

## 40 Miles of Hope, 10 Miles of Reality

Last year was a disaster for the Psychic Pop-Tarts. We came second. A series of corporate failures in training, navigation and kit meant that we endured an epic suffer-fest of 13 hrs 45 mins only to lose to a team that were much better on the day. We resolved never to let complacency ruin our chances again. As 2007 drew to a close, there was palpable excitement in the air; new kit was bought, training started and discussions on where the route might take us could last for hours.

A few days before the event, we noticed that our main rivals from previous years, the Late Finishers, weren't entered. We didn't know whether this was a good or a bad thing. We were ready for a race and a bit miffed that they wouldn't be there. However, there were a few new teams entered this year, any of which could provide a challenge, so we turned up on the morning of the race looking forward to a great day of hiking with a new name, the Cycling Jump-Starts.

Being team number 16, we were the last of the 50 milers to leave. It was a freezing cold morning, dawn was just about to break and it was great to be back out on the course. We overtook our first team at checkpoint one, another at the top of Mount's Hill and caught sight of team 14 disappearing into the valley. We pressed on. I took a last-minute navigational decision just before Botley which Chris, our map reading expert, wasn't too keen on. He was even less keen on stopping to pose for an official photo and the photographer was quite vocal in expressing his disappointment. We used our local knowledge to maximum effect around Chesham and Amersham, and by the time we got to checkpoint four, we were the first 50 mile team on the course.

On the way out of the checkpoint, we spotted team 14, who looked surprised to see us. They looked well kitted out and were obviously up for a race, which added some excitement and put an extra spring in our step. For the next ten kilometres or so they were consistently on our tail and could be seen jogging down hills, leaping over stiles and pushing hard to catch us. The sun was in the sky, it was a beautiful day and I fished around in my bag for my racing shades. It was all looking good.

Our breakthrough came at Hazlemere. Quick thinking and solid navigation from Andy and Chris meant that we had lost sight of the team behind by checkpoint six, only to be confronted by a room full of smoke caused by a large pan of burning bacon. The checkpoint staff told us they would be with us "in a couple of minutes", which didn't really align with our racing strategy, so after much wailing and wringing of hands, we headed back out onto the course, cheered on by our supporters and in good spirits.

Over the next few checkpoints we worked hard to put distance between ourselves and the other teams. As the miles began to bite, Andy floated around the team, keeping conversation flowing and morale high. Our supporters were a constant source of encouragement, cheering us on at every checkpoint they could get to. Dave took comfort from the fact that as the miles ticked by, we were getting closer and closer to the the magic figure of ten miles left to go. The hill at Ivinghoe was particularly tough and we had anticipated some tricky navigation. Fortunately, Chris and Andy were spot on again and we headed down past the monument as the sun set, knowing the end was in sight.

We pride ourselves on having a big finish and coming in to Berkhamsted, we surged up the hill at a pace that would have been unthinkable only a couple of miles beforehand. Just before the gates to Ashlyn's School, we broke out into a light jog, with Dave and I leading

the way. As we came up to the Chapel, Chris and Andy came storming past us, resulting in one of the fastest and hardest-fought sprint finishes I've ever been involved in. Chris vaulted a metal railing, which must have been at least four feet high and we burst through the door in 12 hours and 5 minutes.

We love this event. The organizers deserve huge congratulations and thanks – as do the checkpoint staff for giving their time so freely and ensuring that teams from across the country are able to complete such an awesome challenge every year. We also want to thank the Late Finishers for teaching us a lesson last year and the Undertakers for showing us how effective good navigation can be. Huge thanks are also due to our supporters for being with us all the way and scurrying between checkpoints just to get the chance to see us for thirty seconds at a time.

If any teams competing in the fifty kilometre event have considered stepping up to the full fifty miles, my only advice is “Do it! Do it now!”. If you can walk 50K, you *can* walk fifty miles. It will probably hurt, but you will get to the end and think “I know I could have done that faster”. When we finished this year, beating our previous best by an hour and a half, I was ecstatic, but writing this the day after the event, I have started to think that 11:59 would have looked a lot better than 12:05. Now where could we have saved an extra six minutes?.....

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Perfect day for a hike



Leaving the Reservoir at Marsworth



Andy looking determined



Receiving the Trophy