest retirements in triathlon history! However, I decided to somewhat change my approach to triathlon. I would focus less on performance or trying to beat my PB and I would put more emphasis in enjoying the race atmosphere without caring too much about the finishing time; in effect, doing just enough to make it before cut-off. This new approach really made a difference in 2016 and now, I have already signed up for three ironman distance races in 2017 i.e. Ironman Lanzarote, Triathlon Vitoria-Gasteiz and Ironman Maastricht. As you may gather, I am not done yet!

Over the past 30 years, I have done many triathlon races over many distances so, I would like to mention some that stood out, mainly in relation to the full or half ironman distance:



- **The best overall experience:** Without any doubt, Ironman World Championship Hawaii in 2012 for which I was selected in the first year of the Legacy Program. I didn't have a great day with regard to performance - during the bike portion I sat down on the roadside for a few minutes unable to continue in the heat and against strong headwinds. However, it was a unique and humbling experience to race in such an epic event with so many inspiring athletes, both professionals and age groupers.
- **The best performance:** Challenge Weymouth in 2014 where I finished third in my age group, thanks to a final sprint that allowed me to finish 10 seconds ahead of the fourth finisher.
- **The fastest:** Ironman Canada (Penticton) 2010 in 12 hours 48 minutes, definitely one of my favourite races.
- **The physically toughest:** Embrunman in the French Alps in 2001 with the climb of the Col d'Izoard in scorching heat. It took me two attempts. The first time I missed the bike cut-off by 15 minutes. The second time I finished in almost 17 hours as ninth, and only, non-elite woman. For years my name still appeared in the race program.
- **The mentally toughest:** Ironman Arizona in 2009. I started the race unfit. I managed the swim and bike but I couldn't breathe properly while running. The medical team couldn't determine what was wrong so I decided to continue the race but, I had to walk the entire 42km! It is hard to run a marathon but it is much harder to walk it. I couldn't even run the last bit to the finish line despite the loud cheers of the spectators. It was the only time I finished a race in tears; mostly of relief.
- **The warmest:** Ironman Austria in 2012, with a no wetsuit swim in 27C water and the remainder of the race in 40C (35C when the sun went down). It was the first, but not only, time that I ended up in the medical tent with a saline infusion after the race.
- **The wettest:** Ironman 70.3 Wimbleball in 2013, biking in torrential rain - I met the bike cut-off by only 4 seconds.
- **The windiest:** Holland Almere in 2002 where, at times, I was biking around 12km/h against the wind; even slower than in Hawaii.
- **The most unconventional:** Ironman 70.3 Panama. We swam in the Panama Canal and we biked over the Bridge of the Americas; monumental! The country's president came to give a speech at the opening ceremony. Also, it was full of paparazzi, not for the president, but for Lance Armstrong in one of his few appearances in triathlon. He beat me big time but, we all know why!
- **The scariest moment:** Ironman Sweden in 2015 where I had a panic attack during the swim, which was only resolved after I climbed out of the water and sat on rocks for several minutes. At Ironman Barcelona in 2016 I hit a cone. Luckily, both bike and I were fine but, I can't say the same for the cone.
- **The biggest goose bump moment:** Definitely climbing the Solarer Berg at Ironman/Challenge Roth; a race that I have done five times. An incredible experience and worth doing the race just for the climb. Also, I would consider this as the best race for iron virgins.

- **The best organized:** Ironman Mt Tremblant in 2012, which impressed me with its flawless execution in its first year.
- **The unexpected:** Ironman Weymouth in 2016 when I made the decision to sign up only one week before the race. No regrets!
- **The most homey:** Ironman Zurich in 2004, with the bike course passing my old student home.
- **The nicest swim:** Ironman Barcelona in 2016. Calm water, nice temperature, buoys easy to follow. It helped that it was a rolling start, and the mass starts with up to 3000 athletes were spectacular although crowded.
- **The nicest bike:** Ironman Canada (Penticton) in 2011. It helped that it was also my fastest; the only time I rode under 6 hours despite the climb of the Richter Pass. I loved the last part of the bike course; mostly downhill and very fast.
- **The nicest run:** Not applicable. There is no such thing as a nice run. But, if I am pushed, then Ironman Coeur d'Alene in 2009 - great atmosphere and running with a guy dressed as Elmo from Sesame Street.
- **The best finish:** Ironman Sweden in 2015 where I finished during hero hour; just 15 minutes before cut-off. The atmosphere was so electric that it totally made up for a very disappointing race. I was even featured in the official race video. Ironman Lake Placid in 2011 also had an amazing finish in the olympic oval; the cheering of the spectators was so loud that my heartbeat shot to the stars. And, Ironman Austria in 2012 had cheerleaders.
- **The best supporting crew:** Ironman Barcelona in 2016, of course.

And I could go on and on...

## Closing Remarks

To date, I have completed 27 ironman distance races and many other shorter distances races. Triathlon in general, and ironman distance racing in particular, has given me a lot over all these years. Body and mind have been challenged many times and in many ways and, through this, I have learned a lot about myself both in terms of abilities and limitations. I have also had the opportunity to travel and to see amazing places, often combining racing with a vacation. Finally, I had the joy to be part of various triathlon communities, to meet many inspiring people and to make friends all over the world.

People often think that I have talent for sports, that I am always full of energy and motivation, and that I train like a beast. Nothing could be more untrue. Where my strength lies is that I persevere and don't give up easily even when things get hard. I hope to inspire fellow athletes, especially those who, like me, are not the fastest, strongest or most talented. I truly believe that we can achieve more than we think we are capable of as long as we want it and we put in time, effort and heart into it.

