

ON THE RUN

Bedford Harriers AC Magazine



February 2024

- Meet some of the 'Class of 2023' & hear about their achievements
- Be inspired by the tales from NZ, Patagonia and Switzerland
- Be amazed by the feats of our endurance athletes here in the UK
- Marvel in our annual parkrun stats & learn how it all started for Ray Evans
- Hear about our Club Charity of the Year & charitable activities

From the Editor

Welcome to On the Run, February 2024 Edition. This is our first digital only edition of the magazine, which is exciting in so many ways. Firstly, it is more environmentally friendly - and as a Club we are trying to be more sustainable. Secondly, we have been able to insert hyperlinks into some articles, so with a click of a button, you can go to the events you are reading about - and maybe enter for this year! Finally, it has played into the hands of one of my traits – procrastination! Without a printer's deadline to 'put the mag to bed', I'm sat here the day before publication writing my editor's note!

Last year, I was extremely lucky to have John Elworthy do the graphic design, I now realise that he also put a stop to my procrastination to some extent! This year, John was only able to help over his Christmas break and I didn't have the heart to steal his family time, so I decided to attempt the design work myself. Another way of procrastinating, some would say!

With this edition came the realisation that our multisport athletes are more willing (or desperate) to share their experiences with us. You will note that there are considerably more articles on multisport than there are on running events; this purely reflects the number of articles received! So, my message to the runners: please send me your race reports this year! Articles can be sent to hello@bedfordharriers.co.uk - it's never too early to send an article!

I would like to thank everyone who contributed articles: they have been fun to read and edit. However, I once again ask for some forgiveness, as I have used some editorial licence! Finally, I'd like to thank Richard Lawson, my proof-reader – if any typos get through, they are entirely his fault!

Best wishes, have a fantastic year of running, multisport, volunteering and spectating!

Elaine Massie

Harriers Races in 2024



- 24th March 2024 - [Oakley 20](#)
- 17th July 2024 - [Doug Anderson 5k](#)
- 11th August 2024 - [Bedford Triathlon](#)

Sign up to race or join our team of volunteers, it's fun and we can't do it without you!

Club Championship Races 2024



The Club Championship races are a fantastic way to meet other Harriers; they are usually fun, social events, with lots of support on the route, and a photo or two taken by the 'spectathletes'. Plus, you may win an award or two on Awards Night!



In 2024, the Club Championship Running Races are as follows:

- 14th April 2024 - [Flitwick 10k](#)
- 12th May 2024 - [Phoenix 5 mile](#)
- 17th July 2024 - [Doug Anderson 5k](#)
- 8th September 2024 - [Sawtry 10 Mile](#)
- November 2024 - [St Neots Half Marathon](#)
- Cross Country - [1st race of the 3 Counties XC series](#)



For the Multisport Athletes we have the following races:

- 23rd June 2024 - [Dambuster Standard Distance Triathlon](#)
- 4th August 2024 - [The Stampede - Cowman Sprint Triathlon](#)
- 10th November 2024 - [Dorney Duathlon](#)



Criteria for consideration for awards:

- You must be a paid-up member of the Club on the day of the race;
- You must run in Club kit;
- You must enter the race, and be shown on the results list, as a Bedford Harrier.



A Message from Our Chair

Chris Capps reflects on 2023

For Bedford Harriers, 2023 was a year of moving forward and starting to develop and expand the Club and its offering to members.

It saw four committee members step down after many years' combined service - Richard Watson (Treasurer), Val Bird (Social) and Cint Horne (Membership) did not seek re-election at the March AGM and Jenny King (Secretary) resigned during the year. We thank them for all their efforts. We wish Richard Lawson, Carolanne Gibson, Mark Taggart and Elaine Massie well as they take on these roles.

The three Bedford Harriers' races were all successful and plans are well advanced for 2024. After the 2023 race, Steve Crane stood down as Race Director for Oakley 20 and we thank him for all his hard work in making the race another success and in rearranging the course so that it finished at the front of the school.

We also thank Bev Gous for her work as Race Director for Doug Anderson 5k, and wish her well as she moves to become Race Director for Oakley 20 for 2024. We also wish Niki Jones well as she takes over as Race Director for Doug Anderson 5k.

Simon King did a great job as Race Director at the Bedford Triathlon in 2023, which has been named as the Triathlon England Standard Distance National Championship race for 2024. Congratulations to Simon for securing this accolade for the Club.

The success of these races means we can provide benefits to our Members, such as the summer track and winter circuits sessions as well as social events such as the Box End Summer Social, the Christmas Socials and the Awards Night. The Race Directors rely on the membership to volunteer at all our races, so please do your best to volunteer in 2024. Without your support, we would not be able to run these races or provide these benefits.

In 2023, we had 5 Harriers achieve Club Best Times:

- Nora Haggart (FV65) at Doug Anderson 5k in a time of 22:48, Silverstone 10k (45:03), Sandy 10 (1:18:59) and Berlin Marathon (3:43:46).
- Dea Ditchfield (FV55) at Hatfield 5 (35:15), Brighton 10k (42:06), Great South Run (1:10:23), and Valencia Marathon (3:31:06).
- Kirsty Jones (FV40) at South Downs 100k (16:23:17).
- Bob Wells (MV75) at Derwent Water 10 (1:21:04).
- Larry Corkery (MV85) at Blisworth 5 (57:37) in June, but then beat that time at Wellingbough 5 in July (54:44), and Sandy 10 (1:49:25).



While many Harriers completed personal and worthy athletic achievements in 2023, I have picked out a special mention for 8 outstanding athletic achievements:

- Nora Haggart not only completed 2 of the Major Marathons in 14 days (Berlin and Chicago) but also finished Berlin in a Club Best time (see above) and her time for Chicago was just 1 minute 46 seconds slower than Berlin. Nora also competed in the World Duathlon Championships Standard distance in Ibiza (2:37:54) and was 2nd lady in her age group.
- Gill Fullen completed the Kathmandu Coast to Coast Challenge in New Zealand, a combination of runs, cycles and kayaking over a total of 243.2k in 15:54:05.
- Peter Lowe (MV80) came 3rd in the European Sprint Triathlon Championships in Madrid in 1:41:59, due to the water conditions, the event was changed to a duathlon.
- Noel Jones completed the Chill Swim Windermere Swim (11 miles) in 7:18:20 and the Big Welsh Swim (9k) in 4:15:16.
- Simon King completed the Big Welsh Swim (9k) in 4:05:58.
- Richard Beard ran the Northern Traverse Ultra (300k) in 101:26:00.
- Ed Castro competed in the World Triathlon Championships (Pontevedra) finishing in 2:01:00 and was 1st in AG and 2nd man overall. He also competed in the European Triathlon Championships in Madrid, finishing in 2:08:15 and was the 3rd male.
- Neil Lovesey competed in the World Sprint Duathlon Championships, finishing in 1:11:25 and was a creditable 21st out of 41.



When looking to enter races, please consider those promoted by running clubs first. By supporting these races, you are helping our fellow running clubs and their members by generating funds for them to use as they think fit.

If you want your race to be taken into account for a Club award, please check to ensure the course has an up-to-date course measurement certificate and a license. Please also make sure that it appears on your Runners Page – if not, you'll need to email hello@bedfordharriers.co.uk to get it added.

In 2023, I had a series of injuries, and it was personally not a good year, leading to me stepping back from Group 2 coaching and joining Group 4. Training with new people, new sessions and getting free from injury has helped my fitness and getting my running mojo back, thanks to the Group 4 coaches and group members. So, remember, you do not need stay with the one group, look at all the sessions available and pick and choose whatever fits your athletic ambitions, because stretching yourself is a good way to race faster.



Adios but not goodbye

Jacinta Horne reflects on her time on the Club Committee



I have been involved with Bedford Harriers since my early 20s, as Nette was already a member. I helped out at races and went bowling with them, but I didn't run at that point. John Cheetham, Bill Tallentire, Tony Barnes and Norman Beckwith are just a few of the current members who I would hang out with. Oh yes, there was also Graham Horne, but I didn't know him then!

When I finally bit the bullet and joined in with the running side of things, the Club was about to embark on one of the early beginners' groups. Unfortunately, the coach did not turn up to take the group one evening. "What shall we do?" I asked the then Chairman. "You will have to take them yourself" was the answer, and so I became a coach!

Another time I was helping out by inputting race numbers and race times. When we were done, the guy reading out the numbers and times said, "I am retiring, you've got yourself a job". So, I became Race Entries Manager and Finish Times Manager. I won't even begin to tell you what that entailed back then.

... my reign of terror ... has come to an end

The one job I actually volunteered for upfront was Membership Secretary. It has changed a lot over the years. From standing in the foyer with people coming up to you with a tenner and a scrap of paper, to using a spreadsheet and mail merging, and then an online database with bank transfers and the use of PayPal. I have a book which has every single member in it in number order and another two with every single member in surname order. So long as you haven't changed your name, I can find you!

Anyway, my work has finally got in the way of all that. I will still look after race entries and number transfers on the day of Harriers' races, and will keep the Welcome Committee ship shape, and continue to coach when I am fit enough. But my reign of terror over the membership of Bedford Harriers has come to an end.

Wild Apricot – 'preserving' our future

Mark Taggart introduces us to the new membership system



When I took over as Membership Secretary back in April 2023, I knew there would be a lot to get up to speed on. But what I didn't know was how much dedication it took from my predecessor, Jacinta, to make the onboarding of new runners and the renewal of existing members as seamless as possible. Jacinta did an amazing job over many years to work with the existing technology and build a process that worked – however onerous it was on her!

I was also incredibly proud to take ownership of the paper membership records – lots of history in there.

But with the diversification and evolution of the Club, we knew that the existing method of membership management wouldn't keep working for us.

... we knew that we had to future-proof ourselves

We were unable to keep emergency contact details, monitor diversity information to increase our inclusivity, and have a hassle-free method for payment of subscriptions. The amount of manual work for Committee

members required to process renewals was making it hard to do alongside full-time jobs. As we rely on volunteers to run the Club, we knew that we had to future-proof ourselves.

After doing a load of research, we settled on Wild Apricot as our new membership platform. Designed for clubs like ours, Wild Apricot makes it a lot easier for members to keep on top of their own details and pay their subs – as well as providing a simpler way for the Club to manage membership data, send emails, set up events, manage payments, etc. Plus, with a phone app to go with it, it moved us into the 21st Century!

For most members, since we switched in the summer the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive! Thank you to everyone who has dropped a note to let us know how it's working for them.

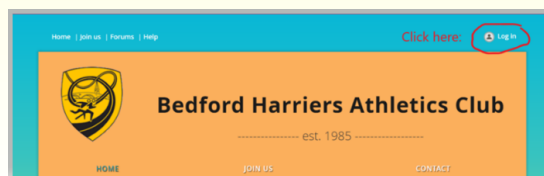
... not everyone has the same digital access and so we are always here to help members who rarely use or struggle with computers/apps

Of course, not everyone has the same digital access and so we are always here to help members who rarely use or struggle with computers/apps. If you are having any issues using Wild Apricot, please let us know and we will be happy to help you out. [Email](#) me, or speak to a Committee member or your coach on a training night.

Lastly, here's a few screenshots, just to help you do some of the basics:

Desktop:

- Go to www.bedfordharriersac.wildapricot.org
- Click "Log In" at the top right of the web page



Email
myemail@me.com

Password

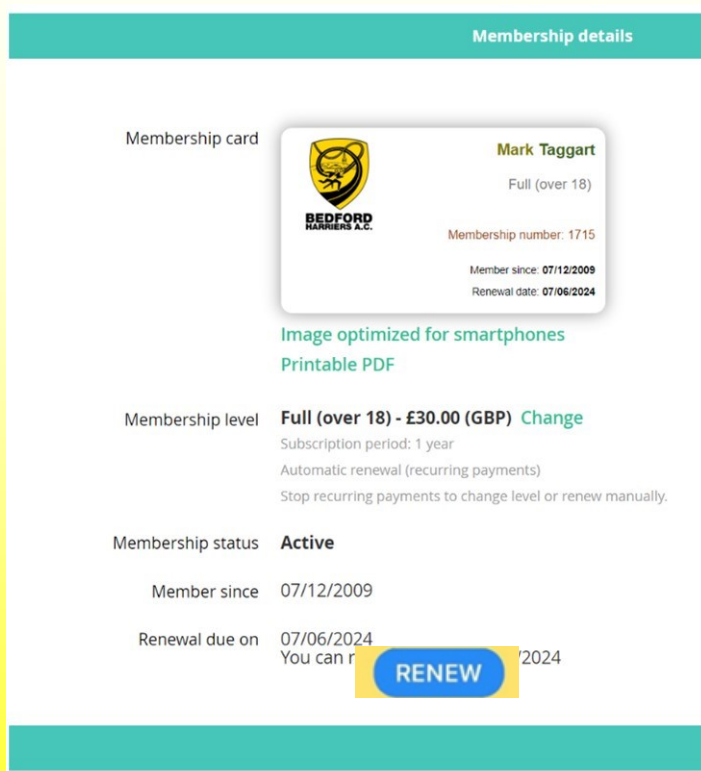
Remember me

I'm not a robot  reCAPTCHA
Privacy - Terms

Log in [Forgot password](#)

- Enter your email address and password and click "I'm not a robot"
- You may be asked to prove you are human by clicking a few pictures, but once you get a green tick just click "Log In" underneath it and you are in your account!

