

Hadrian's Wall Challenge 2013

[29/30th-Jun-2013]

It all started with Dave saying, "I have an idea"; "An idea for what?", I replied. "A run", he said. Now we all know how Dave Bradley likes his running adventures, what with 'Race the Train' and his latest 100 miler as examples, so I wondered what he was planning next. His next words had me worried as they started with 'we', "We should run the Hadrian's Wall National Trail", he said.

After the initial 'what', 'you've got to be kidding' and usual expletives, 'why not', I thought. It's worth mentioning at this stage that after years of injury free running the past two have been a personal nightmare, with problems with my left calf and the cartilage in my left knee, so training has been at a minimum and race speeds have gradually got slower. What's more, I have really missed the thing I enjoy the most with running which is getting out into the country, running off-road on tracks and paths. Dave's barmy idea seemed just the thing for me to try and get my 'mojo' back.

A quick note about the Hadrian's Wall path - it is 84 miles long starting at Bowness-on-Solway fifteen miles west of Carlisle and finishing at Segedunum Roman Fort at Wallsend with 5,722ft of ascent and has a high point of 1130ft at Whinshields Crag. The path follows the line of the defensive wall built on the orders of Roman Emperor Hadrian in the second century AD, in some places you wouldn't know a wall had existed but in others it is still quite impressive.

Initial planning started, what would we need to carry?, what facilities were on the route?, could we do it self-supported or did we need backup?, do it in one go or stop somewhere overnight? were just a few of the topics discussed. Dave painstakingly prepared route notes from a Hadrian's way guidebook written from east to west, we would be doing it from west to east and a planned date of the last weekend in June was selected to allow us to have maximum daylight hours as it had been decided to start early morning and continue until we finished the following day, meaning continuing throughout the night.

At some point in this planning stage it was decided to offer the chance of spending a weekend with the two of us to the rest of the club, after all why shouldn't others suffer the pain with us! An initial surge of interest from about two dozen quickly reduced to a hardcore group of eleven (including myself and Dave) once reality had set in, the other nine being Heather Barrass, Lindsey Chapman, Anne Craddock, Karen Singleton, Steve Dobby, Peter Holmback, John Mallon, Daniel N'Jai and Brian Singleton. At this point Dave K kindly stepped forward to offer his services as bus driver, backup support, chief motivator and (unfortunately) chief photographer.

And so on the 29th of June we found ourselves travelling across to the west coast to start our adventure. I will leave stories of the event to the reports written by Steve D, Daniel and Brian, but on a personal note I had to retire at half way after 42 miles due to knee pain but kept Dave K company on the bus and offered support and encouragement to the rest of the troops through to Wallsend. Finally, a few words of thanks; firstly to Dave K - it would not have been possible without him; the ladies at Walton tea room who stayed open late so we could have a hot cup of tea; the landlady of the Samson Inn at Gilsland who made 11 sweaty, smelly runners very welcome; Dave B for arranging everything and finally the rest of the gang for their support, humour and friendship.

Steve W

Steve Dobby's story

Now where do I start ?

The beginning of course !

Brian , Karen and Dan arrived right on time on Sat morning at my house with enough food and drink to sink a battleship , too which I added my own large bags, then it was off to the bus stop with all the kit for our pick up. Pete joined us shortly after with even more bags of food and drink including 6 x 2ltr bottles of premade liquid !.

It wasn't long before our chariot for our adventure arrived with the rest of gang, upon which we joined the rest of the team who were all as excited and nervous as we were !

Dave K, our driver for the event, as well as photographer, encourager and all round top bloke duly got us across to Solway on bowness in double quick time with a quick stop to empty some rather nervous bladders en route. Then before we knew it, it was time to get off the minibus and get sorted for the 1st leg of 11 (or should i say 12 !!) and John Mallon joined us for the start, but not before we quickly donned our Blyth vests for a cheeky photo.

And so after checking and double checking we all had what we needed for the first leg we gently jogged to the start point, and after another couple of photos we were off !

The first leg was a steady affair, a large part of which was down a rather long straight road, with all of us trying to get used to a slow pace that would stand us in good stead for next 10 stages, this is actually rather harder said than done !

Dave K joined us a few times on this first leg to shout out words of encouragement and take some photos, this was to become a very welcome and familiar occurrence over the forthcoming hours.

