

MAY 2022

# SEAFORD STRIDERS

*We don't just run, we also have fun!*



## WELCOME TO JUNE...

*By Bronwyn Ryan*

June is shaping up to be a busy month - from Bank Holidays to the Jubilee Weekend, Global Running Day and the Summer Equinox Run. There's a lot to look forward to! But before all that here is a little bit of light reading for your Saturday evening...

This month Nick shares with us the first of many recipe ideas - a new feature for the newsletter.

And if you haven't managed to perfect your marathon preparation yet, never fear! Sarah has shared her top 10 tips for marathon training!

We are always happy to hear your feedback and suggestions so if there is anything that you would like to see on these pages, please do contact myself on [bronwyn.2009@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:bronwyn.2009@hotmail.co.uk)

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# COUCH TO 5K

## Week Six update...

C25K takes people from not running at all, to being able to run 5k, in just nine weeks. It is suitable for any adult who is able to walk non-stop for at least 20 minutes and wants to be able to transition to running.

Having now completed Weeks 1 -6 of the programme the Couch25k runners are completing longer runs and beginning to prepare for their Graduation Run at Seaford Beach Parkrun on Saturday 25th June.

We would love for as many Striders as possible to attend, support the C25K runners and help them to complete their first 5k run.



Thank you to all of the Striders who volunteered to help with the Couch to 5k programme. Your support is invaluable and we look forward to seeing you again next week!

# SUSSEX GRAND PRIX

The Sussex Grand Prix consists of taking part in road races organised around Sussex throughout the year with points awarded based on each individual's finishing position. There are 13 races in total and only your top 6 scores will count (individual scoring). There are also two club leagues which are scored differently.

Event	Dates	Event
1	20th March 2022	Hastings Half
2	1st May 2022	Haywards Heath 10 mile
3	15th May 2022	Hastings 5
4	22nd May 2022	Horsham 10k
5	29th May 2022	Rye 10 mile
6	19th June 2022	Heathfield 10k
7	3rd July 2022	Bewl 15
8	13th July 2022	Phoenix 10k
9	TBC July 2022	Bexhill 5k
10	TBC September 2022	Hellingly 10k
11	2nd October 2022	Lewes Downland 10 mile
12	TBC October 2022	Hove Prom 10k
13	TBC November 2022	Crowborough 10k

Please do sign up for the races! It will be a fun season of racing...



# CLUB GRAND PRIX

The Club Grand Prix is a fun series of events throughout the calendar year, where Striders compete against one another in a league. The top place Strider in each event (or top age graded in parkruns) takes 20 points, with 2nd taking 19 and so on and so forth. There are 20 races throughout the year but only your top 10 scores will count. These are collated to give you a total and the highest score wins!

Event	Dates	Event	Scoring based on
1	13-Mar	Pett XC	Position
2	27-Mar	Martello Half Marathon	Position
3	09-Apr	Seaford parkrun	Age grading
4	23-Apr	Bevendean parkrun	Age grading
5	01-May	Haywards Heath 10	Position
6	22-May	Horsham 10k	Position
7	11-Jun	Peacehaven parkrun	Age grading
8	22-Jun	Summer Solstice	Position
9	03-Jul	Bewl 15	Position
10	13-Jul	Phoenix 10k	Position
11	30-Jul	Hastings parkrun	Age grading
12	13-Aug	East Brighton parkrun	Age grading
13	TBC Sep	Hellingly 10k	Position
14	21-Sep	Autumn Equinox	Position
15	08-Oct	Uckfield parkrun	Age grading
16	16-Oct	Great South Run	Position
17	22-Oct	Beachy Head Marathon	Position
18	12-Nov	Eastbourne parkrun	Age grading
19	TBC Nov	Crowborough 10k	Position
20	TBC Dec	Mince Pie 10 Virtual	Position

We will keep you updated each month to let you know who is in the lead... for now...



Female 1st - Sue Curtis  
Male 1st - Jeff Young





# Social Events

Thank you to everyone who attended the May Social Run in East Dean. It was a really successful event that we look forward to repeating one day in the future...

We have a number of other events coming up in the next few weeks:

## **22nd June Summer Solstice Run and BBQ on Seaford Beach**

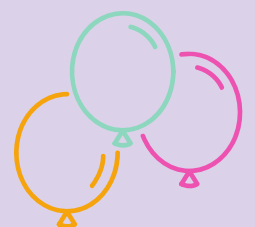
- Please contact Graham for further information and to register for a space

## **25th June Couch25k Graduation at Seaford Beach Park Run**

- Please contact Victoria for further information

## **21st August Striders Sports Day (Provisional Date)**

- Further information to follow in next months newsletter



# Wednesday Night Striders Update

By Victoria Maleski

Thank you to everyone who replied to the email about WNS going forwards. Your responses are really appreciated and have directed the committee on the decisions to be made.

