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Issue 356



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Editorial

The Green Belt Relay is one of the biggest and best things the Stragglers are involved in. The latter is subjective, however the feedback from both within and outside the club is fantastic and we as a club gain so much to our reputation as a result. When we announced we were taking on full control of Cabbage Patch 10, we saw social media posts along the lines of, 'these guys do Green Belt Relay (and Wedding Day) so this is a great move'.

To say this is the biggest thing we do is not up for dispute, and the truth is, many of us don't even see or know the half of it. This issue of Stragmag is much longer than many, and is largely given over to reflecting on an event which goes from strength to strength.

I've included my own write up of how our three Straggler teams performed, plus two articles from Race Director Peter Kennedy – one is a much functional, factual record of the 2019 event, the other an insight into life on the road in the lead car as the travelling circus that is GBR, rolls around the edge of London.

Elsewhere in this issue we've had Stragglers at the London and Birmingham 10k races, our latest mob match with Wimbledon Windmilers and Oli Bowers wins the London to Brighton 100km!

Thank you to all contributors and to Dave Griffiths for his proof-reading and photo inserting skills.

Deadline for the June issue is Wednesday 26th June.

Simon Webb

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Stragglers News



Following two tough legs in the Green Belt Relay, one week later Oli Bowers won the 100km London to Brighton run (May 25th) in a new course record time of 9hrs 11mins. From Stragglers coach Kev Best: “I know Oli has been training hard for this over several months putting in mileage that doesn’t bear thinking about. This is a fantastic achievement for Oli and for the club.”

Meanwhile Liz Killip, selected to represent England in the Simplyhealth Great Birmingham 10k on Sunday 26th May, finished 3rd in her age category 55-60. Her time of 42:16 saw her 2nd scorer for the victorious England team. Liz was 165th finisher overall and 37th female.



Around 100 members still need to renew their subs. We won’t list them all in Stragmag just yet, but this is a gentle reminder that we would like you to head to log into your account on the Stragglers website and pay for 2019/2020.

While many of us were focused on the Green Belt Relay, another hugely popular Stragglers event, the Wedding Day 7k sold out. This must be in record time? If you’ve missed out and would still like to be involved, Simon Brazil will be organising marshals, so please volunteer at simonbrazil@hotmail.co.uk.



Call for Committee Members and AGM Reminder

At the club's Annual General Meeting on 18 July, we will be electing next year's club committee. The success of our club relies on the enthusiasm and support of many of our members, and one of the key ways to support the club is by participating on the committee. We meet every six weeks in an informal setting and keep in touch by email and you don't have to be a fast runner to take on a committee role!

This year, we will be appointing a new club secretary and would be particularly pleased to hear from members who might be interested in taking on this role. However, there are various committee roles and responsibilities to suit a wide range of interests and experience. If you would like to know more about the club's committee, please email Kevin on chair@stragglers.org or speak to any committee member.

The 2019 Stragglers AGM takes place on Thursday July 18th at the Hawker Centre, 9pm, where we will also present the annual club contribution award.

Kevin Price, Stragglers Chair



Vets Victorious as 23rd Green Belt Relay Another Huge Success

Heidi Russenberger, in her debut event, brought the baton home for our ladies' team to give Stragglers a spot on the stage winners list in 2019. From Walton Bridge to the Hawker Centre may appear one of the more straight-forward legs, but many teams put fast runners out hoping for glory in front of the largest finishing crowd of the weekend. We of course did this too, with another first-timer Charlie Jeffrey the first Straggler home and Martin Vivian completing the victorious Vets teams circuit of the 220-mile GBR course.

Taking on the task of managing our Green Belt Relay teams was a daunting task for several reasons, not least the standard set in 2018 by previous captains Helen and Malcolm Davies who secured a second-place finish for both vets and ladies. So, to go one better and win a prize last held by Stragglers in 1996, is massively pleasing. Coming into the weekend I knew we had a competitive team in this category, but with the consistently strong London Front Runners amongst the opposition, the destination of the 'walking stick' was never a certainty. It almost seems unfair to pick out individuals in a title-winning team, but a few of note include Crispin Allen with his V50 record on stage 13 (he finished 4th and 6th over the weekend), Kevin Price another V50 record-breaker on 20, Richard Carter's 10th place on the 13.3 mile Lullingstone to Tatsfield stage, and Dean Morley's 5th and 6th places on stages 2 and 15. Mention too for Mark Pattinson who ran a strong stage 11 after marking parts of the course earlier in the day.

Heidi's win on day 2 completed an excellent debut as she was first Straggler on stage 4 (Little Marlow to Great Kingshill), one of three 'grade 10' legs. Twice more over the weekend our women would secure top spot among Stragglers, with Sophie Biggs holding off the charging Charlie on stage 6, and Eliza Hawthorn running strong on stage 12 – the first on day 2 with its 8 am start a tougher challenge than might seem.

It was a great weekend for debutants, eight out of thirty-three runners: Sophie Biggs, Pete Gregorowski, Eliza Hawthorn, Brigid Hibberd, Charlie Jeffrey, Tom Poole, Heidi Russenberger and Becky Thurtell all making a valuable contribution to the teams they represented. Pete's double 4th one of the many stand out performances of the weekend! A mention is due also for Tom Poole

who was only 6 minutes behind Richard Carter on 'Lullingstone' in his debut GBR, and who didn't have a half marathon PB when he was allocated this stage.

Going one place better than Pete was Oli Bowers, who secured third on stage 5 (Great Kingshill to Chipperfield), a 13.3 mile grade 10. He followed this up by running stage 18 (Merstham to Burford Bridge) including the climb up Box Hill. A tough double as many tell me this should be added to the 'grade 10' list, so also an excellent effort here by Malcolm Davies to come in 12th and Clare Graham who had one of the longer stages on day 1. As well as Oli, huge credit to Gareth Pritchard and Helen Davies, who both ran grade 10 stages on the first day, and took on the deceptively tough stage 17 (Tatsfield to Merstham) on day 2.