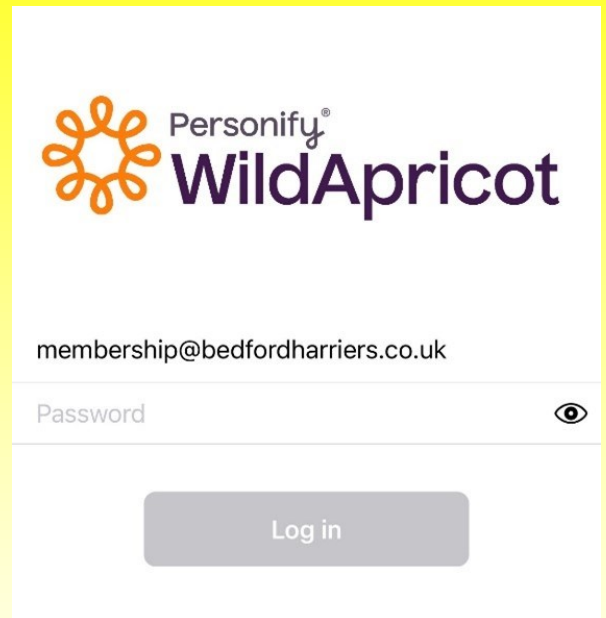
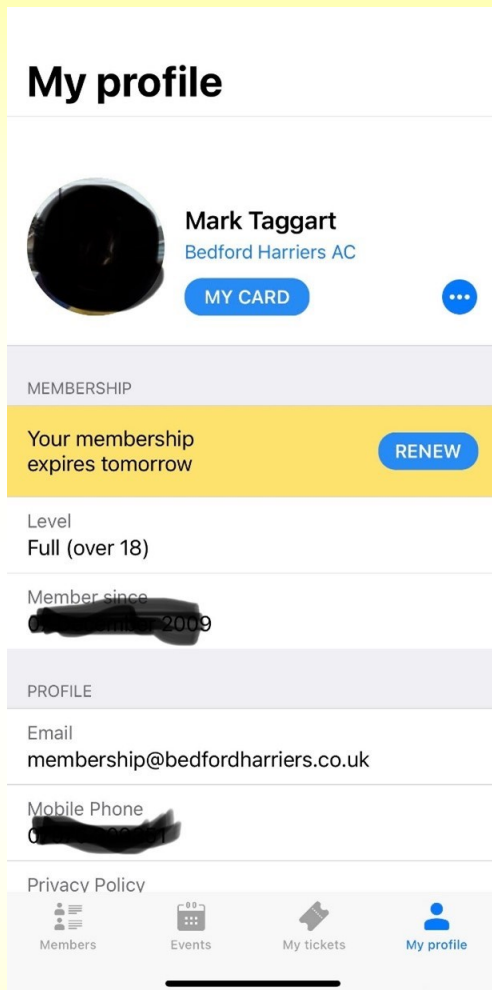
- If your membership is up for renewal – you will see a "Renew" button underneath your profile. You can renew any time from two weeks before your membership is due.
- Click "Renew" and that will take you to a payment page, where you can pay online.



Mobile:

This is even easier, if you have access to a smartphone.

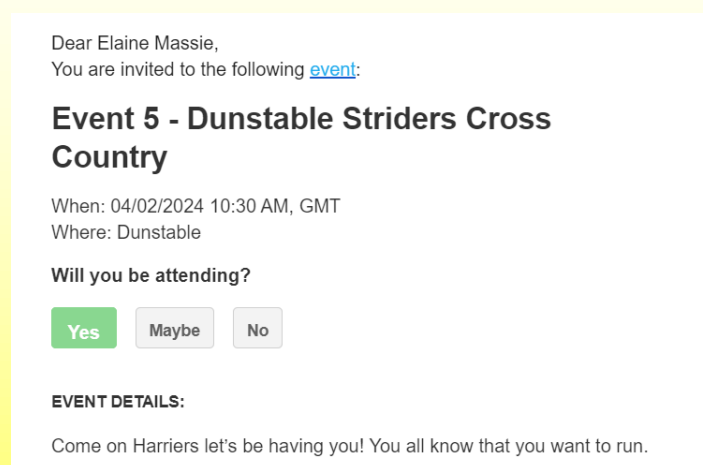
- Download the Wild Apricot Member App from [Apple](#) or [Android Store](#)
- Enter your email and password to log in



- Click Renew under your name and follow the instructions to pay online

Events

- The easiest way to register for an event is to click on the relevant button in the email. Depending on the event, you may be asked to provide more details and/or make payment.



- You should then get a confirmation email – if you don't, please let us know so that we can check that your registration has been successful!

Bedford Harriers at parkrun in 2023

Bev Gous summarises our parkrun achievements

There were 54 UK parkrun opportunities in 2023 and 203 Bedford Harriers ran or walked a total of 3,126 parkruns, at 240 different locations. That's a distance of 15,630km, which would get us from Bedford to the South Pole, with spare for wandering around!

Whilst the average number of parkruns attended was 15, both Ray Evans and Adam Hill managed to complete all 54! Hot on their heels were Bruce Hutchinson (53), Joe Warren and Clare Rulton (52) and Shaun Busby and Debi Fisher (51).

That's a distance
of 15,630km ...

Parkrun milestones are marked by volunteering or running, jogging or walking a total of 25, 50, 100, 250 or 500 times. Nine Harriers joined the 25 Milestone Club in 2023: Sean Crawley, Sue Pyecroft, Peter Gallivan, Emily Ford, Ralph Ward, David Simmons, Val Bird, Chris Hoare and Jerry Pullinger.

Lesley Barnes, Phil Supple, Ellie Sherriffs, Keith Grey, Neil Lovesey, Steph Lill, Helen Gardener, Mark Finn, Suet Lua, Lawrence Folley, Christopher Dilley, Richard Evans, Abigail Turner, Helenor Kirwan and Chris Leigh make up the fifteen Harriers who entered the 50 Milestone Club.

Nine qualified for the black 100 tee-shirt: Martine Moon, Matt Pyecroft, Alan Colley, Andrew Robertson, Helen Whiting, Michael Munro, Peter Pack, Peter Lowe and Chris Fadden.

Ray Evans holds the title of
the most parkruns with 554 ...

Just three Bedford Harriers earned their 250th run milestone: Ray Cooke, Bev Gous and Joe Warren – the latter two also earning the parkrun V250 badge for volunteering an amazing 250 times. V50 milestones were also achieved by Leigh Kendall and Bruce Hutchinson whilst Claire Rulton and Graham Pratt earned V25. As a Club we had 504 occasions of volunteering in 2023.

Ray Evans holds the title of the most parkruns with 554 completed at the end of 2023 and was the subject of a number of BBC and other media articles when he reached his 500 milestone on NYE 2022. Next highest is Russell Page, who is still at least 3 years away from the 500 milestone. James Shea, Larry Corkrey and Bob Wells are close on 4 years away.

Sylvia Jones is our longest running parkrunner, having completed her first parkrun on 28 June 2008 at Brighton & Hove. Thank goodness she had access to a printer!



Chris Fadden's day of changing t-shirts after completing his 100th parkrun



George Murphy was the most active in visiting different locations in 2023, with 43 different venues, bringing his total to 94. Not long until he catches Heather Bourne's 98 and Adam Hill's 99. Stephen Ball only did one parkrun this year, oh but what a far way he went – to Japan's Tsurumi Ryokuchi to clock location 113.



Whilst the majority (815) of parkrun's total of 1,234 events worldwide takes place in the UK, Steph Lill ran 15 out of her 17 parkruns outside of the UK. She has run at every location in Singapore (there are only 3), as well as one in Melbourne. Alongside Graham Pratt, she also ran the only parkrun to cross an international border – Cieszyn starts in Poland before crossing the Olza River into the Czech Republic and then returns back into Poland.



Clearmont Waters is the closest parkrun to Disneyland Orlando, which Tim Southam and Louisa Jackson visited in the summer, whilst Kanata in Ottawa, Canada was the Xmas parkrun destination for Heather Bourne.

Mark Taggart was the only Harrier who visited a parkrun in Austria – Donaupark. Graham Pratt visited Italy's Milano Nord, and Orangefield in Belfast saw Harrier visitors Dea Ditchfield and Mervyn Harmon.



How I got into parkrun!

Ray Evans recalls his first parkrun, having completed his 554th parkrun at the end of 2023

The readers - or reader? - might perhaps be interested in discovering how I managed to find myself taking part in 5k parkruns on a Saturday morning. If, against all expectations, that is the case, then turf the cat off the armchair, plump up the cushions, make yourself comfortable and we shall begin.

Before doing so however a minor observation. Usually in fictional storylines in movies, one may read something like: *"the following story is fictional, any resemblance to actual people or places is purely co-incidental"* or words to that effect. Let it be known the story that follows is an accurate, true and faithful narration of actual people and places. More or less. (I should also add this is the abridged version.)

... parkruns ... were like the Loch Ness Monster; I had heard of them but never actually seen one in situ

We have to backtrack through the mists of time to late August of 2011. In those days, I had heard of parkruns, but only in a peripheral sense by word of mouth or reading about them in a sports magazine. To all intent and purpose, parkruns, as far as I was concerned, were like the Loch Ness Monster; I had heard of them but never actually seen one in situ.

It was also around this time I happened to bump into an old non-running friend of mine, whom I shall call X, in order to protect the innocent. During the ensuing conversation, X mentioned something about a new 5K park event that had recently started in Bedford Park, and suggested I might like to give it a try.

"*I dunno*", I thought to myself. Five kilometres is a relatively short distance, which is ideal for fast runners, one is given to thinking. I might be a runner, of a fashion, but a speed merchant I am certainly not, even with the best will in the world.

So, after giving my friend's suggestion the most careful consideration it deserved, five seconds later I replied with: "*I'll think about it*". (In other words, forget it.) There the story might have ended. However, unbeknown to me, the story had only just begun!

I might be a runner, of a fashion, but a speed merchant I am certainly not, even with the best will in the world

It must have been around 3 weeks later, by which time I had completely forgotten about parkruns, when fate intervened, and by sheer chance I happened to run into X once more. Only on this occasion X had in tow his better half X, a couple of little Xs and a quadruped X.

Again, X suggested I should give the parkrun a try, and again I demurred. I recall him saying: "*Go on Ray, a fine runner like yourself, I'm certain you will enjoy taking part*" as he elbowed me in the ribs to emphasise the point. He was convinced - and convincing.

(Okay then, I admit it, X didn't actually say "*fine runner*"! I just happen to think we authors are deserving of a modicum of poetic licence.)

Eventually, in order to try and wean him off the subject, and to prevent my ribs from aching any further, I heard myself blurt out: "*Oh okay then, I'll give it a go*" - not with the greatest of enthusiasm, it must be said.

Two weeks later saw me climb aboard my trusty, but somewhat antediluvian, bi-cycle, and repair to Bedford Park. Little did I realise, as I slowly rattled my way to the park that October day in 2011, just how profoundly and fundamentally it was destined to reshape my Saturday morning routine thereafter.

Upon arrival, I recall standing alone in the middle of the park surveying proceedings. It immediately became obvious there were some fast runners aboard. Undaunted I looked around the park in more detail and perceived most runners, as they were warming up, had pace and general fitness that was akin to yours truly (or so I thought at the time).

Running events have a certain degree of synergy about them

Running events have a certain degree of synergy about them. That's to say the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. As one takes part in a running event, one seems to be a small part of something bigger than oneself.

