

Stilton Striders Summer Outruns 2012

Big Leggy's Blogs

5/9/12 - Hoby

The final Blog of the year is a sad occasion, as it brings the curtain down on another successful outrun season. We had 44 members (I didn't know we had that many!) making an appearance this year. Before going on to report this week's events at Hoby, there are a few loose ends to tie up from previous weeks.

Nobody got the answer to the question about Long John Silver's parrot, who was called Captain Flint. The parrot, real name Jim, was a successful actor in his time and appeared in a number of films and TV shows, including a cameo role in Hitchcock's film, *The Birds*. But he will be remembered best for his performance alongside John Cleese and Michael Palin in the Dead Parrot sketch, where he literally died for his art. His unselfish act paved the way for better health and welfare reforms for talented pets, with the RSPCA using a new code of conduct banning the use of dead live animals. For his contribution, Jim was awarded a posthumus PBE (Parrot of the British Empire) by the government of the time, who also wanted to give every acting pet a medal or honour, even though they were just doing their job. The thought of changing the rules to give honours willy-nilly surely wouldn't happen in this day and age, would it? In the future, it may be cooler not to have an honour or a title.

What did we think of the pub? It has been on and off our approved list over the years, so it is only right to give them a chance. I appreciate that it was busy on our particular outrun night but I didn't like being pushed out into the skittle alley, like we had a contagious disease. Although I did have contact at work the day before with someone who had mumps, maybe word had got around. Plenty of chips but they could have done with a couple more minutes in the fryer, in my opinion. Mind you, those sandwiches they brought out only a minute or so after Malky had left, were delicious! Thanks also to Richard for sharing his raffle prize, which was one of Sally's excellent cakes, so light in fact that we had to eat it to prevent it from flying away!

Have I mentioned Luke's bum yet? No? Okay - Luke's bum.

Everyone got in the spirit, by bringing a raffle prize and we had a good selection, from cakes, books, booze, head lamps, ankle weights – it sounds like the Generation Game, any sign of a cuddly toy? Thanks to everyone, with a further £23 for Air Ambulance. The Air Ambulance total now stands in excess of £200, a great effort.

Going back to the catering – I didn't think much to the beer either (I wasn't alone in that) and have now decided to scrub the pub from the 2013 program. Mind you, it is a lovely run which we can do from Thrussington next year.

Only one 100%'er this year – Ian Mason again. Although I was there every time, the shrapnel prevented me from doing all 14 runs. Julie was next, with 13 runs, including 1 as sub. All in all, 10 people appeared 10 or more times. Thanks to everyone for your support and well done Ian.

Finally, there has been some talk about the Blog and whether it has reached the end of its shelf-life. Is it a relevant, topical, informative? Are parrots human too? The problem with the runs is that we have done them all before, so I could mention the churches again, or the view, or the nudist colony near Hickling but it has (as I mentioned) been mentioned before.

I was watching the programme Pointless recently and the Blog was featured. The question asked was, "We asked 100 people, what the is the most exciting thing in your life?" Of the six top answers, Neils' Blog was pointless! High praise indeed and an endorsement of another year's ramblings.

So, I am off for a six month sabbatical in a Bhuddist Temple in Bangkok (I think that's what the brochure called it), away from the rat race and we will meet again on Wednesday, 24 April at Ashby Folville. I will have pen and paper at the ready!!

Regards – Big Leggy

29/8/12 - South Croxton

I'd like to bet you are breathless after reading last week's roller coaster of a Blog, so I will pause just a moment to allow you to have a drink, or nip to the loo, before starting on the South Croxton Blog to bring you back up to date.

There! Enjoy the rest? Here we go!

As the summer outrun season draws to a close, and you begin to think no new faces will appear this year, someone does. So, it was nice to welcome Abi back and, indeed Mike, who had about a month off on holiday.

Starting off from the pub, we (when I say "we", it's the royal "we", as the old war wound is still playing up – although it appears to be on the mend) headed off. So I was following but actually in front, pointing the way as the sub Pathfinder is still getting to grips with the OS maps. An early problem presented itself as the group split, with some diverting along the road to avoid the bull in the first field. If being Pathfinder for more than 10 years has taught me one thing, it's never to allow the group to split – it is a recipe for disaster. And so it proved. "Never mind the bullocks" shouted Malky, and he headed through with about five others. I went round the road way (obviously as I had a car) and pointed the road group back over the footpath across the ploughed field to re-join the other runners. Then I drove to the next crossing point, about a mile away. If I had known then what I know now, I may have foreseen what was coming when the group reached the road, after what seemed like forever. Malky was missing and he is not safe to be out alone!

As you know, all of my runs (and the historical/geographical knowledge that surrounds them) are thoroughly researched by me before, during and after the run. This is so I do not fill the Blog with paragraph after paragraph of meaningless rubbish.

So, what is it that I know now? It is this – South Croxton, Hungerton and Keyham are the European equivalent of the Bermuda Triangle, with hundreds of cases, that is to say tens of cases – well, one case – about a farmer and his herd of cattle mysteriously getting lost in mysterious circumstances. It dates back to the 17th Century, when Farmer Bell, an avid amateur mapmaker in his spare time (and later immortalised in the classic childrens TV series "Trumpton" and the follow-up series, "Camberwick Green" and "Chigley". There was even a record by Half Man Half Biscuit which documents the Trumpton Riots of 1968 on their unforgettable album, back in the DHSS – in which Farmer Bell acted as mediator, later becoming Parish Councillor), along with his herd, disappeared. They were about a mile from South Croxton, on their way back from Hungerton, as they skirted a wood on a rarely-used alternative route, recommended by a cartographer from the Ordnance Survey, who wanted farmer Bell to get lost, so he would remain the Number 1 Pathfinder.

Since that time, locals and relatives of Farmer Bell refuse to use the alternative route, preferring instead to go through the dark wood, even in the dead of night! Thinking back, I don't recall writing "alternative route" on the map – spooky!! So, the area has a reputation for people disappearing in the Croxton Triangle. Unfortunately, on this occasion, Malky was only lost and was waiting back at the pub for us.

I can't really report on the run, as any mishaps are kept from me, in case they get reported. However, Steve was very proud of his parachute roll at Beechers Brook.

Back at the pub, another £10 for Air Ambulance. Numbers have been down in the last couple of weeks, so let's have a full house at Hoby. I will see if they do chips and sandwiches – maybe Club Funds will stretch to this – I think we will have a Quorum on Wednesday!

Don't forget the Pot Luck Raffle. Bring a wrapped prize to enter in the raffle, it is only £1 a ticket and is the last Air Ambulance fundraiser until Christmas. Come on! Let us fill the place and finish the season with a smile before heading for West Avenue.

Beer of the Week – it was all a bit "iffy". Let's hope that the knee gets better, it is certainly affecting the taste buds. I think I need some of the Finnish, Reiki stuff!!

See you for end of term at Hoby!

Regards

Big Leggy

22/8/12 - Somerby

It's back and it's bigger, better and even more interesting and informative than ever!!

