



# Valley News

THE NEWSLETTER OF AVON VALLEY RUNNERS

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## *The Long Way Round – A 40 Mile Run in Sierra Leone*



The road from Freetown to Tokeh Beach follows the coast for 20 miles south. Mikey Bryant and I ran it last spring as preparation for Sierra Leone's first marathon in Makeni. This is the "short way round". Mikey had been working with a health centre in Freetown and I had been living and working in Sierra Leone for over a year. Mikey has left but I am still there and on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013 a hardy bunch of us lined up outside the international army base to attempt the "long way round", a 40 mile run starting over the mountains of the Western Peninsula before descending towards the coast and approaching Tokeh beach from other side. We would be passing through Africa villages with the unlikely names of Regent, Hastings, Waterloo, Kent and York.

The run was organised to mark the end of the international army presence in Sierra Leone. The country has returned to stability following the vicious civil war ten years ago. An ultra-marathon running friend of the Commander of the base decided to make one last visit to Freetown before it closed and run "the long way round". John, a veteran of the likes of the Badwater Ultra, the Spartathlon and the Grand Union Canal 145 miler, had invited a British ultra-running friend, James, who in turn had invited an RAF colleague, Martyn. Paul, an army cyclist from the base, had been keeping himself fit during the off season by knocking out 120 kilometres of running a week and decided to give it a go and the Commander's son decided to mark his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday by running as far as he could, And then there was me, training for the Paris marathon in April, who committed to run the first 28 kilometres to the appropriately named Waterloo. I hoped I would not meet mine!

We lined up outside the front gate of the base at 5am. It was two hours before dawn as we attempted to beat the heat of the African day and the dust caused by Chinese construction lorries employed to turn the dirt road into a tarmac highway. With the assistance of head torches and a Land Rover we stumbled off down the hill for 20 tortuous kilometres of dirt and dust barely able to see the road meandering down the valley. We kept a tight group edging gingerly but steadily towards dawn. For the first hour or so I hung off the back of the group not wishing to influence the pace of those going all the way, and not being able to anyway as they were running too fast for me! We covered between 11 and 12 kilometres during that first hour in the dark. One wrong turn saw us add a kilometre to our run but we continued past Devil's Hole eventually emerging at dawn well on the way to Waterloo. It was here that our youngest colleague stopped having completed a life-time distance best of 20 kilometres. We had our picture taken together for the record.

By the time we got to Waterloo, Africa was awake and we were greeted with amusement and disbelief as we tried to run through a packed Waterloo market. The heady smell of fish, fried chicken and "solid waste" helped our rapid transition. "Let's get out of here!" We did. The Land Rover didn't, but eventually made a detour via main road to catch us up. We were on tarmac now and I was beginning to enjoy myself having struggled early on. I let others know that I would keep going to the 4 hour mark. By now the group had adopted the tried and tested ultra-marathon technique of walking the "uphills" carefully deciding in advance what counted as "uphill" and when the "uphill" was to begin and end. Nobody broke ranks. We all conformed to the guidance provided by the seasoned ultra-guys. This helped me because as they stopped to walk I could catch them up running. Once I started walking I would fall behind again as they were really fast walkers. I would again run to catch up with them just before they restarted running.

The effort put in by Ben, a US soldier driving the Land Rover was incredible. Our water stops were few early on but once through Waterloo, with the sun rising, they became more regular. Ben had driven for nearly two hours in the dark in first gear and was now being called upon to stop and start at regular intervals to keep us fuelled up. We were soon joined by two other Land Rovers, one supporting a group of cyclists attempting to do the full 65 mile circumnavigation of the peninsular and so the water stops became even more regular.

At 4 hours I was feeling pretty good. I had even taken on the pacing at the front of the phalanx from time to time. I revised my plan and now committed to reaching the marathon mark which had been measured to the middle of Kissi village. Because of the extra kilometre run early on this was actually well before Kissi but by now I didn't really care. The marathon mark came and went with Paul, Martyn and I now forming a small advance party. Mercifully a bit of a head wind had blown up to cool us. Talking had stopped. I was still running as we passed Mama Beach and the police check point on the turn off to Kent. I had run out and back to Kent while camping at Tokeh two weeks earlier so knew the road only too well. From Kent we would pass through John Obey, Black Johnson, Blue Water and then up the hill to York and down to Tokeh. Only 10 miles to go so for the first time I contemplating actually running the whole damn thing!

