



SOUTH CHESHIRE Harriers

Newsletter

May 2007



22ND MARATHON DES SABLES

or Don't Try This at Home

The Marathon des Sables, or Marathon of the Sands, is a six-day, 240km kilometres (150 miles) endurance race, run across a section of the Sahara desert in southern Morocco, starting from Ouarzazate (pronounced wa-za-zat). Unlike the Marrakech marathon, which takes place in January when temperatures are relatively cool, the organisers of the Marathon des Sables seem to wait deliberately until the Sahara gets seriously hot, up to 50°C. Competitors must carry all personal belongings and food for the entire event in their rucksack. Water and tents are supplied by the organizers. The race is the equivalent of five and a half normal marathons.

The exact route is not revealed to runners until the day before the start to prevent people getting any practice, although it is difficult to imagine who would want to do any more of the course than they need to. About 700 people pay around £2,500 each for the privilege of competing in the race.

Mark Jennings, a Harrier until two years ago, when he moved to the Eastleigh, was a competitor in the 2007 MdS. Here follows his account of what has rightly been described as: "The ultimate test of endurance, or your worst nightmare, or both".



Day 1: Thursday 22 March -

Eastleigh to Ouarzazate

Collected by taxi at 08:20. A nightmare journey with Peter Haig, a fellow runner from Romsey, to Gatwick. Because of traffic we arrive an hour late. We meet Peter's old friend Russell and have a pint of Guinness each while waiting for the plane. Not a good idea: I get a headache.

The charter plane carrying 200-ish UK runners takes 3 hours to Ouarzazate in Morocco; incredibly hot after the UK.

A convoy of coaches takes us to the only 5-star hotel in town. Two to a room; I share with 59-year-old Tony. The hotel is a bit disappointing for 5 stars, except for the food, which is out of this world. A buffet so long, with no repeated dishes, that it's impossible to take something from each and every plate. There's too much choice; several trips later I've not sampled everything. And that's just the "starters"; there are also hot food and pudding tables! My headache has abated after all that food.

Day 2: Friday 23 March -

Ouarzazate to the Desert

Everyone has a good night's sleep (the last for some time). Breakfast as lavish as last night's meal, and headache almost gone. Buy bottled water ready for 6-hour coach journey into the desert. The coach is air conditioned; I am on the shady side, so no real heat at all.

Drive into the desert through spectacular scenery over some big mountains. Evidence of water everywhere (river beds, bridges, etc), but not much actual water or plants of any kind, just bare rocks and sand. Stop for a nice French packed lunch, with plenty of bottled water available.

After 6 hours leave the coaches and get into army trucks which take us a mile from the highway to the camp: 100 ramshackle tents and 30 decent ones.

The organisers get the decent tents, and the runners the ramshackle ones: pieces of plastic stretched over wooden poles and pegged to the ground. The wind and sand can go straight through from any angle, and the sun can enter from 2 opposite sides, depending on the time of day. Totally useless, character-building stuff.

There are 8 to a tent, and you share with the same group at every camp. I locate Peter, to find he's already in a group of 8, so I crawl into a tent with one other lonely-looking soul in it.

More people enter in ones and twos until we are 7: Cliff, 51, Yorkshire accent, runs marathon events around the world;

Jim, 42, Irish, fireman and ex air traffic controller;

Line (pronounced Leena) 33, Norwegian mum;

Chris, 33, Geordie accent, doctor;

Steve and Damian, both 33, Irish, City high-flyers, life-long friends intending to run together.

It gets dark at 6; a meal is provided in the posh tents, and we are in our sleeping bags at 8:00.

Day 3: Saturday 24 March - Registration and Hanging around in the Desert

The coldest, most uncomfortable night ever, but calm. My sleeping bag claims to be OK down to zero degrees. I think that means you don't get frost bite, it certainly isn't warm. Oh, yes, and I'm the only one with no ground mat. I don't regret it, but the thin carpet covering the rocky ground is very uncomfortable.

Today we have to dress in our running kit, because all our non-running gear will be taken back to the hotel after we have registered.

Long boring queues become the norm. Nobody in my tent has anything in their rucksacks checked at registration. All that worry for nothing. The medics have a chuckle in French over my ECG, but I never find out why.

