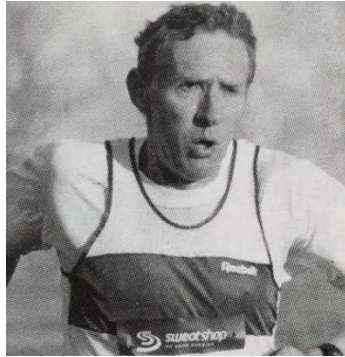
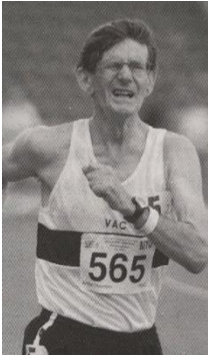


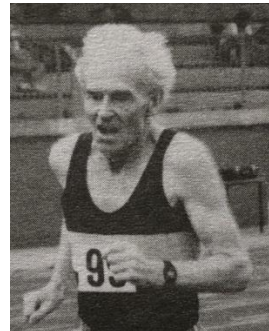


Veterans Athletic Club Newsletter Spring 2021



Can you
name
these VAC
athletes?

Answers
back page



VAC Committee Members: Sept 2020 – Oct 2021

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Veterans Athletic Club was established in 1931 and is affiliated to England Athletics, BMAF, South of England AA, Surrey County AA, the Race Walking Association and the South of the Thames Cross Country Association. We offer athletic competition for men and women aged 35 and over. Cross-country, road, track & field as well as race walking - there is something for everyone. Based in London with members across the South East, we can provide opportunities to compete with other like-minded masters/veterans. Please support our events. The newsletter welcomes contributions and events always need volunteers, as well as competitors. If you want to get involved, contact any of the Committee members listed above.

Editor Angela Kikugawa Writes

Like so many of you, I never expected that when the Olympics were postponed in Spring 2020 that their future would still be in doubt one year later.



Sadly that is the position and although the Japanese Government are talking up the prospects of the games going ahead, very few people here believe that they will. As I write, Japan is yet to approve any of the vaccines that have been produced and there are rumours that the supply of them may not be going as planned. I really hope they can do something but as things stand the Games look unlikely.

As in the UK, most athletic events were cancelled last year including the Tokyo Marathon, which has also been called off this year. We have however been able to restart parkrun after an eight month layoff, which has provided me with a great incentive to keep going. I was also pleased to be able to take part in the BMAF Virtual 10k and have signed up for a virtual half marathon at the end of March. The latter is quite unusual, as although it's 'virtual' it must be run on the actual course but competitors can choose when to run over a five day period. It's a great idea as it's in a fairly small town and as hotels are still open here it provides some revenue to the badly hit hospitality industry.

No doubt many of you will have found other ingenious ways to keep going and it has been interesting to see some of the Strava art that people have produced. Although not a running story I did particularly enjoy a piece on the radio about a pub loving couple who spent their virtual pub nights in lockdown taking turns to go to the bar (Fridge). At the appropriate hour they would call time and even put their chairs on the table before they went to bed! So it's not just us.....

We hope to be back in the UK later this year so I look forward to seeing you at some 'proper' races. Until then, stay safe and keep going.



Message from the Membership Secretary

The current rate for VAC membership is £10 for 2nd claim members and £25 for 1st claim members, which includes the England Athletics registration fee of £15. If you have already renewed, thank you. If not, your membership expires on 1st April and you are strongly urged to renew in advance, as we are reverting to our standard fees of £12/£27 respectively from 1st April. Renewal will also enable you to benefit from free entry to our events in the early part of the summer.

We will keep you informed on how long we can sustain the free entry offer but this depends on how many new members we get as a result of this offer. We welcome non-members in all our events and we hope that many will decide to join the club once they realise what we can offer them.

Please note that if you have entered any VAC or BMAF event in these troubled times, and it has to be cancelled, we will aim to reschedule it for a later date. All entries will be transferable but if you decide that you would prefer a refund of the entry fee, this will be granted, excluding the administrative charges applied by OpenTrack/Stripe.

In 2020, restrictions meant we had to cancel our 5km road race and track meeting at Wimbledon Park the day before it was due to take place on 20 December. The rearranged date in January was similarly not possible. During the January and February lockdowns, we also lost our cross country championship on Wimbledon Common and our indoor track and field championships at Lee Valley.

Looking forward, we are determined to provide a programme of Masters events, with competitions in every discipline for VAC members. It is also intended to bring in new members. In order to achieve this, we would therefore ask some of you who are members of another athletics club to volunteer to become the contact within your club for masters' athletics and promote our events within your club. Please let me or Maggie know if you are willing to help.

Peter Kennedy
Veterans AC Membership Secretary

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VAC's FORWARD PROGRAMME 2021

With inspirational leadership from our Track & Field Secretary, Giuseppe Minetti, we have ambitious plans for 2021 when competition is once again permitted.

The programme is intended as a guide. We are open to other suggestions. In laying on the events, we will be assisted by Ben Noad, who will bring a professional approach to the events, and will work hard on our behalf to make the right connections and get the necessary infrastructure in place.

Track and Field

A VAC meeting at Lee Valley Athletics Centre is planned on Sunday 18 April. Both the indoor and outdoor facilities have been booked. We will also hold T&F meetings throughout the year, focusing on specific disciplines e.g. sprints, middle distance, jumps, throws, as well as our traditional 5k and 10k track championships and 10k track walk if permitted. The cancelled 5km road race/track event will be rescheduled. We also hope to join in with existing T&F fixtures e.g. the South London Athletics Network (SLAN).