A record 52 teams lined up for Green Belt Relay in 2019. Our Vets victory saw them finish 7th overall. The men came in 13th and the ladies 30th, and on paper, second in this category. The one disappointment of the weekend was their ineligibility for the runner-up prize, as the GBR rules state only teams who complete the course can qualify. It's a reminder of the fragility of this race and the magnitude of the achievement of merely getting round. The fact our injured runner was Maddie Garner, who along with Kevin Price have been my support team in the organising this year, was extra disappointing. We're already thinking about what we might do to lessen this risk in 2020.

The 2019 Stragglers Green Belt Relay teams were:-

Vets (winners): Crispin Allen, Richard Carter, Malcolm Davies, Jim Desmond, Pete Gregorowski, Andrew Lane, Dean Morley, Mark Pattinson, Kevin Price, Gareth Pritchard, Martin Vivian.



Ladies: Sophie Biggs, Helen Davies, Maddie Garner, Clare Graham, Sue Hall, Eliza Hawthorn, Brigid Hibberd, Mary Hyde, Carys Mills, Heidi Russenberger, Becky Thurtell.



Men: Richard Baggott, Allan Barrie, Oli Bowers, Neil Carrington, Phil Davies, Charlie Jeffrey, Richard Patient, Stephen Penpraze, Tom Poole, Simon Webb, Fraser Wiggley.

Guide runners for Simon Webb were Simon Brazil and Dan Greenslade.

Some other highlights/recognitions:

As well as several first timers, we saw some noteworthy returns this year. Allan Barrie's results service is a fantastic piece of work, but in recent years it has seen him flat-bound and on the end of a phone. Innovation in 2019 saw clubs sharing some of the work, allowing Allan to run, and take the lead off stage from Hampton Court for our men's team. We also welcomed back to Straggler colours Andrew Lane, who first ran GBR in 1998 but who now lives in Norfolk and is a second-claimer. I gave Andrew our share of the results processing, which from where the rest of us were standing appeared to go extremely smoothly.

Credit too to the runners on stages 9, 10 and 11 (Andrew, Eliza, Tom, Malcolm, Stephen, Maddie, Mark, Becky and Richard) who ran in, or on courses, affected by heavy rain. Also to Phil Davies, who came into the team during the middle of last week. There are certain

runners we can rely on to be dropped onto any part of the GBR course and they will know what they're doing and where they're going, and Phil is one of them.

The Green Belt Relay is a special event. It requires effort, commitment and a willingness to step outside your comfort zone. It's also hugely rewarding, especially so from the position of team organiser. I've asked a lot of people, and everyone has played their part. Runners, drivers, marshals, water stations and a supportive environment, you've all played your part in another great display of Straggler team work.

I was pleased with the numbers who stayed Saturday night in Chelmsford. This will always feel a bit of a rush, but I hope it provides an opportunity for people to get to know one another – I wish we had longer and each year wish we could recklessly stay out all night in some sticky carpet Essex nightclub. The WhatsApp group has been a good addition this year, I especially enjoyed Malcolm Davies' enthusiasm to take photos of anything and everything, once Maddie had shown him how to actually use it! It also allowed us to quickly tell the whole team that club Chair and GBR team co-organiser Kevin Price had arrived for stage 5 – one of the toughies – without his running shoes. Memories of Oli Bowers running up Drovers in Malcolm's shorts came back as Kevin headed off to Chipperfield in my shoes half a size too small.

Both inside and outside the Stragglers, GBR shows us in the best possible light. Peter and Alex, who many of you won't know, do a sensational job staging this event, and they seem to raise the bar each year. See the GBR website www.greenbeltrelay.org.uk for Peter's report, which gives you an idea of the scale of the task and the amount of people who need recognition.

My final thanks are to Kevin and Maddie. I'd have been out of my depth taking this on by myself! Their support was exactly what I needed, with many emails, phone calls and a few pub sessions to turn this into reality – the brewers of Amstel did especially well out of GBR this year. And, to the Chemical Brothers, Vampire Weekend, Jaws and Catfish and the Bottlemen, whose new albums have soundtracked many an email, spreadsheet re-write, and this report.

I've had some wonderful feedback, and wanted to share some of it here:

“It was my first GBR at a tender age and you know Simon how anxious I was with regards to the distances and navigation. It was totally out of my comfort zone but I was so thrilled with how it went and came away feeling a little bit taller than when I went in. A running club that can have that effect on you is surely one to be treasured.” Brigid

“The organisation of this event is mind-blowing. I loved the WhatsApp this year - really felt like we were in a big team.” Sue

“I hadn't been at GBR since 2011 and it is better than ever. Really nice to meet lots of you for the first time.” Andrew

“I've been involved with GBR since the start, and I would say this was the best one yet. Yes, the weather was kind (on most stages ☐), but Peter's organisation gets ever more phenomenal, and the way that Allan/Evan have developed online results & comms gives a hugely enriched experience to all.” Jim

Date for 2020 to be confirmed, but it's usually the third weekend in May.

Written by Simon Webb, Stragglers GBR team captain.



Stragglers Defeated in Mob Match away at Windmilers

The latest in the mob-match 'rivalries' to be introduced is with the Wimbledon Windmilers. On Saturday 25th May, Wimbledon Common parkrun hosted this new event in our Summer Grand Prix calendar.



67 Windmilers lined up with 51 Stragglers, meaning a scoring match of 51 per side. Based on actual finishing position, Windmilers won with 2,350 points to Stragglers 2,941

Based on Age Graded %, Windmilers also won, with 2,138 points to Stragglers 3,031 points. Stragglers had the top 3 age grade performances – Sophie Biggs (81.54),

Roy Reeder (81.05) and Dean Morley (80.53) - and 6 out of the top 10 – Rowena Stent (79.73), Malcolm Davies (78.38) and Julie Haworth (77.52).

First over the line from either club was Jim Lurkins of Stragglers in second place (17:16).

Our attendance boosted the overall turn out to 649, the second highest in its history (parkrun fact, this event was founded by Straggler Jim Desmond as the second event after Bushy).

We may appear in the latest episode of 'Free, Weekly Timed' the parkrun podcast, as presenters Vassos Alexanda and Louise Ayling were recording part of the programme from Wimbledon this week.