The most popular option was Option 5 (groups meeting separately each week) followed by Option 4 (groups meeting once a month, possibly external and could be a different location each time). The next one was Option 2, then Option 1 and finally Option 3.

A fair number of comments about meeting locations were received. It was noted that whilst Wave Leisure is central, the car parking is getting increasingly difficult even with just a couple of groups meeting there and the room available is too small for all of us. Other suggestions included Martello, Buckle car park/sailing club, Top of Firle Road by Seaford Golf Club, Rugby Club, Seaford Town Football Club, Big Park in Peacehaven, South Hill Barn, Cradle Hill School hall or similar, Seaford Head Golf Club/The View etc.

Some people preferred the flexibility of being able to start earlier than a fixed time each week and lots of you liked the variety of different starting points, particularly in the lighter Spring, Summer and Autumn evenings. The possibility of combining a social gathering with a run in a different location, like we did in East Dean, was popular and helpful to those of you with young children who might be restricted on the number of nights out during the week.

It was acknowledged that new members may feel daunted by the possibility of switching groups if they have only ever run with one group and they don't know anyone in the other groups. There is the opportunity for them to mix with other groups at track night and our social events, but our tendency would be to stick with people we know rather than mixing. Maybe we need to introduce an occasional event, social or running, when we combine people from mixed ability groups to help get round this.

There were positive comments about the information provided in the weekly email from Graham and the new format newsletter edited by Bronwyn. Thanks Graham and Bronwyn!

The results and the comments that accompanied your votes were discussed at our committee meeting. We do appreciate that whatever we put in place going forwards some of you will be disappointed but, based on the comments received, more of you will be happy.

The committee has acted on your votes and proposes a combination of Options 5 & 4, with the possibility of finding a suitable occasional pre or post run inside venue for the dark nights. We would also be looking to do more of the East Dean type meeting combining running with the social side at a pub or café. This would replace Thirsty Thursdays unless we have a special reason to get together on a non-running night.

Details of our next all group get together will be available soon.

**\*\*\*IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS PLEASE REACH OUT DIRECTLY TO VICTORIA\*\*\***

# Vitality London 10,000

By Richard Honeyman

I returned to London on 2nd May 2022 for the rearranged 2020 London 10k and his first race since the current pandemic. I have taken part in every event since they have been hosted - from 2008 - as both the Bupa and now Vitality as its headline sponsor. This year 19,000 runners completed the race.

Since returning to Parkrun's my times have been around 28-31 mins so when half way on the course in the City of London at 5km I was happy with just over 29 mins and so the challenge was to get back under an hour. It is always an honour running in central London no matter what the distance is and the route choice along the Mall, Trafalgar Square, Strand, Aldwych, Farringdon, Cheapside, Mansion House and St Pauls returning to Whitehall, Parliament, Birdcage Walk finishing outside Buckingham Palace, has always been so exciting and never disappoints as this run was set up originally as a trial for the London 2012 Olympics marathon route. The weather and start venue of the Green Park was perfect.

I realised I was running just over 5:40 minute miles so if did not slow down I could actually get under my target time. We all work out how long we have in the remaining kms. I used to use Garmins but not today - working it out in my head as going along and once back at the Trafalgar Square - the Lions are grand - I realised could do this. Customary glance down Downing Street and then Big Ben the last 800m to go down Bird Cage Walk is so special - always is and was pleased on the short right hand turn to the Finish Line and did it in 58:33.

On the wider Elite Race - Ellis Cross was first after beating Mo Farah by 4 seconds in 28:40 which was a PB for the young man on the road. I did see Mo near the finish line who looked much perplexed. I talked to Jeanette Kwakye of the BBC who also confirmed the situation before I collected my T shirt/medal. It was further in Green Park where I met Ellis himself. He was very humble and was also impressed by his choice of song which was Mr Blue Sky by ELO. In the ladies Eilish McColgan was first lady in 30:21 beating her mother Liz's time but not Paula Radcliffes under 2 seconds. Overall to run round central London when not necessarily wanting long distances - or not actually getting into the marathon - is an excellent compromise and many runners make a day of it which is Bank Holiday after all.



