**Camel-Teign LDWA 100 Race Report 25/26 May 2013**

Some of you may know that I have been trying to complete a 100 mile event for the last 3/4 years and until this race my record was 5 started and 0 finished with my best effort being 83 miles. However this year it was a case of 6th time lucky.

Each year the Long Distance Walking Association (LDWA) organizes a 100 mile event. It is held in a different part of the UK each year being hosted by different regional LDWA groups. This year it was the turn of the Cornwall and Devon LDWA group. My 3 previous LDWA 100s have been in Scottish Highlands north of Perth, Shropshire and last year’s took place in London and the North Downs.

This year’s route started on the River Camel at Wadebridge and then made it’s way east across Bodmin Moor and Dartmoor to Teignmouth passing through places such as Blisland, North Hill, Tavistock, Princetown and Ashburton.

LDWA events are aimed primarily at walkers and the routes are designed to be off-road as much as possible with plenty of hills to climb! Runners are welcome and I reckon about 40% of the ‘100’ entrants run/jog some bits of the route. There is a time limit of 48 hours for these events which are always held over the late spring Bank Holiday weekend, starting on Saturday morning with the last people finishing on the Monday morning. There are usually 15 to 18 checkpoints where you can get refreshments and attend to your blisters! There are strict opening and closing times of checkpoints and as you arrive your time is recorded and the race-card you carry is clipped. There are often ‘self-clips’ between checkpoints where a clipper (with a unique pattern) has been left at a strategic point (eg top of a hill) to stop anyone taking short-cuts!

My wife and I drove down to Cornwall last Friday where we stayed in a hotel at Port Isaac (home of TVs Dr. Martin) which was about 10 miles from the start at Wadebridge. We asked for an early breakfast (Full English) as my start time was 9:30. There was also an 11:30 start option for fast runners and a 13:30 for the unbelievably fast! The vast majority (400+) opted for the 9:30 start

The race registration was in Wadebridge town hall and after getting my race card clipped and greasing myself up with Vaseline and Sudocreme for more delicate places I strolled to the start area which was on parkland at the start of the Camel Trail - a former rail track converted to a footpath.

Despite starting near back of the crowd and not going that fast (10 m/m tops) I soon found myself at the front of the pack running alongside a wiry older guy who must have been well into his 60s. We got chatting and I found he had done this year’s London Marathon in 3:03:03 and had completed over 500 marathons! We arrived at the first checkpoint (5.1m) over 5 minutes early and had to wait a little before being allowed to leave. We made even better progress to the 2nd checkpoint at Blisland Village Hall (11.9m), again arriving first, and this time about 35 minutes too early. We had to wait but were allowed access to the loo where I filled my water bottle so that I could make a quick getaway once I had been clipped. By 12:30, the official checkpoint opening time, there were over 100 competitors waiting to get access and have their race-cards clipped. I think they must have misjudged the opening time for this one.

At checkpoint #3 (16.6m), a farmer’s barn at Candra, I was still leading the 9:30 starters and again we were early (15+ minutes) and so had to wait. Note to self – if (when?) I enter an LDWA 100 again opt for a later start to avoid the waits and gain at least an hour on my overall time.

Checkpoint #4 was via a tor on Bodmin Moor called Brown Willy which meant that there was some serious uphill sections to be tackled. By the time I got to the top I was surprised (I’m usually rubbish on hills) to find myself alone and at least 5 minutes ahead of the rest. This was rather a worry as it meant that I would have to navigate myself rather than follow others! At the top was a self-clip point and some spectacular views across the moors. The weather had been ideal from the start, light winds, lots of sunshine but not too hot and it was to stay that way for the next 2 days.

After climbing down from the tor and heading across the moor again I was overtaken by a lanky guy speeding across the ground with walking poles. I was rather surprised by this but then realized that he must have been a fast (very fast) 11:30 starter. I caught him up and he confirmed my suspicions. I managed to run with him to the checkpoint #4 at Bolventor (23.4m) and found that, despite being well into his 60’s, he, too, ran marathons in around 3 hours. There is hope for me yet! We were still ahead of the official opening time (by about 15 minutes) when we got to there, but to our surprise, they let us in. It was in another village hall and like many of the checkpoints there were tables of sandwiches, sausage rolls, cakes etc to be eaten. There was also hot food in way of soup or pasta with a tomato sauce. Whilst we were eating the marshals said that they shouldn’t really have let us in and they had been told by those on high that we were not allowed to leave until after the official opening time!

I carried on at a steady but slightly slowing pace and again reached checkpoints 5 and 6 just before their opening times and still the first of the 9:30 starters. At checkpoint #6 (37.3m) I phoned my backup crew (wife and mother-in-law) to give them my ETA for checkpoint #7 (43.6m) which was at the bowling club in Callington. I reckoned on getting there at around 8:30pm they were going to bring me some fresh socks etc and a warm jacket for the night sections. I arrived on schedule and changed slipping on a pair of running tights over my shorts and swapping my thin rain shell for a heavier duty ‘North Face’ jacket.

After wolfing down a hot Cornish pasty I set off again wondering what the approaching night would bring. All went well for the first couple of miles and then just after passing the monument on the top of Kit Hill I found myself well and truly lost. I decided to just follow my Garmin e-Trex which points me in a straight line to grid points that I had loaded into its memory at roughly mile intervals. This would have worked well on flat land but I was on a hill and this plan nearly ended up sending me over a cliff! I found a way round which involved scrambling down a scree of large boulders in the fading light. I then had to force my way through an area of thick bushes and scrub before finally reaching my grid point on the official route at a forestry car park.