We spend the day getting to know each other in the tent. It turns out to be the perfect group. Everyone gets on with everyone else. Only Cliff and I have ever done any running before training for this. Everyone in the tent is jealous of my lightweight sandals, and during the next week they will be borrowed by the others more than once. During the day a small whirlwind destroys the tent next to ours.

Day 4: Sunday 25 March - Stage 1; 29 km

Another cold night, but I wear my running kit this time, so it's not as uncomfortable. However there is a howling gale, which turns out to be the norm. Tents frequently get blown down; apparently ours is rebuilt around me while I sleep.

No more meals provided for the next 7 days: all food has to come from our rucksacks. Soon after 6, when it gets light, the tents are dismantled around us as we cook our breakfast.

At 9:00 on the start line, "Highway To Hell" by AC/DC is blaring out. Fantastic, and surreal to say the least. But stranger is yet to come: as the start gun goes a Moroccan rave version of The Ketchup Song starts to play; the signal to start on most mornings.

I take the day's running too lightly: I run too much and walk too little; I don't drink enough water, although I eat plenty. The dunes I find really tough, and impossible to run through, but everything else is easy enough. It's over 40 degrees, but most of us can't tell. It's just hot!

Chris is first back to the tent, as he will be every day, followed by Cliff. I am third back, and couldn't have gone any further. Chris lectures me about drinking water, and I never make that mistake again. Jim and Line appear together, and lastly Steve and Damian. This pattern will not be maintained: some get stronger, some weaker.



My running shirt, shorts and underpants all turn out to be perfect. My double layer of socks seems to be working too. I only have a single small blister, but some people have much worse.

We get to send a single e-mail if we have the strength to stand in the queue. Received e-mails are printed and brought to the tents in the evening; the best part of the day. My e-mails really keep me going.

Day 5: Monday 26 March - Stage 2; 35 km

Desert evenings, nights and mornings are all the same from one day to the next. Tired, cold, sleepless, sandblasted.

The days are pretty much all alike too. No sunburn problems, we are all much too careful, using plenty of sun cream.

I send an e-mail in response to all those I received yesterday, but I can tell from those I receive in the next few days it doesn't get through.

Today's stage includes a very difficult scramble at 30 km, which wipes us all out. Cliff gets back to the tent in second place again, but Chris, the doctor, recognises heart attack symptoms and marches him off to the official doctors, who retire him from the race. Later he is flown out of the camp by helicopter for emergency treatment. I was

third in again, followed by Jim, Line, Damian and Steve.

This time I felt better because I had drunk enough water, but tired because of the steep climb and longer course. I now have two blisters on each foot, which is as bad as my blisters will get.



Day 6: Tuesday 27 March - Stage 3; 32 km

Apparently my snoring is adding to everyone else's problems at night. At least that means I must be getting some sleep. It doesn't feel like I am.

I find this stage the toughest so far. Jim and Line both beat me home, with Damian and Steve bringing up the rear. I am slipping down the rankings, a trend that will continue. Damian's feet are very bad with blisters.

Days 7/8: Wednesday 28/Thursday 29 March - Stage 4; 70 km

This is the really long stage. Damian makes it to the start line, but no further; he retires from the race, and Steve catches up with me. We make a pact to stick together for this stage. I have now given up running altogether. It's all walking from now on. My four blisters are small but painful.

The elite start the stage 3 hours after us, so we see them bounding past us at incredible speed. At

checkpoint 4, 42 km, cold and tired, we crawl into our sleeping bags on the sand for a rest. We cook a meal, and recover a bit of energy. But we don't get any warmer. So, guided by a green laser in the sky, we continue to checkpoint 5, arriving at 3 o'clock in the morning. There are tents here to sleep in, but they are very full. We find spaces in separate tents, crawl in, and fall asleep. At 6 o'clock I awake, my tent almost empty. A woman thanks me for keeping her warm during the night (!).

Time to move on. I walk around the small camp looking for Steve, but can't find him. So, I continue to checkpoint 6. I ask about Steve, but he hasn't been through, so it looks like I have abandoned him. I spend the rest of the day feeling guilty about it. I finally



reach the camp at 10:30. Chris, Jim and Line had all arrived during the night.