We arrived at our first stop at Dykesfield, but I didn't see any in the field or a field at that point either, for a 15 min break to restock our food and water supplies, then it was off again to the next one at Carlisle Leisure centre. This leg had a mixture of roads and paths throughout the countryside with lovely little villages dotted along the route.

After the first stage we got into a decent routine, run a bit, walk up a hill, chat, drink, eat, wave at Dave as we ran past him or nip in the bushes for a quick comfort break. I would love to tell you all about each stage but I am sorry I can't remember all the details, but what I can tell you what I do remember :

The gang enjoying a cuppa at a tearoom in Walton, then singing queen songs with Heather and dan as we ran through rolling hills in the afternoon, the fantastic views, the constant eating and drinking and the laughing, Stepping in a massive cowpat and having to change my trainers and socks.

We also managed to get to a pub called the samson inn in Gilsland @ 7:15pm for some lovely chips and a drink then we were off again towards Steel rigg and with the light falling and the interesting evening hours were approaching and it was time to put on the head torches, then it became another routine going up a hill then down and up and down again, encountering slippery stones, more cowpats, sheep and lots of cows, which were quite unsettling in the pitchblack night !.

At the end of the night poor Ann really didn't look well and she very sensibly decided to call it a day, she had had a very bad time during the night but she was brilliant and managed to carry on through with the help of her wall buddies, she had by that point done 48 miles which was a fantastic achievement, also, at this stage Steve walker very sensibly decided his wall run was also over as his knee pain was getting steadily worse and to carry to the finish would have done some serious damage, it took alot of guts to pull out and thought with his head over his heart which would have loved him to carry on.

Then as the sun came at 4am we could hear birdsong and the final push began, firstly a long slog down past Chesters into Chollerford and at this stage poor Karen looked like a walking zombie and was really struggling to stay awake/upright and then Brian had a rather large set of blisters burst on him which made it excruciating for him to walk, nevermind run, so with much regret they both had to stop, with much dissatisfaction this was the end of the wall for them, they would be sorely missed, but at this point we didn't realise that their and Ann's and steves part in this journey was far from over.

So with tiredness and fatigue creeping over us the remainder of the wall warriors made our way out of Chollerford up the hill and across to Halton Shield, at this point poor Pete was going through a bad patch as we would all have at some point and for the first time started walking, it was not good to see him so despondant, but after walking a little while he picked himself up was up and running, leading the way again with Lindsey and Heather running ahead as if on duracell, I have alot of respect for those two ladies, they just kept on slogging away, laughing and carrying on and covering some serious ground at pace at the same time.

At this point I will mention Dan, we had noticed he had been limping for a while, but upon asking if he was ok he said yes just a bit of knee trouble , I've had the pain since half way through the second leg ! Dan was also a fantastic team member, always smiling and encouraging, a trooper all the way, but on he went. Dave bradley was the constant throughout the journey along with steve and John keeping us going in the right direction, he certainly kept my mind off my pain with his stories of his past long distance exploits.

Another mention must also go to John Mallon, by this time we were on our way over to Heddon on the wall and I was starting to really struggle, but John stayed at the back with me, encouraging me to keep going and helping to keep my spirits high, even though his knees were hurting he didn't talk about that, he just kept me going. Then as we crossed the A69 into Heddon I probably at my lowest point, I was really struggling, but John kept me going. When we eventually reached the stop at the garage in Heddon I was on the verge of packing it in, I was spent, and almost in tears but with a few more ibuprofens and a hot cup of coffe I finally pulled myself around with the encouragement and support from everyone, especially from Steve Walker, Brian, Dave, ann and Karen, so I dragged my butt off the seat for the last 14 miles, I was determined to finish this.

So off we went down the hill to the riverside and onwards Newburn, up till this point we had ran most of the time , walked up every hill and walked a bit to rest our weary legs but by now we were mostly walking and trying to run a bit and by the time we reached newburn our running days were definitely over, it was walkies time to get though the last couple of stages.

Another welcome break with Dave K and the gang at Newburn to take on the last but one set of supplies and more pills were taken to ease the pain of many a sore muscle, knee and foot then with another welcome batch of encouragement we were off again, across towards Scotswood road. Now this stretch is mind numbingly boring on the blaydon race, at 3mph in pain after 76 miles it is almost soul destroying, little did we know this was not quite the worst bit....