As my favourite quote says:

*If you can dream it, you can do it!*



# Ironman Copenhagen

or, 'in search the little mermaid' - Jutta Crane

Once again, the other half entered an Ironman so I was duly recruited as 'support crew'. Luckily, Juliet Smith agreed to come along as well. We managed to keep this a secret from Steve so when she turned up at our apartment in Copenhagen he was very touched.

On Friday, we set off and drove the bike course in the car, stopping for a lovely lunch by the sea. We managed to dodge the stalls in the expo and not spend any money. Saturday was spent racking the bike and then Juliet and Steve decided to go for a swim in the lagoon where the Ironman swim was going to take place. Muggins looked after the bags, got sand in her shoes and had a coffee whilst trying to work out the best vantage points for spectating on the Sunday.

Copenhagen has the most fantastic underground system; it only has two lines, east to west and north to south. So, we decided to make our way to the start by underground and then walk the last mile. Once we had seen Steve off on his swim we made our way back to the apartment, via the baker's to get fresh rolls and croissants (hungry work this spectating, especially since we had been up at 4:30 am). So we added another mile and a half to our tally. We had been told that we could take the underground and then the train to the bike turnaround point which, we were assured, was just around the corner from the railway station exit. Ha! Dream on. We walked for miles, literally, and then encountered some of the elite already on their way back into Copenhagen and the bike finish. We eventually got to the place in question; about halfway on the bike course, and waited for Steve to come past. Just then, I spotted him coming down the hill and so I looked for Juliet. "He is here, quick, wave!!" Alas, she had gone window shopping round the corner and missed him.

She was upset about this so, to make her feel better, we went for an ice cream. It worked! Well, ice cream makes everything better, doesn't it. Off we went, another two mile hike back to the railway station. On the train, musing where to go next, Juliet decided

that she needed to see the little mermaid, without which, a trip to Copenhagen is not complete. I told her "It's a teeny weeny bronze sculpture in the sea; really not worth the bother". Nope, she insisted. We got off the

train and, guess what? We walked some more! Another mile to the sea where the statue is. En route we passed a café with this outside (see picture).

"Ooh, we found her", squealed Juliet. "No, sorry, that is definitely not the little mermaid!" I still had to take a picture of Juliet posing with it though.

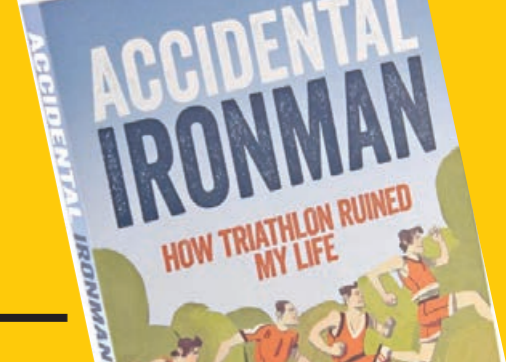
We duly found the real thing, Juliet posed, I snapped away. We wanted to stop for a picnic lunch and wait for Steve to ride past us so, we checked the Copenhagen Ironman app (brilliant stuff, you can follow the athlete all the time and see what check points he has passed). I realised we had a problem; he had not passed any check points in 70 minutes and he should have done so about every 20 minutes. So, off we went, back to the underground and then on to HQ in Copenhagen city centre. We figured that if something was wrong we would find out at HQ. Three miles later, we got there and, guess what? Yeah, he had already gone through so we waited and, in due course, he appeared, en route to transition.

So on to the run course where we clapped and cheered. The city of Copenhagen had provided free deckchairs by the harbour so we finally sat down. Juliet found a stall that sold red wine so she was happy and I had some coffee that didn't have sand in it.

Steve finished in a great time and we met him at the finish line. Then a walk to the bike racking, another walk to the underground and then a stroll back to the apartment. All in all we walked over 20 miles that day, including the little mermaid detour (which looked more like the fallen Madonna with big boobies) which just goes to show - spectating is hard! Good fun, but hard work. Thanks Juliet for making it out to Copenhagen; it was great to have company on the day and Steve really appreciated the fact that you made a special effort to be there.



# The secret code of T-shirts



More observations from Martyn Brunt 'The Accidental Ironman - How triathlon ruined my life'.

I have read other sports books this year, honest, but this one still stands out as the most entertaining read. The author offers another note of caution this time about one's choice of T-shirt at triathlon races.

What you think it says	What you think it says	What it really says
Any T-shirt from a 5k, 10k, or half marathon running race	I am a proper runner	I haven't done a triathlon
Finisher's T-shirt from a sprint triathlon	I am a triathlete	I am a novice
Marathon finisher's T-shirt	I am an endurance athlete	I am a crap cyclist
Finisher's T-shirt from an Olympic-distance triathlon	I am a better triathlete than anyone wearing a sprint triathlon T-shirt	I am either too old or too young to do anything longer than two and a half hours
Ironman 70.3/Middle distance finisher's T-shirt	I am a proper endurance athlete	I haven't done an Ironman
Something whacky or adventurous like Xterra, a Channel swim, or Land's End to John-O'Groats bike ride	I am the real deal	I also haven't done an Ironman
Non-Ironman such as the Outlaw or, er, Challenge Roth	I have definitely done an Ironman	I still haven't done an Ironman
Ironman finisher's T-shirt	I AM AN IRONMAN	I haven't been to Hawaii
Double Ironman finisher's T-shirt	Ironman is for wimps	I've given up trying to get to Hawaii
Ironman Hawaii world championship finisher's T-shirt	Top this you b*****s	This T-shirt cost me so much money I may have to fake my own death and move to Panama

He adds that however unsuitable your choice, it MUST be one from a race you've actually done.