Anyway, where was I? Oh yes...

Divesting myself of some superfluous garments, I began my own warming up procedure.

Whilst thus engrossed, another runner, also warming up, came up to my shoulder. I thought at first that he was going to pass me, and I moved to one side, in order for him to do so. However, somewhat to my surprise he slowed down and, pro tem, we ran together. We hadn't run more than 20 yards - sorry, metres, when I decided that maybe it was time to initiate a conversation. For a subject I chose the weather, always a popular topic amongst people who, perforce, had not met before. I was just about to open the batting when my new-found running companion beat me to it - and began to talk about the weather. Turning in my direction he said, in all seriousness: "*I don't think we will have any rain during our 5K run today.*"

"No, I suppose not," I concurred, casting my gaze to the heavens and a wall-to-wall azure sky. There then followed what we might term a pregnant pause, which ended with my friend turning in my direction once more and asking: "Is this your first parkrun in this here park?" "Yes," I replied. Quick with the repartee, that's me. At this juncture, it has been a long-established convention amongst athletes and gentlemen to reciprocate. I did anyway. "This is my third parkrun at Bedford. Although I have run over 30 times at other venues," he replied. "Wowser, that's amazing!" I exclaimed, hoping I didn't sound too disingenuous as I did so. Shortly after we went our separate ways. Probably because the warm-up he was doing at my pedestrian pace wasn't what he was looking for.

In any event I had just completed my warm-up (or all the warm-up I felt like doing), when I noticed the eclectic group of runners began to foregather for the customary (as I later found out) briefing. Which turned out to be fairly brief. The days of announcing milestones and suchlike had yet to dawn.

Following the briefing a hush of nervous expectancy settled over the assembled company as we all awaited the signal for the commencement of the run. The tension in the air was almost palpable.

Suddenly someone bellowed "Go!" which made me jump, and I found myself in the midst of a stampede of runners as we all began our individual journey around the parameters of Bedford Park (two and a half laps).



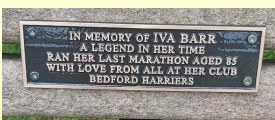
Although it was October, a good number of the participants were still attired in their summer running accoutrements. Not least a young lady, up ahead, who seemed to be running topless. On closer examination however, I realised she was wearing a flesh-coloured top. I slowed down and tried to drag my thoughts back to the reason why we were all gathered in this park on this Saturday morning.

As I puffed and panted my way around the course, overtaking a few runners and more than a few runners overtaking me, I really began to enjoy the experience of taking part in a parkrun. My old friend X was right after all, I thought to myself.

When all was over and the environs of Bedford Park had resumed a more tranquil equilibrium, I determined to return upon the following Saturday, which I duly did.

The rest, as they say, is history.

In Memory of Iva Barr



Iva Barr was a popular and respected Bedford Harrier, who ran marathons well into her 80s. She was also a champion of the Club and would sing our praises whenever she could.

Iva passed away in 2021 at the age of 93, and to commemorate her memory, the Club arranged for a plaque to be installed on a bench in Russell Park, close to Pembroke Street, near to where she once lived.



5K Your Way

Sylvia Jones tells us about the Club Charity of the Year and our links to the charity

5K Your Way is one of the 3 key initiatives of [MOVE Against Cancer](#):

- A website of free exercise resources, articles, blogs, podcasts and live/zoom classes run by Cancer rehab specialists. This started as a response to lockdown and has grown since.
- Online functional exercise programs for young cancer patients (age 13 to 30). These 8-week one-on-one programs are led by Level 4 cancer rehab specialists, backed up with online forums where the young people can support each other. Medicine is having ever more success in curing cancer, but patients, particularly youngsters who have missed school and are forced into inactivity by treatment, are left feeling isolated and lonely.
- The 3rd area of work and the part I want to concentrate on is 5K Your Way. We see ourselves as a support network with a difference. As founding ambassador of the Bedford Group, you can find me in Bedford Park at the last parkrun of every month, encouraging, empowering and supporting people to MOVE Against Cancer, followed by the opportunity to chat over coffee and cake at The Pavilion.



So how did it all start? Back in 2016/17 our esteemed and now distant clubmate, Gill Fullen, was diagnosed with breast cancer. She found a black hole with regards to advice on exercising during and recovering from cancer treatment, even though it is well known that physical

activity reduces side effects, decreases fatigue and has benefits for mental health. Meanwhile I had received my own diagnosis and after chatting with Gill over a cup of herbal tea and with her encouragement I would run at parkrun or with the Harriers when I could, and I'd volunteer from my folding chair when I couldn't. It was my little oasis of normality.

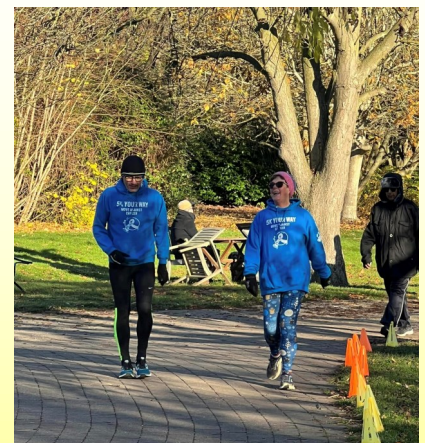
In her extensive research Gill had become friends with Oncology consultant and professional triathlete (11 ironman wins and World Championship top 10 placements!!) Dr Lucy Gossage. Lucy is hugely passionate about supporting cancer patients and the wider cancer community through the power of movement. When in 2018 Lucy began to set up 5k Your Way she asked Gill to suggest someone who might be willing to set up a Bedford Group. That someone was me. We were one of the first groups in the country to get going. I recruited Jenny, a local GP, and Sue, a nurse with an oncology background, as fellow ambassadors and we have been at Bedford parkrun

It is so satisfying to know that patients with no exercise background are hooked and want to keep running in their lives going forward as cancer survivors

every month (lockdown notwithstanding) ever since.

For nearly five years, people have come and gone as they needed us and several Harriers have received our support over the years - Harriers undergoing treatment, survivors, Harriers who have family members with cancer or who have lost loved ones. It is joyful to share in the achievements of our participants. One of our ladies

achieved a PB the day after receiving chemo for ovarian cancer and another regular undergoing treatment for head and neck cancer completed his 8th parkrun having never run one before reading about 5k Your Way online. It is so satisfying to know that patients with no exercise background are hooked and want to keep running in their lives going forward as cancer survivors.



I think we provide a much-needed service. There are still people out there - even professionals - who would wrap a patient up in cotton wool and suggest staying on the sofa. As one in two people will be affected by cancer in their lifetime, we will be there for you or your family or friends if you should ever want our support.

Club fundraising activities to date have raised a grand total of £892.98 from the following events:

- Silent auction of 5 ATW race entries – August 2023 - £80
- Club Charity Mile – 20 September 2023 - £439.98
- Veronica Singleton-Lawley's Kit Sale – September 2023 - £160
- Bring and Buy Sale at Xmas Celebration – 18 December 2023 - £86
- Donations on behalf of Club Officers and Race Directors – December 2023 - £100
- Other donations - £27



Still to come!

- Raffle at Award's Night – 10 February 2024
- Bedford parkrun Takeover – 24 February 2024
- You can also donate using [this link](#) or the QR code below.



Scan to pay

Club fundraising activities to date have raised a grand total of £892.98

Note that the Club Charity of the Year is selected at the AGM in March from nominations from members and the charity year runs from 1 April to 31 March. If you wish to nominate a charity, then look out for the email about the AGM in March.

65 @ 65

Jerry Pullinger tells us about the challenge he set himself

My twin brother John and I turned 65 in June 2023. Unfortunately, John was diagnosed with MND in April 2020.

His eldest son ran seven marathons in seven days as a fundraiser, and following this theme, I decided to attempt to run 65 races at the age of 65, including parkruns and longer distances up to a marathon.

I decided to attempt to run 65 races at the age of 65

My opening major challenge was the Colworth Challenge, which comprises of three races over three days (5 miles, 8.1 miles and 13.1 miles), making a marathon. I completed this in 3:49:38 and won my Age Group.

So far, I have completed 37 races:

- 25 parkruns at various locations, including: Great Denham, Bedford, Irchester, Skipton, Holkham and Henlow Bridges
- Doug Anderson 5k
- Colworth and Wellingborough 5 miles
- Bedford AAA, Bedford Twilight, Standalone and Hertfordshire 10ks
- Colworth 8.1 miles
- Colworth, Cleethorpes and St Neots half marathons
- Folksworth 15 miles



My next big race is the Seville Marathon on 18th February 2024. This will be my first marathon since London in 2014!

If you would like to donate to my fundraiser, please go to this [link](#).



Big Way Round Marathon

David Sheffield shares his experience running the Big Way Round Trail Marathon on 1st May 2023

I was looking for a marathon with a difference - and the [Big Way Round](#) in Winchester seemed to tick the boxes in terms of challenge, location and time. It was very near to my boyhood home and so the day before the race, I plucked up the courage to knock on the door of the house I grew up in. It was very kind of my parents to let me stay!

The event is named after the "Big Way" trails that make up the route. The race started at Winchester Rugby Club just after 8am and headed South through the city centre, past bemused market stall holders setting up for the day. There were a couple of brief stops at pedestrian crossings, but eventually we got out of the city and hit the "Big Ways". First was St Catherines Hill, with beautiful views of rolling hills, although it was hard to take in due to the uneven ground and passing many of the 50k ultra runners who set off 5 minutes ahead of us.

... beautiful views of rolling hills ...

There were two occasions where the course divided into a short and a long option. Taking the long option on both makes 50 km, short then long was the marathon, long then short was 19 miles and both short made 14 miles. The races set off at 5-minute intervals with the shorter races going last. This meant that there was a constant stream of folk coming past for the first 5 or so miles.

...there were some beautiful stretches through old woodland carpeted in bluebells

I asked the race organiser at the start if I should wear road or trail shoes and he implied that it was trail shoes or death by mud, but after a few sunny days, the ground had mostly dried up and there were some beautiful stretches through old woodland carpeted in bluebells.

...no portaloos

The course took in the South Downs Way, the wonderfully named Cheesefoot Head, Allan King Way, St Swithun's Way and the Itchen Way. There were 4 well stocked aid stations on the route offering coke and squash and cakes and sweets, but there were no portaloos. We had been warned about the lack of facilities in the pre-race briefing, so I took a pocket full of loo roll, which a fellow runner was grateful for when I passed him!



I started at 9-minute mile pace, slightly quicker on tarmac and slower on the trails, but reduced to walking up the hills towards the end. I wasn't passed by many other runners, so I guess we were all finding it equally tough (with the exception of my new toilet roll buddy, who breezed past me about a mile from the end). The last 3 miles were back through the city, past bemused shoppers and groups of tourists, and even through the grounds of

Winchester Cathedral, back to the rugby club and the finish where I started 4 hours and 40 minutes earlier.

North Downs Way 100-mile ultra

Kirsty Jones shares her experience of pacing for a friend's first 100-mile ultra

From a running perspective, I'm glad that 2023 is over. Training was almost non-existent after the London Marathon in April, and although I still took part in events, I didn't really enjoy the

... coming into the stadium with Kevin Sinfield and Rob Burrow when finishing ... was an experience I'll never forget

running part of them! The year had plenty of challenges, including the last 6 miles of the London marathon after setting off too fast, imagining (or not...I'm still not sure) that I was being chased by

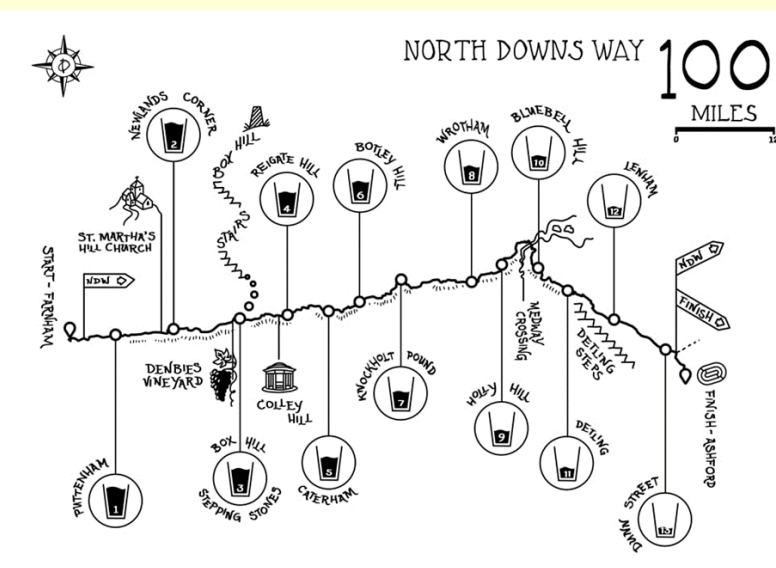
bees/wasps after a night of running in the woods, and the stress of chasing cut-offs on a new event in the South Downs.