## Sweet Potato & Chicken Traybake

**Easy One Tray Dish for All The Family!**



### Ingredients:

- 500g Sweet Potatoes, Peeled and cut into small chunks
- 2 Red Onions, Cut into wedges
- 350g Broccoli, broken into florets
- 8 cloves of garlic, unpeeled. (Reduce if you wish)
- 2 tsp dried thyme
- 1 sprig, fresh rosemary
- 1 ½ tbsp Olive oil
- 8 skinless chicken thighs, cut in half or (Chicken less Plant Based alternative)
- 2 Lemons, 1 juiced, 1 cut into wedges
- 1tsp smoked paprika
- 150ml Chicken Stock (vegetable stock alternative)
- S&P to taste.

### Method:

- 1 - Pre heat oven to gas mark 6, 200°C, 180°C fan.
- 2 - Add, Sweet Potato, onion, broccoli & Garlic to a large roasting tray and sprinkle with dried thyme. Season and drizzle 1 tbsp of the olive oil. Mix together.
- 3 - Lay vegetables out in the roasting tray and bake for approx. 15mins.
- 4 - Remove the tray from the oven and give the vegetables a good mix. Add the chicken thigh pieces and drizzle the remaining ½ tbsp of olive oil.
- 5 - Squeeze over the lemon juice and add the used lemon halves to the tray, sprinkle over the smoked paprika, fresh rosemary leaves and bake for a further 15 mins.
- 6 - Pour over most of the chicken stock and continue to bake for a further 15 mins and until the chicken is cooked. Top up with the remaining chicken stock if the dish is looking too dry and you need to do so.
- 7 - To finish, Squeeze the garlic from the skins, remove the lemon halves and serve.

*Optional Suggestion - Top with balsamic dressed Rocket leaf!*

**ENJOY!**





## Seaford Beach Parkrun

By Tom Roper

### **Join the Seaford Beach parkrun core team!**

At Seaford Beach parkrun we have two Event Directors (Joel Eaton and Andy Farley) supported by a small core team, who help manage the event both on the day and between Saturdays.

Core team members take turns to cover roles such as Run Director - the one who gives the pre-race briefing on the day and takes responsibility for overall management of the event on that day and Volunteer Co-ordinator, who recruits and organises the volunteers. We set up the event and clear up afterwards.

We handle emails that come in to the parkrun inbox, and take turns to process the results. Results processing sounds difficult, but is usually a breeze. It can usually be done on a phone while queueing up for a post-parkrun coffee. We have been known to meet for a core team drink, as well.

If you've enjoyed volunteering at parkrun, you will find being part of the core team is even more rewarding.

If you're interested, or would like to know more, grab one of us at a parkrun or email [seafordbeach@parkrun.com](mailto:seafordbeach@parkrun.com) As well as Andy and Joel, we are Leanne Litster, Michelle Tickner and Tom Roper.



# MARATHON TRAINING - TOP TEN TIPS

By Sarah Hoyle

Earlier this year, I ran the Brighton Marathon in 4 hours and 42 minutes. It had been 11 years since I last took on the race, completing it in 6 hours 30 minutes back in 2011. Looking back to my first marathon, I didn't have a clue! In the intervening years, I have learnt a lot and this year I was determined to do everything right in training. As a result, it was a super day and I felt really chuffed with my time and how well it went. If you are thinking about entering your first marathon, or need some help in training, read on for my top tips.

1

**Make the time** - this may sound obvious, however it really is important before entering a marathon to make sure you have the time to train. Some runners will run 5+ times a week. I successfully trained for a marathon only running 3, sometimes 4 times a week, so it is possible to fit it in. But check that your friends and family will be supportive of you. I often turned down social invites "sorry I can't, I doing a long run" and my partner Steve didn't see much of me for the weekends between January and April. If you have a busy social life or other commitments on your days off, you might want to seriously consider how you will fit it all in before making any commitment. If you don't train for it, it will seriously hurt on race day!

**Start training earlier than you think you need to.** I hear lots of runners say "I'll start after Christmas" or "I've got plenty of time", but believe me you will never have enough time. I would recommend you start training in September for a Spring Marathon. You can follow all the training plans you want to, but please build in extra time. You will be glad you did this if you get injured or get poorly. Most plans don't allow for the time it takes to come back from recovery or illness so starting earlier than you need to will help build this buffer, and will mean you won't lose out on those key longest runs at the end of your training. Missing those will affect you mentally more than physically, so leave plenty of time.