Our penultimate stop of the day was at the top of Spotswood road, behind the garages, where we had a very short stop as we were all eager to just finish, so off we staggered down to the quayside with words of encouragement following us as we did. On any other day/occasion it would have been a lovely walk down the river, but not today. For the first time today I saw Lindsey's infectious smile start dropping, her massive heel blisters were really hurting, she had put up with them for quite a while but were really starting to bite now, but we continued on, trying to take our minds off the last few miles ahead with a little chit chat.

We finally hit the Tyne bridge and was told by John it was another 5 miles to go, we thought it was 5 from the last stop, this was not good news. We eventually fought our way through the crowds at the quayside market and shuffled our way further down the river, past Ouseburn then past St. Peters into the c2c route through a large park area which we were told would bring us out at the back of Segedunum, our final destination.

So on we plodded up, and up, and up, and up the cycle path for what seemed like hours, our delirium punctuated by the many cyclists winging past us. It was at this Point that poor heather had a rather bad patch, she could barely speak and was on autopilot, but we all rallied round and continued on. Yet still the path continued, we were getting slower by the minute and yet seemingly no closer to our goal, this did not feel good. After each corner we hoped to see our salvation, but still it eluded us even when we were "there" we still had to walk around the building to the front, our cheerful happy demeanours had finally been destroyed but with the last of our strength we finally entered Segedunum.

We had done it !, but there was more relief than elation, we were simply spent, with no energy left, our only thoughts were of our homes and sleep.

At the bus we saw that Pete had thankfully made it safely to the end, getting there before us having slogged the last 20 miles on his own, how he did this I really don't know !.

The final curtain was then raised as Dave Bradley rallied us off the bus for one last photo and presented us all with a lovely memento, then it was back on the bus towards home, poor heather missed the presentation as she had fallen asleep almost as soon as she sat down and we didn't have the heart to wake her up and drag her off the bus.

My day ended in a bit of a blur, as I am sure it did for most of my fellow wall mates, I catnapped on the way home and then staggered painfully off the bus to the relieved and shocked faces of my little family, i dumped my bags and dragged myself upstairs for a hot shower, followed by a cold shower then a cold bath as a bit for a bit of damage limitation. I then had a quick meal of chilli and rice, a quick phonecall to the parents to let them know I had survived then I put the phone down, pulled the quilt over my head and was asleep within 30 seconds.

12 hours later I woke up feeling surprisingly refreshed and alert, i even managed to nip to the loo without too much pain !.

The day after has been a very reflective one, writing this all down has helped me relive and appreciate how much we had all achieved this weekend, it almost seems like it was a dream, only the pain in my legs remind me that it wasn't.

So, would I do this again, probably not, was it worth all the pain, definitely. This has been one of the most memorable experiences of my life so far, and one i won't forget, ever.

I would recomend that everyone does something like this as a group at least once in their life, you will be amazed and uplifted by what you can achieve.

Finally I would like to thank all my fellow Wall adventurers again for such an amazing experience.

Steve D

Brian's story - A Journey Into The Unknown

And so they gathered in the far west for the epic journey. A select Legion gathered for the task ahead by the Generals Lucius Bradleyus and Gaius Walker.

Supplies of uniform and sustenance were bountiful, enough possibly for there and back or two Legions.

Mustered at the start Gaius appointed the first legionary with the timing device, barking orders that the group must march steady in the flatlands, else all would perish in the tougher stages ahead.

Progress was fair. The official portrait artist Leonardo di la Kitchino, appointed by the Generals was at frequent locations on the route, inspiring the Legion to march quickly at these points. The images captured were to be exhibited in the Galleria Della Facebook.

The local inhabitants in these civilised lands welcomed the group offering use of their Netty's, providing warm drinks and showing them the safest paths. The Generals drove the group on, the strategic target a settlement named Gilsland where hot food and refreshments were to be taken.

The Legion feasted in the Samson, praying that there be no Delilah to steal their strength. The sanctuary warmth of the hostelry now replaced by the chilly evening air. Night battle dress is adorned and the Legion take to the hills.

In the early evening dusk the sweeping vistas in all directions provide a sense of calm, views that only can be captured by the human eye and stored in the mind. Yet everyone's gaze is inexorably drawn east to themenacing jagged incisors that lie ahead

And so to night, 21st century beacons strapped to heads. The dark crags rears up against the misty grey sky, time after time the Legion scale their heights and negotiate their treacherous descents. Guiding each other over the slippery stones, protecting one another from the wild beasts that roam these parts.

