

## GRAND UNION CANAL RACE 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> MAY 2008

### Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May

In the morning I woke up and instantly felt sick, I put on my antisickness bands so I could manage to eat my breakfast, these seemed to work and so I was quite relaxed about this aspect of the race.

We picked up the MPV and loaded up with all the boxes containing almost everything (and a bit more) you could think you may need whilst running 145miles from Birmingham to London, or so I thought!



**Me "happy" on the journey to Birmingham.**

We set off after lunch (I had forced down two slices of malt loaf), quick check once on the motorway to check I'd not forgotten shoes!! Traffic wasn't too bad and we arrived in Birmingham at about 4o'clock. We checked into our travel lodge and went to look for a place to have tea (whilst I wasn't feeling sick). "Duel" was the place; it had Italian for me and Ginny, and Indian for Garry. We then set off to find the rendezvous pub to meet Dick (race organiser) and some other runners; I was quite nervous about this, what if they looked at me and laughed!

I instantly knew it was Dick when I saw a man with a clip board, he wasn't as I had pictured him (thought he would be old and wider). There seemed to be many people waiting to see him so I patiently waited for my turn whilst eyeing up the other runners (you could tell the runners, they had running shoes on and varied race t-shirts). I introduced myself and Garry and Ginny to Dick and then promptly went to the furthest corner of the group to try and blend in. Whilst waiting for an informal presentation from the Lucozade lady, I was getting a good look at all the race t-shirts – Marathon De Sables/Badwater etc bloody hell! I was so glad I didn't wear a 5k t-shirt, I just had my "Vegetarians have more fun" t-shirt on, don't know whether this was any better! I text Steve to see where he was (a guy I had been emailing before the race, it was his first major Ultra like me and we seemed to have a lot in common like

we were both very nervous!), he'd be here in 20minutes. We went up stairs to see the Lucozade presentation, she was very nice but I think she was preaching to the converted, if we didn't know this by now what chance did we have of finishing the race. I think everyone enjoyed the freebies though and it seemed to break the ice a bit. Steve came up to me (he looked nothing like his photo on the internet) and asked if I was Tracy ( I later asked how he knew it was me, had I sent a photo, or was it because I looked petrified, he had searched on the web for race photos of me, well he is a policeman!). I collected the British Waterways toilet keys I had ordered, I was only allowed two not four, some people were obviously not as organised (paranoid) as me. Lots of runners had ordered sweatshirts/t shirts before the race; I thought this was tempting fate a little.

We then went downstairs to the bar and joined up with Steve and his support crew (sorry can't remember your names). It was good to talk to them, likeminded and very nervous as I was. I kept telling them of all the things I had read and then got extra supplies etc, they laughed at this especially when I produced copies of all the info and lists I'd sent to my support crew. Think we stayed a little longer than we should, and didn't get back to the hotel until about 11pm, but I was feeling quite relaxed and knew this wouldn't last long. Garry was anxious to get back because he was worried we wouldn't get enough sleep.

Back at the hotel, we all settled down and both Ginny and Garry seemed to drift off quickly (you can tell by their breathing and occasional dream like noises), I laid there thinking and thinking, wondering what I'd let myself in for, and then worrying because I couldn't get to sleep. I eventually drifted off only to wake up every half hour to look at the clock to make sure I hadn't overslept. At about 1.30am I was woken by a screaming child next door, there didn't seem to be any adults there talking to it, so I thought maybe it had been left alone. I got up and went down stairs to ask someone to check on it, they offered to move us but I explained that we were getting up in just over 2hours. I was told in the morning that they had moved the people with the child, but I had put my earplugs in now and drifted off again until 4am, wakeup time!

### **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May**

As Ginny and Garry got showered and dressed, I went down to the car to get our breakfast and running kit. Garry managed to slip in the bath and was lying on the bathroom floor groaning, "get up we haven't time for this", hoping he hadn't broken anything (only Garry!). Shelley and Michael arrived having got up and been ready since 4am. I was very nervous now, I asked everyone to go down to the cars and wait for me. Last "number2" toilet stop (or so I thought) and applied plenty of Vaseline as advised by those "in the know" to help prevent chafing of the nether regions.



