**Great North Run**

A little late to publish a report but have had PC problems recently!

**We invite members to send us a report on the runs they do. Can be short and sweet or longer to convey the atmosphere of the race.**

Or just too long!! Here is a starter.

At the start of the year I had planned on trying to run this race in under 1:45 - 3rd time lucky I’d hoped as I’d been poorly the first time; and was recovering from injury the second I ran it. But with life events of May/June taking over – mainly redundancy - I made the another decision to attempt running a marathon [Chester] in under 3:40 as priority. Making use of the afternoon training I’d be able to do for the first time for marathon training. The training would also make me stronger for the half too! And having paid up already and not taken out insurance to be able to cancel the GNR trip – I decided to do it anyway.

I knew Colin was completing his umpteenth GNR and had heard earlier in the year that Kate was doing her second GNR so wondered if I’d see them and possibly have a post-race drink as we were all in orange pens.

Trying to train for the marathon, participate in the Summer Series and complete the park runs proved challenging. This more than doubled the challenge when I managed to injure my quad/hip-flexor end of May and compounded this by putting my back out gardening at the end of August. This meant the long runs were shelved to protect the back. The longest continuous run being 17 miles followed by a 14 and some 13s [Half marathons]!! Enough scene setting. To compound things further y new bone conductive headset had gone missing. I’d have to get my old earphones out!

Out approach to getting there was completely different. Colin was Glamping in South Shields ensconced on the sea front near the finish and would arrive early to acclimatise. Kate, I bumped into her on the day before on the train from Wilmslow to Manchester. She was travelling by train to Manchester and then onto the North East to stay at her friend in the Newcastle area. I’d booked a race package and was alighting at Stockport to get a coach to Newcastle. There I would spend overnight in a room [cell?] at Newcastle Uni. Kate hadn’t fully recovered from her injury. I’d still got both of mine so we both thought 1:45 wouldn’t be on. I’d settle for under 1:50 with Chester marathon coming soon.

Arriving in Stockport with plenty of time to spare I refreshed myself in Debenhams – it’s never too late for a piece of cake. Then found the bus station, waited, waited, another 4 people arrived. We waited. Eventually the coach came. The driver couldn’t find his way round Stockport. We registered and got on board the coach. Plenty of room for having a double seat each. I sat and relaxed. Only Manchester and then Leeds pick ups before we get to Newcastle. A reasonable drive took us into Manchester Piccadilly bus station where we all had a loo break whilst we picked up 3 more runners. Off to Leeds now and it’s raining!

It’s raining and there’s a lot of traffic, we are at a standstill and it takes us ages to get out of Manchester and onto the M62. But before we get to Leeds, we now have to stop - The driver has to have an enforced break!!. Am I complaining? Coffee and another cake 😊. By the time we arrive at the Leeds location we are an hour late. We pick up 2 disgruntled runners. Next and last stop Newcastle. Now for sleep whilst the other runners talk anxiously about tomorrow.

Newcastle eventually appears and we disembark and register - and get cell room key cards allocated. A quick unpack and it’s tea time. Off to the restaurant where there is a good choice on the menu. I skip soup and go for pasta and sponge cake. Back to my room and think what to do now – I know . I’ll go watch the England game on TV. I get directed to the Uni bar. I find it. It is dark and it looks deserted. No! Though there is very little lighting: 3 people are playing pool, the bar is closed and 4 guys are sitting round a table trying to watch the game on an iPhone! OK I’ll give that a miss. A chat with the Security guard on the way back to my cell and he directs me into town to a quiet pub. It will be a nice walk to settle the food and ease the cramped muscles after the coach journey. Off I set through the park, past the hospital, past the reggae event blaring music from somewhere on my left.

“Wey aye man, wot yee aveeng?”

“A J2O and a packet of crisps please”

Seems to have gone little quiet all of a sudden. Heads turn.

“Ah did no’ catch that man. What was eet ageen?”.

I repeat my order less confidently.

“OK mate!” He says and the clientele turn around and continue to chat and watch the game which has just started.

I sit down at a table and relax, it’s going well football-wise. We score! Big cheers. Great.

Before I can take a celebratory sip of my drink we concede a goal almost immediately. Damn! Half an hour gone we concede again. I eke my drink to half time and then decide it would be better to get back and relax and read the paperback that I brought. I do. I pass some reggae attendees leaving their gig. Back at the cell I finish my book, set early alarm and sleep.