The ancient monuments on the route, usually shrouded in eerie black silence are now disturbed. The Legion's Jester leading the group with modern day games and singing.

The worst of the night seems to be over, the light is returning, yet still a never ending field tests the resolve. And so to dawn, the solace of the mobile garrison, beacons are extinguished, and sadly so are the hopes of some.

The bold continue in the blinking morning sunshine, optimism abounds. Yet cruelly, the closer to journey's end the further it seems. Summoning last reserves of energy and strength The Big River is reached. Bravely they march one last agonising section before triumphantly entering Segedunum, and are decorated by General Lucius with badges of honour.

History made on a historical trail. It matters not the time mile per mile. For whenever the Legion meet there will always be that nod, that look and a knowing smile

Brian Singleton

Dan's story

With naïve nonchalance, I thought "why not" when the email came around suggesting the possibility of a Hadrian's Wall run. Many months later, and eleven of us were sat in a mini-bus in buoyant mood on the way to the start point at Bowness-on-Solway. As we drew closer to the start line, the chitter-chatter got gradually quieter as the realisation of what we are about to attempt set-in. There was no turning back now.

We proudly adorned our Blyth vests for the pre-race photo opportunity, in front of the 'ambulance' which would become our place of solace in the challenging hours to come.



At 09:25 we began, setting out enthusiastically from the official start of the wall path. 84 miles lay ahead of us.

Leg 1 - Bowness-on-Solway to Dykesfield

The first was pleasant, and allowed us to find our pace and get used to each other's company. Good natured banter and laughter was the order of the day, and we had our first experience of what would become very familiar 'kissing' gates. After winding through some fields, we came back onto the main road to Carlisle, which gave views across The Channel of River Eden, and into Scotland. The first checkpoint was reached at Dykesfield in good time, where we had a quick re-fuel. Many of us chose this time to enjoy some of Lindsey's rather fantastic Banana & Chocolate cake.

7 miles complete!

Leg 2 - Dykesfield to Carlisle Leisure Centre

The second leg was fairly unremarkable, on and off road, before heading alongside the river towards Carlisle. A series of steps was our first real experience of ascent and descent, and it coincided with the first twinges in my left knee! In all honesty I struggled a bit with this stage, the transition between running and walking was tough. The warming sight of Dave K, however, was a welcome moment, and we all walked through a pleasant park in Carlisle to the Ambulance, and the end of leg 2.

15 miles complete!



Leg 3 - Carlisle Leisure Centre to Oldwall

Heading out of Carlisle along the riverside, and we quickly came to a bridge across the river. Heather quickly turned back when the bridge started vibrating, not helped by Dave trying to rock the bridge even more! With a bit of coaxing, we helped Heather across and we headed out of Carlisle. For the first time, gaps started to open up as we tried to manage a comfortable pace, but it gave us the opportunity to get to know each other as we had one on one conversations. I had my first chance to chat to John, who I had not met before today. John proved to be a great help to me later on during tougher times. Also had a good chat with Dave about the attraction of ultra-running. This short leg was a mixture of trail and road, before we caught sight of Dave K and the ambulance - cue posing for photos!

22 miles complete

Leg 4 - Oldwall to Walton

The run from Oldwall started in an upbeat move, as we discovered that running backwards was in fact easier than running forwards! As we headed through fields there were opportunities to chat to other hikers, who must have thought we were insane when we told them what we were attempting! Steve D earned himself the nickname 'sheep shit' for obvious reasons (see below pic)



The picturesque farmland made for an enjoyable run/walk. The promise of hot drinks at a Tea Room in Walton gave us the extra motivation, and they kindly stayed open late after we phoned ahead. It was also good on this particular stage to have a good chat with Anne. It was a funny moment when she said that she was a little worried about bumping into any big horses - 2 seconds later we did just that!



Arrived at the Tea Rooms, with 26 miles completed, so nearly a marathon distance! The tea was much appreciated, and I even had a quick go on the swings for a bit of light relief.

26 miles complete!

Leg 5 - Walton to Gilsland

With warm tea inside us, we left Walton rejuvenated, heading towards our big evening rest point at Gilstrand. Not long after leaving Walton we came across our first actual chunk of Hadrian's Wall! The photo opportunity was taken with both hands!