If you break this taboo, you risk being driven out of town by a mob brandishing burning track pumps. You have been warned!





# Bringing ultrarunning to the Harriers - Mark Taggart

Having decided to add an ultra distance to the Bedford Harriers club championship races, we'd settled on the Stort 30 as our inaugural event for 2016. A reasonably local, flat, easy to navigate course, at 30 miles it was perfect for first timers looking to step up from the marathon distance. Having pushed for an ultra to be added I'd also felt I should take ownership of publicising it and encourage people who wanted to train for a new distance. So one of the unexpected outcomes was stepping up to be a group leader within the club, something I'm still pretty new at, but hoping to enjoy!

## The day arrives

After a summer of weekend training sessions - some with others, quite a few of the longer ones on my own - the day arrived and off I went to join the handful of Harriers who had entered the event. This isn't my first ultra, and having done races of up to 100km before I know how nice it is to have people to run with, as it becomes tough and lonely out there. Sadly though, one of the club members that I'd done most of my training with, George, had picked up a chest infection and so had been forced to pull out, but I still had a couple of Harriers I'd trained with to team up with on the day.

One of those fellow training buddies - Juliet (Ironman/woman extraordinaire) - shared a car with me on the way over and it was nice to have someone to prep with. We'd not discussed it lots beforehand, but having trained quite a lot together I thought it would be nice to run as a pair for a while. Juliet is a bit faster than me normally, but she said as it was her first ultra she wanted to take it steady and make sure she had the energy to get round. Perfect I thought, if Juliet wants to run a steady pace, that should suit me too.

We got to the race HQ about 45 mins before the race and caught up with the other Harriers there. It was good to chat a bit beforehand and take your mind off the race, although to be honest, I wasn't particularly nervous. I figured that I had done the training and I'd completed more than double the distance before, so I just wanted to enjoy it and hopefully do it in under five hours. I'll let you know how I got on with those two goals later...

## Off we go

After the race briefing and a quick group photo (see above), we were all on the start line, chatting about our race plans for the day. In fact Juliet and I were chatting so much the race started before we noticed! Off we went and settled into a routine pretty quickly. Juliet wasn't looking at pace and distance, wanting to just complete her first ultra and hopefully (given it was a club championship) get first female Harrier home. So we agreed I'd keep an eye on pace for us to make sure we were on track for our target of around five hours, as well as ensure we didn't go too fast and burn out. We settled into a good pace, a little faster than the 10 minutes per mile we needed for five hours, averaging nine to nine and a half minutes per mile. But it felt good and we were ticking the miles off.

The course is really easy to follow as you are literally just running along the Stort Navigation for 15 miles before you turn round and come back. They give you course directions but I never even took mine out of my backpack! I always wear a backpack on my longer, off-road events. It means I can take my hydration pack and not have to rely on anyone else for food and nutrition. There were checkpoints with snacks and drinks at every five miles on this course, but I know I didn't have to stop if I didn't want to as I was carrying two litres of energy drink and some gels / bars in my pack.

## Checkpoint one: passed in a blur...

The first checkpoint came really quickly as we were chatting a lot and had picked up a couple of guys that were running the same pace as us. We decided not to stop at checkpoint one because we all felt fine and it was about 20 meters to the left, off the racing line, which would have slowed us down in going there and back...



The only thing of note that happened in the next five miles was that we picked up a man and a woman who overtook us and then settled in a few feet in front of us. I really wish they had carried on past us as the guy was so annoying! He just wouldn't shut up and had the most frustratingly loud voice. He also seemed to like to use the phrase "it's just my opinion" quite a lot as he covered topics such as the future of the NHS and obesity. He also kept going on about how he was going to crack his 3:30 barrier for his next marathon, which in hindsight may have been a clue that I was running a bit too fast. 3:30 is well outside my running capability, having only gone under four hours once by three mins!

Anyway Opinion Man and his friend eventually, after checkpoint two (10 miles - also avoided as still feeling good), started to pull away from us. Hopefully nothing to do with me muttering "oh shut up" audibly a couple of times!

It was around 11.5 miles in that I said to Juliet that we should probably see the front runners come through soon - we were keeping an eye out for Ian from the Harriers, who we hoped could maybe even win the event today, given his recent ultra results. And funnily enough literally seconds after I said that, the front runner appeared! Sadly it wasn't Ian, but still very spooky. We cheered the lead runner past us, who looked as fresh as a daisy, bounding along. Ian wasn't far behind, he was lying in third. Juliet and I cheered and clapped him, not noticing until he sped past us that he was going for the high five - sorry Ian!

At around 13 miles in I started to notice that I was consistently a few paces behind Juliet, who I'd had to keep telling "slow down, we are doing 8.5 minute miling" for the past couple of miles. But I was also really enjoying this section of the run as the runners ahead of us were returning in the opposite direction, and we were all shouting out a mutual "well done" as we went past. I was also (having now got the hang of it) giving the other Harriers a high five on the way past, which was a nice social element to the run.