It's a one-off, bloggoff with two this week for the price of one. By way of something different this week, I thought that I would waffle on for a couple of pages of seemingly unrelated items, before returning to the run. So, first it is the Somerby run, one of only two 100%'ers on our itinerary.

The excitement began on my driveway as I was getting into my car. I heard an unfamiliar bird-call, I looked up immediately and spotted a bright yellow parrot called a cockateil (there has to be a joke there somewhere, answers on a postcard, usual address), flying overhead. What is it about the sky? Does anyone else look up when a plane, helicopter, microlite or anything else flies over? At the sight of a plane, who hasn't said "Is it one of ours?".

The sight of parrots flying overhead may be a common thing in the future. There are already green invaders flocking northwards. No need to get alarmed, it's not War of the Worlds, it's not a Martian invasion. Anyway, everybody knows that Martians look like robots on the Cadburys Smash advert. The younger ones amongst you may not remember this but you can Utube it. Did anyone think it strange that Cadburys, who are renowned for chocolate, could make mashed potato? Mind you, that's all changed again, as Cadburys now do cheese!

The green invaders are, in fact, Asian Ring Necked Parakeets and are already a common sight in London and some other big cities. They are voracious feeders, prolific breeders and, in their native lands, are considered to be a pest, with flocks of tens of thousands devastating fruit and crops. There is talk of a cull before we have a similar problem at local Pick Your Own Farms.

In the late 19th Century in America, tens of millions of Passenger Pigeons blackened the skies and, with the stability of the Wild West at the time, cowboys had to shoot at something! So they

shot at these pigeons and, within 30 years, they were all gone. The last one, Martha, died in Cincinatti Zoo in 1914. Once again, they had nothing to shoot at, so they joined in with the carnage of War (albeit late). So, think on. Is it wise to cull all the parrots, are they a nuisance? Do they displace native birds, or would you like to see them on your bird table?

In the news this week, some puritanical do-gooders have suggested that shooting magazines are offensive and corrupt the minds of impressionable children. They say that such magazines belong on the top shelf with the more adult magazines. Imagine my embarrassment yesterday when, at the backstreet Newsagent, I was searching for "Pheasant Murderers Weekly" and the Vicar walked in! I quickly grabbed a copy of "Readers Wives XXX" and left hurriedly. (Much like I used to do with toothpaste at the Chemist).

Ring Necked Parakeets do not make good talkers but some parrots do, especially the African Grey. One in particular had a vocabulary of around 200 words, which is more than a professional footballer.

Although I haven't mentioned it, some of you may know that I have a knee injury. So, when I saw the parrot flying overhead, I devised a plan (which, ultimately, failed to catch it) in it becoming part of my Long John Silver fancy dress display team. I already have a wooden leg but I am short of the parrot.

Today's quiz is: What is the name of Long John's parrot in Treasure Island? You may recall in the classic novel written by Robert Louis Stevenson (who also invented the train), a character called Ben Gunn who had vital information but wouldn't reveal anything until he had a bit of cheese. (We are getting there!) And there was no shortage of cheese at the pub this week, with a Stilton-based quiz. This was won by Julie, correctly guessing that a Stilton Cheese weighs 24lbs wet and 17lbs matured.

In the American town of Stilton, Iowa – a place renowned for heart problems obesity and cholesterol (it even has a visitor centre, we call it a hospital!), they have a Stilton eating competition. Competitors must eat a whole Stilton in under 2 hours. This is the culmination of some 4 years training and is the pinnacle of the bulk-eaters career.

Being unable to take part in the run (I may be back at Hoby), I try to make the course easy to follow. I check at various road crossings and vantage points to keep an eye on the running group, to make sure that no-one geI haven'ts lost. Up until now I haven't lost one yet – wait until next week!

After the Ordnance Survey libel case from the Tilton outrun, I thought that I would get the runners to re-enact running through the same field and farm, part of the run where they got lost last week, this week – if you see what I mean? This week the farmer was far from helpful and lambasted the runners for running through the field and disturbing the horses. Two things to consider here are; clearly mark the path and don't put horses in footpath fields if they are liable to be spooked, Mr Farmer!

Still in view with my powerful german binoculars, the pack headed for Owston before a tough climb back into Somerby via the Leicestershire Round.

Another £14 for Air Ambulance, with Julie the Cheesey Winner and Tam, the Sweetey Winner.

A final parrot story to finish. At the pub there was a beer called Scarlet Macaw - a noisy, gaudy bird, common in Essex. Whether it was supposed to taste like it did, or whether the Macaws had been got at – it wasn't one of my favourites. In fact, recently I am getting a bit picky about the taste of beer. I hope that it is not an adverse side-effect of having a bad leg and not running.

See you at Hoby on the 5th September – Look out for the South Croxton Blog next!!

15/08/12 - Tilton

Just a short Blog this week, as I am rather busy being injured! A quick update on last week's quiz, with £15 being raised. The Lottery ticket offered as a prize (which I promised to share) did not win. Sorry, but you will have to trust me on that.

I am actually writing the Blog this week, coincidentally, from my new villa in Barbados, watching the azure-blue Caribbean sea gently lapping the sun-kissed shore, while dolphins play in the shallows and tropical birds sing in the palm trees. I will try and get back in time for the Somerby run. If not, and you see Julie, let her know I'm alright please!

It is difficult, now I'm not running with you, to give a full and factual account of the events as they happen. That goes for Stathern, which was a non-event for me and Tilton, although I was able to join in a bit on the night.

As you know, Steve McGarry took on the role of Pathfinder, managing to get lost at one point and then blaming the Ordnance Survey for producing a poor map! I have 'phoned them (long distance from the villa) to find out if they had considered producing a HUGE PRINT version for people like Steve but they said it would have to be a 1:1 scale and is a waste of paper.

The run itself was a tried and tested route, with few mishaps, except for some unruly cows (leave it!) which played up near Halstead. Keeping close watch at each road crossing, the 16 runners (with another 4 in Richard's posse) headed for the challenge of the big hill near Tilton. I sat at the top of said hill, on a bench dedicated to an old bloke who must have frozen to death on that exact spot! It was chuffing cold sitting on it, even in August. It's the Urals, you know.

Back to the pub for a couple pints of Hops and Dreams, while Tam switched on some adult TV, hurriedly switching back to some kid's TV in the form of England's footballers.

Sorry to have misled you a bit on the quiz. I will make amends at Somerby, where we will have a village-based local knowledge quiz.

Advance warning – Hoby run on 5th September is the last outrun for this year. I thought we could have a pot-luck raffle, with everyone bringing a wrapped-up fun prize. We can all win something and have a laugh at the same time (oh yes we can!). Another great idea. How do I do it? I amaze myself sometimes!

I know that all you regular Blog readers will, no doubt, feel short-changed by this week's offering but don't worry, I hope to be back to full literary capacity next week.

08/08/12 - Wreake Challenge

The annual Wreake Challenge was hosted this year by Stilton Striders, starting from the Rugby Club Headquarters.

A tough, multi-terrain course of 5.25 miles took the runners out towards Burton Lazars and onto the Sawgate, before an off-road loop back onto the village, ending in a final sprint across the sports field to the finish.