I had a brief ultra-marathon running career about 10 years earlier. One Two Oceans Marathon in Cape Town (56 Kms), four Comrades Ultras in Durban (90 Kms) and a Boddington 50K had prepared me for the pain of the ultra, and given me something of the mental technique for survival. But it was a distant memory. However in the Cork marathon last year, I had discovered the wonders of jelly beans so handfuls of jelly beans washed down with ice cold water was my fuel for this trip. I was refuelling more regularly now. It was working. The non-competitive nature of this run also really helped as we encouraged each other, as was the amazing support provided by family and friends in the Land Rovers and my knowledge of the final few miles.

I finally came to a stand-still at 37 miles. It was roasting with little breeze and no shade. The sun was directly overhead and it was 32 degrees C in the shade. Paul and I had stopped to walk the final rise and he walked away from me. I never really got running again. The tank was definitely empty. I tried a jog but nothing. I did muster a shuffle over the final 800 metres to the gate at Tokeh Sands Resort but that was it.

For the record, Paul finished in 7 hours 28 minutes. Martyn had come past me to finish in 7 hours 35. John had me in his sights as I reached Tokeh Beach in 7 hours 44, with James not far behind. We had all covered the 64.6 Kms in under 8 hours. Beer, lobster and chips, a sea swim and fine wins for England and Wales in the rugby followed a memorable morning.

Two days later the Government closed the mountain road until further notice to allow construction work to proceed unhindered.

Now for Paris!

***Phil Harding***

## Tim Triumphs at Bathalf

Well the 2013 running of the Bath Half Marathon or Bathalf, as the logo on our running numbers would call it, is one I will never forget and for all the right reasons too. It also answered my question to myself after spending a week stressing over it and waking up Sunday morning like a bag of nerves "WHY DO I PUT MYSELF THROUGH THIS?" After missing out on Bristol last year because of an injury I was determined to finish below 1hr 30mins.



After meeting up with my AVR Friends who were running, it was time to get ready and go to our start pens. James Hart had offered to pace Fiona Price around as she was also looking for sub 90mins as was Diane Hier. I knew if I could stay with them for some of the way I might be in with a chance.



We all got off to a good start and started pacing straight away. First I caught up with Diane then we both joined Fiona and James. The first 10K seemed to fly by as we all crossed the mat at the same time. Everything seemed to be going a bit too well and I was waiting for something to give. Eight miles went by and apart from the usual leg fatigue everything still felt good, we were all pacing well and on target for a sub 90min. James was getting the crowd going as they were cheering us and eleven thousand other runners



on. A gel at mile nine in preparation to get me through the dreaded final three miles, head down and dig deep. Mile ten came and Diane and James had opened up a slight lead on me and Fiona however we were still on for our target. Mile twelve came and my legs were starting to fatigue a bit too much but with one mile left I was not going to give up now. As I turned back into Great Pulteney Street I could see James and Diane crossing the finish Line I could also see the clock which to my amazement had just turned over to 1hr 28min. With Fiona just behind me we picked up the pace one last time and crossed the finish line in 1:28:16.

On this race everything had come together and the result was well worth all the hard training and nerves before hand and that is why I put myself through it. James Hart was incredible and I will never forget his kind actions of sacrificing his own race to get Myself, Diane and Fiona around to meet our targets. Diane and Fiona are truly inspirational as they seem to get quicker and stronger with every race. A new club record for Diane was the icing on the cake as was The Vet ladies of Fiona Price, Diane Hier and Jo Mumford winning their category.



Having a pint in the Huntsman afterwards, we learned that most of the AVR runners achieved PBs and all had their own stories to tell. In summary having the correct running conditions and the best club mates I could wish for equals a perfect race and a perfect result.

Here's to the next Bathalf

*Tim Lowrie*





Having completed over four hundred 5K's, 10K's, Half Marathons and lots of other distance races I am always on the lookout for a new running challenge. So when my employers, computer services organisation Fujitsu offered me the opportunity to take part in the Vertical Rush tower race in London, I leapt at the chance. The Vertical Rush is an event organised by the housing and homeless charity Shelter and invites around 1,500 runners to race up the 902 steps that lead to the top of Tower 42 or for those of a certain age – The NatWest Tower, which at 600ft (183m) held the title of the tallest building in Britain from 1980 (taking over from the Post Office Tower) until the completion of the Canary Wharf tower in 1990.