## Raves and reality...

About half a mile from the turnaround we could hear loud music and I thought that must be a little party they had for us! But actually it became clear that the music wasn't from the halfway checkpoint as we still couldn't see it, and it was also a bit hardcore. Then I noticed that in the small forest next to us there were a lot of random people with bottles of booze in their hands, some strange clothing and more than one set of dreadlocks. We were obviously going past a rave that was still going from Saturday night - and it was after 11.00am on a Sunday! There were some houses not that far away, and with a very noisy go-kart track the other side of the water, I thought - what a great place to live!

Well about a quarter of a mile later we arrived at the checkpoint / turnaround point. I was about 20 seconds behind Juliet at this point and we stopped together to refuel with crisps, flapjacks and coke. I looked at my watch - 2hrs 16min - well within our five hour target at half way.

We stayed there for a couple of mins and saw fellow Harriers Simon and Kirsty coming in behind us. A quick hi, and we left them there, settling off on the way back.

I must admit at this point I thought things were going really well. I felt OK, a little weary, but then I'd done 15 miles at an average of just over nine minutes per mile. If I'd been doing a half marathon that pace would be a bit slow for me, but for the longer 30 mile course this was well under my more realistic 10 minutes per mile target. In fact, this disconnect became evident within a couple of mins of running out of checkpoint three with Juliet. I told her to crack on without me as I realised I needed to slow the pace down a bit or risk falling off a cliff and she was running strong. So, with a quick "good luck" off she went.

## Adjusting my strategy

I slowed down my pace a little but still felt good at around 9.5 minutes per mile. I actually hooked up for a while with a guy who had run loads of ultra events and we had a bit of a chat about mutual races we'd done. But again I soon realised I was running just that bit too fast and I dropped off from him, letting him go ahead. The next few miles were relatively quiet, the only thing going through my mind being that as it was a club championship it would be nice not to lose any more places to Harriers, so I wanted to keep Simon and Kirsty behind me if possible. I looked back every few mins but couldn't see them, so I just assumed they were running a similar pace to me and we'd all meet up at the end.

The only point of frustration came from a runner I was following who was wearing fluorescent orange camo tights. She was on a run-walk strategy, so I'd just about catch up to within a few feet of her when she was walking and then she'd start running again! She was clearly a faster runner than me so she'd run off ahead, which was a bit demoralising. After about 20 mins of yo-yo running I managed to pass her as she caught her breath at a bridge. I was pleased because for some unfathomable reason my rapidly tiring mind was finding this to-ing and fro-ing really off-putting. My relief was short lived of course as any fool could work out she'd run past me once she started again! And run past me she did, right up to the checkpoint at 20 miles.

I stopped here too as by now I knew I was starting to tire and probably needed to take on some food and more coke (a really great energy drink when flat). The only problem was, I hadn't been there 30 seconds when Simon and Kirsty ran in looking pretty fresh still. Where had they come from?! I had been looking back and had not seen them, so to have come on me so quickly they must be running at a faster pace. Knowing I was slowing, I actually felt a bit disheartened by this. I'd nothing against them personally - they are both lovely people - but I'd set my heart on not losing any more places to Harriers and to try and show up well on the club champs results.

## The wheels start to wobble, but just about stay on

In hindsight I can see now that the pace for the first 15 miles, and what I realise was a very poor food / hydration strategy were playing havoc with my brain as I became quite demoralised - way beyond what was proportionate. Seriously, it was just a couple of people who were running well, but to me it symbolised that today was starting to become out of my reach. I had 10 miles left to run, I was increasingly bored of the same riverbank terrain and I was a bit lonely from no company. But I am pretty stubborn when it comes to running so I didn't give up yet and cracked on - even though I could see Simon and Kirsty bound off into the distance.

The effect on my pace was immediate. Psychologically I slowed down, and physically I did too. My times for the next four five miles were 10:18, 10:24, 11:19, 11:52 and 12:02. My body and mind were struggling and boy did I know it. My quads were on fire now, every step was painful, and I was having to mentally fight the desire to walk. I hate walking unless I have to - in hilly events this is often a good strategy (walk the climbs to save energy), but this was pan-flat. I had to run this whole event or in my head I had failed. I kept saying to myself - I have run way more than twice this distance before, what is wrong with me?!

Eventually I gave in. I allowed myself a stretch of run-walk and did a couple of rounds of run for four mins, walk for one. Then as I came up to checkpoint four (25 miles) I upped that to nine minute run, one min walk because I actually felt a bit better after the relative rest of the previous walking. I made it to the final checkpoint, and took on more food (well actually a few hula hoops and nuts - my stomach was rebelling and telling me it couldn't take any more).



## The final fight

Right, five miles left, four hours 10 mins gone. I could do this I said, I could still do under five hours, I just had to keep a steady pace and not walk. However, I am not sure what my brain was thinking as to achieve the final five miles in 50 mins I would have to run 10 minutes a mile with no stopping whatsoever - something I had not done since mile 19. The chances of me speeding back up were none existent, but it took me another mile or so to realise this.

Eventually though, reality kicked in and I realised my target of under five hours was gone. I had run the first half in just over two and a quarter hours and you would have thought an extra half an hour for the second half would have been enough, but not when you've gone out too fast and you've not been eating and drinking right. Schoolboy error really.

So I slogged on. I passed a few folks walking, but I'd decided that I would keep going until I absolutely had to walk again. I wanted to finish this last five miles running if at all possible - whatever pace I ended up at. And run it I did, as I came back into the last mile in Bishop's Stortford, off the canal and onto the roads I did contemplate walking for a while as it was all uphill to race HQ, but I actually managed to dig in and get back to the field where we had started over five hours earlier.