2

3

Speaking of mental training - it's vital to **train your brain**. I did runs in the wind and rain; when my feet hurt; when I was desperate for a wee; and when everything hurt and I wanted to stop. This is really important to do in the training period as you will train your brain to keep going when things get tough. I trained my brain so well that in the lead up to race day I kept saying out loud "this is going to be a breeze" and in one mad moment "maybe a marathon isn't enough, perhaps I should do an ultra". Feeling mentally ready is 80% of the battle and you can nail this by training your brain to believe you can do it.

**Slow down** - some runners think they need to go all out on every training run, but really you don't, and most people will benefit from slowing down. By slowing down, I mean 2-3 min miles slower than your 5k pace - this is easier said than done (especially with Strava envy), but trust me. 80% of our running needs to be at easy pace. The goal isn't to win Park Run, it's to keep your body going for 3 or 4 hours at a time, so slow down, it's even ok to add in walking breaks too. If you go all out every time you run, you will not progress and will also be more likely to injure yourself. To give you some comfort, my fast 5k pace is 9 min miles, I usually did my long slow runs at 11:30 min miles, and on race day, I kept a near on consistent pace of 10:42 min miles, a pace I had never kept up in my long training runs. Slowing down to speed up really does work. I promise.

4

**5** The missing ingredient – **take electrolytes**. Back in 2011, I finished the Brighton Marathon and truly believed I was dying. I felt dreadful. Looking back, it is because I didn't take on any electrolytes during the race. Have you ever done a sweaty run, and developed a head ache later in the day that you just couldn't shift? Try taking some electrolytes. My personal experience is that you cannot get these from gels alone. I have mine in powder form to mix in with my drink and I have also been eating salt chews which can be taking orally and much easier to carry. You can also make your own. For really long runs, drink electrolytes the day before and the day after too. If you have never done this, try it – you'll really notice the difference.

Speaking of gels, **fuel right**. We have all heard the advice about not trying anything new on race day, and that is very true. Experiment with fuelling during your training runs. My routine is a gel every 45 minutes whether I need one or not, and half a caffeine chew every hour, plus sips of water every mile marker. Doing that meant that I didn't bonk/hit the wall on race day. As well as that, eat more the day before a run. I will consume 3000 calories the day before a long run and when I do this, I certainly notice the difference (just make sure it's good stuff like a bagel with nut butter and bananas rather than 3 slices of cheesecake). Everyone is different, so work out what works best for you.

**7** **Cross train** – back in 2011, all I ever did was run. I now realise how weak my body must have been. For me personally, I walk loads every day, I strength train a couple of times a week and keep up regular yoga. Others may enjoy spin, cycling or swimming. Either way, spend time strengthening and conditioning your body. My non-negotiable is definitely yoga, but if you can't bear to be without running, run up hills – after all, hill running is just strength training in disguise.

**8** **Make Vaseline your friend** – trust me! I Vaseline my feet, anywhere a blister might form, which includes in-between my toes. I Vaseline my eyebrows to stop the sunblock sweating in to my eyes, and if I am off road, I Vaseline my ankles to stop the tiny bits of grit bouncing up and falling in my sock.

**9** **See a physio** – as often as you can afford. I saw a physio every three weeks from January to April. I know it is a luxury, but it was something that I decided to do to invest in myself to give myself the best chance possible. Seeing what my physio was able to help me with, I genuinely don't think I would have felt as confident and fit on race day if it wasn't for her.

**10** **Train with others** – Thanks to Seaford Striders, I know many likeminded people who love a good run. During marathon training, I ran with others, and it helps so much. 3+ hours doesn't seem so long when you are bumbling along with others chatting about nonsense. You also pick up good hints and tips about running along the way. If I had done all my runs on my own, I definitely wouldn't have enjoyed them as much.



**And lastly, remember you put the hard work in during training – race day is just the victory lap. This is what worked well for me. Everyone is different, but hopefully you have found a nugget or two that was helpful. If nothing else, trust me on running slowly. And the Vaseline. Happy running.**

What a weekend! The Mid Sussex Marathon consists of 3 races (10 miles, 10 miles, 10k) making up marathon distance over 3 consecutive days (bank holiday weekend) and lots of Striders rode to the challenge. Myself, Amanda, Jemma, Josh, Nick, Jeff, Phill, Colin, Matt, Richard and Martin all took part in all 3 events but we're joined by more Striders taking part in 1/3.

The Saturday race was East Grinstead 10 mile and kicked off by two humans in giant dog costumes as per tradition. This was more of a trail route with a couple of tough hills (mile 9 I'm looking at you!) and to be honest I don't even know whether I enjoyed it or not! I somehow managed to get the top ladies spot although it was a small field, a win is a win and probably my first and last.