While I am recovering in my tent the runners are called to an emergency briefing, which I can hear from where I am. The news is broken that a runner died during the night. There was no apparent cause: he just never woke up from his sleep after a fast run. The mood is understandably subdued for the rest of the day. Steve rolls in at 12:30, apparently not bothered about being abandoned.

Day 9: Friday 30 March - Stage 5; 42 km

Line's feet look so bad that if they were mine I might not have started this stage. Somehow she manages to keep going. Steve and I attempt another co-operative venture. He walks fast, and I have to make an effort to keep up. We complete the stage together, joint last in our tent. Even with her bad feet Line arrives ahead of us, as does Jim.

Day 10: Saturday 31 March - Stage 6; 12 km

The last stage is short but difficult: 6 km of easy, flat ground, followed by 6 km of impossibly difficult high dunes. I release Steve from our pact; he seems to be getting stronger as I am fading, and, sure enough, he disappears ahead of me right at the start. I finish last again in our tent, this time on my own, but I'm pleased just to have completed the whole course.

Tired but happy I sit on one of the last buses that will take us back to Ourzazate, waiting for it to fill up. The finish is in a small town, and there are children everywhere trying to buy or steal our running kit. There is a 4 hour drive back to the same hotel where we started. We are assigned to the same rooms as before; presumably the hotel isn't that busy then?

I find that my room mate, Tony, has already been in and gone out again. I have a shower with my socks on because I'm a bit worried about what I might find when I eventually peel them off. But my feet are not too bad. My first wash for a week requires a bath as well as the shower. Ah, clean again at last! Then I go to the hotel restaurant for another of those incredible feasts. My tent mates are all there, and they have saved me a seat at their table. The cold beers are flowing, and we have a great evening.



Day 11: Sunday 1 April - Hanging Around in Ouarzazate

Chris, Jim and I go walkabout in the town. We have mint tea and cheese omelettes at a café. Various Moroccans try to buy my watch and my yellow cap from me, but I'm not selling. While wandering I accidentally stub my toe against something and sustain my most painful injury of the whole trip. The evening is a repeat of last night's eating and drinking.

Day 12: Monday 2 April - Ouarzazate to Eastleigh

Up at 4:30. The hotel restaurant has opened extra early for breakfast. One last over-indulgent 5-star meal before we board the coaches back to the airport.

Another 3 hour flight back to Gatwick where I meet Peter Haig again. He has lost a lot of weight. I haven't.

A final taxi journey, fast this time, back home.

The Marathon des Sables was the hardest thing I have ever done, and, although I'm glad I did it, I won't be doing it again.



Damian, Steve, Cliff, Mark, Chris, Line and (front row) James

AIR PRODUCTS 10K and homebrew4U EASTER BUNNY 5K

South Cheshire Harriers hosted the popular Easter Sunday Air Products 10K and homebrew4u Easter Bunny 5K Fun Run on 8th April.

A good quality field of 221 runners encountered warm conditions over the undulating 2 lap course, with the race finishing in the grounds of South Cheshire College.



The Harriers had three entrants in the 10K race:

Glenn Riley completed the course in 43:33, followed by **Steve Hargreaves** in 50:36; **Charm Parker** was the sole Lady, with a time of 55:22.

First home was Daniel Beier of Tipton Harriers who finished in 32 minutes and 19 seconds followed by Wilmslow AC's Michael Halman in 32:51.

First Lady was Trentham Running Club's Adela Salt in 37:06 followed by Sharleen Gibson of Cheadle Running Club in 38:39.



Rachel, Viv and Joe Brown



Glenn, Steve and Charm

The 5K Fun Run had 92 finishers. In first place was Moray Smith (18:57). Christopher Rushworth of Buxton AC was first Intermediate Boy (20:20); Tessa McCormick of Cheshire AC first Intermediate Girl (21:07).

Harriers **Rachel Prince, Viv Colclough, Ray and Sophie Woolgar, Rob Brown's son Joe and Chris Walsh's son Alex** competed in the 5K.

Our Thanks:

To all the Club Members without whose help, on and before the day, the event would be impossible:

To Eric Swan and his friends from Wistaston who once again provided marshals;
To the Police who controlled traffic on Dane Bank Avenue around the Start and Finish (and who also had to cope with a traffic lights failure at Wells Green);
To St John's Ambulance volunteers;
To John Venables of South Cheshire College;
To Bryan Dale for photography and publicity;
To our sponsors: Air Products and homebrew4U;

To the Competitors - we hope you enjoyed it!



