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*Issue 358*



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## *Editorial*

As the Summer Grand Prix continues with three fixtures, we also reflect on our recent AGM including a review of the past twelve months from club chair Kevin Price.

Kevin is also behind the other main article this month, as he was the motivator behind four Stragglers completing the Three Peaks Challenge.

I'm writing this at the end of the hottest week of the year and in fact, the hottest ever in July, however with just one fixture remaining in the Summer Grand Prix, our next issue will give you the 2019/2020 winter calendar – come on, whilst sitting in beer gardens you've secretly been longer for the mud, rain and hills of the cross-country season.

Thank you to all contributors and to Dave Griffiths for doing his thing to make this look good.

August deadline is Thursday 24th.

Simon Webb

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# *Stragglers News*

The 2019/2020 committee was voted in at our recent AGM.

Kevin Price continues as Chair with Phil Hall Treasurer and Phil Davies Club Captain. They are joined by Simon Brazil Men's Team Manager, Kev Best Head Coach and Ladies' Team Manager, Donovan Duffy Men's Team Leadership Group and Helene Hill Ladies' Team Leadership Group. Alan Mawdsley remains our Web Manager, Julie Holmes Membership Secretary, Simon Webb Communications Manager and Anne Woods Little Feet Representative. We welcomed Andy Howarth and Brigid Hibberd to the team.

Standing down were Helen Davies Secretary, Maddie Garner Ladies' Team Leadership Group and Malcolm Davies (Men's and Ladies Veterans Captain) - massive thanks for your contributions, Helen and Malcolm are former captains who transformed the club under their leadership.

We are still keen to hear from anyone who would like to take on the role of secretary.

The AGM saw the presentation of the 2019 Club Contribution Award. This year's winner is a former committee member, for several years the editor of Stragmag, and a key part of the junior handicap team. He developed the timing system which is used by our junior running group throughout the summer. Congratulations Bert Smith.

We also recognised another member with a life membership – Phil Davies. Joining the Stragglers in 1986, he has been club captain for many years, the welcoming face on a Thursday evening, organiser of numerous teams and club trips, regular run leader and recently welfare officer too.

Congratulations to Jan Franks who recently won her age group at the World Qualifier Sprint Triathlon Championships in Cardiff. Jan has worked exceptionally hard these past two years to achieve this. She even did a cross country season this winter for the first time. She's off to Edmonton in Canada to represent GB next August.

The next 5k handicap will be on Thursday 24th August. After a popular trial using the Kingston parkrun course we will do this again, timings to be confirmed in Stragmail.

Finally, we'd like to apologise for any inconvenience over the coming Thursdays as the Hawker Centre have informed us they will not be providing food until early September. Please see Stragmail and our social media channels for news on when this is back on.



## *AGM: Chair's Reflections on Past Twelve Months and Key Points from Treasurers Report*

The main priorities over the past 12 months have been, firstly, to continue to promote our club philosophy, which is to:

- i – Encourage participation in our races and club events.
- ii – Promote camaraderie and the social side of the club.
- iii – Deliver high standard, well supported and enjoyable club races (Wedding Day 7k, Green Belt Relay, River Relay, Cabbage Patch 10 and our club championship races).

Also:

To maintain our level of club membership and appeal to new members from our community.

To build on the club's reputation both locally and nationally.

To continue to support and encourage the different constituent parts of our club and to celebrate them as a whole to reflect the breadth of interest and activities in the club.

To promote the calendar of team events and to strive for individual and club success in the various race categories.

We also planned to begin the job of documenting the history and heritage of the Club with the help of a Club Archivist (or maybe a statistician) to help share and celebrate the heritage of our club. Unfortunately, we have not made progress with this and I shall make a renewed effort to progress this in the coming year. If anybody is interested in getting involved in this project, I would be delighted to hear from you!

## **Membership:**

### **Clubbuzz/Re-registration Process**

- In the run up to the start of the new membership year, we conducted the member re-registration process in the Clubbuzz system for the second time. This involved asking members to check and update their personal information and confirm that they wished to renew their membership.
- The benefits of the re-registration process are that we now have more accurate/up-to-date information on our members which makes administration of the club simpler and helps ensure we are compliant with the now established government data protection regulations.
- We would like to thank our members for completing the process this year and would encourage and appreciate a positive/timely respond to this requirement on an annual basis.