Next up in the Summer Grand Prix is the Ranelagh Richmond 10k on Sunday 16th June.



Green Belt Relay 18-19 May 2019: Race Director's Report

We had a record 52 teams for the 23rd GBR, very fast conditions, record-breaking competition at the fast end, plenty of new runners and lots of old friends. These are some notes about the race itself, then the organisation.

1. THE RACE

Thames Hare & Hounds mixed team broke the 9-year streak by Serpentine in the overall race, with some major course records beaten along the way. Serpentine Ladies continued their dominance in their event, and generally the awarding of second-placed team prizes has reinvigorated competition in the category races.

Prizes

"The Green Belt" - overall winners	Thames Hare & Hounds
"The Pewter Plate" - 1st Women's Team	Serpentine
"The Davis Cup" - 1st Men's Team	Serpentine
"The Lynda Shield" - 1st Mixed Team	Thames Hare & Hounds
"The Walking Stick" - 1st Veterans' Team	Stragglers
2nd Women's Team	Clapham Pioneers
2nd Men's Team	Ranelagh
2nd Mixed Team	London Front Runners
2nd Veterans' Team	London Front Runners
The Toilet Seat	St Neots Riverside

The following titles weren't awarded on the day but have subsequently been assigned:

- Queens of the Mountains: Serpentine (Sarah Pemberton, Natasha Sheel, Ahlem Ben Gueblia, Nicola Kaye)
- Kings of the Mountains: Thames H&H (Paddy Roddy, James Hoad, James Hoad, James McMullan)
- Mark Critchlow award: tbc (James Hoad? Interested in team captain nominations)
- Sonia O'Sullivan award: tbc (Rebekah Edgar? Interested in team captain nominations)

Stage winners

Serpentine have now won a total of 242 GBR stages - 107 men, and 135 women. Next is Ranelagh with 98, Dulwich with 69, Chasers also with 69 and Stragglers with 63. Hugh Torry added yet another win to his all-time lead with 16 wins in total going back to 2007.

Stage winners were as follows:

Stage	Distance	Men	Club	Time
1	12.7	Kitching, Matt	Queens Park Harriers	01:14:51
2	9.42	Wright, Chris	Serpentine	00:55:18
3	11.2	Altmann, Nick	Thames Hare & Hounds	01:06:25
4	11.5	Roddy, Paddy	Thames Hare & Hounds	01:07:28
5	13.5	Hoad, James	Thames Hare & Hounds	01:16:02
6	8.4	Smith, Jonathan	Ranelagh Harriers	00:52:08
7	11.6	Ollington, Richard	Thames Hare & Hounds	01:02:21
8	10.7	McMullan, James	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:58:02
9	10.2	Jones, Matthew	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:58:23
10	9	Pearce, Gordon	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:54:25
11	7.5	Brandie, Gavin	Clapham Chasers	00:46:40
12	10.75	Jones, Matthew	Thames Hare & Hounds	01:02:48
13	6.6	Hughes, Glenn	Serpentine	00:35:38
14	8.2	Torry, Hugh	Serpentine	00:49:18
15	9.4	Ollington, Richard	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:53:17
16	13.1	Hoad, James	Thames Hare & Hounds	01:15:48
17	10.5	Roddy, Paddy	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:55:08
18	9.7	McMullan, James	Thames Hare & Hounds	01:01:53
19	8.4	Pearce, Gordon	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:53:02
20	6	Wright, Chris	Serpentine	00:31:07
21	8.4	Brotchie, Jack	Stock Exchange AC	00:46:41
22	9.15	Baines, Simon	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:49:38

Stage	Distance	Women	Club	Time
1	12.7	Crawford, Victoria	Serpentine	01:26:58
2	9.42	Bushell, Jenny	Ealing Eagles	01:05:02
3	11.2	Blazey, Laura	Ranelagh Harriers	01:22:35
4	11.5	Pemberton, Sarah	Serpentine	01:25:06
5	13.5	Hannon, Felicity	Clapham Chasers	01:34:39
6	8.4	Edgar, Rebekah	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:55:29

7	11.6	Harvey, Rose	Clapham Chasers	01:14:05
8	10.7	Baird, Jen	London Front Runners	01:09:24
9	10.2	Whiley, Alice	Clapham Chasers	01:06:18
10	9	Pickup, Andrea	Dulwich Runners	01:07:18
11	7.5	Roberts, Megan	Serpentine	00:52:21
12	10.75	Pemberton, Sarah	Serpentine	01:12:47
13	6.6	Hedgthorn, Katy	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:44:09
14	8.2	Crawford, Victoria	Serpentine	00:55:10
15	9.4	Baird, Jen	London Front Runners	01:05:45
16	13.1	Hannon, Felicity	Clapham Chasers	01:43:50
17	10.5	Whiley, Alice	Clapham Chasers	01:09:13
18	9.7	Gibson, Melissah	Ealing Eagles	01:15:39
19	8.4	Roberts, Megan	Serpentine	01:02:00
20	6	Sheel, Natasha	Serpentine	00:37:02
21	8.4	Edgar, Rebekah	Thames Hare & Hounds	00:54:10
22	9.15	Russenberger, Heidi	Stragglers	01:04:18

Course records

Fast conditions and keen competition saw plenty of records falling, including records which have stood for decades. Apologies to runners on stage 4 but we haven't awarded records due to the shortened course. For runners on stages 15, 18 and 19, your times are recorded as starting records for the new routes. Apologies as ever for mucking around with courses, as I realise people take the records seriously.

Well done especially to Chris Wright and Andrea Pickup broke course records on both their stages, and although it was a new course, well done to Melissah Gibson (Ealing) and Steve Ramek (26.2) for beating stage records on the new course of stage 18 despite it being a mile longer.