Oh but at this point can I make a plea to all you race directors out there? CAN YOU STOP MAKING US RUN ROUND A BLOODY FIELD AT THE END OF RACES?!?! I know you often need to make up the last few feet / yards to get the distance spot on, but believe me, coming into a field with the finish line just to your left and then being sent RIGHT around the field is soul destroying. Are you taking some perverse pleasure in this????

Rant over.

## In the final analysis

I came across the line in 05:10:54, which is only just over 10 mins a mile on average. If I'd done my own pace from the beginning I'd probably have hit my target. But in reality it is still a great time for an amateur, and I am proud of having completed the 30 miles. I was a bit grumpy with myself and my performance at the time, but I was quickly buoyed up by the great results for the Harriers overall. We had quite a few people who came in the top three for their age group - an important result as it was the UK Trail Running Middle Distance championship. Of particular note were - Ian who came in third overall, and Juliet who not only was the first female Harrier home, but was third in her age group overall. Well done everyone!

**MOST** importantly, every Harrier that started the race finished it. For many it was their first ultra distance, and that is hugely impressive.

**Overall**, it was a great event, well organised and a good day out. Personally the course wasn't for me (I prefer hills and proper off-road terrain), and I had a bad day at the office, having gone off too fast. I had also (I discovered afterwards) only drank half a litre of my two litre reservoir - no idea why.

**But it was a success for our first club ultra championship. Just need to work out an event for next year now!**



# Real in Rio

Richard Watson

Saturday 4th August 2012 as Linda and I sat in the bar at Westfield Stratford having just witnessed Super Saturday, the decision was made. We would save up and head for Rio and the 2016 Olympics. We thought it would be a great opportunity to visit Brazil and the city that the Brazilians call 'the marvellous city'.



And then, the day we'd all been waiting for finally arrived. I woke early and went for a five mile run along Copacabana and Ipenama beaches – possibly one of the most iconic runs I have ever done. After breakfast we headed to Copacabana beach. The waves were amazing and Emily and Jessica spent much of the day in the sea. Although it was winter in Rio it was still in the late 20's early 30's so plenty hot enough. The beach was a hive of activity but we felt 100% safe at all times. Whether renting seats or drinking coconut water from green coconuts, we were certainly well looked after. The evening came and we watched the opening ceremony in a restaurant along with many other nationalities. When Team GB came out we cheered waving our Union Jack, and other nations followed suit with their national flags when their teams appeared.



So, in early 2015 we booked accommodation in Rio, just off Copacabana beach and also booked flights to travel down to Iguazu falls on the Argentinian border as we decided we would have four nights down there visiting the falls before the games, 2 in Brazil and 2 in Argentina. When the BA booking opened we booked flights from London and then the fun started as we tried to book tickets for the events.

Similar to what happened in London, we had to enter a ballot through the UK official re-seller Cosport. We picked a range of events but, disappointingly, we ended up with only a few tickets in the initial allocation. As an EU citizen (pre Brexit), we could apply for tickets through the European resellers so managed to pick up more tickets through French, Belgian and Dutch channels and also managed to secure a few more through Cosport. This had worked out well in the run up to July 2016, as we were able to review availability and affordability. We also factored in time to do the tourist sights in Rio; Sugarloaf, Christ the Redeemer and a Tijuca forest.

I honestly have never been so excited about a holiday and when Saturday July 30th came round we got up early to head for Heathrow. Our flight was full of Olympians. Interestingly the established stars such as Martyn Rooney, Adam Gemeli and Katarina Johnson-Thompson flew Premium Economy, whilst the newer athletes were with us in Economy. The athletes were extremely friendly; happy to have photos with the girls and extremely chatty during my mid-flight G&T at the back of the plane and seemed to be amazed we were going over to watch them.

We landed at Rio and had a long chat with KJT, who was looking forward to the games. We stayed in the airport as we had an early flight to Iguazu the next morning. The waterfalls were amazing and we spent a full day on each side; there are 275 separate waterfalls in total.

It was great to relax there. We managed to take a speedboat trip under some of the falls and enjoy the wildlife which included toucans, monkeys and coatis.

On the Thursday before the opening ceremony we flew back to Rio.

Day 1 brought the men's road race. We saw them start and then spent the day on Ipenama beach waiting for their return. Unfortunately, Chris Froome did not manage a medal although on a TV we did see Adam Peaty smash the world record in the 100m breaststroke. On the Sunday a similar story with Lizzie Armistead although this time we were given free tickets for the finish area from the IOC. Luckily enough, we also managed to buy tickets that morning for the evening's swimming including the breaststroke final. We caught the underground and a bus to the Olympic Park and made our way to the Aquatic centre. We got into our seats, hung up our flag and went down to the BBC area where we met the cameraman from our flight and Rebecca Adlington, who posed for a photo with the girls. We also spoke to Adam Peaty's dad who looked so calm; certainly a lot calmer than I would have been. The swimming started and soon it was time for the breaststroke final. I was desperate for a gold, especially as this is a sport the girls participate in. Adam had a great first 50 and was ahead at the turn. He then stormed into an unassailable lead and was being roared on by the few Brits in the crowd, including we four screaming at the top of our voices. He smashed his own world record and won Team GB's first gold. Next up was the Women's 400m free and Jazz Carlin swam a tremendous swim for a bonus silver medal.