That said, I still took a lot away from the races I did; coming into the stadium with Kevin Sinfield and Rob Burrow when finishing the inaugural [Leeds Marathon](#) was an experience I'll never forget. The mental strength required to keep running through the woods during the night, when my tent was just metres away at the [Wendover Woods Night 50k](#) and viewing a beautiful sunset on the Seven Sisters when I thought I'd have finished the race hours earlier. Overall, my favourite running event of the year was not actually one of my own races but pacing a friend of Oli's on her first 100 miler, Centurion Running's North Downs Way 100.



North Downs Way 100 (NDW100)

Starting in Farnham the [NDW100](#) has a cut-off of 30 hours and 3,350M of elevation in the 103 (not 100!) miles to finish at the Julie Rose Stadium in Ashford. Those 3 extra miles don't sound like much, but tacked on at the end of 100 miles this can take up to an hour of that precious 30 hours. This race is often considered the most difficult of the regular Centurion Running 100s and has the slowest average winning time (over 17hrs) and average finish times (over 25.5hrs). There is some fast running in the first 25 miles, then you have the ascent up Box Hill and onto more technical, hillier terrain in the latter sections of the race.



The race is run in August when there have often been extreme weather conditions from scorching heat to torrential rain and a total mud fest. Runners are allowed 'pacers' from the halfway point, which is great as a pacer can really pick you up and keep you moving in a long race. They are also useful at reminding the runner to eat and drink regularly, as well as taking on some of the mental strain such as the navigating and keeping an eye on the cut-offs. Oli offered to pace Claire from mile 55 at Otford (between the aid stations at Knockholt and Wrotham) to mile 82 at Detling, where I would take over to mile 103 in Ashford.

Recce weekend

Oli and I have crewed plenty of races in the past, where we follow our runner in the car providing food, drinks, a change of clothes and support. Oli has also paced on a number of occasions, but this was my first attempt, and I was quite nervous as we've never run the sections that we had offered to pace. In preparation we headed down to Kent for a recce weekend. Starting off with some parkrun tourism at Maidstone, we had a nice run in the sunshine along the River Medway from the Museum of Kent Life. We planned our

... 'there are cows on the steps' run while indulging in a post-parkrun breakfast at the café deciding to park the car at Lenham and get the bus to Boxley (between Holly Hill and Detling), where we could climb up from the village and join the NDW. The drizzle started as soon as we stepped off the bus, and just got heavier as we made our way along the trail. We joined the NDW in the woods and it was quite slow going until we reached the road section at Detling, when it actually felt like we were running. It was going so well, we actually missed the small gap in the hedge where the NDW diverges from the Pilgrim's Trail and this was exactly why I wanted to run the route, so little navigational errors could be avoided on race day.

I had a lovely chat with a pony with a rainbow-coloured mane as we climbed up the steep hill onto the chalk ridge, with a beautiful view of the vineyard below. Taking a selfie at the top of the hill before our first descent on the Detling steps, I had to get Oli to rescue me from entanglement on a thorny vine. As he released me, he said 'there are cows on the steps'. Fair enough I thought, we'll deal with the cows once we get down into the field. However, he was true to his word and the cows were actually on the

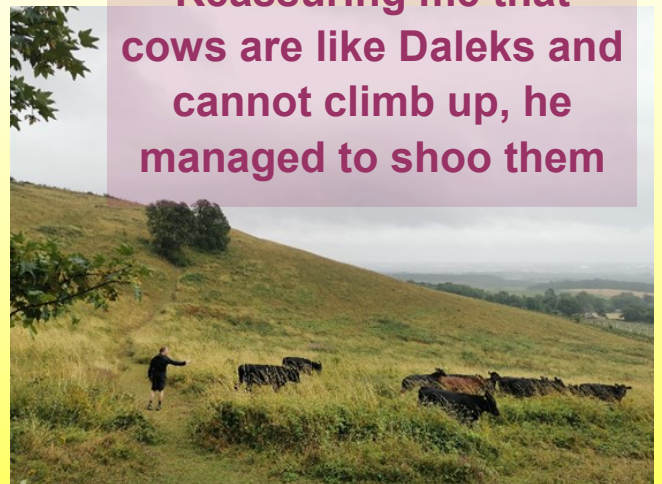


steps. Reassuring me that cows are like Daleks and cannot climb up, he managed to shoo them away and they promptly jumped the fence beside the gate. It was at this point that my number 1 cow myth was busted as I realised that cows can indeed jump fences and that I'm not totally safe when on the other side! Oli continued to shoo the cows away from the gate and we continued along the hillside until taking a slippery detour to see the remains of Thurnham Castle.

Back on the NDW, the route continued along the hillside with more steps up and

down through the woods. I had always thought the Detling steps were one set, not a series of steps over a number of miles. No wonder so many runners dread the Detling section - it was bad enough on fresh legs, never mind after 80 miles of running. We descended from the hillside at Hollingbourne and the path from there to Lenham was nicely undulating and much more runnable. Despite only being 13 miles, this section had taken us nearly 4 hours and we were totally soaked. I'm not sure if this run had helped ease my nerves as I saw how tough it was. If Claire was running well on race day, then I was worried I might not keep up over the technical terrain.

Reassuring me that cows are like Daleks and cannot climb up, he managed to shoo them



After a decent dinner and a good sleep, we rejoined the trail where we'd left it at Lenham and ran towards Ashford. The sun was out and the trail was pretty easy to navigate, with just one tricky turnoff through an ancient churchyard on the Eastwell Estate. Once through the churchyard and along a slightly busy road, we were on the outskirts of Ashford. Instead of running the last few miles to the Julie Rose Stadium, we headed instead to the town centre and the Curious Brewery where we did the visitor tour and tasting before refuelling with pizza. This was a much easier section than the previous day and, although there were no cows on the trail, there were some speedy motor bikers. It was an enjoyable 14 miles and seeing this section put my mind slightly more at ease for race day.



Race Day

Race day was the 5th of August and Storm Antoni was due to make an appearance, bringing heavy rain and muddy conditions to the trail. As we weren't crewing Claire, Oli and I had an easy start to the day. We enjoyed another tourist parkrun, this time at

... pacing was a much more relaxed option to crewing

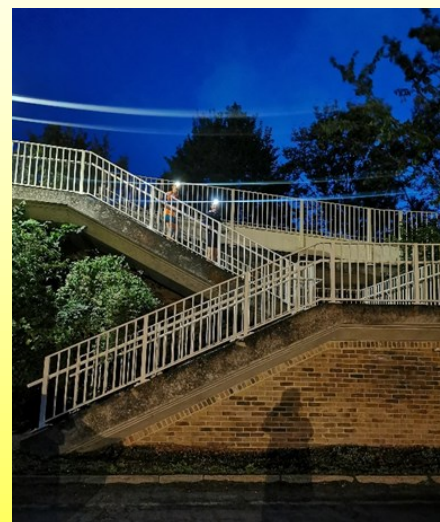
Squerryes Winery parkrun - which we had almost finished when Storm Antoni arrived with the rain. After parkrun we met a

couple of friends for coffee before they went off to set up the aid station at the top of Botley Hill. The rain was really coming down now, so I didn't envy them or the runners being out on the trail. For lunch we headed to the Titsey Brewery where we might have been able to see the Surrey Hills, if it wasn't for the lashing rain. We kept track of the runners on the app while sat in the warm and dry taphouse. So far, pacing was a much more relaxed option to crewing. Claire appeared to be on track and running well despite the horrendous conditions. We headed to our room for the evening, in a pub a mile up the road from Detling Aid Station, where Oli had a nap to prepare himself for the nighttime section. At about 6pm we picked up some sandwiches for dinner and headed over to the crew point at Otford, where we cheered on runners and chatted to the other crews while waiting on Claire. The rain had pretty much stopped when she arrived in the village about 7.30pm. She sorted out her kit and said goodbye to her crew, setting off into the night with Oli. The next time I would see them would be in Detling.



The rain had started again as I drove back to the pub - and it was coming down pretty heavily. I got all my kit ready and tried to settle and get some sleep as quickly as possible knowing it would be a super early start. I set my alarm for 2am to check the tracker, but I was pretty much waking every

hour just to check on their progress. I got up around 3.30am, had a porridge pot and got ready. As I was faffing around, I suddenly had a panic that I should hurry up in case they arrived at Detling before me. I raced along the road at about 8.30 min/mile and was relieved to see Claire's husband Terry when I arrived at the aid station. I couldn't really talk as I was a bit out of breath and had another nervous wee before they arrived. It was great to see them come down the steps into the aid station. I wouldn't say Claire was as happy as she'd been in Otford, but she was still moving well, albeit mainly walking, but there was no mention of giving up. She had a hot meal and changed out of her trail shoes into some reliable, comfy road shoes, said her goodbyes and we were off just after 4.30am. There were no crew points between Detling and Ashford, so the next time we'd see Oli and Terry would be at the finish line.



We set off along the road where Terry and Oli passed us in the car just before we started up the hill. Claire was walking at a good pace, and we had plenty of time, she was around 3 hours under the cut-off at Detling, so we had a decent buffer. After all the rain from Storm Antoni, the trail was a quagmire in places. I was in my trail shoes and holding on to trees for balance, so I have no idea how Claire did this section in road

... cows are not like Daleks and can climb steps if they want to!

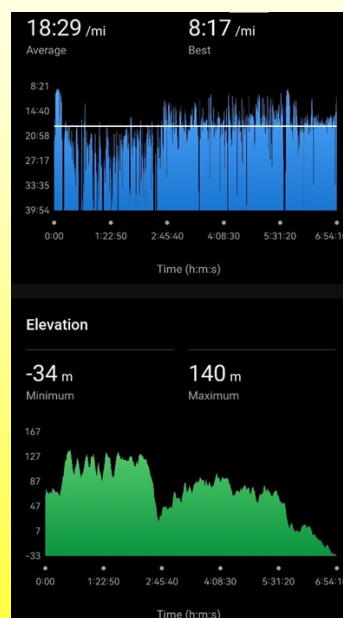
shoes with 80+ miles in her legs. The wooden steps and the handrails were really slippery, so we had to be careful; on the plus side, the cows from my previous visit were nowhere to be seen. On the downside, cow myth number 2 was debunked as there were clearly cowpats all the way up the steps, so cows are not like Daleks and can climb steps if they want to!

Just as we were getting to the end of the technical section, ready to descend down into Hollingbourne, Claire slipped on a root and fell hard on her back. Seeing how hard she fell I was really worried she might not be able to continue, but after a minute to get her breath, she got up and we continued. She was sore, but her main worry was the fact that she was totally caked in mud. I had a couple of tissues and antiseptic wipes, but they only really helped to spread the mud around.

Once onto the easier trail section we got into a nice rhythm of running the flat and downhill sections and walking the hills. We ticked off the aid station at Lenham and continued towards Dunn Street. Claire was worried about making the finish in time and I tried to reassure her that we had plenty of time in hand, she was not quite believing it...almost to the point that I wasn't sure myself. We finally arrived at the Dunn St aid station, and we were over an hour under the cut-off. Although we had plenty of time, she didn't hang around long, passing a couple of runners who were stocking up and heading on ahead of me while I nipped to the loo. I had to find a bit of pace to catch back up to her as we headed through the cornfields before turning off at the Eastwell Estate Church. I pointed out the Champneys Spa up ahead and we had a bit of a laugh about turning up in our current muddy, sweaty get up. We ran/walked the road; I suggested we run the flat, but I was told a firm no and that it was in no way flat. I had a chuckle as I had a similar conversation with my pacer on the Thames Path 100.

