

The JWUltra – 30 Mile – 22 September 2012 – Ian Richardson

After spending the previous Sunday trampling over 28 miles of the Lincolnshire countryside, I was really looking forward to a canal run.

As it turns out this was easily one of the most enjoyable events that I have ever done. Having got a late entry as I left it too late to do Great Langdale, I endured a near 5 hour drive down on the Friday.

Saturday dawned with bright blue skies, a temperature in single figures and almost no wind. Along with a number of others, I parked at the end in Bourneville, to the South of Birmingham, just by the Sea Cadet HQ. They looked after the cars, secured baggage and manned the water stations and also provided any first aid that was required.

A coach then took us to the Carriage café, on the Greenway, just outside of Stratford upon Avon.

After a mug of tea (only £1 !) in the café, I was ready for the low key start of about 70 runners, including relay runners, who were running about 10 miles each.

The first 2.5 miles were on the Greenway followed by some field edges and some steep up and down by the side of the Avon. I had been warned of this in advance, so wasn't concerned that it was all going to be like this.

Entering Stratford, past a food fair, with cruelly enticing smells, we were directed onto the canal where we remained until the end of the event at Bourneville Station.

The path in the early miles was just what I had hoped for. Well made, even under foot and generally a really good running surface. I was a little surprised that it was not all like this and there were sections where clumsy runners like me needed to take a bit more care. The paths were still well defined, but just beaten earth, sometimes a bit overgrown, narrow and with tree roots and rocks. No bother, just needed to have attention paid.

We also ran over the Bearley aquaduct, which is apparently the longest of its kind in the UK.

In what seemed to be no time at all, I reached the first of two checkpoints at about 10 miles in 82 minutes, so it must have been a short 10 miles. I knew that I had set off a bit quick, but that surprised me.

The checkpoints had bottled water, sweets and bananas, and there was an opportunity at the start to have your own food and drink taken to them.

After a banana and a refill of the bottle, I was away again, trying to hold myself back a bit. When the surface improved, I was to appreciate the lovely countryside and the wide variety of boats on the canal.

As we reached around the halfway point, we climbed alongside a flight of locks, up, flat, up, flat and so on. This gave me a chance to see how physically demanding it seemed to be, opening and closing the lock gates. Maybe those doing that thought the same about us runners. There was an overall friendly air though, with much waving and hulloing back and forth.

I was having a bit of a tired spell and the 20ish mile checkpoint came at a good time in 2:56. After that, I knew it was a shortish 10 miles to the end and I even picked up the pace later on, as we left the more rural surroundings and came into a more urban environment.

We had all been issued with a laminated route map, principally to tell us which bridges to cross over, as the canal path moved from one side to the other, but it wasn't necessary. There was a point a couple of miles from the end where the canal went through a tunnel, and we had to leave it and cross a road and round a few houses, but this was well marked.

At the end (in 4:16) we were met with water, bananas and crisps and handed out goody bag. This was amazing. It had a Buff (and I am an inveterate Buff wearer) featuring the names of all the entrants. Well, not me, as I entered late, but everyone else. There was also a hand painted mug, in the traditional narrow boat decorative style, which was lovely and most appropriate. Short walk back to the Sea Cadet HQ and we had showers and a chance to sit outside in the warm sun, eating very reasonably priced food, and tea at 50p !

All in all this was a marvellous event that I cannot recommend highly enough. Despite the distance from the North East, I am sure that I will be back, and I'll enter earlier next time.

Ian Richardson

24 September 2012