**Ginny, Garry, Me, Michael, and Shelley at the start Gas Street**

We all set off to the start, Gas Street (Sat Nav is wonderful!), Oh God when we saw all the other runners and crews I was even more nervous, have I got this, have I got that??? We walked up to the start and saw Steve, had a few photos taken and then it was down to the start on the canal basin, this was it. A few words from Dick, didn't hear most of it, just wanted to start. I looked up and saw Ginny looking down from the bridge, she looked particularly worried.



**Me and Steve just before the start at Gas Street**

6am and we were off, keep it steady I thought, you've got a long way to go. It wasn't long before we crossed a bridge and it was very strange to walk over it as all the advice has suggested. Most people seemed to have paired off and were talking, Steve had shot off, and I felt quite lonely. I managed to work up the courage to chat to a few lone runners early on as we passed each other, they were all very nice and there was lots of to-ing and fro-ing as everyone's

different strategies started to take place. I was on a 40min run (10min/mile) and 5 min walk from the start. There seemed to be lots of bridges in the first few miles. Quite early on the runners seemed to spread out but I could still see and hear runners nearby. The first toilet stop, how I wish I was a man to just be able to turn to the bushes and not worry about looking for a convenient covered and non-prickly area (must tell Ginny I've had a wee so she can log it on my toilet/foods sheet). I noticed a "number2" whilst in the bushes, and thought it was a dog doo, but thinking back it could have been a sign of things to come!

Good luck texts from Pauline @ 7.34am and Teresa @ 9am.

The first time I saw my crew was at Bridge 87/4.7miles, I was feeling good and had a nutrigain to eat as I set off. I had text Ginny shortly before to ask for blister plasters and then alcowipes think blisters were starting, have since looked at a video of parts of the race, and heard the comments from my race crew that they hoped I wasn't starting with blisters just yet, "No she just wants them for her bum bag" Ginny said, little did they know!. This was also one of the first times that I was told I was first lady, this could be good, or bad if I've set off too fast. I was a little ahead of time, and continued to the next stop 10.7miles Bridge 78 Catherine De Barnes (7:52am Sat 24<sup>th</sup>/75). I was early and ate half a chocolate croissant and chocolate roll, refilled my drinks and carried on. I did feel that my feet were warm and was slightly worried about blisters but put this out of my mind because it was only 11miles how could I possibly have blisters yet. I was told again that I was first lady, maybe I was the only lady?

Set off again and soon realised that yes I was getting blisters (bloody hell), next time I saw the crew was at about 15miles, that was it, time to get my feet out and sort the blisters, Shelley played nurse and after I had popped them with a needle she helped put on the plasters and socks. Many runners went past and "ohhh'd" and shook their heads about having blisters so early, YES I KNOW! This was the first time when I really thought I wasn't going to finish, how could I carry on for 130 more miles with blisters? Mental note to tell people to please stop me the next time I have any silly ideas like this, oh yes I remember I was told, well tell them to try harder next time. Set off again and my feet took a while to settle down and for the painkillers to start working.

20.4miles went through Shrewley tunnel, it was dark in here, but I remembered reading about this in a previous GUC runner's story and watched out for the start of the steps near the end.

Some time around mid morning I started to feel nauseous, not too much to start with but it did slow me down, if I ran it made it worse. Just before the 22mile check point I really needed the toilet, luckily there was a café (Hatton canal shop) ahead with a lovely big sign directing you to the toilets. That was the first of 3 "number2" toilet stops, I've never felt this way before in a race, whether it was the nerves or something else I don't know but it wasn't nice. Set off again and heard a women behind me sounding like she was running fast, "well if you can run that fast you'd better pass because you're better than

me I thought" thinking it was another GUC runner. The lady caught up to me and asked if I was running a race, the usual disbelief followed and she turned right as I turned left to cross the bridge at 22miles Hatton locks 2<sup>nd</sup> checkpoint (10:25am Sat 43<sup>rd</sup>/75). Saw the crew and was quite emotional not feeling like I wanted to leave because my stomach was quite upset still, don't think I had anything to eat, filled up water bottles and carried on.