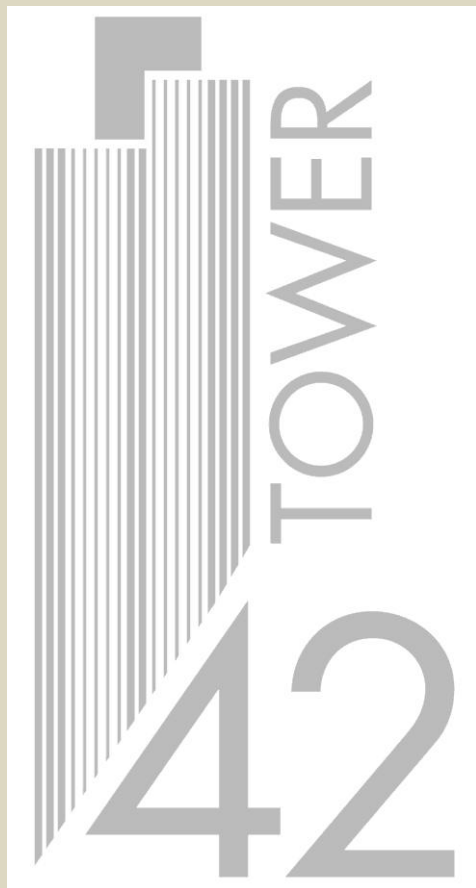
I started my preparation for the event on a cold and wet evening back in January with a run in Bradford on Avon followed by six repetitions of St Margaret's Steps all 48 of them – well that would get me two thirds of the way up the tower and I didn't feel too bad, but road steps are a lot different to tower steps. The Fujitsu office in Bracknell that I occasionally work from has ten floors and so I shifted my training efforts to there. My first attempt saw me run up six floors before resorting to a 'two-steps at a time' walk to complete the ten floors in a shade under 85-seconds, my second attempt had me down to 80-seconds and eventually found myself with a Bracknell best of 74-seconds and it was getting 'easier'. With the NatWest Tower having 42 floors (or so we were told) I found myself doing five repetitions regularly on a lunchtime to make sure that I could complete the distance and it is a good job that the majority of my colleagues choose to use the lift leaving the stairway pretty clear for my training runs.

My preparation though suffered a minor setback after watching a *Youtube* video of the 2012 Vertical Rush when I noticed that the runners were going up an anti-clockwise stairwell and I had been training on a clockwise one, which is very important, as I had discovered that you tend to use your arms a lot more in tower running and therefore needed to adjust to using my weaker left arm. Fortunately we had an alternative staircase in Bracknell that I could use and this had the benefit of also serving the Lower Ground floor and the Roof Deck, so I now had twelve flights on which to train.

Fujitsu were sending a team of 300 runners to the event with a good many based out of the Bracknell office and it was decided that a preparation race would be just the thing to get us motivated. So the Bracknell Vertical Rush was held on the original clock-wise staircase that I had trained on. I found myself leading off at 11:00 and setting a time of 63-seconds what an improvement on my previous 74-seconds best, it was also a time that held the lead for over three hours until a young Commercial Manager called Kane shattered it with a 39-second clocking, but I am reassured that I looked a lot better than he did at the top. I ended up finishing in 8<sup>th</sup> place and also was able to set a target time of six-minutes for reaching the top of the Tower 42. Talking to Kane and few of my younger, faster, considerably lighter colleagues they all shared a similar concern – what is the protocol for over-taking in the stairwell or in my case being over-taken?



To answer this question I got in contact with Paul Smith an experienced Vertical Runner who the previous year had just narrowly missed out on setting a World Best for the Vertical Kilometre by running up the NatWest Tower 9-times!!! Paul imparted lots of useful advice to me, but also some bad news – *"it is not 42-floors to the top of the tower, there are 51-floors!!!"* they conveniently gloss over the fact that you have to run up 6-floors from the ground to the start of the tower and inside the tower are an additional three un-numbered maintenance floors!