It was only as we reached the edge of Ashford that Claire finally believed she would finish in time and collect her buckle, and that's when the emotion hit. We shared a few tears and as we walked the final couple of miles to the finish it was the first time we actually had a proper conversation. As we closed in on the finish line, Claire asked what the plan was when we hit the track at Ashford. I told her I'd peel off and wait for her at the finish so that she could complete her lap of glory on the track and be cheered in by her waiting family. Claire smashed her first 100 miler in 28

Just seeing her believe what she was capable of was a joy.



hours 22 minutes and 56 seconds and I couldn't have been happier to help her get her first buckle. Just seeing her believe what she was capable of was a joy. We were out there for just under 7 hours and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Where I'd been doubtful of my chances of completing the NDW100, seeing Claire's approach and the fact I could probably walk the Detling section and still finish has given me renewed hope...maybe I'll get on that start line soon!

Just keep on swimming!

Noel Jones shares his experience of swimming Lake Windermere, the longest lake in England

Along with a few other Bedford Harriers, I have been doing more swimming, both in the pool and in rivers and lakes, and almost inevitably this led to some of us taking on a few challenges. I think these Tuesday and Saturday swim sessions must be having an impact on us all!

For me, the challenge journey has been from the [Bantham Swoosh](#) (tidal assisted 6k) to [Coniston End to End](#) 5.25m (8.5k) and then last year to the [Thames Marathon Swim](#) (13km). When the email came in about [Windermere](#), I wasn't sure. Could I swim over 10 miles? That's like 7 or 8 hours! I put the email aside, but I couldn't forget it - it ticked all the challenge boxes - and a week later I had entered. My attempts to get some of the others to join me were, unsurprisingly, not successful. They did however want to do [The Big Welsh Swim](#), which offered a 9k option and would fit rather nicely with the training plan.

Could I swim over 10 miles?

My training consisted of three components. Initially lots of time in the pool. There was also a lot of laps of Box End Lake. As the event drew nearer, I started doing three 2 hour swims a week; this made a huge difference mentally, especially when the 2 hours started passing enjoyably rather than as something that had to be ground out. When not in the lake, I spent a fair bit of time swimming various sections of the river with another group of friends.

Eventually I found myself standing nervously in Fell Foot Park on the shore of Windermere. I was in the second wave, so not the slowest, but far from the faster wave! There would be a buoy every mile, with feed station boats midway between them. My plan was to eat and drink every 2 miles. Briefed not to go off too fast, I took the advice, and remarkably quickly for me found my rhythm. The first mile seemed to take forever, but I refused to check on my watch. Mile 2 seemed quicker. Maybe the buoys weren't 100% accurate. I got some High 5 at the first fuel stop and had a gel from my tow float, which seemed to sit in my stomach for a bit. Perhaps it was a bit too soon.



We got to a red buoy, where we crossed to the other shore. Nice to do something different! Now approaching 4 miles and my shoulder began to complain a bit. For the next feed I chewed a fistful of jelly babies with the High 5. This was possibly the hardest section mentally and it was starting to hurt. I gave myself a telling off - compared to the Big Welsh Swim this was calm water and the Big Welsh Swim was over 5 miles in some very testing conditions.

Shortly after 5 miles, we were stopped. Eventually word drifted over that we were getting too far ahead and needed to wait for the safety cover to catch up. I realised this was the front group, so I was in effect ahead of schedule. It was frustrating to be slowed down, but it probably helped me, resting the shoulder, and as I noted later, lowering my HR by quite a bit. There were three or four such stops, and we were being joined by more different coloured hats in the pack. It must have been more frustrating for the speedy ones, but everyone seemed to take it well.

At 7 miles we were let go, no more stops. It had all usefully taken my mind of things for a couple of miles. I looked at my time and figured I wasn't too far off the estimate of 7-8 hours that I'd been handing out. Most of the pack rapidly disappeared into the distance! Not long after this a small flotilla came past. I had the thought to look for a green hat and just spotted the Olympian powering past

Never mind, focus on the pull, high elbow, hand entry

to a new record. Almost exactly twice as fast as me...



Up at the north end of the lake we were being tossed around quite a bit more. There was chop from all the small boats and frequent large swells from the bigger boats. I was doubly grateful for the practice of the Big Welsh Swim. My head felt as though it was full of water, my elbow started twinging and the other shoulder was reporting in as tired. Never mind, focus on the pull, high elbow, hand entry. The 8 mile buoy took ages to arrive and afterwards, I mentioned this to another swimmer, and she heartily agreed, so perhaps it was long, and as before mile 9 did seem quicker.

Somewhere around 9.5 miles I looked up and got a perfect view, between the moored boats, of the huge inflatable duck that marked the finish. That was a boost. Just one last bit of effort through the boats, on into the shallows and finally I beached. Smile! Stand up. Smile! Stop watch. Smile! It was still a poor picture, but at least I don't look grumpy.

Time taken - 7 hours 20 minutes. Average pace - 2:30 average per 100m. That will do nicely. I can honestly say I enjoyed it all!

Bedford Harriers AC Kit Catalogue

Our new Club kit will shortly be celebrating its first anniversary! Feedback on the quality and style has been uniformly positive.

You can order kit online [here](#), in person at No Limitz or by phoning 01234 350720. No Limitz also has some kit in stock.



(It ain't) Half Brutal 2023

Jon Balaam shares his tale of competing in one of the world's toughest triathlons

When I booked [this event](#) in January as my 'midlife crisis' event - I was due to turn 50 the following September - I had visions of misty, damp autumnal weather, a cold deep Llyn (Lake) Padarn and the need for all the gear the kit list included for the run up Snowdon (or Yr Wyddfa to give it its true Welsh name). So, escaping 26 degree early September heat to arrive on the shores of Llyn Padarn in glorious sunshine and 26 degree heat was not part of the original 'vision'!

... being primarily a swimmer who owns a bike and a pair of running shoes, I positioned myself relatively near the front

Having travelled up with my brother, Steve, we collected our numbers in the event marquee – receiving mine from an old Biggleswade AC colleague and friend. I have a few triathlons under my belt, having been competing since 2010 and

taking part in the [Helvellyn Tri](#) in 2018. Steve had done one, back in July at Box End. So, it was no surprise that the briefing reassured me, while it completely bamboozled Steve. Fortunately, Simon King, who had done the event previously, was also on hand and provided a bit more reassurance.

We arrived nice and early at HQ, which helped a lot with nerves (mine anyway!). Following the briefing, we made our way down and into a calm, warm Llyn Padarn for our 1.2-mile swim. Having bid Steve and Simon good luck, I moved into my favoured position – being primarily a swimmer who owns a bike and a pair of running shoes, I positioned myself relatively near the front.

With nerves building it was good to get underway – I always find it hard to control the desire to swim too fast, and even harder to remember to breathe! Tri starts are usually a bit of a melee, but I

... I emerged from the water 5th overall and first in age group ...

wasn't prepared for the very definite grabbing and pulling of my left

ankle as a fellow competitor attempted to overhaul me! I managed

to pull free and soon settled into a steady rhythm for the first of two laps, before kicking on during the second to chase down the pack of swimmers ahead of me. Once I passed through them, I didn't see many others – I hadn't realised but I emerged from the water 5th overall and first in age group (that's as good as it gets!), with first place being taken by Team GB triathlete (and eventual overall winner) Forbes Jackson.

The run back to transition was a fair distance across a field, and my mistake was to try and run it in cros! Once on the bike (56 miles, with 1,513 metres of ascent/descent) and into the first of two laps I began to think of the hills ahead. The profile illustrated at the briefing showed that while we had the long ascent up the Pen-Y-Pass (374m), there were also a couple of 'spicy' ascents early on – but all went smoothly in the cool morning mist. The first descent was a bit of a disappointment, I caught up with lots of cars and needed to keep a 'sensible' head on - being just ahead of a motorcycle marshal! Having not overdone it on the first lap, I was able to give a bit more on the second lap, despite the sun now being stronger, and was lucky to have a long, clear fast descent down the Pen-Y-Pass this time round. Transition was a purposefully slow affair, hindered by my decision not to take my cycling shoes off when visiting the portaloos. Suffice to say, I went for a burton in a confined and not wholly pleasant space, just managing to stop myself from hitting the deck but spraining a finger in the process. Fortunately, my second and last mistake of the day.

... my mistake was to try and run it in cros!



The run (14.7 miles, with 2,129 metres of ascent/descent) starts with a lap of Llyn Padarn, which initially seems like a nice gentle start ahead of the Snowdon ascent. My new Garmin decided to tell me I was having a “Fair Performance” (thanks Garmin!), but all I could think about was how Jenny (King) had warned me that this lap actually turns into a hill climb all of its own soon after the feed station. Having initially felt disappointed to have been reduced to a walk on this section, I noted that no-one overtook me, and I probably would have been slower running. Upon reaching the top I could at last stretch out and run again... only to get massive cramp in both calves! I tried every stretch in the book, plus a couple of unorthodox ones I came up with myself, but it just got worse. What to do? Faced with the prospect of walking painfully back to transition before pulling out I decided to try one last option – running! And within a couple of hundred metres the pain began to subside, and at least making it to the foothills of Snowdon became a prospect again.

Faced with the prospect of walking painfully back to transition before pulling out I decided to try one last option – running!

Things improved from here on, so by the time I reached the queue for the medical once-over (they take this very seriously) I was ready for Snowdon. Or so I thought. The heat built almost as quickly as the mountain rose, and myself and the other runners around me soon realised it was going to be a walking ascent. But that made for a more relaxed feel, chatting with other competitors, congratulating those descending (whether from Brutal events or the massive charity walk also taking place) as we slowly climbed. Initial race instructions suggested having a water container with a 700ml capacity. I took 2 litres up and had drunk the majority by the time I reached the summit turning point (just below the actual summit but close to 1,000m up) ready to head back down. I paused to help a fellow competitor who had collapsed near the top of the ascent - despite seeming to be a prime candidate for being airlifted, or perhaps ‘trainlifted’, off the mountain he apparently perked up, carried on and even overtook people coming down, finishing a place behind me. Would I have felt differently about helping him if he’d overtaken me? I’ll leave that one hanging!

... he then laid down and assumed the embryo position

The rest of the descent was largely uneventful, passing Simon first, then Steve soon after as they made their way up. With a few words of what I hoped were reassurance to each, I made sure my descent was swift enough to ensure neither stood a chance of catching me, relieved to be able to run again. As I approached the last marshal point, my friend Rob (the old Biggleswade AC colleague I mentioned earlier, now on marshalling duty) broke into a trot towards the finish. Funny way of accompanying me I thought, as his trot sped up – I shouted words to this effect but with no impact – finally realising he’d run ahead so that he could present me with my finisher’s medal! I’d estimated a time of 9 hours, and so it was – coming in a few seconds ahead of the 9-hour 15-minute mark (9:14:47) and in 32nd place overall (out of 67).



50 minutes and 14 places later Simon appeared (10:06:36), finishing with a flourish. Rather disconcertingly he then laid down and assumed the embryo position. “It’s ok, I always do this!” he said. I soon found myself repeating this (but not quite believing it) to everyone who asked. Another 20 minutes later Steve appeared – he’d decided to take it easy and walk back down. The enormity of the event and the time it had taken hit when I realised that despite our very early start it was now time to head back to the accommodation, shower and return for an evening meal with Simon (who was no longer in the embryo position).

Would I recommend this race to others? Absolutely – the organisers are fantastic, the atmosphere friendly and relaxed, the scenery stunning and the sense of achievement almost overwhelming. Would I do it again? Yes, but there are other mountains to conquer. Starting with Scafell Pike and the ‘ROC’ in 2024!

Patagonman

George Murphy tells us about the Extreme Triathlon at the End of the World

It's 5:30am, it's dark and I'm standing on the stern of a ferry in Chile. In front of me is a 3-metre jump into a Patagonian fjord. The water is 8 degrees and ahead of me is a 2km swim (mercifully reduced from 3.8km due to water temperature), a 180km bike with 3,000m+ of climbing and then a trail marathon with 1,200m+ of climbing. The air temperature is 3 degrees. I've travelled 8,000 miles from home to compete in [this race](#) and frankly I'm terrified.

A single thought enters my head. *"This is David Prior's fault!"*



"This is David Prior's fault!"

A year before I met David Prior, I had failed to complete a parkrun, quitting after the first lap of a two-lap course because it was too

hard. David was the coach that welcomed me to my first Bedford Harriers session in August 2014 and me feel welcome, so I reason it's his fault I'm stood on this boat!

It's also Dennis Gound's fault, who I did my first Harriers bike session with and who recommended I upgrade to clip in pedals.

It's definitely Viv and Dave's fault, who ran the training for [The Grizzly](#) in 2016, which also served as training for my first marathon.

... I could assign partial blame to at least a couple of dozen Harriers!

