

Liverpool Rock and Roll Weekend 2018

(25th may)

Bright but not very early on Friday 18th May found 5 of Blyths Ambleish Contingency on Platform 1 of Alnmouth Station awaiting the 11.00 to York via Newcastle to collect our token Elswick Harrier Micky. Once in York we would change trains for our final destination Liverpool for the Rock and Roll weekend. Unfortunately it wasn't that simple and owing to an individual being hit by a train, missed connections, cancelled trains and signal failure we finally found ourselves in Liverpool 2 hours later than we had planned.

That put pay to any sight seeing we may have done so we like the true athletes we are we headed for the pub where we were joined a while later by Jo Davies. A few hours well spent carb loading and hydrating and we all returned to our hotel for some well earned rest, after all we had a 5k to run in the morning!

The next morning was another bright but earlier start than the previous day. We were all dressed in pink in support of our AHRC Running Buddy Claire 'The Machine' as it was 5 years to the day she received the all clear from the the big C. Due to the other celebration taking place the same day we all donned some union jack accessories to recognise the occasion, apart from Grumpy Falkous who had some ridiculous idea his hat would slip off his head!!

Anyway, we were all congregated taking a few photos and soaking up the atmosphere when we began talking of starting pens, it was during this discussion that Grumpy Falkous again questioned why he was starting in pen 9 when I was starting in pen 2 (He had mentioned it once or twice when we got our numbers in the post! It was at this point with 5 mins to go before the start of the race I had the brainwave to check his entry e mail. I then wished I hadn't bothered as I soon discovered that I had slightly muddled up his times and had somehow entered his half marathon predicted time on his 5k entry..... so he had a whole 2hrs 15 mins to complete the 5k, ooops!

So leaving an even Grumpier Falkous to figure out how he was going to run his race the somewhat amused ladies made their way to pen 6 to all run together.

The mainly flat course starts outside the Echo Arena and provides many sights along the way. Along Kings Parade, to the Salthouse Quay, past Liverpool 1 on Strand Street. Taking a left onto Georges Pierhead to the Beatles statue, onto Water Street taking in the Royal Liver Building before taking a right back along Strand Street but further this time along the Keel Wharf to the Freijwheel Wheel of Liverpool back past the Echo Arena, onto Queens Wharf then along the Queens Dock where it looks like your about to finish on Kings Parade but you are directed inside the Exhibition Centre to the enclosed finish area.

So off the 5 of us went chatting away and enjoying the atmosphere, singing along at the band stops and monopolising the official photographers for a cheeky photo. It was a few moments after this that Jo started talking about her PB and the pace we were running being somewhat faster than her usual pace, so we packed in the talking and game was on to get her a new PB. All was going good and we where pretty confident that today was going to be her day. With the finish line in site Jo took off for one of her now famous sprint finishes. Crossing the line compere 'Brian' noticed my naughty at 40 sash which I had been made to wear around the course and gathered the ladies for a round of Happy Birthday on the mic!

Official time came through and we were 2 seconds the wrong side of Jo's PB which we put down to two things: the photographer making us wait till he had his camera in the right mode for a group photo and the course measuring long at 3.4 miles, so we're taking that as an unofficial PB, well done Jo.

So 5k done we headed to the expo where we collected our Remix wristbands - This is a bonus medal you receive at Rock and Roll Events if you complete more than one distance over the weekend. The Expo isn't anywhere near the size of the London Expo but it had a few carefully chosen stands which we enjoyed looking around and we made sure that we got #TeamBlyth on the Rock and Roll Wall of fame!

We saw a few familiar faces Tony Dunn and Janice & Alan of the AHRC Crew.

Back to the hotel and what would have been a few hours to relax before heading out for some more important carb loading, but me and Andrea had forgotten to take our numbers for the marathon to the Expo to collect our T Shirts, so back to the expo we went to collect these and then Grumpy Falkous needed to cram in some more carb loading so back to the pub we went!