Sunday's race was Haywards Heath 10 mile. I'd done this a couple of times before so knew what to expect and was pleased they'd reverted back to the original route which has slightly less elevation. That being said, my legs were pretty battered from the previous day and they really felt it even on the first tiniest bit of incline. This run for me was absolutely the hardest. My legs were so heavy and even a bump in the road felt like Mount Everest! But we all made it to the end knowing we only had one run to go.

Monday was the Burgess Hill 10k which was 2 laps around mainly fields. We were all pretty tired by this point but grateful for the shorter race- though I was worried about pace! This ended up being better than expected and after support from the lovely Paula we all crossed the line in high spirits!

Striders absolutely dominated the field and amazingly Phill had won the whole marathon weekend and in a very unexpected turn of events I had won the ladies marathon with Nick and Jemma both taking third spot. Yes it was absolutely exhausting but it was SUCH a great weekend, and so lovely to see the gang's faces every morning ready to tackle our next challenge. The team aspect was a real high for me, I honestly missed everyone so much on the Tuesday and had withdrawal symptoms! It's certainly an endurance challenge but so worth it!

Same again next year?



# Horsham 10k

By Stacey Pollard

I joined the Seaford Striders last year and have enjoyed a few races, including park runs, half marathons and even run my first marathon this April. So, I decided to try my first 10k race.

Previous races that I have entered, I have had my race pack posted to me. For this event, the race packs aren't sent out to you in the post, so you need to collect your pack from headquarters, which was very easy and was well organised. I met up with the other striders and took the obligatory photo before the race started.

We were called over the start line and the race started promptly at 11am. We ran once around the very well maintained rugby pitch and then headed out from the rugby grounds onto the roads of Horsham. The next part of the race was two laps on the roads, muddy tracks and footpaths. Part of the course was well shaded, which was very welcome, as it was a hot day, about 21°C. The course was not flat, but thankfully the hills were not too steep.

The course was well marshalled and very well supported by family and friends and local residents. Lots of people cheering me on with 'you've got this Seaford' and 'keep going Seaford'. I felt like I had changed my name for the race.

The last 1km was all uphill. It seemed never ending and I was starting to overheat. Finally I turned into the rugby grounds and back on the flat grass, where I sprinted to the finish line with all the energy I had left. I managed to get a 10k personal best time of 53mins and 14seconds. I was so pleased. The medal I got at the finish line was very unique too.

That evening, I received a message informing me that I had come first out of the women in my age group. I was (and still am) in shock and am super excited to have won my first ever trophy.



# JUNIOR SEAFORD STRIDERS

By Steph

In addition to the Seaford Striders Senior members we also have a number of Junior Striders who run once a week with the club.

In May they took part in running 1km laps of the Salts whilst wearing Red, White and Blue to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee! They each won a medal and Junior Club Grand Prix points.

*A huge thank you goes to Julie Taylor for working so hard to make this event happen!*





By Jeff Young

The South Downs Way 100M Relay is an epic race and deserves an epic write-up. Unfortunately I have been nominated to do it, so strap yourself in for a bit more of a farcical disappointment, with more ups and downs than the South Downs Way themselves.

## PROLOGUE

The build up for this race stretches back a couple of years. I wasn't even in the original line-up for the team, but Covid hit, then injuries and other commitments cropped up and sadly Damian and Josh were forced to pull out and Alan and I were literally drafted in to take up the baton. I had wanted to do this race for a long time and was incredibly grateful to Nick for even considering me, especially with so many other great runners in our club to choose from. So now I was in, we all got together to decide who would run which leg and generously they all decided to give me all the tough legs! (Joking) not joking.

The race itself is made up of eighteen legs in total of varying lengths and difficulties and each runner has to run three legs.

As it was our first year competing we had to enter a mixed team, comprising of three men and three women. There seemed to be a long list of other strict rules and guidelines that we had to adhere to, involving baton changes and routes that we could and couldn't take. We all knew that we would have to train seriously for this race.

We decided to recce our legs together, going out in groups to make sure that we were familiar with our routes and looking out for potential spots or hazards where we could go wrong. These runs were great and really brought us closer together as a team. It also made everything a little more real and scary, but we were prepared and as ready as we were ever going to be.

However fate and Covid restrictions had other plans and at short notice the race date was changed which conflicted with some team members schedules. Because we had grown so close in our preparations and didn't want to break the team up, we decided that if one of us couldn't compete then none of us would and deferred to the following year.

