For me the inaugural Wall Ultra, on paper at least, seemed like the logical choice for a first go at a decent length Ultra. It starts in Carlisle and finishes at the Newcastle Quayside, so getting home wouldn’t be too much trouble. You can choose from a selection of options to cover the 69 mile route. ‘Experts’ would attempt the route in one day, ‘challengers’ take two days with an overnight camp at Vindolanda, and ‘relay’ teams could be teams of between 2 and 4 who would take it in turns to do the different stages across the route. I plumped for the ‘expert’ choice and decided to up my training.

Organised by quite a big group, ‘RatRace’ put on quite a lot of ultra’s and adventure type runs and cycling events all over the UK. They seem pretty well organised, but it comes with a price tag – the one day run cost £150!!

However, for that you got a fully way marked run all the way from Carlisle, no navigation necessary, which seemed like a good idea when I expected my brain as well as my legs to have turned to jelly by the 50 mile mark. And I liked the idea of finishing near home.

The route started at Carlisle Castle at 7.30am (after a half hour delay) on the very wet and windy morning of June 22nd. Around 250 runners formed the expert group, carrying all manner of equipment that was stipulated by the race organisers – wind proofs, first aid, 1000ml of water, head torch from the half way mark etc etc (you got to drop a half way bag to meet you at 32 miles with anything you might want – within reason).

The route was easy to follow, fully way marked, across a mixture of roads, tarmac paths, trails and off road. Quite demanding at times, considering it essentially followed Hadrian’s Wall I suppose it was to be expected and made just that little bit harder by the weather.

Fully loaded checkpoints were at every 15 miles or so, offering a range of sweets, sandwiches, cakes and snacks, juice and water and shelter! Between the checkpoints there were also water points every 5 or 6 miles.

I met my half way bag at the mid-point with the original intention of changing clothes, putting on some dry socks and refuelling before setting out on the home stretch as fresh as a daisy. However, The ground was so wet, and the weather constantly changing that putting dry stuff on to immediately get soaked seemed pointless, so instead I just carried on, forgoing the hot soup that was on offer.

Loads of support along the way from crew and public alike, coming through Hexham, Newburn and finally along the quayside just after 9 o’clock on Saturday evening was a great way to finish, getting back to familiar territory. The Crew at each checkpoint were really supportive and really seemed to appreciate what you were going through. Being met by a camera man with a microphone asking you how it went at the end seemed a bit glamorous, quick photo and then a hot meal and a drink laid on at the finish.

All in all a very demanding but enjoyable run. The furthest I’ve done in one go. Would I do it again? Well my only disappointment was that I wasn’t in any shape to do the Hamsterley Marathon the following week. The goody bag was ok, decent T shirt, but not much else and the medal was relatively poor considering the rest of the event. Seems like a lot of money for a run at £150, but having said that, the support and way marking etc for 250 runners must have been some effort.

There is also challenger option and relay, previously mentioned, which both do the course over two days following the same route. The cost for these is slightly different and involves overnight camping at the mid-point, which on any other weekend might have been quite pleasant, but this year the mid-point was a quagmire, so I didn’t envy anyone stopping there over night. There were approximately another 600 people doing some variance of the two day event. If the memory of the pain fades, I might be there next year.

Richard Cutter (legs still not quite right) 05/07/2012