With 73 runners representing the three teams (Barrow Runners, Stilton Striders, Wreake Runners), this year's race proved a popular success. After a bit of a problem with signage at the first turning, the race continued without problem.

First home was Wreake Runner, Gavin Poynton, closely followed by Junior Strider, Luke Jane, who had a terrific run against the Seniors. Third in was Ian Cox from Barrow Runners, with Dave Rose (Wreake) 4th and Barrie Moss (Stilton) making up the top 5.

The overall team positions saw a close tussle between Wreake, with 628 points and Barrow with 668 points. Striders came third with 843 points. Everyone put in creditable performances.

After the race, all participants and marshalls headed for the bar and a delicious chilli supper. Proceeds from the race went to the Air Ambulance and their representative, John Nowell, gave a brief speech and received £130 on their behalf.

Thanks to everyone who helped out with marshalling and at the finish, also to the Rugby Club for use of their facilities and not least to the caterer, who did a great job.

18/7/12 - Gaddesby

After 3 weeks (or is it 4?) without a Blog, this is what you have all been waiting for!

Only the toughest-of-the-tough were on the outrun on Wednesday, from the Cheney Arms in Gaddesby, for a 7 mile cross country run in testing conditions. In the words of those musical maestro's, Flanders and Swann:

Mud, mud, glorious mud
Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood.
So follow me, follow
Down to the hollow
And there we will wallow in glorious mud.

Other hits of theirs include "I'm a Gnu" – an animal of strange appearance, famous for throwing itself into rivers, to be eaten by crocodiles. "The gas man cometh" – a song I am sure you all know, which begins "Twas on a Monday morning, the gas man came to call....." – the song continues through the week (a bit like Solomon Grundy) , until there is no house left. Other less well-known, but equally funny, tunes include songs about Sweet Peas, Doctors and Trains, a real eclectic mix. A CD of their work is available from Amazon.

I have waited a few days before writing the Blog, as I was awaiting developments of the Milk Wars. Would you pay more for milk if the extra went to cover the deficit faced by the farmer? Pint of milk costing 40p, goes up 5p = national uproar. Pint of real ale costing £3.20, goes up 5p = national acceptance (we still get ratted!). What a discerning nation we can be at times!

On the run we didn't see any milkers, with their come to barn eyes, as the fields are too wet to produce good grass. Nearly all of the cattle were for beef, used in the production of finest chilli and a popular dish from rural Mexico and, as we ran through the cattle fields, you can't help thinking that cows don't look very intelligent – but you could be wrong. How many scientists do you know who can turn grass into milk? How clever is that? I have heard that farmers in the rest of Europe are awaiting developments also and have secretly been building a pipeline under the North Sea, to pump their milk direct to the UK. As, one-by-one, British farms 'go under', the taps will be switched on and Euromilk will flow. Imagine that, foreign milk on your cornflakes (other cereals are available – I am a shredded wheat man myself). Email your favourite to the usual address and I will conduct a really interesting survey.

The ongoing milk wars brought to mind Norman Wisdom's satirical comedy, "The Early Bird". A film about a small, independent dairy delivering milk in a 1950's inner city. After years of doing the same round, Norman Pitkin (as his character is called) is delivering with his horse and cart one morning, only to find that his bottles have been smashed on the doorstep and a new milkman in town with a swanky new electric float from Consolidated Dairies. How will the small man react? Well, after Norman tells his boss, Mr Grimsdale, a plan is hatched and battle commences. I won't spoil the film for you (also available from Amazon) but 'might' does not always prevail over 'right'. Think on, Consolidated Dairies 2012-style! Other famous milkmen include Ernie, the fastest milkman in the West. Sadly, no longer with us, after being hit under the heart by a rock cake and hit by a stale pork pie to the head. Pies and cakes supplied by my mother, you could knock nails in with her pastry! (Only kidding, Mum. I know I'm safe as she doesn't have a computer).

Norman Wisdom was, of course, a favourite of the people in communist Albania. There is a statue of him outside the Odeon Multiplex in Tirana, where his films (and he made a few) are still shown. After the fall of communism, he was invited to become King Norman of Albania but he declined, settling for a quiet retirement on the Isle of Man, living well into his 90's. There is a statue of him there too, on the seafront in Douglas. I have seen it and it is a very moving experience.

As we trudged, what seemed endlessly on through mud, sludge and primeval ooze, where origins of life were reinventing themselves, I thought "People pay for mud baths at Health Spa's". It passed through my mind to open one there and then but I am not sure opening a Spa in a muddy gateway would be commercially viable. Although the feeling of the mud around your legs was great. I have searched the internet for a duathlon of cross country running and mixed mud wrestling but couldn't find any races. A missed opportunity maybe!

It was nice to see one of our top Juniors taking on the muddy challenge. Jasmin Southam took it all in her stride without complaint – apart from:

My feet are wet
I have been stung
I've got a blister
I've stepped in cow poo
I've put my hand on barbed wire
How long left?
I thought you said it was 5 miles!
Are we nearly there yet?

Until she finally just lost it and head-butted a Little Owl! An Odd Billie moment, if ever there was one and one that took some explaining when the RSPB Inspector arrived at the pub, after receiving a tip-off.

The run started from the pub and opposite is a raised field, a kind of ha-ha retaining the wall and a herd of Pedigree Hereford Cattle. But what is the origin of the wall and the interesting bond of the brickwork? After much research a ha-ha, a wall set in a ditch so as not to interrupt the view of the landscape, is a word of French origin and was in use in Norman times. An excellent example being at Parkside Farm in Kent, a deer park established by Bishop Odo, brother of William the Conqueror. Remains of the ditch can still be seen today. More next week. The interesting wall does not even get a mention on the Gaddesby Village Website, with the only items in the notable features section being, two water pumps, a large boulder and a chapel demolished in 1966. Wow! Bet you can't move for tourists!

So, the end of another Blog, cataloguing our forays in the wet but beautiful countryside. Only 9 this week, with 2 more on the road and Ian Johnson hiding until we had gone and then pretending to be late!

Only 3 100%'ers left – myself, Mike and Ian M – with Dan becoming our 40th outrunner this year. Can we make it 50? There must be someone out there just dying to join us.

No quiz this week, so double-trouble next week and thanks to those who chipped in anyway.

Red Lion, Stathern on 25 July – should be good, it may even be dry!!!!

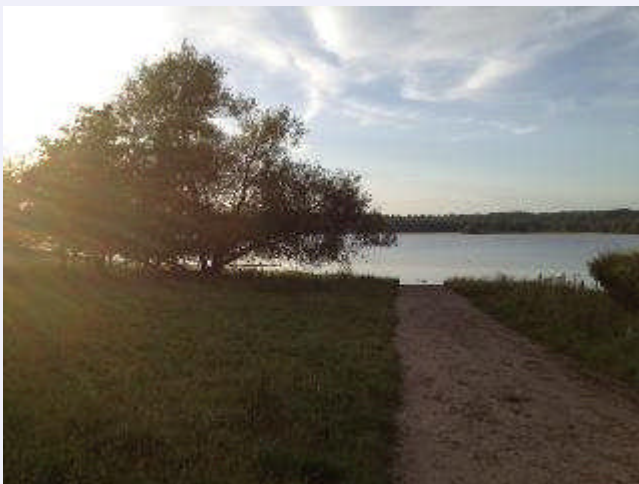
No outrun the following week as there is a LRRL race. I have got a nice 5 mile (ish) run from the Club if anyone cares to join in. It may give us insider knowledge for the Wreake Challenge on 8 August. Please try and run this event, or help in some way, the Striders' honour and reputation are at stake.