So, records set this weekend were as follows:

Time	Runner/club	Stage	Category
00:55:36	Chris Wright - Serpentine	2	Overall (men)

01:07:21	Jess Smith - Bearcats	2	V35 Women
01:22:35	Laura Blazey - Ranelagh	3	V35 Women
01:17:30	Will Parry - LFR	3	V50 Men
01:31:45	David Dixon - BA	5	V50 Men
01:26:57	Jacky Balfour - Misfits	7	V45 Women
01:02:21	Richard Ollington - THH	7	Overall (men)
01:14:05	Rose Harvey - Chasers	7	Overall (women)
00:58:02	James McMullan - THH	8	Overall (men)
01:05:13	David Symons - THH	9	V50 Men
00:58:23	Matt Jones - THH	9	Overall (men) & V40
00:54:25	Gordon Pearce - THH	10	Overall (men)
01:07:18	Andrea Pickup - Dulwich	10, 20	V45 Women
00:40:05	Crispin Allen – Stragglers	13	V50 Men
00:35:38	Glenn Hughes - Serpentine	13	Overall (men)
00:39:42	Graham Sutherland - Chasers	13	V40 Men
00:49:18	Hugh Torry – Serpentine	14	V40 Men
01:15:48	James Hoad – THH	16	Overall (men)
00:55:08	Paddy Roddy – THH	17	Overall (men)
00:31:07	Chris Wright – Serpentine	20	Overall (men)
00:40:01	Andrea Pickup – Dulwich	20	V45 Women
00:40:18	Kevin Price – Stragglers	20	V50 Men
00:37:02	Natasha Sheel - Serp	20	Overall (women)
00:46:41	Jack Brotchie - Stock Exchange	21	Overall (men)
00:54:10	Rebekah Edgar - THH	21	Overall (women)
00:49:38	Simon Baines - THH)	22	V40 Men

(One of the V35s pointed out to me at the finish that she's not quite 35 – please remind me!)

2. ORGANISATION

Route: We made route changes to stage 15 and to the 18/19 changeover on Box Hill; both of these were successful. A change to stage 4 was forced on us by a closed pathway and will revert to the old course next year (which gives runners longer to cross Cressex

Road – the new route forced a motorist to brake hard when the leader came through).

We also need to make a last-minute diversion to stage 11 due to impassable crops and this worked very well – thanks for 26.2 and also Serpentine for stepping in there, and to course marker Chrissie Glew for raising the alarm.

We still have a few typos or wayward pointers on maps (12, 17). Arggh. Sorry.

Marshalling and safety: Organisationally we made some changes to how we check marshals, but this was hampered by one lead car needing to step in and help with timekeeping after an unfortunate Friday night dropout.

As a general point, most teams need to get sharper at telling us (via WhatsApp) when they are in position, and especially if they think they are running late. We can cover if we know about it. We will change the WhatsApp so that results are separate from marshalling. Marshalling was mostly very good although too last-minute in some cases, perhaps because of the much faster conditions and level of competition. We need to build in a little more time in those plans because it's the first 5 or 6 runners who are the ones who really need assertive marshalling.

I missed one off the plan too which we covered on the day (stage 2 in Datchet).

On stage 7, one team missed water stops for lead runners in Hatfield due to traffic delays and even the final one was initially placed on the wrong side of the road. This is a long stage and those are mandatory – I need to change our marking approach on 7 so that I am able to cover any problems, as there's always a high risk of traffic in St Albans. Marshals on critical road crossings on stage 13 were missing too but we were able to cover with help from Chasers – thanks.

There are a few marshal instructions that are wrong or not clear enough (well done to Beckenham for realising that on stage 5), and the instructions for water provision need updating – finish stations especially need 6 or 7 big bottles.

Medics: There were no major injuries to report, with the medics kept busy with cuts and grazes. An injury on the Alban Way was a useful and successful test of our process to get to runners in long sections away from the road.

Course marking was successful – need feedback from team captains (and I remain astonished at how runners can go wrong on the simplest and most clearly marked routes, especially stage 1).

The key off-road sections which I really can't do during the weekend are now well covered by Chrissie (end of 10, 11, 13, 19), Mark (4, start of 10), Tom (5, 16, 17), and David (3, 9, start of 14). David also does the on-road marking on 16, 17, 20 and 21, and Alan does Hertford town centre. The critical woods sections on 7 were completed with 30 seconds to spare and need marking ahead (I need to train someone up here), and the North Downs Way section of 18 needs filling (I did it on Friday but it would be less risky to do it on the day). Some markings were tampered with on 18 by residents on The Coombe, and generally we need to avoid putting arrows on residential roads if marshals can direct runners instead.

Timekeeping: good reliable timekeeping by all teams, despite needing to make last-minute changes. We asked teams to help enter results as they were recorded by timekeepers, which allowed our results team to have a much better weekend. This was OK but I needed to be clearer on instructions and it needs further work; we have a number of options for Parkrun-style technology to further improve this.

Team registration and results: Allan has made some changes to the online service which massively improved response times and allowed everyone to see what was going on. The reporting on stage records is great too. The only remaining nice-to-haves would be a report on stage winners (I forgot to read them out at the finish), and a report on the Queens and Kings of the Mountains.

Start and finish: Hampton Court was good as ever. The finish was also great and thanks to the Hawker Centre, and to Mark Mabin for setting up the finish funnel. Organisationally I always leave this very late to sort out.

Permissions: Alan Mawdsley secured all of our permissions, yet we had plenty of changeovers where gates were locked or staff were

hostile, in particular Little Marlow, Thorndon Park, Davy Down, and Lullingstone. Permissions agreed with managers of locations rarely seem to filter through to the people working there. We will write to each of these and agree an approach.

We had a complaint from someone on Blackmore Parish Council who said we should ask them for help; when we contact them each year they never reply, but we will try again.

Financially, we should have a surplus of several thousand pounds to give to Marie Curie and we have sufficient reserves to cover a race cancellation, and should aim to keep at that level.