ARRIVALS

Gareth and Helen Edwards seem to have begun a popular trend with the birth of their son in November last:

Belated congratulations to **Shelagh and Ray Swinnerton** on the birth of their granddaughter, **Scarlett May Swinnerton**, on 9th March, to their son **John and Sarah**. Scarlett weighed in at 8lb 2oz.



Scarlett May

Congratulations to **Katherine and Dave Cartlidge**; their baby daughter, **Alice Mary-May** was born on 19th April (11 days late) weighing 8lbs 9oz. We raise a glass (of homebrew4u) to the three of them!



Alice Mary-May

Roger and **Jacki Foden** celebrated the birth of their second grandchild on 27th April: **Finn**, 8lb 3oz, was born in Cambridge to their daughter **Clare** and her husband **Steve**.



Finn

MORE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Pam and **Barry Hough**, both very active Harriers, emigrated to Turkish Cyprus in 2005 and we lost contact with them. Now, at last, Barry has managed to 'go technical' and joined the Internet.

Obviously short of something constructive to do, he investigated the Harriers' web-site, read the latest Newsletter and e-mailed us:

Hope you can remember us, we're the little short couple that used to run with the Harriers.

We have just gone technical and finally gone on to the net. Just enjoyed reading the last news letter.

Hope you and all our old friends are keeping well and you are all getting in plenty of runs.

Pam and I are still running. Not many races here, but have done two this year with good results, Pam coming in first in both races in the over 35-year-olds (oldest group for the ladies) not bad for 58.

I came 3rd in the first race in the over 50years (also oldest men's group) and placed 8th in the next.

Next race this Sunday 22nd April at Paphos, so we are both hoping for a good one.

We are coming over to the UK in July and hope we can join you on a run and catch up on all the latest news.

Give our best regards to everyone at the club and we hope to see you soon.

Barry & Pam Hough

Race Results

Sunday 25th March

South Cheshire harriers were busy in various races and locations at the weekend.

Stafford ½ Marathon

The Stafford Half is a popular race in the NSRRA league, as well as being the 4th event of the Club Championship series.

Eleven Harriers competed in the race, which was run in cool ideal conditions and so made for some good times.

First home for the club was **Colin Simpson** in 1:23:43, followed in by **Dave Hindley** in 1:24:42. **Mick Tobin** recorded a new personal best of 1:40:34.

Other club members competing were:

Steve Dawson 1:29:34; **Dave McGrath** 1:30:01; **Rob Cummings** 1:33:55; **Glenn Riley** 1:39:28; **Martin Stirna** 1:42:42; **Colin Earp** 1:45:39; **Colin Wynne** 1:48:57; **Paul Brownbill** 1:50:50 and **Cindy Morrissette** 2:13:31.

Cancer Research Cross Country 10k

Meanwhile **Mike Cutler** (19th in 48:52) and **John Latham** (38th in 56:40) competed in this race, held at Cholmondeley Castle.



Wilmslow ½ Marathon

New Harrier **Steve Whincup** completed the largest ever Wilmslow half (3450 runners) in 1:52:31.

Sunday 15th April

Newcastle 7

Part of the NSRRA champs, this race is both popular and testing. Despite being 7 miles it really feels like 5 miles of ascent and 4 miles of descent.

8 Harriers took part, **Mel Cole** coming first in 48:36.

Rob Cummings took 50:28; **Mike Cutler** (on a good, if not level, surface) 51:55; **Martin Stirna** 55:37; **Colin Earp** 56:55; **Colin Wynne** 61:38; **Dave Griffiths** 62:41 and **John Latham** 64:42.



Sunday 22nd April

London Marathon

The hottest London Marathon Day for some years: the Press was predicting that runners would have great difficulties; extra medical staff had been recruited and millions of extra bottles of water were available at drinks stations.

Haile Gebreselassie failed to finish, but the run passed uneventfully for our five entrants:

Mick Tobin 4:30:29; **Colin Wynne** 4:32:14; **Karyn Amson-Orth** 4:44:11; **Alasdair Dyde** 4:51:26 and **Shelagh Swinnerton** 5:05:30.