Road Racing

We have provisional dates (6 April, 4 May, 8 June, 13 July and 3 August) for VAC's Battersea Park series of 5km and 5 mile road races although the 6 April date looks unlikely. We await England Athletics guidance and may need to adopt a different format. As usual, we will combine our 1 mile, 10km and 10 mile championships with external races.

Walks

The Battersea Park events will incorporate racewalks if possible and if permitted by the Race Walking Association. We will host the Cecil Gittins memorial walk at Cyclopark and will aim to lay on the Jack Fitzgerald memorial walk.

Cross country

We plan to stage a trail race on Wimbledon Common to compensate for losing January's cross country champs. Hopefully the Men's Surrey League, East Surrey League (men and women) and South of the Thames races will resume in the Autumn.

I hope you are as enthusiastic as us about these possible events and will support them. Some will be free for VAC members. Look out for more details as soon as we are permitted to compete.

Masters Athletics Fixtures

It looks likely that competitions will remain suspended until at least April. The BMAF's forward programme at present includes the following events in London and the south east:

1. Westminster Mile, London: Sunday 30 May (Incorporates the British Masters and VAC One Mile Championships). A statement is expected from the organiser in March.

2. British Masters 30k Trail Championships, Cyclopark, Gravesend: Sunday 27 June. Held within the North Downs Run. Organised by Istead & Ifield Harriers. Entry is open on OpenTrack.
3. British Masters Half Marathon Championships, Redhill Aerodrome, Redhill: Sunday 18 July. Held within the Caterham Rotary Half Marathon. Enter via the BMAF website for the Masters' championship.

It would be great to see lots of VAC members at these events. Please keep looking at the BMAF and VAC websites for updates

NEWS

VAC is 90! By Maggie Statham-Berry

VAC's logo proudly proclaims that Veterans AC was "Founded in 1931" but we knew nothing about the circumstances or about the club's early history. Fortunately. Joe Aspinall who joined VAC in 1987, has a treasure trove of "Veteris" magazines published by the Association of Veteran Athletes in the 1970s. He tracked down an article written in 1973 by the late Jack Fitzgerald, telling the reader all about the formation of VAC and about its culture and personalities.

Here are some extracts. Jack's words, written nearly 50 years ago, speak for themselves.

"Veterans athletics is booming. New clubs and associations are springing up throughout the world to cater for the demand, and everywhere the "new" enthusiasm is keeping active athletes in the sport for so much longer. But the banding together of mature athletes is not as new as it would seem, for the Veterans Athletic Club of London has itself reached veteran status".

Jack goes on to describe the circumstances of VAC's formation at Stamford Bridge, the home of Chelsea FC. The VAC club photograph, below, was taken in 1933 with the stands of the White City Stadium in the background.

“Where it all began. The occasion is historic. It is the 12th of September 1931 and a very wet afternoon at Stamford Bridge with a number of veterans “out” for one of their handicaps. The handicaps are just part of the Autumn meeting staged by London AC, but rain has held up proceedings. A message is passed round that the veterans are to gather in one of the stands. Talk, crosstalk, proposal, counter proposal The club is born - Veterans Athletic Club with a membership of just 24.”



From those humble beginnings 42 years ago, the Club has grown in strength and today boasts a membership of more than 300. And the recruitment of 40 years old “youngsters” is growing rapidly, causing

standards to rise in all events. Yet, back in 1931 the limit of competition was 150 yards, paradoxical when one recalls the fine distance runners who have been members since, ranging from Joe Binks (ex-World mile record holder) and Tom Richards (Olympic silver in 1948) to present stars such as Laurie O'Hara and Ron Franklin.”

“That great sprinter “Jimmy” Tremeer was the first President of the Club and the first champion was Harry Wicks. Early Committee meetings were held in “The Coronet” public house, Soho Square.

“The first social occasion organised was a dinner, with concert and presentation of prizes at “The Feathers”, Westminster, on 1st December 1934. The dinner was a great success and established itself as one of the most popular occasions in the calendar.”

“As with most sports clubs in Britain during World War II, Vets AC found it difficult to continue their activities. But with the war over and a new influx of members, they went from strength to strength. The Championship programme was expanded, the jumps were introduced in 1947 and the 2 Miles run in 1948 (first champion, Frank Webb). The walks programme was also expanded and the Club boasts a very active walking section under the guidance of Fred Nicholls, with championships staged from 2 miles on the track to the Annual London to Brighton Walk.”

“Three of the most popular meetings for the growing band of distance runners are the cross-country championship over a tough five-mile course at Wimbledon Common, the 10 miles road championship held in Richmond Park, and the Marathon championship which is held in conjunction with an outside promotion, this year the Harlow Marathon.”

Jack tells the reader about two people whose names are perpetuated in VAC trophies which are still awarded today. He also makes a comment about VAC's “men-only” status but acknowledges that women are appreciated when it comes to providing refreshments!

“Much of the Club’s success these last 20 years or so has been in no small part due to two men, very different in personality but with common interests at heart. The gregarious and affable Arthur Welling has been Honorary Secretary since 1952. His extrovert nature and his singular sense of humour are quite different from those of his colleague and Honorary Treasurer, Frank Webb. Of quieter disposition, his efficiency and popularity is no less than that of Arthur Welling’s. Together, they are a team worth more than the sum of their attributes and have provided the essential continuity all clubs need.”

“Veterans AC has always been a men only club, but its members recognise the support given by wives and daughters when it comes to recording, fund raising, provision of refreshments etc.”