Regards
Big Leggy

27/6/12 - Handicap Race at Hambleton Peninsula, Rutland Water

No extended Blog this week – for once, I am just providing an entirely factual report!

This year's Handicap Race returned to Hambleton for the 5.2mile tough, and deceptively undulating, course around the peninsula. The Club's top 15 runners took up the challenge, with the handicapper sweating almost as much as the competitors on a hot, sticky night.



Julie and Laura set off up the hill from the car park, with the rest of the runners starting off at intervals trying to chase them down. Jim and Pat were the last away, 11 minutes later. At half way Julie and Laura were still ahead but the rest of the field were closing them down, with Ian having cut the deficit to about a minute, having overtaken Gary. A closely bunched group next with Steve, Andy N, Wayne, Ian and John, who appeared to be struggling having closed the gap by about 3 minutes. Andy R and Richard were neck-and-neck, Andy having caught up with Richard after giving him a minutes start. Jim was only 20 seconds further back and 'flying', with Pat only just behind him.



At this stage, I believed Andy to be the favourite, with Wayne and Jim making up the minor placings. But, had the latter runners pushed too hard and underestimated the hills in the first half of the race? Not saving enough for further climbs later on before the long 1½ mile flat section after leaving the woods? That flat part is really tough on everyone, as you can see all the runners in front of you and you begin to push hard to chase them down!

Back at the finish, I waited impatiently for the first runners to appear out of the lane for the 300metre road section to the finish. Unbelievably, Julie and Laura appeared first, clinging onto a slender lead, as Richard came flying out of the lane in hot pursuit with Jim and Andy R close behind. With both girls beginning to struggle, and Richard breathing down their necks, Julie made a desperate sprint for the line with about 100metres to go, breaking the tape in 46:30 and collapsing in a heap on the ground for first place. Laura bravely hung on for second place just 5 seconds behind and Richard third, 13 seconds behind. Jim, who started 11 minutes after the girls, had the fastest run of the night and finished only 16 seconds behind in an impressive 34:31! Andy R made up the top 5, just 33 seconds behind.

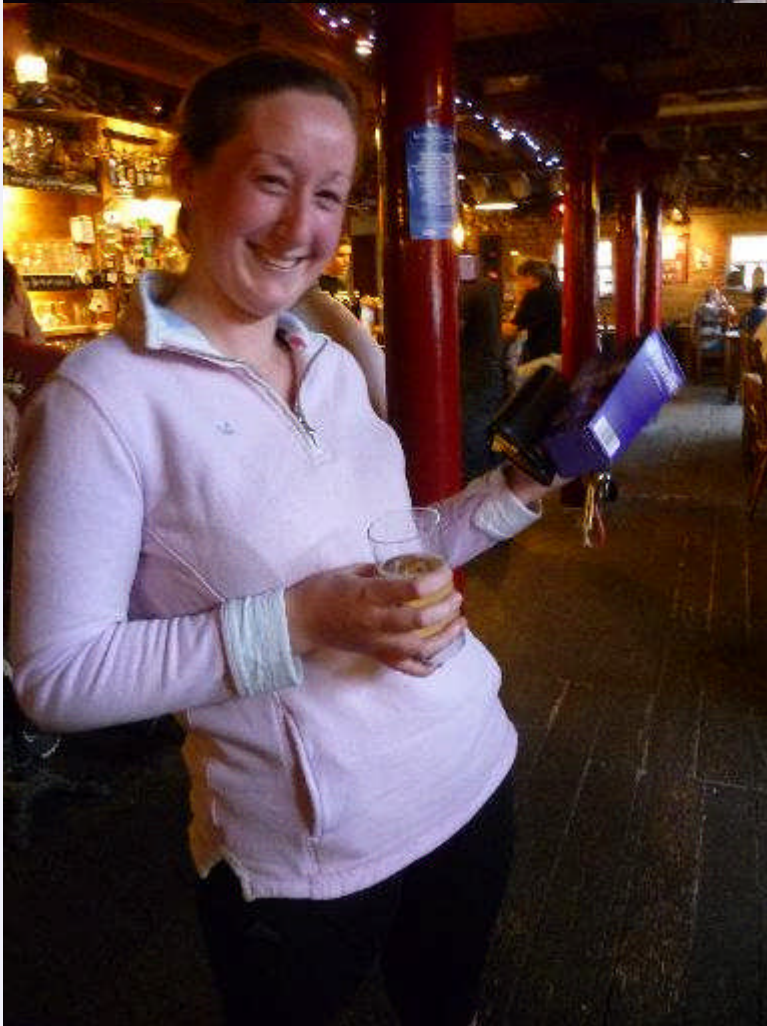
Gary, Ian and Steve (6th, 7th and 8th), all finished within 75 seconds of Julie, with Pat, 9th, making up 5 places and John (who found another gear from somewhere, with a strong second half) finished 10th just 2 minutes behind. Wayne took the honours in his personal running battle with Andy N and Mike, with new boy Iain finishing last in 49:51 (his time 42:01).

A terrifically, closely-contested race, with the girls running really well to stay in ahead of the field when they knew they were there to be shot at and expecting to be overtaken at any time! Full results:

PLACE	DIFFERENCE	NAME	RACE TIME	ACTUAL TIME
1	=	Julie	46:30	46:30
2	1	Laura	46:35	46:35
3	+ 8	Richard	46:43	36:33
4	+ 9	Jim	46:46	34:31
5	+ 7	Andy R	47:03	36:03
6	- 3	Gary	47:21	44:36
7	- 3	Ian M	47:27	43:42
8	- 3	Steve	47:45	41:05
9	+ 5	Pat	48:05	35:45
10	- 3	John	48:30	40:07
11	- 3	Wayne	48:47	40:00
12	- 2	Andy N	48:54	39:24

13	- 4	Mike	49:35	40:35
14	+5	Iain	49:51	42:01

The presentation of the Trophy and prizes was at the Grainstore in Oakham, with Indian Pale Ale being Beer of the Week and a real contender this year.





£13 raised from the Quiz for Air Ambulance, which was a multi-way tie.



It is the Hungarton 7 LRRL this Wednesday, so no actual outrun. However, if any of you fancy a run and can't do Hungarton, meet at the Club and I'll sort out a route from there – 7:00pm as normal.

20/06/12 - Branston

The Striders outrun this week began from The Wheel at Branston, which prompted me to delve into my library of history books to find out which civilisation is credited with inventing the wheel, an invention which changed the world more than any other.