A week later, a further three vertical training sessions completed, the Devizes 10K run and I was on the train into London. I reported to the Fujitsu registration desk in the Gibson Hall just off of Threadneedle Street and then donned in my corporate red t-shirt, waited nervously for the start and with the new information on the number of floors reset the expectation on my finishing time – I will settle for 6:59. My wave of 150-runners set off at 12:30 under the starting orders of London Mayor, Boris Johnson and ably assisted by Miss England who I had been talking to after she had completed an ascent of the tower in a creditable 9:58, but not in her stilettos and tiara that she was now wearing.

I was fortunate enough to get near the start of the wave just behind my new nemesis Kane and 2:45 marathon runner Kevin Smith of Swindon Harriers (who also works for Fujitsu). I started with the beep of my chip being activated as I crossed the timing mat just before the first step and commenced my steady run up the stairs. I think that the nervous energy expended earlier had taken its toll and by time I had reached the tower section was feeling heavy legged and after just 12-floors had to resort to my ‘two-steps at a time’ walk, which was disappointing as I was hoping to get somewhere handy for halfway before walking. Anyway when I reached the 21<sup>st</sup> floor I stole a look at my stopwatch - 3:25, I was on target and well over halfway.

Another ten floors and then the air got very dry with breathing actually getting a little painful due to the fierce air conditioning in the stairwell – this was not expected. My legs were starting to burn but then I spotted Kane just in front of me and this spurred me on and I managed to overtake him. However with just two floors to go my legs turned to jelly and I found myself using both arms to literally pull myself up the final flights of stairs and I crossed the finishing mat with a whoop of joy in 6-minutes 53-seconds!

Apparently the view from the top of the tower is spectacular, especially on a nice clear day that we were having, but I just wanted to collapse in a corner and then needed one of the Shelter representatives to help me back to my feet and lead me out to the lift. Coming back down in the lift afterwards was like a smoker’s convention with all finishers having developed a hacking cough from the stale air in the upper floors of the tower. As I write this some 24-hours later I am still coughing.

I am pleased to have completed it within my target time, finishing in 94<sup>th</sup> place and have raised a few hundred pounds for the homeless and housing charity Shelter. I am certainly going to keep running up stairs as part of my training regime as the benefit to my cardio-vascular system has been very noticeable and hope to return to Tower 42 next year.

**Darren Wrintmore – Vice-President**



## Kieran XC Relays

As I am sure everyone knows Junior Avon Valley Runners (JAVR) organise a FREE under 15s race on the last Saturday of each month. We have had consistent numbers in the 20s but are always thinking of new events or training sessions that we can provide. At a JAVR meeting back in the depths of winter (although that could have been last week!) Kieran Beardmore sowed the seed of his idea for a cross country relay.



Kieran's idea was a FREE junior 8Km relay. Each team consists of at least 1 girl, 1 under 12 and 2 others under 16. The race is split into 8 x 1km legs with each team member running twice. The 1 Km cross country course is the perimeter grass

path of the Kestrel field in Southwick Country Park. It seemed a good idea to run the event after the parkrun on a Saturday the same as the monthly JAVR run. A date in January was set...

January came along with the snow and floods - Puddle Corner as regular parkrunners know it. Only a few teams had entered so we decide to postpone the event until March 16<sup>th</sup>. We took this opportunity to market the race more aggressively including a great new logo designed by Kieran. This worked; we soon had 15 teams entered, including some from Chepstow!



Race day came and once again so did the weather, icy cold and wet. A couple of teams didn't make it but most squelched or waded their way to the start, in some ways the trickiest part of the day!

By just gone 10 the rain had stopped and the sun was out it was even slightly warm, the going remained heavy though! Our very own Michael Towler led a warm up, assisted by Fiona Price and Sean Price gave the race briefing. There was a great buzz as the first runners lined up on the start.

They're off, now for the excitement and worry of the first handover – we hoped we'd explained it right! There was no need to worry all of the handovers were slick with the right runner being in the handover box at the right time, a great job by all the team managers.



After an initial tussle between Team Bath, Kingdown School and JAVR, the depth of talent that Team Bath had brought started to show and by leg 3 they had the top 3 positions. The best times of the day were: for the girls and also under 12! Laura MacNab in 3:35, for the boys James Welbourn and Tom Brown both with a time of 3:42 all of these were from Team Bath. The full breakdown of results and photos can be found at the JAVR website [www.junior.avonvalleyrunners.org.uk](http://www.junior.avonvalleyrunners.org.uk)

The atmosphere was incredible with great support and lots of smiling faces. The last runner was kept company on their lap by Michael Towler and I found it incredibly moving when unprompted all of the teams went out to join them and they all

crossed the line together. Mike also presented all of the team members with JAVR Kieran Relay medals and the top 3 teams received certificates. I'm sure I saw him signing a few autographs too, thank you Mike.