Jack concludes by expressing gratitude to the original members of Vets AC who put in place the foundations upon which Masters athletics has flourished. 90 years on. We too are grateful.

“And if the budding young internationals of today have the sense to continue their activity through the veteran ranks then they will reap the benefits, not only of that wise decision from the physical viewpoint, but of the solid structure of veterans’ athletics founded by that small group of men in 1931 and perpetuated by their successors these last 42 years.”

You can read the full article, complete with old photos, in the September 1973 edition of Veteris which can be found online in the BMAF’s Magazine Archive, on the News tab of the BMAF website. As a further celebration of VAC’s 90th birthday, I am planning to write about the development of VAC in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly about when women’s veteran competition began to be recognised and VAC opened its membership to women. If anyone has any information please get in touch.

Vets AC on Facebook

Vets AC now has a Facebook page which is great for keeping in touch and sharing news, information, photos etc. It's also a good way of engaging with fellow Masters athletes.

You can all join the Facebook group. You first need to be registered with Facebook. Then simply follow the link on the VAC website's Home Page and ask to join the Group. Alternatively, search Facebook for Vets Athletic Club VAC.

There are already around 240 members and lots of posts and photos to look at. Please feel free to post relevant new material and any old photos and historical information about VAC which would be of interest to us. Thanks go to Giuseppe Minetti for setting up the Facebook Group.

An Appeal for help from Richard Askwith

The author Richard Askwith, whose books about running include *Feet in the Clouds* and *Today We Die a Little*, is working on a new book about running in later life and wonders if any of our older readers might be interested in being interviewed by him.

Richard has set himself the challenge of "finding and sharing the magic formula for maximising my chances of continuing to run happily until I am 100". To achieve this, he is seeking advice, anecdotes and insights from runners, coaches, scientists and other experts around the world, with particular emphasis on the oldest age-groups (75+). He says that he is interested in everything from practical training and life-style tips to reflections on the benefits and rewards (and difficulties) of running in later life. "Above all," he says, "I want to hear people's first-hand accounts of what running means to them, and of the differences, good and bad, that the sport has made to their life."

If you would be interested in helping Richard with this project, you can contact him at richardaskwith@mac.com



INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

European Masters Non-Stadia Champs, Madeira, Portugal 29-31 October 2020 by Andy Murray

This mainly road race championship is held every two years and finally went ahead after postponement from April. The rescheduling and continuing covid-19 problems meant that entry numbers were lower than usual. Weather was sunny and in the 20's C, as is normal for most of the year.

The walks (10k and then women's 20k/men's 30k) were based on a flat loop out and back along the elegant waterfront of the capital, Funchal. The 10k run was over two laps, using the waterfront, a steady uphill by a river and then an out and back featuring many cobbles through the old town. The cross country relays (3x2k) were around the top of a ridge, way over 1000m high, in a remote area of the Funchal Ecological Park. Finally the half marathon had repeated out and back sections on a road above the coast through the Lido hotel area, followed by a downhill to final out and backs on the waterfront.

Seven VAC members (results below) made a good contribution to the GB team effort.

10k walk

10k run

M60 6 David Kemp 1:03:28

M70 4 Mike Mann 52:44 (pictured above)

M60 18 Ed Skinner 54:19 (in GB M40 team, 3rd)

M65 9 Andy Murray 55:25

GB M55 team 34:59 (4th) included Philip Cross, Mike Mann

XC Relay 3x2k

Half Marathon

M55 9 Philip Cross 1:44:14 (GB M55 team, 4th)
M60 6 David Kemp 1:51:28
M65 8 Rob Sargent 2:05:14 (GB M55 team, 4th)
M70 5 Mike Mann 2:06:02 (late to start)
W50 6 Elvia Acosta Bermudez 2:08:41 (GB W50 team 1st)

Valhalla Virtual Open Shot Putt Competition (Peter Wishart)

The competition, which was held on June 20th, was open to all competitors around the world. Individuals “competed”, with six competition throws using a self marked out circle and honesty in measuring.



There were 270 entries from around the world. The following three VAC members took part.

W35: 2nd Natalie Mann, 8.11m
W50: 1st Jenny Ageypong 8.55m
M60: 1st Peter Wishart 10.31m

CROSS COUNTRY

East Surrey League Cross Country, Lloyd Park, 24 October 2020

Great credit goes to Matt Kiernan of hosts, Croydon AC, who was not deterred by the daunting licensing requirements of England Athletics. A huge amount of work by many people made the event happen. There were segregated camps for each team, test and trace check-ins, one-way systems, wave-mustering areas, a start line marked out for social distancing, seeded and timed wave starts and an army of marshals on the course. The runners were set off in 16 blocks of 10 in each, at three minute intervals. Those seeded fastest went first, so in theory nobody

would catch up with the preceding group. It did mean that the slower runners going off in the later waves could see the faster runners sprinting for the finish of the single 5.2 km loop. All very strange, but

Clare Elms, Pippa Major, Lucy Woolhouse, Rachel Berry – socially distanced of course!



most people were delighted to be there in person on a start line, in the wind and rain, facing a muddy course.

Team spirit was high in our socially distancing gathering at the VAC camp, superbly managed by Surrey League team manager, Paddy Clark.

The event was a great success with some

fierce battles within the seeded waves. VAC's men were led by Rich Berry (M45) with Terry Booth (first M50), David Ogden (first M60) and Andy Bowen (M55) completing the scoring "A" team. VAC's women were led by Clare Elms (W55) who was third woman overall and the first Masters woman. Anna Critchlow (W50) was the second VAC woman. Rachel Berry (W45) and Lucy Woolhouse (W55) completed the scoring team. The women achieved a fantastic second place out of the nine teams. The men's team finished 6th.