Early references in Greek Mythology date it as far back as Ancient Greece, where the slave bringing news of an invasion 26 miles to Marathon did not, in fact, run all the way but used a bike between the towns, before alighting on the outskirts and running through the crowds and picking his bike up on the other side of town. A tradition now taken only by the 2012 Olympic Committee for the torch relay, although a bus is now used between towns to transport all of the necessary, unnecessary equipment, minders, officials and OAP's, who think that their bus pass is valid for shopping trips.

The Scandinavians also have a claim. The Norse Saga's and the Runes tell of the ancient god, Thor, riding across the sky in his chariot of fire with his mighty horse, Volvolius, at the head. (Has anyone noticed the running theme so far? It ends here!)

Further afield in China, on discovering the 3500 year old Terracotta Army, Professor Wan Hung Lo and his wife, Hoo Flung Dung, were surprised to find a horse and cart stamped 'Made in Hong Kong', giving rise to early trade links at the time and the start of the demise of the Staffordshire pottery industry.

Back in Europe, the German paleontologist Dr Imer Scheister, who has been exploring the fossil remains in the Silesian Slate Quarries for more than 50 years, claims to have found the earliest example yet. Carbon-dating has shown the fossil to be between 65-70million years old and is of a velociraptor, riding a unicycle! Sounds unbelievable, doesn't it? In response, England have called on their top 11 scientists to "sally forth with pick, shovel and hammer" to find anything earlier in order to beat the Germans. This may be our only hope!

You will, no doubt, have noticed there are no historical records from America. They had no history before 1492, long after the wheel was invented by the civilised world. In the 1990's though, a Professor from the University of Chicago, Dr Ronald King, while searching the rocky areas of the Apache Tribal lands, allegedly, found an old wheel-shaped object approximately 2ft in diameter. After 5 years of scientific research, he was denounced as a fraud and a charlatan by The Royal Society, who proved that the object was, in fact, a hamburger dropped by a tourist from New York in the 1980's. Apparently the tourist was so upset at his loss, he took to comfort-eating and has now achieved his goal of being a super-obese 37stone. He is, however, still one of the slimmest men on his block.

Into the valley now, Africa's Rift Valley to be exact. On the dried riverbed where footprints of Annie, the earliest known humanid, were found - two parallel lines, originally thought to have been formed by a forked stick dragged through the mud, are now believed to have been made by a primitive (not a brand-new) roller skate.

Wherever the wheel was invented, it was a good job it was otherwise there would be no pub in Branston bearing the name, to enjoy a delicious pint of Sundown Ale (which seemed to have a hint of ginger). Sundown is one of a number of ales produced by the Buntingford Brewery. Buntingford is also the home of the English bunting industry and has been since the 16th century, producing bunting for the triumphant return of Sir Walter Raleigh at Tilbury Docks. He arrived smoking a potato, eating tobacco leaf crisps and riding a Chopper. Of course, bunting was very different then as there was no Union Flag (it is not correct to use the word "Jack" unless you are in the Navy). This did not appear until the Act of Union with Scotland during the reign (1603-25) of James I (James VI of Scotland) and known as the wisest fool in Christendom.

As Feste says in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night - "Better a witty fool than a foolish wit!" The flag combines the crosses of England and Scotland, the Irish cross of St Patrick was not added until

1801, when it became part of the Union. Wales is represented by the English cross, as it had been ruled by England since the 14th century, after being subdued by Edward I. Indeed his son, Edward II, becoming the first Prince of Wales, being named after a pub in Llandudno High Street. It was actually after a pub in the village of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlilanantysilrogogogoch but I couldn't spell it!

A number of people mentioned the lack of (and quality of) prize for the Air Ambulance quiz and I am sorry to hear that. Your points have been noted and I am not sure how you could have been disappointed with the prize this week. The quiz was about my blood pressure reading and was won by Iain Howe (who, I suspect, has a medical bent) but, due to technical reasons ie he is not yet a member, he was unable to claim his prize of a 2 week-all-expenses-paid holiday to the Caribbean, with a pop star of his choice. (For me it is always a toss-up between Kylie and Beyoncé). The prize, I'm afraid, does not roll over, so it is back to little or nothing from next week. Thanks to everyone for the £15 raised.

Next week's run on the 27th is from Hambleton Car Park at Rutland Water and is the Club Handicap Race. About 5.5miles and completely traffic-free, it promises to be a good evening with good prizes to be won. Afterwards at the Grainstore in Oakham. Don't miss it!

This weeks quiz is: How many song titles in this week's Blog? Answers to the usual address.

Regards
Big Leggy

PS Almost forgot – we did have a run. It was very nice!

06/06/12 - Thorpe Satchville

Sincere apologies for the longer-than-expected delay in the release of the latest saga of our countryside exploits. Trying to emulate the success of the Pulitzer Prize nominated Cake Competition Blog, my creative juices had, temporarily, dried up. Indeed, as news of the nomination leaked out in Melton, I had to sneak off in the dead of night to avoid the glare of the local paparazzi and headed, at great risk, through the Dartford Tunnel, for a few weeks sabbatical in Kent where, thankfully, the smouldering embers of my quill have been reignited.

With so much happening on the night of the Thorpe Satchville run and so many revelations being revealed, where to begin is the problem!

The inclement weather and the gloomy forecast did not deter the 19 runners from another cracking run in the glorious Leicestershire countryside. A tremendous downpour delayed our start for 10 minutes, before heading out to Burrough over some muddy fields, which were proving to be very slippery. Mike, who had already fallen in the pub car park, fell again! We reached Burrough without any further mishap but a few fell for the old "Neil drops back, so those at the front miss the path" trick, meaning my night was already complete. The sun began to come out as we headed for the Trig Point and we paused to admire the view.

Heading on back towards Moscow Farm (see previous Blogs for further information), the group split at the point of the Leicestershire Round. Those of us taking the longer route were treated to the sight of Melton Borough's largest captive German Shepherd Bear, a rare hybrid Grizzly/Alsatian cross, a bit more tricky to achieve than a Labradoodle or a Staffiweiller. I think that I would sooner meet a Grizzsation than a Staffiweiller, at least you could try the old Ray Mears trick of making yourself look big and shouting loudly, which normally scares a bear. It then runs off and does what bears do in the woods.

Further dramas on the longer route, as we ran alongside a lake which is the largest man-made lake in Thorpe Satchville, before emerging into a former cricket ground but is now cow paradise. We were tracked all the way through by said cows, a herd of cross-breeds - probably Hereford-Simentals, although I would have to ask John, who is a bit of an old cowpoke. It was he who shepherded Louise across the field in a chivalrous act, as she has a cow allergy. Thanks also to John, who took his huge Victoria Sponge (!) to sell in his tearoom and raised a further £14 for Air Ambulance – marvellous!

The drama didn't end there either. As Crepe Night is no longer on the agenda at the Fox Inn, they also do not seem to appreciate the prestige that comes with winning the 'Beer of the Week' award:

Oh dear! Oh dear!
Pity the beer
That's called Bombardier
It will never be Best Ale of the Year!

Taken from the Collected Works of the Poets Laureate. This one is by John Betjeman, who visited Thorpe Satchville in 1962, to gather anecdotal evidence for his lamentations on the demise of the railway network by the evil Dr Beeching.