*Shelagh
and
Karyn*

*(and they were
still smiling
at the end!)*



Garstang Gallop 10K

Whilst their colleagues were competing in the London Marathon, **Mike Cutler** and **John Latham** were running in hilly Lancashire. Mike achieved a very creditable 47:59; John 55:50.

Sunday 29th April

Uttoxeter ½ Marathon

The fifth event in the Club Championships and an NSRRA race, spurred on by Chris Walsh the Uttoxeter Half attracted a big group of Harriers, some of whom recorded very good times.

Mike Hatton was first Harrier to finish, in 1:23:04; 2nd V45 man. **Dave Hindley** 1:27:56; **Steve Dawson** 1:29:58; **Mel Cole** 1:31:11 (3rd V55 man); **Dave McGrath** 1:35:45; **Rob Cummings** 1:38:25; **Glenn Riley** 1:38:25; **Peter Cooper** 1:43:09; **Martin Stirna** 1:44:13; **Mike Cutler** 1:45:02; **Colin Wynne** 1:49:21; **Colin Earp** 1:50:05; **Tina Smith** 2:07:26; **Jeanette Hatton** 2:10:21; **Sarah Dyde** 2:10:23; **Cindy Morrissette** 2:16:50; **Jude Whincup** 2:17:59.

The Men obtained 3rd Team Place.
The Ladies obtained 4th Team Place.

ANNE AND LIZZIE'S TUESDAY NIGHT RUNS

These runs are designed for anyone who would like to explore the local countryside at a leisurely pace. They are all approximately 5-6 miles and we plan to run at about 10-11 minute mile pace. They are all within easy reach of Crewe and are often near a pub if anyone requires refreshments!

All the runs will start at 7.00 p.m. and continue throughout the summer. This is the first programme for May and June. Everyone is welcome and no-one will be left behind!

Date	Meeting Point	Run Description
8th May	Romping Donkey Car Park, Hassall Green	A pleasant route on good surfaces along the length of the salt line, onto the canal at Rode Heath Rise and back along the towpath to Hassall Green.
15th May	The Farmer's Arms, Ravensmoor	A varied terrain route passing Dorfold Hall and looping back along the Shropshire Union Canal.
22nd May	The Bear's Paw, Warmingham	A mixed terrain route across fields and woodland and past Moston Flashes.
29th May	The Shroppie Fly, Audlem	A scenic rural route starting along the canal path and finishing on country lanes.
5th June	Apedale Country Park, first car park on left after leaving Halmer End	A hilly, yet scenic route through the country park, taking in a woodland trail and views over Newcastle.
12th June	No run tonight.	
19th June	The Swan, Wybunbury	A lovely rural route through Wybunbury Moss and around Wrinehill Pool
26th June	Brereton Country Park car park	A beautiful route down the Dane Valley Way to the village of Swettenham.

For further details of these runs please contact
Anne Garnett on 01270 668104
 or **Lizzie Marshall** on 01270 661056

DELAMERE CLUB RUN

Billy's Tuesday Night Away Run on 8th May will be from Delamere Forest Station Car Park (the main car park closes at 8pm).

Location is on the B5152 about a mile north of its junction with the A566

There are likely to be at least two groups of runners so the evening will be catering for a wide range of speeds and abilities.

Anyone from the Club is more than welcome to turn up and join the run.

Post running relaxation and rehydration at the Fishpool Inn.

Bill will be posting a map on his website:

<http://uk.geocities.com/billybadfoot.t21@btinternet.com>

SOUTH CHESHIRE 20

**The second road race hosted by our club, the
Bombardier-sponsored South Cheshire 20
is on Sunday 20th May.**

Thanks to the organisers (and that's us),
the race has a good name as a well-organised, friendly event.

To preserve that reputation,
Contact Paul Brownbill 01279 665042, Tina Smith 01270 258664
or Dave McGrath 01270 841351 by Friday May 11th.

YOUR CLUB NEEDS



We need:

**Marshals,
Registrars,
Timekeepers,
Results Runners,
Drinks Station Attendants,
T-shirt distributors**

YOU

Sunday 20th May

South Cheshire 20

**Shavington Leisure Centre; 8:30am onwards,
for a 9:30 am race start**