Thanks to

- Timekeepers Pat and Alan Short, Merran and Jim Sell, Bob and Jane Wheller, Andrew Wallace, Norma Morris, David Griffiths, Roy Reeder, Mike Mabin, Keith Haworth, Sue Waters and Alan and Liz Pemberton.
- Course markers Tom Reay, Alan and Liz Pemberton, Chrissie Glew, David Clarke, Mark Pattinson, Rob Teer and the Thurrock Nomads.
- First aid drivers Kevin Walker and Ollie Walker, and to first aiders Terry and Liam from Event Medical Solutions
- Alan Mawdsley for doing all the permissions and course prep, Allan Barrie for the results service, Evan Bond for the graphics, Roy Reeder for t-shirt procurement
- David Clarke CBE, our race adjudicator, who also marked and marshalled a lot of the course
- All team captains and teams for the massive amount of marshalling and water stations, and to local volunteer John Nall from Cheshunt for the water station on stage 9.
- Pat Short, who books and arranges the finish area and barbecue, and Mike Mabin who sets up the finish funnel.
- Co-race director Alex Cutting, who runs our finances, entries, all sorts of logistics, and drives the race control car.

Peter Kennedy



GBR 2019 – Behind the Scenes: The 2019 Green Belt Relay from lead car no. 1



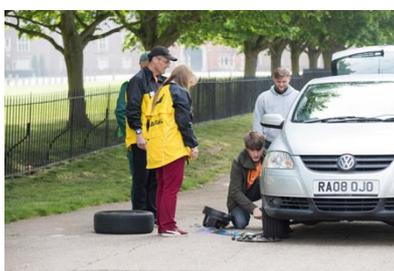
Saturday 7:30. Start: We arrive at Hampton Court. It's quiet and empty – a couple of eights on the river and one or two dog walkers. After the months of preparation (mainly by Alex, who has been dealing with entries, t-shirt orders, hotel bookings etc.) and a week of course marking it's funny to be here in the calm. The medics are already there and the timekeepers Keith and Mike arrive soon, as do Alan and Liz Pemberton in their gorgeous MG. Paul Clarke turns up with his motorbike ready to take pictures of some of the stages – it's hard to capture the sheer scale, fun and furious pace of the GBR and if anyone can, it's Paul.



Yesterday evening I was feeling fairly relaxed, as for once I've had time to do most of my course marking beforehand (been on the road for 5 straight days this week, not the usual 2-day slog) and I've got Alan and Liz to help check the marshals, so it should be easier than usual, shouldn't it? But then late last night poor Roy had to pull out

of the timekeeping team for a family emergency and we've had to reshuffle everyone, so it looks like it will be the usual relentless rush. We'll figure it out but we'll miss Roy.

The runners start arriving at about 8am. I recognise the team captains and some of the runners, and there's a growing buzz of excitement as everyone gets registered. We swap Google locations with the first aid drivers so that we can all see where we are in case of trouble, and Alex does a swift trade in Caution Runners boards, t-shirts and stuff. Then we're lining up and briefing the runners – Queen's Park get there at 8:28! – and we're off. The big cheers, the charge onto the bridge, then everyone's gone, just like that.



We, however, don't even make it across the start line. One of our first aid cars hits one of the bollards before it's fully down and punctures a tyre. The whole medical team are onto it like a Ferrari F1 pit team - within seconds they've worked out who does what, within minutes they've put the spare wheel on

and set off, and barely an hour later they've even managed to get the broken one fixed – impressed with the quick thinking and also the generosity of the tyre company in Staines (Universal Tyres).

Saturday 8:45. Stage 1: We stop at Walton Bridge barely ahead of the runners, where Ealing Eagles have got their water station set up and know what to do. We then pass Elmbridge's marshalling stop at 5.6 miles, then head up to Chertsey Bridge where Ranelagh's absurdly picturesque water station is getting set up. Quick chat and then we head to Staines, where we've got an awkward bit of illegal parking (Alex says it's not illegal if you leave it in gear...) to lay some sawdust to the final bit of towpath.



Saturday 9:42 – Stage 2: We indulge ourselves by staying to see the start of stage 2, where Queen's Park are marshalling the bridge and BearCat are the finish marshals for stage 1. We see the stage 1 leaders as we're heading back to the car, then off through Runnymede and a quick stop at Elmbridge's water station at 3 miles. I then realise I've missed a critical marshal point through Datchet, so we have to stop and do it ourselves – me guiding runners across a junction and Alex doing the water stop further down. That

was silly and now we're getting behind, while I'm also getting reports of trouble at the Little Marlow changeover, so am phoning them while also trying to marshal. I'm pretty sure Pioneers will be in place on Eton Bridge, and we'll just have to trust that 26.2 finish marshals and the timekeepers will be in Boveney because we won't have time to check. One runner is wheezing quite badly from all the pollen – Alex checks she's OK and calls ahead to the finish medics to check.



Elmbridge water station on stage 2

Saturday 10:37 – Stage 3: We miss the start on this and we also don't get a chance to see HWW, Serpentine or Ealing at their marshalling points because we have to get to Little Marlow – I've



been on the phone to the organisers to get the hell over there and open up. I'm grateful that David Clarke has stage 3 well in hand because that's a railway crossing that we absolutely must check. We get to Little Marlow where the gates are only open thanks to Stragglers' Phil Davies blocking them with traffic cones, but we've now got it open and

timekeepers Merran and Jim (stage 3) and Pat & Alan (stage 4) have the whole thing well in hand, along with finish line marshals Burgess Hill. Phew.

Saturday 11:50 – Stage 4: As usual 26.2 have set up their exemplary water station and road crossing at 3 miles – we stop to say hello, then we're off to Booker. Sue is in place for the changed section, then Serpentine get to their spot literally the second the lead runner gets there; I'm glad their other team have confirmed



they're in place at 4.7 miles because that's a must-have and we've run out of time to check. We don't need to check Dulwich or Thames's spots in West Wycombe because they've confirmed already, so we head to Downley to sawdust in front of the school barely a minute before the runners. British Airways are well set up at 10.3 miles, then we've got one tiny last bit to do – up the hill to Great Kingshill and need to put some sawdust showing the turn to the finish. Someone has already removed the arrow I'd put up just 3 days before so it's good we replaced it. A lightning quick hello to Pat and Alan at the finish line, and to marshals from Front Runners, then a drive around the cricket field to stage 5. One day we'll get time to see the cactus show here, but not today. We're remaining mostly calm here but Alex insists on me eating my packed lunch and drinking some Ribena before I start going wobbly.