Andy appeared to either be dressed for an interview or had misread Crepe Night for Stilton Strider 2012 Best Dressed Man Award which, incidentally on that evidence, he a) wouldn't have won or b) got the job. Although he did give me an idea for a future competition which, I am 100% sure that everyone will be up for.

While on the Competiton subject, it was the Singer Car Company which produced the Gazelle. They also made the Chamois (a type of goat), the Giraffe (which got stuck under low bridges) and the Chameleon (which changed colour in the car wash). More weird car names in future blogs – wow!!

Anyway, back to Andy, who left and came back rather quickly, to inform us that his car wouldn't start. Step forward the Striders team of Ace Mechanics – myself, Richard and Ian J with his formidable array of snap-on tools, big hammers, welding equipment and, most importantly, jump leads. It seems easy to attach the leads to both cars and - "kapow!" – Andy's ageing Renault starts. Not so. His car was up against a wall, with the battery on wall-side, Ian's battery on the opposite side and, despite manouevering, the leads didn't reach! So we then had to move Richard's car and then another car, to push Andy's car out but the leads still didn't reach. Then, with the cars nose-to-nose, contact was finally made. We have now been signed up by Red Bull as part of their crack F1 back room pit staff. I trust Andy went directly to a garage to get it properly repaired.

It seemed to be a week for breakdowns, as Catherine revealed that she had broken down at an Adult store, somewhere in the East of England. Luckily, she is in the AA and a Patrolman arrived to give her a jumpstart and send her safely on her way. Other suggested places not to break down are the former Little Thief café on the A1 and, further south down the A1, another one. Both shops not now selling a Full English (although a Full Brazilian is available, so I understand!).

This week's competition was "Guess how many sweets in the jar", won by Ian J but donated to second place winner, Jim. With £15 raised, we have now reached well in excess of £100 for Air Ambulance. Winners of the competitions so far: Tam, Malky, Julie D, Ian J, Richard A.

With two 100%'ers gone last week, we are down to myself, Julie J, Ian M, Sally and Mike as the remaining few.

On the 20th, we are at The Wheel in Branston, where we usually get a warm welcome and a decent pint (and maybe a run as well). Don't miss it!

Also a reminder of the Handicap Run from Hambleton Car Park on the 27th – start at 7:00pm prompt, please. If you are intending to run, please let me know so I can work out your handicap time. Don't worry if you only know on the night that you are able to run, just turn up!

30/05/12 - Plungar

The Cake Competition, once again, proved that the Striders are multi-taskers without compare amongst all running clubs, with entries in all classes this year and an outstanding overall winner.



Winner of the Vegetable-based Cake category was Richard Angrave, with his carrot cake which included delicately moulded carrots around the edge.



Cakes containing fruit were sub-divided into tray bake and loaf shape, with delicious offerings from Julie Dooley (Orange Squares) and Julie Jaggard (Blueberry and white chocolate small loaf).

Olympic-theme Class was won by me, with a runners' podium Lemon Cake. Nobody tried my cake and I can only assume that you thought it was too nice to cut. Extra-large Victoria Sponge was won by John Houghton, with his extra-large Victoria Sponge (!).

Shop-bought cake didn't have a category, as it is a home-made cake competition, so Steve McGarry is not worthy of a mention (although his name will crop up later in the Blog).

The Jubilee Celebration Cake category (run under strict W I rules), was won by Sally for her multi-decorated Diamond Jubilee Cake, which must have taken, literally, minutes to make. A cake fit to grace the Queen's table at a Palace Garden Party.



Congratulations to all who made a cake from all who ate them, a real team effort. There has to be a winner, even in an age where competition is frowned upon and the prize for second place is counselling. Notwithstanding, the overall winner is, of course, Air Ambulance, with a terrific £35 raised on the night. Thanks to ourselves and the generosity of the regulars and landlord in the Anchor Inn.

Some of you commented on my article on Samuel Taylor Coleridge last week and seemed a little confused. You may have been getting mixed up with the composer, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, whose most famous work is the unforgettable setting of Longfellow's *Hiawatha* (a favourite poem of mine) to music in the early 19th century. So impressed were the media by its sheer intensity and musical prose, it was put forward as Britain's entry into the 1815 Eurovision Song Contest. Predictably, after some blatant Franco-Prussian vote rigging, it finished in the bottom one! Britain's anger was uncontrollable and the contest was the catalyst for the Battle of Waterloo. The Iron Duke hot-footed it across Europe to give the upstart Napoleon, and his cronies, a damn good thrashing. A battle commemorated over 150 years later by Abba in the 1974 Eurovision (probably oblivious to the real reason for the Battle). Halcyon days though, when tactical voting hadn't been invented, euro techno-pop was still to come and countries behind the Iron Curtain had yet to be discovered by the West, thanks to Stalin.

They say that things come in threes and, talking of power-crazy madmen like Napoleon and Stalin (latter day apologists, don't start!), did anyone notice the change in Steve this week as he assumed control on his own turf? Urging everybody on, looking at his watch while waiting for slower ones to catch up and then almost moving straight on, giving them no time for a breather. We found out later on that he was keen to get back before the cake shop was closed. It was, in

truth, totally out of character for Steve. Due to recent changes at the Club, he is now our longest serving active runner, having completed 27 years membership. You would think that he would become a genial father-figure in his dotage! He was having none of it – even berating poor old Gary for not paying his subs (which he has now done). Actually, under the Data Protection Act, I should not have divulged information about non-payment, so I apologise to Gary and, to ensure that you are not singled out, here is a full list:

.....
.....

Steve's route, however, was an old favourite, incorporating parts of the Redmile and Granby route from past outruns. On the outward route, the Ramblers Association were out in force and very polite they were too, as they stepped aside, high-fiving as we ran past. I have now revised my opinion of the RA, who previously I had thought to be slightly curmudgeonly, something that could never be levelled at me (ask Julie for confirmation)!

A pleasant run along the canal to Redmile before a loop through Barkestone and back along the canal to Plungar, admiring the large yellow flag irises and listening to the sedge warbler – a typical English summer evening.

Last week's quiz, once again, didn't provide a flood of answers (more a drought situation situation). The answers were:

Highest price paid a ram - £247,000 for Champion Lord Fontleroy of Bestwick, a prize Sussex Ram.

The heaviest sheep ever sold in the UK is reputed to be another ram named Mammoth Bob, which weighed in at a massive 387lbs – sounds unbelievable, doesn't it?

I had likened some of our runners to Antelope or Gazelle, but what is the difference? Well, I am no David Attenborough but a gazelle is a small, deer-like animal of the family gazellai and contains around 30 species, including the Grant's and Thomson's both often seen on the African Plains trying to outrun a cheetah. Other members include the blackbuck, gerenuk and, of course, the dikdik. Whilst an antelope is what you post a letter in.

Quiz: Which car company produced the Gazelle?

Beer of the week: Diamond Reign/Rain/Rein/Rhein – delete as necessary. Brewed in honour of our Majesty, the Queen (who loves it).

Bit of an epic this week but still time to add 2 new runners to our list, which has now reached 38 – 8 of these are 100%'ers.

