

Sandstone Trail Challenge 7 May 2016

Sunday morning

On Sunday I woke up late. Groggy and bleary-eyed, eventually I wandered downstairs to make a cup of tea for Nicola and myself, only to find milk all over the kitchen floor and the inside of the fridge. The living room and kitchen were full of boxes and bags, leftover cakes, tally cards etc, and I knew we'd only unpacked one of the cars so far. I stopped any more milk from leaking out of the container, made the tea and went back to bed, leaving the spilt milk where it lay.

All I managed to do the rest of that day was to clear up the spilt milk, get the results up onto the website, and take the dog to the pub for lunch, in hot sunshine, and snooze the rest of the afternoon away. And I hope that gives a flavour of why I'm not writing this until the Wednesday after the Sandstone Trail Challenge.

Thanks

Before I start to talk about the day, we need to thank everyone who helped make it such a success. All the marshals and helpers out on the course, from Helsby RC, Delamere Spartans, 3rd Frodsham Sea Scouts, Cheshire Search and Rescue, the Cheshire Scouts Event Support Group. And everyone back at the Community Centre too, especially the 1st Helsby Scouts, who waited on everyone. And of course all the walkers and runners, without whom it would all have been a waste of time, to be honest ☺ Also, special thanks to Ben Williams, my deputy, who made things a lot easier for me this year.

On the day



So what of Saturday? Yet again everyone seemed to enjoy the day, although inevitably one or two runners and walkers were disappointed with their performances. We had more records set this year than any year since the first time we organised it though, so not everyone suffered too much from

the heat. Because yes, it was a bit warm this year. It could have been much hotter though, as there was thin hazy cloud blocking the sun for much of the day. I think we'd have had a lot more people dropping out if we'd had Sunday's hot sun instead. As it was, we had few drop-outs, and only a handful of runners in any distress at the end, mainly through dehydration and overheating.

250 paid, 201 started, and 176 finished. We'd like to reduce the number who don't turn up on the day if we can – there are plenty of other walkers and runners who'd have taken those places if we'd known. The runners' places filled on the day we opened for entries, and the walkers' places filled months beforehand too. We'll work on that to try to get more to turn up next year. We don't want to go above 250 places though – it's manageable at that size, and we've got enough space for the cars and for the finishers in the hall to sit in comfort.

The new Mayor of Whitchurch, Mike McDonald, set everybody off from Whitchurch with a few words of encouragement, and at 8:33 they were off across the road and down the alleyway, heading for the canal. That was the last I saw of them until the first runner arrived in Frodsham. The whole Trail had dried out enormously since the mudbath Ben, Charlie and I had experienced just five days earlier, although I think everyone still got their feet wet in the field just after Checkpoint 1. Apart from that, the going underfoot was close to ideal.

The view from the front



Chris Baynham-Hughes

At the front, six runners were jockeying between themselves for positions all the way. Jim O'Hara, Lawrence Eccles and Chris Collins were the first in to Checkpoint 1, with Chris Baynham-Hughes, Dave Clamp and Chris Fitzpatrick a couple of minutes behind them. There were other runners with this second group, but they didn't manage to stay the pace, and it was these six who managed to pull ahead of the rest of the field and stay there. Three from Helsby RC: Jim, Chris B-H and Chris Fitz,

and one each from Penny Lane Striders (Lawrence), Delamere Spartans (Chris C) and Knutsford Tri (Dave).

By Checkpoint 2 (Bickerton), Jim and Lawrence had dropped Chris Collins, who arrived 2 minutes behind them, with the others a further 3 minutes behind Chris. Chris Collins then put his foot down, and had a 9-minute lead at Checkpoint 3 (Beeston) – if the checkpoint log is correct. In any event, he wasn't in the lead by the time they got to Rock Farm (CP4), as there Lawrence had a lead of 3 minutes, with Chris Collins now in 2nd place, just ahead of Jim. Chris Fitzpatrick, Chris B-H and Dave Clamp followed on, with each runner now running on their own, but only 11 minutes between all 6 of them.