There is a link to the full race results in the results section of the VAC website.

East Surrey League Cross Country VAC Results			
	Name	Time	Club
1	Rich Berry (M45)	19:43	West 4 Harriers
2	Terry Booth (M50)	20:01	Guildford & Godalming
3	David Ogden (M60)	20:41	SLH
4	Clare Elms (W55)	20:50	Dulwich Runners
5	Andy Bowen (M55)	21:01	West 4 Harriers

East Surrey League Cross Country VAC Results(continued)			
6	Bruce McLaren (M50)	21:51	Ranelagh Harriers
7	Anna Critchlow (W50)	22:06	West 4 Harriers
8	Rachel Berry (W45)	22:44	West 4 Harriers
9	Lucy Woolhouse (W55)	23:14	VAC
10	Peter Hall (M60)	23:25	West 4 Harriers
11	Tony Harran (M60)	23:43	Herne Hill Harris
12	Andy Mitchelson (M50)	24:16	Brighton & Hove AC
13	Pippa Major (W55)	24:31	SLH
14	Ola Balme (W50)	24:39	Dulwich Runners
15	Gary Budinger (M60)	26:30	Dulwich Runners
16	Patricia Thomas (W55)	26:45	ESM
17	Mike Mann (M70)	27:34	Dulwich Runners

Surrey League Cross Country

VAC member, Malcolm Davis, the General Secretary of the Men's Surrey League, was inspired by the success of the East Surrey League race and worked hard to set up a similar event but sadly it had to be cancelled, as have all subsequent Surrey League fixtures. Let's hope that VAC's team can take Division Four by storm when fixtures resume in October. All VAC men (both 1st and 2nd claim) are eligible to join the team. 10 men form a scoring "A" team, the remainder score for the "B" team.

Marathon Running

Virtual Virgin Money London Marathon, 4 October 2020

Vets AC members always support the London Marathon in force. April 2020 was going to be no exception until the pandemic hit, cancelling the April event and making the mass start in October impossible. Instead, the VLM became a virtual event, on any route. It attracted a new set of participants, both in the UK and overseas, who were excited to pin on their London Marathon number and take to the roads and parks on Sunday 4 October.

VAC members were innovative in their choices of courses and were not necessarily chasing fast times, some preferring instead to accompany others, running and walking. It's a pity that the weather on the day was dreadful, with the morning presenting relentless rain.

Well done to all. There was top class running from three VAC women, high up in their age groups. Susan McDonald was 1st in the W50 category in the virtual race with a sub three hour time. She ran the distance within the actual Dorney Lake Marathon at Windsor and her time put her second in the 2020 Runbritain W50 rankings. New member, Lisa Compton, also ran at Dorney Lake and was the top placed British W65 runner in the virtual VLM and also placed second in the Runbritain W65 rankings. Pippa Major (W55) became very familiar with Bushy Park to achieve a time of just over 3hrs 30 mins in the virtual race and went even better two months later in a real marathon at Goodwood where she ran 3:29.

Bruce McLaren used some of the London Marathon route for his virtual run, starting at Charlton and running alongside the Thames to Richmond, clocking a sub four-hour time. This was great preparation for the Centurion Autumn 100 a week later, comprising a series of four, different, 25 mile out and backs from Goring on the Thames Path and Ridgeway Trails. Bruce was delighted to finish 7th in 18 hours 20 minutes. Andy Mitchelson did his virtual run off-road on a disused railway line, now the Downs Link, from Horsham to Cranleigh and back, contending with a lot of mud and a fallen tree.

John Carter (M70) ran his virtual VLM from his home in Wimbledon to Tower Bridge and back. His interesting account features later.

Finally, Bill O'Connor, one of the ten "ever-presents" and Barbara Ralph (a former VAC member) both received the "Spirit of the London Marathon" award at a ceremony last year. The organisers have only ever awarded 45 such medals to honour those who have made outstanding contributions to the generous and inclusive spirit of the VLM. Barbara has run a total of 30 London Marathons since her first in 1984 and has run the most by any woman. Bill has continued his fantastic sequence of competing in every London Marathon. His

account of running the virtual VLM in and around Finchley also features later. Below is a table of VAC members' times that we know about.

Name	Time	Age Group	Age Grp Pos.	First claim club
Paul Doyle	2:56:29	M50-54	29	Ranelagh Harriers
Tom Cheetham	3:14:12	M50-54	116	Hercules Wimbledon
Bruce McLaren	3:47:51	M50-54	377	Ranelagh Harriers
Andy Mitchelson	3:58:23	M50-54	503	Brighton & Hove AC
Len Reilly	3:20:17	M55-59	68	Kent AC
David Moore	3:45:03	M55-59	170	DMV
Simon Danciger	4:06:15	M55-59	283	Barnes Runners
Alan Roberts	4:14:51	M55-59	335	Vale of Aylesbury
Bob Bell	8:51:58	M65-69	226	Dulwich Runners
Dennis Williams	7:25:25	M70-74	109	Hercules Wimbledon
Bill O'Connor	5:03:35	M75-79	14	Queens Pk Harriers
John Carter	6:04:28	M75-79	23	Wimb. Windmilers
Rachel Berry	3:37:56	W45-49	121	West 4 Harriers
Susan McDonald	2:58:22	W50-54	1	SLH
Pippa Major	3:32:05	W55-59	7 4 th Brit	SLH
Ange Norris	3:59:36	W55-59	57	Dulwich Runners
Nichola Atkins	4:03:33	W55-59	67	Kings & Poly Harr.
Gina Coulson	7:13:40	W60-64	332	SLH
Lisa Compton	3:58:07	W65-69	4 1 st Brit	Lingfield Running Club
Barbara Ralph	4:16:03	W65-69	8	Chiltern Harriers AC
Kathy Crilley	6:27:08	W70-74	24	Surrey Walking Club

MY 40TH LONDON MARATHON

By "Ever-Present" Bill O'Connor

In February 2020 we ten 'Ever Presents' spent a day with the organisers of the London Marathon as publicity for the 40th race to be held in April. We had a day of interviews, photographs and filming which was on television that evening and in the press the next day.