### **Membership Numbers**

Our membership, although slightly down on this time last year remains at a healthy 507 registered members (472 Adults, 27 Juniors, 4 life members and 4 dogs). A contributory factor for the slight decrease from last year's figure of 537, is that we are actively chasing late payment of fees and terminating the membership of those who do not respond.

Some interesting stats on our membership make-up:

- only 15% of members are under 35
- 55% are 50 or over
- 58% are in the 35-60 age range, where we are most competitive as a club.

Breakdown by Membership Category:			Breakdown by Gender:			Breakdown by Age Band:		
	No	%		No	%		No	%
Adult First Claim	455	90	Female	211	42	Under 18	32	6
Adult Second Claim	17	3	Male	296	58	18-34	46	9
Junior First Claim	23	5				35-49	150	30
Junior Second Claim	4	1				50-59	143	28
Life Member	4	1				60-69	97	19
Dog	4	1				70-79	32	6
						Over 79	7	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>100</b>

We receive a steady stream of application enquiries and since the beginning of this membership year (1 April) have registered 21 new members.

### Payment of club/EA subscription fees

- Thanks to all members who have paid their fees for this year. We'd appreciate it if those who have yet to do so could make payment as soon as possible.
- One policy change to note from the past year is that we now encourage all members to include England Athletics membership as part of their annual membership renewal. Some clubs make this mandatory and we believe every athlete, no matter the level they participate at, should be encouraged to support our sport's national body which provides various benefits to the club. Please be advised that if you have requested EA registration this cannot be completed for you until you've paid your subs.
- Whilst on the subject, ideally we'd like members to pay by direct debit, as once set up it's easier all round.

### Website and Communications:

Stragmail remains the main club communications vehicle in its regular two-weekly newsletter. It goes out at 12pm sharp every other Wednesday. And I would like to thank Simon Webb and Andy Ronksley for their team effort on Stragmail. Stragmag remains a popular read for many of our members and we are using Social Media more and more to enhance our communications.

### Cabbage Patch 10

One significant development during the past 12-months has been the transition to the club of full race responsibility and organisation of the Cabbage Patch 10. We see this not only as a great opportunity for the club to preserve and develop this nationally recognised and locally loved classic road race, but it is also a great PR opportunity for the club and a brilliant way of giving back to our community. We

have assembled an experienced organising team with Peter Wedderburn taking on the race director role. The race will be run on 13 October and is already full with 2000 entries! As is traditional, we will be assembling an army of volunteer marshals from the club so that all Stragglers can be part of this great race so please do let Keith Haworth know if you can join us and help on the day.

### **Awards Evening**

And just a quick word about the new format Awards Evening which we held at The Park Hotel last September and received great feedback. The venue is keen to welcome us back and this year's Awards Evening will be held on 20 September again at The Park Hotel in Teddington, where we will be celebrating the past year's team and individual achievements across the club and having a fun evening in the process. Please watch Stragmail for further details about tickets.

And talking about social events, I would just like to mention our mob matches, not always won, but always with a great social element and we hope to continue our enjoyable Saturday mornings at the Tiltyard Café in Hampton Court whenever possible, facilitated by Sue and Phil Hall.

### **Overall:**

- Our club is thriving and offers something for all our members from a friendly social community to competitive racing at a national level
- We have a week-round programme of training and activity sessions and I would like to thank all our group leaders for their inspiration and leadership. This includes Anne Woods (Little Feet), Merran Sell (Thames Ditton Group and Junior Handicap), Barbara Crow (Stragtri), Ray and Sue Cockle (Stragglists), Ian Callendar (5k Handicap), Phil Davies and regularly supported by Mark Pattinson (Thursday night session), our Head Coach Kev Best who helps so many of us all year round with our training and never fails to show up at our Tuesday night speed session, regularly supported by Helene Hill, and all our run leaders who happily support training sessions week in and week out;
- I would also like to thank those who manage our high-profile club races: Peter Wedderburn (River Relay), Peter Kennedy (GBR) and Keith Haworth, Mark Thomas, Linda Pyle (Wedding Day). Also

