

Rolls-Royce Harriers Pennine Way Relay

On the weekend of Friday 29 June, a squad of 21 runners plus a support team of 2, all from the Rolls-Royce Harriers running club undertook a relay run of the 270 mile Pennine Way long-distance footpath.

For the purpose of the relay, the route was divided into thirty stages ranging from five to fifteen miles, and the squad ran the stages in teams of three, with each team running four or five times. Each runner therefore ran approximately 45-50 miles in total. One of our runners, Jon Kinder, set himself the demanding objective of running as many extra stages as he could physically manage, as a result of which he completed over 100 miles in the weekend.

The Pennine Way terrain varies from Derbyshire peat bogs on Kinder Scout, Bleaklow and Black Hill, through the hills of North Yorkshire including Pen Y Ghent, one of the 'Yorkshire 3 Peaks', to barren moorland in Kielder and the Cheviot regions of Northumberland. The highest point is reached in Cumbria, where the runners cross both Great Dunn Fell (847m) and Cross Fell (893m) in a single 15.5 mile stage.

On Friday 29 June at 2300, the first runners set off from Edale, Derbyshire, and the Harriers ran continuously day and night, completing the challenge on the afternoon of Monday 2 July, in a time of 62 hrs 26 mins. The end point was at the village of Kirk Yetholm, which is just over the Scottish border. The squad utilised two mini-buses plus two support cars to transport them and their equipment by road, picking up and dropping off runners at the 30 changeover points.

Of course this could have been a very easy-going (!) weekend, doing the sport we all enjoy, out running in the Pennine hills, with the mid-summer weather providing for moonlit night runs and fine daytime views. However, we managed to choose the wettest June weekend for many years!! As a result, all of the runners were out in extreme conditions for one or more of their stages, with torrential rain, hill fog plus very wet conditions underfoot. This element transformed the whole event into an extreme challenge!

However, all runners completed their stages safely, with no major injuries, and all of the handovers between teams were accomplished on schedule. When you've been running in rain and cloud for 2 hours, it's a great relief to see your team mini-bus appear through the murk as you descend to the road crossing!!

This run had been 'on the radar' for a couple of years. The reason why we chose to do this now is because the Harriers' Club Captain, John Thornhill, has recently been diagnosed with mesothilomia, which is a cancer of the pleural space between the lungs and the rib cage, probably caused by previous exposure to asbestos dust at work. John's condition has prompted us to get on with the run now, while he was still well enough to participate, albeit at a much reduced level than he would have liked.

The Pennine Way Relay has raised a total of £6,700 for Cancer Research UK.

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