It was great fun to be a part of it and all involved should be proud of what was achieved. I'd like on behalf of the club say a big thank you to all of the JAVR team and also Martin Pearce for taking the photos.

**Andrew Hoddinott – Chairman**

## More Great News for Juniors...

From Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> of April we launch a new junior weekly track session based at Bath University. This will run from 19:00 – 20:00 and will be led by Rich Ayling from WASP and AVR. In addition to track based running it will combine strength and balance work. On the last Wednesday in the month this will coincide with the adult monthly track session; hopefully this will help integrate juniors into the main club as they get older. The junior session is open to all aged 11+ and will cost £2.25 each week, please arrive by 18:45 to register and pay.

## All Those Years Ago

Tales from the "Valley" 5, 10, 15 & 25 years ago:

<p><b>2008:</b> Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April saw the inaugural training session from the Chrstie Miller Sports Centre in Melksham.</p> <p>Liz Ringham scored a new club record for the Marathon distance on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April when she ran 26.2 miles through the streets of London in a time of 3:03:21.</p>	<p><b>2003:</b> Tina Vivian, Sue MacGregor and Denise Ellis claimed the 1<sup>st</sup> Ladies team prize at <b>Bournemouth Half Marathon</b> on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April. Meanwhile for the AVR men; Les Unsworth, Neville Yates, Danny Kay and Peter Hunt were hard at it battling the Bards own <b>Shakespeare Marathon</b>. It could have been seen as a comedy of errors, but all's well that ends well.</p>
<p><b>1998:</b> With thoughts of Essex on their minds, Rosemary Barber, Judy and Stan Farr took part in the <b>Newton Towey Run</b> on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April. Rosemary was the 1<sup>st</sup> Lady home in a time of 37:14 for the 8.5Km distance with Judy also claiming a podium position as 3<sup>rd</sup> Lady in a time of 44:33. Stan chose to run the shorter 4.1Km race and crossed the line in 28:13.</p>	<p><b>1988:</b> The fresh sea air aided Gerry Fice to a great time of 1:19:04 at the <b>Plymouth Half Marathon</b> on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April.</p> <p>The following weekend he was racing again and set a club record for a 20 mile race at the <b>Gloucester 20</b> in a time of 1:58:59, well ahead of Tim Northwood who was the next Avon Valley Runner to cross the line in a time of 2:05:57.</p>

## Rosemary, Prepare to go Neolithic

In last months Valley News we launched a new competition whereby you could win the entry fee to a race of your choice just by submitting a few lines to the Valley News then a follow up article once you have completed the event. Well this month we are pleased to inform **Rosemary Barber** that she can start hollowing out some birch and weaving some supple willow from which to create some running shoes as she can now get her entry in for the **Neolithic Half Marathon** courtesy of Avon Valley Runners; Rosemary's short but succinct words penned with the finest eagle feather quill were "After many years of running, I have always channelled my training around specific Club races. It has always been my ambition to run *The Neolithic Half*, but it has never fitted in.....until now. However this year would be an ideal time to enter, and hopefully enjoy."



Congratulations Rosemary on being our first winner you should now contact the club secretary via [secretary@avonvalleyrunners.org.uk](mailto:secretary@avonvalleyrunners.org.uk) to obtain details of how to claim your prize.

## Stop Press - Wrinty & Co Elected to new roles in WAA

Vice-President of Avon Valley Runners Darren Wrintmore has been elected as the new head of Wiltshire Athletic Association and will be targeting youth development in the county as well as continuing to maintain the Associations standing as the premier competition provider in Wiltshire. Taking over Darren's previous role as Wiltshire Road Running Secretary is Thomas Coney also of Avon Valley Runners and moving into the role of XC Secretary is Stuart Henderson of Corsham Running Club who will be launching a Wiltshire Off-Road Race League later this year. Aly Sloane of Salisbury A&RC remains as the Honorary Secretary and Melvyn Potter of Team Bath continues as the Track & Field Secretary with Ray Bell of Swindon Harriers the Treasurer."