Simon Brazil who is active and busy behind the scenes for most of the club races, including the Club 10k;

- We have two people acting behind the scenes in what most people would regard as permanent part-time jobs, but these of course are unpaid: Alan Mawdsley our web manager and Julie Holmes our Membership secretary who keep the wheels of our club constantly turning;
- I would also like to thank Helen Davies who has served as an excellent club secretary over the past year and supported many of this season's races And also Malcolm Davies who has acted as our Vets and Master's captain over the past year. Malcolm, as some of you will know, has been elected as the Honorary Secretary of the men's Surrey XC League and we wish him every success with that role, and encourage him to fly the flag for the Stragglers at the county level.
- Finally, I would like to thank Kev Best and Simon Brazil, our Team Captains for their amazing leadership of our teams over the past year, supported by their leadership teams.

Kevin Price, Club Chair



## *Treasurers Overview*

Membership subscriptions remains our largest source of income. We raised £7,143 in 2018-19 which is our highest ever, reflecting both the decision at the 2017 AGM to increase the annual subscription to £15 and a concerted effort to clear unpaid subscriptions from previous years. Overall, the club made a surplus of £1,253 for the year. We continue to invest in events with the club paying entry fees for a number of events through the year – which is proving very popular with members. In total £3,885 was invested in entry fees and affiliations.

Second, “**Restricted Funds**” are an important part of the Stragglers activities, comprising three of our club races, the SRJRG junior handicap and Straggtri, and which are accounted for separately to the main Income & Expenditure account because the funds are restricted to a specific purpose. Straggtri is completely self-financing and SRJRG largely so, bar a £527 contribution by the club towards the handicap’s 15th anniversary (matched by Ranelagh). Merran Sell’s tenacious fund-raising secured a further £500 from the Skipton Building Society towards the handicap. The club races provide £2,000 towards the Income & Expenditure account but more importantly enable the club to donate money to selected charities. In 2018-19 a total of £12,225 was donated, with the main beneficiaries being Marie Curie, Pancreatic Cancer UK, the London Air Ambulance and the Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity (which in turn used our donation to support projects working with young people in our area).

The club’s **Balance Sheet** remains strong. In addition to the “restricted funds” balances of £12,839 and legacies of £3,785, the club has a further £18,467 (brought forward £17,213 plus surplus of £1,213) to invest in future years’ projects and activities.

This is my second year as Treasurer of Stragglers and my observation is that the club continues to have sufficient funds with which to look forward with confidence. The committee is prudent in its commitment of costs although more investment has been made into enabling participation in races, awards and the social side of mob matches.

I would like to thank our honorary auditor, Jim Sell, for his review of these accounts.

Phil Hall

Treasurer



## *Summer Grand Prix Round Up*

*Three fixtures this month: Claygate, Elmbridge and our own Wedding Day 7k, with a number of Straggler prizes won.*

First came **Claygate Country 5**, returning to our summer calendar after its popular debut in 2018.

Our policy of offering complimentary race places in a couple of summer fixtures resulted in an amazing 60 Stragglers competing. We were rewarded with some outstanding performances from Club members too.

Sophie Biggs claimed both first woman and first vet in a time of 31:49 and 24th overall. We had a clean sweep of SuperVet women: 1st Liz Killip, 2nd Carys Mills and 3rd Brigid Hibberd. Liz Fraser was 3rd senior woman and for the men, Crispin Allen was 3rd vet. Jim Lurkins cemented his place at the top of the Summer Grand Prix rankings with a brilliant time of 29:28 and 7th overall for the beautiful 5-mile course.

We challenged 26.2 to a summer mini-mob match and they took this title on turn-out.

Next was **Elmbridge 10k**, where conditions were warm but with a cooling breeze. Sophie Biggs was first Straggler woman in 41:18 and Liz Fraser second in 43:00. With Alexis Prince (44:23) and Clare Graham (45:48) scooped the Ladies Team Prize.