A lot can happen in a year though and as the new date neared, two members had to withdraw. Understandably we were gutted, but we quickly managed to fill the two places with another two fantastic runners and our final line-up was complete. We were:- Nick, Jeff, Alan, Anneka, Emily and Leanne.

At last race day was suddenly upon us and as panic set in we wondered if we could still remember our routes from the previous year. There was nothing further we could do to help us now though. All that was left for us now was to get out there and run.

## CHAPTER ONE - THE RACE

The unsung hero of this piece has to be Simon Croucher, who selflessly volunteered himself to taxi us about all day from one location to the next and drive our minibus. He was incredible and it must have been just as draining for him driving us around as it was for us to run.

I was the first pick up in Peacehaven at 5.15 am and straight away things started off badly as I realised that I had left all my food at home and had to go back and get it. That done, we were off, rounding up all the others and heading off to Beachy Head for our seven o'clock start.

We got there in plenty of time to collect our batons and listen to the race briefing. Waves of runners had been setting off since six o'clock and would continue to set off until nine. We were worried about meeting our cut off time at Winchester at 9pm and we found it difficult to comprehend how teams leaving later than us were going to manage it.

That was their problem though. All we could do was focus on our own race. Nick however didn't look worried as he made his way to the start line, he just looked as strong and steady as he always does.

There was a brief pause and then they were off and we all began screaming. "COME ON NICK!" Including Colin, who had come out especially to see us off. I could already tell that my voice wasn't going to last the day. We jumped in the minibus, but didn't get far until we pulled into a layby and were out again to cheer Nick on, then back in to Birling Gap and out for more cheering. Nick came bombing confidently passed, still looking strong, even though he still had the Seven Sisters looming fast.

The next leg was Anneka's at Exeat, so we drove there next. She was nervous and I tried my best to reassure her. Everyone knows how brilliantly she can run. I just needed her to believe that herself. Nick charged into view and Anneka was off. Powering up her first hill faster than I had ever seen her go before. We waved goodbye to Sandra and Victoria, who had also come out to cheer us on and then it was off to Bo-Peep.

The atmosphere at leg 3 was electric as more teams seemed to be getting into the race and most of the people that we spoke to seemed to be returning to the race after multiple times and it was great to see how much they still enjoyed it.

We spotted Anneka on the horizon and it was amazing to see how well she was running despite the difficult, hilly terrain of her leg. Leanne was next to take up the baton and she set off at pace to Southease.

We learnt then that the lady that had been running for the team that had been leading after the first leg had not yet come in. The team looked worried and disheartened and we couldn't help but share their anguish, but were glad that our own runner had made it back safely.

On to Southease and it didn't take long for Leanne to appear. She had made incredible time and what was even more amazing was that this was her first ever race.

Nick was off for his second leg, maybe not quite as recovered from his first leg as he would have liked but still looking good. We hopped on the bus and it was off to the start of my first leg, from Holden Farm up to Ditchling Beacon. It seemed to me as if we were catching up on some of the teams that had left on earlier waves. Nick came in fast and I was off to begin my climb. The weather was glorious. Not too hot and not too windy and I felt as if I was running well, overtaking two people.



It was Emily's turn next and she was gone so fast that I didn't even get a chance to see her go. Disappearing into the distance before I even had a chance to gather myself and wish her good luck. I did see her at the other end as she came flying down the last hill, still looking just as strong as I'm sure she must have looked at the start.

Alan then left on his first leg. Attacking the hill and soon disappearing. He had a couple of long, tough climbs ahead, but a very fast downhill finish and I knew he would be quick. Unfortunately the "What three words" app that we were using took us off into the middle of nowhere and we had to ask a farmer for directions to put us back on track. Those wasted minutes had delayed us enough that Alan had already finished when we got there.

Nick set off on his final leg. He would be leaving us soon because he had some prior engagement that he couldn't get out of, which was why he had opted to do the earlier legs. He was bitterly disappointed that he would not get to be with us at the end and we would be sorry to see him go.

He came in and we said our goodbyes.

I made a promise to myself that in his absence I would take care of his team for him and make sure that they all stayed happy, safe and focused.

Little did I know that it was I that would need looking after.

## **CHAPTER TWO - I LIVE UP TO MY REPUTATION**

Leanne was up next with a slightly trickier route than her first and then Emily with a nice, short downhill sprint that she was bound to do fast. Emily was passing her baton on to me and I stood at the bottom of the hill that I would be shortly called on to climb.

I had recced this leg the previous summer and I was fairly sure that I could remember the right route.