There was gait analysis to check our aging styles and goodies from New Balance. We were each presented with the “Spirit of The London Marathon” medallion of which only 45 have ever been presented.

The day ended on one of the walkways at the top of Tower Bridge. It was a fine evening and with the City below us we could look through the glass floor to view the bridge we would soon be running over. Little did we know that a month later the World would be thrown into turmoil with the outbreak of Covid-19 and that the April date would be cancelled.

The new date was set for the 4th October. The Organising committee are to be commended for making an elite race happen for about 35 men, 25 women and 15 wheelchair competitors racing approximately nineteen and a half times around St James’s Park in a Covid secure environment to cover the 42.2 kilometres. The rest of us, approximately 45,000, were to select our own course and do the race virtually. We had the advantage of having 24 hours to complete the distance. Some did it in stages as a fun event while others, including myself, did it as a committed effort to produce a reasonable time.

It had been raining heavily in the days leading up to Sunday 4th October, so I was resigned to a wet day. I had planned an out and back route of approximately seven and a half kilometres repeated six times. I inspected the route on Saturday, and it was still good to go but when all the water accumulated overnight, it turned out to be a different proposition on race day. We found out later that Saturday 3rd October was the wettest day across the country since 1890!

I started at 8 a.m. I had my support crew of Tricia (my wife), Marie (youngest daughter) some nieces and a few friends based at three points to provide gels and food. Within a couple of yards, I was soaked. Soon after starting I turned a corner to find my route had disappeared under about six inches of water for around five hundred yards and I had to make a detour and a decision to change that part of my out and back route. I also had to change another section a couple of kilometres later as it was under at least a foot of water. Excess water was everywhere, pathways and drains were overflowing and bubbling out of manholes were gallons of unclean water. My feeding stations functioned extremely well with the family having refreshments conveniently placed

for me to pick up. Overall, I managed to maintain my pace. I admit I walked a few short distances in the last five miles as I started to feel the effects of my effort and the conditions. I knew I was ahead of recent times and this kept me focused. At one point I thought I may have beaten five hours but I faded a bit over the last three miles. The end came with a certain amount of relief as by then I was fatigued and cold.

My official London Marathon app time of 5 hours 3 minutes 35 seconds was my fastest for ten years but also a bit disappointing as I was close to beating the five-hour barrier. I remember completing the London Marathon in half that time (2:35:52 at the age of 35 in 1981)! But at least I can still do it. So, overall a satisfactory achievement in the constant rain. After crossing the “finishing line” of a precious roll of loo paper we popped a couple of bottles of champagne much to the amusement of people living nearby. It was then home for a shower and the many messages from friends and family in various countries.



Unique. Yes. It was good having family and friends close at various points and frequently as they felt much more involved than in the past. Although we all missed the normal route and the crowds, we can say we were involved in a special London Marathon event which may never happen again.

We “Ever Presents” are a unique group which only came about in 1996 after the fifteenth London Marathon. The race organisers asked for anybody who had completed the first fifteen races to provide their times and placings and if verified, we would have a guaranteed place for life. Originally there were forty two of us but this has decreased over the years to the current ten. We have become good friends. We have arranged to meet up on occasions during the years and still include anybody who has dropped out in our contacts and gatherings. To find out more about us, Google “London Marathon Ever Presents”. It is a group you cannot join so one day it will fade away. I wonder how many of us will survive ten more years and make the 50th event?



Running the Virtual London Marathon

by John Carter (Right)

It's early Sunday morning October 4 and while tucking into my porridge I check the BBC weather forecast, for the umpteenth time. Chance of precipitation, it informs me, is 100%. No ifs or buts, it's going to be wet. On the plus side, I'm running from home, the loo is about 10 paces from the start, and I can set off when it suits me. Outside our house my wife Francesca has arranged a surprise good luck send-off with 20 or so friends and neighbours. I live in Wimbledon at the top of a hill, and ran off down the road feeling good. It had been a year like no other, but all the preparations and worries were over.

I'd decided the route should ideally be flat, solid underfoot, as traffic-free as possible, and in some way evoke the proper event. My original idea was to get to 26.2 miles running down The Mall to the usual finish,

but the Elite runners bagged that. Plan B involved running to the Cutty Sark then back to Westminster Bridge and up Whitehall to finish at the bottom of The Mall under Admiralty Arch. With the event just a few days away however, and with a cold wet and windy day a certainty, I decided an out-and-back from home would be more sensible; this would also avoid any frowned-upon unnecessary travel. The Thames Path seemed the best bet, a trip across Tower Bridge would add a touch of normality, and the familiar territory eliminated any need for navigation. From home I ran through Wimbledon Park, then King George's Park to Wandsworth Bridge, along the river to Tower Bridge, across the bridge and headed west to Blackfriars Bridge where I turned around and traced the route back to SW19.

