

Bethany's First 100-Mile Ultra Run.

This time last year I had just finished the Double Parish Walk. Having completed 170 miles on foot I have been looking for more ultra's to run and walk. Next year I have signed up for JOGLE – John O'Groats to Land's End in a 850 mile running race over 15 days. Therefore I need to get in more ultra runs in preparation for this mammoth run. So when Rory Coleman, an experienced ultrarunner, friend and mentor, told me he was organising a 100 mile ultra run in the Cotswold's on June 26th 2009 I immediately signed up for it.

This ultra run started and finished at Stratford-Upon-Avon Racecourse and the route ran south for 50 miles and then back north for 50 miles in a loop along country lanes and across busy 'A' roads. The course was already marked out on signposts with stickers as it is run usually as a relay race, so the navigation was not difficult, although as part of my 10lb backpack I was carrying OS maps and compass just in case. So at 12 noon 6 of us 'slower' runners started the race in the middle of a thunderstorm and torrential rain! The idea was to finish within 30 hours. At 6pm 2 'faster' runners started the 100 mile run with the aim of running under 24 hours. 2 runners did not make the start line and 3 more runners ran the 50 mile race.

The rain stopped but it was still very hot and humid. It would become very misty overnight and into the dawn. The villages began to roll by. The scenery was stunning, the Cotswold stone cottages were lovely but the hills were steep and soon to become relentless. I set off at a good pace in 4th place, reaching 10 miles in less than 2 hours and 20 miles in 4 hours. I bought some pork pies in a shop and munched on them. I had cereal bars with me and fig rolls and Kendal mint cake. At Chipping Camden I found a Co-op and bought 6 bananas – one of the best things I did on the run. There were 3 support cars to help us all. They tried to meet us every 5 to 10 miles with supplies of water and food, although sometimes it was difficult to get to me as we were all spread out over the course. We really needed more support cars.

I took on board 2 energy gels by 40 miles. At 45 miles I was struggling with the humidity and so when I met Andy, a support guy, I stopped to drink sweet tea and rice pudding. It was lovely to sit down and rest for 30 minutes. It was about 9pm so I put on my headtorch, another layer and my headphones and set off into the dusk. However 2 miles later I vomited twice. The gels had upset my stomach. All I could think was that Jock was sick and still went on to win the Parish Walk this year so I would be okay too!

The dark descended and my headtorch lit the way. I was extra careful not to get lost on the deserted country lanes and only made two minor detours. The only noises were from sheep and cattle while the thin slither of the moon shone with the stars. Dawn broke from 3am and at 4am it was light enough to switch my torch off. It remained warm throughout the dark night and the misty fields in the morning were eerie. However I was walking now, my feet too sore to run on, and my mood was very low. At 75 miles there was nobody to help me and I ran out of water. Thirsty and exhausted I reached Andy at 80 miles in tears and almost quit. Another 20 miles would take 6 hours to walk at my current slow speed and I did not know how I was going to do it. By now 3 runners had dropped out and I was lying in 4th place. I did however manage to keep going. It was desperately hard. It was the loneliest run I had done – all the runners were spread out and the only people to talk to were the 3 support crew. Several passer-bys gave me strange looks, unaware of how far I had run. With a mile to go to the finish I phoned Rory and he came out to meet me and guide me to the racecourse. I was elated to see the finish and ran the last 800 metres. I had finished in 26 hours 55 minutes and in 4th place. I was ecstatic and relieved. I was awarded an engraved trophy.

I am recovering well. John Barton from the Crosby Clinic has re-aligned my back and the 2 blisters on my feet have healed. I have had a couple of sessions in the hyperbaric chamber and my sore

numb feet are improving. I am very tired but feel very proud of my achievement. I am now looking forward to my next race on July 11th – the Hull 24 hour Track Race. I hope to cover as many laps as possible within 24 hours on an athletics track. My two friends, Ernie and David, are supporting me and providing me with the supplied food and water. I won't need a backpack and it will not be a lonely run as there are about 40 runners competing. Wish me luck!

Bethany Clague.

Ultrarunner.