I can't really remember details of the next few miles; I did become hungry and arrange to meet my crew at a particular bridge. I had forgot exactly which bridge number and when I'd past all the bridges near where I thought I should be meeting them I phoned Ginny to see where they were. I had past the meeting point and they had missed me because they were still trying to get my food ready. This was my first tantrum, I was hungry and wanted food why weren't they there! A few phone calls (about 11.30-12noon) and different bridge numbers later and I was told that John and Jack would meet me next and that my food would be further on. Bridge 36 or 34 Leamington Spa about 30miles was I pleased to see John and Jack, a nice hot cup of tea with sugar and some crisps (with salt yummy). A lady GUC runner ran passed me as I was sat down, I thought I must get up and carry on soon. Off I went competitive mode in full swing to catch her, I think I passed her soon enough but was passed by her again at the next check point.

The next major stop was checkpoint 3 at 35.9miles Birdingbury Bridge21 (13:12pm Sat 39<sup>th</sup>/75), I was due to meet up with some people from the Terence O'Grady club here and my estimated time to arrive had been 12.45pm. The support crew had decided to try and meet before this for a food stop but I was worried that I was a little behind time now and if I stopped for food, then had to stop again at Birdingbury to see the TOG club it would be two long stops, and time was starting to slip by, so I decided to continue to the checkpoint and have food there whilst I chatted to the TOG club. I got to this checkpoint about 30mins behind schedule. All the people who had come from the club were on the bridge cheering me on as I approached. I had most of my pasta and a nice cup of tea and chatted to everyone, this cheered me up and reminded me of all the money I was going to raise for the club if I finished, then I set off again, with video cameras pointing at me, not a pretty sight! 36miles down only 109 to go.



**Some people from the TOG club came to see how I was doing**

The towpath turned to grass now and was quite uneven and difficult to run on at points (glad it wasn't raining like last year). My stomach was still not settled and I don't think I had much to eat for a long time after the pasta, much to the annoyance of my crew. From this point I didn't think of the time and really just continued as fast as I could, running and walking dependent on the towpath and stomach.

Think John and Jack took over supporting me until the 53.1 mile 4<sup>th</sup> checkpoint at Weedon (17:32pm Sat 35<sup>th</sup>/68) and then onto Stoke Bruerne 65 miles. Didn't eat much maybe an apple and bit of cereal bar, but kept thinking about ice creams as I passed various canal side shops. At one point when I was sat having an apple the second lady passed me for the final time, from here on I was the second lady. During this long afternoon I met up with a few other runners, some had done the race before others like me were first timers, we passed comments on how we felt we would do and all felt we had the determination to finish it as long as no injuries occurred.



**Me and John at Weedon**

Think also about this time was when I saw Janice and Gill (and husband) for the first time; they had a loud clapping object which made a very loud noise that could be heard a long way away so I knew when they had seen me even if I hadn't seen them. This boosted me and also helped because it was quite hot and I needed a few water top ups.

At 63miles Bilsworth tunnel (Northampton) on the road section I got to a section where I was unsure if I had to turn off, I took a little time to look around the area and went up and down a hill a few times, I still wasn't sure so I waited for another runner that I had passed on the road (after a little chat) to see if he knew where we we're going. Made it back to the canal safely and felt better I had not gone astray. I remember feeling quite good on this section and I think I was running most of the way apart from short stops when I met up with John and Jack.

I got to 65miles Stoke Bruerne at about 8.30pm ish I think, it wasn't dark yet. Met John and Jack and then Garry and Ginny turned up on the opposite side of the canal. They wondered how I had got there so quickly! Apparently John had sent a text earlier and they had only just got it 30mins before I turned up. I was feeling good and didn't want to stop, I knew the next checkpoint (first cut off) Navigation Bridge 70.5miles wasn't far away and it was still light. So I set off at a good pace to get there before dark, or so I thought!