The next day meant an early start to the north of Rio for the canoe slalom. I'd never seen the event before and being up-close made me really appreciate the strength these guys put into it. There was a huge group of Japanese supporting their canoeists, which made for a great atmosphere, and it was particularly satisfying to finish higher in the heats than the Kiwis.

We had purchased tickets for as many different events as possible and it was apparent that Team GB were starting to do rather well. We were lucky enough to see two golds in the rowing (again ahead of the Aussies and Kiwis).

We were really looking forward to the track cycling and we were not disappointed. We saw the Team GB girls' sprint team take back the World Record, Cavendish claim silver in Omnium and Laura Trott compete. Indeed, Linda had met Laura Trott's Auntie the day before and she came up to us in the velodrome and was extremely chatty.



After a day out of Rio, it was Super Saturday and we went down to the Costa Verde. The stadium was pretty full and there were quite a few Brits competing. Unfortunately, it didn't quite happen for Greg and Jessica but, when it was time for the 10k, Mo did not disappoint. We happened to be sitting next to a load of Jamaicans who had seen their lady claim gold in the 100m, and they were trying to tell us that Mo would be good. The race started and I was on tenterhooks. I didn't even see Mo trip, but the final lap was bonkers. As he took the lead, the Brits in the crowd went wild. He stormed to the finish line and took gold. What a moment!

On the Sunday we were back in the stadium for Usain Bolt. Everyone in the stadium (even some of the Americans) wanted him to win and when his name was read out the noise was deafening. Compare this to the reception Gailtin got; he was met by a chorus of boos! What can I say, except Bolt is one of the greats, and one of the few characters left in sport. We all went home happy.

We watched the two triathlons, which again were great. For the women's tri we got tickets for the finish area and saw the swim start, transition and the finish. It was great to see the two Brits compete for third and it gave me an appreciation of what Gill Fullen and the other triathletes go through in races.



We had two more trips back to the Athletic stadium and were lucky enough to see Mo win the 5k, the girls medal in the 4 x 400m relay and, the legend that is Usain, win the 200m.

After that it was one final day in Rio and then a night flight back to London. It was a fabulous holiday and one that none of us will forget. Aside from the great sport we saw, the highlights for me included:

- the warmth and kindness of the Brazilian people; never did we feel threatened, even walking home at night, and it angered us that the UK press put out all the scaremongering beforehand.
- the kindness of the Team GB athletes who would stop and have photos, let you hold their medals and were really appreciative of our support.
- the camaraderie of the Team GB supporters; whenever you saw a Union Jack people would speak, swap stories, tickets, tips etc
- the buzz of Rio and, despite the press, I believe the Olympics was a success and the city will continue to benefit from it in the future.

We are now saving and planning for Tokyo 2020 but have told Emily (our eldest) that her swimming times must improve as we can only afford three places so she will need to go as a competitor. You can dream eh!





# A year on the trails Ian Hammett

## 7 ultra's, 2 Marathons, a lot of miles covered and lots of cake eaten!



**As I made my way along the path, a large gust of wind caught me, my foot slipped in the mud and I came perilously close to disappearing off the edge of the cliff. Thankfully, the wind relented for a few moments and I managed to skip back on to the path with my heart bursting out of my chest... I couldn't wait to turn back inland after an unforgiving 16 miles along the Devonshire coast in what can only be described as biblical conditions. I still had 19 miles to go in my first (and what would prove to be hardest) ultra of the year.**



It is safe to say that in 2015 I caught the ultra-running bug and hence planned in earnest for 2016. Suffice to say, I then almost lost that bug in early February as I decided to tackle the Endurance Life Coastal Trail Series event in South Devon. This inconveniently happened to take place on the same weekend that heavy storms battered the south coast and weather warnings were issued, including the advice to 'avoid coastal paths and cliff tops'. However, us ultra runners are apparently made of sterner stuff and a mere weather warning wasn't going to stop us. It did lead to the course being shortened by four miles as the cliff top had become too dangerous to try and traverse a second time and, having been battered by the elements for a little over 5 hours, I was as close as I have ever been to hypothermia at the end.

My cousin, who was there to support me, was a godsend in my hour of need; enveloping me in a foil blanket and a massive hug, she ushered me through the tent, acquiring a cup of tea from a fellow runner and then helping me to change my clothes as my hands wouldn't work. I'm sure the last thing she thought she would be doing was helping her 37-year-old cousin get changed in a tent after he'd run a ridiculous distance in conditions that most people wouldn't even get out of bed to look at through the window, let alone go outside!!

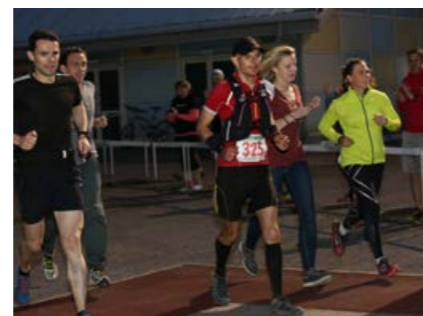
After that experience I held on to the hope that my future races would be in fairer weather and, I am glad to say, they were. The plan for 2016 was aimed at building towards the South Downs Way 100 in June and the next was the Larmer Tree Marathon (I came 2nd) and then the London Marathon (ran a course PB). In between, I did attempt Ashridge Boundary Run, however at 4km my hamstring pulled and I ended up hobbling back to meet Claire. I will be back next year to alleviate the pain of having to DNF at an event I really wanted to do.