Tim Haughian was 18th overall in 34:30 with Laurence Duffy second placed Straggler also sub 40 mins in 39:10.

The impressive turn out at Claygate was bettered at the **Wedding Day**, with 71 Stragglers completing the 7k distance. First over the line for us in 16th place was Jim Lurkins in 24:56, ahead of Charlie Jeffrey (26:52) and Lawrence Duffy (27:07).

Once again Sophie Biggs was first Straggler lady, her time 27:31. Completing the top 3 were Heidi Russenberger (27:47) and Jackie Balfour (28:54. Jackie's age grading of 87.92 was the best performance across all categories.

There's just one fixture to go, the **Wimbledon 5k** on Sunday August 11th. Awards from the Summer Grand Prix will be presented, alongside those from the cross-country season, at our awards evening at the Park Hotel on Friday September 20th.

Simon Webb/Andy Howarth



## *Four Stragglers, Three Peaks, One Distillery*

Four Stragglers, Three Peaks, but that's not even scratching the surface. I've run marathons (nine) and completed several multi-day bike rides (Whitehaven to Tynemouth Coast to Coast, Paris to London, London to Berlin) but I think this may have been the toughest yet. The famous, and infamous, way to complete this challenge is to attempt it in 24 hours. The barman in our hotel the night before we climbed Snowdon told us this was now being discouraged as in his words it's "too dangerous". I certainly feel for me it's not only unrealistic but would be far less enjoyable than the three-day version we were preparing to take on.

'When Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay first stood on the top of Mount Everest, only a handful of people knew the debt of gratitude they owed not only to the mountains of North Wales but also to a little hotel in the lee of Snowdon. It was at the Pen y Gwryd Hotel (or 'PyG') that members of the 1953 Everest Expedition stayed during their training for that historic adventure, and it subsequently became - and remains - a place of pilgrimage for mountaineers the world over.' Truth be told, Purple Moose beer on tap is an equally good reason to stay here. It hasn't changed much since the 1950s, in fact doesn't feel as if much is different from the 19th century when it opened. The shower - shared bathroom - for example comes in an enormous bathtub and is turned on by a massive handle which felt

like something which would start a car from the 1920s. The size of the bath and power of the shower gave a hint at what was to come, ideal for hosing down cold, wet and muddy bodies after a hike up Snowdon.

Our group at the beginning were 10. Me, Simon Brazil, Kevin Price and Julie Homes (from Stragglers). We were joined by Utsava, who Kevin met at a BAFTA event and tempted him along. He brought three others, Edward, Didier and Oxana. The first-day group was completed by two walking friends of Kevin and Julie, Martin and Helen – Martin, Helen and Oxana just climbed Snowdon.

**Day 1: Snowdon** stands 1,085 metres (3560 feet), we didn't climb all of this, as our hotel was high up. The walk covered around 9 miles. Our itinerary would be to climb each mountain in the morning, and drive to the next in the afternoon. It was hoped we'd arrive in time for an evening in the pub, sadly this turned out to be ambitious.

Monday morning, 8:30, we're already behind schedule, but beginning the walk up Snowdon. We went up using the Pyg Trail and came down the Miners Trail, both 723 metres of climb.



‘There is some uncertainty about the origin of the word Pyg. It is believed that the path was named after Pen y Gwryd Hostel by climbers who stayed there. Another possible origin is that the path was named after Bwlch y Moch (the pass of pigs) since the path

crosses it, as it is sometimes spelled as Pig in English. Or it could have been named Pyg due to the fact that this was a path used to carry pyg (black tar) from the Britannia Copper Works in Cwm Glaslyn. The guessing continues!’

After the initial shock to the system of far greater exertion than would usually be expected for a Monday morning – it definitely beats being squashed on a sweltering hot tube train – the walk up was challenging, but not too difficult. Or perhaps this now feels relative with what was in store later in the week. Conditions were good, dry, calm, even warm enough for shorts and to leave hoodies and coats in bags. We'd learnt the night before that Edward was an experienced hill walker. ‘I've come all the way from the mountains of Switzerland to climb some hills’. This would prove extremely valuable throughout the week as Simon Brazil – regular running partner – would have in all likelihood guided me for most of the trip.