I ran with another runner Adrian (I think) along some of this section, there was a large tree which had blocked the towpath at one point that we had to climb over! Even though I thought I felt good this was a difficult task. My legs just didn't want to lift off the ground over the tree, so I had to lift them over with my hands one by one, sitting on top of the tree to steady myself. Bridge 55 which we had to cross to the left side of the canal didn't have a number on it, the other runner crossed it and so I followed hoping it was right (even though there wasn't much of a towpath on the other side). Dusk had started to creep

in and I was worried that I wouldn't get to the next checkpoint before it was dark; stupidly I had thought I had plenty of time and didn't have my headtorch. Along this section the towpath was quite uneven, and there were lots of trees and bushes along the side. This is where I thought I saw the "mad axe man!" At first I thought it was someone having sex! who wanted to kill me so I stopped and waited for the next male runner to catch up then went past and it was only a bush (more about bushes later). It was now dark and even though I felt okay to run I didn't want to trip and injury myself because I was finding it very difficult to see the ground in front of me so I ended up walking until Navigation Bridge. At one point there was a light coming towards me, not another madman I thought, No it was just a support runner looking for his friend, phew! He said that the checkpoint wasn't far now. As I approached the bridge I heard familiar voices shouting my name to see if it was me (they couldn't see me either), "Yes it's me" I shouted, glad that I had finally reached the first cut off at about 10.20pm (I think) on the Saturday night.

At Navigation bridge the 5<sup>th</sup> checkpoint (22:19pm Sat 32<sup>nd</sup>/59) I saw Paul and Sue Taylor for the first time (no messing about now then!), I changed my clothes for warmer ones, as soon as I'd sat down I was starting to shiver. I had lost all inhibitions and as I was trying to put a fresh sports bra on it got caught on my back and in the tired state I was in I was unable to pull it down, I stood up and asked for some help. "Sit down" everyone shouted, oops was I flashing!! The ladies covered me up and helped me get the rest of my fresh clothes on. Once I was dressed I was plied with some food and a hot drink, I think I quite enjoyed it but can't remember what it was. Paul was massaging my legs (It was quite painful and I kept saying it hurt but he didn't stop) and Jack was massaging my neck. I was so pampered.



**Me "enjoying" my leg (Paul) and neck (Jack) massages at Navigation Bridge 70.5miles, probably slightly delirious!**

From here I was allowed to have another runner with me for support, the first to take on this task was Michael, he had had a sleep and was wide awake

and raring to go full of stories to tell about his trip to San Francisco. After the stop I was unable to run at first I think I was just very stiff, but as time went on I became very fatigued and nauseous again and it felt like we were walking at a very slow pace, very early on we passed the only British Waterways toilet that I remember and I got to use my key! I was with Michael for 10miles and we had trained with our headtorches running, which felt like a waste now because I was unable to run. I kept apologising to Michael. Whilst with Michael we passed a few strange sights as we went through Milton Keynes, I heard and Michael saw a few rats!! That was enough to keep me going, we approached a group of kids who were setting fire to a boat I think, as we passed they said something and both me and Michael noticed a cleaver on the towpath!! Neither of us commented until we saw John and Jack a little further up, we had both kept quiet so as not to scare the other. I started to feel much worse and by the time we got to Bridge 88 Peartree (possibly stopped at Br86) at 80miles I was feeling very bad. I sat down on some steps as Michael tried to rouse the troops who were asleep in the cars, John and Jack arrived soon after. Apparently I looked pretty bad and I asked for a sleep, which was in the back of John's car, I didn't really sleep as I could hear the others talking, but after 10mins I suddenly felt very sick and got up to the edge of the car. I was sick (a bit on John's blanket - sorry) and it looked very dark and black. The first thing I thought was oh no I've been sick and then I saw the colour and thought it was blood! Don't say anything I thought they won't notice, they had noticed and had not said anything to me.