Once my two 26.2's were out of the way it was back into Ultra mode... I headed to the lakes in early May for a training camp on the fells and then tackled The Ox towards the end of the month. This had been my first ultra in 2015 and I had finished 2nd, so I went back with high hopes of improving on that. The Ox is a challenging, hilly race around the lovely Wiltshire countryside run by White Star Running. If you've never experienced a WSR race then you really need to. This one was a loop of 37 miles, and whilst it had rained for a few days previously, the weather was kind to us for the start. I had always intended this to be a training run ready for the bigger things to come. However, I settled into the front pack with three other chaps. We stayed together until 22 miles and then I made my move. Feeling strong, I broke away on the long climb to a path called 'The Ox Drove' and then led the rest of the way to win in a new course record. As has become customary, my Dad and Claire were there to support me and enjoy my success. As we exchanged memories of the day I asked if they had seen the heavy rain that I encountered as I ran through miles 25-28, getting absolutely soaked. Dad replied that they had been sheltering and keeping warm in the car, and had been most comfortable. 'Lucky them' I thought.

The year was now gathering pace and my major target was next on the agenda. This was to be the small matter of running from Winchester to Eastbourne along the South Downs Way, as I tackled Centurion Runnings SDW100 mile event, which would be my longest ever run.

Claire dropped me in a random field on the edge of Winchester at 05:00 and then proceeded to return home and go back to bed... sensible girl!! I, on the other hand, checked my kit and prepared to start a 100 mile ultra for the first time. To say I was nervous would be the understatement of the year. I was fully prepared and had a wonderful support crew in place for the day so I didn't need to be too apprehensive. Nevertheless, the mere thought of running 100 miles is in itself ludicrous, let alone doing it on a course that includes 13000 ft of elevation.

At 06.00 we headed off and I knew I wouldn't stop running until I got to Eastbourne. My team was extensive; dad was chief logistics manager, lead photographer (no ultra is complete without his tripod!) and head of support crew (I even bought him a t-shirt). Claire was



my pit crew (aid station specialist) and it was her job to take care of my nutrition through the race providing me with water bottles, electrolytes, energy sweets, flapjacks and everything else. Steve Horton, Gill Fullen and Andy Palombella were my pacers; they would join me at 54 miles and support me through to the end, running various stints between aid stations. Then my mum, brother and two nephews were lead cheerleaders - although I think mum took on the role of chief worrier as well. Luke, my eldest nephew, also took on the role of home video maker with one such video looking like something out of the Blair Witch project as he chased me up the road shouting encouragement.

They all contributed to making this the best event that I have ever taken part in and the day was fantastic; the scenery was beautiful, the course was tough, and the distance was mind-blowing. I somehow managed to lead the race from miles 70-90 but, I was overtaken and found myself struggling to stay in touch with the eventual winner. However, I will never forget the feeling of crossing that finish line and having all my crew there to share it with me. I'd completed my first 100 miler, finished in 2nd place and run the 5th fastest time on the course..... not bad for an ultra-running rookie!

It was then time to enjoy 10 days in Italy to refresh and re-energise and also overindulge in cake and ice cream. Now those of you who know me well are familiar with my sweet tooth, and the largest piece of cake I can find is usually my reward for an ultra run. So, having burnt in excess of 13000kcal during the SDW100 it was open season on the goodies and I suitably indulged.



During our holiday I began to get itchy feet, and no, that wasn't from mosquito bites or blisters. On my return to the UK, I booked the SVP100km; an event that I failed to complete in 2015.

I wanted to slay the demons of that course and, as part of the build up, I signed up for the Chiltern Challenge 50k in July, run by XNRG. This took part on a blisteringly hot day (same weekend as the River Festival) which made it a real test of my recovery. The course was challenging but varied, and it certainly tested me to my limits. I was running well for the first 35km but then the legs started to get tired, after all it had only been 5 weeks since I'd completed the SDW 100. I somehow managed to hang on for the win and also broke the course record; my second of the year.

It was a quick turn around to be ready for SVP100km where I knew I would be racing against the 2012 UK 100km champion and local Essex running legend Allen Smalls. Again it was another hot day and several of us made the mistake of racing immediately from the outset.

This was to be something that we would all regret later in the race as we all suffered. At times I thought about quitting so I had to have a real stern talk to myself as I ran. Claire gave me a great pep talk at about 45 miles and it gave me the kick up the bum I needed. I pushed on and then had to run the last 12 miles with cramp which, on a hilly route with styles and gates to negotiate, wasn't very pretty. I made it to the end though, bagging myself another triumph but just missing out on the course record. This was the result of missing a turning and taking a slight detour as well as pausing for a call of nature! These things happen at the most inappropriate times!



Having banished those demons from 2015 it was time for the 2nd centurion event of the year; the Inaugural Chiltern Wonderland 50. This race was a 50 mile loop starting and finishing in the picturesque village of Goring-on-Thames, passing through some wonderfully named places such as Bix, and Christmas Common. By now the body was feeling tired from a hard year's racing but, I was confident of a good time on a tough course. However at the 30 mile mark my body disagreed with me and it became another battle to the end. The legs didn't want to function and I couldn't even make the most of the downhills. Thankfully, I clung on to 2nd place to maintain my run of podiums at ultra events.

This was supposed to have been my last ultra of the year yet, the Harriers decided to hold their inaugural Ultra Club Championship race at the Stort 30, which also doubled as the UK middle-distance Trail running Championships. My competitiveness got the better of me and I decided to sign up for what would be my 7th Ultra of 2016. After all, I couldn't miss out on this, could I?