We then proceeded through a lovely, but long section through fields. At this point the wall was at its most impressive, largely intact for several miles!



At this point, it's fair to say we were getting weary, hungry and tired. The stop at the Samson Inn in Gilstrand was greatly anticipated. First though we had to negotiate a very steep descent, followed by a seemingly endless climb up some stairs. Gilstrand seemed almost like a ghost town, with derelict buildings and no people or traffic. We arrived at the small but welcoming pub, and were



pleased to be given a corner to ourselves, rather than be dumped outside! Bowls of chips were quickly devoured and alcoholic beverages consumed by some for a little Dutch courage!

As we headed back out to the ambulance, the chill in the air was tangible and many of us took the opportunity to change into our night gear, although there were still a couple of hours of light ahead of us.

33 miles completed!

Leg 6 - Gilsland to Steel Rigg



As we headed out of Gilsland, we were still in largely buoyant mood. Heather and I even took the opportunity to check-in (via Facebook) to the Gilsland Spa Resort! After passing the remains of Thirwell Castle (above), a long but gentle climb towards Walltown brought us into the next stage of our adventure. Ahead of us lay a series imposing,

craggy hills. Little did we know just how challenging these would be in the hours ahead.

Steep climbs up precarious steps to the peaks, and then perilous descents down the other side became the pattern for the next couple of hours. We had some wonderful views in all directions to distract us from the reality of the night ahead. I was having particular difficulty on the descents, as my knee really did not like going downhill at all. Meanwhile, up front Peter and Heather were trying to lead us on at a good pace.



We conquered 3 or 4 of these hills before a flattish run past Chester's Farm. I think it was around here we had to negotiate a roadblock consisting of angry looking cows. It was also around here that we had what would be our last bit of running until dawn.

It felt like we had done a whole stage, but when we met Dave K at Cawfield Quarry for our intermediate stop he told us we had only done a couple of miles. There was a long way to go to Steel Rigg and our next official stop. Everyone used this opportunity to get their head torches ready, as the light faded quickly. We even had a bit of light rain to add to the atmosphere, and also create a slippery surface to negotiate.

As we headed out again alongside the wall, climbing and climbing, the legs of many were becoming weary, but it was the mental effect of the night that we were most worried about. Getting used to walking with only a weak beam of light as a guide was a challenge. I don't think it did much for our morale either as we spent a lot of time looking down in front of our feet. By this time we had become very spread out. No doubt Dave K in the ambulance on the roads below could see a long, slow moving train of white lights on the hills above. This section seemed to go on for hour after hour, and we were all pleased when we finally descended to a car park for our scheduled stop.