Crepe Night at The Fox, Thorpe Satchville next week, don't miss it!

Regards,
Big Leggy.

23/05/12 - Whissendine

A few of you have requested that the Blog appears on the website earlier, as I am told that everyone is regularly logging on from Thursday morning in eager anticipation of (yet another!) literary classic. Now, I'm not one to put myself up alongside such doyens of English Literature such as Shakespeare, Dickens and Enid Blyton (that is for others to do!) but these things take time and I wouldn't want any factual inaccuracies to appear in the public domain through lack of research. Suffice to say, I am sure (actually, I'm not!) it will be worth the wait.

Well, what a night! Not to be confused with "Oh, what a night" by the Four Seasons with Frankie Valley, who took his name from the mining area in South Wales, where his grandmother was born. 26 runners assembled at the Three Horseshoes, which brought back some emotional memories for me, as it was the pub where I had my first pint with my grandad in the 1970's. I am not entirely certain but I think the decor was the same back then. With 26 runners eager to go on a hot, humid night – talk of the demise of the Striders by persons unknown and who don't know us, was beginning to get on my wick! The Club has gone from strength to strength in recent months, with the "old guard" being bolstered by an influx of new runners who join in all of our games. All 26 got back safely and stayed for a drink afterwards. Our quiz of the week was "Guess the beer in the bag combo", won by Tam, who gave the beer away but ate the olympic mascot.

This was another new venue for us. We began by running through a housing estate and uphill, out of the village, onto part of the Rutland Round, with beautiful views over the local area. It brought to mind a favourite line from a piece of poetry (a passion of mine, believe it or not) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which sums up runs in the countryside – "Every man is his own path maker – skip, run and jump – where rushes grow, a man may go." Beautiful! One of Coleridge's other classic poems is, of course, 'Rime of the ancient runner'.

Although I can't recall seeing any rushes in a sea of oil seed rape, which seems to be everywhere this year, we did see and smell much native flora in full bloom, including cow parsley, ceck, buttercups, rosebay willowherb and the may blossom. In ancient times, the may blossom was called "mothers death", as to take it in the house was thought to be unlucky. Once indoors, the blossom begins to smell like putrifying flesh (or my socks, as Julie says!). So, beware when picking wild flowers (which you shouldn't be doing anyway).

On reaching Langham, we ran through the village before taking a cracking path back towards Whissendine. The highlight was running through a garden (I love that) alongside a stream and surprising a lady weeing sorry, weeding! The last field was occupied by a horse and an enormous ram, posing on a rock looking like a centrefold for Farmers Weekly or the Derby County Fanzine. This week's quiz: What is the heaviest weight and highest prize paid for a ram? I don't know, but do you?

Last week's quiz had no entries, as usual, but the answers were: Sir Frank Worrell, Sir Everton Weekes and Sir Clyde Walcott. Sir Clyde is no relation whatsoever to Theo Walcott, a youngster with precocious talent. Maybe at the upcoming Euro's, Roy's young guns (in a mixed squad of youth, experience, pony tails, thugs and over-aged defenders who have tried and failed before), can bring home the trophy. Although on the evidence of Saturday's friendly, it seems unlikely. Incidentally, Roy Hodgson is the third England Manager in a row unable to say "Round the rugged rock, the ragged rascal ran".

Beer of the Week: Tie between Old Speckled Hen and Black Sheep (EIEIO).
No food available but nibbles of the week were Cheesy Balls (its the hot weather!)

100%'ers – 9 - 36 different runners have joined in so far - over £70 for Air Ambulance so far.

Next week (or now this week), the 30th is the Cake Competition run from The Anchor at Plungar. Please join in and bring a homemade cake, big or small. Shop bought cakes will be eaten immediately before being disqualified.

16/05/12 - Wymeswold

Sorry about the Blog being late this week. The reason for this is that I have been summoned to appear before the Leveson Enquiry, to answer phone-hacking charges about highly sensitive material used in previous Blogs. Fortunately, I was able to contact friends in low places by text

message and I am free to carry out my legitimate blogging. If you think this Leveson Enquiry is going on a bit, wait for the enquiry into how much it is costing the tax payer (3rd week in a row), which will be called the "On the Never Never Enquiry". On the bright side though, in a time of double-dip recession, it is creating wealth and jobs for those who already have wealth and jobs, so well done there!

On with the story of last Wednesday's run, which was a first for the Striders from the Three Crowns at Wymeswold. A popular pub, used by a variety of sportsmen and women, which was only enhanced by our presence! In fact, one local was heard to say that we must be the UK Athletics Elite Squad on a night out from Loughborough (although this was before Wayne and Mike arrived!). Among other sports represented, was football, cycling, bowls and a load of petanquers (this is not rhyming slang for anything).

As a result of all these drinkers, the car park was chokka. This did enable Celia to perform her impressive impression of the late, great Reginald Molehusband. An icon of the 1960's and 70's Public Information Films, who was born in the Leicestershire village of Husbands Bosworth, where a Blue Plaque can be found at his former house which commemorates this great exponent in the art of reversing. Keep up the good work, Celia, and may Reginald's memory live on.

There will be a number of you waiting for the result of last week's Stridermillions quiz question. However, as usual, I received less than one reply prior to entries closing, so the Jackpot rolls over again. The correct answers are: Male hares are known as Jack and female hares are known as Jill. And you know what they did up the hill, according to Judge Dread, in his classic tune "Big Seven" in 1972!! (A follow-up to "Big Six" and subsequently followed by "Big Eight", which ended the sequence).

You may recall that I had promised an article on "Wildlife of the Serengeti" and I was beginning to get a little worried that all the interesting wildlife would be hiding, just in case any poachers were about. I should have had more faith, as about two fields from the end of the run, we came across a herd of rare zebra. So rare, in fact, that the stripes have merged into large areas of black and white patches. There were a number of young ones, or puppies as they are called, which are born grey with the distinctive black and white markings appearing later. Do not confuse these zebras with the more common Piebald horses, also found in Great Britain (curiously though, absent in Middlesex – weird!).

The run took us from Wymeswold, across the fields into Nottinghamshire, into the picturesque village of Wysall (pronounced "Wizzell"). Onto the Midshires Way and into the parish of Thorpe in the Glebe, an old Anglo Saxon name, meaning a village or settlement, with land yielding revenue to benefice. Glebe is from the Latin gleba, meaning clod or soil. There endeth the history lesson.

Reaching Willoughby on the Wolds, the third village beginning with 'W', which brings to mind the three 'W's', great West Indian cricketers of the 1950's and early 60's. So, this week's quiz question is: Name the three 'W's'. You can email your answers to the usual address.

At Willoughby, we caught up with Richard's Road Gang, on another marathon slog and we ran together before a split about a mile from home, taking us on separate routes back to the pub.

Beer of the Week: Adnams Southwold Bitter
Basic pub fare on offer and, if you like pie and chips, you were in!

100%'ers – 11

Total different appearances – 28

5 new runners this week, although Jim "Puppyboy" Hatherley went to the wrong place (again!). Is he the new "Aidy"? Only time will tell.