Up. The 3 S’s: Stretch, Shave and Shower. Dress, pack, toilet and to breakfast before bag drop off.

Breakfast in the restraint is a buffet. I have some porridge and tomatoes and bacon. I queue for toast. It’s taking ages. People putting bread in 3 or 4 times. Why don’t they turn it up? !! Relax. It’s my time. Two side by side and I turn it up. One ops out – not great colour I put it back again. Second one hasn’t popped out! I look under the grill. It’s stuck at the end! Vision of smoke and fire alarm and evacuation is passing through my head. Not going to use my knife or fork. Tell the queue behind the problem and spot a restaurant person 50 metres away. I put my tray down and run after her to explain my predicament. “It’s done that again has it” she says and walks back to me. Like true British people the queue behind hadn’t waited and had put their bread in. She finds some long plastic tongs and pokes my jammed piece out its white apart from a black 2 inch strip at the end. Wouldn’t have been long before that had caught fire!! I find a table and sit down to tepid porridge and cold bacon, tomatoes and toast! Self-clear. Back to room. Toilet and hand keys in.

The adrenaline is kicking in early. Load case onto coach. Now to the start line with a bin liner – it looks like rain.

I walk a bit. Follow the crowd, it’s buzzing all around. Find the luggage buses and leave my bag. Walk around he pens. It’s sunny now! This year I am going to see if I can get to the LHS of the start. My impression from previous runs is that that side did not run up the ramp at the beginning. Eventually I find a crossing point, cross and find my pen. It’s too early so I sit on the grass – I knew that dustbin liner was going to come in handy. I may not have been a scout – but what I can do with a match stick, roll of Sellotape and bin liner is nobody’s business. Having relaxed people-watching, I finish my relaxation, and then my beetroot drink. What’s good for the Brownlee’s is good enough for me. Bin the liner and go into my pen. I’d be happy to do the warm up this year with so many niggles and sore back. I take off my GNR t-shirt from a few years ago and threw it over the side. ”That’s my favourite top!”, from a startled lady runner beside me. “Sorry!”, I said, “I’ve just got too many.”

“How any have you done then?”.

This will be my third”

“I’ve done over ten. And that is the best t-shirt they’ve ever done.”

“It’s got paint on it” I replied and thought immediately better shut up. “Hmmphh” was her reply.

I look around for Colin and Kate. Plenty of blue and gold shirts but no WRC vest. Some Chorlton runners about. Salford too. We start the exercising. Watch the elite ladies and wheelchairs go. Beginning to regret leaving the sun cream behind. It’s very sunny now. The announcer keeps telling people it’s not a PB race today. Keep hydrated. Don’t go off too fast. Don’t take water at every water station. There are pacers running for those who want to keep a constant pace.

Eventually it’s time. My watch is set to race 13.1 miles in 1:45. But now realise without glasses I can’t really read the screen!!

The elite are off, the pens move forward. It’s a slow walk, a walk, a jog and then just past the start we can begin to quicken up and start running. We are off. Watch is started.

A minute into the race it begins to rain! It’s brilliant sunshine but it is raining. The LHS proves a good start, we go down below the road and under cover avoid the rain for a while. It’s good to hear again the “Oggy, Oggy, Oggy” chant you get for the first mile. Towards the first mile marker I run past a batman mask. Bet that was too hot to wear (I thought) to run a half marathon in. Wrong again. Just round the next bend there were 20 super heroes, including a demasked batman, cheering us on our way. They only run the first mile it seems!!

Careful not to go too fast on the downward section. When next in the open I realise the rain has stopped. Post race I found out that Colin and Kate didn’t get wet, they saw wet roads but they were not rained upon. I was lucky (!) that a very small isolated shower cooled me down at the start!

The LHS merges with the RHS just before the bridge. A bit of a climb – but think it the better option in future. Across the bridge and commence the uphill. Feeling OK. Not going too fast. I hear behind me the sound of the red arrows crossing the bridge – I catch a glimpse to my left as they veer off to wherever they go to rest before the display later on.

I am having to go around a lot of people during the first half. I wonder why people over state their finish time. I know we can have a bad race – but seriously my fitness rating of some of the people in front of me is very sceptical. Stop it Patrick. No bad thoughts.

