

The Cotswold Way Autumn 2008

102 miles from Chipping Campden to Bath

The small squad assembled for this challenge comprising of Andy Swift, Alan Newby, Julie Smith and I had not spent too much time running in the Cotswolds before this challenge and the trail itself had only just been officially inaugurated as a national trail in May 2007, so this was a step into the unknown for all of us. However with about 5 weeks of unbroken sunshine leading up to the event and the area not being noted for its high peaks how hard could it be?



Julie did a great job of driving through the Friday rush-hour to the start line at Chipping Campden but the timing couldn't have been worse, literally as we were having the traditional starting photograph taken the drought broke in style, and the rain continued to hammer down for the next 15 hours or so! Of course we'd not really prepared for this, only Summer weight shower proofs, no umbrellas for the checkpoints so it was a case of getting on with it in order to stay warm, it didn't help Andy and Alan too much though as they had agreed to do one on/one off throughout the challenge (perhaps consecutive legs of listening to my whinging is too much for anyone!).

It soon became apparent that the guys who mapped out the Cotswold Way had done a really good job of choosing some spectacular scenery; the route follows the top of the Cotswold escarpment giving massive views of out West where the vehicles could just be made out like little ants crawling along the M5. All of the villages in the area were the picture postcard type even the grey skies failed to detract from what was a lovely route. We couldn't help that notice however that the planners

were taking the route passed all of the local points of interest no matter where they were so up and down we went zig zagging along following the little Acorn signs no matter what!

As the light faded we began to tire but our spirits were lifted when we met Allan Pollock at the first night checkpoint, he had nobly agreed to help us through this difficult section and in these weather conditions the company and additional light beam was all the more appreciated. We progressed steadily through the night but the mud was playing havoc with our feet both Andy and Allan were suffering with blisters, Julie took one look at the carnage and pointed out that Logistical support, transport and supplies was where the line was drawn on her services!

We emerged into daylight, the rain had abated and Bath wasn't too far away, but as we reached the village of Cold Ashton we had a Ground-Hog Day experience where we circled the village about 3 times (it seemed like more!) before we realised that the route was undergoing some finishing touches and the signage wasn't quite optimised yet. We pressed on to what we thought would be imminent arrival in Bath all three runners now out on the trail, however the route did another major deviation and swung West to take us through Lansdown Battlefield (from the English Civil War) now at about 5am I was quite tired but I most definitely heard a single musket fire and startled crows squawking as they evacuated the nearby tree canopies! The others must have been suffering tired hearing as well as legs!

With Bath now in sight there was still time for one more crisis, this time it was team support which had been involved in an argument with a much bigger vehicle in crowded Bath, Julie was unsurprisingly shaken up, cue Alan (Winston Wolf) Newby who exuded such calming influence over the phone to Julie it even had a calming effect on Andy and I.

With just a few more zigs and zags we at last entered Bath with the finish line somewhere up ahead. The actual finish is at Bath Cathedral so we all started to weigh each other up for the sprint finish to have the kudos of first to finish, and there it was the Cathedral, time to open up the taps and give it full bore, we all had the same idea and looked like loonies sprinting down the tourist filled streets. As we reached the finish line more or less together we were just about to pat each other on the back for a job well done when we looked up and saw another Cathedral, the real Cathedral? So off we sprinted again we soon realised that all of the buildings in the centre of Bath were worthy of Cathedral status and called it a draw when we found the biggest one!

There was nowhere to sit down in Bath as the entire population of the UK seemed to be there so Andy and I just sat on the floor looking like a pair of tramps while Alan went to find Julie. It was a great relief to get picked up by Julie even though her car was more battered and bruised than us runners and we looked rough, funnily enough when we arrived at the YHA the receptionist asked if I'd been involved in an accident, no that was Julie!

I'm not sure whether or not we were the first team to complete the route non-stop and we didn't quite beat our target time of under 24 hours but we were all very pleased with how the weekend turned out and would definitely recommend the Cotwolds, and this route, for future running epics.

Jon Kinder