Nearing home, I realised the final part of my route presented some snags. My proven-to-be accurate Garmin and the official app were reading different distances (the official app was undermeasuring), I'd no idea how long my road is, and in any case didn't fancy an uphill finish. In the end I decided to finish in nearby Wimbledon Park, stopped my trusty Garmin at 26.2, then carried on for another half lap or so of the Park for the official London Marathon app to announce the finish. In the absence of 750,000 boisterous spectators, the app provided welcome alternative encouragement, loudly broadcasting each mile with enthusiastic cheering. As I ran past the running track entrance in the Park, two workmen were locking the gates. Bad timing, I had hoped the track might be open for a grandstand finish. From the off, I had no intention of 'going for a time' which I thought would be hazardous without closed roads and, while running 26.2 miles in the rain can hardly be considered a 'fun run', that's how I looked at it. Official time: 6:04:28, my trusty Garmin: 5:57:39.

Mike Joins in London too!



Mike Martineau wanted to contribute on London Marathon day and took part in a 2.6 challenge for Bromley Mencap by pressing with each arm a 2.3kg weight 114 times to give a total of 2 x 262.2kg! Well done Mike.

The Beachy Head Marathon, 23 October 2020

This annual trail marathon, looping west from Eastbourne towards Seaford and back through the Cuckmere Haven and along the Seven Sisters Way, must be one of the most scenic and tough in Britain. This year, three VAC women took on the challenge, complete with dreadful weather. Lynda Hembury (W60) completed the course in 4 hours, 14 minutes and was the first in the Over 55 category. She was followed in second place by Catkin Shelley (W55) whose wonderfully descriptive account is below. Then, as 9th in the age category, came Lisa Compton (W65) in 5:09:40. Lisa, who is normally a road runner but was there to support a clubmate, had the misfortune to fall badly on the steep descent to the finish and sustained multiple fractures to her left hand. She was determined to finish though, before heading to A&E!

Not Jungfrau (but Beachy Head instead) By Catkin Shelley

Whilst I have done a couple of road marathons, for the last six or seven years I have been focusing on much shorter distances (sprinting, middle distance and the odd 5km); 2020 however was going to be my year for a new challenge. I regularly visit Switzerland and the Jungfrau marathon (with a climb of 1,829 metres on gravel roads and mountain trails) has long been on my bucket list of “things to do one day”. In 2019, I was at the finish line; it was pouring with rain, cold and there were no views, but as I watched the runners completing the gruelling run I was almost in tears and I made up my mind - I would run it in 2020!

I secured a place in January and planned to start my focused training in April when the weather improved; September was a long way off and Covid “was only flu”. 10th June however and the Jungfrau marathon was cancelled.

I had “unfinished business” and kept searching for events to replace Jungfrau. All were cancelled or postponed, except the Beachy Head Marathon (BHM) which had “entries on hold”. On 4th September BHM

emailed advising that entries would open at 1 pm that day. What do I do? Enter!

With seven weeks to go I refocused my training, but with restrictions tightening across the country, it was hard to believe the race would go ahead. A long weekend in the Lake District gave me the opportunity for some final mountain training including a confidence-boosting run up and down Helvellyn. Reality only hit home when I received my race number and at 8 am on 24th October I was at the start with 1,200 fellow competitors.

The course is entirely on trail through the South Downs National Park with 300 steps, 14 gates and a total height gain (and loss) of 1,318m; it includes the Seven Sisters and culminates with a climb up Beachy Head before dropping to sea level at Eastbourne. The weather forecast was for very strong winds (the remnants of hurricane Epsilon) and rain coming through at 2pm. What was I doing...?

After a staggered start there was no chance to settle into a gentle rhythm; after 50 metres of flat tarmac it was straight up a steep grassy bank and most people were walking within a minute or two! However, the gradient soon eased and I settled into running, enjoying the buzz and camaraderie of being with fellow runners again.

Inevitably the course is a bit of a blur; up hill, down hill, chalk paths, pebble paths, steps, fields, cows, muddy paths, sheep, wind, more wind and even more wind – the only thing missing was much flat (and rain)! Highlights included running around the top of an amazing natural amphitheatre; the Cuckmere River meandering down to the sea; the chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters and the first sight of the Belle Tout lighthouse high on the cliffs.

It was tough, but with the ever-changing terrain and the need to focus on every step, to avoid tripping, there was no time for the mind to wander; with no distance markers there were no thoughts of “how much further until I click off the next mile”. On the longer hills reminding myself of my run up Helvellyn really helped. The wind made it hard and at times I could barely move forward; it was a south westerly so I naively expected it to help us for the last bit, sadly it was so strong I had to fight against it to stay standing up!

We had been advised to carry water and gels as there would only be three water/refreshment stops on the course. I gave the sausage roll a miss at mile 16 but, whilst probably not the choice of the elites, the Mars bar gave a much-needed energy boost!



The last refreshments were around 22 miles; assuming no accidents, I was confident I would finish. I followed a line of runners upwards, most were walking but I ran, not fast, but fast enough to overtake; as we approached the top a marshal shouted “last hill” - a great relief! After a couple of miles of gentle grassy downhill, Eastbourne came into view and I was at the top of the steep bank above the start; the steepness, including five big steps, really tested the quadriceps, but I got down safely and “sprinted” the final 50 metres over the finish line. I had finished and was elated!

The Beachy Head Marathon wasn't the Jungfrau (which I still hope to do in 2021) but a great alternative challenge for 2020. I really enjoyed it and was very pleased with my time (4:32:59) and to come second in the “old ladies” category (over 55s), although I did wake up the next morning thinking “how can I shave off a few minutes next year....”