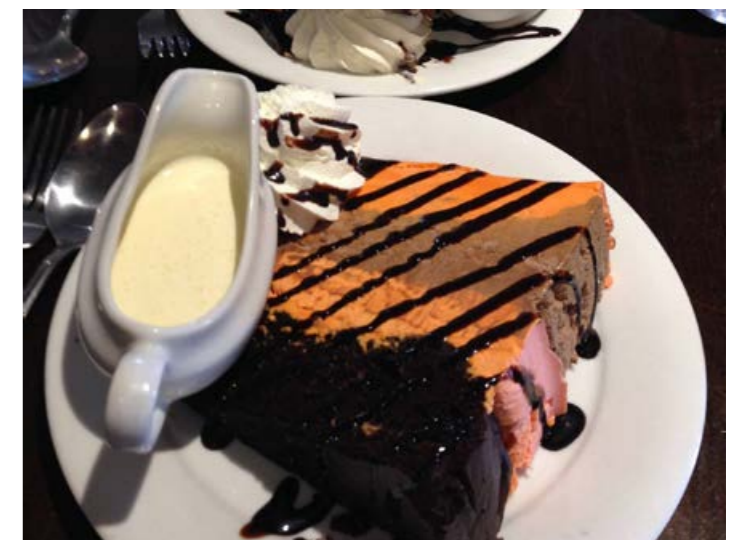
It was a great turnout from the Harriers, with a few first time ultra runners taking part. The 30 mile out-and-back route alongside the river Stort was very runnable and I set off at quite a pace with the lead group. I had decided to run the race as I would a marathon and only use gels and fluid to keep me going so that I could travel as lightly as possible. After a fast first half it was great to see my fellow club mates on the return leg, as I collected high fives from most of them (except Mark Taggart who left me hanging)! I managed to cross the line in 3rd place and take home a bronze medal and the club championship title. All in all, it capped off a very successful first year of ultra running. I'd run in total 7 races, had 4 wins, 2 runners-up, 1 3rd place and 2 course records. Not bad stats for the year.



Now I'm looking forward to 2017 and the challenges that lay ahead, but you'll have to check back here next year to see what they are, or follow me on Twitter @RunHammyRun or check out my blog: [runhammyrun.wordpress.com](http://runhammyrun.wordpress.com).

Happy Trails everybody!

**Editor's note: Think Ian should read Bob Wells' article.**





# Facing 'The Wall' - Jenny King

I was inspired by Ian Hammet's massive achievement to win 'The Wall' ultramarathon last year and it sealed my determination to run across England by following the Hadrian's Wall National Trail. We were short of time, so we decided to combine the holiday with our trip to Newcastle for The Great North Run. "Good luck with that," was most people's reaction when they heard we planned to run over 75 hilly miles immediately before a half marathon.



So as to stuff both into one week off work, we had to ignore the Solway Firth section of Hadrian's Wall, beginning our run in Carlisle and averaging 16 miles a day. Off we went to the castle to begin our first morning, where we stumbled upon the Round Britain Cycle Race. We even had a glimpse of Mark Cavendish before watching the cyclists tour Carlisle.

To be honest, day one was rather ordinary, with no sightings of the Wall above a foot high; just fields and tracks alongside the mostly buried or destroyed remains. Finishing at Lanercost Priory, we had time to check out the tea rooms and tour the abbey, which had been ruined in the Reformation, but was still lovely. Our fellow guests - all walkers - at our lodgings declared us to be mad and they were the first of many to pronounce that diagnosis.

Day two was absolutely lovely! We set off, detouring to visit Birdoswald Roman Fort and eat cake, before chugging uphill to rejoin the path and our first proper run alongside the Wall. We climbed up and up the escarpment, where I admit to walking for most of the two-mile ascent, past Haltwhistle to descend to Once Brewed for the night.

Vindolanda beckoned next morning, causing us to add on a four-mile loop but, what an amazing site; recognisable remains of a great fort and village - even a butcher's shop with its meat counters and drains still intact. The cake in the local tea shop was quite good too. At least the long slog back up to the route was a fitting warm-up for the brutal climb onto the escarpment. We met our fellow travellers en route, overtaking them all only to be caught up and laughed at when we stopped for a snooze under a tree. Housteads provided another stop for ice creams before arriving at Chollerford where we ate the most enormous portions of pub food we have ever seen! What a lovely day in wonderful countryside!

Day four was dull. We saw no more of the Wall and followed a dreary path alongside a main road with only a hedge to shield us. The weather was grey too, as was the accommodation for the night. We were glad to set out on day five for Wallsend. Day four was disappointing, but day five was grotty. Mile after mile along the banks of the Tyne and behind the heavy industrial sites which lined it, to arrive at Segedendum, which was a bit of an anticlimax. But Simon's highlight of the day was when he 'overtook' Mo Farah. It has to be said he was standing on Gateshead riverside completely stationary at the time but that's pure detail. Saturday was a rest day; a haircut for Simon and then spectate at the City Games, with the evening happily spent eating pizza with Simon's best man, who we bumped into at the Games.

Our 80 mile hilly 'taper' in our legs, we went into the pens on Sunday morning ready to accept whatever our results may be. Amazingly, Simon ran a storm - beating his best man and achieving a PB and I comfortably trotted to my second-best time out of four GNRs, hardly noticing the inclines after all the hill work we had just done. We are so grateful for healthy bodies!

Would we do Hadrian's Wall again? No - there are too many other great routes waiting to be tackled! I think the Cornish section of the SW Coastal Path looks inviting...

