

Congleton Harriers Epic Adventure – June 2010

Last Friday 6 members of Congleton Harriers made the long journey to Durness, Scotland to join up with 9 members of Rolls Royce Harriers-Derby (RRH) to undertake the epic run from Cape Wrath, the most northerly point in Scotland to the English border at Berwick upon Tweed, a distance of 450 miles. The trip was in doubt until the last minute due to dropouts caused by injury, illness etc. Originally when planning the run RRH were allowing for a minimum of 20 runners to complete the run. The original time scale for the non-stop relay was 100 hours and it was, very reluctantly, agreed that should the team fall behind the clock it could be necessary to miss out the canal section through Edinburgh. However this was not to be the case and the depleted team managed the entire run in an incredible 98hrs 16mins.

All the runners met up at Durness Youth hostel where we enjoyed our last decent sleep for the next 4 days. To get to Cape Wrath it was necessary to get a ferry (max number of passengers 10) across the Kyle of Durness where we then travelled to the cape lighthouse by mini-bus over 14 miles of rocky trail. Only 2 people live in this area and it was made famous last Christmas when the lady of the house went out for the Christmas turkey on the 29th December and due to the severe weather did not return until 20th January.

At 10.30am the full team gathered for photos and Bryan Lomas produced a compass belonging to Seaton Kennerley whose funeral the team members from Congleton Harriers had attended on the morning of departure. The compass was to be used as a baton and passed from runner to runner over the entire course. This was achieved despite a problem when due to a navigational error (See Bridge of Orchy later!) we had two runners on different legs; one carried the compass and one the string!

The main organiser of the event, Steve Leach, led off the first run along with Bryan Lomas and Bryan Carr, complete with Hollie the Border collie. The route was along the Cape Wrath trail, a misnomer if there ever was one as there was no sign of a track and the whole 12 miles was over rough and hilly terrain. The squad was split into 2 teams with Bryan Carr and Bryan Lomas (plus Hollie) were in team A whilst Anna Reeves, Tim Claughton, John Bushby and Derek Lucas were in team B. The teams were then sub-divided further into groups of 2/3 with one sub group running at any one time. Little time was wasted at handovers as there were 75 legs to run and any time wasted at handover would severely impact on the overall time.

After the 220 miles of the Cape Wrath Trail were completed the run joined the West Highland Way at Fort William which continues over the Highlands and down the east side of Loch Lomond to finish just north of Glasgow. The runners then turned east via the Central Scottish Way and passed through Edinburgh passing under Arthur's Seat at around midnight. The trail then took the runners to the coast at Musselburgh where they joined the John Muir Trail and then the coastal footpath all the way down to Berwick-upon-Tweed. The two teams had little chance to meet as the handovers had to be swift. As team A arrived at the handover point Team B started running immediately with the car despatched to the next Team B handover point. There was no rest for the incoming Team A as they then had travel to the next handover point which could be over 100 miles further on. The theoretical 8 hours off generally turned into about

3 or 4 hours when the runners had to feed and try to get some sleep. It is surprising how well you can manage on only 2 hours sleep!

All the runners arranged to meet at the penultimate handover at Burnmouth so that all runners could complete the last leg of 3 miles to the border near Berwick. There was almost a disaster when it was found that this last 3 miles of track was closed due to a landslip and on contacting the local authority they advised that the only alternative was to take the bus. The landslip was only 600 yards from the finish and after almost 450 miles a little problem like this was not going to deter our intrepid band of runners. Scrambling across the fall hanging on to a wire fence, all made it safely across and the only thing left was a run across a field where the runners formed a line across so we all finished together. Because we were well away from the main road there was no "Welcome to England" sign to greet the runners, just a bedraggled barbed wire fence.

The team then travelled down to Seahouses to stay overnight in a bunkhouse where much needed showers were taken. Reserves were topped up at the local pub with copious amounts of ale and a superb meal.

During the run the runners were provided with detailed OS maps and used GPS navigation aids. Despite this some unfortunate errors did occur. Two runners set off from the check point at Bridge of Orchy to run 6.7 miles to Tyndrum where the handover was to take place at approx 01.40am. The car was on a car park immediately by the finger post. The two runners came in and the next 2 took over for the 6 miles to Crianlarich. Both the incoming runners and the 3 runners in the car watched as the new team took over and ran back the way the incoming team had run despite the fact the finger post stated North & South. The 1st indication something was wrong was a phone call to the backup vehicle, now waiting at Crianlarich, to say that the two runners were back at the Bridge of Orchy. Immediate Executive decisions had to be made; the missing route would have to be covered with the minimum loss of time. Tim Claughton volunteered to run this on his own and Andy Swift of RRH agreed to run the last leg of 14 miles also on his own. This meant that the car was shuttling up and down the road collecting and dropping off runners while running on air, the fuel warning light had been on for almost 2 hours and the only garage was 14 miles back and it did not open until 7.00am. Our prayers were answered and we managed to complete the leg without any further mishaps.

The whole trip was a resounding success and Congleton Harriers send their thanks to RRH for all the preparation work they put in. The 2 Bryan's ran together on all their legs and they marked up the highest mileage of anyone with 98.2 miles each. Hollie the Collie is estimated to have run at least 200 miles as she enjoyed the freedom of the countryside. Anna Reeves, the youngest runner and the only female clocked up a very impressive 77.6 miles just ahead of John Bushby 77.1, Tim Claughton 61.6 and Derek Lucas 22.7. All told the whole team ran 866.2 miles at an average of 57.7 miles per runner. It is believed that this is the 1st attempt at this complicated and arduous route therefore the team is claiming an inaugural World Record. No doubt other running clubs will take up the challenge in the future.

One of the main objectives of the run was to raise funds for Cancer Research and in total over £5,000 was raised.