RACE WALKING

Ian Richards, VAC member, BMAF Race Walking Secretary and Vice Chairman talks about his career in race walking.

2020 was planned to be one of my best ever years as an athlete, right up there alongside competing in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. At the end of 2019 I was awarded five 'best' titles; BMAF, European and World Masters Race Walker of the year plus best BMAF and European Masters Athlete of the year. Much to my surprise I was also awarded Runner up World Masters Athlete of the Year, second only to Canadian Earl Fee one of the greatest ever masters athletes. Five titles out of six was good but not good enough for me as I wanted all six! Alas Covid-19 put an end to that.

Earl is now aged 90. He has set 60 world records and is still running phenomenal times, 89.15 min 400 metres. He is frequently compared with Ed Whitlock, another of the best ever who ran the first sub-3 hour marathon by a 70 year old and sub 4 hour at age 85. They were the



first places to start in my quest to work out what I need to do. Earl has written many books about his training and approach. There is less about Ed except that he was a great believer in high mileage, doing long slow distance training on a circuit near his home.

Many assume that because I am an Olympian, I must have an innate ability to perform at the level I now do, but that ignores my history. I left school at age 18 and the only sporting success I could claim was 3rd place in a wheelbarrow race at age 8. I never represented my school or even my house in any sport. I started work in the City and was invited by some friends to take part in a 7-mile walking

race as they did it every year. Others would be on the route handing out pints! It sounded fun. Much to my surprise this was not just a fun race but at the front a serious competition between the banks, insurance companies and stock exchange. Amongst them was an Olympic gold medallist (Don Thompson), an Olympic silver medallist (Paul Nihill) and several other current internationals. I was blown away at being involved. Out of around 300, I finished in the sixties and was quite pleased with myself. I did the same race for a couple of years and then a friend suggested that I join a walking club I followed it up and without realising it, joined one of the most successful clubs in the country (Steyning AC). Two Olympic gold medallists, a list of other Olympians and GB internationals with an ethos that everyone strived to be the best that they could be, and everyone helped each other. There was me, a complete novice getting advice from the very best.

I was no overnight success but year by year I improved and after 9 years I qualified for the 1978 European Championship 50km walk in Prague. That turned out to be a baptism of fire. On paper I was one of the slowest in the field and I decided to walk at a pace that I felt I could maintain. I soon found myself in last place with a policeman on a motor bike just behind me. As I began to pass people and they found themselves in last place, they dropped out and the motor bike was back! I just couldn't get out of that position and get rid of him.

It would have been easy to retire after that race. I had a young family and a career that was starting to take off. However, the lure of the Olympics two years away was too much. The qualifying time was faster than the British record. I was 10 minutes short and there were at least 6 people in with a chance of making the team. When the qualifying requirements were announced it seemed even more daunting. I was expecting to have to meet the time standard but there were to be 2 trials a month apart. The Moscow boycott also meant that if GB were going it would be a small team and at best probably only one place available for a 50km walker. Training for something that might not happen, having to improve significantly and also win two trials convincingly and worthy of an Olympic vest looked impossible. But then you don't become an Olympian without having to give your all.

As an amateur I was working full time but realised if I was going to make it, I had to fit in two sessions most days and sometimes three. Early mornings, late nights regularly still out training at 1.00am, whatever was needed I was prepared to do it. I wanted to get the qualifying time before the trials so that I could go into them just aiming to win. My first opportunity came in Spain on a hot day and I missed it by 2 minutes. A month later I was in Poland in freezing temperatures with snow on the ground. The start was delayed while the fire brigade cleared the course of snow. This time I got the standard with 2 minutes to spare. Great except I was the second British walker to finish. I now needed to win both trials and impress while doing it. That meant I would have raced 50 kms four times over a four-month period. Suffice to say I won both trials and booked my ticket on the plane. As I expected might happen, I was the only 50km walker selected. Getting to the Olympics took its toll and I have always felt with my 11th place (in 4:22:57), I didn't do myself justice and that is possibly one of the reasons I still want to achieve today.

I retired from the sport two years later to concentrate on my family and career but kept myself fit doing a lot of outdoor pursuits, particularly climbing and mountaineering. I also took on the Olympian ethos of trying to give something back in return for the incredible privilege it is to be an Olympian. I did a lot of children's and youth work particularly at sports camps for inner city kids trying to inspire them with my story of being useless as a kid but finding something I was a little bit good at and persevering until it got me to the Olympics. I am convinced everyone is good at something, but few ever find it.

It was sharing that story that got me back into the sport at age 60. I felt that I needed to refresh the story and decided to do two things that I wished I had done when younger. The first was to become a Centurion - someone who has finished a 100-mile walking race in under 24 hours. The year I did it the race happened to be on a track which needed a lot of mental resilience. Duly achieved in 19 hours 37 mins, I went for the second wish which was to take part in the Marathon des Sables, arguably one of the hardest races in the world. A marathon a day for a week across the Sahara, with a double marathon on one day for good measure, carrying all that you need for the week except a tent and water which was supplied daily. It tested me to my limits and despite

being one of the oldest in the race and race walking the whole distance, I managed to finish in the low 300's out of nearly a thousand starters.