Halfway up Snowdon, Edward took over with all the confidence and responsibility expected of someone who had only met me for the first time the previous evening.

Unsurprisingly the weather turned. It began to rain, and the temperature dropped, making for some tricky stretches of narrow, boulder-covered paths. For the first of many times I wondered about the sense of trying to climb one of these in the dark. As we neared the top the wind became strong, blowing the rain into our faces, meaning the café – there really is one – was a welcome target for getting warm and dry. I went for a regular pasty rather than the Welsh wonder that is an Oggie.

Utsava's line of work turned out to be in the high-end Prosecco business. His alcohol connections would become a theme of this trip, not least in Snowdon's summit café. Here we met Brian who was waiting to deliver a lesson in Cognac tasting – I know, we did still have to get down off this mountain! It's all about the savouring it seems, a necessity at over 40%. I don't remember having drunk this before, and I'm not keen on trying it again. I learnt later this stuff comes at £2,500 a bottle. My tea, which I was more interested in finishing, was around £2.50. I'm far from the target audience.



Returning to the rain and howling wind, we climbed the final few steps for a group photo which could have been of anyone such was the mist. Luckily this cleared on the descent, however it also meant we were able to see our one genuine scare of the week. Shouts and a few screams from behind us and there were a man rolling headfirst down the side of the

mountain. He's a lucky boy as he came to a stop and appeared no worse than sharp pain on the left-hand side of his body. He was apparently an experienced climber, which focused the mind of us first-timers. 20 people die on Snowdon each year, which when you consider the volume of tourists who visit, actually doesn't seem that many.

'Following the opening of the Llanberis pass in 1832, the Miners Path was built to carry copper from the Britannia Copper Works near Llyn Glaslyn to Pen y Pass, where it was then transported to Caernarfon. The mining came to an end in 1916, remains from the work can still be seen on the path to this day.'

Even before our sight of near-death, the Miners Path would have felt harder to me going down than had we come up this way. None of us were taking chances now. Often for me the sensible and safest way down was sideways or backwards. Simon would say after that this was by some distance the most challenging guiding he'd ever done. The final couple of miles were a flat track alongside lakes which had been the focal point of the impressive views for much of the day. It was clear our planned trip to a pub in the Lakes was off - the up and down had taken around seven hours. The drive from Snowdon to Scafell takes around 4 and a half hours. We decided to buy food and beer for the Youth Hostel, but on arrival were informed that "you're not going to like this, but due to our license you can't bring your own alcohol inside". However, the warden added "if I don't see it, I can't know about it". Youth hostels vary a lot from one to another. This was at the basic end, but gave us everything we needed, aside from hot water in the morning. The simple surroundings added to the feeling of being remote. 21st century first world problem, no phone reception or Wi-Fi for at least three miles. The countryside is fantastic, with the bonus for our group of being close to the spot where Kevin and Julie met by chance whilst watching a fel race 14 years ago.

**Day 2: Scafell.** 978 metres – the lowest of the three, but the longest walk. It's also England's highest war memorial with a stone monument found at the top of the mountain.

As well as being the longest walk at over 10 miles, the route we took also meant the longest drive after. The popular way is to do the peaks in the opposite order from us, and this meant a 5:30 alarm and to be walking by 7. We took the route from Borrowdale



via Stockley bridge and Sty Head Tarn, which is longer but avoided a section on the shorter route felt to be dangerous for guiding. Early drizzle was replaced by clearing skies and warm, sunny weather, making this the best day for the scenery-spotters. Around halfway up we found people wild camping, which on a morning like this seemed an amazing idea. The terrain was a mixture of paths, with yet more rocks and boulders everywhere, and grassland. We followed the route of streams and I wondered how fresh and drinkable this water might be? The other question which kept returning was, just which of the steps we

climbed over the three days were man-made, and how many were created by weather and centuries of footfall?

