

Round Norfolk Relay - 21st & 22nd September

Race Report by Dale Mandell

This is the first year I have taken part in the Round Norfolk Relay but I can honestly say that it won't be the last!

Just to give you a little bit of a background on the RNR race (www.roundnorfolkrelay.com). The course follows the county boundary of Norfolk, covering a distance of over 197 miles and ran over 17 unequal, multi-terrain stages. The race starts in Kings Lynn and follows the county boundary clockwise taking in places like Cromer, Great Yarmouth, Feltwell and across the Fens. This is all done while carrying a relay baton (a new experience for me).

At some point earlier this year, I forget when, an e-mail went out to the club asking for people to participate in the race. Thinking nothing of it, I of course put my name down. I also stated I was happy to do any of the stages. Fast forward a few months & I receive another e-mail letting everyone know what stage they would be doing on the weekend. "Ohhh no!!!" I had been given the 'Glory Run'. Stage 17. The final run into the finish line!

There is a lot of pressure to do any of the stages but Stage 17 is something different. 16 of your friends have spent the last 24+ hours running the county boundary of Norfolk, some of them in the middle of the night and now it is up to me to bring it all home. What if I tripped over and hurt myself - could I crawl 11 miles? What if my fitness isn't what I thought it was? What if I was too slow? Would I be able to show my face at the club again if I let them down? These are just some of the pleasant thoughts I had going into the weekend of the race.

Depending on the level of the team, the race can last for about 28hrs and running stage 17, I wasn't due to start until approx. 8am on the Sunday morning. This was 26hrs after Jo Stephenson set off for those first 16 miles at 6am Saturday morning. This meant that I spent a lot of Saturday following the Facebook/twitter updates and being filled with a restless energy. Seeing everyone start & finish their stages & posting some incredible times was amazing and a little bit daunting at the same time. Especially with Rob Kett posting a 5:55/mi average over the 11 miles he was covering. Talk about setting a bench mark!!

When I tried to get some sleep on Saturday night, we were 8 minutes ahead of schedule so I knew there shouldn't be any surprises for me when I woke up the next morning. Helen and I got up about 4:30am and were off driving to Stowbridge by 5am. Upon arriving at the stage start, it was already a hive of activity with some runners already getting in and handing over to their team mates.

After a quick cup of coffee, it was time for me to run my stage! Malene came into sight having completed her 5.5mile stage, the baton was handed over and I was off!

As is normal for me when I'm racing, I went off far too quickly. I knew that after about 3 miles of road, the course would take me onto the river embankment so I wanted to get a few fast miles in before being slowed down by the terrain. However, a 5:56/mi first mile was not on the cards. I would like to say that I was trying to give Rob a run for his money but it was just bad race pacing on my part. The first 3 miles along Low Rd / Stow Rd were pretty comfortable. It was flat, there was little in the way of traffic and I managed to maintain a 06:12/mi average pace.

At Wigenhall, I took a right turn taking me back over the river and up onto the river embankment for the off-road section of this stage. Ouch, those miles hurt, no discernible path as such and a headwind the whole way! By the time I hit the Sluice by the Power Station, my legs had a very 'jelly-like' feel to them. I managed to maintain 06:55/mi over this terrain but this wasn't helped by the farmer letting his huge cows graze on the embankment.

Having finished the off-road section of the stage, I was now on the outskirts of Kings Lynn and only a few miles from the finish line. I should mention at this point that a stipulation of



Well done and
congratulations to all the
Round Norfolk Relay
competitors
and support crew



Dale Mandell brings the Strider RNR baton gloriously over the finish line

the RNR is that during the day, you can have cycled support for the stages and I had Steve Grey. And it is Steve that got me through those last few miles of Kings Lynn to the finish line at Lynnsport Leisure Centre. He expertly guided me through the twisty roads of the town and got me to the outskirts of the leisure centre before peeling off & letting me finish off the stage on my own. He even let me have some of his drink - top bloke.

I was on my last legs by the time I got to the finish line; the last 400m had literally sapped all the energy from me. I crossed the line in 1:18:12 which is an average pace 6:43/mi. I had pushed myself about as fast as I could go! It was great seeing Helen & the other Striders at the finish line. It's why I love being part of the Strider family, there's always amazing support from all the other members. After a quick shower & coffee in the leisure centre, it was the long(ish) drive home and the beckoning sofa. I have already put my name in the hat for next year's event and I tell you what, I really fancy doing one of the night stages. I can't wait!!