As a result of those two experiences, VAC member John Hall asked if I might be interested in doing a Masters European Championships in Hungary. I took up the challenge, won my first gold and became well and truly hooked. My mindset has now gone beyond just winning medals and setting records but pushing myself to the limits to see just what an older person who trains as if he is training for the Olympics, could achieve. I have started a distance-learning Sports and Exercise Degree at Manchester Metropolitan University to better understand the science as I believe current thinking falls short of what is optimal once you get over 60. I am taken by a mixture of the Ed Whitlock and Earl Fee approach and am convinced that we are only scratching the surface of how best to manage the ageing process at higher ages. I am fascinated by the fact that the European Space Agency often sends scientists to European Masters championships to test masters athletes in their research to find solutions to how astronauts can manage long space flights where they go through a similar ageing process, including muscle loss, as older people. They believe elite masters athletes are the closest group of people they have found who are succeeding in finding ways to overcome what many think is inevitable decline.

Exciting times!

Cecil Gittins Memorial Walks, 17 October 2020

VAC was pleased to host our fifth running of this event at Cyclopark, a dedicated cycle circuit much like a scaled-down version of the Brands Hatch motor racing course, with tight turns and many gradients. It proved to be the first race-walking road event in mainland Britain since the national lockdown in March. Only a handful of others followed before the suspension of all competition. VAC deservedly won much praise and gratitude from the race-walking community for providing a successful event and a welcome opportunity to compete.

Staging the event in a Covid-secure environment was daunting but Cyclopark, as a private venue, already had thorough protocols in place and the 2.5km circuit was wide enough to ensure social distancing at



the start and throughout the races. We were anxious to get everything right and were indebted to VAC member, Noel Carmody, for doing a superb job as Referee and Covid Officer to ensure that it could take place safely.

In all there were 35 on the line, a slight increase from 2019. Cyclopark's elevation often makes it windy and cold but we were fortunate to have good racing conditions on a mild cloudy day with wind speed 4 knots. This, and the quality of the field, resulted in fine performances, bringing many PBs and new course records.

VAC was pleased to welcome Dan and Dominic King (pictured, photo by Mark Easton), who have been GB internationals for over 20 years, in particular Dominic participating in the Rio 2016 and London 2012 Olympics. Dominic won the men's 15k in 1:06:18, closely followed by his brother, and he broke Luc Legon's course record by nine minutes. Ian Richards (M70) was third. The winner of the ladies' 15k was Abigail Jennings (AFD) coming in at 1:24:36 in her first attempt at the distance, taking a new course record, previously held by Anne Jones (Steyping AC) since 2017.

The winner of the ladies' 10k was Millie Morris (Ashford AC) who had a significant new PB in 54:33 and took the course record from Emily Ghose held since 2017. The winner of the men's 10k was Luc Legon (Cambridge Harriers) with yet another PB in 45:29, taking the course record from Jonathan Hobbs also held since 2017. The ladies' 5k was won by Abby Hughes (Taunton AC) with a PB in 25:25, and a new course record, previously held by Olympian and Commonwealth Games medal winner Lisa Kehler since 2016. The men's 5k was won

by Christian Hopper (Camb. H) who also achieved a PB in 25:06, and a new course record, formerly held by Marshall Smith, also since 2016.

We were very grateful to all the officials who turned out in the midst of the pandemic and helped us to lay on a great day's racing.

Full results are available on the VAC website.

OBITUARIES

Alistair Jackson (Jacko) 1943-2020



Alistair Jackson, known to most as Jacko, passed away on 7 August 2020, aged 77. He joined VAC in 1988 and was a regular at VAC events especially cross country, often representing the club in the Surrey League team. He was a prolific racer, preferring the small, friendly events such as parkrun and the various lunchtime midweek races including the Woking and Hammersmith Handicaps, Crystal Palace Canter and the Serpentine Last Friday of the Month 5kms, in which he competed

nearly 200 times. He was also a regular at the Algarve and Guernsey challenge races where his friendliness and Lancastrian sense of humour were much appreciated.

In the last ten years, he had devoted his energy to parkruns, firstly at Hove Park and then at Preston Park, which he supported from its first week. He completed 377 parkruns, 271 of them at Preston Park. As well as running, he regularly volunteered as a marshal, many times at the Preston Park junior parkrun. He will be missed by many. (Photo by Cliff Hide.)

Peter Ryan (1954 – 2020)

Peter Ryan, past VAC member and race walker died from cancer on 13 November 2020, aged 66. He was a proud Yorkshireman and a lifelong Sheffield Wednesday supporter. His career was in the Essex police force and he competed for the British Police in representative matches.



Peter Ryan (271) strides ahead of Carlos Cobo Corrales (270) and Steve Allen (Photo by Jeremy Hemming)

Peter, pictured in the VAC Championship in Battersea park in June 2015, was a distinctively tall man with a long stride. He was a formidable athlete in both running and race walking events, at a variety of distances, wearing the vest of Ilford AC. His best moment came at Newmarket in 2003 when he won

the British 100 Miles' Walking Championship in 19 hours 57 minutes and 35 seconds.

For many years, Peter keenly participated in VAC's summer walking races in Battersea Park and was a frequent winner. He was also a willing recorder at VAC's track walks and a great supporter of his partner, race walker, Fiona Bishop. In later years he became a prolific parkrunner, travelling all over the United Kingdom to participate. His record shows that he visited 115 parkruns, with a total of over 170 runs. We send condolences to Fiona. We will miss him.



The only VAC member who is older than the Club and still competing is Dalbir Singh Deol, aged 94. He holds the British M90 outdoor 200m record and British M90 indoor records for 60m, 200m and 400m. (Photo by Alex Rotas).

Photo quiz answers Top Row left to right: Arthur Thomson, Bob Treadwell, Cliff Taylor. Middle row: Wally Franklin (50) and John Browne (37). Bottom row: Laurie O'Hara, Pam Jones, Steve Charlton.