

Run Report - St Peters Way Ultra – Matt Holt



When 3 of the runners I did Run Britannia with last year suggested a catch-up, over a 41-mile run, I jumped at the chance.

The St Peters Way Ultra race starts in Chipping Ongar, and runs through the Essex countryside, until you reach the North Sea at the Dengie National Nature Reserve and a tiny church, The Chapel of St Peter On The Wall.

On the Wednesday before the race, Steve (one of the gang I was meeting up with) sent me a photo of the race director recceing the course. The RD was thigh deep in the middle of a heavily flooded field, and was suggesting trail shoes were definitely required!!!

The event was a really nice, low profile, type of race with about 80 entered.

Registration was open at 7am on Sunday morning in a car park. No indoor facilities at the start, or at any of the 4 checkpoints, which were at 8-mile intervals. If you think runners are brave entering these events, think of those who volunteer at checkpoints, often for hours on end, in February, with only a flimsy gazebo for shelter.

After I'd met up and chatted with Steve, Martyn and Susan, we got our numbers and heard the race brief.

Fortunately, the forecast rain on Saturday hadn't happened, meaning the river level had dropped and the thigh deep water had subsided to only shin deep.

Unfortunately for us, not only were the fields still extremely muddy, like sucking your trainers off your feet sticky mud, but the wind was blowing in from the east. And we were heading due east. Nice!

At least the course made any decisions about trying to avoid ankle deep puddles an irrelevance, as my feet were soaked within the first mile. The floods were so wide, you'd have done double the mileage trying to go around them.

The first 20 miles were lovely, the 4 of us reminiscing of running the length of the UK, in glorious sunshine with usually stunning views. Today, however, was very different. Usually cloudy, with no breathtaking views, as the course was pancake flat (it only had 1500 foot of climb in total).

After the third checkpoint, Susan and Steve pulled away, and Martyn dropped further behind me. And so a long, lonely, muddy, energy sapping 9 miles were endured to the last checkpoint.

If you want to know where you are fitness wise, there's nothing like a race of this type to expose your weaknesses. My left glute and calf were sore and tight, my right hip hurt, my back ached. Basically, all the good habits of daily stretching exercises, along with 2 to 3 core strength sessions per week, that I'd largely neglected over the last 6 months, were now coming back to haunt me.

After the last checkpoint, as the coast got nearer, not that you could see it, the easterly wind had a bit more of a bite to it. Gloves and hat went on to keep me warm, as my pace dropped in more and more endless acres of the Essex mud fest.

Finally, I turned to face North, and headed along the grassy sea defence bank, towards the church and finish line. Out to sea were seemingly endless number of wind turbines.

8 hrs 26 mins after setting off, I crossed the finish line, not needing the mandatory headtorch in the race vest.

Hugs from Steve and Susan (1st female), with hot coffee and apple pie served up by Gina (Steve's partner) while their dog Busby begged for any unwanted food.

Martyn finished about 30 minutes later, then we tried to keep warm inside the tiny, stone floor, church, which has no lighting or heating, for another hour. A few battery-operated lights helped the volunteers serve up more hot drinks.

Finally, in the dark, we shuffled down the lane for the bus back to Chipping Ongar.

A great day out, very tough in places due to conditions, with lovely company. Really nice to meet back up with the people I spent 5 weeks with last year. Oh..... and a big wake up call to get back in the gym for some core workouts, and get those stretching routines started again!

And I shamelessly held Susan's trophy so I looked like I'd won something!