### **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May to Monday 26<sup>th</sup> May**

I was picked up and felt like I was pushed off, holding onto John's arm down the canal again, "don't say I've been sick at the checkpoint" I said to John because I was worried that they would stop me continuing. This was the second time I thought I may not make it to the finish. He was instructed to feed me, but I didn't want any food I'd just been sick. Bit by bit I ate a croissant, until we got to the last bit which we fed to the ducks. We met up with everyone again, I think just after the 6<sup>th</sup> checkpoint Br 99 near Water Eaton (4:05am Sun 31<sup>st</sup>/42), the first thing I remember being asked was if I wanted anything to eat, that was the last thing I wanted. I wanted a sleep, which I was told I couldn't have until I think I demanded one and promptly went off with Garry up a ramp to the cars to get in. Another 10minutes and I was woken again, this time I wasn't sick but felt dreadful and really just wanted to stay asleep, I think I had a drink of soya milkshake to appease everyone who were pestering me with food. It was raining so I put on some waterproofs and off we went again (me and John). The headtorch was ok and felt comfortable but it made my eyes feel weird they felt like I had goggles on where the light ended and the darkness started, I don't know if it was because I was tired. It became light before the next meeting point but I was still tired and the soft grass at the side of the towpath was looking very appealing. I knew the bridge number of the next meeting spot and was slowly counting them down, whilst I was doing this I was trying to work out how I could get another sleep before we met up with everyone else (especially Paul I'd imagined him to be strict like a sergeant major, but I was wrong and I got to know he wasn't like this over the 18+miles I spent with him on the Sunday),

SORRY Paul but I didn't think you'd let me have another sleep, but I hoped John would. So at the last bridge before the meeting point I said to John that I was going to have another sleep and asked him to wake me up in 10 minutes. I promptly lay down on the hard towpath under the bridge and went to sleep, with my bumbag as a pillow and John covered me up with his jacket. John stood watch like a guardian angel and said afterwards that at exactly 10 minutes I opened my eyes. Off we set again, not long after we saw a few of our crew walking back to see where we were, lucky escape!

This was Tesco's at Leighton Buzzard 90.5miles, I wasn't feeling good! I got into the back of the car to have my feet looked at and whilst everyone else was buzzing around my feet, cleaning them, popping blisters, putting fresh socks on (OR not fresh! I had heard Ginny and Garry having a heated discussion about where my clean extra cushioned socks had just disappeared to, later I looked and realised that the old socks were put back on, the other socks eventually turned up later). Sue was at the door which was open and was comforting me as I wept amidst the ouch's, worrying that I wasn't going to make it to the finish, sorry Sue. I think I put on a different waterproof top and then set off again with Paul this time.

Me and Paul were due to do 18miles together and I think he got the worst of the weather, it seemed to rain pretty much none stop most of the way, we were on a grass towpath now and our feet were getting soaked. Apparently I started to eat a bit more; Paul was very persuasive with a little bit of different things every so often. We met up at different points with the crew, I remember eating some porridge. We passed through the 7<sup>th</sup> checkpoint at the Grand Junction Arms 99.8miles (10:28am Sun 36<sup>th</sup>/39) and I remember distinctly having a conversation with the lady registering the numbers of the runners (more about this later), we walked up to the car and I changed into my waterproof socks which felt good and also was into my size 8 shoes at this time also. Off we set onto Boxmoor in Hemel Hempstead at 108miles to finish Paul's first stint and pick up Jack. "Jack's got a surprise for you" Paul had said laughing to himself, I wonder what this could be.



**Paul laughing at when I first saw Jack**

As I turned around the corner a vision of Yellow appeared, it looked like Jack had hired a Sponge Bob Square Pants costume, well how he is going to walk in that I thought. As I got closer I saw that it wasn't a costume but just that he was dressed head to toe in luminous yellow! What a sight everyone was laughing, apparently he only had shorts and had asked if anyone had any spare long pants. I had brought some emergency yellow pants kindly donated by Andy O just in case; these were now being put to good use. We got some very strange looks as we continued down the canal, it cheered me up though.



