

High Peak Marathon (HPM)

One evening after a pack run from the White Swan in Hebden Bridge, I was asked by Kath if I would like to be in the Ladies Team for the HPM, along with herself, Mandy and Jane. I was told it was around 30ish miles. Always up for a challenge (and after 2 glasses of red wine) I agreed. It wasn't until a few weeks later whilst chatting to Rhys, Sharon and Shaun that I learnt it was more like 40 miles – and that is if you chose a good route as it is all navigation. Oh yes, I nearly forgot – it set off at 11pm which meant running through the night!!!! I started to feel very anxious, what if I couldn't do it? What if I was separated from the team?

A few days before the event, Jane's foot injury meant she had to reluctantly pull out and Kay joined in to keep the team.

On the actual day – Friday 3rd March – it started to snow heavily! My mum was on the phone, begging me not to do it. I actually thought it would be cancelled due to the conditions – ha! Not a chance. Mandy picked Kay and me up from Hebden around 8pm. As we arrived in the Peak District, Mandy had to drive very carefully to avoid skidding off the road in the treacherous snow and icy conditions. We breathed a sigh of relief and applauded her as we safely arrived in Edale.

The community centre acting as head quarters was full of other teams taking part. Our blokes' team which consisted of John Crummet, Rhys Watkins, Richard Blakely and Richard Leonard were located next to the carb loaded table stuffing as much food as humanely possible.

The kit check we had to endure was the most thorough I have ever witnessed – it went on forever! I think the checker was gob smacked at the amount of food Kath had managed to get into her rucksack! Everything was checked, I even thought that we had to erect the tent we had to carry round to prove all was there!

The walking teams set off first from 10pm in minute intervals, the running teams the same, but from 11pm. Our team, Tod Totty (don't ask) set off at 11.10pm, the blokes team, Tod Bats, set of at 11.20pm. As we ran into the darkness, I could see the earlier teams' head torch beams outlining the peaks all around us. It was a magical sight but daunting as it showed how high, then low, then high then low etc we had to go. There were 21 checkpoints that Mandy and Kath had to get our team to.

One section of the route was very steep, icy and rocky with a stream directly to the right of us at the bottom of a steep, bramble covered slope. We must have slipped and fallen a couple of dozen times and I'm sure I still have the bruises and cuts to show for it! There were 2 refreshment stops, one $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way in, the other $\frac{3}{4}$ way in. Hot ribena was served and bananas handed out. We met up with the blokes' team on the first one. Richard Blakely looked like Chris Bonnington on top of Everest - his beard was all frozen with dangling icicles chinking together! In between 3am and 5.30am it was so cold that our bananas had turned black and our drinks frozen solid – time to put our refreshments inside our clothes! At around 6ish we saw the sun come up and what a sight it was. A big bright red ball which turned all the snow around us pink – beautiful! Artic hares hopped around us, it was fantastic. At this point we were in the middle of what I can only describe at 10ft high snow dunes. The snow was very deep here and difficult to walk over as every other step you took you went down up to your thigh, at one point Kath and Richard Leonard disappeared up to their waist! This section was only around 4 miles long but it took the longest to get over. Over the next few hours the views down into the valleys were stunning. The sun was bright, the snow whiter than white and the clouds hung in the valleys creating scenes worthy of a guidebook.

When we finished back at Edale community centre, we were greeted by a girl saying "You're the first ladies team back, you are just in time for the presentation!" We all looked at each other, assessing the situation. We had just run 40 miles, through the night, have worn hats all the way round, have hair stuck to our face and head and bits of food stuck to our clothes. What a sight we must have looked! Oh well. I felt chuffed to pieces to receive our prizes in front of the other teams and with the other winners – Sir Ranolph Feinnes being one of them! Not too sure about the pink rubber gloves we won...!

Mandy drove Kay and I back, fuelled on Red Bull and the surrealism of missing a night sleep and burning up a gazillion calories whilst doing it! That evening I was all up for going to my brothers leaving party, but as I sat on the couch, all dolled up, my eyes rolled to the back of my head and by 8pm I was sleeping like a baby.

Would I do it again? Definitely. We have a title to keep!

Rachel Skinner
Team member number 4
Tod Totty.