Mark Taggart needs to take some responsibility for 'forcing' me to run my first ultra.



Certainly, Eva Kovacs had a huge part to play by inspiring and persuading me to sign up for my first Ironman.

In fact, I could assign partial blame to at least a couple of dozen Harriers!

Since that first session with David's group in August 2014, I've done at least 25 marathons, 3 ultra marathons, 3 Iron Distance triathlons and countless half marathons, triathlons, trail races, and road races. I even went back and finished that parkrun!

My point is that an institution like Bedford Harriers, and the many small acts of community and kindness from its members, can change a person's life. It's enabled me to achieve things I never thought possible and visit places I could only dream about. I'll be forever

thankful to those people who inspired, coached and helped me along the way. It's the reason I am still a member of Bedford Harriers, even though I left Bedford 7 years ago and have moved location more times than someone in a witness protection programme.

Sometimes it's good to be terrified. It'll take you places you never thought possible, and Patagonia was the most beautiful of them all

As for the race? Sometimes it's good to be terrified. It'll take you places you never thought possible, and Patagonia was the most beautiful of them all. As scary as the idea of the swim was, swimming in a fjord as the sun rises over snow-capped mountains is quite exhilarating, even if you can't feel your feet.

T1 took around 20 minutes, as I put on all the layers and struggled to put my socks on my frozen feet.

The bike section was in equal parts beautiful and brutal; the first 40 miles were relatively flat and fast following the Carrera Austral past mountains, rock formations, rivers and waterfalls, followed by a rolling section until mile 70, where you pass the small city

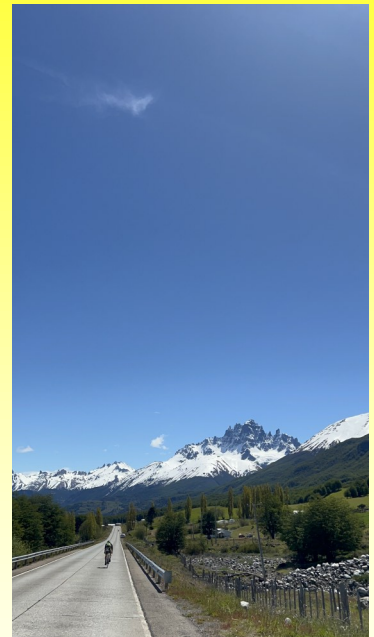
The scenery was breathtaking, but as I turned into the wind at mile 80, I genuinely wanted to quit

of Coyhaique. From mile 70 to 95, it is savage, an almost constant climb through a mountain pass in the Cerro Castillo National Park. The scenery was breathtaking, but as I turned into the wind at mile 80, I

It was genuinely the best experience I'd ever had on a bike

is the 9-mile descent into Villa Cerra Castillo with views for days and endless switchbacks. It was genuinely the best experience I'd ever had on a bike.

genuinely wanted to quit. I'm so glad I didn't though, as the payoff for persevering



T2 was another 10 minutes, stopping to eat a sandwich before heading out on to the run.

The run was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. Usually Ironman runs are a slog, grinding out laps just to get to the finish, but as this race is point-to-point and partially self-supported, it was totally different. The run is predominantly on trails in the foothills of The Andes, climbing almost constantly for the first 13 miles and descending for the final 13 miles, running past glacial lakes, thunderous waterfalls, stunning vistas and encountering wild animals. It felt easy because it was such a privilege to be running amongst such beauty.



Finally, after nearly 16 hours, I finished in Puerto Ibanez on the banks of Lake General Carrera. It was genuinely one of the toughest but most rewarding experiences of my life. I guess I should thank David when I next see him.

The run was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life

I guess I should thank David when I next see him



40 Ironman distance races completed: What's next?

Eva Kovacs reflects on her amazing Ironman distance racing career and what her future may look like

Some of you may remember that in 2015, after 25 Ironman distance races, I announced my retirement - just to sign up for another one only three weeks later! I blame peer pressure. Also, I guess that I wasn't really ready to retire at that point. Since then, I have completed another 15 Ironman distance races, two of which were in 2023.

There were a lot of highs and some lows since my 'comeback', as well as a few changes.

The most significant change was starting to work with a coach. With a full-time job, having a coach has really helped me with structure, accountability and motivation. It took away a bit of flexibility, but I still managed to follow a program that would allow me to incorporate fun races such as the Bedford Harriers multisport and running Club Championship races and the XC runs, while still focussing on my triathlon A-races.

The lows included three DNFs: at Vitoria-Gasteiz triathlon in 2017 (due to a hamstring injury incurred while doing triple jump at EMAC), at Ironman Ireland in 2019 (due to treacherous weather conditions; the swim had already been cancelled) and at Ironman Switzerland in 2021 (due to a panic attack during the swim). But I went back eventually, and I have now finished all those unfinished businesses.

It makes such a difference when you can share your experiences with others

The highs definitely included participating in Ironman races that were well attended by other club mates. With fondness, I think back in particular to Ironman Barcelona, Ironman Lanzarote and Ironman Maastricht, where we went as a large contingency of Bedford Harriers athletes, supported by amazing spectathletes. It makes such a difference when you can share your experiences with others.

I managed to get the special treatment for the last finisher ...

My favourite races, at least scenery wise, were definitely Ironman Norway in Haugesund (which unfortunately only existed for one year), Ironman Ireland in Youghal and Ironman Switzerland in Thun, this year. I guess that I have a preference for the hilly ones!

In several of my races, I had to work hard to finish within the cut-off time, in particular at Ironman Lanzarote and Ironman Wales, which are among the toughest ones. But the most memorable finish was the one at this year's Ironman Switzerland, where I managed to get the special treatment for the last finisher, finishing less than 5 minutes within the cut-off time of 17 hours. Most of you may not know but watching on tv the last athlete finishing at Ironman Roth in 1996 is what actually made me sign up for my first Ironman distance race in 1998.



It may not have been my goal, but I have always dreamed of being the last finisher one day. While I finished many times during 'hero hour', i.e. in the last hour before the cut-off time, it took me a total of 39 races to manage to finish last and experience the big party on the red carpet. What an emotional moment!

I have always dreamed of being the last finisher one day

So, what now? It may seem strange to some, but the urge to sign up for another Ironman distance race has somehow subsided. I have now completed 40 Ironman distance races on two continents, and these included pretty much all those races that were on my bucket list, including the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii in 2012, which I was able to take part in thanks to the Ironman Legacy Program. My last race in 2023, at Ironman Copenhagen, was a bit of a fiasco. Despite finishing the race, I found zero joy in being there, and this made me realise that maybe it is time for a change. Moreover, continuous pain in my shoulders is making swimming and therefore training for and racing in triathlons very painful and less fun.



That's why, for 2024, there will be less swimming, and more focus on running, biking and duathlons. I am planning to run the [Grizzly](#) for the first time, as well as the [Colworth Marathon Challenge](#) and the [Ultra 5](#). And for sure there will be no Ironman distance races, that's a promise! However, there will still be some challenging races in my schedule to write a report about, so stay tuned!

Whether I will return to Ironman distance racing after 2024 is something that I will evaluate in the course of the year. Wouldn't it be great to get to 50? But let's see what 2024 brings first...



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Kathmandu Coast to Coast 2023

Gill Fullen recounts how she ended up on the finish line of this epic challenge

Entering

The seed for [Coast to Coast](#) (C2C) was planted by Mark Pryor, even before we came to NZ! I entered the ballot after being prompted by Lauren Revie, with the intention of choosing a team category if I was allocated a place. That was my first mistake; the first of many it turns out.

Number 85 on the wait list for the Longest Day meant a pretty good chance of an individual entry; hard to turn down. However, if I was going to do this it meant changing my training entirely, so I looked up the elite entry criteria and, on a wish and a prayer, applied. It was a shock to be accepted, but the gauntlet was now well and truly thrown down.

That was my first mistake; the first of many it turns out

Training

First, panic! Then buy a suitable kayak, find a kayak instructor who could get me through my grade 2 and get me up to speed in a relatively short time. Rob Howarth you da man! I fell onto my feet with Rob, who is such a pro and despite weather issues affecting our grading managed to get me certified – kayaking!

For such an iconic race I definitely needed a coach who knew what was needed to complete the course over and above the normal strength and fitness for an endurance event. I was so lucky to find Sam Goodall, elite athlete with numerous C2C elite male placings and patient coach. Initially I wasn't convinced on the focus of the training and, whilst following the programme as near as possible, given the unsuitable terrain and weather of Auckland, remained slightly sceptical until I experienced the course, at which stage I finally understood what he was trying to achieve – better late than never.



The Support Crew

One huge difference between IM and Coast to Coast is the necessity of a support crew. They are not just there to encourage on course and pick you up at the end, rather, they play an integral part in your race, making decisions and having all the equipment in the right place at the right time.

A relatively newbie to NZ, I wasn't sure if I'd find anyone prepared to spend a long weekend dealing with a grumpy Gill: how wrong was I? Karen Riordan and Emma Carlisle both jumped at the chance for various reasons, and I couldn't be more grateful; what a team! Karen had supported before and raced as part of a team, so she was our go-to expert. Emma brought the enthusiasm and practical support of a seasoned athlete and the desire for me to beat her other half, who was also racing. We were a formidable team!



Pre-race/packing/travel

Packing for a multisport event is a minefield of compulsory kit, suggested kit, spare kit, packing for all possible weathers, etc. I was intending to drive down in

the campervan so I had plenty of room to take everything I might need; up until the ferry broke down, leading to a flood of cancellations. After much debate I ended up traveling with John Denize in his car but using my ferry booking, which was moved to another sailing but still hanging on by a thread. The ferry company emailed us on the long drive down to Wellington to change our sailing from 8:45 the next day to 2 am, so all was very tense, and much sleep was lost over whether we'd even make it to the race. At one stage I re-packed for the nth time, prepared to fly down and ask Rob to transport the kayak, which happily wasn't necessary in the end.

My crew were scheduled to fly in on Thursday morning and when there were problems with their flights, I nearly lost it completely. Stress levels were through the roof. They did arrive, however and we got on with the nuts and bolts of getting to the start.

Logistics

We packed the hire car with all my run, bike, kayak gear plus fuel and alternatives and squashed in to drive over to Greymouth for registration. We took a bit of time on the way to scope out the various transition areas on the route and ended up being perilously close to missing registration, which closed at 4pm. Registration was straightforward and followed by a Q&A with the top seeded elites, looking impressively mega-strong and fit, promptly followed by race briefing where the nerves really started to kick in. Food was a bit of an issue for a gluten free veggie/pescatarian in the land of pies and deep-fried food, so I can't say fuelling was ideal in the pre-race build up either.

The Race

The start

The 3:45 am alarm ended my attempts to doze and it was almost a relief to finally get going. It was dark and chilly as we drove to Kumara for the start; I was shaking, sick and in need of the portaloos. I couldn't speak as the girls tried to motivate me and I went through the motions of getting my bike sorted as they dropped me at racking, driving off to the first transition and I made my way down to the beach start with all the other one-day competitors.

I did way too much work on my own and should have ridden far more cleverly. Big mistake!

Run 1: 2.2km

This is a short sharp gravel/road run (wearing run shoes and bike helmets) where you need to use some pace to get in a decent bike pack. I was feeling so sick that I couldn't hammer out anything special and was also mindful that I had a heck of a long day in front of me.

Bike 1: 55km (uphill, into headwind)

I grabbed my bike and headed out with the pack but quickly realised my front hydration system wasn't letting me drink from it. I knew I needed to sort it out so I spent some moments pulling out



the hose, readjusting and generally doing what I should have done at racking, but did get it working. By the time I could concentrate on riding I had missed a large pack, but they weren't too far away. I was riding with 5 or 6 others who I assumed would be just as keen to catch a pacey-looking pack ahead, so I took the front and pushed on to close the gap. When my legs started to tire, I moved over to let someone else take the lead, but to my horror no-one had come with me! I was left alone into a headwind with a pack ahead but the others further behind. Damn! I teamed up with a couple of guys as they came past me at times

for the rest of the ride, but never caught the bunch. I did way too much work on my own and should have ridden far more cleverly. Big mistake!

Run 2: 33km Goat Pass

I arrived at transition for the mountain run feeling that I was in a reasonable place and as I ran off to start the leg there were plenty of other elite lady numbers around, so I was off to quite a positive start. It didn't last long.

Within the first 40 minutes I had fallen over 8 times; that's about once every 5 minutes.