Saturday 12:50 – Stage 5: Off past Team Bushy's road crossing down the road to the Stock Exchange's usual position at 2 miles – they're sitting with their sandwiches and greet us with a "cutting it a bit fine this year Peter!". I jump out and assemble my fold-up bike to mark the fields down to Little Missenden while Alex drives there.

This is always a brief moment of real fun – flying down the crest of the hill and chucking sawdust down. The Misfits are marshalling into Little Missenden and we have a quick chat before heading off again. We're just about in control now – off to Dulwich's stop at Shardeloes to put some sawdust to the path out of the cricket club, through Amersham old town to see Serpentine, then a quick check of the absolutely must-have road crossing, which Sandhurst have already got well in hand. The lead runner is going so fast that Clapham Chasers get to their crossing at 7.1 with little to spare and then we hit traffic, so now we're barely ahead of the runners – when we pass Queen's Park at Bell Lane we're about 5 seconds ahead.

Front Runners have got Latimer Farm well under control as have Clapham Runners in Flaunden, while Sue Waters and Beckenham have some quite long stints on the last bits of this mammoth stage. We find a Stragglers car which has lost its way and guide them into Chipperfield.

Saturday 14:04 – Stage 6. We drive straight through Chipperfield towards Kings Langley before I realise I haven't checked the Stragglers road crossing at half a mile – I get on the phone to Simon Webb and Simon Brazil who are walking down there and try to stay calm while it sounds like they're lost. They get there with a bit of help from a local cyclist and we're all set (and it's a bloody good job we helped them find Chipperfield in the first place).



Sandhurst and Burgess Hill are well on top of their usual crossings in Kings Langley, so then we're out into the country; Alex stops the car in Hartshall Lane and I just have time to draw a big chalk mark on the road pointing to a hidden path before another car comes along. Then we go to see Havering 90 at 4.7, which is one we've worried about because of runners' tendency to hurdle the barrier into the busy road; Denis is well on top of it as ever, as are Ranelagh at 6.1 and HWW at King Harry Lane. The finish marshal in St Albans is David from Kinapse who actually had to pull out of the event but has nevertheless turned up to help.

Saturday 14:55 – Stage 7. I don't know why, but marshals always miss the road crossing at 0.8 miles where the entire field suddenly hurtles across a quiet-ish road; we're there to cover it and it doesn't take long. Then the runners are on the Alban Way for a while and we're off to Hatfield. We get to the critical road crossing at 7 miles and we've got an agonising decision to make – do we carry on to mark the woods section at 8 miles, or do wait for Front Runners and risk the chaos of everyone getting lost in Commons Wood? We carry on to the woods. This Perfect



Storm then gets even tougher when we get a call from an injured runner on the Alban Way, which is a worst-case scenario for first aiders because it's hard to get to. I go off to mark the woods, and by the time Alex picks me up at the other end she's already been in

touch with the medics and they're sorting it out. We then get to BearCat's water station at 10 miles but it's on the wrong side of the road, so we help them cart it all over – well done to them for quick reactions because the lead runner comes through at least 4 minutes ahead of expected time. Then it's off to Letty Green where I'm just in time to high-five the winner as he crosses the line, with Ealing doing the finish line marshalling. Woo hoo! We made it through a tough bit.

Saturday 16:00 – Stage 8. Stages 8 and 9 are easier for us because there's little marking and David Clarke does most of it. So we've got time to breath, go to the toilet and soak up the atmosphere. We head off down the Lea Navigation – Ranelagh and Pioneers are marshalling in Hertford town centre, and Chasers at Amwell End, and all seem in control. Burgess Hill are doing the water station at 7.8 – this is a long stage without much respite and the water stations are essential. We stop to see the changeover at Dobbs Weir where Hillingdon are the finish marshals. It's a bit crowded but everyone seems happy. I'm just starting to dream about dinner when a WhatsApp message pops up from Chrissie, our Stage 10 and 11 course marker – she's had a terrible time getting through the crops on stage 11 and posts up a picture of her bike in the aftermath; we checked this a couple of weeks before but as Alex points out (in true farmer's daughter fashion) that stuff grows 2 inches every day. I've got a contingency plan in mind but we won't have much time. Arrggh!



Saturday 17:00 – Stage 9. We're down a little lane near Cheshunt meeting John Nall, a Straggler who lives there and who does our water station. I've never met him before so it's great to see his smartly organised towpath setup and get a quick photo – we rely on the kindness of so many people. Queen's Park are doing one further down the towpath and British Airways are marshalling around Enfield Lock – David has checked them and it's a horribly easy place to go badly wrong. We don't have time to check



Sandhurst's tough road crossing at 8 or Chasers spot at 9.8 but they've confirmed they're in place, so then it's up to High Beach in the depths of Epping Forest and The Misfits' finish marshal spot.

Saturday 18:00 – Stage 10. It's got really chilly at High Beach and is threatening to rain. Sue has stepped in to time-keep with David, freeing up Alan to help us marshal, and Alex is dishing out emergency supplies of flour to mark start/finish lines. This stage is so hard to follow it's actually been sawdusted twice in the past 24 hours by



me, Chrissie and Mark. Ealing's team are there to steer the field around the first couple of tricky turns. Frank's Clapham Runners are on top of the tough road crossing at 1.3, and Beckenham notify me early of theirs at 2.2, while Alan is helping Chasers at the must-have junction at 3.3, so we can get on. A quick check of Serpies in Epping, SEAC at 5.7 miles and Ranelagh at 6.3, then a drive-by check at Waverley's finish position in Toots Hill. I need to get to High Ongar and work out what the hell we're going to do about the crops, preferably before the runners get there.

Saturday 18:45 – Stage 11. Not too worried about Stragglers' marshal points early in the stage, and THH are in Chipping Ongar high street, so that's OK. We head to High Ongar where we go and have a look at the crops – for me it's very hard wading, but for Alex they're well above head height and it's just not an option to run through there. It's also giving me terrible hay fever. We jump in the car and drive down the road where I suspect there's an alternative path, but I don't know if there's an entrance; we get there and it's a usable bridleway, so Alex stays there while I cycle back to Ongar and brief the 26.2 marshals as fast as I can about the diversion. They respond really promptly – the stage is already underway at this point so there's really no time to lose. Serpentine are also supporting nearby and help us to warn runners. The runners arrive, we divert them (and provide water) up along the road, and Alex points them into the bridleway and back on track. It all works. Phew.