By the time they left Delamere Forest to reach Mario, Joe and Paul at Checkpoint 5 the strain was starting to show on some of them. Lawrence had increased his lead to 5 minutes, with Chris Collins and Chris Fitzpatrick close together behind him. Chris B-H was another 2 minutes behind them, with Dave Clamp and Jim O'Hara in 5th and 6th places. By this time, Lawrence and Chris Collins were both tiring, but Chris Baynham-Hughes found another gear the others clearly lacked, and came through from 4th to take the lead over from Lawrence on the final long climb up Frodsham Hill. As we knew the CP5 times we weren't expecting it to be Chris we saw coming across the field in 1st place, but it was great to see him do it! Dave Clamp's time was a new MV50 record, the first of four new record times of the day.



Chris Baynham-Hughes, Luci Lamb, Dave Clamp

1. 4:50 Chris Baynham-Hughes (Helsby RC)
2. 4:51 Lawrence Eccles (Penny Lane Striders)
3. 4:54 Chris Fitzpatrick (Helsby RC)
4. 5:01 Chris Collins (Delamere Spartans)
5. 5:06 Dave Clamp (Knutsford Tri)

6. 5:07 Jim O'Hara (Helsby RC)

The view from just behind



Lucinda Lamb

Not far behind this leading group, three women were involved in their own race. Lucinda Lamb (Delamere Spartans), Caroline Hall (Wirral AC) and Tracy Entwistle (Warrington Road Runners) were pretty much together for the first half of the run, arriving at CP3 (Beeston) almost at the same time. Caroline is the women's record holder (5:04 in 2012), and Tracy beat her by 2 minutes in 2015 to win the women's trophy last year. Luci finished nearly an hour behind them. This year was a different matter though. At CP4 Luci had established a lead of 5 minutes over the other two, and by CP5 she'd stretched that to 10 minutes. She kept pulling away to win the trophy by 14 minutes. Brilliant performance!

11. 5:21 Lucinda Lamb (Delamere Spartans) – 1st Woman

17. 5:35 Caroline Hall (Wirral AC) – 2nd Woman

20. 5:44 Tracy Entwistle (Warrington RR) – 3rd Woman

Other performances above and beyond the call of duty

First FV50 was Carole Morrison (Pensby Runners), 57th overall in 7:02.

First MV70 was Ian Hilditch (Helsby RC), who regained the MV70 record with a great time of 8:19.

Ian used to hold the record, but Adrian Sumption took it off him in 2014, then beat his own record in 2015. Ian's run this year was a very impressive personal best.



Ian Hilditch

Pip Adamson and Oliver Ormrod finished together in 9:28, so share the trophy for Men Under 18, as Pip had just turned 16 a few days earlier, and Oliver was a few weeks short of his 16th birthday. If they can finish the Trail they're obviously men, no? Anyway we got an extra trophy made so they've got one each now.



Pip Adamson, Tom & Oliver Ormrod

Shannon McCue wasn't on the start list, but still finished in 10:10, at the age of 15. Despite breaking the rules by taking someone else's place unofficially, she was with her older sister all the way round, so was safe enough. We don't want to encourage doing this – it's easy enough to substitute one name for another officially on the online system at no cost. However, it wouldn't have been fair on Shannon to disqualify her – presumably she was led astray by adults! So, she was awarded the trophy for Women Under 18, and is also the new record holder. And well-deserved too.



Shannon McCue

Lastly, Jean Lyon also finished in 10:10, becoming the first woman over 70 to complete the Trail in its current form, as far as we are aware. She won the FV70 trophy, and naturally set the course record too.



Jean Lyon

Later that day...

The walkers kept coming in, and the slower ones got a bit wet, but they didn't seem to mind too much. We lost track of one or two from time to time, Tracey O'Neill being particularly elusive. Through no fault of her own, she didn't get recorded coming through CP3, so we worried until she turned up at CP4. Then she never got to CP5 at all, so we worried again until she turned up at the finish, having found her own unique route. We've no idea where she went, and I'm not sure she had either, but she got her certificate anyway.

The pies, soup and cake seemed to go down well – my two pies did anyway. I lost track of the amount of tea I drank, but it was a lot.

At 9:30 on the dot, Ian Pritchard finally reached the Community Centre in the dark, 35 minutes after the previous walkers, and then we had the full set. Ian knows the way, having walked it many times before, so we weren't that worried. We swept up round him, cleaned up the kitchen, and headed home for a couple of glasses of red wine. I didn't wind down enough to sleep until nearly 1am.

Andy Robinson, Helsby Running Club