Something was not right! This wasn't even the worst of the terrain by a long shot. I couldn't get

I managed to finish the course with a count of 12 proper flat-on-the-face falls and innumerable trips

my heart rate down and every time I fell, I was a bit more battered and bruised and lacking in confidence. Finally, I made the decision to back off and walk as necessary to get myself under control, try and take on fuel and re-set. My hamstrings were cramping

every time I lifted my legs and I'd given myself a dead leg falling on a large rock. This was not the bouncy, strong, positive run I'd had over this route in my recce! Calming myself down, I plugged on at the course, doing what I could and just trying to keep moving forward. Things improved a little from the top of the pass, where I managed to run better downhill but was having serious concerns about cut-offs.

This route is basically making your way up rocky riverbeds, crossing the river multiple times, with various sizes of boulders, plus climbs through narrow, rooty,



bush tracks, boggy in places until the descent throws boardwalk, more rooty, rocky drop-offs, loose boulders and more river-crossings at you. It is decidedly mental and a tough enough challenge on its own, let alone combining it with the other aspects of race day. There is no room for slacking at any point on the course and many good athletes miss cut-offs and DNF every year. I managed to finish the course with a count of 12 proper flat-on-the-face falls and innumerable trips.

I finally made it, way behind schedule, to transition and Emma stripped me of my run gear and packed me off on the next bike leg.

Bike 2: 15km (some slobby uphill plus a couple of short but very speedy descents)

My legs were pretty cooked for this, and the uphill sections were painfully slow. Note to self – get stronger on hills on the bike! Once again slipping further behind schedule I was glad to arrive at Mount White where the bike racking was at the top of a hill. I put on my kayak booties and hoofed it down to the river at the bridge below. The 1km run on gravel felt more like a stagger as I tried to take on some fuel and attempted to do more than grunt in response to Emma's encouraging banter.

Kayak: 70km (into a mega headwind)

Both Karen and a surprise extra crew member, coach Sam, were at the kayak and manhandled me into my boat. Ensuring hydration was all working, they gave me a push into the Waimakariri and I was off.

I followed a small group of paddlers for the first couple of hours, watching their choice of channels so I could see who was getting stranded on the shallow rapids and who was able to paddle through. This was quite a successful tactic, enabling me to make mainly good decisions and a positive start to the leg. We soon reached the first notable rapid, Rock Garden 2, which I wanted to paddle, but hadn't made a firm decision on. The group in front of me mostly pulled off to

portage the rapid, which was an option, however, I told myself that if the guy in front went for it then I would too. As luck would have it, he paddled into the waves, so I followed. It was a rocky entry and I only saw the size of the wave train once I was firmly committed; there followed some unsavoury language and some desperate paddling until I emerged from the immediate danger.

Wow that was epic! The safety crew were all cheering, and I was immensely grateful to survive it without swimming. There were plenty of other challenges on the river, especially where the waves were thrown back off bluffs to hit unwary paddlers side-on, but by some miracle I stayed upright. The Halfway Hut rapids were a compulsory portage due to water levels and although being halfway was a great



... there followed some unsavoury language and some desperate paddling ...

marker, hauling kayaks loaded with water and essential gear in a strong head wind over slippery, loose river rocks was a definite low point. I took the opportunity to tighten up my new rudder lines, which had slackened off, leaving my steering dubious.

Setting off for the second half, the wind remained unceasingly in our faces and through the gorge it was an unbelievable force; I barely maintained any forward momentum and battling it was taking a toll on muscles and energy levels.

Finally, yes finally, arriving at Gorge Bridge I was immensely relieved to have survived and just have the final bike leg to tick off. I was heaved out of the boat, aided by my support crew, and made my way up the slope towards bike racking, divesting myself of kayak gear as we went and attempting to refuel at the same time. I was amazed to be able to walk and then jog up the hill, having expected to be crawling by now.



Bike leg 3: 70km (aggregate downhill but still that pesky headwind)

Waving goodbye to my crew, I was relieved to be back on the bike in more familiar race territory where I knew I could give a good push on the final leg to get home and hopefully catch some of the people who had passed me on the kayak. Sure enough, after the first uphill section the road flattened out and I found my TT legs were ready and willing. I passed a lot of people on this stage, including the lead lady in my age group, and finally rode into Christchurch in the dark to find the finish line.

Finish

As you jump off your bike, divest yourself of your reflective vest (I wasn't prepared for this and had no clue why they were telling me to take my vest off – thought they meant my race number bib), you hit the sand and run the finish chute to a cruel final form of torture which is up steep steps covered in sand. Used to the relative anonymity of finishing IM races, I wasn't expecting the man himself, Steve Gurney, to be at the top of the finish chute wanting to shake my hand. A nice touch and shows some respect for competitors which is lacking in so many commercial events.

After

So, I finished the one-day race on my first attempt, but in a much slower time than I had hoped. Would I do it again everyone asks. On one hand I'm glad to have ticked it off. I have other plans for next year, but the following year I'm in a new age category, so there's a temptation to go as an age grouper and remedy the mistakes I made this time. Maybe!



The Class of 2023

Paul Burridge, Rosemary Allen, Ellen Coulter, Sasha Butler and Fiona Bifield recall their experiences in the Beginner's Group

With the evenings becoming lighter, April was just right for beginners. Coached by Lawrence and Caroline – and Helen too, when we were a bigger group, we would venture out as an untidy gaggle with a minute of slow jogging and (to our relief) a minute of walking. Repeat.

Priory Marina and The Embankment were frequent training spots. I guess it kept us out from under the feet of everyone else. We learned how to run 'Indian file' – well, almost. We learnt how runners tied their shoelaces, and were constantly asked if we were okay or injured before we ran. The coaches were very careful to make sure we did warm-ups and cool-downs with each run.

The coaches worked hard to strike a balance between taking the whole group forward and trying to make sure nobody felt neglected or 'lesser'

The coaches worked hard to strike a balance between taking the whole group forward and trying to make sure nobody felt neglected or 'lesser'. The pace of sessions was sometimes altered to try to make sure that anyone struggling could be accommodated, brought along, and went home feeling they had achieved something. But with that nurturing, there was also

... camaraderie and friendships quickly started to form ...

honesty in feedback, an understanding that the training pace would pick up and the need

to take personal responsibility for further development. You only get out what you put in....

Inevitably the group shrunk over the first three or four weeks as some people found it wasn't for them, had gotten enough from it, or simply couldn't commit the time. We lost one member to an injury, and another fell pregnant. Throughout this, camaraderie and friendships quickly started to form – not only within the group but across the group as a whole and it bound us together.



As the weeks went by, there were re-occurring themes that started to crop up: 'Team Up', 'Doug Anderson' and the 'stand alone' race. What on earth was one of them? Why would we want to stand alone? Where would everyone else be? And what was a Strava?

As our pace and training picked up, our targets grew and we moved away from navigating by lamp posts and trees to running loops and circuits. In the warmer months we went on a run through Rowney Warren. On another riverside run we all bought chips and sat in Russell Park. In

addition to the twice-weekly Club sessions, some of us also met informally to run socially – especially on Saturday mornings and the on the bank holidays when there were no planned Harriers sessions. On several occasions we ran to, or around, Danish Camp at Willington, sharing tea and chats afterwards. We began to put the effort in and, even though we were each developing at our own paces, all of us began to see and appreciate the benefits.

It soon became clear that the Doug Anderson 5K event was the marker for the end of our course. At least fourteen of us entered and on 19 July 2023, we gathered in Bedford Park along with many, many other Harriers, and runners from other clubs. There was such a buzz that evening and a sense of belonging to a community and – in the Beginners – a family.

... a sense of belonging to a community ...

Anticipating the end of our Group, we organised a meal and night out, taking over a long table at a local Italian restaurant and a good time was had by all. But with the Doug Anderson 5K had come some good news, rather than bad news – the Group would carry on for a little longer. While some continued to consolidate their stamina, for others the goal was the [Standalone 10k](#) event in October.

The summer saw various members of the group entering 5k and 10k events – often encouraged and supported in their efforts by other Beginners. The Beginners put in a good showing at the Bedford Run Fest in September with ten or more of us entering the '[Twilight 10k](#)'. The Standalone 10k event at the beginning of October saw a dozen of us entered and, against an initial 5k training goal for the group, that's quite some achievement for beginners.

However, with Standalone over, the Harriers Beginners group really did cease to be – with the 'Class of 2023' alumni moving on to Groups 4 and 7. We still see each other at the Stadium on run nights of course, but in various configurations, we also meet up at one or other Saturday parkrun to run with, or to encourage each other – but mostly to drink tea and coffee.

Ellen's Story

When I joined the Harriers beginner's group back in April, I joined because I'd signed up for the [Race for Life 10k](#). I also wanted to be more confident with running and feel confident within myself. After the four-week trial, I knew I wanted to be a Bedford Harrier!

I cannot thank the coaches enough ...

I have achieved so much since becoming a Harrier. I have made lifelong friends and the coaches, well I think it's fair to say, none of us would have got

to where we are without Caroline, Lawrence and Helen's support and encouragement each week.

When we were told that we'd be training to run a 5k we all just looked at each other thinking can we really do this? With the encouragement from our coaches and each other we did it. However, we didn't stop there! I went on and ran the Race for Life 10k, (with a hamstring injury!). Some of us then went onto run the Bedford Twilight 10k, this was a huge achievement for me personally as this was the first 10k I ran without stopping. We then went onto to do the Standalone 10k.

Now some of us are in different groups, we still go out running together in smaller groups during the weekends. I cannot thank the coaches enough, for helping me to get to where I am

I am what people would call "a proper runner"

today, I've gone from barely running at all, to running a 10k on a weekly basis and now training for an upcoming half marathon.

Last year my friends and family were saying to me "You're a proper runner now!" I thought "a proper runner", I'll never be one of them! But looking back, thanks to the Harriers and all my running friends, I am what people would call "a proper runner"!



Paul's story

Post! Bin! Runners keep left! I'm beginning to feel like a Harrier now. I'd heard of the Harriers and seen groups running in the streets, but that was what other people did. They were proper runners. I couldn't do that. My wife Gayle had always made time to keep herself fit and she was aware that Harriers operated a spring beginner's group, found the 2023 date, gave me a push and we both signed-up. My personal goal was to be able to run 5k without stopping and that was really the essence of the course - a 'couch to 5k'. When the beginners first gathered last April, nervously eyeing each other up, I wasn't sure what to expect, whether it was the right thing for me, or whether I could run that 5k.

Very early on it was clear that something just 'clicked' in the group

Very early on it was clear that something just 'clicked' in the group. I think it was partly because we were all 'putting ourselves out there' and taking a chance. Sometimes succeeding,



sometimes failing. We were seeing each other in adversity, and it made us stronger – individually and as a group - every personal victory was also a group victory. We encouraged and congratulated each other. We may not have been as experienced and skilled as the other runners we saw, but that's what made us the same. But there was more than that. We liked each other and got on! When we ran, we teased each other, we teased the coaches. We giggled, we moaned, we laughed. We squirted each other with water bottles. It was fun! And I looked forward to every session.

Running in the Doug Anderson 5K was the first time I had pinned a number to my chest since

school days, though I didn't yet feel enough of a runner to deserve to wear a Harriers top. The event was a blast. I thoroughly enjoyed being part of 'Class of 2023' that day and, at the Doug Anderson, I was starting to feel like I 'belonged'.

The atmosphere and camaraderie were overwhelming

Even though 5k was my goal, you run beyond the tape, don't you? And I always wondered whether I could run 10k. But that was double 5k! Was it even humanly possible to run that far? Another member of our group - Sasha – answered that, breaking through the barrier and running 10k in July. Sasha's achievement, and the Doug Anderson 5K, really spurred me on and on Saturday, 22 July 2023, Deepak and I - with Sasha there to show us how it was done – ran our first 10k distance, for me, a psychological barrier was broken down.

Our next milestone was the Standalone 10k. By now I was becoming quite addicted to the atmosphere of these events and could nearly pin my number on straight. Nearly! This time I'd bought a Harriers top and wore it with pride – if a little self-consciously. Tactically, we ran in groups of similar ability to provide support and encouragement to one another. The atmosphere and camaraderie were overwhelming.

Harriers, and the 'Class of 2023', are a really important part of keeping me sane and happy

We talk about mental health and wellbeing, don't we? So, I'm going to say it - Harriers, and the 'Class of 2023', are a really important part of keeping me sane and happy. I have a whole new 'family'. People I feel really comfortable with and look forward to seeing. If you had told the 'me' in that room in the Stadium back in April 2023, that come the dark, cold, wet, winter months I'd be getting up at 5am to go running with people I didn't yet know – and be looking forward to it – I'd have laughed in your face.