The Three Horseshoes, Whissendine next week, Jim. Don't miss it!!

02/05/12 - Buckminster

This is to certify that the Stilton Striders Board of Censors (who shall remain nameless but I know who you are and, quite frankly, I am surprised at you Mr R G, as you know I would not do anything to damage the integrity and worldwide good name and respect that this Club has) have given this a PG rating. What is PG? It seems that anybody of any age can watch anything via the internet, I-pod player or U tube, none of which I know how to work! In my day, PG was U and X was for men in raincoats, which I have never had.

Whilst on the subject of letters, I have this week carried out some extensive research to provide accurate content and reliable information for this week's Blog. It appears that one or two of the newer members have questioned the authenticity of some of the details from the Ashby run. This Blog is not just as thrown together as it may appear. Much of the information contained in them is only just coming to the forefront of my mind and that of other scientists and historians at our Thursday night discussion group.

At this week's run (you knew that I would mention it eventually!), I was interested in all of the arable land in and around Buckminster and I began to wonder about the varied crops planted, and whether any adjacent woodland would have an effect (either verse or adverse) on the success of the crop. So I consulted the website for the Scientific Officers Department Of Field and Forest, or S.O.D.O.F.F., and, despite not being very helpful, they had conducted a 10 year pointless survey (at the Taxpayers' expense) in which they concluded that Oilseed Rape:

- Can smell if it gets wet when ripe
- Covers your clothes in yellow pollen when in contact
- Blocks the footpath when it dies off

So, useful research there for farmers, agronomists and runner alike. I was also going to add "ramblers" but was not sure whether it would get past the Censors.

Leaving the pub, the off-roaders turned left, while Richard, Sally, Janice and Clare turned right, for what they thought would be a 6'ish mile road run but turned out to be over 7 miles! Despite some multi-coloured faces in the red-to-purple spectrum, they all survived the ordeal and, I am assured, will be back next time. The off-road run was a bit more open this week, on good tracks, well-marked paths and grassy verges with very few stiles, so the pace was around 8 minute miling throughout whilst running.

The open fields of the area are ideal habitat for the Brown Hare (*Lepus Capensis*). A shy, alert animal of open country, it has black-tipped ears, large eyes and powerful hind legs. The male and female differ slightly in size. This week's just-for-fun quiz is – what are the correct names for a male and female hare? Next week – Wildlife of the Serengeti.

Around two miles from the finish, a few people took the road option back, which gave them an unfair advantage for the observation quiz, as they ran past the Buckminster Nuclear Bunker and Listening Station. The number of the Bunker was 62, with Julie's guess of 57 being the closest. There was no prize this week, as the shop had completely run out of chocolate (none at the pub either). Has this been brought about because of a dispute among the cocoa-growing nations of West Africa which, if it escalates, could lead to a world-wide shortage. I have already started hoarding Chunky Kit Kat's just in case, so far I have 7.

The after-run quiz netted £15.50, making £30.50 so far for Air Ambulance after 2 weeks. Thanks to everyone for their donations and, once the chocolate crisis is over, there will be a prize every week (although it may not be chocolate!).

There was a baby in the pub (how do they manage to sleep through all the noise?). It wasn't alone, it's parents were there and Tam suggested a "Guess the Weight of the Baby" competition. I wish I'd thought of it. However, if any Striders have, or are having, a baby that could be borrowed for a future competition to raise funds, please let me know.

A really nice atmosphere in the pub and it is now firmly back on our approved list. Amber has snatched the lead in the "Smiley Bar Person" competition, a lead she may well keep, although she needs to get the change situation sorted out.

Facts and Figures

18 Runners this week

22 for the year so far

13 100%'ers

Beer of the Week – Oakham Ales JHB – a distinct bitter flavour with citrus overtones and a dry schmack, as it hits the back of the throat. A real contender this year.

Sandwich of the Week – Prawns in spicy mayonnaise with chips and salad, described by our food critic, Steve "Blumenthal" McGarry, as "the best sandwich I have had for a very long time."

Our next outrun is on new territory, from the Three Crowns at Wymeswold on May 16th. Don't miss it!

25/04/12 - Ashby Folville

With the onset of the better weather (who likes the sunshine anyway?), the Striders were out in numbers on a, quite frankly, dreek evening. After 6 long months and, to use Mike's analogy, it was like lambs being let out of the shed to enjoy frolicking in the fresh Spring grass, to gambol amongst the buttercups, to frisk amongst the buzzy bees before, 6 months later, being loaded into a truck and whisked off to market. He didn't actually say all of that but it was along those lines!

17, yes an amazing 17, runners were waiting expectantly in the car park for this year's entertainment to begin. They were not disappointed. As the main body of the group set off uphill to Barsby (5 runners took the road option), with the wind and rain driving into our faces, it looked like being a testing evening. After passing a farmer with his two dogs (who would turn them out on a night like that?), the sun appeared and we had no further rain for the rest of the evening.

As we headed from Barsby through waterlogged fields (note the route description, as running content may have been lacking in previous years) towards Twyford we crossed, what some of you may recall from an entirely factual Blog of some 7 years ago, reputedly the largest field in Leicestershire, where the last remnants of the English rainforest once stood. Some of you may be aware that in Brazil alone, rainforest an area the size of Wales is cleared annually. As a follow-up to this, a recent report in a scientific journal by scientists from the University of Ammafibber in North Wales have carried out extensive calculations and siesmic tests and have concluded that Wales itself is, in fact, an area the size of Wales and not Belgium as previously thought. Clearly money well spent on another pointless study. – although in real life this never happens, does it? After 6 months off and no world ink shortage, I am off to a flyer this year!

Plenty of slippery slopes on the outward half but, sadly, no falls to report - you must try harder!!

A tour around Twyford, before heading back alongside the river towards Ashby. A big, ugly (Steve's words, not mine) house is under construction on the site of the former manor house and Cistercian Monastery of St S unniface of Satchville. As we noted on Wednesday evening, the area is prone to flooding. The monks can actually count themselves as fortunate, as the monastery, monks and all of their possessions were washed away in the Great Flood of 1537, just as Henry VIII's troops were coming up the road to sack the place. Every year, on the anniversary of the night of the flood, the monks can be heard laughing as they deprived Henry of his ill-gotten booty.

Back to Ashby, where the group split again, 5 runners adding a bit more mileage as they hadn't had enough of the mud! A quick sprint back to the pub, where we washed the mud off in a big puddle. Log fires in the pub helped with the drying out process.

The landlord has taken an early lead in "Smiley Barman of the Year" award. Can he hold onto it as the year progresses? (Highly unlikely I should think).

The Quiz raised £14.50, an excellent start, with the funds being boosted by the prospect of a prize – a first for our Quiz! The Quiz involved guessing the mystery chocolate bar, which turned out to be a Drifter, won by an excited Malky. He asked for a cash equivalent but was politely refused. After this success, we can follow up with mystery crisp flavours, beers, breakfast cereals etc etc – the list will be endless. Always be prepared for the unexpected though, we may have an observational quiz next week.

Beer of the Week – Green King IPA
Tea of the Week – Tea

Next week, Buckminster – don't miss it!