The higher we climbed, the harder the challenge became. Edward had taken over from Simon again and we were approaching the one point which Kevin had warned me about. The Corridor route took us via a section of climbing down a rock-face, no more than 20 metres, but proper actual rock-climbing. The trust and teamwork between me, Simon, Kevin and Edward (who took the lead on the climb down and who remember we'd only met less than 48 hours earlier) was essential. As I write this, I still don't know what lay in waiting had any of us fallen.

10 was now 7, but at least we're recognisable in the summit photo as visibility was good, with even the sun out. We'd seen far fewer people on our walk up but there was still a small group at the top. Beginning our descent and the path was busy now, although many take the alternative route which we'd ruled out. Utsava was struggling with injury and it was clear he was going to be a while getting down. We all found this section of the trip a slog. Marathons are a few hours of giving it everything you've got, then doing nothing for a few days. These walks, whilst not as intense, were twice as long (in time), and the following day we'd do it all over again, and then again for a third day.

The other boys were nowhere to be seen when we finally reached the car. Our booking at the Ben Nevis Inn for dinner was cancelled and we hit the road, stopping at a farm shop in Penrith I recognised from my Coast to Coast bike ride a couple of years ago. The sausage rolls and flapjacks here are amazing. It's a five-hour drive from Scafell to Ben Nevis. We settled on a restaurant on the shore of Loch Lomond and travelled the final few miles to our hostel listening to England's semi-final exit from the World Cup through the static of medium wave radio in remote Scotland.

**Day 3: Ben Nevis, 1,345 metres.** Our walk begins at 20m above sea level.

'An ancient giant of the land, Ben Nevis was once a massive active volcano which exploded and collapsed inwards on itself millions of years ago. At the summit, there is evidence of an explosion in the form of light-colored granite. The name itself has two translations from the ancient Gaelic language, meaning 'mountain with its head in the clouds', thanks to its iconic mist-shrouded peak, or it can also

mean 'venomous mountain'. Visit Scotland encouragingly add 'you can decide which translation you prefer after the climb!'

There is a recognised mountain track which is the recommended route up and down, beginning with what is locally referred to as 'Heart Attack Hill' for its steepness. The Glen Nevis Youth Hostel is excellent, sadly we saw little of it as we arrived at 10:45 and were beginning our walk before 7. The deadline today, a ferry crossing to Islay at 5:30pm, and here was me thinking doing this thing against the clock was crazy!

'Now We Are 6' to quote A. A. Milne, for Utsava has dropped out. We imagined his lie-in and full Scottish as we pulled our tired bodies up the first section of climb. Already we're thinking this descent is going to be hard. The extra challenge here is numerous gully's for drainage, should I step in or over them? One rare loss of footing and I feel a muscle pull in my back. Do I really mind if we don't make the top? Loads of people do the three peaks, how many do 2-and-a-half? After what felt like all morning but was only 90 minutes (so the equivalent of the worst nil-nil draw you've ever seen) and we're on a good quality path, gently sloping up. We're making better than expected progress and my spirits rise – for a bit. There are no rock faces to climb up and down today, but the rocks on the ground after two days of them are relentless. Then it starts to rain. That fine, misty rain that seems to make you even wetter than the other types. I've worn shorts throughout the trip and for the most part this has been the most comfortable way to walk, blooded knees and occasionally cold legs can be lived with. After returning home and whilst researching facts for this article, I discovered numerous tabloid websites and the online echo-chamber that is social media, going to town on a woman who'd attempted to climb Ben Nevis in flip-flops. She unsurprisingly hadn't succeeded.

The second half of the walk is a mostly zig-zag steep climb. As we approach the highest point in the UK, vegetation disappears, replaced by a landscape of rocks, stones and boulders. This presented further guiding challenges, the safest way for me was to walk behind someone and follow their footsteps.

There was not a chance of seeing anything at the summit of Ben Nevis. It was also freezing cold; however, we had done this climb in less than 3 and a half hours which is what we had hoped for. We met a woman called Karen who had brought her bear with her. Before leaving home I'd briefly considered doing the same. What a great photo moment that could have been!