And as for fitness? If you'd told me that, before the year was out, I'd not only be running that 5k but would be entering and running a half marathon, I'd have rolled around on the floor in fits. But that's what happened. As the year ended, six of 'Class of 2023' had run half marathon distance – either competitively or informally. And in addition to those, at least three more are training for their debut half marathons in 2024. Others have entered 10k races and, in some quarters, there's even talk of full marathon entries for 2024.

I will always be proud of what I've been helped to achieve as a Harriers Beginner. And when I go to the Stadium on a Monday or Wednesday, and I see those Beginners that went on the same journey as me, then no matter what group they now run in, we will always be 'Class of 2023' and I couldn't have done what I've done without them and the push, encouragement and support our coaches gave us. All power to you all!



Rosemary's story

How did I find myself in the meeting room at the Stadium one cold damp evening in April last year? Well, I'm not entirely clear, but I do remember my good friend and long-term Harrier member "encouraging" me to stop talking about it and get on with it! I've always been an avid gym goer and love dog walking but anything that involves running or swimming were definitely not for me! I had tentatively begun parkrun and was making such slow progress; I was pretty sure I'd never improve.

... what I hadn't bargained for was the incredible support from the rest of the group ...

Anyway, somehow, before I knew what was happening, here I was standing in a room full of strangers listening to Lawrence, Caroline and Helen talking about the Beginners Group. I'm always up for a challenge and am pretty strong, but my cardio fitness and stamina were shockingly bad, and I knew I'd find this difficult.

I was right of course, it was difficult, and I did struggle, but what I hadn't bargained for was the incredible support from the rest of the group and the skill of the coaches in motivating all of us. I knew I wouldn't give up, but I couldn't really see how I would ever become quicker or be able to run without stopping every few minutes to catch my breath.

His threats to sing loudly if I didn't run certainly did the trick

It was demoralising and embarrassing, but Lawrence and Caroline very quickly began to see that I responded to goals and challenges. Too much sympathy doesn't work for me! Every session Lawrence pushed me and swept aside my whinging and complaining. His threats to sing loudly if I didn't run certainly did the trick and made me keep going even when I was absolutely exhausted! On the odd occasion when I had enough breath, I managed to gasp that I hated him! Undaunted he set me yet more challenges and amazingly session by session, I actually began to improve. Supported by members of the group who ran alongside me so many times, pacing and encouraging me, I even found I was enjoying running.

As we moved into our different groups, I worried I would be left behind, but we have become firm friends and continued to meet up socially and love to see each other at training sessions. At nearly every parkrun, I have one or more of the Class of 23 running with me, followed by lots of coffee and catching up on our week. We share our progress on WhatsApp and it's fantastic to see how far everyone has come on this fantastic journey. The move from Beginners to Group 7 was daunting, but eased by Lawrence, who continues to push me to do my best and by Darren and Cint who have been so encouraging and welcoming. I don't think I'll be giving up anytime soon and who knows I might even make Group 6!

Fiona's story

I had seen the advert for the Bedford Harriers Beginner's running group and dismissed it as something I couldn't possibly do, having not done organised sport for some time. Watching my boys have fun in their own sporting activities spurred me on to take another look, along with a further nudge from a Harrier member (you know who you are) on the sidelines. The doubts I had about my ability were holding me back from one of the biggest 'journeys' of my life.

I have gone from barely being able to run for a few minutes to completing a half marathon distance in the space of eight months. The 'runners high' I got from completing my first 5k, after weeks of training, kept me going for months. More recently, running a half marathon was a much greater challenge, a steep learning curve indeed that taught me just how much running is a balance between mental and physical strength to carry on. I undoubtedly had to dig deep.

If this improvement is possible, what else is? Is it a mid-life crisis? Quite possibly! But there are worse things to choose to do if it is! Always pushing each other on to sign up for the next race or take the next challenge has made this possible. The encouragement received from our fantastic coaches and the friendships formed with the 'Class of 2023' has been an inspiration.

Sasha's story

Before joining Bedford Harriers, I had already been on a 6-year long fitness journey that primarily involved weightlifting and cardio. I'd taken up running on the treadmill and was enjoying it, but not making any progress and couldn't run more than 5k. Someone suggested I joined a beginner's group, and it will forever be one of the best decisions I ever made for so many reasons.

Friendships started to form ...



I remember our first few sessions, being coached by Lawrence, Caroline and Helen, thinking "Oh no!" when we had to run for a mile. But as time passed, I started to realise that I (as well as the others) were much more capable than we thought. Friendships started to form, we bonded, had good runs, had bad runs, there was a lot of Indian file (my personal favourite) but we stuck together and pushed through.

In January 2023 I had written down what I wanted to achieve for the year, and "Run 10k by EOY" was a big one. Thanks to the guidance of the coaches, and support from my fellow Harriers, I hit that goal by July. I couldn't believe it. It was a total turning point for me mentally and physically, it really sparked something inside me. My whole outlook on life has changed and when I run, I feel like I can do

I would truly recommend this experience to anyone

anything (more after than during!). I can't believe everything that followed after joining the group, as I

never imagined being such a frequent runner and doing the distances I am. If all continues, I'll be running my first half marathon in February, and it's all thanks to the Harriers - my coaches Lawrence, Caroline and Helen, as well as all my fellow beginners. I have certainly made friends for life, but I would rather say we're now a running family. I would truly recommend this experience to anyone.



Weighty Issues

Jacinta Horne explains how this group helps each other while raising money for charity

It's 6.30 on a Monday morning. I sit bleary-eyed at my computer and open up 'the spreadsheet', a very important spreadsheet.

"Is it a financial spreadsheet?" I hear you ask. "Is it your extensive list of things to do? Could it be where you are working out the chances of winning the lottery so that you can be ready to quit your job?"

Next, I open my WhatsApp and look at the feet! Yes, you read it right, the feet! The photos of feet that are standing on scales, not just one set of feet, but several different photos of different sets of feet!



Next, I open my WhatsApp and look at the feet!

What is Weighty Issues?

Beginning back when we were mere youngsters in 2017, the idea came from a random conversation on a Lazy Gang run and has been raising money for charity ever since. Such a simple concept: send me your feet, on your scales, with your weight, and I will charge you £1 for every week you put on so much as a fairy dusting of weight. (We sometimes call these notes of fairy dust by other less printable names.) The cost of putting on does not increase, just £1 a week is at stake, except for those who pledge more if they don't reach a certain target. It is a small community of people who encourage and cajole each other to stay on the path of fitness and keep their weight on an even keel. Yes, we have had people who really need to lose a bit and I can confirm that they did, but for the most part it is just to keep spirits up and offer support.

The total raised to date is £4,171.90.

The group members choose and agree on the charity, with a preference for local charities where possible, but we don't rule out anything close to anyone's heart at times. If you fancy joining us, or just want to look in to it further, please contact me on via [email](#).

What we have raised and where it went

When	Amount (£)	Charity
Christmas 2017	£200.00	Autism Bedford
Easter 2018	£152.00	Cancer Research
Spring 2018	£186.00	Well Child, the national charity for sick children
Summer 2018	£297.00	East of England Air Ambulance
Winter 2018	£279.00	Motor Neurone Disease
Spring 2019	£202.00	Centrepont
Summer 2019	£274.50	Parkinsons
Winter 2019	£246.00	Rett UK (a rare neurological disorder)
Spring 2020	£165.00	BeChar (Recovery Centre for the homeless and rootless in Bedford)
Summer 2020	£213.50	African School Projects
Autumn 2020	£175.20	Sandy Hedgehog Rescue
Winter 2020	£107.30	Crohn's and Colitis
Spring 2021	£127.00	Dine With Us on the Streets
Summer 2021	£106.30	BeChar
Autumn 2021	£175.00	Bedford Homeless Partnership
Winter 2021	£148.20	Bedford Homeless Partnership
Spring 2022	£160.00	Botswana Diabetes Project
Summer 2022	£185.50	Woburn Lido
Autumn 2022	£232.00	Trussel Trust
Winter 2022	£115.00	FACES (Family and Children's Early-help Services)
Spring 2023	£144.40	Forest of Marston Vale
Summer 2023	£145.00	DEC Turkish earthquake
Autumn 2023	£136.00	5k Your Way

“Que Sera Sera”

Grizzly conversations, as heard by Jacinta Horne during her 2023 Grizzly Cub race

Jack and I stood on the start line after a frantic run from the portaloos and sang a couple of bars of “Que Sera Sera”. I am not going to tell you the story of my “race”: it is just not that interesting. Suffice to say, I got from the start to the finish. In previous years, I had done the full Grizzly, but had never participated in the Grizzly Cub before. The most notable part of the Grizzly Cub is that it includes almost all of the hardest parts of the full Grizzly, with the exception of the rope pull up the hill - and that is not too bad on dry ground.

Not being particularly fit and therefore unable to really push myself, I bimbled along, listening to other people’s conversations. Below is a small selection of what I heard. As they say on the telly, “in no particular order!”

“The only way to do a good Grizzly is to follow this rule. If it is going up you walk, if it is going down you run.”

*“I’m not sure, but I think I may have got my feet wet!”
- just after the split where you run through the sea twice.*

(Someone supporting on the sidelines early on) “Doesn’t matter where in the world you go for a race, you will always find a Bedford Harrier!”

*“Yes, that second loop is a bit of a twat!”
Oakley 20, of course!*

“Going to enjoy that bloody curry tonight!”

“What I really love about running with other people is the smell of their washing powder or softener!”

“We don’t talk about it in terms of years we have entered, we talk about it in terms of the colour of the sweatshirt!” – a conversation about Oakley 20, of course!

I was so pleased to have got round the Cub and I sincerely hope to be back to full Grizzly fitness for 2024. Thanks to the Lakeside runner who kept me going from 4 to 5 miles, when I already thought I was going to phone for a taxi, and to the group of Tiptree runners behind me who kept me amused listening to their ramblings. Also, Richard Gallivan, who accompanied me to the caravan park on the way back, only to find there is no beer in Beer!

A message from Richard Pooley



Richard Pooley

29 December 2023 at 16:51 · 🌐



Hello lovely Harriers people.

As I am no longer resident in Bedford and am unlikely to be running with Harriers any time soon I am sadly stopping my membership at the end of 2023. And as I will get kicked off this page at the end of December I thought I should write something whilst I have the opportunity.

After years of thinking that Bedford Harriers was full of people who were much better runners than me I was talked in to joining by Bev Tredget who assured me that I wouldn't be left behind on group runs!

I joined in 2011 and have enjoyed running with a few groups under the guidance of Ken Toye, Alex Rothwell, Mark Tinkler, Chris Capps, Jen Lovesey, Lawrence Foley, Bev Tredget, Mark Taggart, Richard Woodward and Niki Jones. I have been a badly behaved and sometimes potty mouthed runner - apologies if I offended anyone - but I have thoroughly enjoyed the support, company and humour of the runners who endured me.

So what have I learned? I am sometimes quicker than I think I should be. I can run further than I think I can. It doesn't matter whether I'm first or last - the fact is that I'm still quicker than I would be sitting on the sofa watching TV. I need a challenge to focus on to get me running. I didn't like cross country running when I was at school and I still don't!

The impact of belonging to a club like Harriers should not be taken for granted. Being part of a group of like minded and supportive people is something that many people don't have a chance to experience and many would benefit from.

So where have I gone? I was in a fortunate position to be able to retire early and a health scare hastened the decision to ensure that I was fit and healthy and could enjoy life.

Jane and I took the opportunity to sell up and move to Southsea in Hampshire to enjoy some south coast living and to come back to the place where we met! We made the decision to move in January 2023 and were installed in our new house at the start of April! It all happened quickly which is why I was there one week and gone the next!

I haven't yet joined a running club - I haven't yet found one to match Harriers. I am still running and am signed up to a few races in this part of the world - in fact I will be seeing some of you at a half marathon down here in February. Running by the sea is very therapeutic and is recommended - living a 5 minute walk from the seafront makes that very easy.

If you are down this way please look me up - who knows, I may just be running the same race as you.

In the meantime thanks for the support and company I enjoyed with Harriers.....and don't take Harriers for granted - it doesn't happen by magic!

Cheers

Richard Pooley



**Bedford Harriers
AC**