The final runner, Alison from Bearcat, comes through and I cycle with her towards Alex; when we get there I carry on with Alison while Alex heads off to the finish – we do the long field section, get to Burgess Hill's marshal point at Paslow Farm, head through the junkyard and down the fields into Blackmore, past the Stragglers' finishing points and we're done for the day. Alex is helping at the finish with timekeepers Bob and Jane, and everyone's bemused to see two runners cross the finish line from the opposite direction, but

other than it's all gone well. The finish marshal here is Stragglers legend Andrew Lane, the man who first told me about the GBR and the Stragglers (and indeed Parkrun) back in 2005. Thanks Andrew, I think!



Dinner in Brentwood – always a good chance to catch up

Sunday 8:00 – Stage 12. We've had dinner with the team in the Premier Inn Brentwood and a nice cooked breakfast and we're back on the road. I've finally had a chance to look at the day 1 results too and it looks like an upset is on the cards. No more time to think



about that because we're back in action. Team Bushy are in place at the Mountnessing Windmill before the race has even started, as usual, and I've asked Alan to do the road crossing at 5.5 miles. THH are also already in Hutton, so we slap a bit of sawdust around the church section (which is falling into neglect and will be changed

next year). 26.2 are also in place at 9.4 so we're getting ahead here but I'm getting reports of more changeover trouble in Thorndon Park - an irate parkie is upset with us. I go and find him - he's a typically direct Dutchman, and after a polite "goede morgen meneer, dank uw wel" we're best mates and have swapped email addresses. Phew. BearCat are in place at the finish to do the water, so we're off again.

Sunday 9:00 – Stage 13. Stragglers are there at the first road crossing so we head off, but can't see the marshals at 1.7. I'm worried because they're also supposed to be at 2.3 and both are

needed, so Alex heads there and enlists some passing Chasers to help. The runners pass through at 1.7 and I again find myself accompanying Alison from BearCat to find Alex. We've plugged a gap there but as a result we're a bit behind the race again. But we've got Alan and Liz today to help so it's easier, and Burgess Hill are in place for their one at 5.5. We haven't got time to see the timekeepers or The Misfits at the finish and it's straight into stage 14.



Sunday 9:40 – Stage 14. Team Bushy have the early stretch of Pike Lane sorted out, where runners charge out through a narrow gap in a hedge into a narrow road. Front Runners are on top of their road crossing at 2.3 and David Clarke is looking a bit bedraggled from having had to wrestle with some undergrowth marking through the nature reserve. We've got to get to 3.3 miles which Sue was going to marshal but now can't, having stepped into the timekeeping breach. We're doing that and suddenly I'm getting more reports of trouble at the next changeover – the gate into Davy Down is locked. Alan Mawdsley (our permissions guru) somehow seems to be following all this while being on holiday and sorts it out. We can trust Thurrock Nomads and Serpies for the rest of this stage because we really really need to get to Stage 15 and make sure that the new bits are covered. Over the QE2 bridge and barely 2 minutes ahead of the game – it's a good job the traffic is OK this year.



The Thurrock Nomads team and the Front Runners team with David Clarke on stage 14

Sunday 10:40 – Stage 15. Burgess Hill are there to guide around the first pavements, as are Stock Exchange at Pilgrim's Way, so we check in with Havering to triple-check that they're sending runners the opposite way from previously at 1 mile. Elmbridge are doing Powder Mill Lane but we need to get on because there's a pile of fly-



tipped gravel blocking the way at 2.4 miles and we want to guide runners over it. This is a lot easier because Thames are well on top of their new point at 2.6 miles, and ditto Ranelagh (and Alan and Liz) at 3.3. We've got a bit of time at last and it's loads of fun watching every runner climb over the

gravel. A quick check of Serpentine at 4.6 miles, then we do another bit of impromptu marshalling at Franks Lane. Ealing are doing a new water station on the long final section in Farningham, while Pioneers are at the finish in Lullingstone. We've got yet another irate park manager at Lullingstone to deal with – messages from management never seem to get through here. The timekeeper wants me to come and smooth it over but we just need to keep moving.

Sunday 11:30 – Stage 16. Alan and Liz have gone on to check the critical parts of this so we're feeling a bit more on top of the race here. We miss Dulwich and BearCat's early road crossings and see Front Runners guiding people through Otford, then BA around 4.8, and then a series of tough road crossings around 5.5 miles which Serpentine are marshalling with calm assertiveness. There's a call out for assistance from Queens Park at 7.5 who have run out of cups for their water stations - Alan deals with this one.



Sandhurst are at the 10.8 road crossing looking confident, as are Chasers marshalling the hills into Tatsfield. Stragglers are at the finish station with the timekeepers and making friends with the owner of the café there, who is doing an unexpectedly good day's business. We're getting desperately hungry at this point and are tempted by the café but we need to move on again.

Sunday 13:00 – Stage 17. Front Runners are at the tricky roundabout at 1.6; they're new to this one so we agree the approach. Beckenham are at the 3.2 mile water station, and Waverley are at



the 4.7 miles North Downs Way turn, where I've done some more chalkwork on the road. There's a long offroad section here and I'm yet again grateful to my marking team on these bits, Tom and Chrissie, because there's no way I'm in any fit state for another 2-mile steep run. We miss out Ranelagh's station at 7.6, Chasers' stop at 8.7 and

Ealing's finish station because they've told us they're OK, and we finally get a chance to grab some food and refuel the car. The finish is getting closer but there's still plenty to do.