There are a lot of people out today. More than I can remember at my previous runs here. I seem to be overtaking people slowly but constantly. After 3 miles I water every second station. Sip rinse spit, sip rinse spit, sip swallow, cap off, pour over head, cap on, bottle lobbed into bucket!! I listen to the random shuffle I have put on my music list.

I now find I can run on the LHS of the road with the occasional excursion around slower runners. (Boy will I regret this later!) I pass visual impaired runners attached to their guides. I see a pacer 80 metres ahead. Slowly I catch up with her - 1:40!! Doesn’t feel right to me. Can’t read my watch so stay with her. We approach the halfway mark. It says 17 degrees – no way! It is much hotter than that. Five minutes later there’s a pounding behind me. A pack is coming. It’s the 1:45 pacer. Soon she is going past the 1:40 pacer. I conclude my pacer is having a problem as I up my pace to keep the new pacer in view.

The crowds haven’t thinned as we progress up the hills, around the roundabouts. I skip the offers of jelly babies from the local children. I prefer Jelly Beans I am not put off this year by the constant view ahead of a vibrant snake of athletes going up the inclines. I keep the water routine going. Getting better at lobbing the bottle into the collection bins from afar. And I am running through the showers to cool down. I eventually I pass the Rubik cube man. He’s been me driving crazy loping ahead in his outfit with his little head sticking out at the top. He must be really hot!

A lot of houses surround us now. Some people have hosepipes out too and the kids like to cool you down if you are not quick enough to veer into the middle of the road. The last climb is hurting. I have lost the pacer somehow whilst crowd watching. Starting to pass athletes down on the floor at the side of the road getting attention. Where is the downhill to the coast? Feeling tired now.

We turn, I am going down. I can see the sea. I throttle back to take care of my back until I hit the sea front. This last descent should ideally be three times longer. So short. Now a mile ago. I remember last time. I ran this section quite quickly, overtaking lots of people and encouraging them. Today it feels a bit different. A bit more lethargic, a struggle. I can see the finish.

“Congratulations you have won!” breaks into my music! I am surprised I look at the finish line. It’s nearly 200 metres away. I try to Kick. No way. I become an impression of a lobster trying to run fast and struggle over the line. Feel knackered but great. So close to my dream time. I pick up my medal, bag and shirt and walk on a bit. Haven’t seen Colin or Kate. I wait a bit. I decide to get down on the grass and do some back stretches. Uncurling for the second of three stretches I hear someone calling: “Are you OK!” looking up there is a St. John’s Ambulance lady fast approaching. “I’m fine – just stretching I say”.

“You should go and have a massage she advises!” I agree. Final stretch and I leave. Find the massage tent and queue up outside. Some 20 minutes later inside the tent I register and sit down at the end of about 20 chairs. No sooner than I sit down we shuffle along one as the first in line is summoned to go to one of about 20 massage tables. I look around. Lots of activity here at the tables. We onlookers just sip drinks and watch. I look ahead of me; two ladies one small and very slim, one big and not!! They look like Thai origin. They are bending their runners’ legs back and forward more extremely than the other ladies in the room. After a while they mount table and straddle their runners and egin to bend them into more extreme and strange positions. I feel uncomfortable here, as do the two guys sitting alongside me. “God I hope we don’t one get them” whispers one as the largish lady has got the male runners leg with his foot somewhere near his ear as she leans over and looks him in the eye – smiling. We shuffle along as more runners finish the massage and new ones are called to replace them. It’s our turn now. We are all worried that the two Thai ladies seem to finishing off! My two neighbours get summoned and breathe a sigh of relief as they are beckoned to tables in the middle of the tent. The largish lady now is wiping her hands on a towel. “You next” filters through to my brain and I stand up. Look up. The guy in charge is pointing to the far corner of the room! I smile and walk smartly there before anyone can change their minds. Relief! I tell the woman about my sore back and quad/flexor.

“I just do legs. That’s all you get. Didn’t they tell you?” she barks. I lie down and put my head down in submission.

“Is it your first time?”, “Where are you from? ”Did you enjoy the race?” is the limit and totality of the conversation. And we were finished both in discussion and massage. This has to be the shortest massage I think I’ve ever had. Less than 4 minutes. After queueing for 30 minutes!! I hobble outside to put my shoes on. I can hear the announcer far away. Sir Mo is getting his medal. The Red Arrows are coming!

