

## **TRAVERSE OF ENGLAND RELAY – 28<sup>th</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2011**

While most of the country were gathered around their television sets watching Kate and Wills plighting their royal troth, members of the Rolls-Royce and Congleton Harriers running clubs were embarking on their latest epic, a five-day, 604 mile non-stop relay from the Scottish border at Gretna Green to the English channel at Dover. The objective was to raise money for charity, the beneficiaries being Help for Heroes and Cancer Research UK.

The plan was to keep road running to a minimum by using long distance footpaths wherever possible, so the early stages included some formidable hills crossing the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales, Pennines and the Peak District. Further south, long sections on the Trent and Mersey Canal, Coventry Canal, Oxford Canal and the Thames Path provided gentler terrain before we returned to the hills for the last 100 miles along the ridge of the North Downs Way.

For something of this magnitude to work it needs to be planned with military precision and Steve Leach took on the task of doing the detailed planning. This involved breaking down the route into relay 'legs' averaging around 6 miles in length and working out a schedule of where everyone taking part needed to be and when.

Like any project you also need resources (in this case fit runners!) and due to injuries and other commitments the entire project was in jeopardy until shortly before the off. Fortunately we persuaded enough people to take part and 14 runners did the whole event with a further 5 doing part of the route. As we normally ran in pairs for safety, sometimes in threes on the high moorland sections at night, this required everyone to clock up between 40 and 70 miles though two runners, Jon Kinder and Bryan Lomas, managed to cover 200 miles each, a phenomenal achievement.

With an event of this nature navigation can be a problem. Although footpaths may be obvious in daylight, they are not always obvious in the early hours of the morning especially when you are feeling tired. On two occasions runners got off track and in both cases it involved water. Some time in the middle of the first night, round about where Cumbria merges into Yorkshire, Robin Carter and Allan Pollock found themselves on the wrong side of a river. Rather than retrace their steps, they decided to wade across. It turned out the river was deeper than they thought and they ended up swimming!

On the second occasion, also in the middle of the night, Jon Leek and Bryan Lomas found themselves on the wrong bank of the River Thames having missed a vital bridge crossing. The path they thought they were following ran out where the gardens of the well-heeled souls of the Surrey stockbroker belt run down to the river bank and an unplanned diversion involving crossing gated estates with slavering guard dogs was necessary.

10.30am on Tuesday morning found us all gathered on the cliff top above Folkestone Warren, gazing across the channel to the French coast. All that remained for the twelve still standing was a gentle jog along the cliff path for an arrival on the esplanade at Dover 1 hour and 30 minutes ahead of schedule. A happy discovery 100 yards from the finish was a statue of the Hon Charles Rolls, commemorating his first non-stop double channel crossing in June 1910 and providing a fitting backdrop to a team photo.

And, with money still coming in, the event has raised at least £5,650 for charity to add to the £25,000 raised by previous events.

The squad:; Rolls-Royce Harriers: Kevin Berry, Bob Bond, Chris Booth, Amanda Carter, Robin Carter, Alan Eccleston, Des Gosling, Jon Kinder, Steve Leach, Jon Leek, Ian Page, Allan Pollock, Mark Rogerson, Bill Southgate, Andy Swift, Stephen Turnough, Andy Ward and Ken Northard (support). Congleton Harriers: Bryan Lomas, Harry Stubbs and Laura Stubbs.

**Bill Southgate**



The Rolls-Royce team members posing by the statue of the Hon Charles Rolls at the end of the run.