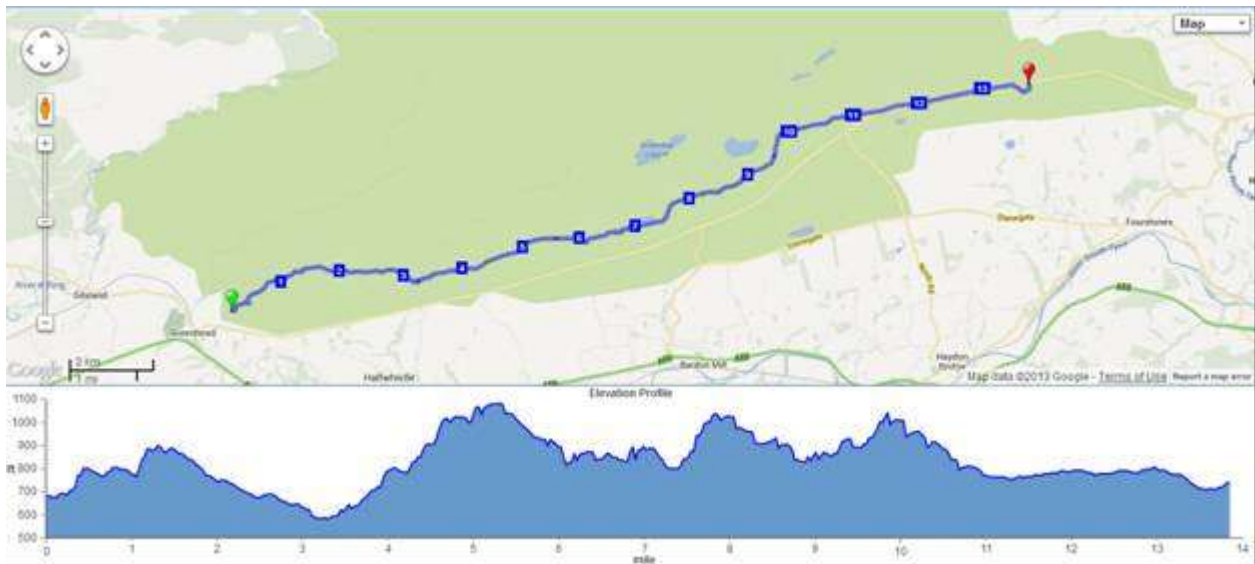


At this point Steve W called it a day as expected, but he would of course keep on supporting us through the rest of the journey, and also it meant that Dave K had some welcome company! Personally, I was feeling a little downtrodden at this time, as Steve had been a great support up to now, and also knowing the next stage would be similar to last. Tiredness was creeping in for a lot of people, and at this point nutrition and pain control was crucial! A mixture of pro-plus, paracetamol and ibuprofen seemed to be the most popular combination.

41 miles completed!

Leg 7 - Steel Rigg to Chollerford

As we headed away on another leg, with John M as usual sprinting to catch us up after our swift departure, we almost immediately got lost in the darkness. Trails that seemed to disappear into long grass, no doubt helped by our tiredness, meant that losing our way temporarily would become a common occurrence over this leg! It's hard to describe the next few hours. Everyone went through a different experience I'm sure. My own memories are a bit hazy. The pain of trying to climb down steps. Marvelling at John's extensive knowledge of Bond films & theme tunes. Worrying about everyone's lack of musical taste after it took no time at all to name 10 Duran Duran hits! Looking at people's faces and not recognizing who they were. It was good to spend time on this leg with Brian & Karen; certainly their brilliant company helped me through. One of my few memories from this stage was looking ahead in the dark and just about seeing them holding hands in the light of my head torch.



Peter's sense of direction was also what got us through this stage. Leading from the front, he did incredibly to keep us on the right path. Steve Dobby was another inspiration through the night; his exciting series of pop quizzes kept our brains active.

We passed Steel Rigg and the highest point on our journey on this stage, although I forget exactly where. Progress remained painfully slow, the only comfort I could take was from seeing the sky getting ever so slightly lighter as the sun began its slow arc back up towards the east.

Psychologically this was the hardest part. Darkness + isolation + sleep deprivation + pain + physical exhaustion are one hell of an evil combination!

Anne had been like a rock up until this point, and she was still going strong, but it wasn't surprising that it was beginning to take its toll.

We started heading downhill and hit a horribly long, straight, flat section. There was a very distant light which never seemed to get closer. We all hoped it was Dave & Steve W in the Ambulance, but sadly not. Even as the light improved further and we struggled to the intermediate checkpoint, our spirits were nearly broken, and our legs battered.

Anne made the brave decision to pull out at this point, through exhaustion. It's hard to describe how brilliantly Anne did, and she should be so proud of the 53 miles that she completed. Again though, she remained with us on the support bus, and to have Anne greet us at every checkpoint from then on was in incredible help.

The next few miles are a bit of a blur, I think we were all getting used to daylight and being back on actual paved roads. As we headed to Chollerford, the first opportunity to run presented itself since the evening before. It was good to be able to stretch the legs for a few hundred metres at 'race pace'. I've got to thank Peter for this as his unrelenting will to drive the team forward had helped us make such good time.

At Chollerford Brian & Karen decided they could not continue. Injuries & blisters having got the better of them, again this was a great shame but I'm sure they are very proud of what they've done. Chollerford was a chance to regroup, get into our day gear, and focus on the final stages of this epic journey.

54 miles completed

Leg 8- Chollerford to Halton Shields

This was certainly the turning point for me. Changed out of wet trail shoes and into old trusty road shoes. Put on my go-faster bandana and necked a couple of codeine! The sun was coming up over the river, and we headed up through a series of constantly rising fields at a gentle walking pace. As soon as we hit the crest of the hill, we had views over beautiful Northumberland all around, and the sun beating down on our necks. Then we ran. For the first time in many, many hours, we all ran. Heather and Lindsey out front, I have to say this stage belonged to these ladies, they absolutely ran their hearts out. Behind, us weary men were doing our best to support each other. I did a lot of running with Dave B on this stage and his experience of these events came in invaluable and he gave me lots of great advice. We reached the checkpoint at Halton Shield an hour ahead of the scheduled stage time!