**Me and Jack (aka Sponge Bob) setting off at 108miles**

Jack was doing Chris's stint because unfortunately Chris had sciatica and was unable to make it. He was carrying a backpack with what seemed like everything you could need in it, like tea but he didn't have any sugar! Oh well it was hot. At one point during my time with Jack I thought about starting to run again, my body felt okay and I wasn't feeling nauseous. So I said to Jack that I'd like to try and run again, just slowly to start and see how I went, off we set, my body didn't feel too bad but then my little toe felt like it had exploded, Oh no what have I done, the pain was the worst I'd ever felt and I really thought I wouldn't even be able to walk after this. I stopped and took some painkillers and we slowed to a very slow walk (hobble), after what seemed like a long time the pain started to fade slightly and that was the end of any running for me from now on. I discovered after the race that I had an enormous blister on my little toe and this had burst causing the pain. Jack and I talked lots and seemed to be making good progress (little did I know), we got onto talking about food and meat seemed to take up a good bit of it, I have been a vegetarian for many years but just recently I do like to reminisce on what meats I ate before I became vegetarian, not that I would eat it again but I do seem to crave it recently especially fish. Peanuts and cheese just mustn't be fulfilling my needs (Shelley obviously noticed this and brought a bag full of vegetarian protein foods round to my house after the race). Anyway at about 5pm (Sunday) we finally decided some chips would be rather nice and Jack text John to see if he could get us some, Oh yes, "any salt and vinegar?", I replied "Yes Lots". John replied that the chips were ready at 5.45pm. We arrived at the 120.3miles checkpoint Springwell Bridge 176 at 17:58pm on Sunday. I have since found out I was 20minutes behind the last runner and I was last 30<sup>th</sup>/30! The chips were a disappointment I had visions of the perfect chip, but these were from a pizza place (the only place open) and were like bad oven chips! I requested more salt and a checkpoint helper found one of those little blue sachets of salt in a pack of crisps, it helped a bit! As you can probably gather I wasn't feeling too grateful at this time especially when I was ushered very quickly from the checkpoint before I had even had chance to eat most of my chips. I heard later that as I was having a toilet stop in a makeshift "tent like" toilet it was thought that I was stalling for extra time to stop, no I just obviously wasn't dehydrated and needed the toilet. Another interesting fact that I found out about after the race was that Paul had enquired about my position in the race at the Springwell checkpoint, he was told that I had been timed out at the previous checkpoint (Grand Junction Arms), he wasn't happy and explained that he had been with me through this checkpoint and that I was there in plenty of time, this was double checked and all was okay (Thank God!).

Off I went with my chips and Sue (poor Sue), I kept asking why I hadn't been allowed to stop and eat my chips, what would I do with the box? Sue seemed to have an answer for everything. Not long after we saw the second to last runner who, as he passed me, said he had better hurry up because he may not make the cut off, I had thought this was strange because I hadn't realised how late we were and that I was last. About 1 mile down the canal, I saw Garry coming towards us, what was wrong? He wouldn't say which just annoyed me even more, so I told him to walk in front of me, and then I saw Ginny. We stopped and Ginny held both my hands in hers, looking very

concerned. She told me that I needed to continue at the pace I was going and have no more stops to be able to finish at 2.30am on the Monday. What? That was only 30minutes inside the final cut off. Why? I thought the last time someone had said anything about times I was on schedule to finish about 12midnight. Why wasn't I told, I'm probably not going to make it was all I could think. This was the worst time for me I was rude and angry, but after I had set off again I just thought that no one would want to talk to me again and that everyone would think I was so ungrateful for all they had done. My head was spinning, I was only giving Sue one word answers at her attempts to make conversation, I was trying to work out that I had about 25miles to go nearly a marathon and less than 8 hours to finish it, and this was after 120 miles. But I also thought that I didn't feel too bad at this point and that I should have been going faster before. The other major thing that was worrying was that no one would like me anymore but this didn't stop me from still feeling very angry and not being able to stop myself from shouting and generally not being nice. I tried to phone Garry before the next meeting place to get the things I would need ready so I wouldn't have to stop, he didn't answer so I phoned Jack instead.