Not surprisingly when I finally reached checkpoint #8 (48.4m) I had started to slip down the field and worse was to come! However, I managed to negotiate my way to Tavistock and the next checkpoint (#9 - 57.3m) at Kelly College without too much trouble. A lot of this section was on cycle tracks routed along old railways which made for ease of navigation and runability. This checkpoint being just over half-way was designated the ‘breakfast stop’ and this is where you could access a bag of your stuff handed in at registration and transported here. Based on my previous experiences I had expected to be in no state to do much more running and so had packed full set of walking gear to change into – trousers, shirt and shoes and thick socks. However I was still feeling good and crucially no blisters seemed to be developing on my feet so all I took from the bag was a Mars Bar and some fresh batteries for my torch and Garmin.

Breakfast was served in the impressive wood-panelled school hall – I had a full English with a mug of tea and a slice of marmite on toast. Seemed a bit odd to be doing this at 1:30am in the morning! When I left the school about half an hour after arriving no one else was leaving at the same time which meant I would have to navigate on my own (always a recipe for trouble).

Just to enlighten you all on LDWA events. They are not way-marked. What you have is an OS-map and set of written directions written in a style that I have yet to fully master. Here is an extract:

“Cross bridge and TL on footpath beside river. Bear R uphill to go thru small gate. Keep L, fence on L, to pass thru 2nd small gate still keeping fence on L, to track. Do not cross cattle grid ahead but TR, fence on L, entering enclosed path and ahead to bear L on track. TL on wide track, ignoring footpath, ahead for 140 yds to TR thru metal gate, waymark on gate post. “

I struggle with these instructions – especially when running and in the dark. So it was no surprise to find that I was not on the right route as I tried to make my way out of Tavistock to start heading across Dartmoor. Again I turned to my Garmin and tried to make my way in a straight line towards a grid point at ‘Bleak House’. This was easier said than done. I needed to make a left turn but I was still in Tavistock town and needed a road going that way as I couldn’t really start clambering over garden gates and fences as I might have done across farmers’ fields! After about half and hour I could see that I was roughly on track again with my Garmin pointing me ahead and the distance to Bleak House steadily falling. My redemption was confirmed when I saw 3 head torches approaching me from another road (the right one) and I joined up with them for a while.

These guys were walking but as we were on flat ground I decided to jog ahead and promptly missed a turning. Luckily I hadn’t gone far before I realized my error and headed back to take the right turn. Whilst doing this I changed the batteries in my torches and Garmin. Five to ten minutes later I found that I had dropped a glove so again more time lost whilst I went back to find it on the track.

As dawn broke we could see just how cold it had been as there was a haw-frost covering the grass. I was glad of the change of jacket and the fleece gloves and woolly hat that I had put on at checkpoint #7.

I was probably at my slowest over this and the next stage due to general tiredness and lack of sleep but managed to pick things up again as the sun started warming things up and I approached checkpoint #12 (81m) which was at Ashburton Methodist Hall. There was a Sunday service going on so we were urged to keep quiet and tip-toe up the stairs to a large room where more food and drink was waiting. My back-up team met me here again and I was glad to ditch the heavy jacket which had been tied round my waist for the last hour due to the heat. I also changed back to shorts and put on a fresh top. As I was also changing socks (new Hilly ‘mono-skin’ which I bought at the VLM expo and found so good I got myself 2 more pairs in time for this event) I decided to put on a couple of ‘Compeed’ blister plasters as I had detected a slight soreness developing on the sole of each foot.

With less than 20 miles to go I felt certain that this would be the year I finished. It was now about 11:00am so I was sure to finish well before darkness came again. I’d always said that if I was to ever finish an LDWA 100 it would have to be within 36 hours as I could not imagine going on through a second night without sleep. This final 20 miles was split into 4 more sections the first of just over 7 miles and the final 3 being just 3.6, 5 and 4.3miles respectively.

Whilst still feeling I could jog a little I spent a fair bit of the next 2 sections walking, chatting with other competitors taking in the fantastic views across the Devon country. We also saw quite a few Dartmoor ponies including some with foals. Checkpoint #14 (91.7m) was in Chudleigh Knighton village hall and I took a little more food, including a scone with strawberry jam and Devonshire clotted cream before heading out to complete the last to sections. With end almost in sight I managed to get myself jogging again and soon started to overtake a few people as by now everyone else seemed to be walking. Navigation on these last 2 sections was fairly straightforward as the route stayed on the same sections of track for long stretches at a time. However the tracks were very undulating (a lot worse than North Ealing) and seemed to be dressed with very coarse builders rubble - no wonder it said ‘unsuitable for motor vehicles’! This wasn’t exactly easy on my tired feet! But still, I managed to jog up all the hills and soon reached checkpoint #15 (96.7m) where I just took on a bit of water to fill my bottles before heading out on the final section.

It wasn’t long before I could spot the sea on the horizon at Teignmouth and after crossing a couple of fairways of the local golf club I was in the town. The final half mile was by no means easy as Teignmoth is a very up and down place. The final stretch was up a gentle slope where after half a mile we turned into Teignmouth Community School to look for the finish. After coming through the gates and breaking almost into a sprint I spotted my wife and mother-in-law sitting in the sun on a grassy bank I gave them a wave and then found I had to run round 3 sides of the sports hall to the finish just inside the door where I got a good cheer from all the marshals, other finishers and supporters. At last! Job done in 32 hours and 11 minutes. I was 66th out of 477 starters and of those just over 100 did not finish.

Whilst waiting for my finishers certificate to be completed I indulged in yet more food – this time a welcome hot beef stew with dumplings and mashed swede. I reflected that the £60 entry fee was good value considering you got food for 2 days and board (on your feet) for 1 or 2 nights as well!