Immersing yourself in a challenge like this, it's easy to get caught up in the fatigue and forget it's meant to be fun. Parts of the climb today, I wasn't enjoying myself at all, and it was important to focus on that coming back down. For long stretches this was the easiest descent of the three, Simon and I found it easier to jog down rather than walk. Didier was struggling now, finding the pain-free way was to go down backwards, which he did at considerable speed!

My memory of what we'd walked up a few hours earlier was vague and we were back at Heart Attack Hill before I even realised. I fell in a few gullies, Simon ended up in the ferns, proof that the four peaks were beyond us both. I probably should have felt some sort of great rush of achievement on reaching the road outside the hostel, but tea and a wee (not in that order) were foremost in my mind. We were ahead of schedule for probably the first time that week, but soon ruined this when Utsava appeared having usefully spent his morning finding an excellent sandwich shop and returned with much-needed fuel.

### **The Isle of Islay: day 3 to 5.**

We'd conquered the three peaks. One of the major challenges the UK offers. Our relaxation time began with a race through the Scottish countryside like something out of a Rebus novel (we should have had the Rolling Stones or Zeppelin blasting from Kevin's car) as we desperately tried not to miss the last ferry to Islay. Safely on the boat and with beers in hand, we learnt more about Didier during our two-hour crossing. Formerly an employee of the Bank of Australia he developed an interest in Aboriginal culture and in particular, their art. His passion was to bring this work to a wider audience - he owns two galleries, one in France, the other in Switzerland. His ambition is to open a third in London.

Islay has 3,228 people (census 2011), covers an area of 600 square kilometres and has 130 miles of coastline. It is famous for its single malt whisky and has nine working distilleries. The history of Islay, Queen of the Hebrides, is one of conflict, boom, decline and resurrection. It has been viewed as either a key military base from where to invade neighbouring islands, or a land-owners playground where the needs of the island's inhabitants were of far less importance than that of a wealthy few from the mainland. A prosperous 18th and early 19th century, which saw the building of many of the islands villages, roads, fishing infrastructure and distilling industry, was replaced by great decline. Emigration was strong even when times were good, but when the potato famine of

the 1840s hit, it was greatly encouraged by the Laird of the Isle. Bankruptcy followed where Islay essentially found itself in administration, with land ownership broken up to a few private investors interested in using it for shooting estates. Whisky would prove to be its route to recovery and throughout the 20th century tourism grew, with people (like the variety of birds found on Islay) flocking to enjoy the landscape and coastlines.

The story of Bruichladdich is similarly turbulent and by the 1990s its successful days were behind it and it closed in 1994. Hundreds of miles away in London a man named Mark Reynier was discovering a love for the distinctive taste of whisky from the North of Islay – it's milder and less smokey than those from the south of the island. He travelled to Islay hoping to replenish supplies, only to find the gates locked and a firm request to leave. Undeterred, he gathered a group of investors and bought the distillery in 2000, returning it and many of its former staff to work. The Victorian machinery restored, it feels like a museum to whisky-making, and one which thanks to Utsava we were able to get greater access to than the public tours would offer.



We cleared our heads with a visit to one of Islay's many fantastic, and deserted beaches. As we approached the dunes the news was broken to me: "Simon, we've got some more climbing to do".

This was an excellent week. Once again running fitness has got me through something arguably much tougher. The Three Peaks is one

of the ultimate UK challenges, but I'd be lying if I said I loved all of it. Some of the descents in particular were tough on the body, especially for me having to hold an arm, shoulder or bag of another person at all times. The impact on my ankles, stepping onto the unknown for much of the time, despite the excellent efforts of others, was also physically demanding. I'd do each individually again, but perhaps not back-to-back like this, but my desire to find more hikes is as strong as ever, and tough ones too. I started by listing some of my previous challenges as a runner and cyclist. A walk in the country, on this evidence, should never be dismissed as just that.

Simon Webb



## *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.

### **August:**

- Thursday 1st: Rothwell Relay
- Sunday 11: Wimbledon 5k (SGP)
- Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>: Stragglers 5k handicap, Hawker Centre
- Thursday 29<sup>th</sup>: SRJRG – Hawker Centre

### **September:**

- Sunday 8: Stragglers River Relay

### **Team contacts:**

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