Emily pressed the baton into my hand and I shot off. The trail ahead of me was empty except for a lone cyclist, so I focused on him and chased him down. It didn't take long to overtake him and once more I was on my own. I paused briefly to cross a busy road and then I was on the trails again.

I was remembering bits and pieces as I got to them. A long twist in the path before a rutted downhill and then another long drag up a hill. I passed a monument at the top which was another landmark that I remembered, then I reached a carpark where the path split and I recalled that the leg instructions said that either track was permissible. The land flattened out and I began to pick up speed, knowing that I would soon begin a fast descent. I was running through woods now and the path still lead me straight and down, but I couldn't remember this many trees before and I was sure it had been more open. I pressed on hoping that I would soon spot something that would jog my memory. I looked down at my watch and saw that I would soon be coming to the finish and sure enough I could hear the sound of traffic ahead where I knew the change over point would be.

I broke from the trees and came upon a busy main road, but there were no marshals or other runners anywhere in sight and my heart sunk as I realised that I had gone wrong. I looked left and then right, but neither direction offered me any clue as to which way I should go. I chose the right purely because it looked slightly hillier that way. There was no pavement, so I was running on the road now, straight towards oncoming traffic. I worried that I would get the team disqualified for doing this and ducked into a field and carried on. The grass was long and tiring to wade through and I kept checking my watch, alarmed to see how much the extra distance was growing and how fast the time was slipping by.

I was absolutely devastated by how much I had let my team down.

Then the field ended in a high hedge and I was forced back on the road again.

At last I saw the check point ahead and a whole wave of emotion flooded over me.

I ran to the marshals and I was distraught. They both gave me a hug, because they could see how visibly upset I was. Although I imagine that they instantly regretted that decision as I was dripping with sweat.

Head down I crossed the road, ashamed at my failure and unable to meet the eyes of my teammates. I got back in the bus and buried my head in my towel, knowing that I had let everyone down.

Anneka had taken over from me, but I barely noticed as she ran in at the next change over. Nor did I see Alan take off.

At the next stop I left the bus wanting to be alone with my thoughts, but as I walked amongst the other runners I began to be recognised as the guy that got lost. They wanted to know what happened and reassured me that they had all done it before. As I talked I began to feel more like my old self and went to cheer Alan on as he came back in and shout encouragement to Leanne as she set out on her final leg.

As we got back things were getting tense. There wasn't long to go now before we would reach the cut off time at the sustainability centre which was at the end of Emily's last leg. We were doing calculations and it didn't look as if we were going to make it. We made a pact amongst ourselves that even if the marshals said that the race was over and we couldn't go on, we would still press on to the finish.

Emily was a little nervous as we waited for Leanne to run in. She hadn't had a chance to recce this last leg, but she is such a capable runner that I knew she'd be fine. Leanne came in, still looking remarkably calm even though she had just completed her very first race and Emily dashed off into the trees.

When we got to the next leg we overheard some marshals saying that they weren't going to stop any teams if they didn't make the cut off time. Relieved, we waited for Emily and Anneka began flapping that she couldn't remember her leg that we had run together the year before. I describe to her the route as best as I could remember it and other runners around helped to fill in the blanks.

Anneka set off and I began to feel a little bit of dread set in. It was my turn next.



**CHAPTER THREE - SARAH**

I was looking forward to this leg and I'm not exaggerating if I tell you that it was probably the hardest one of all the legs. It was certainly the longest, but I would also say that it was the most complicated. Most of the other leg descriptions were only about a paragraph long, but this one stretch on for an entire page with lots of twists and turns described.

With my terrible misadventures of my last leg, things weren't looking good.

I had run the route before, but that was a year ago and the last part of the leg had been reduced to an indistinct blur in my memory. Anneka came into view, powering up her last steep hill and still looking good. I took the baton from her and was off.

I felt good myself and was running well and small details were coming back to me as I ran. I knew that up ahead there was a tight turn and if I missed it I would end up going over a hill instead of around it and that the team would be disqualified if I took that route, but I saw the side gate that I needed to take and raced off down the trail.

So far, so good.

Ahead I saw a runner. Perfect, I thought. If he doesn't mind I'll run with him and lessen my chances of getting lost, but as I quickly caught him up I felt that I was running so well that I didn't want to slow down and forgot all about the sensible decision that I had just made.

I stormed passed him, racing down a steep decline and at the bottom, twisting to the right, then ducking through a small gap in a hedge down a sheer drop and then undercover of trees along a dried up stream bed, full of jagged rocks and loose shale. I was trying desperately to recall my path. I remembered something about turning right at three dead trees, but as the scenery flash by I was unsure whether I had seen them or not. I went under a railway bridge which seemed familiar, but I was beginning to doubt myself.

