

The Sandstone Trail Challenge 2015

The Weather

It could have been a lot worse, couldn't it? The sky was very heavy as I drove down to Whitchurch to start the Challenge off, and it started raining. I thought "oh no, not again!" Were we about to soak the Mayor of Whitchurch for the second year running? But the rain stopped, and after a short delay at the start due to a couple of entrants deciding to go shopping at Tesco's, Cllr Rob Hewson said a few words and everyone headed off for the canal, still dry.



There were a few drops of rain, but not enough to worry anyone. The two leading runners even took their shirts off, and quite a few people, both runners and walkers, told me at the finish that conditions were pretty good. It was a bit cold for marshals and photographers of course, but if they'd have been warm, everyone else would have been too hot.



The Mud

My apologies. The mud really wasn't up to standard this year, and a lot of finishers actually looked pretty clean. That didn't include Charlie Sharpe though, who had no shirt on and mud right up his back. The speed he runs at, he probably generates his own personal mud vortex. Still, at least the field after the canal still had mud: one runner claimed to have been a foot taller by the end of the field.

In fact I'd run the Trail the previous Saturday, and it was the driest I'd ever known it, with no wet bits anywhere. It was the rain on Friday that caused what mud there was.

The Scare

Everything seemed to be going pretty smoothly from an organiser's point of view until fairly near the end of the event, when we suddenly appeared to have lost a walker: one who'd recently had a heart operation. He had last been seen at CP4, and was long overdue at CP5. We were just sending the search and rescue teams out to look for him, when he strolled in at the finish, looking like he'd only walked round the corner. He was the only person CP5 failed to record properly – why him?? So, I could breathe again.

The Finishers

There were a lot of great performances, as there are every year. Not just the faster runners – some of the walkers had never walked as far before, and it's always a big achievement getting to the end successfully. Standout times included:

1st Charlie Sharpe, 4:33. Charlie is local, from Newton-le-Willows, and he's one of the fastest ultra runners in the country. I'm sure he's capable of running the Trail a lot faster than 4:33, but he's recovering from injury and was taking it reasonably easy on Saturday – for Charlie that is.



2nd Dave Douglas, 4:44. Dave's a Delamere Spartan and won the event in 2013. This year he took 7 minutes off that winning time, and (I think) got a Personal Best by 1 minute.



3rd Kelvin Dickinson, 4:56. Kelvin's from Bebington, & he was the one with the Mohican haircut!



7th Chris Fitzpatrick, 5:05. The first Helsby Running Club finisher.



9th Denis Jolly, 5:13. Denis broke my own MV50 record for the Trail by 11 minutes on Saturday. I'm not bitter, honest.



14th Tracy Entwistle, 5:23. First woman. Tracy kept looking over her shoulder worrying that the 2nd woman might catch her up...



15th Caroline Hall, 5:25. ...and the 2nd woman was indeed catching her up, but didn't quite get there.



47th Catherine Hurst, 6:40. First FV50. And she'd gone home by the time we'd realised she'd won, so I'm posting her trophy on to her. No photo as I don't know what she looks like!

104th Adrian Sumption, 8:27. Adrian set a new MV70 record last year, then this year took another 14 minutes off his own record.



The Helpers

I'll be emailing all the people who helped out to thank them in the next day or two.

- Delamere Spartans Running Club looked after Checkpoint 1.
- Helsby Running Club looked after Checkpoint 2 and the first shift at Checkpoint 5.
- 3rd Frodsham Sea Scouts looked after the other checkpoints.
- The Cheshire Scout Events Support Team was at all the checkpoints and at the Community Centre, to record arrivals and make sure we knew where everyone was.
- My wife Nicola, some friends and teams from Frodsham District Guides looked after the catering and serving people at the Community Centre
- Cheshire Search and Rescue were there to help anyone unwell or lost, and they are true partners in the event – I wouldn't want to run the event without them.
- Lots of Helsby Running Club runners were helping at the Community Centre, and out on the Trail taking photos, putting signs up and taking them down again.



We can't put this event on without all this help, and they are all volunteers. Please volunteer to help with the organisation of your local running and walking events if you have the time.

Donations from friends and family for drinks and food at the Community Centre and from Jon Nield raised £118-80 for Sightsavers International this year. I think that's a record!

See you all on 7 May 2016!

Andy