

Hash 168 - The Ridgeway Relay, Bucks, Oxon, Berks & Wilts 20th June 2004

Fortunately it was much cooler than last year, otherwise I doubt many of us would still be here to tell the tale! Only 86 miles - a mere stroll for most of us - sadly true in several cases! But let us remember - as Brian observed in the ghastly Royal Oak afterwards - we are a drinking club with a running problem, and how many other teams were in the bar having a few beers?!

Laura nobly volunteered to do the first and longest leg, starting at a time when most of us were still sleeping off the excesses of the night before. But despite not getting lost this time - unlike many of her fellow-competitors who 'accidentally' took a short-cut, and were penalised [cheating bar stewards!] - Laura is more suited to soft going, whereas conditions were good-firm.

So it was that Mike was the first of many of us to have his very own mass start at the 2nd leg, and his fellow mass-starter duly legged it out of sight uphill. Not in the least discouraged, our splendid ex-GOM matched his time of the previous year, and handed over to a rather isolated Brian for leg 3.

Brian, bless him, had rather expected to be running 7.2 miles, but some sodder moved the finishing line 1½ miles in my direction. Shame. I was ferried to the start of stage 4 by Katrina, to be greeted by a cast of thousands - Mike, Rew, Jeremy, Laura and Iain to name

but a few - much too large an audience with far too much open ground for me to cover in full view of before I could slow to a walk! The long-suffering marshals made several ill-disguised comments about the tardy KVHHH before giving up on Brian and a lost runner, before saying to some burly, fit-looking bloke and me 'well you might as well bugger off now!' Shod in running shoes rather than deck shoes for a change, I managed to keep BF-LB in sight for at least 3 minutes, and managed to complete my shortened leg in a minute over the hour, to rapturous applause as I walked up the final hill.

Rew had long been sent on his way by more long-suffering marshals who were anxiously looking at their watches and muttering about closing time. Once the red mist had cleared from my eyes, we beat a swift retreat to the Pike and Perch at South Stoke, to be greeted by the unexpected sight of Iain drinking - water! Our braw Scots laddie was totally unfazed by the imminent arrival of Rew, who performed magnificently - as Iain had done the previous year - by overtaking a much earlier starter within sight of the finishing line. So unfazed was Iain that he had disappeared for a leak as Rew crossed the line, and had to be zipped up by Brian to take over the baton.

We sat around enjoying a few beers, then headed off to West Ilsley to stand around in the bitter wind to watch Iain finish. There had been another mass start at 2.00 for Maurice, so I nipped home for a quick zzzz before heading off to the end of the last leg to watch our fragrant GOM complete the final stage. But what did I know? Maurice, Keith2 and Jeremy had all run so well that Margaret had been able set off well before the final mass start at 6.15, and was showered, changed and outside of two cups of hot water long before we turned up.

Repairing to the Royal Oak - from whence Maurice, Andrea and Amelia were barred merely because the latter was five years younger than their normal Saturday night clientele - we stood and told each other stories of our heroic doings, and promised that next year we would train longer, harder and fitter, and improve upon our third-to-last place. Yeah, right! But at least we won the award for the best time for a Hash....

