

After stepping-in a month before to enter the Rok the Stones marathon, my first off-road marathon, which I really enjoyed, I set my sights on a new challenge, the Butcombe Trail Ultra, which Matt Milkins assured me was flat!

Having no idea what the route was like I believed him! I gathered information from the pros, from listening to Liz Noakes talk about back-to-back long runs, to Bubbles Young talk about her love of running and eating pizza and tried different things. I roped a friend, Clive from Westbury Harriers, into running as I needed the

moral support and our constant chatter.

Clive had been a great friend to run the coastal path with, with his constant banter and singing all the way. Poor Clive had only run 20 miles during his training; he trusted me with navigation, ha!, ha!: anyone that really knows me knows how bad my navigation is! I wondered how I would get round the



course in the cut-off time, as I did a recce of the second half with another friend and took 8 hours! I voiced my concerns to Matt and Antony who told me I would be fine. I managed to get myself and my training partner, Hayley Corr, lost on our recce a few times, so little did Clive know what he was letting himself in for! Hayley got injured on one of our reces and we made a feeble attempt at hitching to get back to our car.

During the week leading-up to the ultra I took a break from training and went to London, returning the day before. Hungover! Then ensued a frantic search of the loft and my clothes cupboards in search of a compass (that I have a tiny idea how to use) and compulsory kit. My torch wouldn't work and I assured my husband that it was broken beyond repair as he proceeded

to successfully replace the batteries. Why leave everything to the last minute? Hungover?

So the big day arrives and Clive is brave enough to join me. We head to the start with Draycott Hill looming large as life ahead of us and we are off. Us mere mortals walk the hill as Clare Prosser flies up the hill like a mountain goat. We run part of the Strawberry Line and me and Clive get to know each other in ways you shouldn't have to as I have to go to the toilet for the second time. We arrive at our first checkpoint greeted by the lovely faces of Helen

and Lucien and grab a flat coke and sweets. I have pizzas in my backpack; one savoury, one chocolate which I later catch Clive trying to chuck away! I suppose chocolate pizza is not for everyone!

We get up to near Crook Peak and the weather hits us: we have trained in sunshine and on dry ground, today it's pouring down, which leads to fog and poor visibility and rocky

slippery descents. Another friendly checkpoint at Bleadon,

I can't express how much the marshals' encouragement spurred me on and then it was on to the Swan at Rowberrow where I saw the happy faces of Bubbles, Graham and Phil. I took some pain killers as I started to have a pain on the inside of my left leg in my quads and calves. They didn't make much difference but the placebo effect and having them in my pocket spurred me on. Turns out it was a spasm in my leg which lasted for two weeks: every time I ran. We then continued our run through some very barren exposed hills over Black Down, with the wind and rain lashing us. We emerged to be greeted by Liz and Sam in the middle of

nowhere: another lovely boost as they encouraged us telling us we are doing well. We then arrive at the Ring o' Bells in Compton Martin to have some delicious home-made carrot cake courtesy of Sam Milkins and big cheers of support and encouragement from Nailsea Running Club who seem to have put on a great support crew.

We then pass through West Harptree to be greeted by Jim Plunkett-Cole, the founder of the 365 challenge, which has changed my running forever. A muddy struggle uphill to Prospect Stile, gives us none of the expected views as the visibility is poor today.

We arrive at the Ring o' bells in Hinton Blewitt and have a little dance to the music, a warm welcome from Andy and Cathy, and hot cup of tea. I then inform Clive that we only have a half marathon left - by the look on his face he knows exactly every mile left and metre! Clive had not been his usual juke box self and I think he was maybe regretting his spontaneous entry to the Ultra! We met some lovely people running the ultra and exchanged stories along the way.

We headed off again and were greeted in the pouring rain by Sara Marshall and Liz Little, who helped us across the road and imparted some much needed encouragement, then into Stockhill Wood, our feet squishing in the mud and up a hill that is surrounded by ancient burial sites, but these are not visible as the fog has set in. It then dawns on me as we wander about trying to find an animal feeding trough point of



reference, that maybe it's better to use huge telephone poles as markers instead! We find our way through and head into Priddy to be greeted by the gorgeous zombies and some more delights to get us through the last 4 miles. Another lesson learnt, don't try to run and eat crisps as a choking episode started!

Behind us we were being caught up by three figures on a difficult-to-navigate part of the Mendips as the visibility was so bad. My heart sank as I realised there was a lady in the group and I thought how frustrating it would be to be overtaken in the last two miles, but yay she was a supporter that had come to get a fellow runner around the last bit. I navigated us all round and James Wotton took the lead, which was fair really if he still had that much energy.

We hit the finish holding hands, Clive and I coming in joint place and we're so happy to see the faces of Matt and Antony who had made this day possible. I was second lady, yay.

The following two days were painful with my legs stuck in the bent position in bed and me asking for walking sticks and a wheelchair. I went to run the coastal path the week after but had to stop due to pain. Luckily I saw the amazing physio, Dave Alder, and was told it was a spasm that could be massaged and stretched out.

I would recommend this ultra: if I can do it anyone can. The support along the course was amazing, the food stations something else. The course was beautiful, shame about the weather.