I emerged onto a road and ahead was the beautiful village of Exton. Everything was alright, I was on track. However, I knew that there was a sharp turn coming up that was easily over looked. The race description even calls it. "A miss-able path".

I saw a turn and took it, but almost straight away realised that this was the wrong way and turned back. I half expected to see that the other runner had caught me back up but no one was in sight and after a few hundred metres I spotted the right path and was off again.

I ploughed my way through an open field, constantly glancing over my shoulder for a glimpse of another runner, but only as I began to climb a hill on the other side did I at last catch sight of someone appearing on the horizon.

I was tiring and had to start walking, which was unusual for me, as I never walk up hills, but as I glanced behind I saw that the other runner had closed the gap but was also walking so I wasn't worried that he would catch me. As I rose higher more runners were beginning to appear.

At the top there was a turn and then another climb. I tried to get going again but was completely spent and as I finally reached the peak I was overtaken. I tried to pick up my pace to take back my position, but I had no more to give. At a farm I stopped at a tap for water, but as I tried to get going again my legs began to wobble.

"Are you alright?" A runner called out as he sailed by.

"Yes fine," I called back.

"Almost there," said another.

"Liar!" I shouted after him.

I was walking, every step feeling like wading through deep water and black spots were creeping into my vision. Someone offered me a gel which I greedily accepted. That's better I thought and set off again at a run, but the lift was only fleeting and I soon returned to my weaving shuffle.

Now from here on things get a bit more hazy. I remember people cheering me as I ran passed a pub but not much else. I trudged on completely unaware of my surroundings. Aneka had forced me to take my phone on this leg and as part of me realised what bad shape I was in I fumbled it out of its pouch and made a call to the team. I was probably babbling some nonsense to them and have no idea what I said and the reception was awful and the call kept cutting off. Then to top everything off my phone died and that was that. My lifeline was gone.

There was nothing else I could do but stagger on. Luckily it wasn't a busy road as I was all over the place, my vision swimming in and out of focus. I knew I couldn't go on much further and I was beginning to feel a little frantic. There were a few houses up ahead. Huge manor houses. But, as I approached I saw that their gates were shut up tight. I saw one that was open and desperately took the plunge, not knowing what reception I was going to get.

I think that I got incredibly lucky that night. So many people might have turned a strange man appearing on their doorstep away. But although the lady that answered the door looked worried at first, I must have looked pathetic for her to take pity on me. I blurted out a garbled explanation of my plight and asked if she had a charger for my phone. She brought me round to sit in her back garden and brought me some water, chocolate and a banana to help me recover.

Her name was Sarah and she was so, so nice. Her husband was out watching the champions league final and she was at home with her children, which makes it even more remarkable that she took the time to help a total stranger that came knocking at her door. We sat together outside for ages talking possibly to ease her nerves as much as making sure that I was alright and slowly my faculties began to return, although my legs still felt tired and weak.

Eventually my phone was charged enough for me to open it and give Sarah Aneka's number so that the team could come and collect me. Sheepishly I waited on the driveway with Sarah for the minibus to arrive. I was aware that I had let down my team again but this time I really didn't care. I was just glad to be back with them when they arrived. I thanked Sarah profusely for her kindness. (She has even phoned up Aneka since the race to check up on me) and we waved goodbye.

My ordeal was over.

We then had to drive to the finish of the race to pick up Alan, who had once again had to cross the finish line without anyone there to cheer him in.

It was all a bit of an anti-climax, but we had done it. (Well almost) We climbed back into the minibus and rode off into the sunset... (That's a lie, we were heading the other way)

I also want to add what an absolute legend Simon was. We got back to Peacehaven at about half one so he had had a very long day, but had handled the minibus amazingly. Sometimes having to negotiate some really tricky moments.

Well done that man.

I just want to finish by apologising to my team.

I know most people think that I'm a bit of a clown, which is fine, that's how I want people to think of me. But I do take my running seriously and would hate for anyone to think that I was just messing around and that's why I let the team down.

I don't know why I'm always getting lost. I think it's because when I run I do it to forget about the world around me and because I shut everything out and just lose myself in my run I don't always notice the things going on around.

Despite everything that happened I absolutely loved the day. The location is incredible and my team was amazing. I would love to be given the chance to run it again, but understand that I am a bit of a risk. However I still feel as if I have a score to settle with the South Downs Way.



# REACH US ON



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**Please send your race reports and June articles over by 26th June.**