

Every minute counts

Two years ago, 2 of our team members had a traumatic debut in the 30k event and we needed a year off last year to fully recover! However, this year we came back determined to do well with 2 new recruits.

Our 3 practise hikes got us used to all weather conditions - wind, rain, snow, sun and lots of mud. This helped us to develop tactics and hardened us up for the challenge ahead. Our team had 2 Gemma's, Kelly and a token boy called Giacomo (he can't help it, he's Italian).

Our day began about 5:30am, had porridge and apple tea and then off into the dark to get to the start. At the hut at Stoke Row, we sorted out our feet and psyched ourselves up. Got the grid references, plotted our route and then we were off.

We had some aims - to be the first team back as there were lots of teams starting after us, to finish it in a good time and to not get lost. We managed to achieve all of these aims and therefore we had won in our eyes no matter where we came.

Teamwork was important and we all had our roles. Giacomo and Gemma P did most of the navigation, Kelly was our human compass and I helped with that as well and I was also the team psychologist. Me and the other Gemma provided encouragement, set the pace and made sure everyone kept eating and drinking. Gemma P also took the role of the team clown, falling over twice and getting the map dirty, this kept us in good spirits.

We became aware of a team of big boys behind us walking at a very similar pace. We soon realised they were going to be our main rivals, they were team 85. We occasionally looked back to see how far behind us they were. As we came to a field, we stopped to look at the map and the boys (team 85) overtook us and went down the path. However, we decided to cut across the field to gain the lead again.

We arrived at checkpoint 17 and were welcomed by a little boy who had a checklist of questions to ask us. Was this a ploy to slow us down? We also got a present from Santa's sack and we were off again. However, after this checkpoint, there was a long slow hill and we somehow managed to get rid of the boys finally after a long time of trying, after this we were on our own for the rest of the hike.

Got to the valentine's checkpoint and got a heart shaped chocolate and a good welcome as we were the first team to their checkpoint (and we were first for all the remaining checkpoints which meant we didn't know where other teams were and had to keep motivating ourselves to keep going). The checkpoint staff were great, even though we did not stop long we just grabbed something to eat and went. We could not afford to be hanging around and wasting time.

There was a very long, muddy hill where the mud was sticking to our boots which made it very heavy and hard to walk. We tried walking to the side of it where it wasn't as muddy, but we were told that we had to walk on the path. So it was time for some 'go juice' to keep us going. When I saw people struggling I kept saying – think about poor Phill (who had been talked into joining our 50k team) he'll be dying! We also kept saying that we had to beat the boys (team 85) and this was also motivating us because we didn't have a clue how well they were doing, all we knew was that we had to keep pushing ourselves.

We were getting near the finish and we were 'in the zone' and going for it, we looked at the time and we had been going for 5 hours so we aimed to finish in another 30minutes. Our motivation was to try and beat the boys who we had seen on our way and we finally got closer and started to jog to the finish. We got a big cheer as we were the first ones back. The other group of boys got back about 15minutes after and they had started about 15 minutes after us so we knew it was going to be close between us and we didn't have a clue who had a better time.

When our 50k team arrived we cheered them on as they ran around the school to the finish. Then we had a cold shower and both teams went to the pub for a well earned pub dinner.

The following day, there was a presentation. We were on tenterhooks as the positions were announced. They got to the top two and they announced that second place made it in 5 hours 27 and we believed this was us and we prepared to get up, but when they announced the team, it was the boys!!! We couldn't believe it; we had beaten them by 1 minute and did it in a time of 5 hours and 26 minutes.

Well done to the boys (team 85), it could have gone either way! Looking forward to racing you in the 50km in a few years time.

Gemma, Gemma, Kelly & Giacamo – team 77 –Phoenix Flyers Too