As we arrived they weren't ready for me because apparently I had increased the pace lots. Janice was ready to help me to the next checkpoint. Over the last day my supporters had worn my bumbag for me because my back was sore and it made me feel more nauseous. I wanted it back now, I wanted to feel like I was in control, I had to ask many times and then demanded that I carry it, not Janice. Off we set, poor Janice. Sue had got the silent treatment and now poor Janice had to take me letting rip about how I was feeling, then I'd cry saying sorry and no one would like me anymore, she took it all in her stride and didn't hit me! Well done Janice. We passed the second to last guy who had been so worried about not making the cut off, he asked if he had slowed down or I had speeded up, I had speeded up I said, still moaning. Along this section we went past some drunks and idiots on a 4x4, both me and Janice were up for a fight! Not that we got one. John Cox phoned via Janice to talk to me, "Its not the best time John, I'm sorry but I'm not feeling good at the moment", he told me how proud he was of me and wished me luck, it brought a tear to my eye because I hadn't had much chance to talk to John before the race and thought because it wasn't on the fells that he didn't think it was that important. Thanks John it made me feel better. The light was beginning to fade and we put our headtorches on. Near the end of this section was the only time where I was worried about going in the wrong direction, but Shelley and Michael were at the important turning point to make sure we went the right way. It seemed to be up hill to the last checkpoint before the finish, as we went up this last hill my phone was ringing, I didn't answer it I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone, I looked later and I realised it was Steve (another runner), I thought he was phoning to say he had finished and ask where I was. We arrived at the same time as the other runner so I was joint last now.

Text from Kendra 21.13pm Sunday "Good Luck", this was either sent a bit late or just at the right time, maybe she is psychic!

Hamborough Tavern at 21:51pm on Sunday I was equal last out of 29 remaining runners. When we arrived it sounded like they had a disco playing just for us, apparently it was the rather dodgy pub just behind the checkpoint. I saw Garry and decided to ask again about Steve, he had been fobbing me off all day. He still didn't want to say until I demanded (Oh dear someone else I was going to have to apologise to). Steve had dropped out at 95.5miles and everyone had been worried that if they told me it may not help me psychologically, all I wanted was to know the truth. It was the last 12miles now and John was with me again to help me through 6 miles then Paul for the last 6. The last guy had set off again before me. We set off again, John was begging me to eat something and he had some chocolate, never have I had to be forced to eat chocolate! I ate the chunks little by little. It was fully dark again now and this was playing with my mind, the strange feeling of having goggles on had started again and it felt like I was walking up hill. I kept asking if we were going up hill, "No" John said. We were counting the bridge numbers down again and again they were not only numbered one by one but had A, B, Cs and even sometimes Ds after them. I felt very sleepy again and my feet were on fire, they had been on fire for a long time but they felt worse now, I had imagined that my waterproof socks were welded to my feet and would need to be surgically removed when I'd finished. I felt like I was walking very slowly and John was gently pulling me along, every so often I felt like I couldn't continue with the pain from my feet and just stopped and stood there whilst I bent over at the waist and let my body dangle (don't ask!), at some points I was in this position for a while and John touched me on the back to check I was ok, I had fallen asleep stood up. There were points when I was eyeing up the grass verges they looked so inviting and I really wanted to sleep again. A large bush had fallen across the towpath, I just stood looking at it wondering how I was going to get around it, I managed to get half my body under it and John pulled me out the other side, it was lucky I hadn't needed to get on the floor otherwise I wouldn't have got up again. The bridges still kept coming and by this point I felt like I'd been on this 6mile section for hours, I was sure I was going along the same section of canal, I kept saying "we've been here before", poor John. Now the major hallucinations started, all the bushes at the side of the towpath were people sat at tables talking, and stood talking, there were people in the canal, and most annoying I kept seeing bridges with people stood on them sure it was Paul. At one point I saw a bridge and so did John, it wasn't there, so it wasn't just me that was hallucinating. I tried to increase my pace sometimes and managed a steady shuffle occasionally for short periods before my feet said No. This section went on forever and I thought I would never get to Paul, I was swearing quite a lot because of the pain and the bloody bridges 89A, 89B, 89C etc.....I vaguely remember John saying I would have to have something to eat when we got to Paul. Later he mentioned that I practically ran through this point, I was probably hoping that they wouldn't make me eat anything.