And so they do: whizzing one way, then the other. Plumes of blue, white and red. They separate and do almost medieval jousting as single jets race towards each other and pull apart at the last moment. After a while my neck is getting sore looking upwards and so I make my way to the luggage bus. Easy to find. I go upstairs and get my backpack. Transfer my wallet and phone into the goody bag and put on a clean top. Have some drink. Decide I can’t bear to bend and put bottoms on so I leave the bus to make my way into South Shields and the leisure centre for shower and change of clothes. A few minutes walking and it’s a bit chilly now. A breeze has got up. I remove a windbreak from backpack and put it on. Backpack on back I start to walk, possibly hobble a little into town. Something’s wrong. Can’t think of what. I’ll check my phone. Where is it? Where’s my goody bag? I hobble quickly back to where I stopped to put the windbreak on. Look around can’t see anything. This isn’t good as my phone, money, cards and train ticket are in it. I go back to the bus. Upstairs at the back a group of runners are having a party with prosecco and nibblers. I have to move them to look around the seat where my bag was. Lots of goody bags here. I explain the problem and they start to go through their bags to see if mine is there, or if I put my stuff into one of their bags. No Luck. A pair of lady runners getting changed the other side of the seats. They hear what’s going on. “This is mine – sorry” says the one on the left. I have a sip of recovery drink whilst the two ladies finish getting ready. The one on the right stands up and moves to join her friend. As I pass I say – don’t know why – to the one who has moved. “And this bag is yours?” pointing o the one which she has been sat against.

“No that’s not mine” she says. “It was there when I sat down” – I looked into it. My phone and belongings were there. It was my bag. More relief from me and the party of runners at the back. “Thanks” I said and smiled at the lady – thinking what a dozy cloth-eared bint! I might have just walked past it thinking it was hers.

Back to town. Feeling tired now. I find the posh leisure centre, shower and change and go to the refreshment room. Choice of sandwiches, cereal bars, fruit, crisps and soft drinks. Most tables are full so I go out on to the veranda. A couple join me. They have come from London. They flew up and are making a weekend of it. We discuss various races. The Royal Parks Half is their favourite. The wind has got up a bit. The packet with half my sandwich gets blown across the floor! Whilst I go to retrieve it my cup of tea is next victim of the wind. I leave the couple now clinging firmly to their cups and sandwich and go inside and get another tea and eat the emergency chocolate biscuit that was in my backpack.

Not far from the Leisure Centre is the coach park. There are two other runners there. A 1:30 and a 1:50 finisher. We think some of the runners on our coach will be much longer to finish and get back to the coach so we go have a pint in the pub across the road. Not the friendliest of pubs. Didn’t really want runners – wanted diners instead. We negotiate to drink at the tables outside. Time to relax, to notice things. The guys opposite had caught the sun – I could see the outline of the vest on their shoulders then I would have too! I’d need a good excuse, when I got home, as to why I said no to needing sun cream when I left on Saturday.

Back to the coach. 3 sets of couples just made it for the 3:15 leaving time. Some hadn’t started when Mo finished! A pleasant, happy atmosphere in the coach. The Leeds pair had been put on another coach so we wouldn’t need to stop there. At Hartshead Moor services we stopped - for tea and cake!! The Manchester contingent had during the stop arranged to be picked up at Stockport. So on leaving we’d go directly to Stockport before the coach would terminate in Chester. Train back to Wilmslow, walk home and a beer for 8:15! And the results:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Sir Mo Farah | 00:59:27 | 1 |
| Vivian Cheruiyot | 01:07:43 | 1 |
| Patrick Grannan | 01:45:13 | 2,904 |
| Colin Walton | 01:52:16 | 5,138 |
| Kate McCulloch | 01:57:43 | 7,272 |
| Runners |  | 43,596 |

Strava informed me I’d done a 13.1 race in 1:44:29! Sadly the extra 180 metres made it 1:45:13. If only I’d gone straight across -and not run around the left edge of - the roundabouts!!

The time to run the seafront stretch the last mile was my fastest - faster than last time – even though I felt it was slower! Oh Well there’s always next year and another dream.