The next hour spent in the hotel we did relax in the pool and sauna which was very welcome after clocking up double figures in miles just walking around the city.

Saturdays evening meal consisted of 22 of our local club members from Blyth, AHRC, Elswick and Saltwell Harriers all joining together to swap race tactics.

Sunday morning was the brightest and earliest morning of them all or as Kathryn so eloquently put it 'too bloody hot and no breeze'!

Strangely in Liverpool the half marathon starts an hour before the Marathon so the half marathoners - a more cheerful David Elaine & Kathryn left the hotel earlier with Jo who was going to spend the morning volunteering.

I meanwhile went for the most expensive slice of toast in the hotel restaurant while Andrea tucked into her porridge pots in her room. We then made our way down to the half marathon start to see the others off, there were people as far as the eye could see and getting a prime spot to take some photos proved more difficult than we expected. So after a bit of queuing to cross the bridge we then found a spot waving to Tony on the way.

Once they were all safely over the start line off we went to put our bags in the bag drop. More queuing took place so that trained dogs could check out all of our bags before entering the building which was much quicker than a visual

bag check that we are all used to. Amazingly the toilets were completely empty once the first race was underway so we had a relaxed time with no rushing and more queues for comfort breaks which were a welcome change.

A quick good luck hug and we went off to our respective starting pens to await the off. As luck would have it I walked into my pen and straight in front of me were 2 familiar faces from Alnwick Harriers Laura & John so the nerves were forgotten as we caught up on the activities of the past few days with a selfie thrown in for good measure. Then before we knew it we were off. The start is in pretty much the same place as the 5k and we headed on the same path towards the Liver Building, today however you don't get to turn around at this point but have to carry on heading away from the city centre. Within the first 2 miles there were 3 band stops which I enjoyed a bit of a dance past, Beatles songs being tunes of choice. However this was also the route to my hotel and my head kept suggesting it would be nice just to run back there and chill.... as if!!! A familiar voice behind me had me turning around for a chat with Roger from Orchard Eagles Running Club, a quick selfie and off he went into the distance!

Liverpool has many many green parks and heading towards mile 3 saw us running alongside the first being Browside Gardens, the trees providing welcome shelter from the sun. 4 Band stops later and Goodison Park came into view before heading back along the way we came but turning into Stanley Park and around some of the park before heading into Anfield and through the turnstiles. Having a Tottenham fan for a husband and needing to conserve all my energy for the next 19 miles I didn't take the opportunity as others did to run up the steps for a selfie looking out onto the pitch!

So back round the other side of Stanley park and another familiar voice shouts I expected to see you before now! Brian who had found me at 4 miles in London coming out of the loo, at least I had got much further and was running this time!! 4 Band Stops (Quick loo stop as Brian was now safely past,) and there I was back at the 2 mile point which crosses with the 9 mile point. A bit of a run back on yourself then fork off past a few of the city centre museums where you can hear the tunes blasting from the world famous Cavern Club the support there was very welcome. Some more weaving through the city centre comes next before we headed back down towards the Echo Arena, at this point I wished I had remembered about this part of the course and asked 'the Blyth crew' who were now all finished the half marathon to come over to give me a cheer, it would have been very welcome at that point. Someone must have known my head was starting to tell me that my legs didn't want to run and in front of me I recognised 2 red and white vests as Elswick Harriers. I didn't know them but began to chase them down and spent the next mile mildly amused at all the shout outs for Ells Wicks and Blith! Finally catching up with the 2 ladies we ran a mile or so together chatting and discussed the elevation as they had been told about 'the hill' at mile 12 they were relieved when I said I couldn't actually remember a hill on the course which I had ran once before in June 2015 so feeling assured we continued to talk about all the people in common we knew, we concluded it was a very small world! I lost them at the next water stop which was one of many on the course and was relieved that they still had huge stocks of water despite the very warm day, each of the 7 water station up to that point had also been well stocked which gave me hope that there wasn't going to be a repeat of London and people were not going to be left without fluids. I was right and even up to the final station at 24.5 miles there was still more than enough for the people behind me. I digress.