Finally we saw Paul, only 6 miles to go, Oh no not another 6miles, at this point I was running on empty. I linked Paul's arm and off we set. He told me I was 29<sup>th</sup>. I asked "out of how many", "you're 29<sup>th</sup>" he said, "yes but out of how many?" there was no answer. "You mean I'm last!" I know someone has to

be last but I didn't like that it was me. We eventually caught up to Tim, the runner who had been with me at the last checkpoint, he was trying to put on his jacket and gloves without much success, Paul helped him and checked that he was ok, and off we set again. I now wasn't last, yippee! We got a bit of a spurt on then Paul said he couldn't believe it. "What?" There were two guys who had been at least 30minutes in front of me at the last checkpoint and they were now in sight. The competitive part of me took over now I put my head down and we upped the pace, eventually catching the two guys, Paul checked they were ok. I was now 26<sup>th</sup>!! Fantastic, I just had to keep going now. Those last 6miles were the longest 6 miles I've ever walked, they went on forever. A cyclist passed us not far from the finish and he stopped to congratulate us, he was cycling back to check on the other runners. He said there wasn't far to go, Paul asked how long he had been cycling from the finish and guesstimated that we had about 15minutes to go. 15minutes seemed like such a long time, I tried not to think about it and just put one foot in front of the other and kept going, "Don't give up now" I thought.

Little Venice London 1:51am Monday. Finally I think Paul saw the finish before me and counted down the barges, "I can't run" I said feebly. He let me go and watched as I hobbled to the finish line, everyone was clapping and lots of photos were being taken. Finally I'd finished it had taken 43hours and 51minutes to run/walk 145.4miles from Birmingham to London. Dick was at the finish, I think I said something like "How glad I was to see him", I bet he's heard that a few times before. He shook my hand and put the heaviest medal I'd ever seen around my neck. I thanked everyone and gave them well deserved hugs, "where's John?" I asked, "He's over there", oh "He's a tree" I said to everyone's amusement.

I was quite unemotional at the finish; I think I was just exhausted, Dick said he was looking forward to seeing me again next year, Oh no not me! He said he'd heard that before as well.



**Finally the finish, I got my medal off Dick - what a sight for sore tired eyes.**

We set off to go and find a hotel for some sleep; I was sick as soon as the car set off but then fell asleep on the back seat. We didn't get far; Garry was having trouble keeping awake so he stopped at the nearest hotel he could find. As I tried to get out of the car my feet felt enormous, and when the hotel staff said the room was up some stairs, and there wasn't a lift, I nearly laughed. Garry explained the situation and we were given a ground floor room. I fell asleep practically straight away, after Garry had carefully removed my socks that amazingly weren't welded to my feet. In the morning after Garry had helped me with a bath (I felt like a 100 year old woman), we went for some breakfast, my appetite was back and the eggs, beans and toast tasted great.

Over the next few days, both me and Garry found it quite hard to sleep, I kept waking up thinking I'd fallen asleep during the race and I hadn't finished yet and was having terrible hot sweats and Garry woke up comforting me saying there wasn't far to go now. I finally finished the race in my head after about 3 nights of restless sleep. My emotions were all over the place for the next week, I still felt quite numb and hadn't realised quite what I had done, then I would start to cry for no reason, eventually it all sunk in and I started signing emails with "Tracy Lawless Ultra runner". Next year I have promised to help support Steve to finish his race and you never know what for the year after! I've learnt so much and looking baáck think I could improve so many parts of my race that I think I'll always wonder unless I give it another try. We runners are all the same.

A total of £3,310 was raised for the Terence O'Grady club; it was worth all the effort. THANKS to everyone who supported and sponsored me.

Tracy "Ultra Runner" Lawless XXX