Sunday 14:00 – Stage 18. I marked most of stage 18 on Friday, which I nearly left until race day and am glad I didn't because I'd have missed it – Alan is having to step in to time-keep again on this one so we're on our own, and we're also missing Sue (again to timekeeping) who was going to marshal the top of Box Hill – I've forgotten to change my planning here after the last minute changes on Friday night. We skip Clapham Runners and SHAEF Shifters' early marshal stops and get to the critical Pebblehill Road points run by Burgess Hill and Sandhurst; someone has tampered with the direction arrows here and I hope desperately it's just here and not on the remote bits of the North Downs Way – there's nothing I can do about that now. We call David Clarke and Tom Reay and they and Alex cobble together a water station and marshalling points along the top of the hill while I grab my bike and sawdust and mark the



route down it. I enjoy a few minutes of complete peace on the crest of Box Hill before the runners start coming down; Elmbridge are marshalling the new finish down in Burford Bridge and I follow Andy Wood of Hillingdon AC down to the finish. I've messed up a bit by

putting the finish in the wrong place - let's have it in the field next time. But the new changeover seems to work – it's all a bit cramped, and will be much more so on a sunny day, but it's nothing like the chaos of Box Hill.

Sunday 14:45 – Stage 19. Marshals from 26.2, HWW and Front Runners save me a lot of work by notifying me well in time, and Chrissie has done her usual awesome marking job this whole stage (and she's off on holiday later today!) so we don't have anything to do here. I usually enjoy the barmy West Hanger car park, a place so remote that its postcode seems to cover an area the size of Lancashire, but there's no time to go there this year.

Sunday 15:45 – Stage 20. We skip directly to stage 20, as I'm worried about the West Horsley road crossing and Alan is still timekeeping. Chasers are there and we talk through details, then we move on to the 26.2 spot at 4 miles where they have a big crowd



of helpers and a great water station and enjoy a few moments to watch the lead runners, including Kevin Price who is making a Stragglers win in the Veterans' category look like a

real possibility. We get to the finish line in time to see him finish and he got the V50 record too. Burgess Hill are there marshalling the finish. Alex finally gets to go to the loo (no time for that in the lead car!) and I get into a discussion with Pat about how exactly the marshals are supposed to enter results while the timekeepers are busy recording them – I've been way too vague in the instructions on this. The basic idea seems to be right, but it needs more work.

Sunday 16:30 – Stage 21. We never see much of the final two stages. Alan's gone to check the bits where runners briefly leave the Wey Navigation towpath to cross roads, and teams are getting good at telling us when they're in position. Front Runners have what I suspect must be the course's best marshal spot at The Anchor pub, while Pioneers, Ealing and Hillingdon have the others and Waverley are finishing at Walton Bridge. Alex and I are now turning our thoughts towards the finish – who's won what, what do we need to collect from people, prizes, and how do we get it all done without dragging on too much when everyone really just wants to get home. And how big a medal Alex should get for putting up with me getting tired and stressed and excited for two days straight...



Alex

Sunday 17:00 – Stage 22. Stragglers marshal this one – just need to get people over Hampton Court Bridge. When I ran this one in about 2008 my team’s minibus deliberately blocked traffic to allow me a clear run over the road, but these days we don’t allow such daftness. We get to the Hawker Centre where Allan is getting the last stages’ results in – the new system has allowed him a lot more time (and even time to compete in a Stragglers team) and allowed us all to resolve most mistakes as we go along. It’s pretty easy for me to figure out who’s won what and the captains’ meeting is quick – it’s done before the last runner is in and we get on to prizegiving fairly soon. Matt Jones is justifiably delighted with his THH team’s win – a record time achieved with a mixed team. Serpentine have ended their 9-year winning streak but they still picked up the men’s and ladies’ prizes. Stragglers did indeed win the Vets, with Ranelagh, Front Runners and Pioneers picking up second place prizes and race newcomers St Neots winning the famous Toilet Seat. Alex was the one who pushed us to get more category prizes and she was, as ever, quite right.

One of my final chats is with Simon Webb, captain of the Stragglers team. He’s had an amazing year so far – PBs in the marathon and Parkrun, and now a winning captain of the club’s GBR teams, and a very proactive race marshal too. He’s such an effortlessly funny, successful and talented man it’s easy to forget he’s also blind and partially deaf. How on earth does he do that? We’ll probably award the prize for outstanding athlete to Thames’s James Hoad, but if there was a prize for all round amazing brilliance it would go to Simon.

We head off, keen to get home – Alex’s daughter has more GCSEs tomorrow. My head is full of stuff; I write a thanks note and a summary of the results on Facebook and get a draft of the results up

on the website, then wake up at 4am in a panic convinced that I need to be at a stage finish in Essex. There are a few more days' work to clear up, correct results and take it all in, not to mention collecting all the stuff, packing everything up for next year and reuniting Clapham Pioneers and St Neots with their prizes.

So that was the 23rd Green Belt Relay as we saw it - this big, improbable, mad race of ours which means so much to so many people. It just keeps getting better and better thanks to the passion, camaraderie and brilliance of hundreds of people - when we've slept, washed and eaten, we'll be quite happy with it and figuring out what can be better next time.



Chasers doing some impromptu marshalling – that kind of camaraderie is what makes this race really work.

Peter Kennedy



Future Races

Below is a list of all fixtures the club will be taking part in across the summer, plus a few extra events you may like to enter. Fixtures which make up the Summer Grand Prix are indicated with SGP. This list also includes a reminder of all junior events as part of the Stragglers and Ranelagh Junior Running Group, referred to below as SRJRG.

June:

- Sunday 2: Dorking 10
- Thursday 6: SRJRG – Russel School Petersham
- Wed 12: Parkland Relay Richmond Park
- Sunday 16: Ranelagh Richmond 10k (SGP)
- Thursday 20: Stragglers Club 10k Championships (SGP) – Hawker Centre
- Sunday 23: Harry Hawkes 10 miles and Ditton 10k
- Tue 25: Imber Court Relay
- Thursday 27: SRJRG – Hawker Centre
- Saturday 29: Mob Match v Ranelagh (SGP) – Bushy parkrun

July:

- Sunday 7: Claygate Country 5 (SGP)
- Thursday 11: SRJRG - Ranelagh
- Sunday 21: Elmbridge 10k (SGP)
- Friday 26: Wedding Day 7k (SGP)

August:

- Sunday 11: Wimbledon 5k (SGP)
- Thursday 29: SRJRG – Hawker Centre

September:

- Sunday 8: Stragglers River Relay

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