

Coast and Castles Challenge 2021 – Run Report by Julie Lemin

Following on from the success of last year's Summer Endurance Challenge, Claire decided to organise another adventure, this time taking in the coast, countryside and castles of Northumberland. Alongside Dave Bradley, Claire came up with a scenic route, creating the Coast and Castles Challenge for 2021 and with the help of Ann Craddock, Ewa Johnson, Joanne Stobbart and Sue Browning who recced some of the route with Claire, and Leanne Heron who recced some on her own, they provided us with valuable notes to follow when the route became tricky.

Roll forward to 16th October 2021 and nine intrepid adventurers lead by Claire, set out on the epic journey around Northumberland, they included Gwen Forster, Steven Jones, Peter Holmbach, Lesley Falkous, Andrea Wilson, Dawn Martin, Heather Barras and myself.

We met in the car park at Spirelli's in Amble on a dark and cool morning at 6.30am, after a quick briefing we set off around 7am wearing headtorches and armed with backpacks full of provisions, maps and all the essentials required for a 40-mile run/walk. We headed north passing Warkworth Castle, crossing the river Coquet and following the coast towards Alnmouth, the views across the North Sea were stunning as the sun had risen and was shining brightly through the clouds casting rays of dappled light onto the sea, although the temperature remained cool. We then made our way to Boulmer.

Although we had a slightly delayed start we arrived at Boulmer right on time to see Ewa pulling up with a boot full of goodies and flasks of hot tea and coffee which we were all very grateful for. This was the first of our scheduled rest and replenish stops (10 miles in) where we made use of the toilet facilities, and topped up our water supplies before heading off again.

We headed further up the coast with views of Dunstanburgh castle in the distance before baring left towards Longhaughton and onwards to Alnwick, passing the Castle and being shot at as we went through the grounds (some form of shooting practice was taking place from the castle and not because we were trespassing) once past the castle we followed the walls of Hulne park only managing to go awry once 😊. The next part of our journey brought us up to Cloudy Craggs and the MOD golf ball, this was the highest point on our route with an elevation of 808ft, this was a particularly difficult part of the route due to being up a steep grassy bank but the top marked our half way point and gave us some lovely views.

It was at this point on our journey that Lesley felt unable to continue due to an ongoing injury and she made the decision to withdraw at this point as she didn't want to hold anyone back. After David had collected her we carried on down the crag passing a striking sandstone arch, then on to our second rest stop at 22 miles, where Ewa was once again waiting for us with more tea, coffee and goodies.

After our stop we set off and the route continued mainly downhill with a few small lumpy bits, over fields and farmer tracks, heading towards Newton on the Moor at around 29 miles, where we were met by a fresh-looking Lesley, David and Moff. This time we had ginger cake and chocolate crispies made by Steven, and Lesley's home-made fudge to go with our tea and coffee, Moff had brought a camping stove to make us hot drinks, and again this was much appreciated. After a quick sock change and a freshen up we had a decision to make.....did we want to continue on through the fields or go by road? The road would make the route shorter by a mile or so but would mean that we should be back before the light faded. We all agreed that keeping to the fields would be more enjoyable and off we set!! My dry socks didn't last long!

During this part of the route it was noted that this was the furthest some had ever travelled on foot so we ran where we could and walked when we had to, there were sections of the route where it was impossible to run with any speed due to the surface, mud and water, there was lots running involved which may have been quite a surprise due to the distance we were covering, but it's amazing what you can actually achieve with the support and encouragement of like-minded people.

Heading down the hill in Felton at 35 miles, we made one final pit stop, where we topped up on tea, coffee, water and pain killers, supplied again by our amazing crew, it was just what we needed.

This was Andreas turf and it was good to be able to refer to her knowledge of the area and she was able to give us accurate information regarding the distance left to go and which path to follow.

We set off on our final push to the end. As we approached the main street in Amble the pace quickened until it was an all-out sprint to the car park and finish. Reaching the finish at around 6.30pm Claire handed out our medals and we stopped for a few photos and some of Gwen's pizza rolls, then for some it was off to the Cock and Bull for a celebratory drink, while the rest made way home.

The overall terrain was off road, along country tracks and trails, with some muddy sections, we past though fields of cattle and cabbages, crossing brooks and though some slightly overgrown and boggy areas, with one early section on the beach, this made the route so much more challenging and also interesting, I thoroughly enjoyed avoiding the roads. The journey was punctuated by chatter, lots of words or encouragement, including being reminded to drink and eat and to also '*Enjoy the free energy!!*' (ask Gwen), we sang and exchanged some 'grate' cheese jokes. It gave us a lovely opportunity to get to know each other better. We completed the challenge remaining as a loose group but always regrouping and making sure everyone was ok.

Thanks go to Ewa Johnston, Robert 'Moff' Wilson, David and Lesley Falkous for their unwavering support on route, supplying us with hot tea and coffee, cakes (Steven Jones), Fudge (Lesley Falkous), crisps, Haribo, nuts, coke and water amongst other

things, pizza rolls at the end (Gwen) and also to Dave Bradley for his help with the route, Leanne, Anne, Joanne, Ewa and Sue for their recce, and mostly to Claire the brain child behind it all.

I look forward to what adventure awaits us next year!!!