So on I ran and then I saw 'The Hill' how had I forgotten about that?!! I took it as a fuel opportunity and was walking taking on a gel as Roger ran past me again shouting come on Lesley!! Off I went again past the half way mark and into Sefton Park just after the 14 mile point. I was here I met Kirsten a non affiliated runner who seemed to be playing cat and mouse with me, we had a quick chat every time we passed one another until we seemed to be run walking in sync for the next few miles around the park. We had passed another 8 Band Stops and had still been quite energetic clapping and dancing past them all. Just before 18 miles you leave the park for a while and head off towards Penny Lane, I was really looking forward to this part of the course as I remembered a Radio Station being at the end of the lane where Penny Lane was being played on repeat by the DJ who was also giving a running commentary of the runners going past, getting people to do aeroplanes at the turn around point which lifted everyones spirits. Disappointingly this time there was no DJ but a truck with a sound system playing Penny Lane which just didn't create the same euphoria as last time. So back down the lane me and Kirsten went onto the next section of the course which is another switch back and opportunity to see others on the course. I was hoping Andrea wasn't too far behind me and at the very last moment as I was leaving the switch back she came into sight. A very welcome hug and a few words of encouragement and on our way we went again.

4 Band Stops later and at around 23 miles completed you get onto to water side, this was the part of the course everyone had been talking about as being so close to the waters edge we expected a breeze..... we were wrong. The water only seemed to reflect not only the sun but the heat and the next few miles with Kirsten were spent run walking and talking to others along the course about their marathon stories. It was at this point I knew sub 5 was no longer possible which had been in my head since the disaster in London but where as in London it really messed with my head this was a totally different ball game. I had actually enjoyed the course, the people I had met, seeing Andrea for a cuddle so the time no longer was the be all of the race.

Another 2 Band Stops took us past Festival Gardens and the next 2 Band Stops took us to Mile 25. My smile was getting bigger and bigger the closer I got to the finish and as we rounded the bend to take us along the Albert Docks for the last time the last Band Stop was playing The Stereophonics Dakota which is one of my favourite songs, this couldn't get any better.... But it did, approaching the final stretch was a sea of green with #TeamBlyth cheering us along followed by online group The Running Ninjas, grabbing Kirstens hand and pointing out all the photographers along the way we crossed the line 2 very happy ladies.

We thanked each other and said our goodbyes before I went off to gather as many freebies as I could. I didn't do bad with water, apple juice, lucozade, crisps & haribos! Then I made a mad dash to get my bag and medals before heading back to the finish where Andrea had also crossed the line.

By the time we found everyone again and claimed our free pints of beer (token is provided on your run number) we had a mad dash for the hotel to get showered and changed before getting to the restaurant for tea. Mad dash it was with a 20 min walk in each direction to the hotel and back with only 50 mins until we needed to be there, but we made it just about and the cocktails were even better as we had all definitely earned them. Some of the crazy crew had also ran the mile race while we were still out on course after having ran the half marathon. After Jo had completed her volunteering duties she had also ran the mile and amazingly after her run the day before managed a 1 mile PB!!

A bunch of tired campers left the restaurant at around 9 and headed back to the hotel, a few sherbets later and we all were happy to turn in for the night!

Trains were booked to head home at 10.25 Monday so off we headed for a hearty breakfast before getting on the train home. The journey back was much less eventful thanks to Paul our very own #TeamBlyth driver!

Having clocked up about 20 walking miles each over the weekend as well as the distances we had all ran we were all pleased to get home and put our feet up that night and to reflect on what an awesome weekend we had had. In fact we've reflected that it was so good that we've already booked our hotels and races for next year - Early bird price tickets have now been released for anyone who fancies joining us.

Liverpool see you next year.

Lesley