Peter had been feeling unwell for the last few miles, and decided to start the next stage early. Massive respect to Peter for having the mental strength to carry on alone all the way to the finish.

60 miles completed!

Leg 9 - Halton Shield to Heddon-on-the-Wall

This leg was a struggle. Running alongside a largely straight road all the way to Heddon. The over-exertion of the previous stage had taken its toll on me. My knee was giving me hell, and now the top of my foot was giving me agony. Luckily for me I had the legend that is Steve Dobby with me, and we promised we would get to the finish line together! I think it was about 3 minutes though before we were running apart again!!

Lindsey and Heather were again guiding the way home. We had some lovely trails on this leg, grass which had been especially mown for the Hadrian's Wall half-marathon. It was very cushioning!

The seemingly endless walk/run to Heddon was nearly complete as we crossed the A69, and walk slowly up to the petrol station where all our fellow comrades awaited. I've said it a million times, but to have the support of everyone at every checkpoint was inspiring.

A quick cup of tea, whilst Heather gave a group of bikers something to smile about!

68 miles completed!

Leg 10 - Heddon-on-the-wall to Newburn

Only 15 miles to go now!!! We were very much back into real world suburbia. Once we'd negotiated our way through some residential streets, we were heading back towards Carlisle for a short while which was a bit frustrating! We eventually found our path down to the riverside, and it was nice to be heading along the Tyne towards Wallsend. At this point we were on perfect running territory. We were being passed by other runners and cyclists, but we carried on walking, wishing we could shout out to every passing person how far we had come so far.

The legs were so tired by now, but we managed our last bit of running as we headed towards Newburn Leisure Centre. Again, the support of the waiting ambulance, still with a full crew of team members was a great help.

73 miles completed!

Leg 11 - Newburn to Segedunum, Wallsend



So the final leg begins! Not with great fanfare and excitement, but a muted walk as 2 very tired Women and 4 very tired men began the final walk along the Tyne towards the finish. It was honestly painful. I think all of us had a good look at ourselves on this stage. Finding every last bit of doubt in our head and magnifying it, but there was no way we were going to fail now. We met the van at the riverside and heard news that Peter was well on his way to the finish. It was good to know we would all make it to Segedunum. As we came towards Newcastle City centre, we

felt more like rabbits trapped in cyclist's headlights rather than runners. Walking through a packed quayside market was a bizarre experience. Everyone was now running on empty. I'd managed to keep my energy levels high for the whole journey, but now they were sapping. All we could do was keep on encouraging each other. The last drama occurred as the distance to the finish was misjudged. We had a further 5 miles from the end of the Quayside, not the 1 mile some were expecting! This was my chance to take the lead, as I'd been disappointed that I'd not been more useful in a practical sense on our journey.

I guided us along the cycleway, which curved around with the Tyne, but even though we were just a few miles away I was worried we would struggle to make it. This was the time I saw real struggle on the faces of some of my colleagues. 84 miles had taken its toll, but we were there nearly.

We eventually left the cycle path, and came onto a familiar road. Up ahead, we could see the tower at Segedunum. The finish line was in sight. We went the wrong way towards Segedunum, missing the welcome party, but we were too tired to care. I couldn't help but let out a big 'whoop' when I saw the finish line. As a team, we literally fell across the finish line, 30 hours and 15 minutes after we started.

84 BLOODY MILES COMPLETED SOMEHOW!!

We had done it.

My boys ran up to me, I hugged them, and that was me done. In tears for 30 minutes.



Big hugs to everyone then followed, the relief just poured out. And we were all still there. It was great to see Peter, who had finished sometime before, and also Brian, Karen, Steve W, Anne and of course Dave K. Just a shame that poor Heather managed to sleepwalk through the finish!! At the end of the day we did it all as a team, and everyone should be so proud of themselves.

Not sure what else can be said really, except a massive thank you to the other 10 runners and of course Dave K for one of the best experiences I've ever had. Every one of you should be massively proud, I'd like to think we can all count ourselves as good friends having shared this experience.



Dan